

iced sauterne, we sit till the small hours commence, and Minnie raps on the floor overhead.

"To Hermit's Dell to-morrow, Frank, with the ladies!"

"Yes, and to Briar Cliff before I go to the city. Good-night!"

X.

SAUNTERING laughingly along, Frank and Minnie, Blanche and I, went our way downward toward the Dell. We take with us our rods and baskets, ostensibly, for fishing, but that is not our chief object.

Frank is to see the cascade, the rustic bridge, the "big rock," and last, but not least, La Solitaire, if it may so happen.

Reaching the bridge, we stand a while leaning over its side to watch the swift waters beneath it, and for Frank to obtain the best view of the cascade. He marvels at its beauty, and asks me if it does not remind me of something I have seen elsewhere.

"Yes, Frank, one of the cascates which form the great Falls of the Reichenbach; I remember it well."

"It reminds me more," says Frank, "of Tivoli."

"How proud we should be of our sweet little waterfall!" exclaim Minnie and Blanche.

We climb the steep bank by a winding path amidst the dense cedars and hemlocks, and emerge by the great rock which overhangs the pool. Rude steps of nature's chiselling lead to the platform on its summit,

where, under the hemlock branches which shade it, six persons may sit comfortably, if there were accommodations for the purpose.

My companions are pleased with my sequestered seat, and give me the credit of its discovery, but I show them on the trunk of the tree, hidden from superficial view, some characters, deeply carved into the bark, and almost overgrown. They are—a heart, and within it the letters, A. M.—K. G.

“There, friends, you see I am not the first who has trodden this ground, ‘hereby hangs a tale!’”

“Let us call it henceforth, the Lovers’ Rock,” says Minnie. “And so it shall be,” we all exclaim.

We linger there awhile, whilst Frank tries his hand with my fly-rod, catching a few fish; and then we roam through the woods, gradually ascending, till we stand upon the summit of a ridge, which, almost bare of trees, commands a prospect of considerable extent.

Northward on the high ground is our picturesque cottage, a mile distant. Beneath us lies Hermit’s Dell with its familiar murmurs. Westward stretches the river, and its opposite shores, sunny and beautiful; whilst nearer by, is the lonely cabin of La Solitaire, and the fair fields of farmer Mead lying along the hill-top behind it.

But the day is getting warm, and it is proposed that we walk homeward.

“I want a taste of goat’s milk,” says Frank; “suppose we go by the cabin, and get some.”

“Who ever heard of such a thing!” Blanche exclaims, for she had forgotten our neighbor’s idiosyncrasy.

“Why Blanche!” answers Frank, “in some parts of Europe you can find no other milk; it is excellent for delicate stomachs. If I get any, you shall taste it.”

We are soon near the cabin door, and admire the neatness of everything around it. The garden, though a mere patch, was well stocked and flourishing; the creepers were fantastically trained over the doors and lower windows, and a few flowering plants, tastefully disposed here and there, evinced careful tending.

Minnie and Blanche seemed mollified, and more kindly disposed than formerly towards the lonely woman. I had never been able to fathom their unwillingness to become acquainted with her, supposing they might have heard some scandal, or perhaps were in awe of a person living so incomprehensibly as La Solitaire.

The door was open, but no one discernible; and as our approach had been quiet, we were not perceived. Frank, free and easy as he is, advanced to the door and knocked. His summons was quickly answered by the woman, who seemed a little surprised on discerning us standing near by.

Frank gave her no time, however, to inquire his business; for, without ceremony, he made known his wish for a cup of milk, if she had it to spare. It was quickly brought, and a gracious invitation extended to us to come and partake of it also. Frank took the draught with all the gusto of a Swiss herdsman; and when another cupfull was offered to us, Blanche and Minnie each took a sip out of compliment to the donor, leaving me to finish it.

"Signor," said La Solitaire, "will not your friends sit awhile?" As the ice now seemed broken, the invitation was accepted: chairs were brought, and we sat, partly in the room and on the little porch without. After apologizing for our abrupt visit, Minnie and her new acquaintance were soon chatting sociably on various topics. Blanche had won the heart of Pedro, the dark-eyed boy, who had escaped our notice before, whilst Frank and I employed ourselves in taking observations of the fanciful interior within our view, and catching an occasional sentence of the conversation.

"Would you see one of his pictures? come with me," said La Solitaire to Minnie. They go towards the cupboard, which is formed between the chimney and the wall. The door is opened, and the black shroud, which had so excited my curiosity before, drawn aside by the hand of the Italian.

Our eyes were all turned and riveted upon the gem

revealed to us,—a "Magdalen" of such unearthly beauty, it seemed almost the production of an inspired hand. Frank and I stand amazed at its wondrous loveliness; we have seen many an old master-piece, but never before such a "Magdalen." Our companions share our enthusiasm, and Blanche stands before it with clasped hands, the image of wonderment.

It is indeed a marvellous production; she kneels before a narrow window through which a ray of sunlight is gleaming, lighting up her pale and tearful face, and the golden hair which streams adown her partially covered breast and shoulders in dishevelled masses. The dark grey robe which enshrouds her form and indicates her penitence, shows in fine contrast with the pallid yet life-like skin it touches. It is a picture of sin, penitence, and pardon.

"And this was the work of your husband, Signora?" inquired Frank.

"It was his last work, Signor; but will you not call me Bella?"

"Your husband is not living then? Bella," I continued.

"No, Signor, he has been dead almost six years; before I came here in the valley."

"Our neighbor has been informing me some little of her past life," said Minnie, "and we will not ask her to repeat it. It is time we were on our way home too,

it is almost our dinner hour." As we rose to leave, La Solitaire expressed a desire that we would stop again when in the Dell, for she was often lonesome.

We promised to do so, and taking a parting look at the "Magdalen," departed.

"I think," said Frank, "her history would be an interesting one; Minnie, you have heard some of it, and must enlighten us this evening."

"Did you see the image and the crucifix, Harry?" asks Blanche; "so Italian looking, and she seems to be perfectly happy!"

"Yes, Blanche, but the veiled picture! do you not covet it almost? And how romantic too, shrouded in mourning!—Frank! I wonder if she would part with it."

"No, never till death," replies Minnie; "she told me that it is the only treasure she possesses—except her child."

Full of interest in the somewhat mysterious lot of the subject of our conversation; we reach home again, finding Birdie and Bridget awaiting our coming most anxiously. The cook sends word that the dinner is spoiled, as it should have been served an hour ago. But no matter, we can afford to eat a poor dinner after the morning's enjoyment. Frank and I while away the long, sunny afternoon, beneath the willows by the mill-dam, catching perch and chub which there abound

As the sun declines, we stroll along the stream, fishing as we go, till the swamp prevents our further progress.

About a mile eastward of this, where the stream is wide and deep, there was, some years ago, another mill-dam. The remains of it are to be seen yet, with those of the mill, fast crumbling to the ground; and near by, stands a dilapidated and deserted house, once the dwelling of the miller and his family. They are scattered now; some dead, others wanderers—they who once filled a happy home!

The ruins are still called "Ramsay's Mill;" and the history connected with it is a melancholy one, which may be written in after pencillings. Where, on the face of the earth, may we not see the traces of guilt and sorrow? for

"Sorrow treads heavily, and leaves behind
A deep impression, even when she departs."

As we ascend the hill leading homeward, Minnie and Blanche, with a companion whose form is not unfamiliar to our eyes, are coming to meet us. It is Blanche's lover, who has arrived during our absence. We meet him with a warm welcome, and return to the cottage together. How happy is Blanche to-night! and R—— no less so, of course.

The quiet, delicious evening comes, bringing us on

the porch, Frank to enjoy his Havana, the lovers their quiet intercourse, and Minnie ready to tell us all she knows about *I.a Solitaire*.

"Come, Minnie, let us have your story; we will listen now," says Blanche.

"It is not much to tell, for it was told me hurriedly," replies the narrator, "but this is the import of it. I asked our neighbor, Bella—for we may as well call her by her right name—if she was not lonesome sometimes? She said, 'No, it was her choice.' I asked her how long she had been living in the valley? and she commenced to tell me in a very intelligent manner, all I wanted to know for the time being. You know she speaks with considerable Italian accent, and there were some words I did not exactly understand; so I will give the information I received in my own language. Her native place is near Amalfi, not far from the bay of Naples, and her parents are still living there, together with one or two sisters. Her father is a fisherman, or was when she left there, which was some seven years ago; and the tears came into her eyes when she told me of their white cottage, surrounded by an orange grove and vineyard, which her father, assisted by his children, found time to attend to. Her husband had been a peasant of the country near by, but having a taste for painting, went to Naples, and

found employment sufficient to give them means to buy a plot of ground and build a small cabin for themselves; for, she says, everything is very cheap there. By and by, her husband, she called him Pietro, obtained employment in making copies of paintings in the Royal Museum, to sell to strangers in Naples.

He was very successful, and made considerable money, coming home one or two days in the week, to finish his paintings and attend to their little vineyard, which she was able to cultivate herself.

By and by, from making copies, he painted occasionally originals, creations of his own fancy, or now and then a Madonna or a Magdalen after life. One day, an American gentleman chanced to enter his studio, attracted by some beautiful copies hanging within the door. He made a large purchase of the young artist, and gave him farther orders to be finished and shipped to the United States.

Pietro felt flattered at this appreciation of his talent, and thinking that there must be a rich field here in which to labor, hastily made up his mind to emigrate and seek his fortune accordingly. Gathering up all they possessed, they came to America, full of hopeful anticipation. They landed at New-York, but soon found that an artist's life was one of toil. The few

pictures they brought with them were sacrificed from necessity, and then the trial came. The change of climate, want, and exposure, soon preyed upon her husband's health and spirits, till he was laid up with a lung fever. She, with a young child, and obliged to labor to obtain even the poorest necessaries of life, at the same time nursing her sick husband, was almost worn out. But some charitable persons assisted them till Pietro died, and she was left a stranger, alone in a strange land. She knew not which way to turn, when an opportunity offered for her to come into the country, some twenty miles distant from here, as a domestic or housekeeper in the family of an invalid lady. She had by this time acquired sufficient knowledge of our language to make herself useful in various capacities, but the lady died, and she was thrown out of a home, till wandering hither, the house she now occupies struck her fancy, and as it was then vacant, and she could obtain it for a trifling rent, it was taken; and now by economy and taking in a little sewing or fancy work, she obtains a comfortable subsistence. The picture she showed us was the last labor of her husband, and though often in want and tempted to dispose of it, she still retains it. With her garden and her goats, which last are kept because of their requiring so little care, she lives in comparative comfort. She farther said,

that some call her a fortune-teller, but that is only to amuse the young people who come to the glen in picnic parties.

"There, friends, my story is told, it is just as she told it to me, except with the peculiarities of her language; quite romantic—is it not?"

"Well, Minnie!" says Frank, "you are not far out of the way, for I did not miss a dozen words of her relation to you this morning, though I did not appear to be listening; but I shall see La Solitaire again."

R—— is very much pleased and interested, and says that Blanche must show him the way to Hermit's Dell to-morrow; he must make the acquaintance of Bella too.

"Ho! for a sail," exclaims Frank, "see what a glorious breeze is springing up—

'Like the wings of ocean birds,
Flash the white caps of the sea—'

river—I mean.

It is not long before we are at the dock, the white sail of our little "Glide" hoisted, and flying along before the south-east breeze across the wake of a steamer ploughing her way northward.

We round to by the wall of the light-house, and take old Dederich, the Dutchman, and his wife by surprise. We sit awhile on the abutments and watch

the passing craft ; Frank and Blanche sing a gay song ; then leaving the trusty Pharos keeper a handful of cigars, we regain our boat and tack shoreward.

A heaped dish of "Hovey's," and rich cream to "smother" them, await us at the house, and another day is gone.

XI.

THE dark wing of Death's angel has cast its shadow over our fair landscape. Bessie Pike, the fisherman's daughter, died this morning. Her old mother sent for Minnie at day-break, when the last hour of her daughter's life seemed approaching. It was a sad scene, as a death-chamber always is ; but with the dying girl, all was peace and comfort. There were no shudderings at thought of the Dark Valley ; no impatient longings to go or stay. It is the first time that death has entered the lowly dwelling, and it is a hard trial. She was their only child, and they too upon the brink of the grave.

It was a sad task for Minnie to perform—the closing of the eye, the robing for the grave ; but on whom else could they call in their grief and loneliness !

To-morrow she will be buried ; we shall, some of us, follow her to the quiet churchyard, and see her remains decently interred. Till then, oh heart-stricken parents, weep and lament her loss, for she was dear to you, though a seeming burthen in your old age ! yet—