

least a man so endowed would with his reckless, I fear, half-infidel character, exert an evil influence upon the fresh pure minds of my children; but I think now there is no danger, I could not well prevent their meeting him, and others like him, and I think I can trust them one and all, especially as the elder ones have a good hope, resting upon the firm foundation of the Rock of Ages, and with it to overshadow and protect them, they can surely withstand every dart of sophistry and doubting, hurled at either themselves or their younger companions.

Besides it is a pleasant thought that their fresh unworldly nature, may do him good, poor world-weary man, despairing heart. There is a noble nature in him I know, but alas for the thick hard crust of worldliness which has grown over it. A disappointed useless life, and yet they say he had a praying mother.

I cannot account for the strange interest I feel in this young man, perhaps it is because, pleasant memories cluster round the blessed past, in which I first knew him, a gay wild boy.

Mr. Marstone is also our constant guest. All are delighted with him, I have seen him once at church, and I equally with the rest was struck with his resemblance to his uncle, our dear lost friend.

Estelle, who poor friend to her sorrow, knows much of the world, pronounces him a finished gentleman. He is very attentive to my sweet Dora, and always chooses her and her inseparable comrade, Lela, as his companions, in the many delightful walks they take. Cora is wild as a kitten, and fully bent on 'forgetting that a book was ever written, lest the thought of study should mar some mite of her happiness.' Foolish little butterfly.

When we came down here what was our surprise and pleasure too, to find our good friend Mr. Lea, with Mary and Laura already established at one of the hotels. This makes our number almost complete, and there is not a thing to wish for but our quiet, cold Clara's presence. But I suspect her friends are not quite so indulgent of her vagaries as the others are, else our number would be complete.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

SEPTEMBER 5.

ALMOST the last thing I wrote, when last I did write, was something about Clara Robbins, and soon after came a letter from her, containing a request from Ada and Marion to come to her, as she was to be married on the last day of August, and had chosen them for brides-maids, "as her dearest friends." Thus one of our little group has flown already, never to return, made for herself a home in another part of the world, far away from all her old friends. The girls have just returned from their visit to her, and report her as prosperously married and seemingly happy. I am glad of that, for although Clara was too cold and reserved ever to have crept into my heart, yet I feel, and shall ever feel the warmest interest in her future. She is young, not over eighteen I think, but she is the eldest of a large family, who owe their education to the kindness of a bachelor uncle, so I imagine, it is pleasant for Clara to have her life of dependence ended, and for her family to have her out of the way of the rest; I should like to have seen her once more ere she assumed the solemn duties of a wife, but as this could not be, I have written her a long letter full of the best counsel I could devise, and have had a grateful answer, from herself and husband.

We came home almost a week ago, and are all at work again, though not steadily as yet, for the breaking up is to come.

Last night as I sat at work within my own room, I heard a long confab going on between a party of girls; I peeped in at them, gathered round the sofa in all conceivable attitudes. Dora and Mary with Marion between them on the sofa, Ada kneeling with her elbow on Marion's knee, Louise and Birdie perched upon the arms of the sofa, and Lela and Jennie on either side of Ada on the floor. When their chatter tempted me to look in upon the pretty *tableaux vivante* they made, they were discussing Clara's wedding, or rather her husband.

"What would your choice be, could you make a choice in the matter?" was the first I heard. It was Ada who asked the question.

"Yes, come, that will be first-rate," said Birdie. "Let's describe our future husbands."

"Miss C. Percy, not yet in her teens, aspireth to the honor of a husband," said Mary, laughing.

"Why, Mary, Lea, be sure I do; besides, I am in my teens, too."

"Pray, have you chosen the happy man, my dear, but fast young lady?" inquired Jennie.

"No, but I know how I should like him to be,—handsome and brave, of noble birth, and nobler intellect, like the poet Byron,—just like him, except his lame foot."

"But, Birdie, he was an infidel, and a bad, bad man," said Marion.

"But I would make him good. I think that would be the best of all, to win him to be good."

"You are a silly little goose," said Dora, giving her a pull. "It is well you will have time to prove the falseness of your doctrines before they have to bear the test."

"But Dora, tell us what you would choose. What should your hero be like, fair 'Il Penseroso?'"

"I have not given the matter o'er much thought, little one; but I should like a good, true man, one older and far better than myself, who would guide and keep me in the best and truest path."

"Have you no hero to liken him to? Why, she blushes so, I do believe it is no make-believe she has been picturing, but a true person."

The girls laughed, but did not press Birdie's queries.

"Well, Lela, since yonder damsels have told their desires, pray take your turn with the others," said Ada.

"Sir Philip Sidney, the brave and true, the noble, high-born, high-minded scholar, is my type, my hero. To be the cherished darling of such a heart as his, I would endure all things. If only no doubt of his love came upon me, could I feel assured the treasure was my own and mine alone, I would place my hand in his and walk proudly and without a groan over burning ploughshares. Only, he must be with me. Heigh-ho!" she added, as her enthusiasm wore off; "heigh-ho! I wonder if there are any such men now on earth as Sir Philip?"

"To be sure there are, my bonny lass; and you shall find him, and be 'Stella, Stella, queen of my soul,' to him. Mark my words, I prophecy it," said Ada.

"Now, Mary, what would you have?"

Any one who loved me, rich or poor, high or low. I think it would be pleasant to bring wealth to some good man, taking his love in return."

"Dear me!" cried Louise; "you are too humble for me. I will have a man who will be my slave, live when I smile, die when I frown. Rich and handsome himself, he must surround me with the beautiful."

"That's yourself over again, Louise. Selfish little animal!" said Ada. "The poet Keats for me, with his heaven-bright eyes, his noble intellect, his earnest soul. I am like Lela. I would endure anything which came to be beloved of such a pure, noble soul. Now, May?"

"I would like to be the comfort, the helper, of some brave heart, who, through temptations and ills, battled ever toward the right, and who, while he fought his way through the crosses and temptations of life with his whole strength, would look always towards me, and tell me I strengthened and helped him in his struggle for the good. The right, and good in God's way, I mean."

"Would you not care what he looked like? or what his fortunes were?" said Mary Lea.

"Not one whit, so he had a firm true spirit, so brave and true that did God's service require it, he would sacrifice not only himself, but what should be dearer than himself, me."

"Marion has chosen the better part," said Dora tenderly.

"But do you think such beings are possible?"

"Yes dear Jennie, I have known one such, one who if thus tried, would like Abraham of old, have given up the dearest thing God asked from him."

"Who was he Marion?" asked Louise carelessly.

"My father, dear Louise," answered she quietly.

There was a little pause, then she said, "But Jennie we have not heard from you, lady fair?"

"Oh my idea of a spouse is so totally different from the rest of you, it is quite commonplace. I lay it to my greater age and more mature experience, that my choice would be for neither a hero or a genius, although he might with my free consent be both."

"Ahem! dear old lady, who make such a boast of your nineteen years, pray tell us what this happy man must be like, if neither poet, painter, or soldier."

"Any thing almost, so he be not a piece of perfection Ada, I would choose a grave sensible man, who through a long useful life had acted well towards his fellow-man. I do not want a boy to lead me, or a man who has only ten years longer experience in life to rule over me. I do not care how old he is, (so he has not one foot already in the grave.) I think the older, the more I should love and reverence him, then I would give him my whole self such as I am, my girlhood for his age, my fresh young unworldly heart, for his weary, worldly-wise one. While I was a child he should lead and protect me, afterwards, when he crept on to second childhood, I in my prime, in the fulness of womanhood, would lead his footsteps, guard and protect him in my turn. Be ears in the place of his dulled ones, eyes instead of his dimmed ones, and ready hands and willing feet to run at his bidding, in truth you see I would like to be an old man's darling, '*mes amies*.'"

"*Chacun a son goût*," said Ada.

"But, Jennie, you say anything, so he be not a piece of perfection, did you not?" asked Lela.

"Yes, queen," she answered.

"Do you consider the poet Keats, a piece of perfection?"

"No indeed, only perfect in very few things, his eyes for instance," she added, laughing.

"Or Sir Philip Sidney, was he perfect?"

"No, only brave and excellent in many things. I only spoke in the abstract. No, indeed, none of your *preux cavaliers* were perfect types, especially Butterfly's admiration, the great but wicked Byron. Is he your hero of heroes, Birdie?"

"He is for some things, but Sir Walter Raleigh is my great hero, of all."

"You have a strangely worldly taste, Birdie."

"Why, was not Sir Walter great, and handsome, and brave, and except perhaps Sir Philip, the most gallant gentleman of his age?"

"Yes; but he lacked one great attribute of greatness, Birdie, goodness. He was good and brave, and generous, not because God was to be served and glorified by it, but because Sir Walter was to be exalted thereby: besides, by nature he was too noble and high-minded to stoop to low things," said Marion.

"I cannot help it," was Birdie's answer, "had I lived when he lived, I should have worshipped him, now I cherish his memory."

"Naughty little enthusiastic Birdie."

"But, Nora, have you no praises for your hero?"

"Indeed I have, Jennie, pages of them. Oh, I could never love any one of whom I was not justly proud. Could I not have been of him?" and her voice deepened, and I knew well how her eyes looked. "Think of the thousand generous deeds which are recorded of him, from the time he entered Oxford at thirteen, and left with his brow wreathed with laurels at eighteen, until that last day, when pierced with his death-wound he lay in agony upon the ground and though his burning lips craved it so piteously, took the cooling water away from them before one drop had touched them, to give to a poor soldier, because 'Thy necessity is greater than mine.' Marion, I am sure none but a Christian heart would have been capable of such a deed, with the death-thirst upon him, do you not think Sir Philip the 'jewel,' as Queen Bess called him, of her times, was a Christian?"

"Yes, dear Lela, I do think, and believe he was; it is pleasant to believe so. A good thing to think that such a rare combination of excellences, such a union of military renown, literary distinction, courtly refinement, and noble frankness, which it is recorded gave him a passport to every heart, could only have belonged to a Christian gentleman."

"Why, May," laughed Ada, "I verily believe you are in love with him as well as Nora."

"How could any one help it? would not you have been too? Think of a man of whom could be written with truth that eulogy which an able writer has penned for him," said Lela.

"What was it, queen, not having had your love to fasten it upon my rather provoking memory, I have let it slip."

"Few characters appear so well fitted to awaken universal and enthusiastic admiration as Sidney's; uniting, all the accomplishments which youthful ardor and universality of talent could acquire or bestow, delighting nations by the witchery of his power, and courts by the fascinations of his address; leaving the learned astonished by the extent of his proficiency, and the ladies enraptured by his exquisite

beauty and grace, he communicated wherever he went, the love and spirit of gladness; he was, and well deserved to be the idol of the age in which he lived."

"And then better than almost anything," said Jennie, "was his firm refusal of the throne of Poland, offered to him although a simple gentleman just knighted, for his bravery, because his country needed his services, because his duty lay in England. Truly there are few men, who in the fresh ambitious ardor of twenty-seven, could have resisted the temptation of rising from an humble subject of Elizabeth, to being in his own right. Yes, Lela, you are right, Sir Philip Sidney was a great and good man. I know of no other, who in all things was his equal, in some his superior, save one. Our own hero, our Washington."

"Of course he is better than all, but then, I hope the thought is not a wrong one. No girl would think of making a lover hero of our country's father, much more than she would of assigning to her choice any of the perfections which marked the earthly being of our Saviour."

"Oh Lela, Lela, my dear sister, that is wrong, very wrong," said Marion.

"Then I am sorry I said it, I feared it was."

"I think it is a safe rule dear, to leave unsaid and undone, the things we fear may be wrong, at least we are upon the safe side then."

"How old was Sir Philip when he died?"

"Just thirty, Ada," answered Lela.

"Well perhaps had he lived to be an old man, he would have grown worldly and selfish as well as others."

"Not if he was, as we hope a Christian," said Dora.

"But May, have you no hero, of your own?"

"Yes indeed, two of them, one a young man stricken down just when if God had not done it, we would rebel against it sadly. Poor Kirk White, not as a poet, but as a man, I have a very great love for him."

"So young, so full of promise, you know Birdie's pet the wicked Byron says,

'Unhappy White! while life was in its spring,
And thy young muse just waved her joyous wing,
The spoiler came— Oh what a noble
Heart was here undone!'

"And Southey writes of him—'to conceive a human being more amiable in all the relations of life were impossible. Possessing as pure a heart as ever it pleased the Almighty to warm with life.' Oh! it seemed a sad, sad thing for him, crowned with the honors for which he had striven so earnestly, to be called at twenty-one to lay down and die, but doubtless it was right."

"Lovely in his death, as in his life," said Dora, "do you remember his 'Star of Bethlehem?'"

"Yes, but who was your second hero, Marion?"

"One much nearer home, and sublunary things than any of the others. The greatest statesman and the truest man who breathes, 'Henry Clay.'"

"That he is, and all else that is good and great, spite of his youthful sins, which he lives but to repent," said Ada.

"I could see the sense of Jennie's choice, did her old man read Henry Clay, God bless him!"

"Great head, but greater heart massa Clay hab," said Milly at the door, "but he must 'scuse you sayin more 'bout him now, Miss Stella sent hir 'spects, and she like your company in de school room."

"Dear me! study-hour already!" and they were gone.

OCT. 6.

The departure of Leanore and our boys, has been delayed a week by a most singular and unforeseen circumstance.

On the evening of the day after their talk in the sitting-room, Jennie came to me in my room where I sat with the little ones.

"Dear Mrs. Percy, may I talk to you a little while in private?" she asked.

Certainly my dear, go into Nora's room, and I will be with you in a few moments."

As soon as I could get through with the children, I went to her, and found her to my surprise, with her head buried in the pillow weeping in a quiet, subdued way.

"What is it, dear Jennie, tell me, love," and I let her finish her weeping upon my shoulder.

"You will promise to be true to me, and not to scorn me if my desires are wrong?"

"Certainly, have you not proved ere this, that I am to be trusted, Jennie?"

"Indeed, indeed I have, dear Mrs. Percy."

"Well then trust me now, I make no promises, maybe I shall scold a little, or whip perhaps, but never scorn my bonnie Jennie."

Then in her straight-forward honest way, she told me she had just received an offer of marriage.

"From one whom perhaps I do not *adore* in the way girls of my age usually do, but whom I reverence and respect, who has chosen me to be his companion and friend. He has been very kind to me always, I have known him well for years, and he has ever been a more tender father than my own. He offers me a pleasant happy home, not for myself alone, but for my worse than motherless sisters, and oh Mrs. Percy, our home has been a very desolate, wretched place for years."

"Who is the gentleman, Jennie?"

"Mr. Lea, Mary's father. He was so kind to me this summer at Rock Point. I cannot tell exactly how the thought of him as something beside Mary's father came; but it did."

I changed color at his name, but said nothing.

"I know what you are thinking of, dear Mrs. Percy. He has told me all about that. But that you should have been his choice exalted him yet more. I will promise not to be jealous of you, dear friend. I think he could scarcely help loving you. In that I defy him to surpass me," she ended, with a smile beaming through her tears.

"But Mary is nearly as old as you."

"I know. Oh! Mrs. Percy, that is my trouble. What will Mary say? Her love for me will turn to hate, I fear. What shall I do? I must not desire to be his wife, if it makes his children unhappy."

"Shall I tell Mary, love?"

"Oh, if you would! She will hear it best from you. I dare not! I dare not!" And she wept piteously.

"I do not think, dear, you need be frightened; for, though Mary may at first be a little cross, she is too good-natured to be so long."

But we were both mistaken. When I spoke to Mary, I found she had suspected the matter long ago; and, indeed,

desired it ever since Jennie and Lela were at her lake home, two summers ago. Her father's fancy for me caused a diversion for a while; but when that ended, she was anxious for the old plan to be consummated. It was in the hope of this she persuaded her father to the sea-side this summer. Good little body! She whispered "Mother" in Jennie's ears ten minutes after I had sent the sorrowful girl to her room. Mr. Chalton's consent was gained at once, and with something very like a "thank you," in his face.

"Bring flowers, fresh flowers for the bride to wear.
They were born to blush in her shining hair."

MRS. HEMANS.

OCT. 10.

Our pretty Jennie is Jennie no longer, but Mrs. Lee. She has won herself a good, true man. One very poignant *trifle* in his favor, was his manly conduct in respect to myself. He treated me in an open, cordial way, which showed better than any other thing could, how entirely he had conquered the momentary fancy,—how totally he had taken the young thing he had chosen into his excellent heart.

Jennie's father was not a loving one; but he dowered her right nobly, much to my astonishment.

"Glad to get rid of all three of us so easily," said Jennie, half sadly, half playfully.

The darling looked right beautifully. Her *trousseau* was exquisitely, although rather hurriedly, chosen.

They were married quietly in our own little sitting-room, with only the every-day companions of her life for two years past, to witness the ceremony.

Mr. Raymond officiated, committing his pupil, with many tender, heartfelt words, into the keeping of the husband of her choice—parting her from her old life forever.

Marion and Dora, attended by Stuart and Clare, stood with her. A pretty group they made.

After the marriage ceremony was over, they had a grand party, given in their honor by Jennie's aunt, who resides in this city. All the witnesses of the ceremony, young and old, were invited and went, save only my Leane, who sat with her sweet face turned to mine, and my arms about her,

half that night. For on the morrow, with Mr. Lee and Jennie, she joined Miss Weston in New York, and they all sailed for Europe. There is much comfort in knowing she is under such safe protection and pleasant companionship as Jennie and her husband.

CHAPTER XL.

NOVEMBER 14.

WE are quiet once more. I think the wedding did us a world of good. Keeping our hands so busy with wedding favors, our hearts had little chance to show their mournfulness.

The house is desolate without Lela and Jennie, each hour we have fresh need of them. Oh, my darling, my heart pines for one look into your gloriously beautiful face, my queen, I mourn for one more kiss of your dear lips.

I love the light of your dark eyes, my Nora, the world seems strangely dark, missing their radiance near me. God love you, sweet daughter, and I think He will, my true-hearted, all-enduring girl.

Birdie, as usual, has an ocean full of tears, for her sister's loss. Marion is quiet, but her pale cheeks and downcast eyes, tell how her heart goes forth after the sister, who has been her companion and friend so long, round whom for so many years so much pride and love has been garnered.

My May is nearly eighteen now, a gentle, quiet, little lady, dear dove-eyed treasure, her grief, like every other thing, is borne with a graceful dignity, the depth of her sorrow kept for the night time, when only God sees her.

The parting with the boys, which would have been a great trial, has been completely swallowed up, in this other parting, which was for years, and to cause an ocean tide to swell between.

Then we hear from each one of them once in the week, so that we scarcely seem so entirely parted; for Lela's letters

we will have to wait a month at least, but then they will be a blessing.

We have settled down very quietly, quite a diminished family, since this Autumn tide flowed in upon us, two flowers have been gathered into the marriage wreath, Clara a fair pale lily, and bright-eyed Jennie, a blushing rose. I have put my veto upon any such doings in the future, and tell the girls since they are so sought for, I shall have to put my treasures under lock and key.

NOVEMBER 31.

Our boys are getting along bravely. At first it was all up-hill work, especially for Howard, but now they are getting accustomed to it.

Clare writes about Howard: "He bore up like a man, though his lip would quiver, and his voice tremble in a very suspicious manner, when we spoke of home; but now we are getting broken into the traces and are hard at work it is better! 'Hard work drives away dull care,' sure enough."

Stuart is entirely satisfied with the school at which we have placed Howard, and writes:

"The discipline is most excellent. How' is kept amazingly busy; but I am glad of that. I will take care he is not over-tasked, of course some of his companions are not at all desirable; but as he tells me all they do and say, I think I can keep them from harming him; besides, I find his 'Percy' blood, young as he is, keeps him from low associates; how I can picture the way Lela would flush up and proudly say, 'of course it will,' were she only home to hear you read that last sentence. I shall have far more trouble with Clare, dreamy, poetical Clare, than with impulsive Howard, for he takes for granted every thing which is pleasant is right, and gets *in* to trouble because he will not take the trouble to keep *out* of it.

"For myself, I get along indifferently well, for have I not both of them to help me, and your dear letters to comfort and counsel me. Every time you write the precious words, 'my boy,' I kiss them, as I would yourself, my gentle monitor and friend. God bless you!"

We find a world of comfort in these letters, it is next to