VIII.

Summer, with its luxuriance of flowers and verdure, had passed away, and Autumn, with its wealth of grain and fruits, its frosty mornings and clear skies, had come in its most gorgeous beauty. The corn-fields, stripped of their rustling crop, looked bare and sterile, and the meadows, faded from their rich green, had put on the more sombre garb of the season.

The woodlands alone had gained in beauty, and already were clothed in those matchless tints which constitute the crowning glory of our northern autumns.

But for Frank and me, the season had other charms, and ere November came with its sharper frosts, we were snugly domesticated in the rude but comfortable cabin at Otter-creek.

"Uncle Josh," as we boys familiarly called him, was the first settler in that untamed country. His own busy axe had made the small clearing that afforded ground sufficient for the cultivation of corn and potatoes and a few garden plants. His own hands had felled the logs and reared the walls of his lonely tenement, and with untiring zeal, though with hard

labor, he had supported his small family from day to day and year to year.

We, who though young enough to be his children, had seen more of the world, often wondered that the old man was so well contented with his lot, for his declining years were almost as devoid of the simplest luxuries, as were his earlier ones.

He was not lonely either, for there was one true helpmate ever at his side, not less loving and mindful of his comfort than on the day when, with little worldly wealth, they wedded and emigrated from the banks of the Penobscot, to build up a new home and find new friends amidst unknown wilds.

It was always an epoch in their work-day life when we visited the woods, to spend a week or two of the sporting season. Seldom did a newspaper find its way thither except in our portmanteaux, and when "Uncle Josh" had read and re-read them, they were neatly pasted on the rough walls and ceilings, in lieu of better hangings.

And then there was so much to tell in reply to his questions as to what was going on in the Old world as well as the New, to all of which information he was as completely a novice as though he was not a part and parcel of our Republic.

Those were cosy nights indeed, when we came in tired and hungry from our long tramps over hill and

dale, through swamps and underbrush; and after a hearty supper, stretched ourselves before the huge fire, which was so generously fed, to listen to the long yarns which no sailor could spin better than Uncle Josh. There we would sit for hours, cracking jokes and hickory-nuts till the good-natured dame would send us laughingly to bed.

An epicurean fare we lived on, too, such as a haunch of venison betimes, varied by quail and partridge, and now and then a rabbit-pie, to say nothing about corn-bread and buckwheat cakes, with the best of milk and butter—for Uncle Josh kept a cow which managed to get a good subsistence in her wide, forest range.

But there was another inmate of the cabin, of whom I should have spoken before, and that was "little Kate," for thus the old people used to call her, even when she had grown to womanhood.

Kate was the child of their old age and the chief blessing of their life. Though born in almost a wilderness, and the lightest comforts of her home hard-earned and few, no daughter of wealth and luxury was more tenderly loved and nurtured. But the old man had determined that Kate should not grow up "to be no good to nobody," so when she was twelve years old, and had acquired pretty much all she could learn at home, the trial of parting came.

It was during our second visit to Otter-creek that

this was decided upon. The nearest town of importance, in which there was a boarding school, was thirty or forty miles distant; there were no railroads through the forest then, as now, and the common by-way was rough and intricate too, so it was a two-days' journey, most of the way on horseback. It was thus Kate and her father started from home; the old man leading the way, and she on the old grey nag, following after; one, gay and delighted with the prospective change, the other, heavy-hearted enough.

We promised Uncle Josh to remain till his return, and after he had gone, we did all in our power to reconcile the tender-hearted woman to the absence of her daughter.

Four days elapsed before Uncle Josh was again at home. The sacrifice was made, and though he felt that he should have to work a little harder that year and perhaps the next, in order to meet the extra expense of Kate's schooling, he would often say cheerfully, "It makes no odds; larnin, never made nobody poorer."

Two years had now passed, and Kate was once more at home, there to remain and cheer with her gentle care the declining days of her aged parents. She had come back to her sylvan home a creature of grace and beauty, so that it was difficult for Frank and I to realize it was the same nut-brown girl, who used to

stand beside us and listen to our simple stories. She was more of a woman, yet the Indian-like grace of her step was the same, but her brow had grown fairer, and the brown hair laid over it in a smoother fold.

The old cabin was changed for the better too, both inside and without; wild-flowers and creepers were clambering up to the eaves, hiding from view many an unsightly notch. The smoke-browned newspapers which once covered the walls of the sitting-room, had given place to more tasty hangings, and a few books and engravings lay upon the table, betokening a more refined taste than is generally found in the woods. Yet all these little trifles, which to our friends were luxuries, had been attained by an elegant and simple labor of the maiden's own hands. It was an art she had acquired at school—the making of paper flowers, and with the most exquisite taste did she copy the forms and colors of Nature in their loveliest varieties.

How much may love sweeten even a home in the wilderness: what a sunshiny gladness can woman's smile create in the darkest hour, if her love is valued as it should be! With such a blessing was the monotonous life of Uncle Josh gladdened and prolonged.

Across the hills and through the woods, a few miles distant, there was another home which furnished a sad and strange contrast. We were its inmates on one stormy night when far away from our accustomed

shelter, cold and belated, and no other refuge to be had.

Were it not that our old host was with us, we should have hesitated to trust ourselves for the night among such rude and forbidding people; but Uncle Josh was well known there, although there was little communication or sympathy between the two families.

The snow had commenced falling early in the afternoon, whilst we were deep in the forest, and as evening came on, the storm increased; but under the pilotage of our old guide, we reached without difficulty the rude hut wherein we must pass the night.

A gruff voice bidding us enter, answered our impatient knock upon the door. It was far from an inviting shelter that opened before us. Stretched upon a rough bench before the dim fire, lay the man of the house apparently half intoxicated; two huge hounds which growled at our intrusion occupied the stone hearth; a rickety bed in one corner of the room contained two young children, whilst a third was in the arms of its mother, who was doing the double duty of nursing and clearing the table of a few broken pieces of crockery, from which the household had apparently just taken their supper.

The atmosphere of the apartment was redolent with the combined fumes of grease, tobacco-smoke and whiskey, and we were almost tempted to brave

the storm again and seek shelter in the woods, rather than inhale till morning such a nauseating and impure air.

The poor woman, who, by her worn and pale face had already enlisted our sympathies, though Uncle Josh had told us something of her history, seemed anxious to make us comfortable.

Her husband had risen from his hard couch and rudely told us to come to the fire; but when he bade the poor woman go out and bring in an armful of wood, we determined that whilst we were in the house, she should not be thus imposed upon. The wretch did not move even when we started to perform the office; and when the wood was brought and heaped upon the fire, all the thanks we had from him was a muttered curse at our interference, and a still deeper one grumbled at his wife.

We were not sorry, when our clothes had become somewhat dry and we had put our guns in order, to retire to the other apartment assigned us for the night, and, wrapping ourselves in some buffalo robes, strive to shut our eyes and ears to all that was unpleasant in sight and sound.

With the morning, came a recurrence of brutality on the part of the man, and a display of weakness and long-suffering on the part of his wife.

It was sickening to see one who had evidently been

born to a better lot thus enslaved and maltreated; yet so had she lived for years, nursing his children, tending his wants, bearing his abuse. Could it be other than for love? Such was a mystery to us.

The devotedness and fortitude of woman have been the themes of poet and philosopher from the day when her gentle foot first pressed the flowering sod of Eden.

There have been not a few whose names are immortalized upon the deathless page of history; yet in our own day of outrage and wrong, there are spirits whose devotion is no less deathless than was Gertrude Vanderwarts', whose love is as changeless as was that of Arabella Stuart.

Thus in joy, and pain, and sorrow,
Woman ever bears her part;
Sad to-day and glad to-morrow,
Weak of hand, but strong of heart.

It was a joy again to sit by the cheerful fireside at Otter-creek, where the voice and smile of a loving child made glad the heart of an aged father, and lightened the cares of a failing mother: and as we sadly spoke of the worn woman and her cheerless lot in the far-off forest, till the eyes of the maiden filled with tears, we thought of the poet's words—

"A fearful gift upon thy heart is laid,
Woman—a power to suffer and to love:
Therefore thou so canst pity."

IX.

The lapse of three years makes sad changes, not only over all the world, but in the little sphere immediately around us.

The seasons, with their attributes of fruits and flowers, sunshine and snows, have gone their accustomed round: friends with whom we were familiar, the loving and the loved, have passed away: some like the fragile flowers of spring—others like old forest trees, sapless, and broken by the weight of years.

> "A few short years!
> Less time may well suffice for death and fate
> To work all change on earth; to break the ties
> Which early love had formed, and to bow down
> Th' elastic spirit, and to blight each flower
> Strewn in life's crowded path."

Not less altered than the more crowded haunts of men—not more improved in the eyes of some, is the aspect of that once sequestered valley through which the Otter-creek winds its silvery flood.

What a change is there! The old log cabin which

was the handiwork of Uncle Josh, and for so many years the homely shelter of his little family, has fallen to decay. The old man and the thrifty housewife have been gathered to their graves; they sleep beneath the shade of ancient trees in a newly-made burial ground, not far from where they lived. The old pine forest which once surrounded them has been burnt over and cleared away, and the more quiet solitudes of distant woods echo to the neigh of the iron horse, as he rushes on his path to the farther west.

The deer have sought out more noiseless feeding-grounds, and the smaller game has been driven off by the pursuing and reckless sportsmen till it is almost extinct.

An embryo town is growing and flourishing where we once sported and roved, and the "little Kate" of those careless days, no more gathers wild flowers or imitates their hues in her gentle art.

She lives and loves beneath a more modern roof than then, and fair children "like olive plants round about her table," claim her care. Her day of romance is over with ours, and amidst the calmer duties of life with all their varied accompaniments, she finds her pleasure.

Beside the remembrances which her still laughing eyes recall to our hearts and lips, the scenes of our first acquaintance have no other charm, for the glare

of paint and white-wash is far less pleasing than was the dense verdure of that old pine forest with its gleams and shadows. The busy hum of labor seems irrelevant with the holy quiet that should reign in the surrounding forest, for far to the north and west there stretches still an almost trackless wilderness, awaiting the axe and fire of the settler with all their succeeding attendants.

Earnest men, united in all the great purposes of life, are pushing forward, making nature subservient to their endeavors, and a strong assistant in their labors. The once free streams turn their busy mill-wheels feed their canals, and float their timber to the river. The mineralogist and assayer are piercing the mountains to find and prove their garnered wealth, whilst to the tourist and the invalid, an almost *terra incognita* is laid open, whose lakes, and streams, and mountains, rival those of far-off Europe in beauty.

Eight years have passed away since the night on which we first slept beneath the roof-tree of Uncle Josh's cabin; and already all this change is wrought.

The simplicity of forest-life was then untinctured with any of the "isms" which flourish so rankly in the hot-bed soil of the present day.

The fancied power of the magnetizer was then scarcely heard of or believed in; men and women managed their affairs without the aid of the clairvoyant,

and were content to await their own entrance into the spirit-land, to see the forms and hear the voices of their departed friends.

I know that sound and healthful sleep was to our good old host, a "sweet restorer" after the labors of the day; he needed no other anodyne or incentive. His own good sense and forecast taught and told him all he wished to know, and in the presence of ghosts and wraiths in our matter-of-fact world, I am sure he was a mirthful and decided unbeliever.

But my random diary cannot embrace a dissertation on fallacies, or a stricture on the so-called "humbugs of the day;" only we had heard that the "rappings" were frequent in the very neighborhood where no like sounds used to break the Sabbath silence of the woods, save the tapping of the woodpecker or the measured stroke of Uncle Josh's busy axe.

With the changes which had passed over and marred, in our eyes, the fair scenes which had become so dear and familiar, we had changed also in a measure. New haunts, where we could still foster and indulge our fondness for occasional retirement from the busier scenes of life, must be sought out; but with them we well knew there could be no second Uncle Josh, with his good helpmate so thoughtful of our comfort; no second "little Kate" with her laughing eye and joyous step; these were to be with us only in memory.

The spot we next sought, when the mood was upon us, lay among the low, wooded hills whose sparkling rivulets swell the romantic Winnipee.

The waters of this tiny lake wash the base of a range of hills which almost gird it round. So sheltered is it, the winds scarcely ruffle its glassy surface, on which the shores are faithfully mirrored in all their wild and varied beauty.

> 'So lonely in its slumber there,
> It seems a spirit's haunt of prayer."

Joining the swamp-lands of alder and hazel which form a portion of the shore, lay a fertile farm nearly a mile square, embracing acres of woodland and meadow which yielded rich returns under the husbandry and tillage of their thrifty owner. Beyond, stretched an undulating farming country, not densely settled, yet dotted here and there with substantial farm-houses and their huge red barns, bespeaking great crops of hay and grain.

It was mainly a German settlement, and its inhabitants the children of those who came from the *faderland* with their primitive notions and rude tools of labor. The old house near the lake, and in which we tarried for a season, bore evidence of Dutch handicraft.

The thick stone walls and projecting gables, the low ceilings and huge fireplaces, with their tiled mantels

and hearths, almost led one to think that the whole building was brought bodily from Holland or Germany. Every part of it had the appearance of cleanliness and comfort—such solid comfort as we seldom see in these days of ours.

Farmer Fritz was an honest, plain-spoken man, and though Dutch in blood, a good and true republican, and born in the house he lived in. His acres were his birthright, and therefore he felt and was independent. When it suited him, he went fishing or gunning with us; when it did not suit him, he said so and staid at home.

The swamps which bounded his farm abounded with woodcock in the season, furnishing us all the sport, and our good dogs, Pilot and Dash, all the practice we could wish. But we loved better, in those hot July days, to troll upon the lake within the shadow of the mountains, for our favorite fish, or trace some of the leaping rivulets to their cool sources amidst the hills.

There were few who were acquainted with those spots then, or aware of their pleasant resources, but the mode of access to them is easier now.

Farmer Fritz has enlarged his house, become an hotel-keeper, and is making his fortune.

The swamps are cleared up and drained, and the little lake, once so naturally beautiful, serves the purpose of a dam to a noisy paper-mill.

Change is one of the grand features, not only of our life, but of our age; the old must give place to the new; the natural to the artificial; the beautiful to the useful, and they who would seek to see the face of nature unmarred by the hand of man, must set forth as upon a pilgrimage, almost, to a far-off land.

X.

To those, whose feet have not always trodden the crowded highways of life, but oftener its less-frequented by-ways, how varied seems the lot of man, how countless the phases of joy and sorrow which fill up the measure of his cup!

Such was the tenor of my thoughts, as on a day in July, I sat on the crumbling threshold of that picturesque ruin, known in the vicinity as "Ramsay's mill." It was a spot round which sad and happy associations alike clustered; once the scene of all those domestic joys which make life pleasant and desirable; but error, and at last guilt, had crept in, bringing blight and sorrow with their train of misery and desolation.

The dwelling-house, which for many years had been the shelter of the miller and his family, was also tenantless and going to ruin. The doors had fallen from their fastenings, and the windows were open to the sun and storm, affording free passage to the swallows, which twittered joyously around and down the chimneys, and through the deserted rooms, unimpeded in their flight.