

again in that crumbling doorway, and listened to the sounds which so truly harmonized with the memories of the spot.

“They pealed along—those hymns of night,
The anger of the Lord their theme;
With echoing swell and cadence light,
O'er mountain wild and gliding stream.”

XI.

ONE of our own writers has said, “the value of life deepens incalculably with the privilege of travel.” The remark is a truthful one, but how few there are who fitly appreciate the privilege. There are thousands of our fellow-men who spend their lives in roaming the world; some, in search of change and pleasure; others, of wealth, whilst many more go shifting about like helmless barques, with

No guide—no quest,
Knowing no rest.

Some pluck flowers at every step; others, fruit, like the apples of the Dead Sea, fair to the sight, but filled with dust and ashes.

Some find their highest joy in alleviating the woes of others, whilst too many, like the Pharisee of old, pass by on the other side.

Such was my train of thought as I occupied a seat in a crowded stage-coach traversing a dusty highway of a neighboring State. As we pitched and rattled along, I amused myself by surveying the countenances of my fellow-travellers, as is my habit on such occa-

sions, and thereby learning sometimes more of human nature, than we would with more casual notice. The back seat was occupied by a mother and her daughter, who, I fancied, was on her return to boarding school, vacation having expired. The centre seat was well filled by the stout forms of three well-to-do farmers, dressed in home-spun, who had been attending an agricultural show in one of the county towns. They were full of converse on fine cattle, labor-saving machines, and other objects interesting to their class and calling.

Next to me, on the other seat, sat a quiet and thoughtful man, apparently heeding little of what was going on around him, and wrapped up in his own reflections. The little observation I was able to take of him without being rude, impressed me with the idea that he was laboring under some deep dejection or, perhaps, sorrow. Yet his dress and general expression bespoke him to be a man of the world. How often do we meet such men! seeming as if some great and untold sorrow lay crushingly upon their hearts; a sorrow hoarded as it were, and jealously veiled from prying eyes. To such, a kind word or a sympathizing glance sometimes, are blessings not craved, but when freely offered, accepted gratefully. Like a forest tree, touched, yet not riven by the lightning, but wanting more than its fellows, the sun and rain to renew its

verdure; such an one stands amidst his fellow-men more mindful, because more needful of, smiles and tears. Sincere and well-timed sympathy is to the worn and fainting spirit as the cool dew of eve to the fading flower.

One by one, most of my fellow-travellers had, almost unconsciously to me, been dropped at their places of destination along the route, giving me an opportunity to change my seat for one more airy, and from which I could look out on the country through which we were passing. It was new to me, and beautiful and varied. Now, on the summit of a lofty hill, the eye could command a wide expanse, dotted here and there with white-farm houses, and diversified with woods and fields clad with the rich verdure of early summer; then, descending into a valley carpeted with green meadows, we would seem almost caged in from the world by the wooded hills rising on either side.

As we neared the little village of H——, which lies nestling in the lap of a fertile valley, I noticed the quiet stranger was affected by some strong emotion, evidently of sorrow, and that uncontrollable. I never before had seen a strong man so shaken and overcome by grief.

It was embarrassing to me, and would have been more so, had he not, in a few moments, said: "Pardon my weakness, sir, but this is my native place—ten

years have gone since I was here last, and my recollections are very sad."

In a few minutes we reached the small tavern of the village, and weary from my long ride, I soon domesticated myself amidst the snug and cleanly comforts of the attentive host.

I saw no more of my companion till we met at our evening meal, yet drawn towards each other by an undefinable sympathy, we sat long together engaged in most social conversation.

Afterwards, strolling out together, we found a secluded spot, where he told me much of his history, and of the great sorrow, that years before, had blighted his youthful hopes and saddened his after life.

He may be dead now, or living; but with a few alterations, yet with no fancies, and little adornment, I have woven in this chequered woof his sombre thread.

"My own early home; though many years have passed, and sad changes been wrought since I sported in its halls and roamed its green woods, it stands before me now, as on the day I left it for ever—all bright and gay, save my own heart. I never knew a father's love; he died ere I was old enough to recognize his care, and in the old homestead I grew up under the fostering love of my dear, widowed mother—a wayward, petted child.

"I had my own quiet room, my little cabinet of minerals and shells, my library of treasured books; when tired of these, there were my dog and gun, and my saddle pony.

"What was the world to me, or I to the world; I was happy and contented with my selfish pleasures in my little hermitage.

"I had no playmate—knew no game,
Yet often left my book to run
And blow bright bubbles in the sun;
In after life we do the same.'

"So time passed with little variation till I was eighteen years of age, and excepting the few studies that were imposed upon me, which occupied an hour or two a day, I sought but my own enjoyment, and the happiness of my devoted mother. But in the course of another year, she was taken from me, and I was thrown upon my own resources, with no guardian, and scarcely a friend in the wide world.

"With regard to pecuniary matters, I was well provided for, and I resolved to retain the property I now owned, as hallowed by associations which others could never realize; so with an old and faithful house-keeper, the nurse of my infancy, another and another year flew almost unheeded by, for I was happy and asked or sought no change.

"But an unwritten leaf in my book of life was soon

to turn; a change I dreamed not of was soon to be my heart was to expand, and instead of beating for itself alone, was to throb more wildly for another.

"There was a rustic cottage not far from my dwelling, and which you see through the trees now, that had been a long time unoccupied. Its last tenant was a poor and lonely widow, who had then been dead a year or more, at the time of which I speak, and during that season, no living being had entered the door, except an old dependent of the former occupant, who now and then, took possession for an hour, to sweep away the cobwebs, and see that no unlawful intruder had disturbed the scanty furniture which still remained, for the house belonged to the heirs of an estate that was then in litigation. It was a sweet spot then, the house half-hidden from view amidst weeping willows and old shady elms; and the low, rustic porch almost crushed beneath the vines and creepers, which for two summers, had known no pruning or care. A little streamlet, with grassy banks, murmured through a shady dell near by, fed the year round by a tiny cascade that came leaping down yonder hillside. Such was Willowdale.

"A very home for love—an Eden spot,
That seemed secluded from the rest of earth;
Where care and sorrow might be e'er forgot,
And thoughts of joy and love have cloudless birth.

"But rumor whispered that the cottage was soon to be inhabited again; that a family from the city had leased it, and the report was ere long confirmed by the presence of workmen in and about the house, who were soon busy in renovating the paint and plaster, remodelling and refurnishing.

"A skilful gardener soon put the long-neglected grounds in perfect order, and before many weeks had passed, the cottage was ready for its new occupants. As it is natural for youth to be curious and imaginative, you may suppose I was full of impatience to know who were to be my new neighbors; and for several days I watched the stage-coach, as it passed by on its way from the city, with more than usual interest. It came at last, one lovely April morning, loaded with trunks and boxes, and more than its accustomed number of passengers. I saw within it a grey-haired man, a middle-aged, matronly looking woman, and more than all, a sweet young face looking earnestly from the window, as it passed swiftly by. They stopped at the cottage; the strangers had arrived.

"I remember that I lay awake most of the following night, wondering what relation those three persons bore to each other. At last, it was settled in my mind, that the old gentleman and the pale-faced girl were father and daughter, and the matronly looking

person must be their housekeeper, for she looked like one; the sequel proved my suppositions to be correct.

"Then, with youth's hopefulness, and love for anything that savored of a change in my theretofore quiet life, I fancied how delightful it would be, when I had made their acquaintance, to act as *cicerone*, and show them the romantic walks and drives of our wild neighborhood.

"A new source of happiness had sprung up before me; the void in my heart seemed about to be filled, and I felt as though I was to enter upon a new state of being. But I will not weary you with trifling relations or details.

"Ere many weeks had passed, I was a constant visitor at the cottage. Alice G—— was my divinity—her father almost a second one to me. Words cannot describe the happiness I knew in that delightful intercourse.

"I shall not attempt to describe her beauty to you; enough that she seemed to me more of heaven than earth—born only to love and be loved.

"She was my world; filled up the whole of being—
Smiled in the sunshine—walked the glorious earth,
Sat in my heart—was the sweet life of life."

"She was young, gay, and happy; but there were some who said there was often too much color in her

cheek, and that her eyes wore a strange brightness—that she was not going to live long.

"I laughed at their strange forebodings; for to me these seemed but attributes of her matchless loveliness. Boy that I was, love had stolen into my heart, and I felt that she was necessary to my existence.

"And so we lived on for a year or more; we drove, we rode, we walked together. The grove that separated our homes was threaded with paths which our straying feet had made. There we had our rustic seat, where we read our books, and held sweet conversation; and there too, was our trysting-tree,

"Where erst we learned love's lesson."

"As weeks and months flew swiftly by, and I reached, almost unconsciously, the years of manhood, love grew with my growth, and from early blossoming, ripened into full maturity. My books, with which I once found perfect joy, were thrown aside, save when I read them to another. My horse and dog were alike neglected, save when they afforded sport or recreation for the loved one.

"I was happy only in her presence, and with her love; but with this joy, there swept across my spirit, oftentimes, a feeling of distrust,—a prestige that my new-born hopes might soon be blighted.

"Is it not always so, when we fancy that we are

happy? Who among us knows what the morrow may bring forth? The flower, whose bloom and fragrance gladdens us to-day, may fade and fall to-night beneath an untimely frost. The sky, that is bright and blue above us now, may, in one short hour, be swept by lowering clouds. Nothing is sure but death and sorrow.

“But to go on:—It was early in summer, when the roses and honey-suckles that twined so lovingly around the cottage porch were in their richest blossoming, that I was unexpectedly summoned to the city upon urgent business. With my manhood, new cares and responsibilities had also come, and it was necessary that I should go.

“I was at the cottage very early on the morning of my departure, to say a few farewell words.

“The parting seemed to me prophetic of some unforeseen woe; I know not why such doubts and fears harassed me—they were strange presentiments, but oh! how sad.

“Ten days passed wearily away before my business was ended, and I felt comparatively happy when once more on my way homeward. It was nearly evening when I saw again the spire of the village church rising in the distance far above the old trees of the graveyard; and when drawing nearer, the pointed roof of the cottage rose into view, my heart beat more quickly,

and my check grew pale with the thought that all might not be well.

“As the coach passed by, I instinctively looked up at the little window where I had often seen the face of my beloved, radiant with smiles and beauty. The blinds were closed, and her eyes gleamed not through them. I knew if all was well, she would have been there; but now—sickness or death was within, and my heart asked—who is the victim?

“Once more in my quiet chamber, I strove to nerve myself for whatever I might be called to undergo; then summoning the old nurse, who was almost a mother to me, I learned all that my heart had dreaded. Alice was sick and had been in her room for two days.

“Calmly, yet with a sad spirit, I once more trod the shady avenue of Willow-dale. Again I sat in the darkened parlor, once so sunny and cheerful, and awaited the summons to the sick-chamber. An half hour passed, and I was once more by the side of her I loved. But what a change a few short days had wrought; what a sad reunion was ours! She was pillowed on her father's breast, and his careworn brow told of the anxiety that filled his heart. Her complaint was told me in a few words—she had been spitting blood. Though thin and worn, she appeared to me lovelier than ever, with a bloom upon her cheek, that to my unpractised eye, spoke of returning health;

but when I took her hand, and felt the fever that was burning in her veins, hope died within me, and I feared the worst.

“Another week went by, and except at short intervals, I kept a sleepless vigil by her side.

“Those were hours of sweet communion, the memory of which is as fresh and holy as though they were of yesterday; but as she daily grew weaker and thinner, the conviction forced itself upon her that there was no hope of life. Yet, there was no repining at the thought of her blighted youth, no shudder on the verge of the dark valley; all was joy and peace.

“So she faded, day by day through the long winter. March came with its blustering winds and passed away, but the April showers fell like tears upon her new-made grave. She died at the close of a bright, warm day, when Nature was putting on her garments of joy, and smiling as if in mockery of our desolated hearts. She lies in yonder churchyard, and there I have spent my afternoon. Years have passed since she was laid there, and I have been a wanderer in many lands: but from the halls of mirth and splendor—from the smiles of beauty and the fascinations of the world, I have turned away, to think of that green grave, and of that gentle being, whose spirit may now be hovering around me on viewless wings.

“To-morrow I go away again upon my wanderings;

you may never see me more, but I shall remember your kindness whilst I live.”

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Such was the substance of the stranger's tale, and with few additions, this little sketch is a faithful transcript of his history. That night, our paths through life divided, and they have never met again. I know not where his feet may be roving: maybe he has long ago returned to his native village to die and be buried in the old churchyard.

I often think of him and remember the poet's saying:

“What is our bliss that changeth with the moon,
And day of life that darkens ere 'tis noon?”