

XX.

WITH the morning light Teddy is despatched for the physician, with a request from me that he will visit Bella as soon as possible, for I know not how important his services may be.

As Charley will be in use for an hour or two, I put on my top-boots and walk by the nearest route to the cabin. The path runs along a steep hillside the greater part of the distance, and as the snow is very deep and I am the first one to break the surface, my walk is toilsome enough. The little dwelling of Bella is soon visible, and I perceive a thick column of smoke curling upward from the chimney. They are not suffering with cold at any rate, and it has a cheerful look too. When I reach the house Minnie replies to my summons at the door, and if her face is an index of her patient's condition, all is still well.

She tells me that Bella passed the night very comfortably, though suffering some pain and oppression.

"I did not sleep a wink the whole night through," she continues; "you have no idea how lonesome I felt here, though I did not feel afraid of anything. I spent most of the time in reading, and when I became tired

of that, I stood the light under the Magdalen and studied it for an hour. I never appreciated its beauty before. Did you send for the doctor? Bella intimated last evening that she would like to see the priest—but I have had a serious talk with her, and I think she is indifferent now to his coming at all. I find that she is not a very rigid Catholic."

The doctor arrives soon, and pronounces Bella in no danger at present, though her lungs are slightly affected—a little medicine, quiet, and good nursing are all that is necessary, and those she will have.

Minnie suggests that I return home and send Teddy after old Mrs. Pike, who is a capital nurse, to come and remain at the cabin till Bella is convalescent.

This meets my approval, and after replenishing the pile of fuel by the hearth I again tramp and flounder through the drifts homeward. I find my breakfast awaiting me, and it is discussed with a most capital appetite, for I have done hard service since daylight. A covey of quail are running over the snow before the door half famished, and Birdie and I amuse ourselves with feeding them. Hunger has tamed them so that they venture within a few feet of us. If Bella were well she would soon entice them to her traps, and it may be their fate still to get into them.

"Teddy has gone after the nurse, and when he returns, Birdie, we will go after mamma."

The little fellow says it is cold, but I tell Bridget to bundle him up in shawls and I will see that he does not suffer in the sleigh.

In due time we are off, Birdie nestled among the furs and blankets, his little face only visible, reminding me of a tiny chicken peeping from beneath its mother's wings. It is his first sleigh-ride, and he is delighted with the jingle of the bells and the fine snow that Charley flings up for the wind to dust us with.

We find good Mrs. Pike installed into her office, and Minnie waiting patiently for us to take her home. Telling the nurse to send us word by Pietro if we can be of any service, we drive rapidly homeward.

Minnie is tired out, and is glad to reach home again, but there we find Frank and his wife, who have arrived during my absence, and promise to spend the rest of the day with us. They are sorry to hear of Bella's sickness, for they already feel as much interest in her as we do. Frank suggests that we delay the project no longer of trying to enable her to return home when the Spring opens. We know she is longing to do so, and only wants the means.

"Two or three hundred dollars, Harry, will cover all expenses, and provide for contingencies; I will give a quarter of the amount, and I know you will second me: the rest can soon be raised among our neighbors."

Minnie and I promise co-operation, and in a few

weeks Bella's heart will know a new joy, if our promises are good.

The river is covered with an unbroken sheet of ice, and we see the fishermen going out to lift their "fykes" which are generally burdened with fish. The wind has swept off the snow, and Frank proposes that we drive over the river and back for the sake of a good trot. His horses are brought up and we are off. The river is over a mile in width, but in five minutes we are across and warming our fingers at the fishermen's fire in the hut upon the shore.

We buy some fine perch of them, and retrace our way, stopping to see old Diedrich, the genius of the lighthouse. He does not have to light his lantern now, but he lives beneath it because it is his only shelter. He is busy at his old work, making nets to sell to the shad-fishers, and smoking his pipe by way of recreation. He speaks very highly of that last tobacco we brought him, which insinuation we understand: but unfortunately have omitted taking any with us this time. "We will bring some the next visit we make you, Diedrich," says my companion. "Gute!" is his laconic reply, tinged with a tone of disappointment, and we are off again.

We are at home in time to find dinner on the table, and the ladies looking out for us, for with the glass they could see all our movements.

"Harry, what do you think," says Minnie, "we have an invitation to domesticate ourselves at Briar-cliff till the weather becomes milder. Kate will take no refusal; she says she knows we are suffering with the cold here, and that you won't refuse."

"Well, Minnie, as far as the cold is concerned, it is true enough. The house is not proof against these northwesterners, and as far as our comfort is concerned, I think it a very desirable change, but"——

"No 'buts' are necessary at all, cousin Harry," replies Kate; "there is nothing to keep you here whatever; the servants are trusty, we have abundance of room, and to spare, and it will add much to our happiness to have you with us. You must go over with us this afternoon, Bridget and Birdie, bag and baggage."

Frank is not only as decided but quite peremptory in trying to persuade us, and at last we assent to the arrangement.

We leave the house and its appurtenances under the charge of Teddy, promising but a week's absence, and all packed in Frank's commodious sleigh we speed towards Briar-cliff.

The road is now in fine order from frequent travel, and in half an hour we are at the mansion. What an air of comfort there is about it: a veritable Arctic atmosphere could not penetrate its thick stone walls.

There is a great stove in the hall whose capacity is suggestive of never-failing coal-fields: and in the library a hickory fire that would put "Uncle Josh's" to shame is fiercely blazing.

Intimately acquainted and connected as we are with the dwellers here, Minnie and I soon make ourselves perfectly "at home," complying with the spirit of our friends' often repeated wish that we shall do so.

Evening comes with its social tea-quaffing, and afterward we gather in the library to a cozy game of chess or bagatelle.

By and by we have music—the spirit-stirring drinking song, *Crambamboli*, which Frank sings finely.

It is echoed from the kitchen, in which department of the household a young German is instated. As the notes of a tuneful *lied* which we sing afterward come to his ear, I can divine his thoughts if he cherishes fond memories of the Fatherland. He is again amidst the vineyards by the Rhine, or beneath the lindens that o'erhang the Neckar. He remembers the day when, embarking for his new home, he listened tearfully to the melodies of the old. There were others with him too: some perhaps were his kindred: but where are they now? Away through the valleys of the West, by the banks of the Ohio and the Rio Grande, they build their quaint cabins, and gather their viny harvests.

But our songs are over, and whilst our fair compan-

ions draw their lounge aside for a private *tête-à-tête*, Frank takes from his writing-desk a box of old letters which he wishes I would assist him to sort and file. They are the accumulation of years, and some are to be garnered again—others, to feed the fire.

How many memories do those rustling pages awaken! how varied the phases of life they chronicle! Some are worn with frequent reading—others unrumpled and scarcely opened. Of those who wrote them, a few, very few were friends: the rest, not foes perhaps, but selfish and calculating scribes. The characters upon some of those chequered pages were traced by fingers which shall hold the pen no more. Their writing is familiar as were the faces of those who wrote—faces we have looked not on for many a long year. What so recalls the voice and smile of a lost friend as a letter of his inditing? Others have forgotten him—but to you he seems to speak with silent tongue—you hold in yours his invisible fingers.

“Here, Harry,” said Frank, as he handed me a letter of several pages, “is one I prize highly and often read. It was written by a chum of mine only a few months since. He was a noble fellow, and had his health been spared him, would have made his mark upon our country’s page. I do not know of any one more thoroughly educated or possessing more general information. He was a deep thinker and a great ob-

server of men and things, neglecting nothing that could add to his fund of useful knowledge.

“He used to take a great interest in politics, and I have often heard him say it was his ambition to shine in public life. Poor fellow! he died of a cancer before any of his hopes were answered. I think that is the last letter he ever wrote, and I never read it without thinking of that touching sentiment uttered by Henry Clay when he felt that he was failing. What a depth of regretful feeling is contained in those few lines! Do you not remember them? I believe my memory serves me right—‘If the days of my usefulness be indeed past, I desire not to linger an impatient spectator of the oft-scanned field of life.’

“There are passages in that letter imbued with the same spirit. After all, Harry, how vain are our calculations and endeavors.”

I read the letter so full of regrets, yet not repinings, and then Frank hands me another written in a different vein. It is from “a musical genius” studying abroad, and is full of the spirit which characterizes the works of Beethoven and Mozart, and others of their school. Its pages, written almost in rhythmical measure, give evidence of a mind gifted with an intense perception of all that is beautiful and divine in music. It remains to be seen whether, master of his art, he will one day exclaim with the dying Mozart—“Now I begin to see

what might be done in music :” or, disappointed in his aspirings, sigh with Jean Paul Richter—“ Away, music, away ! thou tellest me of joys I shall never realize.”

So for an hour or two we sit over that receptacle of old letters and discuss its contents. Out of hundreds, a few only are laid aside to be kept for reperusal—mementoes of those who are held worthy of remembrance.

XXI.

“ COME, Frank ! it is a fine, still morning : what do you say to a drive over to Hermit’s Dell ? I promised Bella that we would not neglect her, and at the same time there are matters at the cottage I wish to look after.”

Such was Minnie’s salutation and proposition to our host at breakfast this morning.

“ Only grant me an hour to scribble off a letter or two, and I and the horses are at your service for the day,” is Frank’s reply.

It is indeed a pleasant winter’s day ! The snow lies dense and level over the lawn ; here and there a hemlock or pine relieving its glistening surface with its dark shadows, and giving a phase of cheerfulness to the else gloomy woods. The sunshine falls warmly into the winter conservatory on the southern porch, and sitting within it, inhaling its delicious atmosphere, laden with scents of geranium and orange blossoms, we fancy that the breath of a summer’s day is here caged and kept for our enjoyment.

Frank comes here sometimes to enjoy his cigar