

left the village, that Margery's husband had left her and that she was letting lodging rooms to support herself."

And the best thing we could hope has come about from their meeting, for we have secured a pleasant home with an old friend.

Margery lives far away from here, on quite the other side of the city, in a pleasant old house, of which she has the whole. Her husband a worthless drunkard has deserted her, after making her endure much suffering, and she supports herself very comfortably by letting out the rooms of her house, all the front of it, comprising nine or ten rooms, (for it is an old fashioned mansion built when land was plenty and is a double house, with large airy halls running through it,) all of this part is rented out as offices.

"But the back-building is cut up into five or six of the most comical looking little rooms, you ever saw and is entirely vacant," says Stuart.

"Yes, and the best of it is, it has not a particle of connection with the front part, save by one door, which you reach after many twists, and turns, through a small dark entry, which leads from the immense oaken stair-way in the front, you need never go that way at all for there is the nicest way through the garden to the side street," declares Lela whom the idea of thus being able to seclude ourselves from observation rather pleases.

"And then mamma," broke in Cora, who had been one of the party of inspection, "and then, there is a splendid great garden, with a high stone wall all round it, and a summer-house in the centre, and it reaches away back, not the summer-house, but the yard you know, to a little street, and Elm street lies at the side of it. And there are all sorts of nice fruit trees in it, and we can make a splendid garden in the summer, for it will be all our own, because the windows that look out on it are never opened, have not been for so many years indeed that the grape-vines of which there are a dozen, have grown thickly over them, so you could not get the shutters open if you were to try ever so hard. They get their light in those rooms from the side street on the east, and a little side yard on the west, for the house stands all alone. And the great hall door at the back has been barricaded for ages, Margery says, and has shelves built across it on the inside. So you see nobody can have this splendid

old garden but us, and we can work and play in it and climb trees and all sorts of things, and no horrid old men can be peeping at us at all, I think it is grand."

"Especially the climbing trees," says Stuart laughing.

"Oh I dare say you will be glad enough to climb them next summer, when they are hanging full of all kinds of good fruit, looking for all the world as though they were saying, 'come and eat me,' and went I!"

And from Cora's wild talk, and Nora and Stuart's more reliable accounts I think it will be a happy exchange.

"So to-morrow I'll jist give them rooms a taring down washing, and you 'rite a letter for Ally to send on them ar things, and by the first of May we'll be all fixed the best kind," says Milly.

So now Marion and I work early and late with thankful hearts trying to finish the work we have on hand, for of course we will not be able to take any more from here, when we move so far away.

The children are wild with delight at the idea of the garden, which Cora paints to them so gloriously.

"Not because it is pretty at all, for it is barren and grey, but because it is so immense, and will be a place to run in and breathe fresh air, whenever we like," she says.

But still they are in a perplexed state of mind as to whether it is right to be very glad, over what is to take them away from kind Mrs. MacKay.

CHAPTER XI.

MARCH 25.

WE have been settled nearly one whole week—have bidden good-bye to Mrs. MacKay, Marion and Stuart going to Jane's wedding for a while.

Then, while Marion and I still worked steadily finishing shirts, Milly with the aid of all the rest, unpacked, cleaned and put in their places, the furniture which Allison forwarded.

And then, when all was ready we had such a glad home-coming—tears and smiles followed each other closely, but they were tears of—“Joy which never hurts one at-all,” quoted Cora.

And I am fain to confess now when there is a remedy for the evil, how often it has given me the heart-ache to know my children were pining and fading, in our close, uncomfortable quarters.

I could see the color becoming fainter and fainter, in their faces, and that grave quiet look upon brow and eye, which seems like the shadow of poverty, and ever follows her very closely. That same grave hopeless kind of drooping of the whole figure, which one so often sees in children brought up in the lanes and alleys of great cities—a want of sunshine.

Thank God we are where we have plenty of fresh air, and where the beams of the sun can shine full and free upon us, and not creep in once in a while, in slender straggling beams, as though it only came to mock us by a reminder of how very bright it shone elsewhere.

This gradual fading away was more entirely true of Marion and Cora, than the others. Of the latter because she needed the sunshine as verily as the flowers do. Although she was merry and saucy the livelong day: for a long while I have felt as though her gay talk was from mere force of habit, and then her smiles were fewer than they once were.

Dear child the old weed-grown garden, will be a very good thing for her. For the forest has been her home and the green lawn her play-ground almost all her life, and the birds and flowers her companions, and the winds which swung her in the tall trees, or blew her curls over her eyes when she ran races with it, the play-fellow she loved best.

Indeed Walter's pet name for her was always “Birdie.”

And Marion has had so much of the care of our lives upon her, although I have striven very earnestly that it should not be so, yet she seems to know by intuition all that troubles me. I could not bear to have my darling's life so saddened and still I could not help it.

She has kept so smilingly cheerful a face all day, and at night I have been so wearied, that of late I have forgotten to watch her as I ought, but now as I write she is stretched upon the lounge, every limb relaxed and her whole figure having a look of utter weariness about it, that it breaks my

heart to see. And as the rays of my lamp fall upon her face it looks so changed, so very pale!

Now that she is unconscious of mamma's gaze, the smiles are all gone. There is a grave wearied look resting upon the brow—the mouth has a thoughtful exhausted look in the lines that are drawn round it, and the lips are compressed as if in pain.

She lies in a deep sleep, with her little hands clasped lightly over her breast, and it seems almost as if death had stolen in while we sat here, and when I did not know it stolen my darling away. It can not be, God will not so crush me!

I have carried her like a little child and laid her upon her bed, and so deep is her sleep she scarcely was disturbed.

Leanore has never uttered a complaint since that first night, but I think I could better bear her bitter words than see the tightly closed lips and know she does not complain because she has vowed she will not.

She has the stern proud will which seems to belong like an heir-loom to the Percy blood, and she will endure the worst henceforth in silence.

But her cheek grows white, and her eyes larger and more intensely black, and almost startle you now they have lost the dove-like look which was the one thing in her like Marion, although even that was so utterly different.

The mild hazel light of the one told of a meek spirit within, while the other's only looked lovingly upon those they loved.

Now they have a defiant haughty look which is not right. But I know if we can once get her to sing as of old, all will be right. I did not think the saddest thing would have power to still my Leanore's voice, we used to say her father and I—

“If our queen could not sing she would pine and die,” but now she never of her own accord sings one note.

I wonder whether the new comforts and the pleasantness of this old house will not win her back to gentleness once more.

It is a queer old rambling house with odd gable ends in which are perched quizzical little three-cornered rooms, there are six of them surrounding or rather jutting off from the one large room of our establishment. With the front of the house we have nothing to do.

Our own part is in the back building, and from the garden which is on every, or at least three sides of it, it presents a strange appearance looking as though it was running off from the square solid front building, which stands frowning upon its oddity.

On the front stairway you are obliged to push away a pannel in the oaked wall before you know there is any getting into the back building, this leads into the dark crooked entry of which Lela spoke, and this we mean to keep always closed.

The room you enter from this entry is our one large room, and is a low ceilinged hard-finished wall, painted what was once rose-colour, but is very faint now a days.

This room looks gay as possible filled with the pretty furniture which I took such pains to choose long ago, for my poor old Fenton.

The covers are chintz decked out with moss rose buds and green leaves, and the carpet is a beautiful ruby with green acorn cups all over it, and Walter declared the day we bought it, laughing at me,

“Such a treasure of a carpet never was seen before, for it suited everything else so exactly that we had no difficulty choosing the furniture or curtains after we once lit upon it.”

And the best of it is that as the rooms it was purchased for, are large, this carpet covers nicely every one of our apartments, save one, and that we mean for kitchen and dining room, because it is almost as large as our sitting room, and goes the whole length of all the rest, at the back of the house, very long and very narrow. We are getting quite grand with so many rooms, if they are of the most miniature size. Then we have upon the walls our two pictures.

Our pink window-shades with neat mull veils, cast over all a pleasant hue which is “*colour de rose*.”

On the mantel shelf are some pretty statuettes and a set of chess-men, upon the little stand between the windows a set of books in rare old English bindings, they are the writings of four poets in their original tongues, Tasso, Dante, Goethe and Schiller, hanging beside them is Lela's guitar. All of these which are now our only ornaments, were the last gifts of papa “to his dearest children,” given the last time he came home from Washington,—to return never more! this was why we kept them.

But the telling o'er these things, makes me forget my good resolution to put away the past, and go bravely on.

Oh they are such welcome holds upon departed happiness, that spite of my best endeavors, they spread open wide the flood-gates of memory, and cause a mighty surging wave from the by-gone to sweep ruthlessly over me.—

There are six three-cornered rooms all of them surrounding this larger one, and all but two opening directly into it. To get to some of them you mount a couple of steps, to get to others, you descend two or three equally crooked ones.

One, looks as though in the olden time when this house was the residence of some lordly owner, it had been used as the place where the huntsmen's instruments were kept.

One opposite, must have been my lady's pantry, where her good things were stored away. This room, fixed with some of our third-story attic furniture and a bit of our bright carpet, is the home of Marion and one of her little sisters. Stuart and Howard have the other. Then in a rather larger room, which has poor Fenton's furniture, a cottage set, (and so pretty,) I and baby and another of the little ones sleep. Lela and Cora have their room one step down out of mine, and Milly has made a trade of our wardrobe for which we had no room, and gotten instead a nice iron bedstead for them, Milly and all our luggage are stowed away in a loft over head.

So that spite of our large family and little rooms, we have still two to spare, but no matter, better too much than too little. We are so comfortable, we can scarcely be grateful enough for so much mercy.

At every window there is a small verandah, which, Cora says, exultantly,

“Shall be so full of beautiful flowers in the summer.” From these we have a full view of the garden which is really immense. It was a matter of exceeding surprise to me, how it was possible for this old house to have stood untouched save by the finger of time, which has turned it grey and mossy, in the heart of a great city, where land is sold by the foot, at such vast amounts. But Margery says,

“It is a suit in chancery, and likely to be for the next hundred years, it is said. And as nobody can claim it legally, no one is authorized to ask rent for it.”

And so, some of the lawyers or judges who have it in hand rent it to Margery for a merely nominal sum.

Thus the old country mansion with its moss grown stones and solemn grand old garden, stands the sole memento of a forgotten age.

At the very entrance, at each side of the great hall door, there are two very small rooms, which I suppose in the old time were the waiting rooms of the house. One of these Margery tells us,

"Is rented to a doctor, and the other one I have myself, because it is within call of every one, though it is so small."

Thus we are fixed most comfortably we trust for many years. We have now only to be anxious for work with which to support all this *style*.

MARCH 28.

My fears for Marion were not entirely unnecessary, she is indeed quite sick, paying the penalty of her unnatural life for the last few months, now when a relaxing of labors and strivings has come. It seems to be nothing alarming, only that entire prostration of the nervous system which is often the result of long continued and unusual exertion.

Darling, she looks the fairest thing on earth to me, as she lies with her hands meekly folded on her breast. We hope very careful nursing will soon restore her.

The rest are all very well, Stuart is already much improved, and the children have the wildest of romps in the dear old garden.

"The trees are all fruit and the vines are all grape, so we will have lots of good things in summer time," prophesies Howard.

Poor Margery's ill health is a sad sorrow to us all, and the requisite cleaning and keeping in order the various rooms of which she has charge, is almost more than she is able to endure.

Poor girl I wish she could go home to the village, but this she is unwilling to do.

"I do not want to see my old companions and home, until I go back to die," she says.

It makes my heart ache to see my pretty village belle,

the "country beauty" they used to call her, so sadly broken down. Oh it is a sad thing to be a drunkard's wife, and must wear the heart out of one, especially if it is the elected of our early love, who has grown to be that loathsome thing.

Milly is a very fairy, although not of the Titania order, and keeps us in a state of wonderment as to where her resources come from, she always was a famous manager, but now I know, although it would break her heart to let her think I suspected it, that she is spending her own hard savings to help support us.

APRIL 1—8.

Marion is much better—able to sit up. Our troubles, thanks to Him who beareth the burden, seem for the most part past.

We are so nicely fixed in our new home, which is such a "little heaven," after the horrors of the last.

Then too, our anxiety in another way is over, for we have work now, which Margery, who from her long residence in the city and knowledge of its ways, has procured for us.

"If you only had some embroidery finished, such as you used to have, it would sell so," she said.

"I have, Margery, a quantity, some entirely new, and others but little worn, if you think they"—

"Oh! ma'am you are not going to sell your own things! oh no, please not, that's worse than all," said she in great distress.

"Why my good girl," I answered, "poor folks must not dress in purple and fine linen, and besides if I could afford it, a widow's dress does not allow laces and French work, the plainer it is the better."

"Oh yes ma'am, to be sure, but the young ladies could"—

"Yes, yes, we will keep as much as poor sewing girls will ever need to go out in," I said.

"Oh dear lady do not talk like that, it breaks my heart."

"But it is true nevertheless, Margery, they will most likely always be too busy to care very much for the fine things their mother once wore."

But the end of it all was, Margery took some of them to a friend who is a fashionable modistè. I have given up too many things, to feel pain for the loss of these.

It was a week ago she took them and they have not only met a ready sale, but she has brought back an order for an embroidered skirt, with the promise of pretty steady employment. As long as this lasts we can do very well. However I will not work at this fine work after daylight is gone, but rest my eyes and give Stuart and the three older girls a lesson in German every evening. The others have their regular lessons through the day.

CHAPTER XII.

APRIL 20.

I am so engaged I have hardly any time to write down our daily life, as I had intended. Stuart has been going to school for nearly a month, but before he goes in the morning he does a great deal towards making a garden. And the children most vigorously employ their spare time through the day in finishing what he has commenced; weeding, and stoning the particular bed which Stuart has dug up in the morning, constitutes their very important business after study hours.

We are very systematic and have an hour for every thing, and in this way get along nicely.

We are early risers too, and eat our breakfast, almost as soon as the sun bethinks to warm the noses of the far-away mountains; or over them to peer with his just opened eyes, into our humble grey old garden.

And through the day, that my daughters may neither of them be over wearied with sewing, I make them in turns, become the instructors of the younger ones, then for a while my assistants, then one at a time to aid Milly in her multitudinous duties.

Thus an hour at one thing and then at another, nothing grows very monotonous, and they work like a hive of cheer-

ful bees, not one single drone in the hive, save only baby, who has a right.

We speak French all day, and in the evening after the children from Howard down are in bed, we learn German for a couple of hours—and then until ten which is our invariable hour for retiring—while we knit or do some work which does not try our eyes, Stuart reads us some instructive book, which he has brought from the school library.

We have but one thing to trouble us, that is Margery's failing health, which makes us fear she can not much longer endure the labor necessary to the charge of this house.

She is very desirous that we should take it off her hands and allow her to do something which will require less exertion than this.

"It is only the walking about and sweeping which hurts me," she says. I do not know what would be best to do.

We have all felt badly about one thing—and that is, Stuart's being obliged to still go so poorly appareled to school.

I have thought much about this, for although he never hints such a thing, I am very sure the slights he receives on account of his shabby appearance, not alone from the boys, but I fear sometimes from the teacher, depresses his spirits, although he strives, earnestly, and manfully, against such a feeling: still he would not be human were not such taunts and sneers sufficient to sting him, even though he feigns not to regard them at all. I know were his mind free from all this petty vexation, he would improve even more rapidly than he does now.

I had intended to keep the remainder of the little sum left by Mrs. Aldrich, as a foundation upon which in the future we might by strict economy and great endeavors, raise a sufficient sum to send him one year at least to college. This was her cherished scheme, nourished amidst bitter poverty, and it shall be ours.

But now, because this present want seemed more urgent than anything in the future could, I have taken the money and am going to give it to Milly to purchase an entire suit for him. Dear boy how proud I will feel; how proud we shall all feel to see him dressed like—what he is, a true born gentleman.

This is to be a secret, for did he know we dreamed of