

XXII.

THE Christmas holidays are over, and we have been spending them in the city, renewing some old acquaintances and dissipating in various ways.

Again amidst the quiet comforts of home we are recovering from the effects of the week's excitement, and enjoying ourselves as we are wont to do.

The weather still continues cold, but we are so comfortably domesticated, day after day passes by and we linger, loth to return to Hermit's Dell.

Teddy came over this morning, and brings my accumulated mail, with tidings that Bella is now well; and we send back by him an inclosure for the good old nurse who has attended her so faithfully.

It has long been a matter of cogitation and consultation with Minnie and myself whether we shall embrace Frank's offer and build near him. There are many matters to be taken into consideration, but on most accounts it seems desirable, and we have almost decided to do so.

It is a beautiful site that he has selected for us; few

could be more delightful. At a short distance from his own dwelling, yet screened from sight of it by a dense grove of old forest trees, it commands a lovely and wide-spread inland view of hill and valley, with a glimpse of far-off mountains, and from an elevation the river may be seen also.

A wide stretch of greensward is capable of being made a beautiful lawn, dotted as it is naturally with fine deciduous and evergreen trees. Near by is the glen with its stream and fish pond, its sequestered walks and shadowy nooks—a resort which the hand of nature alone has made lovely in the extreme.

There in the summer time one may imagine himself far removed from the haunts of men, amidst the solitudes of scarcely trodden forests, for there are

“Dark owlet nooks, and caves, and battled rocks,
And winding valleys roofed with pendant shade.”

We are talking it all over this evening, and Frank's wife volunteers to draft a plan for us to build after—a Gothic cottage, an Italian villa, or any style we may fancy.

She even brings her drawing materials and carelessly pencils a fanciful outline for Minnie's consideration: and Minnie is none the less in the spirit of it, for she lays out the form and dimensions of the dining-room and library, the size of the hall, and expresses her

opinion of the best exposure for the parlor with its bow window and French sashes.

Then there must be a winter conservatory, for she has a passion for flowers, and the porch must have trellisses for her favorite wistaria and trumpet-creeper.

I even find myself becoming more interested, and confer with Frank in the most serious manner as to the best location for the garden, the most effective disposition of the shrubbery and flower borders, and the easiest route for the approach.

Then there are the out-buildings and fruitery, the pasture lot, and sundry other matters to be considered.

How easy it is to plan and suggest! how interested we can often become in what, after all, is uncertain and perhaps impossible!

This thought strikes me, and I look at Minnie. She is more enthusiastic than I am, and sits dreamily looking at the fairy creation already made by Kate's agile fingers.

Already in her fancy the graceful cottage is reared on yonder knoll. The summer's sun, shining through the foliage of overhanging trees, flecks its roof with gleams and shadows.

The lattices are shrouded with dense festoons of odorous creepers, amidst which her canary hangs and gleefully warbles. The breath of June has blown open the buds of her prairie rose, and the "Bourbons"

on the lawn are out in all their brilliancy. Velvety glades, their surface chequered with sunshine and shade, and bossed with beds of flowers, stretch away amidst the tree-openings forming long vistas of varied beauty.

Ah! my dreamer, I almost say, your eyes see fair visions, your thoughts wander in a mimic fairy-land! will your feet ever tread it, think you?

"Well," says Frank, "we will say no more about it now, but leave it an open question for you to decide before spring. I am sure we have offered you every inducement to be our near neighbors." And so we leave the subject for farther consideration.

During the evening Frank's protégé, the young school-teacher, joins our circle. He is a frequent visitor here, and finds it pleasant to associate with those whose tastes are congenial with his. Young as he is, he has seen considerable of the ups and downs of life, and experience has been his teacher in much that most of us only casually learn.

He has made Frank acquainted with many circumstances which have conspired to place him in his present position. He has truly been reared in the school of adversity, and it is only to be wondered that he has not long ago become disheartened.

His family were once in affluent circumstances, and his father held a high position in one of the New Eng-

land States: but by some misdemeanor of persons connected with him in financial operations, he was completely ruined.

His reputation was blasted too, but as is too often the case, the aspersions cast upon him were unjust and without a shadow of reason.

The world makes few allowances, and public opinion is often too hastily formed and biased. It was so in this case; but the amendment came too late at last; for soon after his reverses, the injured man filled a suicide's grave.

A wife, daughter, and only son were left to struggle on as they could; the son, our present companion, the youngest of the children.

His mother removed from her native town, and went to a neighboring city, where she found employment in a seminary for young ladies. Her daughter became instated in a private family as children's governess, and the son, prepared already to enter college, was admitted as a charity student, an unenviable position generally. He applied himself though to his labors, and graduated well, blessed with a good education and naturally gifted, as we have seen, with talents of a high order.

Since then, his mother has died, and he is endeavoring to the utmost to place his sister in a position above dependency. Whatever he could find to do by which

he might gain an honest livelihood, he has not scorned or neglected.

He has been an engineer in a cotton factory, a conductor on a railroad, and now a village school teacher but brighter days are in store for him. Frank has interested himself in his behalf, and a station of trust and honor will soon be opened for him to fill.

He sits long with us this evening, and recounts many incidents in his past life. For one so young, he has tasted much that is bitter, little that is sweet, and early trials have left their impress on him. We can only wonder that he has braved and borne them so well, better than many older and wiser than he is.

It becomes us to encourage him in his onward course, which bids fair to be successful if he does not neglect his opportunities.

It is not likely that he will. When we once weather the storm, confidence is gained and strengthened, and we almost long to brave another, so the mastery may be more perfect.

"Yet after all," says Frank, who is in his moralizing mood, "what is our joy and glory? We live our little day, 'robust ephemera' as the poet says we are, we die, others fill our places, and we are soon forgotten, unnumbered.

"Do you remember what that quaint old English poet,

Edward Bolten, wrote two centuries ago?" and taking from his book-shelf a rusty volume, he reads —

As withereth the primrose by the river,
 As fadeth summer's sun from gliding fountains,
 As vanisheth the light-blown bubble ever,
 As melteth snow upon the mossy mountains,
 So melts, so vanisheth, so fades, so withers,
 The rose, the shine, the bubble and the snow
 Of praise, pomp, glory, joy, which short life gathers.
 Fair praise, vain pomp, sweet glory, little joy.
 The withered primrose by the mourning river,
 The faded summer sun from weeping fountains,
 The light-blown bubble vanished forever,
 The melten snow upon the naked mountains
 Are emblems—that the treasures we uplay,
 Soon wither, vanish, fade and melt away.

STRAY CHAPTERS.

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"I heard, as all have heard, life's various story,
 And in no careless heart transcribed the tale:
 * * * * * So—did I gather food
 To feed my many thoughts—a tameless multitude."

SHELLEY