

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

which his wife declaims against most forcibly ; but he defends himself with the plea that he drives away the spiders which are particularly obnoxious to her : so he gains his point. But the horses are at the door. Frank has finished his epistles, and whilst the ladies are pulling on their Polish boots, we arrange the hot bricks in a damp blanket on the bottom of the sleigh, and otherwise consult the comfort of our companions ; for Frank slyly whispers in my ear, "I'm going to give them a drive to Leeville."

Our destination, then, is nearly thirty miles distant, and the prospect is that we shall not get home again to-night.

Frank takes the reins, for our vehicle holds but four persons comfortably, and in half an hour we are at the door of Bella's cabin. Minnie runs in for a few moments, and returns with tidings that the invalid is fast improving and very comfortable, wanting nothing but a few more days of good Abby Pike's nursing.

As the cottage we call our home is on the route we intend taking, Minnie tells our Jehu not to drive by without stopping, for she begins to suspect that Frank and I have had our heads together, concocting some scheme or other for their surprise or amusement.

At home we find everything as it should be in-doors, but have to force a perfect barricade of snow, piled upon the porch by the busy winds, before effecting an

entrance. Teddy is now sole occupant, for during our absence his kitchen companions have gone to visit their friends elsewhere. A good hickory-wood fire is blazing in the kitchen, whither we descend to warm our fingers preparatory to a start, and at the same time inspect the larder, which we fear is nearly empty. It is rather soon after breakfast for us to be hungry, but the ladies being admonished that they have a long ride before them, think it best to fortify themselves a little. Minnie produces part of a smoked salmon from a dark corner, and Kate has spied out a jar of pickles, of which, with most of her sex, she is uncommonly fond. There is no lack of bread and butter, so whilst our fair companions take their "cold snap," Frank and I imbibe a warm potation whose flavor awakens memories of "old Schiedam."

But Teddy calls out, "Mister Frank, the beasts are shiverin'," despite of their blankets, and so, once more snugly tucked in, we are off again.

Away through the woods, along the river bank, and then into the woods again, we speed at a gallant rate, till we reach "the Point" where we are to cross the river. The snow covers the surface only in detached places, and keeping watch for the air-holes we drive straight across. The river is here almost a mile in width, but the ice is nearly a foot thick, and perfectly solid, so we feel there is no risk in

crossing on it. As we near the other shore, we find the tide has overflowed the surface, to the depth of several inches, and become frozen again. Our horses break through it, which alarms the ladies some, but it is soon over.

We take the shore near an old-fashioned tavern, which Frank and I well remember as the *rendezvous* of a sleighing party in which we were prominent actors a few years ago. There is the same flaunting sign swinging and creaking, the same tall porch, and there is the identical woolly-headed "Cæsar," who rubbed down Frank's horses so faithfully on that eventful night.

"We must stop for the sake of old times, Harry," said Frank, and so we do. The old negro recognizes us, but says, "Dem ain't the hosses, massa—yah-yah!" No, Cæsar, and where are the fair forms which they bore that night? where is Mabel Lee, the belle of the frolic; where her fair companion? Are they living still, mindful oftentimes of by-gone days, or are they in that realm where retrospection neither gladdens or saddens the spirit!

Leeville is still some ten miles distant, but we are on the post road, now beaten smooth and hard by constant travel.

A fine farming country here stretches for miles westward from the river. Great red barns are visible

from the road, doubtless heaped high with hay and grain, for there are stacks without—the surplus of garnered crops.

Our road courses amidst varied scenes: now, through a piece of woodland; now ascending, then descending; here, over a wide stream, on stone arches; there, through a region of broad and level meadows. The snow lies deeply over all now, but in the summer time it must be a beautiful country that surrounds us.

The moon lights us into Leeville, that quiet little village in which Frank and I have spent so many pleasant days. We pass by the old homestead, standing away back from the road, and dimly seen through the dense locusts and elms which surround it. My friend's right and title to that substantial old mansion has been long since conveyed into other hands, and nothing about it belongs to him now but its pleasant associations.

We stop for a moment upon the bridge that crosses a little stream flowing near the village. "There, Kate," says Frank, pointing to the spot where the willows thickly cluster, "there is a deep pool in which a poor misguided girl drowned herself a few years ago. I will tell you more about it when we reach the tavern."

We have had a long drive, and though not suffering with cold, thanks to the hot bricks and thick furs, it is

pleasant to gather round the wide hearth in the parlor of the tavern, which the family have vacated for our accommodation.

Old Walton is the landlord still, and recognizing us as friends, strives to make us comfortable.

Supper is soon prepared, and a good supper too, consisting of coffee, buckwheat cakes, fresh pickerel from a neighboring lake, and sundry other accompaniments; to all of which we do ample justice.

The dry wood is heaped upon the fire, and cozily disposed around it, Frank and I revive old memories. We remember the harvests-home, the corn-huskings, the apple-peelings, and all the other frolics in which we once took a part. An hour or two passes away in such converse, till Frank is reminded of the little history he promised to give concerning the suicide girl.

"I shall tell it hastily," Frank says, "for it is getting late, and we are all tired."

"She was the daughter of a rich farmer in this vicinity, and it may be that her parents are living yet, although they were pretty old people at the time the affair happened. During the summer, a party of young men from the city came here to rusticate, fish, and shoot woodcock, for the country abounded in game.

"They were wild boys, full of fun, and ready for any frolic: cruising about in every direction, and

making the acquaintance of all the pretty girls for miles around. Every few days they would get up a pic-nic or a fishing frolic, or something of the kind. The girls felt flattered with the attentions of these city beaux, though I don't suppose any one of them had the remotest idea of picking up a wife here. At any rate they all had their favorites, and it is only to be wondered at that there were not more broken hearts than Bell Darragh's. Poor girl! she was young and very susceptible, and was deep in love before she knew it. The young man who waited on her most was well calculated to win a girl's heart, but I am convinced that he was not aware how deep an impression he had made. It was the talk, however, of the whole neighborhood, how deeply the girl was in love with him, till by and by it reached his ears. He did not give it much attention, but rather laughed at it as only a passing fancy, though at the same time withdrawing his attentions to a certain degree; for I believe that he was strictly honorable. It was different with the girl; and though her companions laughed at her and called her foolish, it was soon evident that she was serious in her attachment. Her temperament was peculiar, and she became quite melancholy; would not go out, and refused to join any more of the parties that were made up.

"Her father sent her away to an uncle living in a

different part of the country, thinking a change of scene would have a good effect upon her; but it was of no use. When she came home, the young men had all left, and the one to whom she was attached, not dreaming but that her fancy for him would cease on his departure, had thought it needless to enter into any explanation. This was a twofold disappointment to her. She became moody and mopish, and subject to melancholy spells, so that her parents were obliged to watch her constantly.

"She went on so for several weeks, till one morning she did not make her appearance at breakfast, which was very unusual. Her mother went up to her room, but it was vacant and the bed had not been disturbed. The old people were much alarmed, and the news soon spread through the village that Bell Darragh was missing.

"Her body was found in less than an hour. It lay upon the pebbly bottom of the pool under the willows that I pointed out to you near the bridge. Her face was turned upward, and those who saw it first said that it glistened through the clear water calm and beautiful in its expression. Every means were resorted to in the hope of restoring her, but she was perfectly lifeless.

"I saw her soon after she was taken from the water. Her bonnet hung upon the willows, as if to show the spot where she laid herself down to die. She had

dressed herself in a white robe, with more than usual care, and had even twined some white rose-buds in her hair. It was a fair but sad sight, and as I looked upon the lifeless form, surrounded by wailing friends, I could not but think and exclaim, how soon

"The illusion o'er, the spell dispersed,
Life and life's bubble burst."

"It cast a gloom over the village for weeks, for Bell was a general favorite with young and old. I have often thought how sadly her young love was wasted and quenched, and how many of us would give the world, if we could, to be the object of such devotion as hers."

Such was Frank's relation, and strictly true. I remember well when it occurred, but our companions had never heard of the incident before.

"It is a sad story," says one, "but such things happen oftener than we know of. The world scoffs at there being such a thing as a broken heart, but I know of two in my own experience: Harry, you remember Julia C——! you know the doctor said she died of a galloping consumption: but her intimate friends knew better."

It is late before we retire, although our breakfast is to be ready by daylight, so we can reach home in good season. And a good night's rest we have on the laven-

der scented beds, yet promptly obeying old Walton's summons at our doors ere daylight.

The horses, equally refreshed and well cared for as ourselves, are at the door, anxious to turn their heads homeward again, and it is not long before they are doing so. We propose taking the road running parallel with the river now, and cross it some ten miles farther down than we did yesterday, consequently nearer Briar-cliff.

The road is tortuous and hilly, and the ride rather tedious, but we reach Briar-cliff before evening, much to the relief of the domestics and delight of Birdie, who could not divine the reason of our absence.

Again in the library with its warm atmosphere and glowing hangings, we find our city papers and a letter from Blanche to her brother. He reads to us passages from it, and she is amidst our circle again, but impalpable, invisible. She has been journeying a few days in Florida, and gives us charming descriptions of its almost tropical scenery and climate.

"Why cannot you all make me a visit before spring? it is only a trip of four days from Briar-cliff here," she writes.

We all agree that it would be very pleasant to do so, but then there are good reasons to prevent us this winter.

"But we can go to the city at any rate, can we not, Kate?" Minnie says, half inquiringly, half decidedly

"I see there is a fine opera for Friday night, and the 'Philharmonic' on Saturday, so let us go down this week."

Frank and I are content to remain perfectly passive in this arrangement, so it is decided that day after tomorrow we leave for town, where we shall spend the holidays.

Minnie has some preparatory needle-work to do, and forthwith sets about it with borrowed materials. She intimates, too, that I must go over to the cottage in the morning and pack her bonnet-box with some necessary habiliments.

Kate draws her easel to the light and gives the finishing touches to a sketch of Hermit's Dell, which she wishes to have framed in the city; whilst Frank and I light our "Noriegas," and each with a paper in hand "place" ourselves as our notions of comfort indicate.

"Aha! so Nellie C—— is married at last," exclaims Frank: and he reads the notice from the paper he holds.

"To a foreigner too, Frank! Well! her fancy is gratified at last. I am sure you remember as well as I do that flitting summer of ours, when we met her at the Springs. I suppose you have long ago told your wife of that famous flirtation you had with the fair Nellie! for like most of us married men you have doubtless made confession of all pre-hymeneal strayings

and preferences. Has he not, Kate? You needn't give Minnie the wink, Frank, for she knows who I was enamored with at the same time that you was so desperate. That was a pleasant time nevertheless, though we wasted so much attention and —, I was going to say something else more valuable: but no matter for that! if it had not gone one way, it would another.

"That *was* a golden season to us *then*, Frank, however we may think of it now.

"What glorious gallops and drives over the hills and through the valleys of fair Berkshire! What stolen glances and smiling recognitions by day—what roving and whisperings on moon-lit eves under the old trees—what dreams by night!

"All gone—wasted, my friend! We are not sorry though, are we? we do not miss them, do we? There are fairer forms, and whiter hands, and darker eyes nearer and dearer to us now, are there not?

"We were married, too, before either of them, the sweet coquettes, and they know it. I wonder if it made them feel they were growing *passé*.

"Perhaps the old proverb proved true in their case! but no! let us be generous, Frank; such creatures as they were never grow old: let us hope they have gone farther to fare no worse.

"Ah! you shake your head—cannot forgive her, hey! Well it was rather provoking to be shuffled off like an

old shoe, and discarded for the sake of that *parvenu* Count. But you were well avenged at any rate, Frank; what was he after all, and how every one laughed at her, and none pitied her. I wonder if she has caught a real Count now!"

"You have made quite an *exposé*, Harry," says Frank's wife; "he never told me the whole affair, or why he was jilted. Ah! Frank, you need never tell me you are not conceited after this."

Frank pretends to be very stoical, and, absorbed in his paper, says nothing: but I fancy that his thoughts are running back to that gay summer and its flitting memories. I know that in his life-view the growing years have left a vista through which a reach half shady, half sunny, sometimes opens to his spirit's vision. Like the bit of landscape which the Claude Lorraine mirror pictures, it is clothed in a warm and dreamy haze—the haze of the Past.

Unto what spirit is retrospection not pleasant! Over the long review the shadow and the sunshine are not unequally cast, "and every cloud hath a lining of silver."

In the careless days of boyhood we listlessly read from our dog-eared Martial the truthful line

"Hoc est

Vivere bis, vita posse priore frui."

but it is only in after years that we realize its meaning