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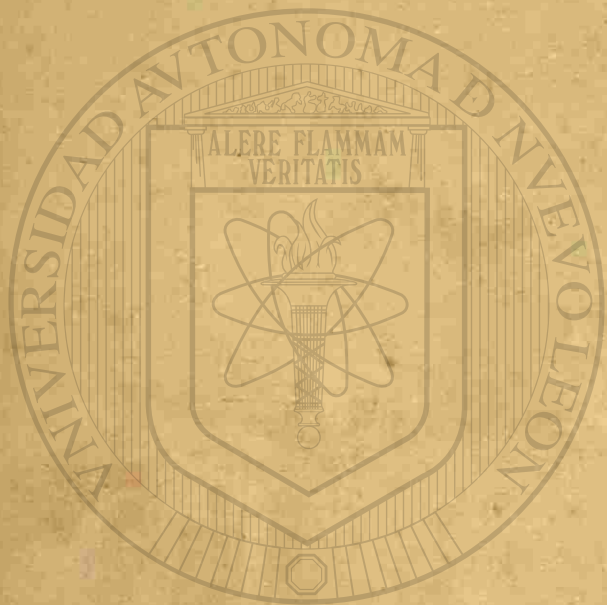
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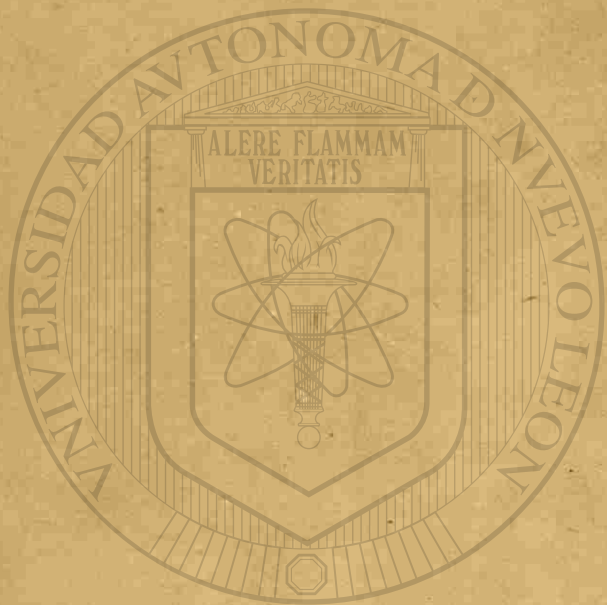


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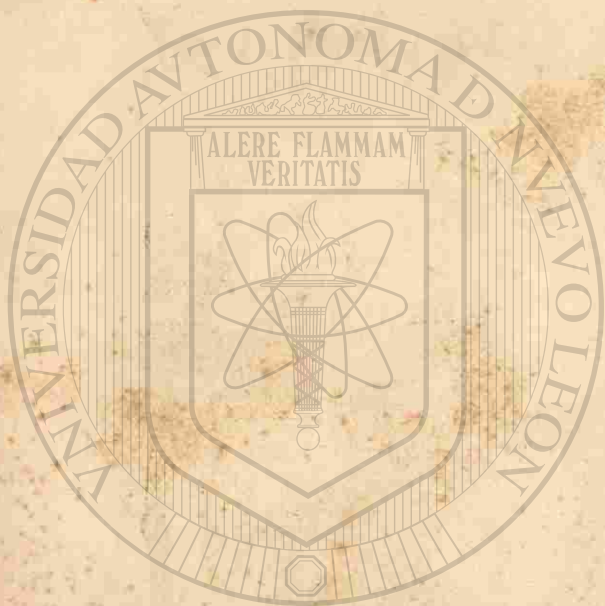
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NOW-A-DAYS!



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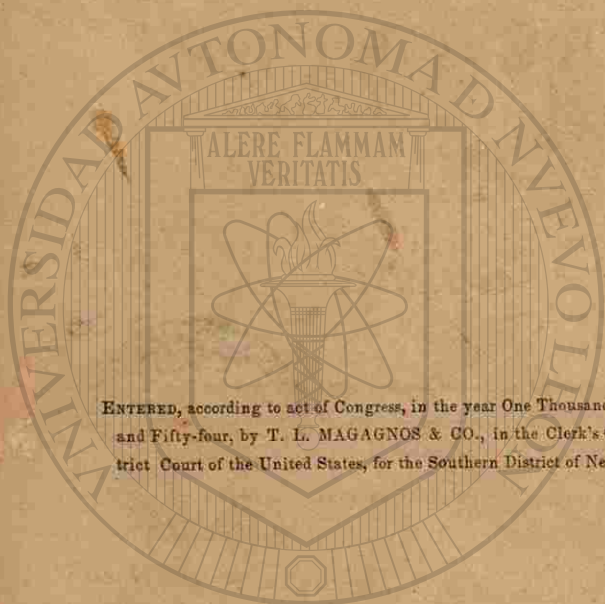
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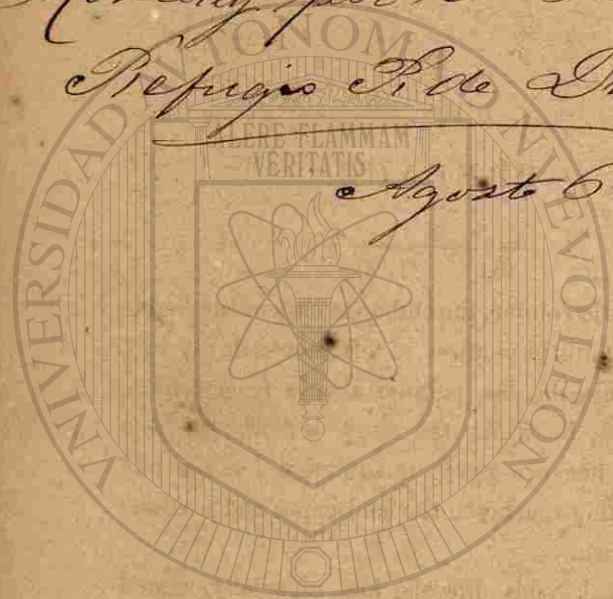
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To F. P. L.

TO THE FRIEND WHO WITH ME HAS PLIED THE NEEDLE,
AND GUIDED THE PEN,
AND WITH WHOM I HAVE SPENT SO MANY HAPPY, BUSY HOURS,
THIS VOLUME IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED, BY
THE AUTHOR.

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Agosto 6 de 1871.*



PREFACE.

IN this little volume, the authoress has endeavored to give a few faithful pictures of life, now-a-days; and, in doing this, she has painted always from nature. Every scene, in which the story is laid, has been familiar to her own eyes; imagination has scarcely added finishing touches to the landscapes and portraits she has drawn.

Maine backwoods life she has, especially, aimed to make true to nature, as it is the first time that it has ever been admitted into romance-world. The manners and customs of this, hitherto, far-off and "unknown land," she has examined for herself. She has, herself, passed over the rough road which Esther travels with her loquacious guide; she has rested at the same roadside inns. She trusts that those, who are entirely ignorant of this kind of life, will be interested and amused in the pictures she gives them,

and that none will censure her for daring to offer a new thing to the novel-reading public.

In writing "Now-a-days," she has stepped a little aside from the path which story writers have, generally, trodden before. She has aimed at naturalness, rather than at anything marked and startling. The public taste is growing weary of murders, and wars, and rumors of wars, and she has preferred to leave these trite themes to some more fiery pen, and to paint, as faithfully as was in her power, real life, New-England life.

F. R. A.

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NOW-A-DAYS.

CHAPTER I.

A SUDDEN CLOUD.

"Has the bell rung yet?" asked Virginia Clifton, joining a group of her schoolmates, who stood busily talking and laughing in their favorite spot, the middle of the long hall, in the boarding-house connected with Mr. Marshall's celebrated school for young ladies.

"No," replied Maria Brooks, coming out of her room, with slate and book in hand; "I hope not, for I do want somebody to help me in this dreadful Trigonometry lesson!"

"Don't ask me! don't ask me!" said one after another, half laughing as she approached them.

"Here comes Esther Hastings; she'll help you," said Virginia.

"What is it?" asked Ettie, as she was familiarly called, slowly walking up the long hall.

"My Trigonometry, as usual," sighed poor Maria, "I cannot understand anything about these sines,

tangents, and cosines; I do despise this abominable Spherical Trigonometry—I always did hate mathematics, and why Mr. Marshall insists on my studying these studies is more than I can see.” And she burst into tears.

“Let me see, Minnie, dear,” soothingly said Esther; and as the troublesome sum was pointed out, continued, “Oh! I can tell you a little about that in a few moments that will make it quite clear, I think; so now to begin,” and in fact, a few words, a few figures on the slate, and Maria wondered that it had so puzzled her.

“Well,” she exclaimed, “I believe I do understand, and thank you ever and ever so much, darling Ettie; but I never should if I had been obliged to do the sum alone; but,” she continued, “I don’t know but this study is good for me. I am sure it cultivates one Christian grace, at least,—humility—for I never look at poor Day’s Mathematics without feeling what a fool I am.—Any letters?” she suddenly exclaimed, springing to meet two girls, who were coming up the long staircase.

“Yes! one for Jennie, and one for Miss Esther Hastings, Hopedale, Mass.—a paper for you, Maria, and for the rest of you—nothing. I am sorry to dash your hopes thus from the highest pinnacle of expectation down to the lowest depths of despairing certainty, but so it is,” said Emily Sidney, the bearer of the letters; “and now, my dear Miss Hastings, if you have finished devouring the contents of that large document, will you do me the favor to accompany me

to Mr. Marshall’s study? as he wishes to see us there a few moments.”

Passing her arm around Esther’s waist in school-girl fashion, they descended the staircase; and the group of girls went on talking as before. Some moments passed, when Emily and Esther re-appeared—Emily was half supporting the fainting form of her friend, and walked hastily by the wondering girls.

“For heaven’s sake, what is the matter with Esther Hastings?” exclaimed Maria Brooks.

In mute astonishment they looked at each other, till Emily came out of Esther’s room, and in answer to their numerous inquiries, replied briefly, “Mr. Marshall has just had a telegraphic dispatch, saying that her father is very sick, and may not live till she gets home.”

“Can I be of any service,” said Maria, “in packing her trunk, or any such thing?”

“No, Maria, I can do all that is necessary,” returned Emily; “but I must go to Esther again.”

“Poor Esther,” ejaculated more than one, after Emily left them; “she idolizes her father, and what will become of her if he dies!”

“I pity her from the bottom of my heart,” said Virginia; “she has only a step-mother, and I know she does not love her much, for she never speaks of her.”

The school bell soon rang, and the girls quickly obeyed the summons, leaving the long hall unoccupied.

A few hours had slipped away, but to Esther’s ex-

cited mind the time had seemed interminable. That precious time was passing, and she not yet on her way: her father might die, and she might not hear his parting words—receive his parting kiss.

She had roused herself from the stupor into which the sadness had at first thrown her, and busied herself mechanically in getting ready for her journey. Now all was ready, and she went out into the hall to bid adieu to her old friends. Mr. Marshall led her to the carriage, Emily accompanied her, and with a fervent embrace, whispered, "God bless and comfort you, dearest."

Esther could not speak, but her warm grasp of the hand she held tightened, and tears gushed to her eyes. They were the first she had shed. She scarcely heeded the introduction which Mr. Marshall gave her to the gentleman who was to take charge of her, but fell back into a corner of the coach, and drawing her veil down, gave vent to her tears. How her heart rebelled against this severe blow which God had dealt her; "First my mother, and now my father," she bitterly thought, "all—all that is left me, and what have I done to deserve this?" She could not pray—she could think of nothing, see nothing but the death-bed of her father, and God had done it. Bitter and scalding tears flowed, but they did not relieve her burdened heart. The coach stopped; her companion half lifted her from it and led her into the depot. Curious eyes Esther felt were upon her, and, hastily controlling her emotion, she sat down, feeling as if her heart was crushed under its load of misery.

The shrill whistle sounded, and the rushing, mighty tread of the locomotive was heard—all was hurry and confusion, and she found herself, she hardly knew how, seated in a car and rapidly passing towards home. Home! the thought was agony! How she had looked forward to this homeward journey, and how different was all from what she had anticipated! She sat in silence brooding over her woes, feeling almost as if wronged, when she was startled by the words of her companion, the first he had addressed to her. "Whom the Lord *loveth*, he chasteneth."

It seemed as if the stranger must have read her thoughts. She looked at him, and read in his dark eyes sympathy for her, yet she also felt a little self-condemned, as if he had known how unsubmitive she had been to the will of God. He continued talking with her, and gradually her reserve gave way. She told him much of herself, of her idolized father, and found a sad relief in talking of her sorrows.

The gentle and compassionate words which Mr. Percival addressed to her, fell like balm upon her heart, and the hope that all might yet be well, that her father might recover, somewhat cheered her. But now Mr. Percival must leave her, he said, for here their paths separated. He placed her on the boat, and saw that all was arranged for her comfort, and with a few hurried but kindly words of sympathy and encouragement, left her. Once more alone, Esther surrendered herself to her grief. Sitting on the promenade deck, she raised her veil, that the fresh breeze might cool her fevered brow. Two gentlemen

sat near her, and were talking busily. They seemed to be old friends, delighted to meet each other after a long absence. Their voices fell on Esther's ear, but she heeded them not, till the name of Hastings arrested her attention—she listened eagerly, as one remarked, half carelessly, "You remember Hastings, the rich lumber merchant?"

"Hastings!—yes, he married that handsome Margaret Wilton for his second wife, didn't he?—well, what of him?" rejoined the other, "hasn't failed, has he?"

"No, I guess not," was the reply, "but he's lying at the point of death!"

"I want to know," returned his friend, "well, he will be a great loss to the community. Let me see—he is President of the Merchant's Bank, isn't he?—How does that Bank flourish?" he continued, and then the conversation turned on bank stock, railroad stock, and the like.—Esther had sank back at the mention of her father's name, feeling more keenly than ever her loneliness and misery. "How heartless all the world is!" she thought; "and I am to live years in it, probably." Hours passed, and she had at length reached Bangor. A servant was waiting for her on the wharf—"Is he alive, James?" she asked, as he assisted her to the carriage.

"Yes, Miss Esther, and asking for you when I came away."

"Drive fast," she said, and in a few moments she had reached home. Scarcely heeding the servant who opened the hall door, she rushed hastily to her

father's room, flinging her bonnet off as she almost flew up the staircase. The room was dark, and the heavy breathing of the sick man alone broke the silence.

"Has Ettie come?" she heard articulated with difficulty, and in another moment she had sprung to the bed, and kissed repeatedly the forehead, cheeks and lips of her dying father, exclaiming again and again, "You *must not die*, oh, my father!"

"This must not be," said the physician who stood near, in a low tone; "Calm yourself, Miss Esther, this agitation may hasten the fatal crisis."

Esther obeyed involuntarily, and in silence seated herself by the bedside, while her father, in low, broken accents, said:

"Thank God that I have seen my child before I die—oh, Ettie, you have ever been a dutiful child," he continued, "and may God bless you;—I die content—"

He paused, as if exhausted, then resumed, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for *Thou* art with me—my trust is in our Saviour—I shall soon join your mother."

Incoherent words now alone fell from his lips, till suddenly he seemed again conscious, and looking at his young and beautiful wife, who stood by his side, he said, "My beautiful Margaret, forgive me if I have wronged you in making you the wife of an old man—you have made life very sweet to me." He took her hand, and with a feeble grasp laid it on Esther's—"love each other," he said, "for my sake." Again

his mind wandered,—“Annie!” he exclaimed, wildly starting up and stretching out his arm, as if to embrace some one; “we meet again.”—He fell back—“Jesus,” he murmured, and all was over—Esther Hastings was fatherless. Calmly Mrs. Hastings bent over the dead man, and imprinted a kiss upon his brow, then led Esther from the room.

CHAPTER II.

THE STEP-MOTHER.

SOME days had passed, and the rich man slept in that narrow resting-place, where all the dwellers on earth must at last lie down together. His business matters had been investigated, but, contrary to the expectations of all, it was found, that what property he possessed would meet the demands of his creditors alone, leaving comparatively nothing for his wife and child. He had been largely engaged in navigation, and for several years past he had met with heavy losses, as was well known; but it had not been supposed that so large a portion of his fortune had been thus lost.

The necessity of making some definite arrangements for the future, which this change of circumstances rendered unavoidable, had been of service to Esther, as it had in a measure prevented her from brooding over her sorrows. But one day an unusual number of kind and well-meaning friends had called on her to offer their sympathy. Their words, it seemed to her, opened the wound afresh, and their inquiries at last became torture to her. It was now evening, and, sitting alone in her chamber, she wept long and bitterly

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"I am alone in the world," she thought, "but yet not alone in my grief; my step-mother must sympathize with me, and I will seek her."

She rose hastily, and, crossing the hall, knocked lightly at the door of the room where she supposed she should see Mrs. Hastings. She was right. A voice bade her come in, and she opened the door. A crowd of bitter memories rushed over her heart, as she stood upon the threshold of that luxurious room, which her father had so tastefully decorated for his young wife. A rich carpet, so soft that the foot was nearly buried in it, covered the floor. Pictures and statuary of rare merit, displaying alike the wealth and taste of the owner, adorned the room. A magnificent piano stood at one end of the apartment, while a large case, filled with books, the works of the best authors, elegantly bound, occupied the other. A marble table, loaded with odd and costly trifles, stood in the centre, over which a chandelier hung. This was not lighted, however, but in an alcove, shaded by soft drapery, on one of the many luxurious lounges, reclined Mrs. Hastings. A bronze statue of a slave, holding a lighted candle, stood at the head of the couch. The light fell on the face of the beautiful woman, showing to Esther an expression of the deepest misery upon her features. Her small and jewelled hands were clasped tightly over her breast, and she lay as if prostrated by the weight of her woe. Esther glanced around, and remembered the sad hours she had spent there, when her father was accustomed to sit listening to the melodious voice of his wife, as she sung to him at twi-

light, his eyes filled with the passionate love which he lavished upon his peerless Margaret. All this Esther had seen till her heart was nearly bursting with jealous resentment, that this radiantly beautiful creature, the usurper, as she felt, had so completely filled the place of the wife of his youth, her own gentle mother, in her father's heart. But this was past; and his dying words, "You have made life very sweet to me," and "love each other for *my* sake," seemed sounding in her ears.

Touched by the evident sorrow of her step-mother, she approached gently, and leaning over the couch, impressed a kiss on the white brow of its occupant, and for the first time called her "mother."

A cold and bitter smile passed over the face of Mrs. Hastings, as she said, "Do not mock me, Esther, with any appearances of tenderness; this is no time for dissimulation: we have never loved each other, and have never stooped to any hypocritical pretences."

A haughty flush suffused the brow of Esther at this reception of her advances, and she turned as if to leave the room; but "love each other for my sake" she seemed to hear, and she replied, "It is true that no affection has ever existed between us, but still we are united by our mutual love for him who has left us;" and tears rushed to her eyes.

"No, Esther," coldly and calmly replied Mrs. Hastings, "you mistake; I *never* loved your father!"

"Not love him!" repeated Esther; "then why did you marry him?"

"You are young yet," answered Mrs. Hastings;

"when some years more have passed over you, you will not probably be so much shocked at the idea of a marriage without love."

The thought that her father's passionate idolatry of his bride had been requited thus, filled Esther with indignation, and she exclaimed, "Oh! you are indeed heartless; and under this cold exterior, which I had hoped was but a disguise for warm feelings, there beats no true woman's heart. And I have called you mother, have given to you the name of that pure angelic being whose place you have so unworthily filled. Thank God that I have *never before* thus desecrated that sacred title!"

She paused, expecting to hear some mocking reply, but what was her astonishment to see tears trickling between her step-mother's fingers, as she had buried her face in her hands.

"You are severe, Esther," she said, in a broken voice, contrasting strangely with her usual sweet and clear tones; "but at your age I should have said the same. Take heed, that when *you* reach my time of life, your proud soul does not have to acknowledge that it has been untrue to itself. I *am* unworthy," she continued, "but, oh! not heartless. Heartless! when now, notwithstanding all my pride, I am forced to own that I love one to whom I am nothing. How I loved that man! How I love him even now, when he has forgotten me, and has given to another that place by his side which I, the poor despised one, might once have claimed. You wonder, Esther, that loving one man thus, with my whole heart, I should have

given myself to another. Yet I did it! Listen to me, for my soul to-night is like a volcano; I can no longer control its hidden fires. I will tell you all. To-morrow I shall again be calm and cold, and no one but you will know what burning misery lies within. You remind me of what I once was. How I should once have scorned such a being as I now am! Yet I cannot bear your contempt. I will tell you all, and you must, you will pity me. I, like you, was an only child, and the idol of my parents. They were rich, and no whim of mine, however fanciful, was ungratified. It was a beautiful village where we lived, and the homestead, a quaint old house, standing midway upon a hill, and surrounded with grand old trees, and half hidden by vines, was, in my childish estimation, almost a paradise.

"My father had a great passion for laying out the grounds around the house in fanciful ways, and it was also my delight to plan intricate walks, beautiful summer-houses, and various things to diversify the gardens, which it was equally pleasant to my father to execute. The interior of the house, too, at least those portions of it which were more particularly my own, I used to fit up as I chose. At one time in the old Elizabethan style, while I would personate some great lady of that age. At another time I chose to have every thing in the Eastern style, and as usual, regardless of expense, my father consented. Arraying myself in magnificent oriental garments, I received my parents. I never looked more gorgeously beautiful, and I remember well the look of proud affection with

which my father regarded me. Meantime my education was by no means neglected. I was fond of study, and nothing was spared to render me an accomplished woman. I had very few associates, for I despised the insignificant girls with whom I was brought into contact when paying visits to their parents, with my father and mother; and they in turn were repelled by the haughtiness of my manners. But I was very happy at home; my books, flowers and music were company enough for me, and when I wearied of these, I used to ride off miles at headlong speed on my favorite horse, a beautiful Arabian, whom I had named Lightning. Then, too, my mother, of whom I was passionately fond, would sit with me, and listen for hours to my wild air-castles, or to my songs, in my gay and restless moments, or in my calmer moods she would sew while I read to her; but oftener I would lie on the grass by her side in the garden, with my arms wound round her, telling her all my strange imaginings, while she seemed fully to understand me, for we were much alike, and all in all to each other. Thus I grew to womanhood, with my faults unchecked, and accustomed to the most implicit obedience from all around me, not excepting my parents.

"But there was a change. My father met with one of those sudden reverses so common to American merchants, and we were at once reduced from affluence to poverty. My mother, whose pride, like mine, was unconquerable, did not sink beneath the blow, but cheered my father and predicted brighter days. I, the proud Margaret Wilton, became a governess!

The family with whom I lived were low-bred and purse-proud people, and disposed at first to treat me with disdainful condescension. But I was as haughty as in my palmiest days, and scrupled not to let them see that I despised them. Yet they did not discharge me, for they had a pitiful pride in saying that Margaret Wilton was their governess.

"Here I first met Arthur Hammond. Long before I knew whether my affection was returned, I had given my whole heart to him. I strove long against it, but it was in vain. He was a poor student of divinity, but his talents were of the highest order. He possessed, too, the power of concealing his feelings, in a remarkable degree, and though I watched him narrowly, I could not tell whether he cared for me. He was very proud and cold to others, but though his deep voice softened when he addressed me, I could not tell whether he loved me, or pitied merely my situation. But at last he told me of his affection! How rapturously my heart beat! but he said that I was unfit for a minister's wife, and that knowing this, he had long striven to conquer his love for me. How changed I was! Once I should have rebelled at such a truth, but love made me very humble, and I owned my unworthiness, and begged him to help me to overcome my many faults. Thus time passed, but still I was not happy. Arthur was so calm, and saw all my faults so clearly, that I feared he did not love me as I wished. My nature was such, that I longed to be assured over and over again that I was beloved, and when I would exclaim—'Do you really love me?'

his cold reply, 'You wrong me to doubt it,' would chill me, and I rarely ventured to say more.

"I was jealous, too, and to my childish complaints and fears, he would reply so severely, and almost contemptuously, that it would rouse my pride, and I would resolve never to see him more. But the next time I met him, one kind glance from his deep eyes, one warm embrace, would at once overthrow my resolution. Then he would reason with me, and urge me to acquire self-command, till I was almost maddened.

"It was at a time when I was half frantic with jealousy of a fair and gentle girl, whose character, I feared, suited Arthur much better than my stormy nature, which I felt wearied him, that your father met me.

"My beauty, which has ever been my curse, attracted him, and ere long he offered me his heart and hand.

"I refused him; but I contrasted almost unconsciously, his warm devotion with the apparent indifference of Arthur. Meanwhile my parents, whom I had acquainted with my rejection of Mr. Hastings, plead with me to accept his suit, which he proffered again.

"They had never liked my engagement to Arthur; and my mother resented, 'not his efforts to improve my character,' she said, 'but his harsh manner of doing it.'

"'Margaret,' she said, 'I would not urge your marriage with Mr. Hastings, if I thought you would be happy with Arthur; but I have seen that you have been restless and miserable ever since your engagement. Good and noble I allow that he is, but he

is yet too much of a tyrant, and your love for him would render you almost a slave to his will. It will be a long time, too, before he can offer you a home, and your father and I long to see you placed in a situation which you are so well fitted to adorn and Margaret,' she continued, 'your father's care and anxiety is wearing him fast to the grave, and will you not gladden his heart by becoming the wife of a generous man, who loves you devotedly.'

"But it is useless to repeat the various arguments which my mother used; suffice it to say, she prevailed, and I consented to do as she wished.

"The preparations for our marriage were hurriedly made, and I had hardly time to realize what a step I was taking, amid the hurry and bustle.

"All this while I had not seen Arthur. It had been his custom, when I had been 'unreasonable,' as he said, to punish me by not coming to visit me for some time; and if reports of my coming marriage reached him, he either disbelieved them, thinking it one of my efforts to awaken his jealousy, or scorned to allow me to know that he heeded them.

"The day before my wedding was to take place, I walked out alone, to visit some of my old haunts, before I left them, it might be forever. Half involuntarily I took my way to a spot which was a favorite with both Arthur and myself, an old rock, shaded by trees, and covered with moss, and sat down to rest, listening to the babble of a little brook which flowed at its foot.

"Suddenly I heard rapid footsteps, and in a moment Arthur Hammond stood before me!

"I could not speak. His dark piercing eyes were fixed upon me, and I suppose I turned pale, for a deathlike faintness spread over me.

"He saw it and said, 'Compose yourself! I do not come to reproach you. No, Margaret, I do not wish to add one drop to your bitter cup, nor would I exchange places with you, suffering as I do. I knew too well,' he proceeded, 'that we were unsuited to each other, but I loved you too fondly and strove to blind myself to the fact that I was doing wrong to link our fates together, but I little thought that yours would be the hand to deal me so severe a blow.'

"'Oh why,' gasped I, 'did you not tell me before that you loved me thus? How much misery might have been spared us both?'

"'I have erred,' he said, 'and I see it when it is too late. While trying to regulate your stormy nature, I have feared to show you the depth of my love, lest, secure of that, you might cease to strive to gain my affection. But, oh! Margaret, it has been a hard task, and I miscalculated the strength of your attachment to me. It is all over now,' he continued, 'and I must bid you farewell. I will not tell you to forget me, for I know that you cannot, but I hope that time, the great healer of heart-wounds, may bring to you more happiness than I can expect for myself.'

He turned to go. The misery of my future life

without him rushed over me, and I exclaimed wildly, 'Then you can leave me—you cast me off forever—'

"'Margaret,' replied he, 'you have chosen your course; it is your hand which separates us—which has placed on the hearts of both, a load of sorrow. It only remains now, for each to bear it as best he can.'

"He approached me and took my hand. 'God bless you,' said he, and hastily, as if he dared not trust himself to say more, he left me.

"Oh! the agony of that hour! It is as fresh as if it were yesterday. I lay on the grass realizing now all that I had done. Resentment and jealousy had given me strength before, but now, when I could not think harshly of Arthur, I saw all as it was. He was lost to me for ever! My future life must be a wretched one, and I alone was the author of my misery. I longed to die—for I dreaded to take the next step, that of marrying Mr. Hastings, and I could not resolve to break off the engagement. I had not strength to resist my mother's strong will, and I felt that retreat was impossible. My own pride, too, when I came a little more to myself, rebelled at the idea. I must go on—for even if I refused to become the wife of Mr. Hastings, I knew Arthur too well to suppose that he would return to me. We were as much separated as if the ceremony that bound me to Mr. Hastings had been spoken.

"It was growing dark when I at last started for home; I had not gone far when I met your father, who had come to our house, and finding me gone, had set out in search of me. He gently chid me for wan-

dering so far and wearying myself. He was so kind and noble that I despised myself for the wrong I felt that I was doing in marrying him without love. I resolved to tell him all, and commenced, but he interrupted me.

"I know, Margaret," said he, "that you have been engaged to another—I know too that you respect and esteem *me*, for you have told me so, and I trust to time and my own ardent love for you to gain me that place in your heart which I wish. Let the past remain in oblivion; I feel sure that at a future time you will discover that your attachment for my rival was but a girlish fancy, and no effort of mine shall be wanting to promote your happiness."

"And nobly did he fulfil all his promises. After our marriage, through his influence, my father obtained a lucrative situation, and I had the pleasure of seeing my mother enjoying the comforts which her declining years demanded. Mr. Hastings was ever most kind and delicate in his attentions, but, alas! though I did try to return his affection as I felt that I ought, I could not love him. It seemed as if the effort I made only estranged me more from him. I was heartsick and miserable, yet strove to hide my grief under an appearance of gaiety, and I succeeded in deceiving my father and mother, and even my husband, into a belief in my happiness. During this time I had heard nothing of Arthur, except that he had graduated with high honors and was spoken of as a young man of great promise. One evening we met at a large party. I was arrayed in most splendid costume and sur-

rounded by a large circle of admirers, when suddenly in the midst of my gaiety, I saw Arthur Hammond, who stood at a little distance looking at me fixedly. My heart beat wildly, and the blood left my cheeks, but by a violent effort I controlled myself, and continued talking though I knew not what I said. I had hoped at times that I should forget him—that I should be able to meet him with composure, but now I knew too well, how fondly I still loved him and feared that I must ever so regard him. As soon as possible I left the circle where I was standing and entered a little conservatory where I hoped for solitude. But soon I heard some one approaching, and a well-known voice addressed me. I started and trembled violently, for it was Arthur Hammond.

"Do not be alarmed, Margaret," said he, "I would not thus meet you to remind you of anything in the past which might give you pain; but I see you happy, and I rejoice in it. Let us still be friends, for as a friend I can now regard you, and can sincerely congratulate you that you are the wife of a man so well worthy of you. I too am married and long to introduce my bride to you. Shall I bring her here?"

I murmured some words of common-place politeness, and he left me. I saw that he loved me no longer, and I calmed myself to meet his wife. I saw the looks of ardent love with which he regarded her as they re-entered the room. She was a pure and fairy-like creature, and as she approached me looking so almost holy in her airy white dress, I felt the contrast which was painfully manifest between us. I, in

my gorgeous apparel and glowing beauty, fitly represented the glory of this world which passeth away, but she seemed fit only for a purer and brighter sphere.

"I spoke a few words to her, and her reply in a voice sweet and birdlike fell on my ear, like some far off heavenly melody. Purity and simplicity breathed in her every movement, and I, proud as I was, felt humbled before her. I did not wonder that Arthur worshipped her, as I saw plainly enough that he did, but I left them, for I could not bear to see my place in his heart so completely filled by another; yet I rejoiced that he did not suspect that I still cherished the dream which had long since faded from his recollection. So the weary years passed, and here am I, in the prime of life, looking back with vain regrets into the past, and shrinking from the future.—Oh! if I could but die!" she exclaimed, passionately, "and yet I fear to die,—alas! alas!—I am fit neither for life nor death," and she buried her face in her hands.

Gently Esther approached her, and passing her arm tenderly around Margaret's waist, whispered, "Dear Margaret, do not repulse me,—I pity you, and love you from my heart—forgive me for my harsh words. Oh, how much pain we might have been spared, had I known your true character before; but now that I do understand you, we will love each other shall we not?"

Margaret did not reply, but she allowed her head to rest on Esther's bosom, while Ettie continued: "You will yet be happy; there is a bright future in store

for you;—how much joy you can bring to the hearts of the sick and sorrowing!—Your past sorrows will enable you to sympathise with the sad, and your higher nature will come forth purified, from the trials through which you have passed. Do not give way to despair! Rise, and in endeavoring to make others happy, you will yourself find peace."

"Alas! dear Esther, it is too late," replied Margaret.

"Too late!" repeated Esther, "oh no! do not say so; you are young, and though all now seems dreary to you, if you will but look around you, and try to promote the welfare of others, you will have no time for repining;—oh, Margaret," she continued, "there is no cure for sadness like employment."

"Employment! and how shall I busy myself?" asked Margaret.

"I will tell you," said Esther, anxious to withdraw her mother from the contemplation of her sorrows; "there is something to be done here; for you know," said she, while tears rose to her eyes, "that this house and furniture are no longer ours. I know that you will agree with me, in wishing my father's name to be unsullied, even if nothing remains to us. All must be given up, and we must leave this home to strangers!"

"You have judged me aright, Esther," replied Margaret; "I am as anxious as you can be, that every debt of my husband's may be discharged, that no stain may rest on his honor. Let us at once give up all, and then we will go together to my father's home."

"No, Margaret," replied Esther, "I have already made my arrangements for the future, and my place is quite a different one—I cannot go with you."

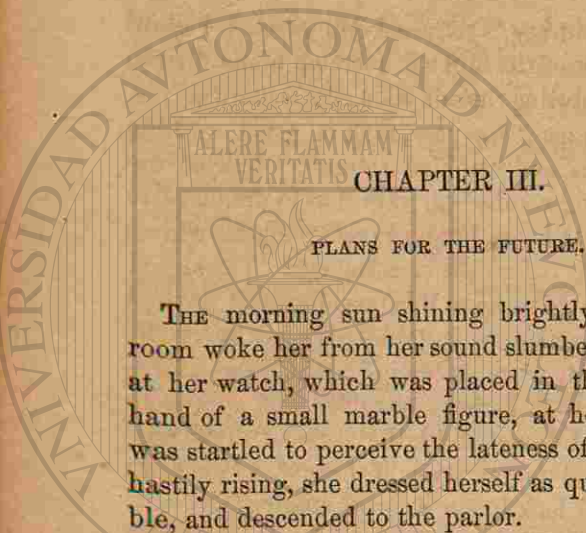
"Not go with me!" exclaimed Mrs. Hastings; "oh! do not say so!—you cannot be serious!—I shall need you so much, for I know myself too well. Let me make ever so good resolutions, I cannot keep them without assistance, and if you leave me alone I shall never rise from my selfish sorrowings—never."

"I *must* leave you, Margaret," repeated Esther, "but not *alone*—Your own words show me plainly my duty—If with you, I fear that you might rely on my puny assistance; while, without me, you will at once seek aid from Him who alone can give strength to our weak endeavors. Look to our Saviour, dearest, to him who knows our weakness, who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, for he has felt the same."

"Oh, dear Esther!" said Margaret, "I can never feel like you, that trust in Jesus, which I do so much need, and if you leave me, what will become of me?" But, she suddenly exclaimed, "how selfish I am!—I have not yet asked you where you are going!"

"To teach a school, and one in the backwoods, too," replied Esther. "I saw Mr. Merrill, our pastor, to-day, just as he was much perplexed about finding a teacher to go up into the Aroostook country. I at once offered to go. He stared at me, and told me that I little knew what it was to go there; but even after his vivid description of backwoods life, I still

persisted in my willingness to go, and in about a week I shall be on my way.—But now good night, Margaret, for it is very late, and you need rest, as well as I." She kissed the brow of her step-mother, and, urging her to seek her couch soon, left her.



PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.

THE morning sun shining brightly into Esther's room woke her from her sound slumber, and glancing at her watch, which was placed in the outstretched hand of a small marble figure, at her bedside, she was startled to perceive the lateness of the hour, and hastily rising, she dressed herself as quickly as possible, and descended to the parlor.

On opening the door, she saw Mrs. Hastings walking leisurely up and down the large apartment; she looked up as Esther entered, and bade her good morning, adding, "I fear that the late hours which we kept last night have stolen the roses from your cheeks, for you are looking quite pale this morning. I hope that your appetite has not gone with the roses; at any rate, I shall do justice to the breakfast.—Ring the bell, Esther, if you will, for my long walk up and down these rooms has quite sharpened my appetite. I compute that I have walked two miles, at least, before you made your appearance."

"I imagine that your sleep was very refreshing," replied Esther, as she obeyed Mrs. Hastings' request,

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.

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and rang the bell; "for you are looking very bright and cheerful."

"On the contrary," returned Margaret, "I spent the greater part of the night in forming plans for the future, and picturing myself, as Lady Bountiful, visiting the dwellings of the poor, making gruel, washing dirty little faces, and combing refractory hair all unused to intruding combs—all very fine to dream of in the lone midnight hours, but how one's romantic whims melt into thin air before the morning sun. I arranged my hair in simple fashion this morning, and dressed as much as possible in suitable costume to try the effect, and find it quite becoming; still," she added, placing her hand on Esther's shoulder, and approaching a mirror, "I do not think the style of dress particularly adapted to my style of beauty. What do you say? Do I look like a sister of charity?"

Esther could not help smiling, as she gazed at the picture reflected there. Margaret's luxuriant hair was indeed knotted simply, yet displaying its abundance; her black dress, open from the throat to the waist, heightened by contrast the clearness and brilliancy of her complexion; a cambric handkerchief lay in smooth folds over her bosom. Her dress was eminently calculated to set off the beauty of her figure, which was almost faultless in its proportions, and a sort of pride, a delight in her own loveliness, lighted up her dark eyes.

Margaret was not vain, she was too proud for that. But she well knew that she was richly endowed with beauty, which not only consisted in regularity of fea-

tures, but in a rare brilliancy of expression, which was more readily felt than described.

Her eyes betrayed the fiery impetuosity of her character, though at times, veiled by her long eyelashes, there was a softness in their depths, that spoke of tenderness, and was even more attractive than their general expression.

Her forehead, white, broad, and low, with its arched and delicately marked eyebrows, would have delighted an artist; but her cheek, round and full, with its delicate bloom, her small mouth, displaying in her frequent smiles her pearly teeth, and her fair and dimpled chin, would have required no artist's quickened perception of the beautiful, to be admired by all.

Her head was set upon her neck in that graceful way which, though often described in story, is so rarely seen in real life. It gave a somewhat haughty expression to her whole carriage; and, in fact, there was an air about her whole person, that, beautiful as she was, would have repelled the fulsome compliments that flattering dangles so often thrust upon their disgusted listeners.

Margaret was not lovely, she was an elegant and beautiful woman; and as she was fully conscious of this, she did not wish to be reminded of it continually; and the expression of scorn, which at times played round her beautiful mouth, was the true exponent of her feelings.

Woe to the luckless wight who, hoping to please, should descend to the common-places of flattery, or

dare to give to his admiration the name of love. Full often had she administered to such individuals such scathing rebukes, that, like the moth, who, lured by its brilliancy, flies through the blaze of the candle, they too have learned, that pain and annihilation must be the penalty of their venture.

Some such thoughts as these passed through Esther's mind. "I must say," replied she, "that at this moment you more nearly resemble a tragedy queen."

"No, Miss Esther, I am neither a nun nor a tragedy queen, yet I feel that I shall reign over a broad dominion; but mine is not the only beautiful figure reflected here."

In truth it was not; though seen together, Esther's quiet loveliness would have been, perhaps, at first, likely to be somewhat obscured by the more striking elegance of her step-mother; yet there was something in the quiet serenity of Esther's deep hazel eyes, and in the delicacy of her almost colorless cheek, that attracted the attention, and led one to look more earnestly, to see in what the charm consisted.

It was not, certainly, in regularity of features, for that could not be claimed for Esther. Her brown silky hair was indeed beautiful, and the simple way in which it was looped up from her face was extremely becoming; her teeth were fine, her complexion clear, though dark; but it was the expression of her face which gave to it its chief charm, for every passing thought and fleeting emotion was pictured in that fresh young face.

Her figure was slight, but yet there was a repose of

manner, a quiet dignity about her, which made one forget this defect, if it might be called one, since her form was well-proportioned and symmetrical. She and Margaret were indeed a perfect contrast to each other.

Both were peculiarly *American* in their styles of beauty; but in Margaret, the spirit of beauty which pervades the majestic forests, the deep thundering waterfalls, and the wild rugged mountains, seemed to dwell; while Esther's loveliness reminded one of the deep, silent valleys and sleeping lakes that dot our beautiful native land.

Margaret seemed formed to be admired, Esther to be loved. Margaret's proper sphere was in the glittering halls of fashion, Esther's in the quiet home-circle, by the cheerful fireside. Margaret was a brilliant gem, sparkling and radiant, which one might be proud to display to the whole world, Esther a simple wild flower, to be loved and cherished in retirement. And as the triumphant smile, which gleamed on Margaret's face as she gazed on her rare beauty, seemed but to lend to it a new charm, so the deep blush that mantled Esther's cheek with its warm glow, but increased her loveliness.

"Do not blush, child," said Margaret, "beauty is not a merit, but a gift, in which we should rejoice. Ah! John enters to announce breakfast, and I will postpone my address to a future period."

Mrs. Hastings chatted pleasantly during breakfast, on various subjects; and as Esther looked at her, radiant in beauty and smiles, she could hardly realize

that she was the same being, whom, the night before, she had endeavored to cheer, in gloom and sorrow.

Something of her feelings Margaret probably read in her expressive countenance; for, as they reëntered the parlor, she said, "I suppose you will soon be ready to accompany me to my father's home, for no doubt *your* whim of school-teaching has, in company with its kindred, *my* visions, passed away. You see as I do, that it is not your proper sphere. Do not be afraid to go with me, for I promise not to weary you with a repetition of last night's performances. There are hours in the life of every one, when we give way to gloomy feelings, and talk and think of the future, as if we hoped for no happiness. It is weak and foolish. You have seen me thus once. If I had thus exposed myself to any other person I should despise myself; but I feel sure that you will not take advantage of my weakness. I hope that you, like a sensible girl, have decided to go home with me; for I feel very much attached to you, and can not have you leave me."

"I shall indeed regret leaving you," answered Esther, "but my decision remains the same. I shall go and teach as I have promised. You are right," she continued, "in thinking that what you are now pleased to term your weakness, has not lessened you in my opinion; so far from that, in it I recognize your true nobility of character, which will assert itself, even though you try so hard to keep it down. Do not, I beg of you, thus wrong yourself! Let your high and noble nature act unrestrained! Cultivate instead of repress-

ing your longings after the good and true in life! Oh! dear Margaret," she continued, "you who might do so much good in the world, give your heart to the Saviour, and devote your talents to his service.

"Do not go into heroics, little Ettie," said Margaret, parting her hair and kissing her brow, "you are a dear good girl, and though we do not agree, yet you are so terribly in earnest that I love you the better for it. I wish I did feel as you do; but my path in life is already marked out. Since you *will* have it so, we must separate. Take your own way, and let me go in mine. Still let me hope that you will love me a little, even if we must disagree," she whispered, "for my heart yearns towards you," and she drew Esther to her bosom and kissed her repeatedly. "Shall we not love each other?" she continued.

"Always," replied Esther, warmly; "and we will hope to meet again."

A few moments Margaret held Esther in her warm embrace, then releasing her, exclaimed with a light laugh, "we are getting quite sentimental, and we have no time to waste thus. I shall leave all business here to Mr. Phelps. A few hours more, and I suppose the hammer of the auctioneer will resound here. Let us now descend to the realities of packing trunks, and the like prosaic duties," she said as they left the room together.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE WAY.

"WHAT rapid changes have taken place within a few weeks in my life," thought Esther, as she sprang into the wagon, which, waiting at Mr. Merrill's door, was to bear her to her new home as school-teacher. "I should hardly have realized that I was so soon to change my place as pupil for that of teacher." Thoughts of the loss which she had sustained in the death of her father rushed over her, and a choking sensation in her throat warned her that she must control her emotion.

She drew back her veil, and looked around her, determined to withdraw her mind from her own self.

It was a lovely day in October. The trees were arrayed in their most gorgeous hues, reminding Esther of the beauty which Consumption lends to its victim just before death. Beautiful as was the scenery, she felt that in her present state of mind, she had better think of something else, and turning to her companion, she made some casual remark on the weather.

"Wall! it is pooty fair," replied Mr. Simpson, a large-framed and coarse-featured backwoodsman;

"pooty fair," he repeated, "but the roads is bad, as you'll find to your sorrow, I guess, afore we git home."

"It seems pretty good travelling here," replied Esther, looking at the smooth hard road over which they were passing.

"Oh, yes! tolerable here, but the teams has cut up the roads dreadful bad, I tell ye, but 'taint nothin to what it was when I first went to the Aroostook country."

"How long ago was that?" asked Esther.

"Oh! ten year ago. You see I had got pooty much run down, and hed a wife and five children on my hands, so I laid awake many a night contrivin what to do, and at last says I, wife, I tell ye I've made up my mind to go up to the Aroostick. All she said was, When shall you go? Right off, says I, and I was as good as my word. We packed up what we had, and that didn't take us long, and started for the new country. I had been up and looked out a place, and as pooty a ridge of land as you'd want to see. There wa'nt but one house there, that was a log one, and folks was a livin in it. My old woman looked rather blank when she see the accommodations—only two rooms,—and we was going to board there till I could git a house built. I went to work and worked hard, and my wife, as good a one as ever man hed, helped me, and now we are doin well, and nery one on us haint never been sorry that we come to the Aroostick. We haint hed no very good schools, but now we are goin to hev one steady six months in the year. But

here we are to Wilkins's, and I'll jist water my horse. I guess you'd better get out, and go in to rest ye a little."

Esther obeyed, and stepped into the parlor, in which was a rag carpet, several painted wooden chairs, a rocking-chair, and a table, over which hung a glass. Pictures of various Marys, Augustas, and one of General Jackson, adorned the walls. Upon the table lay one or two books, the Bible, an odd volume of Thaddeus of Warsaw, and several Daguerreotypes.

Almost as soon as Esther was seated, a door opened, and a woman entered. She was very tall and dark; her short black hair fell in rather a disordered state over her sharp features; her black eyes were particularly keen and piercing, and at one quick glance seemed to take account both of Esther's person and apparel; her mouth was large, and displayed when open an uneven and not particularly *white* set of teeth, which were evidently intended more for use than ornament; her dress was on the principle so often insisted on by books of fashion, adapted to the *style* of the wearer, for it was of coarse material, ill-fitting, and bearing marks of having had little labor bestowed on it, either in its making, or, having been finished, in keeping it clean; it was short, and her sleeves were rolled up, leaving her arms bare. She wiped her hands, which were wet, with her apron, and apologized for her appearance, by saying that she was "cleanin house."

Esther made no reply, nor did the good woman

seem to expect one, for she continued, "How fur be ye goin'?"

"I believe it is to be Umcolcus, No. 9, 6th Range," replied Esther.

"Lord! I know who ye be! you're the school-marm that Simpson went arter, haint you?"

"I presume I am," replied Ettie.

"Wall, ye don't look very stout, be ye well?"

"Quite well, I thank you," returned Esther, and turned to the table, taking up a book, wishing to avoid further conversation; but it was of no avail. Mrs. Wilkins, for this was the mistress of the house, looked curiously at Esther's dress, inquiring—

"If this was the latest fashion for making sleeves? Wall, I declare, it is funny, makes a great deal of washin. Where did you git this?" she continued, drawing Esther's watch from her pocket; "a present from your beau?"

"No, it was given me by my father."

"Wall, where is your father?"

A flood of tears was Esther's only reply.

The good woman seemed sorry, but merely saying, "Then it's him you're in mournin' for," turned and looked out of the window.

"Simpson's ready," she exclaimed, and in a moment Mr. Simpson himself stood in the door, whip in hand, saying, "All ready, Miss Hastings. What's the trouble?" he asked of Mrs. Wilkins, in a low tone.

She replied, "I was a askin' on her a few questions about her father, and it made her cry."

As they drove from the door, Mr. Simpson remarked,

"I hope you don't think all the Aroostick folks is like Miss Wilkins. She is the peekinest, meddlinest, tattlinest creetur that ever I see."

Such a string of superlatives made Esther smile in spite of herself; and naturally cheerful, she soon recovered her good spirits.

Mr. Simpson talked almost unceasingly for a while, seeming, to Esther's great relief, to expect no reply, except an occasional monosyllable, until at length he subsided into a low whistle, or some few words to his horse.

It was now nearly noon, and the rough road had given Esther quite an appetite; she was therefore rather glad to see, a little before them, on a hill, a sign-board, which indicated that here they might find good cheer.

"That's a first rate tavern," remarked Mr. Simpson; "I'll bait my horse there, and we'll git some dinner."

The horse seemed to know that he was approaching good quarters, for he quickened his pace without the reminder of the whip, and soon they reached the door of the house.

It was a large two-storied house, painted red, and a piazza ran across the front; on this a group of men, whose red shirts betokened them lumbermen, was standing. Some were smoking, but the greater part were leaning against the wooden posts of the piazza, chewing tobacco, and talking of the need of rain. They all stared at Esther as she alighted from the

wagon, and as she passed them she heard one say, "Ruther a pooty gal."

"Looks wall enough," replied another, replacing the quid of tobacco which he had discarded with a fresh one, "but them haint the kind to suit me: give me one real hearty, smart, rosy-cheeked gal, before twenty of your pale, cityfied ones, I say."

"Wall, Simpson, how are ye?" said the landlord, as the former entered the bar-room.

"O, I'm so as to be around, but when dinner comes you'll find me to be consumptive, I'm afeard."

The dinner-bell soon rang, and a very substantial repast was spread upon the table. It would have surprised one, less accustomed than Esther to backwoods' life, to see tea and preserves at dinner, but she found, that however ungentle and unseasonable, both tasted remarkably well. She felt quite refreshed after dinner was over, and hoped to set out again at once; but Mr. Simpson said "the horse hadn't eat his oats yet, and she must wait a while." So he returned to the bar-room, and she sat alone in the parlor. Here she noticed an old piano (rather an unusual piece of furniture) and a book-case; the latter, however, was locked. She read through the glass doors some of the titles, and found Rollin's Ancient History, Clarissa Harlowe, Scott's Commentaries, and a French grammar and dictionary, among the number. Finding it impossible to get at the contents of the case, she seated herself at the piano and played a lively air. She had hardly played a march, when a noise caused her to look around, and she was surprised to see seve-

ral heads thrust in at the door; and as she stopped, one man called out—

"That's fust rate, go on; it's been a good while since I heerd that are pianner talk like that."

She hesitated a moment, but concluded to comply with his request; and as she commenced again she noticed a middle-aged woman standing by her side, who exclaimed, in a broken voice, as Esther struck a few chords of a waltz, "That's one that our Liza Ann played;" and raising her hand she wiped her eyes.

Esther left the piano, the audience retreated from the door, and the good woman seated herself by her side.

"Poor Lizzie," said she, as if thinking aloud, "How she used to love to play on that! Them's most all her books." She went on, as she noticed that Esther glanced at the book-case—"I keep um locked up, so they needn't get tore and daubed."

Esther regretted that her music had called up, apparently, a painful subject to her companion; and wishing to recall her from it, asked her the usual question, how long she had been in the country.

"Oh! nigh about twenty year," was the reply. "When we fust come, there wan't a house within a hundred mile on us. We was onest pooty well off, but my husband got in with a rogue, that cheated him all out of his property, and I was too proud to stay where I had been well off arter I got poor, so I coaxed him off here, and a dreadful hard time we had on it at fust; but I didn't care, till my children got old enough to be learnin something, and there warn't ne

schools round here. My folks sent for my boys, but we couldn't spare um, they was needed on the place; so I spent my evenings learnin um all I knew, but I let my only gal go. It was hard for me, but I knew it was better for her. She was the pootiest little creature that ever you see, as lively as a cricket all day long; and arter she went, somehow it seemed as if the sunshine went with her. Her father missed her when he come home tired, arter pilin logs all day, for she always used to comb his hair, and talk so pooty, and I missed her *all* the time. But I let her stay two year, and when she come home, she had grown so tall and handsome that I didn't hardly know her. Then she had a mighty kind of a delicate way with her, and when I fust see her, I was afraid she might hev got prôund like, and despise her old father and mother; but no, her heart was in the right place. She would work hard, and try to save me, and she tried to appear as happy as ever. But I see that she pined. She would play on that pianner, hours to a time; she brought it home with her: and she used to read the Bible a monstrous sight. But the cold winters didn't seem to agree with her, and she took cold, and a cough sot in. I tried every thing for her, but she didn't git no better. One day says she, 'Mother, dear, I shan't live long; I am sorry for your sake, but we shan't be parted long.' I begged her not to talk so, and told her that she'd soon git well; but she shook her head, and told me not to deceive myself. But I would not believe it till I had to. She lived till spring. She used to be very fond of violets, and I used to try and

cheer her up, and tell her she would soon be able to go out and pick them. 'No, mother,' said she, 'when the violets bloom, I shall be in my grave.'

"She was right; but she died so calm and peaceful. She told us all to meet her on high; and just as she was dying, she put her arms around my neck, and breathed out, 'God shall wipe all tears from your eyes.' These were her last words; she fell back, and died with a smile on her lips."

She ceased talking, and wept softly and quietly for a few moments, and then resumed.

"Her death was a dreadful blow to me. I haint never been the same woman since. I felt as though there wan't nothing worth living for, and I wanted to die; but folks can't alus die when they want to. When you fust come in, you put me in mind of Liza; somehow you have the same way with you, though her eyes were blue, and yours are so dark; but you have the same sort of a smile."

Esther was much touched by the simple narrative which she had heard, and, taking her hand, said, "You found one sure and never-failing consolation in Lizzie's Bible, I suppose?"

"Yes, indeed, that I did. I read it fust because she loved it so much, but arter a while I loved it for itself. Yes," she repeated, "I do hope soon to meet my Lizzie in heaven."

Again the vision of Mr. Simpson appeared, to announce his readiness to start on their journey; and, with a warm pressure of the hand, Esther left her new acquaintance.

The country through which they were passing absorbed Esther's attention, as it was her first visit to the backwoods of Maine. At last she said to Mr. Simpson, "I do not see so many of those stump-fences as I expected to."

"Lord bless ye! stump-fences! no, indeed. This is too new country for them. Why they have to rot, so as to be hauled up, and that takes time."

"I think they make a handsome fence," remarked Esther.

"Yes, they do so. Critters can't get through um, no how."

"It must take a great while to clear up these lands," musingly said Esther.

"That it does, and a lot of hard work too," replied her companion. "Fust you cut down these great trees, that's a job, I tell you; then set um afire, unless the fire has run through the woods afore. That's what we call a fell piece. There's one now," he continued, pointing with his whip to a larger tract of land, where trees, blackened by fire, lay in confused masses.

"What next is done?" asked Ettie.

Mr. Simpson, apparently delighted with her interest in a subject so familiar to him, went on: "Why, then we junk it, and pile it, then set the piles afire agin. That makes burnt land. The stump is left in solid too."

"I should think it must be difficult to plough such land," said Ettie, as Mr. Simpson pointed out to her a specimen of the field, ready to be planted.

"I guess it would. Plough!" he ejaculated. "I should hate to be the man to do that job."

"How, then, do you get in your crops?"

"Why, oats and sich like we sow, and then drag a bush arter us, to cover the seed, and potatoes, and corn, we hack in, as we call it, with a hoe."

"That must take a deal of time," replied Esther.

"Wall, yes; but what's time for? We might as well be diggin there, as doin anything else; and the land pays well for the hard work we do. Burnt land is fust rate for crops."

The setting sun warned our travellers to hasten on their way, and soon Mr. Simpson pointed out the bald summit of Mount Katahdin to his companion, with the comforting assurance that they were quite near Patten.

Soon they drove up to a tavern, where a good supper refreshed them. A blazing wood fire shone cheerfully in the parlor, and for a while Esther sat there, thinking of the future, and trying to imagine what would be the character of her companions in her new home. But the fatigues of the day had prepared her to enjoy a quiet night's rest, and she sought her comfortable chamber, where she soon forgot all unpleasant forebodings in sleep.

CHAPTER V.

THE WORK-FIELD REACHED.

THE next morning early found Esther and her companion on their way, and after a hard day's riding they approached what Mr. Simpson said was a cross-road, on entering which, he told Esther that they had only seven miles to go before they reached home. But such a seven miles! A plough had never been through here, she was informed, and readily believed, for stumps and stones of large size lay directly in the middle of the way; and if Esther had not been pretty courageous she might have feared an overturn.

The path seemed to her quite difficult to follow, and several openings, through which she had imagined that they must go, her companion informed her were logging roads, used only in the winter, and pointed out to her one or two fallen trees, which were intended as warnings to travellers not to enter there. They had, however, gone over so many trees, which Mr. Simpson had told her were "windfalls," that she had not supposed these were placed there intentionally. Her companion informed her that one of these roads led into a poke hogin, which he further explained, as a sort of quagmire, very easy to get into, but very difficult to leave.

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The tall trees made the road seem very gloomy, and the two hours which it took to pass through this cross road seemed very long to Esther; and she rejoiced with her companion, when he pointed out to her a house, situated on a little hill, as his home. The lights which streamed from the windows seemed inviting them to hasten, and offering them welcome, and soon they halted before the door.

Loud shouts of "Father's come! Father's come!" were heard, as a troop of boys, of various sizes, rushed out, on hearing Mr. Simpson's sonorous "whoa!"

The greeting which the new comers received indoors was equally cordial, and Mrs. Simpson, with the assistance of a tall, awkward-looking girl, whom she called Elvira, soon had a smoking-hot supper prepared for them.

Esther was really very much fatigued, and her rough ride had given her an appetite, so that she readily agreed with Mr. Simpson, who declared himself "as hungry as a bear," and in thinking it a very nice supper.

Meanwhile the children kept running backwards and forwards, from the kitchen to the parlor (for these were the only apartments on the first floor), peeping curiously at Miss Hastings, and occasionally breaking into a low giggle outside of the door.

"Young uns, go to bed!" exclaimed Mrs. Simpson, as she nearly stumbled over the youngest, Sammy, as he was called. "You'll be the death of me yet! They fly round like a hen with her head cut off," she continued, to her husband; who replied, "Oh, wall,

young uns must be young uns ; taint no use trying to make old men and women on um."

Supper was soon over, and the dishes washed, for the latter was speedily accomplished by Mrs. Simpson and her brisk assistant, Elvira, and they seated themselves before the large fire-place, where huge logs of wood were crackling, with a pleasant, cheerful sound.

"Wall, you look most beat out, Miss Hastings," exclaimed Mrs. Simpson ; "p'raps you want to go to bed?"

Esther replied, that she was indeed very tired ; and Elvira at once arose, lighted a tallow candle, which reposed in an iron candlestick, and signified her readiness to show Esther her chamber.

Bidding the family good-night, they were ascending a flight of stairs, when Mrs. Simpson called after them, "to be sure and put the light out."

The staircase led into an unfinished chamber, where several beds were made upon the floor, and loud breathing denoted that they were already occupied. They passed silently along to the farther end of the apartment, where was a thin partition ; a patchwork quilt formed the door, which Elvira lifted, and they entered.

The room was unfinished, the boards of the floor rattled under their tread, and the light revealed rafters overhead ; a strip of rag carpeting was laid before the bed, which, with a few chairs, a rickety washstand, and a small table, over which hung a cracked looking-glass, comprised the furniture of the chamber.

Esther was about to bid her companion good-night, but saw that she was preparing to sleep with her ; and as she well knew that a request to be allowed a bed alone would only be set down as pride, and feeling herself above her companion, she said not a word.

Elvira was soon snugly ensconced in bed, and her curious black eyes watched closely all Esther's movements. Such close scrutiny was rather unpleasant, and Esther hesitated for a moment, whether to kneel in prayer before retiring ; but, despising herself, she did so, and after her devotions were concluded, as she was about to extinguish the candle, Elvira exclaimed, "Don't *blow* the light out, *put* it out."

"That was what I was going to do," replied Esther.

"No! no!" repeated Elvira ; "*set* it outside of the quilt for Miss Simpson ; she'll be up arter it in a few minutes."

Esther did as she was requested, and once in the good, comfortable bed, was soon fast asleep.

"Breakfast's most ready!" were the first sounds which greeted Esther's ears the following morning. "Haden't you better be a gittin up?"

"Yes, Elvira," replied Esther, "I will be ready in a few moments." She soon found, however, that the washstand was merely intended for ornament, as there was no water in the pitcher ; and as Elvira had disappeared, she was obliged to defer her ablutions till she went below ; resolving, however, as Mrs. Simpson, in answer to her inquiries, pointed her to the sink in the kitchen, that she would effect a reform in this one particular, if in no other.

The table was already set, and Esther had hardly finished her ablutions when quite a number of men, dressed in red shirts, entered, headed by Mr. Simpson. These, Elvira told her, were the occupants of the beds on the floor, up stairs, as they were on their way to get things in readiness for logging operations in the winter. They had come up timber hunting, and had come out to the settlement to spend the night.

All now sat down to the table, upon which was a smoking brown bread loaf, and a large plate of pork, an equally large plate of beans, also another plate heaped with boiled potatoes, and still another, filled with warm biscuits. The ware was white, with blue edges, and everything looked bright and clean, except the knives, which appeared entirely unacquainted with brick-dust, or any similar polisher. The coffee looked very dark, and was rather thick. Esther soon found that its dark hue was not owing to its strength, but to its having been sweetened with molasses; as Mrs. Simpson said, she "alus biled in a cup of molasses, it made it so much better; but she didn't know as it was sweet enough for Miss Hastings," and offered her the bowl of molasses, to add a little more if necessary. This, Esther declined.

All at the table were now requested, by Mr. Simpson, "to take hold and help themselves," which they immediately did, helping themselves to butter with their own knives, and cutting the brown bread loaf in the same manner. Mrs. Simpson helped Esther, telling her "not to be bashful, and to make herself at home." With the exception of this remark, very lit-

tle was said by any one during the meal, which was speedily dispatched.

As it was Sunday morning, after breakfast was over, Esther inquired if there was to be a meeting in the vicinity.

"No," replied Mrs. Simpson, "we don't hev no preachin, except Elder Rider onct in a while, about onct in six weeks. They haint no stiddy meeting this side of Patten."

"I wisht they was," remarked Elvira, "for Sunday's a dreadful long day, with nothin to do, and the men-folks stragglin round in the way, most all the time."

Sol, the oldest hope of Mr. Simpson, a tall awkward boy of nineteen, now entered, saying, "Virey, where's my fishin line?"

"How do you spose I know," responded Elvira, rather tartly; "you're always leavin your traps round. I spose I tucked it into a box in the closet."

"Wall, wall, don't get mad, and snap a feller's head off," replied Sol, opening the closet door, and soon finding the missing line.

On looking out of the window, Esther saw, to her surprise, several men examining their guns, and one or two with fish-hooks and lines, as if preparing for sport.

"Where are these people going?" she asked of Elvira, as they started across the fields.

"Some on um gunnin, and some on um fishin," coolly answered Vira. "We don't know much about Sundays here," she continued, seeing Esther's look of surprise. "I'm going to clear up here a little," she

went on, "and then, if you're a mind to, I'll go in to some of the neighbors with you. Miss Simpson!" she called out, "come in here, and help me turn up the bed."

Mrs. Simpson obeyed the summons; and to Esther's surprise (for she had noticed the bed, but could not imagine what they were about to do), pulled the outer quilt down to the foot of the bed, and slowly lifted the bedstead till it rested against the wall, arranging the quilt so as to cover it quite nicely.

"Didn't you never see a turn-up bed afore?" she asked of Esther, who replied in the negative.

"Wall, they're mighty convenient things for folks that haint got much room."

Elvira had soon swept the apartment, and cleared up, as she called it, a process which Esther thought consisted in tucking everything out of sight, most of them going into the box where Sol had found his fishing line.

This finished, Elvira again offered to make some neighborly calls. This invitation Miss Hastings declined, but proposed taking a walk into the woods, which were now in all the glory of the Indian summer.

Elvira readily consented, taking a knife with her, as she said she wanted to "get some broom-stuff, for the broom she had now was a miserable thing, made of hemlock, and that wan't fit for nothin, they was so many spoozles. Cedar was the stuff for her."

They walked a short distance in silence, for Esther was absorbed in the beauty of the scenery. They were now in a rough road, which led directly through

the forest. The wind sighed through the branches, and the birds were singing their pleasantest songs; the faint drumming of the partridge was heard occasionally, and the quiet humming of insects, united with these sounds, forming one of those delightful melodies that a poet has so beautifully called "Nature's Voluntaries."

Crossing a gridiron bridge, as these rude structures of logs are called, which are laid in marshy spots, they soon came in full view of the Aroostook river, which flowed gently on, fringed by almost every variety of the undergrowth of the forest.

A beautiful meadow was formed there, which Elvira said was called an "*enterval*," further explaining that it was a tract of land which, during the spring freshet, was overflowed and much enriched by this temporary deluge.

"So do the waters of affliction, flowing over it, enrich the heart," thought Esther, for it was a habit of her mind to seek analogies between the material and the spiritual world.

"Is that an island opposite?" she asked, of her companion.

"Oh, no; that's the main land. You see this river crooks round like, and makes what they call the ox-bow. We are in the ox-bow now. You've seen an ox-yoke, haint you? so you know now what shape this ere land is. Folks say you can see Katahdin from here; p'raps you can."

Esther looked fixedly in the direction indicated by

Elvira, and either saw, or imagined she did, the misty outline of that high and snow-capped peak.

Her heart glowed with pride in her native State as she stood there. She felt as if she would challenge the world to produce a wilder, and yet more quietly beautiful scene, than that on which she gazed; and this was but one, and by no means the most beautiful view that she had seen in Maine. Here was all the glory of Vermont's forests and hills, and, added to that, the river, which lends so much beauty to any landscape. The purity of an Italian sky, with, if travellers say aright, greater and more beautiful changes.

She thought of the rocky shores of the upper Penobscot, and its frequent rapids, as it flows towards the sea, gaining, like the human character, new strength from the obstacles which it encounters; and, flowing in a deeper and calmer current, ever onward to the sea, as does our life river mingle at last with eternity's ocean.

But her mind was recalled from the various pictures that memory was summoning before her, dissimilar indeed in their character, yet alike in the silent lessons of truth and beauty which they teach, by the voice of Vira, who asked, abruptly, "Be you a professor?"

"Yes," replied Esther, who understood the technical term which most of the backwoods people apply to Christians.

"Wall, I thought you was, when I see you kneel last night," returned Elvira.

"And do you never ask God's protection through

the night, and his forgiveness for your sins through the day?" asked Esther.

"Wall, no, I aint apt to," replied Vira. "I spose I'd orter, but folks don't alus do as well as they know."

"That is very true, Elvira," said Esther; "still it is no excuse for us, when we do wrong, that others do the same. I hope," she continued, "that you will begin to do what you know is right, in this one thing at least."

Several children now scampered by, looking back shyly. "Whose children are those?" asked Miss Hastings.

"Oh! some on um's Emery's, and some on um's Haley's; they're alus racing round, all over the lot, Sundays."

Esther made no reply, but mentally resolved that she would attempt to make a slight reform in this manner of spending the Sabbath. A Sunday school she determined to establish, if possible; and, building many a pleasant air-castle, she returned to the house.

CHAPTER VI.

WORK BEGUN.

MONDAY morning had arrived, and Esther was aroused very early, by the loud sounds that are usually said to be accompaniments of that morning the world over.

"It's thump, thump! and scold, scold! scold, scold away!
There is no comfort in the house, upon a washing-day."

Both Elvira and Mrs. Simpson were flying briskly about the kitchen, as Miss Hastings entered it, both with elf-locks hanging loosely down, and greatly abbreviated gowns, which displayed to great advantage both their muscular arms and feet, whose size would have horrified a Chinese, to say the least; it was evident that "utility before beauty" had been the principle upon which the aforesaid feet had been constructed.

Mrs. Simpson greeted her guest kindly, and bent again over her wash-tubs, sousing the garments up and down in the white foaming suds, with a vehemence that seemed well adapted to test the strength of the fabric of which they were made.

"Poke down them are clothes over the fire," she exclaimed, to Elvira, who was getting breakfast, and replied, rather tartly—

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"Wall! wall! in a minit! I haint got six hands, and the only two I've got is fryin pork now, and I shan't let it seorch for nobody. Clear out, Sam!" she exclaimed, in her turn, to the youngest of the flock of white-headed urchins. "Get out of my sight! You're alus right in the way when nobody wants ye, and alus gone, nobody knows whar, ef ye are needed to do an errand."

Sam made no reply to this, but, pulling his mother's gown, to attract her attention, began, in rather a whimpering tone, to ask "ef breakfast wan't most ready."

"Clear out!" was the parent's reply, in not the most amiable tone; "go long into t'other room, with Miss Hastings."

Esther at once took the hint, and seated herself in the t'other room, where she endeavored to interest Sammy. But he was very shy, and, looking very sheepish and bashful, either made no reply to her remarks, or in so low a tone, that what he said was quite unintelligible. He stayed but a few moments with her, but escaped again into the kitchen, where, as before, he was greeted by loud and angry voices, which he seemed to think a matter of course, and to which he paid not the slightest attention.

Breakfast was soon ready, and nearly as soon over, and Esther prepared to go to her duties as teacher.

Guided by Sammy, who, though barefooted, trotted briskly over the sticks and stones in their path, she soon reached the school-house. It was situated in an opening, as a spot in the forest cleared of trees is called, where stumps of large size were scattered

thickly around. It was a very pretty place, for the tall primeval forest trees were standing, not far distant, in all their evergreen majesty, while, sprinkled among them, were the maple, birch, and beech trees, decked in the fanciful and many-colored robes that autumn gives them. The maple, with its reddish-yellow tints, the delicate straw-color of the birch, and the deeper yellow of the thick, clustering, though smaller leaves of the beech, gave a brilliancy to the deep forest, to which the evergreens, stately though they were, would have given rather a sombre appearance, had they not been mingled with their more graceful, though frailer sisterhood.

The school-house itself was by no means the least picturesque object in the scene. It was not very large, and was built entirely of logs, piled in a square form, the bark still on them, and the ends sticking out at the four corners, with no thought of being fitted together. The chinks, which were unavoidable, from this manner of building, were filled with moss to keep out the rain. The roof was pointed, and composed of smaller logs, over which was spread the bark of the hemlock. The windows, which were composed of but four panes of glass each, were of course small, and were also irregular. The door was very white and fair, for, owing to the scarcity of boards there, as there was no saw-mill near, it had been split out of a pine log. A leather string hung outside, which Esther pulled; the wooden latch flew up on the other side, and she entered the house.

The loud shouts of laughter which resounded from

the school-room had prepared her to see many of her pupils already assembled there; and on her entrance there was a pause, for all were curious to see the new mistress.

Esther glanced first at the group of scholars, of all ages and sizes, collected there; then at the interior of her new premises.

It was equally as rough as the exterior had led her to expect. The floor was of boards, which were so loosely placed, that they rattled beneath her tread. The walls differed only from the outside, in having the bark hewed off from the logs; but the three large logs which ran across the room, to support the roof, answering the purpose of beams, were free from bark on the lower side only. There was no ceiling overhead, nothing but the mere shell of a house.

A large rock chimney, built like a stone wall, also did double duty, as fireplace. The large stick of timber which formed the boundary line making known where the fireplace ended and the chimney began, bore marks of having been on fire at some time, for it was scorched and blackened. A fire was now burning, though it was not yet very cold weather. The wood rested on two large rocks, which were pressed into service as andirons, and still other stones, some flat, and some sticking up their sharp edges, were placed before the fireplace, making a very serviceable hearth.

The benches were merely boards, some of them having round sticks stuck in the ends as a support, while others rested on pieces of board nailed to them,

and still others, having been broken down, were placed on large stones. Planed boards were nailed against the walls, in a sloping direction, to serve the purpose of writing-desks; and on these laid books and slates, in most "admired disorder." Neither benches or desks were adorned with paint of any description.

Esther looked in vain for her seat of majesty. There was neither platform or desk for her; but a chair stood in one corner, which she immediately appropriated.

The girls had now commenced hanging their outer garments on some nails, which were driven into one corner of the room. These proving insufficient for all their clothes, a pile was thrown upon the floor, beneath those that were hung up, and tin pails, containing their respective dinners, were scattered in various corners of the apartment.

It was nine o'clock. Esther looked in vain for something to call the attention of the noisy troop to that fact, but no bell was there; not even a stick to pound against the walls.

She arose.

"Children!" said she, "you may take your seats; it is time for school to commence."

A scramble ensued, and presently all were seated.

There was a pause, when, all of a sudden, with a thump and several screams, down came one seat, which, having been supported by a stone, Esther shrewdly suspected had been helped to fall by the boy who sat at the end of it, and who looked as solemn as possible, though he could not prevent the

merry twinkle of a mischief-lover, from appearing in his eyes.

After the laughter, which this accident caused, had subsided, Esther began to address her pupils.

"I am glad to see you all this pleasant morning," said she. "You have come here for the purpose of learning, and I hope that the few weeks that we spend together will be of great advantage to you. I shall hope to find you all attentive and obedient, and you will find me always ready to help you to become well educated men and women. Who knows," she continued, "but that some day I shall see some of my pupils in Congress at Washington, helping to make the laws of the land? Stranger things than that have happened," she added, as a giggle greeted this remark. "Now, children, you may take your Testaments, and we will read a few verses."

There was a stir, a running to the sloping desk against the wall, but she soon perceived that there were but few who had books.

"Very well," said she, "I see that you are not all supplied this morning, so we will omit it till to-morrow. We will begin our school by repeating the Lord's Prayer. You may all kneel," she continued; and as she was obeyed, she knelt also, and repeated those solemn and beautiful words, that have thrilled the heart of the Christian, whenever he has heard or uttered them, retaining ever a portion of the same power that they had, when first they fell from the lips of the meek and lowly Jesus, as he taught them to his humble disciples.

The prayer being finished, she set herself to work to write down the names of her pupils; and having accomplished this, which took no little time, she told all those who did not know their letters to come out together.

Nobody answered the summons; and she was obliged to ask each little one, whom she suspected to be about to take this first difficult step in the ladder of learning, separately.

Her pleasant smile and kind words soon did much to divest them of the bashfulness which she had rightly judged to be the only reason for their disobedience; and having pointed out the different letters to some dozen flaxen-haired and lisping children, she dismissed them again to their seats.

"Those who read in some reader" she now called upon, and a long file was soon stretched across the room, some of them standing with their toes on a crack, heads erect, and arms folded stiffly across their breasts, others leaning negligently on the shoulder of their next neighbor.

Several had no book whatever. The greater part, however, were supplied, but unfortunately the books were nearly as diverse as their owners. The English Reader, the Columbian Orator, and the American Preceptor, had each about an equal number of readers. Morse's Geography, one held up in triumph as his book; another had the National Reader; while still another, coming down to modern times, owned an American First Class Book.

"This is bad," thought Esther, "it will oblige me to have so many classes in reading."

"I will hear you read," she said; and taking a book she selected a passage, and gave it to the first of the row.

The pupil, a tall and awkward girl, just emerging from childhood, and entering that period, the transition state, when the girl becomes at once conscious that she is no longer a child, and, with the consciousness of self, loses the freshness and abandon that render childhood so beautiful, too often gaining nothing of value in its place, complied with her teacher's request, and read straight on, heeding neither stops or marks of any kind, in a loud and unvarying monotone.

All the rest read in quite a similar style, some even in a worse one, and Esther was glad to dismiss them to their seats.

"Please m'y g'wout?" asked one girl, popping up from her seat.

"The girls may all go for a short recess," was her teacher's reply.

When girls and boys in turn had enjoyed their recess, Miss Hastings called upon the class in Grammar, and nearly all of the last class in Reading re-appeared. Murray's Grammar was the principal textbook, though some few had a little primer-shaped volume, of rather an antiquated appearance, called "The Young Lady's Accidence."

"Oh! if I only had a black-board!" was Esther's inward sigh; but as that was out of the question, she attempted to do the next best thing in her power.

In answer to her inquiries, as to how far each had advanced in the study, she found that the most of them had gone over a good number of pages; but, from some few questions that she asked, she concluded that they had at best a very vague idea of what they had committed to memory.

"What is Grammar?"

"It is the art of writing and speaking the English language with propriety," rapidly answered Bill Smith, who stood at the head, and who appeared well pleased to be questioned.

"Are we English people?" asked his teacher.

"No, marm."

"Do we speak the English language?"

Bill scratched his head, then plunged his hands into his trousers' pockets, and made no reply.

"Who in the class can tell me what sort of people speak the English language? Any one who knows may raise his hand."

No hand arose.

Esther continued. "You know there are a great many different people living in different parts of the world; and if we were to go there, we could not understand what they said, because they speak differently from us. They all have bread to eat, and beds to sleep on; but if we were hungry, and asked for bread, or sleepy, and asked for a bed to rest on, as we do here, they would not know what we wanted. For instance, the French call bread *pain*, the Germans, *brod*. The language that the French people use is called French that of the Germans is called

German. Now, who can tell me what people would be likely to talk English?"

"The English," shouted all, with sparkling eyes.

"And could we understand the English, if we went to England, where they live?"

"Yes!" and "No!" cried about an equal number.

"What country do we live in?"

"America!" screamed all.

"What language do we speak?"

"American!"

"Not quite right," said Esther. We speak the English language, and can understand the English, of course. And now, Who can tell me how it happens that we Americans speak the same language with the English?"

There was a long pause. Some of the boys scratched their heads; some shifted uneasily from one foot to the other; some plunged their hands deep into their pockets, as if they hoped to draw out a reply from their depths profound—the girls twisted their apron-strings; but none of these movements answered the question.

Esther then proceeded, in a very concise manner, to tell them of the coming of our ancestors from England to America, describing vividly their landing on Plymouth Rock, to which all listened with parted lips and eager eyes. It was evident that they had some new ideas. ®

Having finished this digression, she resumed.

"What is a noun?"

"A noun is a name," answered Mary Haley, the girl who stood next to the head.

"And how many kinds are there? Any one may raise his hand who can tell me."

A great many were raised.

Esther selected a bright-eyed little girl, who stood near the foot, from the number.

"How many kinds are there?"

"Three!" she exclaimed; "active, passive, and neuter."

"No! the next."

"Two! regular and irregular."

"No! the next again."

"Three! masculine, feminine, and neuter."

"No! that is not what I mean. William Smith, you can tell me?"

"Yes marm! two—common and proper."

"Right!" said his teacher. "Now, what part of speech is cow?"

"Noun!" shouted several; while others, somewhat daunted by the late failures of their schoolmates, wisely held their peace.

"Why do you think it is a noun?"

A hand was raised near the foot.

"Speak, my dear," said Miss Hastings, encouragingly, to the little girl who had before missed a question.

"Please, marm, it haint."

Esther smiled.

"How many think cow is a noun?"

About ten hands went up; but, as she still kept silence, five dropped again.

"How many think cow is *not* a noun?"

All the hands flew up again, except Bill Smith's, who stood looking very much puzzled.

"William, why do you not raise your hand?"

"Coz, marm, I think 'tis a noun. I've heern it parsed so many a time; and our last schoolmarm said it was."

"You are right, William, it is: and to-morrow I will teach you all how you may tell a noun, whenever you see one. Now I must call for the Geography class."

Again there was the same difficulty in arranging the class, on account of the variety of the text-books.

Morse's, Cummings', Malte-Brun's, and Olney's, divided the class of ten or twelve pupils.

Esther found them tolerably well versed in some matters, such as the capitals of different countries and their population, but having no more definite ideas of this study than of any other.

It seemed to her that her predecessor had been content with enforcing the committing of the lessons to memory, without caring whether her pupils understood the words which they repeated; and she mentally agreed with Mrs. Simpson, who had told her that the last teacher "wan't no great shakes."

"What color is France?" asked Miss Hastings.

"Blue!" "Yellow!" "Green!" exclaimed each, as it happened to be painted on their several maps.

"What color is America?" asked their teacher.

The more thoughtful paused; others replied, giving it various tints.

"We live in America, do we not?"

"Yes!"

"Look out of doors now, and you will see that it is not a flat place, with but one color, though it is so represented on the map. Just so it is with other countries; they have hills, and woods, and fields, and the blue sky overhead. On the maps it would take too much room to paint them so; and men have measured the countries, and put down their general shape on paper, with the most important rivers and towns in each, and have had them colored, so that you can form an idea where one country begins and another ends. I wanted to explain this to you; because, when I was small myself, I had an idea just as you have, that the moment I stepped from Germany, which was green on my map, into France, if I ever went there, that I should know it by its being *blue*; so you see that you are not the only children who have had the same thoughts about that. Can you tell me now what is the capital of Maine?"

"Augusta."

"Right—and what is a capital—of what use is it?"
No one replied.

"A capital is a town or city that is selected by the people of a state for the place where they build a state-house, where the legislature, that is, the people who are chosen to make the laws, meets, and where the governor goes to meet his council, to decide on different public matters. It is quite important to have such a place, so that anybody who is chosen to help make the laws, knows just where to go. Every state has such a town, which is called the capital. The class may now go to their seats," said Esther,

after asking some few additional questions, for it was now time for the intermission at noon.

Mrs. Simpson had informed her that it was customary to give the "younguns an hour's noonin," and she now dismissed them.

The little room presented at once a lively scene. The boys vented their superabundant animal spirits, which had been somewhat repressed by the restraint of school hours, in loud whoops and halloos, as they rushed out of doors. Here they wrestled with each other, or played "tag" with the wilder girls, while the more quiet walked around the school-house.

Soon the claims of appetite began to assert themselves, and little groups surrounded their dinner-pails and had quite a social time.

Several offered a part of their lunches, which consisted of large molasses doughnuts, bread and butter, and gingerbread, principally, to Miss Hastings, who accepted a little from each, though amply provided for by Mrs. Simpson, who had laden Sammy with a pail, whose contents he felt extremely proud of sharing with the "school marm."

Esther heard him repeatedly exulting over the fact that "she was goin' to live to his house,"—to which, at last, some who grew rather provoked at his self-complacency, replied that "she would tell his marm everything he did in school."

Hereupon an animated discussion ensued, and was only interrupted, just as it was on the point of ending in blows, by Miss Hastings' announcement that the hour had expired.

Once again settled into quiet, she proceeded to call the classes in spelling, and greatly would old Noah Webster have been surprised had he heard the twisting of letters and syllables that followed.

Some seemed determined to insert any number of silent letters into the simplest words, while others, and the greater number, put into practice and as rigidly adhered to the phonetic system.

Mary Haley's theory was the first one, and she pressed so many letters into her service at each word given her, that she could hardly fail to have some of the right ones among the number.

Bill Smith was equally good in the rival system, and as Esther passed the words from the one to the other, as they stood side by side, she could hardly help smiling at the contrast between their methods, and the consistency with which each adhered to his or her favorite one.

"Spell circuit."

Bill replied "s-u-r-k-i-t."

"No, the next."

"S-u-r-r-q-u-e-t-t-e," answered Miss Mary.

From thence it passed through the class till it reached a little boy, who had been anxiously awaiting his turn, listening with fear to each trial, and smiles lighting up his face as it was missed by those above him. It came his turn. He spelled it correctly, and went in triumph up to the head.

"Please marm, he peeked into his spellin' book," exclaimed the boy below him.

"Oh I navar!"

"Did you see him?" asked Miss Hastings of the accuser. He hung his head. "I know he did," said he.

"I think you must be mistaken," was her reply, and she thought how singular it is that the elevation of an equal should so offend us, and lead us even to impute wrong motives and actions to him, when we can look with admiration on an acknowledged superior occupying the same place, and feel not the slightest envy towards him.

Recess followed, after which, classes in arithmetic were called up, and hardly had Esther finished this when four o'clock announced to the glad scholars that school hours for that day were over.

"This has been a happy, busy day," said Esther to herself as she walked slowly homeward, her mind filled with undeveloped plans for the future. "What a field is open to me here! The minds of these children are as fresh, wild, and unwrought as the country in which they live. It is mine to fell and uproot the strong trees of ignorance, and plant in their stead the precious seeds of knowledge and truth. It will require hard labor indeed, but nothing good or great springs up and grows in the soil of earth or of the heart without cultivation.

"I have found the place to work in! And how much more fortunate am I than many who move wearily about in life, asking sadly 'to what purpose am I living? What is there for me to do?' Thank God that he has both shown me what to do and given me strength to enter upon my task."



CHAPTER VII.

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

NEARLY a month had passed away, and Esther, to her great gratification, now saw some of her plans in successful operation. The Sabbath-school had met with no opposition, for the parents were only too glad to be free from the noise of their restless children, even if but for a short time in the day.

She had felt somewhat discouraged, on entering her day school for the first time, and finding it composed of scholars of all ages, from the youth of nineteen or twenty, and girls much larger than she herself, down to the lisping child who had never learned its letters; and her examination of the books which they had brought with them, as we have seen, only increased her perplexity, since hardly two had the same book, as they had taken whatever their parents had happened to have in the house.

She knew that it would take too long to procure books alike, even if the people had the inclination and ability to purchase them, and after a while had succeeded in getting her classes into tolerable order. She decided, however, that she must resort in a great measure to oral instruction, and soon had the satisfac-

tion of seeing her pupils interested, and she hoped, progressing.

The snow had come and covered the ground to a considerable depth, but as her evenings were occupied principally in preparing for her classes, the long hours did not pass heavily. She had made the acquaintance of the families in the neighborhood, and had found one or two possessed of considerable cultivation.

It was late in the afternoon that she was sitting in the front room, talking with her little favorite Sammy, when the door suddenly opened, and a young girl entered.

"How d'ye do?" said she, seating herself near the fire-place, and throwing back her hood, she shook down a mass of long ringlets. "Folks pretty well?" she continued.

Esther assured her that they were.

"I dunno as you know who I be," proceeded the stranger. "Wall, I'm Araminty Cornish—I'm a stayin' to Miss Williams' now, fur a spell."

"And how is Mrs. Williams to-day?" asked Esther, with a good deal of interest, for she was quite a favorite of hers, "and how is the babe?"

"Oh! They're both on 'em well enough! Miss Williams is rather spleeny, I think, to speak my mind, but spleeny folks alus gits along pooty well, I'll risk um. Her youngun's a fortnight old most, and she haint teched to do a livin' thing about house yit. There's Miss Haley, she's done her washin' and her youngun aint but four weeks old, nuther."

Mrs. Simpson now entered, and after talking awhile with Araminta, the latter remarked that she "bleeved she'd drop in and see Miss Haley," and abruptly took her leave.

"I'm goin' down to see Miss Williams'," said Elvira, as she entered, ready dressed to go out.

"I will go with you, if you will wait a moment or two," said Esther, and hastily putting on her bonnet and shawl, she started.

"I hope you've wropped up warm," remarked Elvira, "for it's snappin' cold out."

They walked on a few steps in silence, when Elvira broke out, "That Minty Cornish is the slimsiest piece that ever I see. She talks about Miss Williams bein' spleeny; all she thinks on is gaddin' about among the neighbors and standin' before the glass twistin' them curls of her'n round her fingers. I hed as good a mind as ever I hed to eat, to give her a good dressin' down, when she was talkin' so mighty nippant about Miss Williams."

Mrs. Williams' house was not far distant, and they soon reached it, entering without the ceremony of knocking, as was the fashion of the country.

It was a log-house, and the outer door opened directly into the kitchen, a large room heated by the usual great fireplace. The chimney was made of rocks, and a large flat stone formed the hearth. The fire had now burned low, and it seemed quite cold there. An open door led into a small bedroom, and a feeble voice said, as they entered, "Is that you,

Minty? I'm glad you have come, for it seems very cold. I think the fire has gone down."

"It is not Araminta," said Esther, entering the bedroom, and approaching Mrs. Williams; she noticed, as she did so, that she was shivering as if with the ague, and hastily stepped out to arrange the fire. Elvira, however, was already thus employed, and as Esther came near, said, "Haint this pooty work? To go off and leave a sick woman alone, so!"

Esther meantime was examining a compound which stood in a small frying-pan on the hearth, while Elvira asked Mrs. Williams "What under the sun she let Minty go for?"

"She went to get some milk to put in my gruel," replied Mrs. Williams. "I have had nothing to eat for some time, and feel rather faint."

"Good for nothin' trollop!" ejaculated Elvira, entering the kitchen again.

"This, I suppose, is meant for gruel," said Esther, "but it is poor trash, and I think we had better make some fresh."

"That's my mind," replied Elvira. "Trash! why 'taint fit for the hogs to eat. You go in and make Miss Williams comfortable, and I'll see to the gruel."

Esther complied, and was shocked to see, on re-entering the bedroom, that the flush of fever had succeeded to the chills which had shaken Mrs. Williams' slight frame, and putting her hand on the sick woman's brow, found it burning. She shook up the pillows, and immediately procuring some cold water, bathed with gentle hand the sufferer's fevered brow.

Mrs. Williams' cap had fallen off, and her long silky brown hair lay disordered on the pillow. "Poor child!" said Esther, half aloud, as she gazed on the fair young invalid.

Tears stole over Mrs. Williams' cheeks as she heard these words and felt the caressing hand of Esther on her head. She covered her face with her hand, and lay weeping silently. The babe, who had been sleeping, now awoke, and Esther strove to turn the mother's attention to her child by praising its deep blue eyes, so like its parents', and partially succeeded.

Elvira soon entered, bearing the gruel, and declaring that "there wa'n't a dish fit to be used in the whole house; she wondered, for her part, that they wa'n't all pizoned with the dirt." After a few moments' pause, she inquired "Where's Williams?"

"He went this morning to get some meal," replied his wife; "I expect him home every moment."

In fact, as she spoke, a horse-sled drove up to the door, and Mr. Williams entered. He came directly to the bedroom, and with a "How d'ye do?" to Elvira and a bow to Esther, approached his wife, asking her how she felt.

"Why, you look real smart," he said, as he gazed at her admiringly. "Your cheeks are as red as roses. But where's Minty?" he went on.

"She's gone off," replied Elvira, "and left Miss Williams all soul alone. I dunno but she'd a froze, if it hadn't been for me and Miss Hastings."

As if in verification of the old proverb, relating to the appearance of a rather suspicious person when he

is spoken of, Miss Cornish now entered, and to Mr. Williams' angry inquiry "Why she had left his wife so long?" replied "Lord! what a fuss! I just stepped into a neighbor's to git some milk." Then, flouncing out of the room, she muttered something about "some folks alus thinkin' they must be waited on by inches, and if she didn't suit, they might git somebody else."

She hardly deigned to bestow a nod or look on Esther and Elvira, as they passed through the kitchen on their homeward way.

"Poor Mrs. Williams!" sighed Esther, as they walked briskly over the smooth road.

"Don't you think she'll git up?" asked Elvira.

"I don't know," replied Esther; "I am not much accustomed to sickness, but I am afraid that it will be a long time first, if indeed she ever recovers. She needs careful nursing."

"Wall! I guess she'll have to git somebody besides Minty Cornish to give it to her," retorted Elvira, "for she hain't good for nothin', for all she thinks she's the biggest toad in the puddle."

Mrs. Simpson seemed quite shocked at the account they gave of their sick neighbor, on their return, and soon after tea, went to see Mrs. Williams for herself.

She found her in a high fever, and immediately dispatched a messenger for a physician, though the nearest one resided in Patten, some thirty miles distant.

"Wall!" said Elvira, "Miss Williams must be dreadful sick, for Miss Simpson haint no great friend to doctors, she's sich a good nuss herself, and I never

knowned her to send arter Dr. Plummer, 'thout 'twas a case of life and death."

The doctor shook his head ominously when he arrived and saw his patient, saying he feared that there was nothing which he could do to restore her to health.

"I fear," said he to Mrs. Simpson, "that she is in a rapid consumption. I will do my best, but the result is in God's hands."

But Mr. Williams would not believe so unwelcome an opinion. His wife suffered so little and seemed so cheerful that he could not think she was so soon to be taken from him.

"All you need, Nelly," he would say to his wife, whenever she spoke of her approaching departure, "all you need, in the world, is something strengthening; you'll get up fast enough when you get over these sweats and fever turns, that weaken you so."

"Ah!" she would reply with a sad smile and tearful eyes, "my days on earth are numbered!"

Esther was now much with her, for Mrs. Williams seemed much attached to her, and talked often to her of her approaching death.

"I have thought for a long time past," she said one day when they were alone together, "that I should never recover; and there are some few things that I should like to arrange before I die. My husband will not listen to me when I speak of death, and I must intrust my wishes to you. You will see, will you not, Miss Hastings, that my requests are fulfilled?" she went on, looking earnestly into her friend's eyes.

Esther signified her readiness to do so, by a mute assent, and Mrs. Williams continued, while tears gushed to her eyes, "I should like to live, for the sake of my husband and this dear child, if it could be so—but it is my Father. 'Let Him do what seemeth him good.' I hope I can say 'His will be done.' It is hard indeed to leave this dear babe without a mother's care!" said she, pressing her child to her heart convulsively. "Poor little helpless one!" she exclaimed, while tears streamed over her pale face.

"Remember who has said 'And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of them,'" said Esther. Mrs. Williams raised her eyes to heaven, while Esther continued, "'He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs in his arms and carry them in his bosom.' Can you not trust your lamb to the Shepherd of Israel?"

"I can, I do!" replied the mother, while a smile of holy trust lighted up her sad eyes. "But now will you not read to me some of the sweet consolations which our Father offers to his weak children?"

Esther complied; and as she saw the calmness with which her friend contemplated that great change which was so soon to take place, she inwardly exclaimed, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

It was now late, and Esther rose to take her leave. Mrs. Williams took her hand, pressing it fondly, as if unwilling to have her go. "You will remember," she said, "to write to my aunt of my death, and of my child. She is not a Christian, and this will be a

heavy blow to her; but tell her that I begged her, as my last request, to go to Jesus for consolation. I have told you that she has been a mother to me, ever since I was left, as this little one will soon be, motherless." Her voice was choked, but she continued: "Tell her my dying charge was, that she should meet me in heaven, with the child that I intrust to her care. Will you do me this favor, Miss Hastings?"

"I will, indeed," replied Esther; "but do not fatigue yourself to-night; I shall see you often again, and you can then tell me all you would like me to do."

"Perhaps so," said Mrs. Williams, with a sad smile; "but we know not what a few hours may bring forth. Let me bid you good-bye;" and she wound her arms around Esther's neck, exclaiming, "we shall meet again in heaven."

"I hope so," replied Esther, in a voice tremulous with emotion, "and I hope often again on earth."

Mrs. Williams shook her head. "I have often thought," she said, "that those near death receive a warning from the death-angel; and it seems to me that I have seen the last morning dawn on earth that I shall ever behold."

Esther gently warned her not to give way to gloomy fancies; and, assuring her that she should come on the next day to see her, bade her good afternoon.

"Good-bye," repeated her friend, "we shall not be parted long."

Mrs. Williams' foreboding proved correct; for a sudden change took place in the night, and before any of Mrs. Simpson's family could reach the house, in an-

swer to the half frantic summons of her husband, she had breathed her last.

Esther's tears fell fast on the pallid brow of the corpse, as she stood over her friend; and there anew she consecrated herself to the service of Christ, and prayed that she might indeed meet the sainted one on high.

Mr. Williams' grief was almost overwhelming. He was passionately attached to his gentle wife, and had not, like her, learned where to seek true consolation. He repulsed all who endeavored to offer sympathy, and no persuasion could induce him to leave his wife.

"Dear Nelly!" he would murmur, and gaze with dry eyes upon the sweet face of his loved one.

Many of the neighbors gathered around him, gazing at him with compassion, not unmingled with surprise and curiosity, for such grief as his was new to them. They were accustomed to violent bursts of emotion, but this unnatural calmness almost terrified them; and after striving in vain to induce him to seek rest, several gathered together in a little group, shaking their heads ominously, and predicting that he would be crazy.

"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord," said a tall man, entering the death-chamber, and laying his hand on Mr. Williams' shoulder.

"It's Elder Rider," whispered Elyira, "I'm dreadful glad he's come. If ever there was a good man on a'irth, he's one."

Mr. Williams looked up at the new comer, and, pointing to his wife, said, "She was my all!"

"My son," began the Elder, in a deep, firm voice, "God has indeed come very near you, and laid his hand heavily upon you; but we should not mourn as those without hope. I thank God that she was one of the redeemed. I loved her," he continued, while he hastily wiped away a tear, unwilling that any should see his emotion, "I loved her as my own child; for," he added, "I trust that through my means she was brought to give her heart to the Saviour." He paused a few moments—"Let us pray," said he; and kneeling there, he poured out his soul in prayer.

Never had Esther heard greater eloquence. His whole soul seemed filled with love to God and man; and as he prayed for the bereaved ones, for the husband, "from whose dwelling the sunshine of his wife's smile, and the music of her voice, had been taken to make heaven more bright, and to add to its melody," and for the babe, "the living tie, which bound him to the mother, who had gone before, and whose purity and innocence it was his to preserve, that they might meet the glorified one on high," Esther's eyes were not the only one's in that room that were wet with tears, and Mr. Williams wept like an infant.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SABBATH IN THE WILDERNESS.

It was the calm and holy Sabbath, when all that was mortal of Ellen Williams was intrusted to the cold bosom of the mother earth. Many and sincere were the mourners there—for her gentleness and sweetness had won her many friends; and in so small a community, the death of one of its members casts a gloom over all, which is not speedily dissipated.

From the grave they went to the school-house, where Elder Rider was to preach. Though the house was a log one, it was none the less comfortable. A huge wood fire blazed upon the rock hearth, and its crackling alone broke the silence as Esther entered, and took her seat among the waiting assembly. The elder was already there; and, after a pause of a few moments, rising, said, "Let us commence the worship of God by singing,

'Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove.'

Very few present had hymn-books, but this seemed a familiar tune; for, as the preacher's deep bass voice commenced, he was joined by nearly all the audience. The hymn being ended, he read a chapter in the

Bible, explaining, in a familiar manner, anything which he thought might not be understood by his hearers. After this he said, "Let us unite in prayer." All stood up; and as his fervent supplications arose to the Author of every good and perfect gift, many voices joined him, ejaculating, "Lord, help!" "Hear, Lord!" "Amen!" and the like: and as he prayed that the solemn sight which they had just witnessed might lead many of them to put their trust in the Redeemer, that, like the departed, when the death-summons came, they might obey willingly, and, like her, be enabled to say, "Oh, grave, where is thy victory? Oh, death! where is thy sting?" many a sob was heard, and many tears flowed over rough cheeks, all unused to such a display of feeling. The prayer concluded, they sung a familiar hymn, after which the elder, rising, and saying, in a solemn tone, "Hear what God the Lord saith," announced his text: "Because I have called, and ye have refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh."

"These words, which I have just read," said the Elder, "show us both the justice and mercy of God. 'Because I have called,' he hath said; and has he not called after us in times and ways without number? Hath not his hand been ever open, giving blessing innumerable? Seed-time and harvest have not failed, that your lives might be spared. Yea, even your lives he is lengthening out, while you are still

living regardless of him, as if there were no God. And when he hath found, that his constant kindness hath failed to make you give your hearts to him, then hath he drawn near, and laid his chastening hand upon you. He who hath said that he doth 'not willingly afflict the children of men,' He hath taken now from one, the child of his love, and from another, the wife of his bosom, and still you have refused to listen, or have murmured, and raised your puny arm in rebellion against the Most High. 'Who are ye, that ye should contend with the Almighty? He that reproveth God, let him answer it.' But, oh, my brethren, God hath done yet greater things for us, whereof we are glad," continued the Elder; and his deep voice was choked with emotion, as he told of Christ's coming, and of his pure life on earth.

He dwelt on his miracles, and pictured, while his hearers listened with breathless attention, the scene of the restoration of life to the son of the widow of Nain, and the opening the eyes of the blind. Then, after a pause, he went on: "And how did sinful men receive this spotless Saviour? Methinks I hear, even now, the cry, 'Crucify him! crucify him!'" Then followed a glowing description of Christ's agony in the garden of Gethsemane, of his trial, and, finally, of his crucifixion on Mount Calvary. Groans and sobs were heard; and as he pronounced the last words of Jesus, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" Esther's eyes, too, filled with tears.

"And ye, too, are daily crucifying the Lord afresh," continued the preacher. "Ye, too, are rejecting the

holy and just One. And if God's mercy doth not move your hard hearts, hear now of his terrible justice."

Then followed a stern warning to flee from the wrath to come. The scene of the last judgment was portrayed with a masterly hand, and the preacher concluded: "'To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts,' lest he 'also laugh at your calamity and mock when your fear cometh.'"

The Elder then sat down, first saying, "There's liberty, brethren!" There was a short pause, when a tall man got up and remarked that he "could witness to the truth of what had been said. Every word on it's truth," he went on. "Gospel truth, and I hope that the truth that we have heered this day with our outward ears, will sink deep into our hearts, and take root downward, and bear fruit upward, to the glory of God."

"Amen," said many, as he sat down. He was succeeded by another, who said nearly the same thing, though in different words.

But the people, who had listened very attentively to Elder Rider, now seemed restless, and twisted uneasily in their seats. A baby who had been asleep awoke and cried lustily. Its mother's efforts to quiet it proving unavailing, she rose and hurried out of the room.

After the last speaker had ended, the Elder offered a brief prayer and dismissed the assembly, first announcing that after a short intermission there would

be a conference meeting, which he hoped would be fully attended.

Most of the people now dispersed, with the exception of a few families who had brought their dinners, as they lived too far from the school-house to return to their homes at noon, and were soon gathered in little knots, talking of various matters with their neighbors. Some, however, went home with Mrs. Simpson, who, living quite near, extended a cordial invitation to them to dine with her.

Esther walked slowly home, thinking of the power of the preacher, of how often she had heard these familiar truths, and wondered that she had listened to them unmoved, as she had so frequently. "After all," thought she, "the secret of his eloquence lies in his earnestness."

On entering Mrs. Simpson's front room, she found Elder Rider there. He immediately began to ask her how she succeeded in her sabbath-school, and proposed that it should not be postponed, as Esther had intended.

"I want to see how you manage, my sister," said he. It was therefore arranged that it should be held directly after the conference meeting.



CHAPTER IX.

THE CONFERENCE.

THERE was quite a crowd around the large fireplace, as Esther and Elvira entered the school-room after dinner, at the appointed time for the meeting.

"There's Miss Haley," said Elvira. "She don't git out often; she wa'nt here this mornin', but you alus see her to conference. Old Miss Springer, too, I declare; but there's the Elder."

As he entered, there was a general rush for the seats. After a prayer, Elder Rider read a chapter in the Bible and made a few remarks, after which he said he "hoped to hear from every one present who had named the name of Christ, and that all would remember that whoever 'shall deny' Christ 'before men, him, he will also deny before his father which is in heaven.' He himself hath said it."

He then sat down, saying he "should like to hear from the sisters first."

There was quite a pause.

"Let there be liberty!" said the Elder, and as no one rose, he added, "Quench not the spirit!"

Suddenly a woman rose, and turning her face toward the wall, began to speak.

"That's Miss Haley," whispered Elvira.

Esther listened attentively, but could hear nothing that she said except "Lord," "heart," "soul," "feelings," and the like disconnected words, as Mrs. Haley spoke in a very low tone, quite hurriedly, and shed tears during all the time that she was speaking.

As soon as she sat down, old Mrs. Springer rose. She spoke very loudly, saying: "I hope I haint ashamed of Jesus. I hev been a follower of the Lamb nigh about forty year. Though I know that I hev often followed him afar off. I hev been a soldier of the cross just as long as the children of Israel was in the wilderness, and like them sinful creeturs, I hev often murmured and hankered arter the flesh pots of Egypt, and it is of God's mercy that I haint been cut down, and never see the land of Canaan. But now I do hope to enter the blessed land of promise. I hev hed some precious seasons, when my heart has been filled with the presence of the Lord.

"And oh, my brethren and sisters, why isn't it alus so? Why are we settin' by the cold streams of Babylon when we might so easy git into a more wealthy place. Arise and shine! Let us not have a name to live and be dead! Oh! my friends, let us come humble to the foot of the cross, and confess our sins and ask God to give us a blessin'. Oh! that he would open the windows of heaven and pour down a blessin', so that we might not be able to contain it!"

She took her seat amid many an audible token of approval. A man now arose, and after a deep ahem, commenced: "My friends, I feel as ef—ahem. My

friends, I feel as ef"—here he paused and spit upon the floor. "I feel as ef the Lord was very near to me—ahem. I feel as ef I alus wanted him to be very near to me, and I think, ef I know my own heart, that I feel anxious fur a revival—ahem. I feel as ef I must see some of the outpourings of the Spirit here. I feel as ef we had said 'peace! peace!' when there was no peace; and I feel as ef we had forgotten the God of our salvation, and I hope we shall all feel like goin' for'ard and doin' our duty, and alus do with our might what our hands find to do."

A short pause ensued after he had concluded, upon which Elder Rider observed that he hoped "no time would be wasted."

A tall, spare woman now addressed them, saying "I hope I feel thankful fur another opportunity of meetin' my Christian friends. I think I can say that the conference room is alus a pleasant place to me. I think I can say that the language of Canaan is what I delight to hear. Yes, my dear friends, I think I can say 'Your people are my people, and your God my God.' Oh my friends, I wouldn't go back to the world fur nuthin. I hed ruther 'be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.' I feel a union with all the church, and I hope you will all pray for me."

After she had seated herself, a man got up, remarking, "I don't know as I hev got anything to say that will edify any body. I wisht I *could* say that I hed hed any of those precious seasons that some of my Christian friends has spoke on, but I hev not. I feel that I

can say 'Oh that it were with me as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shone round about me.' I don't know as I hev much to say, except that it makes my heart glad to hear from my Christian friends, and I hope that they will pray for me that I may be made partaker of their joys."

Immediately on his seating himself, a short, but stoutly built man succeeded him. He began—"My friends, I hev just come home from Patten, and they are hevin' a revival of God's work among them. Their hearts are filled with the love of God, and the Holy Spirit seems pouring out his blessings in abundant showers. I went to their meetins, and it made my heart leap for joy, to see Christians filled with the love of God and pointin' out to anxious inquirin' sinners the way to Jesus. But oh! it makes me feel sad to find all so dead and cold here. 'Why should the children of a king go mournin' all their days?' Why are we passed over? I am afeard it is because we do not put ourselves in the way of it. Too many on us is took up with the follies and vanities of this world. Too many on us is 'only stumblin' blocks in the way of sinners. Too many on us is like dumb dogs. My brethren and sisters, these things ought not so to be. Oh! that the Lord would draw nigh to 'this vine which he has planted in the wilderness,' that this branch of his Zion might be lifted up. Oh my brethren and sisters, let us be livin' 'epistles, known and read of all men.' Let us humble ourselves, and the Lord will lift us up. Let us so live that men 'may

take knowledge of us, that we have been with Jesus.'"

Elder Rider rose as Mr. Haley sat down, and said that it was nearly time to close the meeting. He made a few remarks of encouragement to those who seemed depressed, and pointed all to that never-failing fountain set open for sin and uncleanness. His earnest words were received with audible tokens of approval, as had been frequently the case during the remarks of the other speakers, "bless the Lord" and "Amen" being the expressions most in use. After this they sung a hymn, commencing—

"What ship is this you see, that is now sailing by?

Oh, glory, hallelujah!

What ship is this you see, that comes sailing by?

Oh, glory, hallelujah!

'Tis the old ship of Zion, hallelujah!

'Tis the old ship of Zion, hallelujah!"

All joined in this, one or two of the old ladies singing a most indescribable part, called *counter*, which did not seem to have anything in common with the tune. The discord, however, did not seem to disturb any one. On the conclusion of the hymn, the meeting was closed by a prayer offered by the Elder, and the good people scattered slowly, talking with their friends who lived at a distance, and expressing their pleasure in the meeting.

The Sabbath school was now called to order, and Mr. Rider expressed himself well pleased with the progress of the pupils, and with the evident interest which they manifested. As it began to grow dark, there was but a short session, however.

"Elder Rider's a blessed man!" remarked Elvira, as, with Esther, she walked homeward, after the Sabbath school was over.

"I should think he was calculated to do a great deal of good," replied Esther. "But, Elvira," she continued, "how is it that so many responded aloud this afternoon, since this is a Baptist church? I thought only Methodists made use of such expressions as 'Hear, Lord,' and the like."

"Wall," answered Vira, "you see most of the folks here is Baptists, but some on um is Methodists, and a few on um Free-Willers, and Christian Banders; but bein as there is so many more Baptists, they got up the church. Some of the others jined, and some didn't; but they all go to the same meetins, and the Methodists and the rest keeps their own ways."

"The meeting this afternoon was a very interesting one," said Esther, after a pause.

"Wall, yes," replied Vira; "but then they alus say pooty much the same things. There's Haley, now. I alus know jist how he feels, jist as well afore he gits up, as I do when he sets down."

"Ah, Elvira," said Esther, "you should not speak so. I wish you were as truly a Christian as Mr. Haly."

"Wall, as to that," retorted Vira, "I know I haint so good as I had orter be, but I don't want to swop hearts with none on um. I might get a wus one than mine, and that's needless."

"No, Elvira, you need not wish to exchange hearts with any one; but you do need to give yourself to the

Saviour. There is a day coming when you will feel the need of a friend to guide you through the dark valley of the shadow of death, that you may fear no evil. Oh, Elvira," continued Esther, "will you not try to become a Christian?"

Elvira made no reply, but walked along silently. At last she broke out, "Don't think I'm mad with you, Miss Hastings, I haint; but I don't like to be talked to about religion by no body. I never listen to nobody but you, and I do mean to get religion some time or nuther."

Esther was about to reply, but Elvira had left her side, crossed the road, and was talking to one of her friends.

CHAPTER X.

THE CAMP.

THE weeks passed rapidly away with Esther; and though sometimes she wearied of her school duties, and longed for more congenial society, still she did not regret the step which she had taken. She felt keenly the loss of Mrs. Williams, in whom she had found sympathy, and whose cheerful spirit had made her ashamed of her occasional fits of depression. She heard sometimes from Margaret, though the mails were unfrequent, and she could not receive letters so often as she wished.

She had just finished reading an old letter, for the twentieth time, and was now sitting on a low seat, by the fire, indulging in a pleasant reverie. She was just querying how she should spend her day, as it was Saturday, and a holiday, when she was startled by a rough voice—

"Mornin, Miss Hastings, whar's Miss Simpson?"

"Take a seat," said Esther, "and I will see."

The speaker, a man whose huge frame corresponded well with his loud voice, complied, and Esther left the room in search of Mrs. Simpson.

She found the good lady out feeding her pigs, with

a huge kettle of boiled potatoes, and they speedily reentered the front room.

"How are ye, Miss Simpson?" asked the stranger, as they entered.

"Wall, as usual," she replied, and a pause ensued, while Mrs. Simpson waited to hear what was his errand.

"Wall," said he, at length, while the sputtering of the fire greeted the snow which he scraped from his foot upon the andiron, "Wall, I've come to see if you wouldn't go out to our camp. One uv our men is dreadful sick; he's got the rheumatiz, I guess. He was tuk out of his head last night, and keeps hollerin arter his mother, and we thought p'raps he'd better be brung out here. Ye see, he can't hev no great care out thar; and, p'raps, ef he see wimmen round, he might be easier. We knowed you was considerable of a doctor, and thought, if you could see him, you could tell whether or no he had better be fotched out. I've got a horse-sled here; and ef you'll bundle up warm, and go, I'll take you out in less than no time."

"Wall," replied Mrs. Simpson, "I'll go; and ef you will, Miss Hastings, I should like to hev you go too."

Esther readily consented, and they were soon on their way. "So this is a logging road," thought Esther, as they entered a narrow opening, and she saw a winding road, whose smooth polished surface extended far ahead. The evergreens on each side gave it a cheerful aspect, and the bright sun almost blinded her, as she looked on the snowy pathway. In

a short time they reached the camp, which was a log building, some eight feet in height in front, but sloping down to some three or four feet in the rear. The roof was covered with shingles, which were confined in their places by poles laid across them. The spaces between the logs were made tight by moss. There was another similar building, though somewhat larger, standing near, which was an ox hovel, Esther was informed, a shelter for the cattle, as its name indicated. At a little distance was a temporary shed, used for the storing of hay and provisions. They entered the camp, which their guide said was a double one. A large fire was blazing in the centre of the apartment; the huge logs were placed merely on stones, and it seemed to Esther that there was great danger of its setting fire to the camp. This, however, she was told was not common. A smoke-hole was left open at the top of the camp, and from this was suspended a piece of wire, which supported a kettle over the fire. Shelves were nailed at one end of the apartment, upon which a few dishes, plates, tin dippers, and similar articles, were neatly arranged. The opposite end of the room was occupied with hemlock and cedar boughs, the beds of the lumbermen; a small pole laid at the end of these primitive beds, some four or six feet from the fire, and over this pole a seat, called the deacon-seat, was built, upon which the cook, a stout burly-looking man, requested Esther to seat herself. A few stools, which bore the stamp of home manufacture, composed the rest of the furniture.

Mrs. Simpson, meanwhile, approached the sick man, who was groaning as if suffering great pain.

"It's the acute rheumatiz," said she, "and I think he'd better be got out to our house as soon as ever we can do it. We can nuss him up thar."

The delirious symptoms had apparently left him, and he gladly assented to Mrs. Simpson's proposition.

While they warmed themselves at the huge fire, for they were nearly chilled through, Esther watched, with some curiosity, the movements of the cook. He had already set his table, and now, approaching the fire, began to unearth something, which was completely buried in the ashes. It proved to be a large iron vessel, closely covered, which, she was informed, was a Dutch oven, and whose smoking hot contents (baked beans) really looked quite inviting. They received a cordial invitation to "stop and git a bite," but declined, as Mrs. Simpson was anxious to get her patient into more comfortable quarters. She accordingly ordered the quilts and comforters, which she had brought for that purpose, to be arranged on the sled; and several of his companions, lifting the sick man with gentleness (though even their utmost care could not prevent him from suffering great pain at the removal), placed him on the sled, well wrapped up and protected from the cold. The motion of the sled over the smooth ground was so easy, that it did not seem to disturb him much; he fell into an uneasy sleep, and but little was said by any one.

Suddenly they heard a creaking, groaning sound, and soon saw, emerging from a branch road, the cause

of the noise. A bob-sled, drawn slowly by six or eight oxen, to which a huge pine log was fastened, and which groaned and creaked, as if it had forebodings of its future fate, so poetically described by Whittier—

"Down, the wild March flood shall bear them
To the saw-mill's wheel,
Or where steam, the slave, shall tear them
With his teeth of steel."

The log was partly stripped of its bark, as it had been hewn from that part of it which was drawn along on the snow; it was fastened by chains, whose rattling, with the loud cries of the teamster to his oxen, resounded through the forest.

They had hardly got out of hearing of the team, when a loud report caused Esther to start, exclaiming, in some alarm "What is that?"

"Wall," replied the driver, transferring his quid of tobacco from one cheek to the other, "that's the logs rollin' down the sides of a mounting. They're takin' out timber on a ridge whar they can't haul um down—it's too steep—and so they haul um to the aidge of the hill, and let um drive—makes a thunderin' loud crash, don't it, you? I like to see um go, I tell ye—but they look the pootiest on a dry sluice-way—"

"What is that?" asked Esther.

"Wall, that's whar the timber is in a steep place, too, and we lay logs down, so as not to let the pines roll off, and start um along."

"You make an inclined plane, I suppose," said Esther.

"Oh, no; we don't plane the sluice-way, 'taint made o' boards," returned her companion, "straight logs is what we make it on, and I tell ye, it goes swift; the bark and smoke flies well, and it drives ahead like blazes, and drives head foremost into the snow, at the fut of the hill."

"I should think it would be rather dreary in the woods, in winter," said Esther.

"Wall, it taint—the work is hard, but we like it, and when it comes night, we spin yarns, sing songs, and play ceards—but our boss don't want no ceard-playin' in the camp, this winter, and so we gin it up.—Sunday's rather a long day; but we mend our close, and some on us reads, and some on us goes a gunnin' and some on us goes a visitin' to the nighest camp—we lay abed pooty late, too, and so we manage to wear it off; but I'm allus glad when it comes Monday agin."

"Do *you* ever drive logs down river?" asked Esther, after a pause.

"Lord, yes indeed! and *that's* jist one o' the things that I like fust-rate. 'Taint allus so pooty fun to git the logs out when they git in a jam, but, somehow or anuther, I like it, arter all; *its* rayther exciting—"

"And dangerous, too, isn't *it*?" interrupted Esther.

"Wall, I s'pose they is danger—yes, I've knowed many a fust-rate feller to git *his* death on the river. Thar was Tom Davis, as jolly a soul as ever I see in a camp. He was in the same *drive* with me last winter, and when we come to drive *down* the logs, they got into a jam at Slugundy Falls. We hed worked there

a day, and it was a pooty sight, I tell you, to see them master great logs piled up every which way, and the water dashin' through like lightnin'—Tom see a log that he thought if he chopped in two, would let the jam start, and he tuk an axe, and went at it. He hadn't struck more'n three blows, when all on a sudden, the jam started. Tom, he started to run, but 'twan't no use; them great logs whirled round like straws, and snapped like splinters, and the water roared so, you could a heerd it miles. Poor Tom was drowned, and when we got him out, he was tore and bruised dreadful bad; his own mother wouldn't a knowed him. We buried the poor feller, and nobody knows whose turn will come next.—Whoahoa!" he called out to his horse, as they stopped at Mrs. Simpson's door.

Mr. Simpson, who was at the other side of the road, sitting on a horse, as it is called, shaving shingles, approached, and with the assistance of one or two of the neighbors, bore the sick man into the house, and placed him in bed.

"I s'pose they hain't work enough to be done already, in this house," said Elvira, as Esther entered the kitchen, "and so Miss Simpson has gone and fetched a sick man fur me to wait upon."

"He ought to be taken care of," said Esther.

"Wall, of cose; I haint a fool; I know *that*, but why on airth didn't some o' the neighbors take him?"

"Mrs. Simpson is so good a nurse, and you can help her, too, so well, I suppose they thought he could be better taken care of here," replied Miss Hastings.

"Wall, I s'pose it can't be helped," returned Elvira, somewhat mollified, "but she might hev jist named it to me."

"She went away in a great hurry," said Esther.

"Wall, it's all over, now," continued Elvira, "and what can't be cured, must be endured."

After this little ebullition was over, Elvira hastened to offer her assistance, and through the long and tedious illness of the sick man, watched over him with untiring patience and care. Esther, too, as often as her school duties would allow, offered her services, and the invalid was slowly recovering.

CHAPTER XI.

AN EVENING WITH THE LUMBERMEN.

It was terribly cold out of doors; one of those still, freezing nights, that does so much greater execution than the wild and blustering ones; just as a self-willed, though quiet man can effect so much more than an impetuous, but unsteady one.

But the cold did not penetrate into the camp, where it stood surrounded by snow-covered stumps and trees, whose evergreen hue contrasted well with the white surface around them; the clear moon lighted up with a silvery tinge their boughs, laden with feathery flakes, for there had been a violent storm, and the snow had not yet fallen from the branches.

It was not a night which would tempt one out of doors, but within the log-camp all was light and cheerful.

The men, having had their suppers, were gathered round the blazing fire, some sitting on the deacon seat, others on stools, in different parts of the room. A rough, but manly-looking set were they! Dressed in their somewhat picturesque costume of red flannel shirt, and a pair of pantaloons, their vigorous forms unfettered by suspenders, or anything binding, they

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looked well fitted to be the pioneers of civilization—well suited to their work in the free, broad forests—each looked every inch a man. The voices of most of them were deep and clear, like the ring of their own axes on the stout pines, and nearly all had shrewd and intelligent faces, that fitted well with their powerful and muscular frames. Many of them were smoking, but the greater number were chewing tobacco. They were talking cheerfully together on various subjects.

"Talk about trees!" exclaimed an athletic fellow, rather below the middle height, emitting a whiff of tobacco smoke from his nostrils, as he took his pipe from his mouth, "that haint a sarcumstance to one that Bob Sykes and I felled last winter. Why, it scaled nine thousand feet—a pumpkin pine, none of your 'conkusy stuff—clear as a ten-foot snow-drift in the middle—"

"Caan't you make it ten, Bill, so's to make it even numbers?" asked a tall, fine-looking fellow, in a tone that indicated some little doubt of the truth of the last speaker's story. "Neow dew, jist to accomodate!"

"It's true, as I hope to holler, Tompkins," replied Bill, "I'll take my Bible oath on't."

"Oh, I haint no sort o' doubt on't," replied Tompkins, "fur I see a tree onct that scaled twelve thousand—"

"Phew!" interrupted Bill; but Tompkins proceeded, "and Sam Slocum and I chopped that are down in less than an hour; to be sure he was a d—d

smart chopper, and if I dew say it myself, I'm some."

"Rayther smart, I should say. Neow, what's the use o' lyin'!" exclaimed Bill, as a loud shout from all present, indicated that the object of this extravagant story was appreciated, "but if *you dew* lie, 'taint no sign that everybuddy else does. Talk about choppers!—I've seen Sam Slocum."

"Then you've seen a devilish smart feller."

"He's wall enuf, but he haint a primin' to Bob Sykes."

"Neow, git eout with your long yarns, and all-fired stories," interrupted Tompkins.

"Tell as big a one as I'm a mind teu, you allus beat it," rejoined Bill, "but that's coz I stick ten the truth, and yeou draw on your imagination, and there's a never-failin' spring thar, I swan to man."

"Bill, you must do as the Yankee that went to New York did," said a man who had been reading a newspaper, and who had not before taken part in the conversation.

"How was that, Clark?"

"Got a patent right for lyin', I s'pose," exclaimed Tompkins.

"No," said Clark, "he advertised that he'd got the biggest oxen in the world. Somebody asked him how much they measured. He straightened up in his boots—six feet two, he stood in his stockings—and says he, 'Cetch me to tell that! Guess I'm cuter than that comes teu! Ef I was to say one on um girted twelve feet, some long Yankee or nuther would

be sayin' he'd got a pair that girted fourteen. Neon, I say, I've got the biggest in the world; if any Yankee kin beat that, let him come on."

Bill did not appear at all dismayed at the hits of his companions, for he was a notorious "*bragger*." The story only diverted his attention to oxen, and he began, "Wall, I hev seen some mighty pooty cattle in my day."

"So hev I," interrupted John, the teamster, "but I'll stump anybody to keep a team in better order, and do more work with um than I kin with my critters; them's as likely cattle as ever was in these diggins."

"Hosses is better than oxen, in the woods," said Bill.

"Wall, neon, they haint, in my way of thinkin'; they may be spryer, but they haint got the wear to um that oxen hev."

"Oh, wall," replied Bill, "use um up, and get more, that's what I say."

"Neon, that's what I call abusin' God's creturs," exclaimed the teamster, who, like many of his class, would have infinitely preferred overtaking himself, to his cattle.

"Wall," interrupted the newspaper reader, "if it hurts your feelins so, to use up dumb cattle, what do you say to some of them slave-holders, that do the same to men and women?"

"Oh, d—n the niggers," replied John, "you're allus luggin' them in; can't you let one night go, without goin' over that old story?"

"No, I can't, nor I won't," answered Clark, his bronzed face lighting up, "when that infernal system is being helped along by the votes of such men as we are, when men with just such bodies and souls as we have, are sold like brutes, separated from their families, and dragged the Lord only knows whare."

"Oh, be hanged to it! It haint none of my business! I haint got nothin' to deu with it, nohow. I don't buy um nor sell um, nor wouldn't hev nothin' to deu with um, nohow yeou can fix it," said John.

"But you do support the system by voting for men who do their best to extend it, by annexing Slave States, and all such measures," replied Clark.

"Oh, I'm a democrat, dyed in the wool, and I go fur the reg'lar nominee—no splittin' fur me—union is strength; and as to my vote, 'taint of no great account here—why, did you hear how Josh Emerson got 'lected?"

"No! How was it?"

"Why, he kept a kind of a shanty, where the lumbermen stowed their supplies, and the 'lection was thar, and between votin', they would *liker up*, you see. Wall, they kep one man watchin the hat where they threw their votes, but onct the feller left it and kivered it up with a pocket handkercher. Wall, somebuddy, unbeknownst, watched their chance, and when the assessor got back, the hat was rammed full of votes for Emerson. 'Oh, that's too devilish bad!' says the assessor, so he put in his hand and took eout a decent handful, and sez he, 'I guess that's about right; count the rest.' So Josh got in by a swampin'

majority. They sot out to contest his seat, but he hed sich an awful majority that they gin it up. So, one vote thar did't amount to much."

Tompkins squirted a vast amount of tobacco juice from between his teeth into the fire with excellent aim.—"My opinion on slavery," said he, "is jist this—I ask, is it allowed in the Constitution? Ef it is, I go fur it, ef it 'taint I don't. Neou, I say it was; all the old patriots, great men like Washington and Jefferson, understood that it was so. Neou, don't you think yourself, Clark, that, notwithstandin' the word slave haint mentioned in the Constitution, it was a mutual understandin' that the South should keep their slaves?"

"Wall, I might screw around that," replied Clark, "but I'll come to the pint: I do think so, but I think too, that it was looked upon as an evil by those men, and as inconsistent with their views of a republic, and they would hev been glad to hev got rid on't, but they didn't know how; they thought 'twould die out; they all said as much, and if the Constitution don't condemn holding slaves, it taint for extendin' the d—d system, nuther, and I'm down on that, and, furthermore, as to ketchin' their slaves that run away, I'll be d—d if I do sich dirty work as that."

"Wall, I'm with you thar," said Tompkins, "fur I'll be hanged, if arter a feller has got pluck enuf to run for his life and liberty, ef he shouldn't hev it fur all of me. But the most of them slaves is lazy, shiftless, cowardly dogs."

"Who wonders at it!" asked Clark, "I guess you'd

be lazy, teu, if you only got what you had to eat, and drink, and wear fur your work, and not allus enuf of that!"

"Oh, the devil! There haint many of the slaves treated that are way, and ef they was, that is all I git for my work—jist what I kin eat, drink, and wear—neou, ef I was rich, like some of these ere fellers that live like pigs in clover, why then yeou *might* talk; but I'm a slave myself—I hev to work like a dog, and don't get no great pay."

"Pshaw! you get good wages—then, the work suits you.—Why, you'd rave like a tiger, to be shut up in a store, measurin' tape, or sellin' barrels of flour, ef you was a rich man. Rich men are slaves to their money bags; twistin', turnin', screwin', plannin' to make more, and keep what they've got. They haint no happier than we are."

"Wall," said Tompkins, "I wouldn't object to tryin my hand at it a spell, anyhow: wouldn't I cut a dash!"

"I cum plaguey nigh bein' rich onct, myself," said Bill.

"How was that?—A speculation?" asked Clark.

"Not 'xactly," replied Bill. "Not the ushil kind of speculation, though it was *rayther* in that line. Ye see, I cum mighty near marryin' a rich gal, and a pooty gal, teu."

"Well, what hindered you?" inquired Tompkins, looking at Bill's huge and awkward frame, as if he thought him better suited to any character than that of a lady's man.

"Why, ye see, I got acquainted with a gal of that kind, and arter stayin' around a spell, and doin' up the courtin' a leetle, I cum to the pint—I axed her ef she'd hev me—sez she, 'I'd rather be excused,' and I, like a d——d fool, excused her."

A roar of laughter greeted Bill's brief account of his love-affair, and the conversation turned on the beauty of women.

"Wall, neou, that's a pooty gal eout to Simpson's; that are schoolmarm, that was eout here yesterday with the old 'ooman," said Tompkins, "she's a trig-built, good-lookin' gal; got a dreadful pooty foot, teu."

"Wall, I don't say but what she hez," said a man who had not taken much interest in the previous conversation, "but I've seen dreadful many enuf sight pootier than her. She caan't hold a candle to a gal that I know on. That are gal is as straight as a pine tree, and her skin and teeth is as white as the heart of one, and jist the pootiest pair of eyes that ever you did see; as smart as a steel trap, teu, she is, I tell ye."

"Oh, git eout!" exclaimed John, the teamster, "the wimmin is jist like colts: look dredful pooty and frisky in the fields, loose; but the devil and all in harness. Take my advice: don't hev nothin' to do with um! Let um alone! Don't hitch yourself to none on um!"

"Break um in!—break um in!" said Tompkins. "Them frisky ones is jist the best kind, ef ye only keep a taut rein on um."

"Taint so easy doin' on't," replied John, shaking

his head, sorrowfully; "they're the head-strongest jades! They'll take the bits right into their teeth, and off they go, and ef you holler whoa ever so much, they'll kick up their heels the more, and tear off the Lord only knows whar."

"I guess John speaks from experience," said Clark.

"Wall, I don't say but what I den. When it cums to breakin' in critters, horse or ox, I won't giv in to nobody; but ef anybuddy kin head off, my old woman, when she's got sot a sartin way, I'll giv in beat, fur he kin den more than I kin."

John settled back in his seat, whistling in true Yankee fashion, while he whittled out a goad stick. A man near him, was fitting a handle to an axe, as the original one had been broken; he felt the keen edge, and looked at the polished steel with no little pride. "Neou, that are, is what I call a good axe," said he, "though 'taint quite ekil to one I had onct. I don't like braggin, but I will say, give me that are axe, and I'll agree to take the heart of any tree from any man, I don't kear who he is."

"Wall," replied Bill, "'taint so much the axe, in my way of thinkin', that makes the odds, as the man that stands behind it; though tools does a good deal, arter all."

"That are axe I was speakin' on," continued the first speaker, "is layin in the Penobscot, I 'spect, there to Passadunky; that's an all-fired place fur jams. Did you ever drive, on that are river?"

"Wall, I rayther guess I hev," was the reply, "and I guess I've worked *some* getting off jams thar. It's

a ugly lookin' sight, enuf to make a saint swear, to see them logs pile up every way; standin' up straight, in the air, and the water fizin' through like a mill-tail, frothin' and roarin'. 'Taint so pooty fun, nuther, to stand up to your waist in stan' cold water, workin' and pryin' them are logs till you don't know whether you've got any legs or not."

"Wall, that haint so pooty," said his companion, "but I like river-drivin', howsomever; it's lively-like, and I allus like to strike the blow that starts the jam; but I cum mighty nigh loosin' my life, that time that I lost my axe; I thought then, sure enuf that I was a goner. I hedn't gin but one blow, when snap, crack went the log that hung up the jam, and all the rest came whirlin' and rushin' ahead, eend over eend, some on um snappin' like pipe-stems. I was master sorry to lose that axe, but I gin it a fling and sprang for my life. I've seen many a jam, but that was the beatumest. There was ten acres of logs, and we hed been to work most three days tryin' to get um off, and ye see the water hed riz behind um mighty high, so when they did go all of a suddent, it was *some*, I tell ye. I guess I made some mighty smart leaps from one teeterin', whirlin', slippery log to another; wall, none of the fellers ever expected to see me ashore alive agin, and I was as much astonished as they was, to git out safe. 'Twas a narrow squeak, I tell ye. But I 'spect my time hedn't cum," he concluded.

"River drivin' is the pootiest part of loggin', I think," said one.

"They haint no kind of work that suits me better," said Tompkins. "It looks so good to see um sailin' along, clean out of sight; and ef the jams is bad, why I spose we should git tired of chasin' arter a drive, and never havin' no variety. I never git used to a jam. It alus makes me as lively as a cricket. I don't get as mad as a March hare, like some of your fellers, if they do happen to git hung up, that is, ef taint out of all reason afore they start agin."

"Hark!" suddenly exclaimed Bill; "I heerd sleigh bells;" and almost before he had ceased speaking, the rapid tread of a horse, with the jingling of sleigh-bells, was heard, and, with a loud whoop, the driver reined up at the camp.

"That's Jim Gordon, I know," exclaimed Tompkins, as the door opened, and a stout burly-looking man entered.

"How d'ye do, boys?" he ejaculated, in a loud and hearty tone, while John started out to take charge of the horse.

"A pooty piece of horseflesh," said John to himself, as he proceeded in his self-appointed task.

"I guess you've hed to travel *some*," he ejaculated, as he saw that the animal, notwithstanding the intense cold, was reeking with sweat. "Wall, now, he don't know how to use a creetur. He must alus go like the wind. I'd defy the devil himself to catch him, in a fair race."

While John was thus soliloquizing, the new comer (who was no less a person than the proprietor of the logging operations), having somewhat refreshed him-

self by a glass of brandy, which he took from a pocket flask which he carried with him, and set the cook to work to get him some supper) was edifying all present by his cheerful jokes, and frank, bold manners.

He was a man of the middle height, and quite stout, even after taking off the huge buffalo coat in which he was attired. He was perfectly straight, had a good head, an abundance of light-brown bushy hair, a fine forehead, quick, good-humored blue eyes, and a firmly compressed mouth, to which his somewhat prominent teeth gave a still more determined expression. He looked like a man whom no obstacle could daunt, and such in truth he was.

He was famed, far and near, for his untiring energy, whether it was in business or in pleasure. A perfect Napoleon among lumbermen, the most independent of all rules of society, rough and uncouth at times, yet quite the gentleman when he chose; the wildest and merriest at a gander party; the shrewdest and most far-seeing in business transactions, ever ready to enter into extensive speculating operations, and as untiring in carrying them out; courageous, frank, and merry, he was the idol of his men, and ever greeted with delight, in the brief visits which he paid to the many different berths and camps in his employ in the woods. It seemed as if he had no idea of fatigue. He would travel all day, dance and carouse all night, and again, with a clear head, start off in the morning, his loud shout to his horse ringing out as he dashed off, at headlong speed; and as he tasked himself to the ut-

most, so he expected all those with whom he was connected in any way to do also.

"Pooty cold out, haint it, Colonel?" said Clark, to Gordon.

"Well, yes. The trees cracked and snapped like pistols; but then we don't want warm weather this time of year."

"When did you leave Bangor?"

"Day before yesterday."

"You don't say you cum through in this last drivin' storm!"

"Yes I do," replied the Colonel, "I never stopped for the weather in my life yet, and I should like to see the storm that would keep me in, when I wanted to go anywhere."

"Wall, I shouldn't," replied Clark, laughing; "I believe you can stand more'n any other ten men, use um one arter the other."

"I can eat as much as ten men to-night," replied Gordon, drawing up to the well-supplied table, and beginning to do ample justice to the smoking hot viands placed there.

"How're you getting on, Clark?" he asked (for Clark was the boss of the camp.) "Find good timber here?"

"Fust rate," was the reply. "I've found three clear pines, that will bring fifteen hundred dollars for masts, and lots that will scale five thousand; A number 1 boards they'll make, too."

"Guess you'll make a good winter's work. Got a good crew, havn't you?"

"Yes, but one on um is sick; carried out to Simpson's yesterday; p'raps you knew it."

"No, I didn't stop to Simpson's; I'll call there to-morrow. What's the matter with him?"

"Rheumatiz."

"That's bad; sorry for him, sorry for him." Then hastily turning from the table, he exclaimed, "Come, come, boys, don't be so d—d solemn. This aint a Quaker meetin, is it? Come, give us a song." And in a loud, and not unmusical voice, he struck up a song, in which all present joined.

"There, now! that's the way. What's the use of being so devilish stupid? Live while ye do live—that's my doctrine."

All present entered into his humor; and when he proposed that somebody should spin a yarn, there was no lack of speakers.

At length he began to relate one of his own adventures in New York, "before he got his eye-teeth cut," he said.

He had got into a mock auction, it appeared; and he described, in a most amusing way, his own verdant appearance, and the manner in which he was cheated. "But the laugh wasn't all on one side," he concluded, "for when I saw what a d—d set of scoundrels they was, I jist pitched into um; and the way I beat and mauled um wasn't slow. I was pretty smart then, for my dander was up, and they were cowards, like all rascals. I didn't get my money back, but I got the worth of it on them. It was strength against brains then, and brains got the worst of it that time. I

bought experience, and a lot of galvanized watches, pretty dear; but, considerin' the drubbin' that was thrown in, I felt pretty well satisfied with my side of the trade."

After a few more stories had been told, interspersed with boisterous songs, he declared that he would turn in; and, taking a blanket, he threw himself on the hemlock boughs with his men, and was soon fast asleep.

Early in the morning he was again up, and ready for a start, after having a long and private consultation on business with Clark, in whom he seemed to place much confidence.

"There's been a *survare* here to scale the trees, to get the stumpage," said Clark.

"Well, I suppose he saw all the timber?"

"Yes, he saw all that was *necessary*," replied Clark, with a knowing wink; "p'raps he *might* hev overlooked a *few* spots where it's yarded."

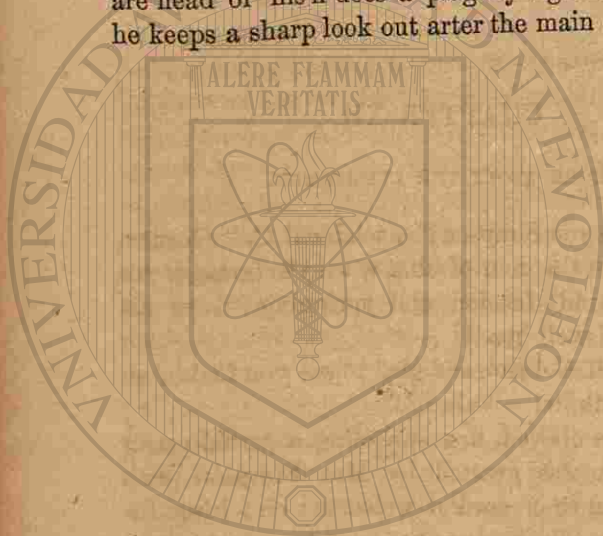
Gordon laughed. "Perhaps his eyes were a little dazzled by something in the money line—hey, Clark?"

"Wall, now, I shouldn't wonder if they was. But, then, they'll get all the stumpage that they orter hev. Them land owners is a dreadful greedy set. Good mornin', Colonel," he added, as Gordon sprang into his sleigh.

"Good morning." And away, like an arrow, flew the spirited horse, as if he well knew the character of his owner.

"I tell you what," soliloquized Clark, looking after

him, "the colonel is a smart feller. He know's what he's about; and, fur all he's such a case on a spree, and 'pears to care so little about making plans, that are head of his'n does a plagney sight of work, and he keeps a sharp look out arter the main chance."



UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE BUCARAMANGA

DIRECCIÓN GENERAL DE BIBLIOTECAS

CHAPTER XII.

MORE ABOUT THE LUMBERMEN.

"How are, you Simpson?" exclaimed Col. Gordon, dashing up to the door of that worthy's house in his usual whirlwind fashion and springing from his sleigh. "All well here?"

"Pooty well, Colonel, and glad to see you lookin' so rugged. Walk in! Walk in!"

Mr. Gordon obeyed, first spreading a buffalo over his horse; he was greeted by Mrs. Simpson with every appearance of cordial welcome; chucking Elvira under the chin he complimented her on her good looks, to which she replied, "oh, stop your nonsense!" though it appeared not at all offensive to her.

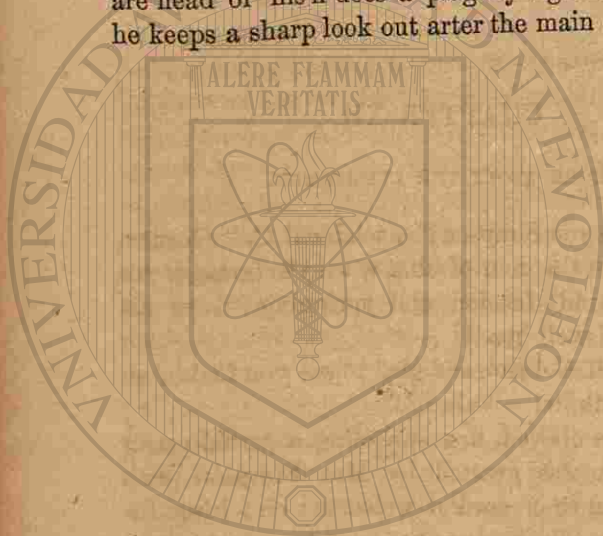
"I hear you've got one of my men sick here."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Simpson, "he's some easier now; walk into t'other room and see him."

Gordon did as requested, and greeted the sick man with a cheerful "How are ye, old boy? Keep up a good heart! You'll come out right end up!"

The invalid smiled as he pressed the hand that was extended to him, for there was something in the voice of the speaker that cheered him at once.

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"It makes it mighty bad for me, though, Colonel, to be took right in the middle of the winter so."

"Have you any family?"

"My mother," replied the sick man, "she's a widow," and tears rushed to his eyes.

Gordon saw at a glance what was passing in the poor fellow's mind, that he was her only support, and that his wages were needed to maintain her.

"Where did you say your mother lived?"

"In Bradley."

"Oh yes, I know. She's a nice woman. You just get somebody to send her this in a letter, as a kind of a Christmas present from her friend Jim Gordon, will you?" he said, putting fifty dollars into the invalid's hand. Then before he could find words to express his thanks, away went the Colonel, and his merry laugh was echoed from the next room.

Just then Esther came down from her chamber. She was aware of the new arrival, for Mr. Gordon had not only a particular faculty of making a noise himself, but "of stirrin' every body all up in a heap," as Mrs. Simpson expressed it, and from the sounds of welcome, she had judged that some pretty important personage had arrived.

"This is Miss Hastings, Col. Gordon," said Mrs. Simpson as Esther entered the kitchen.

Mr. Gordon looked up, made a very polite bow, and addressed her in a very gentlemanly manner on that never failing topic the weather; she replied briefly, and then calling Sammy, told him it was time to get ready for school.

"Allow me to take you in my sleigh to your school house," said Col. Gordon.

"Oh, it is quite unnecessary," was Esther's reply. "It is not far from here; I can very easily walk. I am much obliged, but won't trouble you."

"But this light untrodden snow is very bad to walk in. It's no trouble at all; just get ready, and I'll take you there."

"That'll be raal nice," said Mrs. Simpson as Esther speedily attired herself and jumped into the sleigh.

Mr. Gordon managed to talk a great deal in the few moments ride that ensued, and his frank but yet gentlemanly manners pleased Esther much.

She thanked him as they parted and bade him good bye, as she said she should not probably see him again.

"Why? Do you expect to spend two or three days at your school house?"

"Oh no; but I supposed you only made a transient call at Mrs. Simpson's."

"Well you needn't be in a hurry to say good bye—I have business here that may detain me," he said as he turned away, lifted his cap, and was out of sight in a moment.

"That man reminds me of a March wind," thought Esther, "as bold and rough, yet stirring and invigorating."

"Where did you pick up that little school marm?" asked Mr. Gordon, as he entered Mrs. Simpson's kitchen.

"Oh, she cum from Bangor, and a nice gal she is tew. She's pooty, aint she?"

"Yes; she's as fresh as a rose. By Jove, she's got handsome hair and teeth—then what eyes she's got—and the way she steps off takes me. She's smart I know. I'm going to know more of her," thought he, as he lighted a cigar and walked out of the house.

At four o'clock again the frank, pleasant face of Col. Gordon appeared at the school house.

He walked in very composedly, and informed Esther that he had been sent by Mrs. Simpson to bring her home, as that good lady was fearful that she might take cold.

This was not strictly true, though Mrs. Simpson had in fact assented to his suggestion that it would be a good idea to go after her.

"I am much obliged," replied Esther, "but if you would take a load of these little ones, who are not very warmly dressed, to their homes, it would certainly oblige me far more."

Mr. Gordon laughed. He was not particularly fond of children, and the idea of carrying a load of them struck him as rather comical.

"Well, bundle in, young ones," he said, "and Miss Hastings, wait here till I come back;" and off he started with children all around him and boys hanging on to the runners, shouting merrily.

He was back again in an incredibly short time, and as he handed Esther into the sleigh, he said, "Now, didn't I obey you nicely? I think I deserve a reward, won't you give me one?"

"Oh yes, if you are not too exacting. I will write you a 'good boy' on a slip of paper, if that will do, or give you the highest prize, a certificate of merit with a flower in each corner."

"No, that won't do; this is what I want, that you will go to ride with me now. I want to get acquainted with you, and did you know that there is no way in the world so good for that purpose as riding with a person?"

"Oh well, I shall be happy to oblige you, particularly as sleigh-riding is a favorite amusement of mine; the only trouble is, I am afraid it will be a reward to me instead of to you. I don't agree with those people who say they would as soon sit with their feet in cold water, and jingle bells in their hands, as to go sleigh-riding."

"Nor I either," replied her companion; mentally adding, "when one has so pretty a lady by his side," as he gazed with undisguised admiration on Esther's face.

She did not notice it, for she was thinking of something else, and her utter unconsciousness of it pleased Mr. Gordon.

"What are you getting into such a brown study for?" he asked. "You look as serious as a man does when his notes are falling due, and he's got no money to take them up with."

"Do I? I was thinking what a nice opportunity I have now of asking you about the whole lumbering business. I want so much to ask any number of ques-

tions about it, and you are just the one to answer them."

"Do you think of investing the money you make this winter, in that business?"

"Nonsense! but I do really want to understand it from the very beginning, down to the end at the saw-mill."

"Well, that would be a long story."

"Never mind! tell me what you do first."

"Why, get some good timber-land looked out, and agree to give the owner so much on each thousand feet of lumber that we cut off; that's called stumpage. Then engage a crew of men; some of them go up early in the Fall, to make preparations for the Winter, build a camp, &c. You've seen a camp, haint you?"

"Yes, I went out to see one the other day."

"Well, then, you know all about that. This crew of men is divided into different sets, to do different kinds of work. There are the swampers, as they are called, who cut down small trees, in fact build roads from the most important part of the woods, that is, where there is the best timber, down to the river or lake where we haul the trees after they are felled. A good swamper is very much like a civil engineer. He wouldn't know so many scientific terms, but he will swamp out a road quick, and see very soon the easiest and best course to take. I remember hearing an anecdote of our army during the Mexican war, who had got to a place where it was thick woods, and they had to cross a river besides. I forget just where it was, but it was under the command of General Scott.

The army was rather short of provisions, and didn't feel quite so comfortable when the engineers decided that it would take at least two weeks to make a road to the river, because it had to be cut through a hill, and to build a bridge across. The officers held a consultation, and talked over all sorts of things without getting ahead any, till at last a Yankee colonel, who was then a captain of a volunteer company, got up and said: 'Give me two hundred men, and I'll have all ready to go over in twenty-four hours.' The officers thought it was Yankee brag, the engineers fairly laughed in his face, but he stuck to it. You know you can't laugh a Yankee down quite so easy. General Scott rather liked the idea of making the experiment, so the captain got the men. He was an old lumberman, and knew just what he was about, and how to go to work. He just *swamped* round the hill instead of making a straight cut through it, and threw a log bridge over the river. None of his work, I spose, was very handsome, but it answered the purpose, and in twenty-four hours, sure enough, the Yankee swamper had accomplished what the engineers wanted a fortnight for. Smart set of fellows these woodsmen are. They look rough, but that's no matter. Have you seen any of them travelling up to the camps?"

"Yes."

"Did you notice the packs that they carry?"

"No, not particularly."

"Well, they have the bottom of a red shirt sewed up, then fill it up, put it on their backs, and tie the sleeves around their waists. Rather a new kind of a

valise, but a first-rate one. You see it's a prominent trait of a lumberman to make the most and best out of everything, and it's astonishing how much anybody can do with a little if they only go on that principle. But I'm getting off the track a little."

"You were telling me about stumpage," said Esther, "but don't any of the head lumbermen own the land?"

"Oh, yes! I own a good many townships myself."

"You buy it of the State, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Does it cost a great deal?"

"Well, we manage to make ourselves *whole*, generally speaking. I can't say but what there is a little log-rolling about it."

"Log-rolling! what's that?"

"Why, a good many of us club together;—one wants one township, another wants another, and we play into each other's hands. If the State wants an unreasonable price, we make it up somehow; but I aint a-going to tell you all the secrets of the trade. You know there are a good many quirks in every business."

"I suppose, then, put into plain English, you sometimes cheat the State."

"Oh! that's rather a hard name; perhaps cheating is as good a word as any, but log-rollin is the fashionable term, and sounds much better. Oh, no; lumbermen don't profess to be saints, but then they aint the worst of sinners. We try to make the most money we can, just like any other set of men. We're no

better nor worse than the rest of the world. There's a great deal of log-rollin in all sorts of business, the world over. The merchants understand it; and if practice makes perfect, the politicians ought to be the best hands at it that ever was."

"I have no doubt there is a great deal of truth in what you say," said Esther, "but I never could see the propriety of calling a lack of principle at one time *shrewdness* in a man, and when the same thing is carried a little farther, branding it as dishonesty."

"Oh, there's a difference between cheating and making a good trade."

"Well, how about the swampers? I believe we were talking about them. Do they make roads, except in the fall?"

"Yes, though they make the principal ones early; but if there is a good tree or so, to fell, they swamp a track for that, so as to get the logs all together. It's astonishing how soon a lumberman can tell, by the looks of a tree, whether it's good timber or not."

"Don't they ever make a mistake?"

"Very seldom; and they have a way of making some trees pass for rather better ones than they really are. You have heard of *concussy* timber?"

"Yes, but never knew what it was."

"Well, it's a sort of a disease that rots a tree, and shows itself in little knots, toad-stool like, on the bark. The men have a way of cutting off the bunch, and driving a little wedged-shaped piece of wood in the place, that makes it look for all the world as if a limb had been lopped off there; and so the log goes; and,

like a good many things in this world, appears all right till it's put to trial. Well, besides the swampers there's the choppers. They fell the trees—two to a tree. They cut in with their axes, and chip down, as they call it: that is, they make a slanting cut above the straight one that reaches down to the first cut, and by-and-by over goes the tree with a rush. They stand only a little one side, for they can tell almost exactly how one will fall, and any accident is very rare. Then they cut off the log the length they want, cut off a few of the lower branches perhaps, and leave the top behind. Then the log is ready to be hauled off. The teamster, with his six or eight ox-team, hitches the logs to his bob-sled, and hauls them to the river. They are hauled right on to the ice, so as to be all ready to start when the ice goes out. The life at a camp is a pleasant one; they live well; they don't have any great luxuries, but good, substantial victuals. They don't eat much butter, but molasses, pork, beef, and salt fish, they have in abundance. They drink both tea and coffee. The way they carry up potatoes is a little queer. You see they would freeze, if they weren't prepared beforehand. So they have fish boiled and potatoes boiled and mixed together, so that it makes hash fish. It is put down into barrels, and if it freezes it does no harm. They heat it over the fire, and it is all right."

"Well, now, tell me about the river-driving; isn't that hard work?"

"Sometimes it is, when the logs get into a jam; then there's a good deal of danger. But the lumber-

men are a courageous set of men, and never draw back from anything. It's very exciting getting off a jam, but they like it."

"Isn't there great loss of life?"

"There is some, but not so much as anybody would think. When the logs run down well, the men follow in batteaux. You've seen those sharp built, flattish bottomed boats, haven't you?"

"Yes; I've sailed, or rather been poled along in the Aroostook river in one."

"Well, the men will run over falls in them, in places where it would make a man's hair stand on end to go, if he wasn't used to it. If they hit a rock, they must get swamped, of course, but they can generally steer over safely. They sleep right in the open air at night, wrapped in a blanket, perhaps under their boats; though sometimes they have a rough camp put up at a narrow place, or near falls, where they usually have jams. These men can balance themselves almost like a rope-dancer. I've seen them stand on a log, with a long pick-pole, a pole that has an iron in the end of it, and steer that wet, slippery log anywhere, no matter if it keeps rolling, as they often do, over and over; the man keeps stepping too, and shoves the log just where he wants it to go. They can throw these poles, too, as accurately, and with as good aim, as a Nantucket whalerman would his harpoon."

Esther listened with evident interest. "They are a fine hardy-looking set of men," she said, "and look as if they might do almost anything that required steadiness of nerve. But now, one thing more. It

puzzles me to know how you get your logs separated from other people's, for they all float down the river together."

"Oh, we have our own mark on them; and when the logs get to the boom—do you know what a boom is?"

"Yes; piers and logs placed across a river, to keep the logs from going farther, isn't it?"

"Exactly. Well, when they get there, they are separated and rafted out. We have to pay the owners of the boom for it, what is called boomage. If we don't pay, the boom owners can sell the logs."

"I should think a good many logs would get lost."

"Well, I suppose they do. There are a great many leaks in the lumbering business, but we do a large one, and calculate to make enough to pay. It's like navigation; you either make or lose a good deal. It's a business that I like, for you can go into it strong."

"I suppose," said Esther, "that the logs are floated down from the boom to the saw-mills."

"Yes, they are. You've been into saw-mills, haven't you?"

"Quite often," replied Esther. "I always feel interested to look into the mills, to see those great saws move so steadily through the logs. It always reminds me of the movement of a steam-engine, and conveys the same idea of power."

"Yes, they are powerful," said the Colonel. "There's been great improvement in saw-mills, of late years."

"Not in the beauty of the buildings," said Esther, smiling.

"No, they are only shells, to be sure, though they're very strong; but finishing up is of no consequence. But the saws cut through a log six or eight times where they used to cut only once; so that it makes eight boards in the time it used to take to make one. There are thirty of those great saws going at once, sometimes, in a mill, under one roof, and a grand sight it is. It looks the best at night, when the torches flame out and shine on the water, and the men, in their red shirts, are at work tending the saws, getting up logs, and piling boards. You know they keep the mills going all the time that the water is high enough."

"I should think it would wear the men out," said Esther.

"Oh, they have two gangs, one for the day-time, and another set for the night-work. Did you ever see them get up the logs?"

"Yes, I have. They are hauled up those inclined planes that lead into the water, I believe."

"Yes, they're fastened to iron chains, by having an iron spike, which is called a *dog*, driven into one end of them several inches; then this chain is fastened by a wheel to the carriage, as the frame on which the logs rest as they pass under the saw is called, and it is hauled up by the saw, which at the same time goes on making boards."

"It's very interesting to watch the men at work," said Esther. "I always like to see them, as the saw cuts steadily through, and the log slides slowly along, put other logs in the place of the last ones, and edge

the boards and slide them off. Then the lath machine, where they make laths of the slabs, I always like to watch. They don't seem to waste much in the mills."

"No, nothing but the edgings which they trim off the outside of the boards, and those drift down the river and make fire-wood for poor folks. It looks well to see the men raft boards, don't you think so?"

"Yes," said Esther, "there's no part of the operations of a mill that is uninteresting to me. I don't wonder that they like their business. There is something exhilarating to me, even, in the roar of the water, the whizzing of the saw, and the crashing of the logs. It always makes my blood run quicker to look on."

"It gets to be more of an old story to the workmen," said Gordon, "but still they like it. You see some of the same men work all winter in the woods, logging, drive logs in the spring, and if they get the drive down early enough, work in the saw-mills in the summer. So you see they have variety enough."

"But I wish you could see a saw-mill at night. I have seen them when I've been riding late, on the opposite side of the river, looking as if they were illuminated, and so bright and cheerful that it really seemed like seeing an old friend; they look as pleasant as a light-house to a sailor."

"I have seen one at night," replied Esther, "and it left quite a different impression on my mind from that of which you speak. It was when I was quite a child, and riding with my father at night; as he left no opportunity unimproved to show me all that pertained

to his business, that of lumbering, he took me into a mill which we were passing.

"It was rather dark out of doors, and when he led me over the bridge that leads out to the mill, and the red glare of the lights streamed full in my face, I shuddered, and clung closer to his hand."

"The various sounds of which you speak—the whizzing saws, the crashing logs, and the roar of the water—struck an awe over me, and as I looked on the stalwart frames of the workmen, in their picturesque garb, working in the lurid light, I could hardly realize that they were mortals; and as I shrunk closer to my father's side, the idea of the beauty of the scene was lost in its grandeur and wildness. I had been reading fairy tales, and it seemed to me almost as if I had a glimpse into the interior of the earth, where gnomes that I had read of were piling the mammoth piles which, burning, would burst out in the flames of myriad volcanoes."

"It always left a vivid picture in my mind; but now, smiling at my childish impressions, I remember only the beauty of the scene, and when I began to make the acquaintance of the heathen gods, I felt as if I had already had a glance into sturdy old Vulcan's workshop."

The Colonel smiled. "I never have any fanciful or spiritual thoughts about these men," said he; "I look on them as practical mortals, and as fine specimens of mortality too."

"The lumbermen are a good deal like the sailors in character, aren't they?" asked Esther.

"Yes, some. They are just as fearless and jovial, but I think they are rather more intelligent. They are generous, but not such spendthrifts as sailors. They like a spree, but don't make that, their whole business when they get out of the woods. They have a great fancy for beauty, and as they don't see ladies for so long a time when they are in the camp, they all look handsome to them when they do get out, and they are very apt to compliment them, when they get into the city."

"Yes," replied Esther, laughing, "no matter how plain a woman is, she stands a chance of getting any passable feature complimented in the streets of Bangor, in June or July, by the red-shirters, when the city is full of them. They often follow a woman for a considerable distance, commenting on her various charms. We know it is only meant for mischief, and don't mind it at all. I like the looks of those red shirts; they look so comfortable, but yet I shouldn't think they would be warm enough for these cold winters."

"Oh, they keep putting on one after another till they have on five or six at a time, and even more. They are warm, and not too clumsy. Their dress is for convenience; now, those long thick boots, that reach up to the knee, are capital things."

"But I guess you've heard enough of this, now. Have you made up your mind to go into the business? Because, if you have, and would like a partner, why, I wouldn't object to taking you in, myself."

He looked at her in a quizzical way as he spoke.

Esther laughed. "Thank you! I dare say it would

be more profitable than school-teaching, but I doubt whether I should be so well fitted for it."

"Oh, I have no doubt that you would make an excellent partner; one that would just suit me."

"Whey! what you about!" he suddenly exclaimed, as his horse plunged, reared, and came to a dead halt, trembling violently, and apparently much frightened at something which he saw.

"Go lang!" shouted his master in a stentorian voice; but the animal only plunged and backed.

A sudden change came over the Colonel's frank face: he seemed to forget Esther entirely, but whipped his horse unmercifully, without effect. He sprang from the sleigh.

"Don't be frightened," he said, glancing at Esther's pale face, as he hurried up to his horse, dealt him several violent blows with his clenched fist, about the head, and with an oath, exclaimed, "Will you go lang now?"

Esther supposed that he would lead the animal past the swaying, withered branch of the fallen tree, which had so frightened him; but no, the Colonel had no idea of making a compromise with his horse. He sprang again into the sleigh, and this time the animal, with a bound, leaped past the terrible object, as if he well knew that he must obey.

"Now that's what I like," said the Colonel, as he tucked the buffalo robes, which had got displaced during this struggle, again round Esther, seeming in no hurry to withdraw his arm from the back of the sleigh. "You didn't scream like so many silly fools,

though you did look so frightened. It was nothing, only when I want a horse to go anywhere he's got to do it."

"I don't know which I was most afraid of," replied Esther, "you or the horse, you looked so terribly black and ugly."

The Colonel laughed.

"I know it don't take much to get my temper up, but then it's a flash and soon over."

"I shall begin to believe that a ride is the best way to form an acquaintance," said Esther, "for I begin to think that I've known you a long while."

"Certainly I'm glad to hear it. Now that's the best way. Where's the sense in being on your best behavior a few months and then letting the cat out of the bag—show out what you are! That's my notion. You can do it just as well in a few days as in a year."

"Much obliged for my ride," said Esther as they approached Mrs. Simpson's.

The Colonel had a great mind to claim something more than thanks, but a glance at Esther's calm, quiet face seemed to satisfy him that she would be much offended at any familiarities, and he handed her very politely from the sleigh.

He seemed to be in high spirits, and gave to Elvira the kiss that he had meditated bestowing upon Esther, at which that young lady tossed her head, and exclaimed, "Wall, I never!" She looked rather cross for a moment, but speedily recovered her equanimity.

CHAPTER XIII.

COLONEL GORDON.

THE next day after the sleigh-ride, Colonel Gordon left Umcolcus, and though he had been so recent an acquaintance, Esther really felt sorry, for she liked him notwithstanding his peculiarities.

"He's a smart feller," said Mr. Simpson when the family were sitting together in the evening, as the conversation turned on *people*, which is apt to be the case when there is either a lack of thoughts in the minds of the persons talking, or of congeniality, for to discuss the characteristics of others is always interesting to high or low, since it is a subject on which we feel perfectly at home, and therefore are apt to allow ourselves the largest liberty.

"He's a good hearted man as ever was," continued Mr. Simpson, "as free of his money as ef it was dirt, but he won't stand cheatin' nohow. He's alus in law-suits for ever and eternally." ®

"He's great on fast drivin, and as sure as they hev a law agin it, in the city, he'll be sure to cut on like blazes and drive through the streets as ef the old Harry was arter him; then when they take him up, he knows law enough to plead his own case, and ef

though you did look so frightened. It was nothing, only when I want a horse to go anywhere he's got to do it."

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they do fine him he'll twist and turn all sorts of ways and they can't make nothin' out on him nohow. He don't vally the money, but he won't be *made* to do nothin' 'thout he takes a notion. He had a lawsuit onct that two of the smartest lawyers in the state managed for him. Wall, they got the case, but they charged him an *exorbiant* price for their services, and he wouldn't be gammoned, so, he went to law with um. He plead his own case agin um and beat um tew. They haint nothin' but what he kin turn his hand tew, from makin' a law-plea to drivin' an ox-team. He often starts off a load of supplies himself from the city, marchin' through the streets and flourishin' his goad-stick, and he can make any kind of a critter do as much agin as any other man. He kinder likes to start off a team so, and go a piece way with um. I tell ye there haint many folks that kin git round him in any thing. I don't believe there is any other man that the lumbermen thinks so much on, nuther."

"He is certainly a peculiar person," said Esther, "and one that I should think it would be difficult to dislike."

The wooden clock between the windows gave a loud whirr and struck nine in a very energetic manner.

Mrs. Simpson proceeded to rouse Sammy, who, leaning his head on the table, which was hauled close to the fire, had fallen fast asleep.

Sol hung his newspaper on the nails, where quite a

file of papers were placed, and taking a candle, walked off to his bed.

Esther rose to follow his example, but was recalled by the motherly Mrs. Simpson, who enjoined on her to "heat her feet hot, afore she went into her cold chamber."

It was not long before the Colonel, the same cheerful, noisy, jovial fellow, made his appearance at the settlement. He greeted Esther as if he had known her for years, and it was impossible for her to feel that she had been acquainted with him for so short a time.

Again he wished her to go to ride with him, and when fairly on their way he began:

"Now, I've got something to say to you, and it's my way to come right up to the point without going all round the stump. You know me well enough to tell just what I am, and I know as much about you as I think it necessary. I know one thing certain, that I never saw a girl that I liked so well as I do you, and now I want to ask you if you like me well enough to be my wife. I shan't say any thing about my property, for I don't think you care any thing about that, but if you like me well enough to take me for better or worse I'll make you a good husband, so help me God."

Esther looked at him with no little surprise. "Indeed, Mr. Gordon," she said, "I never thought of you in such a light—I do like you very much as a friend, but I never had the slightest idea that you wished for any thing but friendship from me."

He interrupted her, "Well, I *do* want something else, and if you think you can love me, just say so, and I'll try to make you so happy that you will never repent of it, but if you can't, why just say that, and I must abide by it."

"No, Mr. Gordon, I do not love you well enough to become your wife."

"Not now, perhaps, but do you think you never could?"

"I think not. We are not suited to each other. My tastes and inclinations would be so entirely different from yours that you would weary of me I fear. Besides, you know so little of my real character."

"Nonsense, I'll risk that. The only point is whether you could or could not love me."

Esther was silent. Her eyes filled with tears. "There is so much that is good and noble in him, could I not be happy with him?" she asked herself. But no—love was wanting.

"I would not wrong you so much, Mr. Gordon, as to become your wife, without loving you as you deserve to be loved, with all the fervor of a woman's best affection; but though I cannot give you that, you will remain my friend, will you not? I know your generous nature well enough to hope it; and if I ever need a friend I shall never hesitate to go to James Gordon, sure that I shall ever find one of the truest and noblest in him."

"Thank you, Esther," said the Colonel, in a choked voice.

"I am so sorry to have given you pain," continued

Esther, obeying the impulse of her heart; and taking his hand, she pressed it kindly.

"It was not your fault," he replied, "if I did love you, neither is it yours if you do not love me; and God forbid that I should ever take a woman's hand without her heart. You are a good, frank girl, and I love you better than ever," he said, leaning over her, and pressing a kiss on her brow.

A flush rose to her cheek, but she was not offended. "You will, then, be my friend forever?" she said, softly.

"Forever!" he repeated, turning aside to conceal his emotion.

He had no idea how very much he was attached to her, until he found that she could never be his; and never did there a sadder heart beat in the bosom of any girl, who rejected the suit of a man she did not love, than in Esther's. She strove to talk cheerfully; and the Colonel, who thought it unmanly to betray the strength of his feelings, did the same. But it was in vain; both were thinking of the same subject; and though they did not mention it again, neither could enter with much spirit into any other.

The Colonel did not remain long at Mrs. Simpson's, on their return from the sleigh-ride. He did, indeed, stay to supper, but resisted all their entreaties to spend the night there.

"He must be on his way to St. Johns," he said, "as he was going there on business;" and bidding Esther and the family a cordial good-bye, he drove off at headlong speed.

The moon shone palely down on the white surface of the ground, and glimmered through the branches of the evergreens that lined the road at intervals. No sound broke the silence, except the jingling of the sleigh-bells, the crunching sound that the snow emits when trodden on, in a cold night, and the occasional hi! hi! of the Colonel to his horse, as for a moment he relaxed his rapid trot.

The Colonel, on this occasion, seemed more in a hurry than ever. In truth, he was trying that experiment, which so many have attempted unsuccessfully before him, that of running away from himself and his thoughts. This disappointment, in a matter on which he had set his heart, was a new thing to him. It was almost the first time in his life that he had been thwarted in carrying out an intention; and though he chid himself for being so unmanly, as to let it engross so much of his thoughts, yet it would continually recur, notwithstanding his efforts to prevent it.

He attempted to think of his business; but in the midst of cogitations on lumber, a picture of a pleasant fireside, and the bright smile of a wife, whose face and figure bore a marvellous resemblance to the little school teacher, would rise before him, and put to flight, visions of rolling logs at once.

Let men sneer as contemptuously as they will at the air-castles, of which the weaker sex are generally conceded to be the architects; yet who is there among their number, who, if he will not confess it to others, can deny to himself, that he has seen some such vision

of a home, similar to that which floated before Colonel Gordon, where sat enshrined some maiden, bearing the form of some real or ideal personage, whose smile is to make the sunshine of that home.

Answer, oh most hardened woman-hater, and confirmed infidel in love matters!

Does not the old picture, though perhaps for the most part obscured by the dust and dirt of worldliness, still, at times, lighted up by a stray sunbeam, gleam before you for a moment, withdrawing you, for that brief instant, from this "work-a-day world?"

"The devil take the women!" was the Colonel's unromantic and half audible conclusion to his reverie at last, as he approached a small inn, where he determined to spend the remainder of the night.

There were no lights burning, and all was quiet within; but very soon the loud shouts of Col. Gordon, and his violent thumps at the door, brought out the hostler, who slept upon the floor, and who, half asleep and half awake, grumbled considerably about "being waked up in the middle of the night, when honest folks ought to be in bed."

The Colonel was in no very amiable humor, and repaid this grumbling by some home truths, as to what belonged to his business, interlarded with several oaths. These acted as a sort of safety-valve; and after this escape of steam, Mr. Gordon slipped some silver into the hostler's hand, charging him to take good care of his horse. He himself entered the bar-room, and proceeded to rake open the fire, for he was nearly chilled through.

The reprimand or the silver produced quite a favorable effect on the temper of the hostler, for he soon re-appeared, in very good humor, and speedily discovered a bed for the new comer, although he had at first declared, that the house was running over with company, and that it was useless to think of stopping there.

The next morning found the Colonel in his usual good spirits, and he pushed on towards St. Johns. He was greeted, on his arrival at the hotel there, as if he were no stranger; and he marched into the bar-room, and swung around, in a manner that plainly indicated that he felt all the importance of the honor of being a Yankee, and the immense superiority of that favored race to the Blue-noses.

After taking a drink, and treating all round, he went out at once to make his business arrangements; and no sooner was supper dispatched, than, together with three gentlemen, who had agreed to meet him there, he entered into a private room, where glowed a good coal fire.

Mr. Sinclair was a gentlemanly-looking man, of rather slight figure, and pale countenance, who bore the appearance of one who had spent the greater part of his life in a counting-room. He presented a striking contrast, not only to the hale and vigorous Colonel, but also to one of his friends who accompanied him, Mr. Billings, who had all the portly and comfortable look of a beef-loving and porter-drinking Englishman.

Mr. McPherson, the third gentleman, was of a sandy

complexion, and, being also the possessor of any quantity of freckles, and also high cheek bones, he could make no pretensions to beauty. He was equally deficient in grace of manner; but his eyes, which were shrewd and piercing, seemed to indicate that he possessed other qualities, which are much more requisite than grace or beauty, to a good business man.

The room was well lighted, but neither light or glowing fire could give that air of comfort which, though it may be claimed in truth for inns, in some countries, is in our own, and in the Provinces generally, wanting. True, it was well furnished, and what was lacking, it would have been perhaps difficult to point out; yet the room had that unpleasant air of being generally uninhabited, and gave one at once the disagreeable consciousness that it was not an abiding place; in short, that it was far from being a home. On a table were placed cigars, well filled decanters and wine-glasses; and after patronizing both, the gentlemen proceeded to business.

It seemed to be merely the closing up of contracts previously agreed upon; the drawing up of notes which were to be discounted by Mr. Sinclair, as he was engaged in banking, the negotiation of bills of exchange, and the like.

When this was dispatched, the Colonel proposed cards, to which all seemed agreed; a fresh supply of liquors was ordered, and they prepared to make a night of it.

At first all were in the best possible humor; each seemed pleased with the results of their respective bar-

gains, and the bottle was circulated freely. Toasts were drank, stories told, which, if not particularly witty, were greeted with just as loud shouts of laughter as if they had been the most side-splitting that were ever related; and songs sung, whose principal merit did not lie in their delicacy of sentiment or expression, still less did it consist in the execution; for though they adhered, in general, to the same tune, each sang "ad libitum," putting in any number of variations, in any place, without regard to each other. However, as there were no other listeners, and each performer seemed well satisfied, criticism is altogether unnecessary.

The cards next, which had not at first received their due share of attention, came in for their part, and at first, rather small stakes were placed upon the table.

Presently Col. Gordon exclaimed "D——n it! none of your half-laughs and purser's grins. Down with the dust! I'll go you any sum you want to."

The stakes were accordingly doubled, and doubled, again and again, as the liquor, which all partook of freely, began to produce its usual effects.

It loosened Mr. Billings' tongue, made McPherson a little silly, though good-humored, and stiffened the joints of Mr. Sinclair till he became almost as rigid as if an iron rod had been run through him, while on Colonel Gordon it produced no visible effect.

The Colonel seemed to be in high favor with Dame Fortune, for he won again and again; at last Mr. Billings muttered, as Gordon was again the winner,

"That's a d——d astonishin' run of luck! D——d queer, I must say! I don't understand it!"

"You havn't learned the Yankee ways yet!" said Sinclair.

"Do you mean to say I cheated?" exclaimed Gordon.

"Now, Colonel, don't get that devilish Yankee temper of yours up, and go to showin' your teeth!" said Sinclair.

"Then don't give me none of your d——d blue-nose impudence, or I'll show you something besides teeth!" ejaculated Gordon, straightening up and clenching his fists.

"I ain't anxious to fight," said Billings, "but perhaps you mightn't come out the winner there."

"D——n you! just come on, we'll try it!"

"Now, gen'l'm'n," began McPherson, who began to talk a little thick, "don't spoil th' ev'nin' so; just take a drink, and cool off."

"I'll give you the Queen!" said Sinclair, raising his glass.

"D——n the Queen!" exclaimed Jim, "I'll give you the Yankee Nation!—the smartest nation on God's earth—I'll back um up against the whole world!"

"Oh, the Yankees!" said Billings, sneeringly, "yes! I'll pit um against the world, if the game is *brag*, and the weapons *tongues*, but Old England, forever!—the little Island, on whose possessions the sun never sets."

"Gen'l'm'n! gen'l'm'n! order! order!" exclaimed McPherson, "we didn't come he-ah to fight!—Come!

come!—I'll tell a story!" and he began in a very disjointed way to tell an anecdote, which Gordon speedily interrupted.

"Hold your tongue, Mac! The less you say now, the less you'll appear like a fool!"

"Well, I don't no, Col'n'l, but what you're 'bout right," replied McPherson, good humoredly; and, acting on the Homœopathic principle, that hair of the same dog will cure the wound, he took another glass of brandy.

"Here's to the English flag, always victorious!" said Billings, filling a glass.

"Do drink to that, Col'n'l," said McPherson, beseechingly.

"I don't want to go so much agin my conscience," replied Gordon, "when I know the Yankees can lick you all to pieces, and not half try. The English are a d—d grasping race; ye can't be contented without grabbing arter our lands. Now how like the devil you acted about that North-eastern Boundary!"

"We wanted our rights," said Sinclair, "and what's more, we got um."

"Oh, d—n it! if you're satisfied, we are—you know as well as I do, that 'twant settled accordin' to any sort of a line, and it was lucky for you that it was hushed up, or we should have licked you like thunder."

"You! with your raw-boned, slab-sided militia! What could you do against her majesty's troops?" asked Sinclair, sneeringly.

"Well, we've answered that question, before to-

day. Only look back as fur as the revolution, and if you're anyways reasonable, you'll be satisfied. We did lick you like blazes, then, and in 1812; and if we did it then, we could do it so now that we needn't leave a grease spot of you. D—n me, if I havn't a great mind to give you a specimen of what *one* live Yankee can do, if he sets out!" cried Jim, starting from his seat.

McPherson pushed him in again; but he would not stay in his chair.

His coat was off in a moment—"Come on, both of ye!—all of ye!—I'll show ye that Jim Gordon is more than a match for twenty Blue-noses!"

The pacific McPherson again interposed, and finally a truce was proclaimed, and the compact sealed by copious libations.

Jim would not be stopped from proceeding, however, in a wholesale eulogium on the Yankee nation, whose good qualities and smartness, in every department, he insisted on again and again, if not in an eloquent, at least in a most earnest and enthusiastic manner, throwing in at intervals a sly taunt at the British.

Sinclair and Billings listened with no little impatience, but both by this time were too far advanced in that condition—which is so pithily described as "tight," "half seas over," and a thousand similar circumlocutions, which are used to avoid that disagreeable word *drunk*—that they contented themselves with muttered oaths, and renewed applications to the

decanter, whose contents seemed to soothe their wounded national honor.

McPherson talked on at random, till at last, even his tongue refused to do its office, and what was more marvelous still, he could drink no more, he was fairly "over the bay;" in fact, dead drunk.

Gordon still plied the bottle, and ere long, both Billings and Sinclair were reduced to the same condition.

The Colonel was not much the worse for his deep potations, apparently, though he had not been more abstemious than the rest. It was one of his peculiarities, to be able to carry off any quantity of liquor, and he sought his chamber, leaving his friends to be taken care of, as they were, by the landlord.

And this was pleasure!—This progression from boisterous mirth to maudlin silliness, thence to the point where the man degenerates into the mere quarrelsome brute, till, having lost long since all trace of that nobility which stamps him as indeed created in God's image, he sinks at last into utter insensibility.

This is the tempting cup, that has lured so many of the noblest and most generous of men, step by step downward, till they forget wife, children, friends, their own souls even, in dissipation!

Yet, so it has ever been, from the days of the great men in olden times, down to the present, that those most highly endowed with gifts of mind and heart, have been too often the slaves of sensuality.

No upbraidings of conscience visited the pillow of Colonel Gordon, as he flung himself on his couch, and

was soon wrapped in the lethargic slumber that results from such orgies; but in the morning, the thought of what had passed, flashed through his mind; it did not indeed give him the acute pang that his first revel had cost him, but as the remembrance of Esther crossed his mind, he blushed, though he would not have owned it to himself. He knew that she respected him, and sadly would he have dreaded to lose the place which he held in her esteem.

"Why should I care for her opinion?" he asked himself. Why, indeed! yet care he did, for what man is there, who retains any spark of manhood, who does not value the good opinion of a pure and high-minded woman?

He half resolved that he would never make such a fool of himself again, but his resolutions were, like too many similar ones, made as a sort of quietus to conscience, with no fixed determination of acting on them.

He walked out, with hardly any settled purpose, but entered a jeweler's establishment and purchased a beautiful set of pearls, which he forwarded to Esther, and this, with a few words that accompanied the gift, was all that she heard directly from her old admirer. She often heard through others, mention of him, as driving on, in his own peculiar fashion, as deeply immersed in the tide of business as ever.

Days and weeks passed rapidly away, and her school term had expired.

The last day of school was greeted with mingled joy and sorrow, by both Esther and her pupils.

She could hardly have believed that in so short a time she should have become so strongly attached to her scholars, as she found to be the case on parting with them, and many and sad were her farewell visits to her rough but sincere friends.

"I do hate orfully to hev you go," said Elvira; and her tears flowed fast.

She listened patiently to Esther as she gave her, her own little Bible, and promised that she would try and follow its guidance.

Mrs. Simpson folded her in her motherly arms, and wept over her, as if she had been her own child.

"Wall, the house does seem orful lonesome," she said, as she turned from the window, after the wagon which bore Esther away, had disappeared. "I wouldn't hev believed that I should hev sot so much by her."

"She haint a bit proud," said Elvira, "and she never orders nobody round, but somehow or nuther, she alus made *me* do jist what she set out to. It does seem as ef the whole house hed gone, for all she hed sich mighty quiet ways with her, and never made no sort uv fuss about nothin."

CHAPTER XIV.

A FAMILY PICTURE.

It was a pleasant summer evening. The lamps were not yet lighted, and the doors and windows were opened to catch the cool breeze, which rustled lightly among the shrubbery and the leaves of the trees which surrounded Mr. Wilton's residence.

Margaret and her mother sat alone in the parlor, a large room, whose furniture, consisting entirely of the straight-backed chairs, and curiously carved tables of the times of the Pilgrims, gave it a quaint though not unpleasing aspect.

"Come, mother," said Margaret, breaking the long silence which twilight is so apt to cause, "let us walk out awhile in the garden; the air will do you good."

Mrs. Wilton arose, and after submitting to be carefully wrapped in a shawl by her daughter, walked slowly out into the grounds which surrounded the house.

"How quiet every thing seems," said Margaret, as they paced slowly up and down the winding paths.

"It is indeed a lovely evening," replied her mother, "and your presence makes it doubly pleasant to me. What should I do without you, Madge?" she contin-

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CHAPTER XIV.

A FAMILY PICTURE.

It was a pleasant summer evening. The lamps were not yet lighted, and the doors and windows were opened to catch the cool breeze, which rustled lightly among the shrubbery and the leaves of the trees which surrounded Mr. Wilton's residence.

Margaret and her mother sat alone in the parlor, a large room, whose furniture, consisting entirely of the straight-backed chairs, and curiously carved tables of the times of the Pilgrims, gave it a quaint though not unpleasing aspect.

"Come, mother," said Margaret, breaking the long silence which twilight is so apt to cause, "let us walk out awhile in the garden; the air will do you good."

Mrs. Wilton arose, and after submitting to be carefully wrapped in a shawl by her daughter, walked slowly out into the grounds which surrounded the house.

"How quiet every thing seems," said Margaret, as they paced slowly up and down the winding paths.

"It is indeed a lovely evening," replied her mother, "and your presence makes it doubly pleasant to me. What should I do without you, Madge?" she contin-

ued, pressing her child's arm, by which she was fondly encircled.

"I hope that question will long remain unanswered, dearest mother," said Margaret, "for we will not part soon, if I can help it. But you seem tired, shall we not sit down and rest? Father will be here presently. Let us wait for him."

They had not long to wait, for a gentleman soon approached them. His head was silvered, but his form was unbent; and greeting them affectionately, he gave Margaret a letter; then saying that "it was rather late for invalids to be out," led the way to the house.

"What has detained you so long?" asked his wife, as they entered the parlor, and ordered lights.

"Business, as usual," was the reply. "But how delightful it is to come *home*, after the cares of the day are over. I think," he added, "that no class of men can appreciate the delights of home so fully as the business man. Jostled as he is, all day long, by eager pursuers of wealth, and seeing nothing but selfishness, it is so refreshing to escape from the tumult a while, into his quiet home, and to hear something talked of, beside the 'almighty dollar.'"

Margaret, who had retired to read her letter, now came in. "She is coming," she said; "how glad I am!"

"Esther, I suppose is the person of whom you speak," said her mother, smiling at Margaret's eagerness. "So, then, we are to see that paragon."

"How soon may we expect her?" asked Mr. Wilton.

"In the course of a day or two," replied his daughter.

"Now for some music, Maggie," said her father, after the conversation which ensued, upon Esther's good qualities, had ended; and seating himself near a window, while Margaret proceeded to the piano, he prepared to listen.

It was indeed a delight to hear Mrs. Hastings sing. Passionately fond of music, she threw her earnest soul entirely into her songs, so that the listener, absorbed in the melody, forgot the performer in her music.

She ceased singing, and commenced playing one of Mendelssohn's exquisite songs without words, saying, as she finished, "How near such music brings one to the artist's soul!"

"It does, indeed, with such an interpreter as you are, my dear," replied her mother, with a fond smile; and as Margaret stood by her side, lifting her mother's grey hair, caressingly from her brow, she added, "how delightful it is to have you at home once more."

"It is, indeed," replied her father; "we form once again the perfect chord, which Mrs. Childs speaks of."

The silence was unbroken for a few moments, save by a suppressed cough from Mrs. Wilton.

It fell on Margaret's ear like a death-knell, warning her that the harmony of that triple chord might, ere long, be broken by the stern death-message.

"Father," said she suddenly, "what do you think of our trip to Clarendon Springs? I think it would be

of great benefit to mother, for they are quite different from Saratoga, quiet and retired, and the waters certainly have effected some wonderful cures."

"I agree with you, Maggie," replied Mr. Wilton, "that the journey will do you both good. I should like, of all things, to spend a few weeks there myself, among the green hills of Vermont."

"And why won't you?" asked his wife.

"I can only ring the changes on my old excuse, business," replied her husband; "but I will go with you, and see you nicely settled in good rooms at the Clarendon House, and perhaps spend a few days there."

"Ah!" replied Margaret, smiling, "I don't place any dependence upon your stay there, even of a few days. I know you too well. You cannot rest long enough. I really believe, mother," she added, "that father would be miserable, if he were not surrounded by the hum of that business, of which he complains at times so bitterly."

"I don't know but you are half right," replied her father; "but when shall we start for Clarendon?"

"As soon as Esther comes," said Margaret; "I think she will enjoy the trip equally as much as any of us."

"I should think even more," answered her mother, "for she must be heartily sick of her experiment of teaching in the backwoods."

"I shall be glad enough to get her back into civilized life," said Margaret, as she bade her parents good night, and retired to her chamber.

CHAPTER XV.

CLARENDON SPRINGS.

"THIS is a lovely morning," said a young lady, who was slowly walking up and down the lowest of the three piazzas, which surrounded the Clarendon House, a large four-storied brick building.

"It is, indeed, Miss Sidney," rejoined her companion, a gentleman, whose sallow complexion, and something in his accent, proclaimed from the South. "The air is delightful; so fresh and cool. But have you yet quaffed any of the water from the spring?"

"No," replied Miss Sidney.

"Shall we not go down, then?" he asked.

"If you will wait a moment," answered Miss Sidney, "till I get a veil. You know we ladies must take care of our complexions," she said, smiling, as she re-appeared, with a green veil, wound quite tastefully and becomingly around her head.

"I supposed Miss Sidney quite above the ordinary weakness of her sex, as regards beauty."

"No, Mr. Everett," replied his companion, as they slowly descended the hill, in the shade of a few trees; "I do not profess any superiority over ordinary mor-

tals, and cannot imagine what grounds you had to form your supposition upon. Nor do I admit your premises, that it is a weakness to prize the beauty which we possess, especially when so little happens to fall to the share of an individual, as in my case. I did not say that to draw out a compliment," she added, smilingly, as she saw her companion about to speak; "I know very well that my complexion is about my only hope, to rescue me from the class of homely young ladies, and shall take good care of it."

"Here we are, at the spring; and if you will not allow me to express my opinion, without charging me with flattery, Miss Sidney, allow me to refute your words by your own eyes," he said, drawing her to the railing of a bridge, which crossed a small stream.

"I find only 'assurance made doubly sure,'" replied Miss Sidney, "and prefer that you should offer me a glass of water."

Quite a large company, some of whom ill health, and some of whom pleasure, had drawn to Clarendon, now surrounded the springs, which were three in number.

From one, called the "love-sick spring," Mr. Everett brought a glass of water, which Miss Sidney declined, saying that at present she did not need it.

Another flowed from a little mound; from this they drank, and ascended the hillock to visit the third.

This was famed for the cure of dyspepsia, and little bubbles were continually welling up.

"People say these bubbles contain a deal of virtue; you had better catch one or two," said Miss Sidney.

Stooping down, Mr. Everett dexterously caught one in his glass, and, with a low bow, offered it to his companion.

"There's the breakfast-bell," he said, as she returned the tumbler; "shall we return?"

Slowly they ascended the hill, upon whose summit stood the hotel, greeting with morning salutations several of their acquaintances, who were going somewhat later to the spring, for their morning draught.

"Good morning, Mrs. Carroll," said Mr. Everett, as they reëntered the house. "Your fair niece and I have been beforehand with you, for we have already taken a glass of the pure fountain of life!"

"I think you are mistaken," said Mrs. Carroll, a large and showily-dressed lady; "for I sent Mary to the spring long ago, to bring up a pitcher of water for me, before you or Emily had finished your morning dreams, I imagine. But shall we not join the general tide, which flows towards the breakfast-room?" she continued.

Her companions assented, and they passed through a long and rather dark passage-way, to the low hall which Mrs. Carroll had designated.

Scarcely had they taken their seats, when a party of four entered; a middle-aged gentleman and his wife, with two young ladies; "both rather attractive," Mr. Everett remarked, "and one decidedly handsome."

"I wonder who they are," said Mrs. Carroll.

Emily Sidney looked for a moment, then ex-

claimed, "It is, I am sure it is, Esther Hastings; though I don't know who is with her."

"Let me ask Mrs. Merrill," said Mrs. Carroll. "She will know all about them, I'll wager a pair of gloves; for she knows everybody in the United States, apparently, and all about their relatives, even to the third and fourth generation."

"I shall not accept your wager," answered Mr. Everett, "for I should be inclined to take the same side of the question that you bet upon. But who is Miss Hastings?" he asked, of Emily.

"A very dear school friend of mine."

"Ah, I perceive!" replied Mr. Everett, rather scornfully; "the old story of Damon and Pythias, in a female form."

"Laugh as you choose, about school friendships," returned Emily, "they are sometimes lasting; at least the influence of one will always remain with me. But I can bring better authority than my own; your favorite, Longfellow, speaks almost reverently of the friendship existing between Cecilia Vaughn and Alice Archer; and you cannot be heretical enough to despise his opinion."

"However great an admirer of Longfellow I may be, Miss Sidney, I am not bound to receive every word he utters, and every sentiment he advances, as oracles. I never claimed infallibility for my favorite. I must beg an introduction to your friend; and as her party has just returned to the parlor, let us move in the same direction."

The greeting between the two friends was warm,

and both hastened to make each other acquainted with their companions. After a few moments conversation, Mr. Everett proposed a walk to the spring. Mr. Wilton had excused himself, as he was obliged to write some letters, he said; but Margaret's arm afforded the support she needed, to her mother. Mr. Everett, whose assistance Mrs. Wilton had declined, walked slowly by the side of Mrs. Carroll, while Esther and Emily followed leisurely, talking together in a low tone.

"So that beautiful woman is your step-mother?" said Emily, gazing at Mrs. Hastings, admiringly; "and is she as lovely in character as in person?"

"She is a woman of a great deal of character, in my opinion," replied Esther, "and I love her very much; as to her peculiar traits, I leave you to discover them; you have a fine opportunity here. At present, I prefer to hear what you have to say about yourself. It has been so long since I have seen or heard anything from you, that I presume you have wonderful things to relate. How strange that we should have met here!" she continued: "but it was not ill health that brought you here, Emily?" as she gazed on her friend's blooming countenance.

"Oh, no, indeed!" replied Emily; "I came with aunt Carroll, of whom you have often heard me speak. She has no children, and I have always been her favorite niece. She has begged mother to give me to her as her daughter, but mother could not, of course: however, I stay with her a great part of my time. But, Ettie dear," continued Emily, in a lower tone,

"I have a great many things to say to you; what do you say to taking a long walk with me this afternoon?"

"That it would be delightful," replied Esther, "and would seem like the days of 'lang syne.'"

While the girls were thus talking, Mrs. Carroll and Mr. Everett were quite eagerly discussing, whether Miss Hastings would be called a beauty.

"In my opinion, no," said Mrs. Carroll; "she has too little color" (glancing at Emily's fresh complexion); "and though her features are regular, they lack expression."

"How can you think so?" replied Mr. Everett. "I was just about remarking, that her chief charm consisted in her varying expression. But we are walking too fast for Mrs. Wilton," he said, as he looked back, and saw Margaret and her mother quite a distance behind them.

"Will you not now accept of my support?" he said, approaching Mrs. Wilton.

"I will avail myself of a lady's privilege, that of changing my mind," she replied; "and though I refused just now, I will accept your kind assistance."

"Second thoughts are always best," returned Mr. Everett.

"Do you really think so?" asked Mrs. Hastings.

"In instances like the present, certainly," she replied; "when, as in this case, a lady accepts an attention, which she has once refused."

Mrs. Carroll, who had been waiting for Mrs. Wilton to come near, hearing only the last part of this sentence, now asked if they were discussing the pro-

priety of a lady's acceptance of an offer which she had once rejected.

"Not exactly," replied Mrs. Wilton, "but something a little similar. Pray, what is your opinion, Mrs. Carroll?"

"It would be my advice to a lady in such a case," was the reply, "to adhere to her first decision. No gentleman ever forgets or forgives a rejection."

"You are rather hard upon our sex," said Mr. Everett. "But what do you say, Mrs. Hastings?"

"I think," said Margaret, coloring deeply, "that it is a matter depending entirely on circumstances. Still, in only one case, do I think it justifiable. If the lady's first decision was occasioned by some objection which was afterwards removed, I should think it right to accept the lover, but if want of affection for him had been her reason, nothing could be an excuse for her acceptance of him unless it was a change in her feelings."

"I agree with you," replied Mrs. Wilton, "but she should be careful not to mistake a lack of fancy for a want of affection. For my own part I don't believe in what are generally termed love matches."

"Neither do I, Mrs. Wilton," said Mrs. Carroll, "I have often observed that such marriages frequently prove most unhappy."

"But you do not believe in a marriage without love, ladies," interposed Mr. Everett. "At least you do not, Mrs. Hastings?"

"I believe there *have* been such things," said Margaret, smiling, "but this is a subject upon which I

have not prepared myself for discussion, and therefore cannot discourse upon it, in a sufficiently eloquent manner to satisfy myself, so you must excuse my enlarging upon it. There are the girls waiting for us rather impatiently; let us join them."

After each had taken a glass of the pure water, Mr. Everett proposed some exercise in the bowling alley. It was already occupied by parties of ladies and gentlemen, and as Mrs. Wilton found that the rolling of the balls gave her a headache, Margaret returned with her mother to the house. They were soon followed by the rest of their party, and as Mr. Everett offered to read aloud to Emily and Esther in the parlor, they took their work and seated themselves to listen to him. Mrs. Carroll, not very fond of reading, betook herself to another part of the room, and was soon deeply interested in an animated discussion on that never-failing topic, dress, which was carried on by a group of ladies.

Esther and Emily were very much interested in Mr. Everett's reading of the Ancient Mariner. At its close he abruptly asked them, "if they had never met persons to whom they had felt impelled, like the Ancient Mariner, to tell their thoughts."

"I think," replied Emily, "that I have encountered people who must have felt thus towards me, for I have often been detained by some long tale, quite as unwillingly as was the poor Wedding Guest."

"But seriously, Miss Hastings, have *you* never felt this truth, which Coleridge thus brings out?"

"I think I have," she replied, "both from experi-

ence and observation. Still, I agree with Emily that I have more frequently met with persons who seemed impelled to unbosom to me, than those to whom I felt a desire to reveal 'my innermost,' as Miss Bremer would say."

"How are you going to spend the afternoon?" asked Mr. Everett, after a pause.

"We are going to walk together," replied Emily. "I intend to show Esther some of my favorite haunts. I suppose you, Mr. Everett, will take your usual siesta?"

"I think I shall, Miss Sidney, though I might be tempted to ask permission to accompany you in your walk, if I did not have a presentiment that you would prefer, in your first expedition, an opportunity to talk unrestrained by a third person."

"You are very considerate," remarked Esther. "I think you must have sisters, who have let you into the secrets of school friends."

"No," said Mr. Everett, sighing, "I have never enjoyed the blessing of a sister's society, nor am I so fortunate as to possess young lady cousins, that excellent substitute for the lack of sisters." Then glancing at his watch, and remarking that he had no idea of the lateness of the hour, he sauntered slowly away. ®

CHAPTER XVI

A CHAT IN SCHOOL GIRL FASHION.

MR. EVERETT was sitting, or rather reclining at full length upon a bench on the piazza, smoking a cigar, when the two friends, ready dressed for their walk, appeared.

"You look the very picture of enjoyment," said Esther, as they passed him.

"Ah, that remark only demonstrates anew the truth of the old proverb, 'appearances are oftentimes deceitful,' Miss Hastings. If you could only realize the dissatisfaction and unrest that lie concealed under this apparently calm exterior, you would come to quite a different conclusion."

"*My* imagination is not sufficiently vivid," replied Emily, "to admit of such a supposition, and I shall not waste my sympathy upon one so little needing it."

"Very well," returned Mr. Everett, "you have only furnished me with a new subject for bitter meditations. Adieu, and a pleasant walk to you."

"We wish you delightful dreams in return," said Esther, and they descended the hill.

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"It is rather warm, Emily," she said. "I hope it is not far to your old rock."

"Not very," replied Emily, "we have to cross that field there, where you see that grove; this little stream flows by the side of it. It is charmingly cool, when you get there."

"It is, indeed, a very beautiful spot," exclaimed Esther, as they paused under the shade of some fine old elm trees, "I should like to spend a long time here."

"The water sounds so pleasantly as it prattles along, that it always makes me feel cheerful," said Emily.

As they seated themselves upon the soft grass, Esther asked, "What is it, Emily, that you have to tell me? I am really quite anxious to hear your revelation."

"Your curiosity shall be satisfied almost immediately, Ettie, for do you know that you possess the gift of the wedding guest, that we were reading of, this morning? At the risk of boring you, I am going to play the part of the ancient mariner."

"Very well," returned Esther, "you know that I was always a good listener; so I will take an easy position, and prepare for your story."

"First let me ask you, Esther, if you have ever been in love?"

"No, Emily, I am yet 'in maiden meditation, fancy free,' but your question gives me a clue to your revelation, I think. Have *you* then, my dear, found the other half of your soul?"

"I do not feel sure that I have found my lost half,

from which the ancients would have it, that I was severed, but I am engaged. Mr. Templeton is my lover's name, but it seems absurd to call him a lover—and you will say so, when you see him.—He isn't the least like my beau ideal, but then people never find their day-dreams, in that respect, realized. Mr. Templeton is a business man, and his method of wooing is like any other business transaction, with him; he is ten or fifteen years older than I am, and not at all handsome; but that doesn't matter so much, for I don't care to have a handsome husband, and have people wondering 'how he came to have such a plain wife.'

"How long is it since you became engaged?" asked Esther.

"Six or eight months since," replied Emily; "I never was more surprised in my life, I assure you, Ettie, than I was, when father called me into the parlor one day, and told me that Mr. Templeton wished me to become his wife—I have always known him, but the idea of him as a lover, never entered my mind—I hardly knew what to say: but father, mother, aunt Carroll, and all of my friends, seemed to take it as a matter of course, that in process of time, I should become Mrs. Templeton. I didn't care much about him at first, and it used to trouble me a good deal, to think I didn't love him as I ought, but now, I feel no sort of uneasiness about *that*, for I never could have believed that a few months would have made such a change in my feelings towards him. I love him plenty well enough, Esther, and now the

only thing that troubles me is, whether he has as much regard for me, as I have for him."

"If he did not love you, Emily, why has he chosen you? I should think that was proof enough of his affection."

"I often think of that," replied her friend, "still it does not satisfy me; sometimes I really fear that he does not care at all for me."

"You remind me of the old Spanish proverb," said Esther, "that 'there is no true love without jealousy.'"

"No, I am not jealous—there is no person of whom I could be—but still there is something wanting—something that I cannot explain. It is not lack of attention, for he is polite and kind, always. I long to have you see him, Esther, to see if your sharp eyes cannot discover what is the trouble."

"The trouble, I presume, Emily, exists only in your imagination. You are determined to make a hero out of a plain business man, and when he is thinking of a rise in flour, or railroad stocks, you imagine that he is brooding over some fault in you."

"It may be so," said Emily, laughing, "but still I am not quite satisfied. Mr. Templeton is really a noble man, and one that I shall always respect. I am even willing to *promise* to *obey* him—only think of that concession,—for I know that I should do it without promising."

"I do really feel quite a desire to see the man who could make such a change in a friend of mine, whom I have often heard declare, that she would *never* give

up her will for any man," replied Esther. "When shall I see this wonderful magician?"

"He will be here in the course of a few weeks," returned Emily, "to take us home; but you must promise to make me a long visit this fall, and then you will have a fine opportunity to know all about him, only don't fall in love with him!"

"Never fear that," rejoined Esther, laughingly, "I will try and get a talisman to protect me from his charms."

"Here is one of his letters," said Emily, putting her hand into her pocket, "you see I have been too recently a school-girl, to give up the habit of carrying a pocket full of treasures," she continued, as she pulled out the contents into her lap; "here it is—a little crumpled, to be sure—read it, Esther, dear."

Esther glanced at the handwriting, regular, bold and rapid—"a good business hand," she said, and after reading it, remarked, "it is rather brief, but that seems characteristic of the man—he goes straight to the point; says what he has to say concisely, and stops when he has got through."

"Doesn't it strike you as rather cool?" asked Emily.

"No, not particularly so; it seems to me a very *sensible* love letter," replied her friend, "and sense is an element not usually ascribed to letters of that class."

"Common sense is the principal trait in Mr. Templeton's character," remarked Emily.

"An excellent one, that," replied Esther, "I always

like practical people, to live with; sentimental ones do nicely for variety, but every-day sort of persons are much more agreeable to spend a lifetime with."

Emily now began to ask Esther of her occupations, since they had parted at Mr. Marshall's school, and was quite amused at her friend's description of life in the backwoods.

The conversation next turned upon their old school-days and school-friends.

"Have you heard from Maria Brooks recently?" asked Esther.

"Yes, not long since—poor Maria, how she used to dislike Mathematics. She used to say she had wept a *sea* of tears over that study."

"And Virginia, what of her?"

"Oh, yes, I must tell you,—Maria wrote of her, that she was called a belle, very bewitching and fascinating."

"I never thought Jennie handsome," remarked Esther.

"Handsome!—no indeed, she certainly was not; but you know she never at school paid much attention to her personal appearance—at any rate, she is called handsome now."

"Virginia was always rather a puzzle to me," said Esther, musingly.

"She never puzzled me any," replied Emily; "I never saw anything mysterious in her: she was rather reserved, to be sure, and had no intimate friends. But what did you discover so strange about her?"

"I can hardly tell myself; I never studied her

much," said Esther; "yet I had always an impression, when with her, even when she seemed most open and communicative, that she took care not to reveal her real thoughts."

"Poh, Esther! you are the enigma. Your eyes always look as if you saw deep into every one. How is it? do you possess the gift of second sight?"

"No, I do not claim that power; but I do see that the shadows here are lengthened, and think it time that we were at the Clarendon House."

They quickly started, and, on reaching the hotel, found Mrs. Carroll, Mrs. Hastings, and Mr. Everett upon the piazza. Margaret addressed them as runaways, declaring that she and Mrs. Carroll were about sending Mr. Everett upon a voyage of discovery, in pursuit of them.

"Yes," said Mr. Everett, "I really began to fear that I should be under the painful necessity of inditing a newspaper paragraph, dilating upon the mysterious disappearance of two beautiful damsels, and requesting the same to be returned to their anxious friends, if met by any one."

"This burst of eloquence was to have been headed 'strayed or stolen,' I presume," said Emily. "It is a pity," she continued, "that we had not stayed a little longer; it seems too bad that the world should be deprived of such a glowing paragraph."

"Since Mr. Everett bears the loss of fame so philosophically," said Mrs. Hastings, "don't, I beg of you, bring up any bright visions of glory before him,

lest they should prove too much even for his equanimity."

"Many thanks, Mrs. Hastings, for your consideration," said Mr. Everett, bowing gracefully.

"Who is that gentleman, leaning against a pillar, yonder?" asked Mrs. Hastings. "He seems to be looking at us, as if he despised us: at least, I read contempt in his smile, and in the glance of his dark eye."

"I think you read him aright, fair lady," replied Mr. Everett. "Mr. McIntyre is his name. He is a gentleman of fortune, and rather handsome. Here ends my knowledge of him, for he seems to wish no acquaintance with any one. He has declined an introduction to several ladies, which I happened to overhear an old friend of his, propose to him."

"I have noticed him several times before," said Mrs. Hastings, "since we have been talking, and always wearing that same contemptuous expression, as if he thought we were butterflies of fashion."

"Yes, we call him Diogenes," said Emily.

"Diogenes—that was the name of Mr. Toot's dog, wasn't it?" asked Mrs. Carroll. "Why should you call that gentleman by such a name? I am sure there is nothing of the puppy about him."

The company smiled; and Emily exclaimed, "Pshaw! aunt Carroll, you know very well what I meant; and you must forgive a school-girl, so recently emancipated as I, for allusions to her classical dictionary."

"Why, Emily Sidney," suddenly exclaimed her

aunt, "I really believe your feet are wet. Did you go to walk with those slippers on?"

"I think I must have done so," replied Emily, "since I have not the fairy gift of being in two places at once, and therefore could not have changed them."

"What fairy was that, of whom you speak, possessed of such a marvellous gift?" said her aunt. "I don't remember her name; but then it's a long time since I read Cinderella, and other tales."

Emily looked half vexed, but answered, "I must refer you to a perusal of those volumes, for the investigation of the subject. I don't think it's a good idea for people, who have plenty of time, to depend on others for their information."

"Well, Em, go and change your slippers; and you too, Miss Hastings, if your feet are wet."

Esther replied that her feet were perfectly dry, as she had worn rubbers.

The supper-bell now rang, and Mr. Wilton advanced from the parlor, where he had been sitting, reading a newspaper, and saying that his wife was asleep when he last saw her, asked if Margaret thought it best to waken her. But Esther had already gone in search of her, and, with Mrs. Wilton, now met Margaret in the hall. Mrs. Wilton looked pale and wearied, and, to Margaret's anxious inquiries, replied, that it was merely the fatigue attendant upon the journey, and that she should feel better in a few days.

After tea, most of the people in the house adjourned to the parlor, where music, dancing, and conversation, by turns, entertained them. Margaret noticed that

Mr. McIntyre stood occasionally in the door, and looked upon the gay company with the same indifferent smile. She thought his eyes rested upon her, and *not* with the admiring gaze, which she was accustomed to see everywhere bent upon her.

"He thinks me a vain trifler," she said to herself; "and why should he not? but, after all, what is his opinion to me?"

Many were now dancing the polka, and she could not avoid looking at him, to read what he thought of it.

"I should hate to have those dark eyes bent upon me, with such a contemptuous expression," said Esther, who had approached her step-mother, unnoticed.

"Then you, too, have observed his countenance?"

"Yes," replied Esther, "it is quite a striking one."

"He seems to be a 'looker-on in Vienna,'" remarked Emily, who, with her aunt Carroll and Mr. Everett, now joined them.

"It is a lovely evening," said Mr. Everett; "will not the ladies take a stroll, in the bright moonlight?"

To this proposition Esther and Emily readily acceded; but Mrs. Carroll said that her days of romance were over, and that she preferred a quiet chat with Mrs. Wilton to a star-gazing expedition; and Margaret, pleading fatigue, decided to remain with the quieter party.

"Confess now, Mr. Everett," said Emily, as they walked along the smooth road, shaded by trees, through whose thick canopy the moonlight softly fell, "confess that you prefer our northern summer to your hot, parching, southern skies; and that the music of the wind sighing through the rustling leaves—"

"Mingled with the croaking of the frogs," interrupted Mr. Everett.

"Yes, I accept the amendment," rejoined Emily; "even the songs of the frogs are far preferable to the hum of the mosquitoes, which surrounds you in your gorgeous southern home."

"Ah! there you touch a tender point," replied Mr. Everett; "though there is a slight satisfaction, to a person snugly ensconced behind a mosquito-bar, in the thought that he is free from his aerial tormentors. But, Miss Sidney," he continued, "let us for once, lay aside the weapons in defence of our respective sections. I hang out a flag of truce, and pray for an armistice."

"I agree," said Emily; "for, I dare say, your forces need a few days to rally in, particularly that forlorn hope, which you led up so gallantly to the defence of that weak position, your peculiar institution, a few evenings since."

"I would not say a word in reply, Mr. Everett," said Esther, "for you know our sex must always have the last word; and I assure you, in my acquaintance with Emily, I have never found her an exception to the rule."

"What do you say to a race?" asked Emily, "if it does not shock your ideas of decorum. I'll wager a fig that I beat you both;"—and before her companions could reply, taking Esther by the hand, she had started at a rapid pace, looking back, and beckoning to Mr. Everett, who, looking rather puzzled for a moment, at length followed her example.

"Ah! my fair Atalanta! you have indeed earned such a title," he exclaimed, as he came up, panting, to the spot where the two girls had paused, and were leaning against a tree. "But are you not nearly exhausted by such exertion?"

"Oh no! this is just the night for a scamper," replied Emily; "and I have half a mind to put your gallantry to the test, by challenging you to another trial of speed."

"I beg that you will not subject me to so severe a proof," said Mr. Everett.

"A penny for your thoughts, Mr. Everett," exclaimed Esther, breaking the silence which ensued; "and don't, I beg of you, give me the answer—nothing."

"I dare say," remarked Emily, "if the truth were known, those thoughts would not be particularly flattering to us. Were you not thinking," she continued, "that the Eastern ladies are a strange compound of sense and nonsense?"

"I am sorry to disappoint you, ladies," replied Mr. Everett, "but really my reflections had not assumed so distinct a form, nor were they upon so fair subjects. I was thinking how very tired I was!"

"I can sympathize with you in that," said Esther, "and propose a return to the house."

"Agreed," said Emily; and the trio proceeded slowly homeward.

"And now good-night, and pleasant dreams," said Mr. Everett, as they stood once more upon the piazza; and, gracefully bowing, he left them.

CHAPTER XVII.

A NEW FRIEND.

SEVERAL days had slipped away, unmarked by any incident; for, as Emily said, "Life at the Springs, is much like life at sea, rather monotonous; one day being a fac-simile of all the others, varied only by the arrival or departure of guests, in the one case, and by speaking a vessel, in the other."

Mrs. Wilton still seemed feeble, and her daughter's anxious eyes watched her every movement; at times the vague fear that her mother might die, made her sick at heart, but she banished the thought at once, as if with it, she could expel the danger. One day in particular, Mrs. Wilton had been unusually weak and prostrated, and Margaret had been untiring in trying to relieve her, till at evening her mother insisted that she was much better, and that her child should walk out a while. Margaret could not restrain her grief, but going to her chamber, she buried her throbbing temples in the pillow and wept bitterly. Soon controlling herself however, she started for a walk to the spring, as she had promised to do; but as she came to the little bridge over which she must pass, a sudden faintness caused her to lean for support against the

railing. The moonlight fell upon her features, which were deathly pale; every thing seemed whirling about her, and she would have fallen, had not a gentleman, who was walking by, caught her in his arms. The fresh spring water, which he plentifully showered upon her, soon revived her, and Mr. McIntyre, for it was he, offered to assist her to the house.

She looked at him in surprise, but accepted his offered arm. Her glance of astonishment had not escaped his notice, and he asked, "Am I then so different from all the rest of the world, that the most common act of humanity is received with amazement? Do not deny it," he went on hurriedly. "You wondered that I should perform so trifling an act of kindness."

"You mistake," replied Mrs. Hastings, "I did, no doubt, appear surprised, but it was because I had not expected to see you here, or to receive such timely assistance." She glanced at him and saw his lip curled as if he deemed her deceiving him, and she added, "I have heard too that you were a woman-hater, and have always supposed that one of that class would almost scorn to do a service to one of the despised race."

"A woman-hater!" repeated Mr. McIntyre, musingly; "so they call me by that title, do they? But they mistake, Mrs. Hastings—I am not. No, I admire and love a true, noble-hearted woman; not such painted butterflies as flutter around the brilliantly lighted apartments of fashionable life, but a true woman anywhere, no matter if in a log cabin, I re-

spect and honor. Ah! but it is a hard task to find one," he went on. "The wise man never spoke more truly than when he exclaimed, '*One* man among a thousand have I found, but a woman among all these have I *not* found.'"

"I do not feel well enough to-night, to defend my sex from such sweeping censure," replied Margaret, "but tell me what you allege against us as our greatest fault; perhaps I may undeceive you."

"A want of truth," returned Mr. McIntyre. "Even from a child, a subterfuge comes most readily to a woman's lips."

"This may be the result of her timidity, if such is the case, which I am not prepared to admit."

"I think you must admit it," replied Mr. McIntyre, "if you notice your companions. How many evasive answers, equivocations, nay, downright falsehoods, pass a woman's lips daily! Yes, her very life is a lie. Excuse me, but was it not *your* first impulse to tell me but half the truth to-night, which is almost a lie. You are offended," he said, as Margaret colored and remained silent.

"By no means," she quickly replied. "It is the part of a friend to tell us our faults; and I shall hope to show you, that you have judged woman too harshly from a few individuals."

"I shall be glad to be undeceived," replied her companion, "but when I see such a state of society as now exists, and hear so much of the hollow jingle of unfelt compliments, it will be a hard task to convince me, I fear."

"Nevertheless I shall try it, and if I succeed in so difficult an undertaking, the greater will be the glory of my victory. Many thanks for your kind assistance, Mr. McIntyre," she added, as they parted at the hall door.

"How pale you look!" exclaimed Esther, as Margaret entered the chamber. "What has happened? It cannot be that your mother is worse? I left her sleeping quietly a few minutes since."

"No, nothing of the sort," replied Margaret. "I am suffering from one of my usual headaches and feel a little faint; indeed I do not know as I could have walked up the hill, had not Mr. McIntyre supported me."

"Mr. McIntyre!" ejaculated Esther, "that is a wonder indeed, but do let me bathe your poor head with cold water," and she smoothed Margaret's soft hair lovingly and bathed her fevered brow.

Emily Sidney was sitting the same evening with her aunt Carroll. "Oh, dear Aunty!" she exclaimed, "hav'nt you nearly finished your long lecture on propriety? Now do be good and smile one of your own smiles, and let's talk about something else."

"That's always your way, Emily," returned Mrs. Carroll; "you always manage to turn off all my rebukes; but really I do not like your habit of making acquaintances, without first finding out who they are, and I must protest against it. I despise the way that so many of these young girls have, of dancing and flirting with every gentleman who comes near them."

"That you can't accuse me of," said Emily.

"No, my dear, I should hope not," replied Mrs. Carroll, "but you must remember that 'an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.'"

"But, Aunt Carroll, I am sure that Mrs. Beck, on whose account I have had this long address, is a lady, and very agreeable, and what do I care if she is not wealthy or of an old family, for from what I can gather from your remarks, persons possessed of such qualifications are to be my only associates; and I must say that I prefer good company without these accessions, to stupid people of wealth and fashion."

"Don't talk nonsense, Em. These school-girl notions of yours will wear off, I trust, in time, and now you may read aloud to me, if you will."

"What shall I read? Shall it be Pendennis?"

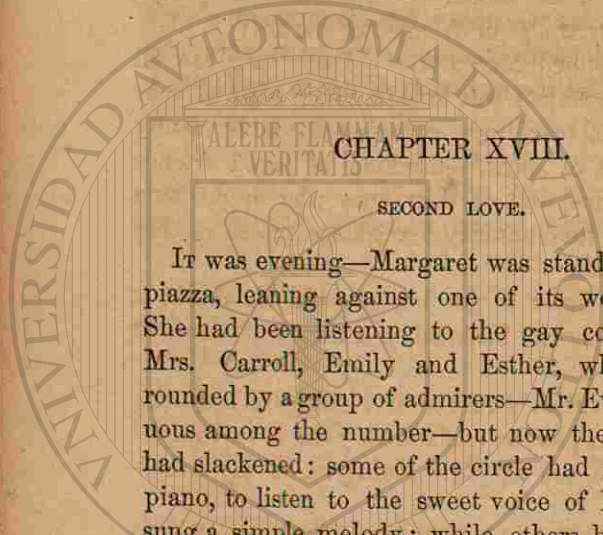
"Oh! I don't care what," replied Mrs. Carroll; "any thing will do. I'm rather wakeful to-night, and nothing helps me to sleep so soon, as reading aloud."

"It would keep me awake," said Emily, "but I will do as you request."

She had not, however, read more than a page or two, when the regular breathing of her listener proved that the dose had been successful, and with a smile, Emily laid aside her book.

Several weeks passed on, during which time, Mr. Wilton had returned to his business, and Mr. McIntyre had attached himself to the party, proving, when he chose to exhibit his powers of pleasing, to be a very agreeable companion. He had received Mrs. Carroll's

sanction, after a long consultation with several ladies, who informed her that he was of unexceptionable family, and very wealthy. Mrs. Wilton was much better, and joined frequently in the walks and rides which diversified the monotony of life at the Springs.



CHAPTER XVIII.

SECOND LOVE.

It was evening—Margaret was standing upon the piazza, leaning against one of its wooden pillars. She had been listening to the gay conversation of Mrs. Carroll, Emily and Esther, who were surrounded by a group of admirers—Mr. Everett conspicuous among the number—but now the conversation had slackened: some of the circle had retired to the piano, to listen to the sweet voice of Esther, as she sung a simple melody; while others had entered a smaller parlor to play checkers, backgammon, cards, and the like games. The windows were open, and the rattling of dice, mingled with gay laughter, fell on Margaret's ear; she, however, did not appear to share the universal gaiety. Her fine eyes were filled with a sad light, and her whole attitude was listless and depressed. It was evident that her thoughts were far away. She started suddenly, as if recalled from a reverie, as Mr. McIntyre, who had approached her unobserved, addressed her. "Are you building bright castles in the air, Mrs. Hastings?" he asked, "if so, I am sorry thus rudely to call you back to earth; but no," he continued, "if I misjudge not,

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your reverie was far from pleasant; but why should you be sad, in the bloom of health and happiness, surrounded by troops of friends, as you are?"

"True," replied Margaret, "yet how long can all this last? Perhaps I was brooding over some of your misanthropical teachings—realizing that all is 'vanity and vexation of spirit,'—thinking of loved friends now lost to me, and of dear ones who might soon follow," and involuntarily her glance rested on her mourning dress.

"But your heart is not buried with the dead; it was not of your late husband, you thought," returned her companion.

A flood of crimson rushed over Margaret's cheeks, neck and brow, as she exclaimed, "this is too much! You presume too far, Mr. McIntyre, on my friendship."

"Forgive me," he replied, "for my presumption in thus addressing you. It is a habit of mine to give expression to my true thoughts—I have always found it offensive in society, and unable or unwilling to use words to conceal my opinions, I have withdrawn myself from it, until in you, I fancied that I had found a friend, who would be willing to receive my blunt words as they were meant,—kindly—I thank you for the few hours of happiness which you have shed over my desolate life, even if that pleasure can exist now, only in the past, since by my presumption I have forfeited my claims to your regard." He turned abruptly away, but Mrs. Hastings recalled him.

"Let me then tell *you* that truth, which you pride yourself so much upon always speaking—perhaps you may find it as unpalatable as your friends:—You are too impetuous, too ready to take offence where none is intended; very apt to say disagreeable things in a disagreeable way, and then expect poor human nature to receive them, without wincing. There are some home-truths for you," she said, smiling, "and now, don't you agree with the rest of humanity, that the whole truth is too much of a good thing?"

"No," returned Mr. McIntyre, "from *you* I can receive what perhaps, I confess, from others I might resent, and under your guidance, if you would curb such a wayward and impetuous nature, I might become very much changed."

"I fear that you over estimate my ability to check the faults of others; I find it far easier to discover deficiencies and positive errors in myself and in my friends, than to correct them, in either case."

"In other words, you would tell me, Mrs. Hastings, that you have not sufficient interest in me, to induce you to undertake such an uninviting task, and that I must be to you only one of your common acquaintances, remembered, if at all, as a singular and rather melancholy man. Yet I have hoped for a higher place than this, in your regard," he continued, "and though what I am about to say to you may seem abrupt, yet I will say it:—I love you, Margaret, and have sought your affection in return—I know that it would have been more in harmony with the usages of society, if I had allowed a longer time to pass

before telling you of my feelings, but I am not shackled by such fetters.—You know much of my history; left an orphan, and my fondest hopes betrayed by false friends, I have led a lonely life; but now, if your love can be mine, a bright future is in store for me—if not, I can but go on my desolate way as before."

He paused for a reply, but Margaret made none.—"You do not reply—how am I to interpret your silence?" he asked, after some little time.

Margaret's eyes were filled with tears, as she raised them slowly to his face, and replied, "I have a long story to tell you; when you have heard it, you may not think of me as you now do."

"I feel sure that nothing could change my sentiments," he replied, "but when will you tell me this tale?"

"To-night—let us walk a while, to avoid inquisitive eyes; in the meantime I will tell you all."

Mrs. Hastings took her companion's offered arm, and in a low, broken voice, told him the story of her first love, and of her marriage. Mr. McIntyre's expressive countenance betrayed a variety of emotions, as she went on, but she did not look at him till she had finished, when she said, "now, I have told you all—do you not despise me, as I do myself?"

"No, Margaret," was the reply, while his eyes were bent upon her with a glance of affection, "your second love is more precious to me, than the first of any other woman. Can you give it to me?"

The hand which he had taken in his, was not with-

drawn, and as she returned his gaze, Mr. McIntyre was satisfied.

They walked on for a few moments in silence when, observing that Margaret had no shawl on, her companion proposed a return to the house; "I must be careful of my newly found treasure," he said, "lest it escape me—even now, I fear that like the fairy gifts, it may vanish in the morning."

"There is no danger of that, it is of quite too substantial a nature," replied Margaret, as she bade her friend good-night, and hastened to her chamber. She had not been long there when Esther entered,—*"You here already!"* she exclaimed, on seeing her step-mother, "I hope you have not another of your headaches!—How thoughtless in me to spend the whole evening in gayety, while you have been suffering here!"

"Don't reproach yourself too soon, Esther," said Margaret, with a smile, "but let me tell you how I have passed my time."

Esther listened in amazement to Margaret's recital of her engagement to Mr. McIntyre, then in a low voice said, "But what of Arthur Hammond? Did you tell Mr. McIntyre?"

"Oh, Esther!" exclaimed Margaret, much pained, "could you think that I would wrong another noble man, by not telling him all, or by marrying him when I loved another?"

"Then you have ceased to love Arthur!"

"Thank Heavens, yes!" replied Margaret; "I have not yet told you, though I have several times been on

the point of it; that not long since, I met Arthur again. To my surprise and delight, I found that my feelings were entirely changed towards him. I saw plainly, that if my wild and varying temperament would have annoyed him, that his rigid ideas would have no less tormented me. In fact, that he was as far from being perfect as I myself; and I really felt relieved to think that I was not his wife. I have wanted to tell you this before, but the truth was, Esther, I was a little ashamed, after the strong expressions that I had used about him, to you, to own that the idol had fallen. I believe that every woman has *one* ardent attachment for some one, unlike what she ever feels for another; but I am by no means sure that it is best for her to marry the object of it. Mr. McIntyre, I not only esteem, but love. I think we are suited to each other, and I feel sure that I can make him happy, and anticipate no less happiness myself. This isn't a very romantic view of the subject," she added, as Esther stood in silence loosening her abundant hair, "but it is the true one, I think."

"Perhaps so," replied Esther, thoughtfully, "at all events, I wish you all possible happiness with the man of your choice."

A few days after this conversation, as Margaret and Esther were seated in their room, Margaret reading aloud, while Esther sat sewing, and Mrs. Wilton leaning back in a rocking-chair, with her thin hands folded, listened to her daughter's reading, an accomplishment in which she excelled, a light rap was heard at the door, and Emily Sidney entered.

"I have just received a letter from home," she said, "and Mr. Templeton is coming to-day, to spend a few days here, and then going to take aunt Carroll and me home. To tell the truth, I am glad of it, for I am tired of staying here."

"Who is Mr. Templeton?" asked Mrs. Wilton.

"A friend of father's," replied Emily, slightly blushing.

"And of the daughter also, I suspect," said Mrs. Wilton.

"Certainly.—He has always been a great friend of our family, and I think you will like him. Aunt Carroll thinks him perfect, and you and she agree so well on most points, that I think it probable you will be united in this."

"I'm glad to hear of a new arrival, who promises to be an addition to our party," exclaimed Margaret, "for I am tired of seeing new faces that tell the same story of insipidity, and seeing people whose only object or use in life, seems to be the wearing of handsome silks and jewelry."

"In short," added Esther, "you are tired of the Springs, since one great attraction, Mr. McIntyre, has left them. At least, since his departure, you have suddenly had your eyes very widely opened to the fact, that the people here are very much as they have been ever since we came here, good, but slightly common-place individuals."

"No matter what has cleared my vision," replied Margaret, laughing, "the fact remains the same; and

I propose that we leave here, when Mrs. Carroll and Emily do."

"I am delighted to hear you say so," replied her mother; "I shall be glad to get home again, to have a decent-sized room; and, in fact, to have comforts once more—I will go and write to your father now," she continued, as she entered her room.

The day wore slowly away to Emily; but five o'clock did come at last, bringing with it the stage, and a load of passengers, among whom was Mr. Templeton.

"Really a very fine looking man," said Margaret, in an under tone, to Esther, after both had been introduced; and he had passed on to a seat, by the side of Mrs. Carroll, who seemed determined to monopolize him. "He looks as if he knew something. I wonder what he sees in Emily to fancy. See what a contrast between his fine, intellectual face, and her pleasant, but far from intelligent countenance."

"Oh, there is no accounting for tastes," replied Esther; "and I have always heard that intellectual men prefer a simple-hearted and affectionate woman, like our dear Em, to any one suspected of being blue."

"I know," answered Margaret, "that such men usually prefer a humble worshipper to a woman who, while she honors their excellencies, sees also their deficiencies."

"But do you not think these worshippers, as you call them, better calculated than the other class to make home happy for their husbands?" asked Esther.

"No," replied Margaret; "the quiet, simple home

virtues may please them for a while; but they will soon tire of them, unless accompanied by the power of appreciating their higher nature. Every man wants sympathy in his most engrossing pursuits, and so does every woman. How can they find it, if the thoughts of the one never go beyond the four walls of her dwelling, while the other is of far-reaching and comprehensive mind!"

"I agree with you," returned Esther, "that in such cases, there must be unhappiness, unless there is an abundance of that love that covereth all deficiencies; but happily Emily is not such a being as you describe. She is a true woman—kind, loving, and intelligent; and I wonder that you do not value her as highly as I do."

"Don't ask impossibilities, Ettie; I do like her very well, but I can't see her with your eyes.—There, poor Mr. Templeton has at last escaped from Mrs. Carroll; I doubt not, to his great relief," continued Margaret, and as she spoke, Emily and her lover joined them. He was indeed, as Margaret had said, a fine-looking man, though his strongly-marked features could by no means be called handsome. He was apparently about thirty-five years of age. His voice was deep and clear, and though he said but little, his remarks were always to the point.

"Whatever he says means something," remarked Margaret, "which is more than can be said, with truth, of the generality of people."

It was now the day before the departure of their party from the Springs, and all necessary arrange-

ments had been made. Esther and Emily had made their farewell visits to their favorite haunts, and now sat together for their last chat, at twilight.

"You will be sure to come and make me a long visit, this winter, won't you, Esther?" were the parting words of Emily, and as her friend replied "I will, if I possibly can," she insisted, "'where there's a will, there's a way,' and I shall expect you."

Good-nights were exchanged, and Esther retired to her chamber. Margaret, sitting by the window, was dreaming pleasant day-dreams, she was holding an open letter in her hand, the first she had received from Horace McIntyre.

"How bright the world seems to me!" she said, as Esther knelt by her side, caressing her, "It is so pleasant, I fear that it will not last;—my mother's health so much improved; both of my parents so well pleased with Horace, and his love for me so ardent;—I am happy, indeed!"

"Yes, dear Margaret," replied Esther, "you are indeed blessed; but forget not who is the author of all this, and do not bestow your whole heart on the gifts—look up to the Giver, in Heaven—"

Margaret interrupted Esther with a kiss, and made no reply. It was always thus, when she was reminded of her duty to the Father of all; on this one subject she was unapproachable, and met all of Esther's attempts at such conversations with impenetrable reserve.



CHAPTER XIX.

SECOND MARRIAGE.

"GOOD-MORNING, Maggie, dear!" said Mrs. Wilton, entering the little breakfast-room, where Mrs. Hastings was singing and chirping to her pet canary bird, "doesn't it seem delightful to be at home once more?"

"Charming," replied Margaret, at the same time giving Bobby a lump of sugar, and, ringing the bell, ordered breakfast.

Mr. Wilton and Esther now entered, and exchanging morning salutations, took their seats at the table.

"I had no idea that Newton was so pretty a place," said Esther, as she sipped her coffee, "I have been looking out of my chamber window for a long time; there is such a fine view from it, of the quiet lake, shining through the trees."

"That is only one of the thousand attractions of Newton," replied Mr. Wilton; "Margaret must show you all its charms."

"I fully intend it, sir," returned his daughter. "I assure you it shall be no fault of mine, if any nook in the woods around remains unexplored."

"I hope you'll enjoy yourselves finely, to-day," said Mr. Wilton, at the same time looking at his watch, and remarking that it was nearly time for the cars to start, he hurried off.

Newton was a small town, not far from Boston, and one of the loveliest spots in that vicinity.

Mr. Wilton's residence was a fine one, situated on a sloping spot of ground, surrounded by fine trees, and a tastefully arranged garden; arbors covered with vines clustering with grapes, were scattered invitingly through the grounds; and here Margaret and Esther spent a large portion of their time, arranging flowers, reading, sewing, or indulging in a favorite amusement of both, building air-castles. Thus, several weeks passed;—Mr. McIntyre was daily expected to visit them, and Esther began to feel that she ought to be "up and doing," again.

"I have two letters to show you," she said, as Margaret and she were sitting alone, on one of the shaded seats in the garden—"One is from our good Mr. Merrill, telling me of a very lucrative situation, as assistant teacher in an Academy, which I can have by applying soon; and the other from no less a person than our watering-place acquaintance, Mr. Everett, in which he does me the honor of placing his hand, heart, and fortune at my disposal."

"Really!" exclaimed Margaret, "and what reply shall you make?"

"What is your advice?" asked Esther—"Do you who take such practical views on the subject of marriage, advise me to get married for a home and good

living, or to accept Mr. Merrill's offer of the situation as teacher?"

"I advise you to do neither," replied Margaret, "but can't you make yourself believe that you are a very little—just a wee bit—in love with Mr. Everett?"

"No, Maggie, that is beyond my powers of imagination, and romantic, if you chose to call me, still it is my firm resolve, never to give my hand without my heart; and I shall never venture on the perilous experiment of marrying without ardent affection, in the vain hope that it will come after the ceremony is performed, which ties me for life to some good man."

"You are right," replied her step-mother, after a pause, "but don't think of putting yourself into the bondage of school-teaching immediately;—I shall insist on your remaining with me till I am married;—I want your good taste in preparing my wardrobe, and I want you for my bridesmaid—now, don't say no: I won't listen to it, if you do. For once, let me have my own way."

Mr. and Mrs. Wilton united in the urgent request, that she would stay with them, and it was arranged that she should remain an inmate of their family until Margaret left them.

"Yet, I cannot help feeling dependent," said Esther to Margaret, "and I assure you, it is by no means a pleasant feeling."

"It is a very foolish one for a daughter to have in her father's house," was Margaret's reply; "but now go and answer your letters, my dear, and be careful that you don't break poor Mr. Everett's heart."

"Never fear that, Maggie; no man ever died of that disease, in my opinion, unless a fever or some similar malady came in to carry him off. I never had the vanity to think my charms were powerful enough to cause such a disaster, at least."

"Ah! you are a hard-hearted little thing!" retorted Margaret, as she left her friend in the library with pen, ink and paper before her.

Mr. McIntyre soon arrived, and it was settled that the marriage should take place in November, as the year of Margaret's widowhood had then expired.

Margaret appeared, as she said she was, very happy. The light of happiness sparkled in her dark eye; her step was elastic, her cheek gained new bloom, and her form new roundness.

"I shall at least make one sad heart glad," she said to Esther, after she had communicated to her some of her many plans for the future. "I am determined that Horace shall at length know what a happy home is."

November, stormy and sullen, came on, stripping the leaves ruthlessly from the trees, and howling winds sounded through the dry and bare branches. But a clear day dawned upon Newton, on the appointed time for Margaret's nuptials.

Very beautiful she looked in her simple travelling costume, as she pronounced the vows that united her with one she loved, and though tears filled her eyes on parting with her friends, they were not bitter ones.

The house seemed very lonely after the departure

of the newly-wedded pair; they missed Margaret's sweet songs, her merry laugh, her cheerful conversation; and, more than all, her mother missed the ready hand that anticipated her every wish.

Esther could not be spared, Mrs. Wilton said. "Do not take both my children from me!" she exclaimed almost imploringly when she proposed leaving, and Esther promised that she would defer it for the present at least.

The stars, one by one, were coming out in the clear heavens, but the wind was cold and chill, as Margaret and her husband approached their journey's end.

Margaret leaned from the carriage window, gazing out at the dreary faded landscape, but oftener her eyes sought the starry heavens, as if she would read there her own future; very pleasant visions she saw there, for our own hearts are almost always cheerful prophets if we question them of the misty days to come.

Horace cared for neither stars or prophecies. He read in Margaret's eyes her happiness, and his own was complete. He did not for a long time intrude on her pleasant reverie, but at last, as the carriage entered a rocky defile, which, in summer when crowned with trees and mantled with vines might have been picturesque, but now was almost gloomy, he spoke—"Margaret! we are almost home!"

The word thrilled through her heart; it summoned an actual *present* before her that was brighter than any ideal picture in the future, and with loving eyes she drew closer to her husband and pressed his hand

fondly, then leaned again from the window to gaze on her new home.

An avenue led up to it, where now only skeleton branches stiffly swayed in the cold night wind, and the paths that wound through the extensive grounds covered with dry leaves, that had lost their autumnal beauty, looked desolate enough.

The house was a quaint looking brown building, not quite coming under the denomination of a cottage, yet not large enough to deserve any other title. It was built in a fanciful style, not according to any strict architectural rules perhaps, but yet giving a favorable impression to the beholder. It had several wings, which, though irregular, were not unpleasing, and in summer, when the pillars that surrounded a part of the house were in all the glory of vines, and the trees which now tossed their branches heavily against the walls only rustled their leaves in playful whispers, it must have been a charming spot.

It did not look dreary to Margaret even now, and so she assured Horace, when he made a remark of that kind, and the explanation why it did not, which her eyes gave as she said gently, "Is it not *our home*?" more than satisfied him of her truthfulness.

He led her first into the parlor, a high-walled room, furnished in just the way that thousands of parlors are, rejoicing in the same carpets, curtains, mirrors, and furniture.

"This, Margaret," said her husband, "is for all the world, and must be like all the world. Throw off your bonnet now, and come with me."

He led her through a winding passage to another room. There was but one bay window in it, and the walls were lined with books.

"Our library! How charming!" exclaimed Margaret, as she flew up to the well-filled cases and glanced at the the books.

A centre table, piled with uncut periodicals, stood before the bright fire that blazed on the hearth, making all kinds of fantastic shapes on the polished brass of the andirons.

Two or three paintings, an Evangeline, a holy, beautiful face, a quiet landscape, and a wierd looking sybil, adorned the walls, and statuettes occupied niches in the room.

There was a lounge placed in the window, and easy chairs were scattered in the room; a stained glass window on the other side of the fireplace Margaret approached.

"That is a door which leads into my sanctum," said her husband, who had been enjoying with pleasure equal to his wife's her restless flutterings to and fro, like a butterfly flitting from flower to flower, and her eager expressions of delight.

He opened the door as he spoke, and disclosed a small room, from the ceiling of which hung a silver lamp. It was lighted now only by the dim firelight from the library, but Margaret saw that its dark oaken walls were unadorned, and that it possessed none of the beauties which she had imagined to be there.

"What did you ever do in this gloomy place, that it deserves the name of your sanctum?" she asked.

"Chewed the bitter cud of fancy," her husband replied. "Here I have cursed myself, the world, and all that is in it."

"Well, Horace, that is past. It shall now be our sanctum. It shall have paintings, statuary, birds and flowers placed in it; it shall resound with laughter, and gay forms shall be reflected on the polished surface of its old oaken walls. It shall be sacred to you and I now. We will sit here, and you shall read to me, and I will sing to you, and we will talk, till you have expiated, in thankfulness for life, all the curses that you have bestowed upon it. Shall it not be so?" she asked, placing her hand on his shoulder and looking into his eyes. A warm embrace was his only reply, as he led his wife from the library into that which he informed her was her own sitting-room.

It was a quaintly-furnished room, filled with old-fashioned, stiffly-carved furniture, fancifully arranged. A piano stood there, and Margaret ran her fingers over the keys, and sang a glad melody.

"How do you like your room?" asked her husband.

"Oh, ever so much; but I half expect to see some old lady, with hoop and powdered hair, come sailing majestically in to tell me that I am an intruder. Don't the shades of the past linger here?"

"If they do," replied her husband, "you must exorcise them by your merry laugh, and by the chat of mortals. You may fill the room as often as you will with troops of living, and crowd out the dead."

"No, Horace, this room shall be sacred to my dear-

est friends. The parlor for the world, as you said, the sanctum for us, and this for my other loved ones. Come, now, I want to see the rest of the house," and she ran up the broad staircase and commented with eagerness on the beauty of all she saw.

The dining-room and kitchen did not pass unnoticed, but Margaret insisted that for this once the library should serve for a tea-room.

"This is all mine!" said she, drawing a low stool to her husband's side as they again entered the library, and though it was not more elegant than the home which Mr. Hastings had given her, love made it seem doubly so, as the sunlight which streams into a dark room lends a fleeting glory to all within it.

Margaret was perfectly happy, and her gayety expressed itself in a thousand fantastical ways, on all of which Horace looked with admiration.

She would insist on toasting his bread before the library fire, and declared that she would show him that her will was to be law in that house.

"I am willing," replied her husband. "I abdicate in your favor."

"Remember that, now; I shall remind you of it some time," she said jestingly, "when you are inclined to play the lord and master."

So they talked on gaily, and absorbed in each other, they hardly thought of other friends.

'Tis even so. Love is at first selfish, for it is so all-absorbing that it swallows up, like an overflowing river, all that lies in its way; yet when it subsides in part, and flows in its true channel once more, a

deeper, calmer current, is not the heart enriched by the deluge? And do not olden affections spring up with renewed strength and verdure?

Let us leave them in their new-found happiness, and glance at Newton again.

"Here, Miss Ettie, is a letter for you!" said Mr. Wilton, a few days after Margaret's departure; as she opened it a piece of paper fell fluttering to her feet. It was a check for five hundred dollars, purporting to come from one of her father's debtors, lent to him, as he said, at a time of great need by her father, and now that he was able to pay it, he sent it to the daughter.

"What shall I do with it?" asked Esther, handing both letter and check to Mr. Wilton. "Ought it not to go to the creditors?"

"No," replied Mr. Wilton. "Your father's business being all settled, it belongs of right to you."

"It has come at a very opportune time," said Esther, "and is another exemplification of the truth of the passage, 'Cast thy bread upon the waters, and thou shalt find it after many days.'"

As she left the room Mrs. Wilton asked her husband if he had any idea whence it came, and as he smiled, she exclaimed, "I suspected you."

"Is it not true that Mr. Hastings was the means of my getting on my feet once more after my failure? It is a debt I can never repay," said her husband with much feeling, "and Esther is too delicate to receive any thing of the sort voluntarily."

"It was just like you, ever considerate and thought-

ful," replied Mrs. Wilton, and the subject was dropped as Esther re-entered the room.

Winter had come, bringing with it the long evenings so pleasant in the home circle. The hours flew rapidly by with Esther, for her time was fully occupied; she felt, too, that her presence was of use to both her adopted parents. She was a sunbeam in the house, both said, and their encomiums upon her, in their letters to Margaret, were so warm, that she replied, "If it were not Esther, I should be jealous."

Mr. Wilton had insisted on her learning to play the harp, and the necessary practice, to enable her to make any proficiency, together with the opportunity which Mr. Wilton's fine library afforded her of gratifying her love for reading, added not a little to her happiness.

"What are you pondering upon so earnestly?" asked Mrs. Wilton, as they sat together one morning.

"I was thinking of Emily Sidney," replied Esther.

"When did you hear from her last?"

"Yesterday," was the reply. "She urged me to come and visit her, as Maria and Virginia, two old schoolmates, are coming, and insists on seeing me."

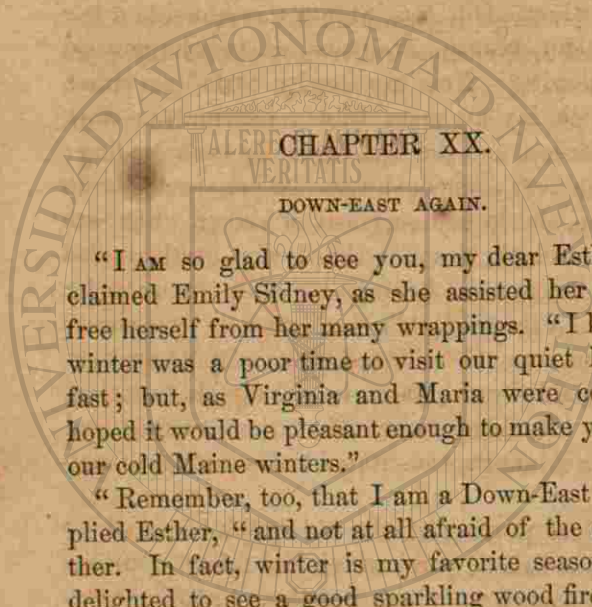
"But why do you hesitate to accept the invitation?"

"I cannot leave you alone, mother dear," replied Esther.

"If that is the only obstacle, my child, it is one very easily removed. Horace has just written a line to Mr. Wilton, saying that he was obliged to go South

on business, and that Margaret is coming home meanwhile."

"Then I will go, if you think it best," returned Esther, "and will write Emily that she may expect me."



CHAPTER XX.

DOWN-EAST AGAIN.

"I AM so glad to see you, my dear Esther!" exclaimed Emily Sidney, as she assisted her friend to free herself from her many wrappings. "I knew that winter was a poor time to visit our quiet little Belfast; but, as Virginia and Maria were coming, I hoped it would be pleasant enough to make you forget our cold Maine winters."

"Remember, too, that I am a Down-East girl," replied Esther, "and not at all afraid of the cold weather. In fact, winter is my favorite season. I am delighted to see a good sparkling wood fire again," she added, approaching the hearth, and warming her cold hands. "But are you alone?" she asked, observing that there was no one else present.

"Yes; all of the family have gone to the Lyceum, except grandma and myself. I had a presentiment that you would come to-night. But let us go to grandma's room, for I left the good old lady alone, and I ought to stay with her."

Esther followed Emily through the long entry, up a flight of winding stairs, to the room which she had designated as grandmother's. The house was an old-

fashioned one, but very large and comfortable in its appearance. The room which they entered was wide, but rather low. Old Mrs. Sidney was seated in a low rocking-chair, near the fire-place, where a large wood fire was blazing. Near her stood a little light stand, upon which lay an open Bible; her knitting-work laid in her lap, and she had evidently been reading; but, as the door opened, she pushed her spectacles up on her cap, and looked curiously at Esther. She was dressed in black, a small shawl was neatly folded over her bosom, and her cap was tied simply under her chin. A large Dutch clock stood in one corner of the room; an old-fashioned desk occupied another, on which laid several books, in equally old-fashioned bindings. Rocking-chairs, of various shapes and sizes, with a lounge, constituted the rest of the furniture.

A cat sat purring at the old lady's feet, looking lazily at the ball of yarn, which had fallen from her capacious pocket upon the hearth, in tempting proximity to pussy; but she, like her mistress, had grown old, and her play-days were over.

All this Esther saw at a glance; for Emily approached her grandmother, saying, in a loud voice (for the old lady was a little deaf), "This is my friend, Esther Hastings; she has just come, in the stage."

Mrs. Sidney extended her hand to the new comer, and looked at her curiously. "Wall, I'm glad to see ye, dear. Hastings! Hastings!" she repeated—

"Sarah Mansfield married a Hastings. Be you any relation to her?"

"That was my mother's name," replied Esther.

"Law, now, you don't say so. Why, I know'd her when she wan't much older than you be. Wall, you're the pictur of her. I know'd, as soon as I see you, that you looked like somebody I'd seen. Wall, she was a pooty gal, and a good gal, too. Set up to the fire and warm you, dear," she continued; "you look cold."

Esther did as she was requested; and, drawing her low chair to the fire, looked, in her turn, rather curiously at Mrs. Sidney.

She was a fine-looking old lady, a little bent by age; but her black eye was undimmed, and a lock of hair, which had escaped from her cap, still retained its jetty hue.

"I guess I'll smoke a little," she said, "and then go to bed."

Her grand-daughter rose, took a pipe from a small box on the end of the mantel, and, lighting it at the fire, handed it to her grandmother.

The good old lady seemed to enjoy her smoke very much; and when her pipe was out, requesting Emily "to rake up the fire, so that there would be a good bed of coals in the morning," arose, and entered her bedroom, a small apartment adjoining the one where they were sitting.

Emily accompanied her, and assisted her in disrobing, a work of but few minutes, and then carefully covered up the fire, crossed the andirons in most ap-

proved style, and laid the shovel across them, saying, as she did so, "I don't know as grandmother would sleep a wink to-night, if she were not sure that the andirons were placed just so; and now," said she, after placing the chairs back in proper order, "let us go down into the sitting-room, and have a cozy chat."

This was also a large, though low room, rejoicing in the usual bright wood fire. It was simply but comfortably furnished. A large secretary or book-case stood on one side of the room, while a piano occupied the other. A sofa, large and wide, was placed across the wall, opposite the fire. The chairs were all arranged very stiffly in their places, as if one would hardly venture to remove them from their respective stations. A large centre-table occupied the middle of the apartment, on which a bright solar lamp stood. A few books, placed at regular distances, reposing on the mahogany, were the only ornaments. A little hour-glass table stood in one corner, heaped with work, some of which was falling off. This was the only disorderly thing in the room. Emily at once set to work to remedy this; and, folding each piece separately, soon reduced it to order.

"Mother's table," said she, "is always in a litter; she isn't what you would call a particular body at all: but aunt Mary's eyes will spy out anything. I think it looks so cheerful to see everything in place, that I always try to have everything in order before the family come home."

Esther looked at the rigidly fixed furniture, and longed to get her hands upon the different articles,

and place them in a more comfortable position: but she made no remarks, as Emily swept the hearth carefully, and lifted a refractory stick of wood into place. "There," said she, throwing herself into a rocking-chair, which appeared to be fixed on a certain figure of the carpet—"there, all's tidy now, I believe; and now, do tell me all about Mrs. Hastings' marriage. Wasn't it rather sudden? I knew she and Mr. McIntyre seemed to like each other very much, but I never dreamed of their becoming one flesh."

"I hear footsteps," said Esther; "and though there isn't much to tell, I'll wait till some other time."

"Yes," said Emily, "they are coming home; the bell rung for nine a few moments ago."

In fact, the door opened, and quite a party, as it seemed to Esther, entered—Mrs. Sidney, her husband, aunt Mary, and brother Ned, as she was informed. She was received by Mrs. Sidney with a passive "How d'ye do?" by Mr. Sidney, with a keen glance and a warm grasp of the hand, while Aunt Mary kissed her, and Ned welcomed her joyously, saying "that he supposed Em was perfectly happy now."

Emily now busied herself in taking her mother's bonnet, ribbons and cloak, and Esther looked with a good deal of curiosity at her new acquaintances.

Mrs. Sidney, divested of her wrappings, was a pale, delicate looking woman, whose blue eyes expressed neither much energy or warm affections. She fell back almost exhausted in the rocking chair which Emily had left, and seemed unconscious that the rockers had become entangled in another chair which Ned

had drawn near it, and, finding it impossible to rock, she had resigned herself to a state of quiet, and had not even taken the trouble to look behind her. Mr. Sidney was a tall but rather spare man. His features were large and far from handsome. His brow, care-worn and wrinkled, was shaded by dark hair thickly sown with gray. He took the slippers handed him by Emily, gave in exchange his boots, and settled himself comfortably upon the sofa. Aunt Mary and Ned had left the room, and there was a silent pause. Mrs. Sidney did not appear to notice the break in the conversation, but her husband seemed to feel in duty bound to say something, and began to ask some questions about the travelling, remarking that a stage ride in winter was anything but agreeable.

Esther replied to this at as great length as possible, but was as much relieved as Mr. Sidney evidently was, at the entrance of Aunt Mary, who, quietly and without the painful appearance of effort which had distinguished her brother's attempts at conversation, soon made Esther feel quite at home, while Mr. Sidney relapsed into silence.

Aunt Mary was tall and finely formed; she had a great abundance of black hair which was tastefully arranged; her features, though not regular, were pleasing, and her eyes, large and deep, lighted up beautifully as she talked. She smiled often, displaying white and even teeth. She seemed to possess that gift so important but so rare, of seeing almost intuitively what was the character of the person whom she addressed,

and of adapting herself at once to her companion, talking of what most interested her listener.

"I wonder how she ever came to be an old maid," thought Esther—for an old maid she certainly was. Emily had assured her again and again that Aunt Mary was forty-one or two, and, though she had many offers, seemed to have resolved on a life of single blessedness. Ned now entered the room, bearing in his hands a huge apple pie which he said he had found in a foraging expedition into the pantry. He was closely followed by Emily with plates and knives, and, though Mr. Sidney declared that it was a most unhealthy practice to eat just before going to bed, he was very easily persuaded to take a piece. Mrs. Sidney roused herself from her half dozing state and did the same. Esther received her portion from the hands of Edward and, as he seated himself opposite her, she had a fine opportunity to study his countenance, a favorite employment of hers. He was a young man of about twenty-five years of age. "A fine, frank face," thought Esther, "though not handsome." His brown complexion, so different from his mother's and Emily's, she attributed to his sea voyages, for he was a sea captain. This she already knew, for, thanks to Emily's communications, none of the family seemed strangers to her. See read, she thought, in the lines of his mouth when at rest, an inflexible will, but this almost sternness vanished at once when he smiled. He was the idol of his sister, and his mother's eyes followed him with proud affection in all his wild vagaries, and they were many. She even suffered his

dog to lick her face without expostulation, and her cold smile became a warm and ardent one as he seated himself by her side, and taking her thin hand, pressed it fondly between his rough palms. She received all Emily's attentions quietly, and suffered her caresses passively, but the slightest token of Edward's love for her called such a light to her wasted features as really made them beautiful, and then, and then only, could Esther trace any marks of the beauty which she was said to have possessed in her youthful days.

"Emily, bring me the Bible," said Mr. Sidney, after a pause.

His daughter at once took from the table the large family Bible, and taking his spectacles from his pocket, wiping them, and giving a preparatory ahem, Deacon Sidney, as he was usually called, commenced reading aloud, one of the Psalms; but his eyes troubled him, and he requested Mary to read for him. She immediately complied, and as her rich sweet voice broke the silence, Esther could not but be struck with the contrast between the reading of the brother and sister. Mr. Sidney read in a cold, hard voice the words, which, imbued with the enthusiasm of Mary's nature, breathed of faith and love, and familiar as were the words to Esther, they seemed almost new to her, coming, as it were, fresh from the reader's heart.

She ceased, and Mr. Sidney knelt down; at once all present did the same, and the voice of the Deacon was lifted in prayer. He prayed long and fervently for the welfare of church and state, for the upbuilding of Zion, for heathen lands, for the poor

and oppressed, but not for the family, except in general terms. Esther felt that there was a lack, she hardly knew of what, and she reproached herself for the feeling which she could not prevent.

At the close of the prayer each bade good night, and taking lamps, sought their chambers. Esther and Emily were to share the same room; they had hardly thrown themselves upon the bed, when Aunt Mary entered.

She approached the bed-side and carefully tucked the covering around them, then laid her hand caressingly upon the brow of each, saying as she bade them good-night, "God bless and keep you, my children."

The words were simple, but the tone, deep and heartfelt, made them very impressive, and as she left the chamber Esther felt that a holy presence departed with her.

"How do you like Aunt Mary?" asked Emily as the door closed after her.

"She is a superior being," returned Esther, "I could love her very dearly, but it surprises me that she should be an old maid."

"It always did me, till a short time since grandma told me her story. She was engaged to a very fine man, a sea captain, and they were to be married on his return from a voyage. All things were in readiness for their marriage, and he was expected in a week or two, when there was a terrible gale; his ship was wrecked, and all but one man lost. This sailor was taken off the vessel, and told of the sad fate of the rest, both captain and crew.

"It nearly killed Aunt Mary, grandma said. She used to be very merry and wild, but this sobered her at once. She is never lively now, though not very melancholy. For all it was so long ago, she can never hear any thing about a shipwreck without leaving the room. None of the family ever name such a thing to her; but once, when I was quite small, I remember I read from a paper a tale of a vessel lost at sea. Aunt Mary was alone in the room with me; she started up, and pressed her hand to her heart, exclaiming, "Oh, God!" then sunk back in her chair. She was deathly pale, and I was frightened enough. I was going to run for assistance, but she bade me remain, and said she should be well in a moment. This was the only time I ever knew her to betray any emotion; but on the anniversary of that fatal day, she goes to her room and sees no one on any occasion. She has had many offers of marriage, but never listens to any of them. I don't know what we should do, if she were to marry. Grandma couldn't live without her, and she is always doing good. She visits the sick a great deal, and if any one is in trouble, she goes to them, and knows just what to say to them to comfort them."

"Surely," thought Esther, as she heard this story, "all things work together for good to them that love God."

Emily now began to tell Esther that Virginia and Maria would be in Belfast in the course of a day or two, and after talking of her plans for enjoyment, the two friends fell asleep, from which Esther did

not awake till the clear voice of Aunt Mary, as she stood by their bedside, awoke both of the sleepers.

"We must make haste," said Emily, "for father never likes to have any one absent or late at prayers." And dressing in haste, they reached the sitting room just as Deacon Sidney had rung the bell, and, Bible in hand, had opened its sacred pages.

Breakfast followed, at which Mrs. Sidney the younger made her appearance for the first time. Grandmother had been up a long time, and as her daughter-in-law spoke of a bad headache, and sleepless night, she cast a glance of incredulity at her, simply saying, "Folks hain't nigh so strong now-a-days, as they used to be when I was a gal."

Breakfast over, Emily and Esther entered the sitting room. It was already in perfect order, for Aunt Mary's hand had been there. Mrs. Sidney threw herself languidly upon the sofa, replying in as few words as possible to Emily's inquiries about her health.

Aunt Mary had been for some time in her mother's room, she now appeared, neatly dressed, and seating herself at a low table, commenced sewing. She had hardly got her work about her, when a large-framed, coarse looking woman entered. She had a piercing black eye, and her hair was cut short, falling over her forehead. Her dress was of calico, and rather short, a large cape or vandyke, as it was usually called, completed her costume.

She bore in her hands a large basket of stockings, which she gave to Miss Mary, telling her that there was "a hull heap on um to mend this week. What

be we goin' to hev for dinner?" continued Violet Maxwell, for this was the name of the new comer, the maid of all work in Mrs. Sidney's family.

"I will come out and see to it," was Miss Mary's reply, and Violet vanished.

"I presume Virginia and Maria will be here to-day," said Emily, "and then we shall have a grand time. It will seem like Auld Lang Syne again. Come, Esther," she continued, "let's try some of our old duetts."

"But your mother," said Esther in a low voice, "will not the music make her head ache?"

"Oh, no," replied Emily, "she always has an ill turn in the morning, but she gets over it and sews or reads in a little while after breakfast."

In fact, Mrs. Sidney now drew her work-table to her side, unfolded nearly every piece of work with which it was covered, looked first at a bosom which was to be stitched, then laid it aside; taking up a black silk apron, she subjected it to the same ordeal; several unhemmed pocket handkerchiefs she added to the pile of rejected articles, and at last taking some knitting work in her hand, she left the room.

"She has gone to grandmother's room," said Emily, and opening the piano they commenced playing.

Hours flew like moments while they were thus engaged, for both were very fond of music; but at last the clock struck twelve. Emily started, declaring that she had no idea that it was so late. "We must go and get ready for dinner," she said, "for we dine at half past twelve."

Aunt Mary had been sitting quietly in the room for some time, and Esther noticed that the pile of work which Mrs. Sidney had left was considerably diminished. The pocket handkerchiefs were hemmed, and the silk apron was in Aunt Mary's busy hands, rapidly approaching completion.

"I have exchanged work with Charlotte," she said briefly, as she noticed the direction of Esther's glance. "She is entertaining mother, while I sew a little for her."

Ned now entered and proposed a sleigh-ride in the afternoon, as it was too pleasant to stay in doors, he said.

Dinner over, the gay party set out; they were joined by Aunt Mary, who had a large basket in her hand, and wished to be set down at a small cottage where one of her patients resided, Julia Eustace, a consumptive, and one of the loveliest beings, Miss Sidney said, that she ever saw.

"One of that blessed woman's many proteges," said Ned, when he had lifted his aunt almost reverentially from the sleigh, and his eyes followed her with such loving glances, as would have made glad her heart.

"If Aunt Mary isn't a saint on earth, then there never was one!" he exclaimed enthusiastically; "I only wish there were more like her." Then dashing off into other subjects, Ned appeared in the highest spirits, and his lively sallies elicited many a shout of laughter from his companions.

"We must begin to think of getting home!" sud-

denly exclaimed Emily, "for Virginia and Maria may have already come. Do turn round and drive home fast!"

Ned did as requested, and soon had landed his fair cargo, as he called it, safely in port.

They had arrived just in time, for hardly had they got warmed, when the door bell rang, and the expected guests alighted from a heavily-loaded stage coach.

They were cordially welcomed and quickly freed from their heavy cloaks.

Virginia declined all assistance, and soon bereft of bonnet, furs, &c., stood before them. Her figure was slight but graceful; her hands, which she seemed to know how to display to advantage, were white, small, and beautifully moulded. Her dress, a dark plaid, fitted her nicely and showed her form to advantage, but Esther and Emily looked in vain for that beauty of which they had heard. Her hair was indeed beautiful, it fell in a profusion of curls negligently but gracefully over her face, but her eyes were far from handsome, her features not very regular, and her hair and teeth were all that redeemed her from positive plainness.

"Well, girls," said she, laughing, "how you stare at me! You were expecting a beauty and you are disappointed. The truth is, I am only a belle. For that character very little beauty is required. The fact is, I was as much astonished as you are, when I was first called handsome. I came from school with a pretty correct estimate of my personal attractions, a

good figure, good hair and teeth, and passable complexion. I went into society and saw so many ordinary-looking women called handsome, that I took courage. I left the numerous body of wall-flowers, just made the best possible use of what fine gifts nature had bestowed upon me, and the consequence is, that I am called the admired Miss Virginia Clifton."

Maria stood silently by, while Virginia went on in a half-joking way to tell of her admirers. "First and foremost, there's the staid, middle-aged Mr. Norton, quite wealthy, which is about his only attraction, for he is abominably dull and abominably homely; then I can boast of a poet lover, who has immortalized my name in a series of acrostics, one of which I found wound tastefully round a bouquet. I really wish I could remember it; though the effect was almost overpowering on me yet I did not commit it to memory. Then there are some half dozen young men who fall in love with every new face, who for the present bow before my shrine. So you see, girls," she concluded, "I have had considerable experience already in affairs of the heart. I have, however, come out from the ordeal unscathed. I have conquered all the subjects in Portland, and have come here to do similar execution."

"You will find a poor field for your brilliant achievements, Jennie, I fear," said Emily; then turning to Maria, she asked her "what she had done worthy of note since she left school."

"Nothing," was her reply, "but to grow thin," in-

terrupted Virginia, "and to grow silent; why she has hardly spoken a word the whole way."

"You have amply made up for my deficiencies," said Maria.

"You do not look well, Maria," said Esther, tenderly, as she sat by her friend's side and gazed at her pale face. She was dressed in deep mourning for her mother, who had died nearly a year since. Her features were regular and quite handsome. Her deep blue eyes had an appealing look which went to the heart, but hers was not the beauty which attracts at once. She was dressed without any pretensions to display; her long brown hair was smoothly folded around her head, and she wore very few ornaments. In this respect, as in most others, she formed a perfect contrast to Virginia, whose fingers were loaded with jewels, and her open sleeve displayed one or two handsome bracelets upon her rounded arm; in fact, she had some article of jewelry wherever she could wear it.

Involuntarily as Esther glanced at her lively companion, who was chatting volubly with Mrs. Sidney, who had just entered, she felt repelled, and as strongly attracted to Maria.

Mrs. Sidney really seemed to partake her young friend's animation; she smiled at Jennie's amusing description of their travelling companions, and of the incidents they had met with on their way.

Emily, who listened, appeared delighted to see the interest which her mother manifested, it was so rarely that she was aroused from her usual listlessness.

Ned, who soon came in and was introduced, was charmed with the ease and frankness with which Jennie greeted him, and was soon in a gay conversation with her.

Deacon Sidney she approached with the same self-possession. She did not appear to stand in awe of him in the least, and this from its very novelty seemed to delight him. Instinctively, she found out what most interested him, and talked with him seriously at first, then gaily and familiarly.

Before nine o'clock she had been all over the house, and had won grandma's heart by her sprightliness, her love for pussy, and by holding a skein of yarn for her. She had visited the kitchen, and her praise of Violet's favorite gingerbread, of which she had begged a piece, had won from her the remark that, "she was a mighty nice gal, none of your stuck-up city gals, but one that knowed what's what."

Esther could not but see that Virginia was a general favorite. She waited with some impatience for Aunt Mary's return, to see if she too would share the universal attraction.

On Aunt Mary's entrance Virginia looked at her with that penetrating glance which she bestowed on all who came in her way; she encountered an equally searching one from Aunt Mary, who addressed her kindly, and then turned to Maria with one of her most winning smiles as she spoke of her mother, one of her dearest friends, she said, in days long gone by, and to whom Maria bore a striking resemblance. "I long to take you into my heart," she continued in a

low voice, "for I feel sure you must resemble her as much in character as in person."

Tears filled Maria's eyes as she returned the warm pressure of the hand which Miss Sidney held.

Virginia had drawn near, and taking Aunt Mary's other hand pressed it warmly to her lips. The action was simple but unexpected. Miss Sidney looked at her with some surprise.

"Love me a little too, if you can," whispered Jennie, pressing her cheek softly against the hand she still held.

Touched by the childlike appeal, Miss Sidney replied in a few tender words. She had won her way to Aunt Mary's heart.

"How much Virginia has improved!" said Emily, when she and Esther were alone in their chamber.

"How simple, natural, and loving she has grown?"

"She is indeed fascinating," replied Esther, rather coldly, but she reproached herself for her coldness; again and again she asked herself, if she was jealous of Jennie's charms. "I am unjust to her," she thought. "I do not understand her, and have misjudged her." So she joined in praise of Jennie's winning manners, and soon fell asleep.

The next evening, Mr. Templeton, who had been out of town on business for a few days, returned and called at Deacon Sidney's. He was very pleasant and cordial in his manners towards Emily and Esther, with whom he talked principally, notwithstanding Virginia's efforts to withdraw him.

At length she approached the piano and sung a

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Before nine o'clock she had been all over the house, and had won grandma's heart by her sprightliness, her love for pussy, and by holding a skein of yarn for her. She had visited the kitchen, and her praise of Violet's favorite gingerbread, of which she had begged a piece, had won from her the remark that, "she was a mighty nice gal, none of your stuck-up city gals, but one that knowed what's what."

Esther could not but see that Virginia was a general favorite. She waited with some impatience for Aunt Mary's return, to see if she too would share the universal attraction.

On Aunt Mary's entrance Virginia looked at her with that penetrating glance which she bestowed on all who came in her way; she encountered an equally searching one from Aunt Mary, who addressed her kindly, and then turned to Maria with one of her most winning smiles as she spoke of her mother, one of her dearest friends, she said, in days long gone by, and to whom Maria bore a striking resemblance. "I long to take you into my heart," she continued in a

low voice, "for I feel sure you must resemble her as much in character as in person."

Tears filled Maria's eyes as she returned the warm pressure of the hand which Miss Sidney held.

Virginia had drawn near, and taking Aunt Mary's other hand pressed it warmly to her lips. The action was simple but unexpected. Miss Sidney looked at her with some surprise.

"Love me a little too, if you can," whispered Jennie, pressing her cheek softly against the hand she still held.

Touched by the childlike appeal, Miss Sidney replied in a few tender words. She had won her way to Aunt Mary's heart.

"How much Virginia has improved!" said Emily, when she and Esther were alone in their chamber.

"How simple, natural, and loving she has grown?"

"She is indeed fascinating," replied Esther, rather coldly, but she reproached herself for her coldness; again and again she asked herself, if she was jealous of Jennie's charms. "I am unjust to her," she thought. "I do not understand her, and have misjudged her." So she joined in praise of Jennie's winning manners, and soon fell asleep.

The next evening, Mr. Templeton, who had been out of town on business for a few days, returned and called at Deacon Sidney's. He was very pleasant and cordial in his manners towards Emily and Esther, with whom he talked principally, notwithstanding Virginia's efforts to withdraw him.

At length she approached the piano and sung a

ballad; she had a sweet voice, and played with great taste and feeling. Edward bent over her admiringly, and Mr. Templeton arose and joined the group. Jennie had been successful, but she appeared perfectly unconscious of his approach, except a flash of the eye, which Esther imagined she read aright, as one of triumph. She started very prettily and naturally as Mr. Templeton requested another song, but complied with much sweetness; then rising, asked Emily or Esther to play.

Esther seated herself at the piano, and played a lively waltz. Jennie at once started off in a dance alone, much to Deacon Sidney's horror, for dancing, of all sinful pleasures, except playing cards, he held in utter abhorrence.

"Miss Clifton," he commenced almost sternly, as Virginia sat down panting at his side.

"Call me Virginia, please," interrupted she, looking up into his face, with a frank smile, which completely disarmed the rebuke he had intended to give her, of its severity.

He smiled—"Well, Virginia," he said, "I am sorry to see that you dance."

"Why?" asked she, in apparently innocent wonder. "I do so love it!" she continued, without waiting for a reply, "I could dance all night!"

"There are much more profitable ways of spending one's nights," remarked Mr. Sidney, gravely.

"But none more pleasant," interrupted Virginia; "but sometime you shall tell me all your objections," she continued gaily: "To-night I challenge you to a

game of checkers," and taking a board from a table, she commenced setting the men.

This was a favorite recreation of Deacon Sidney's, and smilingly he took his place opposite Jennie and commenced playing.

Emily looked on in astonishment, wondering to see Virginia so familiar with one, whom though her father, she had always regarded with mingled awe and reverence.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SEWING CIRCLE.

"WELL, girls, you are all invited to attend the First Congregational Sewing Circle, at Dr. Manning's, this afternoon. Would you like to go?" said Emily one morning, entering the parlor where her guests were seated.

The announcement was received very differently by the persons addressed. "I shall like it, of all things!" exclaimed Virginia, who was arranging her curls before a mirror. Esther replied that it was a matter of indifference to her, and Maria, who had thrown herself at full length upon the sofa, holding a book which she was professedly reading, but which, for the most part, hung negligently between her fingers, yawned, and said, "she guessed she would stay at home."

"Poh, Maria!" replied Virginia, "you shan't do any such thing. We won't excuse you."

"You had all better go," said Aunt Mary, who was sewing, "as you are particularly invited, it would be quite a disappointment to Mrs. Manning, if you did not attend."

"Very well, then," replied Maria, and went on reading.

At two o'clock the party started for Mrs. Manning's. The walk was rather a long one but very pleasant. The Doctor's house stood upon a hill which commanded a fine view of the bay; this was now open, though it was winter, as it was very rarely frozen over. The dwelling was surrounded by trees, which, covered with icicles, glittered and sparkled in the sun.

"It must be a delightful residence in the summer!" said Esther.

"It is, indeed," replied Emily, "and this hill also has its charms in winter; it is a fine place for sliding, as you see. Take care, girls," she cried out, as a whole troop of sleds, whose owners cried "Lulla!" as an admonition to people to get out of the way, came swiftly down the hill. "It would have been wiser in us to have remained on the side-walk. But here we are at last," said Emily.

A girl met them at the door, directing them to the front chamber, where, already, laid piles of clothing, shawls and bonnets heaped up in confusion.

"How do I look?" asked Virginia, when she had given the final brush to her hair, had shaken out the flounces of her black silk, and arranged her under-handkerchief to her satisfaction.

"Remarkably well," replied Maria.

Emily coolly said, "she would do nicely, as nearly all of the people whom she would see were old ladies, and rather blind."

"I think that I do look nicely," repeated Virginia, taking no notice of Emily's remark, and glancing at

herself in the mirror. And she spoke truly. The walk had given color to her cheeks, and her eyes, not usually very expressive, were now quite animated.

"Come, Em," she exclaimed, "lead the way to the lower regions!" There was breathless silence as they entered the large parlor, for all present were anxious to see Emily Sidney's company.

The lady of the house was not present; and Emily, after introducing her friends to a few who were near her, seated herself and her companions on a vacant sofa.

The president of the society, a tall thin woman, wearing spectacles, sat near a square table, where piles of work were spread out; and, on Emily's application to her for work, busied herself in looking it over, to see if she could find any suitable.

There were about twenty already assembled, most of them middle aged and quite old ladies. The matrons were gathered in little groups, knitting with wonderful rapidity, rattling their needles as if they were accomplishing wonders, and talking equally as fast; for they had resumed the conversation, which had been interrupted by the entrance of Emily and her friends. They were discussing, with great earnestness, the merits of their last pastor, who had just left them, as well as those of his successor, when the quiet entrance of a slight, pale, and blue-eyed woman, who had a little girl, of some two years of age, by the hand, suddenly checked the tide of discourse.

She approached the group of old ladies, who had that painfully conscious air that usually marks the

interruption of a choice bit of gossip, by the sudden entrance of the very person who has been the subject of remark, but she did not appear to notice this. She extended her hand cordially to each in turn, asking one of her rheumatism, another of the health of some member of the family who had been sick, and passing none without some pleasant remark.

"Wall, I'm real glad to see ye, Miss Hammond," said more than one. "I was afeard you wouldn't walk so fur."

"Mrs. Manning was so kind as to send for me," replied the new minister's wife, for it was she; "her sleigh met me, when I had walked about half way;" and passing on, she addressed all present in her sweet and simple manner.

Emily sprang forward to meet her, and, after introducing her friends, entered into an animated conversation with her.

"What did you say her name was?" asked Esther, when Mrs. Hammond rose to get some work.

"Mrs. Arthur Hammond," replied Emily, "our new minister's wife. Isn't she sweet? They have only been settled here about two months. A part of the people were much opposed to her husband's settlement here, and were determined not to like either of them; but she has won everybody's heart since she came. Mr. Hammond will be here this afternoon; he always comes just before tea."

Mrs. Manning now entered, bearing a babe in her arms, and sinking into the first chair that came in her way. She was rather an ordinary looking person, and

evidently much embarrassed. She blushed deeply, when she was undergoing the ordeal of introduction to the strangers; and, merely remarking that "it was a fine day," returned to her seat in the corner again.

Virginia, tired of sewing, now threw down her work, and began to play with little Agnes Hammond, and had soon carried her to "Banbury-Cross" an indefinite number of times, to the young lady's great amusement. She was in the midst of the wonderful story of "Jacky Horner," when the door opened, and the Rev. Arthur Hammond entered.

Esther gazed with no little curiosity upon him, and did not wonder that Margaret had loved him so well. "So that is Arthur Hammond," said she, to herself; "he is certainly a fine looking man."

He was indeed; for though his features were too strongly marked to be regularly handsome, there was a certain something in his appearance that involuntarily attracted one's attention. His figure was somewhat above the middle height, erect and vigorous, having none of that worn and fragile look that is too apt to characterize the student. His forehead, which was high and white, was shaded by clustering masses of silky brown hair; his eyes were deep and earnest, and gave a spiritual expression to his face; but there was less of that determined look, expressive of an indomitable will, than Esther had expected to see, from Margaret's description of his character. This was her thought, as she looked at the upper part of his face; but as her eye rested on the lower part of his countenance she altered her opinion, for she read inflexi-

bility in the lines of his mouth, and perceived the general effect of it also in his independent and self-reliant carriage. It was evident that he possessed talent, and, without any disagreeable self-conceit, it was equally evident that he was aware of his attainments.

"Just the one for Margaret," she thought, as she watched his movements, and admired the graceful ease of his manners.

Passing around the room, with a few words to each, he came at last to Emily, and talked pleasantly with her companions. He glanced at Virginia, who had assumed a very graceful attitude, and still continued her occupation, that of amusing Miss Agnes.

"Let me present you to a third of my friends," said Emily, who had followed the direction of his eyes; and soon Virginia and the minister were gayly conversing together.

"I must carry my work to the President," said Esther, "for I have finished it;" and folding her pillow-case, she carried it to the table. The President and Second Directress were examining some work which had just been brought in.

"Who gave this work to Miss Billins to sew on? Did you, Miss Smith?"

"No," replied the Second Directress; "I guess she took it herself. I never give her no nice work to do. I have had too much fuss with her for that."

"Wall! it's done awfully, and no mistake," said the President. "It must be picked out; then I spose she'll be as mad as a hop; but I can't help it, it's got to come out. Give it to Mary Smiley, she'll do it

well," continued the good lady; "and tell her not to let Miss Billins see it, if she can help it."

The Second Directress did as she was commanded; but, unfortunately, Mrs. Billings, a sharp-featured, bright-eyed woman, had seen the manoeuvre, and angrily began talking to her next neighbor. "I guess I can sew as well as Miss Wilcox," said she, "or Mary Smiley either; but she's got a spite against me, and has been and picked out lots and lots of my work. I vow I won't put up with it. I'll take my name off from the Society. Miss Wilcox feels mighty nice since she got to be President; I wonder who she is, that she need to be so grand and stuck up. Why, you can't tech her with a forty foot pole now. 'Set a beggar on horseback,' you know. Lord! I've seen some of her work; her boys wears clothes patched so bad, that I wouldn't let my young ones wear um into the woods. I should be ashamed to let anybody see um, if I was her. I'll agree to sew with her any time."

She contented herself with casting glances of defiance at the President, who bore them with great coolness.

"There's Miss Somers," said Mrs. Wilcox to Miss Smith; "she always comes dreadful late; I guess there wouldn't be much done, if everybody did the same."

"Good afternoon, Miss Wilcox," said Mrs. Somers, pleasantly, coming up to the table. The officers greeted her with respect, and, taking the work which they gave her, she seated herself near Esther, and saying that she presumed she was addressing one of

Miss Sidney's friends, she introduced herself, and commenced a conversation.

Esther was charmed with her new acquaintance, who, though somewhat advanced in life, retained all the sprightliness and vivacity of her youth. They soon found that they had a number of mutual friends; and Mrs. Somers discovered that Esther's father was one of her old, and, she said, "most highly valued acquaintances."

Tea was now announced to be in readiness, by the Doctor, a hale, hearty looking man, and very gentlemanly in his manners.

"The Society will please lay aside their work, and walk out to tea," said the President, as she followed, with much dignity, the minister and his wife into the large dining room.

After a blessing had been pronounced by Mr. Hammond, the Doctor invited Emily to assist in passing round the plates. All the company were standing rigidly against the walls, except Mrs. Hammond, who came to Emily's assistance, and, passing round, gave each a plate; while Emily followed, bearing a plate of buttered biscuits, and Virginia brought up the rear, with cheese and preserved damsons. Mrs. Manning was, in the meantime, pouring out tea, at a side-table, aided by one or two of her friends, so that soon all were supplied.

The Doctor, now declaring that he never knew where to put his plate when he stood up, as he always spilt its contents, or those of his tea-cup, invited Mr.

Hammond to follow his example and seat himself at the table.

Mrs. Somers and Esther still stood together, and were conversing with no lack of spirit.

"I have found an old friend, or rather, the daughter of an old friend in Miss Hastings," said Mrs. Somers as Emily approached them. "The father I knew long before his residence in Bangor, and with his first wife I have spent many a pleasant hour, though I never knew his second. Let me see," she continued musingly, "what was the maiden name of your step-mother?"

"Margaret Wilton," replied Esther.

"I saw her once at a party," rejoined Mrs. Somers. "I remember her perfectly; she was an uncommonly beautiful woman."

At the name of Margaret Wilton, Mr. Hammond looked up, but betrayed no emotion, for Esther watched him narrowly.

He helped himself to another biscuit and praised the bread, to Mrs. Manning's evident satisfaction.

After supper was over, they returned to the parlor. Mr. Hammond now approached Esther and remarked that he as well as Mrs. Somers had made a discovery, that her step-mother had been an old friend of his. He spoke easily, and, without embarrassment, asked where she now was, and listened with interest to Esther's account of her second marriage.

"She is a noble woman," he said after a pause. "When you next write her, please present my regards to her. Alice," he said, as his wife came near and

stood with her hand upon her husband's chair, "do you not remember meeting Mrs. Hastings once in Bangor at a party?"

"Yes," replied his wife after a moment's pause, "she was a very gay and brilliant person."

"This is her step-daughter," continued Mr. Hammond.

"Indeed," said his wife, and, after praising Mrs. Hastings' beauty, in which Esther joined warmly, though declaring that it was the least of her charms, the conversation turned on different subjects, and Esther sat thinking how strangely people altered!

She could not see that the mention of one he had so fondly loved had produced the least effect on Arthur Hammond. Margaret too had ceased to love him. "Well," thought she, "all this talk about undying love must be nonsense." But the vision of Aunt Mary's lost but cherished affection rose before her, and she revoked her hasty decision.

The old ladies now made preparations for departure; the President and directors rolled up the work, and one by one they retired; but young people now began to take their places. Several young girls, neatly and prettily dressed, now came in, closely followed by a number of young gentlemen. Among these was the only son of Mrs. Somers, Frederick, a fine looking fellow, now at home for a short time from Cambridge, where he had been attending the law school. Ned Sidney accompanied him and introduced him to the guests of his sister.

Maria seemed as listless as ever; she was sitting in

a circle of young ladies, one or two of whom were making vain attempts to engage her in conversation. They at last, however, relinquished the effort, and remarked in a low tone as they passed Esther, "she is certainly one of the most insipid girls that I ever saw. All she has said in reply to my strenuous exertions to make her talk is, 'yes,' 'no,' 'do you think so?' and the like."

Esther glanced at her friend, and could not avoid thinking that her appearance justified the remark; but it was so different from the Maria of old times, that she hastened to ask her if she was sick.

The company, meanwhile, had begun to get over a little of the stiffness usually attendant on such occasions. The gentlemen left the sides of the room, where they had all been sitting together talking, and apparently much interested in each other, yet casting longing glances towards their fair friends, who appeared equally oblivious of the male portion of the party.

They seemed at once now to enter into the spirit of the evening, and games, for it would have shocked the orthodox notions of the good people of Mr. Hammond's society if dancing had been introduced, followed thick and fast.

Kitchen Furniture was called for, and, assuming the names of various articles, tongs, broom boots, &c., were obliged to rise up, amid laughter and merry jests.

Grocery Store next came, and Pork was seen in the shape of some fair girl, exchanging places with Cabbage, in the person of Ned Sidney, who seemed rather unwilling to give up his seat by the side of Virginia.

Beans, as Mr. Somers was called for the time being, seemed equally ambitious of a seat by her side, and many were the jests of the company, on the fondness of these gentlemen for Molasses, which was her cognomen.

Jenny appeared to be in her element, casting sly glances at the faces of her two admirers, and welcoming each to her side with the same sweetsmile and arch words.

Maria too, to Esther's great satisfaction, seemed to have roused herself from her listless state, and animation, which alone was wanting to render her beautiful, now sparkled in her eyes and beamed in her smile. Admirers of her were not wanting, but she seemed to repulse every attention quietly and kindly, but in so marked a manner, that she was soon left to herself.

Blindfold was now proposed, and Dr. Manning, with Mrs. Somers and a few of the older people who had remained, though they had adjourned to another room for a quiet chat, now united with the younger members of the circle in clearing the room for action, as he said. Chairs, tables, mirrors and sofas were hurried out into the large entry, and Dr. Manning was first blinded. Emily tied the bandage over his eyes and, admonishing him to "turn round three times and catch who you may," darted from his side.

Now what scampering from one side of the room to the other followed! Then what profound silence as one was caught, while the Doctor vainly attempted to guess whom he had taken.

"You all wear your hair alike, I believe," he said, "but I guess it is Emily Sidney."

His guess proved correct, and, amid her declarations that she really believed that he could see, while he laughingly assured her, that if so, it was her own fault, as she had tied on the handkerchief, she assumed his place. Again the scampering ensued, and the fall of one or two was greeted with shouts of laughter, as each declared that he was unhurt. Suddenly the door opened, and Mr. Templeton entered just in season to be caught by Emily, who guessed him at once. Many were the pleasant sallies which this called forth, but he declined being blindfolded, as he had just come in from the cold.

After a few more had been blinded, the party were all pretty tired, and quite ready to partake of the refreshments, apples, nuts, and raisins, which were now brought in. Apples were now named, causing many blushes, until at last it came to Virginia's turn.

"Who did you name mine?" she asked of the company.

"Mr. Somers," replied one; "Mr. Sidney," said the rest; and so it was repeated until it came to Dr. Manning.

"If I were not a married man," he said, smiling, "I should be tempted to name it, myself; but as it is, I will follow the example already set me, naming it both Mr. Somers and Mr. Sidney, and leave the selection to you."

"How many seeds?" cried all, as she put the little shining specks into her white hand.

"Five, I declare," said she, very demurely, "Five,

I cast away;" and she glanced archly at the rivals, who were close by her side.

Phillipines were now passed round, a game in which all took part. Other games were now proposed, in which Mr. Templeton did not join, for, unperceived, he had slipped out to have a conversation with Mrs. Manning, Mr. Hammond, and his wife, who were in an adjoining apartment.

"He never will play these games," said Emily to Esther, as she noticed his absence.

"I declare, it is eleven o'clock!" exclaimed Emily, as the tones of the old Dutch clock rang out full and clear; "we must go home."

Already shawled and hooded, the girls had bid Mrs. Manning good night, assuring her that they had enjoyed themselves finely. Esther noticed that Virginia stood by the side of Edward Sidney, when Mr. Somers, not observing this, proposed accompanying her home.

"Unfortunately," replied she, in a very low tone, "I am already provided for."

He bowed, and sought Maria, with whom he was more successful.

Edward had been talking to one of his friends; but, by the quick flush of his cheek, Esther saw that Virginia's words had been overheard.

"I am sorry," said he, "to be the *unfortunate cause* of depriving you of so much pleasanter an escort than I can hope to be."

"Pshaw, Edward! don't make yourself ridiculous!" The words were sharp, but spoken in a low, almost

tender tone. It was the first time that she had ever called him Edward. It seemed to have been involuntary; for she added, after a short pause, "Excuse me, Mr. Sidney."

"It is an offence I would gladly have you repeat," he replied.

"Then let us be henceforth Virginia and Edward to each other," was her reply, as they walked slowly homeward.

After this evening Mr. Somers and a Mr. Dunmore, who had seemed quite pleased with Esther, having attached himself to her very devotedly the whole evening, and having been permitted to "see her home," as he expressed it, were frequent visitors at Deacon Sidney's.

Mr. Dunmore was a small, dapper man, remarkable for nothing but his gentlemanly manners, good connections, and regular features; but he considered these qualifications as all-sufficient, and had so good an opinion of himself, that it was unnecessary for others to waste their admiration upon him. So Esther said, when she was complimented on her new admirer. He was indefatigable in his attentions, and construed every repulse which he met with from her—and they were not few—as owing merely to maiden timidity. It was in vain that she attempted to shake him off; he was as constant as her shadow.

"He really appears impudent," she declared, half vexed, to Emily. "I cannot step out to the door, but his smile and bow greet me."

At last she relapsed into a passive state of endu-

rance, hoping that he would, ere long, give her an opportunity of expressing her opinion of his merits, and to free herself from further annoyance.

Virginia, meanwhile, had fully proved her claim to the titles of both belle and coquette. She treated Edward and Mr. Somers in the same capricious manner. While one basked in her smiles, the other was chilled by her petulant manner; and just as the favored lover was hoping that his regard was returned, lo! he must take his turn in experiencing her apparent indifference, and see his rival in the enjoyment of the gracious smiles, which he had so lately thought were his alone.

At such times Ned would assume as haughty a manner as her own. Engaged in attentions to Maria, he would strive to appear unconscious of the fact that Virginia, absorbed in listening to Mr. Somers, was apparently forgetful of all but the pleasure of his society.

But Virginia was not so easily deceived. She would take no notice of Edward's scornful smiles until it suited her sovereign pleasure; then she would request some trifling favor of him, and, while he was thus engaged, retaining all his frostiness of manner, she would throw so much sweetness and reproach into her glance, as she thanked him, and whisper, "Don't be foolish, Edward! are you angry with your friend Virginia?" that he could not but be won by her smiles.

"I am a fool, Virginia," said he, on one of these occasions, "to trust to you; and as I am afraid that I

shall always remain one till I have you, I shall go away soon."

Jennie would pay no heed to any such remark. She seemed to take it for granted that it was her friendship, not her love, that he sought; and, putting her hand playfully over his lips, would reply, "Now, if you are going to look dignified, and scold, I won't talk with you another moment; I'll go and talk with Ned Somers; he's never so cross."

"Go, if you choose," was Edward's cool reply; but, nevertheless, he would drop the offending subject, and Virginia would ride with him, play his favorite songs, listen while he read to her—in short, manage to have him ever at her side till the wind changed: and poor Mr. Somers, who was so deeply in love that he could not, as Edward did, retaliate, by devoting himself to another, but, in a perfectly wretched state, watched her manœuvres, unhappy in her society, and unable to leave her, was received again, most graciously, as a dear friend; for she persisted in having no lovers, misunderstanding every lover-like allusion put into words, but not at all chary of love's unspoken language.

Mr. Templeton, who was also a constant visitor at Deacon Sidney's, looked with indignation at such a course of conduct, and urged Ned to say nothing to her; a resolution which he formed every few days, and which he broke as regularly. Mr. Templeton himself treated her with marked displeasure; and while he talked much with Esther, Emily and Maria, bestowed very little attention on Jennie. For this, however, she appeared to care very little. She

glanced at him with a saucy look, as if she would say, "I could have *you*, too, under my thumb, if I thought you worth the trouble."

Almost every evening he read aloud to the girls while they sewed; and it was to Esther he appealed, when he found something to praise or to condemn. She understood him; and though they differed often in their opinions, Mr. Templeton seemed to enjoy quarrelling with her, as Emily called it.

Esther could not help admiring the firmness, good sense, and candor, with which he defended his side of the question, and his kindness and consideration, which he displayed in various ways. He seemed to understand her dislike to Mr. Dunmore, and often interposed himself between her and her tormentor. In this way they were thrown much together, and a more intimate acquaintance showed each much to admire in the other.

Virginia still retained her place in the affections of Mrs. Sidney; for that lady, not very clear-sighted, had seen none of her capricious treatment of her son; and as long as she praised him, which she frequently did, his mother saw no obstacle to the hopes of Edward, which he had hinted to her.

Aunt Mary said nothing; but Esther felt that the calm kindness of her manner towards Jennie was very different from the deep tenderness of her eye and voice, which she betrayed towards Maria and herself.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

It was a fine day. "Just the day to return some of your calls, girls," said Emily, as they were seated together.

"Oh!" sighed Maria, "of all things on earth I detest making calls, and it is too bad to press such a beautiful day into such service."

"So much the better," returned Virginia. "If the task is disagreeable, you should have all the pleasant things possible; but, for my part," she continued, "I like to make calls."

"I cannot conceive of such a state of mind," said Esther; "yet it must be a very desirable one for people who think of having much society, for it is an unavoidable evil."

"Well," replied Jennie, "I'm just weak-minded enough to like it. I don't have a large amount of subjects to converse on, but I can do pretty well in a five minutes chat on the weather, the last fashion, and the like, and that's pretty much all that's required in making calls."

"For my part," rejoined Maria, "I can never think of anything to say till it's time to leave."

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"Well, that's my sphere!" returned Virginia; "now, I'm out of my element when I get into intellectual society, where you, Maria, are at home."

"Why, I'm sure," said Maria, "you appeared to be having a fine time last night, talking with Mr. Hammond on Henry Ward Beecher's lectures and sermons, on Whipple's essays, Mr. Giles' lectures, and the like."

"Ah, well," replied Virginia, "I had heard all three of those gentlemen lecture, and so got along pretty well; but when he got on to Hudson's lectures on Shakespeare, I was really frightened! I didn't know as I could stand my ground, but by considerable exertions, I managed to come off with flying colors."

"Why, Jennie, hadn't you read them?"

"Never a word," replied she, "and what was worse, I never read more than two of Shakespeare's plays in my life."

"Why didn't you say so, then?"

"Oh, I had no idea that he was going to talk on the subject an hour, and as I had allowed him to suppose that I knew something about them in the onset, I couldn't get off afterwards. How shocked you look, Maria!" she continued, "why, it's the most common thing in the world for people to pretend knowledge that they don't possess."

"I should advise you to read Mrs. Opie," said Maria.

"Read it yourself, my dear," returned Jennie, "I dare say you tell as many white lies as I do. Come,

now, how often do you reply to invitations to call, a thing that you have owned you detest, 'I should be very happy to do so?' If I had time, I could show a great many more such lies, for so they are. The truth is, I'm no worse than the rest of you, girls, but I speak out what the rest of you think. But come, let's get ready to act a few of these same falsehoods."

They hastened up to their chambers, to dress for their expedition. Emily and Virginia walked along together, while Esther and Maria followed.

They had made quite a number of calls, and were returning home, when a young gentleman crossed the street, bowed gracefully to Maria and Virginia, and shook hands very cordially.

Esther looked at Maria in some surprise, for the color had entirely left her cheeks, and she trembled violently. Her companions did not appear to observe her agitation, and Maria, controlling herself, presented Mr. Waldron to Esther and Emily.

Virginia seemed very happy to meet him; had a thousand questions to ask him concerning Portland, whence he had come, but Maria scarcely said a word. She seemed confused whenever he addressed her, and answered as briefly as possible.

Mr. Waldron was tall, and quite handsome. He was pale, and did not seem in good health, but seemed to be in excellent spirits. He had relinquished the task of conversing with Maria, and was now playing the agreeable to Emily and Virginia.

As they reached home, Virginia asked "how long he intended to remain in Belfast."

"He had come on business," he replied, "and it was rather uncertain how long his stay would be, as it depended entirely on circumstances."

He declined going in at present, in reply to Emily's invitation; but assured her that he would call often while in town; he then bowed gracefully and took leave.

In answer to Emily's inquiries, Virginia told her that Mr. Waldron was a young man of good family in Portland, and a very gay and pleasant acquaintance. "Gentlemanly in his manners," she added, "as you may see for yourself. Report says, a little dissipated, but I guess, very much like young men in general."

Mr. Waldron was as good as his word; he called that evening, and many successive ones.

Maria seemed as distant as ever in her manners towards him, while Virginia amply made up, in her graciousness, for all her companion's deficiencies.

Both Edward and Mr. Somers were thrown entirely into the shade, by the appearance of Mr. Waldron, and both did not fail to sneer at him as a "dandy, and mere lady's man."

To Esther, however, he did not appear in such a character. She did not believe, what Virginia very plainly intimated, that he was one of her lovers, who had followed her, to urge his suit; but, as day after day passed, and still he lingered in Belfast, she began to doubt that his business detained him so long, in that quiet place.

"Maria," said she, one night, when they had gone

to their chamber, which they now shared together, "what do you suppose keeps Mr. Waldron here? Shouldn't you think he would go before long?"

"I wish he would," exclaimed Maria.

"Do you dislike him so much, then?" asked Esther.

"No—yes—" replied Maria, blushing deeply; then hiding her face in her hands, she burst into tears.

"What is the matter, my dear?" whispered Esther, drawing her friend tenderly to her bosom. "Let me share your trouble, and try to console you, as I used to long ago."

"I will tell you all, Esther," replied Maria. "Charles Waldron is the only one for whom I ever cared at all. Ever since I came home from school, he has been so kind to me, and so delicate in his attentions, that almost before I knew it, I began to love him. At last, he asked me to become his wife; I owned my affection for him, and if my father should consent, promised to be his. How happy I was that day! I never dreamed of any obstacle, and what was my surprise, when my father came to me, looking, oh, so pale and wretched! I never saw him so agitated! He held me in his arms, and told me I was his all, and begged me never to have any thing more to say to Charles. He said that he was very dissipated, and that he could not trust his only daughter to him. He said that it was my best good he sought, and he convinced me that I must give Charles up. I did as father advised, though it gave me great pain. For oh, Esther! I did not know

how very much I loved him, till I set about trying not to care for him. Father was very kind to me, doing every thing in his power to make me happy, and I tried to appear cheerful. Charles did not come to the house, but I met him at parties, and I tried to avoid him; for, oh, Esther! when he talks to me, I cannot think of any one else, and he makes it out, that I ought to marry him, and seems so unhappy, that my only safe way is to shun him. I was glad to come here, and just as I am beginning to be more like myself, he comes too, and I have got it all to do over again."

"My dearest child," said Esther, "you are doing right, and I love you better than ever, and honor you for your dutiful conduct to your father. You are indeed his all, my love, and you know what a cruel blow it would be to him, if you were to marry one who would make you wretched, for your father is right."

"I know he is," sighed Maria, "and I shall persist in avoiding Charles. If he stays much longer, I shall go home."

"Come to me in your trials, Maria, as you would to an older sister," said Esther, "and I will try to advise you and help you; for yours is an unpleasant position."

Maria buried her face on her friend's shoulder, weeping silently.

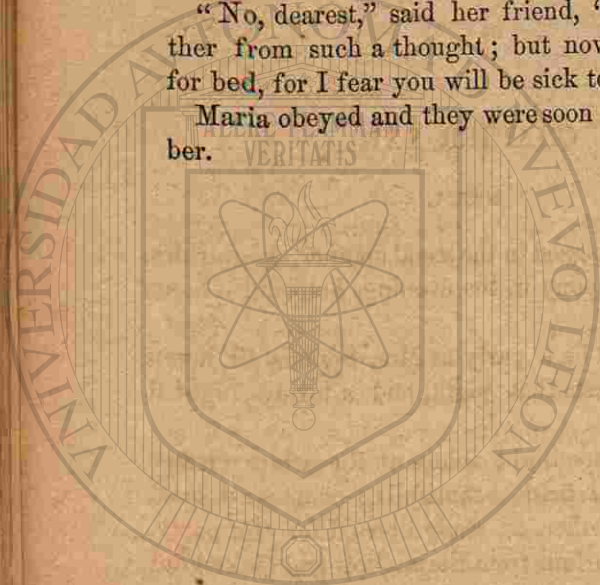
"I have been very unhappy," she said, "but it is a relief to me that you know all."

Esther did not attempt to check her tears. She felt

that they would relieve her ; and at last Maria ceased, saying, as she looked up into Esther's face, "You think me a silly child!"

"No, dearest," said her friend, "I never was farther from such a thought ; but now let us prepare for bed, for I fear you will be sick to-morrow."

Maria obeyed and they were soon wrapped in slumber.



CHAPTER XXIII.

MARIA.

A few days passed in the usual manner, sleigh-rides, walks, and company in the evenings helped the hours away agreeably.

There was to be a party at Mrs. Somers' in honor of Emily's guests that night, and a lovely night it was.

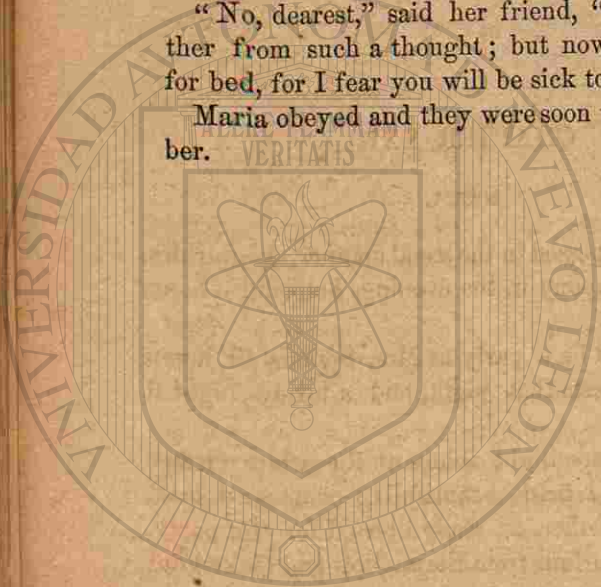
"The clear moonlight shines on the white surface of the snow-clad fields beautifully ; come and look, Maria !" said Esther, as, ready dressed for the party, she lifted the curtain from the window and looked out on the landscape.

Deacon Sidney's house was situated on a hill, and, from the front windows, the large evergreens somewhat interrupted the view, but, from the side-window where Esther now stood, might be seen not only the waters of the bay, sparkling, clear, and cold in the starlight, but the wide-spread fields, with their drifted and uneven surface, looking like the tossing waves of a suddenly frozen sea, where, occasionally, a leafless tree reminded her of the dismantled wrecks of that same sea, were also visible, and, farther below, the

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principal part of the town, with its tall church spires, and the bright lights gleaming from many a happy home, gave life to the picture.

"What is there more beautiful than our winter landscapes?" thought she, forgetting, as we are apt to do, how superior we find the charm of each particular season, in its turn, to anything else at that time.

Perhaps, to a stranger's eye, that same landscape might have looked monotonous and dreary, but, to her mind, the snow-clad ground was associated with all the pleasures of the winter evenings; those long evenings so peculiarly adapted to the joys of home.

It recalled, to her, her youthful romps in the fresh, bracing air, her wild slides down hill with her school-mates, and, later, the cheerful fireside, the bright lights and merry chat of home, where she had pored over so many interesting volumes, in a quiet corner, forgetting the present in the glowing tales of the past that those pages presented; all this and a thousand similar recollections endeared old Winter to her, and made her see new beauty in the familiar scenes before her.

She was indeed lost in thought, till the voice of her friend, who, obeying her summons, had joined her at the window, recalled her from her reverie.

"It looks like the smile on the face of a corpse," exclaimed Maria.

"That is a sad thing to be reminded of by such beauty," returned Esther. "You are not cheerful, and everything takes a tinge from your sadness. Cheer up! my little Maria. You must try and be

hopeful! Do let us see some of your old smiles and gaiety, to-night."

"Are you ready, girls?" asked Emily, tapping lightly at the door of their chamber. "If you are, let's go and give Grandma a call; she'll like to see us ready-dressed for the party. Virginia looks like a beauty, to-night, don't she, Ned?" she continued, as they met him on the staircase.

"It would be very rude in me to contradict you, whatever might be my opinion," he replied, gazing at her with sufficient admiration to satisfy her, however, as the girls passed him.

They reached Grandma's room and tapped lightly at the door; Aunt Mary opened it, and the four girls entered.

"Wall, gals, so you're dressed for the party!" said Grandma.

"Yes, and don't we look handsome?" asked Jennie.

"Oh yes! you're tricked out in all your bravery. You remind me of what the prophet Isaiah says, in the third chapter, 'with your chains, and bracelets, and rings, and wimpling pins, ear-rings, and all your fine apparel,' and the old lady sighed deeply.

"Take care, gals, that you don't do like the darters of Zion, get 'haughty, and walk with stretched out necks and wanton eyes,' lest you have the same cuss that is pronounced on them. This generation does seem to have it. At least part on it is coming true, 'instead of well-set hair, baldness;' for, though you gals has pooty good hair, most of folks seem to be hav-

ing poor heads on't. Can't you see, gals," she continued, "that we're living in the last days?"

"I don't know that I ever thought of it," said Esther.

"Can't you discern the signs of the times?" replied Grandma. "That's the way with you all; even Mr. Hammond don't see it. That's fulfilling the Bible, too, 'blind leaders of the blind.' All on it is fulfilling fast. Don't they 'go to and fro,' and isn't 'much knowledge increased?' The world is dreadful wicked, now-a-days!"

"Oh Grandma! I guess it will bear up a great deal more wickedness than it does now," said Virginia.

"As it was in the days of Noe," replied Mrs. Sidney, "so it shall be then. They were marrying and giving in marriage, and knew not till the flood came and took them away."

"Which looks the handsomest?" asked Emily, as the old lady paused.

"Oh! you all look well enough," said the old lady. "If you only behave as well as you look, you'll all do nicely," and she looked down on her knitting, which she had dropped in the ardor of her speech, and began to make her needles fly fast.

"You used to go to parties when you were young, didn't you?" asked Jennie.

"Wall, yes, child! I can't say but I did—the more fool I."

"Come, girls," shouted Ned, and, bidding good-bye to Grandma, they left the room.

Aunt Mary had clipped off two rose buds from her

single rose-bush, and had added them to the plainly-dressed hair of Esther and Maria.

"I hope you'll have a fine time," she said, as she bade them good-night.

In the parlor, they found Mr. Templeton and Mr. Waldron, whom Virginia had invited to accompany them to Mrs. Somers'. All was gaiety and smiles, and Maria did, indeed, appear more like her olden self.

Charles Waldron devoted himself quite assiduously to Virginia, and, though Maria could not fail to observe this, she thanked him for it.

"If we must part," she said to herself, "it makes it a much easier task for me, if he, too, sees the necessity of it, and bestows his attentions on another."

This apparent indifference, on Maria's part, did not seem to be the object which Charles had sought to gain.

He came towards the latter part of the evening to her side, and said something in a low tone, of which Esther only caught the words "heartless—cruel," but which brought the color to Maria's cheek, and a tear to her eye.

Just as they had bade Mrs. Somers good night, Frederick came up, and requested the pleasure of accompanying Maria home; before she could reply, Charles Waldron, who stood by her side, answered, "I am to serve as this lady's escort to-night," and ere Maria, surprised at such a remark, could collect her thoughts sufficiently to contradict him, Frederick had turned away.

They were now alone together;—it was the oppor-

tunity which Charles had long sought, but which he had not been able to gain.

"How *could* you do so, Charles?" asked Maria, in an almost pleading tone, as they walked homeward. "You know, as well as I, that we are separated, and that we must try to forget the past."

"Forget!" he repeated, bitterly. "That may be very easy for you, but for me, death is preferable to life without you. Oh, Maria!" he went on passionately, "you are mine in the sight of Heaven, and mine you *shall be* in the sight of man. I love you more than my life, and you, too, you cannot deny it, return my affection. I see it in every glance of your eye, in every expression of your face. You may try to overcome it, but it *is*, and it will be, in vain. 'What God has joined together, let no man put asunder.'"

Maria made no reply, she was weeping; she had never before seen him so violent, and was half afraid of him. A tear-drop fell on his hand, and a half-suppressed sob met his ear.

"Forgive me!" he said, in a low and tender voice, contrasting strongly with the triumphant tone he had been speaking in a few moments before. "Forgive me, dearest!—I can never forgive myself for causing you, whom I would die to save from annoyance, a moment's pain. Say you forgive me, Maria, for, it is my great love for you that makes me forget myself. Oh, Maria!" he continued, "since you left me I have tried to steel my heart against you! I have tried to think you heartless, and when I could not, for your

words, when you told me of your love, ever sounded in my ears, then I would try to drown my sorrows in the wine-cup. There I found temporary oblivion! What do I care, if I am utterly ruined, soul and body? You will only see in me a wretch to shudder at, as you do now! And since no one cares for me, why should I wish to live? The sooner I die, and free you from my persecutions, as you have called them, the better it will be. For I tell you, Maria, solemnly, that I *never will* give over my pursuit of you, till *you are mine, or I am dead!*"

"Oh, Charles!" exclaimed poor Maria, over whose weaker nature his violent and determined spirit always gained the ascendancy, "You will kill me! This continual struggle between my duty and love for my father, and my love for you, is wearing me out! Even Esther sees how pale and sad I am. Your pursuit of me may terminate in a way, you do not seem to think of—in *my* death. I sometimes think that you will break my heart."

"But are you doing your duty?" asked Charles. "Is it right for you to drive me to dissipation, as the only means of forgetting your cruelty? And must you," he continued, "even if you resolve never to be my wife, yet treat me as an outcast, shun me like a monster? Why not receive me as a friend, if no more—will you not do so?" he asked, in those soft, low tones, which Maria could never refuse.

"I will do so," she replied, forgetting that she had felt that her only safety was in leaving him altogether.

A triumphant smile passed over his face. He had gained his object.

"Let her receive me as a friend," he thought, "and she is mine, in spite of all the world," as he bade her good night, and lifting her hand tenderly to his lips, left her.

"Oh, Esther!" said Maria, as she sat by her friend's side, "Charles does at last, I hope, see how vain it is to importune me;—he is to be my friend now, and nothing more."

Esther shook her head doubtingly, but made no reply. Several days passed, and, as usual, Charles Waldron was a frequent guest at Mrs. Sidney's.

His lively sallies of wit, and frank manners, made him a favorite with all, particularly with Edward, since he had told him, that he would by no means interfere in his suit of Virginia.

Maria saw him often, for it was his delight to sit by her side while she sewed, to stand near her when she sung, to turn her music when she played, and, in short, anticipating her very wish. Whenever she was joked at all about her lover, as Emily and Virginia now began to call him, she would reply half pettishly, that "it was very singular that a lady could not have a gentleman friend, without being teased about him, as if she must be wishing to marry him."

She avoided now all conversation with Esther, declaring, whenever she was alone in her chamber with her, which she took care should be only when she retired, "that she was extremely sleepy;" and as

Esther saw that any interference on her part was unwelcome, she ceased to say anything to her.

Late at night, she was aroused by a slight noise,—she was a light sleeper,—and opening her eyes, she saw Maria, ready dressed, standing by her bedside.

"Why, Maria!" she exclaimed, "What are you dressed for?"

"Hush, Esther!" replied Maria, "Since you have waked up, I may as well tell you; I am going away."

"And where?" asked her friend. Then, as the truth flashed upon her, she continued, "*Not* with Charles Waldron?"

"Yes," returned Maria, calmly, "with him. I have decided that I ought to do so."

"But your father," said Esther, looking at her fixedly. "Imagine him in his desolate home, his grey hairs bowed with sorrow, over the disobedience of the child he trusted, and that he loved so well."

"Spare me!" exclaimed Maria, as tears streamed over her cheeks. "I am indeed wretched! Which ever way I turn, I bring misery!"

"Do not go, Maria! Your first duty is to your father. He is no tyrant! You see, as well as he, that this rash step would plunge you into misery. You are blinded by your love for Charles, bewildered by his arguments. If you do this, you will never cease to regret it. Depend upon it," continued Esther solemnly, "the curse of Heaven will rest on such an act of disobedience!"

"But I have promised Charles, that I will meet him near the church. He will wait for me! I must go,"

said Maria, breaking from the clasp in which Esther enfolded her. "I will tell him that I cannot go with him to be married. I will repeat to him, that I never will be his wife without my father's consent."

"And he will urge you," interrupted Esther, "and you will forget everything in the world but him, and you will do as he wishes."

Maria wept silently. At last she spoke. "I *must* see him to-night, if we never meet again. Do you go with me, and I will come back with you. But oh! I must go! and, if you do not accompany me, I shall go alone."

"But what if I arouse the house?" asked Esther.

"Oh! you cannot be so cruel! Do go with me!" pleaded Maria, "and I will promise that it shall be the last time that I see him."

Esther hesitated. "I don't know but I am doing a very foolish thing," she said, as she, at last, yielded to Maria's entreaties, and, dressing herself, walked softly out of the house.

It was but a short distance to the church; there Charles awaited Maria with a horse and sleigh. He sprang to meet her, exclaiming, "Then you are here at last. Spring into the sleigh, and, in a few hours, we shall be beyond pursuit; you shall be mine, and no one can take you from me."

"Oh Charles, I cannot go!" whispered Maria.

He started, and, for the first time, noticed her companion. "Miss Hastings!" ejaculated he. "The devil!" he muttered between his teeth; then, addressing her, with much politeness, said, "you are too kind

to accompany Maria. I presume you intend to act as brides-maid!"

"No, Mr. Waldron! I hope to assist this poor infatuated girl to free herself from you. Your present conduct proves you unworthy of her. A man, who can persuade a daughter to forget her duty to her aged parent, will not find it a difficult task to free himself from his own duty as a husband. Maria has come to bid you farewell forever!"

Charles Waldron listened, with ill-disguised impatience, to Esther's remarks, then turning to Maria who stood near, he said, "Speak, Maria, tell me that this is not so!"

"It is indeed the truth," replied Maria. "I have come to bid you farewell! This is our last meeting!"

"It can not be so!" exclaimed Charles, "or, at least, you have been frightened into saying so, by Miss Hastings. You do not really mean it! You could not be so cruel, to hold the cup of happiness to my lips but to snatch it away untasted!"

"I have done wrong," sighed Maria, "but because I have taken one false step, I must not take another. I have decided," and she sprang to Esther's side, clinging there, as if for protection against his anticipated violence. But, instead of the burst of passion which she had expected, he addressed her in a low, sad, and reproachful voice.

"Then you despise me! You cannot trust me! You dash the last hope from me; instead of giving me kind words of encouragement and your assistance in the difficult task of reforming and breaking off from

my associates, you turn from me coldly, you loathe me, and leave me to the only ones who speak to me as a friend, my boon companions, and this," he added bitterly, "is that boasted thing, woman's love! Like the rest of the world, you, Maria, cast off the rope to which the poor struggling wretch clings!"

"Oh Charles!" exclaimed Maria, in a voice choked with emotion, "you will break my heart! Let me go!" she said wildly to Esther, who held her firmly in her arms. "Let me go! I will not forsake him in his wretchedness! My place is by his side!"

"Remember your father!" said Esther; "when he, sick and feeble, calls vainly for his child, shall a stranger's voice reply to him? a stranger's hand supply his wants? Remember that you make his home a wretched one; you leave him, in his old age, desolate and childless!"

"Choose between us!" said Charles, approaching her, for he felt sure of a decision in his favor.

"Oh Esther!" exclaimed poor Maria, "what shall I do?"

"Mr. Waldron!" said Esther, turning to him, "you, alone, are the cause of the misery of one you profess to love! It is your dissipation alone, which causes the objections of her father; it depends on you, alone, to remove that. If you love her, as you say, call that strong will, which you now exert to overpower Maria's weaker nature, to aid you in reforming! If you cannot break from your associates without her help, you never can with it! Take your stand firmly, as a man should. Do not picture your future to her as that of a desolate

wretch, which is untrue, but go into the world, and show yourself worthy of her. Be worthy of yourself! You have talents of a high order. Go, and, in a few years' time, if you choose, you may claim her as your bride, and receive her from her father's hands, with that father's blessing, instead of, as now, stealing her away, carrying sorrow to an old man's heart, and, perhaps, pursued by his curse!"

Charles Waldron hesitated; his better nature was roused. "Is this what you would say, Maria?" he asked.

"It is," was her reply; "go, and may God bless you!"

"One last embrace," he said, and as Esther hesitated, he added, "Do not fear me! I will not take her against her will!"

He pressed her convulsively in his arms, and repeated, "I promise to claim you, in the presence of the world, in four years' time, if I have the right to do so,—or if I fail, we never meet again."

He laid the half-fainting girl in Esther's arms, and, springing into the sleigh, was soon lost to sight.

It was with great difficulty that Esther bore her to the house; but here, Maria made a great effort, that she might reach her room without awaking any one, and succeeded in doing so. And as Esther laid her upon the bed, she fell on her knees, by her side, exclaiming, involuntarily, "Thank God! she is saved!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

A PEEP INTO FUTURITY.

THE morning sun shone brightly into Esther's face, as she woke from her troubled sleep, and glancing at Maria, she was almost frightened to see the pallor of her cheek. She was already awake, and in answer to Esther's inquiries, said that "she had not slept at all."

"You are unable to go down to breakfast," replied Esther; "I will make excuses for you. Try, now, my dear, to sleep a little, for you need rest and quiet."

"Maria is not well this morning," repeated Esther, in answer to the numerous questions which met her, on her entrance of the dining-room. "She did not sleep much last night, and is trying now to make up for the lack of it."

Breakfast was soon over, and they had hardly entered the sitting-room, when a note was handed to Emily, from Charles Waldron, telling her that he was obliged to leave town suddenly, which must be his excuse for not coming to make a parting call.

"I'm really sorry that he has gone," said Virginia, "for he's such a nice, pleasant, social companion."

"We shall certainly miss him a great deal," re-

marked Emily, while Esther went to her chamber to tell Maria that he had left Belfast.

To her great satisfaction, she found her friend sleeping, and returned to the sitting-room.

Emily and Virginia were talking together quite earnestly. "Emily is calling her names!" said Jennie, as Esther re-entered.

"What is she calling you?" asked Esther.

"Oh! a coquette!" replied Jennie. "Now, it isn't true, is it?"

"Emily!" called Mrs. Sidney, "come here a moment!" and she hurried out of the room to obey the summons, while Esther replied: "Since you have asked me such a home question, I must say, that I think you are! And, Jennie," she continued, "allow me to use the freedom of a friend, in telling you, that I think you are cruelly trifling with Edward Sidney and Frederick Somers. It seems to me, that you ought to decide between them, and not keep them both in a state of suspense, as you now do."

"Really, Miss Hastings!" replied Virginia, her eyes flashing fire, and cheeks flushing with anger, "you have given me quite a lecture.—As if I must choose to find a husband, in either Edward Sidney or Frederick Somers! At any rate," she added, "if I do flirt a little, I do not practice my arts upon the betrothed of another, like some others I could name."

"What do you mean?" asked Esther, in her turn indignant.

"Just what I say," replied Virginia. "If the coat fits, take it."

Esther looked at her, in speechless indignation.

"Really, Esther," said Virginia, after a moment's pause, "I wish I had your eyes. You make a pretty good use of them, I confess, but I could do better. I suppose that is a withering glance, of which I have heard so much, though I have never been favored with one, of such power, before. I wonder that I am not annihilated, yet I am, I believe, unscathed. I must be encased in a three-fold coat of armor."

Esther was on the point of replying that she was right, that nothing could penetrate her protection of assurance, but she made no such reply: "I do not know what you mean," she said instead.

"Then, why, my dear, did you fly into such a passion, and blush so deeply, if you were so innocent? No, Miss Esther, with those deep-seeing eyes of yours, you are not unconscious that Mr. Templeton is dead in love with you."

"Virginia!" replied Esther, calmly, "I hope you are jesting; at any rate, I must request you to abstain from such expressions. If your words are in jest, they are unwelcome; if they are serious, they are insulting."

"Esther, my dear," was Jennie's reply, "you should go on to the stage. Your air and manner would do justice to any Tragedy Queen. I have no doubt that you would be a star in a very short time." Then turning to the window, she began humming—"Oh, no! we never mention her," while Esther, half vexed with her, said nothing.

Emily soon entered. "What shall we do with our-

selves to-day?" she asked. "I have just been in to see Maria; she says she feels much better, and is about getting up. What do you say, after she has taken her breakfast, to going to old Mrs. Watson's, and having our fortunes told?"

"That it would be capital sport," said Virginia, while Esther smilingly replied that she should like to go also.

"Very well, then, we will have the horse harnessed, after Maria has breakfasted, and ride there; it is only about a mile from here, and the drive will do Maria good."

They were soon ready, and started on their way; at last, they reached the house—a little low cottage, which, failing to receive any paint from its owner, had assumed, from the hand of Time, a dirty brown hue.

Emily pushed open the outer door, as it was ajar, and stepped in. The entry was unfinished; there were no balusters to the stair-case, and the sides of the place were lathed only. Several water-pails ornamented the entry, over which they very nearly stumbled.

They knocked at the inner door for some time in vain, though they heard heavy footsteps in the next room.

At last the door opened, and a small-framed woman, a little bent by age, stood before them. She was far from prepossessing in her appearance; her complexion sallow and face wrinkled, her hair hung in elf-

locks from under her cap, and her eyes were keen and piercing.

"Wall!" was Mrs. Watson's first salutation, "What under the sun do you stand there, knockin' and knockin', as if you was goin' to tear anybody's house down. When you hear folks round, and they don't come to the door, yon orter go where they be; of course they're busy, and don't want to be called off."

"Can you wait upon us, this morning?" asked Emily.

"I dunno," was the reply, "I hev hed lots of company this mornin'. 'When it rains it alus pours,' and they alus come the wrong time. I hedn't got my bed made nor nothin' done, and I was detarmined to git my bed done, when I heerd you; that's what I was a doin' on when you come. It's most dinner-time now, and my old man 'll be hoppin' mad, ef his dinner haint ready when he gits home. But you might as well come in; you're coldin' my room, keepin' the door open. I don't want to warm all out doors."

The girls obeyed her summons, and wiping the dust out of four chairs with her apron, she offered seats to her company, all the while talking.

"It's alus jist so; I niver knowed it to fail. Folks alus foriver comes the wrong time. Now, last week, I should hev been glad to seen somebody, but here I sot, day after day, and no livin' cretur come nigh me. And to-day and yesterday I was so driv that I didn't actually know whether I was on my head or my heels."

While she was delivering her tirade, Esther looked around the room with some curiosity.

The floor was unpainted, but clean; a bench stood under one window, and a table under the other; a small cooking-stove occupied the centre of the room; behind this was a clothes-line, on which hung several towels, a pair or two of stockings, and an apron. The chairs were of Indian manufacture, with straight backs and basket-work seats; a small closet, or rather a few shelves, covered with dishes, stood opposite the window; by the side of this, upon a water-pail, laid the dough-board and rolling-pin, close to which hung a roller-towel.

While Esther was making observations, Emily was urging the old lady to tell their fortunes.

"You will have plenty of time," she said, and at last Mrs. Watson pulled out her table, wiped it with her apron, which seemed to answer a great many purposes, and going to a bag which hung in the corner, took out an old and much worn pack of cards, and shuffling them, handed them to Virginia to cut in three piles, telling her to wish each time.

Virginia drew her chair to the table and did as she was commanded.

"Wall!" said the old lady, taking her cards up, and laying them, one by one, on the table, in rows. "Wall! You're a gal that hez a great many beaux—you go into a great deal of company, and haint never hed no great trouble. You wisht somethin' about a dark-haired feller, and you'll git your wish; but you'll hev a little trouble gittin' on't. There's a

light complected feller, that bears a good heart for you, but you don't care nothin' about him—your back is turned to him," she said, pointing to the queen of hearts, which was the card she called Virginia. "There's an old man dreadful taken with you," she went on. "He wants you orfully; see, he's standin' on his head, he's in sich a hurry," pointing to the knave of clubs. Cut agin, and I'll tell ye whether you hev him or not."

Virginia did so, and the old lady re-commenced:

"You don't live where you're stayin' now; you're goin' to move soon. There you be; there's good luck round you. This is a good fortin'; you've seen your wust days. There's money round that old feller; he's nearer you than tuthers be this time. Cut agin!"

The third time she announced that there was a letter coming to her. "Good news in it," she said. "You'll be married in six weeks or six months to the old feller. He'll be a good husband to you."

Maria's turn now came, and very nearly the same fortune was in store for her; it was varied, however, by a present, and a journey over the water.

"You won't be married quite so soon as t'other gal, nor you haint got quite so good a fortin', but it's pooty good. There's an old man got a good heart for you; I guess it's your father. There's a light complected feller and a dark complected feller in love with you. You wisht about one on 'em, but I'm afeard, my dear, that you won't git your wish; there's a disappointment near it, but you may git it arter all: there haint no very bad ceards round it. You're goin' to hev a

bit of sickness, you or somebody very near you, p'raps it's your father, but he'll git well again."

She now proceeded to tell Esther's fortune, first filling her tea-kettle, and putting in some potatoes to bake.

"We must hev dinner for all fortins," she said, as she resumed her seat. Esther, she told that she had lost a near friend not long since, which Esther's dress indicated, and at which she expressed no surprise.

"You're a quiet kind of a gal," she said, "and don't meddle with nobody's business but your own. You have seen your wust days; there's good luck in store for you. You are goin' to be married sooner than you think fur; in less than a year. You won't have no greats of a house, but you don't care about show; you'd rather hev one room, and keep it neat and clean. Sally Jenkins was in here last night," she went on, suddenly pausing in the midst of her fortune telling. "She and a real nice-looking feller. Do you know whether she's courted or not?"

Esther did not, as Miss Jenkins was not one of her acquaintances.

"So Peggy Baker is married at last," continued Mrs. Watson, handing the cards to Esther to shuffle. "I alus thought she'd come to, and hev him."

"I never did," said Virginia, very demurely, while her companions looked at her in astonishment.

"Oh! I knowed she would," returned Mrs. Watson. "I see his love-letters. I s'pose I've heerd five hundred read, but his'n beat all. Oh! they made my very blood run cold! so good, passages of scrip-

ture in 'em. 'Oh, Peggy!' says he, 'I love you dearly, I do wisht I could see you; I shall sartin die without you!' Oh, it brought tears to my eyes to hear um. Wall! he'll make her a good husband."

She now proceeded to finish telling Esther's fortune, which was speedily accomplished. Emily declined having her's told; the ninepences were paid, and the girls bade her good-bye, thanking her for her repeated invitations to come again, as she said she hadn't "half time to tell their fortins."

"She is a great curiosity," they repeated, and laughed gaily at the similarity of their fortunes.

CHAPTER XXV.

A TRIAL.

It was night. Maria slept quietly by her side, but Esther tossed restlessly upon her sleepless couch.

The words of Virginia, "Mr. Templeton loves you!" seemed ringing in her ears. "Is it so?" she thought, "and if so, why should my heart bound exultingly at the idea? Have I then given my affections to the betrothed of another?"

She would have banished the unwelcome thoughts, and in a pleasant reverie, pictured to herself her future as the wife of one so noble, good, and generous, as Mr. Templeton.

She hardly thought of Emily at all, but a pang of self-reproach struck her as she reflected on the fate of her friend.

"Shall I then bring wretchedness upon her?" she asked herself, "selfish, heartless being that I am!" She tried now to cheat herself into the belief that it was only as a friend that she regarded him; but the pang that struck her heart, as she thought of him as the husband of another, convinced her of the truth, unwelcome as it was, and she resolved to look it fear-

ture in 'em. 'Oh, Peggy!' says he, 'I love you dearly, I do wisht I could see you; I shall sartin die without you!' Oh, it brought tears to my eyes to hear um. Wall! he'll make her a good husband."

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lessly in the face, and to set herself at once about the task of estranging herself from him.

"I must avoid him," she thought, "for I cannot trust myself in his society. Weak, foolish girl, that I am!"

Bitterly she reproached herself, but at last, having made her resolutions, and marked out her future course, she fell asleep.

For several days following, she adhered to her determination. She excused herself on one plea after another, when Mr. Templeton offered to read to her; and if left alone with him, replied briefly to his remarks, and if possible left him. She noticed that this unusual reserve seemed to give him pain; he appeared surprised, but said nothing; and in the presence of others, she treated him as ever in a calm and friendly manner.

One day Virginia, Emily, and Maria had gone out to take a ride. Esther had declined going, as she had several letters to write, and was busily engaged in so doing, when Mr. Templeton entered.

"I am sorry," she said, in a slightly confused manner, "that the girls have all gone away; I will speak to aunt Mary;" and she arose to do so.

"Stop, Esther!" replied Mr. Templeton, looking at her reproachfully; "I am not at all sorry to have an opportunity to ask, what is the meaning of the reserve with which you treat me? Is it, as I have thought, that you have discovered my feelings towards you, and would chill me, by the expression of your indifference?"

"Mr. Templeton," replied Esther, endeavoring to release her hand, which he held firmly in his grasp, "I am not aware that I have given occasion for any grave charge. I regard you as a friend, and ever shall, as a very kind and highly valued one. I hope to be esteemed by you in the same light."

"Friend!" repeated Mr. Templeton; then suddenly exclaimed, "Do not pretend to misunderstand me, Esther. You do not, or at least you shall not! I am ready fearlessly to avow, that I love you, as I never dreamed that I could love woman, with a devotion such as no one ever can offer you, since I am willing even to be called dishonorable to gain you. And now tell me that I am pledged to another; that all the world will despise me; tell me this, and yet I can bear it. For if these are your words, yet in your heart you will not say so, for I have read your inmost soul, Esther. You love me! I read it in your varying color, in your look, even in the coldness with which you have treated me in everything."

Esther's eyes flashed indignantly—for this manner of triumphantly asserting that she loved him roused her pride—as she replied, "Since you have uttered the words that I would have said, you have spared me the pain of telling one, whom I *have* esteemed indeed, that he is about proving himself unworthy of the high place in my regard that I had given him. And *how* have I then given you occasion to make the bold avowal that I return your love, as you are pleased to call your sentiments towards me? You mistake me, Mr. Templeton, if you think that I regard the solemn

tie which binds you to Emily as a light thing, to be cast off as the whim takes you. If I have been so weak as to forget this it was but for a moment. I have some regard for my honor, if you have none."

"Forgive me," returned Mr. Templeton, when she had ceased speaking, "but hear me," he added, as she turned to leave the room. "Is it then more *honorable*, since you tell me I have forgotten it, to marry Emily, when my whole heart is another's? To make her my wife, in the sight of man, when this is but a solemn mockery in the sight of God! Shall I not do her a deeper wrong, in so doing, than if now, before it is too late, I tell her that I was mistaken in my feelings towards her, that I do not love her as I ought. Tell me, Esther! Forgive my rash and passionate words, and show me what I should do in such trying circumstances. Be my *friend* now, if you will not be more."

Esther was much moved, for a voice in her heart was seconding his words. She hesitated—"But Emily! she loves him so deeply, so devotedly; shall I cause her this great grief?" she thought, and despised herself for her momentary hesitation.

"Mr. Templeton," said she, "you do love Emily! It is only a momentary infatuation which has led you to imagine that you preferred me. You have won her affections, and it is right that you should marry her. You will conquer this fancy for me, and, happy in the consciousness of doing right, and blessed with her love, you will forget me;" and as she pronounced these words, which she felt were to separate her from him forever, her voice faltered.

"Oh, Esther," exclaimed Mr. Templeton, "how can you thus do violence to your nature? Are you not doing yourself a deeper wrong than the fancied one to Emily? For, Esther, you mistake me; calm, cold, and unimpassioned as I may have appeared to you, to others, and even to myself, I see now that there is a depth to my feelings of which I had never dreamed, until my love for you has revealed my secret soul. I thought that I loved Emily! But now I see that I knew not what it was to love. You have taught me this! You have showed me what happiness might be mine, and yet turn from me with cold words of duty, bidding me go on, where every step plunges me deeper into misery! Is it the sincere and upright Esther Hastings who condemns me to a life of hypocrisy?"

Esther trembled and turned pale. Mr. Templeton noticed the impression he had made, and added, "Weigh well what you say! for on your decision hangs, not only my life-long happiness, but that of Emily. Think you that she will not soon perceive that my heart is not hers? and will she not reproach me for the tenfold greater wrong that I do her, in marrying her, than if I had taken the straight-forward course of telling her the truth now? It may cause her a little sorrow at first, but I know her; she has not the depth of heart that you have, Esther."

At the mention of Emily, Esther recovered herself at once. "You do *not* know Emily," she said, "if you think she has not heart. Her very life is in the affections. You are wound into her inmost nature; and if you leave her now, you cast a blight on her

young life. You deceive yourself, if you hope for happiness, when you have rushed on in the path which wild, reckless passion would point out as the true one, heedless of the broken heart of one whom you have vowed to cherish. No, it *is* right for you to marry her, and in the right you will find the only true happiness."

"And shall I cause no sorrow to you, Esther?" asked her companion, in low, tender tones.

She made no reply for a moment, then answered: "You have already caused me pain, by speaking to me as you have done, and I should never have listened to such words from the betrothed of my friend. Such weakness I must expiate by repentance. But you do not inflict on me a life-long grief, as you would on poor Emily."

"Then you will not admit that you love me?" he exclaimed.

"To what purpose do you ask me to do such a wild and foolish thing?" replied Esther. "You have promised to abide by my decision. You have done Emily a great wrong, in gaining her affections, while you have withheld your own. The only remedy in your power is to strive now to give her your whole heart."

"Noble girl!" replied Mr. Templeton, as he looked at her, with ardent admiration. "I will follow your counsels; let me still remain your friend. Forget and forgive my mad folly," he added, taking her hand, almost reverentially, and, bidding her farewell, left her.

Once alone, Esther's assumed fortitude gave way.

She hastened to her chamber, and, fastening her door, flung herself upon her couch, and wept bitterly. Yet she did not regret the course which she had pursued. She looked into the future. Alas! all was a blank there. "Shall I, then," she thought, "because I have met with one heavy blow, sink, crushed beneath it? I, who can counsel others so bravely, shall I, then, at once yield to despair? No! let me now act as I have advised others; let me be up and doing. And have I not, too, been in danger of forgetting the great Creator, while fixing my affection on one of his creatures?"

She arose, and, falling upon her knees by her bedside, prayed fervently to be aided in the path which she felt that she had done right in choosing. As she prayed she grew calmer; and there anew she devoted herself to the cause of Christ.

She had hardly arisen from her position, when a tap at the door was heard. She opened it, and admitted aunt Mary.

"You are not well to-day," said she, fondly smoothing Esther's disordered hair. "Let me bathe your head now, for your eyes show plainly enough that you are suffering from a head-ache."

Esther suffered her to lead her to a seat, for a faintness was coming over her, and she fell back, pale and death-like, in her chair. Aunt Mary, at once dashing cold water upon her, restored her to consciousness.

"My poor child," she whispered, softly, as she bore her to the bed, "what has happened to you?"

"Oh! it is nothing," replied Esther, "or, at least,

nothing that you can help," and tears, which she could not restrain, flowed over her cheeks.

"At least I can sympathize with you, my child," returned Aunt Mary, "and perhaps I have read your coming sorrows, even before you yourself knew them. Do not tremble so, my love. One, who has suffered as I have done, gains a marvellous quickness in seeing the woes of others. Am I not right in thinking that Mr. Templeton loves you?"

Esther buried her face in her hands, and murmured, in the deepest humiliation, "alas, Aunt Mary, I have been so weak and so wicked as to return it."

Miss Sidney pressed her warmly to her heart, and, lying on her motherly bosom in tears and blushes, Esther told her all.

"God bless you, my own noble child!" said Aunt Mary, when she had finished; then, folding her in her warm embrace, added, "your secret is as safe as if you had entrusted it to your mother's keeping."

Several days had passed. Esther had regained her calm cheerfulness of manner, but she felt restless and unhappy. Strive as she might against depression, she could not wholly overcome it. "I must busy myself about something," she resolved, and soon made known her determination to return to Newton.

Emily warmly urged her to prolong her visit, but she had decided and was unmoved. Maria and Virginia, too, said that they had already prolonged their stay longer than they had any idea of doing, and, in the course of a few days, the three friends left together.

Esther had no sooner reached Newton than she an-

nounced her intention of teaching again, and was resolute in her determination, though it was vehemently opposed by both Margaret and her father and mother.

Mr. Wilton, at last, finding that it was of no use to say more to her, obtained for her a situation as assistant in a flourishing boarding-school at Newton, so that Mrs. Wilton might not be left alone, he said.

Employment, she felt, was what she needed, and, engrossed in her duties, she soon felt, as she appeared, like her olden self.

Months slipped rapidly away, and, in the autumn, a letter from Emily announced her approaching union with Mr. Templeton, and requested Esther to be her bridesmaid.

This announcement, though it was what Esther had desired and expected, caused her some sadness, but she reproached herself, and struggled violently to overcome her weakness. In a great measure she succeeded; but she felt that she could not perform the friendly service which Emily asked.

She wrote her kindly and cheerfully, wishing her all happiness, but declining to act as bridesmaid, alleging, as an excuse, her inability to leave her school duties, as, indeed, it would have been very inconvenient.

Long letters from Virginia and Maria soon reached her, giving her glowing descriptions of the wedding. Maria, in a postscript added, that Ned Somers had, at last, been rejected by Virginia, and was about sailing for Europe.

CHAPTER XXVI.

VIRGINIA AT HOME.

THE afternoon sun was shining brightly into a handsomely furnished parlor in Portland, where Mrs. Clifton and Virginia were seated alone together.

"Mother," said Jennie, sauntering up to a mirror, and twisting one of her long curls round her finger, "I must have a new dress for Mrs. Anderson's party."

"Why, Virginia, won't your India muslin do? you have only worn it twice!"

"No ma'am," emphatically replied Virginia, "I'm not going to be known, like Pauline Vernet, by my dress, and hear it whispered, 'here comes Virginia Clifton with that everlasting India muslin.'"

"Well, then! I suppose you must have one. What shall it be? A pink tarleton?"

"Tarleton! no, indeed!" repeated Virginia scornfully. "I'm tired to death of such dresses! At every party, you meet tarletons flounced, or with double skirt, or trimmed in some such way, at every step. No, mother, I'm not going to be dressed in any such common affair."

"What do you want, then?" asked her mother.

"Oh! a lovely white silk, looped up with rosebuds, and trimmed with blond or Valenciennes lace."

"White silk!" ejaculated Mrs. Clifton, in her turn astonished.

"Oh! pink will do as well, if you prefer," said Virginia. "In fact, perhaps pink would be more becoming."

"Why, my child, you are crazy! Think how expensive it would be, and you would never wear it more than twice, either."

"I don't care," persisted Virginia, "but one of two things is certain,—either I have the dress, or I won't go one step to the party."

"And what excuse will you make to Mr. Norton, who has engaged to go with you to Mrs. Anderson's?"

"I leave that to you, mother. You may say I'm sick, or anything else you choose; and he may go with Fan Currier,—she's dying to get him in her train. I'm sure I don't care who he's tacked to, if I only get clear of him. I don't know, on the whole, but it will be the best way, to withdraw a while from the field, and let Fan take him off my hands."

"You talk very foolishly, Jennie," said her mother,—"Norton was the only one of her daughter's many suitors, whom she thought it best to secure, as he was regarded as a very eligible match,—and you treat Mr. Norton very improperly."

"I'll treat him worse than ever," replied Jennie, "if I can't go to the party. I'll see if I can't provoke him, if he has any spirit in him. Oh! I do hate a man that's so like a whipped spaniel; the more you abuse him, the more ready is he to lick your hand!"

"Virginia Clifton! stop, this moment!" exclaimed

her mother, with heightened color and flashing eyes, "Dare to behave as you have proposed, and I will renounce you forever. You may form your own plans, and carry them out as you choose; you shall have no assistance from me."

Virginia quailed a little, for she did not like to brave her mother in her occasional fits of passion, but said, "Well, mother, I'll make a bargain with you. Get me the dress, and I will be as polite as possible to the ancient gentleman, whom you have selected for my cavalier; but, if you do not, I have enough of my mother in me, to do as I have told you."

"I will see," replied Mrs. Clifton, "but I hate to ask your father. Nothing makes him so angry as to ask him for money."

"I leave you to manage that," said her daughter. "But you must ask him to-night, for there are only two days before the party."

Mr. Clifton soon after entered. He was a tall, and fine-looking man, but he looked care-worn and wearied, and threw himself languidly down in a chair, without speaking.

"Does your head ache?" asked his wife, in a low voice.

"Yes," he replied, shortly, and subsided into silence.

Mrs. Clifton looked, appealingly, towards Virginia, who had withdrawn to a window, where she stood, carelessly playing with one of the curtain tassels.

"Just as you choose, mother," she said aloud, in answer to her mother's look.

Mrs. Clifton sighed, and then, approaching her husband, said, "Jennie is invited to the Andersons' to a party."

"Well, what of it?" replied Mr. Clifton, crustily.

"She wants a new dress," continued her mother.

"A new dress!" he repeated, "and where does she expect to get it? How much money will she need?"

"Certainly, seventy-five or a hundred dollars," said his wife.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Clifton, in violent anger, "and where am I to raise it? Here I am, harrassed to death, my notes falling due, and nothing coming in to pay them with. Dunned by everybody for money, to pay bills that your foolish extravagance has run up, at every store in town, and when I come home, tired and worn out with trying to keep myself and you above water, you too, begin to teaze me for money! Oh! you are like the daughters of the horse-leech, crying 'Give! give!'"

"Then, I suppose," said his wife, "you will not let Jennie go to the party!"

"She may go, for all that I care," he replied, harshly.

"But you do not want her to look shabby?" persisted Mrs. Clifton.

"Woman! woman! you will drive me crazy!" exclaimed her husband. "I tell you, failure, dishonor and beggary are staring me in the face, and is this a time to talk to me of ball dresses? I have struggled like a drowning wretch for years past, but I cannot do it much longer. I must sink! You and poor Jen-

nie," he said, his voice softening, "may thank your stars, that you have bread to eat; for if I should die, God knows what would become of you!"

"Oh, father!" exclaimed Virginia, coming to his side, and fondly embracing him, "I will not add to your troubles! I do not want the dress! Oh! if I could only help you, in some way!"

"Poor child! and what can you do?" he said gently.

"Not much," she replied, bitterly. Oh! if I were only a man! How much I would do for you! But it is of no use telling. What we can do now, is to give up this house, sell this expensive furniture, and live within our means. It would be, perhaps, a little mortifying, but it is false pride alone that would prevent. I am willing to do anything to relieve you!"

"God bless you, my child!" said her father, releasing himself from her embrace, and leaving the room.

"Oh! what a curse is poverty!" exclaimed Mrs. Clifton, throwing herself back in her easy chair, and clasping her jewelled hands.

Virginia glanced, with a bitter smile, upon the rich and costly furniture of the room, upon her mother's and her own rich dress, and replied: "Say, rather, what a curse is false pride, and that contemptible fear of what the world will say, that leads us to live beyond our means."

Mrs. Clifton did not heed this remark, but went on—"You see, now, Virginia, what I have to endure! This is only one, of a thousand similar scenes, that

your father gets up, whenever I say anything about money. Oh, my child! never marry a poor man!"

"If I did," retorted Virginia, "I would accommodate myself to his circumstances; not drive him to despair, in trying to gratify my whims."

"You deceive yourself," replied Mrs. Clifton. "With your expensive habits, what you would call economy, would drive a poor man mad."

"It is unnecessary to dispute about that," returned Virginia, "but at least I can do something, if it is but little, to help father. I will support myself! I will teach!"

"Never! Neither your father nor I would ever allow it," replied her mother. "If you are so anxious to help him, do something far better, marry Mr. Norton."

Before Virginia could reply, her father re-entered.

"There," said he, handing her a roll of bills, "take this and get your dress!"

"But, father," began Virginia.

"Do not say anything," interrupted Mr. Clifton. "I have frightened you. Matters are not quite so bad as I represented them."

As she left the room, he said to his wife, "She may as well take what I can give her now. I don't know how much longer I can stagger under my business. This is but a drop in the ocean, and if I deny her request, it will help neither my creditors nor myself."

"But if she should marry Mr. Norton," began his wife.

"Jane!" replied her husband, sternly; "I have violated my *sense* of what is right, often enough, God knows! I can hardly believe that I am the same man I once *was*! But I will never sell my child—she shall never be forced into a marriage. Let her do as she *chooses*"—and he paced hurriedly up and down the parlors.

"But she *shall choose* to become Mrs. Norton," muttered Mrs. Clifton between her closed teeth; then rising, she followed Virginia to her chamber.

"I will not *get* the dress," said Jennie, as her mother entered, "*and* I am sorry enough to have added a feather to father's load of troubles."

"Pshaw, Jennie!" replied her mother; "you don't know your father so well as I do. He has been talking these twenty years, in the same way. He would get along well *enough*, if he only had a little assistance. A lift from a son-in-law would set him on his feet at once, *and* relieve him from this pressure of business; which, to own the truth, I sometimes fear will really make him insane!"

Virginia grew pale!—Insanity! It chilled her very blood. She idolized her father, and, for the moment, thought no sacrifice too great to save him.

Her mother read her thoughts, and thinking she had said enough, left the room, taking with her the bills which Virginia had thrown carelessly on the bureau, for she *was* resolved that her daughter should look more beautiful, at the coming party, than any of the rival belles, who were candidates for the hand of the wealthy Mr. Norton.

CHAPTER XXVII.

TWO LIFE-PATHS, AND THE CHOICE.

VIRGINIA reclined musingly upon a sofa, in the parlor of her father's house. She was lying with her eyes half closed, and a pleasant smile parted her lips. A letter, which she had been reading, she held in her hand, and ever and anon she glanced at its pages. So absorbed was she in her reverie, that she hardly noticed the entrance of the stately and handsomely-dressed woman, who approached her, and drawing a chair to her side, asked her "what she was dreaming about?"

"I was thinking of the future, mother," she replied. "I believe this letter was the beginning of my dream, and the end,—oh, I don't dare to tell you the end," she added, smiling, as she gave the letter to her mother.

"The end of all day-dreams, I suppose," replied Mrs. Clifton, as she took the letter; "they usually share the same fate—an airy nothing, which melts 'into thin air;' 'the baseless fabric of these visions leave not a wreck behind.'"

"Well," she continued, when she had finished the perusal of the letter which her daughter had given

her, while Virginia had been anxiously watching her features, endeavoring to read her opinions, but without success—"well, Jennie, let me read, now, the reply to this eloquent gentleman's letter. He has really a very poetical name—Edward Sidney. Where is your reply? I suppose it is a rejection, and that you have consigned him, like so many more of your admirers, to that sad state, where life is a blank, &c. &c., until they forget their woes, in a new love affair—

'Even as one heat, another heat expels,
Or as one nail, by strength, drives out another,
So the remembrance of their former love
Is by a nearer object quite forgotten.'

But your reply, my dear?"

"I have not yet written one," replied Virginia; "but, mother," she added, speaking with difficulty, and blushing deeply, "I had not determined to reject him."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Clifton, coolly, looking at her daughter with a searching glance, "and why not, pray? I do not regard him as a very eligible match. Why not?" she repeated.

"Because, mother," answered Jennie, "I do really love him, and though he is not rich, nor will he probably ever be, as he himself says, yet I know I should be happy with him. For oh, mother, wealth is not always happiness. He is so noble, so good,—he will check all my faults, and I feel sure that under his direction, I shall be a more noble and true woman."

"Can he assist your father?" asked her mother coldly.

"I know that he would," replied Virginia, enthusiastically; "he would make every exertion in his power, for he is the most unselfish, generous man in the world."

"Have you finished," returned Mrs. Clifton, as Virginia paused. "Because I must say that I am surprised. That you, a sensible girl, should talk in this way is perfectly incomprehensible. But this love, as they call it, what fools it makes of all the world! What do you think a paltry sea-captain's pay would do, towards relieving your father? Nothing! It would be swallowed up, like a grain of sand in the sea; but setting aside this consideration; think of yourself, with beauty, talents, accomplishments, all wasted on a common sailor; and some half-civilized villagers your only society. Picture yourself, Virginia, as the wife of such a man, whose frequent absence must be employed by you in sewing, or quietly spending a few afternoons with his mother. A man who would be forever finding fault with your lively manners, for you would be often exciting his jealousy by your attractiveness, and your coquetry; for, Miss Jennie, though your mother, I can see that you *are* a coquette, and a few words, which tie you for life to any man, will not change your character. You will sigh for society—you will brook no restraint, and though *you* may imagine that you will find perfect happiness in a union with Edward Sidney, *I* see only a brief dream, to be followed by a bitter waking, and long years of repentance. See now,

how different will be your future as the wife of Mr. Norton."

Virginia shuddered. "Oh mother!" she exclaimed involuntarily, "Do not name him!"

"Don't be so silly!" retorted her mother. "Let me tell you, that by a marriage with him, you step at once into a sphere to which you are suited—a leader of fashion. You can thus free your father from all his harrassing cares! The wife of an elderly man, proud of the beauty and charms of his young bride, you can do with him what you will, that is, if you manage him right, and I have no fear of you there. You know very well, Virginia, what it is to be struggling through a lifetime with poverty, or you know enough at least to keep you from falling into the delusion of 'love in a cottage.' It may do very well now for a few years, but look farther. See yourself, in one case, a pale, feeble woman, worn out and harrassed by the petty cares of life, careworn and every vestige of beauty gone, most probably bereft of that love for which you have braved all this; for it is true enough, that when 'poverty comes in at the door, love flies out at the window;' or, in the other case, the same years have but added to your beauty. You will be still one of the brightest ornaments of society, and happy in doing right and in following the advice of your mother, whose interest and yours are one. Choose now, my dear Jennie," said her mother. Look at it well, and decide."

"Leave me, mother," said her daughter, in a low voice. "To-morrow —"

"No, Jennie, decide *now*. Which shall it be, the wife, or rather drudge of Edward Sidney, or the elegant Mrs. Norton? Remember, too," she added impressively, "that your father stands or falls on your decision, though I have said but little about that, and these are not the times when children are ready to suffer for parents. You know all, and I need not repeat what you already know so well."

Virginia made no reply for some time. At last she looked up from the sofa, where she had buried her face in her hands.

"I have decided," she said. "I will do as you wish!"

"Spoken like my own daughter," replied her mother, while Jennie, who had hoped even against hope, that her mother would not compel her to make such a sacrifice, fell back, pale and fainting, upon the sofa.

No gleam of pity softened Mrs. Clifton's eye, as she looked on her child; she merely remarked, as she applied some restoratives, "You should learn to control yourself! Mr. Norton is to receive his answer from me, and he will be here to see you to-night. Remember! no foolish shrinkings. You have chosen him of your own free will!"

"Oh, mother!" groaned Virginia, "This is more than I can bear! I cannot, will not see him to-night!"

Mrs. Clifton looked at her, and saw that she did indeed appear too feeble to see any one.

"Well, then," she answered, "I will excuse you to him for this time."

A mute look of gratitude was her only reply.

"And this letter, Virginia? Will you answer it, or shall I?"

"I cannot," replied her daughter.

"Very well! I will do it," said Mrs. Clifton. Then taking Jennie's hand, continued, "You had better go to your room and lie down a while."

Virginia complied with her mother's advice, and as she left the room, Mrs. Clifton looked after her, murmuring, "It is for her good."

Alone in her chamber, Virginia thought of all that had passed. It seemed almost like a dream, that she had refused the man she loved, and was to become the wife of another; but as her thoughts gained form, she began to agree with her mother. She had seen too long the struggle to keep up appearances, which had galled her mother's proud spirit, had seen too many of the shifts to which poverty had driven her, to wish for a similar life. The thought, too, that she had saved her father, added strength to her resolution. By degrees she began to grow reconciled to the idea of her wealthy lover, and she knew that he must have no idea that she was his unwillingly, if she would retain that power which she knew she possessed over him.

Resolutely, then, she determined that she would go on in the path she had chosen. The crisis in Virginia's fate had come! Henceforward no weak regrets should hinder her from walking steadily forward in

her chosen way. When once she had fully decided, she lay exhausted awhile, then at last fell asleep.

Her mother found her sleeping when she entered her chamber, and pressed a kiss upon her brow, satisfied that the true happiness of her child was secured to her. "She shall never suffer what I have borne so long—the sting of poverty," she murmured. "Her proud spirit shall not be broken, nor her life be made miserable, by the meannesses to which want compels its victims. My darling child!" she uttered audibly, as she kissed her again fondly, and stole quietly from the room.

It was quite late when Virginia awoke from her sleep. She rose hastily and went into the parlor. Her father was slowly walking the floor.

"Is it true, my child, as your mother tells me, that you have, of *your own free will*, consented to marry Mr. Norton?" he asked, approaching her, and taking her hand.

"It is true!" replied Virginia, calmly.

"God bless you, my love!" returned Mr. Clifton, "and may you be happy!"

"He shall never know," thought Virginia, "that I make a sacrifice for him, and indeed I do it willingly, though he is too noble to allow it, if he knew all."

"And when is the marriage to take place?" asked Mr. Clifton.

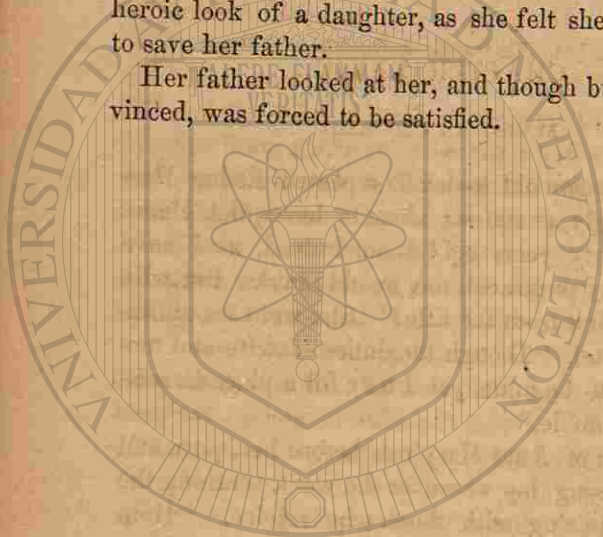
"As soon as possible," she replied briefly, and going to the piano, began playing a lively air.

"You have not deceived me, Jane?" said Mr.

Clifton, almost sternly, to his wife, who was at the opposite side of the room.

"Does she look like a miserable victim?" asked his wife, glancing at her child, who wore the excited and heroic look of a daughter, as she felt she was, about to save her father.

Her father looked at her, and though but half convinced, was forced to be satisfied.



UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE LEÓN

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

ALMOST AN OLD MAID.

"THIRTY years old to-day!" repeated Esther Hastings, musingly, as she sat alone in her quiet chamber. "Thirty years old! I am indeed, as I have overheard my pupils call me, an old maid. But why should I shrink from the title?" She went on, thinking half aloud, "Though the duties of wife and mother may not be mine, yet I may fill a place in society equally noble."

The vision of Aunt Mary rose before her, pure and holy, dispensing joy wherever she went, soothing the sad, and rejoicing with those who rejoice. "Help me, oh Father!" she murmured, "to take cheerfully, like her, the path destined for me, that when death comes, I may receive the welcome, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

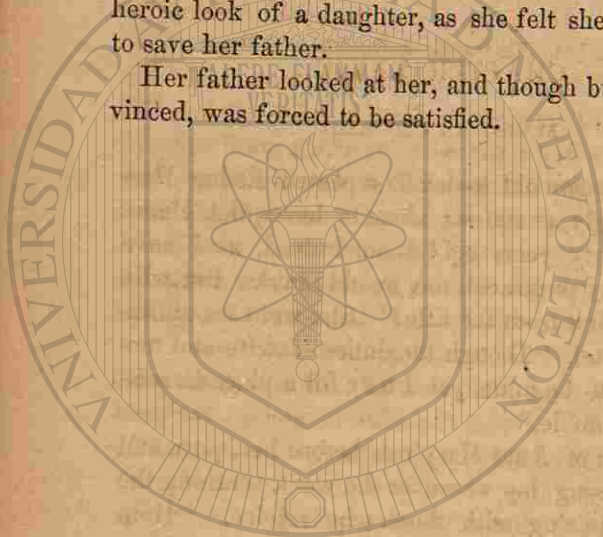
She rose from her seat, by the open window, and standing before the mirror, began to arrange her abundant brown hair, which the wind had tossed, somewhat rudely displacing it.

Time had not made any ravages on Esther's smooth cheek; it had but added beauty to her noble and cheerful countenance. Decision, tempered by gen-

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teness, shone in her quiet smile, and she turned away, half smiling, as she found no old-maidish signs, after close scrutiny.

A tap at the door, and little Emma, Margaret's oldest child, a sweet little girl of eight summers, handed her a letter and a little box, on opening which she found a golden locket, containing the daguerreotypes of Emma and her little brother Herbert.

"My birthday present to you, dear aunt Esther," said Emma, as she received many a warm embrace from her aunt.

Esther now seated herself to read her letter; it was from Maria.

"I was thinking of you, this evening, my dear Esther," it read, "and thought, that since my heart was with you, my pen should make it known to you; for I feared that you were not spiritual enough to feel its presence, or at least to interpret its language, without assistance. It is the anniversary of my wedding-day, my friend; and as I sat here alone (for little Charlie has gone to bed, and his father is attending a public temperance meeting) I thought of the time of my happy deliverance in the hour of temptation, when you, dearest Esther, were my good angel. Tears, but blissful ones, fill my eyes, as I contrast that hour with the happy one when Charles, proud and triumphant, claimed me as his wife. How different now the confidence that I repose in him, from the trembling fear which I should have felt, though I would hardly own it to myself, with which I should have placed my hap-

piness in his keeping. And how different my feelings in that hour when my father gave me, with his blessing, to my husband, from those when I seemed to hear his curse, and to see the look of sad reproach and betrayed confidence with which he regarded me. Charles, too, has never ceased to thank you, for so clearly placing the right before him, and I know often reëchoes my fervent 'God bless you!' Oh, Esther my heart is full to overflowing, when I see the paternal love which my father lavishes upon Charles, and the respectful tenderness which he gives in return.

"But enough of myself, for I forget that I may weary you. You ask me, 'What of Virginia?' I meet her but seldom, as she is very much in society, and I remain as I ever was, a stay-at-home body. We meet occasionally at parties, where Virginia is always radiant as ever, her gay laugh as musical, and her flashes of wit as brilliant, as in her palmiest days. She is, as she always was, extremely fascinating. Her husband idolizes her, and she seems perfectly happy. I said that I saw her but seldom; but she came here a few days ago. I had Charlie in my arms, the dear little fellow, and Virginia took him, caressing him fondly. As she gave him back to me she sighed, saying, 'I almost envy you your treasure.' You know she is childless; her only child died when only a year old. Poor Virginia! thought I, there is one bitter drop in your cup of happiness; I hope not enough to destroy its entire sweetness.

"I suppose you have heard that Mr. Templeton has returned from Europe. Poor Emily! she is buried in

a foreign land. The sunny skies of Italy, where she sought health again, shine on her grave. Mr. Templeton has brought home his two children; poor little motherless things, how I pity them. I clasped little Charlie close to my heart, when I heard of Emily's death, and felt, in some sort, the agony of her parting moments, from the pang that struck me, as I thought of my own dear child left thus desolate.

"I had a call last week from Captain Sidney and his wife. She is a very lovely woman; that is, lovely in manners and disposition, though she is quite plain. Her delicate health is, I presume, the cause of the premature decay of her beauty. I am afraid poor Captain Sidney will not have her long; he seems to watch over her with the most ardent devotion.

"But I hear my husband's step; so good-bye for to-night, and may God bless you, is the prayer of your friend,
 MARIA WALDRON."

A postscript, in a firm, manly hand, was added by Charles, urging her to visit them, and sending his love, which he said his wife had strangely forgotten to enclose.

With a light and happy heart, Esther hastened along to her school that morning; and never had life seemed more beautiful, or full of promise, than on the morning that ushered her into the era of old maidenhood.

"You seem very happy, my child," said Mrs. Wilton, looking at Esther's calm face, as she sat upon the piazza that surrounded her adopted father's house,

while the beams of the setting sun shed a glow over the landscape.

"Yes," replied Margaret, who sat near, her boy leaning upon her knee; "I think Esther has the philosopher's stone, which transmutes everything into gold. I wish you would give me your wonderful secret."

"I can, very easily," answered Esther, as she smoothed the curls of her little niece Emma, who sat by her side. "It is the simple thing of faith in God, trusting his love, and seeing his hand in every event of life, whether glad or sorrowful. Would that you, dear Margaret, were a partaker of my joys."

"You do have a wonderful facility in pressing everything into the service of enforcing your peculiar views," replied Margaret, with a smile; though her lip quivered, and she turned away to conceal the tears which rose to her eyes.

"There's father!" cried out Herbert; and Margaret hastened down the shaded walk to meet her husband, accompanied by her children.

Esther and Mrs. Wilton looked with fond affection upon the noble pair, as they came slowly up the winding road; Horace McIntyre's arm encircling his beautiful wife, while the children, skipping playfully along, talked of the events of the day.

"One thing only thou lackest," thought Esther, and her heart rose in prayer, that this greatest gift might be bestowed on her loved ones.

Mr. Wilton was soon seen hurrying up the same road, the same ever busy, restless look in his fine eyes,

and on his wrinkled brow. Ten years had made but little change in the hurried, energetic business man, neither had Time laid his hand heavily on the invalid, Mrs. Wilton; but her step was slower, her thin and wasted form thinner, and she was passing away, though, so gradually did she draw nearer to the spirit land, that the anxious eyes of affection scarce heeded it.

A few days passed much as usual. Horace had nearly finished the business which had brought him to Newton, and their family were soon to return to their quiet home in Vermont.

"A letter for you, my dear," said Mr. Wilton, as he came up to Esther, tossing one into her lap.

She was sitting alone in the large sitting-room, and, approaching the window, read it by the dim twilight.

Mr. Wilton had left the room, and it was fortunate for Esther, for tears, which she could not restrain, fell on the open letter. It was from Mr. Templeton, asking her to become his wife. The manly, ardent words brought so near to her the presence of her noble friend, that it seemed as if she heard his deep voice, repeating words which fell on her heart like dew. She calmed herself, and, ordering lights to the library, replied to him, bidding him come to her.

Many were the congratulations which she received from her friends, when her engagement was made known.

Mr. Templeton soon answered her summons, and urged no delay in their approaching nuptials; and not many weeks had passed, when Esther resigned her

place as teacher, for the narrower but delightful sphere of home.

Aunt Mary's sweet face and warm welcome met her in her new abode; for she said she did not wish to enter a dreary and desolate home.

Flowers, the inseparable companions of aunt Mary, shed their fragrance in every room of her dwelling; and the children threw their arms around their new mother's neck, and pressed their dewy lips to hers, with no horror of step-mothers before their eyes.

Aunt Mary did not tarry long; for, though her mother slept long since in her narrow resting-place, she was as much needed as ever in her brother's home; but the sunshine which she always bore with her seemed to linger even after her good-bye was spoken: and as Esther, the night after her departure, stole quietly into the sleeping-room of her children, where the cool evening breeze tossed the hair of the sleepers, she fell on her knees by their bedside, praying for guidance from on high, to so lead them that they might meet their angel-mother in heaven.

"My cup of happiness is full," she murmured; "help me, oh Father, never to forget from whose hand I receive it."

THE END.

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