Betty Leicester: A Story for Girls

Sarah Orne Jewett

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WITH LOVE TO
M. G. L.
ONE OF THE FIRST OF BETTY'S FRIENDS

I. AS FAR AS RIVERPORT.

Two persons sat at a small breakfast−table near an open window, high up in Young's Hotel in Boston. It was a pleasant June morning, just after eight o'clock, and they could see the white clouds blowing over; but the gray walls of the Court House were just opposite, so that one cannot say much of their view of the world. The room was pleasanter than most hotel rooms, and the persons at breakfast were a girl of fifteen, named Betty Leicester, and her father. Their friends thought them both good−looking, but it ought to be revealed in this story just what sort of good looks they had, since character makes the expression of people's faces. But this we can say, to begin with: they had eyes very much alike, very kind and frank and pleasant, and they had a good fresh color, as if they spent much time out−of−doors. In fact, they were just off the sea, having come in only two days before on the Catalonia from Liverpool; and the Catalonia, though very comfortable, had made a slower voyage than some steamers do in coming across.

They had nearly finished breakfast, but Betty was buttering one more nice bit of toast to finish her marmalade, while Mr. Leicester helped himself to more strawberries. They both looked a little grave, as if something important were to be done when breakfast was over; and if you had sat in the third place by the table, and, instead of looking out of the window, had looked to right and left into the bedrooms that opened at either hand, you would guess the reason. In Betty's room, on her table, were her ulster and her umbrella and her traveling−bag

beside a basket, these last being labeled "Miss E. Leicester, Tideshead;" and in the room opposite was a corresponding array, excepting that the labels read, "T. Leicester, Windsor Hotel, Montreal." So for once the girl and her father were going in different directions.

"Papa, dear," said Betty, "how long will it be before you can tell about coming back from Alaska?"

"Perhaps I shall know in a month," said Mr. Leicester; "but you understand that it will not be like a journey through civilized countries, and there are likely to be many hindrances and delays. Beside, you must count upon our finding everything enormously interesting. I shall try hard not to forget how interesting a waiting young somebody called Betty is!"

Betty made an attempt to smile, but she began to feel very dismal. "The aunts will ask me, you know, papa dear," she said. "I am sure that Aunt Barbara felt a little grumpy about your not coming now."

"Dear Aunt Barbara!" said Mr. Leicester seriously; "I wish that I could have managed it, but I will stay long enough to make up, when I get back from the North."

"Your birthday is the first of September; thirty−nine this year, you poor old thing! Oh if we could only have the day in Tideshead, it would be such fun!" Betty looked more cheerful again with this hope taking possession of her mind.

"You are always insisting upon my having a new birthday!" said Mr. Leicester, determined upon being cheerful too. "You will soon be calling me your grandfather. I mean to expect a gold−headed cane for my present this year. Now we must be getting ready for the station, dear child. I am sure that we shall miss each other, but I will do things for you and you will do things for me, won't you, Betsey?" and he kissed her affectionately, while Betty clung fast to him with both arms tight round his neck. Somehow she never had felt so badly at saying good−by.

"And you will be very good to the old aunts? Remember how fond they have always been of your dear mamma and of me, and how ready they are to give you all their love. I think you can grow to be a very great comfort to them and a new pleasure. They must really need you to play with."

There was a loud knock at the door; the porter came in and carried away a high−heaped armful from Betty's room. "Carriage is ready at the door, sir," he said. "Plenty of time, sir;" and then went hurrying away again to summon somebody else. Betty's eyes were full of tears when she came out of her room and met papa, who was just looking at his watch in the little parlor.

"Say 'God bless you, Betty,'" she managed to ask.

"God bless you, Betty, my dear Betty!" Mr. Leicester said gravely. "God bless you, dear and make you a blessing."

"Papa dear, I wasn't really crying. You know that you're coming back within three months, and we shall be writing letters all the time, and Tideshead isn't like a strange place."

"Dear me, no! you'll never wish to come away from Tideshead; give it my love, and 'call every bush my cousin,'" answered Mr. Leicester gayly as they went down in the elevator. The trying moment of the real good−by was over, and the excitement and interest of Betty's journey had begun. She liked the elevator boy and had time to find a bit of money for him, that being the best way to recognize his politeness and patience. "Thank you; good−by," she said pleasantly as she put it into his hand. She was hoarding the minutes that were left, and tried to remember the things that she wished to say to papa as they drove to the Eastern Station; but the minutes flew by, and presently Mr. Leicester was left on the platform alone, while the cars moved away with his girl. She waved her

hand and papa lifted his hat once more, though he had already lost sight of her, and so they parted. The girl thought it was very hard. She wondered all over again if she couldn't possible have gone on the long journey to the far North which she had heard discussed so often and with such enthusiasm. It seemed wrong and unnatural that she and her father should not always be together everywhere.

It was very comfortable in the train, and the tide was high among the great marshes. The car was not very full at first, but at one or two stations there were crowds of people, and Betty soon had a seat−mate, a good−natured looking, stout woman, who was inclined to be very sociable. She was a little out of breath and much excited.

"Would you like to sit next the window?" inquired Betty.

"No, lem me set where I be," replied the anxious traveler. "'T is as well one place as another. I feel terrible unsartin' on the car? I don't expect you do?"

"Not very," said Betty. "I have never had anything happen."

"You b'en on 'em before, then?"

"Oh, yes, indeed," said Betty.

"Ever b'en in Boston"—perhaps you come from that way?"

"I came from there this morning, but I am on my way from London to Tideshead." Somehow this announcement sounded ostentatious, and Betty, being modest, regretted it.

"What London do you refer to?" asked the woman, and, having been answered, said, "Oh, bless ye! when it comes to seafarin' I'm right to home, I tell you. I didn't know but you'd had to come from some o' them Londons out West; all the way by cars. I've got a sister that lives to London, Iowy; she comes East every three or four year; passes two days an' two nights, I believe 't is, on the cars; makes nothin' of it. I ain't been no great of a traveler. Creation 's real queer, ain't it!"

Betty's fellow−traveler was looking earnestly at the green fields, and seemed to express everything she felt of wonder and interest by her last remark, to which Betty answered "yes," with a great shake of laughter—and hoped that there would be still more to say.

"Have you been to sea a good deal?" she asked.

"Lor' yes, dear. Father owned two thirds o' the ship I was born on, and bought into another when she got old, an' I was married off o' her; the Sea Queen, Dexter, master, she was. Then I sailed 'long o' my husband till the child'n begun to come an' I found there was some advantages in bringin' up a family on shore, so I settled down for a spell; but just as I got round to leavin' and goin' back, my husband got tired o' the sea and shippin' all run down, so home he come, and you wouldn't know us now from shorefolks. Pretty good sailor, be ye?" (looking at Betty sharply).

"Yes, I love the sea," said Betty.

"I want to know," said her new friend admiringly, and then took a long breath and got out of her gloves.

"Your father a shipmaster?" she continued.

"No," said Betty humbly.

"What trade does he follow?"

"He had written some books; he is a naturalist; but papa can do almost anything," replied Betty proudly.

"I want to know," said the traveler again. "Well, I don't realize just what naturalists hold to; there's too many sects a−goin' nowadays for me. I was brought up good old−fashioned Methodist, but this very mornin' in the depot I was speakin' with a stranger that said she was a Calvin−Advent, and they was increasin' fast. She did 'pear as well as anybody; a nice appearin' woman. Well, there's room for all."

Betty was forced to smile, and tried to hide her face by looking out of the window. Just then the conductor kindly appeared, and so she pulled her face straight again.

"Ain't got no brothers an' sisters?" asked the funny old soul.

"No," said Betty. "Papa and I are all alone."

"Mother ain't livin'?" and kind homely face turned quickly toward her.

"She died when I was a baby."

"My sakes, how you talk! You don't feel to miss her, but she would have set everything by you." (There was something truly affectionate in the way this was said.) "All my child'n are married off," she continued. "The house seems too big now. I do' know but what, if you don't like where you 're goin', I will take ye in, long 's you feel to stop."

"Oh, thank you," said Betty gratefully. "I'm sure I should have a good time. I'm going to stay with my grand−aunts this summer. My father has gone to Alaska."

"Oh, I do feel to hope it's by sea!" exclaimed the listener.

The cars rattled along and the country grew greener and greener. Betty remembered it very well, although she had not seen it for four years, so long it was since she had been in Tideshead before. After seeing the stonewalled and thatched or tiled roofs of foreign countries, the wooden buildings of New England had a fragile look as if the wind and rain would soon spoil and scatter them. The villages and everything but some of the very oldest farms looked so new and so temporary that Betty Leicester was much surprised, knowing well that she was going through some of the very oldest New England towns. She had a delightful sense of getting home again, which would have pleased her loyal father, and indeed Betty herself believed that she could not be proud enough of her native land. Papa always said the faults of a young country were so much better then the faults of an old one. However, when the train crossed a bridge near a certain harbor on the way and the young traveler saw an English flag flying on a ship, it looked very pleasant and familiar.

The morning was growing hot, and the good seafarer in the seat beside our friend seemed to grow very uncomfortable. Her dress was too thick, and she was trying to hold on her bonnet with her chin, though it slipped back farther and farther. Somehow a great many women in the car looked very warm and wretched in thick woolen gowns and unsteady bonnets. Nobody looked as if she were out on a pleasant holiday except one neighbor, a brisk little person with a canary bird and an Indian basket, out of which she now and then let a kitten's head appear, long enough to be patted and then tucked back again.

Betty's companion caught sight of this smiling neighbor after a time and expressed herself as surprised that anybody should take the trouble to cart a kitten from town to town, when there were two to every empty saucer already. Betty laughed and supposed that she didn't like cats, and was answered gruffly that they were well

enough in their place. It was one of our friend's griefs that she never was sure of being long enough in one place to keep a kitten of her own, but the pleasant thought came that she was almost sure to find some at Aunt Barbara's where she was going.

It was not time to feel hungry, but Betty caught sight of a paper box which the waiter had brought to the carriage just as she was leaving the hotel. She was having a hot and dusty search under the car−seat for the sailor woman's purse, which had suddenly gone overboard from the upper deck of her wide lap, but it was found at last, and Betty produced the luncheon−box too and opened it. Her new friend looked on with deep interest. "I'm only goin' as far as Newburyport," she explained eagerly, "so I'm not provided."

"Papa knew that I should be hungry by noon," said Betty. "We always try not to get too hungry when we are traveling because one gets so much more tired. I always carry some chocolate in my bag."

"I expect you've had sights of experience. You ain't be'n kep' short, that's plain. They ain't many young gals looks so rugged. Enjoy good health, dear, don't ye?" which Betty answered with enthusiasm.

The luncheon looked very inviting and Betty offered a share most hospitably, and in spite of its only being a quarter before eleven when the feast began, the chicken sandwiches entirely disappeared. There were only four, and half a dozen small sponge−cakes which proved to be somewhat dry and unattractive.

"I only laid in a light breakfast," apologized Betty's guest. "I'm obliged to you, I'm sure, but then I wa'n't nigh so hungry as when I got adrift once, in an open boat, for two days and a night, and they give me up"—

But at this moment the train man shouted "Newburyport," as if there were not a minute to be lost, and the good soul gathered her possessions in a great hurry, dropping her purse again twice, and letting fall bits of broken sentences with it from which Betty could gather only "The fog come in," and "coast o' France," and then, as they said good−by, "'t was so divertin' ridin' along that I took no note of stoppin'." After they had parted affectionately, she stood for a minute or two at the door of the still moving train, nodding and bobbing her kind old head at her young fellow−passenger whenever they caught each other's eye. Betty was sorry to lose this new friend so soon, and felt more lonely than ever. She wished that they had known each other's names, and especially that there had been time to hear the whole of the boat story.

Now that there was no on else in the car seat it seemed to be a good time to look over some things in the pretty London traveling bag, which had been pushed under its owner's feet until then. Betty found a small bit of chocolate for herself by way of dessert to the early lucheon, and made an entry in a tidy little account book which she meant to keep carefully until she should be with papa again. It was a very interesting bag, with a dressing−case fitted into it and a writing case, all furnished with glass and ivory and silver fittings and yet very plain, and nice, and convenient. Betty's dear friend, Mrs. Duncan, had given it to her that very spring, before she thought of coming to America, and on the voyage it had been worth its weight in gold. Out of long experience the young traveler had learned not to burden herself with too many things, but all her belongings had some pleasant association: her button−hook was bought in Amsterdam, and a queer little silver box for buttons came from a village very far north in Norway, while a useful jackknife had been found in Spain, although it bore J. Crookes of Sheffield's name on the haft. somehow the traveling bag itself brought up Mrs. Duncan's dear face, and Betty's eyes glistened with tears for one moment. The Duncan girls were her best friends, and she had had lessons with them for many months at a time in the last few years, so they had the strong bond in friendship of having worked as well as played together. But Mrs. Duncan had been very motherly and dear to our friend, and just now seemed nearer and more helpful than ever. The train whistled along and the homesick feeling soon passed, though Betty remembered that Mrs. Duncan had said once that wherever you may put two persons one is always hostess and the other always guest, either from circumstances alone or from their different natures, and they must be careful about their duties to each other. Betty had not quite understood this when she heard it said, though the words has stayed in her mind. Now the meaning flashed clearly into her thought, and she was pleased to think that she had

just now been the one who knew most about traveling. She wished so much that she could have been of more use to the old lady, but after all she seemed to have a good little journey, and Betty hoped that she could remember all about this droll companion when she was writing, at her own journey's end, to papa.

II. THE PACKET BOAT.

The day was one of the best days in June, with warm sunshine and a cool breeze from the east, for when Betty Leicester stepped from a hot car to the station platform in Riverport the air had a delicious sea−flavor. She wondered for a moment what this flavor was like, and then thought of a salt oyster. She was hungry and tired, the journey had been longer than she expected, and, as she made her way slowly through the crowded station and was pushed about by people who were hurrying out of or into the train, she felt unusually disturbed and lonely. Betty had traveled far and wide for a girl of fifteen, but she had seldom been alone, and was used to taking care of other people. Papa himself was very apt to forget important minor details, and she had learned out of her loving young heart to remember them, and was not without high ambitions to make their journeys as comfortable as possible. Still, she and her father had almost always been together, and Betty wondered if it had not after all been foolish to make a certain decision which involved not seeing him again until a great many weeks had gone by.

The cars moved away and the young traveler went to the ticket−office to ask about the Tideshead train. The ticket−agent looked at her with a smile.

"Train's gone half an hour ago!" he said, as if he were telling Betty some good news. "There'll be another one at eight o'clock to−morrow morning, and the express goes, same as to−day, at half past one. I suppose you want to go to Tideshead town; this road only goes to the junction and then there's a stage, you know." He looked at Betty doubtfully and as if he expected an instant decision on her part as to what she meant to do next.

"I knew that there was a stage," she answered, feeling a little alarmed, but hoping that she did not show it. "The time−table said there was a train to meet this"—

"Oh, that train is an express now and doesn't stop. Everything's got to be sacrificed to speed."

The ticket−agent had turned his back and was looking over some papers and grumbling to himself, so that Betty could no longer hear what he was pleased to say. As she left the window an elderly man, whose face was very familiar, was standing in the doorway.

"Well, ma'am, you an' I 'pear to have got left. Tideshead, you said, if I rightly understood?"

"Perhaps there is somebody who would drive us there," said Betty. She never had been called ma'am before, and it was most surprising. "It isn't a great many miles, is it?"

"No, no!" said the new acquaintance. "I was in considerable of a hurry to get home, but 't isn't so bad as you think. We can go right up on the packet, up river, you know; get there by supper−time; the wind's hauling round into the east a little. I understood you to speak about getting to Tideshead?"

"Yes," said Betty, gratefully.

"Got a trunk, I expect. Well, I'll go out and look round for Asa Chick and his han'cart, and we'll make for the wharf as quick as we can. You may step this way."

Betty "stepped" gladly, and Asa Chick and the handcart soon led the way riverward through the pleasant old−fashioned streets of Riverport. Her new friend pointed out one or two landmarks as they hurried along, for,

strange to say, although a sea−captain, he was not sure whether the tide turned at half past two or half past three. When they came to the river−side, however, the packet−boat was still made fast to the pier, and nothing showed signs of her immediate departure.

"It is always a good thing to be in time," said the captain, who found himself much too warm and nearly out of breath. "Now, we've got a good hour to wait. Like to go right aboard, my dear?"

Betty paid Asa Chick, and then turned to see the packet. It was a queer, heavy−looking craft, with a short, thick mast and high, pointed lateen−sail, half unfurled and dropping in heavy pocket−like loops. There was a dark low cabin and a long deck; a very old man and a fat, yellow dog seemed to be the whole ship's company. The old man was smoking a pipe and took no notice of anything, but the dog rose slowly to his feet and came wagging his tail and looking up at the new passenger.

"I do' know but I'll coast round up into the town a little," said the captain. "'Tain't no use asking old Mr. Plunkett there any questions, he's deef as a ha'dick."

"Will my trunk be safe?" asked Betty; to which the captain answered that he would put it right aboard for her. It was not a very heavy trunk, but the captain managed it beautifully, and put Betty's hand−bag and wrap into the dark cabin. Old Plunkett nodded as he saw this done, and the captain said again that Betty might feel perfectly safe about everything; but, for all that, she refused to take a walk in order to see what was going in the town, as she was kindly invited to do. She went a short distance by herself, however, and came first to a bakery, where she bought some buns, not so good as the English ones, but still very good buns indeed, and two apples, which the baker's wife told her had grown in her own garden. You could see the tree out of the back window, by which the hospitable woman had left her sewing, and they were, indeed, well−kept and delicious apples for that late season of the year. Betty lingered for some minutes in the pleasant shop. She was very hungry, and the buns were all the better for that. She looked through a door and saw the oven, but the baking was all done for the day. The baker himself was out in his cart; he had just gone up to Tideshead. Here was another way in which one might have gone to Tideshead by land; it would have been good fun to go on the baker's cart and stop in the farm−house yards and see everybody; but on the whole there was more adventure in going by the water. Papa had always told Betty that the river was beautiful. She did not remember much about it herself, but this would be a fine way of getting a first look at so large a part of the great stream.

It was slack water now, and the wharf seemed high, and the landing−stage altogether too steep and slippery. When Betty reached the packet's deck, old Mr. Plunkett was sound asleep; but while she was eating her buns the dog came most good−naturedly and stood before her, cocking his head sideways, and putting on a most engaging expression, so that they lunched together, and Betty left off nearly as hungry as she began. The old dog knew an apple when he saw it, and was disappointed after the last one was brought out from Betty's pocket, and lay down at her feet and went to sleep again. Betty got into the shade of the wharf and sat there looking down at the flounders and sculpins in the clear water, and at the dripping green sea−weeds on the piles of the wharf. She was almost startled when a heavy wagon was driven on the planks above, and a man shouted suddenly to the horses. Presently some barrels for flour were rolled down and put on deck— twelve of them in all—by a man and boy who gave her, the young stranger, a careful glance every time they turned to go back. Then a mowing−machine arrived, and was carefully put on board with a great deal of bustle and loud talking. There was somebody on deck, now, whom Betty believed to be the packet's skipper, and after a while the old captain returned. He seated himself by Mr. Plunkett and shook hands with him warmly, and asked him for the news; but there did not seem to be any.

"I've been up to see my wife's cousin Jake Hallet's folks," he explained, "and I thought sure I'd get left," and old Plunkett nodded soberly. They did not sail for at least half an hour after this, and Betty sat discreety on the low cabin roof next the wharf all the time. When they were out in the stream at last she could get a pretty view of the town. There was some shipping farther down the shore, and some tall steeples and beautiful trees and quaintly built warehouses; it was very pleasant, looking back at it from the water.

A little past the middle of the afternoon they moved steadily up the river. The men all sat together in a group at the stern, and appeared to find a great deal to talk about. Old Mr. Plunkett may have thought that Betty looked lonely, for after he waked for the second time he came over to where she sat and nodded to her; so Betty nodded back, and then the old man reached for her umbrella, which was very pretty, with a round piece of agate in the handle, and looked at it and rubbed it with his thumb, and gave it back to her. "Present to ye?" he asked, and Betty nodded assent. Then old Plunkett went away again, but she felt a sense of his kind companionship. She wondered whom she must pay for her passage and how much it would be, but it was no use to ask so deaf a fellow−passenger. He had put on a great pair of spectacles and was walking round her trunk, apparently much puzzled by the battered labels of foreign hotels and railway stations.

Betty thought that she had seldom seen half so pleasant a place as this New England river. She kept longing that her father could see it, too. As they went up from the town the shores grew greener and greener, and there were some belated apple−trees still in bloom, and the farm−houses were so old and stood so pleasantly toward the southern sunshine that they looked as if they might have grown like the apple−trees and willows and elms. There were great white clouds in the blue sky; the air was delicious. Betty could make out at last that old Mr. Plunkett was the skipper's father, that Captain Beck was an old shipmaster and a former acquaintance of her own, and that the flour and some heavy boxes belonged to one store−keeping passenger with a long sandy beard, and the mowing−machine to the other, who was called Jim Foss, and that he was a farmer. He was a great joker and kept making everybody laugh. Old Mr. Plunkett laughed too, now that he was wide awake, but it was only through sympathy; he seemed to be a very kind old man. One by one all the men came and looked at the trunk labels, and they all asked whether Betty hadn't been considerable of a traveler, or some question very much like it. At last the captain came with Captain Beck to collect the passage money, which proved to be thirty−seven cents.

"Where did you say you was goin' to stop in Tideshead?" asked Captain Beck.

"I'm going to Miss Leicester's. Don't you remember me? Aren't you Mary Beck's grandfather? I'm Betty Leicester."

"Toe be sure, toe be sure," said the old gentleman, much pleased. "I wonder that I had not thought of you at first, but you have grown as much as little Mary has. You're getting to be quite a young woman. Command me," said the shipmaster, making a handsome bow. "I am glad that I fell in with you. I see your father's looks, now. The ladies had a hard fight some years ago to keep him from running off to sea with me. He's been a great traveler since then, hasn't he?" to which Betty responded heartily, again feeling as if she were among friends. The storekeeper offered to take her trunk right up the hill in his wagon, when they got to the Tideshead landing, and on the whole it was delightful that the trains had been changed just in time for her to take this pleasant voyage.

III. A BIT OF COLOR.

Betty had seen strange countries since her last visit to Tideshead. Then she was only a child, but now she was so tall that strangers treated her as if she were already a young lady. At fifteen one does not always know just where to find one's self. A year before it was hard to leave childish things alone, but there soon came a time when they seemed to have left Betty, while one by one the graver interests of life were pushing themselves forward. It was reasonable enough that she should be taking care of herself; and, as we have seen, she knew how better than most girls of her age. Her father's rough journey to the far North had been decided upon suddenly; Mr. Leicester and Betty had been comfortably settled at Lynton in Devonshire for the summer, with a comfortable prospect of some charming excursions and a good bit of work on papa's new scientific book. Betty was used to sudden changes of their plans, but it was a hard trial when he had come back from London one day, filled with enthusiasm about the Alaska business.

"The only thing against it is that I don't know what to do with you, Betty dear," said papa, with a most wistful but

affectionate glance. "Perhaps you would like to go to Switzerland with the Duncans? You know they were very anxious that I should lend you for a while."

"I will think about it," said Betty, trying to smile, but she coud not talk any more just then. She didn't believe that the hardships of this new journey were too great; it was papa who minded dust and hated the care of railway rugs and car−tickets, not she. But she gave him a kiss and hurried out through the garden and went as fast as she could along the lonely long cliff−walk above the sea, to think the sad matter over.

That evening Betty came down to dinner with a serene face. She looked more like a young lady than she ever had before. "I have quite decided what I should like to do," she said. "Please let me go home with you and stay in Tideshead with Aunt Barbara and Aunt Mary. They speak about seeing us in their letters, and I should be nearer where you are going." Betty's brave voice failed her for a moment just there.

"Why, Betty, what a wise little woman you are!" said Mr. Leicester, looking very much pleased. "That's exactly right. I was thinking about the dear souls as I came from town, and promised myself that I would run downn for a few days before I go North. That is, if you said I may go!" and he looked seriously at Betty.

"Yes," answered Betty slowly; "yes, I am sure you may, papa dear, if you will be very, very careful."

They had a beloved old custome of papa's asking his girl's leave to do anything that was particularly important. In Betty's baby−days she had reproved him for going out one morning. "Who said you might go, Master papa?" demanded the little thing severely; and it had been a dear bit of fun to remember the old story from time to time ever since. Betty's mother had died before she could remember; the two who were left were most dependent upon each other.

You will see how Betty came to have care−taking ways and how she had learned to think more than most girls about what it was best to do. You will understand how lonely she felt in this day or two when the story begins. Mr. Leicester was too much hurried after all when he reached America, and could not go down to Tideshead for a few days' visit, as they had both hoped and promised. And here, at last, was Betty going up the long village street with Captain Beck for company. She had not seen Tideshead for four years, but it looked exactly the same. There was the great, square, white house, with the poplars and lilac bushes. There were Aunt Barbara and Aunt Mary sitting in the wide hall doorway as if they had never left their high−backed chairs since she saw them last.

"Who is this coming up the walk?"said Aunt Barbara, rising and turning toward her placid younger sister in sudden excitement. "It can't be—why, yes, it is Betty, after all!" and she hurried down the steps.

"Grown out of all reason, of course!" she said sharply, as she kissed the surprising grandniece, and then held her at arm's−length to look at her again most fondly. "Where did you find her, Captain Beck? We sent over to the train; in fact, I went myself with Jonathan, but we were disappointed. Your father always telegraphs two or three times before he really gets here, Betty; but you have not brought him, after all."

"We had to come up river by the packet," said Captain Beck; "the young lady's had quite a voyage; her sea−chest'll be here directly."

The captain left Betty's traveling−bag on the great stone doorstep, and turned to go away, but Betty thanked him prettily for his kindness, and said that she had spent a delightful afternoon. She was now warmly kissed and hugged by Aunt Mary, who looked much younger than Aunt Barbara, and she saw two heads appear at the end of the long hall.

"There are Serena and Letty; you must run and speak to them. They have been looking forward to seeing you," suggested Aunt Barbara, who seemed to see everything at once; but when Betty went that way nobody was to be

found until she came to the kitchen, where Serena and Letty were, or pretended to be, much surprised at her arrival. They were now bustling about to get Betty some supper, and she frankly confessed that she was very hungry, which seemed to vastly please the good women.

"What in the world shall we do with her?" worried Aunt Mary, while Betty was gone. "I had no idea she would seem so well grown. She used to be small for her age, you know, sister."

"Do? do?" answered Miss Barbara Leicester sternly. "If she can't take care of herself by this time, she never will know how. Tom Leicester should have let her stay here altogether, instead of roaming about the world with him, or else have settled himself down in respectable fashion. I can't get on with teasing children at my age. I'm sure I'm glad she's well grown. She mustn't expect us to turn out of our ways," grumbled Aunt Barbara, who had the kindest heart in the world, and was listening anxiously every minute for Betty's footsteps.

It was very pleasant to be safe in the old house at last. The young guest did not feel any sense of strangeness. She used to be afraid of Aunt Barbara when she was a child, but she was not a bit afraid now; and aunt Mary, who seemed a very lovely person then, was now a little bit tiresome,−or else Betty herself was tired and did not find it easy to listen.

After supper; and it was such a too−good supper, with pound−cakes, and peach jam, and crisp shortcakes, and four tall silver candlesticks, and Betty being asked to her great astonishment if she would take tea and meekly preferring some milk instead; they came back to the doorway. The moon had come up, and the wide lawn in front of the house (which the ladies always called the yard) was almost as light as day. The syringa bushes were in full bloom and fragrance, and other sweet odors filled the air beside. There were two irreverent little dogs playing and chasing each other on the wide front walk and bustling among the box and borders. Betty could hear the voices of people who drove by, or walked along the sidewalk, but Tideshead village was almost as still as the fields outside the town. She answered all the questions that the aunts kindly asked her for conversation's sake, and she tried to think of ways of seeming interested in return.

"Can I climb the cherry−tree this summer, Aunt Barbara?" she asked once. "Don't you remember the day when there was a tea company of ladies here, and Mary Beck and I got some of the company's bonnets and shawls off the best bed and dressed up in them and climbed up in the trees?"

"You looked like two fat black crows," laughed Aunt Barbara, though she had been very angry at the time. "All the fringes of those thin best shawls were catching and snapping as you came down. Oh, dear me, I couldn't think what the old ladies would say. None of your mischief now, Miss Betty!" and she held up a warning forefinger. "Mary Beck is coming to see you to−morrow; you will find some pleasant girls here."

"Tideshead has always been celebrated for its cultivated society, you know, dear," added Aunt Mary.

Just now a sad feeling of loneliness began to assail Betty. The summer might be very long in passing, and anything might happen to papa. She put her hand into her pocket to have the comfort of feeling a crumpled note, a very dear short note, which papa had written her only the day before, when he had suddenly decided to go out to Cambridge and not come back to the hotel for luncheon.

They talked a little longer, Betty and the grandaunts, until sensible Aunt Barbara said, "Now run upstairs to bed, my dear; I am sure that you must be tired," and Betty, who usually begged to stay up as long as the grown folks, was glad for once to be sent away like a small child. Aunt Barbara marched up the stairway and led the way to the east bedroom. It was an astonishing tribute of respect to Betty, the young guest, and she admired such large−minded hospitality; but after all she had expected a comfortable snug little room next Aunt Mary's, where she had always slept years before. Aunt Barbara assured her that this one was much cooler and pleasanter, and she must remember what a young lady she had grown to be. "But you may change to some other room if you like, my

dear child," said the old lady kindly. "I wouldn't unpack to−night, but just go to bed and get rested. I have my breakfast at half past seven, but your Aunt Mary doesn't come down. I hope that you will be ready as early as that, for I like company;" and then, after seeing that everything was in order and comfortable, she kissed Betty twice most kindly and told her that she was thankful to have her come to them, and went away downstairs.

It was a solemn, big, best bedroom, with dark India−silk curtains to the bed and windows, and dull coverings on the furniture. This all looked as if there were pretty figures and touches of gay color by daylight, but now by the light of the two candles on the dressing−table it seemed a dim and dismal place that night. Betty was not a bit afraid; she only felt lonely. She was but fifteen years old, and she did not know how to get on by herself after all. But Betty was no coward. She had been taught to show energy and to make light of difficulties. What could she do? Why, unpack a little, and then go to bed and go to sleep; that would be the best thing.

She knelt down before her trunk, and had an affectionate feeling toward it as she turned the key and saw her familiar properties inside. She took out her pictures of her father and mother and Mrs. Duncan, and shook out a crumpled dress or two and left them to lie on the old couch until morning. Deep down in the sea−chest, as Captain Beck had called it, she felt the soft folds of a gay piece of Indian silk made like a little shawl, which papa had please himself with buying for her one day at Liberty's shop in London. Mrs. Duncan had laughed when she saw it, and told Betty not to dare to wear it for at least ten years; but the color of it was marvelous in the shadowy old room. Betty threw the shining red thing over the back of a great easy−chair and it seemed to light the whole place. She could not help feeling more cheerful for the sight of that gay bit of color. Then a great wish filled her heart, dear little Betty; perhaps she could really bring some new pleasure to Tideshead that summer! The old aunties' lives looked very gray and dull to her young eyes; it was a dull place, perhaps, for Betty, who had lived a long time where the brightest and busiest people were. The last thing she thought of before she fell asleep was the little silk shawl. She had often heard artistic people say "a bit of color;" now she had a new idea, though a dim one, of what a bit of color might be expected to do in every−day life. Good−night, Betty. Good−night, dear Betty, in your best bedroom, sound asleep all the summer night and dreaming of those you love!

IV. TIDESHEAD.

However old and responsible Betty Leicester felt overnight, she seemed to return to early childhood in spite of herself next day. She must see the old house again and chatter with Aunt Barbara about the things and people she remembered best. She looked all about the garden, and spent an hour in the kitchen talking to Serena and Letty while they worked there, and then she went out to see Jonathan and a new acquaintance called Seth Pond, an awkward young man, who took occasion to tell Betty that he had come from way up−country where there was plenty greener'n he was. There were a great many interesting things to see and hear in Jonathan's and Seth's domains, and Betty found the remains of one of her own old cubby−holes in the shed−chamber, and was touched to the heart when she found that it had never been cleared away. She had known so many places and so many people that it was almost startling to find Tideshead looking and behaving exactly the same, while she had changed so much. The garden was a most lovely place, with its long, vine−covered summer−house, and just now all the roses were in bloom. Here was that cherry−tree into which she and Mary Beck had climbed, decked in the proper black shawls and bonnets and black lace veils. But where could dear Becky be all the morning? They had been famous cronies in that last visit, when they were eleven years old. Betty hurried into the house to find her hat and tell Aunt Barbara where she was going.

Aunt Barbara took the matter into serious consideration. "Why, Mary will come to see you this afternoon, I don't doubt, my dear, and perhaps you had better wait until after dinner. They dine earlier than we, and are apt to be busy."

Betty turned away disappointed. She wished that she had thought to find Mary just after breakfast in their friendly old fashion, but ti was too late now. She would sit down at the old secretary in the library and begin a letter to

papa.

"Dear Papa," she wrote, "Here I am at Tideshead, and I feel just as I used when I was a little girl, but people treat me, even Mary Beck, as if I were grown up, and it is a little lonely just at first. Everything looks just the same, and Serena made me some hearts and rounds for supper; wasn't she kind to remember? And they put on the old silver mug that you used to have, for me to drink out of. And I like Aunt Barbara best of the two aunts, after all, which is sure to make you laugh, though Aunt Mary is very kind and seems ill, so that I mean to be as nice to her as I possibly can. They seemed to think that you were going off just as far as you possibly could without going to a star, and it made me miss you more than ever. Jonathan talked about politics, whether I listened or not, and didn't like it when I said that you believed in tariff reform. He really scolded and said that country would go to the dogs, and I was sorry that I knew so little about politics. People expect you to know so many new things with every inch you grow. Dear papa, I wish that I were with you. Remember not to smoke too often, even if you wish to very much; and please, dear papa, think very often that I am your only dear child,

Betty.

"P.S.—I miss you more because they are all so much older than we are, papa dear. Perhaps you will tell me about the tariff reform for a lesson letter when you can't think of anything else to write about. I have not seen Mary Beck yet, or any of the girls I used to know. Mary always came right over before. I must tell you next time about such a funny, nice old woman who came most of the way with me in the cars, and what will you think when I tell you the most important thing,—I had to come up river on the packet! I wished and wished for you.

Betty."

Dinner−time was very pleasant, and Aunt Mary, who first appeared then, was most kind and cheerful; but both the ladies took naps, after dinner was over and they had read their letters, so Betty went to her own room, meaning to put away her belongings; but Letty had done this beforehand, and the large room looked very comfortable and orderly. Aunt Barbara had smiled when another protest was timidly offered about the best bedroom and told Betty that it was pleasant to have her just across the hall. "I am well used to my housekeeping cares," added Aunt Barbara, with a funny look across the table at her young niece; and Betty thought again, how much she like this grandaunt.

The house was very quiet and she did not know exactly what to do, so she looked about the guest−chamber.

There were some quaint−looking silhouettes on the walls of the room, and in a deep oval frame a fine sort of ornament which seemed to be made of beautiful grasses and leaves, all covered with glistening crystals. The dust had crept in a little at one side. Betty remembered it well, and always thought it very interesting. Then there were two old engravings of Angelica Kauffmann and Madame Le Brun. Nothing pleased her so much, however, as papa's bright little shawl. It looked brighter than ever, and Letty had folded it and left it on the old chair.

Just then there came a timid rap or two with the old knocker on the hall−door. It was early for visitors, and the aunts were both in their rooms. Betty went out to see what could be done about so exciting a thing, and met quick−footed Letty, who had been close at hand in the dining−room.

"'T is Miss Mary Beck come to call upon you, Miss Betty," said Letty, with an air of high festivity, and Betty went quickly downstairs. She was brimful of gladness to see Mary Beck, and went straight toward her in the shaded parlor to kiss her and tell her so.

Mary Beck was sitting on the edge of a chair, and was dressed as if she were going to church, with a pair of tight shiny best gloves on and shiny new boots, which hurt her feet if Betty had only known it. She wore a hat that looked too small for her head, and had a queer, long, waving bird−of−paradise feather in it, and a dress that was

much too old for her, and of a cold, smooth, gray color, trimmed with a shade of satin that neither matched it nor made a contrast. She had grown to be even taller than Betty, and she looked uncomfortable, and as if she had been forced to come. That was a silly, limp shake of the hand with which she returned Betty's warm grasp. Oh, dear, it was evidently a dreadful thing to go to make a call! It had been an anxious, discouraged getting−ready, and Betty thought of the short, red−cheeked, friendly little Becky whom she used to play with, and was grieved to the heart. But she bravely pushed a chair close to the guest and sat down. She could not get over the old feeling of affection.

"I thought you would be over here long ago. I ought to have gone to see you. Why, you're more grown up than I am; isn't it too bad?" said Betty, feeling afraid that one or the other of them might cry, they were both blushing so deeply and the occasion was so solemn.

"Oh, do let's play in the shed−chamber all day to−morrow!"

And then they both laughed as hard as they could, and there was the dear old Mary Beck after all, and a tough bit of ice was forever broken.

Betty threw open the parlor blinds, regardless of Serena's feelings about flies, and the two friends spent a delightful hour together. The call ended in Mary's being urged to go home to take off her best gown and put on an every−day one, and away they went afterward for a long walk.

"What are the girls doing?" asked Betty, as if she considered herself a member already of this branch of the great secret society of girls.

"Oh, nothing; we hardly ever do anything," answered Mary Beck, with a surprised and uneasy glance. "It is so slow in Tideshead, everybody says."

"I suppose it is slow anywhere if we don't do anything about it," laughed Betty, so good−naturedly that Mary laughed too. "I like to play out−of−doors just as well as ever I did, don't you?"

Mary Beck gave a somewhat doubtful answer. She had dreaded this ceremonious call. She could not quite understand why Betty Leicester, who had traveled abroad and done so many things and had, as people say, such unusual advantages, should seem the same as ever, and only wear that plain, comfortable−looking little gingham dress.

"When my other big trunk comes there are some presents I brought over for you," confessed Betty shyly. "I have had to keep one of them a long time because papa has always been saying every year that we were sure to come to Tideshead, and then we haven't after all."

"He has been here two or three times," said Mary. "I saw him go by and I wanted to run out and ask him about you, but I was afraid to"—

"Afraid of papa? What a funny thing! You never would be if you really knew him," exclaimed Betty, with delighted assurance. She laughed heartily and stopped to lean against a stone wall, and gave Mary Beck a little push which was meant to express a great deal of affection and amusement. Then she forgot everything in looking at the beautiful view across the farms and the river and toward the great hills and mountains beyond.

"I knew you would think it was pretty here," said Mary. "I have always thought that when you came back I would bring you here first. I liked to call this our tree," she said shyly, looking up into the great oak branches. "It seems so strange to be here with you, at last, after all the times I have thought about it"—

Betty was touched by this bit of real sentiment. She was thankful from that moment that she was going to spend most of the summer in Tideshead. Here was the best of good things,—a real friend, who had been waiting for her all the time.

V. AT BECKY'S HOUSE.

When the happy Becky flew in to free herself from her Sunday clothes she did not meet either member of her family, but on her return from the walk she found her mother grimly getting the supper ready.

"Oh, I have had such a lovely time," cried Becky, brimful of the pleasure of Betty's return. "She is just the same as she used to be, exactly; only grown like everything. And I saw Miss Barbara Leicester, and she was lovely and asked me to stay to tea, and Betty did too, but I didn't know whether you would like it."

"I am going to have her come and take tea with us as soon as I can, but I don't see how to manage it this week," said Mrs. Beck complainingly. "I have so much to do every day that I dread having company. what made you put on that spotted old dress? I don't know what she could have thought, I'm sure. If you wanted to take off your best one, why didn't you put on your satine?"

"Oh, I don't know, mother!" answered Becky fretfully. "Betty had on a gingham dress, and she said I couldn't get over the fences in my best one, and I didn't think it made any difference."

"Well, no matter," said Mrs. Beck sighing, "they saw you dressed up decently at first. I think you girls are too old to climb fences and be tomboys, for my part. When I was growing up, young ladies were expected to interest themselves in things at home."

The good cheer of the afternoon served Becky in good stead. She was already helping her mother with the table, and was sorry in a more understanding way then ever before for the sad−looking little woman in black, who got so few real pleasures out of life. "Betty Leicester says that we can have this one summer more any way before we are really grown up," she suggested, and Mrs. Beck smiled and hoped they would enjoy it, but they couldn't keep time back do what they might.

"Did she show you anything she brought home, Mary?"

"No, not a single thing; we were out−doors almost all the time after I made the call, but she says she has brought me some presents."

"I wonder what they are?" said Mrs. Beck, much pleased. "There's one thing about the Leicesters, they are all generous where they take a liking. But then, they have got plenty to do with; everybody hasn't. You might have stayed to tea, I suppose, if they wanted you, but I wouldn't run after them."

"Why mother!" exclaimed honest Becky. "Betty Leicester and I always played together; it isn't running after her to expect to be friends just the same now. Betty always comes here oftenest; she said she was coming right over."

"I want you to show proper pride," said the mistaken mother. It would have been so much better to let the two girls go their own unsuspecting ways. But poor little Mrs. Beck had suffered many sorrows and disappointments, and had not learned yet that such lessons ought to make one's life larger instead of smaller.

Mary's eyes were shining with delight in spite of her mother's plaintive discouragements, and now as they both turned away from the plain little supper−table, she took hold of her hand and held it fast as they went out to the kitchen together. They very seldom indulged in a any signs of affection, but there was a very happy feeling roused

by Betty Leicester's coming. "Oh good! drop−cakes for tea!" and Mary capered a little to show how pleased she was. "I wish I had asked her to come home with me, she always used to eat so many of our drop−cakes when she was a little girl; don't you remember, mother?"

"Yes; but you mustn't expect her to be the same now," answered Mrs. Beck. "She is used to having things very different, and we can't do as we could if father had lived."

"Grandpa says nobody has things as nice as you do," said Mary, trying to make the sun shine again. "I know Betty will eat more drop−cakes than ever, just because she can hold so many more. She'll be glad of that, now you see, mother!" and Mrs. Beck gave a faint smile.

That very evening there were quick steps up the yard toward the side door, and Betty opened the door and came in to the Becks' sitting−room. She stopped a moment on the threshold, it all looked so familiar. Becky had grown, as we know; that was the only change, and the old captain sat reading his newspaper as usual, with a small lamp held close against it in his right hand; Mrs. Beck was sewing, and on the wall hung the picture of Daniel Webster and the portraits in watercolors of two of the captain's former ships. Betty spoke to Captain Beck with an air of intimacy and then went over to Becky's mother, who stood there with a pale apprehensive look as if she thought there was no chance of anybody's being glad to see her. However, Betty kissed her warmly and said she was so glad to get back to Tideshead, and then displayed a white paper bundle which she had held under her wrap. It looked like presents!

"Aunt Barbara had to write some letters for the early mail and Aunt Mary was resting, so I thought I would run over for a few minutes," said the eager girl. "My big trunk came this afternoon, Becky."

"How is your Aunt Mary to−day?" asked Mrs. Beck ceremoniously, though a light crept into her face which may have been a reflection from her daughter's broad smile.

"Oh, she is just the same as ever," replied Betty sadly. "I believe she isn't sleeping so well lately, but she looks a great deal better than when I was a little girl. Aunt Barbara is always so anxious."

"They were surprised, I observed, when you and I came up the street together last night; quite a voyage we had," said the captain.

"Some day I mean to go down and come back again in the old packet; can't you go too, Becky?" said our friend. "Captain Beck'll be going again, won't you, Captain Beck? I didn't look at the river half enough because I was in such a hurry to get here."

"You're sunburnt, aren't you?" said Mrs. Beck, looking very friendly.

"I'm always brown in summer," acknowledged Betty frankly. "Hasn't Mary grown like everything? I didn't known how tall I must look until I saw her. I'm so glad that school is done; I was afraid it wouldn't be."

"She goes to the academy now, you know," said Mrs. Beck. "the term ended abruptly because the principal's wife met with affliction and they had to go out of town to her old home."

Betty, it must be confessed, had at this point an instinctive remembrance of Mrs. Beck's love for dismal tales, so she hastened to change the subject of conversation. Mrs. Beck was very kind−hearted when any one was ill or in trouble. Betty herself had a grateful memory of such devotion when she had a long childish illness once at Aunt Barbara's, but Mary Beck's mother never seemed to take half the pleasure in cheerful things and in well people who went about their every−day affairs. It seemed a good chance now to open the little package of presents. There were two pretty Roman cravats, and a carved Swiss box with a quantity of French chocolate in it, and a nice cake

of violet soap, and a pretty ivory pin carved like an edelweiss, like one that Betty herself wore; for the captain there was a photograph of Bergen harbor in Norway, with all manner of strange vessels at the wharves. Then for Mrs. Beck Betty had brought a pretty handkerchief with some fine embroidery round the edge. It was a charming little heap of things. "I have been getting them at different times and keeping them until I came," said Betty.

Mary Beck was delighted, as well she might be, and yet it was very hard to express any such feeling. Somehow the awkward feeling with which she went to make the call that afternoon was again making her dreadfully uncomfortable.

The old captain was friendly and smiling and Mary and her mother said "Thank you," a good many times, but Mrs. Beck took half the pleasure away by a sigh and lament that her girl couldn't make any return.

"It's the best return to be so glad to see each other, Becky!" said Betty Leicester, suddenly turning to her friend and blushing a good deal as they kissed one another, while the old captain gave a satisfied humph and turned to his newspaper again.

Mrs. Beck was really mush pleased, and yet was overwhelmed with a suspicion that Betty thought her ungrateful. She was sorry that if there were going to be a handkerchief it had not been one with a black border, but after all this was a pretty one and very fine; it would be just right for Mary by and by.

The old cat seemed to know the young visitor, and came presently purring very loud and rubbing against Betty's gown, and was promptly lifted into her lap for a little patting and cuddling before she must run back again to the aunts. This cat had been known to Betty as a young kitten, and she and Becky had sometimes dressed her with a neat white ruffle about her neck to which they added a doll's dress. She was one of the limp obliging kittens which make such capital playmates, and the two girls laughed a great deal now as they reminded each other of certain frolics that had taken place. Once Mrs. Beck had entertained the Maternal Meeting in her staid best parlor, and the Busy B's, as the captain sometimes called them, had dressed the kitten and encouraged her to enter the room at a most serious moment in the proceedings. Even Mrs. Beck laughed about it now, though she was very angry at the time. Her heart seemed to warm more and more, and by the time our friend had gone she was in really good spirits. Becky must keep the cake of soap in her upper drawer, she said; nothing gave such a nice clean smell to things. It seemed to her it was a strange present, but it was nice to have it, and all the things were pretty; it wasn't likely that any of them were very expensive.

"Oh mother!" pleaded Becky affectionately; "and then, just think! you said last night perhaps she hadn't brought me anything, and it had been out of sight out of mind with her!" Mary was truly fond of her friend, but she could not help looking at life sometimes from her mother's carping point of view. It was good for her to be so pleased and happy as she was that evening, and she looked at her new treasures again and prudently counted the seventeen little chocolates in their gay papers twice over before she treated herself to any. She could keep their little cases even after the chocolates were gone.

Mrs. Beck mended and sewed on buttons long after the captain and Mary had gone to bed. She could not help feeling happier for Betty Leicester's coming. She knew that she had been a little grumpy to the child; but Betty had luckily not been discomforted by it, and had even thought, as she ran across the street in the dark evening and up the long front walk, that Becky's mother was not half so disapproving as she used to be.

VI. THE GARDEN TEA

There was a gnarled old pear−tree of great age and size that grew near Betty Leicester's east window. By leaning out a little she could touch the nearest bough. Aunt Barbara and Aunt Mary said that it was a most beautiful thing to see it in bloom in the spring; and the family cats were fond of climbing up and leaping across to the

window−sill, while there were usually some birds perching in it when the coast was clear of pussies.

One day Betty was looking over from Mary Beck's and saw that the east window and the pear−tree branch were in plain sight; so the two girls invented a system of signals: one white handkerchief meant come over, and two meant no, but a single one in answer was for yes. A yellow handkerchief on the bough proposed a walk and so the code went on, and was found capable of imparting much secret information. Sometimes the exchange of these signals took a far longer time than it did to run across from house to house, and at any rate in the first fortnight Mary and Betty spent the greater part of their waking hours together. Still the signal service, as they proudly called it, was of great use.

One morning, when Mary had been summoned, Betty came rushing to meet her.

"Aunt Barbara is going to let me have a tea−party. What do you think of that?" she cried.

Mary Beck looked pleased, and then a doubting look crept over her face.

"I don't know any of the boys and girls very well except you," Betty explained, "and Aunt Barbara likes the idea of having them come. Aunt Mary thinks that she can't come down, for the excitement would be too much for her, but I am going to tease her again as soon as I have time. It is to be a summer−house tea at six o'clock; it is lovely in the garden then. Just as soon as I have helped Serena a little longer, you and I will go to invite everybody. Serena is letting me beat the eggs."

It was a great astonishment that Betty should take the serious occasion so lightly. Mary Beck would have planned it at least a week beforehand, and have worried and worked and been in despair; but here was Betty as gay as possible, and as for Aunt Barbara and Serena and Letty, they were gay too. It was entirely mysterious.

"I have sent word by Jonathan to the Picknell girls; he had an errand on that road. They looked so old and scared in church last Sunday that I kept thinking that they ought to have a good time. They don't come in to the village much, do they?" inquired Betty with great interest.

"Hardly ever, except Sundays," answered Mary Beck. "They turn red if you only look at them, but they are always talking together when they go by. One of them can draw beautifully. Oh, of course I do to school with them, but I don't know them very well."

"I hope they'll come, don't you?" said Betty, whisking away at the eggs. "I don't know when I've ever been where I could have a little party. I can have two or three girls to luncheon or tea almost any time, especially in London, but that's different. Who else now, Becky? Let's see if we choose the same ones."

"Mary and Julia Picknell, and Mary and Ellen Grant, and Lizzie French, and George Max, and Frank Crane, and my cousin Jim Beck,— Dan's too little. They would be eight, and you and I make ten—oh, that's too many!"

"Dear me, no!" said Betty lightly. "I thought of the Fosters, too" −

"We don't have much to do with the Fosters," said Mary Beck. "I don't see why that Nelly Foster started up and came to see you. I never go inside her house now. Everybody despises her father"—

"I think that Nelly is a dear−looking girl," insisted Betty. "I like her ever so much."

"They acted so stuck−up after Mr. Foster was put in jail," Mary went on. "People pitied them at first and were carrying about a subscription−paper, but Mrs. Foster wouldn't take anything, and said that they were going to support themselves. People don't like Mrs. Foster very well."

"Aunt Barbara respects her very much. She says that few women would show the courage she has shown. Perhaps she hasn't a nice way of speaking, but Aunt Barbara said that I must ask Harry and Nelly, when we were talking about to−night." Betty could not help a tone of triumph; she and Becky had fought a little about the Fosters before this.

"Harry is just like a wild Indian," said Mary Beck; "he goes fishing and trapping almost all the time. He won't know what to do at a party. I believe he makes ever so much money with his fish, and pays bills with it." Becky relented a little now. "Oh, dear, I haven't anything nice enough to wear," she added suddenly. "We never have parties in Tideshead, except at the vestry in the winter; and they're so poky."

"Oh, wear anything; it's going to be hot, that's all," said industrious Betty, in her business−like checked apron; and it now first dawned upon Becky's honest mind that it was not worth while to make one's self utterly miserable about one's clothes.

The two girls went scurrying away like squirrels presently to invite the guests. Nelly Foster looked delighted at the thought of such a pleasure.

"But I don't know what Harry will say," she added, doubtfully.

"Please ask him to be sure to come," urged Betty. "I should be so disappointed, and Aunt Barbara asked me to say that she depended upon him, for she knows him better than she does almost any of the young people." Nelly looked radiant at this, but Mary Beck was much offended. "I go to your Aunt Barbara's oftener than anybody," she said jealously, as they came away.

"She asked me to say that, and I did," maintained Betty. "Don't be cross, Becky, it's going to be such a jolly tea−party. Why, here's Jonathan back again already. Oh, good! the Picknells are happy to come."

The rest of the guests were quickly made sure of, and Betty and reluctant Mary went back to the house. It made Betty a little disheartened to find that her friend took every proposition on the wrong side; she seemed to think most things about a tea−party were impossible, and that all were difficult, and she saw lions in the way at every turn. It struck Betty, who was used to taking social events easily, that there was no pleasuring at all in the old village, though people were always saying how gay and delightful it used to be and how many guests used to come to town in the summer.

The old Leicester garden was a lovely place on a summer evening. Aunt Barbara had been surprised when Betty insisted hat she wished to have supper there instead of in the dining−room; but Betty had known too many out−of−door feasts in foreign countries not to remember how charming they were and how small any dining−room seems in summer by contrast. And after a few minutes' thought, aunt Barbara, too, who had been in France long before, asked Serena and Letty to spread the table under the large cherry−tree near the arbor; and there it stood presently, with its white cloth, and pink roses in two china bowls, all ready for the sandwiches and bread and butter and strawberries and sponge−cake, and chocolate to drink out of the prettiest cups in Tideshead. It was all simple and gay and charming, the little feast; and full of grievous self−consciousness as the shyest guest might have been when first met by Betty at the doorstep, the pleasure of the party itself proved most contagious, and all fears were forgotten. Everybody met on common ground for once, without any thought of self. It came with surprise to more than one girl's mind that a party was really so little trouble. It was such a pity that somebody did no have one every week.

Aunt Barbara was very good to Harry Foster, who seemed at first much older and soberer than the rest; but Betty demanded his services when she was going to pass the sandwiches again, and Letty had gone to the house for another pot of chocolate. "I will take the bread and butter; won't you please pass these?" she said. And away they went to the rest of the company, who were scattered along the arbor benches by twos and threes.

"I saw you in your boat when I first came up the river," Betty found time to say. "I didn't know who you were then, though I was sure you were one of the boys whom I used to play with. Some time when Nelly is going down couldn't you take me too? I can row."

"Nelly would go if you would. I never thought to ask her. I always wish there were somebody else to see how pleasant it is"—and then a voice interrupted to ask what Harry was catching now.

"Bass," said Harry, with brightening face. "I do so well that I cam sending them down to Riverport every day that the packet goes, and I wish that I had somebody to help me. You don't know what a rich old river it is!"

"Why, if here isn't Aunt Mary!" cried Betty. Sure enough, the eager voices and the laughter had attracted another guest. And Aunt Barbara sprang up joyfully and called for a shawl and footstool from the house; but Betty didn't wait for them, and brought aunt Mary to the arbor bench. Nobody knew when the poor lady had been in her own garden before, but here she was at last, and had her supper with the rest. The good doctor would have been delighted enough if he had see the sight.

Nothing had ever tasted so good as that out−of−door supper. The white June moon came up, and its bright light made the day longer; and when everybody had eaten a last piece of sponge−cake, and the heap of strawberries on a great round India dish had been leveled, what should be heard but sounds of a violin. Betty had discovered that Seth Pond,— the clumsy, good−natured Seth of all people!—had, as he said, "ears for music," and had taught himself to play.

So they had a country−dance on the green, girls and boys and Aunt Barbara, who had been a famous dancer in her youth; and those who didn't know the steps of "Money Muck" and the Virginia reel were put in the middle of the line, and had plenty of time to learn before their turns came. Afterward Seth played "Bonny Doon," and "Nelly was a Lady," and "Johnny Comes Marching Home," and "Annie Laurie," and half a dozen other songs, and everybody sang, but, to Betty's delight, Mary Beck's voice led all the rest.

The moon was high in the sky when the guests went away. It seemed like a new world to some young folks who were there, and everybody was surprised because everybody else looked so pretty and was so surprisingly gay. Yet, here it was, the same old Tideshead after all!

"Aunt Barbara," said Betty, as that aunt sat on the side of Betty's four−post bed,—"Aunt Barbara, don't say good−night just yet. I must talk about one or two things before I forget them in the morning. Mary Picknell asked me ever so many questions about some of the pictures, but she knows more about them than I do, and I thought I would ask her to come some day so that you could tell her everything. She ought to be an artist. Didn't you see how she kept looking at the pictures? And then Harry Foster knows a lovely place down the river for a picnic, and can borrow boats enough beside his own to take us all there, only it's a secret yet. Harry said that it was a beautiful point of land, with large trees, and that there was a lane that came across the fields from the road, so that you could be driven down to meet us, if you disliked the boats."

"I am very fond of going on the water," said Aunt Barbara, with great spirit. "I knew that point, and those oak−trees, long before either of you were born. It was very polite of Harry to think of my coming with the young folks. Yes, we'll think about the picnic, certainly, but you must go to sleep now, Betty."

"Aunt Barbara must have been such a nice girl," thinks Betty, as the door shuts. "And if we go, Harry must take her in his boat. It is strange that Mary Beck should not like the Fosters, just because their father was a scamp."

But the room was still and dark, and sleepiness got the better of Betty's thoughts that night.

VII. THE SIN BOOKS.

One morning Betty was hurrying down Tideshead street to the post−office, and happened to meet the minister's girls and Lizzie French, who were great friends with each other. They seemed to be unusually confidential and interested about something.

"We've got a secret club and we're going to let you belong," said Lizzie French. "Where can we go to tell you about it, and make you take the oath?"

"Come home with me just as soon as I post this letter," responded Betty with great pleasure. "Do you think my front steps would be a good place?"

"It would be too hot; beside, we don't want Mary Beck to see us," objected Ellen Grant, who was the most pale and quiet of the two sisters. They were both pleasant, persistent, mild−faced girls, who never seemed tired or confused, and never liked to change their minds or to go out of their own way. Usually all the other girls liked to do as they said, and they were accordingly very much pleased with Betty, apparently because she hardly ever agreed with them.

"Let's go to walk, then," said Betty.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," Lizzie Grant said in a business−like tone. "Let's go down the old road a little way, toward the river, and sit under the black cherry−tree on the stone wall; you know how cool it is there in the morning? I can't stay but a little while any way. I am going to help mother."

Nobody objected and away they went two by two. Evidently there was serious business on hand, which could by no means be told lightly or without some regard to the surroundings.

"Now what is it?" demanded Betty, when they had seated themselves under the old black cherry−tree; but neither of the girls took it upon her to speak first. "I promise never, never to tell."

Mary Grant took a thin, square little book out of her pocket, half of a tiny account book of the plainest sort, and held it up to Betty so that she could see the letters S. B. C. on the pale brown pasteboard cover. It certainly looked very interesting and mysterious. "We thought that we would admit another member," said Mary; "but it is a very difficult thing to belong, and you must hold up your right hand and promise on your word of honor that you will never speak of it to any girl in Tideshead."

"I may have to speak of it to papa. I always tell papa if I am not quite certain about things. He said a great while ago that it was the safest way. I mean I am on my honor about it, that's all. He never asks me." Betty's cheeks grew red as she spoke, but she did speak bravely, and the girls were more impressed than ever by the seriousness of the club.

"I don't believe that she will have to tell him, do you, girls?" Lizzie French insisted. "Any way we want you to belong, Betty. You be the one to tell her, Mary."

"It is a society to help us not to say things about people," said Mary Grant solemnly, and Betty Leicester gave a little sigh of relief. [—] She thought that would be a most worthy object, though somewhat poky.

"We have made a league that we will try to break ourselves of speaking harshly and making fun of people, and of not standing up for them when others talk scandal. There, you see this book is ruled into little squares for the days of the week, a month on a page, and when we get through a day without saying anything against anybody we can

put a nice little cross in, but when we have broken the pledge we mustmark it with a cipher, and then when we are just horrid and keep on being cross, we must black the day all over. Then once a week we have to show the books to each other and make our confessions."

"Wouldn't it be splendid, if we could have a whole week of good marks, to wear a little badge or something?" proposed Lizzie French.

"Oh Lizzie! we never can, it will be so hard to get through one single day," Betty answered quickly. "I should just love to belong, though; I am always saying ugly things and being sorry. What does S. B. C. mean? How did you ever think of it?"

"The Sin Book Club," Ellen Grant explained. "Mary and I heard of one that our cousin belonged to at boarding−school. She said that it took weeks and weeks for some of the members to make one good mark, but after you get into the habit of it, you find it quite easy. I will let you take my book to make yours by, if you will let me have it back to−night. I bought a little book for Mary and me that was only three cents, and cut it in two; and Lizzie hasn't got hers yet, so you can buy on together and go halves."

"I'd like to know who will pay the two cents," laughed Betty. "I will, and then you can give me half a one−cent lead pencil to make change. Papa always has such a joke about a man in one of Mr. Lowell's poems who used to change a board nail for a shingle nail so as to make the weight come right."

"No, you give me the pencil," said Lizzie, "I lost mine yesterday," and the new members became unduly frivolous.

"Now we mustn't laugh, girls, because it is a solemn moment," said Ellen Grant, though she did not succeed in looking very sober herself.

Betty was looking at Mary Grant's sin book, which had kept the record of two days, both with bad marks. If Mary had failed, what could impulsive Betty hope for? it was one of her worst temptations to make fun or to find petty faults in people. She did not know what her friends would think of her as time went on, but she meant to try very hard.

"Just think how lovely it will be if we learn never to say anything against any one! Perhaps we ought to make it a big club instead of a little one," but one of the girls said that people would laugh and would be watching them.

"Oughtn't we to ask Becky to belong?" It was difficult for Betty to ask this question, but she feared that her dear friend and neighbor's sharp eyes would detect the secret alliance, and Mary Beck was very hard to console when she was once roused into displeasure. Somehow Betty liked the idea of belonging to a club that Mary Beck did not know about. She was a little ashamed of this feeling, but there it was! The Grants and Lizzie refused to have Becky join, at any rate just now; and so Betty said no more. Perhaps it would be just as well at first, and she would be as careful as possible to gain good marks for her friend's sake as well as her own. Then the four members of the S. B. C. came back together into the village, and if the black cherry−tree heard their secret it never told. Whom should they meet as they turned the corner into the main street but Mary Beck herself, and Betty for one moment felt guilty of great disloyalty.

"We have been to walk a little way; I met the girls as I was going to the post−office, and we just went down to the old road and sat under the cherry−tree," she hastened to explain, but Becky was in a most friendly mood and joined them with no suspicion of having been left out of any pleasure. Betty felt a secret joy in belonging to the club while Becky did not, and yet she was sorry all the time for Becky, who had a great pride in being at the front when anything important was going on. Becky liked to keep Betty Leicester to herself, and indeed the two girls were growing more and more fond of each other, though a touch of jealousy in one and a spirit of independence

and freedom in the other sometimes blew clouds over their sunny spring sky. Mary Beck had a way of seeing how people treated her and rating them accordingly—a silly self−compassionate way of saying that one was good to her, and a surly suspicion of another who did not pay her an expected attention, and these traits offended Betty Leicester, who was not given to putting either herself or other people under a microscope. There was nothing morbid about Betty and no sentimentality in her way of looking at herself. Becky's sensitiveness and prejudice were sometimes very tiresome, but they made nobody half so miserable as they did Becky herself; the talk she had always heard at home was very narrowing; a good deal of fruitless talk about small neighborhood affairs went on continually and had nothing to do with the real interests of life. It was a house where there was very little to show for the time that was spent. Mary Beck and her mother let many chances for their own usefulness and pleasure slip by, while they said mournfully that everything would have been so different if Mary's father had lived. Betty Leicester was taught to do the things that ought to be done.

The Sin Book Club continued to be a profound secret, and was considered of great value. Some days passed without a second meeting of the members for reports, but they gave each other significant looks and tried very hard to gain the little crosses that were to mark a good day. Betty was in despair when evening after evening she had to put down a cipher, and it was a great humiliation to find how often she yielded to a temptation to say funny things about people. To be sure old Mrs. Max was an ugly old gossip, but Betty need not have confided this opinion to Serena and Letty as they happened to look out of the kitchen windows, to see Mrs. Max go by. Betty had succeeded in being blameless until past six o'clock that day, and it was the fifth day of trial; lost now, and black−marked like those that had gone before. She went back to the garden and sat down in the summer−house much dejected. The light that came through the grape and clematis leaves was dim and tinted with green; it was a little damp there too, and quite like a sorrowful little hermitage. It is very hard work trying to cure a fault. Betty did so like to make people laugh, and she was always seeing what funny things people looked like; and altogether life was much soberer if one could no longer say whatever came into one's head. She was sure that all funny personalities did not make people think the less of their fellows, but it seemed as if most, and the very funniest, did. Our friend dreaded the inspection of her sin book, but when the Grants and Lizzie French showed theirs too in solemn conclave there was only one good mark for the whole four. This was Ellen Grant's, who talked much less than either of the others and so may have found that silence cost less effort.

"Even if we never succeed it will make us more careful," Lizzie French said, trying to keep up good courage.

"I keep wishing that Mary Beck belonged;" urged Betty loyally, but the others were resolute and insisted, nobody could tell exactly why, that Becky would spoil it all. Betty was valiant enough in case of open war, but she hated heartily—as who does not hate?—a chilling atmosphere of disapproval, in which no good−fellowship can flourish. Of course the club soon betrayed its common interest, and because Mary Beck was unobservant for the first week or two, Betty took little pains to conceal the fact that she and the Grants had a new interest in common. Then one day Becky did not come over, though the white handkerchief was displayed betimes; and when, as soon as possible, Betty hurried over to see what the matter was, Becky showed unmistakable signs of briefness and grumpiness of speech, and declared that she was busy at home, and evidently did not care for the news that an old Æolian harp had been discovered on a high upper shelf and carried to one of the dormer windows, where it was then wailing. The plaintive strains of it would have suited Becky's spirit and temper of mind excellently. It did not occur to Betty until she was going home, disappointed, that the club was beginning to make trouble; then her own good temper was spoiled for that day, and she was angry with Becky for thinking that she had no right to be intimate with anybody else. So serious a disagreement had never parted them before. Betty Leicester assured herself that Mary knew she was fond of her and like to be with her best, and that ought to be enough. The Aeolian harp was quite forgotten.

Later in the day Betty happened to look across the street as she was shutting the blinds in the upper hall, and saw Mary Beck come proudly down her short front walk with her best hat on and go stiffly away without a look across. The sight made her feel misunderstood and lonely; and one minute later she was just going to shout to Becky when she remembered that it was a far cry and would wake the aunts from their afternoon naps. Then she

ran lightly down the wide staircase and all the way to the gate and called as loud as she could, "Mary! Mary!" but either Becky was too far away or would not turn her proud head. There were some other persons in the street, who looked with surprise and interest to see where such an eager shout came from, but Betty Leicester had turned toward the house again with a heartful of rage and sorrow. It seemed to be the sudden and unlooked for end of the summer's pleasure. When Aunt Barbara waked she asked Betty, being somewhat surprised to find her in the house alone, to go to the other end of the village to do an errand.

It was good to have something to do beside growing crosser and crosser, and Betty gladly hurried away. She hoped that she should meet Becky, and yet she did not mean to make up too easily, and when she saw Mrs. Beck watching her out of a front window she felt certain that Mrs. Beck was cross too. "Let them get pleased again!" grumbled Miss Betty Leicester, and Mary Beck herself had not borne a more forbidding expression. She lingered a moment at Nelly Foster's gate, hoping to find Nelly free, but the noise of the sewing−machine was plainly to be heard, and Nelly said wistfully that she could not go out until after tea; then she would come down to the house for a little while if Betty would like it, and Betty gladly said yes. Her heart was shaken as she walked on alone and came to the oak−tree on the high ridge where Becky had taken her to see the view and told her that she always called it their tree, in that first afternoon's walk. What could make poor old Becky so untrustful and unkind? Perhaps after all everything would be right when they met again; it might be one of Becky's freaks, only a little worse than usual. Alas, Mary with Julia Picknell, who happened to be in the village that afternoon, came out of one of the stores as the returning Betty was passing, and Becky looked another way and pushed by, though Betty had spoken pleasantly and tried to stop her.

"I don't care one bit; you're rude and hateful, Mary Beck!" said Betty hotly, at which Julia, mild little friend that she was, looked frightened and amazed. She had thought many times how lovely it must be to live in town and have friendships of a close and intimate kind with the girls. She pitied Betty Leicester, who looked as if she could hardly keep from crying; but the grievous Becky was more grumpy than before.

Serena was walking in the side yard in her nice plain afternoon dress, and somehow Betty felt more like seeking comfort from her than from Aunt Barbara, and was glad to go in at the little gate and join her kind old friend.

"What's fell upon you?" asked Serena, with sincere compassion.

"Mary Beck's just as disagreeable as she can be to−day," responded Betty, regardless of her sin book. "Serena! I just hate her, and I hate that horrid best hat of hers with the feather in it."

"Oh, no you don't, sweetin's;" Serena protested peacefully. "You'll be keepin' company same 's ever to−morrow. Now I think of 't, you've been off a good deal with the Grants and that French girl" (not a favorite of Serena's); "I wonder if that's all?"

"Yes—no"—wavered Betty. "Don't you tell anybody, but I do belong to a little club, but Becky doesn't really understand, for we've kept it very secret indeed."

"I want to know," exclaimed Serena.

"Yes, and it's for such a good object. I'll tell you some time, perhaps, but we want to cure ourselves of a fault." It seemed no harm to tell good old Serena; the compact had only been that none of the other girls should know. "We keep a little book, and we can have a good mark at night if we haven't said anything against anybody, but to−day I shall have such a black one! It makes us careful how we speak; truly, Serena; but Becky doesn't know, and she's making me feel so badly just because she suspects something."

"The tongue is an evil member," said Serena. "I don't know but doing things is full as bad as sayin' 'em, though. I s'pose you ain't kind of flaunted it a little speck that you had some secret amon'st you, to spite Mary?"

"She was stuffy about it and she had no right to be," Betty said this at first hastily, and then added: "I did wish yesterday that she would ask to belong and find that for once she couldn't."

Serena took Betty's light hand in her own work−worn one and held it fast. "Le's come and set on the doorstep a spell," she said; "I want to tell you something about me an' a girl I thought everything of when we was young.

"She was real pretty, and we went together and had our young men— not serious, only kind o' going together; an' Cynthy an' me we had a misunderstandin' o' once another and we didn't speak for must 's a fortnight an' said spiteful things. I was here same's I be now, an' your Aunt Barbara, she was young too, an' the old lady, Madam Leicester, she was alive and they all was inquirin' what had come over me. I used to have a pretty voice then, and I wouldn't go to singin'−school or evenin' meetin' nor nothin'. I set out to leave here an' my good kind home an' go off to Lowell working in the mill, 't was when so many did, and girls liked it. Cynthy lived to the minister's folks. I've never got over it how ugly spoken I was about that poor girl, and she used to look kind of beseechin' at me the two or three times we met, as if she'd make up if I would, but I wouldn't. An' don't you think, one night her brother come after her to take her home, up Great Hill way, and the horse got scared and threw 'em out on the ice; an' when they picked Cynthy up she was just breathin' an' that was all, an' never spoke nor knew nothin' again. 'T was at the foot o' that hill just this side o' the Picknells. It give me a fit o' sickness; it did so," said Serena mournfully. "I can't bear to think about her never. Oh, she was one of the prettiest girls you ever saw. I try to go every summer an' lay a bunch o' pink roses on to her grave; she used to like 'em. I know 't was a fault o' youth an' hastiness, but I ain't never forgot it all my long life. I tell you with a reason. Folks says it takes two to make a quarrel but only one to end it. Now you bear that in your mind."

Betty glanced at old Serena, and saw two great tears slowly running down her faded cheek. She was much moved by the sad little story, and Serena's pretty friend and the pink roses. She wondered what the quarrel had been about, but she did not like to ask, and as Serena still held one hand she put the other over it, while Serena took the corner of her afternoon apron to wipe away the tears.

"It's very hard to be good, isn't it, Serena dear?" asked Betty.

"It's master hard, sweetin's," answered Serena gravely,—"master hard; but it can be done with help." They sat there on the shady doorstep for some minutes without speaking. A robin was chirping loud, as if for rain, high in one of the elms overhead, and the sun was getting low. Presently Serena was mindful of her evening duties and rose to go in, but not before Betty had put both arms round her and kissed her.

"There, there! somebody'll see you," protested the kind soul, but her face shone with joy. "Which d'you want for your supper, shortcakes or some o' them crispy rye ones?" she asked, trying to be very matter−of−fact. As for Betty, she turned and went down the yard and out of the carriage gate and straight across the wide street. She opened the Becks' front door and saw Becky at the end of the entry trying to escape to the garden.

"Don't let's be grumpy," she said in a friendly tone, "I've come over to make up."

Becky tried to preserve a stern expression, but somehow there was a warmth at her heart which suddenly came to the surface in a smile and the two girls were friends again. That night Betty put down a black mark, but not without feeling that the day had ended well in spite of its dark shadows.

"I don't believe that we ought to keep the sin books secret," she told the members of the club one afternoon when the second week's trial was over and there had been four or five good days for encouragement. "I don't wish everybody to know, but now that we find how much good they do us, we ought to let somebody else try; only Becky and the Picknells and Nelly Foster."

But there was no expression of approval.

"Then I'm going to do this: not tell them about this club, but behave as if it was something new and start another club. I could belong to two as well as one, you know."

"I wouldn't be such a copy−cat," said Lizzie French quickly. "It's our secret; we shall be provoked that we ever asked you," and with this verdict Betty was forced to be contented. She felt as if she had taken most inflexible vows, but there was a pleasing excitement in such dark mystery. The girls had to employ much stratagem in order to have their weekly meeting unsuspected, for Betty was determined not to make any more trouble among her friends. When she was first in Tideshead she often felt more enlightened than her neighbors, as if she had been beyond those bounds and experiences of every−day life known to the other girls, but she soon discovered her self to be single−handed and weak before their force of habit and prejudice. With all their friendliness and affection for Betty Leicester they held their own with great decision, and sometimes she found herself nothing but a despised minority. This was very good for her, especially when, as it sometimes happened, she was quite in the wrong, while if she were right she became more sure of it and was able to make her reasons clear.

There were several solemn evening meetings of the Sin Book Club after this; the favorite place of assemblage was a shady corner of Lizzie French's damp garden, where the records were sorrowfully inspected by the fleeting light of burnt matches, and gratified crowds of mosquitoes forced the sessions to be extremely brief. Whether it was that new interests took the place of the club, or whether the members thought best to keep their trials to themselves, no one can say, but by the middle of August the regular meetings had ceased. Yet sometimes the little books came accidentally out of pocket with a member's handkerchief, and were not without a good and lasting effect upon four quick young tongues; perhaps this will be seen as the story goes on.

VIII. A CHAPTER OF LETTERS.

The summer days flew by. Some letters came from Mr. Leicester on his rapid journey northward, and Betty said once that it seemed months since she left England instead of a few weeks, everybody was so friendly and pleasant. Tideshead was most delightful to a girl who had been used to seeing strange places and to knowing nobody but papa at first, and only getting acquainted by degrees with the lodgings people and the shops, and perhaps with some new or old friends of papa's who lived out of the town. Once or twice she had stayed for many weeks in rough places in the north of Scotland, going from village to village and finding many queer people, and sometimes being a little lonely when her father was away on his scientific quests. Mr. Leicester insisted that Betty learned more than she would from books in seeing the country and the people, and Betty herself liked it much better than if she had been kept steadily at her lessons. The most doleful time that she could remember was once when papa had gone to the south of Italy late in spring and had left her at a French convent school until his return. However, there were delightful things to remember, especially about some of the good sisters whom Betty learned to love dearly, and it may be imagined how brimful of stories she was, after all these queer and pleasant experiences, and how short she made the evenings to Aunt Barbara and Aunt Mary by recounting them. It was no use for the ladies to worry any more about Betty's being spoiled by such an erratic course of education, as they often used to worry while she was away. They had blamed Betty's father for letting her go about with him so much, but there did not seem to be any great harm wrought after all. She knew a great many things that she never would have known if she had stayed at school. Still, she had a great many things to learn, and the summer in Tideshead would help to teach her those. She was really a home−loving girl, our Betty Leicester, and the best part of any new town was always the familiar homelike place that she and papa at once made in it with their "kits" as Betty called their traveling array of books and a few little pictures, and papa's special kits and collections of the time being. Aunt Barbara could never know upon how many different rooms her little framed photograph had looked. She had grown older since it was taken, but when she said so Betty insisted that it was picture of herself and would always look exactly like her. Betty had grown so attached to it that it was still displayed on the dressing−table of the east bedroom, even though the original was hourly to be seen.

In this summer quiet of the old town it seemed impossible that papa should not come hurrying home, as he used in

their long London winters, to demand an instant start for some distant place. When the traveling kit was first bestowed in the lower drawer of one of the deep bureaus, Betty felt as if it might have to come out again next day, but there it stayed, and was abandoned to neglect unless its owner needed the tumbler in its stiff leather box for a picnic, or thought of a particular spool that might be found in the traveling work−bag. But with all the quiet and security of her surroundings, sometimes her thoughts followed papa most wistfully, or she wondered what her friends were doing on the other side of the sea. It was very queer to be obliged to talk about entirely new and different things, and Tideshead affairs alone, and not to have anybody near who knew the same every−day life that had stopped when she came to Tideshead, and so letters were most welcome. Indeed, they made a great part of the summer's pleasure. Suppose we read a handful as if we had picked them from Betty's pocket: −

Interlaken, July 2.

My dear Betty,—It was very good of you to write me so soon. You would be sure that I was eager to hear from you, and to know whether you had a good voyage and found yourself contented in Tideshead. I am sure that your grandaunts are even more glad to have you than I was sorry to let you go. But we must have a summer here together one of these days; you would be sure to like Interlaken. It seems to me pleasanter and quainter than ever; that is, if one takes the trouble to step a little one side of the torrent of tourists. Our rooms in the old pension are well lighted and aired, and two of my windows give on the valley toward the Jungfrau and the high green mountain slopes. Every morning since we have been here I have looked out to see a fresh dazzling whiteness of new snow that has covered the Jungfrau in the night, and we always say with a sigh every evening, as we looked up out of the shadowy valley and see the high peak still flushed with red sunset light, that such clear weather cannot possibly last another day. There are some old Swiss châlets across the green, and we hear pleasant sounds of everyday life now and then; last night there was a festival of some sort, and the young people sang very loud and very late, jodeling [so spelled] famously and as if breath never failed them. I suppose that the girls have already written to you, and that you will have two full descriptions of our scramble up to one of the highest chalets which I can see now as I look up from my writing−table, like a toy from a Nurnberg box with a tiny patch of greenest grass beside it and two or three tufts of trees. In truth it is a good−sized, very old house, and the green square is a large field. It is so steep that I wonder all the small children have not rolled out of the door and down to the valley one after the other, which is indeed a foolish remark to have made.

I take great pleasure in my early morning walks, in which you have so often kept me company, dear child. I meet the little peasants coming down from the hillsides to eight o'clock school in their quaint long frocks like little old fairies, they look so wise and sedate. Often I go to the village of Unterseen, just beyond the great modern hotels, but looking as if it belonged to another century than ours. We have some friends, artists, who have lodgings in one of the old houses, and when I go to see them I envy them heartily. Here it is very comfortable, but some of the people at table d'hôte are very tiresome to see, noisy strangers, who eat their dinners in most unpleasant fashion; but I should not forget two delightful German ladies from Hanover, who are taking their first journey after many years, and are most simple and enviable in their deep enjoyment of the Kursaal and other pleasures easily to be had. But I must not write too long about familiar pictures of travel. I will not even tell you our enthusiastic plan for a long journey afoot which will take nine days even with the best of weather. Ada and Bessie will be sure to keep a journal for your benefit and their own. Are you really well, my dear Betty, and busy, and do you find yourself making new friends with your old friends and playmates? It goes without saying that you are missing your papa, but before one knows we shall all be at home in London, as hurried and surprised as ever with the interesting people and events that pass by. Mr. Duncan is to join us for the walking tour, and has planned at least one daring ascent with the Alpine Club. I came upon his terrible shoes this morning in one of his boxes and they made me quite gloomy. Pray give my best regards to Miss Leicester, and Miss Mary Leicester; they seem very dear friends to me already, and when I come to America I shall be seeing old friends for the first time, which is always charming. I leave the girls to write their own words to you, but Standish desires her duty to Miss Betty, and says that her winter coat is to be new−lined, if she would kindly bear it in mind; the silk is badly frayed, if Standish may say so! I do not think from what I know of the American climate that you will be needing it yet, but dear old Standish is very thoughtful of all her charges. We had only a flying note from your papa, written on his

way north, and shall be glad when you can send us news of him. God bless you, my dear child, and make you a blessing! I hope that you will do good and get good in this quiet summer. Write to me often; I feel as if you were almost my own girl. Yours most tenderly,

Mary Duncan.

From papa, these:—

Dearest Betty,—This morning it is a wild country all along the way, untamed and unhumanized for the most part, and we go flying along through dark forests and forlorn burnt lands from tiny station to station. I am getting a good bit of writing done with the only decent stylographic pen I ever saw. I thought I had brought plenty of pencils, but they were not in my small portmanteau, and after going to the baggage−car and putting everybody to great trouble to get out my large one, they were not there either. Can any on explain? I found the dear small copy of Florio's "Montaigne" which you must have tucked in at the last moment. I like to have it with me more than I can say. You must have bought it that last morning when I had to leave you to go to Cambridge. I do so like to own such a Betty! Why do you still wish that you had come with me? Tideshead is much the best place in the world. I send my dear love to the best of aunts, and you must assure Serena and Jonathan and all my old friends of my kind remembrance. I wish every day that our friend Mr. Duncan could have come with me. The country seems more and more wide and wonderful, and I am quite unconscious now of the motion of the cars and feel as fresh every morning and as sleepy every night as possible; so don't worry about me, but pick me a sprig of Aunt Barbara's sweetbrier roses now and then, and try not to be displeasing to any one, dear little girl. Your fond father,

Thomas Leicester.

Canadian Pacific Railway, 18th June

Dear Betty,—The pencils all tumbled on the car−floor out of my light overcoat pocket. I then recalled somebody's command that I should put them into the portmanteau at once, the day they came home from the stationer's. I have found a fortune−telling, second−sighted person in the car. She has the section next to mine and has been directed by a familiar spirit to go to Seattle. She has a parrot with her, and they are both very excitable and communicative. She just told me that it is revealed to her that my youngest boy will have a genius for sculpture. I miss you more than usual to−day. You could help me with some copying, and there is positively nothing interesting to see out of the window; what there is of uninteresting twirls itself about. We shall soon be reaching the mountains, in fact, I have just caught my first glimpse of them beyond these great plains. I must really have some one to write for me next year, but this winter we keep holiday, you and I, if we get in for nothing new. It pleases me to write to you and takes up the long day. You will have finished "L'Allegro" by this time; suppose you learn two of the "Sonnets" next. I wish you to know your Milton as well as possible, but I am sorry to have you take it while I am away. Take Lowell's "Biglow Papers" and learn the Spring poem. You will find nothing better to have in your mind in the Tideshead June weather. And so good−by for this day.

T. Leicester.

My dear Betty, −Your letter is very good, and I am more glad than ever that you chose to go to Tideshead. You will learn so much from Aunt Barbara that I wish my girl to know and to be. And you must remember, in Aunt Mary's self−pitying moments, all her sympathy and her true love for us both, and remember that she has in her character something that makes her the dearest being in the world to such a woman as Aunt Barbara. She is a person, in fact they both are, to be liked and appreciated more and more. You and your Mary Beck interest me very much. Are you sure that it is wise to call her Becky? I thought that she was a new girl, but a nickname is indeed hard to drop. I remember her, a good little red−cheeked child. Let me say this: You have indeed lived a wider sort of life, but I fear that I have made you spread your young self over too great a space, while your Becky has stepped patiently to and fro in a smaller one. You each have your advantages and disadvantages, so be "very

observant and respectful of your neighbor," as that good old Scottish preacher prayed for us in Kelso. Be sure that you don't "feel superior," as your Miss Murdon used to say. It is a great thing to know Tideshead well. Remember Selborne and how famous that town came to be!

Yours fondly,

T.L.

Interlaken, July 11th.

Dear Betty,—Ada and I mean to take turns in writing to you,—one letter on Sunday and one in the middle of the week; for if we write together we shall tell you exactly the same things. So, you see, this is my turn. We do so wish for you and think that you cannot possibly be having so much fun in Tideshead as if you had come with us. We see such droll people in traveling; they do not look as if they were gong anywhere, but as if they were lost and trying hard to find their way back, poor dears! There was an old woman sitting near us on a bench with a stupid−looking young man, to hear the band play, and when it stopped she said to him: "Now we've only got three tunes more, and they will soon be done." We wondered why she couldn't go and so something else if she hated them so much. Ada and I play a game every morning when we walk in the town: We take sides and one has the Germans and one the English, and then see which of us can count the most. Of course we don't always know them apart, and then we squabble for little families that pass by, and Ada is sure they are Germans,—you know how sure Ada always is if she feels a little doubtful!—but yesterday there were Cook's tourists as thick as ants and so she had no chance at all. Miss Winter writes that she will be ready to join us the first of August, which will be delightful, and mamma won't have us to worry about. She said yesterday that we were much less wild without you and Miss Winter, and we told her that it was because life was quite triste. She wishes to go to some far little villages quite off the usual line of travel, with papa, and does not yet know whether to go now and take us, or wait and leave us with Miss Winter. I promised to be triste if she would let us go. Triste is my word for everything. Do you still wear out two or three dozen hates a day? Ada said this morning that you would hate so many hard little green pears for breakfast; but we are coming to plum−time now, and they are so good and sweet. Every morning such a nice Swiss maiden called Marie (they are all Maries, I believe) comes and bumps the corner of her tray against our door and smiles a very wide smile and says "Das frühstuck" in exactly the same tone as she comes in, and we have such delectable breakfasts of crisp little rolls and Swiss honey and very weak and hot−milky café au lait. I don't believe Miss Winter will let us have honey every day, but mamma doesn't mind. I think she give orders for a very small dish of it, because Ada and I have requested more until we are disheartened. Mamma says that while we run up so many hillsides here we may eat what we please. Oh, and one thing more: no end of dry little mountain strawberries, sometimes they taste like strawberries and sometimes they don't; but this is enough about what one eats in Interlaken. I have filled my four pages and Ada is calling me to walk. We are going on with our botany. Are you? I send a better edelweiss which I plucked myself. I must let Ada tell you next time about that day. She is the best at a description, but I love you more than ever and I am always your fond and faithful.

Bessie Duncan

P. S. I forgot to say that Ada has made such clever sketches. Papa says that they quite surprise him, and we just long to show them to Miss Winter. There is one of a little girl whom we saw making lace at Lauterbrunnen. The Drummonds of Park Lane drove by us yesterday; we couldn't hear the name of their hotel, though they called it out, but we are sure to find them. They looked, however, as if they were on a journey, the carriage was so dusty. It was so nice to see the girls again.

IX. BETTY'S REFLECTIONS.

As Betty shut the gate behind her one day and walked down the main street of Tideshead she felt more than ever as if the past four years had been a dream, and as if she were exactly the same girl who had paid that last visit when she was eleven years old. Yet she seemed to herself to have clearer eyes than before; her years of travel had taught her how to observe, the best gift that traveling can bestow. She saw new beauties in the gardens and the queer−shaped porches over the front doors, and noticed particularly the cupolas of one or two barns that were clear and sharp in their good outlines. More than all, she was astonished at the beauty of the old trees. Tideshead was not a forest of maples, like many other New England towns, but there were oaks along the village streets, and ash−trees, and willows, beside great elms in stately rows, and silver poplars, and mountain ashes, and even some fruit−trees along the roadsides outside the village. Betty remembered a story that she had often heard with great interest about one of the old Tideshead ministers who had been much beloved, and whose influence was still felt. Every year he had brought ten trees from the woods and planted them either on the streets or in his neighbor's yards; one year he chose one sort of tree and the next another, and at last, when he grew older and could not go far afield in his search he asked his friends for fruit−trees and planted them for the benefit of wayfarers. These had made a delightful memorial of the good old man, but many of the trees had fallen by this time, and though everybody said that they ought to be replaced, and complained of such shiftless neglect, as usual what was everybody's business was nobody's business, and Tideshead looked as if it were sorry to be forgotten. Betty had been used to the thrifty English and French care of woodlands, and felt as if it were a great pity not to take better care of the precious legacy. Aunt Barbara sometimes sent Jonathan and Seth Pond to care for the trees that needed pruning or covering at the roots, but hardly any one else in Tideshead did anything but chop them up and clear them away when they blew down.

It seemed very strange that all the old houses were so handsome and all the new ones so ugly. A stranger might wonder, why, with the good proportions, and even a touch of simple elegance that the house builders of the last century almost always gave, their successors seemed to have no idea of either, and to take no lessons from the good models before their eyes. "Makeshifts o' splendor," sensible old Serena called some of the new houses which had run much to cheap decoration and irregular roofs and fancy colors of paint. But the old minister's elms and willows hung their green boughs before some of these architectural failures as if to kindly screen them from the passers−by. They looked like imitations of houses, one or two of them, and as if they were put down to fill spaces, and not meant to live in, as the old plain−roofed and wide−roomed dwellings are. The sober old village looked here and there as if it were a placid elderly lady upon whom a child had put it's own gay raiment. People do not consider the becomingness of a building to its surroundings as they should, but Betty did not make this clear to herself exactly, though she was sorry at the change in the familiar streets. She was more delighted than she knew because she felt so complete a sense of belongingness; as if she were indeed made of the very dust of Tideshead, and were a part of it. It was much better than getting used to new places, though even in the dullest ones she had known there was some charm and some attaching quality ever to be remembered. She liked dearly to think of some of the places where she and papa had made their home, but after all there was the temporary feeling about every one. She could bear transplanting from most of them with equanimity, no matter how deep her roots had seemed to strike.

After she had posted her letters there was a question of what to do next. She had really come out for a walk, but Mary Beck's mother had a dressmaker that day and Becky was not at liberty; and Nelly Foster was busy, too. The Grants were away for a few days on a visit; it was a lonely morning with our friend, who felt a hearty wish for one of her usual companions. She strayed out toward the fields and seated herself in the shade of Becky's favorite tree, looking off toward the hills. The country was very green and fresh−looking after a long rain, and the farmers were out cutting the later hay in the lower meadows. She could hear the mowing−machines like the whirr of great locusts, and the men's voices as they shouted to each other and the horses. On the field side of the fence, in the field corner, she and Becky had made a comfortable seat by putting a piece of board across the angle of the two fences, and there was a black cherry−tree thicket near, so that the two girls could not be seen from the road as

they sat there. As Betty perched herself here alone she could look along the road, but not be discovered easily. She wished for Becky more than ever after the first few minutes, but her thoughts were very busy. She had had a misunderstanding with both the aunts that morning, and was still moved by a little pity for herself. They had grown used to their own orderly habits, and it seemed to be no trouble to them to keep their possessions in order, and Betty had found them standing before an open bureau drawer in her room quite aghast with the general disarray, and also with the buttonless and be−ripped condition of different articles of her underclothing. They had laughed good−naturedly and were not so hard upon Betty as they meant to be, when they saw her shame−stricken face, and Betty herself tried to laugh. She did not mind Aunt Barbara's seeing the things so much as Aunt Mary's aggravating assumption that it was a perfectly hopeless case, and nothing could be done about it.

"Nobody knows how or where they were washed," Aunt Barbara said in her brisk way; and though she looked very stern, Betty knew that she meant it partly for an excuse.

"You certainly ought to have been looking them over in this rainy weather," complained Aunt Mary. "A young lady of your age is expected to keep her clothing in exquisite order."

Betty hated being called a young lady of her age.

"I hope that you take better care of your father's wardrobe than this: why, there isn't a whole thing here, and they are most expensive new things, one can see; unmended and spoiled." Aunt Mary held up a pretty underwaist and sighed deeply.

"Mrs. Duncan chose them with me; one doesn't have to give so much for such things in London," explained Betty somewhat hotly. "It is no use to pick out ugly things to wear."

"Dear, dear!" said Aunt Barbara, "don't fret about it, either of you! We'll look them over by and by, Betty, and see what can be done;" and she shut the drawer upon the pathetic relics. "You must be ready to meet your responsibilities better [ ] this," she said sharply to her niece, but Betty was already hurrying out of the door. She did not mind Aunt Barbara, but Aunt Mary in the distressing silk wrapper that belonged to cross days was too much for one to bear. They had no business to be looking over her bureau drawer; then Betty was sorry for having been so ill−natured about it. Letty had told her, earlier, that some of her clothes cold not be worn again until they were mended, and Aunt Barbara had, no doubt, been consulted also, and was wondering what was best to be done. Betty's great pride had been in being able to take care of papa, and she had almost boasted of her skill, and of her management of housekeeping affairs when they were in lodgings. She was too old now to be treated like a child, and hated being what Serena called "stood over."

Betty's temper was usually very good, and such provocations could not make her miserable very long. As she sat under the oak−tree she even laughed at the remembrance of Aunt Mary's expression of perfect hopelessness as she held up the underwaist. Aunt Barbara's favorite maxim that there was "nothing so inconvenient as disorder" seemed to have deeper reason and wisdom than ever. Betty considered the propriety of throwing away all her subterfuges of pins, so that a proper stitch must be inevitably taken when it was needed. Pins in underclothes are not always comfortable, but our heroine was apt to be in a hurry, and to suffer the consequences in more ways than one. She made some brave resolutions now, and promised herself to look over her belongings, and to mend all that could be mended and throw away the remainder rags that very day after dinner. Betty was fond of making good resolutions, and it seemed to help her much about keeping them if she wrote them down. She had learned lately from Aunt Barbara, who complained of forgetting things over night, to make little lists of things to be done, and it appeared a good deal easier to mark off the items on the list one by one, than to carry them in one's mind and wonder what should be done next. Our friend liked to make notes about life in general and her own responsibilities, and had many serious thoughts now that she was growing older.

She made her lead pencil as pointed as possible with a knife newly sharpened by Jonathan, and wrote at the end of her slip of paper, which had come out much crumpled from her pocket: "Look over my clothes and every one of my stockings, and put them in as good order as possible." Then she smoothed out another larger piece of paper on her knee and read it. One day she had copied some scattered sentences from a book, and prefaced them with some things that her father often had said: "Learn the right way to do things. Do everything that you can for yourself. Try to make yourself fit to live with other people. Try to avoid making other people wait upon you. Remember that every person stands in a different place from every other and so sees life from a different point of view. Remember that nobody like to be proved in the wrong, and be careful in what manner you say things to people that they do not wish to hear."

Betty read slowly with great approval at first, but the end seemed disturbing. "That's just what Aunt Mary likes!" she reflected, with suddenly rising wrath. "She says things over twice, for fear I don't hear them the first time. I wish she would let me alone!" but Betty's conscience smote her at this point. She really was beginning to wish must heartily that she were good, and like every one else wished for the approval of others as well as for the peace of her own conscience. This was a black−mark day when she had neither, and she thought about her life more intently than usual. When she liked herself everybody liked her, but when she was on bad terms with herself everybody else seemed ready to join in the stern disapproval. Papa was always ready to lend a helping hand at such times, but papa was far away. Nothing was so pleasant as usual that morning, and a fog of discouragement seemed to shut out all the sunshine in Betty Leicester's heart. She did not often get low−spirited, but for that hour all the excitement of coming to Tideshead and being liked and befriended by her old friends had vanished and left only a miserable hopelessness in its place. The road of life appeared to lead nowhere, and perhaps our friend missed the constant change and excitement of interest brought to her by living alongside such a busy, inspiriting life as her father's. Here in Tideshead she had to provide her own motive power instead of being tributary to a stronger current.

"I don't seem to have anything to do," thought Betty. "I used to be so busy all the time last spring in London and never had half time enough, and now everything is raveling out instead of knitting up. I poke through the days hoping something nice will happen, just like the Tideshead girls." This thought came with a curious flash of self−recognition such as rarely comes, and always is the minute of inspiration. "I must think and think what to do," Betty went on, leaning her cheek on her hand and looking off at the blue mountains far to the northward. There was a tuft of rudbeckias in bloom near by, and just then the breeze made them bow at her as if they were watching and approved her serious thoughts. They had indeed a friendly and cheering look, as if there were still much hope in life, and Betty forgot herself for a minute as she was suddenly conscious of their companionship. She even gave the gay yellow flowers a friendly nod, and resolved to carry some of them home to the aunts. It would be a good thing to make a rule for devoting the first half hour after breakfast to the care of her clothes and that sort of thing: then she could take the next hour for her writing. But it was often very pleasant to scurry down into the garden or to the yard for a word with Jonathan or Seth. Aunt Barbara was always busy housekeeping with Serena just after breakfast, and Betty was left to herself for a while; it would take stern principle to settle at once to the day's work, but to−morrow morning the plan should be tried. Betty had offered, soon after she came, to take care of the flowers in the house, to pick fresh ones or to put fresh water in the vases, but she had forgotten to do it regularly of late, though Aunt Barbara had been so pleased in the beginning. "I ought to do my part in the house," she thought, and again the gay "rude beckies" nodded approval, and a catbird overhead said a great deal on the subject which was difficult to understand but very insistent. Betty was beginning to be cheerful again; in truth, nothing gets a girl out of a tangle of provocations and bewilderments and regrets like going out into the fields alone.

Nobody had driven by in all the time that Betty had sat in the fence corner until now there was a noise of wheels in the distance. It seemed suddenly as if the session were over, and Betty, quite restored to her usual serenity, said good−by to her solitary self and the cheerful wild−flowers. "I am going to be good, papa," she thought with a warm love in her hopeful heart, as she looked out through the young black cherry−trees to see who was going by in the road. "Seth! Seth Pond!" she called, "Where are you going?" for it proved to be that important member of

the aunts' household, with the old wagon and Jimmy, the old black horse.

"Goin' to mill," answered Seth, recognizing the voice and looking about him, much pleased. "Want to come? be pleased to have ye," and Betty was over the fence in a minute and appeared to his view from behind the thicket. I dare say the flowers waved a farewell and looked fondly after her as she drove away.

Seth was not in the least vexed by his thoughts. He was much gratified by Betty's company and behaved with great dignity, giving her much information about the hay crop, and how many tons were likely to be cut in this field and the next. They could not drive very fast because the wagon was well loaded with bags of corn, and so they jogged on at an even pace, though Seth flourished his whip a good deal, striking sometimes at the old horse, and sometimes at the bushes by the roadside.

"Do you expect I shall ever get to be much of a hand to play the violin?" he inquired with much earnestness.

"I don't know, Seth," answered Betty, a little distressed by the responsibility of answering. "Do you mean to be a musician and do nothing else?"

"I used to count on it when I was little," said Seth humbly. "I heard a fellow play splendid in a show once, and I just used to lay awake nights an' be good for nothin' days, wonderin' how I could learn; but I can play now 'bout 's good 's he could, I s'pose, an' it don't seem to be nothin'. Them tunes in the book you give me let in some light on me as to what playin' was. I mean them tough ones over in the back part."

"I suppose you would have to go away and study; teachers cost a great deal. That is, the best ones do."

"They're wuth it; I don't grudge 'em the best they get," said Seth, honorably. "I've got to think o' marm, you see, up−country. She couldn't get along nohow without my wages comin' in. You see I send her the most part. I ain't to no expense myself while I live there to Miss Leicester's. If there was only me I'd fetch it to live somehow up in somebody's garret, and go to one o' them crack teachers after I'd saved up consid'able. Then I'd go to work again an' practice them lessons till I earnt some more. But I ain't never goin' to pinch marm; she worked an' slaved an' picked huckleberries and went out nussin' and tailorin' an' any work she could git, slick or rough, an' give me everything she could till I got a little schoolin' together and was big enough to work. She's kind o' slim now; I think she worked too hard. I was awful homesick when I was first to your aunts', but Jonathan he used me real good. He come there a boy from up to our place just the same, an' used to know marm. Miss Leicester she lets me go up and spend Sunday consid'able often. Marm's all alone except what use she gets of the neighbors comin' in. But seems if I'd lived for nothin', if I can't learn to play a fiddle better than I can now," and Seth struck hard with his whip at an unoffending thistle.

"Then you're sure to do it," said Betty. "I believe you must learn, Seth. Where there's a will there's a way."

"Why, that's just what Sereny says," exclaimed Seth with surprise. "Well, they say 't was the little dog that kep' runnin' that got there Saturday night."

"Should you play in concerts, do you suppose?" asked Betty, with reverence for such overpowering ambition in the rough lad.

"You bet, an' travel with shows an' things," responded Seth. "But if I kep' to work on something[’] else that give mother an' me a good livin', I'd like to be the one they sent for all round this part of the country when they wanted first−rate playin'; an' I'd be ready, you know, and just make the old fiddle squeak lovely for dancin'or set pieces for weddings an' any occasions that might rise. I'd like to be the player, an' I tell ye I'm goin' to be 'for I die. Marm she knows I can, but one spell she used to expect 't would draw me into bad company."

"Oh you wouldn't let it, I'm sure, Seth," agreed Betty, with pleasing confidence. "I like to hear you play now," she said. "I wish we could get you a teacher. Perhaps papa can tell you, and—well, we'll see."

"I'd just like to have you see marm," said Seth shyly as they drove to the mill door. "She'd like you an' you'd like her. I don't suppose your aunts would let you go up−country, would they? It's pretty up there; mountains, an' cleared pastur's way up their sides higher 'n you'd git in an afternoon. You can see way down here right from our house," he whispered, as they stopped before the mill door.

Betty thought it was very pleasant in the old mill. While Seth and the miller were transacting their business, she went to one of the little windows on the side next the swift rushing mill−stream and looked out awhile, and watched some swallows and the clear water and the house on the other side where the miller lived. Then she was shown how the corn was ground and tasted the hot meal as it came sifting down from the little boxes on the band, and the miller even had the big wheel stopped in its dripping dark closet where it seemed to labor hard to keep the mill going. "Something works hard for us in our lives to make them all come right," she thought with wistful gratitude, and looked with new interest at the busy maze of wheels and hoppers and rude machinery that joggled on steadily from the touch of the hidden wheel and the plash of its live water. She wandered out into the sunshine and down the river side a little way. There was a clean yellow sandy bottom in one place with shoals of frisky little minnows and a small green island only a little way out, and Betty was much tempted to take off her shoes and stockings and wade across. Her toes curled themselves in their shoes with pleased anticipation, but she thought with a sigh that she was too tall to go wading now, that is, near a public place like the mill. It was impossible not to give a heavy sigh over such lost delights. Then she looked up at the mill and discovered that there were only one or two high and dusty windows at that end, and down she sat on the short green turf to pull off the shoes and stockings as fast as she could, lest second thoughts might again hinder this last wade. She gathered her petticoats and over to the island she splashed, causing awful apprehension of disaster among the minnows.

The green island was a delightful place indeed; the upper end was near the roaring dam, and the water plashed and dashed as it ran away on either side. There were two or three young elms and some alders on the island, and the alders were full of clematis just coming into bloom. The lower end of this was a strip of island−ground was much less noisy, and Betty went down to sit there after she had seen two or three turtles slide into the water, and more minnows slip away into deeper pools out of sight. There was a pleasant damp smell of cool water, and a ripple of light went dancing up the high stone foundation of the old mill. Betty could still hear the great wet wheel lumbering round. She thought that she never had found a more delightful place, so much business was going on all about her and yet it was so quiet there, and as she looked under a young alder what should she see but a wild duck on its nest. Even if the shy thing had fluttered off at her approach, it had gone back again, and now watched her steadily as if to be ready to fly, yet not really frightened. It was a dear kind of relationship to be in this wild little place with another living creature, and Betty settled herself on the soft turf, against the straight young elm trunk, determined not to give another glance in the duck s direction. It would be great fun to come and see it go away with its ducklings when they were hatched, if one only knew the proper minute. She wished that she could paint a picture of the mill and the river, or could write a song about it, even if she could not sing it, so many girls had such gifts and did not care half so much for them as Betty herself would. Dear Betty! she did not know what a rare gift she had in being able to enjoy so many things, and to understand the pictures and songs of every day.

Then it was time to wade back to shore, and so she rose and left the duck to her peaceful seclusion, not knowing how often she would think of this pretty place in years to come. The best thing about such pleasures is that they seem more and more delightful, as years go on. Seth was just coming to tell Betty that the meal was all ground and ready when she appeared discreetly from behind the willows that grew at the mill end, and so they drove home without anything exciting to mark the way.

Betty had taken many music lessons, but she was by no means a musician, and seldom played for the pleasure of it. For some reason, after tea was over that evening she opened Aunt Barbara's piano and began to play a gay

military march which she had toilsomely learned from one of the familiar English operas. She played it once or twice, and played it very well; in fact, an old gentleman who was going slowly along the street stopped and leaned on the fence to listen. He had been a captain in the militia in the days of the old New England trainings, and now though he walked with two canes and was quite decrepit, he liked to be reminded of his military service, and the march gave him a great pleasure and made him young again while he stood there beating time on the front fence, and nodding his head. One may often give pleasure without knowing it, if one does pleasant things.

Next morning, early after breakfast, Betty appeared at Miss Mary Leicester's door with an armful of mending. Aunt Mary waked up early and had her breakfast in bed, and liked very much to be called upon afterward and to hear something pleasant. One of the windows of her room looked down into the garden and it was cool and shady there at this time of the day, so Betty seated herself with a dutiful and sober feeling not unmixed with enjoyment.

"I have thought ever since yesterday that I was too severe, my dear," said Aunt Mary somewhat wistfully from her three pillows. "But you see, Betty, I am so conscious of the mistakes of my own life that I wish to help you to avoid them. It is a terrible thing to become dependent upon other people,—especially if they are busy people," she added plaintively.

"Oh, I ought to have managed everything better," responded Betty, looking at the ends of two fingers that had poked directly through a stocking toe. "I don't mean to let things get so bad again. I never do when I am with papa, because—I know better. But it has been such fun to play since I came to Tideshead! I don't feel a bit grown up here."

Aunt Mary looked at little Betty with an affectionate smile.

"I think fifteen is such a funny age," Betty went on; "you seem to just perch there between being a little girl and a young lady, and first you think you are one and then you think you are the other. I feel like a bird on a bough, or as if I were living in a railway station, waiting for a train to come in before I could do anything." Betty said this gravely, and then felt a little shy and self−conscious. Aunt Mary watched her as she sat by the window sewing, and was wise enough not to answer, but she could not help thinking that Betty was a dear girl. It was one of Aunt Mary's very best days, and there were some things one could say more easily to her than to Aunt Barbara, though Aunt Barbara was what Betty was pleased to irreverently call her pal.

"I do wish that I had a talent for something," said Betty. "I can't sing; if I could, I am sure that I would sing for everybody who asked me. I don't see what makes people so silly about it, hear that old robin now!" and they both laughed. "Nobody asks me to play who knows anything about music. I wish I had Aunt Barbara's fingers; I don't believe I can ever learn. I told papa it was just throwing money away, and he said it was good to know how to play even a little, and good for my hands, to make them quick and clever."

"You played that march very well last night," said Aunt Mary kindly.

"Oh, that sort of thing! But I mean other music, the hard things that papa likes. There is one of the Chopin nocturnes that Mrs. Duncan plays, oh, it is so beautiful! I wish you and Aunt Barbara knew it."

"You must ask Aunt Barbara to practice it. I like to have her keep on playing. We used to hear a great deal of music when I was well enough to go to Boston in the winter, years ago," and Aunt Mary sighed. "I think it is a great thing to have a gift for home life, as you really have, Betty dear."

"Papa and I have been in such queer holes," laughed Betty. "Mrs. Duncan and some of our friends are never tired of hearing about them. But you know we always try to do the same things. If I hadn't any other teacher when we were just flying about, papa always heard my lessons and made me keep lesson hours; and he goes on with his affairs and we are quite orderly, indeed we are, so it doesn't make much difference where we happen to be. Then I

have been whole winters in London, and Mrs. Duncan looks after us a good deal."

"Mary Duncan is a wise and charming woman," said Aunt Mary.

"All the big Duncans are so nice to the little ones!" said Betty; "but papa and I can be old or young, just as we choose, and we try to make up for not being a large family," which seemed to amuse both Aunt Mary and Letty, who had just come in.

The hour soon slipped by and Betty's needle had done great execution, but a little heap was laid aside for the rag−bag as too hopeless a wreck for any mending. It was plain that too much trust had been reposed in strange washer−women, for one could put a finger through the underwaists anywhere, such damaging soap had evidently been used to make them clean. Betty had heard that paper clothes were coming into fashion from Japan, and informed her aunt of this probable change for the better with great glee. Then she went away to the garden to cut some flowers for the house, and found Aunt Barbara there before her, tying up the hollyhock stalks to some stakes that Seth Pond was driving down. Aunt Barbara had a shallow basket and was going to cut the sweet−clover flowers that morning, to dry and put on her linen shelves along with some sprigs of lavender, and this pleasant employment took another half hour.

"Aunt Mary was so dear this morning!" said Betty, as they stood on opposite sides of a tall sweet−clover top.

"She feels pretty well, then," answered Miss Leicester, much pleased.

"Yes," said Betty, snipping away industriously; "she didn't wish to be pitied one bit. Don't you think we could give her some chloroform, Aunt Bab, and put her on the steamer and take her to England? She would get so excited and have such a good time and be well forever after."

"I really have thought so," acknowledged Aunt Barbara, smiling at Betty's audacity. But your Aunt Mary has suffered many things, and has lost her motive power. She cannot rouse herself when she wishes to, nowadays, but must take life as it comes. I can see that it was a mistake to yield years ago to her nervous illness, but I was not so wise then, and now it is too late. You know, Betty, she had a great sorrow, and has never been the same person since."

"So had papa when mamma died," said Betty gravely, and trying hard to understand; "but he cured himself by just living for other people, and thinking whether I were happy."

"It is the only way, dear," said Aunt Barbara, "but when you are older you will know better how it has been with my poor sister."

Betty said no more, but she had many thoughts. Something that had been said about losing one's motive power had struck very deep. She had said something herself about waiting for her train in the station, and she had a sudden vision of the aimlessness of it, and of even the train bills and advertisements on the wall. She was eager, as all girls are, for one single controlling fate or fortune to call out all her growing energies, but she was aware at this moment that she herself must choose and provide; she must learn to throw herself heartily into her life just as it was. It was a moment of clear vision to Betty Leicester, and her cheeks flushed with bright color. It wasn't the thing one had to do, but the way one learned to do it, that distinguished one's life. Perhaps she could be famous for every−day homely things and have a real genius for something so simple that nobody else had thought of it. That night when Betty said her prayers one new thing came into her mind to be asked for, and was a great help, so that she often remembered it afterward. "Help me to have a good time doing every−day things, and to make my work my pleasure."

X. UP−COUNTRY.

Aunt Barbara and Betty had finished their breakfast in the cool breakfast−room, or little dining−room as it was sometimes called by the family. This looked out on the short elm−shaded grass of the side yard, but it was apt to get too warm later in the day. The dining−room was much larger, and had most of the family portraits in it and a ponderous sideboard and side tables, and Betty sometimes thought that a good deal of machinery had to be set running there to give a quiet dinner or supper just to Aunt Barbara and herself. But the little dining−room was very cosy, with a small sideboard and a tall clock and an old looking−glass and very old−fashioned slender wooden armchairs. The sun came dancing in through the leaves at a square window. The breakfast−room was nearer the kitchen, and Serena had a sociable custom of appearing now and then to ask Miss Leicester about the housekeeping.

"There now, Miss Barb'ra," she exclaimed, putting her head in at the door, while Betty and her aunt still lingered. "You excuse me this time, but here's Jonathan considers it best to go off up−country looking for winter's wood, of all things! I told him I 'd like to ride up long of him to see sister Sarah when he went, but I never expected he 'd select the very day I set two weeks ago for us to pick the currants."

"But one day will make very little difference; I thought yesterday when you spoke of them that they needed a little more sun," said Miss Leicester persuasively.

"'T will bring the jelly right into the last o' the week when there's enough to do any way." One would have thought that Serena was being forced into unpleasant duty, but this was her way of beginning a day's pleasure, and Miss Leicester had been familiar with it for many years.

"He's goin' right off; puttin' the hosses in now; never gives nobody a moment to consider," grumbled Serena, but Miss Leicester laughed and bade the good soul hurry and get herself ready. There was nothing to be done that day that Letty could not manage, or Letty's sister would come over in the afternoon, or Mrs. Grimshaw, the extra helper who was frequently on hand. "I think Jonathan is wise not to give you any more time to think about it. There's no use in scouring the whole house outside and in before you take a day's pleasure," she suggested cheerfully.

"I like to have my mind at rest," responded Serena, but still there was something unsaid. Betty's eyes were eager, but she considerately waited for Serena to speak first. "You see, Miss Barb'ra, Jonathan's got to take up the rag−bags, 't is most a year since I got 'em up to sister Sarah's before, and they're in the way here, we all know, and I've got some bundles beside, and I told Seth Pond to run out an' pick a mess o' snap beans. Sister Sarah's piece is very late land and I s'pose she won't have any; and Jonathan he knows when I start I fill up more than the little wagon; so he's got the big one, and that makes empty seats, an' Miss Betty was saying that when I was goin' up again" −

"You are base conspirators, both of you," said Aunt Barbara, much amused. "It is a delightful day; the weather couldn't be better. Now hurry, Betty, and don't keep Serena waiting."

"If it's so that you really want go, Miss Betty."

"I do, indeed, Miss Serena," responded Betty with great spirit, and off she ran up−stairs, while her aunt hurried to find something to send by way of remembrance, not only to Serena's sister Sarah, but to Seth's mother, who lived two miles this side.

There was great excitement for the next half hour. Everybody behaved as if there were danger of missing a train, and Seth and Letty were sent this way and that, and Serena gave as many last charges as if she meant to be absent

a fortnight, while Jonathan, already in the wagon, grumbled at the delay and shouted to the horses if they so much as lifted a foot at a fly. When they had fairly started he gave a chuckle of satisfaction and said that he didn't expect when he was harnessing to get off until much as an hour later, whereat Serena with unwonted levity called him a "deceivin' old sarpent." The wind was blowing gently from the north, and was cool enough to make one comfortable in a jacket, though Betty could not be persuaded that hers was needed. Serena's shawl was pinned neatly about her shoulders. She sat alone on the back seat of the wagon, for Jonathan had said that it would ride better not to be too heavy behind and therefore Betty was keeping him company in front, of which scheme Serena had her own secret opinion. The piece−bags took up a large part of the spare seat. Sister Sarah was lame and took great joy in working the waste material of the Leicester house into rugs and rag carpets, and it was one of Serena's joys to fill the round piece−bags even to bursting.

Then there were the beans, and the bundles large and small, and Betty was in charge of a package of newspapers and magazines and patent medicine almanacs and interesting circulars of all sorts which Seth had been saving for his mother.

Jonathan was a tall, thin man, with a shrewd, clean−shaven face. He wore a new straw hat that day, with a faded linen coat, and a much washed−out plaid gingham cravat under his shirt collar. The' best hat was worn on Betty's account, and was evidently a little stiff and uncomfortable, for he took it off once or twice and looked into the crown soberly and then put it on again.

"Sorry you wore it, I s'pose?" observed Serena on one of these occasions.

"Got to wear it some time," answered Jonathan gruffly, so that nobody thought best to speak of the hat again even when a sudden puff of wind blew it over into a field. Betty had been ready to put on one of her old play−gowns, as she still called them, but upon reflection decided that it would be hardly respectful when she had been invited to go visiting with such kind and proper friends, and indeed Serena had given her a hasty and complacent glance from head to foot when she came down dressed in one of the prettiest of the London ginghams. Mrs. Duncan, Betty's kind friend and adviser, had been sure that these ginghams would all four be needed to clothe our heroine comfortably through the summer, that is to judge from experience in other summers; but it made a difference in the stress put upon ginghams, to be a year older.

The up−country road wound first among farms and within sight of the river, then it took a sudden northward turn and there were not so many white elder flowers by the way as there were junipers and young birches. There were long reaches through the cool woods, and the road was always rising to a higher part of the country, veritable up−country, among the hills. From one high point where they stopped to let the horses rest a minute there was a beautiful view of the low lands that lay toward the sea, and the river which ran southward in shining lines. It would be hard to say who most enjoyed the morning. The elder members of the party seldom felt themselves free for a holiday, and Betty was always ready to enjoy whatever came in her way; but there was a delicious novelty in being asked to spend a day with Serena and Jonathan. They were hostess and host, and Betty felt an unusual spirit of deference and gratitude toward them; it seemed as if they were both quite conscious of a different relationship toward Betty from that at home. It was wonderful to see what cordial greetings most of the people gave them along the road, and how many warm friends they seemed to possess. The farther they went, the more struck by this was our Betty, who gave a little sigh at some unworded thought about always being a newcomer and stranger. She had begun to feel so recognized and at home in Tideshead that it was a little hard now to find herself unknown again. But Serena liked to tell her who every one was, and there was as much friendly interest shown in Miss Betty Leicester as any heart could wish.

They had gone almost fourteen miles, and Betty was just nearing the end of a long description of her experiences at the Queen's Jubilee, when Jonathan said: "Now you can rec'lect just where you put the mark in. I don't calc'late to lose none of it, but here we've got to stop top of the hill an' see Seth's folks. You've got them papers an' things handy, ain't you, Serena?"

Betty saw a yellow story−and−a−half house by the roadside with some queer little sheds and outbuildings, and looked with great interest to see if any one came to the window. "Seth's folks" meant nobody but his mother, who lived alone as Betty knew, and there she was standing in the door, a kind−faced, round−shouldered little creature, who had the patient, half−apprehensive look of those women who live alone in lonely places. She threw her big clean gingham apron over her head and came forward just as Jonathan had got out of the wagon and Betty followed him.

"There, bless ye!" said "Seth's folks." "I waked up this morning kind of expecting that I should see somebody from down Seth's way. I expect he's well 's common?"

"Oh, yes," responded Jonathan. "We had to leave him to keep house. He was full o' messages, but I can't seem to remember none on 'em now."

"No matter, so long I know 's he's well," said the little woman, shaking hands with Betty and looking at her delightedly. "Now I want you all to come in and stop to dinner," but Serena could not even be persuaded to "'light down" on account of her duty to sister Sarah. Betty carried in the armful of reading matter and Mrs. Pond followed her, and while our friend looked at the plain little house and fancied Seth practicing histunes, and saw the beautiful cone frame which he had helped his mother to make, the hospitable little mother was getting some home made root−beer out of a big stone jug, and soon served it to her three guests in pretty old−fashioned blue and white mugs. Betty thought she had never tasted anything so delicious as the flavor of spice and pleasing bitterness in the cold drink, and Jonathan smacked his lips loudly and promised to call for more as he came back. Mrs. Pond took another good long look at Betty before they parted. "I wasn't expectin' you to be so much of a young lady. I do' know 's you be quite growed up yet, though," she said. This was not the least of the pleasures of that day, and they went on next to sister Sarah's, where Betty and Serena and the freight were to be left while Jonathan went off about his business.

It almost seemed as if up−country existed for the sake of its market town of Tideshead. Betty had been there once or twice in her childhood, but her memories even of sister Sarah were rather indistinct. She had taken a long nap once on the patchwork quilt in the bed room, and had waked to find four or five women hooking a large rug in the kitchen, all talking together, which had made an impression upon her young mind. It was strawberry−time too on that last visit. But sister Sarah remembered a great deal more about it than this, and was delighted to see Betty once more. There was the very rug on the floor, already beginning to look worn. One could remember it by a white, or rather a gray, rabbit under some large green leaves which made part of the design. It was impossible to say how many rugs there were in the house, as if life went on for the sole purpose of making hooked and braided rugs. Those in the kitchen at Aunt Barbara's were evidently the work of sister Sarah's industrious fingers. Serena might have left the place of her birth the week before instead of nearly forty years, if one might judge by the manner in which she hung her bonnet and shawl on a nail behind the door and put her grey thread gloves into the table drawer.

Sister Sarah looked like a neat little nun, and limped painfully as she went about the room. Sometimes she used a crutch, but she seemed as lame with it as without it, and she was such a brisk little creature in spirit, and was so little depressed by her misfortune that one felt it would be unwelcome to express any pity. Betty knew that sometimes the poor woman suffered a great deal of pain and could not move at all, and that a neighbor who also lived alone came at those times and stayed with her for a few weeks. "Sister Sarah ain't one mite lame in her mind," Serena said proudly one day, and Betty found this to be the truth. She did not like to read, however, and told Betty that it was never anything but a task, except to study geography, and she only had one old geography, fairly worn to pieces, which she knew by heart, with all its lists of towns and countries and rivers, the productions and boundaries and capitals and climatic conditions and wild animals were at her tongue's end for anybody who cared to hear them. "The old folks used to think she'd better exercise her memory learning hymns, and Sister Sarah favored geography," Serena once explained; "but she knows what other folks knows, and has got a head crammed full o' learning. She never forgets nothing, whilst I leak by the way, myself, and do' know whether I

know anything or not," she ended triumphantly.

Serena's mind was full of plans that day, and after resting a little while and hearing the news, she asked Betty whether she would go with her to a cousin's about a mile away by a pasture path, or whether she would stay where she was. The path sounded very pleasant, but from the tone of the invitation it seemed best to remain behind, so she quickly decided and Serena set forth alone. It was only about eleven o'clock and she meant to be back by twelve, and dinner was put off half an hour. Then Serena would have the afternoon clear until it was time to go. The cousin had seen trouble since the last visit, so it never would do to go home without seeing her. Sister Sarah and Betty sat by the front windows of the living−room, and Betty obeyed a parting charge to tell her companion "about seeing the Queen and the times when she used to go and see the Prince o' Wales's girls," so that the last of the morning was soon gone.

"Such folks has their aches an' pains just like us," commented sister Sarah at last. "I expected, though, they was more pompous−behaved than you seem to describe. Well, they have to think o' their example, and so does others, for that matter. I wonder 'f 'mongst all they've learned to do, anybody ever showed 'em how to braid or hook 'em a nice mat. I s'pose not, but with all their hired help an' all their rags that must come of a year's wear, 'twould be a shame for them to buy."

"I never saw any rugs just like these," said Betty, turning quickly to look out of the window. "I don't believe people make them except in America. But the princesses know how to do a good many things." It was very funny to Betty to think of their hooking rugs for themselves, however, but Serena's sister did not appear to suspect it.

"Land, won't I have a good time picking over those big full bags!" said she, looking at Aunt Barbara's rag−bags with delight, and forgetting the employments of royalty. "Your aunt's real generous, she is so! I sort out everything into heaps on the spare floor and if I have too much white I just reach for the dyepot. I do enjoy myself over them piece−bags."

"I don't know what would become of Aunt Barbara and Aunt Mary without Serena," said Betty, "but I don't see how you can spare her all the time."

"She wouldn't be spared by them," said sister Sarah, putting her head on one side like a bird. "When I was first left alone after marm's decease, folks thought she'd ought to come back, but I says No. She wouldn't be contented now same 's she was before she went, and I should get wuss and wuss if I was waited on stiddy. 'No!' says I to every one, 'let me be and let her be. She's free to come, and she's puttin' by her good earnin's.['] I wept all night when she first went off to Tideshead, seventeen year old, to be maid to Madam Leicester, but I knew from that day she was set to go her way same 's I was mine. But she's be'n a good sister to me; we never passed an hour unfriendly, and 't ain't all can say the same."

"No, indeed," said Betty cheerfully.

"Queen Victori' knows what it is to be alone," continued the little sister. "I always read how she was a real mourner. Now I seem to enter into her feelin's, bein' left by myself, through not a widow−woman."

Betty thought of the contrast between the Queen's life, with its formality and crowded households, and its retinues and solemn pageantry and this empty little New England farm−house on a long hillside that sloped eastward. It was so funny to hear the Queen discussed and to find her a familiar personage, just as one might in old England, where one was always hearing about "our dear Queen." But to sister Sarah the Queen was only another woman who lived alone, and had many responsibilities.

"I expect you're a regular little Britisher by this time, ain't you, Miss Betty?"

"Indeed, I'm not," answered our friend with spirit. "Papa would be ashamed of me. I'm a great American. What made you think so?" Sister Sarah looked pleased, but did not have anything more to offer on the subject. "We're all English to start with, but with the glory of America added on," said Betty with girlish enthusiasm. "You can't take away our English inheritance. I used to be always insisting upon that with the girls, that Shakespeare and King Arthur were just as much ours as theirs."

"I expect you know a sight o' things I never dreamt of," said sister Sarah, "but to me what takes place in this neighborhood is just as interesting as foreign parts. Folks is folks, I tell 'em. There ain't but a few kinds, neither, but they're put into all sorts of places, ain't they?"

Betty found that her hostess had a great many entertaining things to say, but presently there was a fear expressed lest Serena might be beguiled into staying too long at the cousin's, and so delay the dinner.

"Let me begin; oh please let me," said Betty, springing up. She had a sudden delighted instinct that it would be charming to wait upon Serena to−day and sister Sarah, and take her turn at making them comfortable. As quick as thought she turned up her skirt and pinned it behind her and said, "What next, if you please, ma'm," in a funny little tone copied from that of a precise London damsel in Mrs. Duncan's employ, who always amused the family very much.

Sister Sarah was fond of a joke, and to tell the truth this was one of her aching days and she had been dreading to take so many steps. She saw how pleased Betty was with her kind little plan.

"To lay the table and step lively," she answered, shaking with laughter. And Betty followed her directions until the square dinner−table stood in the middle of the floor, covered with a nice homespun linen cloth of which the history had to be told; and the old blue crockery; and Betty had cut just so many slices of bread, and brought just so many spiced pears from the brown jar in the cellar−way, and found the nice little square piece of cold corned beef which the hostess was so glad to have on hand, and had looked at the potatoes two or three times where they were baking in the stove oven in the shed−room where sister Sarah did her summer cooking; all these and other things were done when Serena, out of breath, and heated with hurrying, came in at the door.

"I'm going to finish since I have begun," said Betty proudly. "Now please use this fan, Serena, and rest yourself, and I shall be ready in a few minutes. I'm having a beautiful good time. Which pitcher shall I take for the fresh water?" and out she went to the cool old well under the apple−tree.

"Now was there ever such a darlin' gal," said sister Sarah, and Serena nodded her head. "I dare say she does like to take holt. Miss Barb'ra never was one that shirked at nothin'," she had time to reply before Betty came back and filled the tumblers and called the sisters to their dinner.

"Sarah," said Serena decisively, as she saw how hard it was for sister Sarah to move, "you've got to get Ann Sparks, ain't ye?"

And the lame woman answered Yes.

"I hate to give up, as you know, but one of my poor times is coming on," she said sadly.

The dinner was a great pleasure; Betty would do all the waiting, and there was an unexpected dessert of a jelly cake which Serena had brought with her, being mindful of her sister's fondness for it. Betty was touched with the sisters' delight in being together, for in spite of what Miss Sarah had said about their being contented apart, she knew that the family had seen trouble in earlier times, and that Serena's wages had been the main dependence, while sister Sarah could not be happy anywhere but in her own home.

There never were such delicious baked potatoes, and Betty humbly waited until she was perfectly sure neither of the sisters wanted the last one before she eagerly took it. It was delightful to be so hungry, as hungry as one could be on shipboard! And when the gay little dinner was over Betty made the hostess still play guest, and put on her apron again and carried the plates to the shed kitchen, and found the dish pan and the soap, and in spite of what anybody could say she washed them every one and only let Serena wipe them and put them away. Serena entered into the spirit of the thing and was so funny and nice—making believe to be afraid they were not doing things right and that "sister Sarah would turn to and do 'em over again, being amazing particular."

Then when the flies were whisked out by two efficient aprons, Betty left the sisters to themselves for a good talk and rest, and wandered out along the hillsides by the path Serena had taken, and there she sat and thought and looked off at the green country and at the sky. A little black and white dog came trotting along the path on some errand of his own, and when he saw Betty he held up one paw and looked at her and then came to be patted and to snuggle down by her side as if she were an old friend. Betty was touched by this expression of confidence and sympathy, as indeed she might be, and was sorry to say good−by to the little dog when it was time to go back to the house. He licked her fingers affectionately as she gave him a last patting, and seemed disappointed because she left him so soon, as if he had gone trotting about the world all his life to find her and now she was going away again. He did not offer to follow her, but whenever she looked back there he was, sitting quite still and watching.

Jonathan was already at the house, impatient to be on his way home, and Serena's bonnet was just being taken down from its nail as Betty came in. It seemed too bad to leave sister Sarah behind, but then she had all the piece−bags for company, as Serena said.

XI. THE TWO FRIENDS.

The Leicester household had been so long drifting into a staid and ceremonious fashion of life that this visit of Betty's threatened at times to be disturbing. If Aunt Barbara's heart had not been kept young, under all her austere look and manners, Betty might have felt constrained more than once, but there always was an excuse to give Aunt Mary, who sometimes complained of too much chattering on the front door steps, or too much scurrying up and down stairs from Betty's room. It was impossible to count the number of times that important secrets had to be considered in the course of a week, or to understand why there were so many flurries of excitement among the girls of Betty's set, while the general course of events in Tideshead flowed so smoothly. Miss Barbara Leicester was always a frank and outspoken person, and the young people were sure to hear her opinion whenever they asked for it; but she herself seemed to grow younger, in these days, and Betty pleased her immensely one day, when it was mentioned that a certain person who wore caps, and was what Betty called "poky," was about Miss Barbara's age: "Aunt Barbara, you are always the same age as anybody except a baby!"

"I must acknowledge that I feel younger than my grand−niece, sometimes," said Aunt Barbara, with a funny little laugh; but Betty was puzzled to know exactly what she meant.

In one corner of the upper story of the large old house there was a delightful little place by one of the dormer−windows. It lighted the crooked stairway which came up to the open garret−floor, and the way to some bedrooms which were finished off in a row. Betty remembered playing with her dolls in this pleasant little corner on rainy days, years before, and revived its old name of the "cubby−house." Her father had kept his guns and a collection of minerals there, in his boyhood. It was over Betty's own room, and noises made there did not affect Aunt Mary's nerves, while it was a great relief from the dignity of the east bedroom, or, still more, the lower rooms of the house, to betake one's self with one's friend to this queer−shaped, brown−raftered little corner of the world. There was a great sea−chest under the eaves, and an astounding fireboard, with a picture of Apollo in his chariot. There was a shelf with some old brown books that everybody had forgotten, an old guitar, and a comfortable wooden rocking−chair, beside Betty s favorite perch in the broad window−seat that looked out into the tops of the trees. Her father s boyish trophies of rose−quartz and beryl crystals and mica were still scattered

along on the narrow ledges of the old beams, and hanging to a nail overhead were two dusty bunches of pennyroyal, which had left a mild fragrance behind them as they withered.

Betty had added to this array a toppling light−stand from another part of the garret and a china mug which she kept full of fresh wild flowers. She pinned "London Graphic" pictures here and there, to make a little brightness, and there were some of her favorite artist's (Caldecott's) sketches of country squires and dames, reproduced in faint bright colors, which looked delightfully in keeping with their surroundings. As midsummer came on the cubby−house grew too hot for comfort, but one afternoon, when rain had been falling all the morning to cool the high roof, Mary Beck and Betty sat there together in great comfort and peace. See for yourself Mary in the rocking−chair, and Betty in the window−seat; they were deep in thought of girlish problems, and, as usual, taking nearly opposite sides. They had been discussing their plans for the future. Mary Beck had confessed that she wished to learn to he a splendid singer and sing in a great church or even in public concerts. She knew that she could, if she were only well taught; but there was nobody to give her lessons in Tideshead, and her mother would not hear of her going to Riverport twice a week.

"She says that I can keep up with my singing at home, and she wants me to go into the choir, and I can't bear it. I hate to hear 'we can't afford it,' and I am sure to, if I set my heart on anything. Mother says that it will be time enough to learn to sing when I am through school. Oh, dear me!" and poor Mary looked disappointed and fretful.

A disheartening picture of the present Becky on the concert−stage flashed through Betty's usually hopeful mind. She felt a heartache, as she thought of her friend's unfitness and inevitable disappointment. Becky—plain, ungainly, honest Becky—felt it in her to do great things, yet she hardly knew what great things were. Persons of Betty's age never count upon having years of time in which to make themselves better. Everything must be finally decided by the state of things at the moment. Years of patient study were sure to develop the wonderful gift of Becky's strong, sweet voice.

"Why don't you sing in the choir, Becky?" asked Betty suddenly. "It would make the singing so much better. I should love to do it, if I could, and it would help to make Sunday so pleasant for everybody, to hear you sing. Poor Miss Fedge's voice sounds funny, doesn't it? Sing me something now, Becky dear; sing 'Bonny Doon'!"

But Becky took no notice of the request. "What do you mean to be, yourself?" she asked her companion, with great interest.

"You know that I can't sing or paint or do any of those things," answered Betty humbly. "I used to wish that I could write books when I grew up, or at any rate help papa to write his. I am almost discouraged, though papa says I must keep on trying to do the things I really wish to do." And a bright flush covered Betty's eager face.

"Oh, Becky dear!" she said suddenly. "You have something that I envy you more than even your singing: just living at home in one place and having your mother and the boys. I am always wishing and wishing, and telling myself stories about living somewhere in the same house all the time, with papa, and having a real home and taking care of him. You don't know how good it would feel! Papa says the best we can do now is to make a home wherever we are, for ourselves and others—but I think it is pretty hard, sometimes."

"Well, I think the nicest thing would be to see the world, as you do," insisted Mary Beck. "I just hate dusting and keeping things to rights, and I never shall learn to cook! I like to do fancy work pretty well. You would think Tideshead was perfectly awful, in winter!"

"Why should it be?" asked Betty innocently. "Winter is house−time. I save things to do all winter, and"—

"Oh, you are so preachy, you are so good−natured, you believe all the prim things that grown people say!" exclaimed Becky. "What would you say if you never went to Boston but once, and then had the toothache all the

time? You have been everywhere, and you think it's great fun to stay a little while in poky old Tideshead, this one summer!"

"Why, it is because I have seen so many other places that I know just how pleasant Tideshead is."

"Well, I want to see other places, too," maintained dissatisfied Becky.

"Papa says that we ourselves are the places we live in'," said Betty, as if it took a great deal of courage to tell Mary Beck so unwelcome a truth. "I like to remember just what he says, for sometimes, when I haven't understood at first, something will happen, may be a year after, to make it flash right into my mind. Once I heard a girl say London was stupid; just think! London!"

Mary Beck was rocking steadily, but Betty sat still, with her feet on the window−seat and her hands clasped about her knees. She could look down into the green yard below, and watch some birds that were fluttering near by in the wet trees. The wind blew in very soft and sweet after the rain.

"I used to think, when I was a little bit of a girl, that I would be a missionary, but I should perfectly hate it now!" said Mary, with great vehemence. "I just hate to go to Sunday−school and be asked the questions; it makes me prickle all over. I always feel sorry when I wake up and find it is Sunday morning. I suppose you think that's heathen and horrid."

"I always have my Sunday lessons with papa; he reads to me, and gives me something to learn by heart,—a hymn or some lovely verses of poetry. I suppose that his telling me what things in the Bible really mean keeps me from being 'prickly' when other people talk about it. What made you wish to be a missionary?" Betty inquired, with interest.

"Oh, there used to be some who came here and talked in the vestry Sunday evenings about riding on donkeys and camels. Some times they would dress up in Syrian costumes, and I used to look grandpa's 'Missionary Herald' all through, to find their names afterward. It was so nice to hear about their travels and the natives; but that was a long while ago," and Becky rocked angrily, so that the boards creaked underneath.

"Last summer I used to go to such a dear old church, in the Isle of Wight," said Betty. "You could look out of the open door by our pew and see the old churchyard, and look away over the green downs and the blue sea. You could see the red poppies in the fields, and hear the larks, too."

"What kind of a church was it?"asked Mary, with suspicion. "Episcopal?"

"Yes," answered Betty. "Church of England, people say there."

"I heard somebody say once that your father was very lax in religious matters," said Becky seriously.

"I'd rather be very lax and love my Sundays," said Betty severely. "I don't think it makes any difference, really, about what one does in church. I want to be good, and it helps me to be in church and think and hear about it. Oh, dear! my foot's getting asleep," said Betty, beginning to pound it up and down. The two girls did not like to look at each other; they were considering questions that were very hard to talk about.

"I suppose it's being good that made you run after Nelly Foster. I wished that I had gone to see her more, when you went; but she used to act hatefully sometimes before you came. She used to cry in school, though," confessed Becky.

"I didn't 'run after' her. You do call things such dreadful names, Mary Beck! There, I'm getting cross, my foot is all stinging."

"Turn it just the other way," advised Mary eagerly. "Let me pound it for you," and she briskly went to the rescue. Betty wondered afresh why she liked this friend herself so much, and yet disliked so many things that she said and did.

Serena always said that Betty had a won't−you−please−like−me sort of way with her, and Mary Beck felt it more than ever as she returned to her rocking−chair and jogged on again, but she could not bend from her high sense of disapproval immediately. "What do you think the unjust steward parable means, then?" she asked, not exactly returning to the fray, but with an injured manner. "It is in the Sunday−school lesson to−morrow, and I can't understand it a bit,—I never could."

"Nor I," said Betty, in a most cheerful tone. "See here, Becky, it doesn't rain, and we can go and ask Mr. Grant to tell us about it."

"Go ask the minister!" exclaimed Mary Beck, much shocked. "Why, would you dare to?"

"That's what ministers are for," answered Betty simply. "We can stay a little while and see the girls, if he is busy. Come now, Becky," and Becky reluctantly came. She was to think a great many times afterward of that talk in the garret. She was beginning to doubt whether she had really succeeded in settling all the questions of life, at the age of fifteen.

The two friends went along arm−in−arm under the still−dripping trees. The parsonage was some distance up the long Tideshead street, and the sun was coming out as they stood on the doorsteps. The minister was amazed when he found that these parishioners had come to have a talk with him in the study, and to ask something directly at his willing hands. He preached the better for it, next day, and the two girls listened the better. As for Mary Beck, the revelation to her honest heart of having a right in the minister, and the welcome convenience of his fund of knowledge and his desire to be of use to her personally, was an immense surprise. Kind Mr. Grant had been a part of the dreaded Sundays, a fixture of the day and the church and the pulpit, before that; he was, indirectly, a reproach, and, until this day, had never seemed like other people exactly, or an every−day friend. Perhaps the good man wondered if it were not his own fault, a little. He tried to be very gay and friendly with his own girls at supper−time, and said afterward that they must have Mary Beck and Betty Leicester to take tea with them some time during the next week.

"But there are others in the parish who will feel hurt," urged Mrs. Grant anxiously; and Mr. Grant only answered that there must be a dozen tea−parties, then, as if there were no such things as sponge−cake and ceremony in the world!

XII. BETTY AT HOME.

Everybody was as kind as possible when Betty Leicester first came to Tideshead, and best company manners prevailed toward her; but as the girls got used to having a new friend and playmate, some of them proved disappointing. Nothing could shake her deep affection for honest−hearted Mary Beck, but in some directions Mary had made up her inexperienced and narrow mind, and would listen to none of Betty's kindly persuasions. The Fosters' father had done some very dishonest deeds, and had run away from justice after defrauding some of the most trustful of his neighbors. Mary Beck's mother had lost some money in this way, and old Captain Beck even more, so that the girl had heard sharp comments and indignant blame at home; and she shocked Miss Barbara Leicester and Betty one morning by wondering how Henry and Nelly Foster could have had the face to go to church the very Sunday after their father was sent to jail. She did not believe that they cared a bit what

people thought.

"Poor children," said Miss Leicester, with quiet compassion, "the sight of their pitiful young faces was enough for me. When should one go to church if not in bitter trouble? That boy and girl look years older than the rest of you young folks."

"It never seemed to me that they thought any less of themselves," said Mary Beck, in a disagreeable tone; "and I wouldn't ask them to my party, if I had one."

"But they have worked so hard," said Betty. "Jonathan said yesterday that Harry Foster told him this spring, when he was working here, that he was going to pay every cent that his father owed, if he lived long enough. He is studying hard, too; you know that he hoped to go to college before this happened. They always look as if they were grateful for just being spoken to."

"Plenty of people have made everything of them and turned their heads," said Mary Beck, as if she were repeating something that had been said at home. "I think I should pity some people whose father had behaved so, but I don't like the Fosters a bit."

"They are carrying a heavy load on their young shoulders," said Miss Barbara Leicester. "You will feel differently by and by, about them. Help them all you can, Mary!"

Mary Beck went home that morning much displeased. She didn't mean to be hard−hearted, but it had seemed to her like proper condemnation of wrong−doing to treat the Fosters loftily. Now that Betty's eyes had filled with tears as she listened, and Miss Leicester evidently thought less of her for what had been said, Mary began to feel doubtful about the matter. Yes, what if her father had been like theirs,—could she be shut up like a prisoner, and behave as she expected the Fosters to behave? By the time she reached her own house she was ashamed of what she had said. Miss Leicester was at that moment telling Betty that she was astonished at such bitter feeling in their young neighbor. "She has never really thought about it. I dare say she only needs a sensible word or two to change her mind. You children have such tremendous opinions," and Aunt Barbara smiled.

"Once when I was staying in the Isle of Wight," said Betty, "I belonged to such a nice out−of−door club, Aunt Barbara."

"Did you? What was it like?"

"Oh, not really like anything that I can think of, only we had great fun together. We used to walk miles and miles, and carry some buns or buy them, and get milk or ginger−beer at the farms. There are so many ruins to go to see, and old churches, and homes of eminent persons of the time of Elizabeth, and we would read from their works; and it was so pleasant coming home by the foot−paths afterward," announced Betty with satisfaction. "The governesses used to go, too, but we could outrun all but one of them, the Barry's, and my Miss Winter, who was as dear as could be. I had my lessons with the Duncans, you know. Oh, it was such fun!—the others would let us go on as fast as we liked, and come poking along together, and have their own quiet pleasures." Betty was much diverted with her recollections. "I mean to begin an out−of−door club here, Aunt Barbara."

"In my time," said Aunt Barbara, "girls were expected to know how to sew, and to learn to be good housekeepers."

"You would join the club, wouldn't you?" asked Betty anxiously.

"And be run away from, like the stout governesses, I dare say."

There was an attempt at a serious expression, but Miss Leicester could not help laughing a little. Down came Miss Mary at this moment, with Letty behind her, carrying cushions, and Betty sprang up to help make the couch ready.

"I wish that you would belong, too, and come with us on wheels," said she, returning to the subject that had been interrupted. "You could drive to the meetings and be head−member, Aunt Mary." But Aunt Mary was tired that day, and wished to have no demands made upon her. There were days when Betty had a plan for every half−hour, remarked Aunt Barbara indulgently.

"Suppose you come out to the garden with me to pick some raspberries?" and Betty was quietly removed from the weak nerves of Aunt Mary, who plaintively said that Betty had almost too much life.

"Too much life! Not a bit of it," said Serena, who was the grandniece's chief upholder and champion. "We did need waking up, 'twas a fact, Miss Leicester; now, wa'n't it? It seemed just like old times, that night of the tea−party. Trouble is, we've all got to bein' too master comfortable, and thought we couldn't step one foot out o' the beaten rut. 'T is the misfortune o' livin' in a little place."

And Serena marched back to the kitchen, carrying the empty glass from which Miss Mary Leicester had taken some milk, as if it were the banner of liberty.

She put it down on the clean kitchen−table. "Too much life!" the good woman repeated scornfully. "I'd like to see a gal that had too much life for me. I was that kind myself, and right up an' doin'. All these Tideshead gals behave as slow as the everlastin' month o' March. Fussin' about their clothes, and fussin' about 'you do this' and 'I can't do that,' an' lettin' folks that know something ride right by 'em. See this little Betty, now, sweet as white laylocks, I do declare. There she goes 'long o' Miss Barbary, out into the ros'berry bushes."

"Aunt Barbara," Betty was saying a few minutes later, as one knelt each side of the row of white raspberries,—"Aunt Barbara, do you like best being grown up or being about as old as I am?"

"Being grown up, I'm sure, dear," replied the aunt, after serious reflection.

"I'm so glad. I don't believe people ever have such hard times with themselves afterward as they do growing up."

"What is the matter now, Betty?"

"Mary Beck, Aunt Barbara. I thought that I liked her ever and ever so much, but I have days when I want to shake her. It's my fault, because I wake up and think about her and feel cross before I even look at her, and then I can't get on all day. Then some days I can hardly wait to get over to see her, and we have such a good time. But you can't change her mind about anything."

"I thought that you wouldn't be so unreasonable all summer," said Aunt Barbara, picking very fast. "You see that you expect Mary Beck to be perfect, and the poor child isn't. You made up a Mary Beck in your own mind, who was perfect at all points and just the kind of a girl you would like best to spend all your time with. Be thankful for all you do like in her; that's the best way."

"I just fell in love with a girl in the Isle of Wight, last summer," said Betty sorrowfully "We wished to be together all the time, and we wrote notes and always went about together. She was older than I. But one day she said things that made me forget I ever liked her a bit. She wanted to make up afterward, but I couldn't; and she writes and writes me letters, but I never wish to see her again. I am sorry I ever liked her." Betty's eyes flashed, and her cheeks were very red.

"I suppose it has been hard for her too," said Aunt Barbara; "but we must like different friends for different reasons. Just try to remember that you cannot find perfection. I used to know a great many girls when I was growing up, and some of them are my friends still, the few who are left. To find one true−hearted friend is worth living through a great many disappointments."

Two or three weeks went over before Betty ceased to have the feeling that she was a stranger and foreigner in Tideshead. At first she said "you" and "I" when she was talking with the girls, but soon it became easier to say "we." She took great pleasure in doing whatever the rest did, from joining a class in Sunday−school to carrying round one of the subscription−papers to pay for some Fourth of July fireworks, which went up in a blaze of splendor on the evening of that glorious day.

After the garden tea−party, nothing happened, of a social nature, for some time, although several of the boys and girls gave fine hints that something might be expected to happen at their own houses. There was a cheerful running to and fro about the Leicester house, and the high white gate next the street was heard to creak and clack at least once in every half−hour. Nelly Foster came seldom, but she was the brightest and merriest of all the girls when she grew a little excited, and lost the frightened look that had made lines on her forehead much too soon. Harry was not seen very often, but Betty wondered a great deal about him, and fancied him hunting and fishing in all sorts of dangerous places. The Picknell girls came into the village on Sundays always, and often once or twice in the week it but it was haying time now, and they were very busy at the farm. Betty liked them dearly, and so did Mary Beck, who did not get on with the minister's daughters at all, and had a prejudice, as we know, against Nelly Foster. These made the little company which seemed most closely allied, especially after the Sin Book Club became a thing of the past as an active society. Betty had proposed the out−of−door club, and had started a tennis−court, and devoted much time to it; but nobody knew how to play very well yet, except Harry Foster and Julia Picknell, and they were the most difficult ones to catch for an idle afternoon. George Max could play, and one or two others could stumble through a game and like it pretty well; but as for Mary Beck, her shoes were too small for much agility, and she liked to wear her clothes so tight that she was very clumsy with a racket. Betty's light little gowns looked prim and plain to the Tideshead girls, who thought their colors very strange, to begin with, and had not the sense to be envious when their wearer went by, as light−footed and graceful as they were awkward. They could not understand the simplicity that was natural to Betty, but everybody liked her, and felt as much interested as if she were an altogether new variety of human being. Perhaps we shall understand the situation better if we read a letter which our heroine wrote just then:—

My dear Papa,—This is from your Betty, who intended to take a long walk with Mary Beck this afternoon, but is now prevented by a thunder−shower. It makes me wonder what you do when you get wet, and who sees that you take off your wet clothes and tries not to let you have a cold. Isn't it almost time for you to come home now, papa? I do miss taking care of you so very much. You will be tired hearing about Mary Beck, and you can't stop it, can you? as if you laughed and then talked about something else when we were walking together. You must remember that you said we must be always fighting an enemy in ourselves, and my enemy just now is making little funs of Mary, and seeing that she doesn't know so much as she thinks she does. I like too well to show her that she is mistaken when she tells about things; but it makes me sorry afterward, because, in spite of myself, I like her better than I do anybody. I truly love her, papa; indeed, I do, but I like to tease her better than to help her, when she puts on airs about the very places where I have been and things I have done. Aunt Barbara speaks of her manners, and wishes I would "play with" Nelly Foster and the minister's girls: but Nelly is like anybody grown up,—I suppose it is because she has seen trouble, as people say here; and the minister's girls are little 'fraid cats. That is what Serena says, and is sure to make you laugh. "Try and make em hop 'round," Serena told me at the party, and I did try; but they aren't good hoppers, and that's all there is to say. I sent down to Riverport and bought Seth a book of violin airs, and he practiced until two o'clock one morning, so that Serena and Jonathan were saying dreadful things. Aunt Mary is about the same, and so is Aunt Barbara, and they send their love. Papa, you must never tell, but I hate the one and love the other.

Mary Beck isn't half so bad as I am to say that, but now it is a black mark and must stay. There is one awful piece of news. The Fosters' father has broken out of jail and escaped, and they are offering a great reward, and it is in all the papers. I ought to go to see Nelly, but I dread it. I am writing this last page another day, for yesterday the sun came out after the shower and I went out with Aunt Barbara. She is letting Mrs. Foster do some sewing for me. She says that my clothes were in ruins; she did indeed, and that they had been badly washed. I hope that yours are not the same. Mrs. Foster looked terribly frightened and pale, and asked Aunt B. to come into the other room, and told her about Mr. Foster. Then it was in the paper last night. Papa, dear, I do remember what you said in one of your letters about being a Tideshead girl myself for this summer, and not standing off and finding fault. I feel more like a Tideshead girl lately, but I wish they wouldn't keep saying how slow it is and nothing going on. We might do so many nice things, but they make such great fusses first, instead of just going and doing them, the way you and I do. They think of every reason why you can't do things that you can do. The currants are all gone. You can't have a currant pie this year. I thought those by the fence, under the cherry−tree, might last until you came because it is shady, but they all spoiled in the rain. Now I am going to read in "Walton's Lives" to Aunt Mary. She says it is a book everybody ought to know, and that I run wild more than I ought at my age. I like to read aloud, as you know, so good−by, but my age is such a trouble. If you were here, we would have the best good time.

Your own child,

Betty.

XIII. A GREAT EXCITEMENT.

That afternoon Betty's lively young voice grew droning and dull after a while, as she read the life of Dr. Donne, and at last she stopped altogether.

"Aunt Mary, I can't help thinking about seeing the Fosters' father. Do you suppose he will come home and frighten them some night?"

"No, he would hardly dare to come where they are sure to be looking for him," said Aunt Mary. "Dear me, the thought makes me so nervous."

"When I have read to the end of this page I will just run down to see Nelly a few minutes, if you can spare me. I keep dreading to see her until I am almost afraid to go."

Miss Mary sighed and said yes. Somehow she didn't get hold of Betty's love,—only her duty.

Betty lingered in the garden and picked some mignonette before she started, and a bright carnation or two from Aunt Barbara's special plants. The Fosters' house was farther down the street on the same side, and Nelly's blinds were shut, but if Betty had only known it, poor Nelly was looking out wistfully through them, and wishing with all her heart that her young neighbor would come in. She dreaded the meeting, too, but there was such a simple, frank friendliness about Betty Leicester that it did not hurt as if one of the other girls had come.

There came the sound of the gate−latch, and Nelly went eagerly down. "Come up to my room; I was sitting there sewing," she said, blushing very red, and Betty felt her own cheeks burn. How dreadful it must be not to have such a comforting dear father as hers! She put her arms round Nelly's neck and kissed her, and Nelly could hardly keep from crying; but up−stairs they went to the bedroom, where Betty had never happened to go before. She felt suddenly, as she never had before, how pinched and poor the Fosters must be. Nelly was determined to be brave and cheerful, and took up her sewing again. It happened to be a little waist of Betty's own. Betty tried to talk gayly about being very tired of reading "Walton 's Lives." She had come to a dull place in Dr. Donne's memoirs, though she thought them delightful at first. She was just reading "The Village on the Cliff," on her own account, with

perfect delight.

"Harry reads 'Walton's Angler,'" said Nelly. "That's the same man, isn't he? It is a stupid−looking old brown book that belonged to my grandfather."

"Papa reads it, too," said Betty, nodding her head wisely. "I am in such a hurry to have him come, when I think of Harry. I am sure that he will help him to be a naturalist or something like that. Mr. Buckland would have just loved Harry. I knew him when I was a little bit of a thing. Papa used to take me to see him in London, and all his dreadful beasts and snakes used to frighten me, but I do so like to remember him now. Harry makes me think of Robinson Crusoe and Mayne Reid's books, and those story−book boys who used to do such wild things fishing and hunting."

"We used to think that Harry never would get on because he spent so much time in the woods, but somehow he always learned his lessons too," said Nelly proudly; "and now his fishing brings in so much money that I don't know how we shall live when winter comes. We are so anxious about winter. Oh, Betty, it is easy to tell you, but I can't bear to have other people even look at me;" and she burst into tears and hid her face in her hands.

"Let us go out−doors, just down through the garden and across into the woods a little while," pleaded Betty. "Do, Nelly, dear!" and presently they were on their way. The fresh summer air and the sunshine were much better than the close−shaded room, where Nelly was startled by every sound about the house, and they soon lost their first feeling of constraint as they sat under a pine−tree whipping two of Miss Barbara Leicester's new tea napkins. Betty had many things to say about her English life and her friends. Mary Beck never cared to hear much about England, and it was always delightful to have an interested listener. At last the sewing was finished, and Nelly proposed that they should go a little way farther, and come out on the river bank.

Harry would be coming up about this time with his fare of fish, if he had had good luck. It would be fun to shout to him as he went by.

They pushed on together through the open pasture, where the sweet−fern and bayberry bushes grew tall and thick; there was another strip of woods between them and the river, and just this side was a deserted house, which had not been lived in for many years and was gray and crumbling. The fields that belonged to it had been made part of a great sheep pasture, and two or three sheep were standing by the half−opened door, as if they were quite at home there in windy or wet weather. Betty had seen the old house before, and thought it was most picturesque. She now proposed that they should have a picnic party by and by, and make a fire in the old fireplace; but Nelly Foster thought there would be great danger of burning the house down.

"Suppose we go and look in?" pleaded Betty. "Mary Beck and I saw it not long after I came, but she thought it was going to rain, so that we didn't stop. I like to go into an empty old ruin, and make up stories about it, and wonder who used to live there. Don't stop to pick these blackberries; you know they aren't half ripe," she teased Nelly; and so they went over to the old house, frightening away the sheep as they crossed the doorstep boldly. It was all in ruins; the roof was broken about the chimney, so that the sun shone through upon the floor, and the light−red bricks were softened and sifting down. In one corner there was a heap of withes for mending fences, which had been pulled about by the sheep, and there were some mud nests of swallows high against the walls, but the birds seemed to have already left them. This room had been the kitchen, and behind it was a dark, small place which must have been a bedroom when people lived there, dismal as it looked now.

"I am going to look in here and all about the place," said Betty cheerfully, and stepped in to see what she could find.

"Oh, go back, Nelly!" she screamed, in a great fright, the next moment; and they fled out of the house into the warm sunshine. They had had time to see that a man was lying on the floor as if he were dead. Betty's heart was

beating so that she could hardly speak.

"We must get somebody to come," she panted, trying to stop Nelly. "Was it somebody dead?"

But Nelly sank down as pale as ashes into the sweet−fern bushes, and looked at her strangely. "Oh, Betty Leicester, it will kill mother, it will kill her! I believe it was my father; what shall I do?"

"Your father," faltered Betty,—"your father? We must go and tell." Then she remembered that he was a hunted man, a fugitive from justice.

They looked fearfully at the house; the sheep had come back and stood again near the doorway. There was something more horrible than the two girls had ever known in the silence of the place. It would have been less awful if there had been a face at the broken door or windows.

"Henry—we must try to stop Henry," said poor pale Nelly, and they hurried toward the river shore. They could not help looking anxiously behind them as they passed the belt of pine; a terrible fear possessed them as they ran. "He is afraid that somebody will see him. I wonder if he will come home to−night."

"He must be ill there," said Betty, but she did not dare to say anything else. What an unendurable thing to be afraid and ashamed of one's own father!

They looked down the river with eager eyes. Yes, there was Harry Foster's boat coming up slowly, with the three−cornered sail spread to catch the light breeze. Nelly gave a long sigh and sank down on the turf, and covered her face as she cried bitterly. Betty thought, with cowardly longing, of the quiet and safety of Aunt Mary's room, and the brown−covered volume of "Walton's Lives." Then she summoned all her courage. These two might never have sorer need of a friend than in this summer afternoon.

Henry Foster's boat sailed but slowly. It was heavily laden, and the wind was so light that from time to time he urged it with the oars. He did not see the two girls waiting on the bank until he was close to them, for the sun was in his eyes and his thoughts were busy. His father's escape from jail was worse than any sorrow yet; nobody knew what might come of it. Harry felt very old and careworn for a boy of seventeen. He had determined to go to see Miss Barbara Leicester that evening, and to talk over his troubles with her. He had been able to save a little money, and he feared that it might be demanded. He had already paid off the smaller debts that were owed in the village; but he knew his father too well not to be afraid of getting some menacing letters presently. If his father had only fled the country! But how could that be done without money? He would not work his passage; Harry was certain enough of that. Would it not be better to let him have the money and go to the farthest limit to which it could carry him?

Something made the young man shade his eyes with his hand and took toward the shore; then he took the oars and pulled quickly in. That was surely his sister Nelly, and the girl beside her, who wore a grayish dress with a white blouse waist, was Betty Leicester. It was just like kind−hearted little Betty to have teased poor Nelly out into the woods. He would carry them home in his boat; he could rub it clean with some handfuls of hemlock twigs or river grass. Then he saw how strangely they looked, as he pushed the boat in and pulled it far ashore. What in the world had happened?

Nelly tried to speak again and again, but her voice could not make itself heard. "Oh, don't cry any more, Nelly, dear," said Betty, trembling from head to foot, and very pale. "We went into the old house up there by the pasture, and found—Nelly said it was your father, and we thought he was very ill."

"I'll take you both home, then," said Harry Foster, speaking quickly and with a hard voice. "Get in, both of you,−this is the shortest way,—then I'll come back by my self."

"Oh, no, no!" sobbed Nelly. "He looked as if he were dying, Harry; he was lying on the floor. We will go, too; he couldn't hurt us, could he?" And the three turned back into the woods. Betty's heart almost failed her. She felt like a soldier going into battle. Oh, could she muster bravery enough to go into that house again? Yet she loved her father so much that doing this for another girl's father was a great comfort, in all her fear.

The young man hurried ahead when they came near the house, and it was only a few minutes before he reappeared.

"You must go and tell mother to come as quick as she can, and hurry to find the doctor and tell him; he will know what to do. Father has been dreadfully hurt somehow. Perhaps Miss Leicester will let Jonathan come to help us get him home." Harry Foster's face looked old and strange; he never would seem like a boy any more, Betty thought, with a heart full of sympathy. She hurried away with Nelly; they could not bring help fast enough.

After the great excitement was over, Betty felt very tired and unhappy. That night she could be comforted only by Aunt Barbara's taking her into her own bed, and being more affectionate and sympathetic than ever before' even talking late, like a girl, about the Out−of−Door Club plans. In spite of this attempt to return to every−day thoughts, Betty waked next morning to much annoyance and trouble. She felt as if the sad affairs of yesterday related only to the poor Fosters and herself, but as she went down the street, early, she was stopped and questioned by eager groups of people who were trying to find out something more about the discovery of Mr. Foster in the old house. It proved that he had leaped from a high window, hurting himself badly by the fall, when he made his escape from prison, and that he had been wandering in the woods for days. The officers had come at once, and there was a group of men outside the Fosters' house. This had a terrible look to Betty. Everybody said that the doctor believed there was only a slight chance for Mr. Foster's life, and that they were not going to try to take him back to jail. He had been delirious all night. One or two kindly disposed persons said that they pitied his poor family more than ever, but most of the neighbors insisted that "it served Foster just right." Betty did her errand as quickly as possible, and hastily brushed by some curious friends who tried to detain her. She felt as if it were unkind and disloyal to speak of her neighbor's trouble to everybody, and the excitement and public concern of the little village astonished her very much. She did not know, until then, how the joy or trouble of one home could affect the town as if it were one household. Everybody spoke very kindly to her, and most people called her "Betty," and seemed to know her very well, whether they had ever spoken to her before or not. The women were standing at their front doors or their gates, to hear whatever could be told, and our friend looked down the long street and felt that it was like running the gauntlet to get home again. Just then she met the doctor, looking gray and troubled, as if he had been awake all night, but when he saw Betty his face brightened.

"Well done, my little lady," he said, in cheerful voice, which made her feel steady again, and then he put his hand on Betty's shoulder and looked at her very kindly.

"Oh, doctor! may I walk along with you little way?" she faltered. "Everybody asks me to tell"—

"Yes, yes, I know all about it," said the doctor; and he turned and took Betty's hand as if she were a child, and they walked away together. It was well known in Tideshead that Dr. Prince did not like to be questioned about his patients.

"I was wondering whether I ought to go to see Nelly," said Betty, as they came near the house. "I haven't seen her since I came home with her yesterday. I—didn't quite dare to go in as I came by."

"Wait until to−morrow, perhaps," said the doctor. "The poor man will be gone then, and you will be a greater comfort. Go over through the garden. You can climb the fences, I dare say," and he looked at Betty with a queer little smile. Perhaps he had seen her sometimes crossing the fields with Mary Beck.

"Do you mean that he is going to die today?" asked Betty, with great awe. "Ought I to go then?"

"Love may go where common kindness is shut out," said Dr. Prince. "You have done a great deal to make those poor children happy, this summer. They had been treated in a very narrow−minded way. It was not like Tideshead, I must say," he added, "but people are shy sometimes, and Mrs. Foster herself could not bear to see the pity in her neighbors' faces. It will be easier for her now."

"I keep thinking, what if it were my own papa?" said Betty softly. "He couldn't be so wicked, but he might be ill, and I not there."

"Dear me, no!" said the doctor heartily, and giving Betty's hand a tight grasp and a little swing to and fro. "I suppose he's having a capital good time up among his glaciers. I wish that I were with him for a month's holiday;" and at this Betty was quite cheerful again.

Now they stopped at Betty's own gate. "You must take your Aunt Mary in hand a little, before you go away. There's nothing serious the matter now, only lack of exercise and thinking too much about herself."

"She did come to my tea−party in the garden," responded Betty, with a faint smile, "and I think sometimes she almost gets enough courage to go to walk. She didn't sleep at all last night, Serena said this morning."

"You see, she doesn't need sleep," explained Dr. Prince, quite professionally. "We are all made to run about the world and to work. Your aunt is always making blood and muscle with such a good appetite, and then she never uses them, and nature is clever at revenges. Let her hunt the fields, as you do, and she would sleep like a top. I call it a disease of too−wellness, and I only know how to doctor sick people. Now there's a lesson for you to reflect upon," and the busy doctor went hurrying back to where he had left his horse standing, when he first caught sight of Betty's white and anxious face.

As she entered the house Aunt Barbara was just coming out. "I am going to see poor Mrs. Foster, my dear, or to ask for her at the door," she said, and Serena and Letty and Jonathan all came forward to ask whether Betty knew any later news. Seth Pond had been loitering up the street most of the morning, with feelings of great excitement, but he presently came back with instructions from Aunt Barbara to weed the long box−borders behind the house, which he somewhat unwillingly obeyed.

A few days later the excitement was at an end, the sad funeral was over, and on Sunday the Fosters were at church in their appealing black clothes. Everybody had been as kind as they knew how to be, but there were no faces so welcome to the sad family as our little Betty's and the doctor's.

"It comes of simply following her instinct to be kind and do right," said the doctor to Aunt Barbara, next day. "The child doesn't think twice about it, as most of us do. We Tideshead people are terribly afraid of one another, and have to go through just so much before we can take the next step. There's no way to get right things done but to simply do them. But it isn't so much what your Betty does as what she is."

"She has grown into my old heart," said Aunt Barbara. "I cannot bear to think of her going away and taking the sunshine with her!—and yet she has her faults, of course," added the sensible old lady.

"Oh, by the way!" said Dr. Prince, turning back. "My wife told me to ask you to come over to tea to−night and bring the little girl; I nearly forgot to give the message."

"I shall be very happy to come," answered Miss Leicester, and the doctor nodded and went his busy way. Betty was very fond of going to drive with him, and he looked about the neighborhood as he drove along, hoping to catch sight of her; but Betty was at that moment deeply engaged in helping Letty shell some peas for dinner, at the other side of the house, in the garden doorway of the kitchen. She had spent an hour before that with Mrs. Beck, while they tried together with more or less success to trim a new sailor hat for Mary Beck like one of Betty's own.

Mrs. Beck was as friendly as possible in these days, but whenever the Fosters were mentioned her face grew dark. She did not like Mrs. Foster; she did not exactly blame her for all that had happened, but she did not pity her either, or feel a true compassion for such a troubled neighbor. Betty never could understand it. At any rate, she had been saved by her unsettled life from taking a great interest in her own or other people's dislikes.

That evening, just as the tea−party was in full progress, somebody came for Dr. Prince; and when he returned from his study he announced that he must go at once down the river road to see one of his patients who was worse. Perhaps he saw an eager look in Betty's eyes, for he asked gravely if Miss Leicester had a niece to lend, it being a moonlight evening and not too long a drive. Aunt Barbara made no objection, and our friend went skipping off to the doctor's stable in high glee.

"Oh, that's nice!" she exclaimed. "I'm so glad that you're going to take Pepper; she's such a dear little horse."

"Pepper is getting old," said the doctor, "but she really likes to go out in the evening. You can see how fast she will scurry home. Get me a whip from the rack, will you, child? I am anxious to be off."

Mrs. Prince and Aunt Barbara were busy talking in the parlor, and were taking great pleasure in their social occasion, but Betty was so glad that she need not stay to listen, instead of going down the town street and out among the quiet farms behind brisk old Pepper. The wise, kind doctor at her side was silent as he thought about his patient, yet he felt much pleasure in Betty's companionship. They could smell the new matsh hay and hear the trees−toads, it was a most beautiful summer night. Betty felt very grateful and happy, she did not exactly know why; it was not altogether the effect of Mrs. Prince's tea and cakes, or even because she was driving with the doctor, but the restlessness and uncertainty that make so great a part of a girl's life seemed to have gone away out of her heart. Instead of the excitement there was a pleasant quietness and sense of security, no matter what might be going to happen.

Presently the doctor appeared to have thought enough about his patient. "You don't feel chilly, do you?" be asked kindly. "I find it damp and cold, sometimes, after a hot day, crossing this low land."

"Oh, no, I'm as warm as toast," answered Betty. "Whom see you going to see, Dr. Prince? Old Mr. Duff?"

"No, he is out−of−doors again. I saw him in the hayfield this morning. You haven't been keeping up with my practice as well as usual, of late," said the doctor, laughing a little. "I am going to see a girl about your own age. I am afraid that I am going to lose her, too."

"Is it that pretty Lizzie Edwards who sits behind the Becks' pew? I heard that she had a fever. I saw her the last Sunday that she was at church." Betty's heart was filled with dismay, and the doctor did not speak again. They were near the house now, and could see some lights flitting about; and as they stopped the sick girl's father stole silently from behind the bushes and began to fasten the horse, so that Dr. Prince could go in directly. Betty could hear the ominous word "sinking," as they whispered together; then she was left alone. It seemed so sad that this other girl should be near the door of death, and so close to the great change that must come to every one. Betty had never known so direct a consciousness of the inevitableness of death, but she was full of life herself, and so eager and ready for whatever might be coming. What if this other girl had felt so, too? She watched the upper windows where the dim light shone, and now and then a shadow crossed the curtain. Everything out−of−doors was quiet and sweet; the moon went higher and higher, and the wind rustled among the apple−trees. Some white petunias in a little plot near by looked strangely white, and Betty thought that perhaps the other girl had planted them, and there they were growing on. Now she was going to die. Betty wondered what it would be like, and if the other girl knew, and if she minded so very much. After a few minutes she found herself saying an eager prayer that the doctor might still cure her, and keep her alive. If she must die, Betty hoped that she herself might do some of the things that Lizzie Edwards would have done, and take her place. When old people had to go, who had done all they wished to do, and got tired, and could not help thinking about having a new life, that was one thing; but to

go now and leave all your hopes and plans behind,— indeed, it seemed too hard. But Betty had a sense of the difference between what things could be helped and what were in God's hands, and when she had said her prayer she waited again hopefully for a long time in the moonlight.

At last there seemed to be more movement in the house and she could hear voices; then she heard somebody sobbing, and the light in the upper room went quickly out.

The doctor came after a few minutes more, which seemed very long and miserable. Pepper had fallen asleep, good old horse! and Betty did not dare to ask any questions.

"Well, well," said the doctor, in a surprisingly cheerful voice, "I forgot all about you, Miss Betty Leicester. I hope that you're not cold this time, and I don't know what the aunts will have to say about us; it is nearly eleven o'clock."

"I'm not cold, but I did get frightened," acknowledged Betty faintly; then she felt surprisingly light−hearted. Dr. Prince could not be in such good spirits if he had just seen his poor young patient die!

"We got here just in time," he said, tucking the light blanket closer about Betty. "We've pulled the child through, but she was almost gone when I first saw her; there was just a spark of life left,—a spark of life," repeated the doctor.

"Who was it crying?" Betty asked.

"The mother," said the doctor. "I had just told her that she was going to keep the little girl. Why, here's a good sound sassafras lozenge in my pocket. Now we'll have a handsome entertainment."

Betty, who had just felt as if she were going to cry for nobody knew how long, began to laugh instead, as Dr. Prince broke his unexpected lozenge into honest halves and presented her solemnly with one of them. There was never such a good sassafras lozenge before or since, and Pepper trotted steadily home to her stall and the last end of her supper. "Only think, if the doctor hadn't known just what to do," said Betty later to Aunt Barbara, "and how he goes all the time to people's houses! Every day we see him going by to do things to help people. This might have been a freezing, blowing might, and he would have gone just the same."

"Dear child, run up to your bed now," said Aunt Barbara, kissing her good−night; for Betty was very wide awake, and still had so many things to say. She never would forget that drive at night. She had been taught a great lesson of the good doctor's helpfulness, but Aunt Barbara had learned it long ago.

XIV. THE OUT−OF−DOOR CLUB.

The Out−of−Door Club in Tideshead was slow in getting under way, but it was a great success at last. Its first expedition was to the Picknell farm, to see the place where there had been a great battle with the French and Indians, in old times, and the relics of a beaver−dam were to be inspected beside. Mr. Picknell came to talk about the plan with Miss Barbara Leicester, who was going to drive out to the farm in the afternoon, and then walk back with the club, as besought by Betty. She was highly pleased with the eagerness of her young neighbors, who had discovered in her an unsuspected sympathy and good−fellowship at the time of Betty's June tea−party. It had been a pity to make believe old in all these late years, and to become more and more a stranger to the young people. Perhaps, if the club proved a success, it would be a good thing to have winter meetings too, and read together.

Somehow Miss Barbara had never before known exactly what to do for the young folks. She could have a little supper for them in the evening, and ask them to come and read with her; or perhaps she might propose to read

some good story to them, and some poetry. They ought to know something of the great poets. Miss Mary Leicester was taken up with the important business of her own invalidism, but it might be a very good thing for her to take some part in such pleasant plans. Under all Aunt Barbara's shyness and habit of formality Betty had discovered her warm and generous heart. They had become fast friends, and, to tell the truth, Aunt Mary was beginning to have an uneasy and wistful consciousness that she was causing herself to be left out of many pleasures.

The gloom and general concern at the time of the Fosters' sorrow had caused the first club meeting to be postponed until early in August; and then, though August weather would not seem so good for out−of−door expeditions, this one Wednesday dawned like a cool, clear June day, and at three o'clock the fresh easterly wind had not ceased to blow and yet had not brought in any seaward clouds. There were eleven boys and girls, and Miss Barbara Leicester made twelve, while with the two Picknells the club counted fourteen. The Fosters promised to come later in the summer, but they did not feel in the least hurt because some of their friends urged them to join in cheerful company this very day. It seemed to Betty as if Nelly looked brighter and somehow unafraid, now that the first miserable weeks had gone. It may have been that poor Nelly was lighter−hearted already than she often had been in her father's lifetime.

Betty and Mary Beck walked together, at first; but George Max asked Mary to walk with him, so they parted. Betty liked Harry Foster better than any other of the boys, and really missed him to−day. She was brimful of plans about persuading her father to help Harry to study natural history. While the club was getting ready to walk two by two, Betty suddenly remembered that she was an odd one, and hastily took her place between the Grants, insisting that they three must lead the procession. The timid Grants were full of fun that day, for a wonder, and a merry head to the procession they were with Betty, walking fast and walking slowly, and leading the way by short cuts across−country with great spirit. They called a halt to pick huckleberries, and they dared the club to cross a wide brook on insecure stepping−stones. Everybody made fun for everybody else whenever they saw an opportunity, and when they reached the Picknell farm, quite warm and excited, they were announced politely by George Max as "the Out−of−Breath Club." The shy Picknells wore their best white Sunday dresses, and the long white farm−house with its gambrel roof seemed a delightfully shady place as the club sat still a while to cool and rest itself and drink some lemonade. Mrs. Picknell was a thin, bright−eyed little woman, who had the reputation of being the best housekeeper in town. She was particularly kind to Betty Leicester, who was after all no more a stranger to her than were some of the others who came. It was lovely to see that Mrs. Picknell and Julia were so proud of Mary's gift for drawing, and evidently managed that she should have time for it. Mary had begun to go to Riverport every week for a lesson.

"She heard that Mr. Clinturn, the famous artist, was spending the summer there, and started out by herself one day to ask him to give her lessons," Mrs. Picknell told Betty proudly. "He said at first that he couldn't spare the time; but I had asked Mary to take two or three of her sketches with her, and when he saw them he said that it would be a pleasure to help her all that he could."

"I do think this picture of the old packet−boat coming up the river is the prettiest of all. Oh, here's Aunt Barbara; do come and see this, Aunty!"said Betty, with great enthusiasm. "It makes me think of the afternoon I came to you."

Miss Leicester took out her eyeglasses and looked as she was bidden. "It is a charming little water−color," she said, with delighted surprise. "Did you really teach yourself until this summer?"

"I only had my play paint−box until last winter," said Mary Picknell. "I am so glad you like it, Miss Leicester;" for Miss Leicester had many really beautiful pictures of her own, and her praise was worth having.

Then Mr. Picknell took his stick from behind the door, and led the company of guests out across the fields to a sloping rough piece of pasture land, with a noisy brook at the bottom, where a terrible battle had been fought in

the old French and Indian war. He read them an account of it from Mr. Parkman's history, and told all the neighborhood traditions of the frightened settlers, and burnt houses, and murdered children and very old people, and the terrible march of a few captives through the winter woods to Canada. How his own great−great grandfather and grandmother were driven away from home, and each believed the other dead for three years, until the man escaped, and then went, hearing that his wife was alive, to buy her freedom. They came to the farm again, and were buried in the old burying−lot, side by side.

"There was a part of the story which you left out," Mrs. Picknell said "When they killed the little baby, the Indians told its poor mother not to cry about it or they would kill her too; and when her tears would fall, a kind−hearted squaw was quick enough to throw some water in the poor woman's face, so that the men only laughed and thought it was a taunt, and not done to hide tears at all."

"I have not heard these old town stories for years. We ought to thank you heartily," said Miss Barbara, when the battle−ground had been shown and the club had heard all the interesting things that were known about the great fight. Then they came back by way of the old family burying−place and read the quaint epitaphs, which Mr. Picknell himself had cut deeper and kept from wearing away. It seemed that they never could forget the old farm's history.

"I maintain that every old place in town ought to have its history kept," said Mr. Picknell. "Now, you boys and girls, what do you know about the places where you live? Why don't you make town clerks of yourselves? Take the edges of almanacs, if you can't get courage to begin a blank−book, and make notes of things, so that dates will be kept for those who come after you. Most of you live where your great−grandfathers did, and you ought to know about the old folks. Most of what I've kept alive about this old farm I learned from my great−grandmother, who lived to be a very old woman, and liked to tell me stories in the long winter evenings, when I was a boy. Now we'll go and see where the beavers used to build, down here where the salt water makes up into the outlet of the brook. Plenty of their logs lay there moss−covered, when I was a grown man."

Somehow the getting acquainted with each other in a new way was the best part of the club, after all. It was quite another thing from even sitting side by side in school, to walk these two or three miles together. Betty Leicester had taught her Tideshead cronies something of her own lucky secret of taking and making the pleasures that were close at hand. It was great good fortune to get hold of a common wealth of interest and association by means of the club; and as Mr. Picknell and Miss Leicester talked about the founders and pioneers of the earliest Tideshead farms, there was not a boy nor girl who did not have a sense of pride in belonging to so valiant an old town. They could plan a dozen expeditions to places of historic interest. There had been even witches in Tideshead, and soldiers and scholars to find out about and remember. There was no better way of learning American history (as Miss Leicester said) than to study thoroughly the history of a single New England village. As for newer towns in the West, they were all children of some earlier settlements, and nobody could tell how far back a little careful study would lead.

There was time for a good game of tennis after the stories were told, and the play was watched with great excitement, but some of the club girls strayed about the old house, part of which had been a garrison−house. The doors stood open, and the sunshine fell pleasantly across the floors of the old rooms. Usually they meant to go picnicking, but to−day the Picknells had asked their friends to tea, and a delicious country supper it was. Then they all sang, and Mary Beck's clear voice, as usual, led all the rest. It was seven o'clock before the party was over. The evening was cooler than August evenings usually are, and after many leave−takings the club set off afoot toward the town.

"What a good time!" said Betty to the Grants and Aunt Barbara, for she had claimed one Grant and let Aunt Barbara walk with the other; and everybody said "What a good time!" at least twice, as they walked down the lane to the road. There they stopped for a minute to sing another verse of "Goodnight, ladies," and indeed went away singing along the road, until at last the steepness of the hill made them quiet. The Picknells, in their doorway,

listened as long as they could.

At the top of the long hill the club, stopped for a minute, and kept very still to hear the hermit−thrushes singing, and did not notice at first that three persons were coming toward them, a tall man and a boy and girl. Suddenly Betty's heart gave a great beat. The taller figure was swinging a stick to and fro, in a way that she knew well; the boy was Harry Foster, and the girl was Nelly. Surely—but the other? Oh, yes, it was papa! "Oh, papa!" and Betty gave a strange little laugh and flew before the rest of the club, who were still walking slowly and sedately, and threw herself into her father's arms. Then Miss Leicester hurried, too, and the rest of the club broke ranks, and felt for a minute if their peace of mind was troubled.

But Betty's papa was equal to this emergency. "This must be Becky, but how grown!" he said to Mary Beck, holding out his hand cordially; "and George Max, and the Grants, and—Frank Crane, is it? I used to play with your father;" and so Mr. Leicester, pioneered by Betty, shook hands with everybody and was made most welcome.

"You see that I know you all very well through Betty! So nobody believed that I could come on the next train after my letter, and get here almost as soon?" he said, holding Betty's hand tighter than ever, and looking at her as if he wished to kiss her again. He did kiss her again, it being his own Betty. They were very fond of each other, these two; but some of their friends agreed with Aunt Barbara, who always said that her nephew was much too young to have the responsibility of so tall a girl as Betty Leicester.

Nobody noticed that Harry and Nelly Foster were there too, in the first moment of excitement, and so the first awkwardness of taking up every−day life again with their friends was passed over easily. As for our Betty, she fairly danced along the road as they went homeward, and could not bear to let go her hold of her father's hand. It was even more dear and delightful than she had dreamed to have him back again.

XV. THE STARLIGHT COMES IN.

There was a most joyful evening in the old Leicester house. Everybody forgot to speak about Betty's going to bed, and even Aunt Mary was in high spirits. It was wonderful how much good a little excitement did for her, and Betty had learned that an effort to be entertaining always brought the pleasant reward of saving Aunt Mary from a miserable, tedious morning or afternoon. When she waked next morning, her first thought was about papa, and her next that Aunt Mary was likely to have a headache after sitting up so late. Betty herself was tired, and felt as if it were the day after the fair; but when she hurried down to breakfast she found Aunt Barbara alone, and was told that papa had risen at four o'clock, and, as she expressed it to Aunt Mary a little later, stolen his breakfast from Serena and gone down to Riverport on the packet, tide having served at that early hour.

"I heard a clacketing in the kitchen closet," said Serena, "and I just got my skirt an' a cape on to me an' flew down to see what 't was. I expected somebody was took with fits; an' there was y'r father with both his hands full o' somethin' he'd collected to stay himself with, an' he looked 's much o' a boy 's ever he did, and I so remarked, an' he told me he was goin' to Riverport. 'Want a little change, I s'pose?' says I, an' he laughed good an' clipped it out o' the door and down towards the landin'."

"I wonder what he's after now, Serena?" said Betty sagely, but Serena shook her head absently. It was evident to Betty's mind that papa had shaken off all thought of care, and was taking steps towards some desired form of enjoyment. He had been disappointed the evening before to find that there were hardly any boats to be had. Very likely he meant to bring one up on the packet that afternoon; but Betty was disappointed not to find him in the house, and thought that he might have called her to go down on the packet with him. She felt as if she were going to have a long and dull morning.

However, she found that Aunt Mary was awake and in a cheerful frame, so she brought her boots in, and sat by the garden window while she put some new buttons on with the delightful little clamps that save so many difficult stitches. Aunt Mary was already dressed, though it was only nine o'clock, and was seated before an open bureau drawer, which her grandniece had learned to recognize as a good sign. Aunt Mary had endless treasures of the past carefully tucked away in little bundles and boxes, and she liked to look these over, and to show them to Betty, and tell their history. She listened with great eagerness to Betty's account of papa's departure.

"I was afraid that you would feel tired this morning," said the girl, turning a bright face toward her aunt.

"I am sure I expected it myself," replied Aunt Mary plaintively, "but it isn't neuralgia weather, perhaps. At any rate, I am none the worse."

"I believe that a good frolic is the very best thing for you," insisted Betty, feeling very bold; but Aunt Mary received this news amiably, though she made no reply. Betty had recovered by this time from her sense of bitter wrong at her father's departure, and after she had talked with Aunt Mary a little while about the grand success of the Out−of−Door Club, she went her ways to find Becky.

Becky was in a very friendly mood, and admired Mr. Leicester, and wondered too at ever having been afraid of him in other years, when she used to see him walking sedately down the street.

"Papa is very sober sometimes when he is hard at work," explained Betty with eagerness. "He gets very tired, and then—oh, I don't mean that papa is ever aggravating, but for days and days I know that he is working hard and can't stop to hear about my troubles, so I try not to talk to him; but he always makes up for it after a while. I don't mind now, but when I was a little girl and first went away from here I used to be lonely, and even cry sometimes, and of course I didn't understand. We get on beautifully now, and I like to read so much that I can always cover up the dull times with a nice book."

"Do they last long,—the dull times?" asked Mary Beck in an unusually sympathetic voice. Betty had spoken sadly, and it dawned upon her friend's mind that life was not all a holiday even to Betty Leicester.

"Ever so long," answered Betty briskly; "but you see I have my mending and housekeeping when we are in lodgings. We are masters of the situation now, papa always says; but when I was too small to look after him, we used to have to depend upon old lodging−house women, and they made us miserable, though I love them all for the sake of the good ones who will let you go into the kitchen yourself and make a cup of tea for papa just right, and be honest and good, and cry when you go away instead of clamming the door. Oh, I could tell you stories, Mary Eliza Beck!" and Betty took one or two frisky steps along the sidewalk as if she meant to dance. Mary Beck felt as if she were looking out of a very small and high garret window at a vast and surprising world. She was not sure that she should not like to keep house in country lodgings, though, and order the dinner, and have a housekeeping purse, as Betty had done these three or four years. They had often talked about these experiences; but Becky's heart always faltered when she thought of being alone in strange houses and walking alone in strange streets. Sometimes Betty had delightful visits, and excellent town lodgings, and diversified hotel life of the most entertaining sort. She seemed to be thinking about all this and reflecting upon it deeply. "I wish that papa and I were going to be here a year," she said. "I love Tideshead."

Mr. Leicester did not wait to come back with the packet boat, but appeared by the stage from the railway station in good season for dinner. He was very hungry, and looked well satisfied with his morning's work, and he told Betty that she should know toward the end of the afternoon the reason of his going to Riverport, so that there was nothing to do but to wait. She was disappointed, because she had fancied that he meant to bring home a new row−boat; perhaps, after all, he had made some arrangements about it. Why, yes! it might be coming up by the packet, and they would go out together that very evening. Betty could hardly wait for the hour to come.

When dinner was over, papa was enticed up to see the cubby−house, while the aunts took their nap. There was a little roast pig for dinner, and Aunt Barbara had been disappointed to find that her guest had gone away, as it was his favorite dinner; but his unexpected return made up for everything, and they had a great deal of good fun. Papa was in the best of spirits, and went out to speak to Serena about the batter puddling as soon as Aunt Barbara rose from her chair.

"Now don't you tell me you don't get them batter puddings a sight better in the dwellings of the rich and great," insisted Serena, with great complacency. "Setting down to feast with lords and dukes, same 's you do, you must eat of the best the year round. We do season the sauce well, I will allow. Miss Barbara, she always thinks it may need a drop more."

"Serena," said Betty's father solemnly, "I assure you that I have eaten a slice of bacon between two tough pieces of hard tack for my dinner many a day this summer, and I haven't had such a batter pudding since the last one you made yourself."

"You don't tell me they're goin' out o' fashion," said Serena, much shocked "I know some ain't got the knack o' makin' 'em!"

Betty stood by, enjoying the conversation. Serena always said proudly that a great light of intellect would have been lost to the world if she had not rescued Mr. Leicester from the duck−pond when he was a boy, and they were indeed the best of friends. Serena's heart rejoiced when anybody praised her cooking, and she turned away now toward the pantry with a beaming smile, while the father and daughter went up to the garret.

It was hot there at this time of day; still the great elms outside kept the sun from shining directly on the roof, and a light breeze was blowing in at the dormer window.

Mr. Leicester sat down in the high−backed wooden rocking−chair, and looked about the quaint little place with evident pleasure. Betty was perched on the window−sill. She had looked forward eagerly to this moment.

"There is my old butterfly−net," he exclaimed, "and my minerals, and—why, all the old traps! Where did you find them? I remember that once I came up here and found everything cleared away but the gun,— they were afraid to touch that."

"I looked in the boxes under the eaves," explained Betty. "Your little Fourth of July cannon is there in the dark corner. I had it out at first, but Becky tumbled over it three times, and once Aunt Mary heard the noise and had a palpitation of the heart, so I pushed it back again out of the way. I did so wish that you were here to fire it. I had almost forgotten what fun the Fourth is. I wrote you all about it, didn't I?"

"Some day we will come to Tideshead and have a great celebration, to make up for losing that," said papa. "Betty, my child, I'm sleepy. I don't know whether it is this rocking−chair or Serena's dinner."

"Perhaps it was getting up so early in the morning," suggested Betty. "Go to sleep, papa. I'll say some of my new pieces of poetry. I learned all you gave me, and some others beside."

"Not the 'Scholar Gypsy,' I suppose?"

"Yes, indeed," said Betty. "The last of it was hard, but all those verses about the fields are lovely, and make me remember that spring when we lived in Oxford. That was the only long one you gave me. I am not sure that I can say it without the book. I always play that I am in the 'high field corner' looking down at the meadows, and I can remember the first pages beautifully."

Papa's eyes were already shut, and by the time Betty had said

"All the live murmur of a summer's day"

she found that he was fast asleep. She stole a glance at him now and then, and a little pang went through her heart as she saw that his hair was really growing gray. Aunt Mary and Aunt Barbara appeared to believe that he was hardly more than a boy, but to Betty thirty−nine years was a long lifetime, and indeed her father had achieved much more than most men of his age. She was afraid of waking him and kept very still, so that a sparrow lit on the window−sill and looked at her a moment or two before he flew away again. She could even hear the pigeons walking on the roof overhead and hopping on the shingles, with a tap, from the little fence that went about the house−top. When Mr. Leicester waked he still wished to hear the "Scholar Gypsy," which was accordingly begun again, and repeated with only two or three stops. Sometimes they said a verse together, and then they fell to talking about some of the people whom they both loved in Oxford, and had a delightful hour together. At first Betty had not liked to learn long poems, and thought her father was stern and inconsiderate in choosing such old and sober ones; but she was already beginning to see a reason for it, and was glad, if for nothing else, to know the poems papa himself liked best, even if she did not wholly understand them. It was easy now to remember a new one, for she had learned so many. Aunt Barbara was much pleased with this accomplishment, for she had learned a great many herself in her lifetime. It seemed to be an old custom in the Leicester family, and Betty thought one day that she could let this gift stand in the place of singing as Becky could; one's own friends were not apt to care so much for poetry, but older people liked to be "repeated" to. One night, however, she had said Tennyson's ballad of "The Revenge" to Harry Foster and Nelly as they came up the river, and they liked it surprisingly.

Papa reached for the old guitar presently and after mending the broken strings he began to sing a delightful little Italian song, a great favorite of Betty's. Then there was a step on the stairs, Aunt Barbara's dignified head appeared behind the railing, and they called her to come up and join them.

"I felt as if there must be ghosts walking in daylight when I heard the old guitar," she said a little wistfully. When she was seated in the rocking−chair and Betty's father had pulled forward a flowered tea−chest for himself, he went on with his singing, and then played a Spanish dancing tune, with a nod to Betty, so that she skipped at once to the open garret−floor and took the pretty steps with much gayety. Aunt Barbara smiled and kept time with her foot; then she left the prim rocking−chair and began to follow the dance too, soberly chasing Betty and receding and even twirling her about, until they were both out of breath and came back to their places very warm and excited. They looked strangely alike as they danced. Betty was almost as tall and only a little more quick and graceful than her grandaunt.

"It is such fun to be just the same age as you and papa," insisted Betty. "We do everything together now." She took on a pretty grown−up air, and looked at Aunt Barbara admiringly. It was only this summer that she had begun to understand how young grown people really are. Aunt Mary seemed much older because she had stopped doing so many pleasant things. This garret dance was a thing to remember. Betty liked Aunt Barbara better every day, but it had never occurred to her that she knew that particular Spanish dance. An army officer's wife had taught it to Betty and some of her friends the summer she was in the Isle of Wight. Becky had been brought up to be very doubtful about dancing, which was a great pity, for she was apt to be stiff and awkward when she walked or tried to move about in the room. Somehow she moved her feet as if they had been made too heavy for her, but she learned a good deal from trying to keep step as she walked with Betty, who was naturally light−footed.

Mr. Leicester put down the guitar at last, and said that he had an errand to do, and that Betty had better come along.

"Can't you sit still five minutes, either of you?" maliciously asked Aunt Barbara, who had quite regained her breath. "I really did not know how cozy this corner was. I must say that I had forgot to associate it with anything but Serena's and my putting away blankets in the spring. I used to like to sit by the window and read when I was

your age, Betty. In those days I could look over this nearest elm and see way down the river, just as you can now in winter when the leaves are gone. I dare say the three generations before me have played here too. I am so glad that we could have Betty this summer; it is time she began to strike her roots a little deeper here."

"Yes," said Mr. Leicester, "but I can't do without her, my only Betsey!" and they all laughed, but Betty had a sudden suspicion that Aunt Barbara would try to keep her altogether now. This frightened our friend a little, for though she loved the old home dearly, she must take care of papa. It was her place to take care of him now; she had been looking over his damaged wardrobe most anxiously that morning, as if her own had never known ruin. His outside clothes were well enough, but alas for his pocket handkerchiefs and stockings! He looked a little pale, too, and as if he had on the whole been badly neglected in minor ways.

But there never was a more cheerful and contented papa, as they walked toward the river together hand−in−hand, in the fashion of Betty's childhood. They found that the packet had come in, and there was a group of spectators on the old wharf, who were looking eagerly at something which proved to be a large cat−boat which the packet had in tow. Mr. Leicester left Betty suddenly and went to the wharf's edge.

"Did you have any trouble bringing her up?" he asked.

"Bless ye, no, sir," said the packet's skipper; "didn't hinder us one grain; had a clever little breeze right astern all the way up."

"Look here, Betty," said papa, returning presently. "I went down this morning to hunt for a dory with a sail, and I saw this cat−boat which somebody was willing to let, and I have hired it for a while. I wish to look up the river shell−fish a bit; it's not altogether play, I mean you to understand."

"Oh, papa!" cried Betty joyfully. "The only thing we needed was a nice boat. But you can't have clutters in pots and pans at Aunt Barbara's, can you, and your works going on? Serena won't like it, and she can be quite terrible, you know!"

"Come on board and look at her," said Mr. Leicester, regardless of the terrors of Serena's disapproval. The cat−boat carried a jib beside a good−sized mainsail, and had a comfortable little cabin with a tiny stove and two berths and plenty of lockers. Two young men had just spent their vacation in her, coasting eastward, and one of them told Mr. Leicester that she was the quickest and steadiest boat he ever saw, sailing close to the wind and answering her rudder capitally. They had lived on board altogether and made themselves very comfortable indeed. There was a light little flat−bottomed boat for tender, and the white cat−boat itself had been newly painted with gilt lettering across the stern, Starlight, Riverport.

"I can ask the Out−of−Door Club one day next week," announced Betty, with great enthusiasm. "Isn't she clean and pretty? Won't Aunt Barbara like her, papa?"

"I must look about for some one to help me to sail her," said Mr. Leicester, with uncommon gravity. "What do you think of young Foster? He must know the river well, and his fishing may be falling off a little now. It would be a good way to help him, don't you think so?"

Betty's eyes shone with joy. "Oh, yes," she said; "they do have such a hard time now. Nelly told me so yesterday morning. It has cost them so much lately. Harry has been trying to get something to do in Riverport."

They were busy anchoring the Starlight out in the stream, and now Mr. Leicester helped Betty over the side into the tender and sculled her ashore. Some of the men on the wharf had disappeared, but others were still there, and there was a great bustle of unloading some bags of grain from the packet. Mr. Leicester invited one of his old acquaintances who asked many questions to come out and see the cat−boat, and as Betty hurried up the street to

the house she saw over her shoulder that a large company in small leaky crafts had surrounded the pretty Starlight like pirates. It was apt to be very dull in Tideshead for many of the idle citizens, and Mr. Leicester's return was always hailed with delight. It was nearly tea−time, so that Betty could not go over to tell Mary Beck the good news; but one white handkerchief, meaning Come over, was quickly displayed on the pear−tree branch, and while Betty was getting dressed in a much−needed fresh gown for tea Becky kindly appeared, and was delighted with the good news. She had seen the Starlight already from a distance.

"My father used to have a splendid sail−boat," said fatherless Becky with much wistfulness, and Betty put her arms round her and gave her a warm kiss. Sometimes it seemed that whatever one had the other lacked.

XVI. DOWN THE RIVER.

There was a great stirring about and opening and shutting of kitchen doors early the next morning but one. Betty had been anxious the day before to set forth on what she was pleased to call a long cruise in the Starlight, but Mr. Leicester said that he must give up the morning to his letters, and after that came a long business talk with Aunt Barbara in the library, where she sat before her capacious secretary and produced some neat packages of papers from a little red morocco trunk which Betty had never seen before. To say truth, Aunt Barbara was a famous business woman and quite the superior of her nephew in financial matters, but she deferred to him meekly, and in fact gained some long−desired information about a northwestern city in which Mr. Leicester had lately been obliged to linger for two or three days.

It was a day of clear hot sunshine and light breeze, not ill the least a good clay for sailing; but Betty was Just as much disappointed to be kept at home as if it had been, and after breakfast she loitered about in idleness, with a look of dark disapproval, until papa suddenly faced about and held her before him by her two shoulders, looking gravely into her eyes, which fell at once.

"Don't be cross, Betty," he said quietly; "we shall play all the better if we don't forget our work. What is there to do first? Where's 'Things to be done'?"

Betty dipped into her pocket and pulled out a bit of paper with the above heading, and held it up to him. Papa's eyes began to twinkle and she felt her cheeks grow red, but good humor was restored. "1. Ask Seth to sharpen my knife. 2. Find Aunt Mary's old 'Evenings at Home' and read her the Transmigrations of Indur. 3. Find out what 'hedonism' means in the dictionary. 4. Sew on papa's buttons."

"Those were all the things I could think of last night," explained Betty apologetically, "I was so sleepy."

"It strikes me that the most important duty happened to be set down last," said Mr. Leicester, beginning to laugh. "If you will look after the buttons, I will tell you the meaning of 'hedonism' and sharpen the jack−knife, and I am not sure that I won't read the Transmigrations to Aunt Mary beside, for the sake of old times. I know where those little old brown books are, too, unless they have been moved from their old places. I am willing to make a good offer, for I have hardly a button to my back, you know. And this evening we will have a row, if not a sail. The sky looks as if the wind were rising, and you can ask Mary Beck to go with us to−morrow down the river, if you like. I am going to see young Foster the first time I go down the street. Now good−by until dinner−time, dear child."

"Good−by, dear papa!" and Betty ran upstairs two steps at a time. She had already looked to see if there were plenty of ink in his ink−bottle, and some water in a tiny vase on his writing−table for the quill pens. It was almost the only thing she had done that morning, but it was one of her special cares when they were together. She gathered an armful of his clothes, and finding that Aunt Mary was in a hospitable frame went into her room for advice and society, and sat busily sewing by the favorite cool western window nearly all the morning.

In the evening, when the tide was high, Betty and Mr. Leicester went out for a little row by themselves, floating under some over−hanging oak−boughs and talking about things that had happened when they were apart.

Now we come back to where we began this chapter,—the early morning of the next day, and Serena's and Letty's bustling in the pantry to have a basket of luncheon ready, so that the boating party need not lose the tide; the boating party itself at breakfast in the dining room; Mary Beck in a transport of delight sitting by her window at the other side of the street, all ready to rush out the minute she saw Betty appear. As for Harry Foster and Seth, they had already gone down to the shore.

On the wide sofa in the hall was a funny old−fashioned leather satchel with a strong strap− handle. It seemed full to overflowing, and beside it lay a warm shawl neatly folded, and, not to make too long a story, Aunt Barbara's third−best bonnet was close at hand, and these were her provisions for spending the day on the river. Mr. Leicester had insisted that she should go with them, and that if she found it tiresome there was nothing to prevent her coming back by train from Riverport in the afternoon. Aunt Barbara felt as if she were being a little adventurous, and packed her small portmanteau with a secret foreboding that she might be kept out over night; still she had always been very fond of boating, and had seen almost none of it for many years, in fact since Betty's father had been at home sometimes, in his college vacations. There was a fine breeze blowing already in the elms and making the tall hollyhocks bow in the garden, and when they reached the wharf and put down the creaking wicker basket on the very edge the tide was still high, and Harry Foster had already hoisted the Starlight's sail with one careful reef in it, and was waiting to row them out two at a time in the tag−boat. Nelly Foster could not go, as she and her mother were very busy that day, but Harry's face looked brighter than Betty had ever seen it, and she was sure that papa must have been very good, and, to use a favorite phrase of his, opened a new gate for him. Mary Beck was strangely full of fears, considering that she was the granddaughter of a brave old sailor; but after she was out of the unsteady smaller boat, and had been decoyed by Betty to the bows of the Starlight, and shown how to stow herself away so that she hindered neither jib nor boom, she began to enjoy herself highly. Aunt Barbara sat under her every−day parasol, looking quite elegant and unseaworthy but very happy. Harry Foster was steering just beside her, and Mr. Leicester, with Seth's assistance, was shaking out the reef; for the wind was quieter just now, and they wished to get farther down river as soon as possible, since here, where the banks were often high and wooded and the stream narrow, it was gusty and uncertain sailing for so large a boat. They slipped down fast with the wind and tide, and passed the packet, which had started out ahead of them. She carried an unusual number of passengers, and was loaded deep with early potatoes. The girls waved their handkerchiefs and the men on board the packet gave a cheer, while Mr. Leicester saluted with the Starlight's flag, and it was altogether a ceremonious occasion. Seth said that he "guessed folks would think old Tideshead was waking up." Of all the pleasure−boat's company Seth was perhaps the best satisfied. He had been in a state of torture lest he might not be asked to make one of the crew, and it being, divulged that although of up−country origin he had once gone to the Georges Banks fishing with a seafaring uncle, Mr. Leicester considerately asked for his services. Seth had put on the great rubber−boots and a heavy red woolen shirt that he wore on shipboard in March weather. He was already obliged to fan himself incessantly with his straw hat, as they were running before the wind, and presently, after much suffering, made an excuse to go into the little cabin, whence he reappeared, much abashed, in his stocking feet and a faded calico shirt, which had been luckily put on under the red one. Aunt Barbara held her parasol so that it covered her face for a few minutes, and there was a considerate silence, until Seth mentioned that he "had thought he knew before what it was to be het up, but you never knew what kind of weather 't was to be on the water."

At the next bend of the river the wind made them much cooler, while the boat sailed even better than before. There had been plenty of rain, so that the shore was as green as in June and the old farm−houses looked very pleasant. Betty had not been so far down as this since the day she came to Tideshead, and was looking eagerly for certain places that she remembered. Aunt Barbara and papa were talking about John Paul Jones and his famous river crew, some of whom Aunt Barbara had known in their old age, while she was a girl. Harry Foster was listening with great interest. Betty and even Becky felt proud of Harry as he steered, looking along the river with quick, sure eyes. They did not feel so familiar with him as usual; somehow, he looked a good deal older since the

trouble about his father, and there was a new manliness and dignity about him, as if he knew that his mother and Nelly had no one but himself to depend upon. It was plain to see that his early burden of shame and sorrow had developed a strong character in the lad. There was none of the listlessness and awkward incapacity and self−admiration that made some of the other Tideshead boys so unattractive, but Harry Foster had a simple way of speaking and of doing whatever had to be done.

There was a group of wooden pails on the boat, and a queer apparatus for dredging which Mr. Leicester had made the afternoon before with Seth's and Jonathan's help. They had implored a flat−iron from Serena for one of the weights, and she had also contributed a tin pail, which was curiously weighted also with small pieces of iron, so that it would sink in a particular way. It was believed that a certain uncommon little creature would be found in the flats farther down the river, and Mr. Leicester told the ship's company certain interesting facts about its life and behavior which made everybody eager to join the search. "I have been meaning to hunt for it for years," he said. "Professor Agassiz told me about it when I was in college, but then he always roused one's enthusiasm as no one else could, and made whatever he was interested in seem the one thing in the world that was of very first importance." Betty's heart glowed as she listened; she thought the same thing of papa. "He was such an inspirer of others to do good work," said Mr. Leicester, still thinking lovingly of his great teacher.

Sometimes the river was narrow and deep and the Starlight's course lay near the shore, so that the children came running down to the water's edge to see the pretty boat go by, and envy Betty and Mary Beck in the shadow of her great white sail. Some of them shouted Hollo! and the two girls answered again and again, until the little voices sounded small and piping and were lost in the distance. Halfway to Riverport, where the houses were a good way from any village, it seemed as if these old homes had remained the same for many years; none of them had bay−windows, and the paint was worn away by wind and weather. It was like stepping back twenty or thirty years in the rural history. Aunt Barbara said that everything looked almost exactly the same along one reach of the river as it did when she could first remember it. The shores were green with pines and ferns and gray with ledges. It was salt water here, so that they could smell the seaweed and the woods, and could hear the song−sparrows and the children's voices as they passed the lonely farm−houses standing high and fog−free above the water. From one of these they heard the sound of women's voices singing.

"They're havin' a meetin' in there, I expect," explained Seth. "Yes, I hear 'Liza Loomis's voice too. You know, Miss Leicester, she used to live up to Tideshead and sing in the Methodist choir. She's got a lovely voice to sing. She's married down this way. They like to git together in these scattered places, but 't is more customary up where I come from to have them neighborhood meetin's of an afternoon." Betty watched the small gray house with sleep interest, and thought she should like to go in. There were little children playing about the door, as if they had been brought and left outside to amuse themselves. It was very touching to hear the old hymn as they sailed by, and Aunt Barbara and Betty's father looked at each other significantly as they listened. "Becky, you ought to be there to help sing," Betty whispered, as they sat side by side, but Becky thought it was very stupid to be having a prayer−meeting that lovely morning.

Seth Pond had celebrated the Fourth of July by going down to Riverport on the packet, and he had gathered much information about the river which he was glad to give now for everybody's pleasure and enlightenment.

"There's a bo't layin' up in that cove that's drowned two men," he said solemnly. "There was a lady with 'em, but she was saved. I understand they'd been drinking heavy."

Betty looked at the boat with awe where it lay with the stern under water and the bows ashore and all warped apart. "Isn't she good for anything?" she asked.

"Nobody'll ever touch her," said Seth contemptuously,—"she's drowned two men."

But Miss Leicester smiled, and said that it appeared to have been their own fault.

They could see into the low ruined cabin from the deck of the Starlight, and, after they passed, the cabin port−hole seemed to watch them like an eye until it was far astern.

"I suppose she will lie there until she breaks up in a high tide, and then the women will gather her wreck wood to burn," said Mr. Leicester, watching the warped mast; and Harry Foster said that no fishermen on the river would ever touch a boat that they believed to be unlucky. Just then they came round apoint and passed a little house close by the water, where there were flakes for drying fish and a collection of little weather−beaten boxes shaped like roofs which were used to cover the fish in wet weather. Betty thought they looked like a village of baby−houses. At this moment a woman darted out of the house door, screaming to some one inside, "I've lost Georgie and Idy both!" and off the anxious mother hurried along the steep path to the fish flakes, as if that were where she usually found the runaways. Presently they heard a child's shrill voice, and a pink pinafore emerged from among the little roofs. Ida was deposited angrily in the lane, while the mother went back to hunt for the other one. It was very droll to see and hear it all from the river, but it was some minutes before loud shrieks announced the adventurous Georgie's capture.

"Georgie must ha' been hull down on the horizon," remarked Seth blandly, trying to be very nautical, and everybody laughed; but Betty and Mary thought the woman very cross, when it was such a pretty place to play out there among the bayberry, and perhaps there were ripe blackberries. Harry Foster said that children did mischief in pulling off bits of the dry fish and spoiling them for market; but there was no end of fish, and everybody felt a sympathy for "Idy and Georgie both" in their sad captivity.

Before long the houses were nearer together, and even clustered in little groups close by the river, and sometimes the Starlight passed some schooners going up or down, or being laden with bricks or hay or firewood at small wharves. Then they came in sight of the Riverport steeples, only a few miles below. The wind was not so gusty now and blew steadily, but it was very light, and the Starlight moved slowly. Harry and Seth had already hoisted a topsail, and while Mr. Leicester steered Harry came and stood by the masts, looking out ahead and talking with the two girls. But Harry felt responsible for the boat, and could not give himself up to pleasuring until, as he said, he understood the tricks and manners of the Starlight a little better. It was toward noon, now, for they had come slowly the last third of the way; and Mr. Leicester, after a word with Aunt Barbara, proposed that they should go ashore for a while, for there was a beautiful piece of pine woods close at hand, and the flats which he was going to investigate were also within rowing distance. So down came the sails and alongside came the tag−boat; and Aunt Barbara was landed first, parasol and all, and the others followed her. The tide was running out fast, and it was not easy to find a landing−place along the muddy shores. Betty thought the Starlight looked much smaller from the shore than she seemed when they were on board Harry and Seth made everything trig and came in last, leaving the cat−boat at anchor far out.

Even after the joy of sailing it was very pleasant ashore under the shady pines, and Mr. Leicester found a delightfully comfortable place for Aunt Barbara to sit in, while the girls were near by. "What an interesting morning we have had!" Betty heard Aunt Barbara say. "Sailing down the river brings to mind so many things in the past. The beginnings of history in this part of the country always have to do with the river. I wish that I could remember all the stories of the early settlements that I used to hear old people tell in my childhood."

"See that little green farm in the middle of the sunburnt pastures across the river," said Mr. Leicester, who had been looking that way intently. "Look, Betty! what a small green spot it makes with its orchard and fields among the woods and brown pastures, and yet what toil has been spent there year after year!"

Betty looked with great interest. She had seen the green farm, but she had not thought about it, and neither had Mary Beck, who could not tell why she kept looking that way again and again, and somehow could not help thinking how good it would be to make a green place like that by one's own life among dull and difficult surroundings. Betty was her green place; by and by she could do the same thing for somebody else, perhaps.

"What a lovely place this is!" said Aunt Barbara, still enthusiastic. "There is such sweet air here among the pines, and I delight in the wide outlook over the river. I begin to feel as young as ever. I thought that I was almost too old to enjoy myself any more, last winter. It is such a mistake to let one's self make great things out of little ones, as I did, and carry life too heavily," she added.

"You must feel ever so much older inside than you look outside," said Betty, who was in famous spirits.

Mr. Leicester laughed with the rest, and then looked over his shoulder with a droll expression, as if something was causing him great apprehension. "Aunt Barbara!" he began, and then hid his face with his arm, as if he were about to be well whipped.

"What mischief now?" said she.

"I have played you a trick: you are not leaving your home and friends for one day, but for two."

Miss Leicester looked puzzled.

"You were very good not to say that I was foolish to carry two extra sails."

"I did think it was nonsense, Tom," he was promptly assured, "but then I remembered that you had only hired the boat, and thought perhaps the sails went with it. Of course they take up too much room in the cabin. You can't mean that you are going on a longer voyage?"

"Tents!" shouted Betty jumping up and dancing about in great excitement. "Tents! don't you see, Aunt Barbara? and we're going to camp out." It was a very anxious moment, for if Aunt Barbara said, "We must go home to−night," there would be nothing to do but obey.

"But your Aunt Mary will be worried, won't she?" asked Miss Leicester, whose quick wit suspected a deep−laid plot. She was already filled with a spirit of adventure; she really looked pleased, but was not without a sense of responsibility.

"I thought you would like it," explained Mr. Leicester, in a matter−of−fact way; "and there was no need of telling you beforehand, so that you would make your will and pay your taxes and get in all the winter supplies and have the minister to tea before you started. Aunt Mary knows, and so does Serena; you will see that Serena contemplated the situation by the way she filled these big baskets."

"I saw that they were amused with something that I didn't quite understand. And Mary Beck's mother will not feel anxious?" she asked, for a final assurance. "I never expected to turn myself into a wild Indian at my age, even to please foolish children like you and Betty, but I have always wished that I could sleep one night under the pine woods."

"You said so when we were reading Mr. Stevenson's 'Travels with a Donkey' aloud to Aunt Mary," Betty stated eagerly, as if the others would find it hard to believe her grand−aunt. Somehow, a stranger would have found it difficult to believe that Miss Leicester had unsatisfied desires about gypsying.

Mary Beck was deeply astonished; she had a huge admiration for her dignified neighbor across the way, and yet it was always a little perilous to her ease of mind and self−possession to find herself in Miss Leicester's company. Many a time, in the days before Betty came to Tideshead, she had walked to and fro before the old house hoping to be spoken to or called in for a visit, and yet was too shy to properly answer a kind good−morning when they met. Aunt Barbara used to think that Becky was a dull girl, but they were already better friends. It took a long time to rouse Becky's enthusiasm, but when roused it burned with steady flame. To think that she should be

camping out with Miss Leicester!

But Mr. Leicester and Betty and Becky were soon at work making their camp, and the novices took their first lesson in woodcraft. The young men, Harry Foster: and Seth, came ashore bringing the tender loaded deep with tents and blankets, some of them from Jonathan's carefully kept chests in the carriage−house, and Miss Leicester wondered again how anybody had contrived to get so many things from the house to the boat without her knowledge. There were two sharp hatchets, and presently Seth and Harry were dispatched to gather some dry wood for the fire, though until near evening the tents need not be put up nor the last arrangements made for sleeping. By and by everybody could help either to cut or carry hemlock and spruce boughs for the beds.

Betty helped her father to roll some stones together for a flreplace just at the edge of the river beach, and pleased him very much by rolling a heavy one up to the top of the heap on a piece of board which had washed ashore, just as she had seen farmers do in building a stone wall. Mary Beck, in a trepidation of delight, was helping Miss Barbara Leicester unpack the baskets, to see what would be eaten for dinner and what should be kept for future meals, when Mr. Leicester called them.

"Aunt Barbara," he proclaimed, "I am not going to let you keep tent; you only know how to keep house; and beside, you mustn't do what you always do at home. Let the girls manage dinner and you come with me, now that the fire is started. I have thought of an errand."

Miss Leicester meekly obeyed; she was ready for anything, having once cast off, as she said, all obligation to society, and with a few parting charges to Betty about the provisions she disappeared among the pines with her nephew.

"Isn't it fun?" said Mary Beck, and she put on such a comical face when Betty sedately quoted,

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"What is that, mother?"
     "A lark, my child,"
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that Betty fell into a fit of laughter, and Becky caught it, and they were gasping for breath before they could stop. "Oh, think of Aunt Barbara camping out and setting herself up for a gypsy!" said Betty. "This is just the way papa does now and then. I always told you so, didn't I?—only you never know when to watch for his tricks. He doesn't always catch me like this, I can tell you. Think of Aunt Barbara! I hope the dear thing will pass a good night, she isn't bit older than we are in her dear heart. How will she ever have the face to walk into church so grandly Sunday morning!" and so the merry girls chattered on, while they spread the cloth and Betty put a decoration of leaves round the edge and a handful of flowers in the middle. "You have such a way of prettifying things," said Mary Beck; "there, the chocolate pot is beginning to boil already."

"We ought to have some fresh water; it is time papa came back," said Betty anxiously; and just then appeared papa and smiling Aunt Barbara, and a small tin pail which had to be borrowed at a farm−house half a mile away because it was forgotten.

The wind blew cool across the river, and more and more boats went gliding up and down in the channel, though the tide was very low. Everybody was hungrier than ever, because the sea wind is famous for helping on an appetite, and the hot chocolate was none too hot after all, though Aunt Barbara's bonnet was hanging on a branch and she did not seem to miss the shelter of it. Becky was forced to change her opinion about cooking; she had always disliked to have anything to do with it; it seemed to her a thing to be ignored and concealed in polite society, and yet Betty was openly proud of having had a few cooking−school lessons, and of knowing the right way to do things. Becky suddenly began to parade her own knowledge, and found herself of great use to the party. Instead of being unwilling when her mother asked for help again, she meant to learn a great many more things. She was overjoyed when she found a tin box of coffee, and remembered that Betty had said it was her father's

chief delight. She would make a good cup for him in the morning. Betty was always saying how nice it was to know how to do things. She never expected to like to wash dinner dishes, but the time had come, though a hot sun was somehow pleasanter than a hot stove, and it had been a gypsy dinner, with potatoes in the ashes and buns toasted on a hot stone, and no end of good things beside.

"We must have some oysters to roast for our supper. I know a place just below here where they are very salt and good," said Mr. Leicester; "and one of you young men might go fishing, and bring us in a string of flounders, or anything you can get. We have breakfast to look out for, you remember."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Harry Foster, sailor fashion, but with uncommon heartiness. Harry had been very quiet and care−taking on the boat, and had not said much, either, since he came ashore, but his eyes had been growing brighter, and as Miss Leicester looked up at him she was touched at the change in his face. How boyish and almost gay he was again! She caught his eye, and gave him a kind reassuring little nod, as if nobody could be more pleased to have him happy than herself.

The Starlight was now aground in the bright green river grass and the flats were bare for a long distance beyond, so that there was no more boating for the present. There were plenty of comfortable hollows to rest in farther back on the soft carpet under the pines, and so the dining−room nearer the shore was abandoned and the provisions cachéd, as Mr. Leicester called it, under an oak−tree. Certain things had been forgotten, but just round the point the steeples of Riverport were in full view; and when everybody had rested enough and the tide was creeping in, Mr. Leicester first sent Harry out in the small boat and his long−legged fishing−boots to get two buckets of river mud, and after he had seated himself beside them with his magnifying glasses and a paraphernalia of tools familiar to Betty, Harry was given orders to take Seth Pond and the two girls and go down to Riverport shopping, as soon as the Starlight floated again.

Harry was hovering over the scientific enterprise and looked sorry for a minute, but it seemed to the girls as if the tide had stopped rising. At last they got on board by going down the shore a little way to be taken off the sooner from some rock. Aunt Barbara announced that she meant to go too; indeed, she was not tired; what had there been to tire her? So off they all went, and left Mr. Leicester to his investigations. It took some time to go to Riverport, for the wind was light and the tide against them. Everybody, and Betty in particular, thought it great fun to make fast to the wharf and go ashore up into the town shopping. Aunt Barbara gayly stepped off first, to see an old friend who lived a little way above the business part of the town, and asked to be called for, as they went back, at the friend's river gate. Harry knew it?—the high house with the lookout on top and the gate at the garden−foot. Betty went first to find her early friend, the woman who kept the bake−house, and was recognized at once and provided with fresh buns and crisp molasses cookies which had hardly cooled. Then Betty and Becky walked about the narrow streets for an hour, enjoying themselves highly and collecting ship's stores at two or three fruit shops; also laying in a good store of chocolate, which Betty proclaimed to be very nourishing. She got two pots of her favorite orange marmalade too, in case they made toast for supper.

"All the old ladies are looking out of their windows, just as they were the day I was coming to Tideshead," she said; and Becky replied that their faces were always at just the same pane of glass. The fences were very high and had their tops cut in points, and over them here and there drooped the heavy bough of a fruit−tree or a long tendril of grapevine, as if there were delightful gardens inside. The sidewalks were very narrow underneath these fences, so that Betty often walked in the street to be alongside her companion. There were pretty old knockers on the front doors, and sometimes a parrot hung out under the porch, and shouted saucily at the passers−by. Riverport was a delightful old town. Betty was sure that if she did not love Tideshead best she should like to belong in Riverport, and have a garden with a river gate, and a great square house of three stories and a lookout on top.

The stores were put on board, and Seth Pond came back from researches which had been rewarded by a half−bushel basket full of clams. Then they swung out into the stream again, and ever so many little boys with four grown men on the wharf gave them a cheer. It was great fun stopping for Aunt Barbara, who was in the

garden watching for them, and was escorted by a charming white−haired old gentleman who teased her a little upon her youthful escapade, and a younger lady who walked sedately under an antique Chinese parasol. Betty sprang ashore to greet this latter personage, who had lately paid a visit to Miss Barbara at Tideshead. She was fond of Miss Marcia Drummond.

"It seems like old times to have you going home by boat," said Miss Marcia, kissing Aunt Barbara good−by. "It is much pleasanter than a car journey. Betty, my dear, you know that your aunt is a very rash and heedless person; I hope you will hold her in check. I have been trying to persuade her that she will be much safer to−night in one of our old four−posters;" and so they said good−by merrily and were off again, while the young people in the boat looked back as long as they could see the old garden with its hollyhocks and lilies, and the two figures of the courtly old gentleman and the lady with the parasol going up the broad walk.

"What a good thing it was in Tom Leicester to send his daughter to Tideshead this summer!" said the old gentleman. "I think that Barbara is renewing her youth. Tom is a man of distinction, and yet keeps to his queer wild ways. You are sure that Barbara quite understands about our wishing them to dine here? I think this camping business is positively foolish conduct in a person of her age."

But Miss Marcia Drummond looked wistfully over her shoulder at the cat−boat's lessening sail, and wished that she too were going to spend a night under the pines.

A little way up the river they passed the packet boat, a little belated and heavily laden, but moving steadily.

"Look at old Step−an'−fetch−it," said Seth. "She spears all the little winds with that peakéd sail o' hern. Ain't one on 'em can git by her." They kept company for a while, until in the broad river bay above Riverport bridge the Starlight skimmed far ahead, like a great white moth. Seth mentioned that folks would think they was settin' up a navy up to Tideshead, and just then the Starlight yawed, and the boom threw Seth off his balance and nearly overboard, as much to his own amusement as the rest of the ship's company's. Betty and Mary Beck stowed themselves away before the mast, and wished that the sail were longer. The sun was low, and the light made the river and the green shores look most beautiful. Miss Leicester suggested that they should sail a, little farther before going in, and so they went as far as the next reach, a mile above the camp, on the accommodating west wind. It was a last puff before sundown, and by the time Harry had anchored the Starlight in deeper water than before, her sail drooped in the perfectly still evening air.

Once on shore everybody was busy; the spruce and hemlock boughs must be arranged carefully for the beds and the tents pitched over them before the August dew began to fall.

Mr. Leicester was chief of this part of camp duty, and Miss Barbara, who seemed to enjoy herself more every moment, was allowed by the girls to help, just that once, about getting supper. It was growing cool and the fire was not unwelcome, but by and by a gentle wind began to blow and kept away the midges. Betty began to think that there would be nothing left for breakfast by the time supper was half through, but she managed to secrete part of her cherished buns, and reflected that it would be easy to send to Riverport for further supplies even if breakfast were a little late. Betty felt a certain care and responsibility over the whole expedition, it was so delightful to be looking after papa again; and she was obliged to tell him that he must not touch the river mud any more, or he would not be fit to go through the streets of Riverport next day, at which Mr. Leicester, though deeply attached to his old friends in that town, looked very distressed and unwilling.

The darkness fell fast, and the supper dishes had to be put under some bayberry bushes until morning. The salt air was very sweet and fresh, and it was just warm enough and just cool enough, as Betty said. The stars were bright; in fact, the last few days had been much more like June than August, and it was what English people call Queen's weather. Mary Beck said sagely that it must be because Miss Leicester came, and then was quite ashamed, dear little soul, not understanding that nothing is so pleasant to an older woman as to find herself interesting and

companionable to a girl. People do not always grow away from their youth; they add to it experiences and traits of different sorts; and it is easy sometimes to throw off all these, and find the boy or the girl again, eager and fresh and ready for simple pleasures, and to make new beginnings.

Seth Pond had stolen out to the cat−boat on some errand of his own which nobody questioned, and now there suddenly resounded the surprising notes of his violin. It was very pretty to hear his familiar old tunes over the water, and everybody respected Seth's amiable desire to afford entertainment, even if he failed a little now and then in time or tone. He had mastered several old Scottish and English airs in the book Betty had given him, and already had become proficient in some lively jigs and dancing tunes, as we knew at the time of Betty's first party in the garden. The clumsy fellow had a real gift for music. Some stray fairy must have passed his way and left an unexpected gift. The little audience on the shore were ready to applaud, and two or three boats came near, while some young people in one began to sing "Bonny Doon," softly, while Seth played, and, encouraged by the applause, went on more boldly, and took up the strain again when Seth changed suddenly to "Lochaber no more." Miss Leicester was overjoyed when she heard such fresh young voices sing the plaintive old air so readily. It had always been a great favorite of hers, and she said so with enthusiasm. Mary Beck was sorry that she never had learned it, but by the time the last verse came she began to join in as best she could.

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"I'll bring thee a heart with love running o'er,
And then I'll leave thee and Lochaber no more,"
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the words ended. Nobody who heard it that summer night in the starlight by the river shore would ever forget the old song.

"You must have influenced Seth's choice of music," Betty's father said to Aunt Barbara, who confessed that the droning of the violin over cheap music was more than she could bear at first, and she had been compelled to suggest something in the place of "The Sweet By−and−By" and "Golden Slippers." Luckily, Seth seemed to abandon these without regret.

At last the boats all disappeared into the darkness, and the little camp was made ready for night. The open air made every one sleepy but Miss Barbara, who consoled herself by thinking that if she did not sleep it would be little matter; she had been awake many a night in her life and felt none the worse. But in fact the sound of rippling water against the bank and the sea−like sound of the pine boughs overhead sent her to sleep before she had half time to properly enjoy them. She and Betty declared that their thick−set evergreen boughs and warm blankets made the best of beds. They could see the stars through the open end of the tent. One was so bright that it let fall a slender golden track of light on the river. Mary Beck thought that she had never been so happy. Camping−out had always been such a far−off thing, and belonged to summer tourists and the remote unsettled parts of country; but here she was, close to her own home, with all the delights of gypsy life suddenly made her own. Betty and Betty's friends had such a way of enjoying every−day things. Becky was learning to be happy in simple ways she never had before. She went to sleep too, and the stars shone on, and late in the night the waning moon came up, strange and red; then the dawn came creeping into the morning sky, and one wild creature after another, in the crevices of rocks or branches of trees, waked and went its ways silently or gay with song.

When Betty's eyes first opened she could not remember where she was, for a moment. Then she was filled with a sense of great contentment, and lay still, looking out through the open end of the tent across the wide still river down which some birds were flying seaward. It was most beautiful in that early morning of a new day, and from beyond the water on the opposite shore came the far sweet sound of a woman's voice singing as she worked, as if a long−looked−for day had come and held great joy for her. She was singing just as the birds sing, and Betty tried to fancy how she looked as she went to and fro so busily in one of the farm−houses.

Aunt Barbara did not wake until after Betty, which was a great joy, and there was a peal of delighted laughter from the girls when she waked and found their bright young eyes watching her. She complained of nothing,

except a moment of fright when she saw her own bonnet at the top of a lopped fir which had been stuck into the ground at the foot of the bed, to hang her raiment on. Her wrap had been put neatly round the tree's shoulders by Betty, so that it looked like a queer sort of skeleton creature with every sort of garment on its sharp pegs of bones. Nobody had taken the least bit of cold, and everybody was as cheerful as possible, and so the day began. Seth Pond had trudged off to get some milk at one of the farm−houses, and had lighted a fire before he went and covered it with bits of dry turf, which served to keep it in as well as peat. Mr. Leicester complained that he had found the tent too warm, and so had rolled himself in his blanket and spent the night in the open air. Evidently he and Harry Foster had been awake some time, and they were having a famous talk about one of the treasured creatures in the muddy wooden pail. Harry had managed to learn a great deal by spending an hour now and then in a famous old library in Riverport, in which Miss Leicester had given him the use of her share; and Betty knew that her father was delighted and surprised with the young man's interest in his own favorite studies. She had felt sure all summer that papa would know just how to help Harry Foster on, and as she watched them she could not help thinking that she wished Harry were her brother. But then she would no longer have entire right to papa.

"Come, Elizabeth Leicester!" said papa, in high spirits. "I never had such a dilatory damsel to make my first tent breakfast!" So Betty hastened, and poked the fire nearly to death in her desire for promptness with the morning meal. After it was over Miss Leicester sat in the shade with a book, while all the rest went fishing and took a long sail seaward beside.

That evening they went home with the tide, in great delight, every one. Aunt Barbara was unduly proud of her exploits and a sunburnt nose, and the younger members of the party were a little subdued from their first enthusiasm by all sorts of exciting pleasures. As for Harry Foster, the lad felt as if a door had been kindly opened in the solid wall of hindrance which had closed about him, and as if he could look through now into a new life.

XVII. GOING AWAY.

Miss Leicester and her nephew, Betty's father, were sitting together in the library. Betty had gone to bed. It was her last night in Tideshead, and the summer which had been so long to look forward to was spent and gone. She had felt very sorry before she went to sleep, and thought of many things which might have been better, but after all one could not help being very rich and happy with so many pleasures to remember. When she thought how many new friends she had made, and how dear all the old ones had been, and that she had become very friendly even with Mrs. Beck, it was a great satisfaction. And now in less than a fortnight she was to be with Ada and Bessie Duncan and their delightful mother in London again. She certainly had a great deal to look forward to; still there was a wistful feeling in her heart at leaving Tideshead.

There had been a fire in the library fireplace, for the evening was cool, and papa and Aunt Barbara sat opposite each other. Papa was smoking, as he always did before he went to bed; and happily Miss Leicester liked the odor of tobacco, so that they were comfortable together. They were talking most affectionately about Betty.

"I think you have done wonderfully with her, Tom," said the aunt. "Nobody knows how anxious your Aunt Mary and I have felt at the thought of your carrying her hither and yon, and spoiling her because she couldn't settle down to regular habits of life."

"The only way is not to let one's habits become irregular," answered Betty's papa. "I found out long ago that I could have my hours for work and for exercise, and could go on with my reading as well in one place as in another. I have tried not to let Betty see too many people in town life, yet pretty soon she will be sixteen. She has always seemed to look at life from a child's point of view until last spring. I don't mean that she doesn't still have many days when she only considers the world's relation to herself; but on the whole she begins to be very serious about her own relation to the world, and is constantly made to think more of what she can give than of what she can get. This is a very trying season in many ways, the first really hard time that comes into a boy's or a girl's

life."

"Yes, and one is constantly learning those lessons in one way and another during all the rest of one's life," sighed Aunt Barbara. Then her face lighted up, and she added, "Just in proportion as she thinks that she does things for other people she is making steps upward for herself."

"I always think that Betty looks like Bewick's picture of the robin redbreast; you remember it? There is an expression to its little beak which always reminds me of my girl."

Aunt Barbara was much amused, but confessed that she remembered it, and that Betty and the bird really resemble each other. "I think there is a very good print of it in the large White's 'Selborne' which you sent me," she said, going to one of the bookshelves and taking it down. "Yes, they are certainly like one another," she repeated. "You see that this copy has been used? I lent it for a long time to my young neighbor, Henry Foster."

"I am very much interested in that lad!" exclaimed Mr. Leicester. "I don't know that among all the students I can remember I have seen one who strikes me as being so intent and so really promising. Betty has written about him, but I imagined that he interested her because he had a boat and could take her out on the river. I supposed that he was one of the idle fellows who evade their honest work, and, with a smattering of pretty tastes which give them plenty of conceit, come to no sort of use in the end. Betty knows enough of my hobbies to talk about his fish a little, and I thought it was all girlish nonsense; the truth is that she has shown real discernment of character,—young Foster is a fine fellow."

"Can you do anything for him?" asked Miss Leicester. "I pity his poor mother with all my heart. She is very ambitious for her son. I wish that he could earn enough for their needs, and still be able to go on with some serious study. Mrs. Foster and the daughter would make any sacrifice, but they must have something to eat and to wear. I cannot see how they can absolutely do without him even if his own expenses are paid. They will not accept charity."

"I could learn by talking with him this evening that he is able already to take some minor post in a museum. He would very soon make up what he lacks in fitness, if we could put him where he could get hold of the proper books. He must be put under the right influences, for though he seems to have energy, many a boy with an unusual gift gets stranded in a small town like this, and becomes less useful in the end than if he were like everybody else."

"I think it has been a great thing for him to be developed on the every−day side, and to have care and even trouble," said Miss Leicester. "Now I wish to see the exceptional side of him have a chance. I stand ready to help at any point, you must remember."

"I can give him some work at once, with the understanding that he is to study at Cambridge this winter. I have plans for next summer in which he could be of great service. We will not say too much, but keep our own counsel until we watch him a little longer."

Aunt Barbara nodded emphatically, but for her part she felt no doubt of Harry Foster's power of keeping at his work; then she proposed another subject of personal concern, and they talked a long time in the pleasant old library, among the familiar books and pictures, until the fire had given its last flicker and settled quietly down into a few red coals among the gray ashes.

Every one was glad to know that Harry's collection of fishes and insects and his scientific tastes had won great approval from a man of Mr. Leicester's fame, and that the boy was to be forwarded in his studies as fast as possible.

Who shall tell the wonder of the town over a phonograph which Mr. Leicester brought with him? In fact, the last of the summer seemed altogether the pleasantest, and papa and Betty had a rare holiday together. Aunt Mary and Aunt Barbara, Serena and Letty, and Seth and Jonathan were all in a whirl from morning until night. Serena thought that the phonograph was an invention of the devil, and after hearing the uncanny little machine repeat that very uncomplimentary remark which she had just made about it, she was surer than before. Serena did not relish being called an invention of the evil one, herself, but it does not do to call names at a phonograph.

"It was lonely when I first came," said Betty, the evening before she was to go away, as she walked to and fro between the box−borders with her father, "but I like everybody better and better,—even poor Aunt Mary," she added in a whisper. "It is lovely to live in Tideshead. Sometimes one gets cross, though, and it is so provoking about the left−out ones, and the won't−play ones, and the ones that want everything done some other way, and then let you do it after all. But I thought at first it was going to be so stupid, and that nobody would like any of the things I did; and here is Mary Picknell, who can paint beautifully, and Harry Foster knows so many of the things you do, and George Max is going to be a sea−captain, and so is Jim Beck, and poor dear Becky can sing like a bird when she feels good−natured. Why, papa, dear, I do believe that there is one person in Tideshead of every kind in the world. And Aunt Barbara is a duchess!"

"I never saw so grand a duchess as your Aunt Barbara in her very best gown," said Betty's papa, "but I haven't seen all the duchesses there are in existence."

"Oh, papa, do let us come and live here together," pleaded the girl, with shining eyes. "Must you go back to England for very long? After I see Mrs. Duncan and the rest of the people in London, I am so afraid I shall be homesick. You can keep on having the cubby−house for a very private study, and I know you could write beautifully on the rainy days, when the elm branches make such a nice noise on the roof. Oh, papa, do let us come some time!"

"Some time," repeated Mr. Leicester, with great assurance. "How would next summer do, for instance? I have been talking with Aunt Barbara about it, and we have a grand plan for the writing of a new book, and having some friends of mine come here too, and for the doing of great works. I shall need a stenographer, and we are"—

"Those other people could live at the Fosters' and Becks'," Betty interrupted, delightedly entering into the plans. She was used to the busy little colonies of students who gathered round her father. "Here comes Mr. Marsh, the teacher of the academy, to see you," and she danced away on the tips of her toes.

"Serena and Letty! I am coming back to stay all next summer, and papa too," she said, when she reached the middle of the kitchen.

"Thank the goodness!" said Serena. "Only don't let your pa bring his talking−machine to save up everybody's foolish speeches. Your aunt said this morning that what I ought to ha' said into it was, ' Miss Leicester, we're all out o' sugar.' But the sugar's goin' to last longer when you're gone. I expect we shall miss you," said the good woman, with great feeling.

Now, everything was to be done next summer: all the things that Betty had forgotten and all that she had planned and could not carry out. It was very sad to go away, when the time came. Poor Aunt Mary fairly cried, and said that she was going to try hard to be better in health, so that she could do more for Betty when she came next year, and she should miss their reading together, sadly; and Aunt Barbara held Betty very close for a minute, and said, "God bless you, my darling," though she had never called her "my darling" before. And Captain Beck came over to say good−by, and wished that they could have gone down by the packet boat, as Betty came, and gave our friend a little brass pocket−compass, which he had carried to sea many years. The minister came to call in the evening, with his girls; and the dear old doctor came in next morning, though be was always in a hurry, and kissed Betty most kindly, and held her hand in both his, while he said that he had lost a good deal of practice, lately,

because she kept the young folks stirring, and he did not know about letting her come back another summer.

But when poor Mrs. Foster came, with Nelly, and thanked Betty for bringing a ray of sunshine into her sad home, it was almost too much to bear; and good−by must be said to Becky, and that was harder than anything, until they tried to talk about what they would do next summer, and how often they must write to each other in the winter months between.

"Why, sometimes I have been afraid that you didn't like me," said Betty, as her friend's tears again began to fall.

"It was only because I didn't like myself," said dear Becky forlornly. It was a most sad and affectionate leave−taking, but there were many things that Becky would like to think over when her new old friend had fairly gone.

"I never felt as if I really belonged to any place, until now. You must always say that I am Betty Leicester of Tideshead," said Betty to her father, after she had looked back in silence from the car window for a long time. Aunt Barbara had come to the station with them, and was taking the long drive home alone, with only Jonathan and the slow horses. Betty's thoughts followed her all along the familiar road. Last night she had put the little red silk shawl back into her trunk with a sorry sigh. Everybody had been so good to her, while she had done so little for any one!

But Aunt Barbara was really dreading to go back to the old house, she knew that she should miss Betty so much.

Papa was reading already; he always read in the cars himself, but he never liked to have Betty do so. He looked up now, and something in his daughter's face made him put down his book. She was no longer only a playmate; her face was very grave and sweet. "I must try not to scurry about the world as I have done," he thought, as he glanced at Betty again and again. "We ought to have a home, both of us; her mother would have known. A girl should grow up in a home, and get a girl's best life out of the cares and pleasures of it."

"[']I am afraid you won't wish to come down to the hospitalities of lodgings this winter,"['] said Mr. Leicester. "Perhaps we had better look for a comfortable house of our own near the Duncans."

"Oh, we're sure to have the best of good times!" said Betty cheerfully, as if there were danger of his being low−spirited. "We must wait about all that, papa, dear, until we are in London."