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***** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE OLD HOMESTEAD *****

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THE OLD HOMESTEAD

A STORY OF NEW ENGLAND FARM LIFE.

BY MRS. ANN S. STEPHENS.

AUTHOR OF "FASHION AND FAMINE," "THE REIGNING BELLE," "THE GOLD BRICK," "MABEL'S MISTAKE," "THE WIFE'S SECRET," "BELLEHOOD AND BONDAGE," "LORD HOPE'S CHOICE," "BERTHA'S ENGAGEMENT," "THE CURSE OF GOLD," "NORSTON'S REST," "A NOBLE WOMAN," "THE SOLDIER'S ORPHANS," "THE HEIRESS," "MARRIED IN HASTE," "PALACES AND PRISONS," "DOUBLY FALSE," "MARY DERWENT," "THE REJECTED WIFE," "RUBY GRAY'S STRATEGY," "THE OLD COUNTESS," "SILENT STRUGGLES," "WIVES AND WIDOWS," ETC.

"THE OLD HOMESTEAD" is a superb story of quaint New England farm life in the vein now so popular both in fiction and on the stage. With an absorbing plot, effective incidents and characters entirely true to nature, it holds attention as very few stories do. It possesses all that powerful attraction which clings to a romance of home, the family fireside and the people who gather about it. Simplicity and strength are happily combined in its pages, and no one can begin it without desiring to read it through. All the works of Mrs. Ann S. Stephens are books that everybody should read, for in point of real merit, wonderful ingenuity and absorbing interest they loom far above the majority of the books of the day. She has a thorough knowledge of human nature, and so vividly drawn and natural are her characters that they seem instinct with life. Her plots are models of construction, and she excels in depicting young lovers, their trials, troubles, sorrows and joys, while her love scenes fascinate the young as well as the old. In short, Mrs. Stephens' novels richly merit both their vast renown and immense popularity, and they should find a place in every house and in every library.

CHAPTER I.

THE FATHER'S RETURN.

She kneels beside the pauper bed,
As seraphs bow while they adore!
Advance with still and reverent tread,
For angels have gone in before!

"I wonder, oh, I wonder if he will come?"

The voice which uttered these words was so anxious, so pathetic with deep feeling, that you would have loved the poor child, whose heart gave them forth, plain and miserable as she was. Yet a more helpless creature, or a more desolate home could not well be imagined. She was very small, even for her age. Her little sharp features had no freshness in them; her lips were thin; her eyes not only heavy, but full of dull anguish, which gave you an idea of settled pain, both of soul and body, for no mere physical suffering ever gave that depth of expression to the eyes of a child.

But all was of a piece, the garret, and the child that inhabited it. The attic, which was more especially her home, was crowded under the low roof of a tenant house, which sloped down so far in front, that even the child could not stand upright under it, except where it was perforated with a small attic window, which overlooked the chimneys and gables of other tenement buildings, hived full of poverty, and swarming with the dregs of city life.

This was the prospect on one side. On the other a door with one hinge broken, led into a low open garret, where smoke-dried rafters slanted grimly over head, like the ribs of some mammoth skeleton, and loose boards, whose nails had rusted out, creaked and groaned under foot. They made audible sounds even beneath the shadowy tread of the little girl, as she glided toward the top of a stair-case unrailed and out in the floor like the mouth of a well. Here she sat down, supporting her head with one hand, in an attitude of touching despondency.

"I wonder oh, I wonder, if he will come!" she repeated, looking mournfully downward.

It was a dreary view, those flights of broken stairs, slippery and sodden with the water daily carried over them. They led by other tenement rooms, which sent forth a confusion of mingled voices, but opened with a glimpse of pure light upon the street below.

But for this gleam of light, breaking as it were, like a smile through the repulsive vista, Mary Fuller might have given up in absolute despair, for she was an imaginative child, and glimpses of light like that came like an inspiration to her.

After all, what was it that kept the child chained for an hour to one spot, gazing so earnestly down toward the opening? Did she expect any one?

No, it could not be called expectation, but something more beautiful still--FAITH.

Most persons would call it presentiment; but presentiment is not the growth of prayer, or the conviction which follows that earnest pleading when the soul is crying for help.

"Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Again and again Mary Fuller had read these words, and always to creep upon her knees and ask God to let her come, for she was scarcely more than a little child.

But even upon her knees the trouble of her soul grew strong. She felt as if the air around whispered--

"But you are not a little child--they have no sins of disobedience

to confess--no vengeful thoughts or unkind words to atone for as you have."

And all the evil that had yet taken growth in a soul planted among evil arose before the child, to startle her from claiming the privilege of her childhood.

But though she did not know it, those very feelings were an answer to the unrevealed want that had become clamorous in her soul; it was the promise of a bright revelation yet to come; her heart was being unfolded to the sunshine, leaf by leaf, and God's angels might have smiled benignly as they watched the development of good in that little soul, amid the depressing atmosphere that surrounded it.

From the day that her poor father left home and went up to the hospital a pauper to die there, these feelings had grown stronger and stronger within the bosom of the child. His words, unheeded at the time, came back to her with power. The passages read over so often to a careless ear from his Bible, seemed to have taken music in their remembrance, that haunted her all the time.

She did not know it, but the atmosphere of prayers, unheard save in heaven, was around her. From its pauper bed at Bellevue a strong earnest soul was pleading for that child, and thus God sent his angel down to trouble the waters of life within her.

As we grow good, a sense of the beautiful always awakens within us; and this became manifest in Mary Fuller. For the first time the squalid misery of her home became a subject of self-reproach, and with a thoughtful cloud upon her brow, she set herself patiently to work drawing out all the scant elements of comfort that the place afforded. Out of this grew a longing for the presence of her father, that he too might enjoy the benefit of her exertion.

Never in her life had she so yearned for a sight of that pale face. It seemed as if the trouble and darkness in her soul must turn to light when he came. With this intense desire arose a thought that he might return home without warning. The thought grew into hope, and at last strengthened into faith.

Mary Fuller not only believed that her father would come, but she felt sure he would be with her that very night. Thus she sat upon the stairs waiting.

But time wore on, and anxiety made the child restless. She began to doubt--to wonder how she could have expected her father without one word or promise to warrant the hope. That which had been faith an hour before, grew into a sharp anxiety. She folded her arms upon her knees, and burying her face upon them, began to cry.

At last she arose with her eyes full of tears, and walked sadly into the attic room where she sat down looking with sorrow on all the little preparations that she had made. She crept to the window, and

clinging with both hands to the sill, lifted herself up to see, by the shadows that lay among the chimneys, and the slanting gold of the sunshine which, thank God, warms the tenement house and the palace towers alike, how fast the hours wore on.

"Oh, the sun is up yet, and the long chimney's shadow is only half way to the eaves," she exclaimed, hopefully, dropping down from the window, while a flush, as of joyful tears, stole around her eyes.

"Is there anything else I can do?" and she looked eagerly around the room.

It had been neatly swept. A fire burned in the little coffee-pot stove that occupied one corner, and the hum of boiling water stole out from a tea-kettle that stood upon it.

"Everything nice and warm as toast--won't he like it--clean sheets upon the bed, and--and--oh, I forgot--it always lay back of his pillow--he mustn't miss it"; and opening a worn Bible that had seen better days, she found a passage that cheered her heart like a prophecy, and read it with solemn attention as she walked slowly across the room.

She placed the Bible reverently beneath the single pillow arranged so neatly on the bed, and turned away murmuring--

"At any rate, I will have everything ready."

She opened the drawer of a pine table and looked in. Everything was in order there, and the table itself; she employed another minute in giving its spotless surface an extra polish; then arranged a fragment of carpet before the bed, and sat down to wait again.

It would not do; her poor little heart was getting restless with impatience. She went into the open garret closing the door after her, that no heat might escape, and sat down on the upper flight of stairs again. How she longed to run down--to hang about the door-step, and even go as far as the corner to meet him! But this would be disobedience. How often had he told her never to loiter in the street or about the door? So she sat, stooping downward, and looking through the gleams of light that came through the open hall over flights of steps below, thrilled from head to foot with loving expectation. Half an hour--an hour--and there poor Mary Fuller sat, her heart sinking lower and lower with each moment. At last she arose, went back to her room with a dejected air, and sat down by the stove weary with disappointment.

An old house cat that lay by the stove looked at her gravely, closed her eyes an instant as if for reflection, and leaped into her lap. Anything--the fall of a straw would have set Mary Fuller to crying then, and she burst into a passion of tears, rocking herself back and forth and moaning out--

"He will not come--it is almost dark now--he will not come. Oh, dear, how can I wait--how can I wait!"

As she moaned thus, the cat leaped from her lap and walked into the garret, stood a moment at the head of the stairs, and came back again looking at his little mistress wistfully through the door.

Mary started up. Surely, that was his step! No! there was no firmness in it. Whoever mounted those stairs, moved with a staggering, unsteady walk, like that of a drunken person.

Mary turned very pale and hardly breathed.

"Oh, if it should be mother," she thought, casting a startled look back into the little room, "staggering, too!" and trembling with affright, she stole softly to the top of the stairs and looked down.

A gush of welcome broke from her lips. She held out her arms, descending rapidly to meet him.

"Father! oh, my blessed, blessed father!"

They came up slowly, the deathly pale man leaning partly on his stick, partly on the shoulder of the child, whose frame shivered with joy beneath his pressure, and whose eyes, beaming with affection, were uplifted to his.

"Not here, don't sit down here," she cried, resisting his impulse to rest at the head of the stairs. "I have got a fire--the room is warm--just five steps more--don't stop till then!"

He moved on, attempting to smile, though his lips were blue and his emaciated limbs shivered painfully.

"There, sit down, father: I borrowed this rocking-chair of Mrs. Ford; isn't it nice? Let me put the pillow behind your head. Are you very sick, father?"

His lips quivered out, "Yes, very!"

She stooped down and kissed his forehead, then knelt by his side and kissed his hands, also, with such reverential affection.

"Oh, father, father, how sorry I am; you will stay with us--you will stay at home now--they have let you grow worse at the hospital; but I--your own little girl--see if I don't make you well. You will not go to Bellevue again, father."

"No, I shall never go back again; the doctors can do nothing for me, but I could not die without seeing you again--that wish was stronger than death."

"Oh, father, don't."

The sick man looked down upon her with his glittering eyes, and a pathetic smile stole over his lips. An ague chill seized upon him, and ran in a shiver through his limbs; but it had no power to quench that smile of ineffable affection--that solemn, sweet smile, that said more softly than words--

"Yes, my child, your father must die here in his poverty-stricken home."

"No, no!" cried Mary, in fond affright; for the look affected her more than his words; "it is only the cold, your clothes are so thin, dear father--it is only the cold; a good warm cup of tea will drive it off. Here is the kettle, boiling hot; besides, you are hungry--ah, I thought of that; here are crackers and a dear little sponge-cake, and such nice bread and butter; of course, it's only the cold and the hunger. I always feel as if I should die the next minute, when we've gone without anything to eat a day or two; nothing is so discouraging as that."

She ran on thus, striving to cheat her own aching heart, while she cheered the sick man. As if activity would drive away her fear, she bustled about, put her tea to drawing by the stove, spread the little table, and pulled it close to her father, and strove, by a thousand sweet caressing ways, to entice him into an appetite. The sick man only glanced at the food with a weary smile; but seizing upon the warm cup of tea, drank it off eagerly, asking for more.

This was some consolation to the little nurse; and she stood by, watching him wistfully through her tears, as he drained the second cup. It checked the shivering fit somewhat, and he sat upright a moment, casting his bright eyes around the room.

"Isn't it nice and warm?" said Mary, as he leaned back.

The sick man murmured softly--

"Yes, child, it feels like home. God bless you. But your mother--did she help to do this?"

Mary's countenance fell. She shrunk away from the glance of those bright, questioning eyes.

"Mother has not been home in five or six days," she said, gently.

The sick man turned his head and closed his eyes. Directly, Mary saw two great tears press through the quivering lashes, followed by a faint gasping for breath.

"I have prayed--I have so hoped to see her before"--

He broke off; and Mary could see, by the glow upon his face, that he was praying then.

She knelt down, reverently, and leaned her forehead upon the arm of his chair.

After a little, Fuller opened his eyes, and lifting one pale hand from his knee, laid it on his child's shoulder.

"Mary!"

She looked up and smiled. There was something so loving and holy in his face, that the child could not help smiling, even through her tears.

"Mary, listen to me while I can speak, for in a little while I shall be gone."

"Not to the hospital again--oh, not there!"

"No, Mary, not there; but look up--be strong, my child, you know what death is!"

"Oh, yes," whispered the child with a shudder.

"Hush, Mary, hush--don't shake so--I must die, very, very soon, I feel," he added, looking at his fingers and dropping them gently back to her shoulder; "I feel now that it is very nigh, this death which makes you tremble so."

Mary broke forth into a low, wailing sob.

"Hush! stop crying, Mary; look up!"

Mary lifted her eyes, filled with touching awe, and choked back the agony of her grief.

"Father, I listen."

Oh, the holy love with which those eyes looked down into hers!

"Have you read the Bible that I left behind for you?"

"Yes, father; oh, yes, morning and night."

"Then, you know that the good meet again, after death?"

"But I--I am not good. Oh, father, father, I cannot make myself good enough to see you again; you will go, and I shall be left behind--I and mother!--I and mother!"

"Have you been patient with your mother--respectful to her?" he asked, sadly.

"There--there it is. I have tried and tried, but when she strikes

me, or brings those people here, or comes home with that horrible bottle under her shawl, I cannot be respectful--I get angry and long to hide away when she comes up stairs."

"Hush, my child, hush; these are wicked words!"

"I know it, father; it seems to me as if no one ever was so wicked--try ever so much, I cannot be good. I thought when you came"--

"Well, my child."

"I thought that you would tell me how, and you talk of--. Don't, father, don't; I want you so much."

"It is God who takes me," said Fuller, gently; "He will teach you how to be good."

"Oh, but it takes so long; I have asked and asked so often."

Again that beautiful smile beamed over the dying man's face.

"He will hear you--He has heard you--I felt that you had need of me, and came; see how God has answered your want in this, my child!"

"But I can do nothing alone; when you are with me, I feel strong; but if you leave me, what can I do?"

"Pray without ceasing; and in everything give thanks," said that faint gentle voice once more.

"But I have prayed till my heart seemed full of tears."

"They were sweet tears, Mary."

"No, no; my heart grew heavy with them; and--mother, how could I give thanks when she came home so--!"

"Hush, hush, Mary--it is your mother!"

"But I can't give thanks for that, when I remember how she let you suffer--how miserable everything was--how she left you to starve, day by day, spending all the money you had laid up in drink!"

"Oh, my child, my child!" cried the dying man, sweeping the tears from his eyes with one pale hand, and dropping it heavily on her shoulder.

She cowered beneath the pressure.

"It is wrong--I know it," she said, clasping her hands and dropping them heavily before her, as if weighed down by a sense of her utter unworthiness. "But oh, father, what shall I do! what _shall_ I do!"

"Honor your mother!"

"How can I honor her, when she degrades and abuses us all!"

"God does not make you the judge of your parents, but commands you unconditionally to honor them."

Mary dropped her eyes and stooped more humble downward. She saw now why the darkness had hung so long over her prayers. Filled with unforgiving bitterness against her mother she had asked God to forgive her, scarcely deeming her fault one to be repented of. A brief struggle against the memory of bitter ill-usage and fierce wrong inflicted by her mother, and Mary drew a deep free breath. Her eyes filled, and meekly folding her hands she held them toward her father.

"What shall I do, father?"

He drew her toward him, and a look of holy faith lay upon his face.

"Listen to me, Mary; God may yet help you to save this woman, your mother and my wife; for next to God I always loved her."

"But what can I do? She hates me because I am so small and ugly. She will never let me love her, and without that what can a poor little thing like me do?"

"My child, there is no human being so weak or so humble that it is incapable of doing good, of being happy, and of making others happy also. The power of doing good does not rest so much in what we possess, as in what we are. Gentle words, kind acts are more precious than gold. These are the wealth of the poor; more precious than worldly wealth, because it is never exhausted. The more you give, the more you possess."

A strange beautiful light came into Mary's eyes, as she listened.

"Go on, father, say more."

She drew a deep breath.

"Then the good are never poor!"

"Never, my child."

"And never unhappy?"

"Never utterly miserable, as the wicked are--never without hope."

"Oh, father, tell me more; ask God to help me--He will listen to you."

He laid his pale hands upon her head, and as a flower folds itself beneath the night shadow, Mary sunk to her knees. She clasped her little hands, and dropping them upon her father's knee, buried her

face there; then the lips of that dying man parted, and the last pulses of his life glowed out in a prayer so fervent, so powerful in its faith, that the very angels of heaven must have veiled their faces as they listened to that blending of eternal faith and human sorrow.

Mary listened at first tremblingly, and with strange awe; then the burning words began to thrill her, heart and limb, and yielding to the might of a spirit which his prayer had drawn down from heaven. She also broke forth with a cry of the same holy anguish; and the voice of father and child rose and swelled together up to the throne of God.

As he prayed, the face of the sick man grew sublime in its paleness, and the death sweat rolled over it like rain, while that of the child grew strangely luminous. Gradually mouth, eyes and forehead kindled with glorious joy, and instead of that heart-rending petition that broke from her at first, her voice mellowed into soft throes and murmurs of praise.

The sick man hushed his soul and listened; his exhausted voice broke into sighs, and thus, after a little time, they both sunk into silence--the child filled with strange ecstasy--the father bowing with calm joy beneath the hand of death.

"Let me lie down. I am very, very weak," he said, attempting to rise.

Mary stood up and helped him. She had grown marvellously strong within the last hour, and her soul, better than that slight form, supported the dying man.

He lay down. She placed the pillow under his head and knelt again. It seemed as if her heart could give forth its silent gratitude to God best in that position.

He laid his hand upon her head. It was growing cold.

"And you are willing now that I should die?"

"Yes, my father, only---," and here a human throb broke in her voice, "if I could but go with you!"

"No, my child, it is but a little time, at most. For her sake be content to wait."

"Father, I am content."

"And happy?"

"Very, very happy, father!"

The dying man closed his eyes, and a faint murmur rose to his lips.

"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

His hand was still upon her head, and there it rested till the purple shadows died off into cold grey tints, and upon his still face there rose a smile pure as moonlight, luminous as waters that gush from the throne of heaven.

The same holy spirit must have touched the living and the dead, for when the little girl lifted her face, the pale, pinched features were radiant as those of an angel. She had gone close to the gate of heaven with her father, soul and body. She was bathed in the holy light that had gushed through the portals.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAYOR AND THE POLICEMAN.

When the strong man turns, with a haughty lip,
On poverty, stern and grim,
When he seizes the fiend with a ruthless grip,
Ye need not fear for him.
But when poverty comes to a little child,
Freezing its bloom away--
When its cheeks are thin and its eyes are wild,
Give pity its gentle sway.

It was a bitter cold night--a myriad of stars hung in the sky, clear and glittering, as if burnished by the frost. The moon sent down a pale, freezing brilliancy that whitened all the ground, as if a sprinkling of snow had fallen, but there was not a flake on the earth or in the air. Little wind was abroad, but that little pierced through mufflers and overcoats, like a swarm of invisible needles, sharp and stinging. It was rather late in the evening, and in such weather few persons were tempted abroad. Those who had comfortable hearths remained at home, and even the street beggars crept within their alleys and cellars; many of them driven to seek shelter in their rags, without hope of fire or food.

But there was one man in New York city, who could neither seek rest nor shelter till a given time, however inclement the weather might be. With a thick pilot cloth overcoat buttoned to the chin, and his glittering police star catching the moonbeams as they fell upon his breast, he strode to and fro on his beat, occasionally pausing, with his eyes lifted towards the stars, to ponder over some thought in his mind, but speedily urged to motion again by the sharp tingling of his feet and hands.

A feeling and thoughtful man was this policeman; he possessed much

originality of mind, which had received no small share of cultivation. He had been connected with a mercantile house till symptoms of a pulmonary disease drove him from his desk; then, by the kind aid of a politician, who had not entirely lost all human feelings in the council chamber, he was enrolled in the city police. To a mind less nobly constructed, this minor position might have been a cause of depression and annoyance, but John Chester, though not yet thirty-two, had learned to think for himself. He felt that no occupation could degrade an honorable man, and that gentlemanly habits, integrity and intelligence were certain to shine out with greater lustre when found in the humbler spheres of life.

Chester possessed both education and refinement, but having no better means of support, accepted that which Providence presented, not with grumbling condescension, but with that grateful alacrity which was a sure proof that his duties would be faithfully performed; and that, though capable of higher things, he was not one to neglect the most humble, when they became duties.

To a man like Chester, the solitude of his night watches was at times a luxury. When the great city lay slumbering around him, his mind found subjects of deep thought in itself and in surrounding things. Even on the night when we present him to the reader, the cold air, while it chilled his body, seemed only to invigorate his mind. Instead of brooding gloomily over his own position, certainly very inferior to what it had been, he had many a compassionate thought for those poorer than himself, without one envious feeling for the thousands and thousands who would have deemed his small income of ten dollars a week absolute poverty.

The ward in which he was stationed exhibited in a striking degree the two great extremes of social life. Blocks of palatial buildings loomed imposingly along the broad streets. Each dwelling, with its spacious rooms and luxurious accommodations, was occupied by a single family, sometimes of not more than two or three persons. Here plate glass, silver mounted doors, and rich traceries in bronze and iron, gave brilliant evidence of wealth; while many small gardens thrown together, rich with shrubbery and vines in their season of verdure, threw a fresh glow of nature around the rich man's dwelling. Resources of enjoyment were around him on every hand. Each passing cloud seemed to turn its silver lining upon these dwellings, as it rolled across the heavens.

You had but to turn a corner, and lo! the very earth seemed vital and teeming with human beings. Poor men and the children of poor men, disputed possession of every brick upon the sidewalks. Every hole in those dilapidated buildings swarmed with a family; every corner of the leaky garrets and damp cellars was full of poverty-stricken life. Here were no green trees, no leaf-clad vines climbing upon the walls; empty casks, old brooms, and battered wash-tubs littered the back yards, which the sweet fresh grass should have carpeted. Ash pans and tubs of kitchen offal choked up the areas. The very light, as it struggled through those dingy windows, seemed pinched and smoky.

All this contrast of poverty and wealth lay in the policeman's beat. Now he was with the rich, almost warmed by the light that came like a flood of wine through some tall window muffled in crimson damask. The smooth pavements under his feet glowed with brilliant gas-light. The next moment, and a few smoky street lamps failed to reveal the broken flagging on which he trod. Now and then the gleam of a coarse tallow candle swaling gloomily away by some sick bed, threw its murky light across his path. Still, but for the cold moonlight, Chester would have found much difficulty in making his rounds in the poor man's district. Yet here he remained longest; here his step always grew heavy and his brow thoughtful. Surrounded by suffering, shut out from his eyes only by those irregular walls, and clouded, as it were, with the slumbering sorrow around him, this dark place always cast him into painful thought. That cold night he was more than usually affected by the suffering which he knew was close to him, and only invisible to the eye.

The night before, he had entered one of those dismal houses and had taken from thence a woman who, squalid and degraded as she was, had evidently once been in the higher walks of life. As he passed her dwelling, the remembrance of this woman sent a thrill of mingled pity and disgust through his heart. The miserable destitution of her home, the glimpses of refinement that broke through her outbursts of passion, the state of revolting intoxication in which she was plunged--all arose vividly to his mind. He paused before the house with a feeling of vague interest. The night before, a scene of perfect riot greeted him as he approached the door. Now the inmates seemed numbed, silent and torpid with cold.

As Chester stood gazing on the house, he saw that the door was open, and fancied that some object was moving in the hall. It seemed at first like a lame animal creeping down the steps. As it came forth into the moonlight, Chester saw that it was a child with a singular, crouching appearance, muffled in an old red cloak that had belonged to some grown person. With a slow and painful effort the child dragged itself along the pavement, its face bent down, and stooping, as if it had some burden to conceal. The old cloak brushed Chester's garments, yet the child seemed quite unconscious of his presence, but moved on, breathing hard and shuddering with the cold, till he could hear her teeth knock together. Chester did not speak, but softly followed the child.

The Mayor of New York at that time lived within Chester's beat, and toward his dwelling the little wanderer bent her way. As she drew near the steps, the child lifted her face for the first time, and reaching forth a little wan hand, held herself up by the railing. She was not seeking that particular house, but there her strength gave way, and she clung to the cold iron, faint and trembling, with her eyes lifted wildly towards the drawing-room windows.

The plate glass was all in a blaze from a chandelier that hung within, and the genial glow fell upon that little frost-bitten face, lighting

it up with intense lustre. The face was not beautiful--those features were too pale--the eyes large and hollow, while black lashes of unusual length gave them a wild depth of color that was absolutely fearful. Still there was something in the expression of those wan features indescribably touching--a look of meek suffering and of moral strength unnatural in its development. It was the face of a child, suffering, feeble, with the expression of a holy spirit breaking through, holy but tortured.

The child clung to the railing, waving to and fro, but holding on with a desperate grasp. She seemed struggling to lift herself to an upright position, but without sufficient strength. Chester advanced a step to help her, but drew back, for, without perceiving him, she was creeping feebly up the steps, with her face shrouded in darkness again. She reached the bell with difficulty, and drew the silver knob.

Scarcely had the child taken her hand from the cold metal, when the shadow of a man crossed the drawing-room window, and his measured step sounded along the oilcloth in the hall. The door was unfastened, and the Mayor himself stood in the opening. The child lifted her eyes, and saw standing before, or rather above her, a tall man with light hair turning grey, and a cast of features remarkable only for an absence of all generous expression. He fixed his cold eyes on the little wanderer with a look that chilled her worse than the frost. As he prepared to speak, she could see the corners of his mouth curve haughtily downward, and when his voice fell upon her ear, though not particularly loud, it was cold and repelling.

"Well, what are you doing here? What do you want?" said the great man, keeping his eyes immovably on the shivering child, enraged at himself for having opened the door for a miserable beggar like that.

He was in the habit of extending these little condescensions to the voters of his ward; it had a touch of republicanism in it that looked well; but from that wretched little thing what was to be gained? Still the child might have a father, and that father might be a citizen, one of the sovereign people, possessed of that inestimable privilege--a vote. So the Mayor was cautious, as usual, about exhibiting any positive traces of the ill-humor that possessed him. He had not groped and grovelled his way to the Mayoralty, without knowing how and when to exhibit the evil feelings of his heart. Those that were not evil he very prudently left to themselves, knowing that they could never obtain strength enough in his barren nature to become in the slightest degree troublesome.

Had kindly feelings still lived in his bosom, they must have been aroused by the sweet, humble voice that answered him.

"They have turned me out of doors. I am hungry, sir. I am very cold."

"Turned you out of doors! Where is your father? Can't he take care of you?"

"I have no father--he is dead."

No father, no vote! The little beggar had not the most indirect claim for sympathy or forbearance from the Mayor of New York. He could afford to be angry with her; nay, better, to seem angry also, and that was an uncommon luxury with him.

"Well, why didn't you go to the basement?"

"It was dark there--and through that window everything looked so warm--I could not help it!"

"Could not help it, indeed! Go away! I never encourage street beggars. It would be doing a wrong to the people who look up to me for an example. Go away this minute--how dare you come up to this door? You are a bad little girl, I dare say!"

"No sir--no--no, I am _not_ bad! Please not to say that. It hurts me worse than the cold!" said the child, raising her sweet voice and clasping her little wan hands, while over her features many a wounded feeling trembled, though she gave no signs of weeping.

What a contrast there was between the heartless face of that man, and the meek, truthful look of the child! How cold and harsh seemed his voice after the troubled melody of hers!

"I tell you, there is no use in attempting to deceive me. Station houses are built on purpose for little thieves that prowl about at night!" and the cold-hearted man half closed the door, adding, "go away--go away! Some policeman will take you to a station house, though I dare be sworn you know how to find one without help."

The door was closed with these words, shutting the desolate child into the cold night again. She neither complained nor wept; but sinking on the stone, gathered her frail limbs in a heap and buried her face in the old cloak.

Chester heard the whole conversation; he saw the expression of meek despair which fell upon the child as the door closed against her, and with a swelling heart mounted the steps.

"My little girl," he said very gently, touching the crouching form with his hand, "my poor, little girl!"

The child looked up wildly, for the very benevolence of his voice frightened her, she was so unused to anything of the kind; but the instant her eyes fell upon his bosom, where the silver star glittered in the moonlight, she uttered a faint shriek.

"Oh, do not--do not take me--I am not a thief--I am not wicked!" and she shrunk back into a corner of the iron railing shuddering, and with her wild eyes bent upon him like some little wounded animal hunted down by fierce dogs.

"Don't be frightened--I will take care of you--I"--

"They took _her_--the policemen, I mean. Where is she? What have you done with her?"

"But I wish to be kind," said Chester, greatly distressed; she interrupted him, pointing to his star with her finger.

"Kind? see--see. I tell you I am not a thief!"

"I know, I am sure you are not," was the compassionate answer.

"Then why take me up if I am not a thief?"

"But you will perish with the cold!"

"No--no; it's not so very cold here since the gentleman went away!" cried the child in a faint voice, muffling the old cloak close around her, and trying to smile. "Only--only"--

Her voice grew fainter. She had just strength to draw up her knees, clasp the little thin hands over them, and in attempting to rock herself upon the cold stone to prove how comfortable she was, fell forward dizzy and insensible.

"Great Heavens! this is terrible," cried Chester, gathering up the child in his arms.

Agitated beyond all self-control, he gave the bell-knob a jerk that made the Mayor start from his seat with a violence that threw one of his well-trodden slippers half across the hearth-rug.

"Who is coming now?" muttered the great man, thrusting his foot into the truant slipper with a peevish jerk, for he had taken supper at the City Hall that evening, and after a temperance movement of that kind, the luxurious depth of his easy-chair was always inviting.

"Will that bell never have done? These gas-lights--I verily believe they entice beggars to the door; besides, that great Irish girl has lighted double the number I ordered," and, with a keen regard to the economy of his household, the Chief Magistrate of New York mounted a chair and turned off four of the six burners that had been lighted in the chandelier. Another sharp ring brought him to the carpet, and to the street-door again. There he found Chester with the little beggar girl in his arms, her eyes shut and her face pale as death, save where a faint violet color lay about the mouth.

"Sir, this child, you have driven her from your door--she is dying!" said Chester, passing with his burden into the hall and moving towards the drawing-room, from which the light of an anthracite fire glowed warm; and ruddily "she needs warmth. I believe in my soul she is starving!"

"Well, sir, why do you bring her here--who are you? Is there no station-house? I do not receive beggars in my drawing-room!" said the Mayor, following the policeman.

Chester, heedless of his remonstrance, strode across the carpet and laid the wretched child tenderly into the great crimson chair which "his honor" had just so reluctantly abandoned. Wheeling the chair close to the fire, he knelt on the rug and began to chafe those thin purple hands between his own.

"I could not take her anywhere else--she was dying with cold--a minute was life or death to her," said Chester, lifting his fine eyes to the sullen countenance of the Mayor, and speaking in a tone of apology.

The Mayor bent his eyes on that manly face, so warm and eloquent with benevolent feeling; then, just turned his glance over the deathly form of the child.

"You will oblige me by moving that bundle of rags from my chair!" he said.

"But she is dying!" cried the policeman, trembling all over with generous indignation; "she may be dead now!"

"Very well, this is no place for a coroner's inquest," was the terse reply.

The policeman half started up, and in his indignation almost crushed one of the little hands that he had been chafing.

"Sir, this is inhuman--it is shameful."

"Do you know where you are?--whom you are speaking to?" said the great man, growing pale about the mouth, but subduing his passion with wonderful firmness.

"Yes, I know well enough. This is your house, and you are the Mayor of New York!"

"And you--may I have the honor of knowing who it is that favors my poor dwelling, and with company like that!" said the Mayor, pointing to the child, while his upper lip contracted and the corners of his mouth drooped into a cold sneer.

"Yes, sir, you can know: I am a policeman of this ward, appointed by your predecessor--a just and good man; my name is John Chester. Taking pity on this forlorn little creature, I followed her from a house whence she had crept out into the cold, hoping to be of some use; she came up here, and rang at your door. I heard what passed between you. As a citizen, I should have been ashamed, had I unfortunately been among those who placed you in power; I must say

it--your conduct to this poor starved thing, shocked me beyond utterance. I thank God that no vote of mine aided to lift you where you are."

"And so you are a policeman of this ward. Very well," said the Mayor; and the sneer upon his face died away while he began to pace the room, the soft fall of his slippers upon the carpet giving a cat-like stillness to his movements.

He felt that a man who could thus fearlessly speak out his just indignation, was not the kind of person to persecute openly. Besides, it was not in this man's nature to do anything openly. Like a mole, he burrowed out his plans under ground, and when forced to brave the daylight, always cunningly allowed some pliant tool to remove the earth that was unavoidably cast up in his passage. His genius lay in that low cunning and prudent management, with which small men of little intellect and no heart sometimes deceive the world. He had long outlived all feelings sufficiently strong to render him impetuous, and was utterly devoid of that generous self-respect which prompts a man to repel an attack fearlessly and at once. In short, he was one of those who _lie still and wait_, like the crafty pointer dogs that creep along the grass, hunting out game for others to shoot down for them, and devouring the spoil with a keener relish than the noble hound that makes the forest ring as he plunges upon his prey.

True to his character and his system, the Mayor paused in his walk, and, bending over the child, said coldly, but still with some appearance of feeling--

"She seems to be getting better--probably it will be nothing serious!"

Chester looked up, and a smile illuminated his face. Always willing to look on the bright side of human nature, his generous heart smote him for having perhaps judged too harshly. The little hand which he was chafing began to warm with life; this relieved him of the terrible excitement which the moment before had rendered his words, if just, more than imprudent.

"Thank you, sir, she _is_ better," he said, with an expression of frank gratitude beaming over every feature, "I think she will live now, so we will only trouble you a few minutes longer."

"My family are in bed--and these street beggars are so little to be relied upon," observed the Mayor, evidently wishing to offer some excuse for his former harshness, without doing so directly; "but this seems a case of real distress."

Chester was subdued by this speech. More and more he regretted the excitement of his former language. He longed to make some reparation to a man who, after all, might be only prudent, not unfeeling.

"If," said he, looking at the child, whose features began to quiver in the glowing fire-light, "if I had a drop of wine now."

"Oh, we are temperance people here, you know," replied the Mayor, coldly.

"Or anything warm," persisted Chester, as the child opened her eyes with a famished look.

"You can get wine at the station-house. My girls are in bed."

"I am afraid she will have small hopes of help at the station-house. The Common Council make no provision for medical aid where the sick or starving are brought in at night. It is a great omission, sir."

"The Common Council cannot do everything," replied the Mayor, becoming impatient, but still subduing himself.

"I know sir, but its first duty is to the poor."

"Oh, yes, no one denies that;" replied the Mayor, observing with satisfaction that Chester was preparing to remove the little intruder. "You will not have a very long walk," he added. "The station-house is not more than eight or ten blocks off. She will be strong enough, I fancy, to get so far."

"Don't, don't take me there! I am not a thief!" murmured the child, and two great tears rolled over her cheek slowly, as if the fire-light had with difficulty thawed them out from her heart.

They were answered--God bless the policeman--they were answered by a whole gush of tears that sprang into his fine eyes, and sparkled there like so many diamonds.

"No," he said, taking off his overcoat, and wrapping it around the child, his hands and arms shaking with eager pity as he lifted her from the chair. "She shall go home with me for one night at least. I will say to my wife, 'Here is a little hungry thing whom God has sent you from the street.' She will be welcome, sir. I am sure she will be as welcome as if I were to carry home a casket of gold in my bosom. Will you go home with me, little girl?"

The child turned her large eyes upon him; a smile of ineffable sweetness floated over her face, and drawing a deep breath, she said:

"Oh, yes, I will go!"

"You will excuse the trouble," said Chester, turning with his burden toward the Mayor as he went out, "the case seemed so urgent!"

"Oh, it is all excused," replied his honor, bowing stiffly as he walked towards the door, "but I shall remember--never doubt that!" he muttered with a smile, in which all the inward duplicity of his nature shone out.

That instant a carriage drove up to the door, and after some bustle a lady entered, followed by a young lad, who paused a moment on the upper step and gave some orders to the coachman in a clear, cheerful voice, that seemed out of place in that house.

"Why don't you come in?" cried the lady, folding her rose-colored opera-cloak closely around her, "you fill the whole house with cold."

"In a moment--in a moment," cried the boy, breaking into a snatch of opera music as if haunted by some melody; "but pray send Tim out a glass of wine, or he will freeze on the box this Greenland night."

"Nonsense! come in!" cried the mother, entering the drawing-room and approaching the fire. Here she threw back her opera-cloak, revealing a rich brocade dress underneath, lighted up with jewels and covered as with a mist of fine lace! "he'll do well enough--come to the fire!" she continued, holding out her hands in their snowy gloves for warmth.

The lady had not noticed Chester, who stood back in the hall, that she might pass. Applicants of all kinds were so common at her dwelling, even at late hours, that she seldom paused, even to regard a stranger. But the noble-looking lad was far more quick-sighted. As he turned reluctantly to close the door, Chester advanced with the little girl in his arms, and would have passed.

"What is this?--what is the matter?--is she sick?" inquired the boy, earnestly.

"She is a poor, homeless child, half frozen and almost famished," answered Chester.

"Homeless on a night like this!--hungry and cold!" exclaimed the lad, throwing off his Spanish cloak and tossing his cap to the hall table. "Come back, till she gets thoroughly warm, and I'll soon ransack the kitchen for eatables; a glass of Madeira now to begin with. Lady Mother, come and look at this little girl--it's a sin and a shame to see anything with a soul reduced to this."

"What is it, Fred?" cried the lady, sweeping across the drawing-room; "oh, I see, a little beggar girl! Why don't you let the man pass? He's taken her up for something, I dare say."

"No," said Chester with a faint hope of getting food; "it is want, nothing worse--she is frozen and starved."

"What a pity, and the authorities make such provision for the poor, too! I declare, Mr. Farnham, you ought to stop this sort of thing--it is scandalous to have one's house haunted with such frightful objects."

Young Farnham drew toward his mother, flushed and eager.

"If the girls are in bed, let me go down and search for something,

the poor child looks so forlorn."

As he pleaded with his mother the hall light lay full upon him, and never did benevolence look more beautiful on a young face. It must have been a cold-hearted person, indeed, who could have resisted those fine, earnest eyes, and that manner so full of generous grace.

"Come, mother, music should open one's heart--may I go?"

"Nonsense, Fred, what would you be at? The man is in a hurry to go. Why can't you be reasonable for once," replied the weak woman, glancing at her husband, who was walking angrily up and down the drawing-room; and sinking her voice she added:

"See, your father is out of sorts; do come in!"

"In a moment--in a moment," answered, the youth, moving up the hall and searching eagerly in his pockets--"stop, my dear fellow, don't be in such a confounded hurry--oh, here it is."

The lad drew forth a portmonnaie, and emptied the only bit of gold it contained into his hand.

"Here, here," he said, blushing to the temples and forcing it upon Chester; "I haven't a doubt that everything is eaten up in the house, but this will go a little way. You are a fine fellow, I can see that; don't let the poor thing suffer--if help is wanted, I'm always on hand for a trifle like that; but good night, good night, the governor is getting fractious, and my lady mother will take cold--good night."

Chester grasped the hand so frankly extended, and moved down the steps, cheered by the noble sympathy so unexpected in that place.

"You will understand," said the Mayor, turning short upon poor Fred, as he entered the room, "you will please to understand, sir, that to station yourself on my door-steps and call for wine as if you were in a tavern, is an insult to your father's principles. It is not to be supposed that this house contains Madeira or any other alcoholic drink. Remember, sir, that your father is the chief magistrate of New York, and the head of a popular principle."

"But why may I not request wine for a poor child suffering for warmth and food, when we have it every now and then on the dinner table?" inquired the boy seriously.

"You are mistaken; you are too young for explanations of this kind," answered the father sternly; "we never have wine on the table, except when certain men are here. When did you ever see even an empty glass there, when our temperance friends visit us?"

The boy did not answer, but kept his fine honest eyes fixed on his father, and their half astonished, half grieved expression disturbed the politician, who really loved his son.

"You are not old enough to understand the duties of a public station like mine, Frederick; a politician, to be successful, must be a little of all things to all men."

"Then I, for one, will never be a politician," exclaimed the boy, while childish tears were struggling with manly indignation.

"God forbid that you ever should," was the thought that rose in the father's heart; for there was yet one green spot in his nature kept fresh by love of his only son.

"And," continued the boy still more impetuously, "I will never drink another glass of wine in my life. What is wrong for the poor is wrong for the rich. What I may not give to a suffering child, I will not drink myself."

"Now that is going a little too far, I should say, Fred," interposed Mrs. Farnham, softly withdrawing her gloves, and allowing the fire-light to flash over her diamond rings; "my opinion has long been that whisky punches, brandy what-do-you-call-'ems, and things of that sort, are decidedly immoral; but champagne and Madeira, sherry cobblers--a vulgar name that--always puts one in mind of low shoemakers--don't it Mr. Farnham? if it wasn't for the glass tubes and cut-crystal goblets, that beverage ought to be legislated on. Well, Fred, as I was saying, refreshments like these are gentlemanly, and I rather approve of them, so don't let me hear more nonsense about your drinking wine in a quiet way, you know, and with the right set. Isn't this about the medium, Mr. Farnham?"

The Mayor, who usually allowed the wisdom of his lady to flow by him like the wind, did not choose to answer this sapient appeal, but observed curtly, that he had some writing to do, and should like, as soon as convenient, to be left to himself. Upon this the lady folded her white gloves spitefully and left the room, tossing her head till the marabouts on each side of her coiffure trembled like drifting snow-flakes, while she muttered something about husbands and bears, which sounded very much as if she mingled the two unpleasantly together in her ideas of natural history.

Frederick followed his mother with a serious and grieved demeanor, taking leave of his father with a respectful "good night," which the Mayor, dissatisfied with himself, and consequently angry, did not deign to notice.

When left to himself, the Mayor impatiently rang a bell connected with the kitchen. This brought a hard-faced Irish woman to the room, who was ordered to wheel the easy-chair into the hall, and have it thoroughly aired the first thing in the morning. After that he gave her a brief reprimand for exceeding his directions regarding the gas-lights, and dismissed her for the night.

After she disappeared, the Mayor continued to pace up and down the

room, meditating over the scene that had just transpired.

"I was right in smoothing the thing over," he muttered; "one never cares for the report of a little beggar like that. Who would believe her? But this Chester might tell the thing in a way that would prove awkward; a man like him has no business in the police. He thinks for himself and acts for himself, I'll be sworn; besides, he is a fine, gentlemanly-looking fellow, and somehow the people get attached to such men, and are influenced by them. It always pleases me to twist the star from a breast like that. It shall be done!" he added, suddenly. "His language to me, a magistrate, is reason enough for breaking him; but then I must not bring the complaint. It can be managed without that."

Thus gently musing over his hopes of vengeance on a man, who, belonging to an adverse party, had dared to speak the truth rather too eloquently in his presence, the Mayor spent perhaps half an hour very much in his usual way; for he had always some small plot to ripen just before retiring for the night, and his plan of vengeance on poor Chester was only a little more piquant than others, because it was more directly personal.

CHAPTER III.

THE POLICEMAN'S GUEST.

"Home, sweet home,
Be it ever so humble there is no place like home."

Home is emphatically the poor man's paradise. The rich, with their many resources, too often live away from the hearth-stone, in heart, if not in person; but to the virtuous poor, domestic ties are the only legitimate and positive source of happiness short of that holier Heaven which is the soul's home.

The wife of Chester sat up for him that winter's night. It was so intensely cold that she could not find the heart to seek rest while he was exposed to the weather. The room in which she sat was a small chamber in the second story of a dwelling that contained two other families. Around her were many little articles of comfort tastefully arranged, and bearing a certain degree of elegance that always betrays the residence of a refined woman, however poor she may be. A well worn but neatly darned carpet covered the floor. The chairs, with their white rush bottoms, were without stain or dust. A mahogany breakfast-table, polished like a mirror, stood beneath a pretty looking-glass, whose gilt frame shone through a net-work of golden tissue-paper. Curtains of snow-white cotton, starched till they looked clear and bright as linen, were looped back from the windows, with knots of green riband. A pot or two of geraniums stood beneath the

curtains, and near one of the windows hung a Canary bird sleeping upon its perch, with its feathers ruffled up like a ball of yellow silk.

All these objects, nothing in themselves, but so combined that an air of comfort and even elegance reigned over them, composed a most beautiful domestic picture; especially when Mrs. Chester, obeying the gentle sway of her Boston rocking-chair, passed to and fro before the lamp by which she was sewing--cutting off the light from some object, and then allowing it to flow back again--giving a sort of animation to the stillness, peculiarly cheerful.

Now and then Jane Chester would lift her eyes to the clock, which, with a tiny looking-glass, framed in the mahogany beneath its dial, stood directly before her upon the mantle-piece. As the pointer approached the half hour before midnight, she laid the child's dress which she had been mending upon the little oblong candle-stand that held her lamp, and put a shovelful of coal on the grate of her little cooking-stove. Then she took a tea-kettle bright as silver from the stove, and went into a closet room at hand, where you could hear the clink of thin ice as it flowed from the water-pail into the tea-kettle.

When Mrs. Chester entered the room again with the kettle in her hand, a soft glow was on her cheek, and it would be difficult to imagine a lovelier or more cheerful face than hers. You could see by the rising color and the sweet expression of her mouth, that her heart was beginning to beat in a sort of fond tumult, as the time of her husband's return drew near. The fire was darting in a thousand bright flashes, through the black mass that had just been cast upon it, shooting out here and there a gleam of gold on the polished blackness of the stove, and curling up in little prismatic eddies around the tea-kettle as she placed it on the grate. The lamp, clean and bright as crystal could be made, was urged to a more brilliant flame by the point of her scissors, and then with another glance at the clock, the pretty housekeeper sat down in her chair again, and with one finely-shaped foot laced in its trim gaiter resting upon the stove hearth, she began to rock to and fro just far enough to try the spring of her ankle, without, however, once removing her boot from its pressure on the hearth.

"In twenty minutes more," she said aloud, lifting her fine eyes to the dial with a smile that told how impatiently she was coquetting with the time. "In twenty minutes. There, one has gone--another--five!--so now I may go to work in earnest."

She started up as if it delighted her to be in a hurry, and rolling up the child's frock removed it with a little work basket to the table. Then she spread a spotless cloth upon the stand, smoothing it lightly about the edges with both hands, and opening a little cupboard where you might have caught glimpses of a tea-set, all of snow-white china, and six bright silver spoons in a tumbler, spread out like a fan, with various other neat and useful things, part of

which she busily transferred to the stand.

By the time her little supper table was ready, the kettle began to throw up a cloud of steam from its bright spout. A soft, mellow hum arose with it, rushing out louder and louder, like an imprisoned bird carousing in the vapor. The fire glowed up around it red, and cheerfully throwing its light in a golden circle on the carpet, the stand, and on the placid face of Jane Chester as she knelt before the grate, holding a slice of bread before the coals, now a little nearer, then further off, that every inch of the white surface might be equally browned.

When everything was ready--the plate of toast neatly buttered--the tea put to soak in the drollest little china tea-pot you ever set eyes on, old fashioned, but bearing in every painted rose that clustered around it the most convincing evidence that Mrs. Chester must at least have had a grand mother--when all was ready, and while Mrs. Chester stood by the little supper stand pondering in her mind if anything had been omitted, she heard the turn of her husband's latchkey in the door.

"Just in time," she said, with one of those smiles which one never sees in perfect beauty away from home.

But as she leaned her head gently on one side to listen, the smile left her face. There was something heavy and unnatural in her husband's tread that troubled her. She was turning toward the door, when Chester opened it and entered the room with his overcoat off, and bearing in his arms a mysterious burden.

"Why, Chester, how is this?--the night so cold, and your forehead all in a perspiration. What is this wrapped in your coat?"

As Mrs. Chester spoke, her husband sat down near the door, still holding the child. She took off his hat and touched her lips to his damp forehead, while he gently opened his overcoat and revealed the little thin face upon his bosom.

"See here, Jane, it is a poor little girl I found in the street freezing to death."

"Poor thing! poor little creature!" said Mrs. Chester, filled with compassion, as she encountered the glance of the great wild eyes that seemed to illuminate the whole of that miserable face, "here, let her sit in the rocking-chair close up to the fire--dear me!"

This last exclamation broke from Mrs. Chester, as she drew the great coat from around the child, and saw how miserably she was clad; but checking her astonishment, she placed her guest in the rocking-chair, took off the old cloak, and was soon kneeling on the carpet holding a saucer of warm tea to the pale lips of the child.

"Give me a piece of the toast, John," she said, holding the saucer

in one hand, and reaching forth the other towards her husband, who had seated himself at the supper table. "This is all she wants--a good fire and something to eat. Please pour out your own tea, while I take care of her. She hasn't had a good warm drink before, this long time, I dare say--have you, little girl?"

"No," said the child, faintly, "I never tasted anything so good as that before in my life."

Mrs. Chester laughed, and the tears came into her eyes.

"Poor thing! it is only because she is starved, that this tea and toast seem so delicious," she said, looking at her husband; "a small piece more. I must be careful, you know, John, and not give her too much at once," and breaking off what she deemed a scant portion of the toast, the kind woman gave it into the eager hands of the child.

The little girl swallowed the morsel of toast greedily, and held out her hand again.

Mrs. Chester shook her head and smiled through the tears that filled her eyes. A look of meek self-denial settled on the child's face. She dropped her hand, drew a deep breath, and tried to be content; but in spite of herself, those strange eyes wandered toward the food with intense craving.

"No," said Chester, answering the appealing glance of his wife, "it might do harm."

The little girl gently closed her eyes, and thus shut out the sight of food.

"Are you sleepy?" said Mrs. Chester.

"No," replied the child, almost with a sob. "I only would rather not look that way; it makes me long for another piece."

Tears gushed through her black eyelashes as she spoke, and rolled down her cheek.

"Wait a little while. In an hour--shall I say an hour, John?" said Mrs. Chester, deeply moved.

Chester nodded his head; he did not like to trust his voice just then.

"Well," said the generous woman; "in an hour you shall have something more; a cake, perhaps, and a cup of warm milk."

The child opened her eyes, and through their humid lashes flashed a gleam that made Mrs. Chester's heart thrill.

"Now," she said, rising cheerfully, "we must make up some sort of a nest for the little creature. Let me see, the bolster and pillows

from our bed, with a thick blanket folded under them, and four chairs for a bedstead; that will do very nicely. You remember, Chester, when our Isabel was ill, she fancied that sort of bed before anything. Would you like to sleep that way, my dear?"

"I don't know, ma'am; I ain't used to sleeping in a bed, lately," faltered the little girl, bewildered by all the gentle kindness that she was receiving.

"Not used to sleeping in a bed!" cried Mrs. Chester, looking at her husband; "just fancy our Isabel saying that, Chester."

And with fresh tears in her eyes the gentle housewife proceeded to make up the temporary couch, which she had so ingeniously contrived for her little beggar-guest. She entered her bed-room for the pillows. The light in her hand shed its beams full upon a little girl, whose long raven curls lay in masses over the pillow, and down upon her night-dress, till they were lost among the bed-clothes. The child might be ten years of age, and nothing more beautiful could well be imagined than the sweet and oval cast of her countenance. Color soft and rich as the downy side of a peach, bloomed upon her cheek, which rested against the palm of one plump little hand. Her chin was dimpled, and around her pretty mouth lay a soft smile that just parted its redness, as the too ardent sunbeam cleaves open a cherry.

"Isabel, bless the darling," murmured Mrs. Chester, as she bent over her child, passing one hand under her beautiful head very carefully, that her fingers might not get entangled in those rich tresses and thus arouse the little sleeper.

She gently removed the pillow, and permitting the head to fall softly back, stole away. The child murmured in her sleep, and feeling the change of position, turned indolently. One hand and a portion of her tresses fell over the side of the bed, her curls sweeping downward half-way to the floor. When Mrs. Chester returned she found her child in this position, partly out of bed, and with the quilt thrown back. With a kiss and a murmured thanksgiving for the rosy health so visible in that sleeping form, the happy mother covered up those little white shoulders.

The little miserable child seemingly about her own daughter's age, sat in the rocking-chair, following her with those singular eyes and with that wan smile upon her lips. The contrast was too striking--her own child so luxuriant in health and beauty--that little homeless being with cheeks so thin and eyes so full of intelligence. It seemed to her that moment as if the fate of these two children would be jostled together--as if they, so unlike, would travel the same path and suffer with each other. Nothing could be more improbable than this; but it was a passing thought, full of pain, which the mother could not readily fling from her heart. For a moment it made her breathe quick, and she sat down gazing upon the strange child as if fascinated, holding the warm hand of Isabel with both of hers.

Chester wondered at the stillness and called to his wife. She came forth looking rather sad, but soon arranged the pillows, the blankets and snowy sheets, which she brought with her, into a most inviting little nest in one corner of the room. The little stranger watched her earnestly, with a wan smile playing about her mouth.

Mrs. Chester saw that the strange child, though thinly clad, was clean in her attire, and that some rents in her old calico frock had been neatly mended.

"What is your name?" she said, gently taking the child's hand and drawing her into the bed-room, "we have not asked your name yet, little girl."

"Mary Fuller, that is my name ma'am," replied the child, in her sweet, low voice.

"And have you got a mother?"

"I don't know," faltered the child, and a spot of crimson sprang into her pinched cheek.

"Don't know!"

"Please not to ask me about it," said the child, meekly. "I don't like to talk about my mother."

"But your father," said Mrs. Chester, remarking the color that glowed with such unnatural brightness on the child's face with a thrill of pain, for it seemed to her as if a corpse had blushed.

"My father! Oh, he is dead."

The color instantly went out from her cheek, like a flash of fire suddenly extinguished there, and the child clasped her hands in a sort of thoughtful ecstasy, as if the mention of her father's name had lifted her soul to a communion with the dead.

Mrs. Chester sat down by a bureau, and searched for one of Isabel's night-gowns in the drawer, now and then casting wistful glances on her singular guest.

"Come," she said, gently, after a few minutes had elapsed, "let me take off your frock, then say your prayers and go to bed."

"I have said my prayers," replied the child, lifting her eyes with a look that thrilled through and through Mrs. Chester. "When I think of my father, then I always say the prayers that he taught me, over in my heart."

"Then you loved your father?"

"Loved him!" replied the child, with a look of touching despondency.

"My dear dead father--did you ask me if I loved him? What else in the wide, wide world had I to love?"

"Your mother," said Mrs. Chester.

That flush of crimson shot over the child's face again, and bowing her head with a look of the keenest anguish, she faltered out,

"My mother!"

"Well, my poor child," said Mrs. Chester, compassionating the strange feeling whose source she could only guess at, "I will not ask any more questions to-night. Keep up a good heart. You are almost an orphan, and God takes care of little orphans, you know."

"Oh, yes, God will take care of me," answered the child, turning her large eyes downward upon her person, with a look that said more plainly than words, "helpless and ugly as I am."

"It is the helpless--it is children whom our Saviour--you know about our Saviour?"

"Oh, yes, I know."

"Well, it was such little helpless creatures as you are whom our Saviour meant, when he said, 'Of such is the kingdom of Heaven.'"

"Yes, such as I am, ma'am."

The child again glanced at her person, and then with a look of tearful humility at Mrs. Chester.

Mrs. Chester bent over the drawer she was searching, to conceal her tears; there was something strangely pathetic in the child's looks and words.

"I thought," said the child, lifting her face and pointing to little Isabel, with a look of thrilling admiration, "I thought when I came in here, that Heaven must be full of little children like her."

"And why like her?"

"Because she looks in her sleep like the picture which I have seen of Heaven, where beautiful, curly-headed children just like her, lie dreaming on the clouds."

"Then you think she is like those little angels?" said Mrs. Chester, unable to suppress a feeling of maternal pride, and smiling through her tears as she gazed on her daughter's beauty.

"I never saw an ugly little girl in those pictures in my whole life, and I have looked for one a great many times," said the child, sadly.

"Yes, but these pictures are only according to the artist's fancy--they are not the real Heaven."

"I know; but then those who make these pictures do not so much as fancy a little girl like--like me, among the angels."

"But I can fancy them there," said Mrs. Chester, carried away by the strange language of the child--"remember, little girl, that it is our souls--the spirit that makes us love and think--which God takes home to Heaven."

"I know," said the little girl, shaking her head with a mournful smile, "but she would not like to leave all those curls and that red upon her mouth behind her, would she?"

Mrs. Chester shook her head and tried to smile; the child puzzled her with these singular questions.

"And I--I should not like either, to leave my body behind!"

"Indeed--why not, little girl?" said Mrs. Chester, amazed.

"Oh, we have suffered so much together, my soul and this poor body!" replied the child, sadly.

"This is all very strange and very mournful," murmured Mrs. Chester, deeply moved. But she checked herself, and drawing the child toward her, began to untie her dress. A faint exclamation of surprise and pity broke from her lips as she loosened the garment and observed that it was the only one which the little creature had on.

"Oh, this is destitution," she said, covering her eyes with one hand as little Mary crouched down and put on the nightdress. "What if she, my own child, were left thus,"--and dashing aside her tears, Mrs. Chester went to the bed and covered the little Isabel with kisses.

The strange child stood by in her long night-gown. A smile of singular pleasure lay about her mouth as she attempted with her little pale hands to arrange the plaited ruffles around her neck and bosom. Drawing close to Mrs. Chester, she took hold of her dress, and looked earnestly in her face. Mrs. Chester turned away her head; her lips were yet tremulous with the caresses which she had bestowed upon her child; and it seemed as if those large eyes reproached her.

"You are cold," she said, looking down upon the child.

"No, ma'am."

"Well, what is it you want--the milk I promised you?"

"No, not that. I will give up the milk, if you will only--only"--

"Only what, child?"

"If you will only kiss my forehead just once as you kissed hers," answered the child. And after one yearning look, her head drooped upon her bosom. She seemed completely overpowered by her own boldness.

Mrs. Chester stood gazing on her in silent surprise. There was something in the request that startled and pained her. Here stood a poor, miserable orphan, begging with a voice of unutterable desolation for a few moments of that affection which she saw profusely lavished upon a happier child. Her silence seemed to strike the little girl with terror. She lifted her eyes with a look of humble deprecation, and said:

"Nobody has kissed me since my father died!"

Mrs. Chester conquered the repugnance, that spite of herself arose in her heart, at the thought of chilling the lips yet warm from the rosy mouth of her child, by contact with anything less dear, and bending down, she pressed a tremulous kiss upon the uplifted forehead of the little stranger.

Mary drew an uneven breath; an expression of exquisite content spread over her face, and giving her hand to Mrs. Chester, she allowed herself to be lead toward the pretty couch, made up so temptingly in a corner of the outer room.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MIDNIGHT CONSULTATION

Oh, it is hard for rich men in their pride,
To know how dear a thing it is to give;
When, for sweet charity, the poor divide
The little pittance upon which they live,
And from their scanty comforts take a share,
To save a wretched brother from despair.

Chester was sitting by the fire, and a serious expression settled on his features--he was pondering over the events of the evening; his mind reverting constantly in spite of himself to the conversation which he had held with the Mayor. Like most excitable persons, he found, on reviving his own words, much to regret in them. His impulse had been kind, his intention good, but notwithstanding this, he was compelled to admit that his entrance into the Mayor's house must have seemed singular and his words imprudent. Both were certainly justified by the occasion. Still, Chester felt that he had made an enemy of one who had the power to injure him deeply, and this thought gave a serious cast to his features.

Jane Chester had put her little charge to bed. She now drew a chair close to her husband, and placed her hand upon his.

"You are tired, John," she said. "You seem worn out. Has anything gone wrong that you look so grave?"

"I fear, Jane," said Chester, turning his eyes upon the benign face of his wife, with a look of anxious affection; "I fear that I have not acted in the wisest manner to-night--by a few rash words I may have made an enemy."

"An enemy, and of whom?" inquired the wife, entering as she always did, heart and soul, into any subject that disturbed her husband.

Seeing her look of anxiety, Chester told her of his interview with the Mayor, and the rash words which he had used regarding the little girl. As Jane Chester listened, the anxious expression on her face gave way to a glow of generous indignation.

"Why, what else could you have done with the poor little thing in that dreadful state, and the station-house so far off? Surely, the Mayor deserved all that you said and more--he must be conscious of this, and glad enough to forget it."

"I don't know," said Chester, thoughtfully; "I should think him capable of anything, but a frank and honest feeling of forgiveness."

"Well," said Jane Chester, hopefully, "we must not anticipate evil in this way. Let the Mayor be ever so angry, he really has no power to harm us. You can only be broken for bad conduct, and there we can defy him, you know."

Chester smiled, but more at the trust and exulting love that beamed in his wife's face, than from any confidence excited by her words. He had relieved his mind by this little confidential chat, and made an effort to be cheerful again.

Mrs. Chester turned and glanced toward the bed where her little guest lay quite still, and to all appearance asleep. She looked so comfortable in her snow-white gown and the little cap of spotted muslin, with its border of cheap lace falling softly around the high forehead and hollow temples, that Mrs. Chester could not help smiling.

"How contented she looks," murmured the happy wife, pressing her husband's hand, and thus drawing his attention toward the little bed. "Did you ever see such a change in your life?"

"She does sleep very quietly and looks almost pretty, now that she is comfortable and quiet. You are pleased that I brought her home, Jane?"

"Pleased, why yes, of course I am pleased, but then this is only for one night, John. What will become of her to-morrow?" and Mrs. Chester

looked with a sort of pleading earnestness into her husband's face, as if she had something on her mind which he might not quite sanction.

"I know--it was that partly which made me a little downhearted just now. It will be hard for her to go away to-morrow--she will feel it very much after you have made her so snug and comfortable."

"But why send her away?" said Mrs. Chester softly, as if she were proposing something very wrong, only that her eyes were brim full of kindness, and a world of gentle persuasion lay in the smile with which she met his surprised look--it was a smile of audacious benevolence, if we may use the term.

"If we could afford it," said Chester, heaving a sigh; "but no--no, Jane, we must not think of this, remember I am in debt still. Let us be just before we are charitable. We have no right to give while we owe a cent which is not yet earned."

The smile left Jane Chester's face--she sighed and looked gravely in the fire; this view of the matter dampened her spirits. After a little her face brightened up.

"Well, John, I suppose you are right, but then what if I manage to keep the child, and save just as much as usual at the end of the week? then it would be my own little charity, you know."

"But how can you manage that, Jane?"

"Well, now, promise to let me have my own way--just promise that before we go another step--and I will manage it; you shall see."

Chester shook his head, and was about to speak, but his wife rose just then half leaning on his chair, her arm somehow got around his neck, and bending her red lips close to his cheek she raised the only hand that was disengaged and folded the fingers over his mouth.

"Not a word, John--not a word; only promise to let me have my own way--I will have it--you know that well enough!"

"Well," said Chester, laughing, and trying to speak through the fingers that held his lips, "well, go on--I promise--only don't quite stop my breath!"

"Very well," said Jane Chester, removing her hand, and clasping it with the other that fell over his shoulder; "now you shall hear."

"With our little family, you know, I have a great deal of spare time."

"I don't know any such thing, Jane--you are always at work."

"Oh, yes, stitching your shirt-bosoms in plaits so fine that nobody can see them; ruffling Isabel's pantalets, and knitting lace to trim morning-gowns and frocks--but what does that amount to?"

"Why, nothing, only you and Isabel always look so pretty and lady-like with these things."

"Very well--but does all this stitching and so on, help to pay your debts?"

"No, perhaps not; but then it pleases me--it sends us into the world well dressed, and"--

"Gratifies your pride a little, hey!" said Mrs. Chester, interrupting him. "Very well, this shall not be all my own charity. You and Isabel shall help--we will all adopt the little girl."

"Well, what do you mean--what would you be at?"

"Why, just this--all the extra work that occupies me so much, we must do without; you shall be content with clean white linen, and Isabel's frocks and things must go with less trimming--she is pretty enough without them, you know--then I can take in sewing, and earn enough to pay for what the poor little thing will eat. Perhaps she knows how to sew a little; at any rate, she and Isabel will be handy about the house, and give me more time. There, now, isn't my plan a good one? after all, I shall only do about the same work as ever. You and Isabel will make all the sacrifices."

"I'm afraid not," replied Chester, drawing his wife towards him and kissing her forehead; "but we shall make some, for I have often thought how dreadful it would be to have you--so pretty, so well educated--obliged to go round from shop to shop inquiring for work; and have felt with some pride, perhaps, that while I lived you should never come to this."

"But," said Mrs. Chester, with animation, "if we had no other way--if Isabel were crying for bread, then you would not object--you would give up this feeling of pride--for after all, it is only that."

"No, it is something more than pride, Jane," said Chester, tenderly. "I love to feel that your comforts are all earned by my own strength; that I am soul and body your protector; were I able, you should never soil these hands with labor again!"

Mrs. Chester lifted the hand which she held to her lips, and her eyes beamed with joy through the tears that filled them.

"I know all this, John, and it makes me love you! oh, how dearly; but then it is wrong--very, very delightful, but still wrong."

"Why wrong, Jane, I cannot understand that?"

"Wrong--why because it might, if I were only selfish enough to take advantage of your tenderness, make me a very useless, gossiping, idle sort of person."

"You would never come to that, Jane."

"No, I should not like to become one of those worthless drones in the great hive of human life, who exist daintily on their husbands' energies, making him the slave of capricious wants that would never arise but for the idea that it is refined and feminine to be useless. I would be a wife; a companion; a help to my husband."

"And so you are, all these and more," said Chester, gazing with delight on her animated face. "God bless you, Jane, for you have been to me a noble and a true wife."

"Well, then, of course I am to have my own way now. This poor child, I shall not mind in the least asking about work, when it is for her."

"But the shopkeepers, they will not know why you do this."

"Well, what need I care for them?"

"They will think you have a very shiftless, or perhaps dissipated husband, who obliges you to go about among them begging for work."

"No--no, these miseries are not written in my face, John, they will never think that of me."

"Or a widow, perhaps!" rejoined Chester, with a faint smile.

"Don't talk in that way," and Mrs. Chester's eyes filled with tears. "A widow--your widow--I should never live to be that. The very thought makes my heart stand still. With you I can do anything--but alone--a widow--John, never mention that word again!"

Chester drew down his wife's head and kissed her cheek very tenderly, smoothing her bright tresses with his hand the while.

"Why you should learn to think of these things without so much terror, Jane," he said, in a voice full of tenderness, but still sad, as if some unconquerable presentiment were overshadowing him.

"No--no--I cannot! Talk of something else, John; the little girl, we have forgotten her."

The husband and wife both looked toward the couch. Mary had half risen, and with her elbow resting on the pillow, was regarding them intently with her large and glittering eyes.

"We have disturbed her!" said Jane Chester. "How wide awake she is," and she went up to the couch.

"I could not help listening," said the child, falling back on the pillow as Jane came up. "Besides I want to say something. I can sew very nicely, and wash dishes, and sweep, and a great many other

things--if you will only let me stay!"

"You shall stay--now go to sleep--you shall stay. Is it not so, John?"
said Mrs. Chester turning to her husband.

"Yes," said Chester, "the child shall stay with us; let her go to sleep."

They all slept sweetly that night; Chester, his wife, little Isabel, and the orphan, and such dreams as they had--such soft, bright dreams. Could you have seen them slumbering beneath the humble roof, smiling tranquilly on their pillows, you might have fancied that those little rooms were swarming with invisible angels--spirits from paradise that had come down to make a little heaven of the poor man's home. Indeed, I am not quite sure that the idea would have been all fancy--for Charity, that brightest spirit of heaven, was there, and what a glorious troop she always brings in her train. Talk of flinging your bread upon the waters, waiting for it to be cast up after many days--why the very joy of casting the bread you have earned with your own strength upon the bright waves of humanity, is reward enough for the true heart.

CHAPTER V.

THE MAYOR AND THE ALDERMAN.

A smooth and subtle man was he--
Of crafty heart and Christian mien;
His wisdom--cheating sophistry,
Flung o'er his sins a mocking sheen.

Chester had business with the Chief of Police, and about nine o'clock the next morning, after his adventure with the orphan, he passed into the Park, through the south entrance, on his way to the Chief's office. At the same moment, his Honor the Mayor came through a gate near the corner of Chambers street, and walked with calm and stately deliberation toward the City Hall. Nothing could have been more precise or perfect than the outward man, which his honor exhibited to the gaze of his constituents. Neatly-fitting boots, square toed, and of the most elaborate manufacture, encased his feet. Not a speck defiled their high polish; the very dust and mud which introduces itself cosily into the habiliments of your common, warm hearted men, seemed to shrink away chilled and repulsed by the immaculate coldness that clung like an atmosphere around the Mayor of New York. The nap of his hat lay shining and smooth as satin; so deeply and thoroughly was it brushed down into the stock, that it seemed as if a whirlwind would have failed to ripple the fur. His black coat, his satin vest and plaited linen presented a glossy and spotless surface to the winter sun. His black gloves--in New York we have a great many public

funerals, and the city supplies mourning gloves to the Common Council--his black gloves were neatly buttoned, and above them lay his snow-white wristbands, folded carefully over the cuffs of his coat, and his right hand grasped a prudish-looking cane which seemed part and parcel of the man.

A sublime picture of official dignity was the Mayor as he crossed the Park that morning. An expression of bland courtesy lay upon his features; all the proprieties of life were elaborated in his slightest movement. Nothing, save heart and principle, was lacking that could ensure popularity; but this deficiency, if it does not render a man absolutely unpopular, chills all enthusiasm regarding him.

A man must possess fire in himself before he can kindle up the electricity that thrills the great popular heart. With all his propriety--with all his silky and subtle efforts, our Mayor was generally regarded with indifference. He was neither loved nor hated sufficiently for the populace to know or care much about him. Oily Gammon himself could not have presented a more perfect surface to the people. Still this man could hate like an Indian and sting like a viper. You would not have doubted that, had you seen him when he first encountered Chester in the Park. There was a glitter in his eye which you could not have mistaken. During the moment when he saw Chester turning an angle of the City Hall, this flash came and went, leaving his face unmoved as before, only that he almost smiled as the policeman drew near.

"And how is your little charge this morning?" inquired his honor, pausing in the walk where it curves to the back entrance of the City Hall. "Better, I hope?"

"Oh, yes, sir, much better," answered Chester with generous warmth. "I thank your honor for inquiring."

"I suppose you are going to the Alms House Commissioner," rejoined the Mayor, glancing toward the old building which ran along Chambers street, where many of the public offices were held; "she will be well cared for at Bellevue."

Chester blushed as if he were confessing some fraud, and answered with embarrassment that the little girl would remain with him, at least for the present.

The Mayor looked perfectly satisfied with the answer, bowed and walked forward. On his way up the steps and along the lobby, he occasionally saluted some lawyer that plunged by him with a load of calf-bound volumes pressed ostentatiously under his arm, and paused once or twice to exchange words with a street inspector or petty official, who formed the small wires of his political machinery.

The Mayor spent half an hour in his private office, closeted with his chief clerk, who had been busy over night preparing a speech which his honor was to deliver before some distinguished city guest the

next day. In these matters the chief magistrate proved rather hard to please, as he was fond of high-sounding words and poetical ideas, but found them very difficult to commit to memory.

In this case the clerk had done wonders, and taking a copy for study, his honor disposed himself in the great easy-chair of his private room, with the manuscript before him, as if profoundly occupied with some intricate law opinion, and commenced the arduous task of committing the ideas of a better cultivated mind to his own sterile brain. While he was thus occupied, a man entered with a good-humored, blustering air, and threw himself into a seat by the fire, carelessly shaking the Mayor's hand as he passed, as if quite certain of a good reception at all times.

"Busy making out a new veto case, I dare say?" observed the visitor, glancing at the sheet of manuscript which his honor held.

The Mayor folded up his unlearned speech, and turning quietly in his seat, dropped into a desultory conversation with this man about city matters, talking in a circle, and gradually drawing toward the subject which he had at heart, till it seemed to drop in quite by accident.

"Speaking of policemen," said the Mayor, "there is a man in our ward, Alderman, whom I have heard of very often, lately, a tall, gentlemanly sort of a fellow--Chester, I think that is his name. Do you happen to know anything about him?"

"Chester--Chester--yes, I should think so. A fellow that reads like a minister and writes like a clerk; he is a perfect nuisance in the ward. You have no idea what mischief he does with his gentlemanly airs."

"What! a strong politician is he?"

"I hardly know; but he is not one of us, that is certain."

"It is due to the party--the fellow ought to be removed," said the Mayor. "I wonder some one has never preferred charges against him."

"Plenty of our people have been lying in wait for him, but he is not to be trapped; he understands all the rules, and lives up to them. Never drinks--is always respectful--appears on his beat punctual as a clock. In short, it is a hopeless case."

"Then it must be a very singular one," said the Mayor, with a meaning smile. "Is there no good friend of your own who would be glad of the situation?"

"Oh, yes--one to whom I have made a half promise, but we can get no hold on this Chester, he will baffle us, depend on it."

"Perhaps not. Let your friend, who is waiting for the situation, continue vigilant. If he is keen-sighted, his evidence will have

weight with me."

Our Alderman looked hard at the Mayor, somewhat doubtful if he understood the whole meaning conveyed, more in the glance than in the words of that honorable gentleman, who saw his perplexity and spoke again.

"You know, my dear friend, how far I would strain a point to serve you, but there must be some evidence--something, however slight, you understand--which can be readily obtained against any man."

The Mayor saw by the smile that disturbed the lip of his friend, that he was at length thoroughly understood.

"You know that there is no appeal from my decision," he added, with a smile, "and I decide alone!"

"I comprehend," replied the Alderman, standing up and rubbing his palms pleasantly together. "This is very kind of you, very kind, indeed. I shall not forget it."

"I think your friend may be sure of his situation," was the amiable reply; "you know it is our duty to watch these people well. I think your friend may deem himself secure."

"No doubt of it, now that we have a friend at court."

"Oh, not a word of that," said the Mayor, lifting his hand reprovingly, "everything must be in order, according to rule, you know."

The Mayor smiled, while his friend laughed outright, repeating to himself between each chuckle--"Oh, yes, according to rule, according to rule;" and eager to undertake his new enterprise, the elated Alderman took his leave, walking through the outer room with an exaggeration of his previous blustering importance, that quite astonished the clerks.

The Mayor looked after him with a bland smile, but when the worthy official was out of sight, the smile glided into a contemptuous sneer, and he muttered to himself--"The pompous blockhead, he is so easily cajoled that one scarcely feels a pleasure in using him."

With these characteristic words the noble-hearted magistrate betook himself to the manuscript again, certain that the wire he had pulled, would never cease to vibrate till poor Chester was ruined.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DRAM SHOP PLOT

The stars hang burning in the skies,
The earth gives back their diamond light,
Where like a radiant bride it lies
Reposing in that glorious night.

Again the night was intensely cold. There had been a storm of sleet and rain during two whole days, and now came on a keen frost, sheeting the pavements, the trees and the housetops with ice.

Chester was pacing his rounds, as on the first night when we presented him to the reader. Sometimes he paused to remark the delicate tracery of ice that hung in fretted masses over the gutters, or was frozen in waves along the curb-stones, or looked upwards to the tall trees that seemed absolutely dripping with light, as the moonbeams streamed over them, while the gas from the street lanterns sent up golden gleams through the lower branches and along the glittering trunks.

Intensely cold as the night was, Chester could not resist that exquisite sense of the beautiful, which objects so novel and picturesque were sure to excite in his imaginative mind. There was something so purely ideal in those massive branches, stripped of leaves and laden down with crystalline spray, while the wind swayed them heavily about, and the moonlight flooded them through and through, that even a duller man than Chester must have paused to admire.

Through the glittering arcade--for along the rich man's district the trees grew thick and high--Chester could see the bright winter stars shining, and the deep blue Heavens slumbering afar off, while with folded arms and eyes uplifted he paced along the street, forgetful, for the time, that the night was so cold, or that his own frame was yet too feeble for unnecessary exposure.

In going to the poor man's district, Chester was obliged to pass one of those majestic old elms which our forefathers planted, still to be found here and there scattered over the great city. This elm stood on a corner, and beneath its great pendent branches a small dram-shop desecrated the soil which gave nourishment to the brave old forest tree. This was the squalid object that fell upon Chester's gaze as he glanced reluctantly from those long pendent branches, flashing and shivering as it were with a fruitage of diamonds, to the dull and dirty windows.

The dram-shop seemed to be full, for he could see the shadows of several men passing to and fro behind the murky windows, and when the door opened to let out a woman, who passed him with a small pitcher in her hand, he saw that many others were left within the building. There was something startling in the contrast between the sublime beauty of the sky and the vice hovel underneath, and Chester stopped to gaze on it, pondering in his thoughts how it was that men, upright and honorable in other things, should ever become so lost

to all sense of humanity, as to legalize the vicious traffic which this old elm, rising so nobly and so free against the sky, was obliged to shelter.

As these thoughts occupied his mind, two men came out of the store, arm in arm, and passed the place where he was standing. One of the men looked keenly at him as he went by, but Chester scarcely observed him, and remained as before, with his mind wholly engrossed.

"It is he!" said one of the men to his companion, "and looking toward the corner, as if it would not be a hard job to get him in."

"Hush! he will hear you," replied the other. "Let us walk round the block and go in from the other street; he will not know us again!"

"If we could but get him in for once, just long enough to taste one glass, that would settle his business," was the rejoinder. "Move slower, and let us talk it over. Jones will go in with us through thick and thin, for the fellow has hurt his business more than a little, reformed a great many of his best customers, and persuaded others to be off. We shall find Jones ready for anything."

The two men walked forward, feeling their way along the slippery sidewalk, and conversing earnestly until they reached the dram-shop again.

Chester was still there, pondering the ideas of blended pleasure and pain, which the scene had presented to him with unusual force that evening. The dram-shop had opened two or three times while he was standing there, and when the two men passed in he saw without closely observing them.

At length, he was about to move forward, when the shop, that had been up to that time remarkably quiet, became a scene of some strange tumult. Three or four persons left abruptly, and the sound of loud, angry voices reached him through the door whenever it was flung open to allow persons to pass out. After a few minutes there came running across the street a little boy, who seemed quite breathless with haste and terror.

"Oh! you are a policeman, sir; I am so glad, pray come with me!" he cried, seizing hold of Chester's coat. "They are quarreling--two men are quarreling in there, and one of them has a knife drawn."

Chester hastened across the street, for the angry voices were becoming louder, and there really seemed to be some danger threatened. He entered the store, and to his surprise, found only two persons present, besides the owner, who stood back of a little imitation marble counter with his arms folded, evidently enjoying a scene of altercation that was carried on, it appeared, with some effort between his guests; for as one of the men was thrown back against the counter in the scuffle, he merely circled two or three half empty decanters with his arm, and laughingly told them not to interfere with their

best friends; then throwing half his weight upon the counter again, he seemed to enter heart and soul into the dispute.

"There, there," said the owner, rising as Chester came in, "we have had enough of this--here is the police. Give up, give up, both of you. Shake hands and take a drink--that is the way to settle these little matters. Come, Mr. Policeman, help me to pacify these two hot-heads; what do you say to my recommendation, brandy and water all round?"

"That would be the last thing that I should recommend," said Chester, speaking in his usual bland and gentlemanly manner. "These two persons, I doubt not, will listen to the reason without firing up their blood with more strong drink."

"With more strong drink!" cried one of the men, laughing rudely as he cast his antagonist carelessly from him; "why we haven't had a drop yet. It was thirst, sheer thirst that made us both so savage. Come, Smith, here is my hand. Let us drink and make up."

The man thus addressed rose from the cask against which he had been thrown, and suddenly took the offered hand of his antagonist.

Chester saw that the quarrel, if it ever had been serious, was now at an end, and turned to leave the store; but Jones, the owner, followed him with an anxious face, and whispered that it was only fear of the police that had so suddenly quieted the men, and besought him not to withdraw till they were ready to leave the establishment. Chester turned back; both the place and company were repugnant to him, but it was his duty to remain, and he sat down regarding the two men as they drank at the counter, boisterously knocking their glasses together in token of renewed fellowship.

"Come, Mr. Policeman, take a glass," said Smith, who all the while had been the most noisy. "You look pale as a ghost," and the man took a glass half full of brandy and brought it to the stove by which Chester had drawn his chair.

Chester did indeed look pale, for coming out of the clear night into a room heated to suffocation by a close stove, and redolent with the mingled fumes of tobacco smoke and alcohol, the atmosphere oppressed him with a sickening sensation; his head began to reel, and he sat unsteadily in his chair. Thus oppressed, he reached forth his hand and lifted the glass to his lips. The scent of its contents, however, warned him; he arose without tasting the brandy, and placed it on the counter. Just then two or three persons came in from the street. Jones and Smith exchanged triumphant glances, and Chester sat down again, supporting his forehead upon one hand, sickened with the heat, and becoming each moment more pallid.

"Come," said Smith, at length addressing his companion, "let us go now, we can soon find a place where gentlemen can settle their disputes without being hunted down by the police!" and the two went

out.

Jones hastily came round the counter and addressed Chester.

"They will get up a street fight," he said, with great apparent anxiety. "Had you not better follow them?"

Chester arose with difficulty and left the store, scarcely conscious of his own movements, for he was still faint from the changed atmosphere. But the cold air revived him, and he walked on beneath the old elm, passing the two men, who stood on the curb-stone leaning against its trunk, apparently in excited conversation. The pavement all around was one glaze of ice, and Chester was obliged to guard his footsteps with great care, as he moved slowly forward. As he came near the two men, one of them put forth his foot, and Chester fell forward with a faint cry, striking his temples against the curb stone with a violence that sent the broken ice in a shower over his head.

"Halloo! here is a fallen star," cried Smith, lifting his voice. The dram-shop was flung open at the sound, and its owner came forth followed by several persons who had entered the place just as Chester left it.

They found the policeman stretched on the ice with the two men, who had been the cause of his mishap, bending over him with that jeering expression in their words and features, with which the coarse-minded usually meet accidents which result from intoxication.

Chester was much hurt, but he had lost no blood, so the bystanders turned away with a laugh, and he was left to the mercy of those two evil men.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BIRTH-DAY FESTIVAL.

Her soul was full of tender thought,
Ardent and strong but gentle, too,
Like gems, in purest gold o'er wrought,
Or flowers that banquet on the dew.
Love seemed more holy in her heart,
Than human passions ever are;
She took from Heaven its purest part,
And found on earth its sweetest care.

It was Chester's birth-day, always a season of bright joy in his little household. He had entirely recovered from the ill-effects of his fall upon the ice. The little stranger, instead of being a burden upon his narrow resources, became quite a help and comfort to them.

She had now been three weeks in the family, industrious as a bee, meekly cheerful, and with a sort of homely sweetness in her manner that won affection without effort. Never boisterous or obtrusive in her desire to please she moved about the house like some meek and good spirit, acting, not speaking, the soft gratitude with which her little heart was brimming over. You could see it in her large and humid eyes. You could feel it in the quick joy that came and went over her face, when any one asked a service of her. She seemed perfectly possessed of that most lovely of all earthly feelings, human gratitude; yet she uttered but few words, and was always too busy for extreme sadness.

Occupation, occupation!--what a glorious thing it is for the human heart. Those who work hard seldom yield themselves entirely up to fancied or real sorrow. When grief sits down, folds its hands, and mournfully feeds upon its own tears, weaving the dim shadows, that a little exertion might sweep away, into a funeral pall, the strong spirit is shorn of its might, and sorrow becomes our master. When troubles flow upon you, dark and heavy, toil not with the waves--wrestle not with the torrent!--rather seek, by occupation, to divert the dark waters that threaten to overwhelm you, into a thousand channels which the duties of life always present. Before you dream of it, those waters will fertilize the present, and give birth to fresh flowers that may brighten the future--flowers that will become pure and holy, in the sunshine which penetrates to the path of duty, in spite of every obstacle. Grief, after all, is but a selfish feeling, and most selfish is the man who yields himself to the indulgence of any passion which brings no joy to his fellow man.

If little Mary Fuller did not reason thus--poor thing, she was only twelve years old--she felt thus, and a good heart is, after all, your best philosopher.

She was grateful, and that sweet feeling is, in itself, almost a happiness. So, in her meekness and her industry, this little girl might have shamed the fortitude of many a stout man, for there are no sufferings so sharp as those that sting our childhood, and hers, both of soul and body, had been bitter indeed.

It would have done your heart good to witness the pleasant bustle going on in the policeman's dwelling on his birth-day. Mary Fuller entered into the preparations with delightful spirit. There was the kitchen table, spread out with currants and raisins, and boxes of sugar, and plates of butter--and there was Mrs. Chester, with the sleeves of her calico dress rolled up from her white arms, and her slender hands, all snowy with the flour she was measuring out in a tea-cup, while her sweet smiling lips were in motion as she counted off each cupful, now of sugar, now of fruit, and now of butter for the birth-day cake. There was little Isabel beating up eggs in a great China bowl, and laughing as she shook back her curls, that threatened every moment to drop into the snowy froth.

Down on a little seat by the stove, crouched Mary Fuller, with her lap full of black currants, looking so mild and tranquil as she gathered up the fruit, and allowed it to flow from one thin hand to the other, blowing away the dust with her mournful little mouth, and lifting up her eyes to Mrs. Chester now and then, with a look of such quiet and trusting affection.

And now Mrs. Chester lifted up the bright tin-pan half full of golden and fruit-studded paste between both her hands, with a satisfied and happy look. Mary Fuller quietly opened the stove door, and the precious cake was soon browning over, and rising in a soft cone, almost to the top of the oven. Every other instant Isabel would take a peep in, and thus fill the room with luscious fragrance, and Mary was full of curiosity, for the composition of a cake like that was quite a miracle to her, poor thing!

Then Mrs. Chester could not quite conceal her anxiety that Isabel might interrupt the baking by constantly opening the door. In short, you have no idea what an interest was felt in that birth-day cake. It kept them quite anxious and animated for a full hour.

Then all this suspense was followed by such delighted exclamations when the cake came out, done to a turn, so high, so delicately brown, and with a light golden fissure breaking through the warm swell, like the furrow in a hill-side, betraying the perfect lightness and spongy perfection at the centre--altogether, the whole thing was quite a household picture, a pleasant domestic scene, full of spirit and happiness.

But this was only a preliminary of the day's work. There was the frosting to put on, and there was a pair of plump little pullets waiting to be stuffed, and so many things to be done, that with bringing out little round wooden boxes and bright tin pans, and forks and spoons, and putting them up again, everything was kept in a state of pleasant excitement the whole day.

At nightfall it was perfectly surprising, the bower that lovely housewife and her children had made of the room. The muslin curtains were bordered with wreaths of evergreens; festoons of hemlock and feathery pine tufts fell along the snow-white wall. On a little shelf under the window, stood a bird cage sheltered by a miniature forest of tea-roses and ivy geraniums. The golden feathers of its inmate gleamed out beautifully from among the leaves and crimson flowers; for the genial warmth seemed to have brought all the buds into blossom at once, and there was a perfect flush of them among the glossy and deep green leaves.

As if quite conscious that there was a birth-day developing in all these cheerful preparations, the bird was in a joyous state of excitement, and seemed to enter, with all its little musical soul, into the spirit of the thing. Instead of going sleepily to his perch as the sun went down, he kept chirping about, hopping hither and thither, flinging off the husks from his seed on the bottom of the

cage, or standing on his perch with his head on one side, and eyeing the tea roses askance, as if questioning them regarding this unusual commotion. Then, as if satisfied with the blushing silence of the flowers, he would hop upon his perch and break into a gush of song that made the leaves around him tremble again, having, to all appearances, made up his birdly mind not to give up before midnight at the furthest.

Now everything was ready, save some petty arrangements of the table-top which were in a state of progression.

Mary Fuller, arrayed in a Marino dress, almost as good as new, and with her hair neatly braided, was busy with Isabel's curls, rolling their glossy blackness delightedly around her finger, and dropping them in shining masses over those dimpled shoulders, with far more exulting pride than the little beauty felt herself.

She was a lovely creature, that fair Isabel, more beautiful from contrast with the sallow child that bent over her. The pretty pink frock looped back from those snowy shoulders, with knots of ribbon, her embroidered pantalets peeping from beneath it, and those dainty little slippers on her feet--altogether, the two girls made a charming picture. The Canary stopped singing to watch them, giving out a chirp of admiration now and then, as if he approved of the whole thing, but did not care to make a scene about it.

At last, Mrs. Chester came forth, her cheeks all in a glow of blushes, for she was rather shy of appearing before her children in that pretty, white-muslin dress, fastened over the bosom with bows of pink ribbon, and with a belt of the same color girding her waist.

The girls started up with exclamations of delight, for this dress took them by surprise, and in order to get clear of her awkwardness, Mrs. Chester kissed them both, while the bird went off in a fit of musical enthusiasm quite astounding, hopping frantically about his cage and throwing off gushes of song till his golden throat seemed ready to burst with a flood of melody.

Mary Fuller stood, after the first outbreak of admiration, looking wistfully from her benefactress to the crimson roses. Her keen sense of the beautiful was excited.

"May I?" she said, softly bending down one of the crimson flowers.

Mrs. Chester smiled, and Mary broke off the half-open blossom.

"Please let _me_ put it in."

Again Mrs. Chester smiled, and sat down in her rocking chair, while Mary placed the rose among the snowy folds on her bosom, and Isabel hovered near, admiring the effect.

"Isn't she beautiful!" exclaimed Mary, gently exultant, standing back

to enjoy the contrast of the crimson leaves and the white muslin.

"Isn't she?" cried Isabel, in all the flush of her young beauty, "Isn't she, my own, dear, pretty mother?" and she held up her arms for an embrace.

Mary sighed very gently, for she thought of her mother.

And now four crystal lamps were lighted, two upon the mantel-piece, and two before the looking-glass, which of course made four by reflection, and a splendid illumination all this light made among the roses and evergreens.

There was nothing more to arrange, so Mrs. Chester returned to her rocking-chair. Isabel hung about her, sometimes with an arm around her neck, sometimes playing with the folds of her dress. After a little hesitation, Mary drew her stool to the other side and sat there, smiling softly and with her eyes brimful of contentment, as Mrs. Chester laid one hand kindly upon her head, while with the other she caressed the beautiful Isabel. Thus forming a group that might have served our inimitable Terry for a picture of Charity, Mrs. Chester waited for her company.

And for what company was all this preparation made?

In the third story of the house lived a poor artist, whose eyesight had become so dim, that he was only capable of doing the very coarsest work. Sometimes a theatrical scene, or a rude transparency gave him temporary support; but the little that he was able to do in this way could not have kept him free from debt, humble as his mode of life was, had he not possessed some other means of subsistence. His family consisted of an only son, apparently not more than eleven or twelve years of age. He was some years older than that, but the extreme sensitiveness of his character and ill health gave unusual delicacy to his appearance. A distant relative of the artist lived with these two as a housekeeper, and by her needle managed to contribute something toward the general support. The widow was not yet an old woman, but loneliness and poverty had exhausted the little cheerfulness of character that she once possessed. So pale and weary with toil, she lived on, centering all the hopes and energies of her dull life in the artist and his motherless boy, the object of his especial love.

This old man--this worn, tried woman, whose toil was so constant, and whose amusements were so few--and the delicate boy--these were the guests that Mrs. Chester expected. Even in her amusements she loved to blend the exquisite joy of charity. With every dainty prepared that day, she had given some gentle thought of the rare pleasure that it would bring to the old man and his family.

In the lower story of the house there was also a family, to whom Mrs. Chester had extended her invitation. It was her wish that every one sheltered under the roof with her husband should be as joyous and

happy as she was; but she entertained serious doubts whether this invitation would be accepted.

The man in the attic sometimes went an errand or carried in a load of wood, thus cheerfully earning a few shillings for the family at home. The man on the first floor kept a small thread-needle establishment. The difference was considerable, and the aristocratic pride of the man who sold needles, might revolt at the idea of sitting at the same table with the man who carried in wood.

Misgivings on this subject gave a slight shade of anxiety to Mrs. Chester's sweet countenance, as she sat waiting for her guests. She could just hear the two chickens that lay cosily, wing to wing, in the oven, simmering in their warm nest. The potatoes in a sauce-pan in front of the stove were slowly lifting up the lid and pouring their steam about the edges; and everything promised so well that she began to feel quite anxious that none of her invited guests should be absent.

There really was some cause for apprehension, for the thread-needle man stationed before the parlor grate below was that moment holding conjugal council with a tall, dark-featured woman, on the very subject which cast the one little shadow over Mrs. Chester's expectations. Dear to him, as the apple of his eye, was the pride of his station; but then the needle-merchant had members of the corporeal frame, petted and prompted till it was difficult to resist them. He loved his dignity much, but dignity was, after all, an abstraction, while in a good supper there was something substantial. He had returned home fully resolved not to accept Mrs. Chester's invitation, and in this his tall wife reluctantly concurred, though a black silk dress and a gay cap fluttering with straw-colored ribbons, revealed very plainly that her own inclinations had pointed the other way.

The Chesters were pleasant people, and she felt that it would be rather tantalizing to sit down stairs alone all the evening, while they enjoyed themselves heart and soul above.

When aristocracy is a matter of opinion, not of power, every man of course feels compelled to guard his claim to position with peculiar watchfulness; so with a benign conviction that he and his taller half had made a laudable sacrifice for the good of society, the little needle-merchant and his wife sat down together over a weak cup of tea, feeling rather miserable and disconsolate. They had no children; and a social evening away from home now and then, was a relief to the conjugal *tete-a-tetes*, which will sometimes become a little tiresome when married people have nothing but themselves to talk about.

While the worthy needle-merchant and his wife were sitting at the table the outer door opened, and a light, quick footstep sounded along the hall and ascended the stairs, seemingly two steps at a time. There was something so buoyant and cheerful in this springing footstep, that it quite aroused the needle-merchant, who got up and opening

the door carefully, peeped into the hall.

"It is Chester just coming home," he said, thrusting his rosy face through the opening. "How happy the fellow looks. Hark! here comes his wife to meet him all in white--upon my word she is a handsome woman--and here is the little girl bounding forward with her arms out--and, and--really, my dear, it is refreshing to hear a kiss like that."

Here the little man turned ardently back, and standing on his toes made a fruitless attempt to reach the tall lady's face with his little pursed-up mouth, which his better half resented with great dignity. "There, they have gone in now," continued the little man, going sheepishly to the door again. "They cannot have closed the door though--Laura--Laura! come here, is not this tantalizing?--turkey or chickens, one or the other, I stake my reputation upon it, and--hot--reeking with gravy and brown as a chestnut, nothing less could send forth this delicious scent. What do you say, Laura? Speak the word and I am half a mind to go up, notwithstanding the wood carrier!"

"You know he does other things. I dare say it is not often that he stoops to this!" said the wife brightening up and beginning to arrange her cap before the glass.

"Probably not--besides he really is a gentlemanly old fellow enough. I dare say he would not presume upon it if we did sit down with him for once."

"Not in the least," replied the wife, fastening a cameo pin, as large as the palm of her hand into the worked collar which she had just arranged about her neck. "It will be our fault if he does! You know it is easy to keep up a certain reserve, even at the same table!"

"Certainly--certainly--my dear, as you say, we can be with them and not of them. Just hand out my satin stock from that drawer and give my coat a dash with the hand brush!" and inhaling a deep breath, the little man reluctantly closed the door and began a hasty and vigorous toilet.

You never in your life saw a finer-looking fellow than Chester was that night as he kissed his wife, gave the beautiful Isabel a toss in the air, and patted little Mary on the head, all in the same minute.

"Why Jane, what a winter bower you have made of the room," he cried, his eyes sparkling with delight and surprise as he glanced at the evergreens, whose soft shadows were trembling like pencil-work on the walls. Why the very Canary seems all in a flutter of delight! Cake too, frosted like a snow-bank, and--here he opened the stove door, "have you been among the fairies, wife! I for one cannot tell where you raised the money for all this?"

"Oh, yes, we have been among the fairies, haven't we, little Mary," cried Mrs. Chester, delighted with her husband's spirits, "the Jew fairies that give out collars to stitch, and cloth caps to make."

Nothing but a tear breaking through the happy flash of John Chester's eyes, could have rendered them so full of joyous tenderness.

"And so you have done all this for me. You and the poor little angel? Why you must have worked night and day!--and Isabel, what portion of the work has my lady-bird done?" added the happy man, sitting down and placing the child on his knee.

"Oh, she has done a great deal!" said Mary in a low but eager voice, creeping to Chester's side. "You have no idea how very handy she is about the house, has he, Mrs. Chester?"

Mrs. Chester laughed and shook her head; but further than this she had no time to speak, for that moment the old man from up stairs came in, looking quite neat and gentlemanly in his black silk cravat, and his darned and well-brushed coat. He led by the hand a tall delicate boy with light brown hair and sad blue eyes; a smile seemed struggling with a look of habitual pain on his face. He sat down and glanced around, greeting Mary with a wan smile. The widow followed; her dress was poverty-stricken but very neat, and upon her face was a look of patient endurance, indescribably touching.

"I have invited them to supper," whispered Mrs. Chester to her husband. "They came so soon I had no time to tell you. The people down stairs, I expect them, too."

Chester comprehended it all in an instant. You would have thought by the way he placed chairs and shook hands with his guests, that he had been expecting them with the utmost impatience. His manner brought a cordial smile to the old man's lips, and even the face of the widow brightened with a pleasant glow.

"Let Joseph sit here," said Mary Fuller, rising from her stool with moist eyes, as she saw a spasm of pain pass over the lad's face. "Perhaps he would rather stay by me."

The boy lifted his blue eyes to her face, and his heart yearned toward one who bore such traces of having suffered like himself.

"I should be glad to sit by her," he said, appealing to his father. "She knows what it is."

The next instant his delicate hand was clasped within hers, and Mary was soothing him in a low voice that sounded like the whisper of an angel.

The table was spread, and the young fowls, plump with a rich load of dressing, were placed upon it.

These were supported by a fine oyster pie, plates of vegetables, blood red beets, and the greenest pickles, with a dish of cranberry sauce, while a bunch of golden green celery curled in crisp masses over the crystal goblet that occupied the centre of the table. The little candle-stand on one side, supported the fruit cake, all one crust of snowy sugar, with the most delicate little green wreath lying around the edge. Over all this the four lamps shed their light, which the looking-glass did its best to multiply. Indeed, nothing could be more perfect than the whole arrangement, except it might be the fullness of content which sparkled and shone over the face of everyone present.

Just as the company were all standing--for each guest had resigned a chair, which was placed by the table--the needle-merchant and his wife made their advent, arm in arm, all pompous with a sense of personal importance, and looking stiffly condescending as they bowed to the old gentleman and the widow.

But it was quite astonishing how soon the bustle of sitting down to supper, the cheerful faces and the fragrant steam that rose from the plump pullet as Chester thrust his fork into its bosom, seemed to soften down and carry off all their superfluous dignity. Before the little needle-merchant knew it, he found himself quite interested in the old man at his elbow, for after the ladies, Chester had helped the artist first, and on his plate was a choice morsel of the chicken's liver which made the little merchant's mouth water.

Now what does the old gentleman do but hand over this plate, with a bow, to his next neighbor, and so handsomely, too, that it was quite impossible for the little man to resist good fellowship a moment longer? As the coveted morsel melted away in his mouth, the pride fled from his heart, and in less than three minutes he was the most natural and happy person at the table. It was delightful to hear him complimenting Mrs. Chester, while he helped the children good naturedly, as if he had been the father of a large and uproarious family for years! Indeed, he was quite surprised at it himself afterward, but just then it seemed the most natural thing in the world.

There was room enough for all. There was pleasure for all. Even the suffering boy had sunshine in his eyes and smiles upon his mouth, as he lifted that delicate face to his widow friend; and for the first time in months, her pale cheeks grew red, and she met the boy's glance with a smile that did not threaten to be quenched in tears the next instant.

Mrs. Chester luxuriated in all this happiness as a flower brightens in the sunshine. She seemed to grow more beautiful every moment; the needle-merchant told her so. Chester only laughed, and his own wife did not frown, but glanced complacently down to her cameo breast-pin, feeling confident that there she could defy competition.

The supper was over, the table cleared away, and around the bright

stove they all gathered in a circle, chatting, laughing and telling stories. Here the old artist's talent came in play, and he made even the tall lady shake with merriment behind her broad cameo; and the gentle boy who had crept close to Mary Fuller again, was absolutely heard to laugh aloud, while Mary's smile was softer and sweeter than Isabel's shouts of merriment.

"I say," whispered Joseph to Mary Fuller, "how happy and bright father is--wouldn't it be pleasant if we could do something to make all the rest happy as he does?"

"But we don't know how, like him," answered Mary.

"I am worse than that, it makes people sad to look at me, but you have done something, I dare say, to help make them happy?"

"I helped get the supper and make that," said Mary, pointing to the birth-day cake which still lay glistening white beneath its wreath of evergreens.

"Ah, that was a great deal for you. Now what if I try a little? Bend down your head. I have a violin up stairs. Father bought it for me new year's day. It did not cost much, but there is music in it, and I have learned to play a little. Now I will just steal away and bring it down without letting them see me. Won't it astonish them to hear the music burst up all at once from our corner?"

The boy's eyes sparkled, and he seemed quite animated with his little plot.

"That will be pleasant," replied Mary, equally delighted with the idea. "Let me go! Where shall I find the violin?"

"In the corner cupboard--there is a little fire-light--you will not miss it," answered the lad, smiling gratefully.

Mary stole away and soon returned with the violin. She contrived to reach the boy without being seen, and the two sat close together, while he noiselessly tried the strings and fixed the bow.

There was a momentary hush in the conversation.

"Now!" whispered Mary, "now!"

The boy drew his bow, and such a burst of music poured from the strings, that even Mary started with astonishment.

"Ha, my son!" said the artist, "that was well thought of! now do your best!"

The boy answered only with a smile, but his slender fingers flew up and down on the strings, the bow flashed across them like lightning, and the apartment rung with music.

Spite of all its good resolutions, the Canary bird had gone to sleep, with its head under one wing, but with the first note of music it was all in a flutter of delight, and set up an opposition to the violin that threatened to rend its quivering little form in twain.

Isabel, light and graceful as the bird, sprang from her seat and began to waltz about the room, her curls floating in the air, and her cheeks bright as a ripe peach. She looked like a fairy excited by the music.

"Come, what if we all get up a dance?" said Chester, approaching the needle-merchant's wife.

She looked at her husband.

"A capital idea!" cried the little man, all in a glow, seizing upon the hand of the widow.

"Indeed, I--I--my dancing days are over," faltered the widow, half withdrawing her hand, but looking provokingly irresolute.

"Oh, aunty, let me see you dance once, only this once!" cried the boy, breaking the strain of his music.

The widow turned a look of tenderness upon her charge, and with a blush on her cheek was led to the floor.

"They want another couple--who will dance with me?" said Mrs. Chester, casting a smiling challenge at the old gentleman.

"Oh, father, do," cried the boy, "see, they cannot get along without you."

"I shall put you all out--I haven't taken a step in twenty years," pleaded the old man.

"Never mind, we will teach you--we will all teach you--so come along," broke from half a dozen voices, and Mrs. Chester laughingly took the old man captive, leading him to the floor with a look of playful triumph.

Isabel, after a vain effort to persuade Mary to join her, took a side by herself, quite capable of dancing enough for two at least.

Then the violin sent forth an air that kindled the blood even in that old man's veins. The dancers put themselves in motion--right and left--ladies' chain. It went off admirably. The old man was rather stiff and awkward at first, but the young folks soon broke him in and he turned, now the little girls then Mrs. Chester, and then the tall lady with the cameo; true she was on the side, but then the old gentleman was not particular, and his ladies' chain became rather an intricate affair at last, he added so many superfluous links to it.

But nothing could daunt him after he once got into the spirit of it, and he went through the whole like an old hero; the only difficulty was, he never knew when to stop.

Just in the height of the dance, when the needle-merchant was all in a glow, balancing to every lady, and getting up a sort of extemporaneous affair, made from old remembrances of "The Cheat" and "The Virginia Reel," the whole company stopped short, and he exclaimed--

"Bless my soul!"

And drawing forth a red silk handkerchief, he made a motion, as if his forehead wanted dusting.

"Bless my soul!" he repeated, "Laura, my dear, have the goodness to look, my love."

Mrs. Peters turned, and spite of her cameo defences, blushed guiltily.

"Dear me, my nephew, Frederick Farnham, who would have expected this?" she exclaimed, instantly assuming her dignity, and gliding from among the dancers.

"I couldn't help it, Aunt Peters, I know it is very impertinent for me to follow you up here, but how could you expect me to stay down yonder, with the floor trembling over head, and that violin--? I beg your pardon, sir," continued young Farnham, addressing Chester, "but the fact is, everything was so gloomy down stairs, and so brilliant; up here besides you left the door open as if you'd made up your mind to tempt a fellow into committing an impertinence."

"Don't think of it, there's no intrusion--my wife has found a birth-day, and is making the most of it," answered Chester, advancing toward the door with his hand frankly extended.

The youth stepped forward, and the light fell upon his face. His eyes lighted up splendidly as they fell on Chester.

"What, my fine fellow, is it you?" he said, with a dash of young Americanism that was only frank, not assuming, while Chester exclaimed--

"I'm glad to see you--heartily glad to see you--come in, come in."

"Allow me," said Mrs. Peters, with a stately wave of the hand, "Mr. Chester, allow me to present Mr. Frederick Farnham, my nephew, and only son of the Mayor of New York--Mrs. Chester, Mr. Farnham."

"Never mind all about that, aunt," said the boy, blushing at his pompous introduction, "this gentleman and I have met before--he knows my father."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Peters, coming out from his retirement, "I am delighted to hear it; nothing but this was wanting, my dear Chester. I'm charmed to have been found enjoying your hospitality. Laura, my dear, we are both charmed; my brother-in-law, the mayor, will be charmed also--in short, Fred, we are having a charming time of it."

"I'm sure of it," answered Fred Farnham, pressing his uncle, and looking earnestly at Mary Fuller till his face became quite serious, then, turning to Chester, he said in a low voice, "so you keep the poor girl; I'm glad of it--that was what brought me here."

No one had observed the artist while this interruption took place; but as the youth stepped into the light and spoke, a vertigo seized upon the old man, and staggering back to the wall he leaned against it, pale and with a wild expression in his eyes. When Mrs. Peters proclaimed the lad's name this strange agitation subsided somewhat and took a shade of sadness, as if some train of thought had been aroused that weighed down his spirits. He seemed to forget that his partner waited, and sat down by the window, sighing heavily.

Mrs. Chester remarked this forgetfulness, and with a graceful smile invited young Farnham to take the place which the old man had abandoned. Fred smiled his assent, and the dance went on again; but just as the young musician began to play, there came a knock at the street door. Isabel ran down to open it, and came back with a letter in her hand.

"It is for you, papa," she said, holding up the letter.

"Very well, put it on the mantel-piece. Some direction from the captain or chief, I suppose," said Chester. "Come, Isabel, take your place."

The little girl ran to her partner, and the dancing commenced again.

During this interruption, young Farnham happened to come close up to the artist, and he was struck by the earnest gaze which the old man fixed on him. Some strange magnetic influence was in the glance, for it thrilled him from head to foot. He was seized with an unaccountable desire to hear the old man speak, but all his natural self-command forsook him. He could not find the courage to utter a word. Those dark, earnest eyes seemed to have taken away his strength.

Joseph saw the strange pallor that had come upon his father's face, and, laying down his violin, crossed the room.

"What is the matter, are you ill, father?" he inquired in his usual low voice, "or is it only the light? I thought you looked pale across the room."

The artist cast quick wild glances from his son to young Farnham. At last he drew a heavy breath, and turned with a bewildered air to

his son.

"What did you ask, Joseph?"

"Are you in pain? What is the matter, father?" repeated the lad.

"Nothing--no; I--I am not used to this, you know," faltered the old man. "Do not mind me, I am well."

Joseph went away, but cast wistful glances at his father over his violin. According to the unaccountable desire that had seized him, young Farnham heard the old man's voice. It ran through his veins with a glow, as if he had drained a glass of old wine, and it was some moments before he felt the thrill leave his nerves. Joseph took up his violin, but anxiety had depressed him, and his music lost its cheerfulness.

The dancers took their places, but Fred Farnham still lingered by the artist. Another strange impulse seized him. He obeyed it and touched the hand that lay upon the old man's knee.

The artist started, lifted his eyes and a smile broke over his face.

"Excuse me," said the youth deprecatingly, "I did not intend it."

Still the artist kept his eyes upon the boy, without speaking, but the smile grew sad as he gazed; and when Fred turned to go away, the hand he had touched was held eagerly forth.

"Don't--don't leave me yet," said the old man in a low, pathetic voice.

"I will come back again," said the youth gently. "I could not help it if I wished."

Again the old man smiled, and, bowing his head, allowed the youth to regain his partner.

When the set broke up it was to assemble round the fruitcake, which was cut up by Chester in broad, liberal slices, and then, after another dance, and a plaintive song from the widow, Chester's birth-day party broke up, leaving him alone with the family.

The old artist waited at the head of the stairs, and young Farnham, who had remained a moment to speak with Chester, found him leaning against the banisters as he came out.

"Good night," said the young lad with gentle respect, pausing in hope of being addressed.

The artist took the extended hand, and held it between his, without speaking. Fred felt those old hands tremble.

"Shall I never see you again?" inquired the artist.

"Will you let me come and see you?" asked the lad joyfully.

"Come, come! it will be like the break of day after a dark night."

"I will come," said the youth earnestly.

Still the artist kept the boy's hand in his clasp. At length he bent forward and kissed the lad upon his forehead.

"God bless you--the God of Heaven bless you!" he said in a low, solemn voice, and the old man glided away through the dark hall, leaving Frederick strongly affected by the interview.

With all her cheerfulness, Mrs. Chester was a little weary after her guests departed, and leaned against the mantel-piece, longing to sink into the rocking-chair which the old man had just abandoned.

Chester approached his wife, and saw the letter lying at her elbow. A moment of unaccountable dread came over him, but taking the note in his hand he broke the seal. Mrs. Chester was looking at him as he read the letter, she saw his face turn pale, then his eyes began to flash.

"What is it! what evil news does the letter bring?" she faltered out, for his countenance frightened her.

Chester crushed the letter in his hand.

"I thought that man would follow me!" he said bitterly--"that cold-blooded, relentless Mayor!"

"What has he done? Do not keep me in this terrible suspense, Chester," said the anxious woman.

"I am ordered to appear before him to answer a charge of drunkenness," replied Chester, forcing himself to speak calmly, though the huskiness of his voice betrayed the fierce struggle which the effort cost him.

"Drunkenness! you!" and a smile of proud scorn swept over the features of that noble young wife.

"Let us go to rest," said Chester, taking her hand. "Let us try and forget this letter!"

"We were so happy only half an hour since!" said Jane Chester, placing her hand in that of her husband, and they disappeared in the little bedroom.

"But for me, but for me, this had not been!" murmured poor little Mary Fuller, cowering down by the stove and locking both little hands over her forehead. "Oh, if I could help it now. If I had never rung

at that cruel man's door. What shall I do--what can I do!"

"Come, Mary--come roll up my hair--mother has forgotten it," said Isabel, standing in the closet door where the two girls slept together, and yawning heavily--for the child was weary with coming sleep. "What a splendid night we have had--only I am so tired!"

Mary arose meekly, and sitting down on the bed, began to arrange Isabel for the night. The eyes of the little beauty were heavy, and she did not observe the tearful depression that hung over her patient friend. But during all that night, the beautiful eyes of Isabel alone in that humble dwelling, were visited with sleep. It was a weary, weary night for Chester and his wife; but most unhappy of all, was the poor child whom their charity had warmed into life.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHESTER'S TRIAL.

In his dusty web the spider lay--
All bloated and black was he,
And he watched his victim pass that way,
With a quiver of horrid glee!

A few mornings before the little birth-day party described in our last chapter, two men were seen to enter the Mayor's office, accompanied by the Alderman, whom we have seen closeted with him before. The Mayor was alone in his private room, and the Alderman left his two companions in the outer office, while he held a moment's private conversation with his honor. There was a sort of boisterous exultation in the Alderman's manner, which rather displeased the Mayor, who looked upon the exhibition of any feeling as a weakness, but he received his friend with his usual bland smile, and requested him to be seated.

The Alderman drew his leather-cushioned seat close to the Mayor, and laid his broad red hand on his honor's knee.

"They are here--both the witnesses are here ready to enter a complaint--I told you they were just the men to nail this Chester?"

"Here!" said the Mayor, "my friend--my good fellow--you should not have brought the witnesses here. In all these doubtful cases--do you understand?--I never receive a direct complaint. It must come through the Chief of Police. This one especially. He must call upon me officially to act!"

"The chief!" exclaimed the Alderman, in dismay, "why Chester is one of his especial pets. It will never do to entrust the business with

him."

"Oh! have no fear. His duty forces him to present the complaint, when once entered, before him. Further than that, he has no power, no voice in the matter. It rests by law with the Mayor alone. He is judge--juror. He is the law in these cases, you know."

"Then you think we may venture the case with the chief?" said the Alderman, still doubtful. "He will do all in his power to save Chester, I am certain."

"But he has no power! He has no right even to hear the evidence, unless I desire it. His interference is a mere form--but it has a good appearance--half these fellows know nothing about the law, and when we break them it casts some of the odium on him. It gives him an appearance of responsibility, but not a particle of power. Take your witnesses to the chief--to the chief, my dear fellow, and leave the rest to me--to the law."

The Alderman rejoined his witnesses, and went to the chief's office. From that office, twenty-four hours after, was sent the letter which Chester received on the night of his birth-day.

The day of trial came. Within the railing of the chief's office sat his honor, the Mayor, calmly shaving down the point of a pencil, which he tried from time to time on a sheet of paper that lay on the desk before him. At his elbow was the clerk, with a quire of foolscap neatly arranged, and holding a pen idly in his hand.

In a little room back of the office sat the Chief of Police--his portly person filling the circumference of a comfortable office chair, and his jovial, good-humored countenance somewhat clouded with anxiety for the fate of the noble young man on trial, for he had learned both to love and respect the accused. His presence was evidently annoying to his honor, who dreaded the shrewd observation, the keen knowledge of men and things which would be brought to bear on the examination. He would rather have encountered the whole bar of New York, than the sharp, but apparently careless scrutiny of this one man. But there sat the chief just within the shadow of his private closet, the star of office glittering on his broad chest, linked to his garments by a chain of massive gold. The walls behind him were garnished with heavy oaken clubs, highly polished hand-cuffs and iron shackles, with various other grim insignia of his office.

In vain the Mayor moved restlessly in his chair. In vain he turned his cold and repelling look toward the immovable chief. You might have seen a covert smile now and then gleam in the eyes of that obstinate functionary, but otherwise he seemed profoundly unconscious that his presence was in the least disagreeable. The Mayor did not venture upon the unprecedented step of requiring him to withdraw, so after a good deal of meaningless delay, the trial went on.

Chester stood without the railing which encircled the Mayor and his

clerk. His air was firm, his countenance calm, and almost haughty. He awaited the proceedings with quiet indignation. Behind him stood the two men whom he had followed from the dram-shop on the night of his fall, and in a corner of the office sat Jones, the liquor dealer, with two or three persons entirely unknown to Chester.

The Mayor lifted his eyes, but they glanced beyond Chester. With all his coolness he had not the nerve to look directly into the proud and searching eyes bent so calmly on him.

"Is your counsel here, Mr. Chester?" inquired his honor.

"I am here, needing no other counsel, if I am to have a fair trial," replied Chester, firmly.

"I hope you do not doubt that your trial will be a fair one!" said the Mayor, sharpening his pencil afresh, for he wanted some occupation for both eyes and hands.

Chester smiled with so much reproachful scorn, that the Mayor felt it without turning his glance that way.

"I am waiting," said Chester, "for proof of the charges that have been preferred against me!"

At a sign from the Mayor, the man Smith came forward and was placed under oath. Chester's eyes were upon him as he touched the book, and the man turned visibly pale. But in his false oath--for the man perjured himself in the first sentence--he gained more courage.

"Chester," he said, "had entered the dram-shop, where he and his friend"--here the man pointed to his accomplice--"were quietly passing an hour before going to fulfill an engagement. Here he spent perhaps half an hour, drinking brandy-and-water by the stove. They had noticed him particularly, knowing it to be against the law for policemen to indulge in drinking while on duty. The witness went out with his companion, leaving Chester by the stove, evidently much affected by what he had drank. As he and his companion stood beneath an old tree that grew in front of the liquor store, Chester came forth, reeling in his walk, and after a vain effort to maintain his foothold, fell upon the pavement wholly intoxicated. Several other persons saw him in this position, but the witness and his friend led him home, and consigned him to the care of his wife."

It was a plausible perjury, and several innocent persons came forward to strengthen it. They had seen Chester down upon the ice, and had been told that he was intoxicated; so in good faith, and with no intention of wrong, they corroborated the treacherous story that was to destroy a good name.

Chester stood by as this story was artfully strengthened by the sweet-toned and subtle questionings of the Mayor. His face was very pale, and he trembled from head to foot with honest and stern

anger--nay, he felt something of horror, something unselfish, in analyzing the cold-blooded craft, and unflinching perjury that had been brought to bear upon him. There was absolute sublimity in his pale silence, as he allowed witness after witness to pass from the box unchallenged--unquestioned. And all this foul perjury the clerk registered down, and the Alderman who had arranged the charges stood by to hear.

Then Chester was called upon for his defence. He stood upright, grasping the railing with his right hand. His voice was low and deep-toned as a bell; it made the Mayor start with its clear, searching accents. He told the truth, the simple, natural truth, as it has been given to the reader, but with eloquence, and energy which the pen has no power to describe.

"That man," he said, turning as he stood, and pointing his finger at the perjured Smith, "that man--let him step forward and tell the story he has sworn to, with his face lifted to mine, eye to eye, with the man he accuses. If he can do this, I ask no other defence. Let him say who it is that has instigated him to heap this foul wrong upon an innocent man, what is to be his reward--whose deeper and more subtle enmity he is working out! Let him but speak these things with his eye looking into mine, and I am content."

The craven thus addressed, did look in Chester's eyes as a bird gazes upon the eye of a serpent; he could not do otherwise--his face, his very mouth were white; he trembled from head to foot. Conscience tugging at his evil heart, had well-nigh dragged forth the truth, but the cold, low voice of the Mayor, drove it back again, even from his pallid lips.

"The witness has told his story under oath--others have substantiated it. You had the right to question him then. There is no reason why he should undergo a second examination."

This speech had its desired effect. Smith drew a deep breath, and putting on an air of dogged bravado, looked round at his companions like a mastiff who had been just rescued from a fight that threatened to destroy him. The Mayor fell to sharpening his pencil again, and the Alderman made an effort to open a little gate in the corner of the railing, and would have approached his honor. But the constraining look with which his attempt to open the gate was received by that prudent functionary, checked him. The Mayor felt that any appearance of understanding even with the Alderman, might be perilous, while the Chief sat regarding the proceedings with such real interest and apparent unconcern.

"And have you nothing else to offer--no witnesses?" said the Mayor, addressing Chester.

"None!" answered Chester, wiping the drops from his forehead. "I have told the truth; if that is not believed all the witnesses on earth would be of no avail."

Then came from an outer chamber, grated by the iron door of a cell where chance prisoners were sometimes locked, and hung with gilded stars, and firemen's banners, a young figure diminutive, and of pale and sickly features.

"Mary, my poor child!" said Chester, but she only lifted her large eyes to his an instant, and going up to the railing held to it with her hand.

"May I be sworn as those men have been?" she said, addressing the startled Mayor in the same sweet tones that had claimed his compassion months before.

"You! what can you know of the matter?" said his honor sharply, and almost thrown off his guard.

"Not much, but something I do know," answered the child meekly. "May I speak?"

"But you are too young--how old are you?" cried the Mayor, hoping to have found a legal reason for sending away the obtrusive little imp, as he called the child in his heart.

"I am twelve, sir--just twelve."

The Mayor cast an uneasy glance at the Chief's closet and then at the child.

"Sir," said Chester, "I do not know what this poor child desires to say, but it is my wish that she be heard."

"If she is offered as a witness there is no disputing her right to speak," replied his honor, but with a disturbed countenance, and taking a little worn Bible, marked with a broad cross from the desk before him, his honor held it toward the child.

She took the Bible between both her hands and pressed her lips reverently upon it.

"Now," said the Mayor, "what do you wish to say?"

"It was so still out yonder that I could not help but hear--poor Mrs. Chester was very anxious, and I thought perhaps some one might give me good news to carry home."

"This has nothing to do with the matter, child."

"I know," replied the little girl, meeting the Mayor's rebuff with her usual humility. "But I thought perhaps you might ask how I came by the door. Well, sir, I heard what these men said about Mr. Chester. I knew their voices, sir, for I have heard them before, on the night they were talking about, as they stood under the great elm tree

waiting for Mr. Chester to come out."

"The great elm tree--and how came you there, Mary?" exclaimed Chester, greatly surprised by the child's appearance.

"Do you remember, sir, that you were complaining and quite ill that night before you went out? Mrs. Chester felt very anxious about him, sir," continued the child, reminded that it was her duty to address the Mayor. "We sat up together sewing, and after he went out I saw the tears come into Mrs. Chester's eyes, and once or twice they fell upon her work. She was crying because her husband--oh, if you only knew how good he is--was obliged to go out in such bitter cold weather, when his cough was coming on again. I saw what she was fretting about, and so as he had been too ill to eat supper, I asked her to let me make a cup of warm coffee and carry it out to him on his beat. She would not let me make the coffee, but the idea pleased her and she made it herself, and poured it into a little covered pitcher, while I put on a hood and shawl. I knew the way, sir, and was not in the least afraid of the night or anything else, for the stars were out and nobody ever thinks of harming a little girl like me. Some pity, and some laugh; but I am never afraid of real harm even in the night. I said this to Mrs. Chester, for she did not like to have me go out alone. She kissed me and said I might go, for God was sure to take care of me anywhere. Well, sir, I went on, up one street and down another very slow, for the ice was slippery. Then I saw Mr. Chester standing on a corner and looking toward the windows of a store, over which was a great elm tree all dripping with ice. I knew him by the way he stood and by his star which shone in the moonlight. Just as I was crossing over the street, with my pitcher of coffee, I saw a little boy come out from under the tree and speak to Mr. Chester, who ran over and went into the store.

"I knew that Mr. Chester would not stay long in that place, and so crept close up to the trunk of the tree, on the shady side, and holding the coffee under my shawl, to keep it warm, waited for him to come out. There had been some noise in the store, as if people were quarrelling, but all that died away, and then two men came out and stopped by the tree where I was standing. I kept still as a mouse, and pressed close up to the dark side, for the men were laughing, and I was afraid they might laugh at me if I came into the light. I heard every word that they said, sir, but did not know the meaning of it till now.

"'We have got him at last--Jones saw him take the brandy,' said one.

"'Yes, but he did not drink it; Jones cannot say that.' It was another voice that made this answer, sir.

"'But he will say that or anything else likely to get this fellow out of the way--and so must you, and so will I;' answered the loudest voice again.

"Just then Mr. Chester came out of the store. He looked very pale,

but I thought it was only the moonlight striking on him through the ice that hung all over the elm tree.

"Now!" said one of the men, 'now have your foot ready if he comes this way.'

"Mr. Chester did come that way, sir, walking carefully on the ice. But for the men I should have gone up to him at once. I did not like to let them see me, and so waited a little, meaning to follow him when they were gone, and give him the coffee. He passed close by us and fell. I heard the men laugh low--_so_ low just as he came up. I heard them call out, and saw other people come up.

"They lifted him from the ice--these two men--and held his face up to the cold air. I thought that he was dead, his face shone so white, and it seemed as if the thought hardened me into ice. I could not speak nor move. Everything went dark around me. I felt the coffee-pitcher slip from my hand and break upon the stones, but could not even try to save it. He had been so kind to me--there was only one thought come to me through the cold--they would take him home to his wife, dead. I knew it would break her heart, and still I could not move. When I did get a little strength, those two men were going down the street, and Mr. Chester walked between them. I followed after, but the fright had made me weak, and my eyes were so full of tears that I could only see them moving before me like people in a fog.

"Just before I reached the house, two men--the same who had gone home with Mr. Chester--went by me, walking very fast and laughing. I knew them by the laugh, for they gave me no time to look up. I hoped by that to find Mr. Chester not so badly hurt as he seemed. This gave me strength, and I got home sooner than I should have done. When I went in Mr. Chester sat by the fire trembling like a leaf, and his wife stood over him bathing his head, paler than I ever saw her before or since!"

The little girl paused here, her eyes fell, and the eager look died on her face, for she saw that cold, sneering smile, peculiar to the Mayor, drawing down his upper lip--and it struck a chill to her heart.

"Did you see the faces of those men--can you point them out again?" questioned the Mayor.

"I did not see their faces plain enough to know them again, but by the voice of that man," and she pointed toward Smith, "I am sure he was one of them!"

"And this is all you know!" said the Mayor.

"It is all!" was the faint reply. "It is all!" and the child crept to the side of Chester, and put her hand in his.

He pressed that little hand, looked down kindly upon her, and then

her tears began to flow.

The Mayor arose.

"We have heard the evidence," he said, "and it has been carefully written down. In a few days, or weeks at farthest, the case shall be decided--it requires consideration; it requires a patient review of the evidence. Until the decision, Mr. Chester, you are suspended, without pay."

The Mayor ended his speech with a gentle bend of the head, and prepared to withdraw. The clerk rolled up his minutes and the witnesses went out, anxious to quit a scene that had been more exciting than they expected.

Chester stood alone in the office, holding little Mary by the hand, when the Chief came out from his closet, looking very grave, but with much friendly sympathy in his manner. He wrung Chester's hand, and uttered a few cheering words. Chester could not speak. His firm lips began to quiver, and throwing himself upon a chair, he cast his arms over the railing, his face fell upon them, and the proud, wronged man sobbed like a child.

What all the coldness and falsehood of his enemies had failed to do, was accomplished by a few words of unaffected sympathy. These alone had power to wring tears from his firm manhood, and Chester led his little protegee home with a heavy heart, and a heavy, heavy heart was that which met his with its wild throb of anguish, as he entered the home where his wife sat weeping, and watching for him.

CHAPTER IX.

POVERTY, SICKNESS AND DEATH.

How little would there be of grief or want
If love and honesty held away on earth!
The demon poverty, so grim and gaunt,
But for injustice never need have birth!
Give room and wages for the poor man's toil,
And thus the fiend ye weaken and despoil.

During six long weeks did the Mayor of New York keep Chester in suspense, and all that time the heart-stricken man had no means of support, save that derived from the labor of his wife. Day and night that gentle woman sat toiling at her needle, the smile upon her lip chasing the tear from her eye. Her sympathy was all given to the husband of her choice. She was grieved and indignant at the wrong that had been done to him. She was a generous and feminine woman, but her sense of justice was powerful, and her feelings of

condemnation strong against any man who could violate the bonds of common equity which should bind neighbor to neighbor.

With that keen intuitive sense that belongs to thoughtful womanhood, her conviction settled at once on the man from whom her husband had received his deepest wrong. Great love gave her almost the power of divination, and with all his craft, the Mayor failed to deceive one pure-hearted and clear-minded woman. She knew that he was her husband's enemy, and--blame her not, reader, till you have suffered similar wrongs--her gentle soul rose up against this man; she could not think of him without an indignant glow of heart and cheek. She could not hear his name without a thrill of dislike. She saw her husband's cheek grow paler each day; she saw his firm step grow weaker and weaker. In the night-time his hollow cough would start her from the brief slumber into which she had fallen. Then would the form of this, his unprovoked and relentless enemy, rise before her mind, and her soul turned shuddering from the image.

I know that it is a Christian duty to forgive--that when a bad man smites one defenceless cheek, we are taught to offer the other to his upraised hand. But the Lord of Heaven and earth promises no forgiveness of transgression unless it is followed by repentance; and where God himself draws the strict line between Justice and Mercy, let no merely human being be censured for withholding forgiveness to an unrepented wrong. Forgiveness to injuries for which atonement is offered is a duty, and a sweet one to the noble of heart. But without repentance--that soul offering of the sinful--let no man hope to receive from his fellow what Divine Justice withholds. While we leave vengeance to the Lord, let His great wisdom decide upon the duties of forgiveness also!

And so with an aching heart Mrs. Chester saw her husband sinking before her. His spirit remained firm but sorrowful; the shadow lay upon it; but his body, being the weaker, gave way, and continued suspense was devouring his strength like a demon. Chester knew that any day he might be called up before that man, branded with the drunkard's infamy, and cast forth with a sullied character and broken health to the mercies of humanity. This thought clung around him night and day, deepening his cough, hollowing out his eyes, and visibly bowing down his stately form.

Still Mrs. Chester worked on, and by her side, calm and sweet in her beautiful gratitude, might always be seen the little Mary, toiling also, for the mere pittance that supplied the family with food. They had nothing left for rent--nothing for the thousand little wants that are constantly arising in a household. These two noble females could earn food and nothing more; so after a time gaunt poverty came with the rent-day, and stood before them face to face, darkening the door with his eternal presence. Then Jane Chester began to tremble--one by one she gave up to the fiend her little household treasures--her work-box--her table--every personal trinket, and at last her bed. The poverty fiend took them all, still crying for more, till she had nothing to give. Notwithstanding all this, Jane Chester was hopeful;

she would not think that their bright days had wholly departed. Her husband must be acquitted--he would recover then, and conquer the disease that anxiety had brought upon him. She said these things again and again--little Mary listened with tears in her eyes, and Chester would turn away his head or look upon her with a mournful smile.

At last, when suspense had eaten into his very life, Chester was summoned before the Mayor. Excitement gave him unnatural strength that day, and he obeyed the summons, nerved to meet his fate.

His honor received him alone, in the Chief's office. A look of friendly commiseration was on his face, and he took Chester's hand with a gentle pressure.

"I have sent for you," he said, relinquishing the burning hand he had taken, and motioning Chester to be seated--"I have sent for you as a friend, to advise and counsel you."

Chester bent his head, but did not speak. He sat down, however, for his limbs trembled with weakness.

"I have put off the decision in your case longer than usual," resumed the Mayor, playing with a pen that lay on the desk before him, "because I was in hopes that something might come up to change the aspect of things. It is a very painful case, Mr. Chester, and I wish the responsibility rested somewhere else--but the evidence was conclusive. You heard it all--several persons testified to the same thing--no facts have appeared since, and as a sworn Magistrate, I must do my duty."

Chester did not speak, his cheek and lips grew a shade paler than disease had left them, and he bent his large eyes, glittering with fever and excitement, full upon the Mayor.

There was something in the glance of those eyes that made the Chief Magistrate sit uneasily on his leather cushion. He betook himself to making all kinds of incongruous marks upon a sheet of paper that lay before him.

"I shall be compelled to break you," resumed his honor. "With the evidence, I could not answer to my constituents, were I to act otherwise; but there is a way, and it was for this I sent for you--there is a way by which the disgrace may be avoided. If you could make up your mind to resign now, on the score of ill-health, for instance--you really do look anything but robust--all the disgrace of expulsion would be got over at once, and I should be saved a very painful task."

Chester arose, gently and firmly, the blood-red hectic flushed back to his cheek, and his eyes grew painfully brilliant.

"You can disgrace me, sir; you can ruin me if you choose, I know that you have the power--that, against the very letter and spirit of our

institutions, the breath of one man is potent to decide upon the fate of nine hundred of his fellow men--I know that the accused has no appeal from your decision if you decide unfairly--no redress from injustice should you be unjust. Knowing all this--knowing that, save in the magnitude of his power to do wrong, the autocrat of all the Russias possesses no authority more absolute than the citizens of New York have given to you, a single man, and a citizen like themselves--I say, knowing all this, and feeling in my own person all the injustice and all the peril it brings upon the individual, I will not, by my own act, give strength or color, for one instant, to the injustice you meditate. I will not resign--with my last breath I will protest, fruitlessly as I know, against the cruel fraud that has been practiced upon me."

The Mayor dropped his pen. For once in his life, the blood did rush into that immovable face--save around the upper lip, which grew white, as it contracted beneath the nostril, that began to dilate faintly, as anger got the master over his colder feelings. He turned his eyes unsteadily, from object to object, casting only furtive glances at the face of his victim.

"I have advised you for your own good!" he said at length, "if you choose to let the law take its course there is nothing more to be said."

Chester wiped away the heavy drops from his forehead and his upper lip, where they had gathered like rain.

"You are then decided. You will not be advised!" persisted the Mayor, after a moment's silence, observing that Chester was about to rise.

"No, I will not resign. Not to save my life would I give this cowardly recognition of your act. If I am sent from the police, you, sir, must take the responsibility!"

Chester took up his hat and walking-stick.

"I will wait still longer. You may think better of this?" said the Mayor, rising also.

Chester turned back, leaning for support upon his walking stick.

"I have given my answer, I am ready to meet my fate!" and without another word the unhappy man walked forth trembling in every limb, and girded as it were by a band of iron across the chest.

The Mayor watched him depart with an uneasy glance. He had failed in his usual game of securing a resignation when the responsibility threatened to become heavy. In this case the presence of the Chief of Police at Chester's trial--the character of the man, and above all his own knowledge of the means by which his ruin had been procured, rendered the worthy magistrate peculiarly anxious. It was one of those cases that the public might question, especially when

it became known that the principal witness was to receive the place made vacant by Chester's ruin. He found most men willing to redeem some fragment of a lost character by resignation, and thus had craftily frightened many an honest man from his place whom he would not have ventured to condemn openly. The Mayor had summoned Chester to his presence with this hope. But the high and courageous nature of the policeman, the simplicity, the energy and deep true feeling inherent in him formed a character entirely above the level of his honor's comprehension. His craft and subtle policy were completely thrown away here. Following the noble young man, with hatred in his eye, the Mayor arose muttering--

"Though it cost me my seat, he shall go!" and he followed the policeman, calling him by name.

"It needs no longer time for a decision," he said, touching his hat as he passed out of the City Hall, "to-morrow you can bring your star and your book to the Chief's office; they will be wanted for another!"

"To-night--I will bring them at once!" said Chester, with a start, for he was very weak, and the Mayor's voice struck his ear suddenly. "Then," he murmured to himself, "God help me, to-morrow I may not have the strength."

When Chester went out in the morning, his wife had complained of illness, and this added to his depression as he returned home. "Oh, what news do I bring to make her better," he thought. "What but sorrow and pain shall I ever have to offer her on this side the grave? Feeble as a child--disgraced. Oh, Jane, my wife, how will she live through all that must too surely come upon her!"

Saddened by these thoughts, Chester mounted the stairs. He entered the chamber formerly the scene of so much innocent happiness, and found Isabel sitting by the fire alone and crying. Chester loved his beautiful child, and her tears sent a fresh pang through his heart. The idea crossed his mind that she might be hungry and crying for food. He had often thought of late, that this want must come upon them all at last, but now that it seemed close at hand, it made him faint as death. He sat down and attempted to lift the little girl to his knee, but he had not strength to raise her from the floor, and, abandoning the attempt with a mournful look, he drew her close to his bosom; his forehead fell upon her shoulder, and he wept like a child.

Isabel wiped away his tears, and put her arm softly around his neck. "Oh, papa, don't take on so, I wish I had not cried."

"And what are you grieving about?" said Chester, struggling with himself, "were--were you hungry, darling?"

"No, it was not that, but mamma, you know, had such a headache, and we wanted to do something for her, but Mary find I could find no camphor nor cologne nor anything in the house, and poor mamma kept

growing worse, so we made it up between us, Mary and I, to sell the Canary bird. There was not a bit of seed, nothing but husks in the cage, and the poor thing begun to hang its head; so don't blame us, we had no money for seed, and now that you and mamma are both sick, Mary thought we had better sell the bird."

Chester groaned, and his face fell once more upon the child's shoulder.

"Papa, are you angry," said Isabel, while the tears came afresh to her beautiful eyes.

"No, my child, no. It was right, it was best. But your mother, is she so very ill?"

"She is asleep now! That was the reason I only cried very softly when Mary Fuller went away with the bird--Mary made me promise not to cry out loud, for fear of waking her."

Chester arose and moved softly toward the bedroom. It had a desolate and poverty-stricken look--that little room--but still was neatly arranged and tidy in every part. The bureau was gone, and the straw-bed, though made with care, looked comfortless in comparison with the couch in which we first saw Isabel.

Mrs. Chester was lying upon the bed sleeping heavily, her cheeks were crimson, and there was some difficulty in her breathing which seemed unnatural. Still there did not seem to be cause for apprehension. Since her troubles came on, the poor wife had often been a sufferer from nervous headaches, and this seemed but a more violent attack than usual.

Chester put the hair away from her forehead, and kissing it, softly went out, thankful that she was not awake to hear his evil news.

He sat down by the window, for it was now early spring, and Isabel crept to his side. The little creature found in his presence consolation for the loss of her bird. They had been sitting together perhaps half an hour, when Mary Fuller came in; her face bore a look of keen disappointment, and her eyes were full of tears.

"You have told him?" she said, addressing Isabel, "you have told him about it?"

"Yes, my good little girl, she told me. You were very right to sell the bird," said Chester, reaching forth his hand.

The child came close to him and looked earnestly in his face.

"You look very bad--you are in pain?" she said, "something is the matter with you, Mr. Chester."

"I have a little pain here," said Chester, with a sad smile, pressing

one hand upon his breast. "It seems, Mary, as if an iron girdle were about me, straining tighter and tighter. Sometimes it troubles me to breathe at all?"

Mary touched his hand, it seemed as if a glowing coal were buried in the palm. Her eyes filled with strange terror, and without a word she sat down at Chester's feet, burying her troubled face in her garments.

"Did--did you sell the bird?" asked Isabel, touching Mary's shoulder.

"Yes," replied Mary, in a smothered voice, "I sold it, but they would only give me half a dollar. They saw that we wanted money--but I would not let it go for ever--sometime they will let us buy it back again."

"Oh, that is so much better! When papa gets his place again, we can have birdy back," said Isabel, relieved from her most pressing grief; but the hope so innocently expressed struck upon the poor father's heart like a knife. When he got his place back! That time would never, never come! He was disgraced--a branded, ruined man. The full conviction had been cruelly brought home to him by the words of that hopeful little girl. A smothered groan broke from him. Little Mary lifted her head, regarding him sadly, as he paced up and down the floor.

"Mr. Chester," she said, following him, and speaking in a troubled under-tone, "don't look so sorrowful. I wish you could only cry a little--just a little, it will do you good; come in and see _her_, perhaps that will bring the tears."

"It is here, my girl, it is here!" said Chester, laying one hand upon his chest. "I cannot breathe."

"Perhaps--oh, I am almost sure it is only the tears that cannot get to your eyes lying heavy there. That does give dreadful pain--I know."

"It is something worse than that," said Chester, and the tears gushed into his eyes. "I feel--I feel that it is"--

"Is what, sir? oh you may tell me!"

"No, it is nothing, God may yet spare me!"

Mary gazed at him a moment, and then turned away. She entered the little closet where her bed was, and closing the door, knelt down. She did not weep as other children of her age might have done, but clasping her hands, and lifting her meek forehead to Heaven, prayed in her heart; a little time and the words came gushing to her lips, earnest, eloquent, and full of deep, simple pathos. Her eyelids quivered; her mouth grew bright with the soul that troubled it. Her diminutive frame seemed to dilate and straighten with the energy of her prayer.

"Oh, God, oh, my Father, who art in Heaven, Thou who hast made these, Thy children, so good and so beautiful, look down upon me--bend for one moment from the bright home where Thou hast taken my own father, and listen to me, his only child--I am feeble, helpless, and all alone. Oh, God, no one need grieve or shed a tear upon the earth if I am laid in my little grave before morning. Look upon me, oh, Lord, see if I am not a useless and unsightly thing, whom Thy creatures may look upon with pity, but no love save that which bringeth tears. Take me, oh, Father, take me from the earth, and leave the good man with his wife and with his child. I am ready, I am willing, this night, to lie down in the deepest grave, so this, my kind friend, live for those who love him so much. Father--oh, my own father, who art nearer unto God than I am, plead for me, plead for him; plead that thy little unseemly child, may be taken up to the home where her father is--and that he who saved, and fed, and sheltered thy child, may be left to feed and shelter his own."

It seemed as if the holy spirit of self-sacrifice that possessed this child, had sublimated both her language and her countenance. Her face, so thin, so pallid, beamed with the spirit of an angel--the subdued pathos of her voice, was like the fall of water-drops upon pure marble. Long after her lips ceased to move her face and hands were uplifted to Heaven.

Chester heard the murmur of her voice, and his heart was soothed by it. He went into his wife's bed-room, and bent gently over her as she slept. The fever was still hot upon her cheek, and she murmured in her unrest as Chester took her hand softly in his and pressed his pale brow upon it. Long and mournfully did the heart-stricken man gaze upon those loved features. He smoothed the pillow, he spread the cool linen softly over her arms, he bathed her forehead with cold water, and afterward with his tears, as he bent down to kiss it before he went out.

Then he went into the outer room, and took from a drawer his star, and his official book. These he folded up carefully and placed in his pocket. Still he lingered in the room, moving from window to window, and looking sadly upon his child.

"Isabel, I am going out, come and kiss me."

The child came up, cheerful and smiling, with her arms extended. Chester sat down, and taking her upon his knee, and gathering her little hands in his, gazed mournfully into her eyes.

"Isabel!" he said, with a degree of solemnity that filled the child with awe.

She looked up wonderingly; he said no more, but sat gazing upon her. His bosom heaved with a sort of gasping struggle, sob after sob broke from his lips, and he removed her gently from his knee. He was turning to go out when Mary Fuller came from her little bedroom. Chester turned, laid both hands upon her head, and, as she lifted her gentle

eyes to his, he bent down and kissed her--the first time in his life, and the last.

With a feeble and slow step, Chester entered the Chief's office, and rendered up his book and star. He stayed for no conversation, and only answered the words of sympathy with which he was received by a faint smile. It was raining when he went forth, and a thick fog fell low upon the ground. The night was drawing on dark and dreary, and everything seemed full of gloom. Chester walked on; he took no heed of the way, but turned corner after corner with reckless haste, one hand working in his bosom as if he could thus wrest away the pain that seemed strangling him, and the other grasping his walking-stick upon which he paused and leaned heavily from time to time.

It was now quite dark, and Chester found himself in one of those murky streets that lead out among the shipping. The air came in from the river struggling through a forest of tall masts, and, as it flowed over his face, Chester drew almost a deep breath, not quite, for a sharp pain followed the effort--a cough that cut through his lungs like a knife--and then gushed from his mouth and nostrils a torrent of blood, frothy, vividly red, that fell upon his hands and garments in waves of crimson foam.

Chester was standing upon the pier. Beyond him was the water--close by the tall and silent ships. He cast one wild glance on these pulseless objects and sat down upon the timbers of the pier, grasping the head of his walking-stick with both hands and leaning his damp forehead upon them. Faster and faster gurgled up the vital blood to his lips. Like wine from the press it gushed, and every fresh wave bore with it a portion of his life.

Chester thought of his home--his wife, his child--he would die with them, he would struggle yet with the death fiend and wrest back the life that should suffice to reach them. He pressed one hand to his mouth, he staggered to his feet--the staff bent under him to and fro like a sapling swayed by the wind. He advanced a single step; faltered, and, reeling back, fell upon the timbers. A sob, a faint moaning sound, answered only by the dull, heavy surge of the waters below, as they lapsed against the timbers of the pier. Another moan--a shudder of all the limbs, and then the fog rolled down upon him like a winding-sheet.

CHAPTER X

WAKING AND WATCHING.

Burning with thirst and wild with fever,
She tossed and moaned on her couch of pain;
With an aching heart he must go and leave her;

Never shall they two meet again!
Never? Oh, yes, where the stars are burning
O'er his path to Heaven with a golden glow,
His soul turns back with its human yearning
To watch her anguish and soothe her woe.

When Mrs. Chester awoke from her slumber, which had been one wild and harrowing dream, she inquired of the children, who were early to her bed, if their father had not come back, and if there was yet no tidings from the Mayor's office. They answered that he had but just left the house, and that he had been with her nearly an hour as she slept. She smiled gently, and closing her heavy eyes, turned her head upon the pillow, moaning with the pain this slight motion gave.

Mary went to the little supper table which she had spread in anticipation of Mr. Chester's return, and came back with a bowl of warm tea in her hand.

"If you can only drink a little of this ma'am," she said, stirring the tea with a bright silver teaspoon, the last they had left of a full set, "it always does your head so much good!"

Mrs. Chester rose upon her elbow and attempted to take the tea, but her head was dizzy, and after the first spoonful she turned away in disgust.

"I cannot drink it. Oh, for a glass of cold, cold water!"

Mary ran into the next room and came back with some water. But it tasted tepid to the poor invalid, and she only bathed her parched mouth with it.

"You are ill, you are very ill, ma'am," said Mary; "this does not seem like nothing but a slight headache. May I run for a doctor?"

"We have no money to pay doctors with, my child," said the poor invalid, clasping her hot fingers together, "now that I am sick, who will earn bread for you all? who will comfort _him_?"

"I will do my best, and so will Isabel!" replied Mary, "besides, perhaps--"

The child paused and her eyes fell. She was about to say that perhaps the Mayor might not be so very hard on Mr. Chester, after all; but remembering the look and manner of that unhappy man, she could not say this with truth, knowing well, as if it had been told her in words, that her benefactor had no hope. "Perhaps," she added, "something may happen. When it was at the worst with me, you know something happened."

"And surely it is at the worst with us now," murmured Mrs. Chester, meekly folding her hands, "no, not the worst," she added, with a wild

start, "for I am not a widow yet."

God help the poor woman. She was a widow, even then.

The two children sat up that night watching by the sick, and waiting for the father to return, who lay so cold and still upon the sodden timber of that dismal pier. They had eaten nothing all day--at least Mary had not--and now they cut the sixpenny loaf in slices and partook of it, leaving a small covered dish, which had been prepared for Chester, untouched. His supper was sacred to those little girls. Hungry and worn-out as they were, neither of them even once glanced at it longingly. They were quite content with the dry bread, and even ate of that sparingly, for Mrs. Chester had asked for ice, and various little things in her delirium--she was delirious then--and the children ran out after everything she mentioned, hoping to relieve the terrible state she was in, till they had but one shilling left.

So they made a sparing meal of the bread--those poor little creatures--and a cup of cold water, for the tea must be saved for him and for her. "Children," they said, with tears in their eyes, "ought not to want such things."

With all her brave effort to sit up till her father came, poor little Isabel dropped to sleep with her head upon the table, weary and almost heartbroken, for she was not used to suffering like Mary Fuller, and her childish strength yielded more readily. After this, Mary sat watching quite alone, for Mrs. Chester had muttered herself into a feverish sleep, and the house was in profound silence.

Then came upon Mary Fuller a terrible sense of the desolation that had overtaken them. Dark and shadowy thoughts swept over her soul, leaving it calm, but oh, how unutterably miserable. This foreshadowing of evil fastened upon her like a conviction. She felt in the very depths of her being that some solemn event was approaching its consummation that very moment. She ceased to listen for Chester's coming, but hushing her tread, as if in the close presence of death, crept away to a corner and prayed silently.

There are moments in human life when persons linked together in a series of events may form tableaux, which stand out from ordinary grouping, like an illustration stamped in strong light and shadow on the book of destiny. Thus was Chester's household revealed on that solemn midnight.

Mary Fuller, upon her knees, her small hands uplifted, her face turned to the wall; Isabel, with her lovely head pillowed on her arms; and, through an open door, Jane Chester, in her feverish sleep, with the pale lamplight glimmering over them all--this was one picture.

Another, equally distinct in its mournful outline, was revealed to the all-seeing One alone.

Upon that dark wharf, among the motionless ships, that seemed like

spectres gazing upon his hushed agony, Chester still lay, shrouded by the heavy clinging fog. The tide rose slowly lapping the sodden timbers which formed his death-bed, and creeping upwards, inch by inch, like the weltering folds of a pall. The whisper of these waters, black and sluggish, gurgling and creeping toward him, was the last sound poor Chester ever heard on earth.

Oh, it was a wretched picture that might have won pity from the ghostlike shrouds and spars which hedged it in as with a forest of blasted trees.

One more picture, and the night closes. The Common Council was in session. Both marble wings of the City Hall were brilliantly illuminated, and crowds of eager spectators gathered around the two council chambers. Some fifty or sixty poor and efficient men were to be turned out of office, and the populace were eager to witness the jocose and delicate way in which the New York city fathers decapitated their children. To have witnessed the smiling jests that passed to and fro in the Board, the quiet and sneering pleasure of one man--the careless tone of another--the indifferent air of a third--you would have supposed that these wise men had met to perform some great public benefit. It seemed like a gala night, the majority were so full of generous glee.

And why should they not be jovial and happy in the legislative halls? What was there to dampen their spirits in these gay proceedings? True, the heads of fifty or sixty families were thus playfully deprived of the means of an honest support. Efficient and experienced men were taken from almost all the city departments, and cast without occupation upon the world. Men who had toiled in the city's service, for years, for a bare livelihood, were suddenly cast forth to want and penury. It was in the season of a terrible epidemic, and physicians who had braved pestilence and death, heaped together in the great hospitals of the city--who had made a home of the lazar-house, when to breathe its atmosphere was almost to die--were among those who were to be given up as victims to party.

These men, some of them yet trembling upon the brink of the grave from pestilence, inhaled while nobly performing duties for which they were scarcely better paid than the commonest soldier--these were the men whom our city fathers were so blandly and pleasantly removing from their field of duty. Was it wonderful, then, that the whole affair seemed quite like pastime to those engaged in it; or that they made themselves jocosely eloquent upon the subject, whenever one of the grave minority ventured to lift his voice against the proceedings?

When the two Boards broke up for recess, nothing could exceed the spirit and good fellowship with which they went down to supper. The Mayor was present, for having been an Alderman himself, he always knew when anything peculiarly agreeable to his taste was coming off at the hall. The President of the Upper Board was in splendid spirits, and altogether it was a brilliant scene when the Mayor took his seat next the President, and the aldermen and assistants ranged themselves

on either side the groaning board.

With what relish the city fathers ate their supper that night! Birds worth their weight in gold vanished from their plates as if they had taken wing. Great, luscious oysters, delicately cooked after every conceivable fashion--canvas-backed ducks, swimming in foreign jellies--turkeys and roasted chickens, that went from the table whole, being too common for men who had learned to indulge in wild game and condiments at the cost of ten thousand a year--decanter, through which the wine gleamed red and bright, interspersed here and there with others of a darker tinge and more potent flavor--brandied fruit and rich sweetmeats, all shed their dull sickening fragrance through the tea-room. The flash of glasses in the light; the flash of coarse wit that followed the drained glasses; the clatter of plates; the noiseless tread of the waiters--why it was enough to make the silver urn and curious old pitchers start of themselves from the side-board to claim a share in the feast. It was enough to make the public documents, prisoned in the surrounding book-cases, shiver and rustle with an effort to free themselves from bondage.

The very fragments of that official supper would have fed many a poor family for weeks; but the city fathers really did enjoy it so much it would have been a pity to dampen their spirits by an idea so at variance with their action. They had consigned at least fifty blameless families to poverty that night, and surely that was labor enough without troubling themselves about the means by which they were to be kept from perishing.

You could see by the quiet smile upon the Mayor's lip, as he arose from the supper table, and helped himself to a handful of cigars from a box on the side-board, that he was in excellent spirits. A distinguished guest from the country partook of the city's hospitality that night, and as the two lighted their cigars, they conversed together on city matters.

"To-morrow--to-morrow," said his honor, "you must go over our institutions--Bellevue, the Island, and the various Asylums."

The stranger shook his head.

"Not to Bellevue, if that is where your people are dying off so rapidly of ship-fever," he said. "I have a terror of the disease; why I saw it stated that half the physicians at your Alms House were down with it, and that three or four out of the number have died this season."

"Yes," said the Mayor, lighting a cigar, "the mortality has been very great at Bellevue, especially among the young doctors. They are peculiarly exposed, however."

"I should think," said the stranger, laying down his cigar, for he could not find the heart to smoke quietly, when conversing on a subject so painful, "I should suppose it would be difficult to find

persons ready to meet almost certain death, as these young men are sure to do. It must be a painful task to you, sir, when you sign their appointments. It would seem to me like attaching my name to a death warrant."

"Yes," replied the Mayor, taking out his cigar and examining the end, for it did not burn readily; "it is very disagreeable. Why, sir, the city has paid, already, nearly five hundred dollars for funeral expenses; and there is no knowing how far it may be carried."

The stranger looked up in surprise; he could not believe that he had heard aright--that the Mayor of New York was absolutely counting, as a subject of regret, the funeral cost attending the death of those brave young men who had perished amid the pestilence, more bravely a thousand times, than warriors that fall on the battle-field.

But as he was about to speak again, several aldermen who still lingered at the table, called loudly for the Mayor.

"I say," said the Alderman, who has been particularly presented to the reader, leaning over the back of his chair, with a glass of wine in one hand--"I say, have you settled that Chester yet? My man is getting impatient."

"Hush!" said his honor; "not so loud, my good friend. Bring in the nomination to-morrow--I gave Chester his quietus this afternoon."

And so he had; for while this scene was going on at the City Hall, the two pictures we have given, were stamped upon the eternal pages of the Past, and so was this.

CHAPTER XI.

CHESTER'S HOME IN THE MORNING

It is dancing--dancing--dancing,
Oh, the little purplish sprite!
Now moving, shining, glancing
Through the mazes of the light.

The grey morning dawned gloomily on Chester's desolated home. Isabel awoke and looked around with dull and heavy eyes. The beauty of her young face was clouded by a night of sharp anxiety and broken rest. Mary sat opposite, leaning with both elbows on the table, and regarding the poor child with a haggard and sorrowful countenance.

"Has he not come back--oh, Mary, is he not here yet?"

Mary shook her head. "I have been awake all night, every moment. He

has not come!"

"And I--how could I sleep with my poor father away, and mamma so ill? I did not think that anything could make me sleep at such a time, Mary!"

"But, you were so tired; oh, I was glad when your head drooped on the table; it looked so pitiful to see you growing paler and paler, while she kept muttering to herself. I was glad that you could sleep at all, Isabel."

"I feel now as if I should never sleep again," replied the child, looking at the covered plate where her father's supper had been standing all night. "He will never come back, Mary Fuller, I feel sure of it now!"

Mary did not answer--she only covered her eyes with one hand and sat still.

Isabel arose, took the covered plate in both her hands and placed it in the cupboard, weeping bitterly. This act showed even plainer than her words that she really did not expect to see her father again. She crept back to Mary, and, leaning upon her shoulder, began to cry with low and suppressed passion. Poor thing, it is a hard lesson when childhood first learns to curb its natural grief.

"What shall we do, Mary?" whispered the poor child, burying her wet face upon Mary's shoulder that received its burden unshrinkingly; "oh, what can we do?"

"Isabel," said Mary, solemnly, "what should we do if--if your father should be dead?"

"He is dead--or very, very sick--I am sure of that; what else could keep him from home, and mamma calling for him so pitifully? Mary, I am sure that he is dead; we shall never, never see him again!" and, with a burst of terrible grief, the poor child flung her arms around Mary Fuller, and sunk to the floor, almost dragging the little girl with her. "Mary, he is dead--he is dead!"

"Who is dead--who is dead, I say? Why do you crowd the room with those little dancing creatures, all in loose clothes--scarlet, gold, purple, green--why do you not send them away?" cried the voice of Mrs. Chester, and there was a rustling of the bed-clothes, as if she were trying to cast them from her.

The children held their breath, and cowered close together. Again Mrs. Chester spoke:

"Leave the children, leave them; I did not tell you to drive the children away; Chester, Chester, they are taking our children off; Isabel--Mary Fuller, come back!"

"I am here--no one shall take me away," said Mary Fuller, bending over the bed; "Isabel, too, is close by your pillow--she has been crying to see you so sick; do not mind her eyes, they will grow bright again when you are well!"

Mrs. Chester started up in the bed. A moment of consciousness seemed to come over her. She looked at Mary and at Isabel, and spoke to them in a whisper, leaning half out of bed--

"Girls, where is he? tell me now, Mary, that's a good little girl--what have they done with him?"

The children looked at each other, and Isabel began to sob.

"How long is it since I went to sleep? He was here, you know!" said the invalid.

"Only a little while!" answered Mary, quickly. "You have not slept long."

"Oh! I thought--but then people will dream such things--I say, just tell me--come, will he be back soon--can't you tell me that, little folks?"

"Lie down, there, now take a glass of ice-water, and I will go after him," said Mary, exerting all her little strength to persuade the invalid back to her pillow.

"Ice, ice! give me a whole handful--no water, but clear cold ice!"

They gave it to her; in her burning hands and her parched mouth they placed the crystal coldness; and it slaked the burning fever. It melted in her hand, dripping in soft rain down her arms and over her bosom, where the hand lay clenched tightly upon its cool treasure. With her white teeth she crushed the diamond fragments in her mouth, and laughed to feel the drops flowing down her throat.

"Now, Mary, little Mary Fuller, go and tell him that I am wide awake, and waiting for him! Go now, while the ice is plenty, he shall have a share."

"I will go!" said Mary, and drawing Isabel from the room, she told her to stay close by her mother, and let her have anything she wanted. While giving these directions she put on her hood and shawl.

"I will find him; I will not come back without news; but, oh! Isabel, I have little hope of anything but news that will kill her, and almost kill us; I would not say this, but it has been in my heart since ten o'clock last night. I was all alone, and--don't cry again, Isabel--it seemed to me as if he died then!"

Isabel turned very pale, and gazed upon Mary in terrible silence.

"And I was asleep then?" she said, with a pang of self reproach.

"Hush!" said Mary, "in our sleep we must be nearest to Heaven; why should you feel bad because you were closer to him than I was?"

"I dreamed of him!" answered Isabel, as if struck by some sudden remembrance, and her eyes so heavy the moment before, lighted up; "I dreamed of him!"

"And what did you dream, tell me, Isabel--what did you dream?"

"I don't know all--but he was away in such a beautiful, beautiful place; the hills were all purple and gold and crimson with light, or flowers or something that made them more lovely than anything you ever set eyes on. The rivers were so clear that you could see down, down into the water--and the banks, all covered with flowers, seemed to slope down and line the bottom with soft colors that broke up through; it was all shifting and rolling before me like a cloud. But as true as you live, Mary, I saw my father there, and--yes--now I am sure--mamma was with him--she was, Mary Fuller; and so you see they will meet again, if there is anything in dreams. You will find him, I am sure you will find him. Oh, Mary. I am so glad that I fell asleep, while you were watching!"

Mary did not speak, but threw her arms around the beautiful child, kissing her tenderly before she went forth.

"It was a sweet dream!" she murmured, going down the stairs; "I had many such before my father died. I suppose God sends them to comfort little children when he makes orphans of them--but I never saw my mother and father together; oh, if I had but seen that only once!" With these thoughts Mary Fuller passed into the street, pursuing her mournful errand with a heavy spirit. "I will go," she said, communing with herself; "I will go first to the Chief's office--Mr. Chester took away the star and book in his pocket, and must have gone there. They will know something of him at the Chief's office;" and she bent her way to the Park.

It was a bright spring morning. The fog which had hung upon the city over night, was swept upward by the sun, and lay upon the horizon in a host of fleecy clouds. The trees around the Park fountain and the City Hall, were in the first tender green of their foliage, and the damp night had left them vivid with moisture, through which the sun was shining. The fountain was in full force at the time, shooting up its columns of diamond spray to the very tree-tops. Gleams of sunshine laced the myriads and myriads of liquid threads together, with a rainbow that seemed to tremble and break every instant, but always shone out again brighter than before. The rush and hum of the waters, the showers of cool and broken spray, the soft shiver of the leaves and the young grass just peeping from the earth all around, were enough to make a happy heart beat happier tenfold, under the influence of so much beauty. But poor little Mary looked upon the scene with a heavy eye; all the fresh growth of nature seemed but

to mock her as she passed through it. She would have given worlds for power to convey the sweet air that swept with such cool prodigality by her face, to the close room of Mrs. Chester. It seemed a sin to breathe that delicious spring breeze, while her benefactress lay panting on her sick-bed.

The chief received the little girl very kindly, and gave her all the information he possessed regarding Chester; but that was very little, only dating half an hour from the time that unhappy man left home.

Mary turned away with an aching heart--where should she go? of whom might she inquire? The broad city was before her, but to what part must her search be directed?

Mary crossed the Park and moved down towards the corner of Ann street. She paused for a moment, pondering over the heavy doubt in her mind, when a cart, over which an old blanket had been flung, guarded by two policemen, drove by her. Something smote her heart as the rude vehicle passed her; it seemed as if she could detect the outline of a human form beneath the blanket. She started, and followed the cart. It rolled slowly up Broadway and turned into Chambers street--along the whole length of the old Alms House buildings it went, and still the little girl followed, trembling in every limb and scarcely drawing a full breath.

The cart stopped at the point nearest to that building, where the unrecognized dead were carried. The two policemen drew away the blanket, and there, outstretched upon a piece of carpet, Mary saw her benefactor. She moved slowly forward; she clung with her cold hands to the side of the cart, and bent her eyes upon that still, white face. The sunshine lay upon it, and the breeze swept back from that marble forehead the bright hair that she had seen Mrs. Chester arrange so often. It might have been the sunshine--or perhaps that God, "who careth for the fall of a sparrow," had left a smile upon those white lips to comfort the little girl; for it is in small things often that the goodness of our Heavenly Father is most visible.

"He is smiling--oh, he smiles on me," cried the child, with a burst of tears, lifting her face to the policeman, with a look that went to his heart. "He has not smiled like that, not once since his birth-day," and overcome with all the sweet recollections of that day, the child covered her face and wept aloud while the bystanders stood, lost in sympathy, gazing upon her.

"Did you know this man?" questioned one of the officers, addressing the child, and motioning the driver to be quiet, for he had other work to do, and was in haste to get the body of Chester into the dead-house.

"Did I know him?" repeated the child, looking up through her tears with an expression of wonder that he should ask the question. "Did I know him?"

"If you did," rejoined the man, "tell us his name, and perhaps we need not carry him in there."

"In where?" said the child, looking wildly at the building to which the man pointed. "That is not his home."

"No, it is the dead house," replied the man.

"The dead house?" repeated the child, and her lips grew pale with horror. "And must he go in there?"

"Not if you can point out his home; perhaps he is your father?"

"He was more than that--he was--oh, sir, you do not know how much he was to me!"

"Well, what was his name? if you can tell us that, we will take him home at once. The coroner has seen him--there is nothing to prevent."

"His name, sir," answered the little girl, making a brave effort to speak calmly. "His name was John Chester."

"John Chester! that is the man who held the place that Smith has got this very morning. I saw him at the Mayor's office not half an hour ago with the appointment in his hand," said the officer, addressing his companion.

"Poor fellow, poor fellow, it was a hard case!" and the policeman reverently settled the body upon the cart and bade the driver go to the Chief's office and bring a cloak which he had left there.

While the man was absent, there came along Chambers street two persons walking close together and conversing earnestly. They were passing the cart without seeming to heed its mournful burden, when Mary Fuller looked up and saw them. A faint cry broke from her lips, her eyes kindled through the tears that filled them, and drawing her bent form almost proudly upright, she stood directly before the gate, through which the Mayor and his companion were about to pass on their way to the City Hall.

"Sir," she said, with dignity which was almost solemn from its contrast with her frail person, pointing with one pale and trembling finger toward the cart, "turn and look."

The Mayor at first stepped back, for the sight of that little creature was loathsome to him, but there was something in her attitude and in her eye which he could not resist. He turned in spite of himself, and his eyes fell upon the dead form of Chester. For an instant his face changed, a pallor stole over his lips, and he trembled in the presence of the wronged dead; but he was a man whom emotion never entirely conquered, and turning coldly from the child, he went up to the cart and addressed the policeman in charge of the corpse.

"How and where did this man die?" he said, in his usual cold voice.

"He died in the street--alone upon a pier unfrequented after dark. Last night somewhere between nine o'clock and morning was the time. The coroner renders in his verdict, hemorrhage of the lungs."

"He died," said the little girl, solemnly gazing upon the dead, "he died of a broken heart. I know that it was of a broken heart he died."

"Men do not die of broken hearts in these days," said the Mayor, turning away. "It is only women and children that talk of such things. See," he continued, addressing the officer, "that the body is taken to his house and properly cared for. This should be a warning to all in your department, sir."

The policeman bit his lip and his eyes flashed. The only answer that he made was given in a stern voice.

"I will do my duty, sir!"

The Mayor passed on, joining his companion. The ruddy face of the Alderman was many shades paler than usual, and his voice faltered as he addressed his friend.

"This is very shocking. If I had known that it would end so, I, for one, would have had nothing to do with it."

"I am sorry that you are dissatisfied," answered his honor, coldly.

"The case you brought against the man seemed a very clear one--nothing could have been stronger than the evidence, otherwise, with all my disposition to serve you, I should not have acted as I did."

The Alderman paused in profound astonishment, his eyes wide open, and his heavy lips parted, gazing upon the impassive form of his friend.

"But, sir, but"--he could not go on, the profound composure of the Mayor paralyzed him. He really began to think that the whole guilt of this innocent man's death rested with himself, that he had altogether misunderstood his honor from the first.

Having deepened and settled this conviction upon his conscience-stricken dupe by a lengthened and grave silence, the Mayor added, consolingly:

"In political life these things must be expected; of course no one is responsible for the casualties that may occur; no doubt this man was consumptive long before you ever saw him!"

"I wish that he had never crossed my path, at any rate," replied the Alderman, almost sternly. "To my dying day I shall never forget that face! I do not know, I cannot think, how I was ever led into persecuting him. Smith wanted the appointment, true enough, and he had done something toward my election, but so had fifty others; how

on earth did I ever come to take all this interest in his claim?"

An expression that was almost a smile stole over the Mayor's lip, as he received this compliment to his consummate craft, and the two passed on.

Meantime, the policeman returned from the Chief's office with a cloak, which was placed reverently over the body of poor Chester. The little girl crept close to the cart, and arranged the hair upon that cold forehead as the poor wife had loved to see it best. The cart moved on with its mournful lead, at last, and she followed after.

How sad and heavy was that young creature's heart, as she drew near the once happy home! She began to weep as they stopped by the door.

"Let me! oh, let me go up first. It will kill them to see him all of a sudden, in this way," she pleaded.

The driver had lost much time, but he could not resist that touching appeal.

"It is a dreadful thing," he said,--"let her go up first."

Poor child! Heavy was her heart, and heavy was her step as she mounted the stairs. She paused at the door. Her hand trembled upon the latch; her strength was giving way before the terrible trial that awaited her. But, she heard them from below lifting in the dead. She heard the heavy cloak sweeping along the hall, and, wild with fear that it would all come upon poor Mrs. Chester while she was unprepared, she turned the latch and went in.

The chamber was empty. Mary ran to the little bedroom. It was as still as a grave. The tumbled bed was unoccupied; the bed-clothes falling half upon the floor. Upon the stand was a glass of water, and a lump of ice lay near it. The loose night-dress which Mrs. Chester had worn, lay trailing across the door-sill, and a pillow rested upon the side of the bed, indented in the centre, as if some one sitting upon the floor had rested against it.

When the three men came in, bearing Chester's body between them, Mary stood gazing upon this desolation in speechless and pale astonishment.

"They are gone," she said, turning her wild eyes upon the men. "Some one must have told her what was coming, and she could not bear it."

"No one here?" questioned one of the officers, "only this little girl to watch over him?--this is strange!" And the three men paused in the midst of the room, gazing upon each other over their mournful burden.

"Smooth up the bed a little, and let us lay him there!" said the driver, becoming impatient with the delay.

"Not there--_she_ will come back--she could not go far--on my bed--lay him here, on my bed and Isabel's. It is made up--no one slept in it last night!" exclaimed Mary, opening the door of her little room.

They laid poor Chester upon the bed that his noble benevolence had supplied to the orphan who stood weeping over him. The rustle of that poor straw, as it shrunk to meet his body, was a nobler tribute to his memory than a thousand minute guns could have been.

They were about to arrange his head upon the bolster, but Mary went into the next room, in haste, and brought forth the pillow which still revealed the pressure that Mrs. Chester had left upon it.

"Lay him upon her pillow," said the child. "He would have asked for it, I know."

Those stout men looked upon the child with a feeling of profound respect. They drew back, and allowed her to arrange the death-couch according to her own will. She could not bear the stiff and rigid position in which they had placed him, but laid the hands gently and naturally down. When she turned away, the cold look had been softened somewhat, and in the solemn repose of death there was blended the sweetness of that calm, deep slumber, when the soul is dreaming of Heaven.

The three men went forth, and Mary followed them, closing the door reverently after her.

"I must stay with him," she said, "Mrs. Chester and Isabel are gone; he must not be left alone, or I ought to go in search of them. She was very, very ill, and out of her head I am afraid, and poor Isabel is only a little girl that would not know what to do!"

"I will search for them," said one of the policemen, kindly. "Stay here till some one comes--I am far more certain to find them than such a little thing as you would be."

They left the child alone. For a little time she sat down and wept, but her grief was not of a kind to waste itself in tears, while anything remained undone that could give comfort to others.

"They will bring her back--they will both come," she said, inly, checking her tears. "I will make up her bed, and find something for Isabel to eat; she had no breakfast, and did not relish the bread last night. If they find everything snug and tidy it will not seem so bad."

So the little girl went to work, putting everything in its place, and noiselessly removing the dust that had settled on the scant furniture. Alas, there was not much for her to do, for those desolated rooms contained few of the comforts that had once rendered them so cheerful. When the bed was arranged and the outer room swept, Mary sat down a moment, for grief and watching rendered her very weary,

and she was so young that the profound stillness appalled her. Then there came a faint knock at the door, and she was arising to open it when Joseph stood on the threshold.

"I saw it all from the window, and thought that you might be glad to have some one sit with you," said the gentle boy, moving across the room.

Mary looked up, and these low words unsealed her grief again.

"Oh, Joseph! Joseph! they are gone. He is dead. He is lying in there, all alone!"

"I know it," answered the boy, sitting down by her, "and I was just thinking how strange it was that people so handsome and so good, should be sick and die off, when such poor creatures as you and I are left."

Mary looked up eagerly through her tears.

"Oh, you don't know how I prayed, and prayed that God would only take me, and let him live! But He wouldn't; He didn't think it best; here I am, stronger than ever, and there _he_ is!"

The boy sat still and mused, with his eyes bent on the floor.

"It does seem strange," he said, after a time, "but then God ought to know best, because He knows every thing."

"I said that to myself, when I saw him on the cart with that wicked, wicked Mayor looking on," answered Mary.

"I dare say Mr. Chester was so good to every body that perhaps he had done enough, and ought to be in Heaven, and it may be that there is a great deal for you to do, yet, little and weak as you seem. I shouldn't wonder!"

"What could I do, compared to him?" answered Mary, meekly.

"I don't know, I am sure, but I dare say that God does," replied the little boy.

Mary did not answer. Oppressed by the mournful solitude of the place, worn out by long watching and excitement, she could hardly find strength to speak. Still it was a comfort to have the boy in the same room, and his gentle efforts at consolation comforted her greatly.

"That--that is Isabel's step," she said, at length, lifting her eyes and fixing them upon the door. "How slow--how heavy! She is alone, too. Oh, Joseph, do not go away, I cannot bear to tell her yet."

"I will stay!" said the boy.

The door opened, and Isabel came in. She was hardly beautiful then. Her cheeks were pale; her eyes heavy and swollen, and the raven hair fell in dishevelled waves over her shoulders. She crossed the room to where the two children sat, and seating herself wearily on the floor, laid her head in Mary's lap.

"She is gone, Mary, I cannot find her anywhere," said the child. "I have been walking, walking, walking, and no mother--no father. I don't know where I have been, Mary, I don't know what I said to the people, but they couldn't tell me anything about them."

"Poor Isabel!--poor little Isabel!" said Mary, laying her thin hand upon the child's head, and turning her mournful look on Joseph, who met the glance with a sorrowful shake of the head.

"I am tired out, Mary. It seemed to me a little while ago, that I was dying; and if it hadn't been for thinking that you would be left alone, I should have been glad of it."

"Oh, don't, Isabel, don't talk in that way!" said Mary, "you are tired and hungry--she must be hungry," and Mary looked at the boy. "See how the shadows are slanting this way, and she hasn't tasted a mouthful since last night."

"I don't know; I hadn't thought of it--but I believe I am hungry," and the big tears rolled over Isabel's cheeks.

Mary arose and placed that little weary head upon the seat of her chair.

"She isn't used to it, like us," she said, addressing the boy.

"No," he answered, "she can't be expected to stand it as we should. I hope you have got something for her to eat; we haven't a mouthful up stairs, I'm afraid!"

Mary went to the cupboard. It was empty--not a crust was there save the supper which had been put away for poor Chester the night before. Mary hesitated--it seemed terrible to offer that food to the poor child, and yet there was nothing else. Mary went up to Isabel, and whispered to her.

"Have you a sixpence--or only a penny or two left of the money?"

"No," replied Isabel, with a sob. "I spent the last for ice, and when I came back with it, she wasn't in the room. I flung the ice on the stand, and ran out into the street after her, but you know how it was--she has gone like him."

Mary turned toward the cupboard; she placed the cold supper on another plate, and bringing it forth, spread a clean cloth upon the table, and placed a knife and fork.

"Come," she said, bending over the sorrow-stricken child. "Isabel, dear, get up, and try if you can eat this--it will give you strength."

The child arose, put back the dishevelled hair that had fallen over her face, and sat down by the table. She took up the knife and fork, but as her heavy eyes fell upon the contents of the plate, she laid them down again.

"Oh! Mary, I mustn't eat that; he may come home yet, and what shall we have to give him?"

Again the lame boy and Mary exchanged glances--both were pale, and the soft eyes of the boy glistened, with coming tears. He beckoned Mary to him, and whispered--

"Tell her now--she must know; if those men come back while she is hoping on, it will kill her."

Mary stood for a moment, mustering strength for this new trial; then she crept slowly up to Isabel, and laid her thin arm around the child's neck. That little arm shook, and the low speech of Mary Fuller trembled more painfully still.

"Isabel, your father will never want food again--they have brought him home--he is lying in there."

"Asleep!" said Isabel, starting to her feet, while a flash of wild joy came to her face.

"No, Isabel, he is dead!"

Isabel stood motionless. Her arms fell downward, her parted lips grew white, and closed slowly together. The life seemed freezing in her young veins.

"Come, and you shall see, Isabel, it is like sleep, only more beautiful," and Mary drew the heart-stricken child into the chamber of death.

Chilled with grief and shivering with awe, Isabel gazed upon her father, the tears upon her cheek seemed freezing; a feeble shudder passed over her limbs, and after the first long gaze she turned her eyes upon Mary with a look of helpless misery. Mary wound her arms around the child, her tears fell like rain, while the expression that lay upon her lip was full of holy sweetness.

"Isabel, dear, let us kneel down and say our prayers, he will know it."

"I can't, I am frozen." Isabel shook her head.

"Don't--don't, heaven is but a little way off," answered Mary: "you and I have both got a father there now!"

The two little girls knelt down together, and truly it seemed as if that marble face smiled upon them.

The door was closed between them and the outer room where the boy sat. He heard the low tone of their voices; he heard sobs and a passionate outbreak of sorrow; these ebbed mournfully away, and then arose a low silvery voice, deep, clear, angel-like, and with it came words--simple in their pathos--such as springs from the heart of a child when it overflows with love and tears. The boy bent his head reverently; his meek blue eyes filled with unshed drops; he sunk to his knees and wept, softly, as he listened.

Thus the children were found a little time after, when an undertaker came by orders of the Chief of Police to prepare the dead for honorable burial. Following his example, a few noble fellows about his office had contributed out of their pay, and thus poor Chester was saved from a pauper's grave.

A little before night they carried Chester out through the hall that his light foot had trod so often. Behind him went the two little girls, hand in hand, looking very sorrowful but weeping no longer. Upon Mary's head was an old but well kept mourning bonnet--a little too large--which Joseph had brought down from the scant wardrobe of his aunt, and around Isabel's little straw cottage lay a band of black crape, which had served her as a neck-tie. The boy watched them from the window while these mournful objects could be seen, and then crept to his own home.

Surely Mary Fuller's father was right when he said that no human being was so weak or poor that she could not contribute something to the happiness of others. With an old black bonnet, and a scrap of sable crape, Joseph had managed to comfort the two orphan girls as they went forth on their mournful duty. Now he was ready for a braver work. As the limbs grow sinewy and powerful by muscular action, so the soul becomes stronger with each beneficent act that it performs. Joseph began to feel this truth and his whole being brightened under it.

As Joseph went up stairs he met his father coming in from the street. The old man looked tired and disappointed, for he had been walking all the morning in search of Mrs. Chester; but having obtained no trace of her, came home disconsolate.

"You are tired, father, come up and rest; this is too much for you; keep quiet, and let me go."

"But what can you do, Joseph, without hardly knowing a street in the city, and so much weaker than I am?"

"Did you go to the Mayor's?" questioned the boy, without answering.

"Did I go to the Mayor!--I to James Farnham!" exclaimed the artist almost sternly. "No, not for the whole universe."

The artist checked himself, and added--"What could I have done with him?"

"He is head of the police, Mrs. Chester told me, and might have put you in the way of tracking her, poor lady. I would not go to him after his cruelty; but that handsome young man, I know he would help me."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed the artist with animation, "go to him; he is noble-hearted, God bless the boy, go to him, Joseph."

"The last time he was here, father, you were not at home; but he made me promise to find him out if anything happened, especially if we found it hard to get along without your working too hard for your eyes."

"Did he? Heaven bless the boy."

"Why father, you seem to love him so much, almost more than you love me," said the boy with a faint pang. "Don't do that father, for he has so much, and I have nothing in the wide world but my father!"

"No, no, I don't love him so much--not more than his bright goodness deserves, Joseph; but you are my son--my only son sent to me from your sweet mother's death-bed--how could I love anything so well!"

"Forgive me, father," cried the boy, and his blue eyes sparkled through pendent tears. "Forgive me; I was jealous only a little, and it is all gone; I will go and tell Frederick that you want him to help me!"

"But you are weak, my boy."

"No, father, Mary Fuller has shamed my weakness all away. She is no stronger than I am, but what would that poor family do without her? I will never be so feeble again."

"Yes I will go and rest, and these boys shall do my work," said the old man proudly; "they will find her, together, I think; I could do nothing."

"We will find her, never fear," answered Joseph hopefully and putting on his straw hat he went out.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MAYOR AND HIS SON.

Nature hath many voices, and the soul

Speaks, with a power, when first it feels the thrill
Of buried Love. Then breaking all control,
She claims her own, against man's haughty will.

The Mayor was alone in his office--alone with his conscience. Cold as he had seemed, the face of that murdered man haunted him. There was no subterfuge for his conscience; now it was wide awake, stinging him like a serpent. The sensation was so new, that the Mayor writhed under it in absolute anguish; his hand was lifted to his forehead unconsciously, as if to hide the brand of Cain, that seemed to be burning there.

This was a sudden shock of conscience that he could neither shake off nor endure. His act of injustice against the man Chester had been followed so close by his death, that with all his subtle reasoning he could not separate the two events in his mind. He began to wonder about the family so terribly bereaved, and more than once the form of Mary Fuller rose before him, with her little hand extended, exclaiming, "He died of a broken heart--he died of a broken heart."

The Mayor almost repeated these words with his lips, for his conscience kept echoing them over and over, till they haunted him worse even than that pale dead face.

As he sat with one hand shrouding his forehead, the office door opened, and a boy stood in the entrance.

A strange thrill rushed through every nerve and pulse of Farnham's frame, even before he looked up. It seemed as if a gush of pure mountain wind had swept in upon him when he was struggling for breath.

It was a strange thing, but Farnham did not remove the hand from his forehead, even when he looked up, and when his eyes fell upon the gentle boy that stood with his straw hat in one hand, and his soft golden hair falling in waves down his shoulders--for Joseph followed the artistic taste of his father--the hand was pressed more tightly, and the proud man felt as if he were thus concealing the stain upon his brow from those pure blue eyes.

As Joseph looked at the Mayor, whose sternness had all departed, the small hand that grasped the rim of his hat began to tremble, and an expression full of gentleness shone over his face.

"I beg pardon, sir," he said, and the strong man was thrilled again by his voice, "but I wish to see your son, and thought perhaps you would be good enough to tell me where I can find him."

"My son, my son!" repeated the Mayor, with a sort of tender exclamation. "Oh, I had forgotten, you wish to see Frederick."

"Yes, Frederick," said the boy.

"He is at home--at least I think so," answered Farnham, speaking with kindly respect, as if he had not regarded the torn hat and humble garb in which his visitor came, but thought it the most natural thing in life that a boy like that should inquire thus familiarly after his son, "I am almost certain that Fred is at home."

"I do not know where he lives," said the lad, hesitating, and drawing a step forward as if held in that presence by some irresistible influence.

"Indeed," said the Mayor, holding out his hand, "but you know my son!"

Joseph came forward and placed his little slender hand in that so irresistibly, as it seemed, held towards him. The same tremor, too keen for pleasure and too exquisite for pain, ran through the proud man and the gentle boy while their fingers came lovingly together.

"He visits us sometimes, and you cannot think how much my father loves him."

"But he must love you better," said Farnham, sweeping his hand down the boy's golden hair with caressing gentleness.

"I don't know," said Joseph with a faint sigh, "but he loves me a great deal, I am sure of that!"

"And where do you live?" questioned Farnham, rather as an excuse to keep the boy's hand in his, than from a desire for information.

Joseph mentioned the street and number of his residence.

The Mayor started. "Great Heavens, you cannot be his child?"

"Who are you speaking of?" inquired Joseph.

"Is--is--was your father's name Chester?"

The tears rushed into Joseph's eyes. He drew his hand suddenly from the Mayor's clasp, and his voice was broken as he answered:

"No, sir, it was my father's best friend that you killed!"

Farnham fell back in his chair, his hand dropped heavily upon the table, he strove to disclaim the guilt so mournfully imputed to him, but his eyes fell, and his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. The strong man was dumb in the presence of that rebuking child.

"I must go now," said Joseph, moving backward, "Mrs. Chester is lost, and we must find her."

The Mayor did not hear him; he did not even know when the lad glided from his office; the last words had stunned him.

After a little he looked up and saw that Joseph was gone. As if drawn by some powerful magnetic force, he arose, took his hat and followed the lad.

Joseph was half across the park, but Farnham saw him at once, and followed with a sort of hushed feeling, as the wise men looked upon the star which led them to a Saviour.

Meantime, Fred Farnham had heard of Chester's death and was preparing to go out, hoping to give some comfort to his family. To this end he had gone to his mother for money. The Chesters had refused aid of him before, but now he was resolved to deceive them into accepting it through his Uncle Peters.

"What do you want money for, Fred--twenty dollars--if you are in for a champagne supper or something of that sort, I don't mind; but I must know where the money goes?"

Mrs. Farnham was arranging a tiny French cap on the back of her head, as she made these motherly demonstrations, and its graceful lightness threw her into a charming state of liberality.

"As a mother, you know, Fred, I am bound to see that the money which you ask rather liberally, I must say, is judiciously spent; now tell me where this is going?"

"I intend to help a poor family, who have been wronged and are in trouble," said the generous boy.

Mrs. Farnham closed her pearl portmonnaie with a fierce snap of the clasp.

"Frederick," she said, with a degree of energy that made the delicate spray in her cap tremble, as if it shared her indignation, "I cannot encourage this extravagance, you are getting into low society, sir, and--oh! Fred, you will break your mother's heart if you persist in following after these low people."

"Why, they live in the house with my Aunt Peters, mamma."

"There it is--I do believe you intend to drive me into hysterics; will you never learn that your Aunt Peters is not to be spoken of, and only visited in a quiet way? There is a medium, Fred, a medium, do you comprehend?"

"But what has my Aunt Peters done?"

"She has been ungrateful, Fred, so very ungrateful after I gave up--that is, after I set them up in business; she would keep claiming me as a sister, just as much as ever. Oh! it is heart-rending to know that my own son is encouraging this impertinence."

"Will you give me a portion of the money, ten dollars? I shall be

very grateful for that."

"Not a shilling, sir," exclaimed the lady, putting the portmonnaie into the pocket of her rustling silk-dress; "I will not pay you for going among poor people and degrading yourself; only keep a proper medium, my son, and you have a most indulgent mamma, but without that I'm granite."

A very soft and unstable sort of granite the lady seemed, as she shook her head and rustled across the room, repeating the hard word, more and more emphatically, as Frederick resumed his pleading.

Whether the granite would have given way at last, it is impossible to guess; for while Fred was urging his request with the eloquence of desperation, the street-door opened, and the tall gentleman, whom we have met in the tea-room, as the Mayor's guest, was seen in the hall.

"Do be quiet, Fred, here is Judge Sharp," said Mrs. Farnham, fretfully; "I won't be teased in this way about a parcel of vagabonds!"

Fred Farnham was a passionate boy, and he stood with burning cheeks and flashing eyes in the midst of the floor when the country-gentleman came in.

"I will go to my father, then, or pawn my watch--something desperate I'm sure to do," he muttered, walking to a window and half-concealing himself behind the waves of crimson damask that swept over it.

Mrs. Farnham shook her head at him, reprovingly, as she advanced to receive her visitor, with a torrent of superficial compliments and frothy welcomes.

Before the Judge could recover from this overwhelming reception, the door-bell rang, and a boy was admitted to the hall.

Frederick had seen the new-comer through the window, and went eagerly forward to meet him, at which his lady-mother drew herself up with imposing state, and called out--

"Frederick Farnham! will you never learn the just medium proper to your father's position?"

Frederick did not heed this remonstrance, but, after a few eager words in the hall, came forward, leading Joseph Esmond by the hand. The boy had taken off his straw-hat, and the entire beauty of his countenance, shaded by that rich golden hair, was exposed to the best advantage, notwithstanding his poverty-stricken garments; even the volubility of Mrs. Farnham was checked, as her eyes fell upon that delicate face. She caught the glance of those large blue eyes, and ceased speaking. It was the greatest proof of interest possible for her to exhibit.

Fred led his friend directly up to his mother.

"This is the boy--this is Joseph, dear mother; he tells me that those two little girls are suffering--that they have not a cent to get food with; now will you refuse me?"

Mrs. Farnham kept her eyes bent upon Joseph.

"What is it you have been telling my son about these poor people?"

"Oh, they have suffered so much, Madam--not a morsel to eat nor a house to rest in when they come home from poor Mr. Chester's funeral; but worst of all, the good lady who was so very, very ill, has got up when the girls were out, and gone away. She wasn't in her head, ma'am, raving with fever, and may be killed in the street."

It seemed impossible to look into those pleading eyes, and resist them. Mrs. Farnham took out her portmonnaie again, rather ostentatiously, for vanity always mingled with the best feelings and most trivial acts of her life.

"There," she said, presenting a bank-note to the lad, "take this, and give it to the poor family," and she looked consequentially round upon the stranger, as if to claim his approbation for her charity.

The Judge smiled rather constrainedly, and Mrs. Farnham added, turning to Joseph,

"See now that the money is spent for comforts, nothing else; I would have given it to you, Fred, only as I was saying, there is a medium to be observed--you will remember, my boy."

Joseph's eyes shone like sapphires.

"I will give it to your sister, Mrs. Peters, ma'am; she lives down stairs in the same house, and will take care of it for the little girls," he said, giving a terrible blow to Mrs. Farnham's pride, in the innocence of his gratitude.

Mrs. Farnham blushed up to the temples, shaded by her pale, flaxen curls, at this exposure, and the Judge smiled a little more decidedly, which turned the mean crimson of her shame into a flush of anger.

"You are a very forward little boy," she was about to say, but the words faltered on her lips, and she merely turned away, overwhelming poor Joseph with her stateliness.

"Mother, I am going with him to look for this poor lady," exclaimed Frederick. "The police must help us."

"You will do no such thing," answered Mrs. Farnham, sharply; "I declare, sir, the boy torments my life out with his taste for running

after low people."

"They are not low people."

Fred broke off abruptly, for his father entered very quietly, and with a look so at variance with his usual cold reserve, that even his vixenish and very silly wife observed it.

"What is the matter?--you have been walking home in the heat!" she exclaimed. "Mr. Farnham, will you never remember that there is a medium?"

For once Farnham deigned to answer his wife.

"I walked very slowly, and am not tired," he said, "but what is this? what is it Frederick proposes to do?"

"Mrs. Chester has escaped from her house, sir, in a raving fever, and cannot be found. I was going with Joseph, here, to search for her," answered Frederick, looking anxiously into his father's face.

"What, another!" muttered the Mayor, with a pang of remorse. "Yes, go my son, I will help you; the whole police shall be put on the search if necessary."

Joseph lifted his eyes to the Mayor as he was speaking, and as Farnham caught the look, a smile broke over his face, one of those powerful smiles that transfigure the very features of some men.

"Thank you! oh! thank you!" exclaimed the boy, "we shall find her now."

Here Judge Sharp stepped forward and held out his hand, for the Mayor had not seen him till then.

"Let me go with these young people, perhaps I can help them better than the whole police," he said, kindly.

"I wish you would," answered the Mayor, "for I feel very strangely to-day." He certainly was pale, and seemed much shaken, as if some powerful feeling had seized upon his vitality.

"Then I will leave you to your wife, while I go with these boys on their merciful errand," said the Judge. "Come, my lads."

"One moment," said the Mayor, taking Joseph by the hand, while he led him away from the group, and whispered in his ear. His lips were pale with intense feeling, as he listened for the answer.

"My name is Joseph Esmond, that is his name also."

"I knew it--I was sure of it," muttered Farnham, and he sat down in an easy chair, and watched the boy wistfully as he left the room.

God had reached the conscience of that man at last, and his granite heart was breaking up with the force of old memories and sudden remorse. That day, his past and present life had been linked forcibly together. The shock made him look inward, and he saw clearly that the hard, barren track of politics had led him to become a murderer. The law did not recognize this, but his soul did.

CHAPTER XIII

JANE CHESTER AND THE STRANGER.

Disease, thou art a fearful thing
When, half disarmed by household care,
Thou sweepest with thy poison wing,
O'er the loved forms to which we cling,
And bending to the sweet and fair,
Leav'st thy corroding mildew there!

But if thou treadst the plundered track,
Where poverty has swept before,
Leaving his victim on the rack,
Then, then, thou art a demon black,
That steals within the poor man's door.
Crushing his hopes forevermore!

And Jane Chester--where was she while strangers were bearing away the husband of her youth to his lone grave? Amid her fever that day, amid all her delirium, one idea had been vivid and prominent before her. The woman's heart remained true to its anchorage amid the storm and fire of approaching ship-fever. Long after reason had failed, the love that was stronger than reason told her that some great evil was befalling her husband. Time was to her a vague idea; she thought that he had been gone for weeks--that he was seeking for her and the children along the wharves and in the dim alleys of the city, and that the Mayor had forbidden him to come home. She would find him--she would take food and clean garments to him in the street. He should not wander there so poverty-stricken and neglected, without her. In defiance of the Mayor, in defiance of the whole world, she would go to him.

This thought ran through her burning brain, and trembled wildly on her tongue. Her husband--her husband--he could not come to her, and she must go to him. But the two little girls--they appeared to her like guards--great gaunt creatures dressed in fantastic uniform, stationed by her bed to coerce and frighten her. They held her back; they seemed to smother her in the bed-clothes, and gird her head down to the pillow with the hot clasp of their united hands. Those two little creatures became to her an object of terrible dread. She longed

for strength to tear them down from the towering altitude which her imagination gave, and blindfold them, as they, in her wild fancy, had blindfolded her with their scorching hands.

She saw little Mary Fuller put on her hood and go forth with a thrill of insane delight. That wild, uncouth form had seemed far more terrible than the other, and yet now the petite figure of her own child seemed to rise and swell over her like a fiend.

"Ice--ice!"

She knew, in her delirium, that this cry sometimes sent her dreaded jailors from the room. If they were absent, she could find her clothes--she could steal softly down stairs, and away after _him_.

"Ice--ice!" she cried, "I will drink nothing unless the ice rattles in the glass--cold, cold. It must be cold as death, I say."

Isabel rose up in terror, and taking their last sixpence, went forth for the ice. Then the mother laughed beneath the bedclothes--alone, all alone. She started up--tore off her cap and her night-dress, and thrust her unstockinged feet in a pair of slippers that stood near the bed.

Several dresses hung in the room. With her eager and burning hands she took them down, cast all but one on the floor, and put that on, laughing low and dismally all the while. A bandbox stood at the foot of the bed. She crept to it, took out a bonnet, and drew it with her trembling hands over the disordered masses of her hair, which she tried vainly to smooth with her hot palms. Strong with fever, wild with apprehension that her guard might return, the poor woman arose to her feet, and after steadying herself by the door-frame awhile, staggered from the room down the stairs and into the broad city.

Filled with the one idea, that of finding her husband, she passed on, turning a corner--another, pausing now and then by an iron railing, to which she clung, with a desperate effort to keep herself upright.

Many persons saw her as she passed, reeling in her walk, and with her sweet face flushed crimson; but, alas! these sights are not uncommon in our city, from causes far more heart-rending than illness, and with passing wonder that a person of her appearance should be thus exposed at mid-day. Those who noticed her went by, some smiling in scorn, others filled with such pity as the truly good feel for erring humanity. But the poor invalid tottered forward, unconscious of their pity or their scorn. She had but one object--one fixed thought among all the wild ideas that floated through her brain--her husband. She was in search of him, and, in her fever-strength, she walked on and on, murmuring his name over and over to herself, as a lost child mutters the name of its parents.

At last, her strength gave way. She was upon a broad sidewalk, to

which the granite steps swept down from many a lordly mansion. Her head reeled; the sunshine fell upon her eyes like sparks of fire; she clung to an iron balustrade, swung half round with a feeble effort to sustain herself, and sunk upon the pavement, moaning as she fell.

Many persons passed by the poor invalid as she lay thus helpless upon the stones. At last, one more thoughtful and more humane than the rest, bent down and spoke to her. She opened her eyes, looked at him with a dull, vacant gaze, and besought him, in husky tones, to go away and tell Chester that she was there, waiting. The man saw that she was suffering, and, let the cause be what it might, incapable of moving. He called to a woman, who was passing by with a basket on her arm, and gave her a shilling to sit down and hold the invalid's head in her lap, while he went for help.

"She may be only ill," said the benevolent Samaritan to the officer of police, whom he met on a corner. "There is no look about her of habitual intemperance; at any rate, she cannot be hardened."

The officer followed this kind man, and they found Mrs. Chester moaning bitterly, and much exhausted by the exertion she had made.

"It is a singular case," said the policeman, "her language is good, her appearance might be ladylike. But, see." The man pointed with a meaning smile at the symmetrical feet in their loose slippers. The blue veins were swelling under the white surface, and there was a faint spasmodic quiver of the muscles that seemed to spread over her whole frame.

"I can hardly believe that this is intoxication," said the stranger, gazing compassionately on the prostrate woman. "She must be ill--taken down suddenly in the street."

"But how came she barefooted? and her hair, it has not been done up in a week? I'm afraid we can't make out a clear case, sir."

"But where will you take her?"

"Home, if she can tell us where it is--to the Tombs, if she is so far gone as not to know," replied the man.

"The Tombs!"

"Oh, that is the City Prison, sir."

"I know, but the City Prison is no place for a person like this!"

"Well, if you can point out anything better."

"If I had a home in the city, this poor creature should never sleep in a prison," was the answer.

"Oh, I thought you must be a stranger," was the half compassionating

reply. "It takes some time before one gets used to these sights, but they are common enough, I can tell you, sir. Now let us see if she can be made to comprehend what we say."

With that sort of half-contemptuous interest with which the insane are sometimes cajoled, the policeman began to question the invalid; but she only asked him very earnestly if her husband had come; and turning her face from the hot sunshine that was pouring upon her, began to complain piteously that they had laid her down there to be consumed by a storm of fire-flakes that was dropping upon her neck and forehead.

"You see the poor creature can tell us nothing; she is quite beside herself," said the policeman. "I must take her to the prison--it is the best I can do--to-morrow her friends may claim her, perhaps. At the worst she will only be committed for a day or two."

"Wait here," said the stranger, hurriedly, "wait till I get a carriage; she must not be taken through the streets in this state," and the kind man went off in haste.

The officer looked after him smiling.

"You might know that he was from the country, poor fellow," he muttered, turning his back upon the sun, and good-naturedly sheltering Mrs. Chester from its rays. "After all, I hope he is right; there is something about her that one does not often meet with! upon my word I hope she is only sick."

The stranger came back with a carriage, a showy and rather expensive affair, the cushions covered with fresh linen, and the driver quite an aristocrat in his way.

"So that is the fun, is it?" he said, eyeing poor Mrs. Chester with a look of superb disdain. "I don't, as a usual thing, take people up from the sidewalks in this carriage, my good friend."

"But I will pay you--I have paid you in advance," urged the stranger.

"Not for a job like this. Gentlemen who have an interest in keeping these little affairs quiet, should be ready to pay well--couldn't think of starting without another dollar at the least!"

"There is the dollar--now help lift the lady in!"

"The lady--a pretty place this for a lady!" muttered the man, dismounting from his seat with a look of magnificent condescension, and approaching Mrs. Chester.

"Gently--lift her with great care!" said the stranger, placing his arm under Mrs. Chester's head. "There, my good woman, get in first, and be ready to receive her."

The poor woman who had given her lap to the invalid as a pillow, attempted to get up, but the driver, after eyeing her from head to foot, turned to the stranger:

"I couldn't think of taking in that sort of person; the sick woman seems clean enough; but, as for the other, she'll have to walk if she goes at all! Carriages wasn't made for the like of her."

The noble face of the stranger flushed with something akin to indignation, but, relinquishing Mrs. Chester to the policeman, he stepped into the carriage, and received the poor invalid in his own arms.

The policeman had become more and more charitable in his opinion of the unhappy lady. He hesitated a moment, with his hand on the carriage window.

"I say, sir, there does seem to be a doubt if this poor lady is not really ill. Perhaps, you might as well take her to the Alms House Commissioner first. He may think it right to send her up to the Hospital, and, then, she need not go before a magistrate."

"And can we do this? can she be taken directly to a hospital?"

"If the Commissioner pleases, he has the power to send her there at once."

"Then order the man to drive to the Commissioner's office," cried the stranger, eagerly. "I thought that in this great city the unfortunate might find shelter short of a prison. Tell him to drive on."

The door was closed; the carriage moved on; and in it sat the generous stranger, with the head of that poor invalid resting on his shoulder, supporting her with all the benign gentleness of a father. He felt that the hot breath floating across his cheek was heavy with contagion; he knew that fever raged and burned in the blue veins that swelled over those drooping arms and the unstockinged feet, but, he neither shrank nor trembled at the danger. Possessed of that pure and holy courage which tranquilly meets all peril when it presents itself--a courage utterly beyond that selfish bravado which mocks at death and exults in carnage--he scarcely gave his own position a thought. Bravery, with this man, was a principle, not an excitement. He was fearless because he was good; and, from this cause, also, was kindly and unpretending.

The carriage drew up in Chambers street, not far from the place where the cart had stood with poor Chester's body upon it, not an hour before. The stranger composed Mrs. Chester on the seat, and placed a cushion against the carriage for her head to rest on; then, opening a gate, he hurried through the narrow flower-garden that ran between the old Alms House and Chambers street, crossed through one of those broad halls to be found in the basement, lined on each side with

public officers, and, mounting half a dozen steps, he found himself in the Park. An Irish woman sat upon the steps of the nearest entrance, holding a forlorn bundle in her lap, and with a ragged baby playing with its little soiled feet on the pavement before her. This woman turned her head, and nodded toward the door when he inquired for the Commissioner's office, then bent her eyes again with a dead heavy gaze upon the pavement. The stranger, mounting the steps, found himself in a place utterly new and bewildering to him.

It happened to be "pay-day" for the out-door poor, and, into the ante-room of the Alms House, the alleys, rear buildings and dens of the city, once a fortnight, pour forth their human misery. The room was nearly full, and, amid this mass of poverty--such as he, fresh from the pure country air, had never even dreamed of--the stranger stood overpowered.

There is something horrible in the aspect of poverty when it reaches that low and bitter level that seeks relief in the lobby of an Alms House! The stranger looked around, and the philanthropy within him was put to its severest test. For the first time in his whole life he saw poverty in one dark, struggling mass clamoring for money! money! money! coarse, grasping poverty, such as crushes and kills all the honest pride of man's nature.

The room, large as it was, appeared more than half full, and not a single happy face was there. At the upper end was a platform, reached by two or three steps, and fenced in by a low wooden railing, along which ran a continuous desk. At this desk half a dozen clerks and visitors sat, with ponderous and soiled books spread open before them.

Up to this railing pressed the want-stricken crowd, the strong and healthy bustling and crowding back the fallen and infirm. Here old women struggled in the human tide, some casting fierce and quarrelsome glances at each other, others shrinking back with tears in their eyes, unequal to the coarse strife. Here, too, were men lean and gaunt with the hunger of a long sea voyage, elbowed aside by some brawny armed woman, who clamored loudly of the children she had left fast locked up in her little place, that she could but just pay the rent for. Here, too, were young girls, children with an aged, worn look, like the fruit that withers to half its size before it ripens. Most heartrending of all, persons of real refinement were mingled up with this rude mass; poor wretches who had indeed seen better days, and their helpless, broken-hearted looks, the remnants of early sensitiveness, that still clung around them, was pitiful to behold.

The stranger saw that upon the outskirts of the crowd these persons always lingered, waiting patiently till the coarse and strong were served. Outstretched upon the benches near the walls, and resting upon their bundles, were eight or ten sick men, with the fever upon them, waiting for the van which was to convey them to Bellevue.

Through all this misery, huddled and jostling together, our good Samaritan must force his way; for when he asked for the Commissioner,

the people pointed their lank fingers toward a door within the railing, and between himself and that was all this crowd of hungry beings.

"Let me pass, will you? Let me pass," he said, pale with the effects of the scene, but speaking in a gentle tone.

"And why should you pass? Wait your turn like the rest of us!" said a harsh-featured woman, turning fiercely upon him. "Is't because you've a fine coat on that you'd put before your bethers, I'd be liking to know?"

The stranger drew back. With all his benevolence he could not breast that rough wave of human life, which dashes weekly against the steps of our Alms House.

"Make room--make room there. What does the gentleman want? Make room, I say!"

It was the voice of a clerk, who, casting his eyes over the crowd, had seen the stranger.

The people did not fall back, but they huddled close together, with their heads turned and gazing upon the stranger, some muttering fiercely, others taking advantage of the moment to crowd closer to the railing. Thus a passage was made, and the stranger made his way through a little gate up to the platform, where the attentive clerk came forward to learn his business.

"Oh, you should have passed on to the next entrance. It is difficult to get along in this room on Saturdays," he said, after the stranger had unfolded his errand. "You will find the Commissioner in his office," and the clerk courteously opened a door.

The stranger entered a large, airy room, furnished as most public offices are, with the most hideous carpets and the stiffest looking chairs; in this instance there was a sofa that seemed to have been for years the pauper inmate of some furniture store, and to have been transferred from thence to the City Poor House, when the owners became tired of keeping it as a private charity.

Many persons were in the office, two or three women occupied the sofa, one of them weeping bitterly. Half a score of men, some from the country, others belonging to the institution, were grouped about the room reading newspapers, conversing, or waiting patiently for an opportunity to transact the business which brought them there.

A large table covered with dark cloth ran along one end of the room, around which stood half a dozen chairs more commodious than the rest, two of them occupied by the head clerks of the department, and in one, before which stood a small writing-desk, sat the Commissioner.

He was a slight, active man, with eyes like an eagle's; his features

were finely cut, and you could read each thought as it kindled over the dark surface of his face.

By the side of the Commissioner sat an old woman, talking in a low voice and weeping bitterly. You could see by the expression of the forehead, and by the faint changes of a countenance which no habit of self-control could entirely subdue, that the tale which this poor old creature poured into his ear was one of bitter sorrow. His dark eyes were bent thoughtfully on the table, and a look of deep commiseration lay upon his features as she continued her low and broken narrative.

This man was a benefactor to the poor. Sights of distress, even when they become habitual, had no power to damp his kindly sympathies. Yet while generous to the poor, he was faithful to the people.

At length the Commissioner looked up. You could see by the sudden kindling of his face, that he had bethought himself of some means by which this old woman might be benefited. He addressed her in a low but cheering voice. The poor old creature lifted her head, the tears still hung amid the wrinkles in her cheek; but over her withered lips there came a smile. The Commissioner reached out his hand, she changed her staff, leaned upon it with her left hand, and half timidly held out the other. You could see by the brightening of those aged eyes, and by the increased vigor of her footsteps as she left the room, how like a cordial this evidence of sympathy in her distress had cheered her aged heart.

The stranger whom we have introduced saw all this, and his heart warmed alike to the old woman and to the man who had comforted her. He approached the table, and could hardly refrain from holding out his hand to the Commissioner, so surely do truthful feelings vibrate to the good acts that they witness.

Had you seen those two men as they sat down together, you might have supposed that they had been old friends for twenty years.

The stranger told his story in few words, for he saw by the business appearance of the office that it was no place for long speeches. The Commissioner listened attentively.

"Where is the poor woman now?" he questioned, when the man paused in his narrative.

"She is waiting in the street--I brought her with me."

"I will see her myself: one minute and I am ready."

The Commissioner took up his hat, crossed the room, spoke a few words to the woman who sat weeping on the sofa, told an old man who stood waiting by the door that he would return in a very few minutes and attend to him, then with a light, active step he left the room, followed by the stranger.

They found Mrs. Chester in the carriage, grasping the cushion beneath her head with both hands, and muttering wildly to herself. The last few hours had brought her disease into its most malignant state. She was incapable of a single connected thought.

The Commissioner stepped into the carriage and helped to arrange the cushions.

"She is delirious; it is the fever. Typhus, I should think, in its worst form," he said. "She must have prompt care."

"She must, indeed," replied the stranger. "The noise, the hot sun, all are making her worse."

"And you do not know her name?"

"No; she has muttered over several names, but I could not tell which was hers."

"Nor her home, of course?"

"No; I found her in the street as I have told you."

"It is strange. She seems like an American. It is a pity to send her to the hospital, but I can do no better."

"You will send her there!" exclaimed the stranger, joyfully, "The policeman talked of the Tombs."

"No, no, she is no person for that, I am certain," exclaimed the Commissioner. "I only wish we had the power of doing more than can be expected at Bellevue; but certainly she shall go to no worse place than that."

"Oh, thank you!" said the stranger, gratefully.

"I will write out an order, with a few lines to the resident physician at Bellevue. Nothing more can be done, I am afraid."

"Oh, that is a great deal--everything, in fact--of course she will have proper attention in an institution where you have control."

The Commissioner looked grave, but did not answer that over the Bellevue Hospital his power was merely a name--that he could grant supplies and give directions, but had no real authority over subordinates appointed by the Common Council, and could not, for the most flagrant misconduct, discharge the lowest man about the department of which he was the bonded and responsible head. Shackled in his actions and even in his speech, this truly efficient and good man would pledge himself to nothing, so he merely said:

"Will you, sir--you who have done so much--conduct this poor woman

yourself to Bellevue? The van will go up soon, but she does not seem of the usual class."

"I will go with her, of course," replied the stranger, resuming his seat in the carriage with benevolent alacrity, while the Commissioner returned to his office and hastily wrote a letter to the resident physician, beseeching him to bestow especial care on the unknown patient who seemed so ill, and so completely alone in the world.

CHAPTER XIV.

BELLEVUE AND A NEW INMATE.

A gloomy home for one like this;
So pure, so gentle and so fair,--
Must her sweet life, in weariness,
Go out for lack of human care?

The carriage which bore Mrs. Chester paused before the gates at Bellevue. The gloomy and prison-like buildings loomed in heavy and sombre masses before the stranger, as he leaned from the carriage to deliver his order to the gatekeeper. The Hospital, with its walls of dark stone blackened by age, its sombre wings sweeping out from the main building and lowering above the massive walls, struck him with a feeling of gloom. It seemed like a prison that he was entering. The Hospitals were drear to him, and the dull, heavy atmosphere seemed full of contagion. He looked at the poor creature thus unconsciously brought there, perhaps to die, and his heart swelled with compassion.

The gate swung open, and down a paved causeway leading to the water, bounded on one side by a high stone wall, and on the other by a bakery and various workshops belonging to the institutions, the carriage was driven. The wharf in which this causeway terminated, was full of lounging inmates; some were attempting to fish in the turbid water; others leaning half asleep against the wall, and some were grouped together, not in conversation, but basking lazily in the sunshine.

Before it reached this wharf the carriage turned and was driven through an iron-studded gate, into an open and paved court that ran along the front of the main Alms House. The hospitals were some distance back of this building, but here the sick and dying must be brought first, for their names were to be registered in the Alms House books before they could be permitted to die in peace.

As the carriage drove in, up came the swarm of idlers from the wharf, dragging themselves heavily along, laughing stupidly at the ponderous gambols and grimaces of a huge idiot boy, who, on seeing a new arrival, rolled rather than walked up from the water with his hand extended, crying out--money--money. It was all the language the poor

creature possessed. He had learned to beg, and that was knowledge enough for him. In everything else he was the merest animal that crawled the earth. Yet, the other paupers followed him as they would have chased a dog or tame animal of any kind, whose gambols broke the monotony of their idleness.

Up came this idiot boy to the carriage, leering in upon its inmates, and rolling from side to side, with his hand out, mumbling that one word over and over between his heavy lips: and up came the gang of paupers, gazing in also with stupid curiosity.

It was well for Jane Chester that she could neither see nor hear all this--that the fever had grown strong enough to shut out all the real world to her heated senses! As it was, the sight of these miserable objects did create some new and more harrowing pain. She began to murmur of the torment to which she had been consigned--of the strange, heavy fiends so unwieldy and coarse that had taken her in charge. Every event of that fearful day was absolutely thrusting her a step nearer to the grave.

Just as the driver had dismounted from his seat and was about to open the door, the Alms House van came tumbling along the pavement and into the court with another freight of misery. Along by the carriage and nearer to the entrance rolled the ponderous black vehicle, and out from its tomb-like depths were taken forth the men and women, that an hour before had been lying so helplessly on the benches at the Commissioner's office.

One by one these poor creatures were carried up the steps, and after them rolled the idiot, calling out--money, money--as if the emigrants whom England consigns to our charity, had anything but their own miserable lives to give away.

And now with the heat, the noise, and the motion of the carriage, the poor invalid became almost frantic. She struggled with the stranger--she called wildly for Chester--and would have cast herself headlong to the pavement, for in her hallucination she fancied that the pauper gang were carrying away her husband.

They bore her into the Alms House in a fit of momentary exhaustion.

Her name and history was a blank in the Alms House books. Her lips were speechless--her eyes closed. They only knew that she was nameless, homeless; and thus was her entrance registered.

And now came two men to carry her to the hospital. One was old, with grey hairs, who tottered beneath his burden; and the other a pale lad, who had just recovered from the fever. Out through the back entrance, down a flight of steps into the hot sunshine again, they bore the helpless woman, her garments sweeping the pavement, and her pale hand sometimes striking the stones as they passed along.

But there was no rest for her yet; another registering was to be made.

In the Hospital office a pauper clerk had charge, and to his investigation the invalid must be consigned. He was no physician, certainly; but the hospital was divided into wards, each ward having its own class of diseases. It was this man's prerogative to decide what particular malady afflicted each patient, and to assign the proper ward. The two men placed Mrs. Chester in a chair, and the stranger stood behind it supporting her head upon his arm.

The clerk had entered the blank order upon his books, and now came forward to examine the patient.

"Put out your tongue?"

The order was given in a peremptory tone, worthy the captain of a Down-East militia company. Poor Mrs. Chester opened her wild eyes and looked at the man.

"Your tongue, woman! open your mouth--don't you hear?"

Jane Chester unclosed her parched lips and revealed her tongue. The edges were red, as if they had been dipped in blood; and down the centre, like an arrow, lay the dark incrustations peculiar to ship fever.

The clerk shook his head, and laid his hand upon the sinking pulse.

"Low, very low. Just gone of consumption--no doubt of it--phthisis pulmonalis--a bad case--very. Take her to the wing!"

"I should doubt, if you are not a physician, sir," said the stranger, mildly, "I should venture to doubt, if this lady is not suffering from fever. Not half an hour ago her pulse could hardly be counted; now you feel that each beat threatens to be the last! These terrible changes--do they bespeak consumption?"

"I have pronounced upon her case!" replied the clerk, "but it makes no difference. Let her go to the fever ward. If the doctor don't agree with your opinion, sir, she can be sent to the wing!"

"I am no physician, but she requires prompt care!" interposed the stranger.

"Then you are not an M. D.," cried the clerk, with a look of annoyance that he should have yielded to anything less than a professional man.

"No, but it is quite certain that all this moving about from place to place is killing the poor lady. She requires the greatest tranquillity, I am sure!"

"Well, well, take her up to number ten," said the clerk, addressing the persons who had brought Mrs. Chester in. "The doctor will see to her when he goes his rounds!"

The two men raised Mrs. Chester in their arms, and carried her up a flight of broad stairs and through a neighboring passage, till the stranger, who looked earnestly after them, could no longer detect the faint struggle with which she sought to free herself, or hear the moan as it trembled on her pallid lips.

The stranger drew a deep breath as she disappeared, and turned back to the office greatly oppressed by all that he saw. The clerk was leaning back in his chair, drumming with his fingers upon the seat. Inured to an atmosphere of misery, he felt but little of the painful compassion, the mingled horror and pity which almost overwhelmed that benevolent man.

"You are sure, quite sure, that this poor lady will be cared for," said the kind man, addressing the clerk. "Here is money, I would give more, but am some distance from home and may require all that I have--see that she wants for no little comfort that can be bought!"

The clerk's eye brightened as he saw the money.

"Oh, be sure, sir, she shall have every care."

"I have a letter for the resident physician--where can he be found?"

"Oh, he has just started for the island in his boat. The aldermen and their families dine at the Insane Asylum, and he has gone with them. You might have seen his yellow flag on the water as you came in."

"And when will he return to the Hospital?"

"Oh, in a day or two; his rooms are in the other building, but he usually walks over the wards once or twice a week!"

"Once or twice a week! Why I heard that the ship fever was raging here--that the hospitals were crowded, and many of your doctors sick!"

"Well, no one disputes that the hospitals are crowded--half the patients are on the floor now; and some of the assistants are sick enough!"

"And your resident physician only passes through these hospitals once or twice a week--who attends to the patients?"

"Oh, the young doctors of course!"

"And are they experienced men?"

"Some of them are graduates, almost half I should think."

"And the rest?"

"I suppose, all have studied a year or two."

"And do these men--who have only studied a or year two--prescribe for the patients--without the advice of a superior?"

"Certainly, why not? They must begin sometime, you know."

"And will this poor woman, laboring as she is under an acute disease, be placed under the care of a mere student?"

The clerk mused before he answered.

"Let me see, number ten--yes, young Toules has charge there. It is his turn in the fever ward. He has never graduated, I believe."

"And has he had no practice among fevers?"

"Oh! yes, he has been three days in number ten, and one sees a good deal of fever in three days, I can tell you."

The stranger turned away sick at heart.

"Let me," he said, in a broken voice, "let me speak with the nurse who is to take care of the person I brought here."

The clerk called to a lame pauper who was limping through the building and ordered him to summon the nurse from number ten. The old man went with difficulty up the stairs that led from the hall, and soon returned, followed by a tall dissipated-looking woman of forty, who still retained in her swollen features traces of intelligence and early refinement that redeemed them in some degree from positive brutality.

A look of fierce and settled discontent lay on this woman's features, which was aggravated by the dress of dark blue that fell scant and ill-shapen around her stately figure, and was fastened tightly over the bosom with a succession of coarse horn buttons that but half filled the yawning buttonholes.

This woman approached the stranger with a dogged and sullen air.

"Is it you that wants me?" she said, looking earnestly at him. "That man said somebody wanted to see the nurse!"

"And is this woman a nurse to the sick? Is she to have the charge of this poor lady?" questioned the stranger, turning to the clerk.

"That is the nurse, and I hope she suits you, for you seem hard to please," answered the clerk, crustily. "She is one of the best women in the hospital, at any rate!"

The stranger turned his eyes upon the woman with a grave and pained look.

"I sent to ask your kindness for the poor lady that has just been carried to your ward," he said; "of course you are well paid by the city; but I am willing to reward you for extra care in this case!"

"Well paid by the city!" cried the woman, with a fierce and sneering laugh; "oh, yes, hard work and prison fare at the Penitentiary--harder work and pauper fare when they send us here for nurses. That is the pay we get from the corporation for nursing here in the fever. If we die there is a scant shroud, a pine coffin and Potter's field. That, is our pay, sir!" and the woman folded her arms, laughing low and dismally.

"The Penitentiary--what does she mean?" inquired the stranger, greatly shocked.

"Oh! they come from the Penitentiary, these nurses," said the clerk. "The corporation have to support the prisoners, you know, and the hospitals all get their help by law from Blackwell's Island."

"And is this woman a prisoner?"

"A prisoner--to be sure I am--you don't take me for a Poor House woman, I hope?" cried the nurse. "I haven't got to that yet--nobody can say that I was contemptible enough to come here of my own accord."

There was something too horrible in all this. The stranger sat down and drew out his purse with a suppressed groan.

"Here," he said, giving some money to the woman, "this will pay you for a little kindness to the poor lady. In the name of that God who has afflicted her, see that she has proper care."

The woman's face softened. For one instant some remnant of half-forgotten pride made her hesitate to take the money, but this was soon conquered, and she reached forth her hand clutching it eagerly.

"I will take care of the lady, sir, never fear," she said, and for the moment, she really intended to perform her promise.

"Do, and when you lie ill as she does, God be merciful to you as you are to her!" said the stranger, solemnly, and taking his hat he went forth with a sad countenance.

When Judge Sharp left Bellevue he went directly to the Mayor's residence, where he had made a dinner engagement the night before. We have already described his meeting with Joseph Esmond.

He was satisfied that the person whom he had conducted to the hospital was the lady for whom the lad was in search, and resolved to go with the boy and obtain more knowledge of her condition. The little girls had just returned from the funeral, and were sitting desolately in their bed-room, shrinking into the farthest corner like frightened

birds in a cage, for the landlord had taken possession, and the poor children had no home but the street; even in that little bed-room they felt like intruders.

But the Judge came with Frederick and Joseph, and this was a sunbeam to their grief.

The noble man questioned them gently, and at last told the whole anxious group that Mrs. Chester was alive and in Bellevue, where he had himself conducted her.

The little girls uttered a cry.

Oh, the wild, the bitter joy of that moment. She was alive--alive! They should see her again--stand by her bedside. She would look at them--speak to them. They clung to each other, the sobs they could not suppress filled the room. The Poor House! They were going to the Poor House! What was that to them? She was there, and with her they could lie down and sleep once more. It was better thus. The landlord had taken possession of their home. He determined to keep the scant furniture, for his rent, and after that the home of those poor children was the street. The Alms House! It had a pleasant sound to them. That was a home from which no landlord could send them forth. They went gladly with Judge Sharp before the Commissioner.

"You will not let them take us away from her--we may all be together!" pleaded Mary.

The Commissioner mused; it was unusual, but he resolved to request of the superintendent that these children might not be taken from Bellevue until the mother was pronounced out of danger, or should be no more. He wrote to this effect, and with his own hands placed the children in the carriage that was to convey them to Bellevue.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FEVER WARD AND ITS PATIENTS.

Rest--give me rest--my forehead burns,
Hot fires are kindled in my brain!
Oh, give me rest, till he returns,
Rest--rest from all this racking pain.

Poor Mrs. Chester, half dying and quite insensible, was borne into the fever ward of that close and crowded Hospital. Number ten was a large airy room, capable of holding twenty patients with comparative comfort, but now the fever was raging fiercely. Nearly six hundred patients crowded those gloomy walls, and in the room where twenty persons might have been almost comfortable, eighty poor creatures

were huddled together, breathing the infected air over and over again till their struggling lungs were poisoned and saturated with the deadly atmosphere.

Close together, along the walls, were ranged narrow wooden cots, with their straw beds and coverings of coarse cotton check. And close together on those contracted couches--the meagre causeway from which many of these poor creatures were lifted to a pauper's grave, the patients were huddled, suffering in all the stages of that fierce and terrible disease, the malignant typhus.

There the sufferers lay, their death-couches jostling, the hot poison of their breaths mingling together, and spreading a dank miasma from bed to bed.

Some were in the first creeping stages of the disease flattering themselves that it was only a little cold they had taken. Others were shivering with that deathly chill that glides like the icy trail of a serpent down the back; the limbs aching as with severe toil, and the brain literally on fire with seething poison. Others were fierce and mad with delirium; their faces, their breasts and arms had turned of a dull copper color, the strongest and unmistakable sign of the deadly form which typhus takes when it is called malignant ship fever.

The poor creatures rolled to and fro on their narrow couches, tearing out the straw with their hot and quivering fingers, or twisting the soiled sheets with a feeble and shaking grasp. Some were calling for water, and praying in piteous tone for mountains of ice, cold bright ice to fall down and bury them.

Others were still further advanced in the terrible disease, and lay with the last heavy clouds of delirium resting upon the brain. Pale, emaciated and motionless, they spoke in whispers of the husbands and children whom they had left, it seemed to them years before, and of whom they faintly pleaded for tidings. It was piteous to see those weaker still, that lay more helpless than infants, the tears rolling mournfully from their eyes, unable to utter the inquiries that kept their white lips in constant motion, but gave out no sound.

More than one stretched back upon the meagre pillow, was in her death-throe groping in the air, with glazed eyes rolled upward to the ceiling, while the under jaw dropped lower, lower, leaving the mouth half open never to be closed again, save by a penitentiary nurse.

One lay dead upon her couch stiffening, there unheeded, the God of heaven only knowing at what moment the breath left her body.

Scant and miserable as were those pauper beds, enough for all to die upon could not be found at the Hospital; so blankets had been cast upon the floor, and on them were laid the sick, till the whole ward was completely littered with human misery. Over this scene came the glaring daylight, for the windows had neither blinds nor shutters,

nothing but a valance of gingham through which the sunshine poured upon the aching eyes of the sick.

They laid Mrs. Chester among those who moaned and writhed upon the floor. Nothing but the rough folds of a blanket lay between her delicate limbs and the hard boards. Amid the groans, the ravings of delirium, the faint death rattle that rose and swelled upon the horrid atmosphere, they laid her down. The student physician had been his rounds that day, and so she was left to the care of the nurses. Thus she remained quite unconscious of the horrors that surrounded her, till the nurse came back from her interview with Judge Sharp. This woman grasped the money in her palm, and the touch seemed to give a glow of animal pleasure to her features, as she threaded her way through the prostrate sick.

A nurse some years younger than herself, but with less of character in her face, stood near the door. She approached this woman, and softly unclosing her hand revealed the money.

"What! there have but four died to-day--you did not find that about them? I searched thoroughly myself, and none of them had a cent."

"Never mind where it came from. You shall have a share, but remember I have got to work for it yet. Where is the woman they have just brought in?"

"What, the slender woman with all that beautiful hair? She is about here, on the floor, I believe."

"She must have a cot, I am determined on it," said the elder nurse, resolutely. "Those who pay us shall be first served," and the woman went on through the prostrate sick, searching eagerly for Mrs. Chester. "Yes, here she is, sure enough," talking softly to herself--"now let us see what can be done about a bed."

The woman moved from cot to cot, gazing on the inmates, not with pity, she was used to their moans, but eagerly searching for a bed that promised soon to be empty. Her eyes fell upon the corpse that lay within a few paces of Mrs. Chester, and she approached the cot with gleeful alacrity, saying to her companion:

"Oh, here is an empty bed--I thought it would not be long before we found something for her to lie on besides the floor. Go and call Crofts."

The younger nurse went out, and directly there came two men into the ward, bearing a rude pine coffin between them. They trod heavily along the floor, knocking the coffin now and then against a cot till it jarred the helpless inmate, and thus they carried it down the whole length of the ward. They deposited the rude thing close by the blanket on which Mrs. Chester lay, and then went out, leaving the women to relieve the bed of its mournful burden.

The younger nurse had brought with her a scant shroud, of the coarsest muslin, and there in the midst of the sick, one of the women put this grave garment on, while the other stealthily searched in the bosom of the corpse and under the pillow for any little valuable that the poor woman might have hoarded in her death-bed. After groping about awhile, the young nurse drew forth her hand with a low chuckle. It contained a bit of tissue paper, soiled and crumpled in a heap. A bank note! what else could it be? The two women looked at the paper and their eyes gleamed. It was not often that they found bank notes about the Bellevue paupers! How they longed to examine it then and there! But the sick were not all insensible, and the young woman thrust the treasure into her bosom, whispering as she stooped down to smooth the shroud:

"By and by--of course we go halves to-day!"

"That is fair and above board!" replied the other, folding the arms of the dead upon the pulseless bosom they had robbed, "there now, call in the men!"

Again those two men came tramping heavily among the sick. There was some bustle and a little joking as they placed the pauper corpse in its pine coffin; and when they bore it out one of the men inquired, in a voice that might have been heard half over the room, if there was much chance of their being wanted again within an hour or two.

The elder nurse looked around upon the cots, and answered that it was very likely, but that the next coffin must be longer--at least four inches longer!

The two women followed the coffin out, and when quite alone in the passage, fell to examining the value of their prize.

"There must be two bills," said the younger, beginning to unfold the little parcel, "what if each of them should be a five, now!"

These words were followed by a short and scornful laugh, accompanied by an oath, that most fearful thing on the lips of a woman. The scrap of soiled tissue paper unfolded a lock of grey hair.

"Never mind, mine is here all in hard chink!" said the elder nurse, striking her bosom. "Here will be enough, with what the doctor allows for the patients, to give us one glorious night. Just help me lift the woman into bed, then slide round to the consumption wards; or, what's better, whisper a word to the orderly, and ask him to come; we'll make the old shanty shake again before midnight."

The young woman, after appeasing her disappointment by casting the lock of hair upon the floor, and grinding it fiercely beneath her heavy shoe, became somewhat consoled. But she sullenly expressed a determination to find her share of the drink, if she were obliged to rob every patient in the ward.

After this conference the nurses returned to the ward. One took off Mrs. Chester's outer garments, while the other proceeded to arrange the empty cot. In the same cot, the same sheets, and on the very pillow from which the dead had just been removed, they laid the helpless woman. Upon her fair hands and face still rested the dust that had been gathering upon her from the street. But under our benignant Common Council, the largest hospital in America contained no bath for its patients, though the Croton water gushed everywhere around the building. There was a shower bath for punishment of the penitentiary women, but for the suffering---not even that.

They laid her down, therefore, unrefreshed in that death couch; and there she remained moaning like the rest, lifting her sweet voice louder and louder in her excitement; for the noise, the atmosphere and the horrid sights everywhere in the room drove her wild. She flung up her hands and laughed as the nurses passed to and fro before her bed. She called them angels--those two besotted creatures--and besought them with wild, sweet energy to cherish and care for Chester while she was so far away. These women promised her cajolingly, patting her head with their bloated hands, which, in her madness, she would gather to her bosom or kiss eagerly with her hot lips.

The ordinary course of her disease might not have arrived so early to the fierce virulence that it had now obtained; but the day had been one of fearful turmoil, even for a healthy person, and this fever, in a single hour, grows fierce and strong upon such causes. Fuel for a death-fire had been heaped up in that one miserable day. Now the poor creature began to rave--her child, her husband, and little Mary. She shrieked for them louder and louder, that her voice might rise above the wild, strong cries that swelled as she thought in defiance of her feebleness.

CHAPTER XVI.

JANE CHESTER AND HER LITTLE NURSES.

As the starbeams come earthward, and smile on the night,
Awaking the blossoms that drooped in the day,
And kindling their hearts with a dewy delight,
They came to the couch where the sufferer lay.

All at once, in the very height and fury of her delirium, Mrs. Chester fell back upon the pillow smiling; the hot tears rolled from her eyes, and her shaking hand was outstretched. She knew them--for one minute, that woman's heart grew stronger than her frenzied brain, She knew those two little girls who crept hand in hand to her couch, holding back their tears, and striving to look cheerful; though each smile that they forced broke away in a quiver upon their lips, and the very effort to be calm made their grief more visible.

"Children--_my_ children!" whispered the poor woman, softly, for, after they came in, she never once lifted her voice as she had done, "come, I will make room--the bed is cool and broad--better, so much better than that in which they shook and jostled me--come, my little tired birds--here is pillow enough for us all; when he comes home again it will please him to see us here, so comfortable. Ah, here come my angels; sit close, little ones, till they sweep by. You cannot see their wings now--they are furled close under those comical dresses, but that is because we are not good enough to look upon them. Some day, when he comes, my angels will throw off those blue clothes, and then their wings will unfurl and scatter soft, sweet air all over us. You shall see them then, so beautiful--fringed and starred and spotted with gold and purple and bright green--with sunshine melting through, and the scent of violets dropping around--hush, girls, don't cry, you shall have a good sight at my angels then--see, see, I am beckoning them here. Now, hold your breath and wait; hush!"

The two nurses, who had been at another end of the ward, came that way, and with her hand quivering in the air, the poor invalid beckoned them. They came on, loitering heavily along, and talking to each other. The young woman turned away to another side, and the elder nurse moved forward, grumbling.

"See, one is coming. I have been bad to-day, you know, and only this angel will appear," whispered the invalid, pointing with her unsteady finger toward the nurse.

Mary Fuller looked up; her large eyes began to dilate, and her face grew very pale. The woman's eyes fell upon her. A look of ferocious pleasure rose to her face, and she came forward, laying her hand heavily upon the child's shoulder.

"Mother!" broke from Mary Fuller, and the tears stood in her affrighted eyes, "oh, mother!"

"Don't mother me, puss! A pretty child you are, to sneak off, get yourself new frocks and the like, while your own poor mamma is in prison!" cried the woman, clutching the child's shoulder. "And how came you here at last?"

"I came in search of her!" said the child, pointing to Mrs. Chester; "she was good to me, after--after they took you away. I lived with them; this is her little girl!"

"Then you did not come to see your own mother!--very well--very well! I only wait till I get out, that's all!" and giving the poor child a shake, the woman fell to settling the bed-clothes about Mrs. Chester, muttering threats against the child who stood trembling by her side.

"I have come," said Mary, meekly, following the woman as she turned from the bed; "I have come to stay. The kind gentleman at the Park said that we might both live at Bellevue till she was better. Mother,

oh! mother, let me help take care of her. I can--see how strong I have grown!"

"Take care of her, indeed--and who would take care of me, if I were sick, I should like to know?"

"I would, indeed I would, mother."

"Indeed you would--very likely," sneered the woman. "But stay, for what I care--you will be sure to catch the fever though; and that little doll, with long curls, let her stay, too. It's a sweet place, here, for children!"

"I don't want her to stay here--only let her come in once in awhile to see her poor mother--she is so young and so pretty; the fever takes those first, I am sure!"

"Well, let her come or go--only remember this, if you stay here it will be no baby play, but work--I'll make you work, let me tell you that!"

"I will work--oh, mother, if anything I can do will only save her! You don't know how hungry I was after you went away--and she fed me!"

"Well, feed her, then!" cried the woman, a little softened, "there is a cup, get some water and give her drinks!"

Mary Fuller took the tin-cup pointed out, and filled it with water. She went up to the patient with her gentle voice, and held the water to her lips. The poor woman drank greedily, and then Mary went about seeking for other means of comfort. The doctor had not yet seen his patient, so she could only act by her own feeble judgment. She found a large bowl, and filling it with water, bathed the neck and face and hands of the poor invalid. Then she saturated Isabel's handkerchief, and laid it moist and dripping upon the hot forehead.

"She is better--see, it does her good!" cried the child, with glad tears in her eyes, turning to Isabel, who stood by, weeping as if her heart would break, and trembling with a fit of terror that had seized her the moment she entered the room.

This cool ablution had indeed relieved the patient. She sighed deeply, and her mind seemed to change its tone. She was wandering in sweet and pleasant places, where fountains gushed high, and wild flowers shook and brightened beneath the soft rain-drops that fell around; nothing could be more beautiful than the words that denoted this bright change in her wanderings. Mary's heart thrilled to hear these words, for she knew that it was her hand that had created the paradise in which the sufferer fancied herself to be wandering.

Only once during the next twenty-four hours did Mary leave that humble bed; then it was to accompany Isabel to the matron, who kindly gave her a pillow, and allowed her to lie down on the carpet in her room.

The poor child was completely worn out with fatigue and grief.

But Mary never left her watch for a minute. All the evening she sat by Mrs. Chester's couch, bathing the forehead of her benefactress, cooling the palms of her hands, and listening to the soft murmurs that fell from her lips.

About ten in the evening, there came into the ward a young man, not more than twenty years of age, and singularly effeminate in his appearance. He wore a loose calico dressing-gown, and embroidered slippers. His manners were gentle, and he seemed greatly distressed by all the misery that surrounded him. Never in his brief existence had this young man prescribed for a patient, till he entered the Hospitals at Bellevue; yet there he stood, in the midst of a pestilence that might have taxed the skill of twenty old physicians, free to tamper as he pleased with all that mass of human misery.

It was well for those poor creatures, that this young student made up in goodness of heart what he lacked in experience. He did not fear the pestilence half so much as his own ignorance. But for that professional pride that clings so powerfully to the young, he would have resigned at once, rather than take upon his conscience the solemn responsibility of life and death, as it lay before him in that fever-ward. But the ignorance that does nothing, is preferable to that which absolutely kills. The student had little confidence in himself, but he did not strangle nature with his presumption, and lacking deeper skill, made a kind nurse. He had learned how to watch the changes of this disease--an important thing to know--and gave little medicine, but was prompt at sustaining life with stimulants when the time came for that. Altogether, it was a fortunate chance for the poor creatures huddled in that fever-ward, that they were consigned to no worse hands.

The young doctor went his rounds, with a small blank-book in his hand, writing down with a pencil the few and simple prescriptions that he gave. His presence had a soothing effect upon the patients, for he spoke kindly to them all. At length he came to Mrs. Chester--two days and three nights she had been struggling with the fatal disease. The little Mary sat meekly by her side, for up to this time she alone had ministered to the sick woman.

The young man took Mrs. Chester's hand from the checked coverlet and began to count her pulse. A hundred--more, even more than that he counted before the minute went by. It was a case of fearful danger; he saw that at once. Gladly would he have called in counsel, but no physician had a right within the walls of Bellevue, except those appointed by the Resident. Two of the assistants were ill, and the Resident had not yet returned from his dinner with the Common Council. Perhaps this was a fortunate chance, for the simple remedies ventured upon by the student did no harm, and nature was left untrammelled to wrestle with the disease.

"You will let me stay with her. The gentleman at the Park said I might

stay, if the Doctor did not object!" said Mary, lifting her eyes to the young man as he laid Mrs. Chester's hand upon the bed.

The student had hardly noticed the child before; but the sweetness of her voice pleased him, and he answered that she might stay if she could do any good to her sick friend.

"I have been listening. I heard what you said about them all along here. In the morning you shall see if I hav'n't taken some care!"

"I hope so," said the student, sadly, "for, without care, the greatest care, a good many must be dead before morning!"

"Show me which. Just point them out very softly, and tell me what ought to be done. You need not be afraid that I shall fall asleep!" whispered the little girl, rising eagerly.

The student looked at the child in surprise. Her plain face, a moment before so sad, shone with the brightness of an angel's.

"I am sure you will not sleep," he said. "Now follow me around to these beds and I will repeat my directions to you--the women, I see are gone out. You will make a small nurse, but a very good one, I dare say!"

Mary followed him, listening to every word that fell from his lips, and reading the expression of his face with her intelligent eyes.

All night long the child was on her feet moving from bed to bed, carrying drink to one, persuading another to swallow the medicine that had been prescribed, and pouring a spoonful of wine or brandy into the pale mouth of another; thus keeping the feeble lamp of life flickering on, pauper life, it is true, but precious to them as the breath that swells the purple-clad bosom of a monarch.

The nurses left the ward about midnight, and did not return for many hours. When they came back Mary turned very pale, and cowered down at the foot of Mrs. Chester's bed. Her mother--she knew the signs, oh, how well--her mother had been drinking. Judge Sharp's benevolence had provided the means of a carouse for those two wretched women. They both came in reeling from one sick bed to another; the older muttering taunts upon the wretched inmates; the other shedding maudlin tears more horrible and disgusting still. After wandering about the ward for a time, the two wretched creatures seated themselves upon the floor, and throwing their arms around each other, sunk into a brutal slumber which lasted till day-light.

Again Mary Fuller arose from her place by Mrs. Chester; again she ministered to the lips that unconsciously muttered her name, coupling it with words of tender love; and again she hovered around those pauper couches, treading very lightly, for she trembled with fear that her mother might awake. When daylight came, the child went noiselessly round to those whom the doctor had supposed in the greatest danger.

They were all alive. One looked up, blessing her with eyes that, lacking her gentle care, must have been sealed in death. Another parted her pale lips, and besought the child not to leave her again to the care of those rude women. A third took her little thin hand and kissed it.

The child crept back to her seat, weeping tears of thankfulness. She, apparently one of the most helpless of God's creatures, had that night saved the lives of three human beings. She had done this great good, and with her little hands folded in her lap thanked God--not audibly, but as children sometimes do thank the Heavenly Father--that He had made her so strong.

While these feelings comforted the child, the mother arose heavily from her drunken slumber.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE STUDENT PHYSICIAN AND THE CHILD.

Softly she came like a spirit of light,
And her goodness shone out like the glow in a gem;
As she waited and watched through the wearisome night,
The fall of her footstep was music to them.

Another day went by. New patients were crowded into the hospital, and some were carried out with their feet toward the door. For an hour or two that day Mary Fuller slept a little, with her head resting against Mrs. Chester's cot. The groans and the depression of the sick did not shake her nerves as they had at first; and the poor thing was so exhausted that even in that place, and in the poisoned atmosphere, her slumber was deep and tranquil; and then came a remembrance of her father's dying words, that no human being was so humble or weak that some good to humanity might not be won from her exertions. She looked around the ward and saw a blessing in every eye, and she knew that one in heaven was blessing her also.

Oh, if Mrs. Chester could have slept for one hour like that little creature at her feet. But the poison seemed kindling afresh in her brain; her fancies grew wild and terrible; she was climbing mountains, sinking deep, deep, deep into the very bowels of the earth, where serpents coiled and hissed, and writhed with horrid joy as they saw her descend. Now she clung to the point of some sharp rock, holding on with her fingers, while those huge serpents trailed themselves upward, crawling slowly from the abyss from which she was saved only by the grip of her own slender fingers.

Then you knew by her voice that the scene had changed. She was pleading for Chester--pleading with low broken tones, that would have

touched a heart of stone. She besought the Mayor not to wrong her husband, not to press and wring his proud spirit so cruelly as he had done; and then she believed that her sweet eloquence had prevailed, for her lips trembled with thanks; she murmured nothing but soft blessings upon the man who had been to her worse than a murderer. Another change, and she passed on to some new hallucination, visionary as the last, for day and night her brain never rested. When they questioned her, the poor woman always answered that she was not ill, that nothing was the matter, nothing whatever--she only wondered the people would tease her so with inquiries that had no meaning.

Another night came on, and again Mary prepared herself to watch by the sick. The few hours of slumber she had obtained, made quite a new creature of her. She was resolved to be doubly vigilant--that no one of the suffering persons around her should lack nourishment or care. How cheerful and strong the little creature grew, as a sense of her power to accomplish good increased upon her. It was strange, but after the first few minutes she never once thought of the danger. There she was, feeble and helpless, in the very midst of a pestilence that would have terrified the strongest man; but it seemed quite impossible to the brave girl that the fever should reach her. Perhaps this very confidence protected her, for while she inhaled poison with every breath, it produced no harmful effect upon her.

The nurses were sullen and bitter in their language to the child all day. They seemed to think her an intruder, and, but for the young physician, she must have been driven forth from the ward by her own mother. Toward night these two women whispered much together, going frequently into the passage where several nurses from other wards met them stealthily. As the night drew on, Mrs. Chester sunk into a fitful sleep, and this encouraged the little watcher, who sat gazing wistfully on her face, scarcely daring to move, though the noise around was unabated. The hours crept on, and darkness gathered over those pauper-couches. Mary looked up through the gloom, and saw her mother creeping softly from couch to couch, making herself very busy with the medicines. The doctor had just paid his last visit for the night; finding Mrs. Chester low, and evidently sinking, he had ordered both brandy and wine to be given in small quantities, but very frequently, during the night.

The tin-cups which held the precious stimulants--for they were precious in the sick-room, holding life and death in their strength--stood upon a little stool near Mrs. Chester's cot. It was these tin-cups that drew the nurse like a vampire to the spot where her child sat watching.

"Go," she said, in a more kindly tone than she had hitherto used when addressing the gentle girl, "go and bring that little curly-headed doll in, if she wants to kiss her mother again to-night--I suppose she would like to see her fast asleep, as she is now!"

Mary arose, dissatisfied, she knew not why, with the tone of cajoling kindness in which she had been addressed. But Mrs. Chester slept, and

during the next ten minutes would not require her attendance. Isabel had been drooping like a strange bird, since she came to the Alms House, and Mary knew that it would cheer her to see her poor mother in that calm sleep. Still the child went forth with unaccountable reluctance. The moment she was out of sight, that wretched woman pounced like a bird of prey upon those tin-cups, and poured three-fourths of their contents into a dark earthen pitcher that she carried under her apron. Then she hastily filled the cups with water, leaving just enough of the original contents to color the whole.

The next and next patient was robbed in like manner; then with her black pitcher reeking with the life she had plundered from those poor creatures, the wretch went out, comparing with a chuckle her horrid spoil, with the jar half-full of brandy, which the younger nurse had gathered from her end of the ward.

"Hurry, hurry, or we shan't get through before the young cockatrice comes back to catch us at work! She has got the eye of a hawk, I can tell you," cried the woman, emptying her pitcher into the jar, which was carried away to a safe corner by her accomplice.

"Come, bring the water and fill up after me. There is twenty beds left yet. I gave the right sort of symptoms to the doctor, and he left the kind of medicine that we like best for almost the whole lot."

The young woman followed her ruthless leader into the ward, carrying the water-pitcher in her unsteady hand, for she had not reached the hardened audacity of her preceptress, and there was something in the scene to make even a debased nature tremble.

"Don't, don't take more than half; they will die before morning if we do!" she whispered, as the eyes of a patient, full of heart-rending reproach, was turned upon their work. "See, this one is so feeble."

"Poh, a little brandy, more or less, what does it signify?" cried Mrs. Fuller.

"The wine, then leave the wine. I did not take a drop!"

"More fool, you!"

"Hush!" said the young woman, "I hear her coming. Leave the rest; we shall be found out."

"Take this and give me the water. Out of the way, now, and see that you don't drink any till I come!"

The young woman hurried out of the room, meeting Mary Fuller and little Isabel in the passage.

"They want water. I am going for more water. It is wonderful how they keep us running night and day!" she said, hoping to draw off their attention with a gratuitous falsehood.

Neither of the little girls answered, but passed gently into the ward.

Mrs. Fuller was by a cot near the door, holding her water-pitcher to the lips of a patient; nothing could appear more kind than her demeanor. "Ah, here you are," she said, nodding to the children, "she is asleep yet! Don't make any more noise than you can help."

Isabel went up to her mother's cot, and kneeling by it looked earnestly upon the pale and languid features.

"_Is_ she better?--see how white she is, how her eyes are sunken. She hardly breathes at all. Oh, Mary, _is_ she better?"

"Yes, the Doctor says so--and she does not mutter to herself or seem so restless as she did. I think, Isabel that she _is_ better!"

The tears gushed into Isabel's eyes. She bent down and softly kissed the pale hand of her mother. Mrs. Chester started and opened her eyes; they fell upon her child, and instantly that full gaze was blended with tears.

"Isabel, my child." The words were very, very faint, but oh, how sweetly they fell upon those young hearts.

"She knows me--oh, Mary, she knows me!" cried the child, and her beautiful face grew radiant amid the tears that covered it, like a flower struck with sunshine when the dew is heaviest on its petals. "Mamma, oh, my own mamma, this is Mary, our Mary Fuller!"

The sick woman turned her eyes toward her little nurse. She tried to lift her hand, but it only shook on the checked quilt.

"Mary, my good, good Mary!"

Mary knelt down softly by her friend, and bowing her head wept in sweet and grateful joy.

"Where am I? Where have I been?" asked the invalid, still more faintly.

"You are with us, this is our home!" answered Mary, almost catching her breath, for she dared not tell the poor lady where she really was.

Mrs. Chester was now quite exhausted, her eyes closed, and she scarcely breathed. Mary started up and poured out a spoonful of what she supposed to be wine.

"Every ten minutes--every ten minutes we must give her this, with the beef tea when she can take it."

"Let me--oh, let me give it to her this one time," pleaded Isabel.

Mary resigned the pewter spoon with a faint smile, and Isabel held the colored water to her mother's pale lips. Then Mrs. Chester slept again while the two girls sat watching her with their hopeful eyes. Once every ten minutes these little creatures would steal up to the pillow and pour the mockery of strength between those white and parted lips, hoping each time that she would open her eyes and speak to them again--but no, she slept on and each moment her breath grew fainter. While the two girls sat with their arms interlinked watching that beloved face, the nurses stole out from the ward, and crept, each with an earthen pitcher in her hand, down the Hospital stairs, and out into the open grounds.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MIDNIGHT REVEL--MARY AND HER MOTHER.

Time stole into eternity,
And they stood wondering by,
Breathless, and oh, how silently
To watch the lov'd one die.

Between that portion of Bellevue occupied as an hospital and the main building lay several enclosures sparsely cultivated with flowers, but altogether possessing a barren and dismal aspect. Scattered through these enclosures were offices and shanties, some occupied by favored paupers, and others used as work-shops and for the culinary purposes of the Hospitals.

In one of these shanties a shocking scene presented itself that night. The signal for a secret carouse had been given, and the orderlies and nurses crept stealthily from their posts by the sick, and came through the midnight darkness towards the shanty. Some came slowly and at once; while others stole like gaunt wild beasts, by the high wall that sweeps parallel with the western front of the main Hospital, sheltering themselves beneath the willow trees and the deep shadow cast by the building, while with their hands they groped eagerly along the wall. They found, after some trouble, the cords for which they were seeking, each with a piece of iron at the end, that had been cast over the wall by an accomplice outside the gate. Three of these cords lay tightened across the wall, their iron ballast sunk into the turf, and with breathless haste they were drawn over each with a bottle at the end, which, as it reached the top of the wall, fell into the foul hands grasping at it.

One bottle was broken in the fall, for the man stationed to receive it was very old, and he could not see like the others. When the vessel was dashed against the stones bespattering the aged drunkard with its contents, he fell upon the grass wringing his hands and bemoaning his hard fate. The others met his grief with muttered curses, and one of

them spurned the grovelling creature with his foot, showering fierce reproaches upon his carelessness.

They drove this miserable being back to his lair in the shanties, but he crawled abjectly toward them, begging to join the carouse notwithstanding his great misfortune. They would still have rejected him, but the old man had learned craft with his age, and when pleading was of no avail, betook himself to threats, which proved more effectual than his tears. Fearing that he might expose them in the morning, they consented that the old man should have a portion of their spoils, and he followed them through the darkness like a lame old hound that takes his food greedily, though beaten by the hand that gives it.

A cooking-stove stood in the shanty, with a pine table and some stools. Upon the stove was a metal lamp burning dimly and emitting a cloud of smoke. One end of the table held a tin candlestick, where a meagre tallow-candle swaled away in the socket, and the table was littered with fragments of food in little round pans. An iron spoon or two, with three or four tin cups, lay amid this confusion. Around this table hovered half a dozen women nearly intoxicated with brandy supplied by the nurses, from number ten.

In this state was the shanty when the two orderlies came in, hugging the great black bottles to their bosoms, followed by the old pauper, who still muttered discontentedly at his loss.

Then began the carouse in earnest! The tin cups were filled again and again--the earthen pitchers circulated from lip to lip--like wild animals, they devoured the fragments stolen from the convalescent patients, and swallowed the stimulants, of which they had plundered the dying not a stone's throw off; pipes and tobacco were produced, the women smoking fiercely like the men; while ribald jests and muttered curses rose through the foul smoke.

And these were the persons provided by a law of New York City for the sick poor--these fierce women, reeling to and fro like fiends amid the smoke, making sport of pain, joking about coffins--laughing with drunken glee over the death throes they had witnessed. These were the nurses a great and rich city gave to its poor--merciful economy--sweet, beautiful humanity!

And there sat those gentle children in the fever wards so wickedly deserted. From time to time Isabel parted the violet lips of her poor mother, and forced through them the liquid fraud that was so cruelly deceiving them. Mary went from bed to bed administering to the dying poor, as she had done the night before; but with a heavy heart, for all that she gave them imparted no strength. She could see the helpless creatures droop and sink from minute to minute; one or two were benefited, but the rest only seemed worse from all her tending.

Mary was giving a draught of water to a young woman, who in her delirium clamored constantly for drink, when Isabel stole softly to

her side. The child was very pale, and her large eyes dilated with terror. She took hold of Mary's dress and pulled it.

"Mary, oh, Mary, she did not swallow the last. Come, come and help me!"

Mary sat down the water pitcher and went to Mrs. Chester. She bent down close to the motionless face, listening. You could see her cheek grow pale in the dim light, as she held her own breath, hoping to catch one flutter from those white and parted lips. She lifted her head at last, and turned her mournful eyes on Isabel.

The little girl looked imploringly upon her--she shed no tear--uttered no word; but fell, like a wounded bird, prone to the floor, and there stood poor Mary in the midst of death, utterly alone.

When the nurses came reeling up from their carouse, three lay dead upon those narrow cots besides Mrs. Chester, and two were dying.

"Go and call Crofts!" cried Mrs. Fuller, staggering from bed to bed, reckless and fierce. "Let us have the cots cleared--bring in the shrouds, I say. Tell Crofts we have plenty of use for his pine boxes to-night."

The other nurse obeyed her, muttering fiercely against the unevenness of the floor.

The coffins were brought in, and these two wretched women arranged the poor creatures they had murdered, for their pauper graves. They came to Mrs. Chester last, but Mary Fuller, who knelt by the bed-side with poor Isabel senseless at her feet, arose and stood firmly before her mother.

"You shall not touch her! You shall not even look at her!" cried the noble child--and with her trembling hand she drew the sheet over the features she had so dearly loved.

The woman glared fiercely upon the child. Drink had rendered her ferocious--she lifted her clenched hand, shaking it savagely, and an oath broke from her hot lips--an oath over the beautiful dead.

"I--I will put that on," said the child, pointing to the shroud which the nurse held crushed under her arm.

"Out of my way!" cried the furious woman--"out of the way, or I will strike you!"

"Mother, leave this poor lady to me, or I will go myself and call up the doctor," answered the child firmly.

"Out of my way!" repeated the wretched woman.

The child grew pale as death, but in her eyes rose the steady firmness

of a meek but strong spirit, fully aroused.

"Mother, though you strike me to your feet, though you kill me, I will not let you come near this poor lady--not now--not as you are!"

"As I am!--how is that?" cried the vile mother, lifting her soiled apron to her eyes and heaving a sob. "Here I am, a poor, forlorn prisoner, and you, my own child, must come to taunt me in this way--I wish I were dead--oh, I do--I do!"

And in a fit of maudlin self-condolence, the base woman betook herself to a corner of the ward where, with her arms flung across the cot of a delirious patient, she muttered herself into a heavy slumber.

Mary Fuller turned to her mournful task. First she sprinkled water in poor Isabel's face, and strove with all her feeble skill to bring the child from the death-like swoon in which she had fallen; but the beautiful child lay upon the floor, pale as her mother, and looking nearly as much like death. When all her own simple efforts at restoration proved fruitless, Mary went out in search of help; she met Crofts in the passage, who took the child in his arms and bore her to the matron's room.

When Crofts returned with the pine coffin he found the remains of poor Jane Chester reposing beneath the scant folds of an Alms House shroud. The pale hands were laid meekly on her bosom, and her hair--that long, beautiful hair, which Chester had been so proud of, lay in all its bright beauty over her brow. Disease had not yet reached the purple bloom that lay upon those tresses, and Mary, following her own gentle memory of the past, had disposed them in rich waves back from the forehead, which gave a singular but beautiful look to that calm, dead face. They lifted the pale form of Jane Chester, and laid it reverently in the pauper coffin. There was neither pillow nor lining there, nothing but the bare boards to receive those delicate limbs, and this bleak poverty made even the heart of Crofts sink within him.

"It is a pity--she does not seem like the rest--I wish we had asked the matron for a strip of cloth or something to put under her head," he whispered, addressing the stolid man who stood by.

"Wait, only wait a few minutes," answered Mary, laying her hand eagerly on Crofts' arm. "How kind it is of you to think of this. You will wait, I am sure. I--I will get something!"

"Very well, we will take out the others first," said Crofts, who was very kindly disposed toward the little girl; "be quick, though."

Mary went out in breathless haste. She was very pale, and her eyes were full of sorrowful eagerness as she went forth into the dim, grey morning, just breaking through the fog that lay on the Long Island shore, and revealing the waters that rolled darkly between that and Bellevue. She threaded her way through the enclosures which we have mentioned. The light was just sufficient to reveal a few spring

flowers, starting up from the soil, and the soft foliage of an old vine or two that covered the nakedness of some outbuilding.

Ignorant of those rules that made her act a trespass, Mary wandered on, gathering up the hyacinths, violets and golden crocuses to which the night had given birth. Down to the water's edge she rambled, carefully gathering up each bud in her passage. In a corner of the superintendent's garden she found an old pear tree, dead, except the trunk and a single limb nearest to the ground, that was studded with snow-white blossoms.

Mary clambered up by the wall, and breaking off handful after handful of these fragrant buds, carried them, all wet with dew, back to the hospital. As she bore her treasure along the fever ward, scenting the pestilential atmosphere with their pure breath, the sick turned their languid faces toward her, greedily inhaling the transient sweetness. Two or three of the convalescent women followed her with longing eyes. She felt these glances and turned back, leaving a spray of the dewy buds upon the pillow of each. The grateful look with which her kindness was greeted softened somewhat the sorrow that oppressed her.

With the most touching reverence she knelt by Mrs. Chester's coffin, lifted that cold head softly from the boards, and placed the flowers she had brought beneath it. Softly she laid her benefactress down upon the blossom pillow. The delicate blending of rosy purple with the rich gold of the crocuses and the golden green willow leaves, relieved by the pure white of the blossoms underneath, cast around the dead a halo of spiritual beauty. The soft and blended brightness of the flowers seemed to illuminate those beautiful and tranquil features. Around the form of Jane Chester there seemed nothing of death but its solemn repose.

"Not yet--a little, only a little longer!" pleaded the child, as Crofts came to close the coffin, "I hope, I am almost sure, Isabel can bear to look at her now!"

Crofts smiled grimly, and sat down on the empty cot. In a few moments Mary came into the ward, supporting Isabel with her frail strength. The child wept no longer, but the trembling of her little form was painfully visible as she tottered forward. Not a word passed between the children--not a look was exchanged, but when Isabel bent over her mother, and saw the blossom shadows trembling around her head, her lips began to quiver, and the tears gushed from her heart.

Crofts, the common upholsterer of the Poor House, turned away his face, and wiped his eyes with the skirt of his coat. Close by him stood the man who shared his horrid duties, gazing with a look of stolid indifference on the scene. Crofts arose, and taking this man by the arm, led him out from the ward.

The two little girls went away after the coffin was removed; directly Mary came back with her shawl and hood on. She was ready to leave Bellevue, and returned to say a last, kind word to her mother. The

promise she had made her father on his death-bed rose to her mind, and took the form of a prayer.

"Mother, look up, mother, I am going." The woman turned heavily and lifted her head. "I am going, mother."

"Very well, I can't help it," muttered the mother, heavily.

"I don't know where they will take us, or if we shall ever see one another again," persisted the child; "but, oh, mother before we part, tell me how I can make you love me?"

"If there is a drop of brandy anywhere about, bring it and I'll love you dearly, indeed I will, little Mary; I ain't at all well, Mary, and a drop of brandy is good for sickness; get some, that's a dear; I'm very fond of you, Mary!"

"Mother, I cannot; but, if you will never ask for it again, I will. Oh, I will die for you; I hav'n't anything but my life to give--nor that," she added, with a sudden thought, "for it belongs to God; I have nothing."

Mrs. Fuller had fallen asleep, and heard nothing of this. So Mary turned away sorrowful, but not altogether hopeless. Those who trust in God never are.

CHAPTER XIX.

A SPRING MORNING--AND A PAUPER BURIAL.

Not here--not here with our lovely dead--
Oh, give one spot of sacred earth!
Where the grass may wave, above her head,
And the sweet, wild flowers have holy birth.

Oh, grant our prayer--our solemn prayer--
A lonely grave--and fresh, green sod--
There is earth around us everywhere;
And the mother earth belongs to God.

A long heavy boat lay at the Bellevue wharf. In the bow sat half a dozen paupers, who started up now and then to range the coffins that came in wheelbarrow loads from a little brick building near the wharf.

A name was marked rudely in chalk upon the lid of each coffin, and this was all that those who brought them knew or cared about the senseless forms they carried. Out from that brick house, and along the wharf, they were trundled amid a swarm of loungers, who helped eagerly to lower them into the boat.

It was the harvest time of death at Bellevue, and those pine coffins were garnered by tens and twenties each day. That morning the weight of twenty-four human forms, all breathing souls fifteen hours before, sunk that stout boat to the water's edge.

When the last coffin came alone upon the handbarrow, Crofts accompanied it, followed by two little girls. With his own hands he helped to lower that coffin into the boat, and those paupers who could read saw Jane Chester's name chalked upon the lid. As Crofts settled his burden gently down across an empty seat, a faint odor of flowers stole through the crevices, and when the rude sail cloth was flung carelessly over the rest, he laid a strip of clean, coarse linen over this coffin, then clambering across to the man who sat with the helm in his hand, he imparted some directions to him in a low voice.

"What, up to Randall's Island! Take those two children in the boat there and back to the nurseries! It can't be done, I tell you," said the man, sulkily. "I won't do it without the Superintendent's order, nor then either, if I can help myself."

"Oh, let us go with her--pray take us!" cried Mary Fuller, who was anxiously watching the man, while Isabel bent over the wharf, her hands hanging down, and her eyes full of helpless woe.

The pauper captain neither heeded the pleading cry of Mary Fuller, or the more touching look of the orphan--and to all the humane arguments of Crofts he turned a deaf ear. At length Crofts found a means of persuasion more potent than tears or words. He took from his pocket four twists of coarse tobacco, which the captain received with a grin. Hiding the treasure under his seat, he cast a sharp glance over the pile of coffins to assure himself that the transfer had not been observed by the men in the bow.

"Holloa, there, stop crying and jump in if you want to go!" cried the man, addressing the children; "make room in the bow, will you--we have got to leave these children at the nurseries as we come back."

Crofts lifted the little girls into the boat, sat them gently down in the shadow of Mrs. Chester's coffin, and went back to the hospital.

"Give way, all hands!" cried the captain, seizing the helm. "Pull a strong oar, boys, or the tide will turn agin us!"

Half a dozen oars splashed into the water as this command was given. The boat moved slowly from the wharf, and wheeling through a narrow inlet, shot heavily out with its freight of death, into the East River.

Oh, what a change was there, from the dull and murky gloom of Bellevue! Down upon the broad expanse of waters came the morning sunshine. Rosy and golden it fell upon the waves, as they tossed and rolled and dimpled to the soft spring breeze. Here a current of liquid

gold went eddying in and out, like the trail of a comet; there, lay the smooth, calm surface, rosy with the young light, or blackened by the shadow of an overhanging bank. Behind them lay New York city, Brooklyn, and Williamsburg, the tall masts and steeples rising through a sea of hazy gold, and belted with the silvery flash of the river. The banks, on either side, were clothed with soft, vivid green, broken with dog-wood trees in full flower, and maples in the first sweet crimson of their foliage. The fragrance from these banks swept down upon the water and trembled through the air.

All this seemed like the very atmosphere of paradise to those little girls, after their dreary sojourn in the pestilential gloom of Bellevue. They could not realize that the mother, the benefactress, whose smile had been so sweet only a few days before, was really and truly gone. She was there close by; their little hands could touch her coffin; the scent of flowers stealing through its chinks, constantly reminded them of the mournful truth; but, with everything so bright and lovely around, they could not believe in the reality. The motion of the boat--the melodious dip of the oars in the water--these things were new and strange. There was nothing like death in it all save the heap of coffins, and from them they shrank shuddering and appalled.

As the boat crept by Hurl Gate, a fearful change came over them. The glorious beauty of nature conflicting with the gloom of death; the frightful jokes of the crew; the boiling waters, leaping up only a few yards off, in long glittering flashes, like banners of silver, torn and weltering in the breeze; the sky bending over them deeply blue, and flooded with pleasant sunshine; the ribald criticisms of those coarse men, and the death-heap under which the sluggish boat toiled through the waters--all these sharp contrasts were enough to have unsettled the nerves of strong manhood. To those children, worn out and heartbroken, it brought strange and fearful excitement. Their hands were interlinked; a thrill of keen magnetic sympathy shot through their frames. They looked at the bright water leaping and flashing so near. A wild temptation came over them, to spring from the shadow of that death-heap into the sparkling flood. This thrilling desire assailed them both at once--their hands clung closer--their eyes, a moment before so heavy and sad, gleamed with intense meaning. They crept close to the side of the boat.

"We are alone--we are all alone in the wide, wide world," said Isabel, in a low voice that thrilled through and through the heart that listened.

Isabel leaned over the boat; she was gazing wistfully into the water.

"One spring, Mary, and we both have a home."

The child stood up, her foot was on the edge of the boat, her face was turned toward Hurl Gate.

Mary Fuller started, as if from a wild dream, and flung her arms around the half frenzied child, standing there upon the threshold of

a great crime.

"Isabel, oh, Isabel! can we leave _her_ here, all alone?"

The child turned her head, her foot was slowly withdrawn, and her eyes sank to her mother's coffin. She fell into Mary's arms, and burst into a wild passion of tears. Filled with the same terrible feelings, Mary Fuller could scarcely restrain the wild sobs that broke to her lips. She clung close to Isabel, and, cowering down in the boat, afraid to trust themselves with another sight of the rushing waters that had so tempted them, the little creatures remained motionless till they reached Randall's Island.

All this passed before the stolid crew, and they did not know it, but joked and jeered each other in the midst of death, as if their horrid duties had been a pastime. These men were so used to the King of Terrors, that his aspect had ceased to disturb them.

They landed on Randall's Island, a lovely spot at all seasons, but now teeming with luxuriant beauty. The apple orchards were all in blossom. The cherry and pear trees, white as if a snow-storm had drifted over them. The oak groves were robed with delicate foliage, and a carpet of young grass lay everywhere around. Again the contrast between nature and that death-freight was more than painful.

Two or three men came down to the landing with wheelbarrows, and the boat was disencumbered of its gloomy load. The little girls sat down upon the shore, watching each load as it was trundled away. At length, the men brought the coffin in which their hearts rested, and laid it across a hand barrow. They arose silently, and followed it hand and hand.

They turned into an orchard; the blossoming apple boughs drooped over the coffin as it passed under them. A host of birds made the fragrant air tremble with their songs. The single wheel of the hand-barrow crushed hundreds of wild flowers down in the tender grass. Once more it seemed like a dream to those young hearts. Surely, surely it could not be her grave they were approaching through all this labyrinth of blossoms!

All at once they came into an open space. The world of flowers was left behind. Thickets and broken hillocks were on the right and left. A sweep of green sward fell gently down to the water; here the turf was torn up and mangled, and long deep ridges of fresh soil swept downward toward the shore. Some were heaped high with fresh mould and around them all the young grass lay trampled and dead. There was one deep trench open half the way down, into which a man leaped, while the others handed down the coffins ranged on either side the trench. With their hands clinging together, the children crept close to the brink of the abyss and looked down. One low cry and, in pale silence, they recoiled back to the coffin and sunk down by it, like twin flowers broken at the stem.

An old man rose up from the trench, casting down his spade and dashing the soil from his hands, rejoicing that his task was over for that day; but his eyes fell upon the mournful group we have described.

"What, another yet!" he muttered, with sullen discontent, as he moved forward. The little girls heard his approach and crept closer to the coffin.

"Not there! oh, do not put her there!" cried Isabel, lifting her ashen face to the man.

The pauper-sexton shook his head.

"This is always the way," he muttered, "when the friends are allowed to come here, we are sure of trouble!"

"Is there no other place? oh, do not put her with all them!"

So pleaded Mary, rising to her feet, and taking hold of the old man's garments.

"In all this island is there no room where one person can be buried alone?"

"If you have a dollar to pay for the trouble--yes," answered the old man, softened by her distress.

"A dollar!"

The child turned away in utter despondency. Where on the wide earth was she to find a dollar? Isabel looked at her with mournful solicitude. A dollar! she would have given her young life for that little sum of money; but, alas! even her life would not procure so much.

The old man stood gazing upon those little pale faces, the one so beautiful, the other vivid and wild with intense feeling. His heart was touched, and going back to the trench he took up his spade.

"Come and point out the place where you would like to have her buried, and I will do the work for nothing," he said; "as likely as not my little grandchildren will some day be crying over me for want of a dollar."

The old man seemed like an angel to those little girls. They could not speak from fullness of gratitude, but followed the grave digger back towards the orchard. Here the earth was broken, and rendered uneven by some fifty or sixty hillocks; some marked by a single pine board, others without even this frail memorial by which the death-couch might be traced.

On the outskirts of this humble burial-place they found a fragment of rock, half buried in the rich turf, and overrun with wild flowers,

mingled with fresh young moss. An apple-tree sheltered this spot, and a honeysuckle-vine had taken root in a cleft of the rock, around which its young tendrils lay, covered with budding foliage.

The little girls pointed out this spot, and the old man kindly sent them away, before he sunk his spade in the turf.

When his task was done he came toward them, wiping the drops from his forehead. The sexton was poor, but out of the feeble strength left to his old age, he had given something to alleviate distress greater than his own. A consciousness of this made his voice peculiarly gentle, as he called a man from the trench to aid in the humble funeral of Jane Chester.

Again that coffin was borne beneath the sweeping boughs of the orchard, and lowered into its solitary grave, amid the sweet breath of their restless blossoms. The two children followed it with meek and tearful gratitude. The horrors of the tomb seemed nothing to them now, that the beloved form was secure of a quiet resting-place. The dread of seeing her cast into that trench had swallowed up all minor feelings. It seemed like leaving her there in a holy sleep, when the old man led them from the grave. They knew that it was a sleep from which their grief could never arouse her, but still they went away, greatly comforted.

The last boat was ready to put off when these children reached the shore. They sat down close together, without much apparent emotion. Their energies were completely prostrated; they had lost, almost, the power to suffer or to weep.

"We were ordered to leave you at the nurseries. Do you wish to go there?" inquired the captain.

Isabel looked at him vacantly, and Mary answered,

"We do not know."

"Would you not rather go back to the city, or to Bellevue?" persisted the man, determined to force them into conversation; but still the child answered,

"We do not know."

This mild and passive sorrow was more touching than their worst agony had been. They seemed like two wounded birds bleeding to death without a struggle.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FATHER'S PROPHECY--THE DAUGHTER'S FAITH.

Oh, faith, how beautiful thou art!

Like some pure, snowy-breasted dove,
Nested within that gentle heart,
Ye filled its softest pulse with love.

Just where the banks of the East River are the most broken and picturesque on the New York shore, and the sunny slopes of Long Island are most verdant in their Arcadian beauty, the river opens its bright waters, and Blackwell's Island rises, green and beautiful, from its azure bosom. Years ago, when this gem of the East River was a private estate, with only one dwelling-house to break its entire seclusion, it must have seemed like a mile's length of paradise dropped into the water. Then, its hollows were fragrant with wild roses, haunted by blackbirds and thrushes. Its shores were hedged in by the snow-white dogwood, wild cherry and maple trees, laced together with native grape-vines and scarlet creepers, that, even a year or two back, hung along its shores, like torn banners left upon a battle-field.

Blackwell's Island had other inhabitants than the singing birds and the sweet wild blossoms, when the orphans first landed there. Then its extremities were burdened to the very water's edge, with edifices of massive stone, where human crime and human misery were crowded together in masses appalling to reflect upon.

On one end of the island, naturally so quiet and beautiful, rose the rugged walls of the Penitentiary, flanked by outhouses, hospitals and offices, every stone of which was eloquent of human degradation. Here, a thousand wretched men, bowed with misery and branded with crime, were crowded together. All the day long, herds of these degraded beings might be seen in their coarse and faded uniform, burrowing in the earth, blasting and shaping the rocks that were to form new prison-walls, and filling the sweet air with groans and curses, which once thrilled only to the songs of summer-birds.

At the other extremity of the island stood the Insane Asylum, a beautiful pile, towering over a scene of misery that should fill the heart with awe. There is, perhaps, no spot of its size, throughout the length and breadth of our land, where every variety of human suffering is so closely condensed as it has been for years on this island. The moment your foot touches the shore you feel oppressed with feelings that seem inexplicable. Pity, horror, and a painful blending of both, crowd upon the heart with every breath you draw. Nothing but the air seems free; nothing but the blue sky above seems pure, as you walk from one scene of distress to another. You feel the more oppressed because human effort seems so powerless to alleviate the misery you witness; for who can minister to a mind diseased? What can take away the deformity and sting of guilt? Where lies the power to lift poverty from the degradation that the haughty and evil spirit of man has flung around it? The very heart grows faint as it beats in this wilderness of woe, and finds no fitting answer to questions like these.

But at the time these events happened there was one remnant of

beautiful nature left on Blackwell's Island--one spot where the flowers were permitted to bloom in the pure breath of heaven--where the trees were yet rooted to the earth, and filled as of old, with the music of summer birds. On the very centre of the island stood an old mansion house, the residence of its proprietor before the paradise became city property. It was a rambling old building, with wings of unequal length shaded with magnificent willows, and surrounded by shrubbery, and pretty lawns, interspersed with fine old trees. Terraces beautifully lifted from the water's edge; and gravel walks, bordered with the thickest and heaviest box-myrtle, with here and there a grape arbor spanning them with its leafy arch, sloped with picturesque beauty to the river which washed both sides of the island. A neglected and rude old place it was, but perhaps the more lovely for that. Neglect only seemed to give richer luxuriance to every thing around; the hedges and rose-thickets were tangled together. Great snow-ball trees, trumpet vines and honeysuckles seemed to shoot out more rigorously from want of pruning, and the trees had become majestic with age.

From the broad hall you might see the river on either hand, gleaming through the spreading branches. Now and then a snow-white sail glided by, and at sunset the water seemed heaving up waves of gold wherever your eye turned.

This was the Children's Hospital. In the low chambers, and the fine old fashioned rooms, from two hundred and fifty to three hundred children lay upon their little cots, in all stages of suffering to which infancy is subject. It was a painful scene--those helpless little creatures, orphaned, or worse than orphaned, in the morning of life, wearing such looks of pain, and yet so patient. God help them!

It was a touching sight to watch the brightening of those little faces, whenever the good matron passed into the wards ministering to their comfort--poor things--by a kind look and soothing word, where medicine might often less avail. Strange manifestations of character might be witnessed among those little creatures--fortitude that might shame a warrior--patience the most saintlike; and again--but why dwell upon the evil that sometimes exhibits itself fullgrown, in the heart of an infant?

If cries of bitter passion sometimes arose from those little couches they came, alas! from hearts that had never learned that unrestrained passion was a sin. If fierce words were wrung from those infant lips, it was that anger, not kindness had been showered on them from the cradle. To some of these little creatures oaths had been familiar as caresses are to the infancy of others. Such was their household language.

To this place, so beautiful in itself, so full of painful associations, Isabel Chester was brought in less than a week after her mother's burial. Since that day she had drooped like a broken lily. The terrible grief to which her delicate nature had bent and swayed like a reed; the sudden change from a home of quiet and tranquil love, to

the most bitter solitude known to the human heart--that of a crowd--had completely prostrated the orphan. A slow fever preyed upon her; she could not speak without feeling the hot tears gush from her eyes.

In this state she came under the observation of the Children's physician, and, touched with compassion, he took her to the Infant Hospital. Mary went also, for she too, was ailing, and the doctor saw that it would be cruelty to part them. At the hospital these helpless creatures had better food and more comfort than could be allowed them among the seven or eight hundred healthy children with which the nurseries on the Long Island shore were crowded. For days and weeks Isabel lay prostrate on her little cot. She had no settled disease. The child only seemed quietly fading away.

Mary Fuller never left her bed-side. She, too, was broken down with grief, and her wearied frame had lost all its power of endurance; but though the hand which held Isabel's drink trembled with weakness, the little creature never complained, nor ever acknowledged that she was ill enough to be in bed. Patient and sweet-tempered as an angel, she watched by the child of those who had done so much for her. The love and gratitude of her whole being seemed centered in that pale, but still lovely orphan.

At length all this patient love had its reward. Isabel was well enough to walk in the grounds, and with their feeble arms around each other, these children might be seen from morning till night, wandering along the shore, or sitting quietly beneath the grape-arbors that overlooked the water. To the other children they were always gentle and kind, but they had no companions, and they clung together with the deep trust and holy love of sisters. They had no future--those hopeless children. Chester had left no relatives that his child ever heard of, and his gentle wife had been an orphan. Mary Fuller possessed only her wretched, wretched mother.

But their gentleness, and Isabel's singular beauty, were sure to win them friends. The Physician and the matron began to love the little girls, and after a time they became the pets of the establishment. While the locks of the other children were cut close to the head, Isabel still possessed her long and flowing tresses. Day by day her exquisite beauty deepened into health again, and the pensive cast which grief had given to her features rendered them ideal as they were lovely.

But as Isabel grew better, Mary Fuller seemed to sink and droop in all her being. She was often found amid the shrubbery, weeping bitterly, and alone. Toward nightfall, and at early morning, she might have been detected stealing softly up the Hospital stairs, and away to a dim corner of the garret, with a handful of berries or a fragment of cake which the matron had given her during the day. Sometimes her voice, low and sweet, as if in tearful entreaties, floated along the garret, and then might have been heard another voice, sometimes rude, sometimes querulous, but very feeble, answering her with sharp reprimands. After this the child would come down in tears and steal

away, as we have described, to weep alone.

Thus they entered upon sweet June, literally a month of roses at the Infant's-Hospital. The pale little invalids grew better that month, and were gathered beneath the huge old trees with their nurses, forgetting their pain in the sweet breath of the flowers; but that month, though the butterflies were numerous, and humming-birds came and went through the thickets like flashes from a rainbow, Mary Fuller was seldom abroad with the rest. More and more of her time was spent in the low, dim garret; but when she did come forth, those who observed her saw a new and tranquil light upon her face. She was sometimes seen to smile, as if a pleasant thought possessed her mind. Just before this, Mary had asked permission to carry away a little Bible from the matron's table. It was not brought back, but the matron only smiled, and never inquired the reason. She had learned to love and trust Mary Fuller.

There was a clergyman stationed at Blackwell's Island, to whose spiritual charge was given from four to seven hundred persons at the Penitentiary, four or five hundred of the insane, and nearly a thousand children, at the nursery and its hospital. The welfare of all these souls was entrusted to this meek Christian, and most faithfully has he performed the solemn duties of his office from that day to this. Always busy in behalf of the unhappy creatures, who, amid all their degradation, loved and respected him, always cheerful, always ready with his gentle word and consoling advice, he made this holy mission with the helpless and the prisoner the one great business of his life.

This good clergyman had a family to support on his miserable salary of three hundred dollars a year, voted him by a Common Council that spent ten thousand carousing in their tea-room. Had any one of those city fathers ever been up so early, they might often have seen this good man at daybreak toiling on foot to the city, or perchance miles away to some country town, in search of a service place for some repentant prisoner, or to carry a message from a sick child to its friends. In his gentle humility the good man never complained, never said that the pay awarded to his labors by the Common Council of our most wealthy city, was too little for his wants. You saw it in his garments. You might have read it in his meek sigh, when some object of compassion presented unusual claims to his charity; but in his speech and deportment he seemed ever grateful for the little that was given him. This true-hearted Christian remains upon his post to this day. If a single hundred dollars has been added to his yearly means of support, it was through the intercession of others, and from no discontent expressed by himself. Surely the reward of such men must be hereafter, or in the heaven of their own souls.

It was pleasant to see the eyes of those little children brighten, when the good clergyman entered the hospital. They were fatherless, and he was better than a father to them. They were sick, and he comforted them, even as our Lord comforted little children when they were brought to Him. His hand touched their pale foreheads caressingly;

his mild voice sunk into their little hearts like dew upon a bruised flower. His very tread upon the stairs was a blessing to them; when they heard it, all unconsciously the little creatures would smile upon their pillows, and murmur over fragments of the Lord's Prayer, for with its holy language, his own lips had rendered most of them familiar.

To this brave Christian little Isabel and her friend had become greatly attached. He sat with them in the grape arbors; he helped them arrange bouquets for the sick children, and while they were busy at their sweet task, he, in his gentle way, would lead their thoughts from the flowers to the God who gives them to beautify the earth. At such times he would go quietly away, leaving the children happier and better, but without the slightest consciousness that they had been receiving religious instruction.

This was the man to whom Mary Fuller appealed one night, as he paused to speak with her in the garden-path that leads along the water.

"Oh! sir, I have been waiting for you here; I thought you would come this way," cried the child, placing her little hand in his, "I have something to tell you--something that makes me happy as a bird?"

"You look happy, my child, and you look good, too," said the clergyman, shaking her hand with a smile. "Come, now, tell me what it is."

"It is a long story, and one that would make you cry if you knew all. You are not in a hurry sir?"

"No, no! I am never in a hurry, my dear little girl, so if you have much to say come in here, and I will listen an hour if you like."

There was an old summer-house on the bank, dilapidated, and threatening to tumble over the declivity with the first rough wind. The clergyman led his little friend into this open building, and sat down upon the only entire seat that it contained.

The child sat by his side awhile, thoughtful and evidently striving to arrange her ideas.

"Do you remember, sir, a long time ago, when we first came here, you asked me about my father and mother? I told you that my father was dead, but I did not say much of my mother. Sir, she was a prisoner then, and I did not like to mention it; that perhaps was wrong, but I couldn't help being ashamed."

"There was nothing wrong in that feeling," answered the clergyman, gently.

"I am glad you think so," replied the child, "for now I am sure you will not want me to tell you all that has ever happened--how she took to drink when I was a little, little girl. She was not used to it, and

I don't know how she was led away--for my poor father never talked of these things to me, but they killed him, sir--it broke his heart at last. One day--I was only seven years old then, but I remember it, oh! how well--she had been drinking, oh, she was dreadful always at those times. I don't know what I did, but I believe that I was only in her way as she crossed the floor--all that I can remember is, that she struck at me with her hand and foot. It seemed as if she had crushed me to the floor. The breath left my body--I was the same as dead for a long, long time."

"Poor child," murmured the clergyman, gazing upon the little creature with a look of profound compassion.

"When I came to myself, people thought I would never be good for anything again, and, sometimes, I thought so too, for after that I almost stopped growing, and all that was bright about me died away. I believe, after that, she hated me, sir."

Mary paused a moment, and went on.

"But my father, oh, he loved me better and better; he only wanted to live for my sake, he told me so many a time. My poor father was a good man, sir; as good as you are, as good as Mr. Chester was; but he was so unhappy that God was very kind not to let him live only for my sake. But, oh, sir, I was all alone when he went. I need not tell you how we lived. We were poor. You never, in your life, saw any persons so poor as we were, after father died. She would not work, and when I did not have enough to eat I couldn't do much. Oh, sir, it was a miserable life; now when I have told you so much, you will not want me to say any more about it than I can help."

"Say only what you wish, my child; I will listen."

"One night--she had been drinking night and day, for a week--two or three women had been in, and while they drank I sat in a corner longing for them to go. They quarreled; my mother struck one of the women, and while they were swearing dreadfully, a policeman came in. It was Mr. Chester--that was the first time I ever saw him. I have told you about him, and how his child, poor, beautiful Isabel, came here with me; but I did not tell you that the nurse at Bellevue was my own mother. The doctors found out that she had been drinking, and sent her away after that night. A few weeks ago she came up here to work for the children. Nobody knew that she was my mother, but, oh! sir, she looked very ill, and I said to myself when she passed me without a word, only with black looks--I said, she is ill, I will take care of her; I will go to her at night with nice things that the matron gives me to eat--I will do without them myself, and, perhaps, this will make her love me.

"I went up into the garret the first night, but she drove me away. I would not give up, but went again. She was very ill that night--living among that fever so long had poisoned all the pure breath she had left. She was crying when I went up to the bed; I knelt down by the

bed and began to cry, too. She did not send me away. She did not strike me, though I thought it was for that when she lifted her hand, but she laid the hand on my head. Indeed she did, sir, and then I felt she might be my mother yet!"

The child paused; the big tears that welled up from her heart were choking her.

"I went to see her very often after that, for she was growing worse. I carried her nice things, and tried every way to make her love me. She was not always kind, but I didn't mind a little crossness now and then, for great hopes were in my heart. My father loved his wife, and I thought of him, and what a joy it would be if I, the poor thing he wanted to live for, could do something toward making her good enough to see him once more when she dies.

"Sir, may I ask you one question? If you want a thing very much, and think and pray for it--does not God, sometimes, bring it all about when you least expect anything of the kind? It seemed to me as if He had done it when my mother complained of being so lonesome up there in the Hospital garret, and wished that she had something to read. She was a great reader, sir, once. I went down stairs, trembling like a leaf, and got the matron's Bible. She did not say a word against it, and I read to her a long time. After that she would ask me to read, and every day as she grew weaker and weaker, I could see that she was growing better, too.

"At last I asked her if she would let me bring you up to see her, but she was vexed at the idea of a clergyman. Once or twice after that I mentioned it, but she still answered no. Last night, as I was saying my prayers by her bed, she began to cry softly, and then, sir, she rose up and kissed me on the forehead. Then I asked her again, and she said you might come--only she made me promise to tell you everything about her first. But for that I would not talk of my poor mother's faults, though it is only to you."

The child ceased speaking--she looked earnestly into the clergyman's face.

"You will not go home till you have seen her?" she said.

"No, my child, I only trust that my poor efforts may be blessed as yours have been," and the clergyman went into the Hospital, leading Mary by the hand. It was an hour before he left the building, and when he turned to shake hands with the little girl, you could see by the expression of his face that it had been an important and heart-rending hour to them all; over and over again did that good man's feet tread those worn stairs, and each time his face looked more thankful than it had done before. One evening he remained much longer than usual. Little Mary had been in the garret since morning, and here, about nine o'clock, the physician was called for the fourth time that day. He was absent but a few minutes.

"You had better go up," he said to the matron, who met him in the hall, "that poor woman is gone."

Mary Fuller turned her head as the matron came into that dimly-lighted garret. Tears stood on her cheek, but her eyes were radiant with holy light.

"Oh, madam, she was my mother! She kissed me! with her last breath she kissed me!"

"She died," said the clergyman, in his low mild voice, "she died with her arms round this little girl, calm and peaceful as a child."

"Go," said the matron, gently sending Mary to the stairs, "go, my child, to-morrow you shall see her again."

The child went down, not to weep as they supposed, for there was a higher and more holy feeling than grief in her young heart. She had found her mother.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TWO OLD MEN

The past, sometimes, comes dimly back,
Stealing like shadows on the brain;
We see the ruins on its track,
And feel the dead flowers bloom again.

Since the day of Chester's death, a great change had fallen upon the Mayor. He went to his office as usual, and performed its duties with habitual exactitude, but he never entered the Aldermen's tea-room again. When his political friends called upon him to accomplish any unfinished business, such as giving out contracts long before they were advertised by law--selling city property for a song to confederates, who were certain to allow a portion of the profits to flow back into greedy official pockets--or empowering some favorite to negotiate worthless real estate, and more worthless goods, for which the ever-enduring people were compelled to pay fabulous prices--for in all these things, directly or indirectly, he had been engaged--Farnham resolutely refused to enter into these transactions more.

He felt in the depths of his heart, that the demoralizing influences consequent upon those half-secret, half-audacious speculations had led him to the brink--nay, had actually plunged him into a great crime.

Again and again he had reconsidered the events of Chester's trial and death, following so closely on each other, with a hope of finding something that might remove the terrible responsibility from his

conscience. But his stubborn and acute reason would not be convinced by the sophistry that had so often deceived the public. He had no power to blind his own conscience, and that told him, more and more loudly every hour, that his cruel acts had murdered a blameless fellow creature, directly almost as if the deed had been accomplished by a blow.

Yes, Joseph had uttered the right word--it was murder.

True there was no earthly tribunal to reach his impalpable crime, for the law recognizes only physical violence by which death is accomplished. But there is a just God, before whose high court, sooner or later, will be arraigned the bloodless murderer, whose dagger has been words--low whispers, and assassin machinations--or perchance neglect, and the sweeping back of warm affections on a true heart.

There the all-seeing One, who judges the thought as well as the act will make no distinction between life drained drop by drop from the soul, and that sent forth at a blow with the red hand.

These startling truths fastened themselves at last upon his conviction, breaking through his worldliness and all the hard accumulations which a life of underground politics had heaped upon a nature capable of great good.

It was not without a struggle that the Mayor had yielded himself to this true self-knowledge. But in vain he argued that he had not anticipated this fearful result, from proceedings that after all were only intended as the means of removing an obnoxious person from his path. In vain he reasoned with himself, "I did not wish the man's death, nor use means to bring it about." The fault lay in his own sensitive nature. But his reason answered back, neither does the man who commits murder in his hour of intoxication, mean to become inebriated or to take a human life when he lifts the first cup to his lip; yet even the law, that which takes hold only of actual things, deems this man guilty as if his soul had not been brutalized and made blind before the blow.

There might have been other influences besides poor Chester's death, that aided to accomplish this transfiguration of character; for as Farnham bent beneath the pressure of this truth, other impressions, perhaps not less potent because unrecognized, stole in upon him; angels sometimes come softly and fill a newly aroused soul with love, as the night sheds its dew on the green leaves of an oak, after the storm has passed by.

What was there in the appearance of Joseph to soften the self-upbraiding of this stern man? The boy's words had been, perhaps, the most severe reproof that he had ever met; but they called forth no bitterness. Instead of this arose an attraction so powerful that he could not resist it. Thus he had followed the lad to his own door, and afterwards would turn in the street and gaze on any boy of his size

with a yearning desire to see him again.

But the gentle lad was at home, studying his father's beautiful art, and seldom went into the street. His life had always been so secluded that this one event was a great epoch, to which his mind was constantly going back. A spirit of loneliness came upon him after the little girls left the house, and at sunset he might sometimes be found almost in tears, homesick for a sight of them. A beautiful sympathy had sprung up between him and Mary Fuller that filled him with vague uneasiness.

Sometimes, too, he would think of the Mayor, so stern and cold to others, but so full of gentleness to him, and with the warm gratitude of youth he could not help looking forward to the time when he might visit Fred again, and thus see the man who had filled him with so much of terror unseen, and with such strange happiness after.

Once or twice he spoke of this in a timid way, but his father checked him almost with harshness, and with the reserve of a sensitive nature, he buried this strange feeling in his bosom till it became almost a want, which after a time was gratified.

One night, when he had spent the whole day in attempting to copy one of his father's pictures, while the old artist sat by, giving him such help as lay in his power, an unaccountable desire seized upon the lad, and he arose almost with tears in his eyes.

"Father," he said, with great earnestness. "Father I cannot hold the brush, my hand grows unsteady; please let me go and see Frederick; it seems to me as if some one there wanted me very much!"

"If Frederick wanted to see us, he would come here, I should think!" answered the father.

"I believe--I almost think that his father is sick," said Joseph.

"And how did you know this?" asked Mr. Esmond, rather sharply, for he seemed jealous of his son's interest in the Mayor's family.

"I don't know it--but it seemed to me all day yesterday and to-day, that something was the matter."

"And if there is, your mother's child--my child should not trouble himself about it!"

Joseph looked at his father in astonishment. These sharp words were so unlike his usual kindness, that the lad was bewildered.

"I--I thought you liked Fred so much," he said, at last.

"But it is not Fred--it is his father you are thinking of, unnatural child that you are!"

"Father--oh, father!"

"There--there," said the old man, more gently. "I did not mean it. Go, my son if you wish, I will not stop you, but do not give much love to any one but your father, he has had so little, so very little on earth. Don't let this man get your heart away from me."

"Away from you, my own, own father?" said Joseph, grieved, and deeply hurt.

"Well--well, all this is foolish talk--but I am getting very childish. It ages one so to live alone, Joseph, you would not believe it, but I am a younger man by five years than the Mayor."

"The Mayor has grown very old since I first saw him father, you would be astonished!"

"Then you have seen him more than once?"

"Yes; he comes to Mrs. Peters, now, almost every day, and sometimes I see him."

"In this house--in this house!" exclaimed the artist, "to-morrow we will move--to-night, if another room can be got!"

As the old man spoke, a hesitating knock was heard at the door. Joseph and his father looked at each other wistfully; at length the boy stepped forward and turned the latch.

Mr. Farnham stood on the threshold. The artist drew his tall form up, and remained immovable, with his dark eyes fixed sternly on the Mayor's.

Joseph paused irresolute, with the last dying gold of sunset falling on his head, from a neighboring window.

The artist glanced from him to the Mayor, and a look of sudden pain swept across his face. It was a strange, jealous pang to strike a man of his age.

"Go," said the Mayor gently to the lad; "go, and leave us alone, I wish to speak with your father."

Joseph looked at his father questioningly.

"Go!" said the old man, in a voice so husky that he could only force himself to utter that single word.

Joseph went out, and those two old men--for the Mayor looked very old that night--sat down in the dim chamber, and talked together for the first time in their lives.

Joseph shut himself in the dark hall, and found a seat upon the

stairs, filled with vague wonder; for his keen imagination seized upon this event, and his affectionate nature turned lovingly to the old men, whose voices came through the ill-fitting door in indistinct murmurs.

It must have been an hour when the door opened, and Joseph saw the Mayor and his father standing just within the room. The light from a tallow candle fell upon them from behind, striking their side faces with singular effect. Both were pale, but the cheek of the Mayor, on which the light lay strongest, glistened with moisture. Could it be that this was the trace of tears?--and, if so, what power had that humble artist, to make a man weep who had not been known to shed tears since his boyhood!

The artist too had a look of tender sadness on his face, as if all his deeper feelings had been moved.

The two old men--we call them old, but events rather than time had left hoary marks upon them--the two old men held each other by the hand; Joseph arose and drew back, that the Mayor might pass, but when he went by without a word, the boy was seized with a pang of disappointment, and followed him.

"Mayor," he said, "please won't you say good-bye to me, I have wanted to see you so much all day?"

The Mayor turned his face; the light from a street-lamp shone upon it, as he stood in the lower entrance. Surely there had been tears on that stern face.

"Yes," answered Mr. Farnham, looking into those deep earnest eyes, "I will bid you good-bye."

"Mr. Farnham," said Joseph, "won't you stay a little?"

The Mayor stepped back into the hall, but wavered in his walk, and supported himself by the lad. Joseph could feel that the hands which were laid on his shoulders trembled.

"Are you sick?" questioned the lad, with his forehead up lifted in reverential tenderness.

"Sick--no! I think it is not sickness, but, but"--

"Have I or father done anything to hurt you, sir?"

"Hurt me!--no, no--but Joseph you said once that I had murdered Mr. Chester, did you believe it?"

Joseph's head drooped forward. His eyes were suffused with sadness, he could not answer.

"Did you think so, Joseph?" repeated the Mayor, in a voice of strange

solicitude.

"I thought so then, but now I am sure you could not have intended to do it."

"No!" answered the Mayor, impressively. "I did not intend it; when you think of me hereafter you will remember this--and remember too, my child, that when a man takes the first step toward an unjust act, he loses a great portion of his power to control the second--great crime grows out of small errors, my boy, remember that, and I charge you, repeat it to my son, when he has need of such warning."

"I will repeat it to him, as you wish me to, sir!"

"And now farewell."

Joseph felt a kiss quiver upon his forehead, like the touch of a spirit that had taken flight. He looked around, the Mayor was gone.

"Farewell--why did not he say good-bye--or good-night, Joseph? Farewell! that is a very solemn word. I wish he had not said farewell!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE WALK AND THE WILL.

Now do I drop my heavy load of woe,
As some wet mantle saturate with rain,
And rise as a soft spirit that doth glow
In rays of light beyond the realm of pain.

W. W. FORDICK.

The Mayor walked home very slowly, for remorse, while softening into penitence, had sapped the foundations of his life; and he had grown a feeble old man in so short a time, that those who look upon God as an avenger, rather than a chastiser, might have supposed that old age had fallen as a judgment upon him. But the All-wise one knows best how to redeem the souls he has created, and that weary man as he walked home in the darkness, was a thousand times more worthy of respect, than he had ever been in his whole lifetime before.

There was a private room in the lower story of his house, in which Mr. Farnham had usually received his constituents and persons who came to his residence on private business. It had been little used of late, for the routine of his old life was broken up, and when he went to this apartment, it was usually to be secure of the solitude which daily became more necessary to his habits of self-communion. That

night he found company in the drawing-room. Mrs. Farnham had guests from the South; other friends were invited to meet them, and the lower portion of the house was in a blaze of magnificence. This scene was so at variance with his state of feelings, that the Mayor recoiled from its glitter, as the sick man shrinks from a noontide sun.

His wife, who was standing in the centre of a group near the door, resplendent with jewels and brocade, saw him pass through the hall, and playfully shaking her fan called after him.

Either he did not hear, or he did not heed her, and with the usual obstinacy of a silly woman, she called to her son and bade him go bring his father back.

Frederick went and found Mr. Farnham in his private room, looking cold and weary. The greatest retribution that had fallen upon this man for his evil act had been the effect it had produced upon his own son. Frederick had known and loved Chester. With his energy and quickness of character, it was impossible that he should not have gathered all the facts regarding his trial and death. The very silence which he maintained on the subject was a proof of this. His manner too had changed so completely that it was a constant reproach to the suffering man. There had always existed a certain reserve between the father and son, but now it amounted almost to coldness. Perhaps this repulsion had driven the unhappy man to seek sympathy in the child of another, for it became a weary trial to seek his home day after day, and find all affection chilled there.

That night Farnham's heart was softened toward the whole world, and most of all did he yearn for the old look of confidence from the now constantly averted eyes of his son. Just as these feelings were strongest in his bosom, Frederick entered the room where he sat. The Mayor looked up wistfully.

"My mother wishes me to call you, sir; she has company in the drawing room." The cold respectfulness of his manner fell like snow upon the Mayor.

"I cannot come, Frederick; tell your mother that I am not well enough for company," he said, so mournfully that the warm heart of the lad was touched.

"Are you really ill, father?" he said.

The Mayor could not answer. It was the first time that his son had called him father since Chester's burial.

The boy was struck by his silence.

"Tell me--speak to me father, are you ill?"

The Mayor held out his hands.

"Frederick!"

It was enough--the boy fell upon his knees and kissed those trembling hands.

"Father, forgive me, I had no right to make myself your judge."

"God bless you, my boy, and remember this night you have made your father very happy."

After Frederick left him, Mr. Farnham began to write. His strength had returned, and his whole energies of soul and body were concentrated in the work he was doing. After he had written an hour, pausing now and then in deep thought, there lay before him a legal document, carefully drawn up, which he read twice. Then he arose and rang the bell; a servant came, and he directed her to go to the drawing-room and tell two gentlemen who were his guests at the time, that he wished to see them. The gentlemen came up flushed and laughing. Champagne had freely circulated below, and they were in splendid spirits.

"I will only detain you a moment," said the Mayor, "but here is a document which requires witnesses. Will you sign it?"

The gentlemen laughed gaily.

The Mayor laid his finger on the signature. Again the gentlemen laughed.

"What is it, a marriage contract, or your last will and testament?" said one, delighted with his own wit.

"It is my last will and testament," answered the Mayor, quietly.

Again the men laughed; they did not believe him.

"Well, well, give us hold here, at any rate, we know it's all right, so here goes!"

They signed their names and went out laughing. The next morning they started South without seeing their host, and with a confused sense of what they had signed over night.

But with all these sources of agitation the Mayor was breaking down. He went up to his bed-room after signing the will, greatly exhausted. His wife passed through the room an hour after, and saw the document on the table. It was late, and she resolved to read it over at leisure in the morning before her husband was up; so dropping it quietly into her pocket she went up stairs.

Three days after the city was in mourning. The public building and military banners were all draped with black. It was the first time in years that a Mayor of New York had died in office, and the people were lavish of funereal honors to Farnham's memory.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FESTIVAL OF ROSES.

A ring--a ring of roses,
Laps full of posies;
Awake--awake!
Now come and make
A ring--a ring of roses.

The month of June had littered its path with roses, and now came July, with its crimson berries, its ruddier blossoms, and its profuse foliage. On the Fourth of this luxurious month some gleams and glimpses of the great National Jubilee are sure to reach even the prisoners and the poor on Blackwell's Island. The sick children at the Hospital had a share of enjoyment; presents of toys, cake and fruit were liberally distributed. The grounds produced an abundance of flowers, and it was marvellous how these little creatures managed to amuse themselves. The matron, the nurses, and many of the little patients, were busy as so many bees that morning, before the sun had changed his first rose-tints to the shower of vivid gold with which he soon boldly deluged the water. Among the first and the busiest were Mary Fuller and Isabel. They sat beneath a great elm tree back of the Hospital, with a heap of flowers between them, out of which they twined a world of bouquets, fairy garlands, and pretty crowns. Half-a-dozen little girls, lame, or among the convalescent sick, volunteered to gather the flowers, and some of the larger boys were up among the branches of the elm tree, garlanding them with ropes of the coarser blossoms. The birds were in full force that morning, as became the little republican rovers, absolutely rioting among the leaves, and pouring forth their music with a wild _abandon_ that made the foliage thrill again.

"Now, now the sun will be up in no time. Run, Isabel, with the flowers--here they are, a whole apron full--I will be tying up more while you leave these!" said Mary Fuller, heaping Isabel's apron with the pretty bouquets she had been preparing; "don't leave a pillow without them!"

Isabel gathered up her apron and ran into the house. Up the stairs she went with a fairy footstep, and glided into the wards. Stealing softly from one little cot to another, she left upon each pillow her pretty tribute, where the sick child was sure to see it the moment its languid eyes were unclosed. When her store was exhausted she ran down for more.

"Did any of them wake up? Did they see the flowers?" inquired Mary, eagerly.

"Some were awake--they hadn't slept all night, poor things--but the flowers made them smile," was the cheerful reply. "Come, fill my apron again, and give me those large ones, with the white lilies, for the mantel-pieces. Won't the doctor be astonished when he goes up? They're better than medicine, I can tell him."

Again Isabel's apron was heaped full, and again she glided, in all her bright, young beauty, through the sick wards. When she came down, an earthen pitcher, crowded with great white lilies, honeysuckles and sweetbriar, stood on the windows or mantel-pieces of every room. There was not a pillow without its pretty garland, or bouquet of buds, tied with the spray of some fragrant shrub. She had made the atmosphere of those sick wards redolent with fragrance.

"Now for the boys' hats!" said Mary, "here are plenty of soldier's feathers."

The boys cast down their straw-hats from the tree, shouting for her to make soldiers of them, each one clamoring for a red plume.

But the red hollyhocks did not quite hold out, so, perforce some of the slender plumes were of yellow, some of snow-white--for you never saw such hollyhocks as grew in the Hospital-gardens--and Mary had all variety of tints around her, even to some of a deep maroon.

When each straw hat had its plume, the little girls fell to ornamenting three or four large paper kites, and then they began forming garlands for their own heads. Mary twined a beautiful wreath of white clematis around the dark tresses of Isabel's hair.

"Nothing but white," she said with a gentle sigh, "for that is almost mourning."

The others arrayed themselves according to their own fancy, and when the sun rose high it kindled up a happy and picturesque group beneath that old elm tree.

A company of boys, with a red silk handkerchief streaming over them for a banner, their hollyhock plumes rising jauntily in the sunshine, the tallest mounting an epaulette of red, yellow, and purple flowers, marched out with gallant parade from the shelter of the old tree. Tin trumpets, an old milk pail, and various similar instruments, made the air ring again as this warlike band sallied forth.

A score of little pale creatures watched them from the Hospital stoop and the upper windows. Some of the boys were lame; some were blind; while others bore evidence of recent disease; but if they looked in these things like a company of volunteers returning from Mexico, it only gave them a more warlike appearance, and of this they were very ambitious.

Then the little girls began to seek their own amusements. They played

"hide and seek," "ring, ring a rosy," and a thousand wild and pretty games; for the place was so beautiful, and the day so bright, the little rogues quite forgot that they were in the Poor House, or had ever been sick in the whole course of their lives.

Mary and Isabel were a little pensive at times, but when all the rest seemed so happy, they could not choose but smile with them--and so the Fourth of July wore over.

There was a great tumult and glorious time on Long Island shore that day. The children had a festival of flowers over there also; crowds of people were walking along the banks of the river; and you could see hundreds of gaily-dressed visitors landing every minute from the water, while the children huzzaed, and flung up their hats till you could hear them across the broad river. Still it is to be doubted if there was more real enjoyment among them than our little band of convalescents experienced among the flowery nooks of the old Hospital.

The hour for cakes and fruit to be served under the elm surprised our little warriors down by the river. When the signal was given, they marched along the broad walk, lined on each side with box-myrtle of twenty years' growth. They paraded superbly up the terrace steps--down again--through the grape arbors, and around the end of the Hospital, in gallant array, with colors flying, sixpenny trumpets blowing, and the tin pails doing their best to glorify the occasion.

Our little troop bivouacked under the old elm, amid a storm of fire-crackers, and a shout from the little girls. Here gingerbread and fruit were served, and the girls began their games again. Little Mary Fuller sat upon the grass, singing, while the rest formed a ring, darting, with their garlands and bouquets, like a chain of flowers, through an arch made by the uplifted hands of Isabel Chester and a little lame girl who could not run. Nothing on earth could be more beautiful than Isabel was just then, with the white spray dancing in her hair, a pleasant smile in her dark eyes, and the faintest rose-tint breaking over her cheek.

"She is delicate as a flower, beautiful as a star!"

The speaker was a lady dressed in the deepest possible mourning. The long widow's veil reached to her knees, and was double two-thirds of the way up. Her bombazine dress was so heavily trimmed with broad folds of crape, that you could not judge of the original material; from head to foot she was shrouded in black, till you felt quite gloomy to look on her. She seemed to have measured off her grief in so many yards of crape. Still, as if to show that there was a gleam of hope about her, she wore an immense diamond on the black ribbon at her throat. A large cluster ring that gleamed through the net glove, covering a small and withered hand, with the gem sparkling at her throat, bespoke uncommon wealth; and there was a tone of almost pampered sentimentality in her voice and manner.

"It is indeed a very lovely child," answered the gentleman whom she

addressed, gazing with a smile upon Isabel.

"Was ever anything so perfect found in a poorhouse! Oh, if the policeman's daughter proves only half as pretty as she is," the lady exclaimed again.

"Let us inquire something about her," answered the gentleman, gravely, "with all her beauty she may be a common-place child!"

"No--no, I am quite certain she is everything that is charming. If your protege is only half as lovely, I shall be reconciled to the duty Mr. Farnham has so unreasonably--I must say, imposed upon me," persisted the lady.

The gentleman observed gravely that the idea of adopting a child was no trifling matter, and walked on till they surprised the little girls at their play. The chain broke, the girls scattered through the thickets like a flock of frightened birds. The lame girl dropped Isabel's hand and limped away, leaving the beautiful child all alone save Mary Fuller, who had stopped singing and sat quietly on the grass.

"I am afraid we have frightened your little friends away," said the gentleman, addressing the child, with a bland and gentle manner; "we did not intend to do that!"

His voice seemed to startle the children.

Isabel turned to her friend, with a glad smile.

"Oh, Mary, it is he!"

Mary started up from the grass.

"Oh, sir, we are so glad to see you!"

Judge Sharp took her hand--"You must be glad to see this lady, too."

Mary blushed, and looked timidly at the lady.

Mrs. Farnham stepped back, holding up both hands, as if to prevent the child approaching.

"Judge--Judge Sharp, you don't mean to say that this is the child? Little girl, is your name Chester!"

"No," answered Mary, "that is Isabel Chester--I am only Mary Fuller."

Isabel drew close to her friend.

"She's just the same as me--just like my own, own sister, ma'am."

The lady turned to Judge Sharp, and shook her mourning parasol at him.

"Oh, you naughty wicked man, to frighten me so; but is this dear, pretty darling really the policeman's daughter? I won't believe it yet--how providential, isn't it?"

"I thought you would like her," answered the Judge.

"Like her, indeed; won't she be a lovely pet!" answered the lady, much as she would have spoken of a King Charles spaniel; "how brave she is, too; when all the others ran off she remained!"

"Mary stayed, too," said Isabel, gliding one arm around her friend's waist; "besides, I dare say they were not afraid, ma'am, they only felt a little strange to play before people they didn't know, I suppose! They don't mind the doctor or the matrons in the least!"

"But you are not afraid of strangers!" said the lady. "You didn't run away and hide in the bushes when we came up, but stood all alone like a dear love of a little girl."

Isabel glanced at Mary Fuller.

"She was here, ma'am, just as much as I was."

The gentleman turned and looked earnestly at Mary. There was something in her face that pleased him even more than Isabel's beauty. From the first she had been his favorite.

"And what is this little girl to you?" he said, very kindly.

"Oh, she is everything, everything in the wide world to me now!" answered Isabel with tears in her eyes.

"You know, sir, Mr. and Mrs. Chester died," said Mary, with gentle humility. "And now we are left alone together."

"I knew that the poor lady was dead," answered the Judge, feelingly.

Isabel was weeping; she could not reply, but Mary answered in a faltering voice,

"Yes, sir, we are both orphans!"

"And would you not like to go away from here where you will have a new fine home, with pretty clothes and books and birds to amuse yourself with?" said Mrs. Farnham, bending over Isabel and kissing her.

The child did not answer. She only turned very pale, and drew back toward Mary.

"Would you not be pleased with all those pretty things?" said the Judge, who observed that Mary Fuller turned white as death when they spoke of taking Isabel away.

"If she can have them, too. Will you take her, sir? if not I would rather stay here!"

"But we do not wish to adopt more than one little girl," said the lady, hastily. "You have no mother, I will be one to you. In a little time you will forget all about the people here."

"I shall never forget her, ma'am," replied Isabel, firmly, "never."

"Lead the child away and talk with her alone. This little creature seems intelligent, I will gather something of their history from her," said the Judge.

When Mary saw that the gentleman was about to address her, she arose and stood meekly before him, as he leaned against the elm.

"So, you would not like to have the little girl go away and leave you here?"

Mary struggled bravely with herself, her bosom heaved, she could not keep the tears from swelling to her eyes, but she answered truly and from her aching heart.

"If she will be better off. If you will love her as--as I do, as they did, I will try to think it best!"

"You will try to think it best," repeated the gentleman, and the smile that trembled across his lips was beautiful; "if she goes, my little girl, you shall go with her!"

"Me!" said Mary, lifting up her meek eyes to his face. "Oh, sir, don't make fun of me. Nobody would ever think of making a pet of me!"

"No, not a pet, that is not the word, but, if God prospers us, we will make a good and noble woman of you!" said the gentleman, with generous energy.

"Oh, don't, don't--if you are not in earnest--don't say this!" said the child, almost panting for breath.

"I am in earnest, heaven forbid that I should trifle with you for a moment. If we take the other child you go also. Now, sit down and tell me about yourself."

Mary obeyed with a swelling heart. She told him simply that they were both orphans--that no one on earth could claim them; but with the first few words her voice broke. So the gentleman arose, sought Isabel and led her back to the elm tree, then he took the lady aside and conversed with her long and earnestly. The little girls watched her countenance in breathless suspense. It was dissatisfied,--angry, but she had the will of a strong mind to contend against, and Judge Sharp was resolute.

"As the legal guardian of your son, chosen by the Court and yourself, I have the power to sanction this adoption, and, to own the truth, gave my consent to it before Fred went to College; I doubt if we could have got him off without that!"

"Fred never could find a medium; he is always in extremes. The idea of adopting an ugly little thing like that, and he a mere lad yet! I declare it's too ridiculous; but he need not expect me to take charge of her. There is a medium in all things, Judge, and that is beyond endurance."

"That is all considered; I will see that Mary has a home and proper protection."

"Very well, I wash my hands of the whole affair; poor dear Mr. Farnham was very anxious about this pretty little Isabel. I don't choose to ask why, Judge, I hope I've got pride enough not to stoop so low as that; but, as I was saying, he made a point of it, and you see how resolute I am to perform my duty. It's hard, but I've had to endure a great deal, indeed I have."

"I did hope--in fact, I had reason," said the Judge, "to believe that Mr. Farnham would have provided for that child by will."

Mrs. Farnham colored violently.

"Then you had a reason. He said something to you about it, perhaps?"

"Yes, he certainly did; but then his death at last was so sudden. I don't remember when anything has shocked me so much."

Mrs. Farnham lifted her handkerchief to her eyes; there was something very pathetic in the action, and the deep black border which was intended to impress the Judge with a sense of her combined martyrdom and widowhood.

"Well madam," said that gentleman, heartily weary of her airs, "I hope Fred has your consent to adopt this child. Remember the expense will be nothing compared to the great wealth which he inherits. My word for it, the young fellow will find much worse methods of spending his money if you thwart his generous impulses."

"I have nothing to say. It is my destiny to make sacrifices; of course, if my son chooses to incur himself with a miserable thing like that, he need not ask his mother. Why should he, she is nobody now."

"Then you consent," said the Judge, impatiently, for he saw the anxious looks of the little girls and pitied their suspense.

Mrs. Farnham removed the handkerchief with its sable border from her eyes, and shook her head disconsolately.

"Yes, I consent. What else can I do--a poor heart-broken widow is of no account anywhere."

The Judge turned away rather abruptly.

"Well, now that it is settled let us go; the poor children are suffering a martyrdom of suspense. The Commissioner is on the other side; we can settle the whole thing at once."

"I fancy he'll wonder a little at your taste. But I wash my hands of it--this is your affair. I submit, that is a woman's destiny, especially a widow's."

Judge Sharp advanced toward the children.

"Say to your matron that we may call for you at any minute, and shall hope to find you ready. Tell her that you are both adopted!"

"Together, oh, Mary! we are going away, and together!" cried Isabel, casting herself into the arms of her friend. Mary answered nothing, her heart was too full.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WILD WOODS AND MOUNTAIN PASSES.

Oh, give me a home on the mountains high,
Where the wind sweeps wild and free,
Where the pine-tops wave 'gainst a crimson sky,--
Oh, a mountain home for me!

A travelling carriage, drawn by four grey horses, toiled up an ascent of the mountains some twenty miles back of Catskill. It was a warm day in September, and though the load which those fine animals drew was by no means a heavy one, they had been ascending the mountains for more than two hours, and now their sleek coats were dripping with sweat, and drops of foam fell like snow-flakes along the dusty road as they passed upward. This carriage contained Judge Sharp, the two orphans, and Mrs. Farnham, looking very slender, very fair, but faded, and with a sort of restless self-complacency in her countenance, which seemed ever on the alert to make itself recognized by those about her.

The gentleman had been reading, or rather holding a book before his face, but it would seem rather as an excuse for not keeping up the incessant talk, for conversation it could not be called, which the lady had kept in constant flow all the morning, than from any particular desire to read.

True, he did now and then glance at the book, but much oftener his fine deep eyes were looking out of the carriage window and wandering over the broad expanse of scenery that began to unfold beneath them, as the carriage mounted higher and higher up the mountains. Sometimes, when he appeared most intent on the volume, those eyes were glancing over it towards a little wan face opposite, that began to blush and half smile whenever the thoughtful but kindly look of those eyes fell upon it.

The carriage at last reached a platform on the spur of a mountain ridge where the road made a bold curve, commanding one of the finest views, perhaps--nay, we will not have perhaps, but certainly, in the civilized world.

You should have seen that little pale face then, how it sparkled and glowed with intelligence, nay, with something more than intelligence. The deep, grey eyes lighted up like lamps suddenly kindled, the wide but shapely mouth broke into a smile that spread and brightened over every feature of her face. She started forward, grasped the window-frame, and looked out with an expression of such eager joy that the judge who was gazing upon her, glanced down at his book with a well-pleased smile. "I thought so--I was sure of it. She feels all the grandeur, all the beauty," he said to himself, inly, but to all appearance intent on his book. "Now let us see how the others take it."

"Isabel, Isabel, look out--look look," whispered the excited child, turning with that sort of wild earnestness peculiar to persons of vivid imaginations, when once set on fire with some beautiful thing that God has created. "Look out, Isabel, I do believe that the sky you see yonder is heaven."

"Heaven!" cried Isabel, starting forward and struggling to reach the door, "Heaven! oh, Mary, it makes me think of mamma"--

Mary fell back in her chair, frightened by the effect of her enthusiasm.

"There is nothing, I can see nothing but hills, corn, lots, and sky," said the beautiful child, drawing back and looking at Mary with her great, reproachful eyes half full of tears.

"Oh, Isabel, I did not mean that, not the real heaven, where your--where our mother is, where they all are--but it was so beautiful over yonder, the sky and all, I could not help saying what I did."

Isabel drew back to her seat half petulant, half sorrowful; she was not really child enough to think that Mary could have spoken of heaven as a place actually within view; still it was not wonderful that the thought had for a moment flashed across her brain. Heaven itself could not have seemed more strange to those children than the magnificent mountain scenery through which they were passing. Born in the city, they were thrown for the first time among the most beautiful scenery

that man ever dreamed of, with all their wild, young ideas afloat. Is it wonderful, then, that an imaginative child like Mary should have cried out the name of heaven in her admiration, or that Isabel, so lately made an orphan, should have sent forth the cry of mother, mother, from the depths of her poor little heart when she heard the heaven mentioned, where she believed her mother was still longing for her child?

She sat down cowering close in a corner of the seat, and in order to conceal her tears turned her face to the cushions.

"Sit up," the lady interposed, "my beauty, sit up; don't you see how your pretty marabouts are being crushed against the side of the carriage? Nonsense, child, what can you be crying about?"

"My mother, oh, she made me think of my mother. I thought--it seemed as if she must be there."

The lady frowned and looked toward the Judge with a pettish movement of the head.

"Be quiet, child, I am your mother, now; remember that, I am your mother."

Isabel looked up and gazed through her tears at the pale, characterless face, bent in weak displeasure upon her.

"I am your mother," repeated the lady, in a tone that she intended to be impressive, but it was only snappish; "your benefactress, your more than mamma; forget that you ever had any but me."

"I can't, oh, dear, I never can," cried the child, bursting into a passion of tears, and casting her face back upon the cushion.

Mrs. Farnham seized the child by the shoulder, and placed her, with a slight shake, upright.

"Stop crying; I never could endure crying children," she said. "See how you have crushed the pretty Leghorn, you ungrateful thing! Better be thanking heaven that I took you from that miserable poor-house, than fly in the face of Providence in this manner, crushing Leghorn flats and marabout feathers that cost me mints of money, as if they were city property."

"She did not mean to spoil the feathers, ma'am, it was all my fault," said Mary Fuller; "Isabel loved her poor mother so much."

"And am not I her mother? Can't you children let the poor woman rest in her pine coffin at Potter's Field, without tormenting me with all this sobbing and crying? Remember my little lady, it is not too late yet; a few more scenes like this and it will be an easy matter to send you back where I took you from. Then, perhaps, you will find it worth while to cry after your new mother a little."

The two little girls looked at each other through their tears. Perhaps at the moment they thought of the Infants' Hospital, where Mrs. Farnham had found them, with something of regret. The contrast of a carriage cushioned with velvet and four superb horses, had not impressed them as it might have done older persons. Shut up with strangers, while their hearts were full of regret, they had not found the change for which they were expected to be grateful, quite so happy as she fancied.

Up to the hour we mention they had kept their places demurely, and in silence, drawing their little feet up close to the seats, fearful of being found in the way, and stealing their hands together now and then with a silent clasp, which spoke a world of feeling to the noble man who sat regarding them over his book.

He had watched the scene we have described in silence, and with a sort of philosophical thoughtfulness, using it as a means of studying the souls of those two little girls. When Mrs. Farnham ceased speaking and turned to him for concurrence in her mode of drawing out the affections and settling the preliminaries of a life-time for that little soul, he only answered by leaning from the window and calling out.

"Ralph, draw up and let the horses have a rest under the shadow of this high rock. Come, children, get out, and let's take a look around us; your little limbs will be all the better for a good run among the underbrush."

Suiting the action to his words, Judge Sharp sprang from the carriage, took Isabel in his arms, set her carefully down, then more gently, and with a touch of tenderness, drew Mary Fuller forward, and folded her little form to his bosom.

"We will leave you to rest in the carriage, Mrs. Farnham," he said, with off-hand politeness, as if studying that lady's comfort more than anything on earth. "We will see what wild flowers can be found among the rocks. Take care of yourself; that's right, Ralph, let the horses wet their mouths at this little brook--not too much though, it is a warm day. Now, Isabel, let's see which will climb this rock first--you, or little Mary and I."

Isabel's eyes brightened through her tears. There was something in the cordial goodness of Judge Sharp that no grief could have resisted.

"Please, sir," said Mary, struggling faintly in the arms of her noble friend--"please, sir, I can walk very well."

"And I can carry you very well--why not? Come, now for a climb."

And away strode the great-hearted man, holding her up that she might gaze on the scenery over his shoulder.

Isabel followed close, helping herself up the steep rocks, now by catching hold of a spice-bush and shaking off all its ripe golden blossoms; now drawing down the loops of a grape-vine and swinging forward on it, encouraged in each new effort by the hearty commendations of her new friend.

At last they reached the summit of a detached ridge of rocks that rose like a fortification back of the highway. Judge Sharp sat down upon a shelf cushioned like an easy-chair with the greenest moss and placed the children at his feet.

A true lover of nature himself, he did not speak, or insist upon forcing exclamations of delight from the children who shared the glorious view with him. But he looked now and then into Mary Fuller's face, and was satisfied with all that he saw there.

He turned and glanced also into the beautiful eyes of little Isabel. They were wandering dreamily from object to object, searching, as it were, along the misty horizon for some sign of her dead mother. It was her heart rather than her intellect that wandered over that magnificent scenery for something to dwell upon.

"Are you sure, sir?" said Mary Fuller, timidly, looking up; "are you quite sure that this is the same world that Isabel and I were in yesterday?"

"Why not? Doesn't it seem like the same?"

"No," answered Mary, kindling up and looking eagerly around; "it is a thousand times larger, so vast, so grand, so--. Pray help me out, I wish to say so much and can't. Something chokes me here when I try to say how beautiful all this seems."

Mary folded her hands over her bosom, and began to waver to and fro on the moss seat, struck with a pang of that exquisite pleasure which so closely approaches pain when we fully appreciate the beautiful.

"You like this?" said the Judge, watching her face more than the landscape, that had been familiar to him when almost a wilderness.

"I should like to stay here for ever. It seems as if every one that we have loved so much, is resting near the sky away off yonder falling close down upon the mountains."

"It is a noble view," said the Judge, standing up, and pointing to the right. "Have you ever learned anything of geography, children?"

"A little," they both answered, glancing at each other as if ashamed of confessing so much knowledge.

"Then you have heard of the Green Mountains yonder; they are like thunder-clouds under the horizon?"

The children shaded their eyes, and looked searchingly at what seemed to them a dark embankment of clouds, and then Mary turned, holding her breath almost with awe, and gathered in with one long glance the broad horizon, sweeping its circle of a hundred miles from right to left, closed by the mountain spur on which they stood.

Where distance levelled small inequalities of surface, and made great ones indistinct and cloudy, the whole aspect of the scenery took an air of high cultivation and abundant richness. Thousands and thousands of farms, cut up and colored with their ripened crops, lay before them--golden rye stubbles; hills white with buckwheat and rich with snowy blossoms; meadows, orchards, and groves of primeval timber, all brightened those luxuriant valleys and plains that open upon the Hudson. Deep into New York State, and far, far away among the mountains of New England the eye ranged, charmed and satisfied with a fullness of beauty.

Mary saw it, and all the deep feelings as fervent, but less understood in the child than in the woman, swelled and grew rich in her bosom. Not a tint of those luxuriously colored hills ever left her memory--not a shadow upon the distant mountains ever died from her brain. It is such memories, vivid as painting, and burnt upon the mind like enamel, from childhood to maturity, that feed and invigorate the soul of genius.

Enoch Sharp had been a man of enterprise. Action had ever followed quick upon his thought. Placed by accident in certain avenues of life, he had exerted strong energies, and a will firm as it was kindly, in doing all things thoroughly that he undertook; in no circumstances would he have been an ordinary man. Had destiny placed his field of action among scientific or military men, he would have proven himself first among the foremost; as it was, much of the talent that would have distinguished him there, grew and thrived upon those domestic affections which were to him the poetry of life.

Thrown into constant communion with nature in her most noble aspects, he became her devotee, and was more learned in all the beautiful things which God has created, than many a celebrated savant who studies with his brain only.

True to the unearthed poetry lying in rich veins throughout his whole nature, Enoch Sharp sat keenly regarding the effect this grand panorama of scenery produced on the two children.

He looked on Isabel in her bright, half-restless beauty, with a smile of affectionate forbearance. There was everything in her face to love, but it had to answer to the glow and enthusiasm of his own nature.

But it was far otherwise with little Mary. His own deep grey eye kindled as it perused her sharp features, lighted up, as it were, with some inward flame. His heart warmed toward the little creature, and without uttering a word he stooped down and patted her head in silent approbation.

The child had given him pleasure, for there is nothing more annoying to the true lover of nature than want of sympathy, when the heart is in a glow of fervent admiration; alive with a feeling which is so near akin to religion itself, that we sometimes doubt where the dividing line exists which separates love of God from love of the beautiful objects He has created.

Thus it was that Mary with her plain face and small person found her way to the great, warm heart of Enoch Sharp; and as he sat upon the rock a faint struggle arose in his bosom regarding her destination.

An impulse to take her into his own house and cultivate the latent talent so visible in every gesture and look, took possession of him, but his natural strong sense prevailed over this impulse. Many reasons which we will not pause to mention here, arose in contest with his heart, and he muttered thoughtfully,

"Neither men nor women become what they were intended to be by carpeting their progress with velvet; real strength is tested by difficulties. Still I must keep an eye upon the girl."

Isabel soon became weary of gazing on the landscape. Impatient of the stillness, she arose softly and moved to a ledge close by, under which a wild gooseberry bush drooped beneath a harvest of thorny fruit.

"That is right," said Enoch Sharp, starting up; "let me break off a handful of the branches, they will make peace with Mrs. Farnham for leaving her in the carriage so long."

Directly a heap of thorny branches purple with fruit lay at Isabel's feet, and Enoch Sharp was clambering up the rocks after some tufts of tall blue flowers that shed an azure tinge down one of the clefts; then a cluster of brake leaves mottled with brown spots tempted him on, while Mary Fuller stood eagerly watching his progress.

"Oh, see, see how beautiful--do look, Isabel, if he could only get up so high?"

She broke off with an exclamation of delight. Enoch Sharp had glanced downward at the sound of her voice, and directed by the eager look which accompanied it, made a spring higher up the rock.

A mountain ash, perfectly red with great clusters of berries, shot out from a little hollow between two ledges, and overhung the place where Mr. Sharp had found foothold. As if its own wealth of berries were not enough, a bitter-sweet vine had sprung up in the same hollow, and coiling itself around the tree, deluged it with a shower of golden clusters that mingled upon the same branch with the bright red fruit of the ash.

"Oh, was there ever on earth anything so beautiful?" cried Mary, disentangling the delicate ends of the vines flung down by her

benefactor. "Oh, look, Isabel, look!"

She held up a natural wreath, to which three or four clusters hung like drops of burnt gold.

"Only see!"

With this exclamation she wove a handful of the blue autumn flowers in with the berries and long slender leaves.

"Let me put it around your hat, Isabel. Oh, Mr. Sharp, may I wind this around Isabel's hat; it is so pretty, I'm sure Mrs. Farnham will not mind?"

"Put it anywhere you like," cried the kind man, holding on to a branch of the bitter-sweet, and swinging himself downward till the ash bent almost double. It rushed back to its place, casting off a shower of loose berries and leaves that rattled around the girls in red and golden rain. Directly Mr. Sharp was by them once more, gathering up a handful of gooseberry branches, bitter-sweet and ash, admiring Mary's wreath at the same time.

"Come, now for a scramble down the hill," he cried. "Here, let me go first, for we may all expect a precious blessing, and I fancy my shoulders are the broadest."

The children looked at each other and the smiles left their lips. The "blessing," with which he so carelessly threatened them was enough to quench all their gay spirits, and they crept on after their benefactor with clouded faces.

"See, Mrs. Farnham, see what a world of beautiful things we have found for you up the mountain," cried Mr. Sharp, throwing two or three branches through the carriage window. "The little folks have discovered wonders among the bush--don't you think so?"

Mrs. Farnham drew back and gathered her ample skirts nervously about her.

"What on earth have the creatures brought? Bitter-sweet, gooseberries, with thorns like darning needles! Why, Mr. Sharp, what can you mean by bringing such things here to stain the cushions with?"

"Oh, never mind the cushions," answered the gentleman, lifting Isabel up with a toss, and landing her on the front seat, while Mary stood trembling by his side, with her eyes fixed ruefully on the wreath which surrounded the crown of her companion's Leghorn flat.

"Oh, what will become of us when she sees that?" thought the child in dismay.

But she was allowed no time to ask unpleasant questions, even of herself, for Enoch Sharp took her in his arms and set her carefully

down opposite Mrs. Farnham, whose glance had just taken in the unlucky wreath.

"My goodness, if the little wretches have not destroyed that love of a hat with their trash! Oh, dear, put a beggar on horseback and only see how he will ride! Mr. Sharp, I did hope that the child could appreciate an article of millinery like that; but you see how it is, no just medium can be expected with this pauper taste; a long course of refinement is, I fear necessary to a just comprehension of the beautiful. Only think! two of Jarvis' most expensive marabouts crushed into nothingness by a good-for-nothing heap of, I don't know what, tangled about them! Really, it is enough to discourage one from ever doing a benevolent act again."

Judge Sharp strove to look decorously concerned, but spite of himself a quiet smile would tremble at the corners of the mouth, as he looked at the two marabout feathers flattened and crushed beneath the impromptu wreath.

"Whose work is it? Which of you twisted that thing over those feathers?" cried the lady angrily.

Isabel looked at Mary, but did not speak.

"It was me; I did it," said Mary, meekly. "The berries were so pretty, we never saw any before. Please, ma'am, look again, and see if the blue flowers there against the yellow don't look beautiful."

"Beautiful, indeed! What should you know of beauty, I wonder?" was the scornful answer, for Mrs. Farnham was by no means pleased that Mary had been forced into her company even for a single day's travel. "What on earth possesses a child like you, brought up, no matter where, to speak of this or that thing as pretty? What beautiful thing can you ever have seen?"

"I have seen the sky, ma'am, when it was full of bright stars. God lets poor people as well as rich ones look on the sky, you know; and isn't that beautiful?"

"Indeed! You think so, then?" said the lady.

"And we have seen many, many beautiful things besides that, haven't we, Isabel? One night, when it had been raining, in the winter--I remember it, oh, how well--while the great trees were dripping wet, out came the moon and stars bright, with a sharp frost, and then all the branches were hung with ice, in the moonshine, glittering and bending low toward the ground, just as if the starlight had all settled on the limbs and was loading them down with brightness. Oh, ma'am, I wish you could have seen it. I remember the ground was all one glare of ice; but I didn't mind that."

"I'm afraid your ward will find his protege rather forward, Judge," said the lady, as Mary Fuller drew back, blushing at her own eager

description.

"I really don't know," answered the gentleman; "she seems to have made pretty good use of the few privileges awarded to her, and, really, there is some philosophy in it. When one finds nothing but God's sky unmonopolized, it is something for a child to make so much of that. She has a pretty knack of sorting flowers, too, as you may see by the fashion in which that is twisted. After all, madam, let us each make the most of our favorites. Yours is pretty enough, in all conscience Fred's will give satisfaction where she goes, I dare say."

Judge Sharp was becoming rather weary of his companion again, and so leaned out of the window, as was his usual habit, amusing himself by searching for the first red leaves among the maple foliage, and watching the shadows as they fell softly down the hemlock hollows.

CHAPTER XXV.

A PLEASANT CONVERSATION.

Like the patter of rain in a damp heavy day,
Or the voice of a brook when its waters are low,
That murmurs and murmurs and murmurs away--
Was the sound of her words in their meaningless flow.

After a while, finding that Mrs. Farnham was still talking at the children, and dealing him a sharp sentence or two over their shoulders, for preferring the scenery to her conversation, the Judge quietly drew in his head, and gathering up a quantity of the flowers, arranged a pretty bouquet for each of the little girls, who received them with shy satisfaction.

Then with more effort at arrangement, he completed a third bouquet, and laid it on Mrs. Farnham's lap with affected diffidence, that went directly to that very weak portion of the lady's system, which she dignified with the name of heart.

Enoch Sharp smiled at the effect of his adroit attention, while the lady, appeased into a state of gentle self-complacency, rewarded him with beaming smiles and a fresh avalanche of those soft frothy words, which she solemnly believed were conversation. From time to time she refreshed herself with the perfume of his mountain flowers, descanted on their beauties with sentimental warmth, and murmured snatches of poetry over them, very soft, very sentimental, and particularly annoying to a man filled in all the depths of his soul with an honest love of nature.

"I wish my ward could have seen the old place before he went to college," observed the Judge, adroitly seizing upon a pause in this

cataract of words, and making a desperate effort to change the subject. "He will find Harvard rather dull, I fear, at first."

The Judge was unfortunate. His choice of subject reminded Mrs. Farnham of an old grievance, and that day she was ambitious to establish herself a character for martyrdom.

"Yes," she answered, "I'm sure he will, but Fred would go. I knew they'd make a Unitarian of him or something of that sort, and the way I pleaded would have touched a heart of stone, I'm sure."

"'It was in your father's family,' said I, 'to lean towards what they called liberal views, but I, your mother, Fred, I am firm on the other side, orthodox, settled like a rock in that particular--though it has been said that in other things, the affections for instance--I'm more like a dove.'"

Here Mrs. Farnham settled the folds of her travelling dress with both hands, as if the dove had taken a fancy to smooth its plumage.

"Well, as I was saying to Fred, sir, 'go to Yale, don't think of Harvard, but go to Yale. There you will get a granite foundation for your religion--everything solid and sound there--go to Yale, my son.'"

"It was in this way I reasoned, sir, but Fred has a good deal of his father in him, stubborn, Judge--stubborn as a--a mule, if you will excuse me mentioning that animal to a gentleman who keeps such horses as you do."

The Judge bowed. The love of a fine horse was one of his characteristics; he rather enjoyed the compliment.

His bow set Mrs. Farnham off again with double power.

"'You won't go to Yale,' said I, 'and you will go to Harvard. Let us strike a medium, Fred, a happy medium is the most pleasant thing in the world--go to Harvard one year, the next to Yale, then, sir, I thought of your church--' and, said I, 'finish off at old Columbia, it'll be a compliment to your guardian.'"

"Thank you," said the Judge, with a demure smile; "thank you for remembering my church so kindly; but what did my ward say to this?"

"Why, sir, would you believe it, he answered in the most disrespectful manner, that he went to college to get an education, and Harvard was good enough for that."

"'But,' said I, 'take my medium and you will try Harvard, and Yale, and old Columbia, too; only think what an introduction it would be into all sorts of the best religious society.'"

"Well, sir, what do you think he did but laugh in the most irreverent manner, and ask me if I couldn't point out a Universalist institution"

that he could finish up at. I declare, Judge, it almost broke my heart."

"Well, well, let us hope it will all turn out right," answered the Judge, consolingly--"look, madam, look, what a lovely hollow that is!"

They were now descending the mountain passes. Broken hills and lovely green valleys rose and sunk along their rapid progress. Never on earth was scenery more varied and lovely. Little emerald hollows shaded with hemlock, overhanging brooklets that came stealing like broken diamond threads down the mountain sides to hide beneath their shadows, were constantly appearing and disappearing along the road.

It was impossible for little Mary to sit still when these heavenly glimpses presented themselves. Her cheeks burned, her eyes kindled; her very limbs trembled with suppressed impatience; but she dared not lean forward, and could only obtain tantalizing glances of the sparkling brooks, and the soft, green mosses that clung around the mountain cliffs where they shot over the road.

They passed through several villages, winding in and out through mountain passes, where the hills were so interlapped that it seemed impossible to guess how the carriage would extricate itself from the green labyrinth.

Nothing could be more delicate and vivid than the foliage that clothed the hill-sides, for the primeval growth of hemlocks had been cut away from the hills, and a second crop of luxuriant young trees, beech, oak, and maple, mottled with rich clusters of mountain ash, and the deep green of white pines, covered the whole country.

All at once the coachman drew up his horses on a curve of the highway. The carriage was completely buried in a valley along which wound the river, whose sweet noise they had long heard among the trees.

"Now children, look out," said the Judge, laughing pleasantly; "look out and tell me how we are to get through the hills."

Both the little girls sprang forward and looked abroad breathlessly, like birds at the open door of a cage in which they had been imprisoned. The Judge watched them with smiling satisfaction as they cast puzzled glances from side to side, meeting nothing but shoulders and angles and ridges of the mountains heaving over each other in huge green waves that seemed to be endless, and to crowd close to each other, though many a lovely valley lay between, little dreamed of by the wondering children.

"Well, then, tell me how you expect to get out, little ones?" repeated the Judge.

"Sure enough, how?" repeated Isabel, drawing back, and looking from the Judge to Mrs. Farnham.

But Mary was still gazing abroad. Her eyes wandered from hill to hill, and grew more and more luminous as each new beauty broke upon her. At last she drew back with a deep breath, and the loveliest of human smiles upon her face.

"Indeed, sir, indeed I shouldn't care if we never did get out, the river would be company enough."

"Yes, company enough," replied the Judge, smiling. "But would it feed us when we are hungry?"

"It don't seem as if I ever should be hungry here," replied the child.

"But I am hungry now," replied Enoch Sharp; "and so is Mrs. Farnham, I dare say!"

"No," replied that lady, who prided herself on a delicate appetite, "I never am hungry; dew and flowers, my friends used to say, were intended to support sensitive nerves like mine."

"Very likely," thought Enoch Sharp; "I am certain no human being could support them," but he drowned this ungallant thought in a loud call for Ralph to drive on.

The horses made a leap forward, swept round a huge rock that concealed the highway where it curved suddenly with a bend of the river, and before them lay one of the most beautiful mountain villages you ever beheld. The horses knew their old home. Away they went sweeping up the broad winding sheet between double columns of young maple trees, through which the white houses gleamed tranquilly and dream-like on the eyes of those city children.

CHAPTER XXVI

A VALLEY IN THE MOUNTAINS.

High up among the emerald breasted hills,
There lay a village, cradled in their green.
Surrounded by such loveliness as thrills
The poetry within us--and the sheen
Of a broad river kissed the mountain's foot
Where stately hemlocks found primeval root.

Judge Sharp's carriage stopped in front of a noble mansion near the centre of the village. I think it must have been one of the oldest houses in the place. But modern improvements had so transfigured and beautified it, that it bore the aspect of a noble suburban villa, rather than a mountain residence. The roof lifted in a pointed gable, and supported by brackets, shot several feet over the front, resting

on a row of tall, slender columns which formed a noble portico along the entire front.

In order to leave the first family homestead ever built in those mountains entire in its simple architecture, this portico shaded the double row of windows first introduced into the dwelling; and the main building remained entire within and without, as it had been left years before by its primitive architect. But modern wings had been united to the old building on the left and in the rear pointed with gables, and so interspersed with chimneys that the whole mass formed a gothic exterior singular and beautiful as it was picturesque.

Noble old trees, maple, elm and ash, shaded the green lawn which fell far back from the house, terminating on one side in a fine fruit orchard bending with ripened peaches and purple plums, and broken up on the south by a flower-garden gorgeous with late summer blossoms, shaded with grape arbors and clumps of mountain ash, all flushed and red with berries.

This noble garden lost itself in the deep green of an apple orchard full of singing birds. The waters of a mountain brook came leaping down from the broken hills beyond, and gleamed through the thick foliage, mingling their sweet perpetual chime with the rising breath of that little wilderness of flowers.

This was the dwelling at which Judge Sharp's carriage stopped. It seemed like a Paradise to the little girls, who longed to get out and enjoy a full view of its beauties from the lawn. But Mrs. Farnham was a guest, for the time; and well disposed to use her privileges, she refused to descend, though hospitably pressed, and seemed to think the few moments required by the Judge to enter his own home, an encroachment on her rights and privileges.

But the Judge cared little for this, and was far more engaged with a venerable old house-dog, toothless, grey and dim-eyed, who arose from his sunny nook upon the grass, and came soberly down to welcome his master, than he was with the lady's discontent.

"Ha, Carlo, always on hand, old fellow," he said, patting the grizzly head of his old favorite, "glad to see me, ha!"

Carlo looked up through his dim eyes and gave a feeble whine, which, in his young days, would have been a deep-mouthed bay of welcome. Then, with grave dignity, he tottered onward by his master's side, escorted him up to the entrance door, and lay down in a sunny spot which broke through the honeysuckle branches on the balcony, satisfied by the soft rush of feet and the glad female voices within, that his master was in good hands.

"I wonder," said Mrs. Farnham, leaning back with an air of ineffable disgust, and talking to no one in particular--"I wonder how the Judge can allow that old brute to prowl after him in that manner, but there is no medium in some people. I'm sure if he were at my house I would

have him shot before morning--laying down on the portico indeed!"

"But he seems so glad," said Mary Fuller, struck with a thrill of sympathy for the dog, rendered repulsive to that silly woman by his age, as she was by her homeliness.

"Isn't it the duty of every ugly thing to be still?" replied Mrs. Farnham, casting a look of feeble spite at the child. "But the Judge has a fancy for uncouth pets."

"Perhaps because they feel kindness so much," answered Mary, in a trembling voice.

"Indeed!" drawled the lady; "then I wish he would be kind enough to send us on. This tiresome waiting, when one is worn out and half famished, is too much."

Just then the Judge appeared at the front door cheerful and smiling, and, in the shaded background of the hall, two fair forms were visible, hovering near, as if reluctant to part with him again so soon.

"Not quite out of patience, I hope?" he said, leaning into the carriage, while the ladies of his family came forth with offers of hospitality. But Mrs. Farnham muttered something about fatigue, dust, and the strong desire she had to see her own home--a desire in which the ladies soon heartily, but silently, joined, for it needed only a first sentence to convince them that the interesting widow would make but a sorry acquisition to the neighborhood.

"Then, if you absolutely insist, madam, the next best thing is to proceed," cried Enoch Sharp, and, springing into his seat, he waved an adieu to his family, and the rather reluctant horses proceeded briskly down the street.

The river which we have mentioned, skirted the village with its bright waters; two or three fine manufacturing buildings stood back from its banks, and, having supplied them with its sparkling strength, it swept on wildly as before, curving and deepening between its green or rocky banks with low, pleasant murmurs, like a troop of children let loose from school.

The highway ran along its banks, sometimes divided from the waters by clumps of hoary old hemlocks, that had escaped the axe from their isolation perhaps, and again separated only by thickets of wild blackberries and mountain shrubs.

As they proceeded the hills crowded down close to the highway, that ran along the steep banks of the river; here the stream rushed on with fresh impetuosity, and gathering up its waves in a sudden curve of the channel, leaped down the valley in one of the most beautiful waterfalls you ever saw.

"Oh, one minute; do, do stop one minute," cried Mary, as the broad crescent of the fall flashed before her. "Isabel, Isabel, did you ever see any thing like that?"

"Really, Judge, your pet is very forward, and so tiresome," said Mrs. Farnham, gazing down upon the waters with a weak sneer; "one would think she had never seen a mill-dam before."

This sent the poor child back to her corner again. But Mrs. Farnham had struck the Judge on a sensitive point when she sneered at that beautiful crescent-shaped fall, rolling in a sheet of crystal over its native rocks, the sparkling waters all in sunshine; the still basin beneath, green with stilly shadows cast over it from masses of tall trees that crowded around the brink.

"Madam," he said, "that mill-dam made its channel when the hills around had their first foundation. You must not find fault with the workmanship, for God himself made it."

"Indeed, you surprise me," cried the lady, taking out her glass and leaning forward, "I really supposed it must be the result of some of those logging bees that we hear of in these back settlements. I quite long to witness something of the kind; it must be gratifying, Judge, to see your peasantry enjoy themselves on these rustic occasions."

"My peasantry," laughed the Judge, as much ashamed of the angry feelings with which his last speech had been given, as if he had been caught whipping a lap-dog--"my constituents, you mean."

"Oh, yes, of course, I mean anything that you call that sort of people--constituents, is it?"

"My wife and I call that sort of people neighbors."

"Indeed," cried Mrs. Farnham, dropping her glass and leaning back as one who bends beneath a sudden blow; "I thought you were to be _my_ neighbors."

"If you will permit us," said the Judge, laughing; "but here is your house, and there stands the housekeeper ready to receive you."

Mrs. Farnham brightened, and began to gather up her shawl and embroidered satchel, like one who was becoming weary of her companions.

"This is really very nice," she said, looking up to the huge square building lifted from the road by half a dozen terraces, and crowned with a tall cupola; "depend on it, I shall make it quite a Paradise, Judge. I'm glad it's out of sight of your mill--your waterfall--I hate sounds that never stop."

"How she must hate her own pattering voice," thought the Judge, as he helped the lady in her descent from the carriage.

"And the housekeeper, I thought she was here."

"And so I am, ma'am," answered a slight, little woman, with a freckled complexion, and immense quantities of red hair gathered back of her head in the fangs of a huge comb that had been fashionable twenty-five years before; "been a-waiting at that identical front door full on to an hour, expecting you every minet; but better late than never. You're welcome, ma'am, as scraps to a beggar's basket."

It was laughable--the look of indignant astonishment with which the widow regarded her housekeeper, as in the simple honesty of her heart she uttered this welcome.

"And pray, who engaged you to take charge here? Could no more suitable person be found?"

"Who engaged me, ma'am, me? why I grew up here--never was engaged in my hull life, and never will be till men are more worth having."

"But how came you here as my housekeeper?"

"Well, sort of nat'rally, ma'am, as children take the measles; bein' as I was in the house, I just let 'em call me what they're a mind to; hain't quite got used to the name yet, but it'll soon fit on with practice. Come, now, walk in, and make yourself to home."

All the time Mrs. Farnham had been standing by the carriage, with her shawl and travelling satchel on one arm. She refused to surrender them to Enoch Sharp, and stood swelling with indignation because the housekeeper did not offer to relieve her. She might as well have expected the cupola to descend from its roof, as any of these menial attentions from Salina Bowles, who possessed very original ideas of her duties as a housekeeper.

"Gracious me! I hadn't the least notion that you had children along!" cried the good woman, totally oblivious of Mrs. Farnham's flushed face, and pressing closely up to the carriage.

"But allow me to hope that you will grant permission, now that they have come!" said the widow with an attempt at biting satire, which Salina received in solemn good faith.

"It ain't the custom hereabouts to turn any thing out of doors, ma'am, expected or not; and I calculatate there'll be room in the house for a young 'un or two if they ain't over noisy. Come, little gal, give a jump, and let's see how spry you are."

Isabel obeyed, and impelled by Miss Bowles' vigorous arm, made a swinging leap out of the carriage.

"Gracious sakes, but she's as hornsomeness as a pictur, ain't she though? Not your own darter, marm. I calculatate."

The flush deepened on the widow's face, and she began to bite her nether lip furiously, a sure sign that rage was approaching to white heat with her. For occasionally Mrs. Farnham found it difficult to retain a just medium, when her temper was up.

"Come, child, move on, let us go into the house, if this woman will get out of the way and permit us"---

"Out of the way, goodness knows I ain't in it by a long chance," cried Salina, waving her hand toward the house; "as for permitting, why the path is open straight to the front door; and the house just as much yours as it is mine, I reckon."

"Is it indeed?" sneered the lady, lifting a fold of her travelling skirt, as she prepared to ascend the first terrace; "we shall decide that to-morrow."

But Salina Bowles sent an admiring glance after them, directed at the beautiful child rather than the lady.

"Well, now, she is a purty critter, ain't she, Judge? them long curls do beat all."

But the Judge was at Mrs. Farnham's side assisting her to mount the terrace. When Salina became aware of this, her glance fell inside the carriage again, and she saw Mary Fuller leaning forward and gazing after Isabel with her eyes full of tears. Instantly a change came over the rough manner of the woman--she remembered her encomiums on Isabel's beauty with a quick sense of shame, and leaning forward reached out both hands.

"Come, little gal, let me lift you out; harnsome is as harnsome does, you know. I hope you ain't tired, nor nothing."

Mary began to weep outright. She tried to smile and force the tears back with her eyelids; but the woman's kind words had unlocked her little grateful heart, and she could only sob out--

"Thank you--thank you very much; but I suppose I'm not to stop here, it's only Isabel."

"And is she your sister?"

"No; but we've been together so long, and now she's gone; and--and"--

"Gone without speaking a word, or saying good bye?--well, I never did!"

Away darted Miss Bowles up the terraces, leaping from step to step like an old greyhound till she seized on Isabel, and giving her a light shake, bore her back in triumph, much to the terror of both children and the astonishment of the widow, who stood regarding them

from the upper terrace in impatient wrath; while the Judge softly rubbed his hands and wondered what would come next.

"There now, just act like a Christian, and say good-bye to the little gal that's left behind," cried Salina, hissing out a long breath as she plumped little Isabel down into the carriage. "What's the use of long curls and fine feathers if there's no feeling under them? There, there, have a good kiss and a genuine long cry together; it'll be a refreshment to you both."

Without another word the house-keeper marched away and ascended the terraces, her freckled face glowing with rude kindness, and the sunbeams glancing around her red hair as we see it around some of the ugly saints, that the old masters stiffened on canvas before Raphael gave ease of movement and freedom of drapery to these heavenly subjects.

"What have you done with the child?" almost shrieked Mrs. Farnham, as the house-keeper drew near with a broad smile on her broader mouth.

"Just put her in her place, that's all," replied Salina; "she was a coming off without bidding t'other little thing good-bye. There she sot with her two eyes as wet as periwinkles, looking--looking after you all so wishful. I couldn't stand it; nobody about these parts could. We ain't wolves and bears, if we were brought up under the hemlocks. 'Little children should love one another,' that's genuine Scriptor, or ought to be if it ain't."

"What on earth shall I do with this creature?" cried Mrs. Farnham, half overpowered by the higher and stronger character with which she had to deal. "She almost frightens me!"

"Still she seems to me about right in her ideas, if a little rough in her way of enforcing them. Believe me, madam, Salina Bowles will prove a faithful and true friend."

"Friend! Mr. Sharp, I do not hire my friends!"

The Judge made a slightly impatient movement. He was becoming weary of throwing away ideas on the well-dressed shell of humanity before him.

"You will find the prospect very delightful," he said, casting a glance toward the mountains, at whose feet the river wound brightening in the sunshine, and seeming deeper where the shadows lengthened over it from the hills. "See, the spires and cupolas are just visible at the left; though not close together, we shall be near enough for good neighbors."

The lady looked discontentedly around on the hills, covered with the golden sunset, the river sleeping beneath them, and the distant village rising from masses of foliage, and pencilling its spires against the blue sky, where it fell down in soft, wreathing clouds at the mouth of the valley.

"I dare say it is what you call fine scenery, and all that; but really I cannot see what tempted Mr. Farnham to think of forbidding the sale of this place; and, above all, to make it a condition that I should live here now and then while Fred is in college."

"Your husband started life here, madam," answered the Judge, almost sternly; "and we love the places where our first struggles were made."

"Yes, but then I didn't start life here with him, you know. Poor, dear Mr. Farnham was so much older, and his tastes so different, I sometimes wonder how he managed to win me, so young, so--so--but you comprehend, Judge!"

"He had managed to get a handsome property together before that, I believe," said the Judge, with a demure smile.

"But what is property without taste, and a just idea of style? Mr. Farnham became quite aware of his deficiency in these points when he married me."

"There does seem to have been a deficiency," muttered the Judge, and having appeased himself with this bit of internal malice, he turned an attentive ear to the end of her speech.

"His mother you know, was a commonish sort of person"

Here Salina, who stood upon the broad door-step with the front door open, strode down and confronted Mrs. Farnham. She remained thus with those little grey eyes searching the lady's face, and with her long, bony hand tightly clenched, as if she waited for something else before her wrath would be permitted to reach the fighting point. But Mrs. Farnham remained silent, only muttering over "a very commonish sort of person indeed," and with hound-like reluctance, Salina retreated backward, step by step, to her position at the door.

CHAPTER XXVII.

NEW PEOPLE AND NEW HOMES

There was energy and strength in her,
A heart to will, with a hand to do;
Like the fruit that lies in a chestnut bur
That honest soul was fresh and true.

Meantime Mary Fuller and Isabel had remained in the carriage, locked in each others arms, murmuring out their fondness and their grief, with promises of faithful remembrance amid broken sob; and tears, such as they had never shed before, even in their first poverty stricken

orphanage.

Something of that deep, unconscious spirit of prophecy, which sometimes haunts the souls of children God-loving like Mary Fuller, whispered her that this separation would be for years. She had reasoned with this presentiment all the way from the Alms House, which had so lately been their home, to this the place of their future residence. In the innocence of her heart she had taxed this feeling as a selfish one, and had covered herself with self-reproach, for having fallen into envy of the brighter destiny which awaited Isabel, in comparison with her own prospects. But the child had done herself injustice, and mistook the holiest intuition of a pure heart for a feeling of which that heart was incapable.

Isabel merely knew that they were to be parted, that the young creature whose care had been that of a mother, whose patience and gentle love had given a home feeling even to the Alms House, would no longer share her room, curl her hair, and arrange her dress with kindly devotion, or in any way soothe her life as she had done.

She did not comprehend, as Mary did, the great evil which this separation would bring upon her moral nature; but her affectionate heart was touched, and the passionate grief that she felt at parting, was more violent by far than the deeper and more solemn feeling that shook Mary's heart to the centre, but made no violent outcry, as lighter grief might have done.

Both Salina and Mary herself had done the child injustice, when they supposed her going heartlessly away from her old companion. Confused by the meeting of Mrs. Farnham and the housekeeper, and puzzled by the strangeness of everything around, she had followed her benefactress, or adopted mother, without a thought that Mary would not join them; and her grief was violent, indeed, when she learned that then and there she must separate from the only creature on earth, that her warm, young heart could entirely love.

The children were locked in each other's arms, weeping, each striving to comfort the other.

"Remember now, Isabel, say your prayers every night, the Lord's Prayer, and after that, Isabel, remember and ask God to bless me and make me, oh! so patient."

"Ah! but it will seem so lonesome all by myself, with no one to kneel by me. Mary, Mary, I wish they had left us together at the hospital, I long to get away from here!"

"No, you mustn't feel that way, Mary, because Mrs. Farnham is very good and very kind, to make you like her own child, and dress you up in all these pretty things."

"They are pretty!" replied Mary, examining her plaid silk dress through many tears, "but somehow I don't seem to feel a bit happier in

them."

"But this lady is to be your mother, Isabel."

Poor Isabel burst into a fresh passion of grief. "Oh! Mary, Mary, that is it. You know she isn't in the least like my mother, my own darling, darling mother."

"But she is in heaven," said Mary, in her sweet, deep voice, that always seemed so holy and true. "Now, dear Isabel, you will have two mothers, one here, another beyond the stars. That mother--oh, Isabel, I believe it as I do my own life--that mother comes to you always when you pray."

"Oh! then I will pray so often, Mary," cried the little girl, clasping her hands, "if that will bring her close to me."

Mary looked long and wistfully into that lovely face, with only such admiration as one bereft of all personal attractions can feel for beauty. Isabel clung closer to her, and wept more quietly.

"You will come and see me very often?" she whispered.

"Yes," sobbed Mary, "if they will let me."

"Where are they going to leave you?"

"I don't know, I haven't thought to ask till now."

"I hope it will be near, Mary; and then, you know, we will see each other every day," cried the child, brightening through her tears.

"But I am afraid Mrs. Farnham don't like me well enough. She may not allow it," answered Mary, with a meek smile.

"But I will," persisted Isabel, flinging back her head, with an air that brought fresh tears into Mary's eyes.

"Isabel," she said gravely, and striving to suppress her grief, "don't--don't--Mrs. Farnham is your mother now."

"No, she isn't though. She frightens me to death with her kindness. She don't love me a bit, only because my face is so pretty. I wish it wasn't, and then, perhaps, I could go with you."

"No, no, we needn't expect that, I never did. It's only a wonder they took me at all. I'm Mr. Frederick's child, and you are hers. I'm quite sure if it hadn't been for him and Mr. Sharp, I should have been left in the Poor House all alone. The lady only looked at you from the first."

"I know it, don't you think I heard all she said about my eyes, my curls and my beautiful face, while you stood there with your mouth all

of a tremble, and your eyes growing so large and bright under their tears--I knew that it was my pretty face, that was doing it all; and oh! just then, Mary, I hated it so much."

"It is a great thing to have a beautiful face, Isabel, a very great thing. You don't know what it is to see kind people turn away their eyes for fear of hurting your feelings by a look, and to hear rude, bad persons gibing at you. Isabel, dear, you wouldn't like that."

Mary said this in her usual sad, meek way, smiling so patiently as if every word were a tear wrung from her heart.

"Oh! Mary, but you are beautiful to me--nobody on earth looks so sweet and so good in my eyes, or ever will."

The two children embraced each other, and both wept freely as only children can weep. At length, Mary Fuller withdrew herself from Isabel's arms, lingering a moment to press fresh kisses among her curls.

"Now, Isabel, you must go. See, they are looking at us. Mrs. Farnham will be angry."

"Mary, I want to tell you something; I like the red-haired woman, cross as she is, a thousand times better than Mrs. Farnham. If she did shake me, it was for my good, I dare say."

"She was kind, at any rate, to let you come back," said Mary.

"To let me? Why, Mary, she shook me up as mamma would a pillow, and shot me into the carriage so swift, it took my breath."

Mary smiled faintly, and Isabel began to laugh through her tears, as she scrambled out of the carriage again, Mary followed her with longing eyes. Something of maternal tenderness mingled with her love of that beautiful child; suffering had rendered her strangely precocious, and that prophetic spirit, which might have sprung from a mind too early stimulated, filled her whole being as with the love of a guardian angel.

"Oh, how lovely she is, how bright, how like a bird--if her father could only see her now, poor, poor Isabel! It is so hard for her to be with strange people; but I, who was so long prowling the streets like a little wild beast that everybody ran away from; yes, I ought to be content, and so grateful. But--but, I should like it so much if they would only let me come and see her once in a while. It's so hard, and so lonesome without that."

Thus muttering sadly and sweetly to herself, the child sat with her little face buried in both hands, almost disconsolate.

She was aroused by a vigorous footstep and the cheering voice of Enoch Sharp. He did not appear to notice her tears, but took his seat,

waving his hand to the group just turning to enter Mrs. Farnham's dwelling.

"There, there, wave your hand, little one. They're looking this way."

Mary leaned forward. Mrs. Farnham and the housekeeper had entered the hall, but Isabel took off her Leghorn flat and was waving it toward them. The pink ribbons and marabouts fluttered joyously in the air. Mary could not see that those bright hazel eyes were dim with tears, but the position and free wave of the arms were full of buoyant joy. She drew a deep breath, and choked back her tears. It seemed as if she were utterly deserted, then, utterly alone.

While Mary could feel and admire Isabel's beauty, her own lack of it had only been half felt; now her sun was gone, and she, poor moon, grew dreary in the unaided darkness. Up to this time Mary had hardly given a thought to the fate intended for herself. Always meek and lowly in her desires, feeling that any place was good enough for her, she was never selfishly anxious on her own account. Nor did she inquire now. While Enoch Sharp was striving to comfort her by caressing little cares, she only asked,

"Is it far from here that you are taking me sir?"

"No, child, it is not more than a mile--you can run over and see her any time before breakfast, if you like."

Mary did not answer, but her eyes began to sparkle, and bending her head softly down, as a meek child does in prayer, she covered Enoch Sharp's hands with soft, timid kisses, that went to the very core of his noble heart.

"Would you like to know where, and what, your home is to be, little one?" he said, smoothing her hair with one disengaged hand.

"If you please, but I am sure it will be very nice, so near her."

"Do you wish very much to be with her?"

"Indeed I do, and if they could send us word from heaven, I know her father and mother would say it was best."

"But there is no relationship between you," said he, willing to probe her frank soul to the bottom.

"Relationship, sir," answered the child, with the most touching smile that ever lighted human face, "oh, sir, haven't you seen how lovely she is? And I"--

The child paused and spread her little hands open, as much as to say, "and!! could two creatures so opposite be of the same blood?"

"I think you more lovely by half than she is, my child," cried Enoch

Sharp, drawing the hand, still warm with her grateful kisses, across his eyes; "good children are never ugly, you know."

The child looked at him wonderingly.

"You have seen a thunder-cloud," he said, answering the look, "how leaden and dismal it is of itself; but let the sun shine strike it and its edges are fringed with rosy gold, its masses turn purple and warm crimson, it breaks apart and rainbows leap from its bosom, bridging the sky with light; do you understand, my child?"

"Oh! yes, sir, I have seen the clouds melt away into rainbows so often."

"Well, it is the sunshine that makes a thing of beauty, where was only a dull black cloud. In the human face, my child, goodness acts like sunshine on the clouds. Be very good, little one, and the best portion of mankind will always think you handsome."

Mary listened very earnestly, but with an irresolute and unconvinced expression. This doctrine of immaterial loveliness she could not readily adopt; and, strange enough, did not quite relish. Her admiration of Isabel's beauty was so intense, that words like these seemed to outrage it.

"Come, come," said the Judge, who had never had an opportunity of conversing much with the child, "you must not cry so bitterly at being parted."

"Sir," said the child, turning her large spiritual eyes upon the Judge, "her father and mother were very, very kind to me, when I had no home, no food--nothing--nothing on earth but the cold streets to live in; remember that!"

"It is important that I should be well informed about you, Mary. Who was your father?"

"My father," cried the child, starting upright, and her eyes flashed out brightly, scattering back their tears, "my father was as good a man as ever breathed; good, good, sir, as you are. He did everything for me, worked for me, taught me himself, nursed me in his own arms, my father--oh, my poor, poor father, he is a bright angel in heaven."

"But your mother--did she act kindly by you?"

"My mother, oh, sir, she is with him--she is surely with my father."

Enoch Sharp turned away his head.

"That is a good girl, Mary," he said at last. "But here we are at your new home. Wipe up your tears and look cheerful."

Mary obeyed, and her effort to smile was a pleasant tribute to her

noble friend, as he lifted her tenderly from the carriage.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE OLD HOMESTEAD.

'Twas a picturesque old homestead,
With a low moss-covered roof;
And trumpet vines flung over it
Their green and crimson woof.

The house at which Judge Sharp stopped was long, low, and terribly weather-beaten. Once a coating of red paint had ornamented it, but time had beaten this off in some places, and washed it together in others, till the color was now a dull brown, with patches of red here and there, visible beneath the eaves and around the windows. The highway separated this dwelling from the river, which took a bold, graceful curve just below the house; leaving a broad expanse of meadow-land and some fine clumps of trees in full view on the opposite shore.

Directly in front, ran a picket-fence, old, uneven and dilapidated, but in picturesque keeping with the building. The gate hung loosely on its hinges, just opposite an old-fashioned porch, that shot over the front door, much after the fashion of that hideous thing called a poke, with which English women disfigure their pretty travelling bonnets and protect themselves from the sun.

An immense trumpet-flower overran this porch, whose antique massiveness harmonized with the building, for the straggling branches shot out in all directions, and its coarse blossoms, then in season, seemed to have drank up all the red paint as it vanished from the clapboards. Long, uncut grass, set thick with dandelions, filled the narrow strip between the front fence and the house, except just under the eaves, where it was worn away into a little, pebble-lined gutter, by the water-drops that poured from the roof every rainy day.

A few of those old-fashioned roses, broad and red, but almost single, so common about old houses beyond the reach of nursery gardens, struggled up through the grass, along the lower portions of the fences, and on each side the porch. A garden, at one end of the house, was red with love-lies-bleeding and coxcombs, their deep hues contrasting with great clumps of marigolds and bachelor's-buttons, all claiming a preemption right over innumerable weeds and any amount of ribbon grass, that struggled hard to drive them out.

With all its dilapidation, there was something picturesque and attractive about the old homestead--a mingling of rude taste and neglect, unthrifty, but suggestive of innate character. Mary Fuller

looked around her, with that keen relish of gay colors and rude outline, that a rich uncultivated taste appreciates best. The glow of those warmly-tinted, bold garden flowers seemed like a welcome; and the soft rush of the river, which she had so feared to love, seemed like the voice of an old friend following her among strangers.

She had some little time for observation, for the gate opened with difficulty, groaning on its hinges, scraping its way in the segment of a circle upon the ground, and tearing up grass by the roots in its progress. Evidently the front door was not in very frequent use, and the stubborn old gate seemed determined that it never should be again. A wren shot away from the porch, as the Judge and his protege entered it, and went fluttering in and out through the green branches waving over it quite distractedly, as if she had never seen a human being there in her whole birdhood before.

"Poor little coward," said the Judge, "it's afraid we shall drive its young ones from their old home."

Mary had followed the fugitive with sparkling eyes, and she now began peering among the leaves, expecting to find a nest full of darling little birdlings chirping for food. For aught she knew, poor alley-bred child, the birds built nests and filled them with eggs all the year round.

Judge Sharp rapped upon the door with his knuckles, for the old iron knocker groaned worse than the gate when he attempted to raise it.

After a little, the door opened with a jerk; for, like the gate, it swung low, grating upon the threshold.

In the entry stood a woman, tall beyond what is common in her sex, square built and slightly stooping, not from feebleness, however, but habit. The woman might have been handsome in her youth, for there still existed a remnant of beauty in that cold, grave face, threaded with wrinkles, and shaded by hair of a dull iron grey. Her eyes were keen, and intensely black; they must have had fire in them once; if so, it had burned itself out years before; for now they seemed clear and cold as ice.

"How do you do, aunt Hannah?" said the Judge, reaching forth his hands. "I have brought the little girl, you see."

"What little girl?" inquired the woman, casting her cold eyes on Mary Fuller. "I know nothing about any little girl."

"Then uncle Nathan didn't get my letter," said the Judge, a little anxiously.

"He hasn't had a letter these three years," was the concise reply.

"Well, I must see him then. Where is he, aunt Hannah?"

"In his old place."

"Where, on the back porch?"

"Yes."

"Well, aunt Hannah, just see to my little girl, while I go and speak with uncle Nathan," and the Judge disappeared from the entry, through a side door.

"Come into the out room," said aunt Hannah to Mary, leading the way through an opposite door.

Mary followed in silence, chilled through and through by this iron coldness.

The room was chilly and meagre of comforts like its mistress. A home-made carpet, striped in red and green, but greatly faded by time, covered the floor. A tall, mahogany bureau, with a back-piece and top-drawers, stood on one side, and a long, narrow dining-table of black wood, with slender legs and claw-feet, grasping each a small globe, stood between the two front windows. Over these windows were paper curtains of pale blue, rolled up with strings and tassels of twisted cotton, just far enough to leave the lower panes visible. Half a dozen chairs of dark brown wood touched with green, stood around the room; and over the dining-table hung an antique looking-glass, in a mahogany frame, rendered black by time.

Mary sat down by an end window that overlooked the garden, and peered through the little panes to avoid the steady gaze that the woman fixed upon her. A sweet-briar bush grew against the window; and she caught bright glimpses of marigolds and asparagus laden with red berries, through the fragrant leaves.

All at once she started and turned suddenly in her chair. The woman had spoken.

"Who are you?" was the curt question that aroused her.

"I--I--ma'am?"

"Yes, I mean you. What's your name?"

"Mary Fuller, ma'am."

"What brought you in these parts?"

"I came with Isabel and Judge Sharp."

"What for?"

"To live with somebody, ma'am, I--I thought at first it was here!"

"Where did you come from?"

Mary blushed. Poor child! She had a vague idea that there was something to be ashamed of in coming from the Alms House. As she hesitated the woman repeated her question, but more briefly, only saying:

"Where?"

"From the Alms House!"

Aunt Hannah's eyes fell. A faint color crept through the wrinkles on her forehead, and for a few moments she ceased to interrogate the child. But she spoke at length in the same impassive voice as before:

"Have you a father?"

"No, ma'am."

"A mother?"

"She is dead."

"Who is Isabel?"

"A little girl that was with me in"--she was about to say in the Alms House; but more sensitive regarding Isabel than herself, she changed the term and said, "that was with me in the carriage."

"The carriage," repeated aunt Hannah, moving toward a window and lifting the paper blind, "did it take four horses to drag you and another little girl over the mountains?"

"Oh! no, ma'am, there was a lady."

"A lady! Who?"

"A lady who lives down the river in a great square house, with a sort of short steeple on the roof."

"What, Mrs. Farnham?" said the woman, dropping the blind as if it had been a roll of fire, while her face turned white to the lips, and a glow came into her eyes that made Mary's heart beat quick, for there was something startling in it, as the woman stood searching her face for the answer.

"Yes, that is the name, ma'am."

Aunt Hannah's lips grew colder and whiter, while the glow concentrated in her eyes like a ray of fire.

"Is she coming here to live?" broke in low, stern tones from those cold lips.

"Yes, I heard her say that she was," replied the little girl, gently, warmed by a touch of sympathy; for even this stern betrayal of feeling was less repulsive than the chill apathy of her previous manner.

"And this Isabel. Is the girl hers?"

"No, not hers, she is like me--no, not like me--only in having no father and mother--for Isabel is--oh, how beautiful."

"And what is she doing here?" questioned the woman, still in her stern, low tones.

"Mrs. Farnham has adopted her," answered the child, "and no wonder; anybody would like to have Isabel for a child."

"Why?"

"Because she is lovely."

"Why didn't she adopt you?" said the woman, without a change in her voice.

"Me, ma'am! Oh, how could she?"

The child, as she spoke, spread her little hands abroad, and looked downward as was her touching habit, when her person was brought in question.

The woman stood in the centre of the room, pale, and still gazing upon that singular little face, with a degree of intensity of which its former coldness seemed incapable. At last she strode up to the window, and putting her hand on Mary's forehead, bent back her head, while she perused her face.

"And who will adopt you?" she said, at length, as if communing with herself.

"I don't know," said the child, sadly. "When I came here I thought perhaps this house was the one that Mr. Sharp expected me to live in."

The woman continued her gaze during some seconds, then her hand dropped away from the throbbing little forehead, and she returned to her seat.

That moment the door opened, and Enoch Sharp looked through, with a smile that penetrated into the room like a sunbeam.

"Come, aunt Hannah," he said, "we can do nothing without you."

CHAPTER XXIX.

AUNT HANNAH AND UNCLE NATHAN.

The apple trees were all growing old,
And old was the house that sheltered him;
But that brave, warm heart, was a heart of gold!
Though his head was grey, and his eyes were dim.

Aunt Hannah arose, and walked with a precise and firm step from the room. Enoch Sharp led the way into a low back porch that overlooked that portion of the garden devoted to vegetables. In one end of this porch stood a huge cheese-press; and on the dresser opposite, a wooden churn was turned bottom up, with the dasher leaning against it. Several milking-pails of wood, scoured to a spotless whiteness, were ranged on each side, while nicely kept strainers hung over them. There was a faint, pure smell of the dairy near, as if the porch opened to a butter and cheese-room; but the exquisite cleanliness of everything around made this rather agreeable than otherwise.

The principal object in the porch, however, was an old man seated in a huge armed-chair of unpainted oak, with a splint bottom worn smooth by constant use. The chair stood near the back entrance, and the old man seemed quite too large and unwieldy for any attempt at exercise; but his broad, rosy face was turned toward the door, as he heard Enoch Sharp and his sister coming through the kitchen; and one of the frankest smiles you ever beheld, beamed from his soft brown eyes over the benevolent expanse of his face.

"Well, Nathan, what do you want of me?" inquired the austere lady in her usual cold tones.

The good man seemed taken aback by this short address. He looked at the Judge as if for help, saying,

"Hasn't he told you, Hannah?"

"Yes, he wants us to keep this little thing in yonder, and let others pay us for it. I don't sell kindness--do you, Nathan?"

"No, no, certainly not; but then, Hannah, you must reflect; the Judge's own house is not exactly suited for a person like this little girl; and if we don't take her who will?"

The woman stood musing, her cold face unchanged, her eyes cast thoughtfully downward.

"You see, sister," persisted uncle Nathan, "this little girl isn't as the Judge says, a sort of person to make a pet of, like the one Mrs. Farnham has adopted."

Aunt Hannah started, and looked up with one of those sharp glances,

that we have once seen disturb the cold monotony of her face. There was something in the name of Mrs. Farnham, that seemed to sting her into life.

"She isn't handsome, you know," persisted the good man, "but you won't care for that, Hannah. The Judge says she's a bright, good little creature, and she'll be company for us, don't you think so?"

Aunt Hannah looked at the Judge, who stood regarding her with some degree of anxiety.

"Judge," she said, "that woman yonder? She is rich, and these two children loved each other--why did she send this girl to me?"

"She did not; I brought her without her knowledge," said the Judge. "Young Farnham first suggested it."

"Young Farnham?" said the woman, and a glow came to her forehead.

"But why were they put asunder?"

"Mrs. Farnham seems to have taken a dislike to poor Mary," was the reply. "The other child is very pretty, and this was a great recommendation, for a lady like her, you know; besides my ward was very anxious that you should take charge of her."

The quick fire once more came to aunt Hannah's eyes. She drew herself up, and looking at Enoch Sharp, said, with a degree of feeling very unusual to her,

"Judge Sharp, you can go home. I will take the girl and bring her up after my own fashion; but, as for your money, we are not poor enough--my brother and I--to sell kindness--not, not even to him."

The Judge would have spoken, but aunt Hannah waved her hand, after her usual cold, stately fashion, saying, "take the girl--or leave her with me."

"But she will be a burden upon you!" he began to say.

Aunt Hannah did not answer, but going into "the out room," removed Mary's bonnet and mantilla, then, taking her by the hand, she led her into the porch directly before uncle Nathan.

"Talk with her," she said; "I have the chores to do up yet."

"Yes, yes, talk with uncle Nathan, Mary; you will feel at home at once," cried the Judge, somewhat annoyed that all his benevolent plans could not be carried out, but glad, nevertheless, that his poor favorite had found a home.

There are faces in the world which a warm-hearted person cannot look upon without a glow of generous emotion. Those faces are seldom among

the most beautiful. Certainly, I have never found them so; but, this power of waking up all the sweet emotions of an irrepressible nature is worth all the beauty on earth. Uncle Nathan Heap's face was of this character. Full and ruddy, it beamed with an expression so benevolent, so warm and true, that you were ready to love and trust him at the first glance.

Mary Fuller had too much character in herself not to feel all that was noble in his. Her eye lighted up, the color came in a faint hue to her cheeks, and, without a word, she placed her little hands between the plump brown palms that were extended to receive her.

Uncle Nathan drew her close up to his knees, pressing her little hands kindly between his, and perusing her face with his friendly brown eyes.

"There, that will do, you are a nice little girl," he said, "I'm glad the Judge thought of bringing you here."

Mary was ready to cry. This reception was so cheering, after the cold interrogations of aunt Hannah.

"Go, bring that milking-stool, yonder, and sit down here while I talk with you a little," said uncle Nathan, pointing toward three or four stools, that hung on the picket fence in the back garden.

Mary ran across the cabbage patch, and brought the milking-stool, which she placed near the old man.

"Close up, close up," he said, patting his fat knee, as if he expected her to lean against it. "There, now, this will do. Sit still and see how you like the garden while the sunshine strikes it."

Mary looked around full of serious curiosity. The sunshine was falling across the cabbage patch, which she had just crossed, tinging the great heads with gold. The massive effect of this blended green and gold; the deep tints of the outer leaves, lined and crimped into a curious network; the inner leaves folded so hard and crisp, in their lighter green; all struck the child as singularly beautiful. Then the dun red of the beet leaves, that took up the slanting sunbeams as they strayed over the garden, scattering gold everywhere; and the delicate and feathery green of the parsnip beds: these all had a charm for her young eyes, a charm that one must feel for the first time to appreciate.

"Don't you think it a pleasant place out here?" said uncle Nathan, looking blandly down upon her.

"Oh! yes, very, very nice. I never saw so many things growing at once before."

"No! Don't they have gardens in New York then?"

"Some persons do, but not with these things in them: but they have beautiful roses and honeysuckles, and sights of flowers; don't you like flowers, sir?"

"Like flowers? Why, yes. Didn't you see the coxcombs and marigolds in the front garden?"

"Yes," said Mary, a little disappointed; for, to say the truth, she found more beauty in the nicely arranged vegetable beds, with their rich variety of tints, just then bathed in the sunset; besides, a taste for rare flowers had been excited, by many a childish visit to those pretty angles and grass plats, bright with choice flowers, that beautify many of our up-town dwellings in New York. "Yes, they are large and grand, but I like little tiny flowers, with stems that shake when you only touch them."

"Oh, you'll find lots of flowers like that in the spring time, I can tell you. Among the rocks and trees up there, the ground is covered with them."

"And can I pick them?" asked the child, lifting her brightening eyes on uncle Nathan, with a world of confiding earnestness in them, but still doubtful if she would dare to touch even a wild blossom without permission.

"Pick them!" repeated the old man, laughing till his double chin trembled like a jelly. "Why the cattle tramp over thousands of them every day. You may pick aprons full, if you have a mind to."

"I shouldn't like much to pick them in that way," said the child, thoughtfully.

"Why not, ha?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Call me uncle Nathan!"

"Well, I don't know, uncle Nathan," repeated the child, blushing, "but it seems to me as if it must hurt the pretty flowers to be picked, as if they had feeling like us, and would cry out in my fingers."

"That is a queer thought," said uncle Nathan, and he looked curiously on the child.

"Is it? I don't know," was the modest reply, "but I always feel that way about flowers."

"She is a strange little creature," thought uncle Nathan, who had a world of sympathy for every generous emotion the human soul ever knew, "what company she will be here in the old stoop nights like this."

Then in a quiet, gentle way, uncle Nathan began to question the child,

as his sister had done; but Mary did not shrink from him as she had from his relative; and the sunset gathered around them, while she was telling her mournful little history.

The old man's eyes filled with tears more than once, as he listened. Mary saw it and drew close to him as she spoke, till her little clasped hands rested on his knees.

Just then aunt Hannah came into the porch with a pail in her hand, foaming over with milk.

"Oh!" exclaimed uncle Nathan, lifting himself from the arm-chair with a heavy sigh, "I oughtn't to have been sitting here, in this way, while you are doing up the chores, Hannah. Give me the stool, little darter, I must do my share of the milking, any how."

"Sit still! The child's strange yet; I can do up the chores for once, I suppose," answered aunt Hannah, placing a bright tin pan on the dresser, and tightening a snow-white strainer over the pail. "Sit down, I say."

Uncle Nathan dropped into his capacious chair, with a relieving sigh, though half the authority in aunt Hannah's command was lost in the flow of a pearly torrent of milk which soon filled the pan.

"Can't I help?" inquired Mary, going up to aunt Hannah, as she lifted the brimming pan with both hands, and bore it toward a swinging shelf in the pantry.

"Not now; when you are rested. Go back to Nathan," answered aunt Hannah, looking sideway over the uplifted milk pan.

Mary drew back to her place by the old man, and they watched the sun as it set redly behind the hills, covering the garden and all the hills with its dusky gold.

"See!" said uncle Nathan, pointing to an immense sun flower crowning a stalk at least eight feet high. "See how that great flower wheels round as the sun travels toward the mountains; and stands with its face to the west, when it goes down. Did you ever see that before?"

"The great, brown flower, fringed with yellow leaves--does it really do that?" cried Mary, with her bright eyes wandering from the stately flower to uncle Nathan's face. "Oh! how I should love to sit and watch it all day!"

"I do sometimes, Sundays, when it's too warm for anything else," said uncle Nathan; "but supposing you go to bed early, and get up in the morning, as sure as you do, that sunflower will be found looking straight to the east."

Aunt Hannah, who had bustled about the porch and pantry some time, appeared after a short interval, at the back door. Uncle Nathan

understood the signal, and taking Mary by the hand, led her into a kitchen, neatly covered with a rag carpet, and furnished with old-fashioned wooden chairs. A little round tea-table stood in the middle of the room, covered with warm tea-biscuit, preserved plums in china saucers, and plates of molasses-pound-cake, with a saucer of golden butter, and one of cheese, placed at equal distances.

Aunt Hannah took her seat behind an oblong tray of dark japaned tin, on which stood a conical little pewter tea-pot, bright as silver, and a pile of tea-spoons small enough for a modern play-house, but so bright that they scattered cheerful gleams over the whole tray. Three chairs stood around the table, and in one of these Mary placed herself, obedient to a move of aunt Hannah's hand. A bowl of bread and milk stood by her plate, to which she betook herself with hearty relish, while aunt Hannah performed the honors of her pewter tea-pot, mingling a judicious quantity of water with Mary's portion of her favorite beverage, while uncle Nathan reached over and sweetened it with prodigality, observing that "it was the nature of children to love sweets," at which aunt Hannah gave a cold smile of assent.

After tea, uncle Nathan withdrew to his seat on the porch again. Mary would have made herself useful about the tea-things, but aunt Hannah dismissed her with an observation that she might rest herself in the porch.

It was very pleasant to keep close up to the side of that old man, and find protection from her loneliness, in the shadow of his great chair. Still, a sadness crept over her poor heart, for with all her simple-hearted courage, the place was strange, and in spite of the cordial voice of uncle Nathan that came cheerfully through the gathering darkness, she felt a moisture creeping into her eyes. The very stillness and beautiful quiet of everything around had elements of sadness in it to a creature so sensitively organized as she was. She thought of her father, and fixing her meek eyes on the stars, as they came one by one into the sky, began to wonder if he knew where she was, and how much like a father that good old man was acting toward his little girl.

Then she thought of Isabel; and of Judge Sharp; of the great, good fortune that had befallen her in being so near them both, and her poor little heart swelled with a world of thankful feelings. I do think the sweetest tears ever shed by mortal, come from those grateful feelings, that, too exquisite for words, and too powerful for silence, can find no language to express themselves in but tears.

Mary Fuller began to sob. She had for the moment forgotten the old man's presence.

"What is this?" cried uncle Nathan, laying one hand over her head, and patting her cheeks with his broad palm, "homesick a'ready?"

"No, no," sobbed Mary, "I, I was only thinking how good you all are to me, how very, very happy I ought to feel."

"And can't. Is that it?"

"I don't know," answered the child, wiping her eyes, and looking up, searching for uncle Nathan's face in the star-light. "There is something here that isn't happy entirely, or a bit like sorrow, but sometimes it almost chokes me, and would quite if I couldn't cry it off."

"I used to feel that way once, I remember," said uncle Nathan, thoughtfully, "but it wore off as I grew older."

"I shouldn't quite like to have it wear off," said the child, fixing her eyes on the stars, and clinging to the golden dreams that so haunted her, just before this fit of weeping came on, "altogether, I don't think one would like to part with one's thoughts, you know."

"Not even when they make you cry?"

"No, I think not--those are the thoughts that one loves to remember best."

"Come, Nathan," said aunt Hannah, appearing in the porch with a tallow candle in her hand, "it's almost bed-time."

Uncle Nathan arose and entered the kitchen. Seating himself at the little round stand, he opened a huge old Bible, that lay upon it, and putting on a pair of iron spectacles began to read.

Mary, seated by aunt Hannah, listened with gentle interest with her little hands folded in her lap, and her large grey eyes dwelling earnestly on the face of the white-haired reader.

When the chapter was done, they all knelt down, and uncle Nathan poured forth the fullness of his faith in a prayer, that went over the child's heart like the summer wind upon a water-lily, stirring all its young thought to their gentle depths, as the fragrant leaves of the lily give forth their sweetness. Two or three times she heard aunt Hannah murmur some words uneasily, as if a thought, at variance with her brother's prayer, disturbed her. But directly the child was enraptured, heart and soul, in the earnest words that fell from the old man's lips, and when she stood up again, her face had a sort of glory in its expression. It was the first night in a long, long time that Mary had been so near heaven.

And this was the kind of home which Enoch Sharp had given to the orphan. Did she sleep well? If grateful thoughts can summon angels, many bright spirits hovered over her little bed that night.

But aunt Hannah never closed her eyes.

CHAPTER XXX.

MORNING AT THE OLD HOMESTEAD.

Awake, poor orphan girl, awake!
The wild birds flutter free,
And all the trumpet blossoms quake,
Amid the tuneful glee.

Mary Fuller was aroused from her sleep the next morning by the most heavenly sound that had ever met her ear. It was a wild gush of song, from the birds that had a habit of sleeping in the old trumpet-flower vine, and among the apple-trees back of the house. She began to smile even in her sleep, and awoke with a thrill of new and most delicious pleasure. Out from the old porch and distant trees came this wild gush of song, to which the river with its soft chiming, made a perpetual accompaniment. She drew a deep breath tremulous with pleasure and reluctantly opened her eyes.

Aunt Hannah was standing before a little upright looking-glass, combing out her long grey hair with a ferocious-looking horn comb, which she swept through those sombre tresses deliberately as a rake gathers dry hay from the meadow. The paper curtains were partly rolled up, and one of the small sashes was open, admitting a current of fresh air and the bird's songs together. These two blessings, which God gives alike to all, aunt Hannah received as she did her daily bread, without a thought and as a necessary thing; but to the child they made a heaven of the little attic chamber.

This was not alone because habit had familiarized one to a bright circulation of mountain air and mountain music, and the other to the sluggish atmosphere and repulsive scents inseparable from the poverty-stricken districts of a city. Temperament had more to do with it than habit. Mary, with her sensitive nature, never could have breathed such air, or listened to those melodious sounds, without a feeling of delight such as ordinary persons never know. Thus it happened, while aunt Hannah was busy twisting up her hair and changing her short nightgown for a calico dress, that Mary closed her eyes again, and a tear or two stole from beneath their long lashes.

Aunt Hannah just then came to the bed, with both hands behind, hooking up her dress. She saw the tears as they stole through those quivering lashes, and spoke in a voice so stern and chill that it made the child start on her pillow.

"Home-sick, I reckon?" she said, interrogatively.

"No no," answered Mary, eagerly, "it isn't that, I haven't any home, you know, to be sick about."

"What is it then?"

"Oh, the bright air, and the sweet noise all around, it seems so--so--indeed I can't help it. Is there another place in the wide world like this?"

"Well, no, to my thinking there isn't," said aunt Hannah, looking around the room with grim complacency; "but I don't see anything to cry about."

"I know it's wrong in me, ma'am, but somehow I can't help making a baby of myself when I'm very happy--don't be angry with me for it."

"I don't like crying people, never did," answered aunt Hannah, tersely; "tears never do anything but mischief, and never will--wipe your eyes now, and come down stairs."

Mary drew a little hand obediently across her eyes. Aunt Hannah left her and went down a flight of narrow steps that led to the kitchen: the child could hear her moving about among the fire-irons, as she put on her clothes. Still there was joy at her heart, for the birds kept singing to her all the time, and when she rose from her knees, after whispering over her prayers, they broke forth in such a gush of music, that it seemed as if they knew what she had been about and rejoiced over it.

When Mary descended into the kitchen, she found aunt Hannah on her knees, between two huge andirons, fanning a heap of smoking wood with her checked apron, which she tightened at the corners around each hand. The smoke puffed out in little clouds around her, with every wave of the apron, and floated off in fantastic wreaths over her head. When Mary came down, she turned her face over one shoulder with an inclination toward the door, and the words, "You will find a place to wash by the rain-water trough," issued from amid the smoke.

Mary found the huge trough standing full of soft water, to the left of the back stoop. On one end where the wood was thick, stood a yellow earthen wash-bowl, with a square piece of soap, of the same color, lying by it.

To a child of Mary's habits this rustic toilet was luxurious. Standing upon a piece of plank, that protected her feet from the damp earth around the trough, she bathed her hands and face again and again, drawing in deep draughts of the bright air between each ablution, with a delicious sense of enjoyment.

"That's right--you are beginning to find out the ways of the house, darter. Grand old trough, isn't it?" said uncle Nathan, issuing from the porch, and turning back the cotton wristbands from his plump hands, as he came up to where Mary was standing. "That's right. Now for a good wash."

Mary hastened to cast the water away that she had been using, and fill the bowl afresh for uncle Nathan, before he reached the plank on which

she stood. Then she resigned her place, and running into the stoop, wiped her hands and face till they were rosy again on the roller towel, that she had observed hanging near the cheese-press.

"Now, what must I do next?" she said, confidentially, as uncle Nathan claimed his turn at the crash towel, "I want to be of some use, please tell me how!"

"That's right," said uncle Nathan, patting her head with his wet hand "run, hang over the tea-kettle, set the table, sweep up a little. You can do chores, I reckon?"

"I don't know; what are chores?"

"Oh! a little of everything," replied the old man, laughing his deep, good-natured laugh.

"Oh! yes, I can try at that, any way," cried the child, and her laugh stole through the mellow fullness of his, much as the bird-songs mingled with the flow of the river. "I'm a good deal stronger than I look!"

"Bright as a dollar, and smart as a steel-trap. I knew it. Them eyes weren't made for nothing. Now run and begin; but look here, darter: don't plague Hannah with questions; just make yourself handy; and no fuss about it, you know."

"Oh! I can do that, you'll see," cried the girl, cheerfully, and while uncle Nathan was polishing his broad face with the towel, she seized a heavy iron tea-kettle, and carried it to the well, which, surrounded by plantain and dock leaves, was near a corner of the house. She had some little difficulty in managing the windlass, and when the old mossy bucket fell with a dash into the water twenty feet below, it made her start and shiver all over as if she had harmed something.

I am afraid she never could have managed with those little hands, to have drawn the bucket over the well-curb; but while she stood trembling like a leaf, holding back the windlass with both hands, and gazing desperately on the bucket, down whose green sides the water-drops were raining back into the well, good uncle Nathan came up, panting with exertion, and seizing hold of the bucket jerked it over the curb.

"Don't try that again; it's rather more than you can manage yet," he said, breathing hard. "I was an old Ishmaelite to put you up to it."

"I thought it was easy enough," said Mary, trembling with affright and the overtax of her strength, while uncle Nathan filled the tea-kettle and bore it into the porch; "next time I shall know how better."

She took the kettle from the old man's hand, and bending her whole strength to the task, bore it into the kitchen.

Aunt Hannah was still on her knees, blowing away at the obstinate green wood that smoked and smouldered at its ease. When Mary came tottering under the weight of her kettle; and hung it upon the trammel-hook just over an incipient blaze, the old lady gave her a keen glance, as much of surprise as pleasure, and working vigorously with her apron, sent a whirl of smoke into the child's eyes, while her lips muttered something that sounded like "nice girl."

It was quite wonderful how the little creature found out all the ways of that old house so noiselessly! While aunt Hannah sat, knife in hand, stripping the skins from her cold potatoes, and cutting them in round slices that dropped hissing one by one into the hot gravy, which, with thin slices of pork, simmered in the frying-pan just taken from the fire, Mary had drawn forth the little cherry wood table, found the tablecloth of birds-eye diaper in one end of the drawer, and the knives and forks in the other, which she proceeded to arrange after the fashion she had observed the night before.

Aunt Hannah turned her head now and then, after stirring up her potatoes, and held the dripping knife above the frying-pan, while she gave a sharp glance at these proceedings, quite ready to impart a brief reprimand should the case require it. But each glance grew shorter, and at last those thin lips relaxed into a look of grim satisfaction, when she saw the little girl measuring a drawing of tea in the top of her tin canister, levelling it nicely off with the edge of a spoon handle, not a grain more or less than the usual allowance.

Aunt Hannah was not a close woman in the usual country acceptance of the term, but she hated changes and loved tea. That old canister lid had been the household standard for thirty years, and it was not likely that she would heartily sanction any addition or diminution for a little girl like that.

At length the breakfast was ready. The slices of salt pork were neatly arranged on a plate; and the potatoes crisped to a turn, were placed beside it on the hearth. Between them stood a plate of milk-toast and the little pewter tea-pot, puffing threads of steam from its puny nozzle as if it really intended an opposition to the great salamander of a kettle that sung and fumed and made a great ado over the hot fire back in the chimney.

Just as everything seemed ready for breakfast, uncle Nathan came in, obedient to a nod from his grim sister, and seating himself before the fire, opened the Bible and began to read.

It was a temptation to worldly thoughts, that warm breakfast, so savory and tantalizing to a child whose appetite was stimulated with exercise and the fresh mountain air, and it is no use pretending that once or twice she did not wonder a little if uncle Nathan always read so slow or prayed so long. But it was a passing thought, and, as uncle Nathan said afterward, "she couldn't help birds flying over her head, but that was no reason why they should build nests in her hair." In this case, naughty thoughts were like the birds, and if she drove them

away, that was all that could be expected. Uncle Nathan was a good old man in his day and generation, and we have no idea of criticising any opinion of his.

When the breakfast was over, aunt Hannah disappeared from the back porch, with a milk-pail in one hand and a three-legged stool in the other. Uncle Nathan followed her example, but more slowly, and the cotton handkerchief of many colors that his sister had tied on her head, disappeared over the back garden-fence before he had half crossed the cabbage-patch. He lingered behind long enough to give Mary an encouraging smile through the kitchen-door, and went off murmuring, as if in confidence to his milking-stool,

"Nice girl, nice girl, I wonder we never thought of taking a little thing like that before. If Hannah had only kept poor Anna's baby now, what company they would have been for each other."

When the good man reached the little pasture-lot, thinly scattered over with apple-trees, in which half-a-dozen fine cows grazed over night, he found aunt Hannah beneath one of the largest trees, seated upon her stool, and milking what she called the "hardest" cow of the lot. When disposed to be refractory she cut its "tantrums" short with a sharp "soh!" that went off from her thin lips like the crack of a pistol; and this one word had more effect upon the animal, than a world of uncle Nathan's gentle "so-hos, so-hos," that seemed as if he were quieting an infant. The vicious animal knew the difference well enough, for one was usually followed by a whack of the stool over its ribs, while the other sometimes resulted in leaving the rotund old gentleman wallowing, like a mud-turtle, on his back in the grass.

It is natural to suppose that under these circumstances, uncle Nathan usually gave a wide berth to his sister's favorite; but this morning he drove the meekest and fattest cow of the herd gingerly up to the old apple tree, and after placing his stool very deliberately on the grass, and the pail between his knees, began a slow accompaniment to the quick motion of aunt Hannah's hands, which kept two pearly streams in rapid flow to the half-filled pail resting against her feet.

While the milk rattled and rushed upon the bottom of his empty pail, uncle Nathan kept quiet, leaning his head against the cow, and thinking over the pleasant ideas that little Mary had aroused in his kind heart. Unconsciously wishing to share those thoughts with his sister, he had driven his cow close to hers that they might converse together. Hannah took no notice of his presence, however, but went on filling her pail so rapidly, that it began to foam over the edge. When her brother saw this, and knew by the soft, feathery sound that she had nearly finished, he stooped down, and with his dear old face just visible under the cow, called out,

"I say, Hannah, what do you think of her?"

Did the vicious animal start? Or what was it that made the stern woman shriek out, and wheel round so sharply on her stool?

"Why, Hannah, did I frighten her! has she kicked again?" cried uncle Nathan, surprised by the sharp action and wild look that she cast back upon him.

"Yes, she did start," answered aunt Hannah, rising and taking up the pail, now quite full, which made her waver to and fro, a singular weakness which no one had ever witnessed in her before.

"But you ain't frightened, sister; nothing can frighten you," said Nathan, soothingly.

"No, but you asked something, what is it."

"Only, how you liked her?"

"Her!--who?"

"Why, Mary Fuller, our little girl, you know."

"You are thinking of her then."

"Why, yes, Hannah, I can't think of anything else. Isn't she a nice little creature?"

"Yes!"

"How handy she was about the breakfast, I shouldn't wonder now if all the dishes are washed up by the time we get back."

"Do you think so!" said aunt Hannah, gazing down into her foaming pail so steadily, that even uncle Nathan could see that she was not thinking of anything so trivial as her morning's work.

"Hannah," he said, "what has come over you! you seem so strange since this little girl came. You scarcely speak."

"Do I ever speak much?" she answered.

"No," said uncle Nathan with a sigh, "but now something has gone wrong--what is it? don't you like to keep the child?"

"Yes, I like it."

"She will be a help to you."

"Yes, I think so--of course she must."

"And company for me--for us both."

"For you, yes--as for me, brother, I have no company, good or bad, but my own thoughts."

She spoke with some feeling, her voice shook, her hard eyes wavered as they turned towards her brother. In years Nathan had not seen her so moved. Why was it? What was there in the coming of a helpless child beneath their roof, to disturb the composure of a woman like that?

As the good man sat upon his stool, pondering over these thoughts, for he was too much surprised for speech, she hung her stool upon a limb of the apple-tree, and moved towards the house, stooping more than usual beneath the weight of her milk-pail.

As uncle Nathan had prophesied, Mary was busy as a humming-bird washing up the breakfast dishes, and putting every thing to rights in the kitchen. Aunt Hannah did not seem to observe it, but strained her milk, and went out again. When she came back, uncle Nathan was with her, looking rather grave and perplexed.

It was now approaching nine o'clock, and all the "chores," as the good couple called the household work, "were done up."

"Go up stairs and get your things," said aunt Hannah to Mary, "it's school-time."

Mary obeyed, and aunt Hannah proceeded to change her checked apron for one of black silk, and to invest her head in a straw bonnet that had been tolerably fashionable ten years before, and since that time it had been often bleached, but never changed in form.

She took Mary by the hand, when she came down, with her plain mantilla and cottage bonnet on, surveyed her keenly from head to foot, and led her into the street.

They passed down the village, the woman not deigning to notice that she was an object of curiosity, the child shrinking with that sensitive dread of observation, that always haunted her when among strangers. About the centre of the village stood a brick academy, with an open space before it, and surrounded by a succession of wooden verandahs.

Aunt Hannah entered the lower story of this building, where some forty children were assembled under a female teacher, who came forward to receive her visitors.

"This little girl," said aunt Hannah, "we have adopted her. She must come to school."

"What branches do you wish her to study?" inquired the teacher.

"Reading, writing, cyphering, enough to reckon up a store bill, if she should ever have one, and enough of geography to keep her from losing her way in the world."

"Is that all?" said the teacher, "a girl of her age ought to know those things without further teaching."

"Like enough she does, ask her," said aunt Hannah.

The teacher looked at Mary, who smiled, blushed, and after a moment's hesitation, said, modestly,

"I know how to read and write, and a little of the rest."

"Very well, I will examine you presently," said the teacher, "yonder is an empty desk, you can take it."

Mary advanced up the school-room, blushing and trembling beneath the curious glances that followed her. So sensitively conscious was she that every movement, when strange eyes were upon her, brought its suffering. But, with true heroism, she subdued all appearance of the annoyance she felt, and, in her very meekness and fortitude, there lay a charm that won more worthy affection than beauty could have done.

Thus she entered upon her school life, alone and among strangers, for aunt Hannah left her at the door. She looked around with a forlorn hope that Isabel might, like her, be sent to school, or that something might happen to take the sad weight of loneliness from her heart; but, all was new, cold and depressing, and leaning her head on the desk, she felt chilled in all her veins. There was no disposition to weep in little Mary now.

Sensitive as she was, no one ever saw her shed tears over her own sorrow; but kindness, poor child! _that_ always brought the dew sparkling up from her heart to her eyes.

CHAPTER XXXI.

HOMESICK LONGINGS.

Oh, give me one clasp of her friendly hand,
One tender glance from those gentle eyes;
For my heart is alone in this mountain land,
And every joy of my childhood dies.

Poor Isabel. She had found her new home dreary enough, notwithstanding its large airy rooms and elegant furniture, far too elegant for country uses, where magnificence is seldom in good taste. While nature is so beautiful, art should never appear, save to enhance its splendor.

In her whole life she had never been thoroughly homesick before, for never had her young heart been taken from all its loving support so completely as now.

Mrs. Farnham made a great effort to be kind, and to impress upon the child all the importance which she would henceforth derive from an association with herself, and the immense difference that must hereafter exist between her and Mary Fuller.

"Remember, my pet," said that lady, with bland self-complacency, "remember, my pet, that you are the protege of--of, as I may assert, of wealth and station, and though born I don't know where, and bred in the Poor-House, the fact that you have my protection is enough to overbalance that. You understand, Isabel--by the way, I think it best to call you Isabel Farnham now--with your beauty the thing will pass off without question; with that face, nothing would seem more natural than that I should be your real mamma; so, be a very good girl, and, who knows but I may have you called Miss Farnham!"

The color mounted into Isabel's face.

"No, ma'am, I would rather not; call me Isabel Chester, please, it was my father's name, and I love it, oh, how much!"

"You are a naughty, ungrateful little--well, well, I was a fool to expect anything else; Chester, as if I'd have a name in my house that has been registered on the Alms House books!"

"Is it a disgrace then, to be poor?" asked the child, innocently.

"A disgrace to be poor! certainly it is, and a great disgrace, too!" answered the lady, speaking from her heart, "or else why are people ashamed to own it?"

"Are they ashamed to own it? I didn't know," answered the child. "My father was poor, at the last, but I don't think he was ever ashamed of it, or ever to blame for it either."

"I dare say not; poor people are always shameless."

Isabel's eyes kindled and her passion rose.

"I won't hear my father abused--please, ma'am, I won't stand it; he wasn't poor till bad people made him so, and, and"--The child broke off, and burst into a passion of tears.

Mrs. Farnham was gratified. She had worried the poor child out of her silent moodiness, and now fell to soothing her exactly as she would have pulled the ears of a lap-dog, till he was ready to bite, and then patted him into good humor again.

And this was the training which was to prepare poor Isabel for the great after-life of a soul, imbued with natural goodness, and yet possessed of great faults.

The lovely child, who from her infancy had been the subject of some superior care, was now at the mercy of a capricious, silly woman,

selfish as such women usually are, and with a dash of malice in her nature, which more frequently accompanies a frivolous mind than we are disposed to admit.

But Isabel had a good heart, and an intellect so much superior to that of the woman who claimed to be her benefactress, that this constant irritation of a naturally high temper, was more likely to end in exciting her passions than in really undermining her principles.

Mary Fuller, with her gentleness and her beautiful Christianity, had, up to this time, exercised the most worthy effect upon Isabel's character, and never in her after-life did she entirely lose the noble impressions thus obtained.

It is difficult to spoil a human being, entirely, who has spent the first ten years of life under pure domestic influences. Chester's daughter had carried a heart of gold to the Alms House, and she brought all this wealth away; but she was an impulsive, sensitive girl, and if Mrs. Farnham had no influence strong enough to pervert her nature, she had the power to thwart and annoy her beyond her capacities of patient endurance.

The truth was, Mrs. Farnham had no idea of the responsibility which she had taken upon herself. Isabel was to her a pet--a subject upon which to exercise her authority, and that promised to gratify her vanity--not a human soul which it was her solemn duty to guard, strengthen and develop. Benevolence in this woman amounted to nothing higher than a caprice.

The conversation we have repeated was a sample of many others that were constantly irritating the poor child, even amid her first hours of homesickness. Unlike Mary Fuller, she had no occupation, for Mrs. Farnham considered usefulness of any kind the height of vulgarity. Indeed! she was so remarkably sensitive on this subject that a very shrewd observer might have fancied that the lady had known a little more of labor, in her younger days, than she was willing to admit.

The great want of Isabel's life was the society of her friend. No child ever pined for the presence of its mother more longingly than she desired the society of Mary Fuller. This was the ground of her sadness. It was this want that kept her so restless. She was like a bird shut up in a cage calling for its mate and drooping when no reply came.

But with that distrust which a want of respect always produces, Isabel kept this longing to herself. Something told her that Mrs. Farnham would meet it with reproof to herself or insult to Mary, and she could not force herself to speak of this, as a cause of her sadness, or ask permission to visit her friend.

For two or three days she was compelled to follow Mrs. Farnham about her sumptuous home--sumptuous and yet replete with discomfort--to pick up her handkerchief, bring her eye-glass and listen to the confusion

of commands with which the lady tormented her servants from morning till night. It was an irksome life, this forced companionship with a person whom she could neither respect nor even like.

The poor child's heart was famishing for love, and she began to grieve for her mother as if the mournful funeral of her last parent had taken place but yesterday.

Mrs. Farnham had fitted up a chamber next to her own for the little girl. Here intense selfishness seemed to have worked the effect of good taste. Isabel's room was superior to any thing in the neighborhood, but secondary to the gorgeous appointments of her own chamber. Her pretty rose-wood bed was hung with lace that seemed like frost-work, instead of the orange silk drapery that fell like an avalanche of gold over the couch on which Mrs. Farnham took her nightly repose. Everything around her was pure white, but the walls were covered with clustering roses, and the carpet under her feet glowed out with flowers like the turf in a forest-glade.

When the door stood open between this room and Mrs. Farnham's the contrast was striking. The cold white and green, warmed up only by a few rich flowers, seemed exquisitely cool as you turned to it for relief from the heavy drapery and costly furniture with which Mrs. Farnham smothered the fresh mountain air that visited her apartment.

At first, Isabel was dazzled with this splendor; but after she had been all day long following Mrs. Farnham like a lap-dog, till the very sound of her voice became wearisome, it was an overtax on her patience when she was obliged to share almost the same chamber, and listen to that voice so long as the lady could keep herself awake.

But when her tormentress was once asleep, when Isabel could turn on her pillow and look upon the moonlight as it flooded her room, with a free spirit, she began to weep with a bitterness that had never fallen upon her straw cot at the Nursery Hospital. A spirit of utter loneliness possessed her, and while the delicate lace brooded over her couch like the wings of a spirit, she murmured out--

"Oh, mother--oh, my dear, dear father--oh, Mary, dear Mary Fuller, if I were only with you anywhere, oh, anywhere but here!"

Thus, night after night the child lay and wept. Her eyes were so heavy one morning, after a night of silent anguish, that Salina Bowles observed it, and in her rude way inquired the cause.

Mrs. Farnham was still asleep, and Isabel had crept down to the kitchen, resolved to ask counsel of the housekeeper, for it seemed to her impossible to live another day without seeing Mary.

It was a great relief to the child when Salina lifted her face from the tin oven, in which she had just arranged the morning biscuit for baking, and asked in her curt but not really unkind way, what had brought her into that part of the house, and what on earth made her

eyes look so heavy.

"Oh, I have come to tell you--to ask you what is best; I am so miserable, so very unhappy without Mary; I cannot live another day without seeing Mary Fuller!"

Salina Bowles dusted the flour from her hands, and wiped them on her apron.

"Mary Fuller! that's the little gal that came with you I calculate!" she said, walking up to the child, who retreated a step, for Salina had a fierce way of doing things, and marched toward her like a grenadier.

"Yes," said Isabel, "that was Mary; do you know where she is? Oh, I must see her or, it seems to me as if I should die!"

"So you don't know where she is?"

"No! but, oh, do tell me!"

"Why didn't you ask madam up yonder?"

"I don't know; I was afraid; I feel quite sure she won't let me go," replied the child.

"Let you go, of course, she won't--no more feelin' than a chestnut stump."

"Then, what can I do?"

"What can you do--why, go without asking, and I'll help you; it's right, and I'll do it,--there!"

"Will you, oh, will you?" cried the child, with a burst of joy.

"Will I!--who'll stop me, I'd like to know?"

"But, how--when?" inquired the child, breathless with joy.

"To-night, I reckon?"

"Isabel--Isabel! where is the creature gone?" cried a voice from the stairs.

"Scamper!" exclaimed Salina, with an emphatic motion of the hand, "scamper, or she'll be coming down here, and I'd rather see old scratch any time."

"But you will certainly take me?" pleaded the child, breathlessly.

"When I give my word I give it!"

"Oh, thank you--thank you!"

Isabel sprang up--flung her arms around Salina's neck, and kissed her.

Before Miss Bowles could recover from her astonishment the child was gone.

"Well, now, I never did!" exclaimed the housekeeper, blushing till the hue of her face was like that of a brick fresh from the kiln; "it's a great while since I've had a kiss before, and it raly is a refreshment."

With this observation, Salina drew one hand across her lips and bent over the tin oven again.

It was in this way that the orphans commenced life in their new homes.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE EVENING VISIT.

They have met, they have met--with a warm embrace,
Those panting hearts beat free again;
And joy beams out in each glowing face,--
Together, they fear not grief or pain!

A week elapsed, and Mary Fuller had heard nothing of her little friend, nor ventured to hint at the keen desire to see her, which grew stronger every day.

One night, when this wish was becoming almost irresistible, and the child sat silent and drooping by the kitchen window, she heard a sweeping sound among the cabbage-heads, and, peering keenly out, saw a shadow moving through them.

Mary's heart began to leap, and as the shadow disappeared round a corner of the house, her eyes, bright with expectation, were turned towards the back door. A footstep sounded from the porch, followed by a light tread that seemed but the faintest echo of the first.

Slowly, step by step, and holding her breath, Mary crept forward. Aunt Hannah, who was making a cotton garment, which from its dimensions could only have belonged to uncle Nathan, looked at her through her steel spectacles, while the needle glittered sharply between her fingers, as she held it motionless.

Mary stopped short in the middle of the floor. A pointed bayonet could not have transfixed her more completely. There was a slight noise outside, as of some one feeling for a latch, but uncle Nathan, who was

just lifting his head from a doze, took it for a knock, and called out with sleepy good nature.

"Come in--come in."

"Gracious me, ain't I trying to come in?" called a voice from the porch. "Why on airth didn't you keep to the old string-latch? One could always see light enough through the hole to find that by, but this iron consarn is just about the most tanterlizing thing that I ever did undertake to handle."

As this speech was uttered, the door swung open, and Salina strode into the kitchen, leading Isabel Chester by the hand.

"There, now, just have a kissing frolic, you two young 'uns, and be over with it, while I shake hands with aunt Hannah and uncle Nat," exclaimed Salina, pushing Isabel into Mary's outstretched arms.

"There, now, no sobbing, nothing of that sort. Human critters weren't sent on earth to spend their time in crying. If you're glad to see each other, say so, take a hug, and a kiss, and then go off up stairs or into the porch, while I have a chat with uncle Nat and aunt Hannah, if she's got anything to say for herself."

The children obeyed her. One shy embrace, a timid kiss, and they crept away to the porch, delighted to be alone.

"Now," said Salina, drawing a splint-bottomed chair close up to uncle Nathan. "You hain't no idea, uncle Nat, what a time I've had a-getting here with that little critter. She cried and pined, and sort a-worried me till I brought her off right in the teeth and eyes of madam. Won't there be a time when she misses us?"

"Why wouldn't she let the little gal come to see her playmate?" asked uncle Nathan.

"Playmate--well now, I'd like to hear Madam Farnham hear you call her that; she'd just tear your eyes out. But Lord-a-mercy, she hain't got animation enough for anything of the sort; if she had, a rattlesnake wouldn't be more cantankerous to my thinking. She's got all the pison in her, but only hisses it out like a cat; in my hull life I never did see such a cruel, mean varment."

"Then Mrs. Farnham don't want her girl to come here, is that it?" inquired aunt Hannah, setting the gathers in a neck-gusset with the point of her needle, which she dashed in and out as if it had been a poniard, and that cotton cloth her enemy's heart.

"You always hit the nail right on the head when you do strike, aunt Hannah. She don't want her gal to come here, nor your gal to come there; that's the long and short on it."

"What for?" inquired uncle Nathan, moving uneasily in his great wooden chair. "Isn't our little gal good enough?"

"Good enough, gracious me, I wonder if she thinks anybody in these parts good enough for her to wipe her silk slippers on? Why, she speaks of Judge Sharp as if he was nobody, and of the country here as if God hadn't made it."

"But what has she against that poor child?" inquired aunt Hannah, sternly.

"She ain't handsome, and she came from the Poor-House; isn't that enough?" answered Salina, stretching forth her hand, and counting each word down with a finger into the palm of her hand as if it had been a coin. "She's homely, she came from the poor-house, and more than all, she lives here."

"So she remembers us, then?" said aunt Hannah, resting the point of her needle in a gather while she steadied her hand.

"Yes, you are the only people she has asked about, and her way of doing it was snappish enough, I can tell you."

"I have not seen this woman in sixteen years," said aunt Hannah, thoughtfully, "we change a good deal in that time."

"She hasn't changed much, though; fallen away a little; her red cheeks have turned to a kind of papery white; her mouth has grown thin and _meachen_; there's something kind o' lathy and unsartin about her; as for temper that's just the same, only a little more so, sharp as a muskeeters bill, tanterlizing as a green nettle. The rattlesnake is a king to her; there's something worth while about his bite, it's strong and in arnest, it kills a feller right off; but she keeps a nettling and harrering one about all the time, without making an end on't, I wish you could see her with that poor little gal, dressing her up as if she was a rag-baby, scolding her one minute, kissing her the next, calling her here, sending her there, I declare to man, it's enough to put one out of conceit with all womankind."

"Where is Mrs. Farnham's son now?" inquired uncle Nathan, to whose genial heart the sharp opinions of his visitor came unpleasantly; "he ought to be a smart young fellow by this time."

"I don't know who he'd take after then," observed the housekeeper, drily.

"His father was an enterprising man, understood business, knew how to take care of what he made," said uncle Nathan. "We never had many smarter men than Farnham here in the mountains."

"Farnham was a villain!" exclaimed aunt Hannah, whose face to the very lips had been growing white as she listened.

Uncle Nathan started as if a shot had passed through his easy-chair.

"Hannah!"

The old woman did not seem to hear him, but lowering her face over her work sewed on rapidly, but the whiteness of her face still continued, and you could see by the unequal motion of the cotton kerchief folded over her bosom, that she was suppressing some powerful emotion.

Uncle Nathan was not a man to press any unpleasant subject upon another; but he seemed a good deal hurt by his sister's strange manner; and sat nervously grasping and ungrasping the arm of his chair, looking alternately at her and Salina, while the silence continued.

"Well," said Salina, who had no delicate scruples of this kind to struggle with, "you do beat all, aunt Hannah; I hadn't the least idea that there was so much vinegar in you. Now Mr. Farnham was a kind of father to me, and I'm bound to keep any body from raking up his ashes in the grave."

"Let them rest there--let them rest there!" exclaimed aunt Hannah, slowly folding up her work. "I did not mean to speak his name, but it is said, and I will not take anything back."

"Well, nobody wants you to, that I know of; it's a kind of duty to defend one's friends, especially when they can't do it for themselves; but after all Mr. Farnham up and married that critter, I don't know as it's any business of mine, what you call him."

"I remember his mother," said uncle Nathan, striving to shake off the heavy feeling that his sister had created.

"I remember her well, for she took me for sort of company," said Salina. "I was a little gal then; Farnham hadn't made all his money, and he was glad enough for me to settle down and do his work. But it was awful lonesome, I can tell you, after she was gone; and I used to go down into the grave-yard and set down by her head-stone for company, day after day. But it was afore this then your sister came to help spin up the wool--wasn't she a harnsome critter?--your sister Anne."

Aunt Hannah seemed turning into marble, her face and hands grew so deathly white; but she neither moved nor spoke.

Uncle Nathan did not speak either, but he pressed both hands down on the arms of his chair, and half rose; but he fell back as if the effort were too much, and with one faint struggle sat still, with the tears of a long-buried grief stealing down his cheeks.

"Well, what have I done wrong now?" asked Salina, looking from the old man to the pallid sister, and shaking her head till the horn comb rose like a crest among her fiery tresses.

"We haven't mentioned Anne's name between us in more than fifteen

years; and it comes hard to hear it now," answered uncle Nathan, drawing first one plump hand and then another across his eyes.

"I didn't mean any harm by it," answered the housekeeper, penitently, "she was a sweet, purty crittur as ever lived; and no one felt worse than I did when she died in that strange way."

"Hush!" said aunt Hannah, standing up, pale even to ghastliness. "It is you that rake up the ashes of the dead--ashes--ashes"--

The words died on her pale lips; she reached out her hands as if to lay hold of something, and fell senseless to the floor.

Salina seized a pitcher that stood on the table, rushed out to the water trough and back again, so like a spirit that the two little girls in the porch broke from each other's arms and shrieked aloud. But they recognized her when she came back and stood trembling by the door, while she dashed the contents of her pitcher both over the fainting woman and the kind old man that knelt by her.

It had no effect. Aunt Hannah opened her eyes but once during the next hour. Neither the chilly water nor the old brother's terror had power to reach the numbed pulses of her life.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AUTUMN IN THE MOUNTAINS.

The children gazed with a grateful thrill,
'Twas a glorious sight I know--
Those cornfields sweeping o'er the hill--
Those meadow-slopes below!--
Tall mountain ridges rich with light,
Broke up the crimson skies,
Their refted blossoms burning bright,
With autumn's fervid dies.

It was fortunate for Isabel that Mrs. Farnham was unstable even in her petty oppressions. While the country was a novelty she would not allow the child out of her sight. But after a little her agent sent her up from the city a dashing carriage and a superb pair of grey horses, which she gloried in supposing excelled even the noble animals with which Judge Sharp had brought her over the mountains.

These new objects soon drove Isabel from her position as chief favorite, and she was allowed to run at large without much constraint. This threw her a good deal with Salina Bowles, in whom she found a rough but true-hearted friend. What was far better than this, it left her free to visit Mary Fuller, and it was not long before the child

was almost as much at home with dear old uncle Nat, as Mary herself.

It was pleasant to watch the two girls meet in the garden when Mary returned from school, and go about the household work together so cheerfully. That working-time was the sunny hour of Isabel's day, she did so love the order and quiet of the old homestead.

But the autumn drew on, and Mrs. Farnham began to talk of returning to the city. It was time, she said, that Isabel should be placed at boarding-school, where all her old vulgar associations might be polished away, and that she might be taught the dignity of her present position.

These threats, for they appeared to poor Isabel in this light, only made her cling more tenaciously to her friend, and every moment she could steal from the exactions of her benefactress was spent at the Old Homestead or among the hills where Mary wandered with a deeper and deeper interest as the autumn wore on.

One night, while the foliage was green and thrifty on the mountain ridges, there came a sharp frost, and in the morning all the hill-sides were in a blaze of gorgeous tints.

Never in their whole lives had the children seen anything like this. It seemed to them as if the trees had laced themselves with rainbows that must melt away when a cloud came over the sun.

It was Saturday. There was no school, and Uncle Nat insisted on doing all the "chores" himself, that the little girls might have a play-spell in the woods--but for this, I greatly fear the wild creatures would have run off without leave, they were so crazy to see what those gorgeous trees were like, close to.

Below Judge Sharp's house, and near the bold sweep of the highway that led into the village, there was an abrupt hill, crested with a ledge of rocks, which formed a platform high above the road--and back of that the forest crowded up like an army in rich uniform--checked in battle array upon the eminence.

A footpath wound up the face of this hill, and under a shelf of the rocks that crowned it, gushed a spring of pure bright water, that lost itself in diamond drops among the grass and ferns that hung over it.

To this spot, which commanded a fine expanse of the valley, Mary and Isabel went for the first time, that Saturday afternoon.

They were tired with mounting the hill and sat down by the spring to rest.

Mary caught a great yellow maple leaf as it floated by, and twisting it over her hand, formed a fairy pitcher that looked like mottled gold, out of which they both drank; laughing gleefully when the brim bent and let the water dash over their dresses.

"Now," said Mary, flinging away her golden cup, which had transformed itself into a leaf again, "let us take a good rest and look about before we go into the woods. Look how grand and large Judge Sharp's house is, down below us; and away off there, don't you see, Isabel--is the old homestead? Stand up and you can see almost all of the orchard, and a corner of the roof."

Isabel stood up, shading her eyes with one hand. The river was sweeping its bright waves at her feet, enfolding the opposite mountain at the base as with a belt of condensed sunshine. The village hidden amid its trees, lay dreamily in the curve of the valley, and beyond the river rose a line of broken hills, clothed to the top of their lofty peaks with the glory of a first autumn frost.

"I am so happy, I can hardly breathe," said Mary Fuller, clasping her hands. "It seems as if one could bathe in all that sea of colors! the mist as it floats up seems to make them eddy in waves like the river, Isabel. I am feeling strangely glad, everything is so bright, so soft--oh! Isabel, Isabel, what a great, good God it was who made all this!"

Isabel saw all the marvellous beauty that surrounded her, but she could not feel it as Mary did--few on earth ever do so look upon nature. To Isabel the scene was a pleasure, to Mary a thrilling delight; she dwelt upon it with the eye of an artist and the spirit of a Christian.

"Oh!" she said, in that sweet overflow of feelings, "I want to hide my face and cry!"

She sat down upon a rock covered with scarlet woodbine, and allowed the tears that were swelling up from her heart to flow softly as the dew is shaken from a flower. It was pleasant to see deep feelings melt away in tears, to that gentle and sweet serenity which soon fell upon the child.

Isabel could not entirely comprehend this almost divine feeling, but she respected it and sat down in silence, with an arm around her friend, sorry that she had no power to share all her joy in its fullness.

Thus, for a long time, they sat together in dreamy silence, with the spring murmuring behind them, and a carpet of brake leaves, touched with white by the frost, scattering its new-born perfume around their feet.

It was a touching picture, those two girls so loving and yet so unlike, the one so wonderfully beautiful, the other awaking a deeper interest with her soul beauty alone.

They arose together and walked quietly to the woods. Once within its gorgeous shades, all their cheerfulness came back, and the squirrels

that peeped at them through the branches, and rattled nuts over their heads from the yawning chestnut buds, were not more full of simple enjoyment than they were.

A light wind had followed the frost, and all the mossy turf was carpeted with leaves crimson, green, russet and gold. Sometimes a commingling of all these colors might be found on one leaf; sometimes, as they looked upward, the great branches of an oak stooped over their heads, heavy with leaves of the deepest green, fringed and matted with blood-red, as if the great heart of the tree were broken and bleeding to death, through all the veins of its foliage.

Again the maple trees shook their golden boughs above them, as if they had been hoarding up sunshine for months, and poured it in one rich deluge over their billowy and restless leaves.

They wandered on, picking up leaves with far more interest than they had ever felt in searching for wild flowers. It was wonderful, the infinite variety that they found. Now, Isabel would hold up a crimson leaf, clouded with pink and veined with a brown so deep that it looked almost black; again, she would hoard up a windfall from the gum tree, shaped like a slender arrow-head, and with its glossy crimson so thickly covered with tiny dark spots, that it seemed mottled with gems; again, it would be an ash leaf, long, slender and of a pale straw color, or a tuft of wood-moss, that contrasted its delicate green with all this gorgeousness so strongly, that they could not help but gather it.

Thus, filled with admiration of each leaf as it presented itself, they wandered on overclouded with the same foliage in gorgeous masses. The sunbeams came shining through it in a rich haze, as if the branches were only throwing off their natural light, and the very wind as it stirred the woods seemed sluggish with healthy scents flung off by the dying undergrowth.

But even delight brings its own weariness, and at last the two girls sat down upon a hemlock log, completely covered with moss, that lay like a great round cushion among the ferns, and dropped into conversation as they sorted over the treasure of leaves that each had gathered in her apron.

"I suppose," said Isabel, "this will be almost our last day together for a long, long time."

Isabel spoke rather sadly, for she was becoming thoughtful.

"I suppose so," answered Mary, dropping the leaf whose purplish brown she had been admiring; "but," after a moment's thoughtfulness, she added, quite cheerfully, "but, why should we fret about that; we can practice hard and write to each other every week; I dare say, just now, we might read each other's writing; it seems to me as if I would make out some meaning even in a straight mark if you wrote it, Isabel!"

"Yes," said Isabel, still sadly, "that is something; but if I could only have stayed here, and gone to school with you, we should not have to think about writing."

"But it'll be very nice to write letters," answered Mary; "you don't know how proud I shall be with a whole letter all to myself; won't it be pleasant to ask for it at the post office!"

"But, Mary," persisted Isabel, "do you know they mean to send me to a great, grand school, where I'm to learn music and French, and everything, and be with nothing but proud, stuck-up rich men's daughters, that'll try to make me just as hateful as they are?"

"But, all rich men's daughters are not hateful, I dare say. Remember Frederick, he was a rich man's son, and yet, he's almost as good as Joseph!"

"No, I won't stand that, no one ever was so good as Joseph," persisted Isabel; "besides, Fred is a Farnham, he's got his father's name, and his father's blood too; I don't see how you can speak of Fred and Joseph in the same day."

"At any rate," answered Mary, "we ought to be very grateful to young Mr. Farnham, for he was good to us; only think how kind he was to bring Joseph over to see us so often, after we came from the hospital, and all without giving Mrs. Farnham a chance to scold!"

"Scold!" said Isabel, "I sometimes thought she liked Joseph better than her own son--she always was glad to see him."

"That was because Frederick persuaded her."

"I don't believe that; she was always so hateful to Fred it was not to please him that she took to Joseph, I am sure."

"Well, at any rate, she was very good to let him visit us so often."

"I don't know," said Isabel, determined not to give any credit to Mrs. Farnham; "at any rate I don't like her and I won't try."

"This is wrong, Isabel--at first I thought I never could like aunt Hannah she was so queer, but now I love her dearly, almost as well as uncle Nathan, for all her hard way of speaking, she's as kind as kind can be."

"Oh, aunt Hannah, I like her myself, anybody couldn't help liking her, and there's Salina Bowles, she's just the best creature you ever knew, both of 'em have got feelings, but I don't believe Mrs. Farnham has got one bit."

"Don't let us talk of her faults," said Mary.

"Well, don't scold, I won't say a word against her, but there is one thing, Mary, that I must speak about, for it poisons all the rest. I cannot be content with Mrs. Farnham till that is settled. Mary, I am sure Mr. Farnham killed my father--hush, hush, I know how it was. He did not strike him dead, but it was his cruelty in driving him from the police that did it in the end."

"Yes," said Mary, with quiet sadness, "I think it was Mr. Farnham that did it."

"Is it right then, tell me, Mary, isn't it mean and cruel for me, his own little girl, to live with these people and let them support me--the father's murderers, as one might say supporting his child?"

Mary remained silent some time, not that this idea had never struck her before, but the flood of remembrance it brought back affected her painfully.

"I have thought of that a great many times, Isabel," she said, "for I felt a good deal as you do at first, but it isn't a right feeling, and so I did the best I could to conquer it without saying a word."

"Why is it a wrong feeling?" said Isabel quickly, "wouldn't it seem horrid to any one? Every mouthful I eat belongs to the people who murdered my own father."

"But Mr. Farnham was the only one to blame, and he was very, very sorry before he died."

"How do you know that?"

A faint color came into Mary's face as she answered,

"Joseph Esmond told me, Mr. Farnham came to his father's only three nights before he died, and he told Joseph with his own lips that he did not mean to kill your father, and Joseph said he looked more sorrowful than his words. It was the last time they ever saw each other. Poor Joseph cried when he told me about it."

"Then Joseph believes he really was sorry," said Isabel, softening.

"Yes, and that he didn't mean to do it; but even if he did, and was really sorry, we have nothing to do but forgive him, just as your father would have done."

"Yes, forgive him, but not eat his bread."

Again Mary was thoughtful, she was pondering over the question in her mind.

"I think," she said at last, "to take kindnesses willingly from those that are sorry for a wrong is the best sort of forgiveness; God forgives in that way when he lets us serve him, and strive by good

acts to make up for the evil thing we have done. I think you need only remember that, when you wish to know the right."

"I did not think of it in that way," said Isabel.

"Then, there is Frederick," continued Mary, "who loved his father so much, and who is so full of kindness to us both--he wishes to make up for the wrong his father did."

"He has been kind to you, not to me; you are his pet, I am Mrs. Farnham's," said Isabel, a little petulantly. "I shouldn't so much mind if I were in your place, but from her"--

"He has been very kind to you, Isabel; was it nothing to buy all the pretty things you have told me of in your chamber, out of his own pocket-money too?"

"What, my pretty bed, and the lace curtains, and that carpet, did he buy them?" exclaimed Isabel, eagerly.

"Yes, they were his choice, and for you."

"Who told you this, Mary? I--I'm so surprised--so glad. Who told you about it, dear Mary?"

"Joseph Esmond. Fred made a confidant of him, and they went together to look at the things."

"And that's what makes my room different from his mother's. Oh, Mary, I wish you could see it--so white, so fresh and breezy, and hers so hot looking and smothered up with silk. How I shall love that dear room after this."

After a moment Isabel's face lost its sparkling expression. She was accusing herself of selfishness.

"But why did he get nothing of the kind for you, Mary!" she said very seriously.

"Oh, I'm to be brought up so differently, such things would look queer enough at the Old Homestead, you know," answered Mary, laughing.

Isabel shook her head, but there was light in her eyes, and a rich color in her cheeks. She no longer felt it wicked to receive kindness from the Farnhams, and her little heart beat with gratitude to them, the first she had ever felt, for the pretty things with which she was surrounded.

"Come," she said cheerfully, gathering up her apron with its treasure of leaves. "How long we have been sitting here. It is almost sun-down."

Mary started up. True enough, the woods were flooded with a dusky

purple, and the sunset was shooting its golden arrows everywhere among the trees around them.

It seemed as if some of the maple boughs had taken fire, they kindled up so like living flame. The fruit of a frost-grape vine that had clambered up one of the slender elms overhead, took a richness from the atmosphere and hung amid the leaves like clustering amethysts growing dusky in the shadow, and when they left it the hemlock log which they had occupied was flecked with gleams of light, that lay among its soft green like a delicate embroidery of gold.

"It is so very beautiful," said Mary, looking around, "I hate to go yet."

"But it will be dark and the hill is steep," persisted Isabel, less enthralled by the scene. "Do hurry, the sun is sinking fast--we will come every day next week, just as soon as school is out."

Mary drew a deep breath and followed. Isabel led the way out of the woods.

The next time Mary went there it was alone, for in the morning Mrs. Farnham left for the city, with scarcely an hour's notice--and a week from that time Isabel Chester was entered as a scholar in one of the most fashionable boarding-schools in New York.

Mary Fuller continued in her school, pursuing a strangely desultory course of studies, but improving greatly both in intellect and health. Where her heart urged the effort, her progress was wonderful, and it was not three months before the most neatly written letters that went out from the village post-office, were known to be in Mary Fuller's handwriting.

Joseph Esmond and Isabel Chester, these were her only correspondents, and she was indeed a proud girl when the answers came directed entirely to herself. That day was an epoch in Mary's life.

Sometimes Mary broke over the rules of the school by drawing profiles and rude landscapes in her copy-book and on the slate, till the teacher, detecting her one day, examined the productions with a smile, and gave her a few rudimental lessons in drawing. These rough efforts of her pencil happened to come under Judge Sharp's observation, and he who never forgot the smallest thing that could make others happy, brought her some brushes and a box of water-colors from the city.

True genius requires but little encouragement, and most frequently develops itself against opposition. This little box of paints and pencils was enough to bring forth a latent talent, and the enthusiasm that had exhausted itself in tears of delight on the hill-side, grew into a power of creation. This beautiful development became a strong bond of sympathy between her and the boy-artist, Joseph Esmond. In truth, Mary was drawing many sources of happiness around her, as the good can never fail of doing.

But we cannot follow this strange child through her school life, so monotonous, and yet full of incident, or what seemed such to her inexperience. All studies that she undertook were singularly broken up and independent. Indeed, I much doubt if regular methodical teaching can ever be applied to a nature like hers. Such organisms generally study through the taste and heart.

Certain it is, Mary Fuller, whom no one understood, except, it may be, Enoch Sharp, through his acute observation, and uncle Nathan through his great warm heart, had pretty much her own way, and oftener studied poems and histories from Judge Sharp's library, than anything else even in the schoolroom. Thus her mind grew and thrived in its own rich fancies; and in the wholesome atmosphere of the old homestead her heart expanded and lost nothing of its native goodness. It is wonderful how soon the scholars forgot to think her plain, if anything is wonderful which genius and goodness has the power to accomplish.

Thus three years wore on, and each day was one of progression to that young mind.

Besides this, Mary began to grow; the invigorating air of the mountains, wholesome food, and active habits, had overcome the deficiencies of her former life, and though still slight and unusually small, she ceased to look like a mere child.

I dare not say that Mary was beautiful, or even handsome, for she was still a plain little creature, and persons who could not understand her might cavil at the assertion; yet, to aunt Hannah and uncle Nat--yes, and to the Judge also--one might venture to say that Mary was a very interesting girl, and, at times really pretty; but, then, these persons loved her very dearly, and affection is, proverbially, a great beautifier of the face. Yes, on the day she received her letters, almost any one would have thought the young girl pretty, but, then, it was not her features that looked lovely, but the deep, bright joy that broke over them.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SUNSET IN AN ITALIAN CATHEDRAL.

A dim, religious light came softly stealing
Along the solemn stillness of those aisles--
The sculptured arch and groined roof revealing--
As the bright present on tradition smiles.

But Isabel Chester. I wish you could have seen her as she stood upon the deck of the Atlantic steamer, which was to convey the Farnhams to Europe! Those large almond-shaped eyes, velvety and soft, yet capable

of intense brilliancy--that raven hair, so glossy and with a purple glow in it, and those oval cheeks, with their peachy richness of bloom. Indeed, Isabel was very beautiful. No wonder she was embarrassed, with all that quantity of bouquets, and seemed a little annoyed by their profusion; for young Farnham was looking on, and he did not appear particularly well pleased.

Isabel was not the least of a flirt, but she really could not prevent all this crowd of persons coming down to see her off, with lavish flowers and more lavish compliments; besides, what right had Fred to be angry? he was not even a brother!

Mrs. Farnham was delighted with this display of her protege's popularity. It seemed to cast a reflected glory on herself, and she began to calculate, very seriously, on marrying so much beauty to a Prince of the blood, at least, of whose palace she was herself to dispense the honors. But Frederick Farnham had little time to devote even to the jealousy this crowd of admirers was calculated to excite, if, in reality, he cared for the matter at all. He was looking eagerly over the side of the steamer, as if in expectation of some one who had not arrived.

At last his eyes brightened, and he threw out his handkerchief as a signal.

A young man who stood near the gangway answered this recognition with a wave of the hand; a moment after he was on the deck, and Isabel came gladly forward.

"Dear Joseph! this is so kind of you; we heard that your father was worse, and hardly expected you," she said.

"He is worse, but I could not let you and Farnham go away for so long without a parting word," answered the youth, reaching his hand to Frederick, who held it affectionately in his.

"Don't say anything sorrowful now, or you will set me off into another crying fit," said Isabel, striving to laugh back the tears that came into her eyes, as she turned away, burying her face in the flowers with which she was still encumbered.

"Come this way one moment, Edward, I want to speak with you," said young Farnham, drawing the young artist aside. "I want you to paint me a picture, old fellow, anything you please!"

"Shall I paint Isabel from memory?" said the young man, with a quiet smile, glancing at the young girl.

Farnham blushed.

"You can't do it, Joseph; no pencil on earth can paint her! but--but if you are not joking, I should like it of all things."

"I can make the effort," was the good-natured reply.

"And will?"

"And will!"

"Thank you, Esmond, you are a capital fellow, now let me--let me. It isn't half what a picture of her would be worth."

Here Frederick thrust a bank-note into his friend's hand, blushing like a girl.

"Thank you," said Esmond, gently, "my father is so ill, for his sake--the picture shall be my first work."

Isabel forgot her other admirers in looking at the two young men, as they stood together contrasted, and yet in many things so much alike; both were tall, and an air of singular refinement distinguished them above all others.

In different styles they were remarkably fine-looking young men. The golden hair of the artist had taken a chestnut tinge, but still it was bright with sunny waves, and his eyes had lost nothing of the heavenly expression. His manner too was calm and thoughtful. The sickly boy had become an intelligent man.

In everything Fred was a contrast to his friend; passionate and impetuous even in his most noble acts, he carried the fire of an ardent nature in his looks and his manner. His dark eyes were bright with animation, and even Isabel's tresses of purplish black were not more glossy, than the short curling locks that shaded his manly forehead. In everything the young men were contrasts, and yet they loved each other like brothers.

"And now, good-bye," said Joseph, with a slight tremor in his voice, but struggling manfully for firmness.

Isabel gave him her hand, while she drew down her veil, that he might not see how moist her eyes were becoming.

Fred wrung his hand.

The bell rang, and many a warm heart leaped painfully to the farewell summons. There arose starting tears, sobs, and the warm clasp of hands, that might never meet again. Then there was a rush to the gangway, a moment's pause and the steamer swung out from its berth, and swept proudly into the river.

Isabel stood upon the stern, languidly waving her embroidered handkerchief to a group of admirers gathered on the wharf.

You would have thought a flock of doves had taken flight by the cloud of scented cambric that answered her farewell signal. But there was

one form standing out alone, which she and Frederick watched to the last, and even Mrs. Farnham looked earnestly in that direction through her eye-glass, so long as Joseph Esmond was visible.

But the steamer made rapid progress. In a few minutes the passengers upon her deck lost sight of the crowded wharf, and became themselves invisible, wrapped in a cloud of haze, from all the eyes that followed them. During the voyage young Farnham and Isabel were thrown constantly together for the first time. He was fresh from college, and the young girl had only been two months from school.

They travelled through England and France, stopping a month or two in Paris. The winter found them in Italy, and here the reader has one more glance at Isabel.

She has changed somewhat, and there is a look of restlessness about her. The color comes and goes on her cheek in crimson waves, when any one addresses her suddenly, as if some sweet hidden thought had been disturbed, and, like a shaken rose, sent its perfume to her face. She has grown a little thinner too, and the dreamy contentment of her eyes is utterly broken up; there is unrest and anxiety in the bright flashes that come like sudden gleams of starlight through those inky lashes.

There need be no lengthened explanation of the causes which led to these indications of an aroused heart. Indeed, we scarcely know when or where Frederick Farnham first told Isabel of the love, which had become a portion of his being; for their whole lives were so intermingled, every opening thought was so promptly shared between them, that affection required no words, till it had become the essence of their souls. It was a happy season for them while this love remained impassive, as perfume sleeps in the heart of the Lotus bud, swayed softly by the waters and breathing out its sweet life imperceptibly, till some sudden gust of wind or outburst of sunshine, scatters the secret perfume from its heart, which can never close again.

Through all her years of adoption, Isabel had been haunted by a sense of wrong, in receiving kindness from the mother and son of Farnham. Her education and course of reading had tended to increase this prejudice; and she learned to look upon herself, like Hamlet, as in some way destined to avenge her father's death. She had no idea how this was to be accomplished, but certain it is she never received an obligation from Mrs. Farnham, or a kindness from her son, but it was with a rebellious swelling of the heart, as if she were inflicting a fresh wrong on the memory of her father.

But Frederick Farnham shared in none of these feelings, nor even suspected their existence. When he became aware of the depth of his own passion for the lovely orphan, he spoke it frankly, and with all the earnestness of a true-hearted man. Love makes the proudest heart distrustful, and even Isabel's pride was satisfied with the humility of his pleading. Now came her punishment. In every throb of her heart

and nerve of her body, Isabel felt a response to the generous love offered to her. But her will rose proudly against him, and against herself. Love for Farnham's son, was in her estimation a fearful wrong to the memory of her parents.

"I will never marry the son of my father's destroyer," she said, "it would be sacrilege!"

Frederick could not believe her in earnest--she, so playful, so loving in all her bright ways; surely, these bitter feelings could not have lived all these years in her heart! He would wait--he would give her time for reflection; his father's sin could not be so cruelly brought up from the past, to poison his own young life; he would not believe it!

But Isabel was firm; the very love that thrilled her with every sound of his footstep or tone of his voice, brought with it bitter self-upbraiding. She looked on the purest and holiest sensations her soul could ever know, as a sin against the dead.

This was the condition of things when they reached Arezzo, an Etruscan city, in the mountainous portions of Italy. They were to remain in this place overnight, on their way from Rome to Florence.

Arezzo is a picturesque old town, rich with historical and religious associations, and as the birth-place of Petrarch, possessed a singular interest in the eyes of Isabel; for, just then, she was keenly alive to all that was sad in the life and love of the Italian poet.

It was with all the romance of her nature aroused, that she came in sight of this ancient place. It seemed to her, as she saw its spires rising from the hill-side upon which they stood, surrounded by the luxurious beauty of an Italian winter, that, in some way, the town was connected with her destiny, that she would neither be so strong nor so free when that was left behind.

It was an unhealthy state of mind, but Isabel had become passionate, romantic and headstrong, in the process of her fashionable education. True these faults were on the surface, and had not yet reached her inner soul, but they were grave defects in a beautiful nature.

All day their route had been among the hills, along roads hedged in with laurestines, covered with sunny blossoms and myrtle thickets always in rich leafiness. The atmosphere was bland as spring-time, and though the sun was going down when they drove up to the hotel at Arezzo, Isabel entered it reluctantly, the twilight was so beautiful.

Frederick remembered that it was the hour for vespers, and gently touched Isabel's arm as she was following Mrs. Farnham into the hotel.

"There is light enough yet, let us go to the cathedral," he said, in the low serious voice with which he always addressed her now.

She started, with a thrill of pleasure, and took his arm.

The cathedral at Arezzo stands in the most elevated portion of the town.

Isabel was almost breathless with the rapidity of their walk, as they mounted the ascent, for Frederick hurried on in silence, urged forward, as it seemed, by the force of buried thoughts that had kept him silent all day.

The cathedral was seen just touched with the coming twilight when they entered it. A calm stillness hung around it, a stillness that seemed independent of the strain of music that swelled, rich with sacred sweetness, from one of the chapels.

They moved forward through the solemn twilight of the interior. The atmosphere without had been singularly transparent, but now many stained windows tinted it with gorgeous mistiness, and the shadows, as they gathered around the sculpture and ancient paintings, were broken with a soft purplish haze that was lifted in waves and eddies by the slow swell of the music.

The chapel from which these vesper hymns were stealing, was lighted up, and the tapers gleamed like flashes of starlight across that end of the edifice, rendering the gorgeous gloom in which they stood more palpable by contrast.

It was by this beautiful twilight alone that they approached the grand altar, and saw the carved foliage that lay upon it like incrustations of frozen music, left there more than five hundred years ago, when Geovanni Pisano gave his genius to religion.

Those young hearts had been swelling with poetic thoughts all the day, and now, surrounded by everything that could thrill the soul and delight the imagination, they stood hand in hand listening to the distant music.

Their fingers were woven together, and trembled with the electric shock of two souls thrilled with a worship of the beautiful, and the solemn poetry of the past.

Frederick felt Isabel's hand tremble in his; he bent down his head, clasping that little hand more tightly.

"Isabel, my beautiful--speak to me!"

"Hush!" said Isabel, trembling, "I beseech you do not speak now."

"Why not, Isabel! There can be no place so holy that a love like mine may not be pleaded there. It is the religion of my soul!"

"I cannot--oh, I cannot listen to this," murmured the young girl, striving feebly to extricate her hand from his clasp; "do not, I

entreat you, do not speak to me in this way again!"

Her voice faltered, and she leaned against the altar for support, but he would not be repulsed. He felt that her resolution was giving way--that the love of her young heart was growing powerful in his behalf, and drawing her from the altar supported her with his arm.

"Isabel, be true to yourself, be just to me! Why shrink from a happiness so great? Speak to me, beloved--speak to me!"

Isabel felt her resolution wavering; her strength gave way, she yielded to the pressure of his arm, and for one moment was drawn to his heart.

Down in the distant chapel the music still swelled, and with it came the voices of the choir, "Father, oh, our Father!"

The solemn Latin in which those words were uttered fell upon her like winged arrows; she started forward and stood for an instant immovable, horrified by the tenderness to which she had yielded.

"Oh, my father, my father, forgive me!" she exclaimed, passionately.

"Isabel, Isabel, what is this?" pleaded the young man, astonished at the abrupt change.

"Stop!" she said, waving him back. "Tempt me no more, I cannot bear it!"

Still he pressed toward her, grieved and anxious. He had not observed the words of the music, and her change of manner was inexplicable.

"Listen to me, Isabel!"

She waved him back, and walking toward the high altar fell upon her knees before it, and there, touching the sculptured leaves that had occupied a human life five hundred years before, she uttered a solemn vow. The words fell in whispers from her white lips, her forehead was one moment uplifted to heaven. She arose and stood before her lover, cold and pale as the marble she had touched.

Then the music swelled out again in a slow, plaintive strain, as if it were moaning over the burial of a dead hope. Those who had gathered for worship in the chapel, glided away; the tapers were extinguished, and through the gathering darkness Frederick Farnham and Isabel Chester walked forth into the world again.

Isabel had made a vow never to marry the son of her father's murderer. It was a rash act, for even then she had not the courage to tell Frederick of the oath she had taken. Oh, Isabel! that vow may prove like that of Jephthah yet--only it is your own hand that gives, and your own heart that receives the blow.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SISTER ANNA

Ah, we never could resist her,
Since the day that she was born;
For we loved that winsome sister
As we loved the opening morn.

Four years!--yes, I think it was a little over four years, after the scene in our last chapter, when we bring our readers to the Old Homestead again.

It was the evening of a disagreeable, chilly day. Everything was gloomy inside and out. Salina had come up from the Farnham's deserted mansion to spend the evening with aunt Hannah, and arrange the preliminaries for a "husking frolic," which was to take place on the morrow in uncle Nathan's barn. But she found the good lady so taciturn and gloomy, that even her active spirit was awed into stillness. So the two women remained almost in silence, knitting steadily, with a round candle-stand between them.

Uncle Nathan, notwithstanding the cold and the storm, occupied his great chair in the porch. I think the old man must have grown a trifle stouter since the reader saw him, and his face had a still more benevolent look; something of serene goodness, mellowing in the sunshine of his genial nature, was perceptible there, as the tints of a golden pippin, ripened in the autumn sun.

But you could see nothing of this, as the old man sat in his easy-chair that night. Everything was dark around him. Black clouds hung overhead, broken now and then with gleams of pale blue lightning. Once or twice these flashes were bright enough to reveal his features, which were strangely troubled and thoughtful. Since nightfall, he had been sitting there almost in silence, watching the storm gather overhead, and the black shadows as they crowded down from the hills and choked up the garden. He listened to the wind as it rose and swelled down the valley, rushing through the orchard boughs, and tossing them up and down in the darkness. The old man was not reposing; thoughtful and aroused he took a clear retrospection of those phases of life that had left scars even on his placid heart.

A shadow, for it seemed nothing more, lingered by his side.

It moved now and then, and amid the hushes of the wind you might have known that two persons breathed close together in the old porch.

At length what seemed the shadow spoke.

"Shall we go in, uncle Nathan? The wind is getting high, here. How the rain beats on the porch--you will catch cold."

"No, I'd rather sit out here yet awhile. But go in yourself, Mary; it is getting rather chilly for you."

"No," answered Mary, in her old gentle way, "I'd rather sit with you, uncle Nat."

"I'm bad company," said the old man, "somehow I can't feel like talking to-night."

"Nor I," said Mary Fuller, leaning her cheek against the arm-chair, "something is the matter with us both. I wonder what it is!"

"My heart is full," said uncle Nathan, mournfully.

Mary crept close to him.

"Tell me, uncle Nat, is it about Mr. Ritner's note that you feel so bad?"

"That may have set me to thinking of--of other things. I seem to remember everything that ever happened to-night, I never saw clouds exactly like them before, or heard the wind howl so, but once."

"When was that, uncle Nathan?" inquired his companion, in a whisper.

"The night our sister Anna died," answered the old man in the same hushed tone.

"Uncle Nathan, do tell me about her, I want to hear it so much, it seems as if I must ask you now, though I never dared before."

Uncle Nathan remained silent a minute or two, then turning in his chair, he said, in a low, husky voice,

"See what they are doing in there. Hannah must not hear what we are talking about."

Mary opened the kitchen-door and looked through.

"They are sitting by the fire, both of them. Salina is talking. Aunt Hannah knitting hard, with her eyes on the fire, as if she didn't hear." And reseating herself she continued; "now tell me about _her_--she was very handsome, wasn't she?"

"She was like a picture, Mary. You think Isabel Chester handsome, but she don't more than compare with our Anna. She had the softest and most beautiful brown eyes you ever saw, bright as a star and soft as a rabbit's--and such hair, it was all in crinkles and waves, breaking out into curls let her braid and twist it as she would--brown when she sat by me at her sewing-work in the morning, and shining out like gold

when the sun lay in the porch. I wish you could a-seen her as she was drawing out her thread of woolen yarn, and running it up on the spindle as bright and spry as a bird."

"I wasn't so old nor so heavy," continued uncle Nathan, with a sigh, "as I am now-a-days, but she always loved to wait on me just as you do; and when I came into the stoop, hot days in summer, tired with mowing or planting, away she would run after a pitcher of cool drink, holding it between her two little hands, and laughing till the dimples swarmed about her mouth like lady-bugs around a rose. I do really think, Mary Fuller, that our sister Anna was the handsomest gal I ever set eyes on, and so sweet tempered: you put me in mind of her every day, Mary."

Mary Fuller did not answer, she was afraid that uncle Nathan might detect the tears that swelled at her heart in her voice.

"I didn't like to part with Anna, she was so young, and both sister and I had promised our parents to take their place with her. We two were the children of their youth, but she was a sort of ewe lamb in the house, the child of their old age, and when they died we looked upon her as our own.

"We both gave up all ideas of marrying for her sake; that wasn't much for me you may think, but it was a good deal for Hannah; she was a tall, good-looking woman then, and might have done well in the world; she did give up a match that I knew her heart was set on. As for me--but no matter about that--I wasn't likely to make a promise to my own parents on their death-beds and only half keep it, by marrying and putting a sort of step-mother over Anna--no, Hannah and I just put away all thoughts of settling for life, except with one another, and gave ourselves up to little Anna, heart and soul."

The old man paused awhile, and bent his head as if overpowered by the fierce storm that raged around the house. The porch was sheltered, and though the rain rushed over its low eaves in sheets, nothing but the dampness reached the great easy-chair upon which uncle Nathan sat. Still Mary felt three or four heavy drops fall upon her hand, too warm for rain and too sacred for comment.

"I couldn't help it," resumed uncle Nathan, in a broken voice. "From the first I was agin Anna's going out to work but she wanted a new silk dress, and we, in our old-fashioned ideas, objected to it--so in her pretty, willful fashion she determined to earn it for herself.

"I always thought Hannah had a hankering after the dress, too, for she never thought anything too good for the gal, but there was a good many debts left on the old place, and she knew well enough that we couldn't afford to indulge the child that way; but she sided with Anna agin me, and so the poor child went up to Farnham's to spin his wool. Old Mrs. Farnham kept house for her son, and no one thought harm of it. I shall never forget how bright and pretty she looked that morning, in her pink calico dress and that little straw cottage. Her cheeks were rosy

as the dress, and her eyes shone like diamonds, when she came out here to shake hands with me.

"I felt hurt, and couldn't help looking so. She saw how I took it, and tried to laugh in her old cheerful way, but it was of no use; the sound died on her open lips, and her eyes filled with tears.

"Nathan, Nathan,' she said, 'I will give up the dress if you feel so about it,' and she began to untie her bonnet; 'I never had a silk dress in my life, but--but'---

"She sat down on a stool and fairly burst into sobs.

"Anna,' says I, 'couldn't we make it out, and you stay at home, think? There is Hannah's orange silk gown, that mother gave her years ago, wouldn't that make over for you nicely now?'

"Anna threw herself back on the stool and laughed like a bird, while the tears sparkled in her eyes.

"Oh, Nathan don't speak of it, I've tried it on a dozen times, and thought and thought how to make it do, but the waist is under my arms, the skirt gored like an umbrella cover, and so scant, why I couldn't get over a fence or jump a brook in it to save my life.'

"I answered, 'But you look so nice and pretty in that pink calico, Anna, I wish a silk dress had never come into your head. I'm afraid it'll be the ruin of you.'

"My pink calico!' said the naughty child, lifting up a fold between her thumb and finger, and eyeing me sideways, like a pet bird as she was; 'don't you think, brother Nat, that I was born for something better than pink calico?'

"I couldn't keep from laughing, and at that she threw her arms round my neck, and thanked me for letting her go.

"Mary Fuller, my heart sunk like lead as the door closed after her. But what could I do? she would have her own way. She had it, Mary Fuller, the gal had her way!"

Once more the old man paused, while drops fell thick and heavy on Mary Fuller's hand.

"Anna staid three months at old Mrs. Farnham's, but she came home at last with her silk dress, happy as a lark, and handsomer than ever. The dress was heavy white silk. Mr. Farnham had bought it for her in York.

"But what did you get white for, Anna?' says I, as she unfolded the silk, smiling and looking with her bright eager eyes in my face, 'It isn't a color for use--this comes of trusting young girls to choose things for themselves.'

"I didn't choose it--it was Mr. Farnham,' says she, blushing up to her temples, and trying to laugh.

"Well, what did he get this useless color for?' says Hannah, holding up the silk with one of her stern looks, that I could see made poor Anna tremble from head to foot. 'It will be spoiled the first time of wearing! fit for nothing on earth but the wedding-dress of some great lady.'

"It is a wedding-dress--that's what Mr. Farnham bought it for,' says Anna, bursting out a crying, while her face was as red as the wild rose.

"Hannah dropped the silk as if it had been a firebrand, and her face turned white as a curd. She looked at me, and I at her, then we both looked at Anna. Poor girl! how frightened she was! First she turned to sister; but Hannah was taken by surprise and didn't know how to act--then she crept towards me with a sort of smile on her mouth and her eyes pleading for her, as I've seen a rabbit when taken from a trap--I just reached out my arms without knowing it, and drew her close to my bosom.

"She flung her arms around my neck and then we both burst out a crying, while Hannah sat down in a chair with her hands folded hard in her lap, and looked on growing whiter and whiter every minute.

"It's true, brother,' whispered Anna, at last, hiding her face agin mine, 'I'm going to be married--kiss me, please, and just whisper that you like it.'

"I couldn't help kissing her hot cheeks, though every word went to my heart, for I saw well enough how Hannah would take it.

"Anna hung around me till I had kissed her more than once, I'm afraid, then she drew away from my arm like a child that's determined to stand alone, and went up to sister Hannah.

"Sister, won't you kiss me, as well as Nathan?' says she in her sweet, coaxing way.

"But Hannah sat still, white as ever. She only gave her fingers a closer grip around each other. Anna sunk down to the floor, bending her ankle back and sitting upon the heel of one little foot.

"Mother Hannah, don't be cross--what harm have I done?' says she, lifting her pretty face, all wet with tears, to meet the hard, set look of our sister. 'Mother Hannah,' says the girl again, drawing her face closer and closer, 'won't you kiss me as Nathan did?'

"Hannah bent her head, and it seemed as if a marble woman had moved. She touched the girl's forehead with her lips, and, says she,

"God forgive you!"

"I think to this day that sister meant, 'God bless you' and tried to say it, but 'God forgive you' came from her lips in spite of that. This frightened Anna. So with a sort of wild look toward me, the girl got up and went out of the room, crying as if her heart would break. She couldn't understand the thing at all.

"The minute she was gone, Hannah unlocked her hands, that shook like dead leaves in parting from each other, and holding them out toward me, she cried out, 'Nathan, Nathan!' and fell down in a fainting fit, just as she did the other night."

"But why," said Mary Fuller, drawing a deep breath, "why did aunt Hannah feel so dreadfully, wasn't Mr. Farnham a good man?"

Uncle Nathan bent down his head and whispered the reply.

"I told you, when our last parent died, Hannah gave up all thoughts of marrying. She had thought of it day and night for two years. Mr. Farnham was the man."

"Poor aunt Hannah!" murmured Mary, "it was hard."

"She was up next morning and got breakfast just as usual," said uncle Nathan, "from that day to this she has never spoken of that fainting fit. You see what Hannah is now, she was not so silent or so hard before that day."

"But Anna's wedding was put off," resumed uncle Nathan, after a pause. "Mr. Farnham had gone down to York about some of his affairs, and finally concluded to go into business there. He wrote that it would be some months before he could settle things and come after her. Poor little Anna, how she did practice writing, and how much letter-paper the creature tore up and wasted in answering the long letters that came, at first every week, then every fortnight, and at last irregularly, longer and longer apart. She became uneasy, and I could see that Hannah grew sterner and more set every day.

"The next summer a painter came into these parts for his health and to study the shape of trees and rocks as they really grow. He put up at the tavern in the village and spent his time among the hills, taking pictures of the scenery, as he called them. He took a fancy to the old house here, and I caught him one day sitting across the road on a stool and taking it off on paper. It was about our dinner-time, and so I asked him in to take a bite with us.

"He was a clever, gentlemanly sort of a fellow, not over young, nor much of a dandy, and we all took a sort of liking to him; Hannah, because he'd made a genuine picture of the homestead, and may be I felt that too a little, for we both set everything by the old place. Anna took to him at first; she loved the homestead as well as we did, almost, besides the painter came from York, and she seemed to fancy

him for that more than anything else.

"I remember, Anna only got one letter from Mr. Farnham, all summer, and that was the only one she did not, sooner or later, let me read. She lost her spirits, and really grew thin. The artist was a good deal of company for her; she had talent, he said, and a few lessons would learn her to paint pictures almost as well as himself. He was old enough to be the girl's father, and so Hannah and I were glad to have him there to cheer her up.

"All at once she took a dislike to the man, and when he came to the house, she would always find something to busy herself about, up stairs, or in the cheese-room. The painter seemed to feel this, and after awhile it was as much as I could do to get him into the house.

"One day toward fall Salina came up from the square house with a letter that she gave to Anna, who ran up stairs to read it alone.

"Salina was the only person in the village that knew of Anna's engagement to Mr. Farnham. His letters had always come under cover to her, after his mother died, and she loved the girl as if she had been her own sister. Like the rest of us, she had thought it strange, that he did not write as usual, and was as proud as a peacock when this letter came.

"Anna stayed up stairs a long time, reading her letter, while Salina and I talked it over in the porch.

"'I reckon,' says she, 'that we shall have the white dress made up within a week or so. Then, uncle Nat, I'll show you what a genuine house warming is. Just think of little Anna's being the mistress of our house, instead of Hannah!'

"I felt a little anxious somehow, and did not answer at once. She was going to speak again, when we heard the front door shut to, with a sort of groan, as if a pang had passed through it. And so there had, for when we got to the entry and looked out, Anna was a good way from the house, with her bonnet and shawl on, running in a wild hurry down the street.

"'She's gone to see the dressmaker,' says Salina, winking her right eye-lid, and giving me a cunning look from the other eye; 'see the bundle under her arm, didn't I tell you?'

"I wanted to believe her, and we went back to the porch. But there was a strange feeling about me, and I couldn't sit still in the old chair, no more than if it had been made of red-hot iron. As for Hannah"--

The old man paused again, and for some moments the rushing sound of the storm was all that filled the porch. When he spoke, it was with a sort of desperate effort, as if all that was left for him to tell were full of pain.

"Anna did not come back in three days, and then the painter, or artist, as he called himself, came with her. She was his wife."

"His wife!" uttered Mary Fuller; "but the letter from Mr. Farnham!"

"It told her that he was married to a city lady. You have seen her, Mary Fuller; it was the woman who came with you into these parts. But you never saw the poor girl they murdered between them, none of us will ever see little Anna again."

Mary was silent, listening to the old man's sobs, as they mingled with the storm.

"She came back with her husband," uttered the old man, "the whitest and stillest creature you ever saw. Her husband loved her, and she was so gentle and submissive to him. Poor fellow! poor fellow! he deserved something better than the dead ashes that she had to give him.

"Anna's husband was nothing but a common artist, wanting to do something great, but with no power to do it. He could dream of beautiful things, and then pine his soul out, because his hand failed in making them. But he had a true, good heart; that was our only comfort when Anna went away with him to live in the city.

"'Why did you act so wildly, Anna?' says I, as she crept to my chair and laid her head so sorrowfully on my knee the night before they went away; 'we would have worked ourselves to death, poor child, if you had only stayed in the old place--what possessed you that night, Anna?'

"'_He_ will never know that I was the forsaken one,' says she, and her cheeks burned with crimson once more. 'I only thought of that at first, but in the pain his letter gave me, I remembered the disappointment I had dealt on a good man who loved me--I was wild, brother Nathan, but not bad. But my husband, I will make him a humble, patient wife, see if I don't.'

"And she did, Mary Fuller--the poor girl did make a dutiful, good wife; but it was enough to break your heart to see her trying so hard to please a man, who wanted nothing but her love to make him happy, and felt she could not give him that."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE TWO INFANTS.

And then I thought of one, who in her pale, meek beauty, died,
The fair young blossom that grew up and faded by my side;
In the cold, moist earth, we laid her, where the forest cast its
leaf,

And we sighed that one so beautiful should have a lot so brief.

BAYANT

After awhile the old man resumed.

"The next year Farnham came up into the mountains with his wife. Some city speculation had made him rich, and they sat a terrible dash--but I won't speak of that, Mary. If ever the old adversary does rise in my bosom, it is when I remember the way those two persons drove by the house they had made gloomy as a grave-yard.

"Hannah was sitting by the window. Her face seemed turning into stone as the woman leaned out of her carriage, gave a long, impudent stare, and then fell back laughing, as if she had found something about my sister's appearance to make fun of.

"A little after this, Anna came home. She wanted care and comfort, poor little darling, and her husband let her search for it in the Old Homestead.

"Farnham went back to New York the day after she came, so I believe she never saw him to the day of her death.

"Mrs. Farnham was left behind, and poor Salina had a nice time with her airs and the impudence of her city servants, as she called the white slaves that came with her. Our Anna came alone, for her husband could neither spend time nor money to bring her further than Catskill. He had been out of employment, and divided his last few dollars with Anna when they parted.

"She was very down-hearted all the time, and it was more than I could do to make her smile, though I tried to say a thousand droll things; and Hannah, I'm sure it made my heart ache to see how she tried and tried to cheer the young thing up."

Here again the old man paused. By this time the storm was raging down the valley in a hurricane. The hoary old hemlocks on the river side shook and bent and tossed their gnarled limbs over the vexed waters with terrible fury. The winds roared and held a wild riot on the hill-tops. In years and years so fierce a gust of weather had not been known in the mountain passes.

Uncle Nathan bowed his head, and locking his hands, went on.

"It had been threatening weather all day, and everything looked gloomy inside and outside the house. At sunset the storm commenced just as it did to-night. It seems to me as if it was only yesterday--no--as if this was the very night," continued the old man in a faltering voice.

"The wind howled among the trees, and tore down the valley, just as it does now. The rain came down in buckets full, rolling like volleys of shot on the roof, pouring in sheets of water over the eaves. Out yonder you could see the old apple-trees tossing about, and groaning

as they do this minute like live things tormented by the storm. It was an awful night!"

"It is an awful night _now_!" murmured Mary Fuller, shivering. "How the rain beats; how the old trees tug and wrestle against the wind! The valley is full of fierce noises. I cannot even hear the river in all this rush of wind and water."

"So it was then," said uncle Nathan, "but there was another sound, that I seem to hear now deep in my very heart."

"What was it, uncle Nathan? A wolf or a panther? Such animals used to prowl among the hills here, I know."

"It was the cry of a young child, darter, of our Anna's baby; a little, feeble wail; but I should have heard it, if the storm had been twice as loud. I had been sitting here, from sundown to ten o'clock, with no company but my fears and the raging storm. Hannah came, once or twice, and put her pale face through the door, and went off again as if she wanted me out of the way, but for the whole world I couldn't have moved till that little cry came."

"But you went then," said Mary Fuller, deeply moved, "of course you went then."

"I got up to go, but it was of no use; my knees shook, and knocked together; the porch seemed whirling around, rain and all; I made one step toward the out-room; fell into the chair, and burst out a crying. The baby's voice had taken away all my strength."

"But you didn't sit here all night, in a storm like this!" said Mary.

"After awhile--I don't know how long--I got up and went into the house. Everything was still as death. I stood at the out-room door and listened. There was no noise. I thought it was the storm that drowned everything, and opened the door. Hannah was not there, nor Salina either, but a window had blown open, and in drifted the rain and wind over the bed that stood close by it--poor Anna's bed. I could not see distinctly, my eyes were blinded with the storm that leapt into my face, and I could hardly close the window again it.

"At last I got the sash down and went up to Anna's bed. She was there"--

"Well!" said Mary, at length, in a low whisper.

"She was there--all alone--dead--my little sister Anna!" answered the old man, covering his face with both hands, and crying till his sobs were carried away in the louder wail of the storm. "At first I could not believe it. A candle stood on the table with its wick bent double. It had swirled away at the sides till the tallow ran down upon the brass. After I had shut the window, it gave out a steadier light, that fell on Anna's face. I would not believe it, but bent down and kissed

her on the forehead. My lips were almost as cold as hers then, I believe. Oh! darter, darter, our poor little Anna was dead--dead--and cold--with the storm blowing over her."

Mary took uncle Nathan's hand between hers, and kissed it.

"Don't cry," said the old man, gently removing his hand, upon which her tears had fallen. "_I_ can't help it, but _you_ mustn't cry. It was very hard at the time, and the old house has never been the same since,--or, at any rate," continued the kind old man, thoughtful of Mary's feelings even in his grief, "not till you came."

"But I can't be supposed to fill her place," said Mary, "she, so bright and handsome."

"I thought," answered uncle Nathan, "as I sat by her bed that night, and saw her lying there, so young, and with her bright hair falling in waves down the pillow, that one of God's own angels couldn't have looked more lovely. She was smiling in her death, just as I'd seen her a thousand times when she fell asleep. It seemed as if a kiss from brother Nathan would make her start up, and open those great brown eyes again; but when I gave the kiss it didn't wake her, but froze me almost into a stone."

"But the cry you had heard?" said Mary.

"I forgot that, and never thought to ask why every one had left poor dead Anna alone, with the swirling light and the storm. But the next day Hannah took me up into her bedroom, and showed me our sister's child, a little boy, Mary, that might have been a comfort to us. I couldn't bear to look at it, lying there so innocent, like a young robin left alone in its nest; the sight of it almost broke my heart."

"But what became of it?"

"Hannah brought it up by hand a few weeks, and then went down to York with it herself, and left the poor baby with its father."

"How could she?" exclaimed Mary; "I wonder you could part with it."

"I did want to keep him, but Hannah was set in her way, and would not hear of it. She never looked at the helpless little fellow, as he slept there in Anna's bed, like a forsaken bird, without turning pale to the lips. It was enough to kill her!"

"You must have hated to give it up so much though," said Mary.

"She did her duty--Hannah always does, let what will come. Money has been sent, every year, to help bring the boy up. Let what would come she always scrimps and saves enough out of the old place for that."

"Perhaps it is this that has put you so behind-hand," suggested the child, thoughtfully.

"I've often misdoubted it--but she's right. I'd rather see the Homestead sold, than have Anna's boy want anything; but, somehow, the drain comes heavier and heavier every year."

"And I! what am I but a burden?" said Mary, in a heart-broken voice. "What can I do? Surely, God intended some walk of usefulness to every one of his creation. Oh, uncle Nathan, tell me where mine lies!"

"You ain't much more helpless than I am," answered uncle Nathan, sadly. "It seems as if the more things go wrong, the more clumsy I grow, and the heavier I weigh. The chair is getting almost too small for me, and I ain't fit for anything but sitting now."

Mary shook her head, and a quaint smile stole across her lips in the darkness.

"You are too large, uncle Nathan, and I am too helpless; we are good for nothing but to comfort one another."

"Aunt Hannah, you don't know how much she loves us both."

Mary was very thoughtful. The story she had heard for the first time; the rush of the storm; the darkness that seemed to surround her, body and soul, was cruelly depressing. It seemed like an epoch in her life, as if some grave event were approaching in which she must hold a share.

"Now, darter," said uncle Nathan, laying his hand on her head, "you and I have got a secret between us. It's the first time in years that I have mentioned Anna. We needn't be afraid to talk about her now, when Hannah isn't by."

Just then, amid the turmoil of winds, and the tossing of trees, a burst of thunder shook the house in every timber. Then came flash after flash of lightning, shooting long fiery trails through the rain, and spreading sheets of lurid flame in the air. Another crash, another burst of fire, and lo! a column of flame shot up into the blackened sky, lighting the river, the hills, and all the minute surroundings of uncle Nathan's house; as it were with a fiery cataract.

"It is the dry hemlock by the river-side," cried uncle Nathan; "that night it was struck for the first time, this night for the last," and he rushed out bareheaded, into the storm of fire and rain that deluged the valley.

Mary followed him. A little further down the valley was the grave-yard. The stones with which it was crowded gleamed cold and ghastly in the light of the burning hemlock.

On two of these stones, somewhat apart, but facing the same way, Mary could see the black lines with gloomy distinctness.

"Isn't it strange?" said uncle Nathan, pointing toward the stones, "isn't it strange that the light should fall strongest on those two graves, just as we were talking about them for the first time? What is going to happen now? That night two children came into the world, and one good soul went out of it. While Farnham's wife lay under her silk curtains, with her baby warm and sleeping by her side, our Anna lay alone in her cold bed, and the baby would have been chilled to death on her bosom. Why was the storm only for our Old Homestead, the sunshine for them?"

"Perhaps God will explain all this when we get to heaven," answered Mary, lifting her forehead in the gloomy light. "Come, uncle Nat--come in."

With gentle violence the girl drew him into the house.

From that night Mary Fuller ceased to be a child. The story of a woman's wrongs had given her a woman's heart.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

DARK STORMS AND DARK MEMORIES.

Hush! be silent--let the storm sweep by!
Its howlings fill me with unuttered dread!
This shuddering soul hugs its dark mystery,
Oh, trouble not the ashes of the dead!

While uncle Nathan and Mary were conversing on the porch, the two women within doors remained comparatively silent, till the storm rose almost to a hurricane. The gloominess of the night seemed to oppress them, and they sat before the hearth till the fire had nearly smouldered out, leaving only a couple of large pointed brands of what had been a back-log, protruding from a bed of ashes, that grew whiter and deeper with each coal that crumbled away from the original stock.

With her calf-skin shoes planted on each foot of the andiron, and her dress just enough lifted to reveal a glimpse of her blue yarn stockings, aunt Hannah sat gazing on the embers, with a countenance that grew stern and troubled as the storm raged more and more fiercely. Her knitting-work lay upon the stand beside her; three of the needles formed a triangle, and the fourth was thrust through the stocking, in a way that betokened a strange tumult in the owner, for never, save when it was the sign of some great calamity, had aunt Hannah been known to lay down her knitting except at the seam-stitch.

That some bitter trouble weighed upon her now was certain, for the thoughts that possessed her seemed bowing her person forward. She stooped heavily toward the fire, with her long, flail-like arms

clasped around her knees, not rocking back and forth as seemed most natural to the position, but immovable as the andiron upon which her feet rested, and sombre as the storm that shook the windows and howled down the chimney.

Salina occupied the other andiron. Her leathern shoes were tinged with mud about the soles, and a spot or two had settled on her white yarn stockings, which were gingerly exposed at the ankles. But while aunt Hannah stooped forward, bowed down by thought, Salina sat upright as a church-steeple, with one elbow planted on each knee, and her sharp chin resting in the palms of her hands. Faint flashes from the fire now and then gleamed across her hair, firing it up with ferocious redness; and her eyes were bent upon the broken back-log, as if defying it to a competition, while her feet were planted on the andiron.

At last, when the storm grew so fierce that it rocked the old house to its foundations, and gusts of rain came sweeping down the chimney, the two women looked into each other's eyes.

"Did you ever see anything like it!" said Salina.

It was an exclamation only, but aunt Hannah answered as if her thoughts had been questioned.

"Yes, once--that night!"

"True enough--that was an awful night. I hate to think of it."

"But how can one help it?" said aunt Hannah, bending her white face downward again, "I'd give anything on earth to forget that one night."

"Well," answered Salina, "I have sort of forgot a good deal about it; but now, as you bring it to mind, there was a thing or two happened that I never told of before, and couldn't account for in any way--that is, for the whole of it."

"What was that?" questioned aunt Hannah, sharply.

"Well, now, it's no use snapping one's head off, if the night is howling like old Nick himself," answered Salina, kindling up.

"If I was snappish, it wasn't because I meant it," said aunt Hannah, sinking to her dejected position again; "you said something about that night--what was it?"

"Well, now, I'll up and tell you--it's nothing worth mentioning--but somehow I always sort of remembered it. You know, after poor little Anna died, I went home in all the storm, for I had only run over to tell you about Mrs. Farnham's baby, and hadn't expected to stay. I couldn't but jest get along, the wind and rain beat in my face so; and somehow what I had seen here took away all my nat'ral strength; besides, it was dark as pitch, and before I got home there wasn't a

dry thread on me.

"Well, I went in through the back door mighty still, I tell you, for I didn't want any one to know that I'd been out when there was sickness in the house. Besides, I'd promised the nus to sit up and tend the baby, while she got a little sleep. So, without stopping to bolt the back door or anything, I jest stole up to the chamber next Mrs. Farnham's, where the nus was with the baby, and opening the door a trifle, told her to go to bed, and I'd be down in less than no time.

"The baby was sound asleep in the cradle, that had been ready for it ever so long, so the nus just put the blanket a little more over its head and went out.

"I ran up stairs, got off my wet clothes, and went down to the room agin, but first I remembered the back door, and went to fasten it for fear some one would find out that I had been away from home.

"When I got to the door, it was wide open, and the wind came storming in like all possessed. The candle swirled till it almost went out in my hand, and it was as much as I could make out to shut the door and get things to rights, without being wet through agin. At last I got the door shut to and fastened, but when I went to cross the kitchen, where I never would let them put a carpet down, you know, the white pine boards were tramped over and over with wet footsteps. Now, I hadn't crossed it but once with my wet things on, and the footsteps went both ways, as if some one had gone in and went out agin.

"Well, I held down the light and followed these same steps along the carpet clear into the room where the baby was; I hadn't gone across the threshold, remember, and yet the steps were all over the room, and a little puddle of water lay close agin the cradle--are you listening, aunt Hannah?"

"Go on," answered the old woman, in a husky voice.

"I haven't anything more to say, only this," said Salina, "the baby lay snug in the cradle, but its little hands were as cold as stone, and I'm sartin there was a drop of water on its forehead. That wasn't all. As I was looking around, I saw a little baby's night-gown a-lying half across the door-sill."

Aunt Hannah looked up suddenly, and Salina checked herself.

"Good gracious, how pale you are!--do tell--what's the matter?"

"You heard the thunder--I always was afraid of thunder."

"Yes," answered Salina, "lightning don't amount to much, but when thunder strikes it is awful. That clap wasn't nothing to speak of, though, after all."

"Wasn't it?" said aunt Hannah, dropping her face between both her

hands. "It seemed terribly loud to me."

"Well, as I was a-saying about that night. There was a baby's night-gown on the door-sill. I took it up and looked at it. It was fine cotton, edged round with a little worked pattern, such as I'd seen our Anna working there in the out-room. The sight of it sort of puzzled me, I can tell you, besides it made me feel bad to think how cold her poor little fingers were then, so I sat down and cried over it all by myself. But how came the little gown there? It didn't belong to Mrs. Farnham, for her baby's clothes were all linen, cambric, and lace, and French work. I sat down and thought and thought, but at last burst out a-crying agin. It was all clear enough."

"How," said aunt Hannah, lifting her face suddenly, "how was it clear?"

"Why, the night-gown must have stuck to my shawl when we laid Anna's baby in your bed up stairs. Everything was tossed about, you know; and I am always catching to briars and things every time I move. Never could go a blackberrying with other gals, but the first thing they were calling out, 'that Salina had got a bean' and there would be a great long briar dragging to the bottom of my frock. It was my luck always to have things hanging onto me. I wish you could see the ticks and burdock leaves that I have picked off from this identical dress since harvest."

Aunt Hannah drew herself up a little more freely, but it was some moments before she spoke.

"Did you keep the night-gown?" she inquired.

"Yes, I hadn't the heart to bring it here at the time, so I locked it up in the till of my chest, and there it lies yet, as yellow as saffron. Would you like to have it now?"

"No," answered aunt Hannah, "what should I have it for? keep it safe just as it is; who knows but it may be wanted yet?"

Salina drew herself primly up, and observed that if the best man in York State was to offer himself to her, he would get sent about his business in double quick time.

Aunt Hannah raised her eyes, with a heavy questioning look, but dropped them again without in the least comprehending the drift of Salina's thoughts.

"No," said the spinster, stoutly. "It's of no use looking at me in that way; if every hair of his head was hung with diamonds, I wouldn't have him. It's no use asking me, I'm a sot cretur where I am sot, aunt Hannah."

While Salina was moving her head up and down, with a force that almost dislodged the horn-comb from her fiery tresses, a clap of thunder

shook the house to its foundations, and sheets of lightning rushed athwart the windows.

"Nathan, where is my brother Nathan?" cried aunt Hannah, starting to her feet.

"No, it's of no use calling even him," persisted Salina, unmindful of both thunder and lightning. "The face of a man can't change me; you needn't call him, I tell you it's of no use, I'm flint."

"The old hemlock is in flames again!" cried aunt Hannah, rushing through the porch, "and Nathan's chair empty. Is this thunderbolt for him? Nathan! Nathan!"

By the light of the stricken hemlock, she saw her brother coming toward the porch, holding Mary Fuller by the hand.

"Come, brother, come!" she cried, stretching forth her arms, "you are all that I have left."

Nathan heard his sister, and came toward her. She saw that he was safe, and her old manner returned.

"Come," she said, opening the kitchen door, "it is time for prayers."

"Yes, let us pray," said uncle Nathan, solemnly, "for truly, God speaketh to us in the thunder and the lightning."

Salina, who had remained standing in the room, was so struck by the unusual sadness of every face around her, that for the time she forgot herself. There was something in uncle Nathan's face that she had never seen before, a depth and intensity of feeling that held even her rude strength in awe.

"Good night," she said, tying on her hood and folding a large blanket shawl over her person; "it's time for me to be a going."

"Not in this rain," said Mary, "you will be wet through."

"Well, what then? I ain't neither sugar nor salt," she said, folding her shawl closer. "The old tree gives light enough, and as for a little rain I can stand that."

"It mayn't be safe to pass the hemlock, when it's on fire. I'll go with you till you get beyond that," said uncle Nathan, taking his drab overcoat from a nail behind the door.

Salina drew the shawl with still more desperate resolution around her lathy figure.

"No, sir," she said, with emphasis, "after what your sister has been saying to-night, I feel it a duty that I owe to myself to go home alone."

"But this terrible weather," said uncle Nathan, holding his great-coat irresolutely in his hand.

"As I observed before," said Salina, "I'm neither sugar nor salt, sir, but rock, marble, or, if there is a stone harder than these, I'm that."

Uncle Nathan was too thoroughly saddened for contention; indeed he scarcely noticed the magnificent change in Salina's manner; and, if the truth must be told, was rather glad to be left under the shelter of a roof, when the rain was rattling over it so fiercely.

"Well," he said, hanging up his coat again, "if you'd rather go home alone than stay all night, or let me go with you, of course I don't want to interfere."

"Thank you," answered the lady, tossing her head and snuffing the air like a race-horse; "I'm sure I'm obliged beyond anything. It's kind of you to let me have my own way."

Uncle Nathan looked at little Mary Fuller, to gather her opinion of the unaccountable airs their guest was putting on, but the girl's heart was full of the story she had been listening to, and she sat by the table gazing sadly upon the floor, with one hand supporting her forehead.

Aunt Hannah had seated herself on the hearth again, and was gazing absorbed into the embers. Salina had poor uncle Nathan thus entirely to herself.

"Now," said she, "if you will have the goodness to turn your face toward the chamber-door, while I pin up the skirt of my dress a little, I shall be prepared to depart from this roof."

Uncle Nathan quietly withdrew into the porch, and sat down in his easy-chair. Salina would have puzzled him exceedingly but for the pre-occupation of his feelings. As it was, the old man was rather sorry that she would go home alone, in all the rain, but his heart was too heavy for a second thought on the subject.

I do not pretend to be a judge of these matters, but really I believe Salina was a little taken aback, when she came forth into the porch, with her dress nicely tucked up, and her shawl folded in a fashion that left one arm at liberty, and saw uncle Nathan sitting there in the dark, instead of standing by the cheese-press, hat in hand, determined to escort her as a man of spirit ought to have been, after the trouble she had taken with the shawl. Nor do I pretend to say that she was disappointed, or anything of the sort, because Salina in her day possessed the very germ and root of a strong-minded woman of modern times, and persons of ordinary capacity are shy of running counter to ladies of that class--all that we venture to assert is that she made a dead halt on the porch, looked up and down the garden,

observed in an under-tone "It was raining cats and dogs yet," devices by which a weak-minded woman might have insinuated, that she had taken the subject of going home alone into consideration and thought better of it.

Uncle Nathan, instead of suspecting the art that I have been wicked enough to insinuate, seemed perfectly oblivious of the antique damsel's presence.

At last she gathered up her raiment and muttering.

"Well, now, I never did!" prepared to step from the porch, when the voice of uncle Nat arrested her.

"Salina, is it you? Come here, Salina!"

Salina drew close to uncle Nathan's chair--very close considering the circumstances, and, with a relenting voice, answered, "Well, Mr. Nathan, I'm here--what is it you want to say?"

Uncle Nathan reached forth his hand. Salina's unconsciously crept out from the folds of her shawl, in a sort of way as if she didn't intend to let the left hand know what the right was about.

"Salina," said uncle Nathan, pressing her fingers in his broad palm.

"Well, uncle Nathan?"

"My heart is full to-night, Salina, I feel a'most broke down."

"Well, now, don't take on this way. My bark is worse than my bite, you know that."

"You are a kind soul at the bottom, I always knew that, and have been a true friend to us; I shall never forget you for it."

I don't know as uncle Nathan was conscious of it, but Salina's hand certainly tightened around his plump fingers.

"You were kind to _her_, and I want to thank you for it."

"_Her_! Who are you talking about?"

"Our Anna. The night has put me so in mind of her. I've been talking about her to little Mary all the evening, and now let me thank you, for you were always good to Anna."

Salina drew her hand from uncle Nathan's, and folded it in her shawl.

"I hope I haven't hurt your feelings mentioning her suddenly, after so many years," said the old man.

Salina stood upright while he was speaking, but the moment he ceased,

the dim light through the kitchen window revealed her wading through the wet plaintain leaves as she turned a corner of the house.

"She always was a kind creature," said uncle Nathan, moving his head with gentle compunction. "I'm afraid it came hard though to hear poor Anna mentioned, but I couldn't help it."

With these meek words, half of sorrow, half of self-reproach, uncle Nathan went back into the kitchen. Aunt Hannah had gone up stairs, but Mary sat by the little stand, reading in the open Bible. She turned it gently toward the old man as he sat down, but he shook his head and motioned her to read aloud.

Mary had a clear, silver-toned voice, and she read with that natural pathos which true feeling always renders effective. That night there was depth and sweetness in her reading, that fell like the voice of an angel on the excited feelings of uncle Nathan. The storm was now hushing itself in the valley, and her voice rose sweet and clear, till it penetrated to the room above, where aunt Hannah lay.

Why had aunt Hannah absented herself from family prayer that night? Why did she, as the voice of that young girl rose to her ears, cower down in the bed, and nervously draw up the coverlet to shut those sweet tones out from her soul?

CHAPTER XXXVIII

APPLE GATHERINGS.

There's comfort in the farmer's house,
In the old age of the year,
When the fruit is ripe and squirrels roam
Through the forests brown and sere.

It was fortunate for uncle Nathan, that his little harvest was stored in the barn before the storm we have described swept the valley, for a good many crops of corn were destroyed that night, and not only the winter apples, but half the leaves were shaken from the orchard boughs. The river, too, was swollen and turbid for several days, and the splintered and half-charred trunk of the old hemlock, was at times nearly buried in water.

But uncle Nathan's crop of corn was safely housed in the barn, on the very day before the tempest broke over it, and all the harm he suffered, was a little delay in the "husking frolic," which, for many years, had been a sort of annual jubilee at the Homestead, for the young people of the village usually managed, in some indirect way, to help the old man forward in his farm labor, making plowing matches in the spring, mowing parties in the summer, and "husking frolics" in the

fall; and this with a hearty good will, that would have convinced any other man that his neighbors got up these impromptu assemblies, for no purpose but their own amusement.

But uncle Nathan had too much goodness in his own heart, not to detect it lurking in any disguise in the hearts of others, and with that true dignity which makes the acceptance of a frankly offered kindness, pleasant as the power of conferring it, he always looked forward to these gala-days with interest, striving by generous hospitality to express a sense of the benefits he received.

Aunt Hannah was genuinely grateful for all this kindness in her young neighbors, and always stood ready to perform her part of the entertainment with prompt energy, which, if not as genial as the good nature of uncle Nat, revealed itself in a form quite as acceptable, for never in any other place were such pumpkin pies, drop cakes, tarts and doughnuts produced, as emanated from aunt Hannah's kitchen on these occasions.

But I have said the "husking frolic" was put off a little in order to give time for repairs after the storm. For two whole days uncle Nathan had his hands full, gathering up the winter apples that had been dashed from their boughs on that awful night. In this labor, aunt Hannah was first and foremost abroad with her splint basket, directly after breakfast, gathering up the fruit with an energy that seemed quite unequal to her age.

I am almost afraid to say it, because some of my readers are, doubtless, young ladies of the young American school, who will think my heroine degraded by her usefulness, but Mary Fuller put on her little quilted hood, the moment the breakfast things were washed up, and following the old man into the orchard, with another splint basket, filled it, turn for turn with aunt Hannah, while uncle Nathan--bless his old heart--carried the baskets and emptied them into a little mountain of red and golden apples, beneath his favorite tree.

I dislike to make this confession, because, in every sense of the word, Mary Fuller was my idea of a young gentlewoman--or as near an approach to that exquisite being, as a girl of her years ever can be. More than this, she promised those higher and still more noble qualifications that distinguish souls lifted out from the multitude by imagination and intellect, and for this very reason perhaps she was not ashamed of being useful, or of partaking heartily in any labor borne by her benefactors.

In truth, souls like hers are ashamed to undertake no duty that comes naturally in the path of life.

I have only spoken of Mary up to this time, as a bright, cheerful, good little girl, earnest in the right, and shrinking from the wrong, because I deem such qualities, the very essence and life of a firm intellectual character, and acknowledge no greatness that hasn't strong sense and moral worth for its foundation.

Like the green leaves that clasp in a rose-bud, these qualities must unfold themselves first, in the life of any human being, allowing thought to expand in the intellect as the sunshine pierces through these mossy leaves to the heart of the flower.

Precocious intellect is not genius, but a disease. It is the bud that blossoms out of season, because there is unwholesome warmth forcing it open. There is a species of insanity that men call genius which springs from a want of intellectual harmony, without the moral and physical strength necessary to perfect development, but with this erratic mischief we have nothing to do. Mary, the reader well knows was plain in person, and as a child almost dwarfish, but wholesome food, fresh mountain air and household kindness, had modified and changed all this.

She was only a little smaller than ordinary girls, and very pleasant-looking even to strangers.

Still there was something in the young girl's face difficult to describe, but which possessed a charm that beauty never approached, a quick kindling of the eyes--a smile that lighted up all her features till the gaze was fascinated by it. This charm was more remarkable from the usual gravity of her face. She never had been what is usually termed a forward child, and in early life, the common expression of her eyes was sad, almost mournful. As she grew older and happier, this settled into a gentle serenity, only changed as we have described, by that thrilling smile, which actually transfigured her. You forgot her plainness then, forgot her humble garments, her dull complexion, and wondered what power had, for the moment, rendered her so beautiful.

This exquisite expression of the soul had deepened perceptibly and become more vivid, since her conversation with uncle Nathan on the night of the storm; but she was more thoughtful after that, and crept away to her room whenever she could find time, as if some object of interest forced her into solitude.

The night before the apple-gathering, aunt Hannah found her seated by a little cherry-wood table near the window, with her box of paints out finishing up a sketch on the leaf of an old copy-book. The same thing had often happened before, but this time there was a nervous rapidity of the hand, and that singular glow upon the face, which made the old woman pause to look at her.

"I wonder what on earth that girl is always working away at them pictures for?" said aunt Hannah as she surrendered her basket of apples to uncle Nathan that day. "Last night she was at it again--I went close up to her and looked over her shoulder--she had not heard me till then, but the minute I touched her, the color came all over her neck and face, as if she'd been caught stealing. I wonder what it's all about, Nathan?"

"Never you mind, Hannah. Let the child do as she pleases," answered

uncle Nathan, pouring the ripe apples softly down to the heap. "There is something busy in her mind that neither you nor I can make out yet. In my opinion, such girls as our Mary should be left to their own ways a good deal. Let her alone, Hannah, there is not a wrong thought in her heart, and never was."

"I don't understand her," said aunt Hannah, receiving her empty basket, and tying the broad kerchief more tightly over her head.

"Now, don't meddle with what you can't understand," said uncle Nathan, earnestly; "you and I are getting to be old people, Hannah, and as we go down hill, this girl will be climbing up; don't let us drag her down with the weight of our old-fashioned ideas. There is something more than common, I tell you, in the girl."

"But this painting won't get her a living, when we're dead and gone, Nathan."

"I don't know, picters are the fashion now-a-days--who knows but she may yet have one hung up at the Academy."

A grim smile came to aunt Hannah's face. "You may be right, Nathan," she said. "More strange things than that have happened in our time, so I'll just do as you think best, but she does waste a good deal of time and candle-light with her paints and things."

"She's brought more light into the house than she will ever take away, heaven bless her," answered uncle Nathan.

Just then, Mary came up with her basket. Exercise and the cold autumn air had left her cheeks rosy with color; she looked beautiful in the eyes of her benefactors.

"Now," she said, pouring down her apples, "had not you better go into the cellar, uncle Nathan, and get the apple-bin ready? the air feels like frost."

"They're not going into our cellar this year," said aunt Hannah, looking up into the branches above her, as if she feared to encounter the inquiring eyes of her companions; "we must do without winter apples; I've sold the whole crop."

"Do without winter apples," exclaimed uncle Nathan, with a downcast look, "is it so bad as that sister?"

"Apples are high down in York this fall," she answered, evasively.

Mary turned away, sighing heavily, "Shall I never be able to help along?" she muttered to herself, and she fell into a train of thought that lasted till long after the apples were all gathered in a heap ready for the cart that was to carry them away.

"Hannah," said uncle Nathan, the moment they were alone, "what has

happened; Anna's boy, is it anything about him?"

"His father is sick, Nathan, very sick, and will starve if we don't come to his help a little."

"And this is why we are to have no winter apples in the cellar, I'm sure it's of no consequence. I've thought a good while that old people like us have no use for apples, we hain't got the teeth to eat them, you know. But then Mary is so fond of them, supposing we take out a few just for her, you know."

"No," said aunt Hannah, sorrowfully, "she can do without apples, but they cannot do without bread; besides she wouldn't touch them if she knew."

"No, no, I'm sure she wouldn't--but isn't there anything I could give up: there's the cider, I used to be very fond of ginger and cider, winter evenings, but somehow without apples, it wouldn't seem exactly nat'ral: supposing you save a few apples for her without letting her know, and sell the cider. It would be a good example to set to the young men, you know, these temperance times?"

"No," answered Hannah, with unusual energy, "not a comfort shall you give up; I will work my fingers to the bone first."

"But," said uncle Nathan, rather timidly, as if he ventured a proposition that was likely to be ill received. "Why not let the poor fellow come here?--it would not cost much to keep him at the Homestead, and Mary is such a dear little nurse."

Aunt Hannah did not receive this as he had expected, but with a slow wave of the head, "That can never be--I couldn't breathe under the same roof with them; don't mention it again, Nathan."

"I never will," said the old man, touched by the sad determination in her voice and manner, "only tell me what I can do."

"Nothing, only let me alone," was the reply, and taking up her empty basket, aunt Hannah went to work again.

"Poor Hannah," murmured the good old man, "poor Hannah, she's got a hard row to hoe and always had, I'd help her out with the weeds, if some one would only tell me how, but she will work by herself."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE FARNHAMS' RETURN FROM ABROAD.

There is fruit from the orchard and corn from the field,

For old mother earth gives a bountiful yield;
There is light in the kitchen and fire on the hearth,
The Homestead is ready for feasting and mirth.

It was the day before uncle Nathan's husking-frolic. All the corn was housed and stacked upon the barn floor, which had been swept and garnished for the occasion; for after the husking was to come a dance--not in the house, aunt Hannah had some old-fashioned prejudices about that--and uncle Nat shrunk from the idea of having a frolic in the out-room where poor Anna had died; so as the barn was large and the room sufficient, the play usually ended where the work began, upon the barn floor, which was always industriously cleared from the corn-stalks as the husking went on.

Of course it was a busy day at the old house. Salina came early, and was in full force among the culinary proceedings of the occasion. Aunt Hannah received a slight exhilaration of life; she moved about the kitchen more briskly, let her cap get somewhat awry, and twice in the course of the morning was seen to wear a grim smile, as Mary, in her active desire to please, brought the flour-duster and nutmeg-grater to her help, before the rigid lady had quite found out that they were wanted.

Uncle Nat, too, acted in a very excited and extraordinary manner, all day running in from the porch, asking breathlessly if he could do anything, and then subsiding back in his old arm-chair before aunt Hannah could force her thin lips into a speaking condition.

As for Salina, though her tongue was always ready, she had found the old man too dull of comprehension for any thought of taking help at his hands; and when he meekly offered to cut up a huge pumpkin for her, she paused, with her knife plunged deep into its golden heart, and informed dear, unconscious uncle Nathan, that she did not require help from the face of man, not she.

With that, she cut down into the pumpkin with a ferocity quite startling, and split the two halves apart with a jerk that made the horn-comb reel among her fiery tresses, and sent uncle Nat quite aghast through the back door.

Salina looked after him with a smile of grim triumph, snuffed the air like a victorious race-horse, and after forcing the half-dislodged comb into her hair with both hands, she proceeded to cut up the pumpkin into great yellow hoops, with another toss of her head, which denoted intense satisfaction.

It is possible that Salina would have been a little provoked, had she seen with what composure uncle Nat took the rebuff, and how quietly he settled down to a basket of large potatoes by the barn door, which he softly cut in twain, scooping each half out in the centre, and cutting off the bottoms with mysterious earnestness. As each potatoe was finished, uncle Nat fastened it to the edge of a new hogshead-hoop that lay on the floor beside him, till the whole circle was dotted

with them.

When this mysterious circle was completed, uncle Nat tied a cord to the four divisions of the hoop, and with the aid of a stout ladder, suspended it between two high beams in the centre of the barn. Having descended to the floor and taken a general observation of the effect, he was about to mount the ladder again, when Mary Fuller ran in, eager to make herself useful.

"Stop, stop, uncle Nathan, let me go up, while you set down on the corn-stalks and tell me if I place them right. Here, now, hand up the candles," she continued, stooping down from the ladder after she had mounted a round or two.

Uncle Nathan drew a bundle of candles from his capacious coat-pocket and reached them up.

"I hope there'll be enough," he said, regretfully, "but somehow Hannah is getting rather close with her candles."

"Plenty--plenty," answered Mary Fuller, "we'll scatter them about, you know; besides, Salina brought over half a dozen nice sperm ones."

"Did she?" said uncle Nathan, heaving a deep sigh, "that's very good of her, especially as she seems to be a little out of sorts lately with us--don't you think so, Mary?"

"Not at all," said Mary, laughing blithely from the top of the ladder, as she settled the candles each into the potatoe socket prepared for it. "Salina's cross sometimes, but then it amounts to nothing."

The old man sat down on a bundle of corn-stalks, and quietly gazed upon Mary as she proceeded with her task; but all at once the folding-door was softly opened, and a broad light flooded the barn.

"Jump down--jump down, Mary!" cried uncle Nat, "some one is coming."

"Oh! it's only me, don't mind me, you know," said a sharp, little weasel-eyed man gliding through the opening; "yes, I see, preparing for the husking frolic. All right, just the thing, labor gives value to everything--of course corn is worth more with the husks off."

At first uncle Nathan seemed a little startled by this abrupt entrance, and Mary came down the ladder with an anxious look, for this man was the village constable, and with a vague sense of debts that they did not comprehend, both the old man and girl received him with something like apprehension. But he clasped both hands under his coat behind, and looked so complacently first at the corn-stalks, then at uncle Nathan, that it quite assured the old man; though Mary, who had glided down the ladder, and stood close by his side, still bore an apprehensive look in her eyes.

"Fine corn!" said the constable, breaking off an ear, and stripping

the husk carelessly from the golden grain, "the rows are even as a girl's teeth, the grain plump and full as her heart I say, uncle Nathan, why didn't you invite me to the husking? I'm great on that sort of work."

"Didn't Hannah invite you?" answered uncle Nat, blushing at this implied charge of inhospitality. "If she didn't, I'll do it now, of course we should be glad to have you come--why not?"

"Of course--why not? If I can't dance like some of the young fellows at a regular strife, I'll husk more corn than the best on 'em. See if any of 'em has as big a heap as I do after the husking. Oh, yes, I'll come!"

"What are you coming for?" inquired Mary, in her low, quiet way, fixing her clear eyes on his face.

"To dance with you, of course and to drink the old man's cider--what else should I come for, little bob-o'-link?"

"I don't know," answered Mary, with a faint sigh, which uncle Nat did not hear, for he was busy gathering himself up from his low seat on the bundle of stalks.

"Won't you step in and take a drink of cider now?" said the kind old man to his visitor.

"No, thank you; but this evening, you may depend on it, I'll be among you."

As he said this, constable Boyd put on his hat, settled it a little on one side, and thrusting a hand into each pocket of his coat, walked with a great dignity toward the door.

A yoke of oxen, fat, sleek, Old Homestead animals, lay in the grass a little distance from the barn.

"Fine yoke of cattle," said the constable, sauntering toward them, "fat enough to kill a'most, ain't they?"

"I fed them myself," answered uncle Nathan, patting a white star on the forehead of the nearest animal, as he lay upon his knees half buried in the rich aftergrowth. "Isn't he an old beauty?"

"Kind in the yoke?" questioned the constable.

"I should think so!" answered uncle Nat, with a mellow laugh. "Come go in and see how the women folks get along."

"No, thank you, I'll just take a short cut across the garden; but you may depend on me to-night--good day."

"Good day," said uncle Nat; with his usual hearty manner, and picking

up a fragment of pine, he moved with it toward the porch.

A barrel of new cider had been mounted on the cheese-press. It was evidently just beginning to ferment, for drops were foaming up from the bung, and creaming down each side the barrel in two slender rivulets.

Uncle Nathan drove the bung down with his clenched hand. Then seating himself comfortably in the old arm-chair, took a double-bladed knife from his pocket, and began with great neatness to whittle out a spigot from the fragment of pine, sighing heavily now and then, as if some unaccountable pressure were on his mind.

Aunt Hannah crossed the porch once or twice on her way to the milk-room, and at each time uncle Nat ceased whittling and gazed wistfully after her. Once he parted his lips to speak, but that moment Salina came to the kitchen door with a quantity of apple-parings gathered up in her apron, and called out, "Miss Hannah, do come along with that colander, the pumpkin sarse will be biled dry as a chip--where on arth is Mary Fuller?"

"Here," answered Mary, in a low voice, coming down from her chamber.

Had Salina looked up she might have seen that Mary's eyes were heavy and moist, as if she had been weeping, but the strong-minded maiden had emptied her apron, and sat with a large earthen bowl in her lap, beating a dozen eggs tempestuously together, as if they had given her mortal offence, and she were taking revenge with every dash of her hand.

"Throw a stick or two of wood into the oven, Mary, that's a good girl, then take these eggs and beat them like all possessed, while I roll out the gingerbread and cut some brake leaves in the pie crust. Aunt Hannah now always will cut the leaves all the way of a size, as if any one with half an eye couldn't see that it isn't the way they grow by nature, but broad at the bottom and tapering off like an Injun arrow at the top. Besides, Mary, it's between us, you know, aunt Hannah never does make her thumb-marks even about the edges, but Nathan, now I dare say, don't know the difference between her work, and a leaf like that."

Salina had resigned her bowl while speaking, and was now lifting up the transparent upper crust of a pie, where she had cut a leaf, through which the light gleamed as if it had been lace-work.

"Look a-there, now, Mary Fuller, I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he never noticed the difference between this and that outlandish concern;" here Salina pointed, with a grim smile, to a neatly-covered pie which aunt Hannah had left ready for the oven, and added, with a profound shake of the head, which arose from that want of appreciation which is said to be the hunger of genius, "there's no use of exerting one's self when nobody seems to mind it."

With these words Salina spread down the crust of her pie, and lifting the platter on one hand cut around it with a flourish of the case-knife, and began pinching the edges with a determined pressure of the lips, as if she had quite made up her mind that every indentation of her thumb should leave its fellow on uncle Nat's insensible heart.

"There," she said, pushing the pie against that of aunt Hannah's, "see if any one knows the difference between that and that--I know they won't--there now!"

This was said with a dash of defiance, as if she expected Mary to contradict her, but the young girl sat languidly beating the eggs, lost in thought; something very sad seemed to have come over her.

"Humph?" said Salina, snuffing the air, "what's the use talking!" and seizing the rolling-pin, she began with both hands to press out a flat of gingerbread, and proceeded to cut it up into square cards, which she marked in stripes with the back of her knife. Just then aunt Hannah came from the out-room rapidly, and with a strange look in her usually cold eyes.

"Goodness gracious, what's the matter now?" cried the strong-minded maiden, pointing her case-knife toward the old lady, "one would think she'd seen a bear or a painter! What is it now, do tell?"

Aunt Hannah did not reply, but sat down in uncle Nat's arm-chair in silence. Mary looked up with strange confusion in her eyes; she fancied that the cause of aunt Hannah's agitation might be the same that had filled her own mind with forebodings, and her look was eloquent of sympathy.

Salina failing to obtain an answer, rushed into the front room, still grasping her knife, and thrust her head out of the window.

A travelling carriage was passing rather slowly, which contained three persons, two ladies and a gentleman. The ladies leaned forward, looking out toward the house. Never were two faces more strongly contrasted than those; the elder, pale, withered and thin, glanced out from a rather showy travelling bonnet for an instant, and was drawn back again; the other, dark, sparkling and beautiful, was turned with a look of eager interest toward the house, and as Salina gazed after the carriage, a little gloved hand was waved toward her, as if a recognition or adieu were intended.

"Well now, I never did, if that isn't--no--yes--goodness me--it is Miss Farnham!"

Back ran the maiden to the kitchen, untying her apron as she went. She flung the case-knife upon the table, and began vigorously dusting the flour from her hands.

"Where's my own bonnet? where's my shawl? I must be going--aunt

Hannah, now do guess who was in that are carriage."

"I know!" answered the old woman, in a hoarse voice.

Mary Fuller sat motionless, with her eager eyes on Salina, and her lips gently parted. Thus she looked the question her lips refused to utter.

"Yes, it's them, Mary. The old woman, Mr. Frederick and"--

"And Isabel, is she with them?"

"Well, I suppose it's her, by the way she put out her hand--but she's grown as beautiful as a blooming wild rose, I can tell you. Now, good day, don't let them pies burn or have them underdone at the bottom. I'll try and run over to-night, but you mustn't depend on me; every thing is uncertain where Miss Farnham is."

Away went Salina through the out-room and into the street. Long before aunt Hannah arose from her easy-chair, or Mary Fuller could conquer the joyous trepidation in which she had been thrown, the strong-minded maiden had disappeared along the curving shore of the river.

After awhile aunt Hannah arose and went on with her preparation, but in silence, and with a degree of nervous haste that Mary had never witnessed in her before.

CHAPTER XL.

THE HUSKING FROLIC.

There were busy hands in the rustling sheaves,
And the crash of corn in its golden fall,
With a cheerful stir of the dry husk-leaves,
And a spirit of gladness over all.

The barn was a vast rustic bower that night. One end was heaped with corn ready for husking; the floor was neatly swept; and overhead the rafters were concealed by heavy garlands of white pine, golden maple leaves, and red oak branches, that swept from the roof downwards like a tent. Butternut leaves wreathed their clustering gold among the dark green hemlock, while, sumach cones, with flame-colored leaves, shot through the gorgeous forest branches. The rustic chandelier was in full blaze, while now and then a candle gleamed out through the garlands, starring them to the roof. Still, the illumination was neither broad nor bold, but shed a delicious starlight through the barn, that left much to the imagination, and concealed a thousand little signs of love-making that would have been ventured on more sliily had the light been broader.

But the candles were aided by a host of sparkling eyes. The air was warm and rich with laughter and pleasant nonsense, bandied from group to group amid the rustling of corn-husks and the dash of golden ears, as they fell upon the heap that swelled larger and larger with every passing minute.

Uncle Nathan's great arm-chair had been placed in the centre of the barn, just beneath the hoop of lights. There he sat, ruddy and smiling, the very impersonation of a ripe harvest, with an iron fire-shovel fastened in some mysterious manner across his seat, a large splint basket between his knees, working away with an energy that brought the perspiration like rain to his forehead. Up and down across the sharp edge of the shovel, he drew the slender corn, sending a shower of golden kernels into the basket with every pull of his arm, and stooping now and then with a well-pleased smile to even down the corn as it rose higher and higher in his basket.

Our old friend Salina sat at a little distance, with her fiery tresses rolled in upright puffs over each temple, and her great horn-comb towering therein like a battlement. A calico gown with very gay colors straggling over it, like honeysuckles and buttercups on a hill-side, adorned her lathy person, leaving a trim foot visible upon a bundle of stalks just within range of uncle Nat's eye. Not that Salina intended it, or that uncle Nat had any particular regard for neatly clad feet, but your strong-minded woman has an instinct which is sure to place the few charms sparsely distributed to the class, in conspicuous relief on all occasions.

As Salina sat perched on the base of the corn-stalk, tearing away vigorously at the husks, she cast an admiring glance now and then on the old man as his head rose and fell to the motion of his hands; but that glance was directly withdrawn with a defiant toss of the head, for uncle Nat's eyes never once turned on the trim foot with its calf-skin shoe, much less on its owner, who began to be a little exasperated, as maidens of her class will when their best points are overlooked.

"Humph!" muttered the maiden, looking down at her calico, "one might as well have come with a linsey-woolsey frock on for what any body cares." In order to relieve these exasperated feelings Salina seized an ear of corn by the dead silk and rent away the entire husk at once; when lo! a long, plump red ear appeared, the very thing that half a dozen of the prettiest girls on the stalk-heap had been searching and wishing for all the evening.

This discovery was hailed with a shout. The possession of a red ear, according to the established usage of all husking parties, entitled every gentleman present to a kiss from the holder.

The barn rang again with a clamor of voices and shouts of merry laughter. There was a general crashing down of ears upon the corn-heap. The roguish girls that had failed in finding the red ear,

all abandoned work and began dancing over the stalk-heap, clapping their hands like mad things, and sending shout after shout of mellow laughter that went ringing cheerily among the starlit evergreens overhead.

But the young men, after the first wild shout, remained unusually silent, looking sheepishly on each other with a shy unwillingness to commence duty. No one seemed urgent to be first, and this very awkwardness set the girls off like mad again.

There sat Salina, amid the merry din, brandishing the red ear in her hand, with a grim smile upon her mouth, prepared for a desperate defence.

"What's the matter, why don't you begin?" cried a pretty, black-eyed piece of mischief, from the top of the stalk-heap; "why, before this time, I thought you would have been snatching kisses by handfuls."

"I'd like to see them try, that's all!" said the strong-minded female, sweeping a glance of scornful defiance over the young men.

"Now, Joseph Nash, are you agoing to stand that?" cried the pretty piece of mischief to a handsome young fellow that had haunted her neighborhood all the evening; "afraid to fight for a kiss, are you?"

"No, not exactly!" said Joseph, rolling back his wristbands and settling himself in his clothes; "it's the after-clap, if I shouldn't happen to please," he added, in a whisper, that brought his lips so close to the cheek of his fair tormentor, that he absolutely gathered toll from its peachy bloom before starting on his pilgrimage, a toll that brought the glow still more richly to her face.

The maiden laughing, till the tears sparkled in her eyes, pushed him toward Salina in revenge.

But Salina lost no time in placing herself on the defensive. She started up, flung the bundle of stalks on which she had been seated at the head of her assailant, kicked up a tornado of loose husks with her trim foot, and stood brandishing her red ear furiously, as if it had been a dagger in the hand of Lady Macbeth, rather than inoffensive food for chickens.

"Keep your distance, Joe Nash; keep clear of me, now I tell you; I ain't afraid of the face of man; so back out of this while you have a chance, you can't kiss me, I tell you, without you are stronger than I be, and I know you are!"

"I shan't--shan't I?" answered Joe, who was reinforced by half a dozen laughing youngsters, all eager for a frolic; "well, I never did take a stump from a gal in my life, so here goes for that kiss."

Joe bounded forward as he spoke, and made a snatch at Salina with his great hands; but, with the quickness of a deer, she sprang aside,

leaving her black silk apron in his grasp. Another plunge, and down came the ear of corn across his head, rolling a shower of red kernels among his thick brown hair.

But Joe had secured his hold, and after another dash, that broke her ear of corn in twain, Salina was left defenceless, with nothing but her two hands to fight with; but she plied these with great vigor, leaving long, crimson marks upon her assailant's cheeks with every blow, till, in very self-defence, he was compelled to lessen the distance between her face and his, thus receiving her assault upon his shoulders.

To this day it is rather doubtful if Joe Nash really did gather the fruits of his victory. If he did, no satisfactory report was made to the eager ring of listeners; and Salina stalked away from him with an air of ineffable disdain, as if her defeat had been deprived of its just reward.

But the red ear gave rights to more than one, and, in her surprise, Salina was taken unawares by some who had no roguish black eyed lady-loves laughing behind them. There was no doubt in the matter now. Salina paid her penalty more than once, and with a degree of resignation that was really charming to behold. Once or twice she was seen in the midst of the melee, to cast quick glances toward uncle Nathan, who sat in his easy-chair laughing till the tears streamed down his cheeks.

Then there rose a loud clamor of cries and laughter for uncle Nathan to claim his share of the fun. Salina declared that "she gave up--that she was out of breath--that she couldn't expect to hold her own with a child of three years old." In truth, she made several strides toward the centre of the barn, covering the movement with great generalship, by an attempt to gather up her hair and fasten the comb in securely, which was generous and womanly, considering how inconvenient it would have been for uncle Nat, with all his weight, to have walked over the mountain of corn-stalks.

"Come, hurry up, uncle Nat, before she catches breath again," cried half a dozen voices, and the girls began to dance and clap their hands like mad things once more. "Uncle Nat, uncle Nat, it's your turn--it's your turn now!"

Uncle Nathan threw the half-shelled ear upon the loose corn in his basket, placed a plump hand on each arm of his chair, and lifted himself to a standing posture. He moved deliberately toward the maiden, who was still busy with her lurid tresses. His brown eyes glistened, a broad, bland smile spread and deepened over his face, and stealing one heavy arm around Salina's waist--who gave a little shriek as if quite taken by surprise--he decorously placed a firm and modest salute upon the unresisting--I am not sure that it was not the answering--lips of that strong-minded woman.

How unpleasant this duty may have been to uncle Nat I cannot pretend

to say; but there was a genial redness about his face when he turned it to the light, as if it had caught a reflection from Salina's tresses, and his brown eyes were flooded with sunshine, as if the whole affair had been rather agreeable than otherwise.

In fact, considering that the old man had been very decidedly out of practice in that kind of amusement, uncle Nat acquitted himself famously.

When the troop of mischievous girls flocked around, tantalizing him with fresh shouts of laughter and eyes full of glee, the dear old fellow's face brightened with mischief akin to their own. His twinkling eyes turned from face to face, as if puzzled which saucy mouth to silence first. But the first stride forward brought him knee deep into the corn-stalks, and provoked a burst of laughter that made the garlands on the rafters tremble again. Away sprang the girls to the very top of the heap, wild with glee and daring him to follow.

The tumult aroused Salina. She twisted up her hair with a quick sweep of the hand, thrust the comb in as if it had been a pitch-fork, and darting forward, seized uncle Nat by the arm just as he was about to make a second plunge after his pretty tormentors.

Slowly and steadily, that strong-minded female wheeled the defenceless man round till he faced the arm-chair. Then quietly insinuating that "he had better not make an old fool of himself more than once a day," she cast a look of scornful triumph upon the crowd of naughty girls, and moved back to her place again.

The youngsters now all fell to work more cheerfully for this burst of fun. The stalks rustled, the corn flashed downward, the golden heap grew and swelled to the light, slowly and surely, like a miser's gold. All went merrily on. Among those who worked least and laughed loudest, was the little constable that had taken so deep an interest in the affair that morning. Never did two ferret eyes twinkle so brightly, or peer more closely into every nook and corner.

Two or three times Mary Fuller entered the barn, whispered a few words to uncle Nat or Salina, and retreated again. At last aunt Hannah appeared, hushing the mirth as night shadows drink up the sunshine.

She made a telegraphic sign to Salina, who instantly proceeded to tie on her apron, and communicate with uncle Nathan, who arose from his seat, spreading his hands as if about to bestow a benediction upon the whole company, and desired that the ladies would follow Salina into the house, where they would find a barrel of new cider just tapped in the stoop, and some ginger-cake and such things set out in the front room.

As for the gentlemen, it was always manners for them to wait till the fair sex was served, besides, all hands would be wanted to clear out the barn for a frolic after supper. Moreover, uncle Nat modestly hinted that something a little stronger than cider might be depended

on for the young men, after the barn was cleared, an announcement that served to reconcile the sterner portion of the company to their fate better than any argument the old man had used.

Down came the girls like a flock of birds, chatting, laughing, and throwing coquettish glances behind, as they followed Salina from the barn. Up sprang the young men, clearing away stalks, kicking the husks before them in clouds, and carrying them off by armsful, till a cow-house in the yard was choked up with them, and the barn was left with nothing but its evergreen garlands, its starry lights, and a golden heap of corn sloping down from each corner.

Meantime, the bevy of fair girls, full of harmless, frolicsome mirth, and blooming like wild roses, had trooped gaily into the old house.

Aunt Hannah had allowed Mary Fuller to brighten up the rooms with a profusion of autumn flowers, which, though common and coarse, half served to light the table with their freshness and gorgeous colors. A long table, loaded down with every domestic cake or pie known in the country, was stretched the whole length of the out-room. Great plates of doughnuts, darkly brown, contrasted with golden slices of sponge-cake, gingerbread with its deeper yellow, and a rich variety of seed cakes, each varying in form and tint, and arranged with such natural taste that the effect was beautiful, though little glass and no plate was there to lend a show of wealth.

Little old-fashioned glasses, sparkling with the cider that gave them a deep amber tinge, were ranged down each side the board, and along the centre ran a line of noble pies. These pies were aunt Hannah's pride and glory. She always arranged them with her own hands in sections, first of golden custard, then of ruby tart, then the dusky yellow of the pumpkin, and then a piece of mince, alternating them thus, till each pie gleamed out like a great mosaic star, beautiful to look upon and delicious to eat.

Then there was warm short-cake and cold biscuit, the yellowest and freshest butter, stamped in cakes, with a pair of doves cooing in the centre, and a thousand pretty contrivances that made the table quite a thing of romance.

At the head stood aunt Hannah, cold and solemn, but very attentive, just as they all remembered her from their birth up, with the same rusty dress of levantine silk falling in scant folds down her person, and the same little slate-colored shawl folded over her bosom, only with a trifle more grey in her hair, and a new wrinkle or so creeping athwart her forehead. There she stood as of old, quietly requesting them one and all to help themselves; while Salina and Mary Fuller flew about, breaking up the mosaic pies, handing butter to this one and cake to that, and really seeming to make their two persons five or six at least, in this eager hospitality.

Aunt Hannah always threw a sort of damp on the young people. Her cold silence chilled them, and that evening there was a shadow so deep upon

her aged face, that it seemed almost a frown. Still she exerted herself to be hospitable; but it was of no use; the girls ranged themselves around the table in silence, helped themselves daintily, and conversed in whispers. Salina insisted that this state of things arose from the absence of the young men, but as she only suggested this in a whisper to Mary Fuller, no one was the wiser for her opinion, and after a little there arose a fitful outbreak or two that began to promise cheerfulness.

It certainly was aunt Hannah's presence, for when the girls left the out-room and trooped up to Mary's chamber, they grew cheerful as birds again; and it was delightful to see them aiding each other in the arrangement of the little finery which was intended to make terrible havoc among the young men's hearts below.

And now there was a flitting to and fro in Mary's room; a listening at the door; and every one was in a flutter of expectation. Pink and blue ribbons floated before the little glass, with its green crest of asparagus-tops red with berries. Now a pair of azure eyes glanced in, then came black ones sparkling with self-admiration. A hundred pretty compliments were bandied back and forth. It was a charming scene.

But even a gay toilet cannot give delight for ever. As the last ribbon was settled, they heard the young men coming in from the barn, and the next half hour, while the beaux were at supper, threatened to be a heavy one with the girls.

"Oh, what shall we do, huddled up here like chickens in a coop?" cried one. Salina, tell us a story; come, that's a good creature."

"Do," said Mary, earnestly, "or they will be dull. Let me run down and help aunt Hannah."

CHAPTER XLI

THE HOUSEHOLD SACRIFICE.

Like a human thing she looked on me,
As I stood trembling there.
For many a day those dreamy eyes
Went with me everywhere.

"Well," said Salina, seating herself on Mary Fuller's bed, "if you insist on it, I'll do my best, but I can't make up nothing, never could, and what I've got on my mind is the genuine truth."

"That's right, tell us a true story, made up things are like novels, and they're so wicked," cried the girls, swarming around the strong-minded one full of curiosity, but arranging their ribbons and

smoothing down their dresses all the time, like a flock of pigeons pluming themselves in the sunshine.

"Come, now, Salina, begin, or the young fellers will be through supper."

"Well," said Salina, settling herself comfortably on the bed, and deranging her attitude the next moment, "that sneaking constable who came into the barn among the first, and went out again so sly, has riled me up awfully. I've a nat'ral born hatred to all constables. What business had he there, I'd like to know?"

"True enough," cried one of the girls, "An old married man! why don't he stay home with his wife and children? Nobody wants him."

"I declare to man!" said Salina, "it made my blood bile to see him sneaking about with both hands in his pockets, whistling to himself, as if nobody was by; oh, I hate a constable like rank poison. They always put me in mind of old times--when I was a young gal a year or two ago."

Here the girls looked at each other; none of them remembered the time when she had appeared a day younger than now.

"Well, as I was a saying, when I was a gal, my father and mother moved from old Connecticut into the Lackawana valley in Pennsylvania, with ten little children, all younger than I was. They had lost everything, and went out into that dark, piny region to begin life agin.

"Well, they got a patch of wild land, partly on credit, built a log-house, and went to work. Before the year was out father died, and we found it hard dragging to get along without crops, and deep in debt. We gave up everything to pay store debts, and should have felt as rich as kings, if we could only have raised what the law allowed us. But we had no barrel of beef and pork, which even the law leaves to a poor family, but we lived on rye and injun, with a little molasses when we couldn't get milk.

"The law allowed us two pigs and a cow with her calf. Our cow was a grand good critter, capital for milk, and gentle as a lamb--you don't know how the children took to her, and well they might--she more than half supported them.

"Marm did her best for the children, and I worked as hard as she did, spinning and carding wool, which she wove into cloth on a hand-loom.

"Well, in a year or two the calf grew into a fine heifer, and we calculated on having milk from her after a little. So we began to fat up the old cow, though I hain't no idea that we should ever have made up our minds to kill her.

"There was some debts, still, but we had given up everything once, and neither marm nor I thought of any body's coming on us agin. So we were

proud enough of our two cows, and as long as the children had plenty of milk, never thought of wanting beef, and the old cow might have lived to this time for what I know if we'd been left to ourselves."

Here Salina's voice became disturbed, and the girls settled themselves in an attitude of profound attention.

"Well, as I was saying, things began to brighten with us, when one day in came the town-constable with a printed writ in his hand.

"He'd found out that we had one more cow than the law allowed, and came after it.

"I thought poor marm would a-gone crazy, she felt so bad, and no wonder, with all them children, and she a widder. It came hard, I can tell you.

"But the constable was determined, and what could she do but give up. There stood the little children huddled together on the hearth, crying as if their hearts were broke, at the bare thought of having the cow drove off, and there was poor marm, with her apron up to her face, a-sobbing so pitiful!

"I couldn't stand it; my heart rose like a yeasting of bread. I detarmined that them children and that hard-working woman should have enough to eat, constable or no constable.

"'Wait,' says I to the constable, 'till I go drive up the cow; she's hard to find.'

"He sat down. Marm and the children began to sob and cry agin. I tell you, gals, it was cruel as the grave.

"I went to the wood-pile and took the axe from between two logs. Across the clearing and just in the edge of the woods I saw the old cow and heifer browsing on the undergrowth. The old cow had a bell on and every tinkle as she moved her head went to my heart. I had to think of marm and the children before I could get courage to go on, and with that to encourage me, I shook and trembled, like a murderer, all the way across the clearing.

"The old cow and the heifer were close by each other, browsing on the sweet birch undergrowth that grew thick there. When I came up they both stopped and stood looking at me with their great earnest eyes, so wistfully, as if they wondered which I was after."

Here Salina dashed a hand across her eyes and the color rushed into her face, as if she were opposing a pressure of tears with great bravery.

"It was enough to break any one's heart to see that old cow, with the birch twigs in her mouth, coming toward me so innocent. She thought--poor old critter--that I'd come to milk her; but instead of

the milk-pail I had that axe in my hand. She couldn't a-known what it meant, and yet, as true as I live, it seemed as if she did."

"There she stood, looking in my face, wondering, I hain't no doubt, why I didn't sit down on a log as usual, and fix my pail--and there I stood, trembling, before the poor dumb animal, ready to fall down on my knees and ask pardon for my cruel thoughts, and there was the heifer looking on us both--oh, gals, gals, I hope none of you will ever have to go through a thing like that."

The girls thus addressed were very still, and a sob or two was just heard while the tears leaped like hail-stones down Salina's cheeks.

"My heart misgave me--I would't a done it. Those great innocent eyes seemed as if they were human, I grew so weak that the axe almost fell. I turned to go back ready to starve or anything rather than look that animal in the face again with the axe in my hand. Yes, I turned away, but there half across the clearing was the constable with the writ flying out in his hand. My blood rose--I thought of the children with nothing to eat--I don't know what I didn't think of. He was walking fast, I turned; the cow was right before me. Oh, girls, there she stood so quiet, chewing the green birch leaves, I was like a baby, the axe wouldn't rise from the ground, I could not do it.

"He called out, I heard his step in the underbrush. Then my strength flew back. I was wild--strong as a lion, but my eyes seemed hot with sparks of fire. I shut them, the axe swung back--a crash, a deep, wild bellow, and she fell like a log. I had struck in the white star on her forehead. When I opened my eyes she was looking at me, and so her eyes stiffened in their film. I had to hold myself up by the axe-helve with both hands. It seemed to me as if I was dying too.

"'What have you been about, where is the cow?' said the constable, in a passion, as he came up.

"'There,' said I, pointing to the poor murdered critter with my finger, 'the law, you say, won't allow us two cows, but it does give us a barrel of beef. This is our beef--touch it if you dare!'

"He skulked away and I fell down on my knees by the poor critter my own hands had killed. It seemed as if my heart would break! There she lay with the fresh green leaves in her mouth, so still, and there stood the heifer looking at me steadily as if she wanted to speak, and I couldn't make her understand why it had to be done. Oh, gals, gals it was tough!"

There was silence for a moment, they had no disposition to speak.

"There, now, I've made you all miserable," said Salina, wiping her eyes and making a great effort to laugh. "Hark! what's that?"

The girls jumped up and listened, smiles chased the tears from their eyes, the young men were coming out from supper, and joy of joys, they

heard the tones of a violin from the back stoop.

You should have seen that group of mountain girls, struck by the music, as each threw herself into some posture of natural grace and listened.

"It is, it is a fiddle--where did it come from? a fiddle, a fiddle, how delightful!" and they broke into an impromptu dance, graceful as it was wild.

CHAPTER XLII

THE STRANGE MINSTREL.

Time weaves the web of fate around us,
In iron wool and threads of gold,
The present, and the past that bound us,
Still some new mystery unfold.

There was, at the time of our story, a public house, or tavern, about five minutes walk up the street from uncle Nathan's house. To this tavern the young men betook themselves, while the girls were partaking of aunt Hannah's hospitality; two or three of the upper rooms were full of commotion created by the change which each deemed necessary to his apparel, before he appeared in dancing trim before the ladies. Flashy vests were taken from overcoat pockets. The dickies, snugly curled under the lining of a fur cap or narrow-brimmed hat, came forth to be arranged under neck-ties of gay hues and flowing dimensions.

Here and there, one more exquisite than his neighbor, exchanged his mixed socks and cowhide boots for white yarn stockings and calf-skin pumps; but this was a mark of gentility that few ventured on, and that was assumed with a stealthy sort of an air in a dark corner, as if the owners of so much refinement were not quite certain of the way in which the democratic majority might receive it.

Never were two small mirrors brought into more general requisition than those hanging upon the walls of the two chambers, appropriated to uncle Nat's guests. It was like a panorama of human faces passing over them. First a collar all awry was set right with a jerk; then the plaits of a false bosom were smoothed down; next the tie of a flowing silk cravat was settled; while, in other parts of the room, there was a stealthy display of private rolls of pomatum, and a desperate brushing of hair, sometimes refractory to anything but the fingers.

Then followed a deal of bustle and confusion, half a dozen young fellows crowding at once to the mirror in hot haste to catch a last glimpse. Red bandana handkerchiefs fluttered out of a dozen pockets and back again, mysteriously leaving a corner visible. Then there was

a general movement toward the door, and the crowd descended, each youth treading lighter by far than when he went up, and moving with the air of a man expected to change his manners somewhat with his garments.

While all this was going on above stairs, there sat in the bar-room below a fair young man, travel-soiled and looking weary, like an over-taxed child. He was very slender, and with a sort of a lily paleness on his forehead, that fatigue or sorrow had lent to its natural delicacy.

His garments were old and threadbare. Dust from the highway had settled upon them, and the crown of his hat which lay on the floor beside him, had taken a reddish tinge from the same source.

He sat in a remote corner of the room, on a buffalo skin that had been flung over a wooden bench, where travellers sometimes cast themselves down for temporary rest. His hands were clasped over the smaller end of a violin-case that stood upright before him, and his forehead fell wearily upon them.

"Look there!" said one of the young men, turning to his companions, who were descending the stairs, "don't that look tremendously like a fiddle?"

"A fiddle! a fiddle!" ran from lip to lip, till the sound ended in a shout up stairs. "Let us see where it is. Where did it come from?"

This clamor aroused the young man, who lifted his forehead from the violin-case and turned a pair of full blue eyes misty from fatigue or some other cause, upon the group.

The young men paused and looked at each other. There was something touchingly beautiful about that young face which impressed them with a sentiment of awe.

Still the youth gazed upon them with an unmoved look, like one who listened rather than saw with his eyes. Meanwhile, a smile stole over his lips, so child-like and sweet, that it made the young men still more reluctant to approach him; he seemed so far removed from their nature with that smile, for the lamplight glimmering through the thick waves of his golden brown hair shed a sort of glory around him.

"I wonder if he plays on it himself," said one of the young men in a whisper.

"Did any one speak of me?" said the stranger, in a voice so rich and sweet, that there seemed no need of other music to him.

"Well, yes," answered the foremost youth, advancing toward him. "We've got a husking frolic on hand, and are all ready for dancing; but there isn't a fiddle within ten miles, nor any one to play it if there was. We might have got along with the girls singing well enough, I suppose,

but the sight of this fiddle-case has set us all agoing for a little music."

"Oh," said the youth, with a smile, "it's my violin you wish to have; but I am very tired; for I've travelled since noon, and your stages are wearisome over the mountains."

"It's of no use asking you to play for us then, I suppose?" said the young farmer, in a disappointed tone.

The youth shook his head, but very gently, as one who refuses against his will; and this gave his petitioner a gleam of hope.

"Wouldn't a good supper, and a cup of cider that'll make your palate tingle, set you up again?" he pleaded. "There's a hull hive of purty gals over at uncle Nat's, that would jump right out of their skins at the first sound of that fiddle. If you only could now."

"Give me a crust of bread and a cup of drink, and I will try and please you. I think it is, perhaps, as much the want of food as weariness that has taken away my strength."

The young men looked at each other. "Want of food," said one of them, "why, didn't you find taverns on the way?"

"Yes," answered the stranger, sadly, "but I had no appetite; I came here in hopes the mountain air would give me one, but, with fatigue and fasting, I am faint."

The group of youngsters drew together, and a whispered conversation commenced, which was followed by the clink of silver, as each one dropped a two shilling piece into the hat of the young man who had been most active in the negotiation.

"Here," said the youth, holding forth the money, "an even exchange is no robbery. Set the old fiddle to work, and here is enough dimes to last you a week."

The stranger blushed crimson, and the white lids drooped over his eyes, as if something had been said to wound him.

"No," he said, with a quivering smile, "my poor music is not worth selling. Besides, my journey must end not far from this, or I have travelled slowly. Give me some clean water for my face and hands, that is all I ask."

"Of course we will, with a famous supper, too, that would make a ghost hungry. Come with us up to uncle Nat's. Water, why there is a trough full at his back door, that you may bathe in all over if you like; and as for cider, we'll just try that before you say anything about it."

The stranger arose and took up his violin; then lifting his large eyes, misty with fatigue, he said almost mournfully--

"Will some one give me his arm? I am very weary."

The young men became at once silent and respectful with these words, for there was something of reverence in their sympathy with a being at once so feeble and so full of gentle dignity.

"Let me carry the violin," said one, while another stout, brave fellow clasped the slender hand of the stranger, drew it over his own strong arm and led him carefully forth, hushing even the cheery tones of his voice as he spoke to the youth.

Thus subdued from hilarity to kindness, the group of young men conducted their new friend to the Old Homestead and into the outer room, where the table was newly spread, and where uncle Nat stood with a huge brown cider pitcher in his hand from which he began to fill the glasses as the crowd of guests rushed in.

Aunt Hannah, having performed her duty among her female guests, was busy in the milk-room, cutting up pies, dividing pound-cake into sections, and slicing cards of gingerbread, while uncle Nat presided diligently at the cider-cask.

Thus it happened that the stranger was almost overlooked in the crowd, for he sat down in a corner of the room, where his new friend brought him in abundance of dainties from the table, for Mary was too busy even for a glance that way.

"How do you feel now? Stronger, I know by your mouth; there's color in the lips now," said the young man, who had taken a leading interest in the stranger from the first.

"Oh! yes, I am much stronger," answered the youth, with one of the sweetest smiles that ever beamed on a human face. "A little fresh water now, and you shall see if I haven't music in the old violin."

"Come this way. The water-trough is out by the back porch."

The youth took up his violin, saying very gently that he never left that behind him, and following the lead of his friend glided from the room.

After bathing his hands and face, leaving them pure and white as those of a girl, he went back to the porch, and seating himself in uncle Nat's arm-chair, drew forth his violin and began to tune it.

Uncle Nat was just returning the spigot to his cider barrel, after having filled the brown pitcher once more to the brim; but at the first sound of the violin, an instrument he had not heard for years, the spigot dropped to the floor, and out rushed the cider in a quick amber stream, overflowing the pitcher, dashing down to the floor, and rushing off in a tiny river the sloping edge of the porch. You could hear it creeping in a rich current through the plaintain leaves, while

uncle Nat stood quite oblivious of the waste, listening like a great school boy to the violin.

An exclamation from Salina, who had just left her friends in the dressing-room, as she came forth and seized the pitcher, brought the good old man to his senses. Clapping his fat hand over the aperture, he drove the cider back in the cask, and looked right and left over his shoulder for the spigot, avoiding the scornful eyes of that exemplary female, who stood with the pitcher between her hands, over which the surplus moisture went dripping, like an antiquated Hebe defying an overgrown Ganymede.

"There!" exclaimed the strong-minded damsel, pointing toward the spigot with her foot, "there's at least two gallons of the best cider in the county gone to nothing. What do you think aunt Hannah will do for apple sauce, if you go on this way, making regular mill-dams out of her sweet cider?"

"Maybe we'd better say nothing about it," answered uncle Nat, making futile efforts to restrain the cider with one hand and reach the spigot with the other, "dear me, I can't reach it. Now, dear Miss Salina, if you only would."

"Dear Miss Salina!" The strong-minded one turned at the words, blushing till her face rivalled those fiery tresses. She sat down her pitcher, shook the drops from her fingers, and seizing the important bit of pine presented it to uncle Nathan.

All this time the young stranger had paused in tuning his violin, but when uncle Nat drew a deep breath, after repairing the mischief already done, out came a gush of music that made him start again, and threw the strong-minded woman into a fit of excitement, quite startling. She seized uncle Nat's moist hand and unconsciously--it must have been unconsciously--pressed it in her wiry fingers.

"Music! Did you ever hear such music, uncle Nathan! It's enough to set one off a-dancing."

"Well, why not?" answered uncle Nathan.

"Yes, why not?" replied the strong-minded one, "if the other young people dance, why shouldn't we?"

"Of course," said uncle Nat, wiping his hands on the roller towel.

"Why not? I shouldn't wonder if we astonish these youngsters."

"And aunt Hannah, too," chimed in Salina.

"Oh! I'd forgot her," said uncle Nat, looking wistfully toward the milk-room door, "I'm afraid it won't do, she'll think--but here they come, like a flock of blackbirds!"

True enough, the first full notes of the violin had drawn the crowd of

girls from the chamber overhead, and down they came, laughing and racing through the kitchen, perfectly wild with delight.

"Uncle Nat, dear, dear, uncle Nat, is it really a violin? Will aunt Hannah let us dance to anything but singing?" cried a dozen voices; and uncle Nathan was at once surrounded by a rainbow of streaming ribbons and floating ringlets, while a host of merry eyes flashed their delight upon him.

"I don't know--I can't take it on myself to say," cried uncle Nathan, quite beside himself, "you must ask some one else. I haven't any objection in life"--

"Nor I," said Salina, "and that's two agin one, if Miss Hannah does stand out. Come, I'll go with you. We'll say that I, and all the other young girls, have just made up our mouths to dance after a fiddle, and we mean to, that's all."

"Stop, stop a minute!" exclaimed uncle Nathan, spreading his hands, "maybe you'd better say nothing about it, but just go into the barn and begin. If sister Hannah has got a conscience agin dancing to a fiddle, you know, it ain't worth while to wake it up; but there's more ways of getting into a lot than by taking down the bars. Jest climb the fence, that's all."

How uncle Nathan ever came to give this worldly piece of advice is still a mystery. Some insinuated that the cider had sent its sparkles to his brain, and others thought the music had aroused some sleeping mischief there. Perhaps it was both. Perhaps too the bright eyes and ripe laughter around him had something to do with the matter.

At any rate the advice was too pleasant not to be taken. A telegraphic signal brought the young men from the out-room, and off the company fluttered in pairs toward the barn making the starlight melodious with their laughter.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A DANCE AFTER HUSKING

Merrily--merrily went the night
The laugh rang out
And a gleeful shout,
Shook the autumn leaves in that starry light.

In their haste the young people had left the strange youth seated in the chair, in a dark end of the porch.

"Come," said uncle Nat, in his kindly fashion, "you and I will follow

them."

"Thank you;" said the youth, rising, "it has been a long ride, and I was growing weary."

"Have you been sick?" said the old man, sorrowfully.

"It's hard!"

He paused. A strange thrill shot over him, as the hand of the youth touched his. "Come," he added, tenderly, leading the stranger on, "I have strength for us both."

The slender hand trembled in his clasp; the agitation was mutual; for through the young man's delicately organized frame ran a spark of joy that warmed him to the heart. They walked on together in silence, both thrilled with a strange sensation of pleasure, and drawn, as it were, by invisible influences toward each other.

"I'm afraid," said the youth, "I'm afraid my music will disappoint them. I know hardly any but sacred or sad airs."

His voice made all the blood in uncle Nathan's veins start again; it was music in itself, such music as brought back his youth, sad and ineffably sweet.

"Oh," answered uncle Nathan, drawing a deep, pleasant breath, "you must have a dancing tune or so, Yankee Doodle, Money-Musk, and Money-in-both-pockets, as like as not."

"Yankee Doodle, oh, yes, it was the first air I ever learned, how my poor father loved it--as for the rest--well, we shall see."

Uncle Nathan's chair had been placed near the door as it happened, away from the light which fell warmest in the centre of the barn. Thus, during the whole evening, the young musician had been constantly surrounded by shadows that left his features mysteriously undefined. Still, uncle Nathan hovered by; his warm heart yearned to sun itself near the youth.

When the stranger drew forth his bow, and, without a prelude, dashed into Yankee Doodle, uncle Nat sunk to a rustic bench, covered his face with both hands, and absolutely shivered under the floods of tenderness let into his soul with the music.

But no one heeded the old man; why should they? Couple after couple rushed up to the centre of the barn, gaily disputing for places beneath the rustic chandelier, while here and there a young fellow, more eager than the rest, broke into a double shuffle or cut a subdued pigeon-wing as an impromptu while the set was forming.

It was no wonder. The violin was absolutely showering down music. A thousand strings seemed to find voice beneath those slender fingers.

It set the young people off like birds in a thicket, down the outside, up, down the middle, swinging corners, oh, it is impossible for a pen to keep up with them, that is not naturally musical.

There they go, whirling, smiling, dancing higher and faster, flying with the music till they pause, flushed and panting, at the bottom of the set. Even now they cannot be still, but give each other a superfluous twirl, or go on in a promiscuous way, doing over again the dance in fragments, till their turn comes back.

Somehow Yankee Doodle wavered off into various other airs quite unknown to the dancers, all swelling free and with a bold sweep of sound, as if the musician improvised as much in his music as the company certainly did in their dancing. But it was the more exhilarating for that, and never did enjoyment run higher or mirth gush out more cheerily.

Mary Fuller had made her way quietly into the barn, and seating herself by uncle Nathan, watched the bright revel as it went on, filled with a pleasant sort of wonder that anything could be so happy as these gay revellers seemed. Once or twice she was asked to dance, but shrunk sensitively from the proposition.

Salina stood erect by uncle Nathan, with her arms folded and her head on one side, filled with burning indignation against mankind in general, and dear old uncle Nathan in particular, because she was left a solitary wall-flower planted in the very calf-skin shoes which she had expected to exhibit, at least in a French Four, with that rotund gentleman.

There was a change in the music. The strings trembled and thrilled a moment, then out came a wild gush of melody that made the very dancers pause and hold their breath to listen.

Mary Fuller started to her feet one moment. The color left her lips, and then back it came, firing her face with scarlet to the brows.

"Uncle Nat, uncle Nat," she said, seizing him by the arm, "that music!--I've heard it before--listen--listen!"

She sat down trembling from head to foot, but her grey eyes flashed from beneath their drooping lids, and her mouth grew tremulous with agitation. When the air was finished, for it died off in a few plaintive notes, as if the violinist had entirely forgotten the dancers, Mary arose and crept softly toward the musician, till she could obtain a view of his face. By the stray candles that wavered to and fro among the evergreens, she could dimly see the white outline of those pure features and the mysterious beauty of the eyes.

Now her countenance, hitherto varying and anxious, settled into a warm flush of joy; she drew close to the musician, and resting one hand on the back of his chair, placed the other softly on his arm.

"Joseph--Joseph Esmond," she said, in a voice that scarcely rose above a whisper. "Is it you, Joseph?"

He started and turned his eyes toward her.

"I know the touch of your hand, Mary Fuller; and your voice is full of the old music. Where am I? How does it happen that you and I meet here?"

"I live here--I have friends, oh! such kind friends. And you, Joseph, how came you here? Where is your father--that dear, good father? Surely he is well."

"My father," said the youth, bowing his head, with a look of touching sorrow, "my father is dead--I am alone in the world, but for this!"

He touched his violin with a mournful smile.

"Then you and I are orphans alike." But she added more cheerfully, "we are not alone, you have your music, and your art, and I have my, my--oh, I have many things."

"Music, music!" called out the dancers, impatiently, from the floor.

Mary drew back.

"Don't leave me," said the youth, anxiously. "Come listen to my old friend here, and we will talk between the dances."

"Leave you?" replied the young girl; "you do not know, you cannot guess how happy I am to see you again."

"And I," answered the youth, smiling softly, "I can feel how beautiful everything is around me when you are near. Did you know how my father loved you, and how he grieved over it when you left us?"

"Did he?" answered Mary, with a low sob, "how often I thought of you and him; but he must have known where we went."

"Not till Frederick came back at vacation; soon after you began to write, Mary. Then he was so pleased to hear from you. We heard you had been taken from the Alms-House."

"Music, music!" clamored the dancers once more. The young man took up his bow with a sigh.

"Listen, listen," he said, softly, drawing it across the strings. "Do you remember the music we had that night? I will give it to you again."

He began to play, and while others were dancing merrily, she listened till her young heart filled and her eyes were crowded full of tears. She remembered that small room high up in a city dwelling. The

furniture was scant but neat, and so daintily arranged. The bright cooking-stove, the bird-cage, the little round work-stand, above all, the handsome, cheerful woman, with her household love and genial benevolence, Isabel Chester's mother--how vividly the sight of that young minstrel brought all this to her memory.

The music was ringing cheerily through the barn, which trembled to the buoyant movements of the dancers, till the garlands shook upon the walls, and all the lights seemed to twinkle and reel with sympathetic motion. But the face of the violinist grew sad in its expression, and as Mary Fuller gazed at it through her tears, her heart trembled within her, though a gleam of most exquisite pleasure lay at the bottom--pleasure so unlike anything she had ever felt that its very newness made her tremble.

"Don't you dance, Mary?" inquired the musician, speaking to her, but without a break in his music.

"Dance!" she answered, smiling upon him, "no, I never have danced in my life."

"Oh! if you would dance now. I should like to see how you look when quite happy--my heart used to ache to see you thus, Mary."

Mary shrunk back blushing and frightened, he spoke so earnestly.

"No, no," she stammered, "I don't know how to dance; but I am very, very happy."

The young musician shook his head, and the light of a stray candle rippled through his hair like gold. There was something angelic in his aspect, as he murmured amid the music,

"Oh! but she is heavenly. Never on earth have I heard a voice so full of melody. Sweet spring sounds and the breath of flowers seem floating in it. Oh! she is so good, this dear child."

Then he began to smile again; richer sounds gushed from beneath his fingers; the dancers fell into a circle; the steps grew lighter. The ring of life flashed round beneath the lights, whirling its way amid floods of laughter, like a water-wheel casting off rainbows and foam in the sunshine. The ring gave way; its sunny links broke into pairs; balancing, smiling, and gliding off to the half-hushed music; all glad to rest, but eager to begin again.

That moment the double doors were softly pushed open, and a group of visitors entered the barn, almost unnoticed at first, but that soon cast a restraint upon all this hilarity.

It was a young man, evidently from the city, and a fair girl so beautiful that the whole company paused to look at her.

She was dressed very plainly, in a dark silk travelling-dress, and her

air was remarkable only for its simple quietness, though her large eyes turned with a look of eager haste from form to form, as if she were searching for some one.

Mary Fuller, who had been standing by the violinist, very thoughtful, and with her eyes dim with heart-mist, saw the group come in. She drew her hands across her eyes to clear their sight, clasped them with an exclamation of joy, and moving down through the shadows stood close to the young stranger.

"Isabel! Isabel!" broke from her eager lips.

Isabel Chester turned. Her face was radiant. She opened her arms, and with an exclamation of delight, received Mary to her bosom.

"Mary, dear, dear little Mary Fuller--how glad I am. You love me yet, I know. She never would forget me, any more than I could forget her. Come, talk to me, I was determined to see you before I slept, and so persuaded Fred--Mr. Farnham, I mean--oh, Frederick, isn't she a dear creature?"

Isabel drew Mary's face from her bosom, and stood with one arm around her as she said this.

Young Farnham reached forth his hand; before he could speak, Isabel went on.

"She has grown a little, too; reaches to my shoulder and rather more; her eyes, oh! I knew her eyes would be beautiful; and, and there is something about her that I didn't expect. Frederick, why don't you tell Mary Fuller that she's handsome? There now, isn't that look something better than beauty? Oh! Mary Fuller, how glad I am to see you."

Tears were flashing like diamonds down the peachy bloom of Isabel's cheek; for Mary had crept to her bosom again, and she felt the shiver of delight that shook the young creature from head to foot. Her own heart leaped back to its old memories, and swelled against the clinging form of her friend.

"That's right, that's just about as it ought to be," exclaimed Salina, coming forward triumphantly, for her honest heart rose to meet the scene. "I knew she'd be here afore bed-time, if New York finery and foreign countries hadn't completely upset her. Isabel Chester, you're a fust rate gal, and I say it. Mr. Farnham, she's a credit to human nature. You may reckon on that, now I tell you. Says I to myself, says I, 'that are gal is sure to come up to the Old Homestead afore bed-time or I lose my guess.' Wasn't I right?"

"You always think too well of me," said Isabel, laughing through her tears. "Come, Mary, let me hear your voice. You haven't spoken a word yet."

"Oh! I love you so much Isabel! I'm _so_ happy, Isabel."

Isabel bent down and kissed the happy face upon her bosom. As she lifted her eyes again, they fell upon the strange musician, who, disturbed by voices that he recognized, had moved toward them unnoticed.

"Who, who is this, Mary Fuller? I remember the face. No, no, it's one of Guido's heads that has bewildered me. Surely I never saw anything living like that before. It is Guido's Michael in repose. Look up, Mary, and tell me who this young man is."

Isabel spoke in a low voice, regarding the youth with a look of mingled admiration and surprise, while the tears still sparkled on her cheeks.

Mary looked up; her eyes kindled, and she smiled proudly through her tears.

"Isabel? Can't you remember something that you have seen before in his face?"

"I don't know. The memory of a picture I saw at Rome blinds me. Who is it, say?"

"Hush, Isabel! you will grow sad when I tell you. That night when you and I watched"--

"Yes," answered Isabel, drooping her head, "I shall never forget that night."

"Do you remember who was with us, Isabel?"

"That angel boy."

"Yes, Isabel. It is Joseph Esmond."

"Oh! this is too much happiness. All of us together again," and with her arm still flung caressingly over Mary's shoulder, Isabel Chester moved toward the youth; but she was checked by the capacious person of uncle Nat, who came between her and her object with a look of strange interest on his face. His hands were clasped, and you could see the plump fingers working nervously around each other; while his eyes filled and shone with anxious tenderness. At length, after a long gaze, his chest swelled like the heave of an ocean wave; his hands fell apart, and he murmured softly, as if speaking only to himself.

"It is little Anna's boy!"

"Who speaks my mother's name?" inquired the youth, in his low, gentle way; "surely some one is near that I ought to love."

"Ought to love?" cried uncle Nat, seizing the hand which had been half

extended. "Ought to love? Why it would be again nature and the Lord's Providence, if you didn't love Nathan Heap, the old man that"--

Uncle Nat checked himself; a crowd had gathered around him; but the feelings he was constrained to suppress broke forth in two large tears that rolled down his broad cheeks.

"Nephew," he sobbed, shaking the hand that he still grasped, "you're welcome to the Old Homestead. Neighbors," he added with dignity, "suppose you make out the evening with blind-man's-buff, or Who's-got-the-button? This is my own nephew, that I haven't seen since he was a baby. You won't expect him to play any more to-night; he's tired out; and I"--

The old man's lips began to tremble, and tears came again to his eyes, and coursed rapidly after those that had fallen. He shook his head; tried to go on without success; and taking Joseph by the hand led him toward the door.

"Stop, just one minute, now, till I've done a little chance of business," cried the constable, creeping out from a corner of the barn, where the husked ears had been piled, and planting himself, like a pert exclamation point, before the old man. "I've got to make a levy on this corn heap," he said; "the oxen out yonder, and sundry other goods and chattels about the Old Homestead. I want to do everything fair and above board, so just wait to see the law executed."

Uncle Nathan paused, half wondering, half shocked at the man's words.

"What! the corn that my kind neighbors have just husked? the oxen I brought up from steers? who has a right to take them?"

"There's the writ. All correct you'll find. Madam Farnham claims a right to her own, and I'm here to see that she gets it."

"Madam Farnham, my mother!" cried young Farnham, indignantly. "Knave, you slander my mother."

"You'll find it there," said the little constable, dashing the back of his dirty hand against the open writ. "Your mother, if she is your mother, authorized me to buy up all claims agin uncle Nat here and aunt Hannah, six months ago; and I've done it. Five hundred and ten dollars with costs."

"Come with me," answered the young man, sternly. "Isabel, go to the house with Salina. I will return."

He took the constable by the arm and led him out, followed by hoots and cheers from the young farmers.

Uncle Nathan stood for a moment, dumb with amazement; then he drew a deep breath and grasped his nephew's hand more firmly.

"It seems as if the Old Homestead was falling around us," he said,
"but so long as a shingle is left, it shall shelter my sister Anna's
son."

And he led the young man forth into the starlight.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE MOTHER, THE SON, AND THE ORPHAN

Age is august, and goodness is sublime,
When years have given them a solemn power.
But souls that grow not with advancing time,
Like withered fruit, but mock life's opening flower.

"Mother!"

"My son, don't speak so loud; you quite make me start; and with these delicate nerves you know a shock is quite dreadful--why don't you say mamma, softly, with the pure French pronunciation, and an Italian tone; that's the proper medium, Fred. 'Mother!' I did hope, after travelling so many years, that you would have forgotten the word."

"No, mother; I have not lost the dear old English of that word, and pray God that I never may. Still more do I hope never to lose that respect, that affection, which should make the name of mother a holy thing to every son."

"My dear son, don't you understand that affection uttered in vulgar language loses its--its--yes, its perfume, as I may express it. Now there is something so sweet in the word mamma, so softly fraternal--in short, I quite hear you cry from your little crib with its lace curtains, when you utter it."

"Mother, let us be serious a moment."

"Serious, my child? What on earth do you want to be serious for?"

Here young Farnham took a paper from his pocket, and held it before his mother's face. "Mother, what is this? Did you authorize the purchase of these claims against the helpless old man and woman down yonder?" he said.

Mrs. Farnham turned her head aside, and taking a crystal flask from the table before her, refreshed herself languidly with its perfume.

"Did you authorize this, madam?" cried the young man, impatiently, dashing one hand against the paper that he held in the other. "This purchase, and after that the seizure of the old man's property?"

"Dear me, how worrying you are," answered the lady, burying the pale wrinkles of her forehead in the lace of her handkerchief; "how can I remember all the orders with regard to a property like ours?"

"But do you remember this?"

"Why, no, of course I don't," cried the lady, with a flush stealing up through her wrinkles, as the miserable falsehood crept out from her heart; "of course the man did it all on his own account, there's no medium with such people. Certainly it was his own work. What do I know about business?"

The young man looked at her sternly. She had not deceived him, and a bitter thought of her utter unworthiness made the proud heart sink in his bosom.

"Mother," he said, coldly, and with a look of profound sorrow, "whoever has been the instigator, this is a cruel act; but I have prevented the evil it might have done."

"You prevented it, how?" cried the mother, starting to her feet, white with rage, all her langour and affectation forgotten in the burst of malicious surprise, that trembled on her thin lips, and gave to her pale, watery eyes the expression, without the brilliancy, that we find in those of a trodden serpent. "What have you done, I say?"

"I paid the money!"

Mrs. Farnham sat down, and remained a moment gazing on the calm, severe face of the youth, with her thin hand clenched upon the folds of her morning dress, and her foot moving impetuously up and down on the carpet, as if she wanted to spring up and rend him to pieces.

The youth had evidently witnessed these paroxysms of rage before, for he bent his eyes to the ground as if the sight awoke some old pain, and turning quietly, seemed about to leave the room.

"You have done this without consulting me--countermanded my orders, defeated my object--how like you are to your father, now."

The last words were uttered with a burst of spite, as if they contained the very essence of bitterness, the last drop in the vials of her wrath.

The youth turned and lifted his eyes, full of sorrowful sternness, to her face. "Then you did--you did!" He paused, and his lips began to tremble under the muttered reproaches that sprang up from his heart.

"Yes," cried the woman, weak in everything but her malice, "yes, then, I did order it done--these people have tormented me enough with their miserable old house, always before my eyes, and that grim ugly face staring at me as I go to church. I tell you they shall leave the

neighborhood, or I will. Give me the papers."

The youth lifted his eyes and regarded her sternly.

"They are cancelled, madam, and torn to ribbons, that our name might not be disgraced."

"Torn to pieces?"

"Into a thousand pieces, madam. I would have ground them to dust, if possible."

"You shall answer for this," cried the baffled woman, and with that sort of weak ferocity which is so repulsive, she sat down and began to cry.

The young man drew close to her chair, for though his whole soul recoiled from sympathy with her, he forced himself to remember that she was his mother, and in tears.

"Why do you dislike these old people so much?" he urged, with an attempt at soothing her.

"Because he liked them!" she answered, dashing his proffered hand aside; "because his low tastes followed him to the last; he was always talking of the creature that died the night you were born. He cared more for her to the last, than he ever did for me; and I hate them for it. Now, are you satisfied?"

"Mother, you are talking of things that I do not understand."

"Well, your father was engaged to Anna, the girl that died in the old hovel down yonder; engaged to her when he married me."

"Then my father committed a great wrong!"

"A great wrong! Who ever doubted it, I should like to know? Even to think of her after marrying me--to say nothing of the way he went on--sometimes talking about her in my presence, with tears in his eyes. Once, once, would you believe it! he said--to me--me, his lawful wife, that your eyes--it was when you just began to walk--that my own baby's eyes put him in mind of her."

"I know very little of my father, nothing in fact, for he was a reserved man, always; but it is hard to believe that he would willfully do this foul wrong to a woman."

"Willfully! I wish you could have seen him when I, with the proper spirit of a woman, felt it my duty to expostulate with him about his feelings for that creature; how he took me up as if I were to blame for being young and beautiful, and engaged in the bazar just under his hotel, as if I had some design in standing at the door about meal-times, or could help him coming in after collars and cravats

afterward, and, and"--

She stopped suddenly, and all the sallow wrinkles of her face burned with a crimson more vivid than exposure in the actual commission of a crime would have kindled there. Her mean spirit cowered beneath the looks of surprise that her son fixed upon her, as this confession of original poverty escaped her lips.

"I mean, I mean," she stammered, after biting her lips half through in impatient wrath, "that he should want my advice about such things before he was married."

It is a mournful thing when respect becomes a duty impossible to perform. Young Farnham felt this, and again his eyes drooped, while a flush of shame stole over his forehead.

"Well, madam," a woman of more sensitive feelings would have noticed that he did not call her mother, "well, madam, whatever cause of dislike may have been in this case, I cannot regret that all power to harm these old people is now at an end. The notes are cancelled, the money paid to your agent from my own pocket."

"But you had no right to pay this. You are not yet of age by some months. I will not sanction this extravagance."

"Nay, madam, this money is mine, and was saved from the extravagance that you did sanction. I had intended to purchase a gift for Isabel with it, but she will be better pleased as it is."

"To Isabel, five hundred dollars to Isabel!" cried the harsh woman.
"This is putting a beggar on horseback with a vengeance."

"Hush, madam, I will not listen to this; you know, or might have seen long before this, that the young girl your language insults, has refused to become my wife."

"Your wife! Isabel Chester your wife! A pauper, and the child of a pauper! Say it again, say that again if you dare!" cried the woman in a whirlwind of passion. "Say that the policeman's daughter has refused you!"

"When you are calmer, madam, I will repeat it, for no truth can be more fixed, but now it would only exasperate you."

"Go on--go on, let me hear it again. It proves the Farnham blood in your veins, always sighing and grovelling after low objects. Go on, sir, I am listening--you intend to make me mother-in-law to a pauper; a miserable thing that I took to keep me company, as I would a poodle-dog, and dressed and petted just in the same way. Marry her! try it, and I'll make a beggar of you!"

"I do not know that you have the power to make me a beggar, madam, but a slave you never shall make me; as for Isabel," he added, with a

scornful smile on his lips, firing up with something of her own ungovernable anger, "she is at least your equal and mine."

"_My_ equal, the pauper, the--the--oh--oh!"

Insane with bitter passion, the woman stamped her foot fiercely on the floor, and began tearing the delicate lace from her handkerchief with her teeth, laughter and hysterical sobs hissing through them at the same moment.

"Madam, restrain yourself," pleaded the young man, greatly shocked, "I have been to blame, I should have told you of this some other time."

"Never, never," she answered, tearing the handkerchief from her teeth, and dashing it fiercely to the floor. "The miserable Alms-House bird shall leave my roof. I have got her pauper garments yet--would you like to see them?--a blue chambrey frock and checked sun-bonnet--it was all she brought here--and shall be all she takes away."

Again she stamped fiercely with her foot, and menaced her son with her hand. "Send the girl to me, I say!"

"I am here, madam," said Isabel, arising from a chair by the door, where she had fallen paralyzed and unnoticed, on her entrance, just as her name was brought up. Her cheeks were in a blaze of red, and her eyes emitted quick gleams of light. "I am here to take leave of you for ever." Isabel's voice was constrained and hoarse; her face was white with passion.

"Isabel, Isabel Chester!" exclaimed young Farnham, turning pale, and yet with a glow of animation in his fine eyes, "my mother was angry; she would not repeat those offensive words; she loves you!"

"But I do not love her!" answered the proud girl, regarding the woman whom the world called her benefactress, with a glance of queenly scorn. "Her very kindness has always been oppressive; her presence almost hateful; now it is entirely so."

"Isabel, Isabel!" exclaimed the young man, "remember she is my mother, and you, beloved--oh, let me say to her, that you will be my wife!"

Isabel Chester turned her beautiful eyes upon him, and proud fire gleamed through the tears that filled them like star-light in the evening mist.

"No!" she answered in a very firm voice, "never will I become the wife of that woman's son. My very soul recoils from the thought that she who can so insult, ever had the power to confer benefits upon me. She is right; I will go forth in the pauper garments in which she found me at first. God has given me health, talent, energy; with his help I will yet repay this lady, dollar for dollar, all that she has ever expended on me. I shall never breathe deeply again till this is done."

"This is gratitude, this is just what I expected from the first," said Mrs. Farnham, applying the mutilated handkerchief to her eyes. "It's enough to sicken one with benevolence for ever. This girl, now, that I've educated, taught everything, music, painting, all the ologies and other sciences see how she has repaid me, after putting herself in the way of my son, and tempting him to degrade himself by marrying her!"

Young Farnham started forward and attempted to arrest Isabel, who had turned in proud silence, and was leaving the room.

"Isabel, where are you going?"

She turned, and looking into his anxious eyes, answered,

"Anywhere out of this house, and away from her presence."

"No, no, you shall not do this."

"I must; ask yourself if I could remain here another hour without being in soul what she has called me in name--a pauper."

Farnham paused. Rapid changes, the shadows of many a turbulent thought, swept over his face. Isabel lifted her eyes to his with a look of sorrowful appeal, as if in waiting for him to confirm her resolution.

"But where will you go, my Isabel?"

"I have not yet determined--but this lady has taught an to respect myself. I have been spending an idle, useless life, dependent on her bounty, a pet, a protegee which no human being endowed with health and energy should ever content herself with being. Henceforth I will redeem the past."

"Stay with me, my Isabel, stay in your own home, not as a dependent, not subject to any one's caprice. Isabel Chester throw off these cruel prejudices; become my wife, and this day shall you have a right here, holy as any that ever existed!"

"Farnham!" cried the old lady, starting fiercely upon the scene, "remember the difference, remember who she is, who you are and who I am!"

"He need not, madam. I remember all this. But only to assure myself that I am incapable of becoming his wife," answered Isabel. "Do not suppose that I have any of that miserable pride what would make me reject this noble offer, because, in the chances of life, he happens to be rich and I poor. I give to wealth no such importance. Human souls should match themselves without trappings, that have nothing to do with their greatness. To say that I will not marry Mr. Farnham because he would give me a legal right to spend wealth, which I have no power to increase, would be to acknowledge a mean reluctance to receive where I would gladly give. No, madam, it is not because I deem

myself in any way an unfit wife for Mr. Farnham, that I reject, gratefully reject, his offer; but I will never enter a family where these things can be supposed to give superiority, never while one of its members rejects me because of my poverty. More than this, I have taken a solemn vow, for causes for which you are not responsible, madam, never to marry your son."

"Isabel, Isabel!" exclaimed young Farnham, with a look of distress, "you cannot love me, or this pride--this wicked vow, would not separate us."

Isabel laid her hand on his arm; her eyes filled, and her lips began to tremble.

"I do love you, heart and soul I love you! but I cannot become your wife. It would be to separate the son from his mother; to grasp at happiness through an act of disobedience; it would be to mingle my life with--with--you know, Frederick, it is impossible."

"But my mother will consent," cried the young man, turning with a look of anxious appeal to Mrs. Farnham, who stood near a window, angrily beating the carpet with her foot.

"You needn't look this way--you needn't expect it. I never will give my consent. If Mr. Farnham's son chooses to marry a pauper, I will never own him again."

Isabel cast one sorrowful look at her lover, and feeling her eyes grow misty as they met his, turned away.

"I will go now," she said, in a hollow voice, and, with a heart that lay heavy and burning like heated lead in her bosom, she left the room.

Young Farnham followed her, pale and anxious.

"Isabel, sweet Isabel! you cannot be in earnest!"

"Miserably in earnest!" she answered, staggering blindly forward, for a faintness crept over her.

He caught her in his arms.

"I knew--I knew it could not be! you have no strength to put this cruel threat in force against me."

"Don't--oh! don't, I am faint, my heart is breaking--let me go while I can!"

She clung to him as she spoke, and rested her head wearily on his shoulder, as he strained her closer to his heart.

"Oh, my Isabel, you love me, you have told me so now for the first

time, with the very lips that renounce me for ever. You love me, Isabel!"

"You felt it--before this you knew it," she murmured amid her tears.

"Yes, yes, I felt it; what need has the heart of words? I felt it truly, as now; but the sound is so sweet from your lips. Isabel; say it again."

"Yes, why not, as we shall part so soon. I love you, oh, how much I love you!"

"Then stay with me."

"No, no!"

"I can and will protect you from every annoyance. Stay with me, Isabel!"

"Oh, if I could--if I only could!" cried the young creature, looking wistfully at him, "but that terrible, terrible oath."

"Forget it--the oath, if you made one, was an act of frenzy--cast it aside as such. You can, you will, my beloved. A little time, a little patience, and all will be well. Come, come, stop crying, my heart aches to see your tears. Be comforted, and say once more that you love me."

"I do, I do!"

"And that you will never leave me?"

She drew a deep, unsteady breath; her eyes began to brighten through their tears; he held her close to his breast, and pressed his lips, quivering with an ecstasy of love, upon her forehead.

"You will stay--you will stay!"

She released herself gently from his arms, her eyes were flooded with tenderness, her cheeks lighted up with a glow of joyous shame. With that graceful homage which comes so naturally to the heart of a loving woman, she took his hand and pressed it to her lips, and stood drooping beneath the overflow of tenderness that filled her heart, as a flower bends on its stock when loaded with honey-dew.

But this beautiful submission did not satisfy him; he encircled her again with his arm.

"Tell me in words, dearest--tell me in words, consenting words, or I shall gather them from your lips."

Blushing and agitated, she attempted to withdraw from his arms, but softly as a bird moves in its nest.

"Speak, Isabel--speak, and promise me!"

Her eyes were filled with tears, and her face burned with blushes; where was her pride, where all her haughty resolutions now? Her lips trembled apart, and the words he coveted were forming upon them--but that instant the door opened, and Mrs. Farnham looked through, regarding them with a cold sneer.

Isabel started as if a viper had stung her, tore herself from Farnham's arms, and fled.

CHAPTER XLV.

OLD MEMORIES AND YOUNG HEARTS.

Away, away, on the wide, wide world--
With aching heart and fevered brain,
Like a broken waif she is sharply hurled,
To her dreary orphan life again.

When uncle Nathan led his nephew into the house, and told aunt Hannah who he was, she grew pallid as a corpse, and when the young man took her hand, she began to shiver from head to foot, till the chattering of her teeth was audible in the stillness.

"It is our nephew, little Anna's boy, come to live with us, Hannah."

"To live with us?" she repeated, in a hoarse voice.

"Yes," answered uncle Nathan, taking the youth's hand between both his plump palms, and smoothing it caressingly as he would have quieted a kitten, for he felt all the chill that was in her voice. Where else should our sister's child make his home?"

"But his father?"

"My father is dead," answered the youth, sadly, "and before he went I was told of all your kindness, how for years your own means of livelihood had been stinted that I might become perfect in my art. I have not wasted your means, and some day, God willing, may return something of all that you have done for me."

Aunt Hannah listened in silence, but her eyes burned in their sockets, and her hands worked nervously around each other. Happily the youth saw nothing of this, or he might have doubted the welcome so expressed.

It was now late in the night, and with anxious haste aunt Hannah

turned to a stand, where an iron candlestick supported the end of what had been a tallow candle.

"We are all tired," she said, presenting the candlestick to uncle Nathan. "He can sleep in the spare bed up stairs."

Uncle Nat took the candle and conducted his relative from the room, leaving aunt Hannah standing by the hearth, pale and almost as rigid as marble.

After a little she began to pace up and down the kitchen with measured strides, her eyes cast down, and her fingers locked together as if made of iron. Thus the morning found her, for she did not go to rest that night.

A few days after, just before sunset, uncle Nat was enjoying himself as usual in the old porch, while Mary Fuller and Joseph sat together on the threshold of the door, conversing in low tones between the impromptu air which he gave to them in delicious snatches. Behind, in the dark of the kitchen, sat aunt Hannah, gazing over her knitting-work at the group. Her hands were motionless upon the needles, and she seemed lost in profound thought. All at once her lips moved, and she muttered,

"Yes, they, too, will love each other. I can see it plainly enough. Poor Mary, how he turns to her voice, how greedily he listens when she speaks; can the love of childhood revive so suddenly? But what do I know of love, save its humiliation and pain--rejected, despised, trampled on!"

Here her hands began to tremble, and she worked her needles for a moment, vigorously, but made another abrupt pause the minute after, and thus her thoughts ran,

"Well, why should they not marry, these two noble creatures? She is dearer than a child to us, the true-hearted Mary, and he--who could help being good under the care of a father like Esmond? She loves him, I can see it in her eyes, in the quiet humility of her look; she loves him, and he loves her; they will soon find it out, but the others, I must see the young man; I must try to read all these young hearts."

Aunt Hannah was disturbed in her reverie by a light step that came through the outer room, followed by the quick opening of a door, and Isabel Chester entered the kitchen.

Poor Isabel! her eyes sparkled wildly through their tears, her face was flushed, her lips quivering, and the rich masses of her hair hung in waves around her head. Still was she wondrously beautiful, for grief softened a style of loveliness sometimes too brilliant and imperious. In tears, Isabel was always sweet and womanly. She was a being to cherish as well as to admire.

She entered hurriedly, and flinging back the shawl, of mingled colors,

that partially covered her head, looked eagerly around.

"Mary, where is Mary Fuller?" she inquired, "I wish to speak with Mary Fuller."

Mary heard her voice and sprang up.

"Oh! Isabel, this is kind, I am glad you have come so soon."

"Come with me, Mary. I must speak with you."

"Let us go up to my room," said Mary, with some excitement, when she saw the flushed face and agitated manner of her friend.

"Mary, Mary, come here, hold my head against your bosom, it aches, oh, it aches terribly," cried Isabel, reaching out her arms as she sunk on the bed in Mary's room. "I have come to live with you dear Mary, tell me I am welcome, oh, tell me I shall not be turned out of doors. I ask nothing better than to stay at the Old Homestead all my life."

"You are sick, darling Isabel, very sick, to talk so wildly," said Mary, striving to soothe her excitement; "why, you would seem like a bird of paradise in a robin's nest here at the Old Homestead--yes, yes you are sick, Isabel, your hands are burning, your lips mutter these things strangely; what has come over you?"

"I have left Mrs. Farnham for good!" exclaimed Isabel, starting up and pushing the hair back from her temples. "I shall never see Frederick again, never, never--Mary, Mary Fuller, I know this is death, my heart seems clutched with an iron claw."

"Try and be calm, dear Isabel--if you have really left Mrs. Farnham, tell me, how it all came about, and what I can do."

"She taunted me with my poverty--she flung the Alms-House in my teeth--oh, Mary, Mary, dependence on that woman has been a burning curse to my nature--oh I would die for the power to fling back all the money she heaped upon me. It crushes my life out."

"Hush, hush Isabel, this is wicked rebellion--one insult should not cancel a life of benefits," said Mary, very gently.

Isabel laughed wildly. "Benefits! What have they made me? a beggar and an outcast. Where can I find support out of all the frothy accomplishments she has given me? Not one useful thing has she ever taught me. You, Mary, are independent, for you work for your daily bread--no one can call you a pauper."

"And you have really left Mrs. Farnham?" said Mary, smoothing down Isabel's disturbed tresses with her two palms, "and you would like to live here at the Old Homestead, I hope, oh, how much I hope that it can be so."

"I have been wandering in the woods for hours, trying to think what was best. I have no friend but you, Mary. Among all my fine acquaintances, no one would stand by me. Let me stay, Mary, and make me good like the rest of you--I wish we had never parted!"

"Lie still and rest, darling--I know aunt Hannah will let you stay--don't mind the expense or trouble, for I'll tell you a secret; Isabel, Joseph has been teaching me to paint, and in a little while he says I can make the most beautiful pictures, and sell them for money--besides, don't say that you can do nothing; out of all these pretty accomplishments it will be strange if you can't make a living without hard work too."

"Dear, dear Mary, how you comfort me!" was the grateful answer, given in the quick, rapid enunciation of coming fever. "You will ask aunt Hannah for me, but Mary, she must not let Frederick Farnham come here!"

"Why not? how can you ask it, he who paid their debts and saved them from so much sorrow?"

Isabel drew Mary close to her and whispered in a wild hoarse way, "We love each other; he wants me to become his wife, but I have taken an oath, a great black oath against it."

"An oath!" said Mary, half doubting if this were not all feverish raving.

"Yes, yes, an oath. You would not let me marry among my father's murderers--oh, I was dreadfully tempted, but the oath saved me, and I am here!"

Mary became terrified, there was too much earnestness among the fire of poor Isabel's eyes. Had she in reality taken an oath of this kind, and was it working out its own curse?

"Ask her, ask aunt Hannah if I can stay," pleaded Isabel; "these clothes are so heavy I want to get into bed where no one can find me--my head aches--my heart aches, oh, I am very miserable!"

"I will call aunt Hannah," said Mary; "we will ask her together."

Isabel burst into a passion of tears. "Yes, go now, while my head is clear, put some more cold water on it, that is so cool, go Mary."

Mary went softly down stairs.

Aunt Hannah had looked keenly after the girls as they disappeared. She dropped the knitting-work into her lap, and sat gazing hard at the door long after it was closed.

She was still motionless, gazing on the distance in this hard fashion, when the door was pushed open and Mary Fuller looked out.

"Aunt Hannah, dear aunt Hannah, will you come up here?" she cried in an excited voice, "Isabel and I want you."

Aunt Hannah arose, folded her needles, closed them at the end with a pressure of the thumb, and thrust them into the ball of yarn, muttering all the time,

"I could not help it if I wanted to," and she mounted the stairs.

Isabel Chester lay on the bed, white with anguish, but with a feverish heat burning in her eyes. The shawl, with its many gorgeous tints, lay around her, mingling with her purple dress in picturesque confusion. She tried to sit up when aunt Hannah approached the bed, but instantly lifted both hands to her temples, and fell back again moaning bitterly.

"Ask her, ask her," she cried, looking wildly up at Mary Fuller, "I have been wandering in the hills so long, and am tired out. Ask her for me, Mary Fuller."

Aunt Hannah sat down upon the bed, and Mary Fuller stood before her holding Isabel's hot hand in both hers. With the eloquence which springs from an earnest purpose, she told aunt Hannah all that she had herself been able to gather from the lips now quivering with a chill that preceded violent fever. It was a disjointed narrative, but full of heart-fire. Mary wept as she gave it; but aunt Hannah sat perfectly passive, gazing upon the beautiful creature before her with steady coldness.

When Mary had done, and stood breathlessly waiting for a reply, the old lady moved stiffly as if the silence had aroused her.

"Then she wishes to stay with us," she said.

Isabel started up. "I will be no expense, I can paint, and embroider and sew! I can do so many things. All I want is a home. Give me that, only that!"

She fell back again, shivering and distressed, looking up to aunt Hannah with a glance of touching appeal that disturbed even the composure of that stony face.

"You will let her stay with us!" pleaded Mary.

"What else should we do?" inquired aunt Hannah. "She wants a home, and we have got one to give her. Isn't that enough?"

Isabel, who had been looking up with a vivid hope in her eyes, broke into a hysterical laugh at this, and seizing aunt Hannah's hard hand, kissed it with passionate gratitude.

"One word," questioned aunt Hannah; "do you love that young man?"

"Love him, oh, yes, yes, a thousand times, yes!" cried the poor girl, and the sparkle of her eyes was painful to look upon "I think it must kill me to see him no more. I am sure it must!"

"And you are sure he loves you?"

"_Sure_?" she cried, flinging out her clasped hands, "sure, yes, as I am of my own life!"

"And you believe him to be a good man?"

"I know it, have we not grown up together? He is passionate, proud, impulsive--but noble. I tell you his faults would be virtues in other men."

As aunt Hannah listened, there came a glow upon her sallow cheeks, and a soft smile to her lips, as if something in Isabel's wild enthusiasm had given her pleasure.

"She shall stay with us! Surely with all our debts paid, we can find room for the child!"

"Room--room for the pauper--room!"

Isabel had caught the word, and sent it back again with wild glee, half singing half shouting it through her burning lips. The fever was beginning to rage through her veins.

Three times that night aunt Hannah went to the front door, to answer the eager questions of young Farnham, who had been wandering for hours in sight of the house. At last, as if struck with sudden compassion, the old lady invited him into the kitchen, and these two seemingly uncongenial persons, sat and conversed together with strange confidence till the day dawned.

When young Farnham arose to go, he took the aged hand of his companion and pressed it to his lips, with a homage to years acquired from abroad. He did not see the blood flush up into that withered face, or the tears that gathered slowly into her eyes; and was therefore, surprised when she arose, and as if actuated by an unconquerable impulse, kissed his forehead.

"Good-bye," she said, in a broken voice, "the poor girl up stairs shall not die for want of nursing."

"How good you are!" said the young man; "how can I ever repay you?"

Aunt Hannah looked at him with strange fondness.

"You paid our debts last night," she said, "or we might have had no home to give this girl."

"That was nothing, never mention it again."

"Nothing, why, boy, it was an act that you shall never forget to your dying day."

"Save _her_, and that will be an act that I shall never forget."

"Do you love her so much, then?"

"Love! I worship her--I can hardly remember the time when I did not love her!"

"And what would you sacrifice for her?"

"What? Everything."

"Stop and answer me steadily. If you could choose between all the property left by your father and Isabel Chester, which would you take?"

"Which would I take? Labor, poverty, and my Isabel. The property! what has it of value in comparison to this noble girl? I answer again Isabel, Isabel!"

A singular expression stole into the old woman's face.

"Would you live here, and work the place, when Nathan and I are too old, if you were sure of her for a wife?"

"I would do anything with her and for her," cried the youth, ardently.

"And," continued aunt Hannah, in a broken voice, still eyeing him anxiously--"you would find a corner for two old people somewhere in the homestead!"

"This is wild talk," said the young man, with a troubled smile. "I am my father's heir, and have no right to throw away his wealth; so it is useless talking of what I might, or could, do, under other circumstances."

"Then you would not be content to live here with your wife, and support yourself from the place?"

"I did not say so--but that it was impossible. Heaven knows I count wealth as nothing compared to Isabel."

"Then you only think of her, you care nothing for, for "--

Aunt Hannah paused, and put a hand to her throat, as if the words she suppressed pained her.

"I care for her, and for all that have been kind to her, now or ever," he replied, impressively; "most of all I am grateful to yourself."

"Once again," said aunt Hannah, clinging tenaciously to the point which seemed to interest her so much, "if you could not marry Isabel Chester without becoming as poor, for instance, as Joseph Esmond is--would you give up all and marry her?"

"Once again, then, yes, I would."

"And be happy after it?"

"With _her_, yes!"

"But you have never worked?"

"I can learn!"

"You are learned and love to mingle with great men. You are proud, and this is a poor old house!" She argued so earnestly that he could not refrain from smiling.

"I fancy, if the need come, I would get along with all these difficulties, without much regret. But this is idle speculation. In another month I shall be of age; then no one can claim legal authority over me or mine. I know there is great wealth to be accounted for, but have never known how much, or what restrictions are upon it. If it leaves me at liberty to marry Isabel, and she will give up this cruel resolve to abandon me, for her sake independence shall be welcome, if not, then I will answer your questions more promptly than you perhaps expect."

"That girl will never marry your mother's son--she has taken an oath against it."

"She shall marry me. Who can help it? Do we not love each other? If her proud spirit rejects the property, so be it--I care as little for gold as she does. As for that miserable oath, it is worthless as the wind, taken in a moment of romantic excitement. The angels do not register oaths like that."

"I say it again, Isabel Chester will not marry Mrs. Farnham's son," persisted aunt Hannah.

And she was right.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE MOTHER'S FRAUD.

That solemn oath is on my soul,

Its weight is creeping through my life--
It binds me with a firm control,
I cannot--cannot be thy wife!

Frederick Farnham would not leave the country. With the resolution of a strong will he persisted in treating Isabel's vow as nothing, and would not be convinced that she might not herself see it in this light at last. As for his mother, one month more and he would be of age, and her power over him must give way; surely Isabel would recognize his independent position then.

Every day he went to the Old Homestead with renewed hope, and left it in disappointment. Isabel's recovery was protracted till even the physician believed that she was sinking into a decline. She could not see Frederick in her wretched state, the excitement would have killed her.

Oh, that rash, rash oath! In the pure atmosphere of her new home, with the invigorating influence of Mary Fuller's cheerful piety and rare good sense assuming its former sway, Isabel began to see her act in its true light, but repentance could not expunge the black vow from her soul. It was devouring her vitality like a vampire.

At last she came down stairs; the doctor thought it possible, that one unvaried scene retarded her advancement, and, one day, Frederick was surprised by a vision of her pale loveliness, as she sat in her easy-chair, by a window of the room in which sister Anna died.

Reverently and almost holding his breath, with intense feeling, young Farnham stole up to this window.

"Isabel, my Isabel!"

She started, with a faint shriek.

"Are you afraid, Isabel? has the sight of me become a terror," he said, sadly.

"No, no," answered the young girl, and her eyes filled; "I wanted to see you; it was for this I consented to come down stairs."

"Bless you for that, darling."

"I wanted to tell you how very, very sorry I am for having taken that wicked oath. It was against you, Frederick, but more against my own heart; I think that one sin will kill me in the end!"

"Then you repent. You see how romantic and foolish it was, how like a puff of wind it ought to be on your conscience. We shall be happy yet, dear Isabel!"

The poor girl shook her head.

"It was foolish--cruel, but unchangeable, Frederick; I have fastened it here between your love and mine for ever and ever. I haughtily fancied myself an avenger. Behold, to what it has brought me!"

Isabel lifted her thin hand, which was so pale you could almost see the light shining through it.

"Yes, my poor Isabel, you have suffered, and this wild resolve has given me so much pain. Let us cease to remember it; get well--only get well! When your mind is strong you will look upon all this as I do."

"Oh, how I wish it were possible! but even Mary considers a vow, such as I have taken, binding, so does aunt Hannah, so must every unprejudiced person."

"They are all stupid--no, no, I did not mean that--but it's not the less nonsense. What can a nice little thing like Mary or that old maid, aunt Hannah, know of subtle questions in moral philosophy? I tell you, Isabel, a wicked promise, that can do no good, but infinite harm, ought not to be kept. Besides, that vow was not solemnly taken, it was an outbreak of enthusiasm, brought on by the gorgeous twilight of that old edifice--the music and atmosphere. It was a vow of the senses, not of the soul."

Poor Isabel was so feeble, so completely incapable of reasoning justly, that she dared not listen to these ingenious arguments, for she was growing keenly conscientious, and feared that weakness might betray her into a fresh wrong.

"Do not talk to me in this way just now," she said, gently. "Let me rest."

Frederick gathered hope from her gentleness, and his voice trembled with affection, as he promised not to excite her again.

"Only get well by my birth-day, Isabel," he said; "have the roses on your cheeks then, and all will end happily."

In spite of herself, a gleam of hope brightened in Isabel's eyes; her resolution was not shaken, but there was so much warmth in his faith that she could not choose but share it with him. She went up to her chamber that night invigorated and almost cheerful.

When this conversation was repeated to Mary, she looked serious, and said very tenderly:

"Not in that way, Isabel. It was a vow taken before the Most High--besides," she added, with a faint tremor of the voice, "there does seem to be something that shocks the feelings in this marriage. It may be prejudice, but I should shrink from marrying a Farnham had I your father's blood in my veins."

Isabel's cheerfulness fled with these words, and she drooped more

despondingly than ever.

But aunt Hannah was earnest in comforting her, and though she gave no tangible grounds for hope, the confidence that woman of few words expressed in the future, gave Isabel new strength.

Salina, too, with her warm defence of Frederick's course--her contempt for vows of any kind--for in this she was an intensely strong-minded woman--and her detestation of Mrs. Farnham, served to strengthen the life in that drooping form. In spite of her hopelessness, Isabel grew perceptibly better; but with this slow gathering of strength came back the old struggle; nothing had been changed. How could she ever be well again with this eternal strife between her conscience and her heart?

Cold weather came on, producing no event at the Old Homestead. Uncle Nathan stationed his easy-chair by the kitchen fire, but insisted on resigning it to Isabel whenever she came down to sit with the family. Aunt Hannah became more and more lonesome, but was always keenly observant, and towards the young girls her kindness was exhibited in a thousand noiseless ways, that filled their warm hearts with gratitude. Young Farnham had been to the city, and it was only two evenings before his birth-day that he returned.

Since the time when Isabel left his house, he had avoided all conversation with his mother regarding the young girl, and Mrs. Farnham, after sending the poor girl's wardrobe after her, seemed to have forgotten that such a being existed, except that she talked to her son about the ingratitude of the world in general, and of poorhouse creatures in particular.

The young man had a clear head and a firm will, that might waver to circumstances, but seldom swerved entirely from its object. His resolution to marry Isabel Chester was unshaken, even by the firmness of the young lady herself. He was resolved to conquer the prejudice, as he thought it, which was the great obstacle to their immediate union. His mother's consent he did not despair of attaining.

The night after he returned home, Mrs. Farnham was in a state of remarkable good humor. Frederick had brought her pleasant news from the city. The house they had been building in one of the avenues was completed, and ready for its furniture. There was a promise of endless shopping excursions and important business of all kinds. The lady was heartily tired of her present still life, and found the prospect of returning to town, under these circumstances, exhilarating.

"I am glad you are so well pleased," said Frederick, seating himself among the silken cushions of the couch, upon which his mother had placed herself; for, as we have said, Mrs. Farnham affected great splendor even in her country residence.

"I am glad you are pleased, mother, for I wish very much to see you happy."

"Oh, if it hadn't been for that wicked upstart girl we should always have been happy, Fred. I'm so grateful that you have got over that degrading fancy," said Mrs. Farnham, a little anxiously, for with that low-born cunning which is the wisdom of silly women, she took this indirect way of ascertaining whether Frederick really held to his attachment for the wronged girl or not.

"Such a catch as you are, Fred; young, handsome and a millionaire, to throw yourself away on a pauper, when half the most fashionable girls in town are dressing and dancing at you."

"Hush, mother," said the young man, I cannot hear you speak lightly of Isabel, for God willing, if I can win her consent, the day I am of age makes her my wife."

"Are you crazy, Farnham? how dare you say this to me?"

"Because it's the truth, mother."

"And you will brave me! you will bring a pauper into my house! be careful, sir, be careful!"

"Mother, in this thing, I must judge for myself. My father, I know, intended that I should, else why did he leave me, untrammelled as I am?"

Mrs. Farnham started up--her pale blue eyes gleamed venomously. She stood for a moment, growing paler, and more repulsive; some evil idea evidently possessed her.

"Be careful, be careful," she said, shaking her finger at him, menacingly, "do not provoke me--don't go a step farther, or I will prove how far you are untrammelled. Another word and there will be no medium between my love and my hate."

"Mother, are you mad?"

"Mother, indeed! I have been a mother to you. I've done what few mothers would have the courage to undertake for a child, but what I have done can be taken back--don't provoke me, I tell you, again, Frederick Farnham--don't provoke your mother."

"Oh, be a mother, a true-hearted woman," cried Fred, imploringly; "Isabel will love you; be kind to her."

Mrs. Farnham drew back, and folded her arms in an attitude she had seen Rachel assume on the stage, and which she deemed very imposing.

"Frederick Farnham, if you marry that girl I will bring you to her level--I will make a pauper of you."

Frederick smiled; the whole thing struck him as a farce badly played.

"I shall certainly marry her, if she will accept me," he said, coldly.

Mrs. Farnham strode from the room, sweeping by her son with a furious display of temper. Directly she returned with a folded paper in her hand.

"Here, sir, is your father's will, made out by his own hand, three days before his death; we shall prove how far it makes you independent of your mother."

"My father's will!" exclaimed Frederick, turning white with surprise; "my father's will in your hands, and produced for the first time! Madam, explain this."

The stern paleness of his face struck the woman with terror; the passion that had made her forget everything but revenge, was quenched beneath his firm glance. She began to tremble, and attempted to hide the paper in the folds of her dress.

"Promise me to give up this girl, and I will burn it," she said, with a frightened look. "It was for your sake I kept it back; he wanted to give your fortune away; I could not stand it, besides no one asked for the will; promise me, and I'll burn it."

"I will make no promise. If that is my father's will give it to me and it shall be acted upon, though every cent I have be swept away. Give me the will, madam."

"No, no, don't ask for it. There is a medium in all things; I was angry, I did not mean what I said."

"Oblige me, madam, I must see that paper--mother, I will see it!" exclaimed Frederick, impetuously, as she crumpled the document tightly in her hand, retreating backward from the room with her eyes fixed upon his with the expression of a weak child, detected in its wickedness.

"How dare you, Frederick Farnham, how dare you speak to your mother in that tone?" she said, in a voice that was half defiant, half reproachful, still retreating from him.

"It is useless, mother, I demand that paper! It must be placed in the hand of my guardian."

"It never shall!" cried the mother, darting through the door; and rushing toward the kitchen with angry swiftness, she dashed the paper over Salina's shoulder into a huge fire that blazed in the chimney.

Frederick followed her, pale with excitement.

"You have not, mother, you dare not!"

Mrs. Farnham broke into a hysterical laugh.

"It's burned--it's ashes!" she said. "Oh, Frederick, what a mother I have been to you."

Farnham turned away, muttering gloomily to himself. The old lady followed him.

"Don't be angry, Fred, I did it for your good, for your own good; nobody is hurt by it but myself; I lose all authority over you now. Why, Fred, by that will, if you'd persisted in marrying without my consent, the whole property would have been--yes, would have been mine. See what I have sacrificed to you; but there is a medium in everything but a mother's love. I could have forced you to give up that girl, but see how I have destroyed my own power. You will remember this, dear boy, and not break my heart by this low match."

"Mother, if that paper was my father's will, you have committed a great wrong--a serious legal wrong. I cannot be grateful for it, I can never respect you again."

Mrs. Farnham began to cry.

"There it is," she said. "If I have done any wrong, it's you that urged me to it; as for that will, I always meant to keep the just medium between right and wrong, and let the thing rest in my writing-desk without saying a word about it. I wouldn't have burned it--nor have touched it again on any account, but you made me do both. First you provoked me to bring it out from where it had rested innocent as a lamb for so many years. Then, as if that wasn't enough, the way you went on was so dreadful. You drove me to it; what else could you expect from a mother's love, especially such a mother as I have been to you, Frederick?"

Farnham was still excited, but sternly thoughtful.

"Mother," he said, "I must know what the will contained. It shall be acted upon to the very letter. You know its contents; tell me on your honor as a lady, on your honesty as a woman, all that you remember of it, word for word."

"No!" said Mrs. Farnham, petulantly, "I won't say a word about it, I won't own that there ever was a will; but if you'll be quiet, to-morrow Mr. Wales, my lawyer will be up. I sent for him to meet your guardian and myself on your birth-day, to help about settling the affairs, he will talk with you."

"Beit so, mother, but remember this testament must be carried out to the letter."

"Very well; I'll consult about it, we shall be able to strike a medium yet. Fred, you may not believe it, but you've got a mother, a true mother, one in ten thousand, Frederick Farnham."

By the way Mrs. Farnham withdrew, one might have fancied she had done a meritorious thing in concealing, and at last destroying her husband's will. Indeed she had convinced herself of this, and went out with an air of great self-complacency.

CHAPTER XLVII.

SALINA BOWLES' MISSION.

With an honest purpose, whatever betide,
She stands like a pillar of native stone,
Firm and rough, with a cap of pride--
Till her trust is given, her mission done.

With characteristic reverence for ancient usages, Salina Bowles set herself resolutely against all cooking-stoves, modern ranges and inventions of that class. That exemplary female was often heard to declare that no decent meal could ever be cooked by any of these new-fangled contrivances. A hickory back log, and good oak-wood answered her purpose quite well enough. Only give her plenty of them and she'd cook a dinner with any woman on this side of sundown. From these prejudices it happened that Salina, in order to prepare the late dinner with which Mrs. Farnham usually taxed all her culinary genius, had built a huge wood-fire, and was planting again even on the hearth before it, when a folded paper flashed over her shoulder, and rushing through the flames fell behind the back log.

Salina rose promptly upright, gave Mrs. Farnham a sharp look, and stooped to pick up the comb that had been knocked loose from her hair. When her eyes fell once again on the young man and his mother, she began deliberately twisting up her hair, while the brief dialogue we have recorded passed between them.

After they went out, Salina removed her tin oven from before the fire, took up a huge pair of tongs and deliberately fished out Mr. Farnham's will from behind the back-log. It had been a good deal blackened and scorched at the edges in its passage through the flames, but the writing was only slightly obliterated. Salina, who had no scruples against reading a document so obtained, recognized the signature, and gathered enough from the contents to be certain that it was an important paper.

She thrust the will into her bosom with great deliberation, replaced her tin oven on the hearth, and went on with her work as usual. Once or twice she paused in her occupation, and seemed pondering over some idea in her mind, but when the other servants came in she said nothing of the subject of her thoughts. The moment dinner was over, which Mrs. Farnham partook of alone. Salina put on her sun-bonnet and shawl, merely saying that "she was going out a spell," and took a short cut

across the fields towards Judge Sharp's house, leaving the Old Homestead on her right, determined not to visit that till after her errand was accomplished.

The judge was a little surprised when Salina appeared before him with a peremptory request that he would leave his women folks and give her a few words with him alone.

He went into the library and closed the door, wondering in his mind what could have brought that interesting female into his presence, with her face so full of mysterious importance.

Salina folded her shawl close over her bosom while she drew forth the will.

"Here, Judge, you may as well take charge of that concern, I reckon; being a friend of the family, you'll know best what to do with it."

The Judge unfolded the paper and glanced at the first page. His eyes began to fill with astonishment.

"Why, where on earth did you get this?" he said.

"I got it honestly, and that's enough; if it's all right I'll go."

"But tell me something more about it," persisted the judge.

"Least said soonest mended; I ain't a female traitor and spy, nor nothing of that sort! what you've got you've got! It ain't of no consequence where you got it, or how you got it, it's there, and that's enough?"

"But, but"--

"I'm in a hurry, the dishes ain't washed up yet."

"Indeed Salina you must tell me!"

Salina folded her blanket-shawl tightly around her upright person.

"Judge Sharp, it's of no use--I'm flint."

With these words that strong-minded female turned, with her nose in the air, and left the room, planting her footsteps with great firmness, as if she meant by their very sound to impress the judge with the strength of her determination.

"I hate the woman like rank poison," she said while wading through the stubble behind uncle Nat's barn on her way home, "but her name is Farnham, and it'd be mean as a nigger and meaner too for me to say a word about that document; let Judge Sharp cipher out his own sums if he wants to, I ain't a-going to help him--there!"

With this exclamation, the strong-minded woman returned home, perfectly satisfied with her mission and herself.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE DOUBLE CONFESSION.

Ask her not why her heart has lost its lightness,
And hoards its dreamy thoughts, serenely still,
Like some pure lotus flower, that folds its whiteness
Upon the bosom of its native rill!

"Mary Fuller, what ails you? All this time your eyes are heavy, and you look every other minute as if just going to cry. What is it all about?"

This was a long speech for aunt Hannah, and it made Mary start and blush like a guilty thing, especially as it followed a protracted silence that had been disturbed only by the click of aunt Hannah's knitting-needles.

"Matter with me, aunt? Nothing. What makes you think of me at all?"

"Because it is my duty to think of you. Because there is need that some one should take care of you."

"Of me?" said Mary, blushing to the temples, "what have I done, aunt?"

"What everything of womankind must do, sooner or later, I suppose, my poor girl."

"What is that, dear aunt?" faltered the girl.

The old lady laid down her knitting, and leaned on the candle-stand with both her elbows; thus her aged face drew close to that of the young girl.

"You have begun to love this artist youth, Mary Fuller!" she said, in a low whisper, for the very name of love pained her old heart as a sudden shock sends veins of silver along a sheet of ice. "Don't cry, Mary; don't cry; it is a great misfortune, but no fault. How could you help it, poor child!"

"Oh! aunt Hannah, how did you find this out?" whispered the shame-stricken girl, "I thought"--

"That nobody knew it but yourself. Well, well, don't look so frightened; it's no reason that others know it because I do."

"And Joseph, do you think? do you believe? I would not think it for a moment," she continued, with the most touching humility, "but he cannot fancy such a thing--and so I--I did not know but"--

"I think he loves you, Mary Fuller!" answered the old lady, breaking through her hesitating phrases, in womanly pity of her embarrassment.

Mary started as if a blow had fallen upon her.

"Oh! don't, don't, I dare not believe it. What? me?--me? Please don't say this, aunt Hannah, it makes the very heart quiver in my bosom."

"I am sure he loves you, Mary, or I would not say it. Do I ever joke? Am I blind at heart?"

Mary Fuller covered her face, while great sobs of joy broke in her bosom, and rushed in tears to her eyes.

"Oh! I am faint--I shall die of this great joy--but oh! if you should be mistaken!"

"But I am not. How should I be mistaken? When a mother buries her child deep in the grave-yard, does she forget what mothers' love is? Those who forget their youth in happiness may be deceived. I never can!"

"And you think he loves me?"

Mary leaned forward and laid her clasped hands pleadingly on the knotted fingers of the old maid.

Aunt Hannah looked down almost tenderly through her spectacles, and a smile crept over her mouth.

"I know he loves you."

Mary Fuller's radiant face drooped forward at these words, and she fell to kissing these old hands eagerly, as if the knotted veins were filled with honey dew upon which her heart feasted.

"Stop, stop!" said aunt Hannah, withdrawing her hands, and laying them softly on the bowed head of her protege, "don't give way so; remember Joseph is very feeble yet, from the fever that nearly cost him his life, and that he has nothing to live on but what he calls his art; Nathan and I might help him, but we have only a few acres of land to live on, and are getting older every day. There is not the strength of one robust man among us all--to say nothing of the poor girl up stairs."

"But he loves me. Oh! aunt, you are sure of that?"

"But how can he marry you, poor as he is, with no more power to work than a child?"

"Marry me! I never thought of that," said the girl, lifting her face all in a glow from her hands, "but he will live here always, and so will I. Morning and night, and all day long I shall see him, hear his music, watch the changes of his beautiful, beautiful face. You may grow old as fast as you like, you and uncle Nat; I can support you, he will teach me to paint pictures, and we can sell them in the city. Besides, Joseph can make music on the violin, and I have learned to write it out on paper. The rich people in New York will give money for music and pictures like his, I know; you shall not work so hard after this, aunt Hannah; and as for uncle Nat, he shall snooze in his easy-chair all day long if he likes."

Aunt Hannah shook her head, and a mist stole over her spectacles. She was getting very childish in her old age, that stern old maid.

"You are a nice girl, Mary," she said, "and mean right, I know. But Joseph will never be content to let you support him if you had the strength. He is very manly and proud with all his softness."

"I know it, aunt, but then remember I am like his sister."

"But sisters do not support their brothers, and men do not like to take favors where they ought to give them."

"Oh! aunt Hannah, you make me so unhappy. What difference can it make which does the work where two people love each other?"

"This," answered the old maid; "women were born to look upward with their hearts and cling to others for support--men were made to give this support. You cannot change places and be happy!"

"I see, I see," murmured Mary Fuller, thoughtfully, "but Joseph will get well again; only think how much better he is since he came to the Old Homestead."

That moment Joseph came in from the garden, where he had been walking by himself, for the day was fine, and he loved to gratify his eye for colors, even among the vegetable beds and coarse garden flowers, and had been quietly enjoying them till the dusk drove him in-doors.

Mary looked toward him wistfully. She remembered that for some days he had seemed sad and preoccupied, going alone by himself and drawing only sad strains from his violin.

"Aunt Hannah, I am glad you are here," said the youth, moving slowly toward his seat by the stand; "I want to talk a little with you!"

Mary had drawn back as he came in; there was no candle lighted, and she was lost in shadow.

As he spoke, Mary started and would have gone out, but aunt Hannah extended her hands to prevent it, and the youth sat down sighing

heavily, doubtless unconscious of her presence. Two or three times, as was his habit when thoughtful, he drew the slender fingers of his right hand through his hair, scattering the curls back on his temples. At length he spoke, but with hesitation.

"Aunt!"

"Well, Joseph!" and the old lady began to knit.

"Aunt, I come to say"--He paused, and drew the hand once or twice across his forehead, as if to sweep aside some inward pain. Aunt Hannah remained silent, knitting diligently.

"I must go away from here, aunt; you have given me shelter when I most needed it. Now I must take to the world again."

Mary listened with a sinking heart and parted lips that grew cold and white with each word. At last a wild sob arose in her throat, and the veins upon her forehead swelled with the effort she made to suppress it.

"You wish to leave us, then?" questioned aunt Hannah, coldly, "and why?"

"My life is idle here, utterly idle and dependent. God did not smite all the pride from my soul when he took my father. I cannot live on the toil of two old people whom my own hands should support."

"But you are welcome Joseph; and we love to have you with us."

"I know it--still, this should make me only more anxious to relieve your generosity of its burden."

"This is not all," said aunt Hannah, mildly, "you keep the principal reason back for leaving us, tell me what it is?"

"Perhaps I ought--though the reason I have given should be enough. Yes, aunt, there is another motive--do not laugh at my folly, that I cannot dwarf myself and become a helpless nonentity, without a struggle to grasp the blessings so much desired by other men. It has been a happy time that I have known at the Old Homestead, still what has it secured to me but unrest, and such disquiet as will follow me through life, unless I work out a destiny for myself like other men?"

He broke off, hesitating for words, and a faint blush stole over his face even in the darkness.

Aunt Hannah felt his embarrassment, and had compassion on him.

"I know all about it," she said, quietly, "you love Mary Fuller. She is a good girl. Why not?"

"Why not?" exclaimed the youth, passionately, "I am penniless? Nay, it

is more than probable that I may never be really strong again."

"That is God's work, but no fault of yours!"

"But how can I support a wife? I who cannot earn bread for myself?"

"You wish to leave Mary then?"

"_Wish_ to leave her! Do the angels wish to flee from paradise, when all its flowers are in blossom? No, bear with me, good aunt. It may be folly, but, I have some power. Let me try it. Every year sends a troop of persons to our country who turn their talent into gold. Why should not I?"

"And what would you do then?" inquired the old lady.

"What should I do!" exclaimed the youth, with enthusiasm. "Why, return to you with the money I had earned, and, instead of a burden, become a protector to your old age."

"And Mary."

"Then I could, without cowering with shame at my own helplessness, ask her to love me even as I love her."

"But how many years must go by before you can return to us? The best part of her life and yours will have passed before then."

"I know it. I feel all the madness of my hopes. They are wild, insane perhaps, but I will not give them up; do not ask me, do not discourage me. Why must I, with my heart and brain alive like other men's, live and die alone?"

Aunt Hannah looked towards Mary Fuller, who sat trembling in the darkness. The triumphant consciousness that she was beloved, overwhelmed the girl with a pleasure so exquisite that it almost amounted to pain. Still she felt like a criminal stealing the secret of her own happiness, but the shadows were too thick; aunt Hannah saw nothing of this.

"And now," said the youth, more calmly, "you will let me depart, or I shall speak out the love which is becoming too powerful for concealment. I shall tell her that the beggar loves her and dreams of making her his wife."

Mary arose, the joy at her heart swelled painfully, and her delicate frame trembled beneath it. She would gladly have crept from the room with her sweet burden of happiness, but this excitement had been continued too long; her limbs gave way and she sank to the floor.

"Who is here? what is this?" cried the youth; "has another heard my mad confession?"

"_I_ heard it all, forgive me, forgive me. I could not go out; at the first attempt my strength gave way"--

"You heard me?" questioned the youth, pale and trembling. "You heard all that I said. Girl, girl, you have stolen the secret from my heart to despise me for it."

Mary Fuller rose to her feet, and drew towards him. The beauty of an angel glowed in her face; it was bright with holy courage.

"Despise you for it! I, who love you so much!"

"Love me! Stop, Mary, do not say this if it is not holy truth, such as one honest heart may render to another."

"It is holy truth. Take my hands in yours. See how they quiver with the joy of your words."

"But I am poor, Mary Fuller, I am stricken in all my strength."

"And I, what am I?"

"Oh, you are an angel. I know you are that!"

"No, no!" cried the poor girl, covering her face with her hands.

"But you are. I drink in beauty from your voice, there is beauty in your touch. Oh! how I love to hear you talk, it was music to me from the first day I ever saw you."

"Oh, forbear, forbear, it is Isabel you are describing," said Mary, shrinking away from him. "Oh! she is all this and more."

"Hush, Mary, hush; I feel the tones of your voice thrilling through and through me. This is the best beauty I can comprehend. When you disclaim it, I hear the tears breaking up through your voice, and it grows heavenly in its sadness. Your beauty is immortal, it can never grow old!"

The youth paused, and turned towards aunt Hannah, for his quick sense had caught the sobs that she was striving to smother by burying her face in her folded arms. Many a stern grief and sore trial had wrung that aged heart, but for a quarter of a century she had not wept heartily before. As she looked on these young persons, and witnessed the first rich joy of their love, her heart gave way. The memories of her youth came back, and in the fullness of her regrets she cried like a child.

Mary Fuller withdrew her hand from her lover, and moving close to aunt Hannah, stole her arm around her neck.

"Aunt, dear aunt, look up and tell Joseph that he must not leave us. Tell him how strong I am to work for us all."

Aunt Hannah lifted her face, and swept the grey locks back from her temples.

"What day of the month is this?" asked the old lady, standing up and speaking in a subdued voice; "it should be near the tenth of November."

"To-morrow will be the tenth," answered Mary.

"Stay together while I go talk with Isabel." With these words the old woman went up stairs feebly, as if her tears had swept all the strength from her frame.

Mary and her lover sat down by the hearth and fell into a sweet fragmentary conversation. Soft low words and broken sentences, the overflow of two hearts brimful of happiness alone, passed between them. A strange timidity crept over them. Neither dared approach the subject of a separation, though both were saddened by it.

Aunt Hannah came down at last, calmer, and with more of her usual cold manner.

"Help me," said Mary, appealing to her; "oh! aunt, persuade him to stay with us!"

"To-morrow will be time enough," was the answer. "Go away, now, and God bless you both!"

Never in her whole life had the voice of aunt Hannah sounded so deep with meaning, so solemn in its earnestness. It was seldom that she ever blessed any one aloud, or entered, save passively, into the devotions of the family--now her benediction had the energy of an earnest soul in it. The very tones of her voice were changed. She seemed to have thrown off the icy crust from her heart, and breathed deeper for it.

Mary and Joseph went out, and sat down together in the starlight, that fell softly upon them through the apple boughs. They had so many things to say, and confessions to make; each was timidly anxious to search the heart of the other, and read all the sweet hidden mysteries that seemed fathomless there.

Meanwhile aunt Hannah went into the out-room--that in which her sister Anna died, and kneeling down, with her hands pressed on the bottom of a chair, broke into a passion so deep and earnest that her whole frame shook with the agony of her struggle. She arose at length and began to walk the floor, wringing her hands and moaning as if in pain. Thus she toiled and struggled in prayer all night, for it was the anniversary of her sister's anguish and death. Many a softening influence had crept into that frozen nature, with the young persons who brought their joys and their sorrows beneath her roof, and now came the solemn breaking up of her heart. She learned the true method of atonement in

the stillness of that nightwatch. It was the regeneration of a soul.

When the day broke, she stole up to Isabel Chester's room, and kissed her pallid cheeks as she slept. "Be comforted," she said, smiling down upon the unconscious face; "be comforted, for the day of your joy is at hand."

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE DOUBLE BIRTH-DAY.

Brother awake--my soul is strong with pain--
And humbled with a night of solemn prayer,
Never--oh, never, can I rest again,
Till restitution lifts me from despair!

When aunt Hannah entered uncle Nathan's room he was sound asleep, with a smile upon his half-open mouth, and two large arms folded lovingly over his head, as if a sweet morning nap were the most, exquisite enjoyment known to him. For a moment aunt Hannah stood by the bed-side with her eyes, full of dark trouble, fixed upon his serene face. When had she slept so tranquilly? would she ever know an hour of innocent, child-like slumber like that again?

"Nathan--brother Nathan," she said, in a husky voice that aroused the old man from its very strangeness; "get up--I have something for you to do."

"Why, Hannah," said the old man, rubbing his eyes like a great fat child, "am I late? what is the matter? just give me my clothes there, and I'll be up before you can get the breakfast on the table. I'm very sorry, very sorry, indeed; but somehow, I couldn't seem to get asleep, last night, tired as I was--you know what night it was. Old times keep me awake nights, Hannah, I think so much just now of poor little Anna!"

"It isn't late, Nathan," answered the sister, still in her hoarse, unnatural voice, "but I want you to go up the street, and ask our minister to come here at ten o'clock."

"The minister! why, what for, sister Hannah? You ain't getting anxious, nor nothing--I thought the day of regeneration had come, long ago, with both of us."

"Do not ask me questions, now, brother, but get up and go my errand."

"Yes, yes, of course," answered uncle Nat, eyeing the pale face before him, anxiously; "I'll do anything that's best."

"When you have seen the minister, go down to Mrs. Farnham's, and ask them all to come--Mr. Farnham, his mother, and Salina. After that call for Judge Sharp."

"Do you want them at ten?"

"Yes!"

Aunt Hannah went out, and from that hour till after nine, was shut up alone in the out-room. The family sat down to breakfast without her, marvelling why she chose to fast, that morning, all but uncle Nathan--he remembered that it was the anniversary of his sister's death; and when he came in from the performance of his errands, there was a gentle look of tenderness on his face that made those around long to comfort him.

After breakfast aunt Hannah came forth, still very pale, but with a look of serene resolution that no one had ever observed on her face before.

"Children," she said, addressing Joseph and Mary Fuller, "tell me, once again, that you love one another."

"We do--we do?" cried the young pair, lifting their faces, full of holy sunshine, to hers, while their hands crept together, and intertwined unconsciously.

"And you would be glad to marry this girl, Joseph?"

"Marry her!" exclaimed the youth, trembling from head to foot, "how dare I--how can I?"

"Answer me, Joseph, yes or no, would it make you happy, if within an hour, this girl could be your wife, to live with you, and love you for ever and ever?"

"So happy," cried the youth, flushing red to the temples, "so happy that I dare not think of it."

"And you, Mary Fuller?" she questioned, moving close to the shrinking girl, and speaking in a low voice, impelled to gentleness by womanly compassion.

"Oh, do not ask me, dear, dear aunt! you know how it is with me, I have not dared to think of this."

Aunt Hannah bent down, and kissed that portion of the burning forehead which Mary's hands had left uncovered.

Mary started, and lifted her moist eyes in amazement. Scarcely in her life had she seen that cold woman kiss any one before.

Aunt Hannah looked kindly into her eyes, and laying a hand on her

head, addressed Joseph.

"This child is not beautiful, my son," she said, "but she has something in her face, this moment, worth all the beauty in the world."

"I know it; I feel the sunshine of her presence," answered the youth.

"It is this that troubles her; she fears that, in your love for beautiful things, she will not always please you."

Joseph reached forth his arms and drew the shrinking girl to his bosom.

"Don't tremble--don't cry, Mary, you are in my heart, and that is flooded with beauty; what else do I want?"

Mary sobbed out the tenderness and gratitude that filled her bosom in a few low murmurs, that had no meaning, save to the heart over which they were uttered.

Aunt Hannah turned to uncle Nathan.

"Is it not best, my brother, that two creatures who love each other so much should be married?"

Uncle Nathan was busy wiping the tears from his brown eyes, that were full of tender light as those of a rabbit. It was seldom that he awoke to a sense of worldly wisdom; but the helplessness of the young creatures before him, for once overcame his benevolence.

"Oh, Hannah, what would become of them when we get too old for work?"

"We are too old, now," answered the sister, "but put all this on one side. If you and I were rich enough to make them and theirs comfortable, what would you say then?"

"What would I say--why, God bless them and multiply them upon the face of the earth! That's what I would say!"

"And I," responded aunt Hannah, solemnly, "would answer amen!"

With a dignity that was very impressive, she took the clasped hands of the youth and maiden between both hers and once more she uttered the word "amen"

All this time Isabel Chester, pale and feeble from illness, sat in an easy-chair upon the hearth, filled with self-compassion, and yet feeling a generous pleasure that others could be happy though she was so very desolate. Thus ten o'clock drew on, and the clergyman knocked at the front door.

Aunt Hannah stood stiffly upright for a moment, as if nerving herself,

then, turned toward the family.

"Come!" she said. "It is twenty-one years to-day, since our sister died, come!"

CHAPTER L.

EXPLANATIONS AND EXPEDIENTS.

It was a scene of solemn power and force,
That woman, standing there, with marble face,
As cold and still as any sheeted corse,
The martyr herald of her own disgrace.

Meantime another strange scene was going on at the Farnham mansion. On that day young Farnham was of age. His mother was to give up her trust as associate guardian, and for the first time in his life, the young man would have a right to question and act for himself.

The counsellor whom Mrs. Farnham had summoned from the city--a shrewd, unscrupulous lawyer, was present with his accounts. The young man held these documents in his hand, with an angry flush upon his brow.

"And so this testament left me still a slave!" he exclaimed, passionately. "In all things where a man should be free as thought, I am bound eternally."

"You were only required not to marry against this lady's consent," answered the lawyer; "in all things else, as I am informed, this great property, subject to the lady's dower of course, was left to your control."

"In all things else!" exclaimed the youth, bitterly. "Why, this is everything."

"Certainly, certainly," answered the lawyer, "you see now the great self-sacrifice made by this inestimable lady, when she destroyed the will, leaving you encumbered only with a moral obligation"

"Which she knew to be fifty times as binding," said Farnham, glancing sternly at his mother.

"Yes, yes; I knew that your sense of honor would be stronger than fifty legal documents like that; I depended on your generosity, Frederick; I drew a medium between the legal tyrant that your papa made me, and the powerless mother. Fred is noble, I argued; he loved his father; he will not bow to the law, but will fling all this fortune back into my lap. I will burn the will and trust to his sense of duty. There was a medium, sir, you comprehend all its delicate

outlines, I trust."

This was said blandly to the lawyer, who bowed with a look of profound appreciation.

Farnham stood up firmly. "Mother, in this thing there is no medium between right and wrong. If my father left his property to me, his only child, on these conditions they must be enforced." He hesitated an instant, the crimson mounted to his temples, and he added in a clear, low voice, "madam, will you say upon your solemn word of honor, that this was the purport of the will you have burned?"

Mrs. Farnham turned white, her eyes fell, she trembled beneath the searching glance of her son.

"I--I cannot remember word for word, but as surely as I stand here, the property would have never been yours by the will, without--without"--

"Enough," said the young man, "enough that you have said it once, I submit to the will of my father."

"And you give up this girl. Dear, dear, Frederick!"

"No, madam; I give up the property. You have made us equal; Isabel would have refused me with this wealth; she will not find the heart to reject me now."

"Frederick, you are--yes--if this gentleman permits, I must say it--you are an ingrate!"

"My guardian must be informed of this will and its conditions," said Farnham.

"I expected this!" exclaimed Mrs. Farnham, addressing the lawyer; "no regard for his mother, no respect for his dear father's memory. You see, my friend, what a trial I have had!"

The lawyer looked keenly at young Farnham.

"You had better let this subject rest," he said; "it has been well managed so far; leave it with this good lady and myself."

"There seems no need of management here," was the firm answer; "my father's will must be carried out."

"Let me act between you and your gentle mamma, dear sir. She must yield a little, I see. You have a fancy, I am told, for the young lady who has been so long an object of her bounty. Suppose your mother can be induced to withdraw her objections to the match, on condition that you let this matter of the will rest. It is so unpleasant to a sensitive nature like hers, this raking up of buried troubles. Consent to let them rest as they are, and I will undertake to gain consent to

your marriage with this--I must admit--very beautiful young creature. Say, is it settled?"

"Not yet, or thus," answered the young man, firmly; "I have an alternative, and I solemnly believe the only one which will win this noble girl to become my wife. Instead of embezzling my father's property, which does not belong to me, if I marry her, I can renounce that which brings so cruel an incumbrance."

"But you will not," said the lawyer.

"Yes, if it is necessary to gain Isabel Chester, I will!" answered the youth.

"In that case you know the property will become your mother's!"

The young man looked suddenly and searchingly on his mother. His heart rose indignantly. He could not force himself to respect that woman!

"Have you decided?" inquired the lawyer, smiling.

"Not till I have seen Isabel," answered the youth, looking at his watch. "Madam, it is half-past nine, and I think we promised that old man to be at his Homestead at ten; Isabel Chester is there. In her presence you shall hear my decision."

Mrs. Farnham looked at the lawyer, who almost imperceptibly bent his head, and she rang the bell for Salina to bring her shawl and bonnet.

Directly the strong-minded one came with an oriental cashmere thrown over one arm, and a costly bonnet perched on her right hand.

"It's time for us to be a-going if we ever expect to get there, now I tell you," she said, tossing the lady's garments into her lap, and tying her own calico hood with superfluous energy; "aunt Hannah is punctual as the clock, and expects others to be so, too. Come!"

The lawyer had risen, and was quietly fitting a pair of dark gloves to his hands directly in range of Mrs. Farnham's eye who could not choose but remark the contrast between those white hands and the dark kid, while she coquetted with the folds of her shawl.

"Come!" repeated Salina, thrusting her arm through that of the lawyer, and bearing him forward in spite of all opposition. "Just a beau apiece. Mr. Farnham will take care of the old lady, and I can get along with you. Half a loaf is better than no bread, at any time. So, for want of a better, I'm content."

The lawyer would have rebelled when once out-of-doors, but young Farnham had placed himself near his mother, and was walking by her side with so stern a brow, that he resolved to submit, and, if possible, glean some intelligence from Salina about the object of their visit to the Homestead; but that exemplary female was as much

puzzled as himself, and they reached the Homestead mutually discontented.

"This way--take a seat in the out-room till I go call Miss Hannah," cried Salina, pushing open the front door that grated and groaned as if reluctant to admit such guests. "This door!"

Salina pushed the out-room door open as she spoke, and to her surprise found not only aunt Hannah, but the whole family. Mary Fuller, Joseph, Isabel Chester, the two old people, and, what was most remarkable, a clergyman of the church at which uncle Nat and his sister worshipped. Judge Sharp came in a moment later.

"Sit down," said aunt Hannah formally, and in a suppressed voice, as if they had been invited to a funeral. Then as the party ranged themselves in the stiff, wooden chairs, chilled by the silence and gravity of everything they saw, aunt Hannah drew close to Joseph, who sat by Mary, and said to them both in a serious gentle way:

"Have faith in me, children."

"We have, we have!" they murmured together with a firmer clasp of the hands.

"Remember I have promised, now be ready!"

They both began to tremble, and a thrill of strange delight ran from frame to frame, kindling its way through their clasped fingers.

Aunt Hannah turned towards her guests, her upright figure took an air of dignity, her dark eyes lighted up and scanned the faces of her guests firmly, they dwelt longer upon the withered features of Mrs. Farnham, and a cold smile crept over her lips as she said,

"We have invited you to a wedding. It is now time, Joseph, Mary!"

The young couple stood up, still holding each other by the hands. The ceremony commenced, and it was remarkable that when the clergyman came to that portion which commands any one that can make objections to render them then, or henceforth hold his peace, aunt Hannah held up her hand that he might pause, and stepping in front of Mrs. Farnham, said in a low stern voice,

"Have you any objections?"

"_Me_!" exclaimed the lady with a sneer. "What do I care about them!"

"Then you are willing that the ceremony goes on?" persisted the singular woman, without a change of voice or attitude.

"What earthly objection can I have? of course the ceremony may go on, what are these people to me?"

The ceremony went on, and with a deep breath of such joy as few human beings ever know, the husband and wife sat down, almost faint with excess of emotion.

Isabel Chester had been sitting apart from the group, passive and feeble, but now and then lifting her great mournful eyes with a look of unuttered misery to the face of young Farnham.

The first of these eloquent glances brought him to her side.

"Isabel, I will give up all, I came to renounce everything but you," he whispered.

She shook her head mournfully and glanced with a shudder towards Mrs. Farnham.

"Poor or rich I cannot marry her son. It may kill me, but my oath, my oath! let me rest, let me rest"--

She drew her hand wearily across her forehead and her bright eyes filled with tears.

"But you are sorry for this oath, my Isabel?"

"Sorry, it is killing me."

He looked down upon the white folds of her muslin wrapper, brightened as they were by the crimson glow of a dressing-gown that flowed over it. He saw how thin she had grown, how like wax her delicate hand lay upon the crimson of her dress, and how mournfully large her eyes had become.

"This shall not be, it is madness!" he exclaimed aloud and passionately. "Mother I"--

"Hush!" said aunt Hannah, silencing him with her uplifted hand, "let me speak!"

She moved a step forward, standing almost in the centre of the room, with Mrs. Farnham and her lawyer friend on the left, and the clergyman who stood near the newly married pair on her right. All had a full view of her face. Her features seemed harder than ever--the expression on them was stern as granite. Her eyes burned with a settled purpose, and her whole person was imposing.

For a moment, when all eyes were bent upon her she seemed to falter; you could see by the choking in her throat and a spasmodic gripe of her fingers, that the struggle for her first words was agony.

But she did speak, and her voice was so hoarse that it struck those around her with amazement; nay, a look of awe stole over the faces turned so earnestly towards her.

"Twenty-one years ago last night, I committed a great wrong in the face of God and the law," she said; "that woman," here she lifted her long, boney finger and pointed it towards Mrs. Farnham, "that woman had wronged me and the being I loved better than myself, and this filled me with a heathenish thirst for vengeance upon her."

"Me! me! why, did you ever--I never wronged a creature in my whole life--you know how bland and gentle I always am!" whimpered that lady.

"Be still!" interposed aunt Hannah in the same deep voice. "The husband of that woman was betrothed to me in my youth."

"I'll never believe that, never--never!" cried Mrs. Farnham, flushing up angrily.

"Peace, I say, and do not interrupt me again. My parents died leaving Anna, a little girl pretty as an angel, for Nathan and I to take care of; she was the dearest, loveliest little thing."

"I'll take my Bible oath of that," cried Salina, reddening suddenly around the eyes, "I never set eyes on anything half so purty in my life."

"I gave up all for this child, and so did Nathan; we both agreed to live single for her sake and be parents to her."

"More fools you," muttered Salina, "as if uncle Nat's wife couldn't and wouldn't have taken care of a dozen such children, that is, if he'd only had sense enough to choose a smart--but what's the use, it's all over now."

This was said in a muttered undertone, and aunt Hannah went on without heeding it.

"It was a hard struggle, for I was young then, and loved the man I expected to spend my life with--Nathan too"--

"No matter about me, Hannah, don't mention anything I did; it was hard at the time, but one gets used to almost everything," cried the old man, wiping the tears from his eyes with a cotton handkerchief that Salina handed to him, her own eyes flushing redder and redder from sympathy.

"I need not speak of him," commenced aunt Hannah, with one look at her brother's face. "He did his duty; if I had done mine as well, this hour of shame would not have brought me where I am."

"The child grew up into a beautiful girl--so beautiful and with such sweet ways, that it did one good only to look at her, but she was willful too, and loved play; wild as a kitten she was, but as harmless too."

"She would go out to work; we tried to stop it, but the child would

go; Salina there, kept house for old Mrs. Farnham; they wanted help to spin up the wool and Anna went. She came back engaged to Mr. Farnham. I forgave her, God is my judge; I did not hate the child for supplanting me in the only love I ever hoped to know. It was a hard trial, but I bore it without a single bitter thought toward either of them. It nearly killed me, but I did my duty by the child.

"He went to the city, for he had gone into business there, and was getting rich. Time went fast with him and slow with us. In the end he married that woman. Anna went wild when she knew it, and like a wounded bird fled to the first open heart for shelter. She married too, and in a single year died here in this room."

"I remember it, oh! how well I remember it," sobbed Salina, while uncle Nat covered his face with both hands and wept aloud.

"It was an awful night. Thunder shook the Old Homestead, and the winds rocked it as if death were rocking her to sleep; across them windows came the lightning, flash after flash, as if the angels of heaven were shooting fiery arrows over her as she breathed her last. Salina was there, but no doctor. He was at Mrs. Farnham's mansion up yonder, for that night her only son was born.

"He came at last, to find her dead body lying there, cold and pale in the lightning flashes that broke against the windows. He found me alone with my dead sister, numb with sorrow, dead at the heart.

"After this Salina brought Anna's baby and laid it in my lap. The doctor had ordered her home. The rich man's wife could not be neglected."

"But I wouldn't have gone, you know I wouldn't for anything he could say," cried Salina, firing up amid her tears. "If you hadn't said go, all the doctors on earth couldn't have made me stir a foot!"

"Yes, I told you to go, but it was in bitterness of heart; why should I with that living soul in my lap, and that cold body before me, keep you from the rich woman's couch? Farnham's heir must be kept warm, while ours lay wailing and shivering in my lap.

"I was left alone amid the lightning and thunder and the noise of the rain; my poor dead sister seemed to call out from the clouds, that I should help her spirit free from the raging of the tempest--I think all this worked on my brain, for I sat and looked on the babe with a stillness that seemed to last for months. I thought of her broken life--of the poverty she had felt--of that which must follow her child. I thought of that woman, so paltry, so mean, so utterly unworthy of care, pampered with wealth, comforted with love, while my sister, so much her better in everything had died of neglect, I thought of many things, not connectedly, but in a wild bitter mood that made me fierce under the wrongs that had been heaped upon us. It is impossible for me to say how the idea came first, but I resolved that her child should not be the sufferer. His father was miserably

poor, but he would not, I knew, give up his child. I did not reason, but these thoughts flashed through my brain, and with them came an impulse to give her child the destiny which Anna's should escape. I tore a blanket from the bed; poor Anna did not need it then. I wrapped it about the child and went forth into the storm. The lightning blazed along my path, and the thunder boomed over me like minute guns when a funeral is in motion.

"I knew the house well, and stole in through the back door onward to the half-lighted chamber of Farnham's wife. Her son lay in a sumptuous crib under a cloud of lace. I laid Anna's babe on the floor and took this one from its silken nest. My hands were cold and trembling, but the dresses were soon changed, and in a few minutes I went out with Farnham's heir rolled up in my blanket, and Anna's child sleeping sweetly in the cradle that I had robbed."

Mrs. Farnham started up, pale and trembling.

"What, what! my child rolled up in a blanket! a mean, coarse blanket!"

"Be still," commanded aunt Hannah; "your child has had nothing but coarse blankets all his life; but he is all the better for that; ask him if I have not toiled that he and the good man who brought him up might never want; but I was a feeble woman and could do no more--a woman weighed down by a sense of the crime which I might repent of daily, but could not force myself to confess."

"But my child! where is my child, you horrible kidnapper?" cried Mrs. Farnham. "I will know--but remember, if he's been brought up among common people and all that, I never will own him."

"Your son," said aunt Hannah, going gently toward Joseph Esmond, and laying her hand on his shoulder. "This is your son; he is worthy of any mother's love."

"My son, and married to that thing! I never will own him, don't ask me, I never will!" cried the excited woman, eyeing the youth, disdainfully. "He is handsome enough, but I cannot own him for my son!"

"Mother," said the youth, rising and coming forward, with both hands extended. "Mother, why will you not love me?"

She had gathered up her shawl, haughtily, and was about to leave the room; but his voice struck upon her like a spell; the folds of her shawl dropt downward, and for once, yielding to a warm, natural impulse, she burst into a passion of tears, and received the youth in her arms.

"Oh, mother, bear with me; you would, did you know how I have pined for a mother's love."

She did not speak, but kissed his forehead two or three times, and sat

down subdued, with gentler affections than she had ever shown before.

"Not only to me, mother, but to my wife. Will you not love my wife?"

Mary was drawn forward, for one arm of her husband was around her, and stood with downcast eyes and flushed cheeks, waiting for the repulse, which seemed inevitable.

Mrs. Farnham looked at him, and something of the old scorn curled her lip. Mary slowly lifted her eyes, full of meek solicitude, and even her mother-in-law's heart was touched.

"Well, well, make him a good wife, and I'll try to love you."

"I," said the youth, whom we have known as young Farnham--"I have no longer a mother."

"No," said uncle Nat, arising and opening his arms; "but you have an old uncle and aunt that will divide their last crust with you. Sister, sister, he looks like Anna, now, with the tears in his eyes."

Aunt Hannah turned; it was the first time in her life that she had ever looked her nephew full in the face, and now a consciousness of the wrong she had done made her timid; she stood before him with downcast eyes, trembling and afraid.

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"I have wronged you," she said. "How will you bear hard work and want?"

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All that was good in that woman's nature broke forth with the first gush of true maternal love; for a moment she forgot herself and held out her hand.

"Oh, Fred! I hate to give you up altogether; but, then, I really am not your mother. Don't you see it in his bright hair? in those beautiful eyes?--we ought to have known he was my son by his face. But, only think of that horrid woman's bringing him up among all those low people; but she could not make him like them. There is a medium in blood, you see. But, when, you took so naturally to our life; really, I don't see my way clear yet!"

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A flush of beautiful joy drove the gloom from Esmond's face. He arose and held out his hand.

"Farnham! Farnham! wish me joy. You can wish me joy, now."

Every heart rose warmly as the young men shook hands, and all eyes were so blinded with happy tears, that no one observed Mrs. Farnham as she shrunk cowering in a corner of the room. Even Judge Sharp avoided looking that way, and Salina planted herself before the pallid woman, expanding her scant skirts, till they swelled out like a half-open umbrella, in a prompt effort to screen that guilty form.

"Young men!" and as he spoke Judge Sharp assumed a look of more than ordinary dignity. "Thank God, that in this great change, he left you to the influences which have best developed the powers within you. Now, go forth, my children, with the fair wives you have chosen, and always remember, that the trials of early life should give strength and power to manhood."

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A flush of beautiful joy drove the gloom from Esmond's face. He arose and held out his hand.

"Farnham! Farnham! wish me joy. You can wish me joy, now."

Every heart rose warmly as the young men shook hands, and all eyes were so blinded with happy tears, that no one observed Mrs. Farnham as she shrunk cowering in a corner of the room. Even Judge Sharp avoided looking that way, and Salina planted herself before the pallid woman, expanding her scant skirts, till they swelled out like a half-open umbrella, in a prompt effort to screen that guilty form.

"Young men!" and as he spoke Judge Sharp assumed a look of more than ordinary dignity. "Thank God, that in this great change, he left you to the influences which have best developed the powers within you. Now, go forth, my children, with the fair wives you have chosen, and always remember, that the trials of early life should give strength and power to manhood."

THE END.

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