

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—

“She will awake no more, oh, never more!
 Within the twilight chamber spreads apace
 The shadow of white Death, and at the door
 Invisible Corruption waits to trace
 His extreme way to her dim dwelling place.”

The event has cast a gloom over our household; for we had felt interested in the family, and had ministered somewhat to their comfort occasionally.

Blanche and her friend spend most of the afternoon amidst the quietudes of Hermit's Dell. Minnie has household duties to attend to; so Frank and I drive by the river road to Hillsdale, stopping on the way to visit the beautiful grounds and conservatories of a neighbor, which I was desirous my friend should see.

We go on to the post office, sit and read our papers for awhile, and drive by a circuitous route homeward as the shadows are lengthening. Frank is becoming enamoured of country life, and it would not be surprising, if another season found him settled down among us, and married too.

“By the by, Harry, can we go over to Briar-cliff in a day or two? I am anxious to see it before I go to the city and make farther inquiries. I have to go to Glen-Clunie too, and my friends in the city will wonder how much longer I am to be absent. You know I came here right off ship.”

To-morrow, Frank, the funeral takes place, you

know, and I should attend it. Suppose we leave going to Briar-cliff till Thursday. Will that suit you?”

“Perfectly,” replies Frank; “Friday night will find me at Uncle's; I can stay there until Monday, and be in the city by Tuesday morning. That will do very well.”

When we reach our gate, we see our friends sitting on the knoll above, awaiting us. R—— is obliged to leave us on the morrow, and Frank tells me that the wedding day is appointed some time during the fall. We do not like to anticipate the event, for Blanche has become endeared to us, and Minnie will miss her so much; they have been companions so long. But “change is the order of nature,” and we will have to submit.

Joining the party on the knoll, we sit an hour or more, looking at and expatiating on the surrounding scenery, so varied and beautiful. Below us, half hidden amid old willow trees, by the river bank, is the dwelling, wherein Bessie Pike lies cold and still; and as we speak of her, it is a question what the poor old people will do now. Will they live there still, or go among their kindred in the neighboring county? Time will solve!

But a coming thunder-shower, with its precursive gust, drives us to the house. We cannot even remain

on the porch, and by and by the heavy rain comes, beating down the gravel, despoiling the rose-bushes of their lingering flowers, and making a mimic flood to course down our steep carriage road to make work for Teddy again.

On our elevated position, we feel a little fearful of the vivid lightning whenever it comes, although the house is well rodded; still to me, the lightning has always been a sort of terror.

But it is soon over; everything is glittering and bright with the rays of the setting sun, and in the East, a faint tinge of prismatic hues is lingering, but fading.

How delightfully cool and fresh is the air now, and how grateful to our parched garden has been this shower! We will not complain to-morrow of wilted salad or peas, and our late potatoes will commence growing again. The pasture lot wanted it too, and also our meadow, which must be mowed next week.

Another shower, whose premonitory mutterings had been long continued, ushers in the night. We are driven in doors for the rest of the evening, and each amuses himself or herself to their inclination.

Frank settles himself in my study chair and reads Sir Thomas Brown's essay on "Urn Burial," now and then reciting a passage for our appreciation. I have letters to write; Minnie is at her everlasting sewing

and stitching, whilst our interesting couple play chess till Blanche is tired and betakes herself to the piano, to enliven us with the translation of some difficult music, Frank brought her from Par's.

XII.

THE green sods are heaped over Bessie Pike's grave in the churchyard of Hillsdale, and will soon seem as if they had never been disturbed. Her old parents, bowed down and grief-stricken, are sitting lonely enough in their desolate home, perhaps soon to be vacated by them, too, and Minnie is with them, striving to tender all the consolation in her power. R—— has taken his departure for a season, leaving Blanche in a saddened mood. The next time he comes, perhaps, it will be for a more satisfactory purpose to both of them, but not so much so to us.

As the afternoon is long, and the ladies have said that they did not care to go to Briar-cliff again so soon, Frank and I purpose going without them. Old Charley is put to the light wagon, and we are soon on our way over the hills.

It is but an half hour's drive, yet a charming one, embracing almost every variety of scenery; and my friend is much pleased with the appearance of the country. Passing by the cottage at which we had stopped on the previous visit, we enter the grounds

and, tying our horse, commence our survey. Everything is in a most dilapidated condition; ground run to waste and well stocked with weeds of every sort, especially those odious specimens, St. John's wort and Canada thistle. The out-buildings are commodious and may be repaired at small expense. The house, which we managed to enter by creeping through a narrow cellar window, is well built and roomy; a little old fashioned as to its finish, but still elegant. The upper windows command a glorious view, not only of the surrounding country, but a range of mountains, forty miles distant, and a broad stretch of the river, not more than five miles away at the farthest.

Frank says his only objection to the place would be its distance from the river, and consequently the difficulty of access in winter or when the roads are bad.

Without guidance we descend into the valley or glen in the rear of the house, and wander through its recesses. There is no waterfall, as at Hermit's Dell, but in its stead a large and deep pond of ever-living water, stocked with choice fish. Traces of gravelled walks winding among the woods are visible, but now choked up with leaves, and barricaded with broken branches. It has evidently been a fair haunt in years gone by.

Bridge-valley cannot be very far from here, and Hillsdale is almost as near as to us, being in a different direction.



Frank appears pleased with the property, and if it can be purchased at a fair price, I doubt not he will buy it and live here permanently.

On our departure, we stop a few moments at the cottage to chat with the old man, who entertains us awhile, and would keep us till night if he could, listening to his manifold relations.

He has not heard that the property is offered for sale, though he thinks "it mout be so," and evidently wishes it were; for he was very anxious to fathom the motives of our visit.

He gave us, however, one item of information which was new; and that is, the probability of a railroad running about half a mile distant, and forming a connection with the city. That would obviate much of Frank's objection to the residence, at any rate.

It is quite late when we reach our home. Minnie and Blanche have been delaying supper for us, which we are prepared to enjoy with good relish, especially as a dish of fine red "Antwerps," the first we have had this season, grace the table.

Birdie climbs upon my knee with his picture alphabet, to show me what he has learned under Bridget's tuition, who is very proud of her success.

The little fellow informs me too that "Aunty Blanche" has been riding his pony almost to the village; and he laughs thinking how "funny" Shag

looked under his unaccustomed burden. But his bedtime has arrived, and off he scampers to dream his fairy visions.

Frank says he must leave us to-morrow for a few days; and then our household will relapse into its former quietness.

"I shall miss you very much, Frank; more now than ever before."

"And so shall we;" continue the others. "But then, not as much as Harry will, you know, Blanche; for we shall have our hands full of work for two weeks," says Minnie.

Frank promises to return soon, and stay till we get tired of him; but notwithstanding this, we—he and I—find matter for converse till the clock strikes twelve—late hour for our simple, country life.

XIII.

It is the sweet haying-time! and the air is fragrant with the odor of drying grass, which Teddy is turning on our meadow-lot. Bridget and Birdie are revelling sportively amidst the odorous winrows, whilst some truant urchins, who should be conning their tasks in the corner school-house, are popping away most industriously at the meadow larks, scattered over the field and perched on the neighboring tree-tops.

It is nearly noon, and I have just returned from old farmer Mead's, with whom it is my pleasure to have a frequent chat, either over the fence which divides our possessions, or more sociably, upon his ample porch, shaded by great locusts, planted by his father fifty years ago.

Hard labor and the burden of years have left their impress on the old farmer. His head is gray and his form bowed, but not with infirmity; for he is as sturdy as an old oak, and likely to live for many years to come. He is a thoughtful old man too, for he has had his share of sorrows and cares, and loves to sit in his accustomed seat within the door, whence he can look

over the greater part of the farm that has witnessed for so many years his untiring labors. Some of those years have been weighty with affliction, but he never repines; though he often wishes "his boy had taken to the farm better than he did."

Looking upon him this morning as he sat musing, but cheerful, I thought of those beautiful lines which he might fitly sing.

"No more to bind the amber sheaves
With the reaper bands I go;
I stand where the rays in the gabled eaves
From the orient softly flow.
I am old, but hope can never decay,
And why should my spirit care:
The sun sheds blessings on locks of grey,
And hallows an old man's hair."

Frank has returned to us again, but is away most of the time, attending to his new purchase, for he is possessor of Briar-cliff. Its last owner, who had been abroad many years, returned a few weeks since, and not wishing to revive old and painful reminiscences, offered the property for sale. The price was less than we anticipated, and my friend became the willing purchaser.

He has bought a horse, and divides his time between us and Briar-Cliff, superintending masons, carpenters,

and gardeners in their manifold labors. I go there with him occasionally, and although it is but two weeks since he commenced operations, a great change is manifest. The old man at the cottage near the gate is highly delighted to see the "haunted house" again occupied, and hobbles back and forth to note the improvements and occasionally tender Frank his advice. He is desirous that his little house should be moved within the gate, so that it may be called "the lodge," and offers to teach his grandchild to be gate-keeper. Frank has promised to think of it, and if he can modernize the house, perhaps he will make use of it in that way.

Blanche is delighted at her brother's good fortune in being able to settle so near us. She is at Briar-cliff frequently, roaming over the grounds and suggesting many alterations and improvements. She says she will have two homes to visit now when tired of the one she is soon to occupy in the city.

Frank has committed to us a confidential item of information too. He is to be married soon after Blanche; and he kept his secret pretty well, for the chosen person is one he met in his travels abroad—a resident of a southern city, and who has just returned.

What with preparations for Blanche's wedding and the entertainment of our metropolitan friends who visit us occasionally, our ladies have about as much as

they can attend to. Consequently Frank and I depend upon ourselves and each other for company and amusement.

When not obliged to be at Briar-cliff, we don our thick boots and shooting jackets, and spend a day scouring the swamps after our favorite game, woodcock. Frank is a glorious shot, and always drops his bird; I cannot speak as well of my skill. It is rather against our principles to kill woodcock before the Fall months; but as our rustic sportsmen commence early in July, we are rather loth to lose the share we are entitled to, as some of the best ground in the country is embraced within the bounds of Briar-cliff.

Frank wants to string up the heads of all we kill as a tally; but Minnie rebels at this innovation of her epicurean taste; she must have the heads for her share.

As we were sitting on the porch last evening, the only part of the day which brings us all together, sounds of gay merriment came up from Hermit's Dell. We proposed walking thitherward to see what was going on.

Crossing the stream which flows into the river, some distance below the cascade, we wound our way through the woods till the path brought us to a point in view of "the Lovers' Rock."

Sitting upon its mossy summit, revealed by the

moonlight were two figures ; one clothed in white, the other, a manly form not unfamiliar to me, that of farmer Mead's son. We thought of the mysterious initials on the trunk of the hemlock, and passed on unseen. Below, by the cascade and on the rustic bridge were many others, some of whom recognized us as we passed ; the sons and daughters of neighboring farmers. Again, in the doorway of La Solitaire's dwelling, stood a more silent and thoughtful group, listening to the oracle perhaps, or some story of old Italy.

We pass by unobserved, and reaching the cottage, hear for an hour or two longer the voices and laughter of that merry party, ringing through the woods and valleys.

How, in this world of ours, are scenes of gladness and sorrow mingled ! Like the changing phases of the kaleidoscope, sometimes dull and clouded, sometimes bright and brilliant. The merry sounds to which we have been listening are scarcely silenced, when a pitiful and travel-worn group come winding up the hill and stand before us. It is superfluous and cruel to ask them their cravings ; they are apparent enough. A man of stout form, but wan and wasted, bearing in his arms a child four years old ; a woman of like appearance carrying a whining infant, and two older children following after, constitute the group. They

are Irish emigrants, come from their famine-stricken isle, and wandering about the country looking for a relative, whom they have traced to this vicinity. They have travelled thus for many days, sleeping by the roadside when weary and during the night, but they are almost discouraged. They thought this a country where gold could be picked up in the streets, and bread might be had for nothing ; but they find it far different.

We can do nothing for them except to give them food and a few articles of clothing, which they sorely need. They do not want a shelter ; for they say it is warm, and if we will let them lie on the hay down in the meadow, they will bless us. Poor wanderers ! may you find him you are seeking ; but it will be a long and weary search ; and may be you will wish that you had never left "swate Ireland," miserable as she is, and blighted with a withering curse.