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THE OLD STONE HOUSE
by ANNE MARCH
(CONSTANCE FENIMORE WOOLSON)

“He that goeth on his way weeping, and beareth forth good seed, shall doubtless come again with joy and bring his sheaves with him.” — *Psalms cxxvi.*

CHAPTER I. THE FIVE COUSINS.

Aunt Faith sat alone on the piazza, and sad thoughts crowded into her heart. It was her birthday,—the first day of June,—and she could look back over more than half a century, with that mournful retrospect which birthdays are apt to bring. Aunt Faith had seen trouble, and had met affliction face to face. When she was still a bride, her husband died suddenly and left her lonely forever; then, one by one, her brothers and sisters had been taken, and she was made sole guardian of their orphan children,—a flock of tender little lambs,—to be nourished and protected from the cold and the rain, the snare and the pitfalls, the tempter and the ravening wolf ever prowling around the fold. Hugh and Sibyl, Tom and Grace, and, last of all, wild little Bessie from the southern hill−country,—this was her charge. Hugh and Sibyl Warrington were the children of an elder brother; Tom and Grace Morris the children of a sister, and Bessie Darrell the only child of Aunt Faith's youngest sister, who had been the pet of all her family. For ten long years Aunt Faith had watched over this little band of orphans, and her heart and hands had been full of care. Children will be children, and the best mother has her hours of trouble over her wayward darlings; how much more an aunt, who, without the delicate maternal instinct as a guide, feels the responsibility to be doubly heavy!

And now, after years of schooling and training, Aunt Faith and her children were all together at home in the old stone house by the lake−shore, to spend a summer of freedom away from books and rules. Hugh was to leave her in the autumn to enter upon business life with a cousin in New York city, and Sibyl had been invited to spend the winter in Washington with a distant relative; Grace was to enter boarding−school in December, and Tom,—well, no one knew exactly what was to be done with Tom, but that something must be done, and that speedily, every one was persuaded. There remained only Bessie, “and she is more wilful than all the rest,” thought Aunt Faith; “she seems to be without a guiding principle; she is like a mariner at sea without a compass, sailing wherever the wind carries her. She is good−hearted and unselfish; but when I have said that I have said all. Careless and almost reckless, gay and almost wild, thoughtless and almost frivolous, she seems to grow out of my control day by day and hour by hour. I have tried hard to influence her. I believe she loves me; but there must be something wrong in my system, for now, at the end of ten years, I begin to fear that she is no better, if indeed, she is as good as she was when she first came to me, a child of six years. I must be greatly to blame; I must have erred in my duty. And yet, I have labored so earnestly!” Another tear stole down Aunt Faith's cheek as she thought of the heavy responsibility resting upon her life. “Shall I be able to answer to my brothers and sisters for all these little souls?” she mused. “There is Hugh also. Can I dare to think he is a true Christian? He is not an acknowledged soldier of the Cross; and, in spite of all the care and instruction that have been lavished upon him, what more can I truthfully say than that he is generous and brave? Can I disguise from myself his faults, his tendencies towards free−thinking, his gay idea of life,—ideas, which, in a great city, will surely lead him astray? No; I cannot! And yet he is the child of many prayers. How well I remember his mother! how earnestly she prayed for the little boy! Have I faithfully filled her place? If she had lived, would not her son have grown into a better man, a better Christian?” Here Aunt Faith again broke down, and buried her face in her hands. Hugh was her darling; and, although he was now twenty years of age, and so tall and strong that he could easily carry his aunt in his arms, to her he was still the curly−haired boy, Fitzhugh Warrington, whom the dying mother gave to Aunt Faith for her own. “There is Sibyl, also,” she thought, as she glanced towards the garden, where her niece sat reading under the arbor; “she is at the other extreme, as unlike her brother as snow is unlike fire. Sibyl never does wrong. I believe I have never had cause to punish her, even in childhood. But she is so cold, so impassive; I can never get down as far as her heart; I am never sure that she loves me.” Aunt Faith sighed heavily. Sibyl's coldness was harder for her to bear than Hugh's waywardness.

Then her thoughts turned towards the younger children. “Grace is too young to cause me much anxiety; but still I seem to have made no more impression upon her religious nature than I could have done upon a running brook; and as for Tom,—” Here Aunt Faith's musings were rudely interrupted by a shout and a howl. Through the hall behind her came a galloping procession. First, “Turk,” the great Newfoundland dog, harnessed to a rattling wagon, in which sat “Grip,” the mongrel, muffled in a shawl, his melancholy countenance encircled with a white ruffled cap; then came Tom, as driver, and behind him “Pete” the terrier, fastened by a long string, and dragging

Miss Estella Camilla Wales, in her little go−cart, very much against his will. “Miss Estella Camilla Wales” was Grace's favorite doll, and no sooner did she behold the danger of her pet, than she sprang from the sitting−room sofa and gave chase. But Tom flourished his whip, old Turk galloped down the garden−walk with the whole train at his heels, and Miss Wales was whirled across the street before Grace could reach the gate.

“Tom, Tom Morris! stop this minute, you wicked boy! You'll break Estella's nose!” she cried, as they pursued the cavalcade toward the grove opposite the house. Here Pete, excited by the uproar, began barking furiously, and running around in a circle with a speed which soon brought Estella to the ground, besides tying up Tom's legs in a complicated manner with the cord which served as a connecting link between the team in front and the team behind. Old Turk, after taking a survey of the scene, gently laid himself down, harness and all, and wagged his ponderous tail; while poor Grip, in his efforts to free himself from the shawl, managed to pull his cap over his eyes, and howled in blind dismay. In the midst of the confusion, Grace rescued Miss Wales from her perilous position, and, finding her classic nose still unbroken, laid her carefully in the crotch of a tree, and prepared for revenge. In his desire to secure the obedience of his dog−team, Tom had fastened them securely, by long cords, to his belt; Pete had already managed to wind his tether tightly around Tom's legs, and Grace incited Turk to rebellion, so that he, too, began to gambol about in his elephantine way, and Tom was soon tangled in another net. “I say, Grace, let the dogs alone, will you!” he said angrily, as he vainly tried to disentangle himself. “Here, Turk! lie down sir! Where in the world is my knife? Pete Trone, you are in for a switching, young man, as soon as these cords are cut!” During this time Grip had been pulling at his night−cap with all the strength of his paws; but as he only succeeded in drawing it farther over his nose, he finally gave up in despair, and, hearing Grace's voice, patiently sat up on his hind legs, with fore−paws in the air, begging to be released. He looked so ridiculous that both Tom and his sister burst into a fit of laughter. Good humor was restored, the tangles cut, and the procession returned homeward, Grip released from his cap, but still wearing his trailing shawl.

When they reached the gate Tom stopped, and calling the dogs in a line, he began an address: “Turk, Grip, and Pete Trone, Esquires, you have all behaved very badly, and deserve condign punishment!” At these words, uttered in a harsh voice, Pete Trone gave a short bark, and Grip instantly sat up on his hind legs, as if to beg for mercy. “None of that, gentlemen, if you please!” continued Tom; “special pleading is not allowed before this jury. Turk, Grip, and Pete Trone, Esquires, you are hereby sentenced to walk around the—garden on the top of the fence. Up, all of you! jump!” said Tom, picking up a switch. Now, indeed, all the culprits knew what was before them. That fence was a well−known penance,—for when they did anything wrong this was their punishment. Old Turk felt the touch of the switch first, and mounted heavily to his perch, his great legs curved inward to keep a footing on the narrow top; then came Pete, and, last of all, Grip, who, being a heavy−bodied cur, crouched himself down as low as he could, and crawled along with extreme caution. The fence was high, with a flat, horizontal top about four inches wide. It ran around three sides of the garden, and often, as Aunt Faith sat at her work in the sitting−room, the melancholy procession of dogs passed the window on this fence−top, followed by Tom with his switch. But Aunt Faith never interfered. She knew that Tom was a kind master, who never ill−treated or tormented any creature. Tom was a large−hearted boy, and, although full of mischief, was never cruel or heartless; he found no pleasure in ill−treating a dog or a cat, nor would he suffer other boys to do so in his presence. Many a battle had he fought with boys of mean and cruel natures, to rescue a bird, or some other helpless creature. “It is only cowards,” he would say, “who like to torment birds, cats, and dogs. They know the poor things can't fight them back again.”

Old Turk,—a giant in size among dogs,—had been in the family for many years; Grip was rescued from the canal, where some cruel boys had thrown him, by Tom himself; and Pete Trone, Esquire, was bought with Tom's first five−dollar bill, and soon proved himself a terrier of manifold accomplishments,—the brightest and most mischievous member of the trio. All the dogs had been carefully trained by Tom. They could fetch and carry, lie down when they were bid, sit up on their hind legs, and do many other tricks. Aunt Faith used to say, that if Tom would only learn his lessons half as well as he made his dogs learn theirs, there would be no more imperfect marks in his weekly reports.

In the meantime, the dogs had turned the corner of the fence, and were slowly advancing towards the house; while Grace, carrying Estella, came up the garden−walk. “Halt!” said Tom, and the three dogs stopped instantly; Turk, not daring to turn his head to see what was the matter, for fear of losing his balance, blinked out of the corner of his eye, as much as to say, “I wouldn't turn round if I could.” “Pete Trone,” said Tom gravely, “it is

evident that this punishment is not severe enough for you; a dog that has time to wag his tail and yawn, cannot be in much anxiety to keep his position on the fence. Pete Trone, Esquire, for the rest of the way you shall wear Grip's cap." So the terrier's black face was encircled with the white frill, and, this accomplished, the march was resumed, and the three dogs disappeared behind the house.

"Aunt Faith," said Grace, as she reached the piazza, "that wicked Tom put Estella Camilla Wales in her wagon, and made Pete draw her all over. It's a wonder her nose wasn't broken and her eyes knocked out. If they had been, that would have been the end of her, like the last ten dolls I have had."

"Not ten, surely, my dear?"

"Yes, Aunt Faith, ten whole dolls! Polly he painted black to make her like the Queen of Sheba; he made Babes in the Woods of Beauty and Jane, and it rained on them all night; Isabella and Arabella I found on the clothes−line all broken to pieces, and he said they were only dancing on a tight rope; he sent Rose and Lily,—the paper−dolls, you know,—up in the air tied to the tail of his kite; the rag−baby he took for a scarecrow over his garden; and surely, Aunt Faith, you have not forgotten how he made Jeff Davis on the apple−tree, out of my dear china Josephine, or how he blew up Julia Rubber with his cannon last Fourth of July, when I lent her to him for the Goddess of Liberty?"

"Well, Gem, I did not realize that you had suffered so much. Take good care of Estella, and perhaps Santa Claus will make up your losses."

Grace, or Gem, as she was called from the three initials of her names, Grace Evans Morris,—G. E. M.,—ran off into the house to look up Estella, leaving Aunt Faith once more alone.

On a rustic seat in the arbor sat Sibyl Warrington reading. Her golden hair was coiled in close braids around her well−shaped head, her firm erect figure was arrayed in a simple dress of silver gray, and everything about her, from the neat little collar to the trim boot, pleased the eye unconsciously without attracting the attention. Sibyl Warrington knew what was becoming to her peculiar style of beauty, and nothing could induce her to depart from her inflexible rules. Fashion might decree a tower of frizzed curls, and Sibyl would calmly watch the elaborate structure raised on the heads of all her friends, but her own locks, in the meanwhile, remained plainly folded back from her white forehead with quaker−like smoothness. Fashion might turn her attention to the back of the head, and forthwith waterfalls and chignons would appear at her behest, but Sibyl, while congratulating her friends upon the wonders they achieved, would still wind her thick golden braids in a classical coil, so that her head in profile brought up to the beholder's mind a vision of an antique statue. Rare was her taste; no clashing colors or absurd puffs and furbelows were ever allowed to disfigure her graceful form, and thus her appearance always charmed the artistic eye, although many of her schoolmates called her "odd" and "quakerish." Sibyl had already obtained her little triumphs. An artist of world−wide fame had asked permission to paint her head in profile, as a study, and whenever she appeared at a party the strangers present were sure to inquire who she was, and follow her movements with admiring glances, although there were many eyes equally bright, and many forms equally graceful in the gay circle of Westerton society. But in spite of her beauty, Sibyl was not a general favorite; she had no intimate friends among her girl companions, and she never tried to draw around her a circle of admirers. She had no ambition to be "popular," as it is called, and she did not accept all the invitations that came to her as most young girls do; for, as she said, "occasionally it is better to be missed." Thus, in a small way, Miss Warrington was something of a diplomatist, and it was evident to Aunt Faith that her niece looked beyond her present sphere, and cherished a hidden ambition to shine in the highest circles of the queen cities of America,—Boston, New York, and Washington. With this inward aim, Sibyl Warrington held herself somewhat aloof from the young gentlemen of Westerton; there were, however, two whom she seemed to favor in her gentle way, and Aunt Faith watched with some anxiety the progress of events. Graham Marr was a young collegian, the only child of a widowed mother who lived in Westerton during the summer months. He had a certain kind of fragile beauty, but his listless manner and drawling voice rendered him disagreeable to Aunt Faith, who preferred manly strength and vivacity even though accompanied by a shade of bluntness. But Sibyl always received Graham Marr with one of her bright smiles, and she would listen to his poetry hour after hour; for Graham wrote verses, and liked nothing better than reclining in an easy chair and reading them aloud.

"What Sibyl can see in Gra−a−m'ma, I cannot imagine," Bessie would sometimes say; "he is a lazy white−headed egotist; a good judge of lace and ribbons, but mortally afraid of a dog, and as to powder, the very sight of a gun makes him faint."

But Aunt Faith had heard of the fortune which would come to Graham Marr at the death of an uncle, and she could not but fear that Sibyl had heard of it also. The grandfather, displeased with his sons, had left a mill tying up his estate for the grandchildren, who were not to receive it until all of the first generation were dead. Only one son now remained, an infirm old man of seventy, and at his death the hoarded treasure would be divided among the heirs, two girls living in North Carolina, and Graham Marr, who was just twenty−one. Sibyl was eighteen, and self−possessed beyond her years; could it be that she really found anything to like in Graham Marr? Aunt Faith could not tell. As she sat on the piazza, looking down into the garden, the gate opened and a young man entered,—the Rev. John Leslie, a clergyman who had recently come to Westerton to take charge of a new church in the suburbs, a struggling little missionary chapel, where it required a large faith to see light ahead in the daily toil and slow results. Mr. Leslie caught the shimmer of Sibyl's gray dress under the arbor, and turning off to the right through a box−bordered path, he made his way to her side and seated himself on the bench. Aunt Faith could not hear their conversation, for the old−fashioned garden was large and wide, but now and then she caught the tones of the young man's earnest voice, although Sibyl's replies were inaudible, for she possessed that excellent thing in woman, a clear, low voice.

John Leslie was poor. He had only his salary, and that was but scanty. Energetic and enthusiastic, he loved his work, and his whole soul was in it. He was no plodding laborer, who had taken the field because it happened to be nearest to him; he was no loiterer, who had entered the field because he thought it would give him a larger chance for idleness than the close−drawn ranks of business life. He had felt the inward call which is given to but few, and he obeyed it instantly. To him the world was literally a harvest field, and he, one of the hard working laborers; he had no worldly ambition; he looked upon life with the eyes or a true Christian; his little chapel was as much to him as a large city church, influential and wealthy, could have been, as he loved his small and somewhat uninteresting congregation with his whole heart. Older men called him an enthusiast. Would that the world held more enthusiasts like him; men who have forsaken all to follow Him, men to whom the whole world and its riches are as nothing compared to the souls waiting to hear the tidings of salvation. For even in Christian America, there are in all our streets souls who have not heard the tidings. It is their own fault, do you say? They can come to our churches at any time. Nay, my friend; we must go out into the highways and hedges and force them to come in with kindly sympathy and brotherly aid.

John Leslie was the other friend whom Sibyl Warrington had selected from the large circle of Westerton society. Did she really like him? Aunt Faith could not decide this either, but she noticed the increasing interest in the young clergyman's manner, as he came and went to and from the old stone house. Free from guile as Nathanael of old, John Leslie felt an increasing attachment to the beautiful Miss Warrington, who came occasionally to his little church, and seemed, whenever he spoke on the subject, so truly interested in the work of his life; he talked with her about his Sunday School, and her suggestions had been of service to him; for Sibyl possessed a talent for organization, and a ready tact quite unusual for one so young. And in this work she was no hypocrite; she enjoyed her conversations with Mr. Leslie, and looked forward to his visits with real pleasure. What wonder that he thought her a true child of God, an earnest Christian, a fellow−laborer in the vineyard? Sometimes, when Aunt Faith was present and heard Mr. Leslie's conversation, her old heart glowed within her breast, and she felt herself carried back to the ancient days when the young converts went about the world with ardent enthusiasm, preaching the new gospel to every creature in spite of perils by land and sea, perils of torture, and perils of death itself. Then she would look at Sibyl. Sometimes the girl's cheek glowed with an answering enthusiasm, and for the time being, Aunt Faith would think that her heart was touched, and her soul uplifted by the earnest love of God which shone out from John Leslie's words. But the next day, perhaps, a letter from her cousin in Washington would come, and Sibyl's face would light up over the descriptions of some great ball, and her thoughts turn towards the approaching winter with double interest.

A mist came with the twilight, and a slight chill in the air soon brought Sibyl to the shelter of the piazza; she never trifled with her health, her good looks were of serious importance to her, and she never hazarded them for the sake of such sentiment as sitting in an arbor when the dew was falling, or loitering in the moonlight when the air was chilly.

“Good−evening, Mrs. Sheldon,” said Mr. Leslie as they approached, holding out his hand in cordial greeting; “we have come up to the shelter of your pleasant piazza to finish our conversation in safety.”

“I hope there was no danger,” replied Aunt Faith with a smile; “a hot argument, for instance.”

“Oh, no; on the contrary the danger, if there was any, came from the opposite direction. I was afraid the dew might dampen Miss Warrington's dress.”

“And her enthusiasm also,” said Aunt Faith, with a shade of merriment in her pleasant voice.

“Certainly not her enthusiasm,” replied the young clergyman gravely; “I think it would take more than dew−drops to dampen such enthusiasm as hers.” As he spoke, his eyes were turned full towards Sibyl's face, but he met no answering glance; Sibyl was occupied in spreading out the folds of her skirt to counteract any possible injury from the dampness. “He does not doubt her sincerity in the least,” thought Aunt Faith; “perhaps, after all, his influence will be strong enough to cure her one fault, the one blemish of her character, the tendency towards worldliness which I have noticed in her since early childhood.”

“We were speaking of Margaret Brown, Mrs. Sheldon,” said Mr. Leslie when they were all seated on the piazza; “that girl has made a brave battle with fate, and I have been trying to help her. Miss Warrington has also been much interested in her; no doubt she has told you Margaret's history?”

“No,” replied Aunt Faith, “I have heard nothing of her.” Sibyl colored, and Mr. Leslie looked surprised; a slight shade rested on his frank face a moment, but soon vanished in the interest of the story. “Margaret Brown is a poor working girl about twenty years of age, Mrs. Sheldon; an orphan with a younger sister and two younger brothers to support, and nothing but her two busy hands to depend upon. She is a sewing−girl and a skilful workwoman, so that by incessant labor over her machine, day after day, she is able to keep her little family together, and, more than all, to send them to school. She realizes the disadvantages of her own ignorance, and she feels a noble ambition to educate those orphan children. Her faith is great; it is like the faith of the primitive Christians who lived so near the times of the Lord Jesus, that, in their prayers, they asked for what they needed with childish confidence. It was her great faith which first drew me towards her; she was a regular attendant at the chapel service, and in the course of my visits, I went to see her in the little home she has made in the third story of a lodging house at South End. It was Saturday, and I saw the three children, already showing evidences of improved education in their words and looks, while, busily sewing on her machine, sat the sister−mother, pale and careworn, but happy in the success of her plan. It seemed to me a great load for one pair of shoulders, and I said so. The children had gone into another room, and as I spoke, rashly perhaps, the overworked girl burst into tears. 'Oh, sir,' she said, 'it is the wish of my life to give them a good schooling, and I don't mind the work. But sometimes it is *so* hard! If it was not for the prayers, I could not get through another day.'

“'Your prayers are a comfort to you,' I asked.

“'They are more than that, sir,' she replied earnestly; 'they are life itself. Every morning I kneel down and just put the whole day into the Lord's hands, asking Him to give us bread, and help us all,—me in my work and the children in their lessons. And while I'm asking, some way a kind of peace comes over me, and although I may know there is not a crumb in the closet, or a cent in my purse, I always get up with a light heart. The Bible is true, indeed, sir; I can't read it myself, but my little sister, she reads to me evenings. It says, 'the Lord will provide.' He does; He has. So far, me and mine have not suffered, although I can never see my way a week ahead.'“

“Mr. Leslie,” said Aunt Faith, “I must try and help Margaret; please give me her address.”

“Miss Warrington has it; I think she has already been there,” replied Mr. Leslie. At this moment a form approached the house through the dusk of evening, a step sounded up the walk, and Graham Marr appeared. “Ah, good evening, ladies!” he said, in his languid voice. “Mr. Leslie, I believe! Your servant, sir. Miss Warrington, I have brought that new poem from the French; I am sure you will like it.”

“Thank you,” said Sibyl, smiling. “Pray be seated, Mr. Marr.”

But the enthusiasm died away, the conversation languished, and Mr. Leslie soon rose to take leave. Then Sibyl stepped forward, and accompanied him part way down the garden−walk, pausing for a few moments earnest conversation before he said “good night.”

“Now what made her do that?” thought Aunt Faith, as she tried to keep up a conversation with the languid Mr. Marr; “does she like Mr. Leslie better than she is willing to acknowledge?”

But Sibyl returned to her place on the piazza, and soon entered into an animated discussion of the last volume of poems, in which Aunt Faith's old−fashioned ideas found little to interest them.

“Well, young people,” she said pleasantly, after half an hour of patient listening, “I *am* afraid I do not appreciate modern poetry. I am behind the times, I suppose; but I really like to understand what a poet means, and, now−a−days, that is almost impossible.”

“The mystery of poetry is its highest charm,” said Graham Marr; “true poetry is always unintelligible.”

“Then I fear I am not poetical, Mr. Marr. But I am, as you see, frank enough to acknowledge my deficiencies, and, if you will excuse me, I will go into the sitting−room and finish some work that lies in my basket.”

Want of courtesy was not one of Graham's faults; indeed, he prided himself upon his polished manners; so he accompanied Aunt Faith within doors, placed an arm−chair by the table, drew up a footstool for her comfort, and even lingered a moment to admire the shaded worsteds in her basket, before he returned to the piazza and Sibyl. Once back in the moonlight, however, the poetical conversation soon began again, and the murmur of the two voices came faintly to Aunt Faith's ear as she sat by the table, while the light breeze brought up from the garden the fragrance of the flowers, always strongest after nightfall.

Back of the old stone house on the north side, the ground sloped down towards the lake; first grassy terrace and bank, then a large vegetable and fruit garden, terminating in a pasture and grove. The stable and carriage−house stood off to the left, and the place was somewhat carelessly kept, more like a farm than a residence; but an air of cosy comfort pervaded the whole, and the grounds seemed to be as full of chickens and ducks, cats and dogs, doves and sparrows, horses and cows, as the house was full of canary and mocking−birds, gold−fish, kittens, and plants, besides a large aquarium. Up from the back pasture, at this moment, two shadowy forms were stealing. As they drew nearer, sharp eyes might have discovered that they were two persons on horseback coming up from the road which ran east and west across the foot of the pasture. At the garden−fence they stopped, the gentleman dismounted and lifted the lady to the ground. It was Bessie Darrell and her cousin Hugh Warrington.

“Hush, Hugh; don't make me laugh so! we shall be discovered,” she said, as she gathered up her long skirt.

“But it is such a good joke!” said Hugh, mounting his horse again. “Think of the fun we've had! And you ride like a little witch.”

“We can go again to−morrow night, can't we, Hugh?”

“I suppose so; if you can get away unobserved.”

“Of course I can. Oh, it is such fun! I like it better than anything I ever did, Hugh; and you are a dear good fellow to teach me.”

“Teach you!” exclaimed Hugh, with a laugh; “that's good! Why, you took to it as a duck takes to water. What a glorious gallop we have had! By the way, Bessie, Gideon Fish would look well on horseback!”

“Or Graham Marr,” said Bessie laughing. “I do believe he is on the piazza with Sibyl this very moment.”

“If he is, I propose we extinguish him. Out, little candle,” said Hugh, striking a dramatic attitude.

“You won't be gone long, Hugh?”

“No; the man will be waiting at the road.”

“Then I will run upstairs, lock up my riding skirt, and come down and wait for you.”

Bessie went through the garden and up to her room, while Hugh, riding one horse and leading the other, crossed the pasture and the grove, and gave them to a man who was waiting near the fence: he led them down the narrow road towards the west, for the old stone house was in the east suburb of Westerton, more than two miles from the business portion of the town.

Bessie Darrell was sixteen,—a tall, slender maiden, with irregular features, brown complexion, dark eyes, and a quantity of dark, curling hair which defied all restraint, whether of comb, net, or ribbon. Her eyes were bright and her expression merry, but beyond this there was little beauty in her face. A quick student, Bessie always stood at the head of her classes for scholarship, and at the foot as regards demeanor. Twice had she been expelled for daring escapades in defiance of rule, and Aunt Faith's heart had ached with anxiety, when the truant returned home in disgrace. But her merry vivacity had made home so pleasant, that the seasons of penance were, as Tom said, “the jolliest of the year,” and Gem openly hoped that Bessie would soon be expelled again. Poor Aunt Faith sometimes thought there must be a tinge of gypsy blood in Bessie's ancestors on the Darrell side of the house, for in no other way could she account for her niece's taste for wild rambles and adventure. “Bessie, my child,” she said one evening during the previous year, when she had happened to discover her wayward niece returning from a solitary drive with Sultan, one of the carriage horses, in Hugh's high buggy, “if you are fond of driving, you shall go when you please. I will hire a low basket phaeton for your especial use, and I shall be glad to go with you when you wish.”

“Oh, Auntie! if I can go when I please, there is no fun in it,” said Bessie, laughing.

“Then I am to conclude, my dear, that the fun, as you call it, consists in deceiving me,” said Aunt Faith, gravely.

“Oh no, Auntie; not you especially, but all the world, you know. 'It's against the rule!' That sentence has always been my greatest temptation. I do so long to try all those forbidden things; if I had been Eve, and if the forbidden fruit had been a delicious peach instead of a commonplace apple, I should certainly have taken it. Now there was Miss Sykes at Corry Institute; she was always saying, 'Young ladies, it is against the rule to go into the garret. Three bad marks to any one who even opens the door.' That was enough for me; I slipped off my shoes and climbed up the stairs, while a crowd of girls stood in the hall to see what happened. I opened the door and went in, and after a moment I stepped right through the lath and plastering and hurt myself severely. Of course I got the bad marks, and a big bill for lath and plastering in addition to my lame leg, and the whole thing was Miss Sykes' fault.”

“You deliberately disobeyed her rule, Bessie.”

“Why have such a goose of a rule, then? Why didn't she say right out that we must not go into the garret because there was no flooring there? Then we would have understood the whole thing. For my part, I don't believe in piling temptation in people's way like that.”

“My dear child, we cannot always know. We must all sometimes be content to give up our wills to the guidance of a Wiser Hand,—be content simply to *trust*.”

“I don't think that time will ever come to me, Aunt Faith; Hugh says the human mind is sufficient for itself.”

Aunt Faith sighed, and laid her hand gently on the young girl's dark curls. “My child,” she said in a low voice, “I cannot bring myself to pray that you may learn the lesson of trust, for it is a very hard one. But I fear it will come to you, as, sooner or later, it comes to almost all of us.”

“Dear Aunt Faith,” said the impulsive Bessie, throwing her arms around her aunt's neck, “of all your children, not one loves you more truly than I do!”

“I believe you do, my child,” said Aunt Faith, returning the caress.

Arrayed in her ordinary dress, Bessie Darrell went down the back stairs and seated herself on the porch steps. In a few moments Hugh joined her. “Do you feel tired?” he asked.

“Tired! No, indeed. Horseback riding never tired me. You will take me again to−morrow night?”

“I think it is you that takes me, Brownie. Is Marr there?”

“Yes; quoting poetry like everything. I heard him out of the front−hall window; something about 'a rosy cloud,' I believe.”

“Are they sitting directly under the hall window?” asked Hugh.

“Yes; in two arm−chairs, side by side.”

“Let us go up and have a look at them,” said Hugh. So up they stole, and took their places at the upper window.

The old stone house was two stories high, with wings on each side, which projected out beyond the main building; the space enclosed by stone walls on three sides was floored with stone, and lofty stone pillars ran up to the overhanging room. There was no intersection at the second story, so that the view of the piazza from the upper windows was uninterrupted. It was a pleasant piazza, fronting towards the south, overlooking the old−fashioned garden with its little box−bordered paths, and entirely cut off from the lake winds, which are apt to have an easterly sharpness in them. On this piazza sat Sibyl and Graham Marr, and the two listeners above caught fragments of their poetical conversation. “I say, Bessie, do you know what a 'lambent waif' is?” whispered Hugh. “What a calf that Marr is! How can Sibyl listen to him? He has not common sense.”

“I believe he is to have uncommon cents, sometime,” said Bessie, punning atrociously. “However, if my knowledge of Sibyl is worth anything, I should say she really prefers Mr. Leslie.”

“What, the minister!” exclaimed Hugh; “I am surprised. Not that I object at all, but ministers' wives sometimes have a hard life.”

“Gideon Fish says, that ministers' wives ought to be the happiest women on earth, because their husbands are always at home, brightening the domestic shrine with their presence,” quoted Bessie, with a dramatic tone.

“That is a fish−story; I know it by the sound. I say, Bessie, wouldn't it be fine fun to throw the great red blanket down on their heads in the middle of the next verse?”

As Bessie highly approved of this suggestion, the two conspirators crept away softly to find their blanket. But

it was safely packed away in the bottom of a chest, and some search was necessary to bring it to the surface; in the midst of which, Tom and Gem appeared on the scene, curious to know what was going on.

"Run away, children, and shut the door after you!" said Hugh, coming up from the chest with a red face.

"No, Mr. Fitz!" replied Tom, deliberately seating himself on a box; "not one step do I go until I know what you're up to—some fun, I know. Come, Bessie; tell us, that's a good fellow."

"We shall have to tell them, Hugh," said Bessie, "or they might spoil the whole thing." So the plan was hastily explained.

"Come along, Gem," said Tom, in great glee.

"All right, Bessie, we won't spoil your fun."

The two children ran off down the back stairs and out upon the terrace behind the house. "Don't you say one word, Gem Morris," said Tom in an excited whisper, "but I'm going to be in this game, if I know myself. The blanket's very well, but the dogs are better, and Graham Marr is terribly afraid of 'em. I never liked him since he called me 'my lad,' and this will be a good chance to pay him off." So saying, Tom started towards the carriage−house, closely followed by Gem; for, as Hugh said, they always hunted in couples, and whether they played or quarrelled, they were always together.

Opening a side door of the carriage−house, Tom called out Pete and Grip; Turk had a kennel of his own, and sleepily obeyed his master's summons.

"Now Gem," said Tom, "I shall go round to the big barberry−bush, and when the blanket comes down I shall send the dogs at it. They won't hurt anybody,—they never do,—but they'll make believe to be awful savage, and Grip will bark like mad. You'd better slip round into the parlor and look through the blinds; it's dark there." Gem obeyed softly, and Tom disappeared around the corner of the house, followed by the dogs, who understood from their master's low order, that a secret reconnaissance was to be made, and moved stealthily behind him single file, big Turk first, then Pete Trone, Esq., and last of all plebeian Grip, his tail fairly sweeping the ground in the excess of his caution.

On the piazza all was peaceful and romantic. No thought of coming danger clouded the poet's fancies, as he repeated a stanza composed the previous evening by the light of the moon. "I never write by gas−light, Miss Warrington," he said, "but I keep pencil and paper at hand to transcribe the poetical thoughts that come to me in the moonlight. Here is a verse that floated into my mind when the moon was at its highest splendor last night:—

'Shine out, Oh moon! in the wide sky,—
The creamy cloud,—the dreamy light—
My heart is seething in the night.
Shine out, Oh moon! and let me die.'"

"I think we'd better let him, don't you?" whispered Hugh to Bessie at the upper window. She assented, and down went the great blanket on the heads of the two below, enveloping them in sudden darkness. At the same instant the three dogs plunged forward and pawed at the dark mass; Grip barking furiously, and Pete nosing underneath as if he was in search of a rat−hole. The noise brought Aunt Faith to the door.

"What is it?" she said in alarm, gazing at the struggling blanket with her near−sighted eyes.

"Nothing, Aunt Faith, but some of the children's nonsense," answered Sibyl, extricating herself, and stepping out from the stifling covering. "Mr. Marr, I hope you are not alarmed or hurt."

"Not in the least,—oh!—oh!—" gasped poor Graham, crawling out of the blanket. "Those dogs!—oh!—get out!—get down, sir!"

"They will not hurt you," said Sibyl, coming to the rescue. "Grip, be quiet! Pete get down, sir! You are not going, Mr. Marr?"

"I think,—yes,—I think I will," said the discomfited poet; "it is getting late. I was on the point of making my adieu when,—when the children played their little joke. Ha!—ha!—really, a very good joke. Quite amusing! Good−evening, ladies! Really,—quite amusing!"

When Graham had gone, Aunt Faith stepped out on the piazza. "Tom," she said, in a severe tone, "I am ashamed of you! Such pranks are only fit for a child!" But no answer came from the silent garden.

"Grace, you are there somewhere! come out and show yourself," said Aunt Faith. But still no reply. Then she called the dogs, but they, too, had mysteriously disappeared.

"Sibyl," she said, going back into the sitting room, "I am very sorry the children were so rude. I am afraid Mr.

Marr will feel seriously offended."

"Oh, as to that, Aunt Faith, it is a matter of small consequence what he feels. But I see Pete has torn off part of the trimming of my skirt; I will mend it before I go to bed. Good−night,—" and Sibyl kissed her aunt in her gentle way, and went off to her room in the wing.

"I don't believe she cares for the calf after all," whispered Hugh to Bessie, as, after watching this scene from the top of the stairs, they separated for the night.

A few minutes later, when Aunt Faith went up to her room, all her children seemed to be unusually sound asleep; the lights were all out, and Tom's snores came through his half−opened door with astonishing regularity.

"It's of no use, my dears," called out Aunt Faith, standing at the door of her room; "I know you are all wide awake, and know you were all in that blanket−and−dog affair." A burst of stifled laughter greeted this announcement, and, when Aunt Faith got safely in her own room and closed the door, she laughed too.

CHAPTER II. LIFE AT THE OLD STONE HOUSE.

“Come, come, children,” said Aunt Faith, as she went down the stairs, “do not waste so much time in talking or you will be late for prayers.”

The talking consisted of a dialogue between Tom and Gem, carried on through the half−closed door of their respective rooms during the morning toilet, and the subject, as usual, was Pete Trone, Esq. “Who did Pete vote for?” began Gem.

“Pete voted the Republican ticket, like a sensible dog!” replied Tom, in a high key.

“He did not! I watched him at the polls. He is an out−and−out Democrat!” returned Gem, at the top of her voice.

“No such thing!” shouted back her brother; “he attended a rat−ification meeting last night in the cellar, and made a speech from the text, '*aut rates aut bones*.'“

“Oh, if you're going to quote Latin, I give up,” said Gem, “and besides, there's the bell.”

In a few moments the family assembled in the sitting−room,—Tom, Gem, Sibyl, and after some delay, Bessie; Hugh did not appear, and Aunt Faith, with an inward sigh, opened her Bible and read a chapter from the New Testament. Then they all met in prayer, and the mother−aunt's heart went up in earnest petition for help during the day, and a thanksgiving for the peaceful rest of the previous night; as she rose from her knee—, she kissed each one of her children with a fervent blessing, and the day was begun.

The sitting−room was large and sunny and the old−fashioned windows were set low down in the thick stone walls, so that a recess was formed in which a cushioned seat was fitted; Gem's favorite resort, with Estella Camilla Wales. A cabinet organ, a harp, and a violin, betrayed the musical tastes of the family, and an easel, with a picture in water−colors, as well as the books and papers on the table showed their varied occupations. Aunt Faith believed that music was a safeguard against danger. The love of harmony kept young people together around a piano, and filled their evenings with enjoyment; it was always a resource, and opened a field of interest and employment which increased the store of life's innocent pleasures. In addition to this negative virtue, Aunt Faith believed in the duty of taking part in the worship of the sanctuary; she believed that every voice, unless absolutely disqualified, should join in the praises of the great Creator, and some of her happiest moments, were those when her children gathered around the cabinet organ to sing the hymns she had taught them, or took their part in the congregational worship of song.

Sibyl played correctly both upon the piano and organ; Grace was already an apt scholar; Hugh sang, when in the mood, with a wonderful expression in his rich baritone; and Bessie, although negligent in practising, sometimes brought a world of melody out of her harp, charming all ears with her wild improvisations.

Tom owned the violin. The cousins united in the declaration that he had no musical ability, but Aunt Faith stood by him, and even encouraged his spasmodic attempts to find the tune. His favorite air was “Nelly Bly.” On this he would progress satisfactorily until he came to “Hi,” when he was sure to waver. “Hi,” E flat; “Hi,” E natural; “Hi,” F natural; and finally, when all within hearing were driven nearly to frenzy, out would come the missing F sharp, and the tune go on triumphantly to its close.

The breakfast table at the old stone house was always a pleasant scene; Aunt Faith presided behind the coffee urn, and before the meal was over, the postman came with letters and papers, which caused another half hour of pleasant loitering. This morning Sibyl had her usual heap,—letters from various schoolmates, and one from Mrs. Leighton, her relative in Washington, which seemed to be full of interest. Aunt Faith also had several letters, and Bridget handed one to Bessie,—a large, yellow envelope, whose ill−formed address attracted general curiosity. “I say, Bess, who's your friend?” said Tom.

“Never mind,” answered his cousin, with flushing cheeks, as she put the unopened letter into her pocket and went on hastily with her breakfast. Hugh, who had entered a moment before, glanced at Bessie, and then diverted the attention by a word−assault upon his sister. “What a mass of writing, Sibyl,” he began, stretching out his hand; “I'll help you to read it. That rose−colored sheet will do; the one crossed over four times.” But Sibyl quietly secured her correspondence, and went on with her reading. “Does she tell you what she wore at the last ball, dear? Was it blue, with rose ruffles, or pink with green puffles,” continued Hugh. Sibyl smiled; her temper was never

disturbed by her brother's banter. “If you could see Louisa May, you would be sure to admire her, Hugh, ruffles and all,” she said, calmly.

“Undoubtedly; but as I cannot see her, ruffles and all, give me the nearest thing to it, a sight of that page,—

'Tis but a little criss−cross sheet,
But oh,—how fondly dear!
'Twill cheer my breakfast while I eat,
And keep the coffee clear,”

chanted Hugh, in a melo−dramatic tone.

“Aunt Faith,” said Sibyl, as she rose to leave the table, “Mrs. Leighton has invited me to go to Saratoga next month, to stay four weeks.”

“Saratoga!” exclaimed Bessie. “Well, you are always lucky, Sibyl. But why don't you do something instead of standing there so quietly?”

“What would you have me do?” said Sibyl, smiling.

“Why, dance,—sing,—hurrah,—anything to give vent to your excitement.”

“But I am not excited, Bessie,” answered Sibyl, quietly.

“I don't believe you'd be excited if the house was on fire,” said Tom, looking up from his plate.

“No, probably not,” said Aunt Faith; “and for that reason, Sibyl would be of more use in such an emergency than all the rest of you put together. Does Mrs. Leighton fix any time for the journey, dear?”

“Yes, aunt; about the fifteenth of July.”

“Would you like to go?” continued Aunt Faith, somewhat anxiously.

“Of course she would!” exclaimed Bessie. “Four weeks at Saratoga. Think of it!”

“Of course she would!” said Hugh. “Four weeks of puffs and ruffles!”

“Of course she would!” said Gem. “Four weeks of dancing!”

“Of course she would!” said Tom. “Ice cream every day!”

“I believe I will not decide immediately,” said Sibyl, slowly; “I will think over the matter before I write.” As her niece left the room, Aunt Faith's eyes followed her with a perplexed expression, but recalling her thoughts, she rang the bell, and then set about her daily task of washing the delicate breakfast−cups, and polishing the old−fashioned silver until it reflected her own face back again.

In the garret over the old stone house, a small room had been finished off as a “studio” for Bessie. It was but a rough little den with board walls and ceiling, but two south windows let in a flood of light, and the boards were covered with pictures in all stages of completion,—fragments of landscape, and portraits of all the members of the family circle, more or less caricatured according to Bessie's mood when she executed them. A strong patent−lock secured the door of this treasure−house, and seldom was any one admitted save Hugh. In vain had Tom bored holes in the walls, in vain had Gem pleaded pathetically through the key−hole, Bessie was inexorable and the door was closed. Chalked upon the outside of this fortress were some of Tom's sarcastic comments intended as a revenge for his exclusion,—

“Turn, stranger, turn, and from this sanctum rush,—
The fires of genius burn when Bessie wields the brush.”

And this: “She won't let me in! *Hinc illae lachrymae*!” This legend was accompanied by a chalk picture of himself shedding large tear−drops into a tub.

This morning, however, the studio was not in a state of siege, as Tom and Gem were both engaged in a work of great importance in the garden. Seated near one of the windows was Bessie, her eyes full of tears, and her face the image of despair. A low knock at the door interrupted her reverie. “Is it you, Hugh?” she said, rising.

“Yes,” replied her cousin, and in a minute he was admitted. “What is the matter, Bessie?” he said kindly. “I saw at breakfast that something was wrong. You will tell me, won't you?”

Bessie hesitated, and a flush rose in her dark face. “I suppose I must!” she answered, after a pause; “I always tell you everything Hugh, and I want your advice; but I don't know what you will think of me after you have read this letter.”

“Never mind; give it to me, Brownie. You have always been my dear, little cousin, and it will take more than a letter to separate us,” said Hugh, opening the envelope. The letter was as follows; “Miss B. Daril: I don't want to trouble you, but I must have that money. Bills is coming in every day. It belongs to me, as you know yourself,

Miss, very well, and I've a right to every cent. If it don't come soon I shall have to send a lawyer for it, which I hate to do, Miss; and am yours respectful, J. Evins."

"What can this mean, Bessie?" asked Hugh, in astonishment.

"It means, last winter, at Featherton Hall, Hugh, I got into a wild set of girls there, and one of our amusements was sending out for suppers late in the evening; the servants would do anything for money, and they were always willing to go over to Evins, and get what we wanted for a small bribe. The bill was allowed to run on in my name, for, although it was understood that all the dormitory girls should share in the expense, it was more convenient to order in one name. Then the end of the term came, and there was so much confusion and hurry, that most of the girls forgot all about the bill, and went home without paying anything towards the suppers. I fully intended to give my share to Evins before I left, but the amount was so large I could not come near it," concluded Bessie, with two tears rolling down her cheeks.

"You have not told Aunt Faith, then," asked Hugh.

"No; I do not want to tell her, for it would make her feel badly, and besides, she would pay it herself, and I don't want her to do that, for she has already taken ever so much of her own little income to buy me new summer dresses in place of those I have torn and stained."

"How much do you owe this man?" said Hugh gravely.

"Two hundred and fifty dollars," said Bessie desperately.

"How could you contrive to run up such a bill in one winter?" exclaimed Hugh in astonishment.

"Why, you see there were a good many girls in the dormitory, and we always had plum−cake, eclairs, and French candy; and then I have no doubt but that the servants took their share," said Bessie, with a half sob.

"And why was your name selected for the bills?"

"I don't know, unless because I was,—the,—the,—"

"The ringleader?" suggested Hugh.

"I am afraid so," murmured Bessie, hiding her face.

"Have you got this man's bill?" said Hugh, after a pause.

"Ah! yes. He sent it to me weeks ago."

"Let me have it, please."

"Oh, Hugh! what are you going to do with it?"

"Pay it, of course."

"Pay it! How can you?"

"So long as it is paid, what do you care about it, Brownie?"

"But I do care, Hugh; and I shall not give it to you unless you tell me."

"Well then, listen, Miss Obstinate. You may not know that Sibyl and I have some money coming to us this month. We shall be quite rich. I shouldn't wonder if there were five hundred dollars in all. Quite a fortune, you see! And I shall take mine to pay the debts of my foolish little cousin, who must be a real sugar−dolly to have eaten so much candy," said Hugh, laughing.

"Oh, Hugh! you splendid, generous fellow," said Bessie, with the tears still shining in her eyes; "but I shall not let you do it."

"Yes you will, Bessie; you would do the same for me."

"That is true enough; but I hate to take your money, Hugh."

"You don't take it; 'J. Evins' takes it," said Hugh merrily. "Come, give me the bill, and say no more about it, or we shall quarrel." So it was settled, and there were two light hearts in the studio that bright June morning.

While Aunt Faith was busy with her house−keeping duties, she heard Sibyl's touch on the piano,—giving full value to every note, and exact time to every measure. Sibyl was an accurate musician, and several hours of each day were invariably devoted to piano practice. She never turned over a pile of sheet−music, trying now a little of this, and now a little of that; but, having made her selections, she played the piece entirely through, note for note, exactly as it was written. Most people liked to hear Miss Warrington play, for the performance was very complete. She sat gracefully at the piano, showed no nervous anxiety, interpreted the notes conscientiously, and finished the music to the very last octave. But Aunt Faith detected a want of expression in this studied mechanism; it seemed to her that Sibyl did not, in her heart, feel the spirit of the music which her fingers played. Coming in from the kitchen, this morning, after setting in motion the household wheels for the day, she again

noticed this automatic execution in the strains of Mendelssohn's “Spring−Song,” and it grated on her ear as she tended the hanging baskets on the piazza. Continuing her round from her plants to her birds and gold−fish, Aunt Faith kept listening to the monotonous sound of the piano. “I wonder if Sibyl has a heart?” she thought; “sometimes I am tempted to think she has none. How can she practise so steadily when she has so much to decide? This visit to Saratoga will mean more than it looks. The decision will be between religion and the world. If she deliberately makes up her mind to go, it will show me that Mr. Leslie's influence has not been strong enough to subdue her worldliness and secret ambition. Poor child! she is like her mother. And yet, Mabel Fitzhugh became an earnest Christian before she died. God grant that her daughter may grow in grace also. Hugh, now, is all Warrington; he is like his father, with all his father's faults and all his father's generosity. Dear James! my favorite brother!” and Aunt Faith wiped away a tear, as she crossed the hall and entered the parlor where Sibyl was practising.

The parlor in the old stone house was the counterpart of the sitting−room, large and square, with two north and two south windows,—for the main body of the house contained only the length of the apartments finished by a north and south piazza, while the other rooms ran off on either side in wings and projections, as though the designer had tried to cover as much ground as possible. The parlor was plainly furnished as regards cost, for there was no superb set of furniture, no tall mirror, no velvet carpet or lace curtains. Easy−chairs of various patterns were numerous, the carpet was small figured, in neutral tints, and the plain, gray walls brought out the beauties of the two fine pictures which lighted up the whole room with their vivid idealism; the piano was a perfect instrument, filling a corner of its own, and opposite to it was an open book−case filled with pleasant−looking, well−used books, well worn too, like old friends, so much better than new ones. The crimson lounge seemed to invite the visitor with its generous breadth and softness, and the white muslin curtains were in perfect keeping with the old−fashioned windows, through which came the perfume of the old−fashioned flowers in the garden.

“Sibyl,” said Aunt Faith, as her niece paused in her practising; “shall we talk over your plans for the summer now?”

“Yes, if you please, aunt; I can finish my practising another time,” said Sibyl, carefully replacing the sheet−music in its portfolio.

“Mrs. Leighton is very kind to invite you, Sibyl; such a summer excursion will be expensive.”

“Yes, Aunt, I suppose so; but cousin Jane knows that the addition of a young lady will add to the attractions of her party.”

“Do you really wish to go, dear?”

“I have been thinking it over, Aunt Faith. While I was practising I looked at the subject in all lights, and I have almost decided to go; there is nothing to keep me here, and no doubt the society at Saratoga and Newport would be of great advantage to me.”

“In what way, Sibyl?”

“In giving me the acquaintance of persons and families who will be desirable friends for a lifetime. I am not rich, as you know, Aunt Faith, and I do not wish to be a burden upon Hugh. I consider it prudent to look to the future, and see life as it really is; I do not believe in fancies,—I must have something sure.”

Aunt Faith looked at the speaker in silence for a moment. Then she said, “There is nothing sure in this life, Sibyl, but our trust in God.”

“I know that, Aunt; I hope you do not think I have been remiss in my religious duties?”

“No, child no,” replied Aunt Faith with a half−sigh; “but are you sure there is nothing in Westerton that interests you more than the fashionable life at Saratoga!”

“Nothing, Aunt; except affection for all of you, of course.” Sibyl's voice did not waver, neither did the shade of color in her oval cheek deepen; Aunt Faith, who was watching her closely, said no more on that subject, but turned the discussion towards the arrangements for the journey. “You will need some additions to your wardrobe, I suppose, my dear?”

“Yes, Aunt; I think I shall take that money that is coming to me this month for the purpose. I do not care for many dresses, but they must be perfect of their kind, and I think I shall purchase that antique set of pearls at Carton's,”

“But they are very costly, Sibyl.”

“Of course they are. I should not wish them if they were not rare. Pearls become me, and the antique setting

will set me off far better than anything modern; a white organdie, long and flowing, with the pearls, would be just my style," said Sibyl in a musing voice, as though she saw herself so arrayed. As she spoke, a vision rose before Aunt Faith's eyes: Sibyl at Saratoga, her classical head and hair adorned with the antique circlet, rising in simple beauty from the soft, white draperies. "She will look like a Greek statue," thought the elder lady; "after all, how beautiful she is!"

The discussion went on, arranging the details of the various toilets, a committee of ways and means highly important in Sibyl's eyes.

"At any rate, you need not begin immediately, Sibyl," said Aunt Faith; "if you only wish two or three dresses; and those are to be so simple, a week will be time enough to devote to them. You can have a full month of quiet here with all of us, dear; and, after all, something may happen to change your plans."

"I think not, Aunt Faith. Are you going? Then I may as well finish my practising;" and for the next hour the Spring−song filled the parlor with its oft−repeated harmony.

Down in the back garden, Tom and Gem were deeply engaged in the construction of an underground shanty. The grassy terrace behind the north piazza sloped down in a gentle declivity towards the vegetable garden, and at the base of this small hill the two sappers and miners were at work, their operations being marked by a convenient growth of currant−bushes at the top. The three dogs watched the proceedings with great interest. Turk, always thoughtful of his own comfort, had stretched himself out near by under the shadow of the bushes, and Pete Trone, in the excess of his zeal, had burrowed so far into the hill that nothing was to be seen but his tail and hind legs; Grip, however, persisted in tearing around the garden in wild circles, barking furiously every time he passed his master as if to encourage him in his labors. "This will never do!" said Tom, pausing and wiping his forehead; "Grip will spoil everything with his ridiculous barking, and the whole neighborhood will come to see what is the matter. Here, Grip! Here, this minute! Very well, sir! *ver−y* well! *ex−treme−ly* well! You'd better come, sir! You'd *bet−ter*,—oh! you're coming, are you? There! get into that tub, sir, and don't let me see you so much as wag your tail without permission!"

So Grip sat mournfully *in his* tub, and watched the work in silence, resting his nose on the side, and blinking his eyes at every fresh shovel−full of earth. The sun shone out warmly, and the laborers felt the perspiration on their heated faces. Gem was the first to drop her shovel. "Oh, Tom!" she said, wiping her forehead, "my hands are all blistered!"

"What of that?" said Tom, shovelling steadily; "the honest hand of toil, you know." But Gem didn't know, and betook herself to the shade of the bushes for a rest. "There's Dick Nelson coming up through the pasture, Tom," she said, after a few moments.

"Is it? oh, how jolly! Now we'll have a shanty that will beat the town. I'll get Dick to bring all the B. B.'s to help."

So saying, Tom ran down to meet his friend, and the two, after some conversation, darted away to the right and the left, returning in about fifteen minutes with the "Band of Brothers," as they called themselves, a number of boys who lived in the vicinity, and hunted in a herd, as the neighbors said, for they were seldom seen apart.

"The B. B.'s have come, Gem! the B. B's have come!" cried Tom, as they approached; "now you'll see a shanty fit for a king! Just run in and get all the shovels you can find, will you?"

Gem obeyed, and having confiscated those in use in the kitchen, she went up to the garret to find the fire utensils belonging to the other rooms, stored away there for the summer. Collecting a number, she started to return, but, loaded as she was, this was no easy matter. First one shovel fell, then another, and finally to save the whole load from going, she sat down on the stairs and considered the situation.

Hugh and Bessie were still in the studio; for, her troubles over, Bessie's good spirits had returned, and she had persuaded Hugh to give her a sitting in order that she might satisfy a long−cherished desire to paint his portrait. "But what can you make out of my stupid phiz?" Hugh had said, laughing.

"I can make Fitz Hugh Warrington out of it; fair and golden, Saxon and strong; ruddy and stalwart; lithe and long. Now sit still, Hugh, and I will do my best. If you had black eyes I would not paint you; black eyes are *snaky*; that's the reason I don't like Gideon Fish."

"But he likes you, Queen Bess."

"No, he only likes Aunt Faith's cake. If he had to choose between me and pie, I am afraid I should not have a chance. As for jelly, he fairly gloats over it. Do you know, Hugh, I shall feel *so* sorry for his wife when he

marries; how tired she will be of him!”

“Oh, no, she won't,” said Hugh; “she will think he is perfect, and cook for him all her life without ever once finding out what a humbug he is.”

“Well, perhaps it is better so. Deception is sometimes a blessing,” said Bessie. At this point a singular noise was heard outside the door; then another, and still another.

“What can that be?” said Hugh, opening the door; “Gem, what are you doing?”

“Oh, Hugh, don't make any noise,” said Gem, in a whisper.

“*I* am not making any noise. It is you with your shovels. What are you doing with them?” asked Hugh, laughing.

“Oh, Hugh, please don't tell! but Tom and the B. B.'s are making an underground shanty, and they sent me for all the shovels, and I got all I could find, and now I can't carry them,” said Gem dolefully.

“An underground shanty! What in the world are you going to do with it, and who are the B. B.'s?” asked Hugh, relieving his little cousin from her load, and carrying it down the stairs for her.

“Live in it, like Robinson Crusoe, you know, and roast potatoes and everything.”

“It will be rather hot, won't it, Pussy?”

“Oh, no!” said Gem decisively; “Tom says it will be delightfully cool. We're going to have a stove, and chairs, and a table, and candles, and things to eat; and then the dogs can stay there too. Grip has never had a regular house, you know, and Tom says it isn't respectable for him to be loose round the garden at night any more, and so he's going to let him live in the shanty.”

“Happy Grip!” said Hugh, as he delivered the shovels at the foot of the stairs; “but who are the B. B.'s, Gem?”

“Oh! the Band of Brothers,—a secret society. Don't let them see you, please, Hugh, for I promised not to tell, and I'm almost afraid of them, they've got such a dreadful motto.”

“What is it, Pussy?”

“Ruin, Riot, and Revenge,” said Gem in a solemn whisper.

“Well done, B. B.'s!” said Hugh laughing; “truly, a terrific motto! There, take your shovels and run, little one. I won't betray you.”

So the shovels disappeared, and Hugh, returning to the studio, related the adventure to Bessie with a hearty laugh. “Do you know anything about the B. B.'s?” he asked, as Bessie resumed her work.

“Oh, yes!” she replied; “I know them to my cost. They are ruin to water−melons, riot on peaches, and revenge to anyone who interferes with them. A few weeks ago, they frightened Mrs. Lane and her sister almost into a fainting−fit. You know that high board fence below here? Well! one evening the B. B.'s happened to find out that they were over at Mrs. Reed's, so they waited until the ladies came along, and then they laid themselves down on the ground close behind the fence, and putting their mouths against the boards, groaned out, one by one, 'seven years ago I was murdered and buried under this fence, oh!—oh!—oh!'—each boy keeping up the groan until the next one took it up as the ladies hurried by.”

Hugh laughed; “What did they do it for?” he asked.

“Oh, I believe Mrs. Lane had ordered them out of her garden, one day, when they were playing there with her Johnny.”

“I am afraid if Aunt Faith knew they were undermining her terrace, she would order them out of her's, too.”

“I think not, Hugh. Aunt Faith likes boys, and she never seems to see their pranks.”

“Dear Aunt Faith! she is certainly the kindest aunt a graceless nephew ever had,” said Hugh warmly.

“That she is; I love her dearly, and I do mean to try not to vex her any more,” said Bessie earnestly.

“But, the horseback−riding, Bessie!”

“But, the horseback−riding, Hugh!”

The two offenders looked at each other a moment in silence, and then burst into a peal of laughter.

“It's of no use,” said Bessie; “we can't be good.”

“Do you think Aunt Faith would be very much shocked if we should tell her?” asked Hugh.

“Of course she would. She does not like to see a lady on horseback, because her cousin was killed by a fall from a horse, you know. Still, she might not forbid my going, provided I would ride quietly on a country road; but that is just what I do not want to do. The whole excitement is in the racing, you know.”

“Well, I suppose it would be better not to tell her, then,” said Hugh slowly.

Dinner−time came, and the family assembled in the dining−room, Sibyl attired in a fresh muslin, and Bessie and Hugh somewhat dusty after their morning in the studio. Tom and Gem came in with flushed faces;—the B. B.'s were to return after dinner and finish the excavation, and the afternoon was to be full of glory.

"Sibyl," said Aunt Faith, when the others had left the dining−room, "would you like to go with me to see Margaret Brown, about four o'clock? You have been there before, I believe?"

"No, Aunt Faith, I have never been there."

"I thought Mr. Leslie said so."

"He did, but he was mistaken," replied Sibyl calmly. "I will go with you, however, this afternoon, aunt, if you wish."

"Do not go merely to oblige me, my dear. I thought you seemed to be interested in Mr. Leslie's description. For my part, I have thought of it ever since."

A slight flush rose in Sibyl's fair face. "I was much interested, aunt," she said quickly, "and I shall be glad to go with you, if you will allow it."

So Aunt Faith went upstairs for her afternoon siesta, and soon fell asleep on the cool chintz lounge, in her shaded room, where the old−fashioned furniture, high bedstead, spindle−legged chairs, and antique toilet−table, had remained unchanged from her youth, when the oval mirror reflected back a merry, rosy girl−face, instead of the pale, silver−haired woman.

But Sibyl did not sleep. She went into the still parlor, and seated herself by the window with a book; but her thoughts were busy, and only her eyes were fixed upon the page, as her mind wandered far away from the author's subject. "Shall I or shall I not go to Saratoga?" she mused. "This is more than the mere question of a summer journey; I know that very well. It is, I feel it, a turning−point in my life. Can I deliberately give up my ambition, my hopes, all my prospects for a bright and prosperous future? Is it, after all, wrong to like wealth and ease? Is it wrong to like elegance and refinement, the society of cultivated people, and the charming surroundings which only money can bring? I have an innate horror of misery,—an inability to endure the want of all that is beautiful in life. I think I could be a very good woman in an elegant city home, with all my little wishes gratified, and nothing to offend my taste. But I fear, yes, I know, I should be a miserable, if not a wicked woman, in a poor home, with nothing but rasping, wearing poverty, day after day. Why, the very smell and steam of the wet flannels coming from the kitchens of small houses where I have happened to be on washing−days, has made me uncomfortable for hours. I know I am not heroic, but I am afraid I was not intended for a heroine. I know myself and all my faults thoroughly. I am sure I should be generous with my money if I was rich,—kind to the poor, and regular in the discharge of all my religious duties. People would love me; I should make them happy, and be happy myself. Now the question is, am I right in thinking such a life far better for me, constituted as I am, than any other?

"Let me look at the opposite side, now. It is not likely I should ever be obliged to work at severe manual labor; but the annoyances and privations of a limited income seem to me almost worse than that. I think I would rather be a washerwoman, provided I could acquire the strength, than the wife of a struggling man who has all the refined tastes and sensitive nerves of a gentleman, without a gentleman's income. I should see him growing more and more careless, more and more haggard, day after day; I should see myself growing old, ugly, ill−tempered, and sick, hour after hour. I have not the moral force of mind, or the physical force of body, to make a cold, half−furnished house seem a haven of rest, a piece of corned−beef and potatoes continued indefinitely through the week seem a delicious repast, or an old−fashioned cloak and dowdy bonnet seem like my present pretty fresh attire. Well! this being the case, I am afraid I am but a worldly woman, and, as such, would I not wrong a poor man if I consented to be his wife? Would he not be sure to repent when it was too late,—when he had discovered the selfishness and love of luxury which are in me? I know he would. I will not put myself in such a position. I will do the best I can; but, as I cannot make myself over, I will select the life which is best suited to me."

Here Sibyl sighed, and tried to bring her mind back upon her book. In vain; her thoughts would wander. "There is poor Aunt Faith. I can easily see how anxious she is about me, and how her heart aches over my worldliness. I do love her dearly; all the good in me I owe to her, and if I ever do anything right, it will be the result of her loving guidance. Sometimes I am tempted to tell her all that is in my heart,—all I have been thinking this afternoon, for instance. I believe I will write it down now, and give it to her. She will understand me better, then; and, if I request it, she will never allude to the paper in words. Yes, I think I will do it." So Sibyl took a

sheet of paper from the drawer, and, in her clear handwriting, wrote out her thoughts of the afternoon, adding a request that the subject might not be brought into discussion, and also, that the paper should be destroyed. “I will not take any false steps,” she thought; “I will be true to my determination, and therefore I will not go to see Margaret Brown this afternoon; there would be a double motive in the visit, I fear.” Rising, she went slowly up the stairs to Aunt Faith's room; the door was partly open, and she could hear the rustle of book−leaves. “Aunt Faith!” she said, standing outside in the hall, “I have decided not to go with you this afternoon, if you will excuse me. I shall go over to the cottage to see Rose Saxon. And I have written down some ideas of mine on this paper; perhaps you may be interested in reading them.”

She did not wait for a reply, but laying down the folded paper on a chair by the door, she went down the stairs, took her little straw round hat, and walked over to the cottage, the residence of Mrs. Marr, whose niece, Rose Saxon, had been one of her schoolmates. Aunt Faith laid aside her book and read Sibyl's paper several times over; then she arranged her dress, and went alone to see Margaret Brown, leaving an order for some work, and inviting the children to come and play in the large garden at the old stone house. Her voice was gentle, her words cordial, and Margaret felt cheered by the visit; but the visitor's heart was sad, and when, on her way home, she met Mr. Leslie, she merely bowed, without stopping as usual to exchange a pleasant greeting. But the young clergyman joined his old friend in spite of her constrained manner, and began talking: “You have been to see Margaret Brown, I presume, Mrs. Sheldon. I am very glad. I am sure she will interest you, and she has so few friends to help her, that I feel anxious to gain for her your good will. Miss Warrington has also visited her, I believe?”

“No, Mr. Leslie,” replied Aunt Faith; “Sibyl has never been to see Margaret, and she did not care to accompany me this afternoon.”

A shade came over the young clergyman's face, but he made no comment.

“Westerton is very dull for Sibyl; she is better fitted for the gay society of the busy city,” pursued Aunt Faith, determined at any cost to prevent Mr. Leslie from looking at her niece with blinded eyes.

“Miss Warrington is fitted for any life,” replied the young clergyman gravely; “if you please, Mrs. Sheldon, I will accompany you home. I would like to see Miss Warrington.”

Poor Aunt Faith! what could she do but murmur an invitation. As they reached the old stone house and Sibyl greeted them with a bright smile, poor Aunt Faith felt very much like the spider in the old song of the spider and the fly.

The tea−table was inviting, and the circle around it as pleasant as six handsome young faces and one handsome old face could make it,—faces handsome with vivacity and good nature as well as artistic beauty. Mr. Leslie was there, and being a general favorite, the conversation was full of life and interest.

“He's just splendid!” said Gem to Tom after the meal was over, “and I wish we dared to show him the shanty. He'd like it ever so much; I've heard him tell such funny stories about what he did when he was a boy.”

“But he would not like our keeping it all from Aunt Faith.”

“That's true. Well, I suppose, then, we'd better not tell him now. But, oh! Tom, how I wish I could stay up with the B. B.'s to−night.”

“No; girls must always stay in nights. I've always thought it a great pity you could not be a boy, Gem. But it can't be helped now. Remember, if I fling a stone up, it will mean that we want something, and you must be sure to get it.”

Aunt Faith spent the evening in the sitting−room busily engaged in her fancy work. On the piazza, Sibyl and Mr. Leslie talked in low tones, and now and then she caught a word or two which seemed to indicate the serious character of the conversation. “I fear I am doing wrong to allow it,” she thought; “there is no doubt in my mind as to John Leslie's liking for Sibyl, and the child is so worldly! Still, what can I do? The way in which he put aside my little endeavors this afternoon and walked boldly into the very danger! It certainly looks as though he was not afraid of anything, and, to tell the truth, I do not think he is. I shall have to let him take care of himself; he looks fully able to do it,” and Aunt Faith smiled at her own discomfiture, as a vision of the clergyman's resolute face and broad shoulders rose before her eyes.

Later in the evening Bessie came in and slipped into the sofa corner by her aunt's side.

“How flushed you are,” said Aunt Faith, stroking the young girl's cheek; “do you feel quite well, dear?”

“Oh yes, auntie,” said Bessie with downcast eyes; “the evening is warm, you know.”

“Do you find it warm also?” asked Aunt Faith, as Hugh entered, fanning himself with his straw hat. Hugh,

who had just taken the horses down through the pasture, murmured some inarticulate reply and crossed the hall into the parlor. “Let us have some music, Bessie,” he called out as he opened the piano. Then as his cousin joined him, he said in a low tone, “I cannot bear this deception, Bessie. It makes me feel like a puppy.”

“Oh Hugh, you are not going to tell, and spoil all my fun?”

“You are a second Eve with her apple, Brownie.”

“I am not Eve, and I don't like apples,” said Bessie indignantly. “Don't spoil my fun, now, Hugh. The summer will soon be over, and you will be gone. Then I shall be oh!—*so* good.”

“When you have no longer a chance to be naughty,” said Hugh, laughing.

At eleven o'clock the lights were all extinguished in the old stone house, and every one was soon asleep. After awhile a sharp rap on the closed blinds awoke Gem; at first she was startled, but instantly remembering the night−watch in the underground shanty, she stole to the window and peeped out. There stood Tom! “We want something to eat,” he said in a loud whisper; “the B. B.'s are awful hungry. Come down and open the back door.”

“Oh, Tom, I don't dare to do it!” said Gem, trembling.

“Don't be a baby, Gem! Come down, or I'll tell, the B. B.'s you're afraid of the dark.”

This taunt aroused Gem's failing courage, she stole down the stairs and slipped back the bolt, regaining her room with the speed of a little pussy cat. She heard nothing more for some time, and was almost asleep when another tap on the blinds aroused her.

“We want more candles,” whispered Tom; “I can't find 'em. Of course you know where they are. Hurry up!”

“Oh, Tom! must I come down again?” pleaded Gem.

“Of course you must! hurry up!”

So Gem got the candles and crept back to her bed with a lessening respect for the delights of the underground shanty. In a few moments another tap was heard. “Oh, Tom! what is it now?”

“I want my fiddle; the B. B.'s are awful sleepy, and they say they'll all go home if I don't play for them.”

“Oh, Tom, somebody will hear you!”

“Not under the ground, you silly! Come down and get the fiddle; I can't go in the sitting−room with my boots on.”

So the violin was handed out, and poor Gem at last fell asleep, with a vague intention of being a good girl, and giving up the society of Tom and the B. B.'s forever.

About half past twelve Aunt Faith awoke; “I certainly hear music!” she thought. Opening the blinds she heard the faint strains of “Nelly Bly,” with the well known “Hi,” E flat; “Hi,” E natural; “Hi,” F natural, and at the same time saw a light proceeding mysteriously from the ground. Hastily dressing herself, she ran over to Tom's room; it was empty. Much disturbed, she knocked at Hugh's door; “Hugh! Hugh!” she called; “something is wrong. Please get up.”

“What is it, Aunt Faith?” said a sleepy voice.

“Get up at once! Tom is gone; there is music somewhere, and the strangest light coming out of the ground in the back garden.”

“The B. B.'s, I'll be bound,” said Hugh with a laugh, as he threw on his clothes. “Don't be frightened, Aunt Faith; it's Ruin, Riot and Revenge.”

“Dreadful!” murmured Aunt Faith outside the door.

By this time the whole household was awake, and a group of persons stole out of the back door and went down the garden walk. Finding a barricade of boards at the base of the hill, they opened it, and discovered a little den in the earth containing one chair, a table, the three dogs, and Tom; a candle stuck in a bottle gave light to the scene, and the table was covered with the remains of a feast, cake and pies having evidently once filled the empty dishes. Tom was playing dismally upon his violin, and the three dogs sat mournfully at his feet.

“Thomas, what does this mean?” said Aunt Faith severely.

Tom looked up and saw the extent of his audience. “It's just my underground shanty, Aunt Faith,” he said dejectedly; “I've worked like a slave over it all day, and the B. B.'s agreed to sit up here all night and have lots of fun, so I climbed out of the back window and came down. But first they wanted things to eat, and I had to get 'em; and then, when they'd eaten up everything, they said if I didn't play they'd go home, so I had to get my fiddle. And I only knew one tune, and they got tired of it after a while, and a few minutes ago they all skedaddled and left me here alone with the dogs. However, I wasn't going to give it up, so I was just playing to amuse myself a little

before daylight.”

“Before daylight?” said Aunt Faith; “what time do you think it is now?”

“I suppose about four or five,” said Tom.

“It isn't one yet,” said Hugh laughing. “Come in and go to bed, you young brigand.”

At first Tom objected, but the dogs had already taken advantage of the open door to depart, the candle burned dimly, and the air was damp. He yielded, and the underground shanty was left to its earthy seclusion.

CHAPTER III. THE EDITOR'S SANCTUM.

“Justice has never been done to the month of months,” said Hugh, coming in to the breakfast−table one morning, bringing a spray of roses with the dew shining on their fragrant petals. “I propose we celebrate the day, the fifteenth of June; the most perfect day of the most perfect month of this most perfect year of our lives. Who knows where we shall be before another June comes round? 'We have lived and loved together through many a changing year; we have shared each other's pleasures and wept each other's tears.' But *tempus fugit*, oh, how fast! and before we know it we shall all be old! Friends, fill your coffee−cups to the brim, and let us resolve to celebrate.”

“A picnic!” said Gem.

“A torch−light procession and fireworks!” said Tom.

“A croquet−party!” said Sibyl.

“A dance!” said Bessie.

“An editor's sanctum,” said Hugh.

The novelty of this suggestion made a favorable impression. “Explain yourself, Hugh,” said Aunt Faith; “I am afraid your project is too large for the field.”

“Oh, no, Aunt Faith, it is not so large as you fancy. There is a store of hidden genius in this family, and I propose, to bring it out and let it scintillate in the light of day! We will invite a few friends to spend the evening, give them notice that they must bring to the 'Sanctum' an original contribution, in prose or verse as they please, and at nine o'clock we, will all assemble in the parlor to hear them read aloud. I will act as editor, receive manuscripts, throw them into a basket, and when the appointed time comes, take them out and read them aloud, as they happen to come.”

“Splendid!” said Tom; “I'll go right away and begin mine.”

“Oh, I can never think of anything to say!” said Gem in a despairing voice.

“I have never noticed any difficulty of that kind in you, Pussy,” said Hugh, laughing.

“Oh, I mean to *write*, of course,” said Gem; “I don't know what I shall do unless you'll take my last composition?”

“Anything you like as long as it's original,” said Hugh.

So Gem went upstairs with a lightened heart and the others discussed the list of invitations.

“We will have old Mr. Gay,” began Bessie; “he is always an addition. I wish he would stay here permanently instead of going back to Boston.”

“A Boston man will never forsake the 'Rub,'“ said Hugh; “that is too much to expect. We will have Mr. Leslie, of course.”

“Rose Saxon and Graham Marr,” said Sibyl.

“Now, Sibyl, how can you?” said Hugh. “Graham is not a congenial spirit.”

“He is congenial to me,” replied Sibyl calmly.

“Of course we will have the Marrs,” said Aunt Faith; “and Gideon Fish also.”

“Oh, Aunt Faith! Not Gideon?” said Bessie.

“Poor Gid! If he could hear you say so,” said Hugh, laughing.

“I wish he could,” answered Bessie hotly; “he does not understand a hint.”

“How should he, doubly enrolled as he is in his own self−importance?” said Hugh.

“I am inclined to think there are good points in Gideon Fish,” said gentle Aunt Faith.

“Have you ever seen him eat?” asked Bessie with marked emphasis.

“No, my dear; but we all eat, do we not?” said Aunt Faith, smiling.

“Not like Gideon Fish, I hope, auntie. He never has enough; he is always eyeing the baskets at picnics, and the supper−table at parties. And then he never openly takes what he wants,—as Hugh does for instance,—but he always pretends he does not care for anything, that he is too much absorbed in intellectual conversation to attend to anything so sublunary as eating, while all the time he is gloating over the nice things, and sure to outstay everybody at the table. The very way he gets a piece of cake is a study. He never takes it boldly, like any one else,

but eyes it awhile; then he turns the plate to the right or the left, edging it a little nearer; then he looks furtively at the slices, and gradually he gets hold of a piece, his little finger carefully extended all the time, and his face wearing an expression of pure self−sacrifice to an arduous duty."

Everybody laughed at this description, but Aunt Faith said, "Gently, Bessie, gently. If that is all you have against Gideon, he has fewer faults than most young persons of his age."

Somewhat conscience−stricken, Bessie did not reply, and the discussion went on until the list was fully made out, and Hugh departed to deliver the invitations and explain the conditions connected with the editor's sanctum. He returned in an hour with acceptances from most of the invited guests, and then silence reigned in the old stone house for the remainder of the day, while all the contributors wooed the Muses, ransacked their brains, or paced their floors in desperation, according to their various temperaments. Aunt Faith having been exempted from duty, moved about the house, arranging flowers and decorating the pretty supper−table which stood in the sitting−room. Gem had nothing to do but copy her composition, and yet she consumed the whole day in a battle with the ink, and came out with a blotted page at the last. Tom had disappeared; no one knew where he was. Sibyl came down to dinner in her usual unruffled state, but Bessie's curly hair stood on end, and there was a deep wrinkle between her eyes. "Well, Sibyl, have you made a commencement?" she asked, as her cousin took her seat at the dinner−table.

"I have finished my contribution entirely," said Sibyl.

"Did it take you all the morning? I have not heard a sound from your room."

"Oh no! I finished it some time ago, and since then I have been making a new underskirt for my Swiss muslin; the old one was not quite fresh."

"There it is," said Bessie, half laughing, half vexed; "you are always ahead of me, Sibyl. Your contribution will be perfect, and your dress will be perfect,—and I am always just—"

"Bessie Darrell!" interrupted Hugh; "and I would not have you different if I could."

"Thank you, Hugh; but the rest of the world may not agree with you."

"If you mean Gideon Fish," began Hugh, merrily, but something in his cousin's face stopped him. It was seldom that the keenest observer could detect anything like wounded feelings in Bessie Darrell's bright eyes, but when it did come, they were like the eyes of a wounded fawn.

"How has your contribution advanced, Hugh?" asked Aunt Faith.

"Done! madam, at your service," said Hugh with a low bow. "The muses visited me in a body, and I had hard work to choose between the numerous gifts they offered."

"Very well," said Bessie, "I see I am entirely behind you all. I shall shut myself into the studio this afternoon, and my ghost will come out at tea−time, deliver a manuscript written in blood, and vanish into thin air. Farewell, my friends, farewell!"

Evening came, and found Sibyl seated on the piazza looking like a lily in her white draperies. Tom and Gem were in the parlor, in their best attire, trying to look grown−up and dignified; Tom's collar was especially imposing. The guests assembled slowly; Hugh received their folded papers as they entered, and placed them in a covered basket. Nine o'clock struck, and the merry party seated themselves in the parlor, Sibyl by the side of Graham Marr, and Rose Saxon on the opposite side of the room with Mr. Leslie. When they were all in place, the door opened and Hugh appeared, carrying the basket. His entrance was greeted with applause; an arm−chair by the table, and a shaded light were ready, and, with much solemnity, the reader took his seat. Placing the basket on the floor before him, he coughed, unfolded a pocket−handkerchief, and laid it on the table at his elbow, brought out a box of troches and placed them in position by the handkerchief, gravely asked for a glass of water, which was also ranged in order, and then, putting on a pair of green spectacles, bowed to the company and began his preliminary speech:—

"Ladies and gentlemen; the humble individual who now addresses you asks in advance for your kind sympathy for his present embarrassing position. Of a gentle nature, timid as the wild rabbit, blushing as the rosy dawn, he yet finds himself called upon to address the public,—and such a public! (applause). Ladies and gentlemen,—his feelings are too much for him, and, withdrawing to the basket, he hides his own personality in the following no doubt brilliant effusions taken at random from this intellectual vortex. Ladies and gentlemen,—I beg your attention to the story of:—

'THE UNSEEN VISITOR

"'While I was still a school−girl, I paid a visit to a young lady friend in the pleasant city of C———. We occupied a room together in the second story, and were the only persons on that floor, as the other members of the family slept down−stairs, the house being large, with irregular one−story wings on each side in the old−fashioned style. C———is a city of a hundred−thousand inhabitants, the streets closely built up, lighted, paved, and guarded by a well−regulated police force. It is a new town also, with no old associations, old legends, or old people to cast a veil of mystery over its new houses and young history; thus, it, would seem to be the last place for anything mysterious, and yet it was there that a singular incident occurred which I have never been able to explain. One night I had been asleep perhaps two hours, when suddenly I awoke,—it was about half−past ten when Kate and I went to our room,—and soon after I awoke, I heard the clock strike one. The street lamps were not lighted, in accordance with the almanac which predicted a fine moon without any regard for the possibility, now a certainty, of heavy clouds; not a gleam, therefore, came in through the blinds to lighten the dark, still house. Our room was large, opening into the hall which was long and broad, extending from one end of the house to the other; the stairs from below came up into this hall, and there was no way of getting to the back part of the house, where the servants slept, without going entirely through it to the west end.

"'Waking suddenly in the night always gives me a strange sensation. I feel as though some one must have called me, and, involuntarily, I listen for a second summons. This night I listened as usual, and distinctly heard a step in the hall. Our door stood partly open, but the darkness was intense. At first I thought it might be a member of the family in search of something in the upper story, for there were several unoccupied rooms and a medicine−closet opening into the hall; but, after a moment, I noticed that the step did not pause or enter these chambers, but seemed to keep in the hall, going back and forth, from one end to the other, with perfect regularity and steadiness. Much perplexed, I gently awakened Kate, and, placing my hand over her lips, I whispered in her ear, 'listen!' She obeyed, and, with beating hearts, we heard the footstep pacing back and forth before our door, now at the west end, now at the east, in a measured gait to which we could almost beat time, so regularly came the sound. The hall was carpeted, and the footfalls soft, yet not as though the unseen visitor was trying to deaden the sound. It was a natural step. From the light tread we might have supposed it to be a woman's foot, but from the stride it was more like a man. I do not know how long we lay there motionless. I felt myself growing more and more nervous, and Kate's hand, as it pressed mine, was cold and trembling. I think we would have been relieved if the step had paused, or even entered our room; that, at least, would have been like an ordinary burglar. But this steady march, to and fro, seemed so unaccountable. If the steps, too, had been soft and muffled, if we could have supposed the person was creeping about after booty of some kind, we should have been frightened, no doubt, but not so appalled as we were now at this singular, easy, and apparently aimless promenade. We did not speak, but lay trembling, and scarcely daring to breathe. Our room was long, and the distance to the open door so great that we could not hope to reach it unnoticed in the darkness, before the step would be upon us again. Besides, the lock was out of order, so that even if we could have summoned courage to shut it, it could not be fastened. The stairway, too, was at such a distance beyond our door, that we did not dare to try that way of escape, bringing us, as it would, face to face with our unseen visitor. There was nothing left but silent endurance, and thus we lay counting the footsteps through the long hours. We could not hope, either, that the other members of the family would be aroused, as their sleeping−rooms were not directly below us, but beyond, in the wings. The clock struck two, and half−past, and steadily the step kept on its regular sound, passing and repassing our door. It grew insupportable. It seemed as though I should not be able to keep from shrieking aloud each time it drew near. If we could have spoken to each other we might have regained some courage, but we were paralyzed with nervous fear; our throats were parched, and our muscles rigid with long continued tension, for we dared not move. It was like a spell, and the fact that we did not know what it was we feared, made the fear all the more intense. At length, after what seemed a century of suffering, the strange footsteps paused. Our hearts gave a leap. Was it coming in? Who was it? Would it come and stand by the bedside, and look at us in the darkness? No! Slowly—and steadily it went down the stairs. We counted every step to the bottom. Then a pause. Would it go towards the dining−room, where the silver was, or towards the sleeping−rooms? We almost hoped it would, for that would prove a desire for plunder. Still silence! We dared not move for fear it might have crept softly up the stairs; it might even now be crawling towards us in the darkness. We shuddered; the silence seemed worse than the regular footfalls. Suddenly we heard a distinct snap in the hall below. We instantly recognized the bolt of the front door, and simultaneously we sprang from the bed. *It*—whatever *It* was,—was going. We ran across the room, hearing, as we went, the

sound of the footfalls on the stone walk outside, which led from the door to the street. We rushed down−stairs and alarmed the house. The front−door was found open, but no trace of our unseen visitor remained, although the neighborhood was carefully searched. Investigation showed that entrance had been effected through a dining−room window. But the silver was untouched; nothing had been disturbed, although the house contained many valuables, and it was evident that none of the sleeping−rooms had been visited. It, whatever it was, had entered, passed up the stairs, spent the night pacing to and fro in the upper hall, and then, just before dawn, had departed as strangely as it came.

"'Who or what it was, we never knew. The only possible solution was, that it might have been some somnambulist; and, in that case, it must have been some acquaintance who bad been in the house in his waking moments. But even this solution seemed unsatisfactory, and finally Kate and I gave up trying to solve the enigma, content to let it rest as the mystery of our Unseen Visitor.

SIBYL WARRINGTON.'"

"Oh, Sibyl! you never told us anything about it before!" exclaimed Gem, who had listened with breathless interest. "Is it all really true?"

"Entirely true," replied Sibyl; "it is an exact description of what happened during my visit to C———last summer."

After a little general conversation upon somnambulism, and the stories connected with it, Hugh took up another paper.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "the next manuscript, which I have taken at random from the basket, seems to be poetical. It is prefaced by the following note:—

"'To the Editor,—Sir: I am a Boston man; I do not deny it, but glory in the title! Some winters ago I was tempted to go west on business, and found myself snowed up in that great Metropolis of the Lakes,—the Pride of the West,—the Garden City,—in a word, Chicago! It was before the great fire; the hotels were crowded; I was in the fifth story, and, need I say it, I was miserable! In addition to my bodily sufferings, my ear was tortured by the various pronunciations given to the city's name. No sooner had I mastered one than I heard another! At last, driven to desperation, I tried to while away the time in composing the following 'Ode,' in which my feelings, and the three different pronunciations are expressed:—

'ODE TO CHICAGO.

The wind is loud, and on the road
The snow lays an embargo,
While, in his room, a Boston man
Sits snow−bound in Chi−CAR−go.

A monkey when he is so sick
That he can't make his paw go,
Feels better than a Boston man
When storm−bound in Chi−CAW−go.

A spinster, when she cannot make
Her thin and grayish hair grow,
Feels happier than a Boston man
When storm−bound in Chi−CARE−go.

A Boston man would sooner lose
His credit, cash, and cargo,
He'd sooner be a beggar than
A dweller in Chi−CAR−go.

A Boston man would sooner far
To wigwam with a squaw go,
Than to enjoy domestic bliss
In the best house in Chi−CAW−go.

All the extreme and dreadful lengths
A Boston man would dare go,
Could ne'er include the direful thought

Of DWELLING in Chi−CARE−go.
ELIJAH GAY.'"

There was a general laugh over this effusion of the Boston bachelor. Mr. Gay was a genial, pleasant man, and although approaching his three−score years and ten, he enjoyed the companionship of young people, and, what is more unusual, the young people sought his company; he entered into their feelings and interests, and was not so devoted to memories of the past but that; he could see the advantages and improvements of the present.

"The next article to which I shall call your attention," said Hugh, taking another paper from the basket, "is a grave and scholarly essay upon that momentous subject, ambition. After the story and the poem, no doubt our minds will receive much enjoyment from the contemplation of this instructive theme:—

'AMBITION

Ambition is the curse of nations.
If it was not for ambition, America would be a better country.
Ambition is wrong.
Americans are very ambitious.
It is always better to be content with what we have got.
Especially when we have got so much.
It is not right to be too ambitious.
It is said we are going to have Cuba, Mexico and Canada.
Of course we can have them if we want to.
Or anything else.
But we must always remember that ambition is wrong.
THOMAS MORRIS.'"

"Very good, my boy," said Mr. Gay to Tom, whose scarlet face had betrayed the authorship of this profound essay long before his name was read; "adhere to that moral, and, mark my words, you will—never be President of the United States."

Tom's embarrassment checked the smiles of the audience, and Hugh took up another paper. "Ah!" he said with enthusiasm, "this seems to be a poem in earnest, breathing the real afflatus, written with the pen of Melpomene! With your permission, ladies and gentlemen, I will refresh myself with a glass of water before I begin:—

'A JUNE LYRIC.

After all, not to labor only,—
But to breathe in the essence of vivified sheen,
The fragrance of rarefied thoughts as they surge to and fro,
Heaving the unknown depths up to mountains of night.
Crystalline, luminous, rare, opalescently rare,—
This,—this is June!
GRAHAM MARR'"

"Ah, blank verse," said Sibyl to her companion, with admiring interest. He bowed and stroked his moustache with a dreamy air.

"*Very* blank, I should say," murmured Bessie to Mr. Gay.

"It seems to me as though I had heard the beginning of it before, somewhere," answered the Boston bachelor in the same tone.

"The next contribution consists of a series of illustrations," said Hugh, unfastening some loose sheets of drawing paper; "the following introduction is appended:—

'The hand is not only an index of character, but it has a character of its own. We may disguise or droll our features, cultivate our voices and expression, but our hands betray us; I propose to illustrate this principle by a series of sketches. To begin: when you see an irregular hand with large, broad palm, strong wrist, but shapely, tapering fingers, you may know that hand betokens a duplex temperament, where opposite characteristics are constantly struggling for the mastery. The palm may denote strength and industry, but the fingers may overbalance these qualities by their love of ease or generous prodigality. For instance, when you see a hand of this

nature, you may know that its owner might give you half his fortune, might even give you his life, and yet would be very likely to keep the household in discomfort for months, for want of one new shingle on the roof. In short, my friends, you might know it was—'"

Here the reader paused, and held up a large drawing of two hands, so lifelike and alive with character that the whole company cried out with one voice, "Hugh!"

"Rather embarrassing for the editor," said Hugh, hastening on with his task as the laughter subsided. "Here, my friends is another design. When you see a hand proportioned in careful outlines, beautiful, but also firm; white, but also strong to the playing of a sonata, you may know the owner will be prompt, even−tempered and calm; you may know the owner will be such a one as—" here Hugh held up another design; "Sibyl!" said the audience, as the two hands appeared.

Mr. Leslie rose, and crossed the room to examine the drawing; he did not lay it aside, but carried it back to his seat, as though it was the most natural thing in the world. Sibyl's color rose, but she turned with marked interest towards Graham Marr, and listened to his remarks with a bright smile.

"The next design," Hugh read, "requires no explanation. It is the strong, broad, long palm, and strong, long, shapely fingers of the well−balanced, resolute man, who will fight the battle of life with all his strength, and never give up until it is won. In short, it is—"

"Mr. Leslie!" said the audience, as the illustration was held up for inspection. Sibyl's eyes brightened as she saw the life−like picture, but she sat silent as the others poured forth criticisms and comments.

"Go on, Hugh!" said Mr. Leslie laughing; "this is quite an ordeal, I find."

"The next design," read Hugh, "shows all the faults of nature's worst handiwork. (No pun intended.) A scraggy little paw, brown, knotted and shapeless; of course every one will know that it is—"

"Bessie!" cried the laughing audience, as two ridiculous caricatures of Bessie's little brown hands came into view.

"Last of all, I present the fat−simile of a perfect hand. Our other designs have been youthful, but this one has borne the burden and heat of the day. Originally beautiful and shapely, it is now worn with labor for others; it has given to the poor, it has tended the sick, it has guarded the young, and soothed the afflicted. It is,—I am sure you will recognize it,—"

"Aunt Faith!"—"Mrs. Sheldon!" cried the company, as the last drawing was displayed.

"Bravo, Bessie!" said Tom; "your contribution is the best so far."

When the buzz of conversation had subsided, Hugh took another paper from the basket.

"The next contribution is poetical," he said; "it is entitled:—

'A JUNE RHAPSODY.

The lovely month of June has come,
The sweetest of the year,—
(I've heard this somewhere;—never mind;)
The meadows green and sear;—
Sear's not the word; there's something wrong,—
I fear my muse will drop
The fire of genius' flowing song,
And so I'd better stop!
ROSE SAXON.'"

A general laugh followed this effusion, and no one joined in it more heartily than the authoress, a bright little brunette with sparkling eyes, in whose expression merriment predominated.

"Our next manuscript seems to be of a serious nature," said Hugh; "it treats of a solemn subject, and I beg you to give it your attentive consideration:—

'BOYS.

Boys are funny sometimes, but girls are more dignified for their age. Boys are rude, but girls are polite and lady−like. It is a pity boys are not lady−like too. Once I knew a boy, a very little boy, and he had a pair of boots. Real boots,—the first he ever had. One night when his father came home, he found Jimmy sitting on the stairs in the hall. The boots were outside the parlor door,—against the wall. "What are you doing here, Giant Grimm?" said his father. (His father called him "Giant Grimm," sometimes; for fun, I suppose.) "I'm seein' how my boots

'ud look if they was stood outside the door at a hotel to be cleaned," said Jimmy. He could not speak very plain, so I have not written it plain.

GRACE EVANS MORRIS.'"

"Very good, little girl," said Aunt Faith, drawing her youngest child to her side, and signing to Hugh to go on in order to divert attention from her; "I didn't know you could write so well."

"THE OHIO CAPTAIN,"

read Hugh.

"When the war for the Union broke out, I had just completed my studies and entered the ministry. My intention had been to enter upon my new duties in a little village not far from my home, but as the excitement spread through the country, and the young men left their fields, their workshops, and their homes, to join the army, I could not overcome my desire to go with them. I could not sleep, through many exciting weeks; in imagination I saw this one, and that one, friends that I knew, cold in death, or lying wounded alone in the night. I seemed to walk through crowded hospitals and to hear the 'ping' of the balls; I felt that if ever there was a place where the gospel words were needed, it was after the battle, when men were left with the awful shadow of death hanging over them. My youth and inexperience would be obstacles in the well−regulated quiet village, but in the army might they not be overlooked, if accompanied by willing hands and heart? In the great haste, in the great excitement, in the great agony, might not the great tidings be delivered acceptably even by an inexperienced messenger? Thus I thought, and soon after the battle of Bull Run, I obtained an appointment as chaplain, joined the army, and remained with it until the close of the war.

"Part of this time I was with an Ohio volunteer regiment; the colonel belonged to the regular army, but all the other officers were volunteers. I grew to know them all, and among them I found many noble hearts, and, had I the time, I could relate many incidents of generosity and true courage, part of that unwritten history of the war which will never come into print. Among these officers there was one young captain whom I especially liked. He was quiet and reserved, and although he never talked with me as his companions sometimes did, although he told me nothing of his life and history, I still felt that, he was a Christian at heart, probably one of those who have never been drawn out of themselves, or taught the pleasure of sympathetic fellowship. Captain Worthington often came to the Sunday service, when I was able to hold one, and his voice joined in the hymns, which gave the greatest charm to those military prayer−meetings; but beyond this I could not pass. He was reserved and silent; I could not force myself upon him. Sensitive natures abhor an intruder.

"One evening in September, while passing through the camp, I met Captain Worthington walking up and down under the trees; he spoke to me with unusual cordiality, and we continued the walk together, strolling through the forest at, random, and talking upon any subject which happened to suggest itself. The week had been hard and annoying. The brigade had been marching and counter−marching in an apparently purposeless way, although, no doubt, there was a concealed motive in every movement; the ground was stony, and broken by deep ravines, the forage wretched, and rain had been falling almost continuously, so that deep mud alternated with sharp stones, making every mile seem two. There had, also, been no enemy in sight to keep up the ardor of the soldiers, and make them forget their discomfort; it had been, as I said before, a wretched week, and Allan Worthington, always grave, seemed this evening almost sad. We sat down upon a fallen tree, and in the still gloom of that night he first spoke of his home.

"'I have been thinking about my mother,' he said; 'I cannot explain it, but home seems very near to me to−night. I can see the house as plainly as though it stood here before me, and I see mother sitting in her arm−chair by the table, knitting. Poor mother! how lonely she looks.'

"'Has she no other children?' I asked.

"'No; I am her only child. She let me go because I would not stay; I sometimes think perhaps I was wrong to leave her. We lived alone on the hill, and when I rode into the country town and heard the latest news, I seemed to be all on fire; I would ride back over the quiet road, my blood fairly tingling with excitement. At last, as the story of the battles began to come, I could stand it no longer, and I told mother I must go. The regiments from my part of the country were all full, but I got a lieutenant's place in another county, and marched away. That was more than two years ago, and I have never felt homesick until this evening. I don't know what has come over me.'

"'In what part of Ohio does your mother live, captain?' I asked.

"'At Benton Fails, South county. I hope to get a furlough before long. I want to go home, if only for a few

days; there is one there besides mother whom I want to see; I never knew how much until now.'

"These last words were spoken in a low tone, almost as if the young soldier had forgotten my presence and was talking to himself. He was sitting on the log, with his back against a large oak−tree, resting as though he was in an arm−chair. He said no more, and I strolled away for a moment, thinking that if he resumed the subject when I returned, I would gladly pursue it, but unwilling to take advantage of what might have been an inadvertent utterance. I was absent several minutes, climbing down the bank to the spring to get a drink of water; then I returned and took my place upon the log again.

"'I suppose you often hear from your mother, captain?' I said.

"He did not answer. I repeated the question; no reply. I was perplexed. Could he have fallen into a brown study? His eyes were open, and he appeared to be looking off through the forest. At length I touched his shoulder, but he did not move. I took his hand; he was dead! Shot through the heart. The roaring of the brook, and the steep bank, had prevented my hearing the report; but, as I sat there holding the dead hand, suddenly the woods seemed to grow alive with noise and light. Our camp had evidently been surprised by the enemy, and a sharp conflict began. I took poor Allan's note−book and watch, and, remembering his mother, I managed to cut off a lock of his curly hair; but, before I had gone far, I myself was struck by a stray shot, and knew nothing more until I awoke in a border hospital two months afterwards, pale and weak, the very shadow of my former self. As memory came back, I thought of the captain. The relics had been preserved, and, as soon as I was able, I sent them to the poor mother, with a letter describing my last conversation with her boy,—his last words on earth. I supposed, of course, that she knew from other sources all the details of the attack, but I felt that I must also tell her what *I* knew; possibly it would be some comfort to her. In about a week I received a letter written in a careful, old−fashioned handwriting. The poor mother had known nothing all that long time save this: 'Captain A. Worthington reported missing.' Our regiment had suffered severely. The camp had been abandoned, and the dead left on the field. The suspense had been dreadful, and she had prayed for relief. It had come in the inward conviction that her boy was dead; that he was not in the southern prisons or languishing in a hospital, but gone from earth forever. My letter brought her the first definite tidings, and my description of that last conversation, the first comfort. 'I shall go to him though he shall not return to me,' wrote the afflicted mother; and she gave me her blessing in such solemn, tender words, that I can never forget them. In the letter she enclosed a picture of Allan, sent home to her during the previous year; and with it another, a picture of the one of whom Allan said, 'I want to see her; I never knew how much until now.'"

As Hugh finished reading, he took the photographs from an envelope, and handed them to Aunt Faith. They were passed from hand to hand, with gentle comments, and some tear−dimmed eyes gazed on the pictured faces,—a resolute, grave young soldier, with earnest eyes, and a little, delicate, wistful maiden, as fair and simple as a wild−flower.

"The war made many partings," said Aunt Faith, as she replaced the pictures in their envelope, and returned them to Mr. Leslie; "but the lost ones are only gone before. There are no partings there."

The gayety had subsided into a quiet thoughtfulness, by common consent the reading was abandoned, and, as it was growing late, Aunt Faith led the way into the sitting−room, where the pretty supper−table soon aroused the vivacity of the young people. Youth is buoyant, and, as for Aunt Faith, she was never saddened by the thought of death. She had lost so many loved ones, that her home seemed more there than here. In a few moments all the company were talking and laughing as merrily as ever, and in the crowd around the table no one noticed that Rose Saxon had slipped away. If they noticed anything beside themselves, it was the amount of chocolate−ice which Gideon Fish consumed!

Rose was in the parlor. The basket was still in its place, and she was looking over the remaining manuscripts. "'Gideon Fish,'" she murmured, "no one wants to hear that; 'Lida Powers,' 'William Mount,' 'Edith Chase,'—oh, here is something! I know the handwriting, although there is no name. Let me see,—yes; this is Hugh's. It is sure to be good, and I mean to have it read." So, just before the company broke up, Rose rapped on the table with her plump little fist.

"Ladies and gentlemen," she began, in her merry voice, "I presume you all know Mr. Pete Trone, the distinguished terrier, whose accomplishments and sagacity are in every mouth."

"Oh, we know him!" answered the company; "we know him well." "He is the celebrated dog of republican principles,"—"who climbs trees;"—"and walks the tight−rope;"—"and dances the hornpipe!"

“I perceive that you know him,” said Rose, “and therefore you will be pleased to hear an epic poem in his honor. Indeed, it is supposed that he wrote it himself. He speaks with modesty of his achievements, alludes with feeling to his fancy for digging in the garden, and begs for sympathy. With your permission, I will read the:—

'COMPLAINT OF PETE TRONE, ESQ.

I'm only a poor little terrier,
Very small, black−and−tan,
But a dog who is brighter or merrier
Never breathed, never ran.
I'm death on piratical cats,
And, mangled and gory,
The bodies of hundreds of rats
Testify to my glory.
My duty I try to fulfil
Whenever I know it;
If I do not accomplish your will
You've only to show it;
Yet, though I'm thus honest and square
In all my dealings,
It is plain that you are not aware
A dog has his feelings.
If master is kept in at school
Why must I feel the stick?
If sweetheart is distant and cool,
Why should I get a kick?
If Turk steals the mutton for dinner,
And goes off to gulp it,
Why screen HIM, the solemn old sinner,
And call ME the culprit?
And if I am fond of the sand−banks,
And fresh garden−soil,
Why should you molest with your brickbats
My hard, honest toil?
And why should you call it a 'dusty muss,'
And make me abandon
My labor? Remember, 'DE GUSTIBUS
NON EST DISPUTANDUM!'
The world should remember a canine
Has a heart in his breast;
If you knew all you never could say mine
Was worse than the rest.
Then help me to gain the position
To which I aspire,
And grant this poor dog−gerel petition
Of Pete Trone, Esquire!'“

“Excellent! excellent!” cried the audience, as Rose finished reading the verses.

“I propose we have the hero in person,” said Mr. Gay.

So Tom went out, and after some delay returned with Mr. P. Trone, who had been hastily attired in his red suit for the occasion, four red pantaloons, a red coat, and little cap with a red feather. He was received with applause, and, after being regaled with macaroons, went through all his tricks, concluding with a slow horn pipe to the tune of “Lochinvar.”

About midnight the guests took their departure, and the cousins assembled in the parlor for a few moments

before going to bed.

“I think the sanctum was real fun,” said Gem; “but you did not read all the papers, Hugh?”

“No; it would have taken too much time,” answered Hugh; “what a good thing you made of those hands, Bessie. We must keep the drawings. Why!—where is Sibyl's?”

“Mr. Leslie took it away;—he laid a paper over it and put it in his pocket, just as though it belonged to him,” said Tom; “but of all the contributions, *I* liked Mr. Gay's 'Chicago' the best.”

“And I liked Mr. Leslie's story,” said Aunt Faith; “it is singular he never before mentioned his army life.”

“Oh! he isn't one of the talking kind like Gideon Fish,” said Hugh. “Gid is always telling everybody about his 'emotional nature,' and his inner 'consciousness.' He seems to think his mental condition, a subject of public interest, and constantly sends out bulletins for the benefit of anxious friends. His manuscript was poetical, but I took good care to hide it in the bottom of the basket. By the way, Sibyl, how did you like Graham Marr's Lyric? Pretty deep, wasn't it?”

Sibyl was arranging the books and music in their proper places. “You know I am not myself poetical,” she answered calmly; “but I like Mr. Marr, and therefore I like his verses, Hugh.”

“Oh, Sibyl! surely not so well as Mr. Leslie's story?” said Bessie earnestly.

“Poetry and prose cannot be compared, neither can Mr. Marr and Mr. Leslie be compared,” said Sibyl; “they are very different.”

“I should think they were!” said Hugh.

“And tastes are different also,” added Sibyl, as she finished her task. “Good−night all.”

The cousins dispersed, while Aunt Faith turned out the lights. “I almost think she likes that Marr, after all,” whispered Hugh to Bessie as they went up the stairs; “she was with him all the evening.”

“Let me tell you, Hugh Warrington, that if Sibyl likes anybody, it is Mr. Leslie,” returned Bessie emphatically.

“When did you discover that, Brownie?”

“I have always suspected it, but to−night I saw it plainly,” replied Bessie.

“To−night! Why, she was with Marr all the time!”

“Men are as blind as bats,” said Bessie scornfully; “good−night.”

CHAPTER IV. HUGH.

One bright morning towards the last of June, Bessie and Hugh were together in the studio; Bessie was working at her picture, and her cousin, seated in an old arm−chair, was gazing dreamily out through the open window over the pasture, and grove, and the blue lake beyond. “I think life is very beautiful,” he said, after a long pause. “I have no patience with people who are always sighing and complaining, always talking of the cold world, the hard lot of man, and the sufferings of humanity. I always felt sure that they themselves have no taste for beauty, no affection for their friends, or enthusiasm for great deeds, and, judging others by themselves, of course they are always looking for double motives in the kindest actions, and hypocrisy in the most unselfish impulses.”

“What has brought these thoughts to the surface, Hugh?”

“The beauty of the sky and the lake. How can any one look at them and not be happy?”

“If you were very poor, Hugh, you might not have time to look at them,” said Bessie, taking up the other side.

“Why not? One can work and not be blind! I expect to work all my life, but I am going to be happy too.”

“But suppose you should lose all those you love,—suppose they should all die,” said Bessie, pursuing the argument.

“Even then I should be happy on such a day and with such a sky. I cannot understand how people who believe God's word can brood over their sorrows in such a gloomy way. Are not the dead with their great Creator? Can we not trust them to Him? Why, when I look up into this blue sky, I can almost see them there. My mother,—how often I think of her; not with sadness, always with pleasure, and a bright anticipation of meeting her again. Bessie, if I should die, you must not mourn for me. Think of me as gone into another world where sooner or later you will come too.”

“Why do you say such things, Hugh?” said Bessie, laying down her brush with her eyes full of tears.

“Because they happened to come into my mind, I suppose. Why, you are not crying! Nonsense, Brownie! look at me. Do I look like dying? Am I not a young giant, with every prospect of outliving all my family? I fully expect to live to a hale old age, and you have no idea how full and busy my life is going to be. Go to work again, and I will tell you all my plans; I have never told them to any one before. In the first place, I shall go, of course, to New York, and enter Cousin John's establishment. I shall work with all my might, and, with the aid of my relationship, I shall no doubt be able to obtain a good position there in the course of a few years. Gradually I shall mount higher and higher, I shall make myself indispensable to the firm, and at the end of ten years you will see me a partner; at the end of twenty, a rich man. I shall then retire from active business, and spend part of my time in travelling, although I intend to be very domestic, also. I shall buy beautiful pictures, choice books, and fine statues; I shall give private concerts, and, if possible, have a small orchestra of my own; I shall entertain my friends in the easiest and most charming manner. In addition to my city home, I shall have a yacht for summer cruises, and a pretty cottage on the seashore, and I shall invite pleasant people to visit me; not the rich and the fashionable merely, but others who are shut out from all such luxuries, young authors, poor artists, musicians, and many others who are obliged to work night and day while their intellectual inferiors live in ease. Oh! I shall have a beautiful, happy life, Bessie. Do you not think so?”

“Yes, Hugh. But will it be so easy to get rich?”

“Twenty years of hard labor and earnest application will do it, with the opening I have. I suppose it sounds conceited, but I have unbounded confidence in myself. What man has done man can do, you know; and why am not I the man?”

“I think you can do anything, Hugh.”

“Thank you, Miss Flattery. But, really Bessie, there is something stirring within me that makes me feel sure I can take my place in the world, and make my mark among men. I do not, mean that I am wiser or stronger than my fellows, but only, that my courage is indomitable, and that I am determined to succeed. I *will succeed*!”

“Of course you will,” said Bessie, laying down her brush again, and looking at her cousin's kindling eyes and flushed cheeks with sympathetic excitement.

“And then,” pursued Hugh, “when I have got my money, I shall not hoard it; I shall make others as well as myself happy with it. I shall use it worthily; I shall not be ashamed to render my account at last. Oh, Bessie, it is a

glorious future! Life is so beautiful,—so full of happiness!" Hugh paused, and his eyes wandered over the blue horizon; Bessie went on with her painting, and there was silence in the studio for many minutes. At length Aunt Faith's voice was heard at the foot of the stairs; "Hugh! Hugh!" she called.

"Coming, aunt," said Hugh, opening the door and going down to the second story; "do you want me?"

"Yes, will you come into my room, dear."

The two went in and the door was closed. Aunt Faith's room was like herself, old−fashioned and pleasant; the sunshine streamed in through the broad windows across the floor, and the perfume of the garden filled the air. Hugh took a seat on the chintz lounge, and Aunt Faith having taken a letter from her desk, sat down in her arm−chair by the table. "I wish to consult you, my dear boy, on a matter of business," she said. "You know the condition of my property and the amount of my income, I am anxious to make some necessary repairs in that little house of mine in Albion, where poor Mrs. Crofts lives, a second cousin of mine, you remember, a widow with very limited means of support. The repairs ought to be made at once, and, just at present, I have not the money on hand; I could borrow it, of course, elsewhere, but I prefer to borrow it of you, the amount that came to you a week or two ago. Sibyl will need hers for her summer wardrobe, but you will have no use for yours at present, and on the first of August, I shall repay you; with interest," added Aunt Faith, smiling; "I am not sure but that I shall *pay* twenty−five per cent."

A flush rose in Hugh's face; he did not raise his eyes, but trifled with a piece of string.

"Well, my dear?" said Aunt Faith in some surprise at his silence.

"I am very sorry, Aunt," said Hugh in a low tone; "I have not got the money, I have spent it all."

"Spent it?" echoed Aunt Faith in astonishment. "My dear boy, is it possible!"

"Yes, it is all gone," said Hugh, with downcast eyes.

A shade of trouble clouded Mrs. Sheldon's gentle face, and she sighed; the old heart−ache came back, the same pain which had assailed her on the first of June, her birthday, when doubts came thronging into her mind, doubts as to her own fitness for her position with its heavy responsibility of training five young souls in the path of duty and righteousness. "Hugh must have got into some trouble," she thought, "and something, too, which he has not confided to me. I fear it is a debt; perhaps a debt of which he is ashamed. Oh, my poor, poor boy!" Hugh did not speak, and at length his aunt said gently, "I fear you have had some debts, dear; if you had told me, I could have helped you before this."

"I know you are always ready to help me, Aunt Faith."

"Then it was a debt, Hugh?"

"Yes; it was a debt, Aunt Faith," said Hugh gravely.

"Is it all paid now?"

"Yes; every cent. I have the receipt."

"I am glad of that; but have you any other debts?"

"No, not one," said Hugh, raising his eyes at last with a brighter expression. "I cannot tell you about that debt, Aunt Faith, but I *can* tell you that it was no disgrace to me."

The shadow melted away from Mrs. Sheldon's face, she laid her hand upon her nephew's golden hair, and looked lovingly into his dark blue eyes. "Hugh," she said earnestly, "you are like your father, and he was my favorite brother. I love you very much, more than you know, and I believe you would not willingly grieve me. You are still under twenty−one, and you are soon to leave me to enter the busy life of a great city. I am so anxious for you, Hugh! If I could only know that you had that firm faith which is man's only safeguard in temptation!"

Tears stood in her eyes as she spoke, and Hugh felt that she loved him indeed.

"What is faith?" he said thoughtfully.

"A firm belief in the mercy of God through His son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and a realization of the necessity of a Saviour to atone for our sins," said Aunt Faith reverently.

"I believe in God, Aunt Faith. I believe in Him implicitly. I cannot understand how a reasonable being can deny His personal and omnipotent majesty. The sky alone would be enough to convince me, without counting the wonders of the earth and our every−day life. How can any one look out of the window, at night, and see those myriad lights on high, without bowing in adoration before the incomprehensible greatness of the Creator? What do we know of the stars, after all? How much has the most profound science discovered? Next to nothing! Not but that I read all that has been written by the late astronomers, for the subject is very fascinating; it is the fairy tale of

science. But still, the nursery rhyme expresses it best:—

'Twinkle, twinkle, little star!
How I wonder what you are!'"

"What we know not now, we shall know here−after," said Aunt Faith; "but in addition to your belief in the Creator, do you not also recognize the necessity for a Saviour?"

"There it is, Aunt Faith! Are we all really such miserable sinners? Is there none good? Must we always answer, 'no, not one?' Even in my short life, I have known so many who are good and generous! I never could endure whining, you know. I never could endure a gloomy, tearful religion. If we were put into the world, it surely was intended that we should enjoy its beautiful life, and be happy with our fellow mortals. I believe men should try to be good sons, good husbands, and good citizens, and should try to be happy themselves, as well as to make others happy. I can never believe in the virtue of morbid self−analysis, gloomy depression, and harsh judgment. 'Worms of the dust!' they say. Well, if the worms are created, and put into the dust, that is the state of life to which they are called, and they will be better worms if they fulfil the duties of a worm, no matter how humble, than they would be if they crawled up on a solitary stone, and wilfully starved themselves to death."

"Surely, Hugh, there is nothing in the idea of a merciful Saviour to forbid a reasonable enjoyment of life."

"There ought not to be, Aunt Faith; and if I was not so weary of hypocrisy, I think I could almost throw myself at His feet and give my life into His hands. I want to believe in Him; indeed, I may say I do believe in Him. But I have been kept from coming forward as an 'avowed disciple,' by the contempt I cannot help feeling for some whom I know as 'avowed disciples.' If there is a contemptible fault in the world it is hypocrisy. I will not believe that God loves the rich church−member, who makes long prayers, and puts five cents in the plate, better than the poor outcast who goes half−starved for days in order to help a sick companion."

"But, Hugh, no one asks you to believe anything of the kind. Do you not remember our Saviour's parable of the Good Samaritan who saved the wounded man, while the priest and the Levite, men supposed to be particularly religious, passed by on the other side! The world was the same in our Saviour's day that it is now, and there is no class against which He utters more severe reproaches than these very religious hypocrites."

"But, Aunt Faith, these hypocrites are so often prominent in the churches. That is what offends me."

"It was so then, Hugh. Our Saviour saw it, and repeatedly tore off the masks."

"But if the hypocrites are in the church, is it not better to stay out?"

"By no means, my dear boy. God has commanded us to make an open profession before men, and we must obey with reverent humility. It is not enough to believe; we must also openly avow our belief. Because there are tares in the field we must not, therefore, stay out in the desert. Because there are hypocrites in the church, we must not, therefore, give ourselves up to evil."

"Oh, I don't mean that, aunt! We could be just as good Christians all the time."

"No, Hugh. That is a fatal error. Men are weak, and God mercifully helps them to conquer themselves by sending them the safeguards of religious vows and duties. It is His appointed way, and we must not question His wisdom. The dangers are ten times greater outside the church than within it, and a blessing is given to obedience. God requires obedience. He distinctly says, 'he that is not with me, is against me, and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad.' And as regards hypocrisy, Hugh, it is indeed a wretched fault; but, are there not other faults equally bad?"

"No, aunt; not to me. I can never go to church in the winter without a bitter feeling towards old Mr. Braine, who always leaves his poor horse tied outside through the long service, during the severest weather. Then there is Gideon Fish, too. How very, very good he is! When he was a little boy he always took the highest place in school for good conduct, and yet, there was not a meaner boy in town. He copied the other scholars' exercises, peeped into the books, and had a key to his Arithmetic. He never got into trouble at recess, and why? Because he was too cowardly to take his share of the sport. As he grew older, he grew to be more and more of a pattern. He was always talking about his feelings. He always 'felt it to be his duty' to do just what he most wished to do, and he always had some wonderfully self−sacrificing motive for the greatest self−indulgence. He 'felt it to be his duty' to stay at home from church to warn truant boys not to steal the peaches on the Sabbath−day, and how many do you suppose he himself ate that morning?"

"It seems to me, Hugh, that you and Bessie *are* unreasonably severe upon Gideon's love of eating," said Aunt Faith smiling. "Perhaps some time there will come a revelation to Gideon Fish; perhaps some great affliction or

disappointment will open his eyes and cause him to see his selfish propensities as they are. In the meantime, let us not forget the beam in our own eyes while we are talking of the mote in our brother's eye. To go back to our subject; you have acknowledged your belief in God and also, I hope, in His Son our Saviour Jesus Christ?"

"Yes, Aunt Faith; but I cannot acknowledge that the world is a miserable place and life a failure."

"I do not ask you to acknowledge that, Hugh; you are young and it may be that you have not yet been assailed by the terrible temptations which come, sooner or later, to most of us. Perhaps you have not yet learned from sad experience how hard is the struggle against evil inclinations, and how many are the relapses into which the best of men are apt to fall. It was only when worn with the contest and depressed by repeated failures that the good men of all ages have sent up those cries of abasement and gloom which you so much dislike. This time has not yet come to you; you know nothing of its power. I do not ask you to be wise beyond your years; I only wish you to become as a little child and reverently say, 'Lord I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.' The rest will come in due time. There is a blessing given to prompt obedience, and this blessing I want you to gain."

For several minutes there was silence in the pleasant room, and then Hugh rose. "Dear Aunt Faith," he said, "you and I will have many more talks on this subject. Who knows but I shall be a pillar of the church in my old age?"

"I hope so, Hugh. But do not put off till old age a plain duty of the present. Give the best of your life to your Maker; after all, the present is all you can call your own."

"Oh, no, Aunt Faith, the future is mine too. How glorious, how bright it looks! You will be proud of your nephew some day."

"I am proud of him now," said Aunt Faith, with an affectionate smile; "but I want to feel secure as to his safety. Oh, Hugh! if you could only say in perfect sincerity these two sentences: 'Lord I believe; help Thou mine unbelief,' and 'Lord be merciful to me a sinner,' I should rest content."

"Well, Aunt Faith, when I can say them with all my heart, I will tell you first of all."

"God grant that it may be soon," and then Hugh left her.

Bessie was still busy with her painting when she heard a tap at the door. "Is it you, Hugh?" she said; "I am so glad you have come back. I cannot get the exact color of your eyes. Sit down, please, and let me try again." Hugh sat down in the old arm−chair, and for some minutes he said nothing; at last, however, he burst forth, "Bessie, shall we not tell Aunt Faith about the horseback−riding."

"Oh, Hugh! and give up all our fun?"

"I do so hate hypocrisy, Bessie; and here I have been rating away against Gideon Fish without even a thought that all the time I myself was deceiving Aunt Faith."

"I don't call that hypocrisy, Hugh."

"What is hypocrisy, then?"

"A hypocrite is a person who pretends to be very good, and I am sure you never pretended to be good at all."

Hugh laughed; "That is true," he said "but I hate all underhand dealings."

"But you won't tell, Hugh? Please don't."

"*Et tu Brute*?"

"And don't quote Latin either."

"I only meant that you should help my good intentions instead of thwarting them," said Hugh.

"I am not good myself, Hugh, and never was."

"Oh, yes, you are, Brownie."

"No, I am not. I have been expelled twice."

"I believe it is your nature to be naughty, Bessie."

"I don't know about that, Hugh; but, at any rate, I ought to have some allowances made because I am so homely. It is easy to be good if one happens to be good−looking too. Everybody loves beautiful children, everybody admires beautiful girls; people are predisposed to like them, and make the best of everything they do. Beauty is of little consequence to a boy, but it makes or mars many a girl. I presume, now, if my nose had been Grecian, and my complexion lily fair, I should have been far more amiable."

Hugh laughed merrily at this tirade. "But, Brownie," he said, "*I* have always thought you pretty."

A shade of color rose in Bessie's dark cheek "Thank you, cousin," she said quickly, "you are kind to say so. But your real taste is for a very different style; a dove−eyed blonde, fair as a lily, and gentle as Griselda."

“Like Edith Chase, I suppose,” said Hugh, with a merry twinkle in his eye. “Well, a man might do worse. I venture to say the fair Edith never took a horseback−ride after dark in her life.”

“Certainly not; is she not a pattern?” said Bessie sharply. “And, by the way, Hugh, of course you will give me my ride to−night.”

“Oh, Bessie, Bessie, you are incorrigible! Well, if I must, I must! The musicale is to−night, you know.”

“I had forgotten it; but we can go afterwards.”

“That is, if you will mend my gloves.”

“Do get a new pair, Hugh.”

“No; I have only ten dollars left; I shall not have any more until August, and my heart is set upon a little picture at Gurner's. You have no idea how much I want it; I stop to look at it every time I pass the window, and the liking has, grown into a positive longing. I really must have it.”

“What is the subject?”

“It is, I suppose, an allegorical design, but what attracted me was the beauty of the coloring and its fidelity to nature. It represents a youth standing in a little shaded valley, looking forward and upward through a vista which gradually rises into a bold mountain peak. The atmosphere is all morning, early morning, with purple hues on the hill−side, mists rising from the river, and a vague remoteness even in the nearest forest; deep shadows lie over the valley, but the rising sun shines on the mountain−peak, lighting it up with a golden radiance, while behind it, there seemed to spread away into distance the atmosphere of another country, a beautiful unseen Paradise. Towards this mountain−peak the youth is looking with ardent eyes; one feels sure that his hopes are there, and that sooner or later he will reach the golden country beyond.”

“I remember the picture. Is there not a crown shining in the sunlight over the mountain−top, and the outline of a great cross in the dark shadow over the steep path which leads up to the summit?”

“I believe so; but it was the figure of the youth that attracted me. His face expressed aspiration, that bright confidence in the future which Aunt Faith and I have been discussing this morning.”

“So you were in her room all that time, were you?”

“Yes; and that reminds me that I must do a little reading. I am growing shamefully lazy. Good−bye, Queen Bessie. Be sure and make my picture as handsome as you can.”

“I shall do my best;”—“but I cannot hope to make it as handsome as the original,” she added, after the door closed.

Twilight came and the two cousins were riding in a country lane several miles from the old stone house; they had left the turnpike where they usually rode, and, instead of going at headlong speed, the horses were walking slowly over the grassy path as if the summer evening had influenced their riders with its peaceful quiet.

“I have never been here before,” said Bessie; “where does that path lead?”

“To Rocky brook where we used to go a fishing.”

“Let us go that way, please. I have not been to Rocky brook for years and years.” So the horses were turned, and, after a pleasant ride through the woods, they reached the edge of the ravine; the path, an Indian trail, came to an end, and down below they could hear the rushing sound of the water.

“Oh I must get down, Hugh!” said Bessie eagerly; “I want to go down to the brook.”

“It will be hard climbing in that long skirt, Bessie. I will bring you out some other time.”

“No, Hugh; I want to go now, this very minute.”

“I suppose you must have your way, then,” said her cousin, as he lifted her to the ground; “wait until I fasten the horses so that I can help you.”

But Bessie had already disappeared, swinging herself from rock to rock by aid of the bushes, as actively as a squirrel; she had reached the bottom of the ravine as Hugh appeared at the top. “Don't go too near the bridge,” he shouted; “wait till I come down.”

Bessie looked down the ravine, and seeing the plank which served for a bridge high in the air over the foaming water, she was seized with a sudden desire to cross it; Hugh's warning, as usual, only stimulated this desire. If there was any danger, she wanted to be in it immediately. So she clambered over the rocks towards the forbidden locality with a pleasant excitement, not really believing in the danger, but lured on by the spirit of adventure strong within her from childhood.

“Don't go near the bridge!” shouted Hugh again, by this time half way down the bank.

“Hugh is too despotic,” thought his cousin, as she climbed up on the wet stones. “I shall certainly do as I please. If he wants implicit obedience, he must go to Edith Chase.” In another instant she was on the plank, and balancing herself, walked forward over the torrent, holding her long skirt over her arm; her head was steady, she did not know what fear was; many a time she had crossed deeper chasms in safety, and she laughed to herself as she heard Hugh crashing through the bushes down the bank behind her. “He will like me all the better for my courage,” she thought, somewhat surprised at his silence, for she had expected to hear further remonstrance. Suddenly, when she had reached the middle of the bridge, the plank cracked, gave way entirely, and in an instant she was in the foaming torrent below. She sank, and for one moment, one dreadful moment, she was under water, suffocating and terror−stricken, while all the events of her life seemed to rush before her like an instantaneous panorama. Then she felt the air again, and opening her eyes, found herself in Hugh's arms, as he strode out of the water and laid her down on the bank. “Oh, Hugh!” she gasped, “it was dreadful!”

“Are you hurt, dear? Did your head strike the rocks?” asked her cousin anxiously.

“No, I think not; but I feel rather dizzy,” said Bessie, closing her eyes.

“Can you stay here for a moment alone, while I run back to the farm−house? Fortunately the weather is so warm there is not much danger of your taking cold.”

“Oh, yes,” said Bessie, smiling, as her cousin chafed her hands with anxiety that belied his words. He sprang up the bank, and after some delay reappeared carrying shawls and wrappings. “Do you feel better? Are you faint?” he asked, as he enveloped her in the shawls.

“I feel quite well now,” said Bessie, trying to rise.

“Stop; I am going to carry you,” said Hugh.

“You shall do nothing of the kind, Hugh. I am able to walk, and the bank is steep.”

“I shall take you round by the path, so don't make any objection, for it will be useless. The farmer will have his carriage waiting for us, and we shall drive home as rapidly as possible.”

“Oh, Hugh, I am so heavy! You will never be able to do it,” said Bessie, as Hugh lifted her slight form muffled in shawls.

“Very heavy! Really, quite elephantine! A matter of ninety pounds, I should say!”

“Nonsense, sir! I weigh one hundred and ten.”

“And what is that to a man of muscle? Don't you know that I pride myself upon my strength! The old proverb *says* that cleanliness is next to godliness; if that is so, I give the third place to strength. What a pity we cannot say 'muscleness,' to keep up the rhythm! Do you know, Bessie, if ministers had more muscle, I should like them better.”

“Mr. Leslie has muscle, Hugh.”

“Yes; he has got a good strong fist of his own. I like him, too, in every way. He is so manly in his goodness, and so frank in his religion! He is one of those fine, large−hearted men who give their very best to the cause. He did not take to the ministry because he was not fitted for anything else; he has the capabilities and qualifications for a first−rate business man, civil engineer, or soldier. But it is evident that the whole world was as nothing to him compared to the great work of salvation. I honor him. He is a man to be envied, for he is living up to his ideal.”

“Why, Hugh! I had no idea you admired him so much! Are you thinking of following his example?”

“Don't joke, Bessie. The subject is too serious.”

“I am not joking,” said Bessie, in a low voice.

“I am no hero,” said Hugh, with a half sigh, as they reached the lane; “I could never do as Mr. Leslie has done. I can only hope to make others happy in my small way by—”

“By helping ill−behaved cousins out of their troubles,” interrupted Bessie, “paying their debts, saving their lives, and so forth and so forth.”

The ride home was pleasant, in spite of wet clothes. Hugh drove the farmer's horse in an old carryall, and the farmer himself rode Hugh's horse, leading the other alongside. When they reached the back−pasture it was quite dark. Hugh lifted Bessie out, threw the shawls back into the carryall, and farmer Brown, after fastening the saddle−horses behind, drove away towards the town, where he was to leave them at the livery−stable according to agreement.

“Now, Bessie, take up that skirt, and let us have a run across the garden,” said Hugh. “I am so afraid you will

take cold."

But Bessie's long, wet skirt proved such an obstacle, that in spite of her objection, Hugh lifted her up again, and carried her across the pasture, through the garden, and up the terrace into the house.

"Shall you go to the musicale?" he whispered, as he put her down in the dark hall.

"No," said Bessie; "I wish you would make it all right with Aunt Faith. I have a headache; the fright, I suppose."

Hugh went off to his room, and in an incredibly short time he was down−stairs again, in evening dress. Aunt Faith came in a few moments afterwards, dressed in gray silk with delicate white lace around her throat and wrists; "Is it not time to go?" she said. "Where is Sibyl?"

"Here, Aunt," said Sibyl from the parlor; "I have been ready some time."

"Come in, child, and let us see you"

Sibyl crossed the hall and stood in the door−way. Her dress of soft blue harmonized with her fair beauty, and brought out the tints of her hair and complexion; she wore no ornaments, and the flowing drapery floated around her devoid of any kind of trimming. "Her dress was nothing; just a plain, blue tarleton," said one of her companions the next day to a mutual friend. "But Sibyl herself looked lovely." This was Sibyl's art; her dress was always subordinate to herself.

"You look like the evening star, sister," said Hugh.

"Thank you, brother. A compliment from you is precious, because rare," said Sibyl, smiling; "and as for you, you look like the Apollo in Guido's *Aurora*."

"Bravo! That's a compliment worth having," said Hugh, tossing back his golden locks. "And now that we are both gorged with compliments, let us start for the halls of Euterpe."

"Where is Bessie?" said Aunt Faith, as Hugh rose.

"She is not going. She has a headache," answered Hugh.

"Poor child! I will run up and see her before I go."

"That is not necessary, Aunt. I think she would rather not be disturbed," said Hugh. "Let us start; it is late."

The musicale was held at the residence of Mrs. Arlington, on the opposite side of the avenue, but a short distance from the old stone house, and Bessie, after taking off her wet clothes, dressed herself in a wrapper, and took her seat at the open hall−window in the second story, where she could see the lights through the trees, and even hear an occasional strain of the music on the night breeze. She felt depressed; her head ached, and her conscience likewise. "I am always doing something wrong," she thought ruefully; "I let Hugh pay that debt; then I teased him out of his idea of telling Aunt Faith, and made him take me riding again, and when he was kind enough to give in to my wish, I deliberately went out on that plank when he told me not to go, and the result was I came near being drowned, and poor Hugh must have had a struggle to get me out in that current. I suppose he is over there now talking with Edith Chase! she is an affected, silly girl, but I suppose Hugh does not understand her as well as I do. However, perhaps she is better than I am! I am dreadful, I know; and so homely, too! I look just like an Indian. Edith is considered pretty. To be sure *I* think she looks just like a white cat; but then, some people think white cats are pretty. Well, her looks are nothing to me. *I* don't care anything about it!" And in truth of this assertion, Bessie crouched down among the cushions of the lounge, and had what girls call "a good cry."

About an hour afterwards she heard a step on the gravel walk in front of the house, and the sound of a latch−key in the front−door; in another minute Hugh came up the stairs on the way to his room. "Hugh! Hugh!" called out a voice in the darkness.

"Is that you, Bessie? What are you doing here?" said her cousin, lighting a burner in the chandelier. "Why, you have been crying! Does your head ache? Do you feel faint?"

"My head is better, Hugh; but I *am* wicked," murmured Bessie from the heap of cushions.

"Wicked! What do you mean, Brownie?"

"Just what I say. I am always in trouble myself and drawing you in too. You would be a great deal better without me, Hugh. I shall be glad when you go to New York."

"Glad, Bessie!"

"I mean it will be better for you," murmured Bessie.

"And how about yourself?"

"Oh, I shall never be good at all; I shall stay at home and be wicked, I suppose," said Bessie, with the sound of

tears in her voice. Hugh did not reply, but he put out his hand and stroked the dark curls gently. After a moment or two Bessie suddenly recovered her spirits. “How was Miss Chase?” she asked gayly.

“Lovely as a lily,” said Hugh, laughing; “I told her so, too.”

“Was Graham Marr there?”

“Yes; I left him with Sibyl.”

“Did he quote poetry?”

“I presume so, in the intervals of the music, Gid was there, too.”

“At the door of the supper−room, I suppose?”

“Yes, he was looking at the salad when I came away.”

“That reminds me; why did you leave so early, Hugh?”

“I believe, after all, I am a little tired; I strained my wrist slightly in the brook.”

“Let me get some arnica for you; do, Hugh.”

“Oh, no! the strain is very slight. It will be all over in a day or two.”

“Was there really any danger, Hugh?”

“Yes; I think it right that you should know it, because you may be tempted to do the same thing again. The water was deep there, and the brook swollen by the last rains; the current was very strong, and there is a fall just below. But your greatest danger was from the sharp jagged rocks; when I plunged after you I cannot express how alarmed I was!”

Bessie covered her face with her hands. “It was all owing to my obstinate wilfulness,” she said in a low tone, “Oh, Hugh! can you forgive me?”

“Do not think of it any more.” said her cousin, “but come down and give me some music.”

“What! In this old wrapper, Hugh?”

“There speaks feminine vanity. As though I knew a wrapper from a dress?”

So Bessie went down to the sitting−room, and, taking the cover off her harp, sat down in her old wrapper to play for Hugh. When she was in the mood she brought very spirited music out of the silver strings, but to−night she played soft airs, and minor chords, weaving in among them Hugh's favorite plaintive melodies, with her now wild improvisations between. At last she rose and replaced the harp−cover. “It is late; I must go,” she said. “They will be coming home before long, Of course *you* won't say anything about our ride, Hugh. It would only frighten Aunt Faith. But I have decided not to go again; what happened to−night seems like a warning.”

“Superstitious, Bessie?”

“No; I am only trying to stop before I drag you into any more danger. Think how much trouble I have given you, too! And, oh, Hugh! you had to pay that farmer,” added Bessie, as the idea came to her for the first time.

“Run upstairs, Brownie; it is late.”

“I shall not run, Hugh. I know very well you had to pay him that ten dollars, and I have robbed you of your last cent,” said Bessie tragically.

“Oh, what a dismal face! Run, before Aunt Faith comes.”

“And the picture you were going to buy,” said Bessie, with tearful eyes.

“Foolish child! as if I cared for the picture; when I am rich I shall buy a whole gallery. Now run; I positively hear their voices at the gate.”

As Bessie went away with a full heart, Aunt Faith, Sibyl, and Graham Marr came up the garden−walk and entered the house. “You came away early, Hugh,” said Aunt Faith; “do you feel well?”

“I am tired, aunt; that is all.”

“It was a pleasant party,” continued Aunt Faith; “did you not think so, Sibyl?”

“I enjoyed it!” said Sibyl quietly.

“It was a rare feast,” said Graham; “one seldom meets such a combination of aesthetic talent in Westerton.”

“Mr. Leslie was not there, however,” said Hugh.

“Ah,—no. But ministers are not generally cultivated musicians,” said Graham, in his slow way. “They have not the time to,—ah,—to muse upon the mystery of harmony.”

“Mr. Leslie is a fine musician,” said Hugh bluntly; “I have seldom heard so fine a baritone,—so rich and manly.”

Now Graham sang tenor,—a very delicate tenor, and naturally he could not sympathize with Hugh's fancy for

a rich baritone. As he rose to take leave, Sibyl said, “I wish you would bring over your music, Mr. Marr, and sing for us. We were all charmed with that little German song you sung this evening; it was so full of pathos.”

“Pathos!” whispered Hugh to Aunt Faith, as Sibyl accompanied the poet into the hall. “How can Sibyl endure that calf!”

“As Pete Trone said, '*de gustibus*' and so forth, Hugh,” said Sibyl's voice from the hall as she closed the door behind Graham.

“Well, Sibyl; I did not intend you to hear the epithet, but I cannot with sincerity take it back,” said Hugh.

“I like calves,” said Sibyl, “they have beautiful eyes! Good−night!”

“I never can make Sibyl out!” said Hugh, as his sister disappeared. “She never loses her temper, and truth always comes out with the temper, you know. Well, Aunt Faith, I have been a very bad boy all day. Will you pardon all my misdeeds?”

“If you are penitent,” said Aunt Faith, smiling. Then, more seriously, “You will not forget what I said to you this morning, Hugh?”

“No, aunt; I shall not forget. Your words sank deeper than you knew,” said Hugh gravely.

CHAPTER V. FOURTH OF JULY.

The first of July came, and with it the summer heat. Hugh hung up a hammock in the second story hall, between the north and south windows, so as to catch every wandering zephyr; and, armed with a book, he betook himself to this airy retreat for the purpose of study. At least that was his announcement at the breakfast−table. “For the purpose of sleep?” suggested Sibyl. “Day−dreaming!” said Bessie. “Lazying!” said Tom, coining a word for the occasion with true American versatility.

“Very well, fellow−citizens, laugh on,” said Hugh; “these are the last strawberries of the season, and I have no inclination to discuss anything at present but their sweetness. But I will venture to assert that at six o'clock this evening I shall have imbibed more knowledge in that very hammock then any of you in your prosy chairs.”

“I shall go and see Miss Skede about my white dresses,” said Sibyl, rising.

“Not this warm morning,” exclaimed Bessie.

“The very time. I could not have chosen a better day. Miss Skede has no imagination; she can *never* lift herself beyond the present. If I had gone to her in June, she would have made my dresses heavy, in spite of all my orders and descriptions. Even yesterday, for instance, she would have been unable to conceive anything more than half−way effects; but to−day it is so warm that the heat may inspire her, and I hope to get out of her something as flowing and delicate as a summer cloud.”

“I see now, Sibyl, where all your poetry goes,” said Hugh, laughing; “the puffs and ruffles get it all!”

“Fortunately Graham has enough for two,” said Bessie, looking up with a malicious smile.

But Sibyl's temper was never ruffled: “I like Graham, as you know, Bessie. You, also, have your likes and dislikes, but *I* do not tease you about them.”

“That is true, Sibyl,” said Bessie, warmly; “you certainly have the best disposition in the family. I wish I had half your amiability.”

Soon after breakfast, Tom and Gem went out into the garden, and sat down under the shade of the great elm−tree. The three dogs were not long in discovering their place of retreat, and invited themselves to join the party with their usual assurance,—Turk stretching himself on the ground alongside, Grip under a currant−bush, and Pete Trone occupying himself in tilling the soil.

“What are you going to do to−day, Tom?” said Gem, as she adorned Turk's shaggy back with flowers.

“Well, I don't exactly know,” replied Tom; “the B. B.'s are coming, and we've thought a little of building a house up a tree.”

“What for?” said Gem rather languidly,—for when the thermometer stands in the eighties, the idea of building becomes oppressive.

“What for!” repeated Tom indignantly; “that's just like a girl! For fun, of course. What else, do you suppose? But you needn't have anything to do with it. You can go right into the house this very minute, if you like.”

“I don't want to go into the house; you know that very well, Tom Morris. I always like to see the B. B.'s, and I think a house in a tree will be splendid!” said Gem quickly.

“Won't it, though! We're going to take the big cask over there, and hoist up all the boards, and nails, and things. There's a place in the main branches where we can build a real room, big enough for all of us, if we squeeze tight. We're going to have a floor, and roof, and sides, and a hole in the bottom to climb in,—a sort of sally−port, you know. It will be a regular fort, and I rather guess those south−end fellows will wink out of the wrong sides of their eyes when they see it.”

“Won't it be rather warm up there?” suggested Gem.

“I never saw such a baby!” exclaimed Tom. “Warm? of course it will be, and what then? The monitors were warm, I reckon, but you never caught our soldiers whining about it. The B. B.'s will stand up to their work like men, and they'll stay in that house when it's built, even if they melt down to their very backbones!”

“I wonder what Pete is doing?” said Gem, after a pause, wisely making a diversion in the conversation.

“Oh! burying bones, I suppose,” said Tom; “He's always at it. I believe he'd dig a hole in an iron floor if he was chained up on it. Hallo, Pete! stop that! You're making too much dust. Do you hear me, sir? Very well! you'd—a—bet—” When Tom got as far as “bet,” pronounced in an awful voice, Pete knew that a stick was

forthcoming. He accordingly paused in his digging, his little black nose covered with yellow earth, and his eyes fixed mournfully on the half−finished hole. “Let us go and dig up some of his bones and show them to him,” said Tom; “it always makes him feel so ashamed! I know where they are; he has his favorite places, and I've often seen him toiling up and down from one to the other, as important as the man that goes round with the panorama and jaws at the people.”

“What an expression!” said Gem, with an air of superiority; “you boys are so common!”

“And you girls are so soft!” said Tom. “I'd rather be a boy than a girl, any day. Come, now!”

But Gem was not inclined to argue this point, so they carried out their bone−hunting project, much to the discomfiture of Pete Trone, Esq., who followed behind as if fascinated, watched the disinterment of each relic with mortified interest, and, when the last was brought into view, drooped his head and tail, and sought refuge in the corn−field where he relieved his feelings by burrowing wildly in twenty different places.

“There come the B. B.'s!” exclaimed Gem, interrupting Tom in a search for artichokes; “eight of them, as sure as you live!”

“What an expression,” said Tom, imitating his sister's voice; “you girls are so common!” But the approach of the visitors made a truce a matter of necessity, and soon the project of the tree−house engrossed the entire attention. Boards were brought from the little tool−house, saws were in demand, and Gem was deputed to confiscate all the hammers and nails in the house for the use of the builders; the work went bravely on, and by noon the walls of the fortification were up, and the roof well advanced towards completion. A ladder brought from the barn, took the workmen half−way up the trunk; but the old tree was lofty, and a long space intervened between the end of the ladder and the lowest branches, which must of necessity be ascended in that squirming manner peculiar to boys, wherein they delight to bark their shins, tear their trousers, and blister their hands in the pursuit of glory. Gem, of course, could not hope to emulate the B. B.'s in this mode of progression towards the fortification, but she brought nails and carried boards with great energy. When there was no call for her services, she watched with intense interest the B. B. who happened to be squirming up. If there was no B. B. squirming up, there was sure to be one squirming down, for a principal part of the time seemed to be devoted to journeys below and aloft, besides elaborate contrivances for slinging boards and tools to the climbers' backs; indeed, to a looker−on, this seemed to be the chief interest of the fortification.

At last it was done, all but the floor; Tom said it did not matter about that, as the boys could easily stand on the branches. Word was given to ascend, and, one by one, all the B. B.'s squirmed up the tree and took their places inside; nothing was to be seen but their feet, huddled together on the branches. It took ten minutes for all the band to assemble on high, but in less than two, down they squirmed again. “What is the matter?” said Gem in astonishment; she had not expected to see the B. B.'s for hours, absorbed as they would be in their leafy abode.

“We're going to take up the dogs,” said Tom, who came first; “we're going to sling 'em up in a basket. It will be such fun, and they'll like it first−rate.”

“Oh, don't, Tom!” exclaimed Gem; “Turk is too big, Grip will be sure to fall out, and it will make Pete Trone seasick.”

But no attention was paid to her remonstrances, and the B. B.'s inspired to new exertions, made numerous journeys up and down, rigging a pulley and making various preparations for the aerial voyage. When all was ready there was a discussion as to which dog should go. Turk *was* too big, no basket would hold him; and Grip, Tom said, had “no common sense,” and would not appreciate the situation. Pete Trone was evidently the man for the place, and he jumped gayly into the basket at Tom's command, without any suspicion of danger; and when he found himself hanging in mid−air, he did not flinch, but settled down resolutely on his haunches, looking over the side with one eye as much as to say, “Who's afraid?”

“Didn't I tell you?” said Tom enthusiastically. “I knew Pete would come out strong. It will take a good while to get him up there. I say, boys, let's sing 'Up in a Balloon.' It will be appropriate to the occasion.”

So all the B. B.'s joined in the chorus with so much power that Aunt Faith came to the back door to listen.

“Tom! Tom!” she called, when the song was finished; “what are you doing?”

“It's only the B. B.'s, Aunt Faith. We're hoisting Pete Trone up into the tree,” shouted Tom.

“Dinner will be ready in a few moments; you had better come in and rest; you must be very warm,” said Aunt Faith from the shaded piazza.

When the basket reached the air−shanty, the B. B.'s who were there to receive it, suddenly remembered that

there was no floor, and Pete, although a dog of varied accomplishments, could hardly be expected to keep his footing on the branches. So there was nothing to be done but let him down again, which was accordingly effected with great care, Pete sitting composedly in the basket without moving a muscle, and jumping out when he reached the ground with conscious importance wagging in his tail. It was one o'clock, and the B. B.'s, after promising to return, adjourned for dinner; Tom and Gem bathed their burning faces, and joined the family circle in the cool dining−room.

"You are as bad as a fire−ball, Tom," said Hugh, looking at his red face; "what have you been doing?"

"Splendid fun! We've been building a house in a tree." And forthwith Tom launched into a full description of the fortification.

"'Oh for a lodge in some vast wilderness, some boundless contiguity of shade!' That was the motive which actuated the Band of Brothers, I suppose," said Hugh.

"The B. B.'s don't know anything about poetry," said Tom, with scorn; "they've got other things to attend to, I can tell you."

"They're coming again this afternoon," said Gem, "to talk over what we shall do on Fourth of July."

"To be sure; the Birthday of Freedom is close upon us," said Hugh; "whatever you do, my countrymen, let it be worthy of the occasion."

"We've got two or three plans," began Gem, but Tom interrupted her; "Don't breathe a word, it will spoil all, Gem."

"I hope it is not dangerous," said patient Aunt Faith, who associated the Birthday of Independence with visions of boys disfigured for life with gunpowder, and girls running madly towards the house with their muslin dresses blazing.

"None of the plans are dangerous, Aunt Faith," said Tom; "but we don't want anybody to know anything about them beforehand; especially Hugh."

"I smell a rat,—I see him floating in the air,—but I shall yet be able to nip him in the bud," quoted Hugh, with pointed emphasis.

"Now don't, Hugh! just promise that you won't cross the back terrace until after the Fourth," pleaded Gem. "It will be twice the fun for you, too, if you don't know anything about it beforehand." After some delay the two conspirators wrenched the required promise from their cousin, who pretended to be deeply curious about the plot, and heroically unselfish in abandoning his designs upon it.

At three o'clock the meeting was held under the elm−tree on the terrace; the B. B.'s reinforced to the number of twelve were there, and Tom and Gem did the honors with cordial hospitality. Many plans were brought forward for the consideration of the patriots, but objections were found to one and all; at length Gem disappeared and after a long delay, returned carrying some books under her arm. "I have thought of something," she said, taking a seat under the tree; "we will have the battle of Bunker Hill and the life of General Israel Putnam." The word "battle" stimulated the B. B.'s, who were lying about on the grass, worn out with their efforts to arrange a programme. "Bunker Hill forever!" said one, tossing up his hat. Tom said nothing; he was not going to be carried away by any of Gem's nonsense, not he! "My plan is this," began Gem, encouraged by the general attention; "we will have a real battle,—we've got torpedoes, fire−crackers, and Tom's cannon, you know,—and we'll make a big monument of boards for Bunker's Hill; I've been there and know just how it looks."

"It wasn't there when the battle was fought, Goosey," said Tom.

"How do you know?" retorted Gem; "*you* were not there, I guess. And as to history, who got ten imperfect marks in one week?"

The B. B.'s not being strong in history, did not take sides in this contest, and Gem went on triumphantly. "Jim Morse can be General Putnam, because his uncle's name is Putnam; you see, I thought of that," said Gem, with conscious pride.

"Hurrah for Jim!" said the enthusiastic B. B. before mentioned.

"Then there will be the wolf−scene," continued Gem. "You remember how Putnam went down in a cave when everybody else was afraid, and shot a great wolf there. They had a rope around his legs, and when he pulled it they jerked it up, and out he came holding the wolf by the ears. Now that will do splendidly for us, for we can have the underground shanty for the cave, and Turk will just do for the wolf."

This last idea was received with applause, and the discussion became general, even Tom forgetting his scorn

in the interest of the occasion, and actually taking some importance upon himself because his sister was the originator of so much brilliancy. Books were consulted, suggestions and changes made, and the whole plot of the drama altered again and again. Each B. B. felt himself called upon to be a general, and they had all selected the names of revolutionary heroes, when some one suggested that an army composed entirely of generals would be difficult to manage. Then, there was the question of time, also. Should they confine themselves to Bunker Hill, or give an abstract of the whole war? Tom was for the whole war; but that was because he had already announced himself as George Washington, and naturally wished for as many battles as possible. He intended, also, to throw in the episode of the hatchet; “It will be real easy,” he said, advocating his plan, “I know it all, out of the reader, and besides, we've got a cherry−tree.”

But another boy maintained that more than one battle would spoil the effect; a number of the forces must of course be left dead and wounded upon the field, and it would not look well for them to come to life over and over again, right before everybody.

It was finally decided to adopt a circuitous course, steering between the impossibilities, yet bringing in all the desired effects. The drama was to open with the wolf−hunt. Then the scene was to change; Putnam, peacefully engaged in ploughing, was to hear the glorious news and depart instantly for Bunker Hill. The battle was to rage fiercely on the terrace slope, and in the vegetable garden, while a masked battery did terrible execution in the asparagus bed, and whole ranks of the enemy were to be mowed down in the cornfield conveniently out of sight. As Tom said, “Something must be left to the imagination.” The third scene was to bring in the hanging of the spy, Nathan Palmer, in order that Putnam might read his famous letter on the subject; but as Gem objected to the tragical end, it was decided to alter history a little, and let Nathan escape by night, which change would also give a fine chance for dark−lanterns, masks, and a muffled drum. The whole was to close with a tableau, and the singing of the “Star−Spangled Banner,” in which the audience were to be especially requested to join.

The outline of the performance was now arranged and nothing remained but to fill in the details; the whole afternoon was consumed in this labor, and still the work was not completed. For several days the B. B.'s studied severely; United States histories were in great demand, and the pages of Shakespeare were turned over for inspiration. Each boy was to compile his own speeches, and many hurried consultations were held over back fences, and in haylofts; one boy, who represented General Stark, selected Hamlet's 'to be or not to be.' A companion objected to the lines as inappropriate, but General Stark replied, “Well, I know the piece because I've spoken it in school, and I ain't going to learn another, I can tell you! I don't see why it won't do as well as anything else.”

Fourth of July came, and with it, great excitement in the vicinity of the old stone house. The B. B.'s belonged to the neighboring families, and their fathers, mothers and sisters were to compose the audience for whom benches had already been placed on the terrace under the trees. The day was warm, but enthusiasm was warmer, and although there was some foreboding of suffering among the audience as they looked out from their cool parlors into the vivid sunshine, there was no flinching among the actors.

There had, however, been great difficulty with the cows who were to represent General Putnam's oxen, for the horses' harness did not fit them very well, and they objected to dragging the plough as well−regulated oxen should have done; so at the last moment it was decided to give up the idea of a moving scene, and simply attempt a tableau; General Putnam at his plough in the field, reading the Declaration of Independence. A sheet could be held up until the cows were in position, then it was to be dropped and the tableau revealed to the audience. “The effect would be grand,” Tom said.

At ten o'clock the actors were all in the vegetable garden, and the audience under cover of straw hats and parasols were slowly assembling on the benches above. The cannon was loaded at the top of an earthwork commanding the asparagus−bed, torpedo ammunition was stored in a box half way down the hill, and fire−crackers were everywhere, provided by the combatants who had clubbed their spending−money for the purpose. A hole had been made in the roof of the underground shanty through which Putnam was to be let down by a rope, and Turk, as the wolf, had been imprisoned there since early morning, with Grip to keep him company. At last all was ready, and the orchestra opened the entertainment with “Hail Columbia” on the violin, by Tom, accompanied by the jews−harp, tambourine and triangle, and a flute which could only play two notes, but made up in power what it lacked in variety. Tom had tried hard to learn “Hail Columbia” for this occasion. He thought he knew it, and the family thought so too, from the amount of practising they had heard. But the excitement

confused the performer, and the violin, after careering around among “Independence be your boast,” ended in the well−known “Nelly Bly,” Tom's chef−d'oeuvre. Fortunately the change made no difference to the rest of the orchestra, their accompaniment was the same to all tunes, and “Nelly Bly” was finished in triumph, and received with applause by the good−natured audience and calls for “first−violin.”

But the orchestra had already dispersed to aid in the grand opening scene, the wolf−hunt, an “historical incident in the life of General Israel Putnam of glorious memory,” as the written programme designated it. First appeared one of the B. B.'s attired as the “Classic Muse,” with a wreath of laurel around his brow. He recited the following lines taken from the “Putnam Memorial:—”

“Hail! Hero of Bunker's Hill.
Thy presence now my soul doth thrill!
This is a sacred and heavenly spot
Where thou, Putnam, didst thy body drop;
May future generations be blest
With the patriotic spirit thou possessed!
Thy memory is like a sweet balm,
That will bless and do no harm.”

This remarkable ode concluded, the Muse retired, and Putnam himself appeared, dressed in full uniform with a sword by his side, and a majestic feather in his hat. The general made a bow to the audience and repeated the following verse, also extracted from the “Memorial.”

“I am Israel Putnam the brave,
Who in Pomfret shot the wolf in the cave;
And by her ears did draw her out,—
I am no coward, but rash and stout!”

Having thus announced his character, General Putnam walked towards the shanty and brandished his sword. “Ha!” he said, snorting fiercely, “there is a wolf here! I shall descend and slay him!”

“Nay, nay!” shouted the B. B.'s in a chorus, as they rushed from the currant−bushes where they had remained hidden to give full effect to the scene. “Putnam, descend not; the wolf is wild!” cried one. “Putnam, descend not; remember thy child!” said another. (This was considered highly poetical by the B. B.'s). But Putnam was not to be persuaded, and the rope was therefore carefully secured to his belt. He took leave of all his friends, shaking them all by the hand, and then, feather and all, he was lowered into the cave, *i.e.* underground shanty. It was intended that there should be no delay in this part of the scene; Turk had been through his portion of the programme many times, and had allowed himself to be hauled up and down with his usual good−nature. As it was expected, therefore, that Putnam would vanquish the wolf in no time, no dialogue had been provided for the friends and neighbors waiting outside, and as time passed and no signal to “draw up,” came, they grew somewhat embarrassed. Tom, urged by necessity, spoke impromptu: “He fighteth the wolf!” he cried; “he fighteth fiercely!” Then, in an undertone to his next neighbor, “say something, Will; anything will do.” But Will could think of nothing but “He fighteth the wolf!” also; so he said it to Dick and kicked him on the shin as a signal to proceed. “Doth he?” said Dick after a long pause; then, at his wits' end as he received another and fiercer kick, he varied the phrase and stammered out, “Doth he?” in a despairing voice, at which all the audience laughed uproariously. Still there was no signal from below, and Tom grew desperate. Stooping down he called through the aperture, “I say, Putnam, why don't you jerk out that wolf?” But no answer came from the den. “Sing something,” said Tom to the B. B.'s in an undertone, “'Battle Cry of Freedom' will do; while I run down and see what is the matter.” So all the friends and neighbors joined in singing a song, probably to intimidate the wolf, while Tom hurried down to the door at the bottom of the hill.

“What *is* the matter, Jim?” he cried, bursting in to the underground shanty; “you've almost spoilt the whole thing! Why don't you hurry up?”

“It's all very well to say 'hurry up,'“ said General Putnam, indignantly, “but Turk won't let me come near him. He's worse than a wolf any day.”

“I suppose he's tired; he's been shut up here since daylight,” said Tom looking at the angry old dog. “Well, I suppose you'll have to take Grip, then. Hurry,—they're at the last verse.”

So the signal was given, and the friends and neighbors, rejoiced that their embarrassment was over, began to

pull with such a will that Tom had hardly time to run back and repeat his prepared speech. “He is safe! Our noble Putnam is safe!” cried Tom, with enthusiasm. “He bringeth out the wolf, the great, the dreadful wolf!” At this instant the General hove into view, his feathered hat knocked over his eyes, the rope girding his chest with alarming tightness, and wee little Grip suspended by the nape of his neck as the wolf, “the great, the dreadful wolf!” A burst of irrepressible laughter from the audience greeted this tableau, and Putnam's mother cried out in great anxiety, “Jimmy, Jimmy, take off that rope directly; it will hurt your chest!”

The first part over, the scene was supposed to be changed. Half of the B. B.'s were required to bring the two cows from the cow−house where they were standing already harnessed, and the others put the plough in position and hold up the sheet. But the cows were obstinate and would not walk together, so that gradually the whole force was summoned, and Gem was left to hold up the curtain with the assistance of a small boy, the brother of General Stark. At length, after severe labor, the cows were brought up behind the sheet and attached to the plough, but before Putnam could take his position, one of them, a frisky animal, put down her head and shook her horns so threateningly that Gem abandoned her corner of the sheet and fled in terror, leaving the mortified patriots to the full blaze of public ridicule. Tom was furious, but he reserved his rage for another time. “Bring those cows together by main force and hold 'em still, boys,” he said in a concentrated tone as he picked up the corner of the sheet. “Take hold of the plough, Jim. Now, Dick, say your piece.” The Classic Muse advancing before the curtain obeyed, in the following language: “Behold the peaceful Putnam tilling the soil. His gentle oxen feed among the clover. But the noble Declaration of Independence rouseth his manly heart. He leaveth his team in the furrow and goeth to Bunker Hill!” declaimed the Muse at the top of his voice as the sheet was dropped disclosing the spectacle of ten boys fiercely holding the two cows in position while Putnam, in full uniform as usual, peacefully read a huge paper document apparently all unmindful of the struggles of his team.

The effect of this tableau was, like the first, far greater than anticipated. The audience laughed till they cried; and not the least part of the amusement was the retreat of the “peaceful oxen,” wildly careering back to the pasture, their harness fluttering behind their frightened heels.

After a short pause the Battle of Bunker Hill began in earnest, and was esteemed a great success. The cannon raked the asparagus−bed very effectively, and the musketry of torpedoes and fire−crackers, was really deafening; the British flag was ignominiously hauled down from the Bunker Hill Monument, and the Stars and Stripes raised in its place; every now and then, also, the shrieks and groans of the wounded, were heard from the corn−patch, which added, of course, the pathetic element to the scene. At last, when all the ammunition was exhausted, peace was declared, and the American forces assembling around the monument, listened to General Stark, as he vehemently burst forth into “To be, or not to be,” pointing aloft, at intervals, to the Banner of Freedom, and closing with,—

“The Flag of our Union! At Lexington first
Through clouds of oppression its radiance burst;
But at brave Bunker Hill rolled back the last crest,
And, a bright constellation, it blazed in the West.
Division! No, never! The Union forever!
And cursed be the hand that our country would sever!”

as a highly appropriate termination, giving a local and military coloring to Hamlet's celebrated soliloquy.

The battle well over, and generous applause bestowed upon the army, the episode of the spy was introduced, and Gem retrieved her character by patiently holding up her end of the sheet while the tent was constructed out of some poles and colored blankets,—a real camp−fire along side being relied upon to give a life−like resemblance to “Valley Forge.” The sheet removed, General Putnam was discovered seated within his tent, writing a letter. Enter, from the potato−patch, an orderly, who reported in a deep voice, “General Tryon demands Nathan Palmer.”

“Ha! Doth he so! British miscreant! thus will I fell him!” exclaimed Putnam, brandishing his sword with so much ferocity that the whole tent fell to the ground, covering him with blankets and confusion. Rescued from the wreck by the orderly, the general stammered out his next sentence: “Behold what I have written to Tryon! Take the letter and read it to the army!” he said sternly, and retired—to what was once his tent. The enemy filed in from the chicken−yard, presented arms, and stood motionless while the orderly read as follows:—

“MARCH 8th, 1777.

”———TRYON,—Sir:

"Nathan Palmer, a lieutenant in your king's service, was taken in my camp as a spy, He was tried as a spy; he was condemned as a spy; and he shall be hanged as a spy.

PUTNAM.

"P. S.—Night. He is hanged."

This celebrated letter having been read, Putnam's part was over, and he retired backwards to the corn−patch to slow music from the orchestra hidden behind the currant−bushes, while the army marched away in the opposite direction,—the two effects having been contrived by Tom to imitate a dissolving view. This pantomime was received by the merry audience with great applause.

The next scene exhibited, after long preparation, the body of the unfortunate Palmer hanging from a tree, suspended by his hands, with a rope conspicuously coiled around his neck. The Classic Muse again appeared, and took his position near by, while the American army in masks, with dark−lanterns and muffled drums, filed in softly, and formed a circle around the tree. "Friends!" said one of the band stepping forward, "I am Ethan Allen, and I cannot leave this man, although a British subject, suspended to this tree. We will bury him, friends, 'darkly, at dead of night, by the struggling moonbeams' misty light, and our lanterns dimly burning.'"

The army agreed to these sentiments, and, deputing two of their number to act as bearers, marched away to the sound of the muffled drums. But the body, which had conveniently dropped to the ground in the meantime, proved too heavy for the bearers. John Chase, who had been thoughtlessly allowed to take the part of the Spy, was a particularly heavy boy, and the bearers pulled and tugged in vain. The army, absorbed in the muffled drums (each boy had one), was already at some distance, and the final tableau, in which the body took a part, was still to be enacted; the bearers made another effort, the perspiration rolled down their faces, but all in vain. There was nothing to be done but signal to the Classic Muse to come forward and help. He hastily tucked up his robes and took hold. With his aid the spy was hurried after the retreating army, reaching it just in time to spring to his feet under the flag−staff where floated the Star−Spangled Banner, Red, White, and Blue, and exclaim fervently, "Fellow−citizens, I am not dead! Behold me a changed man! From this moment I am a true and loyal patriot. Long live the Sword of Bunker Hill!" As the resuscitated spy uttered these words, the army formed an effective tableau around him, and the Classic Muse, still breathless from his late exertions, waved his laurel−wreath in the foreground, and struck up the "Star−Spangled Banner," in which the audience joined with enthusiasm.

The patriotic drama being over, great applause ensued, and then the army was invited in to lunch in Aunt Faith's cool dining−room; here ice−cream, cakes, and other camp−dishes were provided in great abundance, the soldiers stacked arms, and seemed to enjoy themselves as easily as private citizens. The numerous young sisters of the B. B.'s gradually forgot their shyness, and the afternoon was spent in games and merriment,—the Old Stone House being entirely given up to the young folks early in the evening, when the weary warriors departed.

"It's been a splendid Fourth!" said Tom, throwing himself into a chair when the last guests had taken their departure; "I wish we could have such fun every day!"

"If you had it every day you would soon be tired of it," said Aunt Faith smiling.

About midnight, when all was still, Aunt Faith, who had not been asleep, thought she heard a slight sound; she listened, and distinguished faint sobs coming from Gem's room, as though the child had her head buried in the pillows. Throwing on a wrapper, she hurried thither, and found her little niece with flushed cheeks and tearful eyes, tossing uneasily on her bed. "What is the matter, dear?" asked Aunt Faith, anxiously.

"Oh, is it you, Aunt Faith? I am so glad you have come!" said Gem. "There is nothing the matter, only I cannot sleep, and I feel so badly."

Do you feel ill? Are you in any pain?"

"No; only hot, and, and—a little frightened."

"Frightened? My dear child, what do you mean?"

"I don't know, auntie. I woke up, and kept thinking of dreadful things," sobbed Gem, burying her head in the pillows. Aunt Faith saw that the child was trembling violently, and, sitting down on the edge of the bed, she drew the little form into her motherly arms, and soothed her as she would have soothed a baby. "Come into my room, dear," she said; "you are tired and excited after this busy day. I have not slept, either, and I shall be glad to have you go with me."

So the two went, back across the hall, Gem clinging to her aunt, and glancing fearfully around, as though she expected to see some ghostly object in every well−known corner. When she had crept into her bed, however, she felt more safe, and nestled down with a deep sigh of relief. After some conversation on various subjects, Aunt Faith said: “And now, my little girl, you must tell me what frightened you. I have always thought you a brave child. What was it you fancied?”

“Oh, I don't know, auntie; all kinds of things. Ghosts, and everything.”

“Gem, you know very well there are no such things as ghosts.”

“Really and truly, Aunt Faith?” asked Gem, in a low tone.

“Certainly not. I am surprised that you have any such ideas. Where did you get them?”

“I have heard the girls talking about them, sometimes, in the kitchen. They believe in them, Aunt Faith.”

“That is because they are ignorant, my dear. Ignorant people believe a great many things that are false. You know there *are* no fairies, Gem? You know there is no such person as Santa Claus, don't you?”

“Of course, aunt. Only very little children believe in Santa Claus.”

“Well, my dear, ignorant people are like little children; they will tell and believe stories about ghosts just as little children tell and believe stories about Santa Claus and his coming down the chimney. My dear little girl, never think of those silly ghost−stories again. People die, and the good Lord takes them into another life; where they go or what they are doing we do not know, but we need *never* fear that they will trouble us. It is of far more consequence that we should think of ourselves, and whether we are prepared to enter into the presence of our Creator. Our summons will come and we know not how soon it may be. When I think of our family circle, six of us under the roof to−night, I know that it is possible, I may even say probable that among so many a parting will come before very long. And, my little Gem, if it should be you, the youngest, I pray that you may be ready. I do not want you to think of death as anything dreadful, dear. It is not dreadful, although those who are left behind feel lonely and sad. I look forward with a happy anticipation to meeting my brothers and sisters, my father and mother, and my husband; it will be like going home to me. But, although I am old, the summons does not always come to the oldest, first. Tell me, my child, are you trying to be good, to govern your temper, and to do what is right as far as you are able?”

“I try when I think of it, Aunt Faith,” said Gem, “but half the time I don't think; I forget all about it.”

“I do not expect you to think of it all the time, dear; but when you do think of it, will you promise me to try as hard as you can? Will you try to speak gently to Tom, to forgive him when he teases you, to give up your own way when your playmates desire something else, and, above all, to pray night and morning with your whole heart?”

“Yes, Aunt Faith,” whispered Gem, “I will try as hard as I can.”

“God bless you, my darling,” said Aunt Faith, kissing her little niece affectionately. “And now, go to sleep; it is very late.”

With the happy facility of youth, Gem was soon asleep, but Aunt Faith lay wakeful through several hours of the still summer night. Her heart, was disturbed by thoughts of Sibyl and her worldly ambition, of Hugh and his unsettled religious views, of Bessie and her lack of serious thoughts on any subject. Again the sore feeling of trouble came to her, the doubt as to her own fitness for the charge of educating and training the five little children left in her care. “I fear I am not strong enough,” she thought; “I fear both my faith and my perseverance have been weak. Have I entirely failed? When I look at Sibyl, and Hugh, and Bessie, I fear I have. Even the younger children are by no means what I had hoped they would be.”

A terrible despondency crept into Aunt Faith's heart, and the slow tears of age rolled down her cheeks; but with a strong effort of will she conquered the feeling, and kneeling down by the bedside, she poured out her sorrows in prayer. She laid all her troubles at the feet of her Saviour, and besought Him to strengthen her and give her wisdom for her appointed task. Again and again she asked for faith, earnest faith, which should never falter, although the future might look dark to her mortal eyes, and again and again she gave all her darlings into the Lord's hand. “Give me strength to do my best,” she prayed, “and faith to leave the rest to Thee,”—and gradually there came to her a peace which passeth all understanding, a peace which cometh after earnest prayer, and which those who pray not earnestly, can never know.

Aunt Faith knelt a while longer, but no words formed themselves in her mind; she seemed to feel a benediction falling around her, and a sweet contentment came into her heart. When she lay down again, sleep

came, and for the rest of the night all was quiet in the old stone house.

CHAPTER VI. SUNDAY.

Breakfast at the old stone house was later on Sunday morning than on week days, by Aunt Faith's especial direction. She gave all the family a longer sleep than usual to mark the day of rest and give it a pleasant opening, but they all understood that when the first bell rang there must be no further delay, and at the sound of the second bell they all assembled in the sitting−room in their fresh Sunday attire for morning prayers. Aunt Faith's rule was gentle, but there were some regulations which the cousins had been brought up to obey implicitly; this way of beginning the Lord's day *was* one of them, and unless prevented by illness they never failed to assemble promptly in the sitting−room, carefully dressed, and with pleasant, quiet demeanor at the sound of the second bell. This bright July Sunday, Aunt Faith received them with a smile, and when they were seated, she opened her Bible, and read in her clear voice the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, the beloved disciple of our Lord. Then Sibyl went to the cabinet organ, and all the young voices joined in singing a morning hymn, simple and cheerful like the praise of creation at the dawn of day, when from the forest ascends the song of thousands of God's creatures, praising their Maker in the only way they know. The hymn ended, Aunt Faith knelt down, and they all joined in the Lord's prayer. Then came the petition for the day, for a better realization of God's goodness, and a reverent spirit in the worship of this temple; for forgiveness of sins and aid in forgiving the faults of others; and above all, for a spirit of hearty thankfulness and praise to the Maker of the universe, and loving remembrance of His Son the Saviour of mankind. With a final petition for the aid of the Holy Spirit, Aunt Faith closed her prayer, and the morning worship was concluded by the ancient ascription of praise to Jehovah. The conversation at the breakfast−table was bright and happy; there was no gloomy or sullen look, no fault−finding. When the children were little, their tempers often showed themselves on Sunday as well as on other mornings, but patience overcomes many obstacles, and Aunt Faith's unvarying effort had been so far crowned with success, that as they grew older, they grew to remember and even love the brightness of the Sunday morning breakfast−table. Habit is a powerful agent, and perhaps also the fact that Aunt Faith did not severely rebuke every manifestation of ill temper on week days, but allowed them to come naturally to the surface, helped to produce the placid atmosphere of Sunday morning. Her children were not afraid of her; they never hurried out of her presence to vent their bad feelings; she saw the worst of it, whatever it was, and at some quiet hour she sought the offender alone, and reasoned or rebuked as the case required. The cousins loved her dearly, and as her rule was easy, it was generally obeyed; love is a great aid to authority where children are concerned.

Aunt Faith, on her part, also, never transgressed her own rules; no matter what her cares, feelings, or bodily ailments might be, she never allowed them to darken the opening of the Lord's day. They were thrown aside as far as possible, and, in after years when the old stone house was tenantless and its inmates dispersed, their thoughts often turned with affectionate regret towards the bright Sunday morning breakfast table.

An hour later, the faint sound of the church−bells brought the family together again in the front hall, and, as every one was dressed for the day before breakfast, there was no hurry, no confusion. Aunt Faith had in early life seen much of tardiness, haste, and consequent ill temper on Sunday morning; at the last moment somebody would be late, something lost, and everybody cross in consequence; little biting speeches would be spoken, unnecessary comments made, and the result was, that the family almost always arrived at the church−door in anything but a peaceful state. Indeed, “Sunday headaches,” and “Sunday temper,” were by−words in the house, and, as a child once expressed it, “everybody's cross on Sunday.”

With this example, (and it is a very common one) before her, Aunt Faith had striven to bring about; a different order of things in the old stone house. She had not confined herself to theory, but, for years she had made it a rule to examine personally on Saturday all the clothes to be worn on Sunday, to inspect the strings and buttons which are apt to give way under impatient, childish fingers, and to see that all was in order from the hat to the shoe−strings. She superintended the Saturday−night bath, for she was rigid in her ideas of personal neatness, and the five little children always tumbled into their five little beds on Saturday night, as fresh and clean as it was possible to make them. Not that this was the only cleansing time in the week, for they were taught to jump into their bath−tubs daily, but on Saturday more time was given to the work, and it was made pleasant with nice soaps, soft towels, and all the little luxuries that children love; for children are made as happy by gentle purification as

other little animals, and it is a mistake to suppose they dread the water. It is the rough hand they dread; to be caught up roughly, smeared with coarse soap, sent into a shivering fit with cold water, rubbed the wrong way with torturing towels, rasped against the grain with stiff hair−brushes, and left to stand on an icy oil−cloth, naturally excites their terror. I imagine there are few grown persons who could endure it with equanimity. But Aunt Faith had no such method. She made the bathing−hour a happy time, and showed the little children all the luxuries of personal neatness, so that as they grew older, they kept up themselves all the habits she had taught them, as matters of necessity for *their* own comfort.

Thus, trained in these habits, the children grew into men and women with physical health to help them in their contest with evil. And it, is a great help. Aunt Faith knew that all the cleanliness in the world could not compensate for the lack of godliness, but she reasoned that while first attention should be paid to the inside of the platter, certainly second attention should be given to the outside that both may be clean together. A clean heart in a clean body, she thought, was better than a clean heart in a dirty body; health and steady nerves help a man to be orderly and even−tempered, while nervousness, dyspepsia and weakness are so many additional temptations besetting him on every side.

This July Sunday, the cousins started from the old stone house with time enough for a leisurely walk amid the music of the bells, arriving at the church−door before the service commenced, without hurry, quiet and composed, and ready to join in the worship without distracting thoughts. The church was full, Aunt Faith had two pews, one for herself with Gem and Tom, another immediately behind for Sibyl, Bessie, and Hugh. As the organ was pealing out the opening voluntary, a young girl came up the aisle and entered the first seat; Aunt Faith looked up and recognizing Margaret Brown, she smiled and pressed her hand cordially. When she visited Margaret, she asked her to accept a seat in her pew when ever she desired to come to that church, but the invitation had passed from her mind among the occupations of her busy life, so that she was surprised as well as pleased when the young girl appeared. Aunt Faith had no respect for persons; she thought of them only as so many souls sent into the world, all equally dear to the Creator, and precious to the Saviour of mankind. That there were great differences in their lot on earth, that some were more easily tempted than others, that, some had apparently small chance for improvement and religious privileges while others found all ready to their hand, that some suffered trouble, affliction, sickness and hard labor while others seemed to pass through life without a cloud, she well knew, but she did not attempt to explain it. She left it all in the hands of a Higher Wisdom and addressed herself to the evident duty that lay before her. Some of her friends said that she was narrow minded, that she had no interest in the progress of humanity; it is true that she cared more about having the children of the Irish laborer, down on the flats, washed and comfortably dressed, than about an essay on philanthropy, and took more pleasure in aiding Margaret Brown than in talking about the sufferings of human nature; but perhaps she was none the worse for that. Once when an enthusiastic lady called to ask her aid in establishing an International Society for Reform, Aunt Faith listened quietly, and then said, “I will join you, Mrs. B———, when I have the leisure time at my disposal.” She never found the time, but in her answer, she was not insincere. If she had been left unemployed, she might have joined some organization for religious work, and esteemed it a pleasant privilege, but as it was, her daily home duties stood first, and as long as they surrounded her, she did not lift her eyes beyond.

The minister was an old man, who had officiated in the same church many years of his life, and hoped to die, as he expressed it, “in the harness.” The people loved him, and respected his wishes with more unanimity than they might have given to a younger man; there was no discord, no restless desire for novelty among the congregation, and the various good works connected with the church moved forward at a steady pace, growing with the growth of the town, but not running into any violent extremes to the right hand or the left.

Mr. Hays, the venerable minister, was a gentle, kind−hearted man; the children in the Sunday school listened to him with attention, and their parents loved to hear his sermons. He had the rare faculty of interesting children, and when he addressed them, the teachers had no difficulty in keeping their classes in order, because the children really wished to hear what he said. In church, among older hearers, the effect was the same; his sermons were simple, but all liked to hear them. As he grew older, he seemed to think more and more of the beautiful words, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son;” on this text all that he said and did was founded, and he never wearied of telling his hearers about this great love, and urging them to give their reverent affection in return.

"If we were all like Mr. Hays, the world would be a very different place, Aunt Faith," said Hugh, as they walked home together; "I suppose he has had nothing but love all his life."

"You are greatly mistaken, Hugh. He has endured severe suffering, and no doubt the want of earthly affection has taught him to appreciate the dearer worth of heavenly love."

"I thought he had lived here in Westerton for forty years without anything to disturb his quiet," said Hugh.

"Because his troubles came to him long ago, they were none the less heavy to bear, Hugh. Before he came here, a half−brother to whom he had trusted all his little fortune, disappeared, carrying the whole with him; and not only that, but upon hearing of his loss, the young girl to whom he was engaged, broke her promise and married another. Thus he was left doubly bereft; not only forsaken and injured, but also wounded by the discovery of treachery in those he trusted with all his heart."

"I could never recover from such a blow," said impulsive Hugh; "the thought of being deceived and betrayed by those we love and trust is fearful to me."

"It was fearful to Mr. Hays also, Hugh; after a short time he came to Westerton, and threw his whole strength into his work. It may have been a hard struggle at first, but you can yourself see how he has conquered at last; love is the groundwork of all he says and all he does, and his sufferings instead of turning his heart into bitterness, seem rather to have given it a new sweetness."

"Yes, that is why I like Mr. Hays. He is not censorious. He does not denounce sin so continually that he has no time to tell of forgiveness; he does not keep us so constantly trembling over the past that we have not the courage to hope for better things in the future; I like him for that."

Aunt Faith did not reply. She knew when to be silent, and she had long hoped that the gentle, fervent words of the good old man would yet bring her impulsive nephew into the right path. She knew that much harm was sometimes done by too much urging, and when she saw that Mr. Hays' words had made an impression upon Hugh, she left the impression to sink by its own weight.

The Sunday−noon meal at the old stone house was always a simple lunch, prepared the previous day in order to give the servants full liberty to attend church. It was, however, abundant and attractive. In the winter, Aunt Faith added a hot soup, prepared by her own hands, but at this season of the year, cold dishes were the most appetizing. Directly after lunch the family dispersed, Sibyl, Bessie, and Hugh going to their rooms, and Aunt Faith remaining in the sitting−room with Tom and Gem while they looked over their Sunday school lessons. At half−past two, the children started for the church, and then Aunt Faith rested quietly on the sofa until it was time to prepare for afternoon service at the chapel where Mr. Leslie officiated, a mission in whose welfare she was much interested. There was never any regularity about attending this afternoon service; sometimes Aunt Faith would go alone, sometimes Sibyl would accompany her, and sometimes the three cousins would all go. This afternoon they all came down, and Aunt Faith welcomed them pleasantly; she knew that Hugh might have been influenced by the beauty of the weather, Bessie by Hugh's companionship, and Sibyl by the opportunity of seeing Mr. Leslie; but she believed that all her children were truly reverent at heart, and she had large faith in the solemn influence of the house of God, so she always encouraged them to go to church whenever they would, and on this occasion she made the walk pleasant with her cheerful conversation.

The chapel stood in one of the suburbs of Westerton, where the houses of the railroad workmen were crowded together in long rows, with the smoke from the mills and shops hanging in a cloud over them all the week. Busy, grimy men lived there, careless, tired women, and a throng of children, some neglected, some apparently well−tended, but all poor. In the midst of this bustle and smoke Mr. Leslie lived and worked. When he first came to Westerton, this chapel was almost deserted, but now it was filled with a congregation of its own, a congregation drawn from the neighboring houses, the laborers and their families whose zeal and liberty according to their means, might have put to shame many a church record in the rich quarters of the town.

Aunt Faith and her party entered the door as the little bell rang out its last note, and took their seats upon the benches, for there were no pews, and the sittings were free to all. The organ was played by a young workman, a German, with the national taste for music, and when the hymn was given out, the congregation as with one voice took up the strain, and in a powerful burst of melody, carried the words, as it were, high towards heaven. The music was inspiring, as true congregational music always is. All sang the air, but the harmony was well supplied by the organ; all sang, men, women, and children, and if there were any discordant voices, they were lost in the powerful melody. Hugh liked to sing, and he liked the simple hymns which Mr. Leslie always selected for his

congregation; so he found all the places and sang with real enjoyment, while Bessie, looking over the same book, joined in after awhile in her low alto, as if borne along by his example. Then came the sermon, and, as Mr. Leslie gave out his text, Aunt Faith recognized it as one of the verses which she had read in the morning,—St. John, the seventeenth chapter, and the fifteenth verse, “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.” “My friends,” said Mr. Leslie, speaking as usual without notes, “we often hear and read of the great desire felt by Christians of this and all ages to leave this world, this world of sickness and sorrow, of labor and poverty, and enter immediately into another life. Young persons who have lost dear friends wish to go and join them, for life looks dreary without love, and the days seem very long when they are not broken by the sound of that well−known footstep on the walk, and the words of love in that well−known voice which they can never hear on earth again. 'I cannot stay on earth alone,' they cry; 'I shall grow wicked in my wild grief. Let me go to them, since they cannot come back to me.' The middle−aged who have outlived the quick feelings of youth, sigh over the years still before them, years neither dark nor light, neither hard nor easy, the dull, monotonous path lengthening out before them, with neither great joy to lighten it, or great sorrow to darken it, the same commonplace cares and duties until the end. 'This is doing us no good,' they think; 'life is slowly withering, zeal is gone. A flower cannot bloom in the desert! Let me go to a better country.'

“The old, who are past all labor, sometimes grow weary of waiting. 'I am of no use,' they say; 'I am only a burden to myself and every one else. I have outlived my time, and it would be better for the world if I was taken out of it. My day is over. Let me go.' Thus they all lament, and thus they sometimes pray, forgetting that the Lord knoweth best.

“The feeling is natural, and is founded upon the innate aspiration of the soul towards immortality, the consciousness and certainty that better things are laid up in store for us in another world. This innate consciousness of immortality is found in all men, even the most ignorant heathen possessing a glimmering of the idea, and this fact is an eternal contradiction to the arguments of the atheist; he cannot destroy this soul hope, for even if he should succeed in blighting it in the father, it would be there to confront him in the child, and so on from generation to generation. That there are persons who have wilfully stifled this divinely−given hope, that there are persons who have brought themselves to contradict their very being is an idea so awful that we shudder to think of it. A man may murder his companion and yet repent and be forgiven; but a man who murders his soul, a man who turns his back upon his Creator cannot repent, for he does not believe in his sin, and he cannot ask for forgiveness because he cannot believe in the existence of a power to forgive. My friends, the idea of such a man is almost super−human; and some wise persons have said that no such men have ever existed. They may think they have stifled their consciences and souls, and even live a long life in this belief, but sooner or later the terrible certainty of their mistake will overwhelm them, and they will find themselves stripped of their poor sophistries, of all sinners the most miserable.

“I hope and believe that there are no such persons in this congregation to−day. Do you not, on the contrary, feel in your hearts, the certainty of another and better life? I feel sure that you do,—that there is not one of you who is not looking forward to that happiness which God has prepared for those who love Him; a happiness which eye has not seen, which ear has not heard, and which it has not entered into the heart of men to conceive.

“But this precious engrafted hope must not be abused. It must not be twisted into an excuse for neglecting our duties here on *earth*. We are put into the world to live in it, and the duties which lie nearest to us must be faithfully performed, no matter how humble or how commonplace they may be. We must not go sighing through life, deluding ourselves with the idea that we are too good for our lot, and that it is praiseworthy to hold ourselves above common labor and dull routine, and devote our time to so−called religious aspiration. If the labor and routine are placed before us, it is our duty to accept them, and, whatever we do, do it with our *might*. I tell you, my friends, our path is clear before us, and we are sinning if we turn out of it. Suppose we are afflicted, suppose our loved ones are taken from us; we may weep, for Jesus wept. But we must not throw down our appointed work, and sit with idle hands and gloomy regret, while the precious time slips by. The mourner who stays in her darkened room, and refuses to interest herself in anything but her sorrow, is far less a Christian mourner than she who goes forth to take up her tasks again, thinking of her lost ones as only 'gone before.'

“Those of us who have dull lives, with neither the sunshine nor the thunder−cloud to vary the monotonous gray of our horizon, must still strive to perform faithfully our uninteresting duties. We must not murmur over our lot, or think we are fitted for better things; we are not so fitted if the Lord keeps us there. There is, perhaps, some

fatal weakness in our character which needs just that routine; we must learn patience and humility in the world, not *out* of it. *Here* is our school−house. *This* is our appointed lesson.

“The old, also, who are full of eagerness to go,—they, too, are wrong. To them, life with its joys and sorrows, its labor and care, is over, and they look uneasily around them; their occupation is gone. Perhaps they were busy workers, and it is hard to be idle; perhaps they were self−reliant, and it is hard to become a care to others; perhaps they have had powerful intellects, and it is hard to endure the consciousness that their mental powers are failing, day by day. Still, there is one duty remaining, and that they must learn. It is this: to wait. To wait patiently for the Lord in the world in which He has placed them. And this is, sometimes, the hardest duty of a long life.

“My friends, I cannot too heartily condemn the spirit of scorn for this world which we sometimes meet among Christians. The world is full of beauty. God Himself pronounced it very good. The evil, and the sorrow in it, are owing to man. What can be more fair than this very summer afternoon? What more beautiful than that lake, with those white clouds heaped over the horizon? Let us enjoy it, and praise God for His goodness; it is ungrateful not to admire and love His tender care for us in every flower by the roadside, in every tree that shades the heated land. I say, then, love this fair world; notice its beauties; take pleasure in the gifts it offers to you, its fruits and its flowers, its spring−time and harvest. Learn to admire them; thank God for them, and teach your children to appreciate them. The same words apply here which the beloved disciple used in reference to our love for our fellow−men: 'For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?' That is, if we have never tried to love on earth, if our hearts have never been softened by unselfish affection for those of our own household, how can we expect to love in heaven? And, in the same manner, it seems to me that if we scorn this world, if we neglect the innocent pleasures it offers us, and never pause to admire and love its beauties, it will be very hard for us to love the Celestial country. We must learn to love here on earth if we would love in heaven.

“My friends, the text is a part of our Saviour's last prayer before he entered the garden of Gethsemane. He was praying for his disciples, so soon to be left to temptation and danger. Notice the words: 'I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.' He did not ask that they should be taken *away* from the earth, but that strength should be given them to fulfil their duty *on* the earth; they were men, the earth was their home, and on the earth were their duties.

“And so it is with us now. We have our work to do, and the time is none too long to accomplish it; every day brings its task and the man who stays among his fellows, doing his part with energy, actuated by firm religious principles, is a far better Christian than he who shuts himself up apart, scorning the fair world, unmindful of the suffering he might relieve, neglecting his own plain duties, and occupied only with his own brooding thoughts and gloomy self−analysis.

“No, my friends; we are not to be taken out of the world until our Lord so wills, we must not think of it, must not pray for it. He knows best. And, while He leaves us on the earth, let us work with all our might. Let us see to it that our faith is earnest, and that our gratitude and praise are expressed in our daily lives.

“I fear we do not think sufficiently of the great part which praise should hold in our worship; whereas if there is any lesson taught us by the whole created universe, and by the long testimony of holy men from the beginning of the world until now, it is this: 'Praise ye the Lord. Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord.'“

Such were some of the points in Mr. Leslie's sermon. He spoke in a direct manner, using all the powers of eloquence which nature and cultivation had given him, but his ideas were plain and his words simple, and the charm of the discourse lay in its earnestness. He spoke as though his heart was in his words; and so it was. Another great attraction was that his sermons were short; before the attention of the congregation flagged in the least, the sermon was done. There was no looking at watches, no stifled yawning, no uneasy change of position, no watching the clock; strangers visiting the chapel listened, at first, from real interest, with a feeling that by−and−by they would relapse into their usual listlessness, but before they had time to *relapse*, behold the sermon was done. This afternoon there was the accustomed attention, and then after the closing hymn, the congregation streamed out into the late afternoon again to enjoy the quiet of the Sabbath, the working−man's blessed day of rest.

The party from the old stone house walked homeward by a circuitous route, taking in the bank of the lake on their way. Here on the grassy slope they found a religious service going on, under the direction of the Young Men's Christian Association, and they lingered to hear the final hymn which sounded sweetly on the evening

breeze with the pathos of open−air music. The lake looked very beautiful, the sinking sun lay behind a screen of white clouds, and in the distance vessels could be seen sailing gayly before the wind with all their canvas up, or beating up against it with the patience that belongs to inland navigation. Towards the west extended the headland of Stony Point, and still farther the faint outline of White River beach, looking like an enchanted island floating in the sky.

"The lake looks very beautiful this evening," said Aunt Faith; "it makes one think of the sea of glass mingled with fire."

"It is treacherous with all its beauty," said Bessie; "these fresh−water seas cannot be relied upon for two hours at a time. They are more dangerous than the ocean."

"You make too much of the little ponds," said Hugh.

"They may be ponds," returned Bessie, "but they are deep enough to drown men, and cruel enough to tear vessels to pieces. I should feel safer on the ocean in a storm than on our lake, for there you can run away from it, or scud before it, but here there is no place to run to, no offing, and always a lee shore."

"Where did you learn your nautical terms?" said Hugh, laughing, as they turned towards home.

"You may laugh, Hugh, but I am in earnest. You have not watched the storms as I have; you do not know how suddenly they come. Even in the summer, a speck of a cloud will grow into a thunder−storm in a few minutes, and in the autumn the gales are fearful. I remember last year in September, two vessels were lost in plain sight from the bank where we were standing a moment ago. One came driving down the lake at daylight and went ashore on the spiles of the old pier; the crew were all lost, we saw them go down before our eyes. The next, a fine three−master, came in about noon and anchored off the harbor, hoping that the wind might go down before night; but, as the gale increased, the captain made an attempt to enter the river. The vessel missed and ran ashore below; only two of the men were rescued, for the surf was tremendous."

"Well, Bessie, are there not wrecks at sea, also?"

"Yes; but one expects danger on the great ocean, whereas here on the Lakes, a stranger would not dream of it."

"As far as that goes," said Hugh, "a fall down−stairs might kill a man quite as effectually as a fall from Mount Blanc."

"But he would so much prefer the latter," said Bessie.

"Well,—for hair−splitting differences, give me a young lady of sixteen," said Hugh as they rejoined the others. "Aunt Faith, you have no idea how romantic Bessie is!"

"Oh yes, I have!" said Aunt Faith smiling. "A girl who plays the harp as Bessie plays, and who paints such pictures as Bessie paints, must necessarily be both romantic and poetical; and I use both adjectives in their best sense."

Bessie colored at Aunt Faith's praise. "I only play snatches, and paint fragments," she said quickly.

"I know it, my dear," replied her aunt; "that is your great fault, you do not finish your work. But I hope you will correct this defect, and give us the pleasure of—"

"Of hearing you play one tune entirely through, and seeing one picture entirely finished: before old age deafens and blinds our senses," interrupted Hugh, laughing. "You don't know the studio as well as I do, Aunt Faith; there are heads without bodies, and bodies without heads, but no poor unfortunate is completely finished. Sometimes I think Bessie is studying the antique. Antiques, you know, are generally dismembered."

Bessie had now quite recovered her composure; praise disconcerted her, but she *was* accustomed to raillery, and parried Hugh's attack with her usual spirit. They reached the old stone house before sunset, and soon assembled in the dining−room for the pleasant meal which might be called a tea−dinner, or a dinner−tea, although not exactly corresponding to either designation. Tom and Gem had returned from Sunday School some time before, and since then they had been absorbed in reading their library−books, their customary employment at that hour. After the meal was over, the family went into the sitting−room and seated themselves near the open windows. They rarely attended evening service, although they were at liberty to go if they pleased; the church was at some distance, and Aunt Faith always kept the children with her on Sunday evening, so that generally they were all at home, talking quietly, reading, or singing sacred music; this last occupation giving pleasure to all, as the five cousins were naturally fond of music, and Aunt Faith had taken care that their taste should be rightly directed and enlarged.

“I went into the brick church a few Sundays ago,” said Hugh, “but I do not like the choir there at all. They sing nothing but variations.”

“What do you mean?” asked Sibyl.

“Why, when I hear a lady playing a long uninteresting piece of music, it always turns out to be something with variations. That choir is just the same; everything they sing is long and unintelligible. I wonder at the patience of the congregation in listening to it. However they had a doxology after the sermon, sung—to the tune of 'Old Hundred;' everybody joined in and let off their feelings in that way. It acted as a sort of safety−valve.”

“There is nothing in worship so inspiring as congregational singing,” said Aunt Faith, “and I always wonder why it is not general in our churches.”

“It is difficult to introduce it when the people are not accustomed to it,” said Sibyl; “only a particular kind of music can be sung, broad, plain tunes with even notes like 'Old Hundred,' or the German Chorals. Then the organist must understand his duties thoroughly; he has to supply the harmony and lead the congregation at the same time.”

“The music in a church depends greatly upon the pastor,” said Bessie. “If his musical ideas are correct, and his taste good, his choir will be good also.”

“Not always,” said Hugh, laughing; “choirs are apt to be despotic. I remember when I was at Green Island, last summer, I used to go up to the little fort chapel to attend service on Sunday; I knew the chaplains quite well. One Sunday I was late; as I went in, the choir were busy with something in the way of music. I have no idea what it was, but it went on and on, seemingly a race between the soprano and tenor, with occasional bursts of hurried sentences from the alto and bass, until my patience and ears were weary. The next day I met the chaplain, and, in the course of conversation, I spoke of the music the previous day. 'Was it an anthem or a motet?' I asked.”

“Oh, don't ask me,” said the old gentleman, lifting his hands and shaking his head; “I have not the least idea myself. They had been at it a long time when you came in!”

“Poor chaplain!” said Bessie, laughing.

As sunset faded into twilight, Sibyl took her seat at the organ, the cousins gathered around her, and the evening singing began. They all had their favorites, and sang them in turn, beginning with Gem's, and ending with Aunt Faith's, which was Wesley's beautiful hymn, “Jesus, Saviour of my Soul.” Hugh selected, “Brightest and Best of the Sons of the Morning;” Sibyl, “Luther's Judgment Hymn;” and Bessie, “Come ye Disconsolate,” in order that Hugh should sing the solo. Aunt Faith sat by the window and listened, looking out into the night, and thinking of her circle of loved ones beyond the stars.

The young voices sang on from hymn to chant, from chant to anthem, and from anthem back to simple choral. At nine o'clock Tom and Gem went to bed, and at half−past nine, Sibyl closed the organ and said “good−night;” Aunt Faith was left with Bessie and Hugh, who joined her on the broad−cushioned window−seat and looked out with her into the night. “I like the darkness of a summer night,” said Hugh; “how bright the stars are!”

“We do not know where heaven is,” said Aunt Faith, “but it is a natural thought that our loved and lost are 'beyond the stars.' We too shall go there some day. How beautiful and happy our life will be, there! How precious the certainty of our hope!”

“That is what Mr. Leslie said to−day,” said Bessie.

“I liked that sermon,” said Hugh; “what he said about the beauty of this world, and the plain duty of taking our faithful, active share in the work of this world, struck me as sensible and true. Perhaps I am uncharitable, but I cannot understand the religion that sits apart and makes life miserable with its gloomy asceticism.”

“I liked what he said about love,” said Bessie; “that if we do not love here on earth, it will be very hard to love in heaven. I wonder if people could love each other better if they tried. That is, whether one could learn love as one learns patience, by steady trying.”

“Oh, no,” said Hugh; “love is not to be learned! It comes naturally.”

“I think you are mistaken, Hugh,” said Aunt Faith. “I think love may be acquired. At least it may grow from a little seed to a great tree, with proper care. If we earnestly try to see all the good traits in a friend, we shall end by loving him at last. And if we earnestly try to care for some helpless, dependent person, we shall end by loving that person very dearly. Don't you remember your flying−squirrel, Hugh? You did not care much for the little thing, when you found it on the ground, but, as you took care of it and held it in your warm hands, night after night, to keep it warm, you grew to love it very dearly, and when it died I remember very well how you cried, although you

were quite a large boy."

"Poor little Frisky!" said Hugh; "when I brought in a branch and put him on it, how he capered about; and then he was so cunning! Do you remember, Aunt Faith, how one day I left him in your care, shut up in his basket, while I went down town. When I came back and asked about him, you said, 'Oh, he's safe in his basket. I think he must be asleep he is so quiet.' And all the while you were speaking, the little scamp was looking at me with his bright eyes out from under your arm as you sat sewing! I was very fond of Frisky; I have never had a pet since."

"You loved him because you had tended him so carefully," said Aunt Faith. "It is the same feeling, intensified, that influences and inspires many of the weary fathers and mothers we see around us. Mr. Leslie was right. It is better to patiently fulfil our earthly duties, no matter how dull or how hard, as long as we are on the earth, than to sit apart nourishing lofty ideas and sighing for release. That sentence which Mr. Leslie took for his text has always been a favorite of mine. Do you care to hear some verses I once made upon it?"

"Oh, yes, Aunt Faith!" said Hugh and Bessie eagerly.

Aunt Faith took a little blank−book from her desk and read as follows:—

"St. John; 17th Chapter, 15th Verse.

"I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world."

"Not out of the world, dear Father,
With duties and vows unfulfilled,
With life's earnest labors unfinished,
Ambition and passion unstilled;
Not out of the world, dear Father,
Until we have faithfully tried
To burnish the talent Thou gavest,
And gain other talents beside,
Not out of the world, kind Father,
But rather our lowly life spare,
While those Thou hast lent us from heaven
Are needing our tenderest care;
Not out of the world, kind Father,
While dear ones are trusting our arm
To work for them hourly, and save them
From poverty, terror, and harm.
Not out of the world, good Father,
Until we have suffered the loss
Of self−loving ease and indulgence
In willingly bearing the Cross;
Not out of the world, good Father,
Till bowed with humility down,
The weight of the Cross is forgotten
In the golden light of the Crown.
Not out of the world, our Father,
Until we have fought a good fight,—
Until to the last we have guarded
The lamp of Thy Faith burning bright;
Until the long course is well finished,
Until the hard race has been won,
And we hear, as we rest from our labors,
Well done, faithful servant, well done."

CHAPTER VII. THE PICNIC.

“Monday morning, bright and early, what shall we do to−day?” chanted Gem, as she entered the dining−room.

“Yes; what shall we do?” repeated Tom; “something out of the common run, of course, for it's vacation, and besides, it will be so hot pretty soon that *we can't* do anything,—and Hugh's going to New York in the fall,—and Sibyl's going to Saratoga before long, and when *I* enter college, of course I shan't care about such things any more; so I've got to hurry up.”

“Bravo, Tom! you've made out a strong case!” said Hugh, laughing, “Aunt Faith cannot resist such a mountain of arguments!”

“I do not intend to resist anything reasonable,” said Aunt Faith, smiling; “what do you wish to do, Tom?”

“Tableaux!” said Gem, excitedly.

“No; I veto that instanter,” said Tom, decidedly. “Girls always want to dress up in old feathers and things, and call themselves kings and queens! For my part, I'm tired of being 'Captain John Smith,' and the 'Sleeping Beauty in the Wood.'“

“May I ask when you took the last−named character?” said Hugh.

“He never took it at all,” said Gem, indignantly; “Annie Chase was the Princess, and she looked perfectly beautiful with her sister's satin dress, and pearls, and—”

“There you go!” interrupted Tom; “fuss and feathers, silks and satins! I was the 'Prince,' wasn't I? and that's the very same thing! Besides, I've been 'Cupid' over and over again, because I'm the only one who can hang head downward from the clothes−line as though I was flying. You can't deny that, Gem Morris!”

“You got up one tableau which was really astonishing,” said Hugh; “I remember it very well; an inundation, where all the company in clothes−baskets, were paddling with rulers for their very lives. The effect was thrilling!”

“I remember a charade, too, which was really unique,” said Sibyl. “The first part was simply little Carrie Fish standing in the middle of the room; the second and last was audible, but not visible, consisting merely of a volley of sneezes behind the scenes. The whole was supposed to be 'Carry−ca−choo,'—or 'Caricature.'“

“It may all be very funny for you people who only have to look on,” said Tom; “but *I* am tired of the whole thing, and I vote for a picnic.”

“Oh, Tom!” said Sibyl in dismay, “if tableaux are old, picnics are worn threadbare!”

“I have not had *my* share in wearing them, then!” said Tom; “I never went to but one picnic in my life, and then I fell in the river, and had to come home before dinner.”

“I have attended a great many,” said Sibyl, “and the amount of work I have done in washing dishes and drawing water, casts anything but a pleasant reflection. Last year, when we had that mammoth picnic at Long Point, the gentlemen ordered twelve dozen plates, cups, saucers, goblets, spoons, and forks, to be sent out from a crockery store, in order to save trouble; and when I reached the Point in my fresh, white dress, there they were in crates, covered with straw, just as they stood in the warehouse. The guests were expected in half an hour. I was one of the managers, and, after standing a few moments in dismay, we rolled up our sleeves and began. Two gentlemen and two ladies, in gala attire, washing seventy−two dozen dishes in a violent hurry, with a limited supply of water and towels, on an August afternoon with the thermometer at eighty−eight. That is *my* idea of a picnic!”

The cousins laughed merrily at Sibyl's description, and Bessie said, “I have never been to a 'full−grown picnic,' as Gem calls it. My experience is confined to the days we used to spend out on the lake shore four or five years ago. We no sooner got there, than all the boys disappeared as if by magic, and we had to do all the work, make the fire, draw the water, and cook the dinner, Then the boys would appear on the scene with dripping hair, eat up everything on the table−cloth, like young bears, and off down the bank again until it was time to go home.”

“As you are all giving your ideas of a picnic,” said Hugh, “*I* will give you mine. Ride five miles in a jolting wagon in the hot sun, walk five more through tangled underbrush, arrive at the scene; pick up sticks one hour, try to make the fire burn and the kettle boil another hour; and finally sit down very uncomfortably on the ground, with burnt fingers and limp collar, to eat buttered pickles and vinegared bread, and drink muddy coffee; clear everything up, and ruin your clothes with grease−spots, wristbands hopelessly gone; sit down again under a tree,

to hear the young lady you *don't* like read poetry, while the one you do like goes off before your very eyes with your rival; devoured by mosquitoes, gnats and spiders; ice melted and water tepid; another fire to make, more bad coffee, more *grease spots*, and a silver spoon *lost*; hunt for the spoon until dark, and then find it was a mistake; walk back five miles through the underbrush, get into the wagon, perfectly exhausted with heat and fatigue; force yourself to sing until you are as hoarse as a frog, and reach home worn out, wrinkled, haggard, parched with thirst, famished for food, and utterly ruined as to common clothes. That is *my* idea of a picnic!"

Everybody laughed at this cynical picture, and Aunt Faith said, "I remember just after the war, when a number of our Westerton soldier−boys had returned, it was proposed to celebrate the home−coming by a grand picnic. The project, however, came to the ears of the returned volunteers, and I happened to be present when one of them, Lieutenant John Romer, expressed his opinion. 'See here, Katie,' said he to his sister, 'I understand that you young ladies are getting up a picnic to welcome us back from the war. I wish you would gently extinguish the plan. We have had picnic enough for all our lives; the very sight of a camp−fire and a kettle takes away any romance we may have possessed, and as for out−door coffee, it is fairly hateful to us.'"

"I remember old Deacon Brown used to say, that when, once in ten years, he went to New York to visit his relatives, the first thing they did was to get up a ride into the country for him," said Hugh laughing. "They did not understand that what he wanted was that very bustle and crowd that annoyed them."

"In the mean time," said Tom impatiently, "what has become of my picnic in all this talk?"

"Oh Tom! do you really insist upon it?" said Sibyl with a sigh.

"Of course I do! and the B. B.'s must all be invited, too."

"No, indeed?" said all the family in a chorus, "*that* is too much."

"I would as soon go into the woods with a set of pirates," said Sibyl.

"They howl so," said Bessie.

"We could never carry enough for them to eat," said Gem.

"I could not take such a responsibility," said Aunt Faith; "something might happen, they might get into the lake."

"They would be sure to get in; they take to the water like young ducks," said Hugh.

Before this mass of testimony, Tom was obliged to give way. "Well," he said, after a pause, "never mind about the B. B.'s so long as you have the picnic."

"Of course we cannot go to−day," began Sibyl.

"Why not?" interposed Tom; "no time like the present. I'll agree to do all the running round; I can run like a tiger."

Sibyl sighed, and glanced out into the sun−shine with a foreboding of heat and freckles.

"Who shall we have?" said Bessie.

"Mr. Leslie will go, I presume," said Aunt Faith; "I know that clergymen often make a holiday of Monday."

Sibyl's face cleared, and she made no further objection to the plan.

"As I do not like to be hurried," continued Aunt Faith, "I propose that we do not start until after dinner; we will have a tea instead of a dinner in the woods, and come home at twilight."

At first Tom objected to this idea, but as the others liked it, he yielded, and the question of invitations was taken up.

"I propose we leave that to Aunt Faith," said Bessie; "if we once begin discussing it, we shall sit here all the morning, for we never can agree."

"Where shall we go?" said Hugh.

Aunt Faith suggested Oak Grove.

"Oh no!" said Tom, "that is too near town. Let us go somewhere ever so far away, so that we shall feel like Robinson Crusoe on a desert island."

Hugh, who had a secret plan for driving a four−in−hand, seconded Tom's idea, and finally it was decided that they should go to Mossy Pond, a beautiful glen ten miles from Westerton, in a rocky region on the lake shore apart from the farming country. Sibyl took the list, and went out to deliver the invitations which Aunt Faith had wisely confined to the immediate neighbor−hood. Mr. Leslie was the only one who lived at some distance, and immediately after the early dinner, Hugh drove over and brought back, as he said, "*vi et armis*." "Here is Mr. Leslie, Aunt Faith," he called, as he opened the dining−room door. "Walk in, sir, if you please." Having thus

safely accomplished his charge, Hugh disappeared to arrange the means of transportation. Aunt Faith supposed they were to go in two wagons drawn by their own bays, and Mr. Marr's blacks. She little knew the truth!

Mr. Leslie thus unceremoniously introduced into the family circle, took a seat at the table, and watched the proceedings with amused interest. “Surely we do not need all that coffee, Mrs. Sheldon,” he said, as Aunt Faith filled a tin box with the fragrant mixture,—ground coffee and egg all prepared for the boiling water.

“My only fear is that it will not be enough,” replied Aunt Faith, with a smile.

“And those biscuits! Do you keep stores for an army on hand night and day?”

“Oh, no; I sent to a bakery for these. But, with all my efforts, I have not been able to get enough cold meat.”

“You say that in the face of this mountain of cold tongue? Do we, then, turn into gormandizers by going a few miles into the country?”

“I fear we do, Mr. Leslie,” said Bessie, as she packed the loaves of fresh cake in a long basket. “I, for one, am always ravenous; I do not remember that I ever had as much as I wanted at a picnic.”

At this moment Sibyl entered the dining−room, and the color rose in her face as she saw the young clergyman at the table. He rose and offered his hand, as he said, “Good−morning, Miss Warrington, we are, I trust to be companions for the day; I shall take good care of you in the wilderness.”

John Leslie's way of speaking was often a puzzle to Aunt Faith; he seemed so frank, and yet if he had planned each sentence, he could not have contrived words so well adapted to carry their point. He always seemed confident that Sibyl agreed with him, and that their views coincided on all points. He took the lead, and never seemed to have a doubt but that she would follow, and, when he was present, Sibyl generally did follow; it was only when he was absent that the wide difference in the motives which actuated their lives became clearly visible, and Aunt Faith saw worldliness on one side, and unworldliness on the other, with an apparently impassible gulf between. When Mr. Leslie spoke, therefore, Sibyl smiled, and took a seat by his side while she occupied herself in wrapping up the cups and saucers ready for the hamper which Nanny and Bridget were packing on the back piazza.

At two o'clock everything was ready, and the family assembled on the front piazza to wait for the expected guests. “Are they all coming, Sibyl?” asked Aunt Faith.

“Most of them, aunt. We shall have Edith Chase and Annie, Lida Powers, Walter Hart, Rose Saxon and Graham Marr, Mr. Gay, Gideon Fish, William Mount, and one of the B. B.'s,—Jim Morse.”

“Oh, General Putnam!” said Bessie: “so much the better. He will give a military air to the scene.”

“Seventeen in all,” said Aunt Faith; “the two wagons will be well loaded.”

Bessie turned away her head, but not before Mr. Leslie had seen the smile on her face. “Miss Bessie is laughing at the idea of a possible break down,” he said: “but for my part I am quite well able to walk home, and even help draw the wagon if necessary.”

“Aunt Faith, how could you put Gideon Fish on the list?” said Bessie, as Sibyl and Mr. Leslie strolled off into the garden.

“Because I think you are somewhat unjust to him, Bessie; he has excellent qualities.”

“Well, aunt, if you like him, will you be so kind as to entertain him when he comes?” said Bessie impatiently.

“Hey,” said Tom, looking up, “Bess is getting mad! What fun!”

“There's Rose Saxon!” said Bessie; “how do you do, Rose? You are the first and shall have the heartiest welcome.”

“What has gone wrong, Bessie? There is a wrinkle between your eyes that betokens something vexatious, I know,” said Rose, taking a seat on the step.

“It is Gideon Fish,” answered Bessie, in a low tone as Aunt Faith went into the sitting−room for a shawl.

“Is *he* coming?” exclaimed Rose.

“Yes; he was invited, and of course he will not decline when cake and coffee are in question.”

“And when Miss Darrell is in question,” said Rose, laughing.

“Do not tease, Rose. I am vexed in earnest this time.”

“What do you say to having a little fun out of him, Bessie?”

“By all means, if you can extract it from such material.”

“Well, then, I have thought of something. Come down in the arbor and I will tell you about it.” The two girls walked away, and Aunt Faith was left alone to welcome the guests as they gradually assembled on the piazza. Mr.

Gay, the Boston bachelor, was the last to arrive.

"Now we are all here," said Aunt Faith; "I will tell Hugh to have the wagons brought round."

"I will go, Aunt," said Bessie, and running through the house she went down to the stable−yard where Hugh sat expectant in his car of triumph. Slowly the equipage came round the house and drew up in front of the piazza, it was a circus band−wagon, gayly painted, and drawn by four horses, two bays and two blacks, while Hugh as charioteer sat on the high front−seat and held the reins with a practised hand.

"Hugh Warrington!" exclaimed Aunt Faith, "Four horses! I shall never dare to ride after them!"

"Do you suppose we are going to make spectacles of ourselves in that wagon, Hugh?" asked Sibyl scornfully.

"Yes, I suppose you are," replied Hugh, laughing. "Aunt Faith, I have driven a four−in−hand over and over again, so you need not feel alarmed. And, as to the circus−wagon, I consider it the crowning attraction of the picnic."

"Certainly," said Mr. Gay calmly. "The West is a country of new sensations. I vote for the circus−wagon, by all means."

The majority of the guests agreed with Hugh, and climbed into the decorated chariot with great hilarity. Even the fastidious Miss Chase was pleased to be amused with the idea, and quietly secured the seat nearest the driver, which gentle manoeuvre having been observed by Bessie, that wilful young lady took the very last seat at the extreme end of the wagon, and devoted her entire attention to Mr. Walter Hart. The provisions had been sent out in a cart some time previously, and the merry party laughed and talked all the way to Mossy Pond, amused with the sensation they created on the road, amused with themselves, amused with everything; the four−in−hand carried them safely in spite of Aunt Faith's fears, although one of the leaders showed some signs of restlessness, wishing, Hugh said, to have his share of the fun.

Mossy Pond was a small, deep pool, skirted with moss and shaded with evergreens; the brook which issued from it ran down the glen, jumping over the rocks in a series of waterfalls, reaching the lake a quarter of a mile distant where it disappeared under a sand−bar, after the manner of the streams that ran into the western lakes. On the shore the headland was bold, rugged and treeless, commanding a fine view of the water, but back in the glen the shade was dense, and there was a faint spicy odor in the air, coming from the cedars, a rare tree on the fresh−water seas. Altogether it was a wild, secluded spot, and but few of the company had ever visited it, so that the charm of novelty was added to the other attractions, and parties of explorers scaled the rock, penetrated up the glen or down towards the lake shore, coming back with wild−flowers, vines, cones, and mosses,—treasures of the forest by whose aid they transformed themselves into nymphs and woodmen, not even Aunt Faith escaping without a spray of grasses in her hat.

There were however some disadvantages in the wildness of the locality; as there was no shed for the horses. Hugh and Jonas the man−servant were obliged to unharness them and fasten them as well as they could to the trees, not without misgivings as to the result; but the blacks and bays stood quietly eating their dinner, and, at length, leaving them to the care of Jonas, Hugh went back to the glen to assist in making the fire.

"Mr. Warrington, you are not to do anything," said Rose Saxon as he approached; "it is understood that you regard picnics as devices for extracting severe labor from unwilling young men, and we have resolved to convince you of your error. This, sir, is a strong−minded picnic; we are standing upon our rights, and request you to take a back seat upon that log with the other despots, and see us throw off our chains."

On the log, in a row, sat all the gentlemen of the party,—Mr. Gay, Mr. Leslie, Graham Marr, Walter Hart, William Mount, Tom, and "General Putman," Hugh gravely joined the band. "When are you going to throw off the chains, Miss Saxon?" he asked.

"We are throwing them off now. Don't you hear them clank?"

"Not a clank!" said Hugh.

"That is because you do not choose to hear; you will find, sir, that we are *no* longer down−trodden," said Rose, brandishing a carving−knife which she had just unpacked.

"If there is anything down−trodden here except the grass, I shall like to know it," said Hugh. "For my part I feel quite sorry for the tender little blades under the ruthless tread of fourteen French heels."

Here there was a general laugh, and all the pretty little boots peeping in and out, disappeared as if by magic, all save the sturdy Balmorals of Gem and her friend Annie Chase, darting hither and thither in search of sticks.

The ladies were very busy. They were going to make a fire, and such a fire! They were going to make coffee,

and such coffee. The supper was to be altogether unparalleled in picnic annals, and it was to be prepared by feminine hands alone.

"See how glorious it burns!" exclaimed Rose, as the first flame shot up from the pile of sticks.

"See how gloriously it smokes!" said Hugh, as the fickle blaze vanished, and Rose inhaled a puff of the stinging smoke.

"I can make it burn!" said Bessie, coming to the rescue with fresh newspapers. A match,—another blaze,—another cry of exultation,—another failure, and a red burn on Bessie's hand to mark it.

"Let me try," said Edith Chase, kneeling gracefully beside the obstinate pile. More newspapers, more flames, more smoke, ending in another failure, and a grimy mark on Miss Chase's delicate dress.

"Oh ye strong−minded!" said Hugh, jumping up, and lifting the pile of sticks; "don't you know that you cannot start a fire in the sunshine? Down under this stump, now, it will burn like a *furnace*." So saying, Hugh rearranged the fuel, while Rose coughed, Edith furtively rubbed her dress, and Bessie bound up her burned hand in her handkerchief. At this moment Sibyl came into view, carrying a pail of water. Mr. Leslie got up and took the pail out of her hand in spite of her objections. "It is too heavy for you," he said decidedly; "don't attempt anything of the kind again, I beg."

"The kettle must be hung up," said Lida Powers, coming forward with a tea−kettle in her hand. Will Mount and Walter Hart understood this duty, while Gideon Fish and Mr. Gay laid the cloth, the former eyeing the cake with pleasant anticipation.

"It seems to me, young ladies, that the gentlemen are doing the work after all," said Aunt Faith.

"Of course, aunt," said Hugh, blowing his fire with a scarlet face: "did I not predict we should have to work like slaves."

"The meat! The meat! Turk has got the meat!" cried Gem from a neighboring rock, where she and Annie where making wreaths of wild flowers. There was a general exclamation of dismay as the curly back of the old depredator was seen through the trees making off with the booty. "How did Turk get here?" asked Aunt Faith; "Tom, I suspect you are the culprit!"

"Well, aunt, I just thought I'd let him come out with Jones and the cart; they might be of use, you know, in case of tramps or gipsies."

"They! You do not mean to say all the dogs are here?"

But doubt was soon dispelled by the appearance of Pete Trone in person, attracted by the provisions spread out upon the ground. Too well−bred to snatch,—for, as Tom said, "Pete was a truly gentlemanly dog,"—Pete sat upon his hind legs with fore paws drooping on his breast, eying the company gravely as if to call attention to his polite demeanor. "He certainly is a funny little fellow," said Rose Saxon, as Hugh gave the terrier a fragment of cake.

"He is the wisest dog I ever saw," said Hugh.

"There is no end to his knowledge. I was fishing one day last summer down over the dam at Broad River, and caught a large cat−fish. My line was too slender to haul him up, and I was considering what to do when, much to my astonishment, Pete jumped over, ran out on the stones, and caught the struggling fish in his mouth. That was the first time I ever heard of a dog going fishing."

"The rascal seems to reason, too. Once I belonged to the choir, you remember, and of course I could not allow Pete to go to rehearsals, although he was in the habit of following me almost everywhere else. So, after many futile attempts to send him back, and consequent annoyance at the church, one Saturday before starting, I shut him up in the carriage−house and fastened the door. I looked back several times but saw nothing of Pete, and was congratulating myself upon the success of my plan, when, just before I reached the church, at the corner of Huron and South Streets, there he was waiting for me. He had escaped, gone down town another way, and did not show himself until I was so far from home that he knew I would not take him back. Then, what did he do, as soon as he saw me coming, but up on his hind legs with the most deprecating air, sitting there, a ridiculous little black image on the pavement, so that everybody laughed to see him."

The meal was a merry one although the meat was gone and the cream sour; there was an abundance of cake, the coffee was strong, and the good spirits of the company supplied the rest.

"There is no more sugar for your coffee, Mr. Warrington," said Edith Chase, as she poured out Hugh's second cup.

“Smile on it, please,” said Hugh, gayly.

“Now, Miss Chase, if you neglect my cup any longer,” said Walter Hart, “I shall grow desperate; I shall be obliged to give you—”

“Fitz,” interrupted Hugh.

“Bad puns are excluded from this picnic,” said Rose Saxon; “and, by the way, Mr. Warrington, why do you drop the first syllable of your name?”

“Because it is never pronounced rightly,” said Hugh; “it is either called 'Fitz−He−yew,' or 'Fitchew.'“

“Pronunciation is a matter of taste,” said Mr. Leslie, laughing. “A lady once asked me if I did not think Walter Scott's *Rock−a−by* was a 'sweet thing.' At first I supposed she was alluding to some cradle−song with which I was not familiar, and it was sometime before I discovered that she meant *Rokeby*.”

“I have often been puzzled myself with the names of books,” said Aunt Faith. “Years ago there was a book published called *Ivar or the Skujts−boy*? I liked it but I never dared to venture on the name.”

“And since then,” said Mr. Gay, “the names of the heroes and heroines in magazine−stories are really astonishing. The favorite letter, now is 'Y.' They have 'y's' in the most unexpected places. Such names as 'Vivian' and 'Willis,' for instance. They spell them 'Vyvyan' and 'Wyllys'“

The meal over, the company dispersed through the woods. Graham Marr took a book from his pocket. “Miss Warrington,” he said, in his slow way, “I have brought out a new poem; if you care to hear it, there is a mossy rock which will make an admirable sofa.”

Sibyl smiled and accepted this proposal, seating herself on a heap of shawls, and looking at languid Graham as he read, with much apparent interest.

Mr. Leslie was sitting by Aunt Faith's side under the trees at some distance. “Mrs. Sheldon, I have a plan for yourself and Miss Warrington,” he said, after a pause. “You have been kind enough to take an interest in Margaret Brown, and I know you will like to help her through the summer. The warm weather is telling on her strength; she has not been able to sew as steadily as usual, and she needs an entire rest. Do you think you could, between you, advance her a small sum of money? She will repay you with her work in the fall.”

“I shall be glad to help her,” said Aunt Faith; “I consider it a precious opportunity to help a truly deserving woman.”

“And Miss Warrington will aid her also,” said Mr. Leslie. Aunt Faith looked towards the rock and caught the smile with which Sibyl received some remark of the reader's.

“I cannot answer for Sibyl,” she said gravely; “she is going soon to Saratoga, and she is much occupied with her preparations.”

“To Saratoga?” repeated Mr. Leslie; “I was not aware of that. Will she be long away?”

“It is uncertain how long; she may return home for a short visit before she goes to Washington for the winter,” replied Aunt Faith. “I shall miss her, but I must make up my mind to losing her before long. Sibyl is very fond of fashionable life and gayety.” Aunt Faith spoke with a purpose; she wished to open the young clergyman's eyes to her niece's faults.

Mr. Leslie did not reply immediately; after a while he rose and stood leaning against a tree. “Mrs. Sheldon,” he said, looking down at her with a smile, “you will not lose Sibyl.”

“What do you mean, Mr. Leslie?”

“Only this; she will not go to Saratoga,” replied the clergyman, walking away towards the ravine.

“Well!” thought Aunt Faith, as she recovered from her astonishment, “if I did not know Sibyl so well, I should be inclined to think Mr. Leslie was right. If any one can break through her worldliness, he can; but I fear it is too strong even for him.”

In the meanwhile the rest of the party were loitering in the glen by the brook. Gideon Fish after gorging himself with jelly−cake, was inclined to be sportive.

“Oh!” he cried, throwing himself back upon the moss, “I feel like a child let loose from school! Let us indulge our lighter natures; let us for once give up deep thought! Mr. Leslie, it will do *you* good also. I remember once when some of my college−mates happened to meet at our house last summer, we were sitting on the piazza talking together, and all unwittingly we got so deep down among the ponderous mysteries of psychology; so wrought with the mighty thoughts evolved from our own brains; so uplifted in grappling with gigantic reasonings, that, fearful for our very sanity, we rushed out upon the lawn like children; we rolled upon the grass; we found a

ball and tossed to each other; anything,—anything to keep ourselves down to earth."

"But, Gideon," said Mr. Leslie, smiling, "my reason is in no danger of any such overthrow. I never climbed to such heights as you describe."

"Probably not; very few, if any, mortal minds have ever ascended as high as ours did that afternoon," replied Gideon. "Miss Darrell, I see a delicate little tendril on the other side of the brook. Shall we go over and pluck it?"

"No," said Bessie, shortly; "I don't care for tendrils."

"I will go with you, Mr. Fish," said Rose Saxon rising, and of course Gideon was obliged to accompany her, although she was not the companion he preferred. As Rose turned away, she looked meaningly at Bessie, who started, and then smiled to herself. After five or ten minutes when the tendril−hunters had disappeared on the other side of the glen, Bessie suddenly proposed that they should all cross over, and, after some persuasion, she succeeded in getting the whole party across the brook. Then she lured them on slowly, turning here and there, until she caught the sound of voices. "Hush!" she said, "what is that?" They all stopped, and distinctly heard Rose Saxon's voice, somewhat louder than usual, coming from behind some high bushes. "No, Mr. Fish!" she said, emphatically, "it can never be. I must request you to say no more; this subject must be set at rest forever." Then they heard Gideon; "Excuse me Miss Saxon, but—" "Not another word, Mr. Fish!" interrupted Rose, cutting short his sentence. "I would not wound you needlessly, but we are not suited to each other. I have long known your secret,—I have tried to ward off this avowal,—I beg you to say no more."

"Miss Saxon, I assure you—" began Gideon, in an agitated voice, but Rose stopped him again; "Mr. Fish, if you *will* persist in speaking, I must leave you," she said, pushing aside the bushes and disclosing the party on the other side to her companion's gaze. "What, Bessie!—all of you here? How very embarrassing!" Gideon Fish gave one look at the company and then turned and retreated down the glen; when he was out of hearing, the two girls ran away into the wood to indulge in a hearty laugh. They made no confessions to the others, but every one suspected the truth, and when poor Gideon returned to take them aside, one by one, and assure them that he had "no idea what Miss Saxon meant," that he "admired her exceedingly, but as for anything serious the thought had never occurred to him," that he was "speaking to her of the tendrils, when suddenly, without any connection, she began talking in the most singular way," his auditors would laugh merrily and turn away, leaving Gideon more miserable than ever.

"My good fellow," said Hugh gravely, when his turn came, "let me give you a piece of advice. Don't try to back out of it now. We all heard you; and we all feel for you. Miss Saxon is a charming young lady, but if she does not like you, you must bear it like a man."

"But I never intended,—I never thought of such a thing,—it is all a mistake!" stammered the unfortunate Gideon.

"Of course it was a mistake," replied Hugh. "You thought she liked you and she didn't. If I was you I wouldn't say any more about it."

So poor Gideon got but cold comfort in his trouble. He wandered about looking half−angry, half−perplexed; he almost began to think he had said something to Rose, after all!

"The mighty thoughts evolved from his brain are in some confusion, I fear," whispered Bessie to Rose; "he will have no trouble in keeping himself down to earth *this* afternoon, I think."

After some hours, the party assembled in the glen to join in a round game. "It is very dark," said Aunt Faith, looking up through the thick foliage; "I fear we are going to have a storm."

"Let us run down to the lakeshore and look," said Bessie, and several of the young people started down the glen, followed by the rest of the party at a slower pace; all but Sibyl who still remained on the rock with Graham Marr.

When they reached the beach, a threatening expanse of sky and water met their gaze; the lake was unusually still, but its blue changed into a leaden gray, and out in the west a white streak followed by a black line told of the approaching squall. In the south, and east, the sky was clear and summer−like, but from the north−west great clouds came rolling up, looking black and menacing, and the air was oppressively close.

"A thunder−storm!" said Hugh, "and close upon us too!"

"Oh, I am so terribly afraid of thunder!" said Edith Chase, turning pale. "What shall we do?"

"Why did we not notice the storm before?" said Aunt Faith, in dismay; "it must have been some time coming up."

“No, Aunt,” said Bessie; “probably not more than ten minutes. That is what I mean when I call the western lakes treacherous; the changes are so sudden.”

“You are right, Miss Darrell,” said Mr. Gay, looking over the dark water with an uneasy expression in his face; “I don't think much of these fresh water mill−ponds. On the ocean, now, we know what to expect.”

“Isn't there some house near by, Hugh?” asked Aunt Faith.

“No, Aunt. I selected this place because it was so solitary, you remember; there is no house within two miles.”

“Could we not get there, by driving rapidly, before the storm reaches us?” said Mr. Gay, mindful of his rheumatism.

“I am afraid not, sir,” replied Hugh: “it would take some time to harness the horses, and besides, the house is not on the road, but across the fields towards the south.”

“What *shall* we do?” said Edith Chase, as the sullen water began to break with a low sound on the beach at her feet.

“The lake is beginning to growl already,” said Hugh. “Come, Aunt Faith, let us go back to the woods; we will make the best shelter we can for you, all. A summer thunder−storm is not such a terrible disaster after all.”

“We can't trim up the wagon with all the beautiful wreaths we made,” lamented Gem. “It's too bad!”

“The shower will prevent the show,” said Hugh, laughing.

“Why is Hugh like Tennyson's Brook,” said Rose Saxon, as the party made their way back to the glen.

“Because he is *idyl*,” said Bessie.

“Good, but not correct. Because he,—

'Chatters, chatters, as he goes,
Till all our nerves do quiver,—
For we may talk, or we may stop,
But Hugh puns on forever,
Ever,
Hugh puns on forever.'“

sang Rose, taking up the well−known air as she sprang over the rocks in advance of the rest.

“We shall have to make an impromptu wigwam under the shelter of those rocks and beech−trees,” said Mr. Leslie, collecting the shawls and water−proof cloaks; “the foliage of the beech is very thick, and the rock will protect you from the west, in which direction the storm is coming. Mr. Marr, please throw down those shawls.”

“What is the matter, Mr. Leslie?” said Sibyl, descending from her perch.

“A thunder−storm!” said Hugh, “and close upon us, too!”

“Surely, then, you are not thinking of remaining here under the trees,” said Graham Marr, hastily putting on his water−proof coat.

“The ladies will be in more danger from the drenching rain, than from the lightning,” replied Mr. Leslie, breaking down branches for his wigwam. “Here, Jonas! Jonas! have you a hatchet there?”

But Jonas did not answer, and Hugh, upon going up to the platform, discovered that he had started homeward with his cart, having first harnessed the four−in−hand. The horses were standing tied to the trees, but they looked uneasy, and one of the leaders pawed the ground restlessly. “I shall have to stay here with them,” thought Hugh, “or they may break away when the storm strikes them.” He ran back and called over the edge of the cliff. “Jonas has gone home, Mr. Leslie, and I shall be obliged to stay with the horses; but here is the hatchet.”

“Very well!” said the clergyman, catching the hatchet with the dexterity of an Indian as Hugh threw it down; “go back to the horses, Mr. Warrington. We can attend to the ladies.”

Under his direction an impromptu wigwam was speedily built of long boughs, with the high rock as a background; this was thatched with bushes, and the shawls and cloaks spread over the whole as the first muttering of thunder was heard. “Oh!” said Edith Chase, “what shall I do? I cannot stand the lightning!”

“Come inside with me!” said Aunt Faith; “you can hide your head in my lap.”

The ladies hurried inside the wigwam, Aunt Faith, Sibyl, Rose Saxon, Edith Chase, Lida Powers, Bessie, Annie Chase and Gem.

“I see there is room for the gentlemen, too,” said Gideon Fish, creeping in.

“I really think we had better all be together,” said Graham Marr, following his example.

“Tom!” called Aunt Faith, pulling aside a cloak that formed part of the wall, “come inside directly.”

“Oh, Aunt Faith! we've found a splendid cave up here; it holds Jim and me first−rate,” answered a voice from above.

“They've squeezed themselves into a little cranny in the rock, Mrs. Sheldon,” said Mr. Leslie, looking up and laughing to see the 'splendid cave;' “I think they will keep dry by force of compression.”

“Aren't you coming inside, Mr. Mount?” said Lida Powers.

“No. I shall go and help Hugh with the horses; you had better come too, Walter. We may have some trouble with them.”

“Mr. Leslie, you will join us, I hope?” said Rose Saxon, peeping out from between the leaves.

“I think not, Miss Rose. I am hardened, you know; I have camped out in winter storms too many times to dread a July shower. But I insist upon Mr. Gay's going inside. The 'Boston man' will now have an opportunity; he can 'to a wigwam with a squaw go,'“ quoted Mr. Leslie, helping the old bachelor under the overhanging branches.

In a few moments the storm was upon them; first a tornado of wind, then intense and almost continuous lightning, followed by heavy rolling thunder. Edith Chase trembled, and buried her face in her hands.

“This war of the elements affects my nerves,” whispered Graham to Sibyl, by whose side he was crouching.

“Does it?” she replied coldly; “I was not aware you were so timid.”

Then came the rain, falling in sheets, the drenching torrent of a summer thunder−shower. In spite of the foliage, the wet began to penetrate the wigwam; Sibyl, who sat on the outside of the huddled circle, felt the drops on her shoulder through her light dress.

“Take this coat, Miss Warrington,” said Mr. Leslie, stooping down and parting the branches.

“Oh no!” replied Sibyl; “you need it more than I do.”

But the coat was thrown around her, and Mr. Leslie was gone before she could remonstrate.

At last, after half an hour, the fury of the storm was over, but the rain still fell steadily.

“I am afraid it will not clear immediately,” said Mr. Leslie, coming to the wigwam entrance; “I have been down to the lake, and the sky looks as though we should have a wet night.”

“How dark it is!” said Aunt Faith; “What time is it?”

“Half−past seven,” said Mr. Leslie, looking at his watch.

“Oh, how shall we ever get home?” sighed Edith Chase.

“We had better start immediately, I think,” said Mr. Gay; “it will be very unpleasant to ride in the darkness as well as in the rain.”

“And the horses!” said Lida Powers; “I hope they will be quiet. That black was inclined to dance a little when we came out.”

“Now, ladies!” said Mr. Leslie, coming towards the wigwam again, “I have been up on the plateau; the horses are ready, and the sooner we start the better, as more black clouds are gathering in the west. Mrs. Sheldon, let me help you up the bank.”

“Oh, Mr. Leslie, how wet you are!” exclaimed Aunt Faith, as she emerged from the wigwam. “Where is your coat?”

“Miss Warrington has it,” he replied; “I made her take it.”

“Here it is, Mr. Leslie,” said Sibyl, stepping from under cover.

“Keep it, Sibyl,” said the clergyman in a low tone. “It gives me pleasure to see you protected.”

“It is still raining steadily, I perceive,” said Graham Marr, peeping out from the sheltering branches; “don't you think we had better remain here awhile longer, ladies?”

“The rain won't wash us away, Graham,” said his cousin Rose.

“It washes out dyes, however? and shows us all in our true colors,” whispered Bessie to Lida Powers. “Look at Graham! He looks like a faded ray!”

“He always was a fair−weather piece of goods,” answered Lida; “high color, you know, don't stand soaking.”

Reaching the wagon, the company climbed inside, the cushions had been kept dry, but the floor was wet, and the rain still fell with the persistence that betokens what farmers call a “steady soaker.” Edith Chase sat with Aunt Faith at the rear end of the wagon, but Bessie in Edith's old place, felt her spirits rising with every plunge of the restless leaders.

“Do you think you can manage them, Hugh?” she whispered, just before they started.

“I hope so,” he replied confidently. But the blacks had had their nerves tried by the flies, the thunder, and the

lightning; besides, they had never been driven four−in−hand before, and they had their doubts as to what the bays were doing behind them. For the first mile or two they kept the road, and then they whirled suddenly round to the left, and stood still.

"Oh!" cried Edith Chase, "we shall all be killed!"

However, after some persuasion, the blacks started on again as suddenly as they had stopped, for wonderful are the ways of balky horses. But the increasing darkness brought new terror; black clouds settled down over the earth and the narrow, winding road grew invisible before them. After several more miles a flash of lightning and a peal of thunder startled the party, the leaders veered round again, jumping violently, and carrying the wagon perilously near the gully. William Mount and Walter Hart sprang to the horses' heads, while the ladies screamed in concert. Aunt Faith was an arrant coward where riding was concerned. "I would rather get out and walk all the way home than sit in this wagon a moment longer," she said, earnestly.

"Take me with you, aunt," said Gem, who was crying aloud.

"I will go, too," said Edith Chase, climbing down with alacrity; "it cannot be very far, now."

"We are still four miles from Westerton," said Hugh. "There is no danger, Aunt Faith; do get in again. The horses are only a little balky; they will be quiet soon."

"Do you call that quiet?" said Rose Saxon, as a flash of lightning revealed the plunging leaders with William Mount and Walter Hart at their heads.

"By all means, let us walk," said Graham Marr, getting out quickly.

"Of course if the ladies insist upon walking, it is our duty to accompany them," said Gideon Fish, following his example.

"Mrs. Sheldon," said Mr. Gay, "if you will walk, pray take my arm."

"Miss Darrell, I shall be happy to help you down," said Gideon Fish.

"Thank you, but I shall stay where I am; I am not at all afraid," replied Bessie.

After a few moments, the horses started again; and the walking party plodded along behind; Hugh drove very slowly so as to keep near them, and, in the darkness, Bessie climbed up on the driver's seat beside him. "Bravo, little woman! I knew *you* would not be afraid," said Hugh.

"Afraid, Hugh! With you!" exclaimed Bessie.

At the other end of the wagon sat Sibyl and Mr. Leslie, who also preferred the wagon to the road. The rain still fell, and the wind had grown cold, but although Sibyl still wore the coat, her companion did not seem to notice his uncovered shoulders. They talked earnestly together in low tones all the way, and when at last the lights of Westerton appeared in the darkness ahead, and the pedestrians, emboldened by these signs of civilization, took their seats in the wagon again, Sibyl's face was so bright that Aunt Faith noticed it. "You do not look at all cold, my dear," she said, as the light from the first street lamps fell across the wagon, "and yet the air is very chilly."

"I fear I shall have an attack of dumb−ague," said Graham Marr, shivering.

Edith Chase sat on the edge of the seat, ready to spring, watching the leaders with intent gaze; as they approached the old stone house she heaved a deep sigh of relief. "I am so glad it is over," she said, audibly.

"I hope you will all come in and have a cup of hot coffee after the exposure," said Aunt Faith, as, one by one, the tired guests climbed down from the circus−wagon.

"We *are* all so wet, I think we had better go directly home," said Lida Powers.

"Thank you, Mrs. Sheldon," said Edith Chase, "but we really must go directly home; come, Annie."

"Excuse me, Mrs. Sheldon," said Mr. Gay, "but my seventy years require hot flannels. Good−night."

Mr. Leslie had accompanied Sibyl up the long walk to the piazza in order to take back his coat when she was under shelter. All the other guests made their excuses at the gate, all but Gideon Fish, and when Bessie saw him lingering, she pretended to be very obtuse. "Well, as you won't any of you come in, I will say 'good−night' to all of you," she said, closing the gate and turning away. "I couldn't help it, Aunt Faith," she whispered, as they went up the walk; "Gideon wanted some of your coffee, but we have had enough of him for one day, I think." Mr. Leslie, however, put on his coat and took his coffee with the cousins as though unconscious of his wet clothes; Hugh made up a bright wood fire on the hearth, and they all talked over the incidents of the day, and laughed over its disasters together. It is always amusing to look back on discomfort when it is well over.

"Where now is your beautiful 'Monday morning, bright and early,' Tom?" said Aunt Faith, remembering the conversation at the breakfast−table.

"*Sic* transit *gloria Monday*!" said Hugh.
"Incorrigible," said Mr. Leslie, laughing as he said good−night.

CHAPTER VIII. RIGHT AT LAST.

"Sibyl," said Aunt Faith, the day after the picnic, "have you completed all your preparations for Saratoga?"

"You speak as though my going was a matter−of−course, Aunt," said Sibyl slowly.

"Is it not, dear? I supposed your decision was made several weeks ago," said Aunt Faith, thinking of the written paper which Sibyl had given her to read.

"I think I shall go," said Sibyl, after a pause. "Everything is ready but the pearls; I can buy them any time."

"I hope you will enjoy the summer, my dear," said Aunt Faith, taking her niece's hand affectionately.

"Then you approve of my going, Aunt?"

"You must make your own decision, Sibyl. No one can aid you in such a question as this," replied Aunt Faith gravely.

Sibyl sat awhile in silence; then she rose and left the room.

An hour or two afterwards, Bridget came upstairs to tell Aunt Faith that Mr. Leslie wished to see her; she went down, somewhat surprised at so early a call, and found the young clergyman waiting for her in the parlor.

"Mrs. Sheldon," he said, after the first words of greeting, "poor Margaret Brown is in great trouble. You remember our conversation about her yesterday? Calling in to tell her of it this morning, I found two of the children stricken down with fever, seriously ill, the doctor says; and I have come directly to you for aid; to you and Miss Warrington."

"Sibyl has gone out, Mr. Leslie, but I shall be glad to do anything I can. Shall I go there at once, or send a nurse?"

"I hardly know yet; I came to talk the matter over with you. I do not like to ask you to go there, for the fever may be dangerous, and yet Margaret needs sympathy as much as money. Perhaps if they could all be moved into a purer air,—into the country, for instance,—away from that crowded neighborhood, it would be the wisest course."

"But can the sick children bear a journey now?"

"I think they could go a few miles in an easy carriage, but, as they are growing worse every hour, it must be done at once if done at all. Do you know of any farm−house where they could be received for a time?"

"Mr. Green might take them," said Aunt Faith; "he would probably expect ample payment, however. Mr. Leslie, I am sorry I cannot give you *carte blanche*; but owing to outside circumstances, I have but a small sum at my disposal at present."

"We will put our means together, Mrs. Sheldon. I have something laid by, and perhaps Miss Warrington will assist us."

"Sibyl has other uses for her money, I fear."

"Surely none more worthy than this, Mrs. Sheldon."

Aunt Faith grew somewhat impatient. "Mr. Leslie," she said emphatically, "you do not understand my niece."

"I think I understand Miss Warrington's character, and I think she will help Margaret Brown," replied the young clergyman gravely.

At this moment a step on the gravel−walk was heard, and Sibyl herself crossed the piazza and entered the hall.

"Have you been down town, Sibyl?" asked Aunt Faith.

"Yes, aunt," replied Sibyl, coloring slightly, as she returned Mr. Leslie's greeting.

"Have you made any purchases?" continued Aunt Faith, glancing at an oblong box in her niece's hand.

Sibyl hesitated; then, as if impelled by a sudden impulse, she took off the wrapping−paper and opened the case. "I have bought my pearls at last, Aunt Faith. Are they not beautiful?" she said.

The fair jewels lay on a velvet bed, white and perfect, and looking from them to Sibyl's blonde beauty, one could not help noticing their adaptation to each other.

"They are very lovely, my dear," said Aunt Faith, passing the case to Mr. Leslie. He took the jewels, looked at them a moment, and retaining the case in his hand, said, "I came here this morning to ask your assistance in a case of distress, Miss Warrington. Margaret Brown is in need of instant aid; two of the children are ill, and I wish to have them removed into the country, if possible, before they grow worse. I rely upon you to help us."

Sibyl sat with downcast eyes a moment. Then she said in a low voice, "I am sorry, Mr. Leslie; but I have just

spent all my spare money upon those pearls."

"The jeweller will take them back; I will arrange it for you, if you wish," said the clergyman, looking at her intently.

The color deepened painfully in Sibyl's cheeks, and the tears came into her eyes, but she did not speak. Aunt Faith saw the struggle, and came to her niece's assistance with her usual kindliness. "You must not expect young ladies to give up their pretty ornaments so easily," she said to Mr. Leslie, trying to shield Sibyl's embarrassment.

"I am not speaking to a young lady; I am speaking to a fellow Christian," said Mr. Leslie, gravely. "Miss Warrington and I have often spoken of the duty of giving. Only last evening we had a very serious conversation on that and kindred subjects. Mrs. Sheldon has said that I do not understand her niece. But I am unwilling to believe myself mistaken. I still think I understand her better even than her own aunt does,—better even than she understands herself."

Still Sibyl did not speak. Aunt Faith looked at her in surprise. Could it be that her worldliness was conquered after all? "Sibyl," she said, gently, "you must decide, dear. Shall Mr. Leslie take back the pearls?"

"No," replied Sibyl, rising and struggling to regain her composure, "I wish the pearls, and there is no justice in asking me to give them up. I shall keep them, and as I have to write to Mrs. Leighton that I will meet her next week as she desired, my time is more than occupied, and I will ask Mr. Leslie to excuse me."

She left the room, taking the pearls with her, and not a word more did Mr. Leslie say in allusion to her. He turned the conversation back to Margaret Brown, discussed the various arrangements for removing the family into the country, and then took his departure.

"I was very sorry about the money, Aunt Faith," said Sibyl, after he had gone, standing at the sitting−room window and watching the tall figure disappearing in the distance.

"Sincerity first of all, my dear," replied Aunt Faith.

"How will he get the money, aunt?"

"He is going to apply to Mrs. Chase, I believe. Although she has never attended the chapel−services, he knows her to be generous and kind−hearted."

"Rich, too, Aunt Faith. It is very easy to be generous when one is rich," said Sibyl, with a shade of bitterness in her tone.

"Riches are comparative, Sibyl. Mrs. Chase is rich, but she has very many depending upon her assistance."

"Mr. Leslie had no right to make such a demand of me," said Sibyl, after a pause.

"Perhaps he thought you had given him the right to guide you," said Aunt Faith.

"I have never given him any right," said Sibyl, hastily. "I presume he thinks I am a selfish, hard−hearted creature," she added in another tone.

"He thinks more highly of you than your own aunt did, Sibyl; he said so himself. He believes, or has believed, firmly in the purity of your religious faith and firm principle. I have several times been surprised to see how sure he was of you."

"He asked too much," said Sibyl; "he is too severe with me."

"Not more severe than he is with himself, my dear. He has taken all his little savings for Margaret Brown, and I presume those savings represent comforts, not luxuries like pearls."

"Mr. Leslie should not try me by the same test he uses for himself; I cannot stand it."

"That is where he made his mistake, my dear. He thought you could."

Sibyl colored angrily. "Mr. Leslie is an enthusiast," she said; "he expects people to throw down all their treasures at his feet."

"Not at his feet; at the foot of the cross, dear."

"Aunt Faith, do you really believe people can be happy in such a life?" said Sibyl vehemently.

"Mr. Leslie is happy, my child."

"He is a single man with few cares. I am alluding to married people, burdened with responsibility and anxiety."

"If they are so burdened, my dear, so much the more reason why they should seek help from Him who said 'come unto me all ye that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'"

"But in every−day life there are so many petty annoyances, aunt."

"Will they be any the less annoying without His aid, dear?"

"They will be less annoying if people are rich, Aunt Faith."

"Some of the most unhappy women I have ever known, have been rich, Sibyl."

"But I would not be one of those, aunt. I would be rich and happy at the same time."

"If you could, my dear. But wealth brings with it its own troubles; sometimes in the shape of the donor; I trust you would not marry for money?"

"Not for money alone, aunt. But I see no reason why a rich man might not be loved for himself as well as a poor man. It does not follow that because a man is rich he must therefore be selfish or ill−tempered."

"Certainly not, my dear; but we will not discuss it any longer, at present. You are young, and I wish you to understand yourself thoroughly. Take no rash steps, and remember that wealth is as nothing compared to a true heart, and that this world's best treasures are perishable, while religious faith abides with us through life and death into eternity."

In the afternoon Mr. Leslie came again to the old stone house, and inquired for Mrs. Sheldon. "I have come to ask for your horses," he said, as Aunt Faith entered the parlor; I have secured a large carriage that will take all the family, and now, if you will send Jonas down with the horses, we can hope to have Margaret safely established at Mr. Green's before night."

"Certainly, Mr. Leslie. Is there nothing more I can do?"

"Not to−day, thank you. I shall go out with them myself."

"How are the children?"

"Worse, I fear; but I have large faith in country air."

"I shall be anxious to know how they bear the ride."

"I will stop on my way home as I must come back with the carriage," said the young clergyman as he went away.

"Was not that Mr. Leslie?" asked Hugh, coming in from the dining−room a few moments afterward.

"Yes," replied Aunt Faith; "he came to see me on business."

"Didn't he ask for Sibyl?" said Hugh.

"No," replied Aunt Faith, with a warning look at her nephew, as Sibyl came in. But Hugh was not to be warned. "Sibyl," he said, "Mr. Leslie has been here and did not ask for you."

"Is that so very surprising?" said his sister coldly; she had regained all her composure and her face was calm and quiet.

"Of course it is surprising," said Hugh bluntly. "He has been in the habit of coming here to see you for months, and, let me tell you, Sibyl, he is one in a thousand; he is a hero, every inch, and I heartily respect and like him."

"I have said nothing to the contrary, Hugh."

"Don't be a hypocrite, Sibyl," said Hugh with brotherly frankness. "I am not good at splitting hairs, but there is no more comparison between Mr. Leslie and Graham Marr, than there is between an eagle and a sickly chicken."

"I have never thought of comparing them, Hugh. I do not like comparisons, and yours is entirely unjust. But even supposing it was correct, *I* have no taste for standing on a mountain−peak, in the icy air of unknown heights, and gazing at the sun all day as an eagle does," said Sibyl, as she crossed the hall into the parlor. In a few moments the Spring−Song sounded forth from the piano, and under cover of the music, Hugh said to Aunt Faith, "There is nothing wrong between them I hope?"

"There is nothing between them either right or wrong," replied Aunt Faith with a sigh. "Sibyl is not suited to Mr. Leslie."

"Then it is her fault," said Hugh warmly. "There is no doubt in my mind that John Leslie is deeply interested in her, and I should be proud and glad to have him for a brother. He is the truest, most honest man I know."

"That is because he is such a sincere, earnest Christian."

"I know it, aunt. He works hard, and he thoroughly believes in his work. He really thinks there is nothing in the city so vitally important as that little chapel, and those workmen."

"He is right, Hugh. To *him* there should be nothing so important as their welfare."

"Yes, I suppose so; that is, if I could look at it with his eyes. But it is rare to see practice so consistent with theory in every−day life."

“It is, as you say, rare indeed; but he is a rare man, Hugh.”

“He is, truly. That is the reason why I feel Sibyl's manner. Can it be possible that she really prefers Graham Marr?”

“I do not know, Hugh. Graham will be rich some day.”

“That is the worst of it, aunt. Who would have thought Sibyl could be so mercenary!”

“Do not judge her harshly, dear. She has none of that impulse which you admire, but her heart has always been true,—at least so far,” said Aunt Faith gently. Then, after a pause, she continued in a lower tone, “Hugh, if you like and admire Mr. Leslie so much, why are you not willing to follow his example?”

“What! Become a clergyman, Aunt Faith?”

“Not that, unless you feel an inward call towards the blessed vocation,” replied Aunt Faith reverently; “but why do you delay to come forward and make your open profession of faith? Is it honest, is it manly, to hang backward?”

“Oh, Aunt Faith, I am not good enough!” said Hugh quickly.

“Goodness is not required of any of us, Hugh; only repentance, and an earnest endeavor to improve. My dear boy, I never see you come and go, without an aching desire to have you enrolled under His banner, to have you a soldier of the Cross, openly, before all men. Have you thought over our last conversation on this subject?”

“Yes, aunt, many times; but I have such a high idea of a professing Christian. It seems to me that such an one ought to be like Mr. Leslie, working with all his might for the salvation of souls.”

“It is not required that all professing Christians should be ministers of the word, Hugh. There are many other spheres of action, and many qualifications, varied according to our varied temperaments and positions. The Bible makes that point very clear. You read it, I hope?”

“Yes; but I always read the same part, the Gospel of St, John. I like it best of all. There are so many beautiful verses in it which are found nowhere else, so much love and warm faith! For instance; 'Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.' And 'I will not leave you comfortless, I will come unto you.' And, 'woman, behold thy son; behold thy mother;' to me one of the most touching incidents in the Gospel. Then there is the story of Lazarus, and the verse 'Jesus wept.' *He* sorrowed for the mourners, too! Oh, I cannot understand how true Christians can mourn so bitterly for their dead, when they believe that this loving Saviour cares for them.”

“It is not always so much for their lost ones as for themselves, Hugh; their own loneliness, their crushed hopes, and perhaps their remorse that in the lifetime of those they mourn they did not do more for their happiness.”

“You have lost many dear ones, Aunt Faith,” said Hugh thoughtfully.

“Yes; my husband, my parents, and among my intimate friends, all my generation.”

“Do you often think of them, aunt?”

“Yes, Hugh, very often. At first with tears and sadness, but gradually with hope, and a certain looking forward instead of backward. At first I kept all my anniversaries sacred, the many days hallowed by associations with my dear ones; but gradually I tried to break up the habit, and now I only think of their heavenly birthdays,—the days when they left the earth,—and even these have come to be pleasant. I have always been fond of autumn. There is something that charms me in the hazy air and colored foliage. It is not sadness,—it is not joy,—but a sweet peace. Then, my dead always seem near to me. If you like, I will give you something I once wrote on the subject, expressing this *feeling*.”

“Do, aunt!” said Hugh, earnestly: for so seldom did Aunt Faith allude to her past life and its sorrows, that all the cousins held it in reverent respect, and although they often spoke of it among themselves, they never broke through the bounds of Aunt Faith's silence. In her own room hung the portrait of her husband, Lester Sheldon, a young man's face, with blue eyes, and thick golden hair, tossed carelessly back from the white forehead, while below, the firm mouth told of decision and self−control beyond his years. Once, when Bessie was a child, she sat looking at this portrait for some time in silence. Then she said, “Aunt Faith, if that is your husband, what makes him so young when you are so old?”

“He died when he was a young man, little Bessie.”

“But he won't know you when you go to heaven, I'm afraid,” continued the child, looking anxiously at her aunt's gray hair.

“Oh, I shall be young then, too, Bessie. Here is a picture of me when I was eighteen,” said Aunt Faith, taking

a box from her drawer, and drawing out a miniature. It was one of those lovely, old−fashioned ivory pictures, showing a fresh young face with dimples, and a sunny smile.

"Oh, auntie, *that* isn't you!" Bessie had exclaimed, and the other children having come into the room, the picture was shown to them also. Since that day they had never seen it, but Hugh retained a vivid remembrance of the picture, and, as Aunt Faith looked through her desk to find the paper, something in her face recalled it to his mind, and there came across him, like a revelation, a vision of what she was at eighteen. Faith Warrington at eighteen! Faith Warrington, who had long been Mrs. Sheldon with her gray hair and pale face. Going up to his room, Hugh seated himself by the window, and opening the paper, read the following lines:—

"Far back within the cycles of the past,
A train of centuries rolls,
From out whose cloudy borders came the day
Of memory for all souls.
How long it seems, a thousand years ago!
How dark and weary, if we did not know
A thousand years are but as yesterday within His sight,
Seeing that it is past like one brief watch within the night!
Could they have known, those men of childlike faith,
Half ignorant, half sublime,
The fitness of the souls' memorial day
Falling within the time
Of Nature's holy calm, her blest repose,—
When all the land with loving fervor glows,
And from the naked woods, the empty fields, through the soft haze,
Her work well done, her garners full, she offers up her praise.
A stillness fills the consecrated air,—
The blustering winds that swept
The red and yellow leaves in giddy rounds,
By mighty hands are kept
In their four corners, while the liquid gold
And purple tints over the earth unrolled,
And full of mystery and heavenly peace, as though the skies
Had opened, and let out the atmosphere of Paradise.
Departed souls! Their memory may *come*
With grief in Spring's soft hours,—
With weary, lonely sadness when our hands
Are gathering summer flowers,—
With wild despair in winter: when the graves
Are white with drifted snow, and wildly raves
The wind among the stones and monuments, in accents dread,
Calling in vain the sculptured names of our beloved dead.
But in this golden dream−time of the year,
Our bitter murmurs cease;—
We seem to feel the presence of the dead,
Their shadowy touch of peace;

We seem to see their faces as we gaze
Longingly forth into the purple haze,
And hear the distant chorus of the happy souls at rest,—
And catch the well−known accents of the voice we loved the best."

All Souls' Day, November 2nd.

In the evening, as Aunt Faith was sitting on the piazza with Bessie, Mr. Leslie came up the walk; Sibyl was in the parlor playing soft chords on the piano, but she could hear his words as he spoke. Mr. Leslie's voice was deep, but clear, and his pronunciation perfectly distinct without any apparent effort. He did not obtrude the alphabet unpleasantly upon his hearers; he was not so anxious to show his correct pronunciation of "Been" as to force it to rhyme with "Seen;" he was not so much concerned with "Institute," as to te−u−ute the last syllable into undue importance; neither did he bombard his hearers with the arrogance of rolling *rr's*. Although his voice was not loud, any one occupying even the last seat in the chapel could not only hear him, but was absolutely invited to listen by the pleasant distinctness of the words.

"I am pleased to be able to tell you that Margaret and the children are safe in the farm−house, Mrs. Sheldon," he said, taking a seat on the piazza. "Poor girl, how glad she was to get there! She sent her grateful thanks to you."

"How did the children bear the ride?" asked Aunt Faith.

"Better than I expected. Indeed, the novelty, and perhaps the pleasant country air, seemed to revive them, and lessen the fever. They even walked about the garden when we arrived there, and began to make bouquets of flowers, but before I left, the reaction had come and they looked very tired."

"You look tired, also, Mr. Leslie," said Aunt Faith; the light from the hall−lamp shone on the young clergyman's face and showed its pale weariness.

"I am tired," he replied, "but a night's rest is all I need." Then he leaned back in his chair and sat talking pleasantly with Bessie and Aunt Faith. "This is a charming old house," he said, "it must have been built a long time ago."

"Yes," replied Aunt Faith; "for a western town it is quite venerable. The main portion was built in 1822, and the wings were added as the family increased, without much regard for architectural regularity. The stairs were originally out−doors on the back piazza, but father finally had them enclosed. You may have noticed that the west side has only two windows, and that those are singularly placed. It is amusing to think that so implicit was grandfather's belief in the growth of Westerton, then hardly more than a pioneer village, that he built up that side without any windows so as not to interfere with the blocks of dwellings which he was sure would press up against this house as the town grew into a city. It was only after many years that father was allowed to pierce the thick wall and with great difficulty insert those two windows."

"That is something like my old home, a little village in the interior of New York," said Mr. Leslie. "One old man was so impressed by the growth of the town, that meeting my father he shook him by the hand and exclaimed, 'how it do grow, Judge! Please heaven, we'll make a seaport of it yet!'"

They all laughed at this story. Then Aunt Faith said, "I should like to think that some of the children would occupy this old house after I am gone. But in America, and especially in the Western States that is hardly possible."

"I will live here, if I can, Aunt Faith," said Bessie warmly. "I love every stone in the old house, and every old flower in the old garden."

"Are flowers ever old, Miss Darrell?" said Mr. Leslie, smiling.

"Oh, yes. Flowers grow old−fashioned and out of date just like people. We have a genuine old−fashioned garden here, and all the neighbors laugh at it in comparison with their smooth lawns and choice plants. We have bachelor's−buttons, lady−slippers, tiger−lilies, flower−de−luce, hollyhocks, and pinks, besides bushes of lilac and matrimony; then we have old cedars clipped into shape, and ever so many little paths and garden−beds edged with box. Oh, we are entirely behind the times! But for all that, I love the old garden better than the smoothest trimmed lawn, and I can pick you a bunch of violets which you cannot match in Westerton; real violets, too, not flaring pansies."

"I too am fond of old−fashioned gardens, Miss Darrell," said Mr. Leslie. "My mother had one, not so large as

this, but resembling it in general arrangement. I remember we had a little patch of trailing arbutus; it grew wild, and I can distinctly recall its perfume as the snow melted. I have never seen it in the West."

"No, it does not grow here," replied Aunt Faith; "our climate is too warm for it."

"There is a great difference between the climate of the lake country and that of New England," said Mr. Leslie; "there is so little snow here."

"Snow!" exclaimed Bessie. "I scarcely know what snow is; and as for stories of drifts over the fences, and tunnels cut through them, I can scarcely believe anything of the kind. They are as much like legends to me as the fairy tale of little Kay and the Robber Maiden. Once at Featherton Hall the eastern girls were talking about sleigh−riding, and I told them that snow was so scarce in Westerton that when a few snow−flakes actually fell, they were immediately fenced in and guarded by the police, and then the whole population assembled in sleighs, cutters, and pungs, to ride over them in alphabetical order. Of course, as aunt's name began with S, there was not much left of the snow−flakes when our turn came."

"You ridiculous child!" said Aunt Faith, laughing, "how can you invent such exaggerations?"

"Oh, Bessie can invent anything!" said Hugh, coming out from the sitting−room; "if she had charge of even the Patent−Office Reports, she would gild them into veritable romances."

Later in the evening, Graham Marr came up the garden walk. "Good−evening, Mrs. Sheldon!" he said; "is Miss Warrington at home?"

"Yes; she is in the parlor," said Aunt Faith. "Will you go in, Mr. Marr?"

"Thank you, yes. I came especially to see her," replied Graham, taking off his straw hat, and passing through the group on the piazza.

"Excuse me, Miss Darrell. Is that you, Hugh? Ah!—Mr. Leslie, I believe. I did not observe you in the darkness. I hope you experienced no ill feeling after your exposure yesterday?"

"None at all, Mr. Marr. And you?"

"I took cold, as I expected; but, so far, my head has given me no severe pain," said Graham, passing on into the parlor.

"Is Mr. Marr subject to pain in his head?" inquired Mr. Leslie, as Graham disappeared.

"Chronic inflammation of the brain, produced by intense study and seething, poetical thoughts," said Hugh, in a dramatic whisper.

Soon afterwards, Mr. Leslie rose to take leave. "I feel very tired, so I will say good−night," he said. "I will let you know the condition of the children some time to−morrow, Mrs. Sheldon."

"Thank you. If it is quite convenient I shall be glad to know," replied Aunt Faith.

Graham Marr stayed until a late hour, so late that Bessie and Hugh had gone upstairs when he took leave, and Sibyl, coming in to the sitting−room, found Aunt Faith alone.

"You look tired, my dear," said the elder lady kindly.

"I am tired, aunt. Graham talked a long time. He had something to tell me. His uncle is dead, and he has come into the fortune."

"Ah!—" said Aunt Faith. She made no other comment, but waited for her niece to speak.

"Graham is going to Saratoga next week," continued Sibyl slowly. "He thinks of removing to New York for a permanent home; he likes city life, you know."

"Yes," said Aunt Faith again; but she said no more.

Sibyl closed the windows, replaced the chairs, and fastened the front−door; then, as she carelessly turned the leaves of a book on the table, she said at last, "Mr. Leslie was here, I believe?"

"Yes: he came to tell me that Margaret Brown and the children were safely established in the farm−house."

"Did he ask for me?" said Sibyl, as she extinguished the hall lamps.

"No, my dear," answered Aunt Faith, and Sibyl went to her room without another word.

Two days came and went, and Mr. Leslie did not appear.

"I say, you people!" said Tom, bursting into the dining−room at tea−time. "Did you know that Mr. Leslie was sick? Dangerously sick, Jim Morse says; not expected to live, I believe."

"Thomas!" said Aunt Faith with unusual severity, "what do you mean? Tell the truth."

"Well, he's sick, any way; and Jim heard his mother say it was a dangerous fever. Hallo, Sibyl! what's the matter? How pale you are!"

“No more pale than the rest of us,” interrupted Bessie, with a quick glance at Sibyl; “we all like Mr. Leslie, don't we?”

“Of course we do. He's the best man in the world,” said Gem fervently.

“I shall go and see him immediately,” said Hugh, rising.

“Oh, Hugh, it is probably the same fever the Brown children have!” said Aunt Faith anxiously. “You must not expose yourself needlessly.”

“In this call I consider it necessary, Aunt Faith,” said Hugh. “Mr. Leslie has no near relatives, and although he is loved by his congregation, dread of the fever will keep most of them away; besides, they cannot leave their work. He will be left to hired nurses and you know what Westerton nurses are!”

“Go, then, my boy, and may God be with you,” said Aunt Faith, with tears in her eyes.

The tea−table was soon deserted. Sibyl went to her room, Tom and Gem took refuge in the back garden with the three dogs to bear them company, but Aunt Faith and Bessie sat on the piazza waiting for Hugh's return.

“After all,” said Bessie, “we need not feel so anxious. The report has passed through several mouths; no doubt it is exaggerated.”

“I hope so,” replied Aunt Faith; “and still I have a strong presentiment that Mr. Leslie is very ill. His face looked strangely worn and pallid as he sat there that last evening, and when fever attacks a man as strong and full of life as he is, the contest is far more severe than with a more feeble patient.”

Eight o'clock struck, but still Hugh did not return. A step sounded up the walk in the dusky twilight, but it was not his; Graham Marr appeared, and again asked for Miss Warrington.

“Go and tell Sibyl, my dear,” said Aunt Faith to Bessie with an inward sigh. Then, as Bessie went into the house, she said, “Have you heard of Mr. Leslie's illness, Mr. Marr?”

“No,” replied Graham, as he stood in the doorway carelessly twirling his hat in his hand; “is he very ill?”

“We do not know; we have heard only a rumor. Hugh has gone to find out the exact truth.”

“Ah—yes. If it is fever, no doubt he caught it in that unpleasant locality where his chapel stands,” said Graham. “I have often wondered how he could endure the life he leads, but I suppose he is not fastidious. His nature is not so finely wrought, or his nerves so delicately strung as those of some other organizations.”

“His nature is strong and manly,” replied Aunt Faith, with a shade of indignation in her voice.

“Ah, yes, exactly. A man in his position has need of strength,” said Graham loftily. Then, after a pause, “You have heard of my good fortune, Mrs. Sheldon?”

“I have heard that your uncle was dead, Mr. Marr.”

“Ah—yes. Poor old gentleman! I never knew him well; we were not at all sympathetic. My grandfather's singular will has now been fulfilled, and the estate, which has rolled up to double its original value, will now be divided between my two Southern cousins and myself.”

“I congratulate you, Mr. Marr.”

“Thank you. I think I shall not discredit my fortune; I have long endeavored to cultivate the tastes which belong to wealth,” said Graham with languid pride.

At this moment Bessie returned. “Sibyl is in the parlor, Mr. Marr,” she said; “will you walk in?”

“Thanks, kind messenger,” said Graham, bowing gracefully as he passed her; “Hebe could not be fairer!”

“How ridiculous he is, Aunt Faith,” she said, as the young man disappeared. “How can Sibyl like him? I do not really think she does like him, but I cannot make her out. When I went to her room she was as pale as a ghost, but while she was smoothing her hair, the color rose, and she began to laugh and talk as gayly as possible. Listen, now; hear her laugh. How can she be so heartless!”

“Do not be too severe, Bessie. I suspect Sibyl is putting a great strain on herself to−night. She has so many good traits,” said Aunt Faith with a sigh. “She has so much energy! She only needs to have the right direction given to it and she will accomplish a wonderful amount of good work if her life is spared.”

“But that right direction, Aunt Faith; is Graham Marr to give it?” asked Bessie with a tinge of scorn in her voice.

“I do not know, dear. But Sibyl has a true heart at bottom.”

“I do believe you are made of charity, aunt. Your name ought to be Faith, Hope, and Charity, instead of Faith alone,” said Bessie warmly.

“I have learned one lesson by the experience of a long life,” replied Aunt Faith, smiling; “the lesson of

patience."

"How else could you have brought up such a troublesome set of nephews and nieces?" exclaimed Bessie. "We must have tried your patience severely, Aunt Faith. But we do love you dearly, every one of us." And the impulsive girl threw her arms around her aunt and kissed her affectionately.

About half−past nine they heard the sound of the gate, and recognized Hugh's step on the gravel walk.

"How is he, Hugh?" said Bessie, before he came in sight.

"He is a very sick man," replied Hugh gravely, as he came up the steps. "The doctors are perplexed, for the case is not like ordinary fever. They think he will either be much better or much worse before morning."

"Oh, Hugh; you do not mean that he is in any danger?"

"Yes; so the doctors say. There is trouble with the brain, threatenings of congestion, I believe. As I said before, he will probably be out of danger before morning, or,—or, gone where he is fully prepared to go," said Hugh with emotion.

"Then I shall go to see him now,—directly," said a strange, muffled voice behind them.

"Sibyl!" exclaimed Aunt Faith.

"Yes, aunt," said Sibyl, stepping forward and speaking in the same muffled voice. "I heard what Hugh said, and I wish to go directly to see Mr. Leslie; you must go with me."

They all looked at her as she stood in the lighted hall; her face was deadly pale, and her eyes had a far−off look as though she saw something terrible in the distance. Behind her was Graham Marr looking perplexed and angry; he did not know what to do or say, and his usual graceful manner had given place to confused irritation. As Sibyl spoke he made an effort to regain his composure.

"Ah!" he said, with studied carelessness, "so Leslie is sick, is he? I must really send a nurse to take care of him. I will do what I can for him, poor fellow!"

"I shall be his nurse," said Sibyl, in the same strange, still voice.

"You are joking, Miss Warrington. Of course you would not expose yourself so foolishly," said Graham angrily.

"*I* shall be his nurse. I shall go to−night," repeated Sibyl, without changing her attitude.

Graham looked at her a moment as if about to continue the argument, but something in the set expression of her face convinced him of the hopelessness of the attempt. Curbing his annoyance under an appearance of amusement, he smiled and turned to Aunt Faith. "There is no use in combating a young lady, I suppose, Mrs. Sheldon. Really,—I had no idea it was so late. I must go. I will bid you good−night, ladies, and at the same time good−bye, as I shall soon leave Westerton for the summer." Then he turned again to Sibyl; "I shall meet you in Saratoga next week, I trust, Miss Warrington?"

"No," said Sibyl, with the same far−off look in her eyes. "Aunt Faith, are you ready to go with me?"

"Ah!" said Graham lightly; "you ladies change your minds so rapidly that it is difficult to follow you. But it is your privilege, I know, Farewell, then, Miss Warrington. Life is long,—we may meet again."

"Good−bye, Mr. Marr," said Sibyl, hardly noticing his departure.

As the young man disappeared, Aunt Faith spoke; "Are you in earnest, Sibyl? Do you really wish to visit Mr. Leslie to−night?"

"I am in earnest, and I *must* go, Aunt Faith. Do not try to prevent it."

"But there may be danger for you, dear."

"Hugh has seen him, and am I to be kept back?" cried Sibyl passionately. "I must go! I will go! Aunt Faith, do not desert me now!"

"I am not deserting you, poor child," said Aunt Faith, rising and putting her arms around her niece with motherly affection. "If you wish to see Mr. Leslie to−night, I will go with you. You approve of your sister's wish, Hugh?"

"Yes," said Hugh decidedly. "Sibyl, you are right at last."

They found Mr. Leslie unconscious and breathing heavily; two physicians were in attendance, and a nurse sat by the bedside.

"He does not know me," whispered Sibyl, clinging convulsively to Aunt Faith, as the sufferer opened his eyes and looked blankly at them.

"No, dear, he is unconscious," replied Aunt Faith, herself much moved at the sight of one whom she had so

lately seen full of young life, stricken down almost to death.

The doctors were watching their patient closely; they expected a crisis before morning.

“I shall stay,” said Sibyl, quietly taking off her hat and sitting down on the sofa.

Aunt Faith spoke a few words of objection, but the mute appeal of Sibyl's eyes silenced her; she said no more, but sitting down by her niece, took her cold hand and held it in both her own. She had felt sorrow herself, and she could feel for others; she knew that in Sibyl's heart the depths were broken up.

Hugh went back to the old stone house and returned about midnight; from that time on, there was silence in the sick−chamber, and anxious eyes watched the unconscious face with painful interest. The night seemed endless; only those who have watched by a sick bed can know how minutes can lengthen themselves! As the gray twilight of dawn came into the room the sick man moved restlessly upon his pillow and moaned. Sibyl's heart throbbed; any change seemed for the better. But one of the physicians after bending over the patient, shook his head gravely.

“Let us pray,” said Aunt Faith in a low tone, and, falling upon her knees, she bowed her head in silent prayer. Sibyl knelt beside her, and, after a moment, Hugh too joined them, and throwing his arm around his sister, drew her to his side.

“Oh, Hugh, I cannot bear it!” she murmured; “he will die,—he will never know,—and I—” here her voice was broken by stifled sobs and low moans of anguish, strangely touching in the proud, self−reliant Sibyl.

Hugh held his sister in his arms, and soothed her as one would soothe a child. From that hour Sibyl's coldness left her never to return.

As the first sunbeams brightened the sky, Mr. Leslie again opened his eyes, the doctors bent over him, and it seemed to Aunt Faith as if she could hear all the hearts in the room throbbing aloud in the intense anxiety of the moment.

“The worst is over,” whispered Doctor Gregory, stepping back and shaking hands with Aunt Faith; “we shall bring him through, now, I think.”

Sibyl sat with her head hidden on Hugh's shoulder; she heard the doctor's words, but a sudden timidity had come over her. “Let us go,” she whispered, turning towards the door.

But Hugh had been watching the sick man.

“He is conscious; he knows us!” he said suddenly, and leading his sister forward, he left her at the bedside, pale and trembling with joyful emotion.

“Sibyl,” said Mr. Leslie in a faint voice, “is it you? Have you come to me at last, dear?”

“Yes, John,” said Sibyl, bending over him with tears in her eyes. “I have brought myself and my life to you,—if you care for them.”

“If?” said Mr. Leslie, with the ghost of a smile on his pale face; “as if there was any doubt—” but here the doctors interfered, and the rest of the sentence was postponed.

CHAPTER IX. THE LAST DAY OF SUMMER

Mr. Leslie improved slowly; when he was able to leave his room most of his days of enforced idleness were spent in the shaded parlor of the old stone house, or riding through the narrow country lanes, sometimes with all the cousins, sometimes with Sibyl alone. A friend had come from the interior of the State to take charge of the chapel during July and August, for the physicians had forbidden any active work during that time; but, although Mr. Vinton preached and attended to the duties of the position, Mr. Leslie retained all his interest in the congregation, and his people felt, that he was with them in spirit, hour by hour, and day by day. They came to him also,—came in greater numbers and with more open affection than ever before; they showed their interest in many different ways,—and the young pastor's heart was filled with joy at these evidences of love from the flock for which he had labored.

"It takes sickness or affliction to bring hidden love and sympathy to the surface," he said, one afternoon, as he sat in the parlor with Aunt Faith, Hugh, Bessie, and Sibyl. "We do not see the rainbow until the storm comes; and so people may live on for years in prosperity, and never know, save by intuition, the deep affection in each other's hearts. But when sorrow strikes them, then love comes to the surface, doubly precious and comforting in the hour of trial."

"But, Mr. Leslie," said Hugh, "would it not be far better for the world if people were taught to express their love and sympathy at other times as well as in the house of affliction and sickness? Is there any reason why we should all go on through life in cold silence, living in the same house with those we love the best, and taking everything 'for granted,' and leaving it 'for granted' also? Why! people may live and die without ever knowing the great joy of expressing how much they love, or of hearing in return how much they are loved, so hard is it to break down these barriers of reserve."

"We are tongue−tied, here, Hugh. We do not know how to speak the language of the heavenly country, and our best efforts are but stammering, half−expressed utterances. It is a great mercy, however, that the touch of sickness, or affliction, seems for the moment to loosen the bonds, and allow us a few sentences of the heavenly love."

"It is indeed," said Aunt Faith. "I remember in the darkest hours of my affliction, people with whom I had but slight acquaintance came to me with tender sympathy, and kind messages were sent from many whom I had always thought cold, and even disagreeable."

"Still," said Hugh, "I think it would be better if people tried to express their love more freely, without waiting until the household is clouded with grief."

"It would certainly be better, but it may not be possible," said Mr. Leslie; the world has gone on in the same old way for many centuries, and I am inclined to think, Hugh, that this free expression of love will only be given to us in another life. It will form one of the blessings of heaven."

"What is heaven?" said Hugh abruptly.

"It is perfect peace," said Aunt Faith.

"It is wonderful new life and hope," said Bessie.

"It is love," said Sibyl.

"It is all this and more," said Mr. Leslie reverently. "Speculations are useless, and our time should be too full of earnest labor to allow us to indulge in them. We should be content to leave it to our Maker, who has made even this world so beautiful, and this life, rightly used, so glorious."

July gave place to August, and the family of cousins, into whose circle Mr. Leslie had been received, lived a happy life in the old stone house. The heat of the dog−days was tempered by the lake breeze. At ten in the morning it came sweeping over the water from Canada, and men walking through the hot streets, felt its gentle coolness on their foreheads, and took off their straw hats with a sigh of relief. In the evening it came again, rustling through the trees with a refreshing sound as though the leaves were reviving from their parched stillness; people came out to meet it, the piazzas and door−steps were crowded, and all the closed blinds were thrown wide open to catch the blessed coolness which promised refreshing sleep.

"You dwellers by the lake−shore know nothing of the real August heat in the lowlands," said Mr. Vinton, one

evening as he sat among a group of visitors on the piazza of the old stone house. “Here the lake breeze is invariable, but a hundred miles south, days and nights pass with alternate blazing heat and close, lifeless darkness, the latter even more trying than the former. The country where I live is the richest agricultural land in the State; it is a valley with a broad, slow river rolling through it, the very water dark and sluggish with the fertility of the soil. As long as the grain is growing, there is some vitality in the air in spite of the heat, but when the harvest comes, and field after field is shorn, it seems as though the superfluous richness rose from the earth into the air, and filled it with heavy rankness. The sun shines through a haze in the daytime, and the moon through a mist at night; everybody and everything is languid. One goes to bed oppressed with fatigue, sleeps heavily, and rises without refreshment; there is no fresh morning air, nothing but a weary looking forward to the next twelve hours of heat.”

“What a forlorn description!” said Mr. Gay, laughing. “Is this all you can say for the great, rich state of Ohio?”

“It's very richness brings about what I am describing,” said Mr. Vinton. “But perhaps some of your eastern farmers would endure the Ohio dog−days for the sake of the miles of level grain−fields without a stone, without a break of any kind, which extend through the midland counties. When I first came West, I was overpowered with homesickness for the hills of New England; the endless plains were hateful to me, and I fairly pined to see a rock, or a narrow, winding road. While in this mood, I happened to be riding in a stage−coach through one of the midland counties in company with two New England farmers. They had never been West before, and they were lost in astonishment and admiration at the sight of the level fields on either side of the broad, straight road, stretching away to the right and the left, unbroken by the slightest elevation. 'This country is worth farming in,' said number one; 'Ethan would admire to see it, but he'd hardly believe it, I guess, without seeing.'

“'Not a stone nor a rock nowhere; none of them plaguey hills neither,' said number two. 'Well, now! *this* is what I call a be−a−utiful country! Western farmers must have an easy life of it.' You can imagine with what feelings I listened to these men. There I was, longing for the sight of a hill with the longing of a homesick child for its mother.”

“I am afraid you are prejudiced, George,” said Mr. Leslie, with a smile. “You dwell upon the heat of August in Ohio, but you say nothing about the other eleven months of the year.”

“The other eleven months are beautiful, I must acknowledge,” replied Mr. Vinton. “As soon as the frosts come, nothing can surpass the climate; colored October, hazy November, and bright, open December are all perfect. Any New Englander,—even you, Mr. Gay,—would be obliged to yield the palm to the West in respect of winter climate.”

“No sir,” replied the Boston bachelor emphatically; “I would yield no palm under any circumstances. I even prefer a Boston east wind to the mildest western zephyr.”

“Oh, you are prejudiced!” said Bessie, laughing.

“Of course I am, Miss Darrell. It is a characteristic of Massachusetts Bay. We do not deny it,—on the contrary we are rather proud of it.”

Thus, in many conversations, the dog−days passed along.

“It seems to me we do nothing but talk,” said Bessie, after a long evening on the piazza with several visitors.

“The dog−days were intended for conversation,” said Hugh. “Our hands and our brains are busily employed all the rest of the year, but when the thermometer gets up into the nineties, the tongue talks its share and gives the other members a rest.”

“I hope you don't mean to insinuate that our brains are not employed in our conversation,” said Bessie.

“Not much brain in dog−day conversation,” said Hugh, laughing. “I know that I have been talking nonsense this evening, and from what I have overheard, I suspect the others have not done much better.”

“Oh, you slanderer!” cried Bessie.

“But nonsense is appropriate to the season, Queen Bess. We don't eat much solid food now; then how can we hear much solid talk! Aunt Faith's 'trifle' is the chief of our diet, and the result is, naturally, trifling conversation.”

August was a happy month to Aunt Faith. She rejoiced in Sibyl's happiness, and she rejoiced in the triumph of unselfish love and Christian humility over the worldliness and ambition which had sullied her niece's good qualities. Sibyl was not impulsive; it was not an impulse which had led her to renounce a life of fashionable gayety and wealth for Mr. Leslie. It was a sudden realization of the truth, a sudden conviction of the strength of her own feelings, a sudden horror of the wickedness of falsifying them, and a sudden appreciation of the

hollowness of worldly ambition when brought face to face with death. There was no hesitating vacillation in Sibyl's character. She had been self−deceived, but, as soon as she felt the truth, she threw aside errors with all her might, and gave herself up boldly, wholly and heartily to her new life. Aunt Faith understood her niece thoroughly, and she knew there would be no danger of a relapse into the mistakes of the past; other faults, other temptations would assail her, but these were harmless. Having once seen and realized the falsity of worldliness when compared with religion, the worthlessness of mere money, when compared with true affection, Sibyl could never forget the lesson, for firm reason and resolve were parts of her nature.

Aunt Faith saw, also, that Sibyl was very happy. She was calm as usual, but there was a new light in her eyes, and a new glow on her cheeks. She found a new pleasure in instructing the children of the Chapel Sunday School, and her scholars loved her dearly; she went about among the poor, and devoted much of her time and means to their service. She assisted in the household work; not the light graceful labors which generally fall to the daughters, but the real burden of the day, lifting it from Aunt Faith's patient shoulders with cordial good will; and in all she did there was a new charm,—the charm of a rare humility, the most difficult of all Christian graces to a proud, self−reliant spirit.

One afternoon, towards the end of August, Aunt Faith found Sibyl resting on the lounge in the sitting−room. The house was still, the children were in the garden, and Bessie and Hugh had gone up to the studio; Sibyl had been out visiting the sick all the morning, and, wearied with the walk, she had thrown herself down on the lounge for a rest before tea−time.

“Do I disturb you, dear?” said Aunt Faith, as she entered.

“Oh, no, aunt. I am not sleeping, only resting.”

“I fear you are doing too much, Sibyl.”

“I think not, aunt. I know how much I can bear, and I would not be so foolish as to overwork myself. It would be a poor preparation for the life to which I look forward with so much hope.”

“It will be a pleasant life, I hope, my dear child.”

“Oh aunt! pleasant seems too cold a word to express it! I never knew what life was before; I was blind and deaf to real beauty and real happiness. I thought of nothing but money, ease and social fame. I shudder to think how near I came to bartering my life for what I supposed would give me the most happiness; whereas, now I know how great would have been my misery, and how surely and quickly I should have discovered it. I was entirely blinded, but now I see plainly; it is as though a great ray of light had come into my heart to show me life as it really is, and myself as I really am.”

“God be thanked for this—mercy, my child.”

“I thank Him daily and hourly, Aunt Faith. It was a narrow escape, and no one can appreciate how great was the danger but myself. If I had gone astray I might, indeed, have come back to Him at last, but through what trials, what bitter suffering! Now, I feel that my feet are upon a firm rock, and although trouble and temptation will of course come to me, I know that if I cry for help, it will not be refused.” Sibyl's face glowed as she spoke, and Aunt Faith offered up a silent thanksgiving that one of her little band had found the safe abiding place, that one of the souls given into her charge had entered the only safe pathway in the many roads leading across this troubled earth.

“How is Margaret Brown to−day, Sibyl?” she asked, after a pause.

“Much better, aunt. I sat with her for an hour or two, and she asked me to read to her.”

“The children are well now, I believe?”

“Yes; we are going to keep them in the country until cold weather; Margaret must not be allowed to work at present.”

“Mr. Leslie has not asked for the remainder of the sum I promised to give him,” said Aunt Faith; “I suppose Mrs. Chase must have given more than he expected.”

Sibyl blushed deeply. “No, aunt,” she said in a low tone, “I gave him my pearls as a thank−offering, perhaps I ought to say a sin−offering.”

Aunt Faith bent over and kissed the suffused cheek; then the two had a long conversation about the future, and gradually and surely a more joyous tone crept into their words, as is apt to be the case when the talkers hear in the distance the sound of future wedding−bells. The marriage was to take place before December, and Mr. Leslie had already selected the little house which was to be their home; Aunt Faith, with true housewifely interest, was

already making plans for the furniture and stores of fair linen, which her old−fashioned ideas deemed a necessary part of the household outfit, and even Bessie had set her unskilful fingers to the work of manufacturing various little ornaments to brighten the simple rooms. But her chief present was to be a picture representing the piazza of the old stone house with Aunt Faith, Hugh, Tom, and herself sitting or standing in their accustomed attitudes, while Sibyl going down the garden−walk with Mr. Leslie, turned her head for a farewell smile, and Gem threw a bunch of roses after her. Bessie prided herself upon this picture; the likenesses were all completed save Hugh's, for the first object was to finish his portrait before he went East, and from that she could fill in the other face at her leisure.

“You are all so kind to me, Aunt Faith,” said Sibyl, as the long conversation came to a close; “I am so happy in your love, and so happy in the future opening before me; it is almost too much happiness.”

Aunt Faith possessed a fund of native humor which neither age nor care had been able to subdue. As her niece rose to go to her room, she said with a merry glance, “By the way, Sibyl, how about the smell of the flannels from the kitchen on washing−days?”

“I will have them washed at the extreme end of the back garden,” replied Sibyl, echoing Aunt Faith's laugh, as she escaped from the room.

The thirty−first of August came,—Hugh's last day at home. His departure was hastened by his wish to return to Sibyl's wedding; he hoped to get initiated into the duties of his new position, conquer the first difficulties, and gain a few days of leisure for a short visit home before the busy winter season commenced. Mr. Hastings, the second−cousin who had offered Hugh a place in his counting−room, was a New York merchant, a stern, practical man, who expected full measure of work from all his subordinates. Yet, with all his rigor, he had a kind heart in his breast, and was inclined to treat his young relative with favor: he had seen him but once, when, during school−life, Hugh had spent a vacation at his house; but the old man had been more pleased than he would acknowledge, with the boy's overflowing spirits and bright intellect. He had no sons; his daughters were married, and the next year he had written to Aunt Faith proposing to take Hugh into his business on the completion of his education, promising, if the young man stood the test well, that he would give him a small share of the profits after a certain period, and intimating that there would be no bar to his becoming a partner eventually, if he showed the proper qualifications. The business men among Aunt Faith's acquaintances told her that this was a fine opening for Hugh, that the house of J. B. Hastings &Co. stood well in New York, and that they would gladly accept such an opportunity for their sons. Hugh himself was pleased with the idea, and, when it was finally decided that he should go, he wrote a letter full of enthusiastic thanks and hopes to Mr. Hastings, and finished his remaining two years at college with many pleasant visions of his future life floating in his brain.

“'Tis the last day of summer, left blooming alone,” chanted Tom, as he entered the dining−room where the rest of the family were at breakfast. “To−morrow Hugh will be gone,—to−morrow Estella Camilla Wales must pine in vain for her mistress, who will be engrossed in decimal fractions, and to−morrow I must take down from the dusty shelf that dismal old *Latin Prose*. I wonder who cares for *Romulus* and *Remus*? I don't!”

“Don't talk about it beforehand,” said Gem; “let's pretend it's the very first day of vacation.”

“Oh, what dismal faces!” said Aunt Faith, laughing. “School is not such a trial after all. I should be sorry to hear you spell deficiency, 'd−e−f−i−s−h−u−n−s−y,' as Annie Chase did, Gem.”

“Or to say, '*il est la plus mauvais garcon que je sais de*,' as Jennie Fish did,” added Gem, laughing at the remembrance.

“Or like Ed. Willis in the Bible class, last term,” said Tom. “Mr. Stone was talking about the Jews and Gentiles. 'I'm not a Gentile,' said Ed. getting real mad; 'I'm a Presbyterian.'“

Everybody laughed at this story, and Aunt Faith said “You are as liable to make mistakes as the rest, children, so do not complain about your lessons, but rather try to make them a pleasure. School−days will be soon over,” and she looked at Hugh with a half sigh.

“Come along, Gem,” said Tom, when he had finished his breakfast. “Let's have all the fun we can to−day; let's crowd it in, and pack it down tight. We'll get all the B. B.'s and have a regular training day in the back yard.”

The children vanished, and their merry voices came back through the open windows where the others still sat at the table.

“The boat leaves at seven,” said Hugh, pushing away his plate, and leaning back in his chair. “I am something like Tom; I feel like ' *crowding*' my last day with pleasant things, and 'packing them in tight.' I hardly know where

to begin."

"I will tell you; begin with the morning and give it to me in the studio," said Bessie.

"Oh no," said Sibyl; "Hugh is going to finish that bracket for me."

"Hugh will not go away without keeping his promise to me; there is some unfinished reading for him in my room," said Aunt Faith with a smile.

"My face, my hands, and my tongue are all in demand, it seems," said Hugh, laughing. "We never know how much we are valued until it is too late to fix our price, as the Irishman said, when he lost both arms and could no longer saw wood for his family. I cannot subdivide myself, so I had better subdivide the time."

"Well then, Hugh, I spoke first. Walk right upstairs," said Bessie, leading the way.

"Will you walk into my parlor, said the spider to the fly," sang Hugh, as he followed her. "I go, Bessie, from sheer compassion for my nose; you have made it Grecian, and I am sure it is Roman!"

"How gay they seem," said Sibyl, as they disappeared, "and yet Bessie will miss Hugh sadly. They have been devoted companions since childhood, and through our school−days Bessie was always looking forward to vacation, and spending her spare time in writing letters to Hugh. They have, of course, been parted for months together, but this parting is different. Hugh will be back again soon, and he may make us many visits, but still his home will now be in New York, and, absorbed in his new duties, and in the new interests and attractions of a great city, he will no longer be the same."

"Yes; I too feel this, Sibyl," said Aunt Faith; "I feel it very deeply. My child, my little boy, will go from me forever, when I say good−bye to Hugh to−night. The young man, the kind nephew, the successful merchant may all come back at different times, but the little boy, never! Hugh is very dear to me. It is hard to let him go. God grant that in the dangers of his new life, he may be preserved. We can only pray for him, Sibyl."

Two tears rolled down Aunt Faith's cheeks, but she hastily wiped them away as Sibyl kissed her affectionately. "Dear Aunt Faith," she said, "do not be down−hearted. Hugh has the seeds in his heart planted by your faithful hand, and although they have not blossomed yet, I feel sure they are growing."

"Yes, dear; I cannot help feeling as you do," replied Aunt Faith, trying to smile. But her heart was heavy.

Upstairs in the studio Bessie was painting rapidly, while Hugh in the old arm−chair sat gazing out through the open window, much as he had done on that bright June morning three months before, when Bessie had confessed the secret of the unpaid bill.

"How does the picture progress, Queen Bess?" he asked.

"Very well, excepting the eyes; I cannot get the right expression, I have tried over and over again. They are never the same two minutes at a time; I almost wish they were made of glass," said Bessie impatiently.

"Then I would be the bully boy with a glass eye," said Hugh, laughing.

"And a wax nose," said Bessie.

"And a tin ear," continued Hugh.

"And a cork leg," added Bessie.

"And a brass arm, finis," said Hugh; "the weather is too warm for further studies in anatomy."

"What does it all mean, anyway, Hugh? I have heard Tom and his friends say the whole string over and over again with the greatest apparent satisfaction; but to me they convey not a shadow of an idea."

"Nor to any one else, I imagine," said Hugh. "If the phrases ever had any meaning, it has long ago vanished into obscurity. I have seen explanations given of many popular terms but never of these. After I am gone, though, Bessie, you had better give up slang. It is all very well with me, and to tell the truth, *I* have taught you all you know, but it would not do with any one else."

"Just as though I should ever speak a word of it to any one else," said Bessie indignantly. "With you, it is different; you are like another myself."

"*Alter* ego," said Hugh.

"I don't know anything about alter ego, but I know I shall miss you dreadfully," said Bessie, throwing down her brush as the thought of Hugh's departure came into her mind with vivid distinctness.

"I shall be back again in November, Bessie."

"Yes; but only for a day or two."

"Perhaps I shall come home in the spring, also."

"But it won't be the same. You will change,—I know you will," murmured Bessie, with a half sob.

“I shall not change towards any of you here at home, but of course I shall grow older, and I hope I shall improve. You remember all I told you about my plans for the future?”

“Yes, Hugh. But it is such a long way off.”

“It does not seem long to me, Bessie; I have so much to accomplish that the time will be short. I love to look forward,—I love to think of all I shall do, of all the beautiful things I shall buy,—of all the unfortunate people I shall help. I shall succeed,—I know I shall succeed, because I shall work with all my might and main,—and also because I shall try to do so much good with my money.”

“Yes; but all this time where shall we be? Where shall I be?” said Bessie, sadly.

“You shall come down to visit me with Aunt Faith: you have only one more year of school−life, and then you can spend a part of every winter in New York.”

“That will be nice,” said Bessie, slowly, taking up her brush again; but, child−like, the present seemed more to her than the future. Hugh was silent, gazing out through the window 'over the summer landscape,—the pasture, the grove, and the distant lake. “Aunt Faith will miss you,” said Bessie, after a pause.

“Dear Aunt Faith,” replied Hugh, “she does not know how much I love her! She will miss me, but I shall miss her still more. All my life she has been my guardian angel. And to think how I have deceived her!”

“Oh, Hugh, such little things!”

“The principle is the same. I think, before I go, I will tell her all,—all the numerous escapades we have been engaged in; then I shall have a clear conscience to start with. After I am gone, Bessie, you will not be tempted to transgress in that way, and who knows but that we shall turn out quite well−behaved people in our old age.”

“I have tempted you, not you me, Hugh.”

“Call it even, then. Why! what are you crying about, Brownie?”

“You are going away,—you are going away!” was all that Bessie could say.

Hugh's eyes softened as he saw his cousin's grief. “Don't cry, dear,” he said gently. “We shall not be parted long. And while we are parted, I want to think that you are happy, that you, too, are trying to improve as I am trying. I want to think that my little Bessie is growing into a stately, beautiful Elizabeth. You are part of my future, dear, and you can help me to succeed.”

“How, Hugh?” said Bessie, wiping away her tears.

“By being happy, trying to improve yourself, and writing me all you are doing. Such letters will be very pleasant to me when I am working hard in the great city. We have never, either of us, taken a serious view of life, but for once, to−day, I feel very serious, Bessie; I am going to try to be good,—I am going to try to be a good man. And I want you to try and be good too.”

“I will try, Hugh,” whispered Bessie, affected by his serious tone.

“That is right. And now let us have no more sadness to spoil my last day at home. Whatever the future may bring to me,—and I have full confidence in the future, you know,—all of you here at home will have the first place in my heart. I have a great many plans, and all of them are bright; I have a great many hopes, and all of them are certain; life seems very beautiful to me, and I thank my Creator for my health and strength. I ask nothing better than what lies before me, and I am willing to take the labor for the pleasures it will bring.”

Hugh paused, and an expression of glowing hope lit up his face and shone in his blue eyes. Bessie seized her brush, and, filled with a sudden inspiration, worked intently at her portrait for some time in silence.

“There is the first dinner−bell, Queen Bess,” said Hugh; “I have idled away the whole morning up here. Good−bye, little studio,” he continued, rising as he spoke; “I hope one day to see you altered into a beautiful, luxurious abode of art, filled with striking pictures, the work of America's greatest artist, Elizabeth Darrell!”

“If I should paint the best pictures in the world, you would not allow my name to be connected with them in public, Hugh. You are so prejudiced.”

“Prejudiced, is it? Well, perhaps it is. I own I do not think that types adorn a woman's name. A woman ought not to appear 'in the papers' but twice; when she marries, and when she dies.”

“So if she don't marry, she never has a chance of being anybody until she is dead; I don't call that fair, Hugh.”

“Surely, Elizabeth Darrell, you are not shrieking for suffrage!”

“Never!” said Bessie, “I'm only shrieking for my name.”

“What's in a name!” replied Hugh, laughing. “Paint away, little artist; I will buy all your pictures, and pay you so well for them that you won't care for fame. By the way, am I not to ———

[Transcriber's Note: There is some dialogue missing here, although there are no pages missing in the images.]

"No," replied Bessie, moving the easel; "but I've got your eyes at last!"

"I'm glad of that; good−bye, Brownie," and Hugh ran off down the stairs to prepare for dinner.

"And my bracket!" said Sibyl, as he came into the dining−room.

"And my poems!" added Aunt Faith, with a smile.

"All in good time, ladies," replied Hugh. "The first hour after dinner is to be devoted to packing; the second, to Sibyl and her bracket; the third, to Aunt Faith and her book; the fourth I give to the family as a collective whole, and all the rest of the time I reserve for tea, general farewells, and embarkation."

"Highly systematic! You are practicing business habits already, I see," said Sibyl.

"The B. B.'s are all coming to see you off, Hugh," said Tom.

"What an honor! I am overwhelmed with the attention of the band! What time may I expect them?"

"A little after six. They are going to form on both sides of the front walk, and hurrah like troopers."

"Oh Hugh, I am real sorry you are going," said Gem suddenly, dropping her knife and fork as though the idea had only just become a reality to her. "I shall hate to see your empty chair in the morning when I come down to breakfast; I know I shall."

There was an ominous tremor in Gem's voice as she spoke.

"Come, little girl, no tears," said Hugh, bending to kiss his little cousin; "everybody must be cheerful or I shall not like it. And as for the chair, take it out of the room if you like, but be sure and bring it back in November when I come home again."

"I'll keep it in my room, and bring it down myself the day you come home," said Gem eagerly.

A little after three, Hugh tapped at Sibyl's door. "Is it you, brother? Come in," said Sibyl, and entering, Hugh sat down by the table and began to work on the half−finished bracket. They talked on many subjects, but principally on Hugh's New York life, and his plans for the future; then gradually they spoke of November, and the approaching wedding−day. "Before I go, Sibyl, I want to tell you in so many words how pleased I am to give you into Mr. Leslie's care. If I could have chosen from all the world, I know no one to whom I would more willingly have given my only sister; no one so welcome as a brother−in−law."

"How glad I am that you feel so, Hugh," said Sibyl warmly.

"And you yourself Sibyl; you have improved so much. It is not often that brothers and sisters express the affection they feel for each other, but you know I do not believe in such reserve, and I want you to know, dear, how thoroughly I appreciate the change in you. Leaving you, as I must, it is very pleasant to think that my one sister is growing into a noble good woman, such as our mother would have wished to have her."

Sibyl threw her arms around Hugh's neck; she was much moved. In her new life and new love, her brother had become doubly dear to her, and perhaps for the first time, she realized how much she loved him.

"No tears, I hope, sister," said Hugh, gently raising her head. "This is my 'good−bye' to you, dear. You know I do not like formal leave−taking. Here is your little bracket all done, but I shall bring you a better present from New York, a set of wedding pearls. You will have to wear them if I give them to you, although you are a clergyman's wife."

Aunt Faith was sitting by the window in her room when she heard her nephew's step outside. "Come in!" she said; and when he entered she pointed to a chair next her own. "My dear boy, I cannot realize that you are going to leave me."

"Only for a few weeks, Aunt Faith; I shall be back in November."

"Not to stay, dear. No, I feel that this is our first real separation, although for years you have been absent at school and college many months at a time. You are the first to leave the old stone house,—the first bird to fly away from the nest."

"I am the oldest, aunt, and therefore naturally the first to go."

"That is true, but the old bird feels none the less sad."

"You must not feel sad, Aunt Faith; the future looks very bright to me. Let me tell you all my plans." Sitting there in the quiet room, the young spirit full of hope, told to the old spirit full of resignation, all its bright dreams and plans.

"I hope they will all come true, dear," said Aunt Faith, after they had talked long on these subjects.

"I hope,—I think they will, if human energy can bring it about. But now, aunt, to look back on the past, I want

to make a confession to you, I want you to hear and forgive me before I go."

Then Hugh told of all the secret horseback rides, and many other wild adventures of past years, in which he and Bessie had each borne a part. "It has been all my fault, Aunt Faith," he said, as he concluded. "I was the elder and the stronger, and I led Bessie on. Without me she would have done none of those things. Poor little Bessie! she is very dear to me. You will be kind to her when I am gone?"

"I will, Hugh. I, too, am very fond of Bessie. But do not take all the blame upon yourself; she is by nature rash and way ward."

"I know she is, aunt. But, at the same time, if it had not been for my influence, Bessie would have been a very different girl; if she had thought that I disapproved of any of her actions that would have been the last of them, whereas instead of this, I have encouraged her. Whatever the blame may be I take it all upon myself. But Bessie is changing, I think; you will have no trouble with her hereafter, she will grow into a noble woman yet. And now, aunt, I will leave no work undone, but finish that volume, if you wish it."

So saying, Hugh took up the book which Aunt Faith had placed ready for him, and began reading aloud; he read well, and it was one of her greatest pleasures to listen to him. She often kept volumes by her side for weeks with the pages uncut, waiting until he could find time to read them aloud. "And now I will say good−bye!" said Hugh, as he finished the little book; "you know I dislike formal leave−takings in the presence of all the family."

"Good−bye, my dear boy!" said Aunt Faith, with a motherly embrace. "May God bless you and keep you in all your ways, in danger, sickness, temptation and perplexity, for the sake of His dear Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Oh, Hugh, can you not gladden my heart by saying those two sentences before you go,—you know what I mean?"

"I will try to say them soon, aunt. I feel that I have changed lately, but I want to know that it is not the mere excitement of parting and anticipation of a new life which has affected me. I am going to try hard to be a good man,—indeed I am; and if I find that these new feelings outlast my present excitement, I will write you word. Sometimes I almost feel as though I could make my public profession of faith now; but the next two months will show me the exact truth, and perhaps, Aunt Faith, the time of Sibyl's wedding will also be the time when I shall come forward to join the church."

"God be thanked," said Aunt Faith, fervently; "the feelings will last, Hugh, for they are holy and true. Go, my boy; I give you up freely now, for you are virtually enrolled in the army of the Lord, and He will aid you in all times of trial if you call upon Him."

A little before six all the family, together with Mr. Leslie, assembled in the sitting−room; there was an undercurrent of sadness in their minds, but Hugh would allow no melancholy words or looks.

"First we will have tea, then Bessie shall play 'Bonnie Dundee' for us, then we will all make a triumphal arch of flowers through which I shall pass, in token of the grand success which awaits me in the mercantile world, and then I shall go. No one must accompany me to the boat; I want to see you all on the piazza as the carriage drives away, and if there is so much as one tear−drop, I shall know it and be ready to inflict condign punishment therefor," said Hugh, laying down the law with a magisterial air.

Tea was soon over, and then Bessie with trembling fingers managed, with severe self−control, to play 'Bonnie Dundee' to the end without a tear. Another note, however, she could not play, but replaced the cover of her harp in silence. Then Tom and Gem brought in from the garden all the flowers they could find, and a long wreath was made and twined around and over the two pillars of the front piazza.

"There comes the carriage!" said Tom, "and there come the B. B.'s, too. Here, boys, form on both sides of the walk; Hugh's going in a minute."

The trunk was carried out, and Hugh took up his coat and valise. "Now I want you all to come out on the piazza," he said. "Aunt Faith, here is your chair. Gem, you stand by Aunt Faith's side: Sibyl and John, please stand opposite to them; and Tom,—where is Tom?"

"Here I am!" answered Tom from the back of the house; "I'm getting the dogs together for the group."

"That's right, the dogs by all means, for they are an important part of the family," said Hugh, laughing. "Sit over that side, Tom, and keep them by you. Bessie, I want you to stand in the centre just under the arch; there, that is perfect. I shall turn round and look at you all when I reach the gate." So saying, Hugh bent down and kissed Bessie's pale cheek, and then passing under the arch, walked rapidly down the long garden−walk. The B. B.'s in martial array on either side, gave him three cheers as he passed, and when he reached the gate he turned and

looked back with a smile, waving his hat in token of farewell. In another moment he was gone, then the carriage rolled down the street out of sight, and Aunt Faith, rising, said solemnly, “May God bless our dear Hugh, now and forever.”

“Amen,” said Mr. Leslie.

Bessie had disappeared.

CHAPTER X. THE HOME−COMING.

“A forlorn, gloomy day,” said Bessie at the breakfast−table the next morning, “and I'm glad of it!”

“I don't know that I care,” said Tom. “When a fellow has got to go to school, it don't make much difference.”

“It must have rained very hard in the night,” said Sibyl, looking out into the garden where the vine−leaves were strewed all over the ground.

“It rained, but there was not much wind,” replied Aunt Faith; “I was awake part of the night and listened to the storm. There was not wind enough to make any sea, and Hugh is probably in B———by this time.”

“What a jolly ride he will have on the cars to−day, whirling through the country and getting nearer to New York every mile, while I am digging away at these old books,” said Tom discontentedly.

“Hurry, children!” said Aunt Faith, looking at the clock; “you must not be late the very first day of school.”

“Here comes Mr. Leslie!” called out Tom, slinging his books over his shoulder.

“John is very early this morning,” said Sibyl, going out to meet him as he came up the walk.

“That is the way it will be all the time now, I suppose,” said Bessie with some irritation; “Hugh gone, and Sibyl so absorbed that she is good for nothing as a companion. Aunt Faith, you and I are like the last roses of summer left blooming alone.”

Aunt Faith smiled. She was very gentle with Bessie this morning; she remembered her promise to Hugh, and she saw also that the young girl was suffering under her share of the sorrow of parting, a sorrow always heavier for the one that stays than for the one who goes.

“I shall go upstairs and paint,” said Bessie after a pause; “I succeeded at last in giving the right expression to Hugh's eyes. You may see the picture, now, Aunt Faith; it is so like him.”

At this moment Mr. Leslie came into the sitting−room, but Sibyl was not with him; his face was pale, he went up to Aunt Faith and took her hand with tender solemnity.

“What is it?” she asked, sinking into a chair; her voice was quiet, she had too often endured affliction not to recognize its messenger at a glance. Mr. Leslie, in his ministration in times of trouble, had learned never to hide or alter the plain truth.

“The morning boat from B———has just come in,” he said. “The captain reports that the evening boat of the same line, the *America*, which left Westerton last night, collided with a schooner off Shoreton about midnight, and sank in ten minutes. The night was very dark, but many of the passengers were picked up by the 'Empire' as she came along two hours afterward, some clinging to fragments of the wreck, and some in one of the *America's* small boats. The other boats are missing, but there is hope that they are safe, as the storm was not severe, and the lake is now quite calm. The rescued passengers think that some may have been picked up by a propeller whose lights they saw in the distance.”

“You have come to tell us that Hugh is among the rescued,” said Aunt Faith in a faint voice, hoping against hope.

“Hugh is drowned!” said Bessie with hard, cold distinctness; then she sat down by the table and buried her face in her hands.

“Hugh is not among those brought back by the 'Empire,'“ said Mr. Leslie, “but I have strong hope that he is safe. Tugs have already started for the scene of the accident, the water is still at summer heat, and besides, among the many vessels and propellers constantly passing over that very spot, there is every probability that many have been picked up before this time. Hugh is very strong, and an excellent swimmer, also.”

“Hugh is drowned!” said Bessie in the same hard voice; “He will never come back to us alive.”

“Bessie, Bessie!” cried Sibyl, rushing into the room, “you shall not, you dare not say such cruel words!” Sibyl's face was discolored with violent weeping, and her whole frame shook with agitation; she and her cousin seemed to have changed places, for Bessie did not shed a tear.

“I say what is true,” she answered; “Hugh is drowned! Hugh is dead!”

Mr. Leslie went over to her, and took her cold hand; “Bessie,” he said gently, “why do you give up all hope? There are a great many chances for Hugh.”

“Go away!” said Bessie in the same dull monotone; “Hugh is dead, I tell you! Go put crape on the door!”

“She is ill,” said Mr. Leslie in a low tone to Aunt Faith; “you had better take her upstairs.”

Aunt Faith roused herself from her own grief; “come, dear,” she said, rising.

“I shall not go,” said Bessie; “I shall wait here for Hugh.”

At this moment Tom and Gem ran into the room.

“Oh, Aunt Faith! what is it?” began Tom. “We met some boys and they told us that the *America* was run into last night.”

Gem looked at Bessie and Sibyl, and then without a word, she sat down in her little chair and began to cry bitterly. Aunt Faith could not answer Tom, the sound of Gem's violent weeping, and Sibyl's sobs, seemed to choke the words on her lips.

“I don't believe a word of it!” cried Tom indignantly. “Hugh can swim better than any one in Westerton, and he's as strong as a lion! I'm going right down to the dock, and you'll see him coming back with me before night.”

“Hugh is dead!” said Bessie again; “Hugh is dead!”

The hours passed slowly in those long minutes of weary waiting in which young hearts grow into old age in a single day. Friends and neighbors flocked into the old stone house, and their voices were hushed as they came and went with kindly but useless sympathy. Mr. Leslie had gone to the scene of the accident on a fast tug, accompanied by some of Hugh's young companions, and as, during the day, different vessels came into port, they were boarded by anxious friends and the latest reports eagerly sought. The bank of the lake was thronged, people stood there with glasses, in spite of the steady rain, scanning the eastern horizon in the hope of discovering the smoke of approaching propellers. Others had friends on board the *America* besides the family at the old stone house. But Hugh was well known and well liked, and his was the only young life among those still missing from Westerton; the others were middled−aged or old, and with that universal sympathy which the death of a bright vigorous youth always awakens, the whole town mourned for Hugh, and stories of his generous, manly nature, flew from mouth to mouth, until even strangers felt that they knew him.

At five o'clock a tug returned bringing a man and wife exhausted with twelve hours in the water lashed to floating spars; but they soon revived, and the good news flew through the city, and friends told it to the family in the old stone house, clustered together around Bessie, who had not changed her attitude or tasted food since morning. “If they were saved, why not Hugh?” they said hopefully.

“Hugh is dead!” repeated Bessie; “they will bring him home, poor drowned Hugh!” Sibyl broke forth into violent weeping, and Aunt Faith shuddered at Bessie's words. “Can you not persuade Bessie to go upstairs and lie down?” said a lady friend, looking apprehensively at the young girl's fixed eyes.

Aunt Faith shook her head. “We must leave her to herself for the present,” she answered sadly; “her grief is beyond expression now.”

Later in the day, the tug Mr. Leslie had taken was sighted from the bank, and a crowd assembled on the dock, with the feeling that suspense would soon be over.

“They would not have come back so soon unless they had found him,” said one; “they would have cruised around there for a day or two as long as there was any hope.”

“But they don't hoist any signal,” said another; “they must know we are waiting here.”

The little tug came rapidly in, watched by hundreds of eyes, and when at last she approached the dock, the anxiety grew intense. There came no shout from those on board, the quiet was ominous, and, chilled by a sudden awe, the crowd stepped back, and awaited the result in silence. The boat was made fast, and then, after a short delay, the young men came forth bearing the shrouded form of their late companion, now still in death. Hugh was dead, then? Yes, Hugh was dead!

But he had not died in vain, and the story of his death was repeated from mouth to mouth throughout the city; women heard it and sobbed aloud, as they held their darlings closer; men heard it and spoke a few brief words of praise and regret to which their wet eyes gave emphasis.

About half−past eleven the previous night, the *America* had been struck amidships by an unknown schooner driving down unseen in the intense darkness of the storm. Most of the passengers had gone to their state−rooms, but Hugh was still in the cabin; rushing out on deck he saw and heard that the boat would sink, and, accompanied by the captain, ran back through the cabin, arousing the passengers and telling them of the danger. In an instant all was confusion, agony, and despair; some of the men leaped overboard, but the women with their instinctive shrinking from the dark water, could not be persuaded to leave the deck. A few passengers and part of the crew

got off in one of the small boats, but the other boats were swamped by the rush into them; a cry went up that the steamer was sinking, and Hugh was seen to jump overboard with a little child in his arms, a baby whose mother had held it imploringly towards him, as he tried to persuade her to take the dangerous leap. “Take the child,” she said; “I will follow you,” and then as they disappeared, with a wild cry the poor woman flung herself over after them. In the mean time the captain and some of the hands and passengers had ascended to the hurricane deck, and when the *America* sank, the force of the waves separated the deck from the hull, and it floated off, a frail support for the little group it carried. The lake was strewn with fragments, spars and barrels, and to these many persons were clinging. Hugh had managed to secure a piece of broken mast with spars attached, and with its aid he supported the mother and child until an iron−bound cask, caught in the cordage, struck him heavily in the darkness. The mother heard him groan, and his grasp loosened, “Quick!” he said hoarsely; “I cannot hold you. I must fasten you with these floating ropes; I am badly hurt, but I think I can hold the child.”

He bound the ropes and rigging about her, and told her how she could best support herself; then he was silent, but every now and then she heard him moaning as though in pain. How long they floated in this way the mother could not tell; it seemed to her many hours,—it was, in reality, less than four. They saw the lights of the *Empire* in the distance, but they could not make themselves heard, although they shouted with all their strength. At the first glimmering of dawn they discovered the hurricane deck not far distant, and Hugh said, “shout with all your might. I cannot hold on much longer, my head is on fire!” So the mother exerted all her strength in a piercing scream, and to her joy, an answering cry came back through the rain. Hugh made an effort to steer the spars towards the floating deck, and those on board pushed their raft towards him as well as they could. Still it was slow work, and as the dawn grew brighter, the mother saw her preserver's haggard face, and the blood matted in his curly hair. He did not speak, as, holding the baby in one arm, with the other he tried to guide the broken mast, but his eyes were strangely glazed and the shadow of death was on his brow. They reached the deck at last, and kind hands lifted them on board; it was only a raft, but it seemed a support after the deep, dark water. The mother took her baby, and Hugh sank down at her feet. Some one had a flask of brandy, and they succeeded in pouring a little through his clenched teeth; after a moment or two he revived, sat up, looked about him, and murmured some incoherent words. Then he tried to take out his little note−book, but it was wet, and the pencil was gone; the captain gave him his own, and Hugh had scrawled a few words upon it, spoke to the mother and smiled when she held up the child. But gradually he relapsed into unconsciousness, grew more and more death−like, and, after breathing heavily for an hour, passed away without a struggle. The mother and her child were safe; all the others on the floating deck were rescued,—but Hugh, dear Hugh was dead!

Mr. Leslie had preceded the funeral cortege by a few moments; slowly he alighted from the carriage and passed up the garden−walk towards the old stone house. His heart was heavy, and words of comfort came not to his lips; in the presence of so great a sorrow he bowed his head in silence. The friends who were in the house, came out to meet him, but no one spoke; they knew by his face that the worst was true. They did not follow him into the presence of the mourners, but going down to the gate, they waited there.

Mr. Leslie entered the sitting−room. “The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away,” he said solemnly. “Blessed be the name of the Lord. Hugh, our dear Hugh is dead.”

Sibyl screamed and fell back fainting, the children burst into tears, and Aunt Faith knelt down by her chair and hid her face in her hands. Bessie alone was calm. “Are they bringing him home?” she asked, lifting her tearless eyes to Mr. Leslie's face.

“Yes Bessie; they will soon be here, now.”

Without reply she rose, smoothed her disordered curls and arranged her dress. “Sibyl,” she said, “do not cry; Hugh never could bear to hear any one cry! Aunt Faith, Hugh is coming. Let us go to meet him.”

Her strange composure awed the violent grief of the others into silence, and they followed her mechanically as she led the way to the piazza; involuntarily they all took the positions of the previous evening, and, with Bessie standing alone in the centre, they waited for their dead.

The young men bore their burden up the walk slowly and solemnly, and behind followed a train of sorrowing friends, two and two, thus rendering respect to the youth who had so suddenly been taken from them in all the flush and vigor of early manhood. On came the sad procession, and when the bearers reached the piazza, the friends fell back and stood with uncovered heads, as up the steps, and under the faded triumphal arch, Hugh Warrington came home for the last time to the old stone house.

At midnight Aunt Faith went softly into the parlor; a faint light shone from the chandelier upon the still figure beneath, and Bessie with her face hidden in her hands, sat by its side. She did not move as Aunt Faith came to her; she did not answer when Aunt Faith spoke to her; she seemed almost as cold and rigid as the dead.

“Bessie dear, I have something to show you,” said Aunt Faith, in a low tone; “I have a letter to you from Hugh.”

Bessie started and looked up; her face was pinched and colorless, and her dark eyes wild and despairing.

“I have a letter to you, dear, from Hugh,” repeated Aunt Faith; “he wrote it on board the floating deck just before he died.”

“Give it to me,” said Bessie hoarsely, holding out her cold hands.

“In a moment, dear. Come upstairs with me and you shall see it,” answered Aunt Faith, trying to lead her away. But Bessie resisted wildly. “I will not go!” she said. “I shall stay with Hugh until the last. Give me my letter! It is mine! You have no right to keep it. Give it to me, I say!”

Alarmed at the expression of her eyes, Aunt Faith took out the captain's note−book, opened it, and handed it to her niece. The words were scrawled across the page in irregular lines; there seemed to be two paragraphs. The first was this: “Bessie, try to be good, dear; I love you.” The second: “I can say the two sentences, Aunt Faith,—I am saying them now.—Hugh.”

The writing was trembling and indistinct, and the last words barely legible; the signature was but a blur.

As Bessie deciphered the two messages, a sudden tremor shook her frame; then she read them over again, speaking the words aloud as if to give them reality. “Oh Hugh! Hugh!” she cried, “how can I live without you!”

With a quick movement, Aunt Faith turned up the gas and threw back the pall; then she put her arms around the desolate girl and raised her to her feet. “Look at him, Bessie!” she said earnestly; “look at dear Hugh, and think how hard it must have been for him to write those words, how hard he must have tried, how much he must have loved you!”

Hugh's face was calm, the curling, golden hair concealed the cruel wound on his temple, and there was a beautiful expression about the mouth, that strange peace which sometimes comes after death, as if sent to comfort the mourners. His right hand, bruised by the hard night's work, was covered with vine−leaves, but the left, the hand that had held the little child, was folded across his breast; he was dressed as he had been in life, and some one had placed a cross on his heart,—a little cross of ivy simply twined. “My soldier, true soldier of the cross,” murmured Aunt Faith, stooping to kiss the cold brow. “In those hours it all became clear to you. 'Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief;'—'Lord be merciful to me a sinner.' With these two sentences on your lips, you passed into another country. Farewell, Hugh! You will not return to us, but we shall go to you.”

Bessie had not raised her head from Aunt Faith's shoulder. She had not looked upon Hugh since they brought him home, and now she stood holding the note−book in her hands, and trembling convulsively.

“Look at him, Bessie,” said Aunt Faith again; “look at dear Hugh. He is speaking to you now, in that dying message.”

At last Bessie raised her head and looked upon the still face long and earnestly; then, throwing herself down upon her knees, she burst into a passion of wild grief, calling upon Hugh, beseeching him to speak to her, and listening for his answer in vain. Aunt Faith did not try to check her, for these were her first tears; she knew they would relieve that tension of the head and heart, which, if long continued, must have ended in physical and mental prostration. After a few moments, Sibyl came in, and the two watched over Bessie until she sank exhausted to the floor, when they lifted her slight form and bore her upstairs.

Then, from the sitting−room, two of Hugh's friends came in, turned down the light, covered the still face, and went back to keep their watch in the desolate hours of mourning.

The sun was sinking towards the west in unclouded brightness when a throng gathered in the old stone house to pay their last tribute of respect to the dead. “Fitz Hugh Warrington, aged twenty years and ten months,” said the inscription on the coffin−lid, and many tears dropped upon it, as, one by one, the friends bent over to take a farewell look at the handsome face with its clustering golden hair. Then came the voice of the aged pastor, reading the words of the Gospel of St. John,—Hugh's favorite chapter, the fourteenth. A hymn followed,—Hugh's favorite hymn, “Brightest and best of the sons of the morning,” and then they all knelt in prayer, the fervent prayer mingled with tears which ascends from the house where the dearest one of all is dead.

Mr. Leslie took no part in the services; he stood with Sibyl as one of the family. Aunt Faith leaned upon the

arm of Mr. Hastings, who had come from New York immediately upon hearing of the accident. Tom and Gem stood together, but Bessie was alone; she wished no support, she said; she only wanted to stay by Hugh until the last. So they let her stand by the head of the coffin alone,—alone with her dead, and with her God.

Then came another hymn, and slowly the bearers lifted all that was left of their friend, and bore it forth under the same faded flower−arch, and down the garden−walk, where the throng made way for them on either side as they passed.

The sun was setting, and, standing on the piazza, the choir sang,—

Abide with me; fast falls the even tide,
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide;
When other helpers fail, and comforts Bee,
Help of the helpless, Oh abide with me.

I fear no foe with Thee at hand to bless,
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness;
Where is death's sting, where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.”

CHAPTER XI. CONCLUSION.

A year had passed, and the colored leaves were dropping for the second time upon Hugh's grave. Aunt Faith and Bessie were in the sitting−room of the old stone house, and the voices of Tom and Gem sounded through the open hall−door from the back garden, where they were sitting under the oak−tree. Hugh's portrait stood upon an easel, with living ivy growing around it from the little bracket which he had made that last day of summer. The afternoon sun struck the picture, and gave it a vivid realistic expression; Bessie saw it, and laying down her work, looked lovingly into the bright face. “It is very like Hugh, is it not, Aunt Faith?” she said at last.

Aunt Faith put on her glasses, and drew nearer the easel. “It is indeed a wonderful likeness, especially the eyes,” she replied. “How came you to succeed so well?”

“I had been working at it all summer, aunt, but the eyes I could not copy to my satisfaction, they varied so constantly. It was Hugh's last day at home; don't you remember how I begged for the morning? He was sitting in the old arm−chair by the window, looking out towards the lake, talking about the future; he was so full of life and hope that morning,—so sure of success,—so happy in the thought of the good he could accomplish, that his eyes fairly shone. Something came over me; I took the brush, and, by a sudden inspiration, I succeeded in copying the expression exactly.”

“It is a comfort to have the picture,” said Aunt Faith, “and a blessed thought that we shall see that dear face again, and know it when we see it.”

“You believe so, aunt? So do I. I believe that we shall love each other there as here, only far, far better. To be with those we love, away from affliction, care, and temptation,—that is heaven.”

“I often think of the meetings there, Bessie. Hugh found his father and his mother there. While we were mourning here, they were rejoicing there.”

“I no longer mourn, Aunt Faith; I have found comfort.”

“I know that, my dear, and am thankful for it; but you are sad at times.”

“I feel sad over myself, aunt, over my loneliness, and my faults. I feel sorry for myself as one feels sorry for a child; I sympathize with myself as though I was another person. Sometimes it seems as if my soul sat apart peaceful and quiet, while all the rest of me gave way to deep despondency. But all the while I know that Hugh is safe; that I shall go to him, and that through the mercy of our Saviour we shall find eternal joy. And I always try to remember that Hugh disliked morbid grief; that he used to say the world was a beautiful place; that we had no right to despise it; that as long as we were in it, it was our duty to make others happy and be happy ourselves. Therefore I try to be cheerful, and when I think of Hugh, I am cheerful. It is only when I think of myself that despondency comes back to me.”

“You have done well, dear,” said Aunt Faith; “I have seen your struggles, and rejoiced over your victories. I have confidence in you, Bessie, and if I am called away, I can leave the children in your charge with an easy heart.”

“They are no longer children, Aunt Faith.”

“True! Gem is thirteen, but she will need watchful care for many years yet. And Tom, although tall and strong, is still a thorough boy at heart, and the next five or six years are full of danger for him.”

“Tom is a fine fellow,” said Bessie warmly; “he is full of generosity and courage.”

“Yes, but there are corresponding dangers for his sanguine temperament. However, although still young, he has an earnest faith; Hugh's death was a lesson which he will never forget, and all though he may often go astray, I feel sure he will *come* back again at the last. Gem, too, is one of the lambs of the flock; she has improved greatly the past year. I have had deep cause to be thankful, and I am thankful,” said Aunt Faith, folding her hands reverently. “The children Thou gavest to me are all Thine; Thou hast cared for them and brought them to a knowledge of Thy goodness. One hast Thou taken, the dearest of all; taken him away from trouble to come. Lord, I thank Thee, for all Thy goodness.” As Aunt Faith murmured these words, she leaned back in her chair and closed her own heart in silence.

After a few moments, Bessie went out on the piazza to welcome Mr. Leslie and Sibyl as they came up the walk.

"Aunt Faith is resting in her chair," she said, smiling; "we will sit out here, if you please. How well you look, Sibyl!"

Mrs. Leslie threw off her bonnet, and the light shone in her golden hair. She looked well, better than she had ever looked as Sibyl Warrington; for, although her skin had lost something of its extreme delicacy, her face had gained in animation, and her manners in cordiality, so that people who could not love her before, loved her now with sincere affection. Her beautiful hair was coiled gracefully around her head, and she was dressed with as much care as ever, for Sibyl was Sibyl still, and could no more change her love for harmony and taste than the leopard could change his spots. But everything *was* simple, inexpensive, and fashioned by her own fingers, so that although all admired, not even the most censorious could find fault with the appearance of the pastor's wife.

Mr. Leslie, too, was somewhat altered; he looked well and vigorous, but his manner was more gentle. The poor said he was more compassionate, the sick said he was more gentle, his congregation said he was more eloquent; Hugh's death and Sibyl's sorrow had not been without their lessons for him, also.

The little chapel was still poor and struggling, but husband and wife worked together with heart and strength. Sibyl was invaluable; she threw her system, her energy, and her tact into the week−day work, and her husband found his Sunday labors doubly successful, because they were followed up and carried out during the six working days as well as on the day of rest.

"I have had a letter from Mrs. Stanly, to−day, Bessie," said Mr. Leslie; "she says little Hugh is beginning to talk, and already can say 'Aunt Bessie.' He associates you with the Noah's Ark you sent him. Here is his picture, enclosed in the letter." The photograph represented a chubby boy with large, wondering eyes and curly hair.

"Brave little man!" said Sibyl, looking over Bessie's shoulder. "What a wonder he lived through that night!"

"Oh, Hugh held him up out of the water most of the time," said Bessie quickly; "the mother told me that his little knitted shirt was scarcely wet at all. I must certainly go East to see the child next spring, now that his father is dead, I feel more at liberty to assist Mrs. Stanly, and, between us, we are going to give little Hugh the best education the country will allow."

"Is that you, Sibyl?" said Aunt Faith's voice within.

"Yes, aunt. Shall we come in?" said Mrs. Leslie, rising.

"No, dear, I will come out;" and Aunt Faith joined the group on the piazza, taking her seat in an arm−chair.

"What a beautiful afternoon!" she said, "and how brilliant those maple−leaves are! Have you seen the monument, John?"

"No," answered Mr. Leslie; "is it in place?"

"Yes, the work was all finished this morning, and Bessie and I went over to look at it. Why not walk over now? We can all go, and these lovely days cannot last long."

"I should like to go, John, if you have the time," said Sibyl.

"Yes; I can postpone the visit I intended to make. As Aunt Faith says, these warm, still days cannot last long."

The cemetery was about half a mile distant, a forest glade sloping to the lake, with a brook in a little ravine running through the centre. But few graves were there, for the land was but newly consecrated to its use, but the great forest−trees were old, and in the spring, wild flowers grew everywhere, and wild birds sang in the foliage. Now, the trees were dyed in scarlet and gold, and the colored leaves dropped slowly down upon the ground, for the air was still and hazy with the purple mists of Indian summer. Hugh's monument stood on a little eminence overlooking the lake. It was of marble, a slender shaft broken at the top, with a profusion of roses growing over the broken place, carved in the marble with life−like fidelity, so that the stone itself seemed to have blossomed. Below, on one side of the base was Hugh's name and age, and on the opposite face was the sentence, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

"I like it;" said Mr. Leslie, standing with uncovered head beside the grassy mound; "it expresses the idea of the broken young life, and the roses of hope, faith, and even joy which have grown up to cover the place."

"It is appropriate that it stands here overlooking the lake," said Sibyl. "Hugh was so fond of the water, and, on this very lake he lost his life,—gave it up for the sake of others."

"And *I* like the monument on account of the sentence," said Bessie, who sat by the side of the grave arranging a bunch of autumn leaves.

"The monument is only raised to Hugh's earthly memory," said Aunt Faith. "Hugh is not here; I never feel that I am nearer to him here than at home. But I like to honor the place where his mortal body lies, and I like to think

when I die, those who love me will likewise honor my grave."

Bessie completed her wreath and laid it on the mound, and then they all went back to the old stone house, quiet and thoughtful, but not sad; the faith within their hearts was too earnest, and the hope too bright for sadness.

After tea they sat together on the piazza; the night was warm, and the full−moon shone through the haze, giving the landscape a magical softness and beauty. Tom and Gem were there also, and at, Tom's feet were the three dogs, Turk, somewhat sobered, Grip, less hilarious than formerly, but Pete Trone, Esquire, as vivacious as ever, investigating every corner of the garden as though he never saw it before, and coming back after each foray with increased importance, the air of a philosopher who had discovered all the secrets of the moonlight. Friends came in and joined the family circle. Rose Saxon, Edith Chase, who had become one of Bessie's firm friends, and Walter Hart. An hour or two of pleasant conversation ensued, and Tom delivered some bright sayings, retiring within the shadow, overcome with boyish embarrassment when the company applauded him. Finally, when the visitors had all gone, Aunt Faith rose; "I hope you will stay to prayers, John," she said; "it is late, but the bright moonlight seems to postpone the hour of sleeping."

"Yes, Aunt Faith," replied Mr. Leslie; "we will stay, and Sibyl can play the hymn."

He read a chapter from the Bible, then they all sang a hymn and knelt a few moments in prayer. With affectionate farewells, they parted for the night, Sibyl and her husband going home through the moonlight, and the others separating to their respective rooms.

As Bessie stood before her dressing−table, brushing out her thick curls, she noticed the lines about her mouth, and the hollows in her temples. "I am growing old," she thought, with a half−smile, "and yet, I am only seventeen. How long this year has been; it is like a lifetime. But yet, it has been a precious year; it has taught me hope and peace, I shudder when I think how I felt a year ago."

Going across the room, she lifted a little curtain which hung before a picture; the frame contained only a fragment of paper, and through the glass the faint pencilled words of Hugh's last message could be seen. "Bessie, try to be good, dear. I love you." Bessie read the words over several times, and then, dropping the little curtain, she fell on her knees by the bedside, and prayed Hugh's prayer. "Lord I believe; help Thou mine unbelief. Lord, be merciful to me a sinner."

Seasons of despondency came to Bessie Darrell; often her pillow was wet with tears; often she was obliged to mourn over her shortcomings, often she prayed in deep contrition for forgiveness of sins,—sins belonging to her quick impulsive nature, besetting sins with which she must struggle to the last. But she never lost her faith, she never ceased to look forward to the other country. Through trouble, through care, through sickness, through affliction, through life, and through death she held fast to the hope that abideth forever. Busy and active, she gave her time first to her Aunt Faith, then to Tom and Gem, and afterwards to the poor and afflicted. She worked hard, and in the very labor she found peace at the last; she tried to make others happy, and, in the end, she found happiness for herself.

Aunt Faith sat by her table, thinking. She was thinking of her loved ones, her father and mother, her brothers and sisters, her husband, and last of all, of Hugh. "For the past month my strength has seemed to fail; it may be that I am nearer home than I know," she thought.

"But all my times are in Thy hand, dear Lord, and whether I go soon, or whether I must tarry many years longer, Thou knowest. Only grant me Thy constant aid, for without Thee I can do nothing." She knelt in prayer, prayed for her children as well as herself. Many tears had she shed over them, many times of trial and apparent failure had darkened her way since the five orphans were given into her charge. But the promise was sure, and although this life may not be long enough for the harvest, although the laborer may see only the bud here on earth, that bud will surely blossom and ripen into fruit in heaven.

"He that goeth on his way weeping, and beareth forth good seed, shall doubtless come again with joy, and bring his sheaves with him." Psalm CXXVI.

The faithful laborer toils on
In spite of present sorrow,—
He heeds not toil, he heeds not storm,
But labors for the morrow;
To him the harvest comes in overflowing measure,
To him the fields pour out their overflowing treasure.

He that goeth on his way
Bearing seed, though weeping,—
Shall doubtless come again with joy
Loaded from the reaping,
Loaded with the precious sheaves of faith, and hope,
and love,
Bearing them, rejoicing, to his Father's house above.

There is quiet now in the old stone house. One of its inmates has gone from earth; one has gone to another home, and those who are left under the roof are all sleeping. The soft moonlight shines on the gray walls, caressing them as though it loved them. Dear old house! thy rooms are haunted with memories of happiness, and hallowed with memories of sorrow. We leave thee regretfully, and turn back again and again as we go, for a last

FAREWELL!