

Like the bee amidst the flowers,
 Pass that day in gladness;
 Soon enough will come the hours,
 Bearing pain and sadness.

Yet that little sigh of thine,
 Was to me a blessing,
 On this wayward heart of mine,
 Sober truth impressing.

VI.

THE early rains and late blighting frosts are over, and on the bright weeks of Spring we are gliding rapidly towards Summer. The early fruits have begun to ripen, and the gardens and fields promise opulent returns to the labor of the husbandman.

Blanche has already been a week at her uncle's place, Glen-Clunie, a day's travel westward, and we are anxiously awaiting her return. The house seems gloomy, in a degree, when her gay laugh is not ringing through it.

Minnie says, this is a foretaste of what is to be hereafter; for when Frank comes back from his travels, she is to be married. We can hardly realize it; for a year or two ago, she was a fairy-like girl, just from school.

“Standing with reluctant feet,
 Where the brook and river meet;
 Womanhood and childhood sweet.”

Now, almost a woman, accomplished and beautiful, she is worthy of all the love that can be lavished on her by the heart of man.

It is a soft star-lit evening, and we sit on the porch, now festooned with twining and odorous creepers, and listen to the sounds which form our out-door melodies: the occasional chirp of a sleepless bird upon its nest in the sweet-briar; the bell on the factory at Bridge-valley striking the quarter-hours; the murmur of waters; the breeze-whisperings, and now and then the hoot of the owl in farmer Mead's woods.

Birdie's little "chippy," doubtless listens to the last ominous sound, its heart throbbing with all a mother's anxieties.

We have been to Briar-Cliff to day: a deserted old mansion of which we had frequently heard, and long desired to see. It is five miles inland, and a pleasant drive most of the distance along the post road.

We had started soon after breakfast from home, and spent some hours there, wandering over the desolated grounds. The approach to the mansion is by a short and narrow lane leading from the main road, and going no farther than the enclosure of the property.

We entered the unclosed gate-way, flanked by massive stone pillars, leaning and defaced; and keeping the gravelled road, now overgrown with grass and weeds, a drive of a few hundred yards brought us to the house.

It stands amidst majestic locust and chestnut trees, mingled with indigenous evergreens, under which is a

level sward, sloping and undulating, which must have been a beautiful lawn; but now covered with long, waving grass and underbrush. At a little distance from the rear of the house, you stand upon the edge of a cliff and look down into a glen, full of dense verdure, and holding in its bosom a deep, dark pond of living water. The sides of the cliff, steep and rugged, are covered with tangled briars and creepers, and from this the place derives its name.

It was melancholy to walk the long, winding paths of the once beautiful garden, now a wilderness of rank weeds. Choice fruit trees and luxuriant grape vines were left unpruned, and threw their straggling branches far and wide, yet giving promise of fruit in abundance. In the pleasure grounds, a few hardy plants were still living and blossoming; but everywhere else was nothing but desolation and gloom.

The house was closed, though the frail door could have been easily burst open. It was no less dilapidated than the out-buildings which surround it, though it bore witness to the action of fire upon one of its wings, probably at a remote time. There was no living thing upon the premises, except the birds and squirrels, which sing and gambol undisturbed in fearless freedom.

We have never heard the full history of those who once lived there, and we wondered why it was deserted, and that no one had ever been tempted to purchase

and restore the property to its former beauty, for it has evidently been highly improved at no inconsiderable expense and labor.

As we emerged from the avenue into the lane, on our way homeward, we noticed a small cottage, which had escaped us before, almost hid from view by a hedge of willows on the road side. It was not far from the gate-way we had just passed through, and had probably been a lodge or tenant house attached to Briar-Cliff mansion.

An old, decrepid man sat on the door-step, watching a sportive child playing with a kitten on the grass before him. He seemed to be dreaming of his own youthful days, if we might judge by his listless expression and disregard of our passing.

I proposed to stop under pretence of giving Charley a draught of water from the well near by, thinking we might gain some information concerning the spot we had been visiting.

Minnie, none the less curious, assented; so, tying the horse by the fence, we entered the picket gate amidst the willows. The child, probably unaccustomed to the sight of strangers, left its sport and ran into the house crying. The old man essayed to rise, and respectfully asked us into the house, but I insisted on his not disturbing himself, as we only stopped for a moment. "Ay, but ye must sit," said he; "Jenny!

bring a chair for the people!" he continued, to some one inside. It was brought by Jenny, a woman of middle age, cleanly and neatly dressed, whom we rightly supposed was his married daughter, and the mother of the child that was playing in the yard. We could not but accept the cheerfully proffered hospitality of the strangers, and Minnie took the seat while I watered Charley.

On my return, I found Minnie and old grandfather well acquainted, for he appeared to be communicative in the extreme; so much so, that his listener could not put in a question, even if it was necessary. I sat down on the door-step near him and listened for a while too, but his subject was irrelevant to the one I wished to be informed on, and I let him edify Minnie whilst my inquiries were addressed to "Jenny." This did not suit the old man though; he wanted to give all the information himself.

"Ay, ye want to know about the old house up there, do ye? I know all about it," said he, as soon as he heard our conversation.

"Yes, my friend, we have been there this morning for the first time, and are a little curious about it."

"Well, I'll tell ye. I was a boy about here when they builded the big house there, and a power of men was at it, a-workin' on it; I said I was a boy, some twenty-two or three, thereabout; we wasn't

men then right out of school; and I worked at carpentering with old Boss Jones, dead, you know. Well, I worked on the house odd spells, when dad wasn't harvesting or makin' cider, and I knows about the house, roof to cellar. When it was done, there was nary a house in the country about, near it. Oh! dear me; the rooms, and the closets, and the cupboards, and sich a hall! all carved and painted like, what d'ye call it? friscoes; I forget, it's so long gone. Howsomever, they was grand folks what came in coaches when it was done, and sich furniture and trampery as they brought, too, among us farmers and sich like; and sich horses, big and slick, and black men to mind and drive 'em. There was an old man and his wife and two boys, about twenty-five and thirty, like you, sir, or thereabouts; and they were wild enough too—made the mud and dust fly on yon road there. People said they'd been over the sea and got forrin ways; I don't know, but they used to talk of their grand-dad bein' an Englishman, and a lord, too. In summers there was loads of company from the city, and they lived high at the Hall, we called it; plenty wine, and fruits in the garden, lots of it, and to spare: look at it now, goin' to waste."

"My good friend," said I, for the old man had stopped a minute to get breath, "we do not want to tire you, only tell us 'he reason why no one lives there now,

why some one does not buy it and put it in order; there are always purchasers to be found for such places. Who holds the property?"

"Well, have patience. I'll tell you in time, sir; you must know whys and wherefores, always. Ye see, the old man took sick after he lived there a spell, mortal sick, and doctors, city doctors couldn't save him; so he died. A great funeral that was; he wasn't buried hereabouts; some big church-yard in the city; Trinity, I believe; and then the old lady lived with the boys; but they was away a good deal, and she was lonesome, very, only an old nurse with her betimes; and then she pined away, and went after the old man; and the boys had it all their own way awhile, till they got quarrelling about money matters, and went to law, and the old place 'gan to go to rack, and the servants wasted every thing.

"That was fifteen years ago, or thereabouts; time goes so fast now, these old days! Well, the law giv the Hall to one on 'em, the oldest, and then, arter that, the other never come here again; they said he went over the sea to live. I never saw him more. And the one what lived there was always gloomy like; he never liked no one, and people hereabout never liked him, he was so grum and short. The boys called him Old Grum' arter a while, and he sent off all the servants but one white-headed negro, black enough too;

the boys about called him 'Guinny,' for he told 'em he came from there when he was a youngster. He used to cook vittles for the master, and work in the garden, and do all sorts of work and chores around. Well, by this time, the young man that was had got to be nigh fifty or thereabouts, and he takes a notion the house was hanted, and he had a room made out-doors somewhere, and shut up the old house, and made old 'Guinny' sleep at the foot of his bed. People got to say he was a miser, and only eat bread and cheese, and sich like, and put his silver, all he could get, in holes and rags, and sich places. He looked poor enough, skin and bone, and the old nigger not much better; he was a true friend though; old Guinny never said a hard word about the man:

"Sometimes, there would be people come from the city to see the miser, but by and by they stopped; he didn't want to see nary body. He took sick too, one winter, when he wouldn't have fire, and no doctor either afterward; and he lay so a while, till it got on his lungs, and he didn't last long.

"Old Guinny was with him when he went, and cried like a baby too; and when word got to the city of his death, some old friends come up and took him down to where the old folks was buried; and then they sent word to his brother, and after two or three months, or thereabouts, they had a great vandoo at the Hall; but

his own brother wasn't there, only folks from the city and towns about. There was heaps of rubbish, and what money the lawyer found, what old Guinny had safe laid by, he took to keep, I s'pose, for the other one; and so no one has been in the house since. People about here won't go there; they say it's hanted. Boys go there in day-times to get the fruit when it's ripe; they wont go there of nights though. I s'pose the brother what's away hasn't come back yet, and so they don't sell the old place. It got afire once too, and burnt some, but not much; some boys was 'spected of it. I'd tell ye great stories of doin's there, if ye'd wait a while, or come again, but I guess that's enough now."

"Yes," replied Minnie, "that will do, my old friend, perhaps we will have another talk the next time we come." We both acknowledged our thanks, but the old man would not let us go till we ate a piece of bread and butter, and drank a glass of buttermilk right out of the churn, which we did with great relish.

"Jenny" told us, when we came again, her husband, who was away from home then, would take us down to the pond we had seen from the cliff, and catch us a mess of trout, with which it is full, notwithstanding its frequent dragging by the boys of the neighborhood. It was a pleasant hour we spent with the garrulous old

man, and he seemed to live over the best part of his life during the recital of his tale.

As we sit on the porch and talk over our excursion, we fancy the interest with which Blanche, who is inclined to be romantic, would visit those deserted grounds, and listen to the narrative of our superannuated informer.

Strange it is, that in this enlightened age of ours, this short life too, wherein we may gather and cherish so many elements of true happiness, a man can become the vile slave of accumulating gold! living devoid of every comfort to—

“Take pleasure in his abjectness, and hug
The scorpion that consumes him.”

VII.

JUNE, sweet, leafy June has come! bringing roses and strawberries, and other pleasant things, among which, last but far from least, is our radiant and long absent Blanche, laden with gifts and messages of love from our kindred at Glen-Clunie.

We have many questions to ask about Nelly, and Kate, and Bob, just from college; and in return, Blanche has so much to tell, she hardly knows where to begin. In a day or two, however, all is thought of and communicated, and Blanche settles down again to our quiet life, yet looking forward to her brother's return with no little anxiety.

We had a few hurried lines from him yesterday, written at Naples, as he was embarking for the Ionian Islands, closing thus:—“I may go to Egypt, but if I do not, you will see me as soon as a letter could reach you.” Blanche says when he receives *her* letter, he will not go farther east; it will bring him right home.

Minnie and her cousin both intimate a desire to go trout-fishing to-day, in accordance with a promise

made some weeks ago, and which I had not forgotten. It was proposed to wait till the afternoon, when the pool would be more shady, and the walk pleasanter; so after dinner the ladies equipped themselves with sun-bonnets and stout shoes, and were soon on the way to Hermit's Dell, whilst I followed their tripping feet, bearing poles and all necessary accompaniments. A few minutes walking brought us into the shadows of the glen, past the cabin of La Solitaire; along the brook side till we crossed the rustic bridge below the cascade, and wound our way up the steep bank, fragrant with cedar boughs, to the brink of the pool.

My companions not being skilled in fly-fishing, preferred other bait, which Teddy had provided, and I fixed their hooks for them. Blanche, entering into the sport with great enthusiasm, caught the first fish, and a very fine one, which disengaged itself from the hook when landed, and was quickly secured in the basket. Minnie, the very impersonation of patience, reclined upon the bank, waiting for a bite at her quiescent hook; a Minnie catching "Minnies," for her first fish was one of those diminutive shiners which so often annoy the angler by their pertinacious nibbles at his bait. Minnie has no fondness for the craft; she only came to keep us company. Her minnows, however, did me good service, for not finding my fly taking, I substituted a live fish, and was very successful. In

two hours our basket was full, some of the fish weighing nearly a pound, though we followed the stream some distance from the pool, before we took them.

Blanche was uncommonly successful, although a novice in the art, taking almost as many as I did, and taking them from the hook herself with perfect nonchalance.

There are some beautiful walks through the surrounding woods, which we had never explored, so, when we became tired of fishing, we took a long stroll of discovery, embracing quite a circuit.

The ridge which commences at Hermit's Dell runs for miles and miles eastward from the river, and is covered with dense woods, most of which are primeval. Here and there they have been cut off by their owners, but a dense second growth is rapidly filling up the openings.

Where a little spot of natural meadow lay along the stream, we came upon the goats which belong to our neighbor La Solitaire; and as the afternoon was wearing away, they were browsing homeward.

It was quite a pastoral picture, and we could almost imagine ourselves for the moment amidst Alpine hills or the ridges of La Cava, and we wondered if it might not be that the similitude of these hills and streams to those of her native land, had won the heart and feet of the Italian woman hither.

It was sundown when we stood upon the bridge again, returning, yet lingering awhile to watch the foamy waters of the cascade, and feel its cool spray upon our faces.

The cabin of La Solitaire lay near our homeward path. She came to the door as we passed, and we were inclined to stop and exchange a few words with her, the first opportunity we had ever had, but seeming to be in dishabille, she retired inward, as if to avoid an interview.

Blanche was much disappointed, for it was the first time she had manifested any desire to approach the stranger, with whose appearance she was evidently pleased at the first glance. "You will have other opportunities, Blanche, and I expect I shall introduce you, after all, for I am determined to know something more than we do of the woman."

"Yes, Harry," replies Minnie, "you are quite famous for making wonderful acquaintances, and we must depend on you for an introduction to La Solitaire."

I felt a little chagrined at this termination to our excursion, for my sole object in making it, was to get the ladies into the good graces of our neighbor, whom I, for some undefined reason, had always felt an interest in. Still, though she appeared unapproachable, as we have heard she was, I did not despair.

When we reached home, Birdie was riding his pony

on the lawn, under the guidance of Bridget, and the little fellow was enjoying himself to the utmost. Our approach was, however, a pretext for his being tired of riding, and Shag was soon in the back-ground.

We had a royal supper of broiled trout, and a modicum of strawberries, the first of the season, which Teddy's sharp eyes had discovered in the sunniest portion of the bed.

Some pleasant neighbors came in after tea, and with a stroll along the river, a short and breezy sail to the light-house and back, and a little music at the house, the evening glides away. Not our evening though, for we sit an hour or two after our friends leave, and Blanche listens to the description of our excursion to the deserted domain of Briar Cliff with great interest, proposing, when Frank arrives, that we shall all go and spend a day there.

Ah! Frank, I expect you will be valued more than ever, when you return; you are becoming of great importance to us, in more ways than one! There are even half a dozen bottles of that amber olive oil reserved for your enjoyment, not to mention the spiced fish, over which, with our rural bread and butter and a bottle of "Sauterne," we shall talk away many a cosy, lamp-lit hour!

"Is the day fixed yet, Blanche, rain or shine, Frank

or no Frank? Come, you have kept your secret long enough." Blanche's reply is non-committal, though I shall probably be informed. "Don't ask me, cousin, Minnie knows;" and the next sound I hear is my favorite "Don Pasquale," with a new and brilliant after-piece, something she has brought from Glen-Clunie.

Minnie whispers that R——, our prospective cousin, intends visiting us soon, and as he is one of us already, he will be welcome as ever to this our country home. How doubly happy Blanche will be!

VIII.

LEANING over the pool whose full bosom nurses the sportive rapids, there is a massive rock, from the crevices of which, dense cedars spring and mingle, forming an arbor almost impervious to the wind or sun. It is a favorite resort of mine, and sitting there in the breezy afternoons of June, I while away many an hour in enticing the silver trout from their cool nooks below, by means of worm or fly too tempting for their epicurean taste to resign.

It was on one of these occasions that I won the acquaintance of La Solitaire's child. He had been searching the woods for the goats, and attracted by the wild flowers which grow in such profusion along the margin of the stream, unconsciously drew near to where I was sitting.

The cast of my line upon the water first apprised him of my presence. Unaccustomed to strangers, he started back half affrighted, but a kind word or two and the proffer of a live fish in his hand, brought him to my side and we were soon friends. The remarkable beauty of the boy somewhat surprised me; it seemed so inconsistent with the humble and secluded