Driven Back to Eden

Edward Payson Roe



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DRIVEN BACK TO EDEN

BY

E. P. ROE

THIS VOLUME

IS LOVINGLY DEDICATED TO

"JOHNNIE"

PREFACE

Months since, with much doubt and diffidence, I began this simple story. I had never before written expressly for young people, and I knew that the honest little critics could not be beguiled with words which did not tell an interesting story. How far I have succeeded, the readers of this volume, and of the "St. Nicholas" magazine, wherein the tale appeared as a serial, alone can answer.

I have portrayed no actual experience, but have sought to present one which might be verified in real life. I have tried to avoid all that would be impossible or even improbable. The labors performed by the children in the story were not unknown to my own hands, in childhood, nor would they form tasks too severe for many little hands now idle in the cities.

The characters are all imaginary; the scenes, in the main, are real: and I would gladly lure other families from tenement flats into green pastures.

E. P. R.

CORNWALL-ON-THE-HUDSON,

August 10, 1885.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I A PROBLEM

CHAPTER II I STATE THE CASE

CHAPTER III NEW PROSPECTS

CHAPTER IV A MOMENTOUS EXPEDITION

CHAPTER V A COUNTRY CHRISTMAS IN A CITY FLAT

CHAPTER VI A BLUFF FRIEND

CHAPTER VII MR. JONES SHOWS ME THE PLACE

CHAPTER VIII TELLING ABOUT EDEN

CHAPTER IX "BREAKING CAMP"

CHAPTER X SCENES ON THE WHARF

CHAPTER XI A VOYAGE UP THE HUDSON

CHAPTER XII A MARCH EVENING IN EDEN

CHAPTER XIII RESCUED AND AT HOME

CHAPTER XIV SELF-DENIAL AND ITS REWARD

CHAPTER XV OUR SUNNY KITCHEN

CHAPTER XVI MAKING A PLACE FOR CHICKENS

CHAPTER XVII GOOD BARGAINS IN MAPLE SUGAR

CHAPTER XVIII BUTTERNUTS AND BOBSEY'S PERIL

CHAPTER XIX JOHN JONES, JUN

CHAPTER XX RASPBERRY LESSONS

CHAPTER XXI THE "VANDOO"

CHAPTER XXII EARLY APRIL GARDENING

CHAPTER XXIII A BONFIRE AND A FEAST

CHAPTER XXIV "NO BLIND DRIFTING"

CHAPTER XXV OWLS AND ANTWERPS

CHAPTER XXVI A COUNTRY SUNDAY

CHAPTER XXVII STRAWBERRY VISIONS AND "PERTATERS"

CHAPTER XXVIII CORN, COLOR, AND MUSIC

CHAPTER XXIX WE GO A-FISHING

CHAPTER XXX WEEDS AND WORKING FOR DEAR LIFE

CHAPTER XXXI NATURE SMILES AND HELPS

CHAPTER XXXII CHERRIES, BERRIES, AND BERRY-THIEVES

CHAPTER XXXIII GIVEN HIS CHOICE

CHAPTER XXXIV GIVEN A CHANCE

CHAPTER XXXV "WE SHALL ALL EARN OUR SALT"

CHAPTER XXXVI A THUNDERBOLT

CHAPTER XXXVII RALLYING FROM THE BLOW

CHAPTER XXXVIII AUGUST WORK AND PLAY

CHAPTER XXXIX A TRIP TO THE SEASHORE

CHAPTER XL A VISIT TO HOUGHTON FARM

CHAPTER XLI HOARDING FOR WINTER

CHAPTER XLII AUTUMN WORK AND SPORT

CHAPTER XLIII THANKSGIVING DAY

CHAPTER XLIV WE CAN MAKE A LIVING IN EDEN

DRIVEN BACK TO EDEN

CHAPTER I

A PROBLEM

"Where are the children?"

"They can't be far away," replied my wife, looking up from her preparations for supper. "Bobsey was here a moment ago. As soon as my back's turned he's out and away. I haven't seen Merton since he brought his books from school, and I suppose Winnie is upstairs with the Daggetts."

"I wish, my dear, you could keep the children at home more," I said, a little petulantly.

"I wish you would go and find them for me now, and to-morrow take my place—for just one day."

"Well, well," I said, with a laugh that had no mirth in it; "only one of your wishes stands much chance of being carried out. I'll find the children now if I can without the aid of the police. Mousie, do you feel stronger to-night?"

These words were spoken to a pale girl of fourteen, who appeared to be scarcely more than twelve, so diminutive was her frame.

"Yes, papa," she replied, a faint smile flitting like a ray of light across her features. She always said she was better, but never got well. Her quiet ways and tones had led to the household name of "Mousie."

As I was descending the narrow stairway I was almost overthrown by a torrent of children pouring down from the flats above. In the dim light of a gas-burner I saw that Bobsey was one of the reckless atoms. He had not heard my voice in the uproar, and before I could reach him, he with the others had burst out at the street door and gone tearing toward the nearest corner. It seemed that he had slipped away in order to take part in a race, and I found him "squaring off" at a bigger boy who had tripped him up. Without a word I carried him home, followed by the jeers and laughter of the racers, the girls making their presence known in the early December twilight by the shrillness of their voices and by manners no gentler than those of the boys.

I put down the child—he was only seven years of age—in the middle of our general living-room, and looked at him. His little coat was split out in the back; one of his stockings, already well-darned at the knees, was past remedy; his hands were black, and one was bleeding; his whole little body was throbbing with excitement, anger, and violent exercise. As I looked at him quietly the defiant expression in his eyes began to give place to tears.

"There is no use in punishing him now," said my wife. "Please leave him to me and find the others."

"I wasn't going to punish him," I said.

"What are you going to do? What makes you look at him so?"

"He's a problem I can't solve—with the given conditions."

"O Robert, you drive me half wild. If the house was on fire you'd stop to follow out some train of thought about it all. I'm tired to death. Do bring the children home. When we've put them to bed you can figure on your problem, and I can sit down."

As I went up to the Daggetts' flat I was dimly conscious of another problem. My wife was growing fretful and nervous. Our rooms would not have satisfied a Dutch housewife, but if "order is heaven's first law" a

little of Paradise was in them as compared to the Daggetts' apartments. "Yes," I was told, in response to my inquiries; "Winnie is in the bed-room with Melissy."

The door was locked, and after some hesitation the girls opened it. As we were going downstairs I caught a glimpse of a newspaper in my girl's pocket. She gave it to me reluctantly, and said "Melissy" had lent it to her. I told her to help her mother prepare supper while I went to find Merton. Opening the paper under a street lamp, I found it to be a cheap, vile journal, full of flashy pictures that so often offend the eye on news-stands. With a chill of fear I thought, "Another problem." The Daggett children had had the scarlet fever a few months before. "But here's a worse infection," I reflected. "Thank heaven, Winnie is only a child, and can't understand these pictures;" and I tore the paper up and thrust it into its proper place, the gutter.

"Now," I muttered, "I've only to find Merton in mischief to make the evening's experience complete."

In mischief I did find him—a very harmful kind of mischief, it appeared to me. Merton was little over fifteen, and he and two or three other lads were smoking cigarettes which, to judge by their odor, must certainly have been made from the sweepings of the manufacturer's floor.

"Can't you find anything better than that to do after school?" I asked, severely.

"Well, sir," was the sullen reply, "I'd like to know what there is for a boy to do in this street."

During the walk home I tried to think of an answer to his implied question. What would I do if I were in Merton's place? I confess that I was puzzled. After sitting in school all day he must do something that the police would permit. There certainly seemed very little range of action for a growing boy. Should I take him out of school and put him into a shop or an office? If I did this his education would be sadly limited. Moreover he was tall and slender for his age, and upon his face there was a pallor which I dislike to see in a boy. Long hours of business would be

very hard upon him, even if he could endure the strain at all. The problem which had been pressing on me for months—almost years—grew urgent.

With clouded brows we sat down to our modest little supper. Winifred, my wife, was hot and flushed from too near acquaintance with the stove, and wearied by a long day of toil in a room that would be the better for a gale of wind. Bobsey, as we called my little namesake, was absorbed—now that he was relieved from the fear of punishment—by the wish to "punch" the boy who had tripped him up. Winnie was watching me furtively, and wondering what had become of the paper, and what I thought of it. Merton was somewhat sullen, and a little ashamed of himself. I felt that my problem was to give these children something to do that would not harm them, for do SOMETHING they certainly would. They were rapidly attaining that age when the shelter of a narrow city flat would not answer, when the influence of a crowded house and of the street might be greater than any we could bring to bear upon them.

I looked around upon the little group for whom I was responsible. My will was still law to them. While my little wife had positive ways of her own, she would agree to any decided course that I resolved upon. The children were yet under entire control, so that I sat at the head of the table, commander-in-chief of the little band. We called the narrow flat we lived in "home." The idea! with the Daggetts above and the Ricketts on the floor beneath. It was not a home, and was scarcely a fit camping-ground for such a family squad as ours. Yet we had stayed on for years in this long, narrow line of rooms, reaching from a crowded street to a little back-yard full of noisy children by day, and noisier cats by night. I had often thought of moving, but had failed to find a better shelter that was within my very limited means. The neighborhood was respectable, so far as a densely populated region can be. It was not very distant from my place of business, and my work often kept me so late at the office that we could not live in the suburb. The rent was moderate for New York, and left me some money, after food and clothing were provided, for occasional little outings and pleasures, which I believe to be needed by both body and mind. While the children were little—so long as they

would "stay put" in the cradle or on the floor—we did not have much trouble. Fortunately I had good health, and, as my wife said, was "handy with children." Therefore I could help her in the care of them at night, and she had kept much of her youthful bloom. Heaven had blessed us. We had met with no serious misfortunes, nor had any of our number been often prostrated by prolonged and dangerous illness. But during the last year my wife had been growing thin, and occasionally her voice had a sharpness which was new. Every month Bobsey became more hard to manage. Our living-room was to him like a cage to a wild bird, and slip away he would, to his mother's alarm; for he was almost certain to get into mischief or trouble. The effort to perform her household tasks and watch over him was more wearing than it had been to rock him through long hours at night when he was a teething baby. These details seem very homely no doubt, yet such as these largely make up our lives. Comfort or discomfort, happiness or unhappiness, springs from them. There is no crop in the country so important as that of boys and girls. How could I manage my little home-garden in a flat?

I looked thoughtfully from one to another, as with children's appetites they became absorbed in one of the chief events of the day.

"Well," said my wife, querulously, "how are you getting on with your problem?"

"Take this extra bit of steak and I'll tell you after the children are asleep," I said.

"I can't eat another mouthful," she exclaimed, pushing back her almost untasted supper. "Broiling the steak was enough for me."

"You are quite tired out, dear," I said, very gently.

Her face softened immediately at my tone and tears came into her eyes.

"I don't know what is the matter with me," she faltered. "I am so nervous some days that I feel as if I should fly to pieces. I do try to be patient, but I know I'm growing cross!"

"Oh now, mamma," spoke up warm-hearted Merton; "the idea of your being cross."

"She IS cross," Bobsey cried; "she boxed my ears this very day."

"And you deserved it," was Merton's retort. "It's a pity they are not boxed oftener."

"Yes, Robert, I did," continued my wife, sorrowfully. "Bobsey ran away four times, and vexed me beyond endurance, that is, such endurance as I have left, which doesn't seem to be very much."

"I understand, dear," I said. "You are a part of my problem, and you must help me solve it." Then I changed the subject decidedly, and soon brought sunshine to our clouded household. Children's minds are easily diverted; and my wife, whom a few sharp words would have greatly irritated, was soothed, and her curiosity awakened as to the subject of my thoughts.

CHAPTER II

I STATE THE CASE

I pondered deeply while my wife and Winnie cleared away the dishes and put Bobsey into his little crib. I felt that the time for a decided change had come, and that it should be made before the evils of our lot brought sharp and real trouble.

How should I care for my household? If I had been living on a far frontier among hostile Indians I should have known better how to protect them. I could build a house of heavy logs and keep my wife and children always near me while at work. But it seemed to me that Melissa Daggett and her kin with their flashy papers, and the influence of the street for Merton and Bobsey, involved more danger to my little band than all the scalping Modocs that ever whooped. The children could not step outside the door without danger of meeting some one who would do them harm. It is the curse of crowded city life that there is so little of a natural and attractive sort for a child to do, and so much of evil close at hand.

My wife asked me humorously for the news. She saw that I was not reading my paper, and my frowning brow and firm lips proved my problem was not of a trifling nature. She suspected nothing more, however, than that I was thinking of taking rooms in some better locality, and she was wondering how I could do it, for she knew that my income now left but a small surplus above expenses.

At last Winnie too was ready to go to bed, and I said to her, gravely: "Here is money to pay Melissa for that paper. It was only fit for the gutter, and into the gutter I put it. I wish you to promise me never to look at such pictures again, or you can never hope to grow up to be a lady like mamma."

The child flushed deeply, and went tearful and penitent to bed. Mousie also retired with a wistful look upon her face, for she saw that something of grave importance occupied my mind.

No matter how tired my wife might be, she was never satisfied to sit down until the room had been put in order, a green cloth spread upon the supper-table and the student lamp placed in its centre.

Merton brought his school-books, and my wife took up her mending, and we three sat down within the circle of light.

"Don't do any more work to-night," I said, looking into my wife's face, and noting for a few moments that it was losing its rounded lines.

Her hands dropped wearily into her lap, and she began gratefully: "I'm glad you speak so kindly to-night, Robert, for I am so nervous and out of sorts that I couldn't have stood one bit of fault-finding—I should have said things, and then have been sorry all day to-morrow. Dear knows, each day brings enough without carrying anything over. Come, read the paper to me, or tell me what you have been thinking about so deeply, if you don't mind Merton's hearing you. I wish to forget myself, and work, and everything that worries me, for a little while."

"I'll read the paper first, and then, after Merton has learned his lessons, I will tell you my thoughts—my purpose, I may almost say. Merton shall know about it soon, for he is becoming old enough to understand the 'why' of things. I hope, my boy, that your teacher lays a good deal of stress on the WHY in all your studies."

"Oh, yes, after a fashion."

"Well, so far as I am your teacher, Merton, I wish you always to think why you should do a thing or why you shouldn't, and to try not to be satisfied with any reason but a good one."

Then I gleaned from the paper such items as I thought would interest my wife. At last we were alone, with no sound in the room but the low roar of the city, a roar so deep as to make one think that the tides of life were breaking waves.

I was doing some figuring in a note-book when my wife asked: "Robert, what is your problem to-night? And what part have I in it?"

"So important a part that I couldn't solve it without you," I replied, smiling at her.

"Oh, come now," she said, laughing slightly for the first time in the evening; "you always begin to flatter a little when you want to carry a point."

"Well, then, you are on your guard against my wiles. But believe me, Winifred, the problem on my mind is not like one of my ordinary brown studies; in those I often try to get back to the wherefore of things which people usually accept and don't bother about. The question I am considering comes right home to us, and we must meet it. I have felt for some time that we could not put off action much longer, and to-night I am convinced of it."

Then I told her how I had found three of the children engaged that evening, concluding: "The circumstances of their lot are more to blame than they themselves. And why should I find fault with you because you are nervous? You could no more help being nervous and a little impatient than you could prevent the heat of the lamp from burning you, should you place your finger over it. I know the cause of it all. As for Mousie, she is growing paler and thinner every day. You know what my income is; we could not change things much for the better by taking other rooms and moving to another part of the city, and we might find that we had changed for the worse. I propose that we go to the country and get our living out of the soil."

"Why, Robert! what do you know about farming or gardening?"

"Not very much, but I am not yet too old to learn; and there would be something for the children to do at once, pure air for them to breathe, and space for them to grow healthfully in body, mind, and soul. You know I have but little money laid by, and am not one of those smart men who can push their way. I don't know much besides bookkeeping, and my employers think I am not remarkably quick at that. I can't seem to acquire the lightning speed with which things are done nowadays; and while I try to make up by long hours and honesty, I don't believe I could ever earn much more than I am getting now, and you know it doesn't leave much of a margin for sickness or misfortune of any kind. After all, what does my salary give us but food and clothing and shelter, such as it is, with a little to spare in some years? It sends a cold chill to my heart to think what should become of you and the children if I should be sick or anything should happen to me. Still, it is the present welfare of the children that weighs most on my mind, Winifred. They are no longer little things that you can keep in these rooms and watch over; there is danger for them just outside that door. It wouldn't be so if beyond the door lay a garden and fields and woods. You, my overtaxed wife, wouldn't worry about them the moment they were out of sight, and my work, instead of being away from them all day, could be with them. And all could do something, even down to pale Mousie and little Bobsey. Outdoor life and pure air, instead of that breathed over and over, would bring quiet to your nerves and the roses back to your cheeks. The children would grow sturdy and strong; much of their work would be like play to them; they wouldn't be always in contact with other children that we know nothing about. I am aware that the country isn't Eden, as we have imagined it—for I lived there as a boy—but it seems like Eden compared to this place and its surroundings; and I feel as if I were being driven back to it by circumstances I can't control."

CHAPTER III

NEW PROSPECTS

There is no need of dwelling further on the reasons for or against the step we proposed. We thought a great deal and talked it over several times. Finally my wife agreed that the change would be wise and best for all. Then the children were taken into our confidence, and they became more delighted every day as the prospect grew clearer to them.

"We'll all be good soon, won't we?" said my youngest, who had a rather vivid sense of his own shortcomings, and kept them in the minds of others as well.

"Why so, Bobsey?"

"'Cause mamma says that God put the first people in a garden and they was very good, better'n any folks afterwards. God oughter know the best place for people."

Thus Bobsey gave a kind of divine sanction to our project. Of course we had not taken so important a step without asking the Great Father of all to guide us; for we felt that in the mystery of life we too were but little children who knew not what should be on the morrow, or how best to provide for it with any certainty. To our sanguine minds there was in Bobsey's words a hint of something more than permission to go up out of Egypt.

So it was settled that we should leave our narrow suite of rooms, the Daggetts and the Ricketts, and go to the country. To me naturally fell the task of finding the land flowing with milk and honey to which we should journey in the spring. Meantime we were already emigrants at heart, full of the bustle and excitement of mental preparation.

I prided myself somewhat on my knowledge of human nature, which, in regard to children, conformed to comparatively simple laws. I knew that the change would involve plenty of hard work, self-denial and careful managing, which nothing could redeem from prose; but I aimed to add to our exodus, so far as possible, the elements of adventure and mystery so dear to the hearts of children. The question where we should go was the cause of much discussion, the studying of maps, and the learning of not a little geography.

Merton's counsel was that we should seek a region abounding in Indians, bears, and "such big game." His advice made clear the nature of some of his recent reading. He proved, however, that he was not wanting in sense by his readiness to give up these attractive features in the choice of locality.

Mousie's soft black eyes always lighted up at the prospect of a flower-garden that should be as big as our sitting-room. Even in our city apartments, poisoned by gas and devoid of sunlight, she usually managed to keep a little house-plant in bloom, and the thought of placing seeds in the open ground, where, as she said, "the roots could go down to China if they wanted to," brought the first color I had seen in her face for many a day.

Winnie was our strongest child, and also the one who gave me the most anxiety. Impulsive, warm-hearted, restless, she always made me think of an overfull fountain. Her alert black eyes were as eager to see as was her inquisitive mind to pry into everything. She was sturdily built for a girl, and one of the severest punishments we could inflict was to place her in a chair and tell her not to move for an hour. We were beginning to learn that we could no more keep her in our sitting-room than we could restrain a mountain brook that foams into a rocky basin only to foam out

again. Melissa Daggett was of a very different type—I could never see her without the word "sly" coming into my mind—and her small mysteries awakened Winnie's curiosity. Now that the latter was promised chickens, and rambles in the woods, Melissa and her secrets became insignificant, and the ready promise to keep aloof from her was given.

As for Bobsey, he should have a pig which he could name and call his own, and for which he might pull weeds and pick up apples. We soon found that he was communing with that phantom pig in his dreams.

CHAPTER IV

A MOMENTOUS EXPEDITION

By the time Christmas week began we all had agreed to do without candy, toys, and knick-knacks, and to buy books that would tell us how to live in the country. One happy evening we had an early supper and all went to a well-known agricultural store and publishing-house on Broadway, each child almost awed by the fact that I had fifteen dollars in my pocket which should be spent that very night in the purchase of books and papers. To the children the shop seemed like a place where tickets direct to Eden were obtained, while the colored pictures of fruits and vegetables could portray the products of Eden only, so different were they in size and beauty from the specimens appearing in our market stalls. Stuffed birds and animals were also on the shelves, and no epicure ever enjoyed the gamy flavor as we did. But when we came to examine the books, their plates exhibiting almost every phase of country work and production, we felt like a long vista leading toward our unknown home was opening before us, illumined by alluring pictures. To Winnie was given a book on poultry, and the cuts representing the various birds were even more to her taste than cuts from the fowls themselves at a Christmas dinner. The Nimrod instincts of the race were awakened in Merton, and I soon found that he had set his heart on a book that gave an account of game, fish, birds, and mammals. It was a natural and wholesome longing. I myself had felt it keenly when a boy. Such country sport would bring sturdiness to his limbs and the right kind of color into his face.

"All right, Merton," I said: "you shall have the book and a breech-loading shot-gun also. As for fishing-tackle, you can get along with a pole cut from the woods until you have earned money enough yourself to buy what you need."

The boy was almost overwhelmed. He came to me, and took my hand in both his own.

"O papa," he faltered, and his eyes were moist, "did you say a gun?"

"Yes, a breech-loading shot-gun on one condition—that you'll not smoke till after you are twenty-one. A growing boy can't smoke in safety."

He gave my hand a quick, strong pressure, and was immediately at the farther end of the store, blowing his nose suspiciously. I chuckled to myself: "I want no better promise. A gun will cure him of cigarettes better than a tract would."

Mousie was quiet, as usual; but there was again a faint color in her cheeks, a soft lustre in her eyes. I kept near my invalid child most of the time, for fear that she would go beyond her strength. I made her sit by a table, and brought the books that would interest her most. Her sweet, thin face was a study, and I felt that she was already enjoying the healing caresses of Mother Nature. When we started homeward she carried a book about flowers next to her heart.

Bobsey taxed his mother's patience and agility, for he seemed all over the store at the same moment, and wanted everything in it, being sure that fifteen dollars would buy all and leave a handsome margin; but at last he was content with a book illustrated from beginning to end with pigs.

What pleased me most was to see how my wife enjoyed our little outing. Wrapped up in the children, she reflected their joy in her face, and looked almost girlish in her happiness. I whispered in her ear, "Your present shall be the home itself, for I shall have the deed made out in your name, and then you can turn me out-of-doors as often as you please."

"Which will be every pleasant day after breakfast," she said, laughing. "You know you are very safe in giving things to me."

"Yes, Winifred," I replied, pressing her hand on the sly; "I have been finding that out ever since I gave myself to you."

I bought Henderson's "Gardening for Profit" and some other practical books. I also subscribed for a journal devoted to rural interests and giving simple directions for the work of each month. At last we returned. Never did a jollier little procession march up Broadway. People were going to the opera and evening companies, and carriages rolled by, filled with elegantly dressed ladies and gentlemen; but my wife remarked, "None of those people are so happy as we are, trudging in this roundabout way to our country home."

Her words suggested our course of action during the months which must intervene before it would be safe or wise for us to leave the city. Our thoughts, words, and actions were all a roundabout means to our cherished end, and yet the most direct way that we could take under the circumstances. Field and garden were covered with snow, the ground was granite-like from frost, and winter's cold breath chilled our impatience to be gone; but so far as possible we lived in a country atmosphere, and amused ourselves by trying to conform to country ways in a city flat. Even Winnie declared she heard the cocks crowing at dawn, while Bobsey had a different kind of grunt or squeal for every pig in his book.

CHAPTER V

A COUNTRY CHRISTMAS IN A CITY FLAT

On Christmas morning we all brought out our purchases and arranged them on a table. Merton was almost wild when he found a bright single-barrelled gun with accoutrements standing in the corner. Even Mousie exclaimed with delight at the bright-colored papers of flower-seeds on her plate. To Winnie were given half a dozen china eggs with which to lure the prospective biddies to lay in nests easily reached, and she tried to cackle over them in absurd imitation. Little Bobsey had to have some toys and candy, but they all presented to his eyes the natural inmates of the barn-yard. In the number of domestic animals he swallowed that day he equalled the little boy in Hawthorne's story of "The House of the Seven Gables," who devoured a ginger-bread caravan of camels and elephants purchased at Miss Hepzibah Pyncheon's shop.

Our Christmas dinner consisted almost wholly of such vegetables as we proposed to raise in the coming summer. Never before were such connoisseurs of carrots, beets, onions, parsnips, and so on through almost the entire list of such winter stock as was to be obtained at our nearest green-grocery. We celebrated the day by nearly a dozen dishes which the children aided my wife in preparing. Then I had Merton figure the cost of each, and we were surprised at the cheapness of much of country fare, even when retailed in very small quantities.

This brought up another phase of the problem. In many respects I was like the children, having almost as much to learn as they—with the advantage, however, of being able to correct impressions by experience. In other words, I had more judgment; and while I should certainly make mistakes, not many of them would be absurd or often repeated. I was aware that most of the homely kitchen vegetables cost comparatively little, even though (having in our flat no good place for storage) we had found it better to buy what we needed from day to day. It was therefore certain that, at wholesale in the country, they would often be exceedingly cheap. This fact would work both ways: little money would purchase much food of certain kinds, and if we produced these articles of food they would bring us little money.

I will pass briefly over the period that elapsed before it was time for us to depart, assured that the little people who are following this simple history are as eager to get away from the dusty city flat to the sunlight, breezy fields, brooks, and woods as were the children in my story. It is enough to say that, during all my waking hours not devoted to business, I read, thought, and studied on the problem of supporting my family in the country. I haunted Washington Market in the gray dawn and learned from much inquiry what products found a ready and certain sale at some price, and what appeared to yield to the grower the best profits. There was much conflict of opinion, but I noted down and averaged the statements made to me. Many of the market-men had hobbies, and told me how to make a fortune out of one or two articles; more gave careless, random, or ignorant answers; but here and there was a plain, honest, sensible fellow who showed me from his books what plain, honest, sensible producers in the country were doing. In a few weeks I dismissed finally the tendency to one blunder. A novice hears or reads of an acre of cabbages or strawberries producing so much. Then he figures, "if one acre yields so much, two acres will give twice as much," and so on. The experience of others showed me the utter folly of all this; and I came to the conclusion that I could give my family shelter, plain food, pure air, wholesome work and play in plenty, and that not very soon could I provide much else with certainty. I tried to stick closely to common-sense; and the humble circumstances of the vast majority living from the

soil proved that there was in these pursuits no easy or speedy road to fortune. Therefore we must part reluctantly with every penny, and let a dollar go for only the essentials to the modest success now accepted as all we could naturally expect. We had explored the settled States, and even the Territories, in fancy; we had talked over nearly every industry from cotton and sugarcane planting to a sheep-ranch. I encouraged all this, for it was so much education out of school-hours; yet all, even Merton, eventually agreed with me that we had better not go far away, but seek a place near schools, markets, churches, and well inside of civilization.

"See here, youngsters, you forget the most important crop of all that I must cultivate," I said one evening.

"What is that?" they cried in chorus.

"A crop of boys and girls. You may think that my mind is chiefly on corn and potatoes. Not at all. It is chiefly on you; and for your sakes mamma and I decided to go to the country."

At last, in reply to my inquiries and my answers to advertisements, I received the following letter:—

Maizeville, N.Y. March 1st, '83

Robert Durham, Esq.

Dear Sir

I have a place that will suit you I think. It can be bought at about the figure you name. Come to see it. I shan't crack it up, but want you to judge for yourself.

Resp'y John Jones

I had been to see two or three places that had been "cracked up" so highly that my wife thought it better to close the bargain at once before some one else secured the prize—and I had come back disgusted in each instance.

"The soul of wit" was in John Jones's letter. There was also a downright directness which hit the mark, and I wrote that I would go to Maizeville in the course of the following week.

CHAPTER VI

A BLUFF FRIEND

The almanac had announced spring; nature appeared quite unaware of the fact, but, so far as we were concerned, the almanac was right. Spring was the era of hope, of change, and hope was growing in our hearts like "Jack's bean," in spite of lowering wintry skies. We were as eager as robins, sojourning in the south, to take our flight northward.

My duties to my employers had ceased the 1st of March: I had secured tenants who would take possession of our rooms as soon as we should leave them; and now every spare moment was given to studying the problem of country living and to preparations for departure. I obtained illustrated catalogues from several dealers in seeds, and we pored over them every evening. At first they bewildered us with their long lists of varieties, while the glowing descriptions of new kinds of vegetables just being introduced awakened in us something of a gambling spirit.

"How fortunate it is," exclaimed my wife, "that we are going to the country just as the vegetable marvels were discovered! Why, Robert, if half of what is said is true, we shall make our fortunes."

With us, hitherto, a beet had been a beet, and a cabbage a cabbage; but here were accounts of beets which, as Merton said, "beat all creation," and pictures of prodigious cabbage heads which well-nigh turned our own. With a blending of hope and distrust I carried two of the catalogues to a shrewd old fellow in Washington Market. He was a dealer in country produce who had done business so long at the same stand that among

his fellows he was looked upon as a kind of patriarch. During a former interview he had replied to my questions with a blunt honesty that had inspired confidence. The day was somewhat mild, and I found him in his shirt-sleeves, smoking his pipe among his piled-up barrels, boxes, and crates, after his eleven o'clock dinner. His day's work was practically over; and well it might be, for, like others of his calling, he had begun it long before dawn. Now his old felt hat was pushed well back on his bald head, and his red face, fringed with a grizzled beard, expressed a sort of heavy, placid content. His small gray eyes twinkled as shrewdly as ever. With his pipe he indicated a box on which I might sit while we talked.

"See here, Mr. Bogart," I began, showing him the seed catalogues, "how is a man to choose wisely what vegetables he will raise from a list as long as your arm? Perhaps I shouldn't take any of those old-fashioned kinds, but go into these wonderful novelties which promise a new era in horticulture."

The old man gave a contemptuous grunt; then, removing his pipe, he blew out a cloud of smoke that half obscured us both as he remarked, gruffly, "'A fool and his money are soon parted.'"

This was about as rough as March weather; but I knew my man, and perhaps proved that I wasn't a fool by not parting with him then and there.

"Come now, neighbor," I said, brusquely, "I know some things that you don't, and there are affairs in which I could prove you to be as green as I am in this matter. If you came to me I'd give you the best advice that I could, and be civil about it into the bargain. I've come to you because I believe you to be honest and to know what I don't. When I tell you that I have a little family dependent on me, and that I mean if possible to get a living for them out of the soil, I believe you are man enough both to fall in with my plan and to show a little friendly interest. If you are not, I'll go farther and fare better."

As I fired this broadside he looked at me askance, with the pipe in the corner of his mouth, then reached out his great brown paw, and said,—

"Shake."

I knew it was all right now—that the giving of his hand meant not only a treaty of peace but also a friendly alliance. The old fellow discoursed vegetable wisdom so steadily for half an hour that his pipe went out.

"You jest let that new-fangled truck alone," he said, "till you get more forehanded in cash and experience. Then you may learn how to make something out of them novelties, as they call 'em, if they are worth growing at all. Now and then a good penny is turned on a new fruit or vegetable; but how to do it will be one of the last tricks that you'll learn in your new trade. Hand me one of them misleadin' books, and I'll mark a few solid kinds such as produce ninety-nine hundredths of all that's used or sold. Then you go to What-you-call-'em's store, and take a line from me, and you'll git the genuine article at market-gardeners' prices."

"Now, Mr. Bogart, you are treating me like a man and a brother."

"Oh thunder! I'm treating you like one who, p'raps, may deal with me. Do as you please about it, but if you want to take along a lot of my business cards and fasten 'em to anything you have to sell, I'll give you all they bring, less my commission."

"I've no doubt you will, and that's more than I can believe of a good many in your line, if all's true that I hear. You have thrown a broad streak of daylight into my future. So you see the fool didn't part with his money, or with you either, until he got a good deal more than he expected."

"Well, well, Mr. Durham, you'll have to get used to my rough ways. When I've anything to say, I don't beat about the bush. But you'll always find my checks good for their face."

"Yes, and the face back of them is that of a friend to me now. We'll shake again. Good-by;" and I went home feeling as if I had solid ground under my feet. At supper I went over the whole scene, taking off the man in humorous pantomime, not ridicule, and even my wife grew hilarious over her disappointed hopes of the "new-fangled truck." I managed,

however, that the children should not lose the lesson that a rough diamond is better than a smooth paste stone, and that people often do themselves an injury when they take offence too easily.

"I see it all, papa," chuckled Merton; "if you had gone off mad when he the same as called you a fool, you would have lost all his good advice."

"I should have lost much more than that, my boy, I should have lost the services of a good friend and an honest man to whom we can send for its full worth whatever we can't sell to better advantage at home. But don't mistake me, Merton, toadyism never pays, no matter what you may gain by it; for you give manhood for such gain, and that's a kind of property that one can never part with and make a good bargain. You see the old man didn't mean to be insolent. As he said, it was only his rough, blunt way of saying what was uppermost in his mind."

CHAPTER VII

MR. JONES SHOWS ME THE PLACE

The next day, according to appointment, I went to Maizeville. John Jones met me at the station, and drove me in his box-sleigh to see the farm he had written of in his laconic note. I looked at him curiously as we jogged along over the melting snow. The day was unclouded for a wonder, and the sun proved its increasing power by turning the sleigh-tracks in the road into gleaming rills. The visage of my new acquaintance formed a decided contrast to the rubicund face of the beef-eating marketman. He was sandy even to his eyebrows and complexion. His scraggy beard suggested poverty of soil on his lantern jaws. His frame was as gaunt as that of a scare-crow, and his hands and feet were enormous. He had one redeeming feature, however—a pair of blue eyes that looked straight at you and made you feel that there was no "crookedness" behind them. His brief letter had led me to expect a man of few words, but I soon found that John Jones was a talker and a good-natured gossip. He knew every one we met, and was usually greeted with a rising inflection, like this, "How are you, John?"

We drove inland for two or three miles.

"No, I didn't crack up the place, and I ain't a-goin' to," said my real-estate agent. "As I wrote you, you can see for yourself when we get there, and I'll answer all questions square. I've got the sellin' of the property,

and I mean it shall be a good bargain, good for me and good for him who buys. I don't intend havin' any neighbors around blamin' me for a fraud;" and that is all he would say about it.

On we went, over hills and down dales, surrounded by scenery that seemed to me beautiful beyond all words, even in its wintry aspect.

"What mountain is that standing off by itself?" I asked.

"Schunemunk," he said. "Your place—well, I guess it will be yours before plantin'-time comes—faces that mountain and looks up the valley between it and the main highlands on the left. Yonder's the house, on the slope of this big round hill, that'll shelter you from the north winds."

I shall not describe the place very fully now, preferring that it should be seen through the eyes of my wife and children, as well as my own.

"The dwelling appears old," I said.

"Yes; part of it's a good deal more'n a hundred years old. It's been added to at both ends. But there's timbers in it that will stand another hundred years. I had a fire made in the livin'-room this mornin', to take off the chill, and we'll go in and sit down after we've looked the place over. Then you must come and take pot-luck with us."

At first I was not at all enthusiastic, but the more I examined the place, and thought it over, the more it grew on my fancy. When I entered the main room of the cottage, and saw the wide, old-fashioned fireplace, with its crackling blaze, I thawed so rapidly that John Jones chuckled. "You're amazin' refreshin' for a city chap. I guess I'll crack on another hundred to the price."

"I thought you were not going to crack up the place at all."

"Neither be I. Take that old arm-chair, and I'll tell you all about it. The place looks rather run down, as you have seen. Old Mr. and Mrs. Jamison lived here till lately. Last January the old man died, and a good old man he was. His wife has gone to live with a daughter. By the will I

was app'inted executor and trustee. I've fixed on a fair price for the property, and I'm goin' to hold on till I get it. There's twenty acres of plowable land and orchard, and a five-acre wood-lot, as I told you. The best part of the property is this. Mr. Jamison was a natural fruit-grower. He had a heap of good fruit here and wouldn't grow nothin' but the best. He was always a-speerin' round, and when he come across something extra he'd get a graft, or a root or two. So he gradually came to have the best there was a-goin' in these parts. Now I tell you what it is, Mr. Durham, you can buy plenty of new, bare places, but your hair would be gray before you'd have the fruit that old man Jamison planted and tended into bearing condition; and you can buy places with fine shade trees and all that, and a good show of a garden and orchard, but Jamison used to say that an apple or cherry was a pretty enough shade tree for him, and he used to say too that a tree that bore the biggest and best apples didn't take any more room than one that yielded what was fit only for the cider press. Now the p'int's just here. You don't come to the country to amuse yourself by developin' a property, like most city chaps do, but to make a livin'. Well, don't you see? This farm is like a mill. When the sun's another month higher it will start all the machinery in the apple, cherry, and pear trees and the small fruits, and it will turn out a crop the first year you're here that will put money in your pocket."

Then he named the price, half down and the rest on mortgage, if I so preferred. It was within the limit that my means permitted.

I got up and went all over the house, which was still plainly furnished in part. A large wood-house near the back door had been well filled by the provident old man. There was ample cellar room, which was also a safeguard against dampness. Then I went out and walked around the house. It was all so quaint and homely as to make me feel that it would soon become home-like to us. There was nothing smart to be seen, nothing new except a barn that had recently been built near one of the oldest and grayest structures of the kind I had ever seen. The snow-clad mountains lifted themselves about me in a way that promised a glimpse

of beauty every time I should raise my eyes from work. Yet after all my gaze lingered longest on the orchard and fruit-trees that surrounded the dwelling.

"That's sensible," remarked Mr. Jones, who followed me with no trace of anxiety or impatience. "Paint, putty, and pine will make a house in a few weeks, but it takes a good slice out of a century to build up an orchard like that."

"That was just what I was thinking, Mr. Jones."

"Oh, I knowed that. Well, I've got just two more things to say, then I'm done and you can take it or leave it. Don't you see? The house is on a slope facing the south-east. You get the morning sun and the southern breeze. Some people don't know what they're worth, but I, who've lived here all my life, know they're worth payin' for. Again, you see the ground slopes off to the crick yonder. That means good drainage. We don't have any malary here, and that fact is worth as much as the farm, for I wouldn't take a section of the garden of Eden if there was malary around."

"On your honor now, Mr. Jones, how far is the corner around which they have the malaria?"

"Mr. Durham, it ain't a mile away."

I laughed as I said, "I shall have one neighbor, it seems, to whom I can lend an umbrella."

"Then you'll take the place?"

"Yes, if my wife is as well satisfied as I am. I want you to give me the refusal of it for one week at the price you named."

"Agreed, and I'll put it in black and white."

"Now, Mr. Jones," I began with an apologetic little laugh, "you grow one thing up here in all seasons, I fancy—an appetite. As I feel now, your pot-luck means good luck, no matter what is in it."

"Now you talk sense. I was a-hankerin' myself. I take stock right off in a man or a critter with an appetite. They're always improvin'. Yes, sir; Maizeville is the place to grow an appetite, and what's more we can grow plenty to satisfy it."

Mrs. Jones made a striking contrast to her husband, for she first impressed me as being short, red, and round; but her friendly, bustling ways and hearty welcome soon added other and very pleasant impressions; and when she placed a great dish of fricasseed chicken on the table she won a good-will which her neighborly kindness has steadily increased.

CHAPTER VIII

TELLING ABOUT EDEN

Never was a traveller from a remote foreign clime listened to with more breathless interest than I as I related my adventures at our late supper after my return. Mousie looked almost feverish in her excitement, and Winnie and Bobsey exploded with merriment over the name of the mountain that would be one of our nearest neighbors. They dubbed the place "Schunemunks" at once. Merton put on serious and sportsman-like airs as he questioned me, and it was evident that he expected to add largely to our income from the game he should kill. I did not take much pains to dispel his illusions, knowing that one day's tramp would do this, and that he would bring back increased health and strength if nothing else.

No fairy tale had ever absorbed the children like the description of that old house and its surroundings; and when at last they were induced to retire I said to my wife, after explaining more in practical detail the pros and cons to be considered: "It all depends on you. If you wish I will take you up the first pleasant day, so that you can see for yourself before we decide."

She laughed as she said, "I decided two minutes after you arrived."

"How is that?"

"I saw you had the place in your eyes. La, Robert! I can read you like a book. You give in to me in little things, and that pleases a woman, you know. You must decide a question like this, for it is a question of support for us all, and you can do better on a place that suits you than on one never quite to your mind. It has grown more and more clear to me all the evening that you have fallen in love with the old place, and that settles it."

"Well, you women have a way of your own of deciding a question."

My wife was too shrewd not to make a point in her favor, and she remarked, with a complacent nod, "I have a way of my own, but there are women in the world who would have insisted on a smart new house."

"Little wife," I said, laughing, "there was another girl that I was a little sweet on before I met you. I'm glad you are not the other girl."

She put her head a little to one side with the old roguish look which used to be so distracting when the question of questions with me was whether pretty Winnie Barlow would give half a dozen young fellows the go-by for my sake, and she said, "Perhaps the other girl is glad too."

"I've no doubt she is," I sighed, "for her husband is getting rich. I don't care how glad she is if my girl is not sorry."

"You do amuse me so, Robert! You'd like to pass for something of a philosopher, with your brown studies into the hidden causes and reasons for things, yet you don't half know yet that when a woman sets her heart on something, she hasn't much left with which to long for anything else. That is, if she has a heart, which seems to be left out of some women."

"I think it is, and others get a double allowance. I should be content, for I was rich the moment I won yours."

"I've been more than content; I've been happy—happy all these years in city flats. Even in my tantrums and bad days I knew I was happy, deep in my heart."

"I only hope you will remain as blind about your plodding old husband who couldn't make a fortune in the city."

"I've seen men who made fortunes, and I've seen their wives too."

I thanked God for the look on her face—a look which had been there when she was a bride, and which had survived many straitened years.

So we chose our country home. The small patrimony to which we had added but little—(indeed we had often denied ourselves in order not to diminish it)—was nearly all to be invested in the farm, and a debt to be incurred, besides. While yielding to my fancy, I believed that I had at the same time chosen wisely, for, as John Jones said, the mature fruit trees of the place would begin to bring returns very soon.

CHAPTER IX

"BREAKING CAMP"

We were now all eager to get away, and the weather favored our wishes. A warm rain with a high south wind set in, and the ice disappeared from the river like magic. I learned that the afternoon boat which touched at Maizeville would begin its trips in the following week.

I told my wife about the furniture which still remained in the house, and the prices which John Jones put upon it. We therefore found that we could dispose of a number of bulky articles in our city apartments, and save a goodly sum in cartage and freight. Like soldiers short of ammunition, we had to make every dollar tell, and when by thought and management we could save a little it was talked over as a triumph to be proud of.

The children entered into the spirit of the thing with great zest. They were all going to be hardy pioneers. One evening I described the landing of the "Mayflower," and some of the New-England winters that followed, and they wished to come down to Indian meal at once as a steady diet. Indeed, toward the last, we did come down to rather plain fare, for in packing up one thing after another we at last reached the cooking utensils.

On the morning of the day preceding the one of our departure I began to use military figures of speech.

"Now we must get into marching order," I said, "and prepare to break camp. Soldiers, you know, when about to move, dispose of all their heavy baggage, cook several days' provisions, pack up and load on wagons what they mean to take with them, and start. It is a trying time—one that requires the exercise of good soldierly qualities, such as prompt obedience, indifference to hardship and discomfort, and especially courage in meeting whatever happens."

Thus the children's imaginations were kindled, and our prosaic breaking up was a time of grand excitement. With grim satisfaction they looked upon the dismantling of the rooms, and with sighs of relief saw carts take away such heavy articles as I had sold.

Winnie and Bobsey were inclined to take the children of neighbors into their confidence, and to have them around, but I said that this would not do at all—that when soldiers were breaking camp the great point was to do everything as secretly and rapidly as possible. Thenceforward an air of mystery pervaded all our movements.

Bobsey, however, at last overstepped the bounds of our patience and became unmanageable. The very spirit of mischief seemed to have entered his excited little brain. He untied bundles, placed things where they were in the way, and pestered the busy mother with so many questions, that I hit upon a decided measure to keep him quiet. I told him about a great commander who, in an important fight, was strapped to a mast, so that he could oversee everything. Then I tied the little fellow into a chair. At first he was much elated, and chattered like a magpie, but when he found he was not to be released after a few moments he began to howl for freedom. I then carried him, chair and all, to one of the back rooms. Soon his cries ceased, and tender-hearted Mousie stole after him. Returning she said, with her low laugh, "He'll be good now for a while; he's sound asleep."

And so passed the last day in our city rooms. Except as wife and children were there, they had never appeared very homelike to me, and now they looked bare and comfortless indeed. The children gloated over their

appearance, for it meant novelty to them. "The old camp is about broken up," Merton remarked, with the air of a veteran. But my wife sighed more than once.

"What troubles you, Winifred?"

"Robert, the children were born here, and here I've watched over them in sickness and health so many days and nights."

"Well, my dear, the prospects are that in our new home you will not have to watch over them in sickness very much. Better still, you will not have to be so constantly on your guard against contagions that harm the soul as well as the body. I was told that there are rattle-snakes on Schunemunk, but greater dangers for Winnie and Merton lurk in this street—yes, in this very house;" and I exulted over the thought that we were about to bid Melissa Daggett a final good-by.

"Oh, I know. I'm glad; but then—"

"But then a woman's heart takes root in any place where she has loved and suffered. That tendency makes it all the more certain that you'll love your new home."

"Yes; we may as well face the truth, Robert. We shall suffer in the new home as surely as in the old. There may be stronger sunshine, but that means deeper shadow."

CHAPTER X

SCENES ON THE WHARF

The last night in the city flat was in truth like camping out, the fatigues of the day brought us sound sleep, and we looked and felt like emigrants. But in the morning we rose with the dawn, from our shakedowns on the floor, to begin eagerly and hopefully our final preparations for departure. In response to my letters John Jones had promised to meet us at the Maizeville Landing with his strong covered rockaway, and to have a fire in the old farmhouse. Load after load was despatched to the boat, for I preferred to deal with one trusty truckman. When all had been taken away, we said good-by to our neighbors and took the horse-car to the boat, making our quiet exit in the least costly way. I knew the boat would be warm and comfortable, and proposed that we should eat our lunch there.

The prospect, however, of seeing the wharves, the boats, and the river destroyed even the children's appetites. We soon reached the crowded dock. The great steamer appeared to be a part of it, lying along its length with several gangways, over which boxes, barrels, and packages were being hustled on board with perpetual din. The younger children were a little awed at first by the noise and apparent confusion. Mousie kept close to my side, and even Bobsey clung to his mother's hand. The extended upper cabin had state-rooms opening along its sides, and was as comfortable as a floating parlor with its arm and rocking chairs. Here, not far from the great heater, I established our headquarters. I made the children locate the spot carefully, and said: "From this point we'll make

excursions. In the first place, Merton, you come with me and see that all our household effects are together and in good order. You must learn to travel and look after things like a man."

We spent a little time in arranging our goods so that they would be safer and more compact. Then we went to the captain and laughingly told him we were emigrants to Maizeville, and hoped before long to send a good deal of produce by his boat. We therefore wished him to "lump" us, goods, children, and all, and deliver us safely at the Maizeville wharf for as small a sum as possible.

He good-naturedly agreed, and I found that the chief stage of our journey would involve less outlay than I had expected.

Thus far all had gone so well that I began to fear that a change must take place soon, in order that our experience should be more like the common lot of humanity. When at last I took all the children out on the afterdeck, to remove the first edge of their curiosity, I saw that there was at least an ominous change in the weather. The morning had been mild, with a lull in the usual March winds. Now a scud of clouds was drifting swiftly in from the eastward, and chilly, fitful gusts began to moan and sigh about us. A storm was evidently coming, and my hope was that we might reach our haven before it began. I kept my fears to myself, and we watched the long lines of carts converging toward the gang-planks of our own and other steamboats.

"See, youngsters," I cried, "all this means commerce. These loads and loads of things will soon be at stores and homes up the river, supplying the various needs of the people. Tomorrow the residents along the river will bring what they have to sell to this same boat, and by daylight next morning carts will be carrying country produce and manufactured articles all over the city. Thus you see commerce is made by people supplying themselves and each other with what they need. Just as soon as we can bring down a crate of berries and send it to Mr. Bogart we shall be adding to the commerce of the world in the best way. We shall become what are called the 'producers,' and but for this class the world would soon come to an end."

"'Rah!" cried Bobsey, "I'm goin' to be a p'oducer."

He promised, however, to be a consumer for a long time to come, especially of patience. His native fearlessness soon asserted itself, and he wanted to go everywhere and see everything, asking questions about machinery, navigation, river craft, the contents of every box, bale, or barrel we saw, till I felt that I was being used like a town pump. I pulled him back to the cabin, resolving to stop his mouth for a time at least with the contents of our lunch basket.

Winnie was almost as bad, or as good, perhaps I should say; for, however great the drain and strain on me might be, I knew that these active little brains were expanding to receive a host of new ideas.

Mousie was quiet as usual, and made no trouble, but I saw with renewed hope that this excursion into the world awakened in her a keen and natural interest. Ever since the project of country life had been decided upon, her listless, weary look had been giving place to one of greater animation. The hope of flowers and a garden had fed her life like a deep, hidden spring.

To Merton I had given larger liberty, and had said: "It is not necessary for you to stay with me all the time. Come and go on the boat and wharf as you wish. Pick up what knowledge you can. All I ask is that you will use good sense in keeping out of trouble and danger."

I soon observed that he was making acquaintances here and there, and asking questions which would go far to make good his loss of schooling for a time. Finding out about what one sees is, in my belief, one of the best ways of getting an education. The trouble with most of us is that we accept what we see, without inquiry or knowledge.

The children were much interested in scenes witnessed from the side of the boat farthest from the wharf. Here in the enclosed water-space were several kinds of craft, but the most curious in their eyes was a group of canal boats—"queer travelling houses" Mousie called them; for it was evident that each one had a family on board, and the little entrance to the hidden cabin resembled a hole from which men, women, and

children came like rabbits out of a burrow. Tough, hardy, barefooted children were everywhere. While we were looking, one frowsy-headed little girl popped up from her burrow in the boat, and, with legs and feet as red as a boiled lobster, ran along the guards like a squirrel along a fence.

"O dear!" sighed Mousie, "I'd rather live in a city flat than in such a house."

"I think it would be splendid," protested Winnie, "to live in a travelling house. You could go all over and still stay at home."

I was glad on our return to find my wife dozing in her chair. She was determined to spend in rest the hours on the boat, and had said that Mousie also must be quiet much of the afternoon.

Between three and four the crush on the wharf became very great. Horses and drays were so mixed up that to inexperienced eyes it looked as if they could never be untangled. People of every description, loaded down with parcels, were hurrying on board, and it would seem from our point of view that American women shared with their French sisters an aptness for trade, for among the passengers were not a few substantial, matronly persons who appeared as if they could look the world in the face and get the better of it.

CHAPTER XI

A VOYAGE UP THE HUDSON

As four P.M. approached, I took the children to a great glass window in the cabin, through which we could see the massive machinery.

"Now," said I, "watch the steel giant; he is motionless, but in a moment or two he will move."

True enough, he appeared to take a long breath of steam, and then slowly lifted his polished arms, or levers, and the boat that had been like a part of the wharf began to act as if it were alive and were waking up.

"Now," I asked, "shall we go to the after-deck and take our last look at the city, or forward and see the river and whither we are going?"

"Forward! forward!" cried all in chorus.

"That's the difference between youth and age," I thought. "With the young it is always 'forward.'" But we found that we could not go out on the forward deck, for the wind would have carried away my light, frail Mousie, like a feather. Indeed it was whistling a wild tune as we stood in a small room with glass windows all round. The waves were crowned with foaming white-caps, and the small craft that had to be out in the gale were bobbing up and down, as if possessed. On the river was a strange and lurid light, which seemed to come more from the dashing water than from the sky, so dark was the latter with skurrying clouds.

Mousie clung timidly to my side, but I reassured her by saying: "See how steadily, how evenly and boldly, our great craft goes out on the wide river. In the same way we must go forward, and never be afraid. These boats run every day after the ice disappears, and they are managed by men who know what to do in all sorts of weather."

She smiled, but whispered, "I think I'll go back and stay with mamma;" but she soon found much amusement in looking at passing scenes from the windows of the warm after-cabin—scenes that were like pictures set in oval frames.

The other children appeared fascinated by the scene, especially Winnie, whose bold black eyes flashed with excitement.

"I want to see everything and know everything," she said.

"I wish you to see and know about things like these," I replied, "but not such things as Melissa Daggett would show you."

"Melissy Daggett, indeed!" cried Winnie. "This beats all her stories. She tried to tell me the other day about a theatre at which a woman killed a man—"

"Horrid! I hope you didn't listen?"

"Only long enough to know the man came to life again, and danced in the next—"

"That will do. I'm not interested in Melissa's vulgar stories. As you say, this, and all like this, is much better, and will never prevent you from becoming a lady like mamma."

Winnie's ambition to become a lady promised to be one of my strong levers in uplifting her character.

I confess that I did not like the looks of the sky or of the snow-flakes that began to whirl in the air, but the strong steamer plowed her way rapidly past the city and the villa-crowned shores beyond. The gloom of the

storm and of early coming night was over all, and from the distant western shores the Palisades frowned dimly through the obscurity.

My wife came, and after a brief glance shivered and was turning away, when I said, "You don't like your first glimpse of the country, Winifred?"

"It will look different next June. The children will take cold here. Let them come and watch the machinery."

This we all did for a time, and then I took them on excursions about the enclosed parts of the boat. The lamps were already lighted, and the piled-up freight stood out in grotesque light and shadow.

Before very long we were standing by one of the furnace rooms, and the sooty-visaged man threw open the iron doors of the furnace. In the glare of light that rushed forth everything near stood out almost as vividly as it would have done in a steady gleam of lightning. The fireman instantly became a startling silhouette, and the coal that he shovelled into what was like a flaming mouth of a cavern seemed sparkling black diamonds. The snow-flakes glimmered as the wind swept them by the wide-open window, and in the distance were seen the lights and the dim outline of another boat rushing toward the city. Clang! the iron doors are shut, and all is obscure again.

"Now the boat has had its supper," said Bobsey. "O dear! I wish I could have a big hot supper."

The smoking-room door stood open, and we lingered near it for some moments, attracted first by a picture of a great fat ox, that suggested grassy meadows, plowing, juicy steaks, and other pleasant things. Then our attention was drawn to a man, evidently a cattle-dealer, who was holding forth to others more or less akin to him in their pursuits.

"Yes," he was saying, "people in the country eat a mighty lot of cow-beef, poor and old at that. I was buying calves out near Shawangunk Mountains last week, and stopped at a small tavern. They brought me a steak and I tried to put my knife in it—thought the knife might be dull, but knew my grinders weren't. Jerusalem! I might have chawed on that

steak till now and made no impression. I called the landlord, and said, 'See here, stranger, if you serve me old boot-leather for steak again I'll blow on your house.'—'I vow,' he said, 'it's the best I kin get in these diggin's. You fellers from the city buy up every likely critter that's for sale, and we have to take what you leave.' You see, he hit me right between the horns, for it's about so. Bless your soul, if I'd took in a lot of cow-beef like that to Steers and Pinkham, Washington Market, they'd 'a taken my hide off and hung me up 'longside of my beef."

"Grantin' all that," said another man, "folks in the country would be a sight better off if they'd eat more cow-beef and less pork. You know the sayin' about 'out of the frying-pan into the fire'? Well, in some parts I've travelled they had better get out of the fryin'-pan, no matter where they fetch up."

We went away laughing, and I said: "Don't you be troubled, Mousie; we won't go to the frying-pan altogether to find roses for your cheeks. We'll paint them red with strawberries and raspberries, the color put on from the inside."

As time passed, the storm increased, and the air became so thick with driving snow that the boat's speed was slackened. Occasionally we "slowed up" for some moments. The passengers shook their heads and remarked, dolefully, "There's no telling when we'll arrive."

I made up my mind that it would be good economy for us all to have a hearty hot supper, as Bobsey had suggested; and when, at last, the gong resounded through the boat, we trooped down with the others to the lower cabin, where there were several long tables, with colored waiters in attendance. We had not been in these lower regions before, and the eyes of the children soon wandered from their plates to the berths, or sleeping-bunks, which lined the sides of the cabin.

"Yes," I replied, in answer to their questions; "it is a big supper-room now, but by and by it will be a big bedroom, and people will be tucked away in these berths, just as if they were laid on shelves, one over the other."

The abundant and delicious supper, in which steaks, not from cow-beef, were the chief feature, gave each one of us solid comfort and satisfaction. Bobsey ate until the passengers around him were laughing, but he, with superb indifference, attended strictly to business.

My wife whispered, "You must all eat enough to last a week, for I sha'n't have time to cook anything;" and I was much pleased at the good example which she and Mousie set us.

Both before and after supper I conducted Bobsey to the wash-room, and he made the people laugh as he stood on a chair and washed his face. But he was a sturdy little fellow, and only laughed back when a man said he looked as though he was going to dive into the basin.

Mousie at last began to show signs of fatigue; and learning that it would be several hours still before we could hope to arrive, so severe was the storm, I procured the use of a state-room, and soon Bobsey was snoring in the upper berth, and my invalid girl smiling and talking in soft tones to her mother in the lower couch. Winnie, Merton, and I prowled around, spending the time as best we could. Occasionally we looked through the windows at the bow, and wondered how the pilot could find his way through the tempest. I confess I had fears lest he might not do this, and felt that I should be grateful indeed when my little band was safe on shore. The people in charge of the boat, however, knew their business.

CHAPTER XII

A MARCH EVENING IN EDEN

At length we were fast at the Maizeville Landing, although long after the usual hour of arrival. I was anxious indeed to learn whether John Jones would meet us, or whether, believing that we would not come in such a storm, and tired of waiting, he had gone home and left us to find such shelter as we could.

But there he was, looking in the light of the lanterns as grizzled as old Time himself, with his eyebrows and beard full of snow-flakes. He and I hastily carried the three younger children ashore through the driving snow, and put them in a corner of the storehouse, while Merton followed with his mother.

"Mr. Jones," I exclaimed, "you are a neighbor to be proud of already. Why didn't you go home and leave us to our fate?"

"Well," he replied, laughing, "'twouldn't take you long to get snowed under to-night. No, no; when I catch fish I mean to land 'em. Didn't know but what in such a buster of a storm you might be inclined to stay on the boat and go back to the city. Then where would my bargain be?"

"No fear of that. We're in for it now—have enlisted for the war. What shall we do?"

"Well, I vow I hardly know. One thing first, anyhow—we must get Mrs. Durham and the kids into the warm waiting-room, and then look after your traps."

The room was already crowded, but we squeezed them in, white from scarcely more than a moment's exposure to the storm. Then we took hold and gave the deck-hands a lift with my baggage, Merton showing much manly spirit in his readiness to face the weather and the work. My effects were soon piled up by themselves, and then we held a council.

"Mrs. Durham'll hardly want to face this storm with the children," began Mr. Jones.

"Are you going home?" I asked.

"Yes, sir. I'd rather travel all night for the sake of being home in the morning."

"To tell the truth I feel the same way," I continued, "but reason must hold the reins. Do you think you could protect Mrs. Durham and the children from the storm?"

"Yes, I think we could tuck 'em in so they'd scarcely know it was snowin', and then we could sled your things up in the mornin'. 'Commodations on the landin' to-night will be pretty crowded."

"We'll let her decide, then."

When I explained how things were and what Mr. Jones had said, she exclaimed, "Oh, let us go home."

How my heart jumped at her use of the word "home" in regard to a place that she had never seen. "But, Winifred," I urged, "do you realize how bad a night it is? Do you think it would be safe for Mousie?"

"It isn't so very cold if one is not exposed to the wind and snow," she replied, "and Mr. Jones says we needn't be exposed. I don't believe we'd run as much risk as in going to a little hotel, the best rooms of which are

already taken. Since we can do it, it will be so much nicer to go to a place that we feel is our own!"

"I must say that your wishes accord with mine."

"Oh, I knew that," she replied, laughing. "Mr. Jones," she added, sociably, "this man has a way of telling you what he wishes by his looks before asking your opinion."

"I found that out the day he came up to see the place," chuckled my neighbor, "and I was half a mind to stick him for another hundred for being so honest. He don't know how to make a bargain any more than one of the children there. Well, I'll go to the shed and get the hosses, and we'll make a pull for home. I don't believe you'll be sorry when you get there."

Mr. Jones came around to the very door with the rockaway, and we tucked my wife and children under the buffalo robes and blankets till they could hardly breathe. Then we started out into the white, spectral world, for the wind had coated everything with the soft, wet snow. On we went at a slow walk, for the snow and mud were both deep, and the wheeling was very heavy. Even John Jones's loquacity was checked, for every time he opened his mouth the wind half filled it with snow. Some one ahead of us, with a lantern, guided our course for a mile or so through the dense obscurity, and then he turned off on another road. At first I hailed one and another in the black cavern of the rockaway behind me, and their muffled voices would answer, "All right." But one after another they ceased to answer me until all were fast asleep except my wife. She insisted that she was only very drowsy, but I knew that she was also very, very tired. Indeed, I felt myself, in a way that frightened me, the strange desire to sleep that overcomes those long exposed to cold and wind.

I must have been nodding and swaying around rather loosely, when I felt myself going heels over head into the snow. As I picked myself up I heard my wife and children screaming, and John Jones shouting to his horses, "Git up," while at the same time he lashed them with his whip.

My face was so plastered with snow that I could see only a dark object which was evidently being dragged violently out of a ditch, for when the level road was reached, Mr. Jones shouted, "Whoa!"

"Robert, are you hurt?" cried my wife.

"No, are you?"

"Not a bit, but I'm frightened to death."

Then John Jones gave a hearty guffaw and said:

"I bet you our old shanghai rooster that you don't die."

"Take you up," answered my wife, half laughing and half crying.

"Where are we?" I asked.

"I'm here. Haven't the remotest idea where you be," replied Mr. Jones.

"You are a philosopher," I said, groping my way through the storm toward his voice.

"I believe I was a big fool for tryin' to get home such a night as this; but now that we've set about it, we'd better get there. That's right. Scramble in and take the reins. Here's my mittens."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to 'light and smell out the road. This is equal to any blizzard I've read of out West."

"How far have we to go now?"

"Half a mile, as nigh as I can make out;" and we jogged on again.

"Are you sure you are not hurt?" Mousie asked me.

"Sure; it was like tumbling into a feather bed."

"Stop a bit," cried Mr. Jones. "There's a turn in the road here. Let me go on a little and lay out your course."

"Oh, I wish we had stayed anywhere under shelter," said my wife.

"Courage," I cried. "When we get home, we'll laugh over this."

"Now," shouted Mr. Jones, "veer gradually off to the left toward my voice —all right;" and we jogged on again, stopping from time to time to let our invisible guide explore the road.

Once more he cried, "Stop a minute."

The wind roared and shrieked around us, and it was growing colder. With a chill of fear I thought, "Could John Jones have mistaken the road?" and I remembered how four people and a pair of horses had been frozen within a few yards of a house in a Western snow-storm.

"Are you cold, children?" I asked.

"Yes, I'm freezing," sobbed Winnie. "I don't like the country one bit."

"This is different from the Eden of which we have been dreaming," I thought grimly. Then I shouted, "How much farther, Mr. Jones?"

The howling of the wind was my only answer. I shouted again. The increasing violence of the tempest was the only response.

"Robert," cried my wife, "I don't hear Mr. Jones's voice."

"He has only gone on a little to explore," I replied, although my teeth chattered with cold and fear.

"Halloo—oo!" I shouted. The answering shriek of the wind in the trees overhead chilled my very heart.

"What has become of Mr. Jones?" asked my wife, and there was almost anguish in her tone, while Winnie and Bobsey were actually crying aloud.

"Well, my dear," I tried to say, reassuringly, "even if he were very near to us we could neither see nor hear him."

Moments passed which seemed like ages, and I scarcely knew what to do. The absence of all signs of Mr. Jones filled me with a nameless and unspeakable dread. Could anything have happened to him? Could he have lost his way and fallen into some hole or over some steep bank? If I drove on, we might tumble after him and perish, maimed and frozen, in the wreck of the wagon. One imagines all sorts of horrible things when alone and helpless at night.

"Papa," cried Merton, "I'll get out and look for Mr. Jones."

"You are a good, brave boy," I replied. "No; you hold the reins, and I'll look for him and see what is just before us."

At that moment there was a glimmer of light off to the left of us.

CHAPTER XIII

RESCUED AND AT HOME

All that the poets from the beginning of time have written about light could not express my joy as I saw that glimmer approaching on the left. Before it appeared I had been awed by the tempest, benumbed with cold, shivering in my wet clothes, and a prey to many terrible fears and surmises; but now I cried, "Cheer up; here comes a light."

Then in my gladness I shouted the greeting that met Mr. Jones everywhere, "How are YOU, JOHN?"

A great guffaw of laughter mingled with the howl of the storm, and my neighbor's voice followed from the obscurity: "That's famous—keepin' up your courage like a soldier."

"Oh, I won't brag about keeping up my courage."

"Guess you didn't know what had become of me?"

"You're right and we didn't know what was to become of us. Now aren't we nearly home? For we are all half frozen."

"Just let me spy a bit with the lantern, and I'll soon tell you everything." He bobbed back and forth for a moment or two like a will-o'-the-wisp. "Now turn sharp to the left, and follow the light."

A great hope sprung up in my heart, and I hushed Winnie's and Bobsey's crying by saying, "Listen, and you'll soon hear some good news."

Our wheels crunched through the deep snow for a few moments, and soon I saw a ruddy light shining from the window of a dwelling, and then Mr. Jones shouted, "Whoa! 'Light down, neighbors; you're at your own door."

There was a chorus of delighted cries. Merton half tumbled over me in his eagerness to get down. A door opened, and out poured a cheerful glow. Oh the delicious sense of safety and warmth given by it already!

I seized Mousie, floundered through the snow up to my knees, and placed her in a big rocking-chair. Mr. Jones followed with Winnie, and Merton came in with Bobsey on his back. The little fellow was under such headway in crying that he couldn't stop at once, although his tears were rapidly giving place to laughter. I rushed back and carried in my wife, and then said, in a voice a little unsteady from deep feeling, "Welcome home, one and all."

Never did the word mean more to a half-frozen and badly frightened family. At first safety, warmth, and comfort were the uppermost in our thoughts, but as wraps were taken off, and my wife and children thawed out, eager-eyed curiosity began to make explorations. Taking Mousie on my lap, and chafing her hands, I answered questions and enjoyed to the full the exclamations of pleasure.

Mr. Jones lingered for a few moments, then gave one of his big guffaws by way of preface, and said: "Well, you do look as if you was at home and meant to stay. This 'ere scene kinder makes me homesick; so I'll say good-night, and I'll be over in the mornin'. There's some lunch on the table that my wife fixed up for you. I must go, for I hear John junior hollerin' for me."

His only response to our profuse thanks was another laugh, which the wind swept away.

"Who is John junior?" asked Merton.

"Mr. Jones's son, a boy of about your age. He was here waiting for us, and keeping the fire up. When we arrived he came out and took the horses, and so you didn't see him. He'll make a good playmate for you. To use his father's own words, 'He's a fairish boy as boys go,' and that from John Jones means that he's a good fellow."

Oh, what a happy group we were, as we gathered around the great, open fire, on which I piled more wood!

"Do you wish to go and look around a little?" I asked my wife.

"No," she replied, leaning back in her rocking-chair: "let me take this in first. O Robert, I have such a sense of rest, quiet, comfort, and hominess that I just want to sit still and enjoy it all. The howling of the storm only makes this place seem more like a refuge, and I'd rather hear it than the Daggetts tramping overhead and the Ricketts children crying down-stairs. Oh, isn't it nice to be by ourselves in this quaint old room? Turn the lamp down, Robert, so we can see the firelight flicker over everything. Isn't it splendid?—just like a picture in a book."

"No picture in a book, Winifred—no artist could paint a picture that would have the charm of this one for me," I replied, leaning my elbow on the end of the mantel-piece, and looking fondly down on the little group. My wife's face looked girlish in the ruddy light. Mousie gazed into the fire with unspeakable content, and declared she was "too happy to think of taking cold." Winnie and Bobsey were sitting, Turk-fashion, on the floor, their eyelids drooping. The long cold ride had quenched even their spirit, for after running around for a few moments they began to yield to drowsiness. Merton, with a boy's appetite, was casting wistful glances at the lunch on the table, the chief feature of which was a roast chicken.

There seemed to be no occasion for haste. I wished to let the picture sink deep into my heart. At last my wife sprang up and said:—

"I've been sentimental long enough. You're not of much account in the house, Robert"—with one of her saucy looks—"and I must see to things, or Winnie and Bobsey will be asleep on the floor. I feel as if I could sit

here till morning, but I'll come back after the children are in bed. Come, show me my home, or at least enough of it to let me see where we are to sleep."

"We shall have to camp again to-night. Mrs. Jones has made up the one bed left in the house, and you and Mousie shall have that. We'll fix Winnie and Bobsey on the lounge; and, youngsters, you can sleep in your clothes, just as soldiers do on the ground. Merton and I will doze in these chairs before the fire. To-morrow night we can all be very comfortable."

I took the lamp and led the way—my wife, Mousie, and Merton following—first across a little hall, from which one stairway led to the upper chambers and another to the cellar. Opening a door opposite the living-room, I showed Winifred her parlor. Cosey and comfortable it looked, even now, through Mr. and Mrs. Jones's kind offices. A Morning Glory stove gave out abundant warmth and a rich light which blended genially with the red colors of the carpet.

"Oh, how pretty I can make this room look!" exclaimed my wife.

"Of course you can: you've only to enter it."

"You hurt your head when you fell out of the wagon, Robert, and are a little daft. There's no place to sleep here."

"Come to the room over this, warmed by a pipe from this stove."

"Ah, this is capital," she cried, looking around an apartment which Mrs. Jones had made comfortable. "Wasn't I wise when I decided to come home? It's just as warm as toast. Now let the wind blow—Why, I don't hear it any more."

"No, the gale has blown itself out. Finding that we had escaped, it got discouraged and gave up. Connected with this room is another for Mousie and Winnie. By leaving the door open much of the time it will be warm enough for them. So you see this end of the house can be heated with but little trouble and expense. The open fire in the living-room is a luxury that we can afford, since there is plenty of wood on the place. On

the other side of the hall there is a room for Merton. Now do me a favor: don't look, or talk, or think, any more to-night. It has been a long, hard day. Indeed"—looking at my watch—"it is already to-morrow morning, and you know how much we shall have to do. Let us go back and get a little supper, and then take all the rest we can."

Winifred yielded, and Bobsey and Winnie waked up for a time at the word "supper." Then we knelt around our hearth, and made it an altar to God, for I wished the children never to forget our need of His fatherly care and help.

"I will now take the children upstairs and put them to bed, and then come back, for I can not leave this wood fire just yet," remarked my wife.

I burst out laughing and said, "You have never been at home until this night, when you are camping in an old house you never saw before, and I can prove it by one question—When have you taken the children UPSTAIRS to bed before?"

"Why—why—never."

"Of course you haven't—city flats all your life. But your nature is not perverted. In natural homes for generations mothers have taken their children upstairs to bed, and, forgetting the habit of your life, you speak according to the inherited instinct of the mother-heart."

"O Robert, you have so many fine-spun theories! Yet it is a little queer. It seemed just as natural for me to say upstairs as—"

"As it was for your mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother."

"Very well. We are in such an old house that I suppose I shall begin to look and act like my great-grandmother. But no more theories to-night—nothing but rest and the wood fire."

She soon joined me at the hearth again. Merton meanwhile had stretched himself on the rag-carpet, with his overcoat for a pillow, and was in dreamless sleep. My wife's eyes were full of languor. She did not

sit down, but stood beside me for a moment. Then, laying her head on my shoulder, she said, softly, "I haven't brains enough for theories and such things, but I will try to make you all happy here."

"Dear little wife!" I laughed; "when has woman hit upon a higher or better wisdom than that of making all happy in her own home? and you half asleep, too."

"Then I'll bid you good-night at once, before I say something awfully stupid."

Soon the old house was quiet. The wind had utterly ceased. I opened the door a moment, and looked on the white, still world without. The stars glittered frostily through the rifts in the clouds. Schunemunk Mountain was a shadow along the western horizon, and the eastern highlands banked up and blended with the clouds. Nature has its restless moods, its storms and passions, like human life; but there are times of tranquillity and peace, even in March. How different was this scene from the aspect of our city street when I had taken my farewell look at a late hour the previous night! No grand sweeping outlines there, no deep quiet and peace, soothing and at the same time uplifting the mind. Even at midnight there is an uneasy fretting in city life—some one not at rest, and disturbing the repose of others.

I stole silently through the house. Here, too, all seemed in accord with nature. The life of a good old man had quietly ceased in this home; new, hopeful life was beginning. Evil is everywhere in the world, but it seemed to me that we had as safe a nook as could be found.

CHAPTER XIV

SELF-DENIAL AND ITS REWARD

I remember little that followed until I was startled out of my chair by a loud knocking. The sunlight was streaming in at the window and John Jones's voice was at the door.

"I think we have all overslept," I said, as I admitted him.

"Not a bit of it. Every wink you've had after such a day as yesterday is like money put in the bank. But the sleighing is better now than it will be later in the day. The sun'll be pretty powerful by noon, and the snow'll soon be slush. Now's your chance to get your traps up in a hurry. I can have a two-hoss sled ready in half an hour, and if you say so I can hire a big sleigh of a neighbor, and we'll have everything here by dinner-time. After you get things snug, you won't care if the bottom does fall out of the roads for a time. Well, you HAVE had to rough it. Merton might have come and stayed with us."

"Oh, I'm all right," said the boy, rubbing his eyes open as he rose from the floor, at the same time learning from stiff joints that a carpet is not a mattress.

"Nothing would suit me better, Mr. Jones, than your plan of prompt action, and I'm the luckiest man in the world in having such a long-headed, fore-handed neighbor to start with. I know you'll make a good

bargain for the other team, and before I sleep to-night I wish to square up for everything. I mean at least to begin business in this way at Maizeville."

"Oh, go slow, go slow!" said Mr. Jones. "The town will mob you if they find you've got ready money in March. John junior will be over with a pot of coffee and a jug of milk in a few minutes, and we'll be off sharp."

There was a patter of feet overhead, and soon Bobsey came tearing down, half wild with excitement over the novelty of everything. He started for the door as if he were going head first into the snow.

I caught him, and said: "Do you see that chair? Well, we all have a busy day before us. You can help a good deal, and play a little, but you can't hinder and pester according to your own sweet will one bit. You must either obey orders or else be put under arrest and tied in the chair."

To go into the chair to-day would be torture indeed, and the little fellow was sobered at once.

The others soon joined us, eager to see everything by the broad light of day, and to enter upon the task of getting settled. We had scarcely come together before John junior appeared with the chief features of our breakfast. The children scanned this probable playmate very curiously, and some of us could hardly repress a smile at his appearance. He was even more sandy than his father. Indeed his hair and eyebrows were nearly white, but out of his red and almost full-moon face his mother's black eyes twinkled shrewdly. They now expressed only good-will and bashfulness. Every one of us shook hands with him so cordially that his boy's heart was evidently won.

Merton, to break the ice more fully, offered to show him his gun, which he had kept within reach ever since we left the boat. It made him feel more like a pioneer, no doubt. As he took it from its stout cloth cover I saw John junior's eyes sparkle. Evidently a deep chord was touched. He said, excitedly: "To-day's your time to try it. A rabbit can't stir without leaving his tracks, and the snow is so deep and soft that he can't get away. There's rabbits on your own place."

"O papa," cried my boy, fairly trembling with eagerness, "can't I go?"

"I need you very much this morning."

"But, papa, others will be out before me, and I may lose my chance;" and he was half ready to cry.

"Yes," I said; "there is a risk of that. Well, YOU shall decide in this case," I added, after a moment, seeing a chance to do a little character-building. "It is rarely best to put pleasure before business or prudence. If you go out into the snow with those boots, you will spoil them, and very probably take a severe cold. Yet you may go if you will. If you help me we can be back by ten o'clock, and I will get you a pair of rubber boots as we return."

"Will there be any chance after ten o'clock?" he asked, quickly.

"Well," said John junior, in his matter-of-fact way, "that depends. As your pa says, there's a risk."

The temptation was too strong for the moment. "O dear!" exclaimed Merton, "I may never have so good a chance again. The snow will soon melt, and there won't be any more till next winter. I'll tie my trousers down about my boots, and I'll help all the rest of the day after I get back."

"Very well," I said quietly: and he began eating his breakfast—the abundant remains of our last night's lunch—very rapidly, while John junior started off to get his gun.

I saw that Merton was ill at ease, but I made a sign to his mother not to interfere. More and more slowly he finished his breakfast, then took his gun and went to the room that would be his, to load and prepare. At last he came down and went out by another door, evidently not wishing to encounter me. John junior met him, and the boys were starting, when John senior drove into the yard and shouted, "John junior, step here a moment."

The boy returned slowly, Merton following. "You ain't said nothin' to me about goin' off with that gun," continued Mr. Jones, severely.

"Well, Merton's pa said he might go if he wanted to, and I had to go along to show him."

"That first shot wasn't exactly straight, my young friend John. I told Merton that it wasn't best to put pleasure before business, but that he could go if he would. I wished to let him choose to do right, instead of making him do right."

"Oho, that's how the land lays. Well, John junior, you can have your choice, too. You may go right on with your gun, but you know the length and weight of that strap at home. Now, will you help me? or go after rabbits?"

The boy grinned pleasantly, and replied, "If you had said I couldn't go, I wouldn't; but if it's choosin' between shootin' rabbits and a strappin' afterward—come along, Merton."

"Well, go along then," chuckled his father; "you've made your bargain square, and I'll keep my part of it."

"Oh, hang the rabbits! You shan't have any strapping on my account," cried Merton; and he carried his gun resolutely to his room and locked the door on it.

John junior quietly went to the old barn, and hid his gun.

"Guess I'll go with you, pa," he said, joining us.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Jones. "It was a good bargain to back out of. Come now, let's all be off as quick as we can. Neighbor Rollins down the road will join us as we go along."

"Merton," I said, "see if there isn't a barrel of apples in the cellar. If you find one, you can fill your pockets."

He soon returned with bulging pockets and a smiling face, feeling that such virtue as he had shown had soon brought reward. My wife said that while we were gone she and the children would explore the house and plan how to arrange everything. We started in good spirits.

"Here's where you thought you was cast away last night," Mr. Jones remarked, as we passed out of the lane.

The contrast made by a few short hours was indeed wonderful. Then, in dense obscurity, a tempest had howled and shrieked about us; now, in the unclouded sunshine, a gemmed and sparkling world revealed beauty everywhere.

For a long distance our sleighs made the first tracks, and it seemed almost a pity to sully the purity of the white, drift-covered road.

"What a lot of mud's hid under this snow!" was John Jones's prose over the opening vistas. "What's more, it will show itself before night. We can beat all creation at mud in Maizeville, when once we set about it."

Merton laughed, and munched his apples, but I saw that he was impressed by winter scenery such as he had never looked upon before. Soon, however, he and John junior were deep in the game question, and I noted that the latter kept a sharp lookout along the roadside. Before long, while passing a thicket, he shouted, "There's tracks," and floundered out into the snow, Merton following.

"Oh, come back," growled his father.

"Let the boys have a few moments," I said. "They gave up this morning about as well as you could expect of boys. Would Junior have gone and taken a strapping if Merton hadn't returned?"

"Yes, indeed he would, and he knows my strappin's are no make-believe. That boy has no sly, mean tricks to speak of, but he's as tough and obstinate as a mule sometimes, especially about shooting and fishing. See him now a-p'intin' for that rabbit, like a hound."

True enough, the boy was showing good woodcraft. Restraining Merton, he cautiously approached the tracks, which by reason of the lightness and depth of the snow were not very distinct.

"He can't be far away," said Junior, excitedly. "Don't go too fast till I see which way he was a-p'intin'. We don't want to follow the tracks back, but for'ard. See, he came out of that old wall there, he went to these bushes and nibbled some twigs, and here he goes—here he went—here—here—yes, he went into the wall again just here. Now, Merton, watch this hole while I jump over the other side of the fence and see if he comes out again. If he makes a start, grab him."

John Jones and I were now almost as excited as the boys, and Mr. Rollins, the neighbor who was following us, was standing up in his sleigh to see the sport. It came quickly. As if by some instinct the rabbit believed Junior to be the more dangerous, and made a break from the wall almost at Merton's feet, with such swiftness and power as to dash by him like a shot. The first force of its bound over, it was caught by nature's trap—snow too deep and soft to admit of rapid running.

John Jones soon proved that Junior came honestly by his passion for hunting. In a moment he was floundering through the bushes with his son and Merton. In such pursuit of game my boy had the advantage, for he was as agile as a cat. But a moment or two elapsed before he caught up with the rabbit, and threw himself upon it, then rose, white as a snow-man, shouting triumphantly and holding the little creature aloft by its ears.

"Never rate Junior for hunting again," I said, laughingly, to Mr. Jones. "He's a chip of the old block."

"I rather guess he is," my neighbor acknowledged, with a grin. "I own up I used to be pretty hot on such larkin'. We all keep forgettin' we was boys once."

As we rode on, Merton was a picture of exultation, and Junior was on the sharp lookout again. His father turned on him and said: "Now look a' here, enough's as good as a feast. I'll blindfold you if you don't let the

tracks alone. Mrs. Durham wants her things, so she can begin to live. Get up there;" and a crack of the whip ended all further hopes on the part of the boys. But they felt well repaid for coming, and Merton assured Junior that he deserved half the credit, for only he knew how to manage the hunt.

CHAPTER XV

OUR SUNNY KITCHEN

Before we reached the landing I had invested a goodly sum in four pairs of rubber boots, for I knew how hopeless it would be to try to keep Winnie and Bobsey indoors. As for Mousie, she would have to be prudent until the ground should become dry and warm.

There is no need of dwelling long on the bringing home of our effects and the getting to rights. We were back soon after ten, and found that Winnie and Bobsey, having exhausted the resources of the house, had been permitted to start at the front door, and, with an old fire-shovel and a piece of board, had well-nigh completed a path to the well, piling up the snow as they advanced, so that their overshoes were a sufficient protection.

After we had carried in the things I interceded with Mr. Jones and then told the boys that they could take their guns and be absent two or three hours if they would promise to help faithfully the rest of the day.

I had bought at Maizeville Landing such provisions, tools, etc., as I should need immediately. Therefore I did not worry because the fickle March sky was clouding up again with the promise of rain. A heavy downpour now with snow upon the ground would cause almost a flood, but I felt that we could shut the door and find the old house a very comfortable ark.

"A smart warm rain would be the best thing that could happen to yer," said Mr. Jones, as he helped me carry in furniture and put up beds; "it would take the snow off. Nat'rally you want to get out on the bare ground, for there's allus a lot of clearin' up to be done in the spring and old man Jamison was poorly last year and didn't keep things up to the mark."

"Yes," I replied, "I am as eager to get to work outdoors as the boys were to go after rabbits. I believe I shall like the work, but that is not the question. I did not come to the country to amuse myself, like so many city people. I don't blame them; I wish I could afford farming for fun. I came to earn a living for my wife and children, and I am anxious to be about it. I won't ask you for anything except advice. I've only had a city training, and my theories about farming would perhaps make you smile. But I've seen enough of you already to feel that you are inclined to be kind and neighborly, and the best way to show this will be in helping me to good, sound, practical, common-sense advice. But you mustn't put on airs, or be impatient with me. Shrewd as you are, I could show you some things in the city."

"Oh, I'd be a sight queerer there than you here. I see your p'int, and if you'll come to me I won't let you make no blunders I wouldn't make myself. Perhaps that ain't saying a great deal, though."

By this time everything had been brought in and either put in place or stowed out of the way, until my wife could decide where and how she would arrange things.

"Now," I said, when we had finished, "carry out our agreement."

Mr. Jones gave me a wink and drove away.

Our agreement was this—first, that he and Mr. Rollins, the owner of the other team, should be paid in full before night; and second, that Mrs. Jones should furnish us our dinner, in which the chief dish should be a pot-pie from the rabbit caught by Merton, and that Mr. Jones should bring everything over at one o'clock.

My wife was so absorbed in unpacking her china, kitchen-utensils, and groceries that she was unaware of the flight of time, but at last she suddenly exclaimed, "I declare it's dinner-time!"

"Not quite yet," I said; "dinner will be ready at one."

"It will? Oh, indeed! Since we are in the country we are to pick up what we can, like the birds. You intend to invite us all down to the apple barrel, perhaps."

"Certainly, whenever you wish to go; but we'll have a hot dinner at one o'clock, and a game dinner into the bargain."

"I've heard the boys' guns occasionally, but I haven't seen the game, and it's after twelve now."

"Papa has a secret—a surprise for us," cried Mousie; "I can see it in his eyes."

"Now, Robert, I know what you've been doing. You have asked Mrs. Jones to furnish a dinner. You are extravagant, for I could have picked up something that would have answered."

"No; I've been very prudent in saving your time and strength, and saving these is sometimes the best economy in the world. Mousie is nearer right. The dinner is a secret, and it has been furnished chiefly by one of the family."

"Well, I'm too busy to guess riddles to-day; but if my appetite is a guide, it is nearly time we had your secret."

"You would not feel like that after half an hour over a hot stove. Now you will be interrupted, in getting to rights, only long enough to eat your dinner. Then Mousie and Merton and Winnie will clear up everything, and be fore night you will feel settled enough to take things easy till to-morrow."

"I know your thoughtfulness for me, if not your secret," she said, gratefully, and was again putting things where, from housewifely experience, she knew they would be handy.

Mr. and Mrs. Jamison had clung to their old-fashioned ways, and had done their cooking over the open fire, using the swinging crane which is now employed chiefly in pictures. This, for the sake of the picture it made, we proposed to keep as it had been left, although at times it might answer some more prosaic purpose.

At the eastern end of the house was a single room, added unknown years ago, and designed to be a bed-chamber. Of late it had been used as a general storage and lumber room, and when I first inspected the house, I had found little in this apartment of service to us. So I had asked Mr. Jones to remove all that I did not care for, and to have the room cleansed, satisfied that it would just suit my wife as a kitchen. It was large, having windows facing the east and south, and therefore it would be light and cheerful, as a kitchen ever should be, especially when the mistress of the house is cook. There Mr. Jones and I set up the excellent stove that I had brought from New York—one to which my wife was accustomed, and from which she could conjure a rare good dinner when she gave her mind to it. Now as she moved back and forth, in such sunlight as the clouding sky permitted, she appeared the picture of pleased content.

"It cheers one up to enter a kitchen like this," she said.

"It is to be your garden for a time also," I exclaimed to Mousie. "I shall soon have by this east window a table with shallow boxes of earth, and in them you can plant some of your flower-seeds. I only ask that I may have two of the boxes for early cabbages, lettuce, tomatoes, etc. You and your plants can take a sun-bath every morning until it is warm, enough to go out of doors, and you'll find the plants won't die here as they did in the dark, gas-poisoned city flat."

"I feel as if I were going to grow faster and stronger than the plants," cried the happy child.

Junior and Merton now appeared, each carrying a rabbit. My boy's face, however, was clouded, and he said, a little despondently, "I can't shoot straight—missed every time; and Junior shot 'em after I had fired and missed."

"Pshaw!" cried Junior; "Merton's got to learn to take a quick steady sight, like every one else. He gets too excited."

"That's just it, my boy," I said. "You shall go down by the creek and fire at a mark a few times every day, and you'll soon hit it every time. Junior's head is too level to think that anything can be done well without practice. Now, Junior," I added, "run over home and help your father bring us our dinner, and then you stay and help us eat it."

Father and son soon appeared, well laden. Winnie and Bobsey came in ravenous from their path-making, and all agreed that we had already grown one vigorous rampant Maizeville crop—an appetite.

The pot-pie was exulted over, and the secret of its existence explained. Even Junior laughed till the tears came as I described him, his father, and Merton, floundering through the deep snow after the rabbit, and we all congratulated Merton as the one who had provided our first country dinner.

CHAPTER XVI

MAKING A PLACE FOR CHICKENS

Before the meal was over, I said, seriously, "Now, boys, there must be no more hunting until I find out about the game-laws. They should be obeyed, especially by sportsmen. I don't think that we are forbidden to kill rabbits on our own place, particularly when they threaten to be troublesome; and the hunt this morning was so unexpected that I did not think of the law, which might be used to make us trouble. You killed the other rabbits on this place, Junior?"

"Yes, sir, both of 'em."

"Well, hereafter you must look after hawks, and other enemies of poultry. Especially do I hope you will never fire at our useful song-birds. If boys throughout the country would band together to protect game when out of season, they would soon have fine sport in the autumn."

In the afternoon we let Winnie and Bobsey expend their energy in making paths and lanes in every direction through the snow, which was melting rapidly in the south wind. By three o'clock the rain began to fall, and when darkness set in there was a gurgling sound of water on every side. Our crackling fire made the warmth and comfort within seem tenfold more cheery.

A hearty supper, prepared in our own kitchen, made us feel that our home machinery had fairly started, and we knew that it would run more and more smoothly. March was keeping up its bad name for storm and

change. The wind was again roaring, but laden now with rain, and in gusty sheets the heavy drops dashed against the windows. But our old house kept us dry and safe, although it rocked a little in the blasts. They soon proved a lullaby for our second night at home.

After breakfast the following morning, with Merton, Winnie, and Bobsey, I started out to see if any damage had been done. The sky was still clouded, but the rain had ceased. Our rubber boots served us well, for the earth was like an over-full sponge, while down every little incline and hollow a stream was murmuring.

The old barn showed the need of a good many nails to be driven here and there, and a deal of mending. Then it would answer for corn-stalks and other coarse fodder. The new barn had been fairly built, and the interior was dry. It still contained as much hay as would be needed for the keeping of a horse and cow until the new crop should be harvested.

"Papa," cried Winnie, "where is the chicken place?"

"That is one of the questions we must settle at once," I replied. "As we were coming out I saw an old coop in the orchard. We'll go and look at it."

It was indeed old and leaky, and had poultry been there the previous night they would have been half drowned on their perches. "This might do for a summer cottage for your chickens, Winnie," I continued, "but never for a winter house. Let us go back to the barn, for I think I remember a place that will just suit, with some changes."

Now the new barn had been built on a hillside, and had an ample basement, from which a room extending well into the bank had been partitioned, thus promising all one could desire as a cellar for apples and roots. The entrance to this basement faced the east, and on each side of it was a window. To the right of the entrance were two cow-stalls, and to the left was an open space half full of mouldy corn-stalks and other rubbish.

"See here, Winnie and Merton," I said, after a little examination, "I think we could clear out this space on the left, partition it off, make a door, and keep the chickens here. After that window is washed, a good deal of sunlight can come in. I've read that in cold weather poultry need warmth and light, and must be kept dry. Here we can secure all these conditions. Having a home for ourselves, suppose we set to work to make a home for the chickens."

This idea delighted Winnie, and pleased Merton almost as much as hunting rabbits. "Now," I resumed, "we will go to the house and get what we need for the work."

"Winifred," I said to my wife, "can you let Winnie have a small pail of hot water and some old rags?"

"What are you up to now?"

"You know all about cleaning house; we are going to clean barn, and make a place for Winnie's chickens. There is a window in their future bedroom—roost-room I suppose I should call it—that looks as if it had never been washed, and to get off the dust of years will be Winnie's task, while Merton, Bobsey, and I create an interior that should satisfy a knowing hen. We'll make nests, too, children, that will suggest to the biddies that they should proceed at once to business."

"But where are the chickens to come from?" my wife asked, as she gave the pan to Merton to carry for his sister.

"Oh, John Jones will put me in the way of getting them soon;" and we started out to our morning's work. Mousie looked after us wistfully, but her mother soon found light tasks for her, and she too felt that she was helping. "Remember, Mousie," I said, in parting, "that I have three helpers, and surely mamma needs one;" and she was content.

Merton at first was for pitching all the old corn-stalks out into the yard, but I said: "That won't do. We shall need a cow as well as chickens, and these stalks must be kept dry for her bedding. We'll pile them up in the inner empty stall. You can help at that, Bobsey;" and we set to work.

Under Winnie's quick hands more and more light came through the window. With a fork I lifted and shook up the stalks, and the boys carried them to the empty stall. At last we came to rubbish that was so damp and decayed that it would be of no service indoors, so we placed it on a barrow and I wheeled it out to one corner of the yard. At last we came down to a hard earth floor, and with a hoe this was cleared and made smooth.

"Merton," I said, "I saw an old broom upstairs. Run and get it, and we'll brush down the cobwebs and sweep out, and then we shall be ready to see about the partition."

CHAPTER XVII

GOOD BARGAINS IN MAPLE SUGAR

By eleven o'clock we had all the basement cleaned except the one cow-stall that was filled to the ceiling with litter; and Winnie had washed the windows. Then John Jones's lank figure darkened the doorway, and he cried, "Hello, neighbor, what ye drivin' at?"

"Look around and see, and then tell us where to get a lot of chickens."

"Well, I declare! How you've slicked things up! You're not goin' to scrub the dirt floor, are you? Well, well, this looks like business—just the place for chickens. Wonder old man Jamison didn't keep 'em here; but he didn't care for fowls. Now I think of it, there's to be a vandoo the first of the week, and there was a lot o' chickens printed on the poster."

I smiled.

"Oh, I don't mean that the chickens themselves was on the poster, but a statement that a lot would be sold at auction. I'll bid 'em in for you if they're a good lot. If you, a city chap, was to bid, some straw-bidder would raise 'em agin you. I know what they're wuth, and everybody there'll know I do, and they'll try no sharp games with me."

"That will suit me exactly, Mr. Jones. I don't want any game-fowls of that kind."

"Ha, ha! I see the p'int. Have you looked into the root-cellar?"

"Yes; we opened the door and looked, but it was dark as a pocket."

"Well, I don't b'lieve in matches around a barn, but I'll show you something;" and he opened the door, struck a match, and, holding it aloft, revealed a heap of turnips, another of carrots, five barrels of potatoes, and three of apples. The children pounced upon the last with appetites sharpened by their morning's work.

"You see," resumed Mr. Jones, "these were here when old man Jamison died. If I hadn't sold the place I should have taken them out before long, and got rid of what I didn't want. Now you can have the lot at a low figure," which he named.

"I'll take them," I said, promptly.

"The carrots make it look like a gold-mine," cried Merton.

"Well, you're wise," resumed Mr. Jones. "You'll have to get a cow and a horse, and here's fodder for 'em handy. Perhaps I can pick 'em out for you, too, at the vandoo. You can go along, and if anything strikes your fancy I'll bid on it."

"O papa," cried the children, in chorus, "can we go with you to the vandoo?"

"Yes, I think so. When does the sale take place?"

"Next Tuesday. That's a good breed of potatoes. Jamison allus had the best of everything. They'll furnish you with seed, and supply your table till new ones come. I guess you could sell a barrel or so of apples at a rise."

"I've found a market for them already. Look at these children; and I'm good for half a barrel myself if they don't decay too soon. Where could we find better or cheaper food? All the books say that apples are fattening."

"That's true of man and beast, if the books do say it. They'll keep in this cool, dark cellar longer than you'd think—longer than you'll let 'em, from the way they're disappearin'. I guess I'll try one."

"Certainly, a dozen, just as if they were still yours."

"They wasn't mine—they belonged to the Jamison estate. I'll help myself now quicker'n I would before. I might come it over a live man, you know, but not a dead one."

"I'd trust you with either."

While I was laughing at this phase of honesty, he resumed: "This is the kind of place to keep apples—cool, dry, dark, even temperature. Why, they're as crisp and juicy as if just off the trees. I came over to make a suggestion. There's a lot of sugar-maple trees on your place, down by the brook. Why not tap 'em, and set a couple of pots b'ilin' over your open fire? You'd kill two birds with one stone; the fire'd keep you warm, and make a lot of sugar in the bargain. I opinion, too, the children would like the fun."

They were already shouting over the idea, but I said dubiously, "How about the pails to catch the sap?"

"Well," said Mr. Jones, "I've thought of that. We've a lot of spare milk-pails and pans, that we're not usin'. Junior understands the business; and, as we're not very busy, he can help you and take his pay in sugar."

The subject of poultry was forgotten; and the children scampered off to the house to tell of this new project.

Before Mr. Jones and I left the basement, he said: "You don't want any partition here at present, only a few perches for the fowls. There's a fairish shed, you remember, in the upper barnyard, and when 'tain't very cold or stormy the cow will do well enough there from this out. The weather'll be growin' milder 'most every day, and in rough spells you can put her in here. Chickens won't do her any harm. Law sakes! when the main conditions is right, what's the use of havin' everything jes' so? It's

more important to save your time and strength and money. You'll find enough to do without one stroke that ain't needful." Thus John Jones fulfilled his office of mentor.

CHAPTER XVIII

BUTTERNUTS AND BOBSEY'S PERIL

I restrained the children until after dinner, which my wife hastened. By that time Junior was on hand with a small wagon-load of pails and pans.

"Oh, dear, I wanted you to help me this afternoon," my wife had said, but, seeing the dismayed look on the children's faces, had added, "Well, there's no hurry, I suppose. We are comfortable, and we shall have stormy days when you can't be out."

I told her that she was wiser than the queen of Sheba and did not need to go to Solomon.

The horse was put in the barn, for he would have mired in the long spongy lane and the meadow which we must cross. So we decided to run the light wagon down by hand.

Junior had the auger with which to bore holes in the trees. "I tapped 'em last year, as old Mr. Jamison didn't care about doin' it," said the boy, "an' I b'iled the pot of sap down in the grove; but that was slow, cold work. I saved the little wooden troughs I used last year, and they are in one of the pails. I brought over a big kittle, too, which mother let me have, and if we can keep this and yours a-goin', we'll soon have some sugar."

Away we went, down the lane, Junior and Merton in the shafts, playing horses. I pushed in some places, and held back in others, while Winnie and Bobsey picked their way between puddles and quagmires. The snow

was so nearly gone that it lay only on the northern slopes. We had heard the deep roar of the Moodna Creek all the morning, and had meant to go and see it right after breakfast; but providing a chickenhome had proved a greater attraction to the children, and a better investment of time for me. Now from the top of the last hillside we saw a great flood rushing by with a hoarse, surging noise.

"Winnie, Bobsey, if you go near the water without me you march straight home," I cried.

They promised never to go, but I thought Bobsey protested a little too much. Away we went down the hill, skirting what was now a good-sized brook. I knew the trees, from a previous visit; and the maple, when once known, can be picked out anywhere, so genial, mellow, and generous an aspect has it, even when leafless.

The roar of the creek and the gurgle of the brook made genuine March music, and the children looked and acted as if there were nothing left to be desired. When Junior showed them a tree that appeared to be growing directly out of a flat rock, they expressed a wonder which no museum could have excited.

But scenery, and even rural marvels, could not keep their attention long. All were intent on sap and sugar, and Junior was speedily at work. The moment he broke the brittle, juicy bark, the tree's life-blood began to flow.

"See," he cried, "they are like cows wanting to be milked."

As fast as he inserted his little wooden troughs into the trees, we placed pails and pans under them, and began harvesting the first crop from our farm.

This was rather slow work, and to keep Winnie and Bobsey busy I told them they could gather sticks and leaves, pile them up at the foot of a rock on a dry hillside, and we would have a fire. I meanwhile picked up the dead branches that strewed the ground, and with my axe trimmed them for use in summer, when only a quick blaze would be needed to

boil the supper kettle. To city-bred eyes wood seemed a rare luxury, and although there was enough lying about to supply us for a year, I could not get over the feeling that it must all be cared for.

To children there are few greater delights than that of building a fire in the woods, and on that cloudy, chilly day our blaze against the rock brought solid comfort to us all, even though the smoke did get into our eyes. Winnie and Bobsey, little bundles of energy that they were, seemed unwearied in feeding the flames, while Merton sought to hide his excitement by imitating Junior's stolid, business-like ways.

Finding him alone once, I said: "Merton, don't you remember saying to me once, 'I'd like to know what there is for a boy to do in this street'? Don't you think there's something for a boy to do on this farm?"

"O papa!" he cried, "I'm just trying to hold in. So much has happened, and I've had such a good time, that it seems as if I had been here a month; then again the hours pass like minutes. See, the sun is low already."

"It's all new and exciting now, Merton, but there will be long hours—yes, days and weeks—when you'll have to act like a man, and to do work because it ought to be done and must be done."

"The same would be true if we stayed in town," he said.

Soon I decided that it was time for the younger children to return, for I meant to give my wife all the help I could before bedtime. We first hauled the wagon back, and then Merton said he would bring what sap had been caught. Junior had to go home for a time to do his evening "chores," but he promised to return before dark to help carry in the sap.

"There'll be frost to-night, and we'll get the biggest run in the morning," was his encouraging remark, as he made ready to depart.

Mrs. Jones had been over to see my wife, and they promised to become good friends. I set to work putting things in better shape, and bringing in a good pile of wood. Merton soon appeared with a brimming pail. A

kettle was hung on the crane, but before the sap was placed over the fire all must taste it, just as it had been distilled by nature. And all were quickly satisfied. Even Mousie said it was "too watery," and Winnie made a face as she exclaimed, "I declare, Merton, I believe you filled the pails from the brook!"

"Patience, youngsters; sap, as well as some other things, is better for boiling down."

"Oh what a remarkable truth!" said my wife, who never lost a chance to give me a little dig.

I laughed, and then stood still in the middle of the floor, lost in thought.

"A brown study! What theory have you struck now, Robert?"

"I was thinking how some women kept their husbands in love with them by being saucy. It's an odd way, and yet it seems effective."

"It depends upon the kind of sauce, Robert," she said with a knowing glance and a nod.

By the time it was dark, we had both the kettles boiling and bubbling over the fire, and fine music they made. With Junior for guest, we enjoyed our supper, which consisted principally of baked apples and milk.

"'Bubble, bubble,' 'Toil' and no 'trouble'—"

"Yet, worth speaking of," said my wife; "but it must come, I suppose."

"We won't go half-way to meet it, Winifred."

When the meal was over, Junior went out on the porch and returned with a mysterious sack.

"Butternuts!" he ejaculated.

Junior was winning his way truly, and in the children's eyes was already a good genius, as his father was in mine.

"O papa!" was the general cry, "can't we crack them on the hearth?"

"But you'll singe your very eyebrows off," I said.

"Mine's so white 'twouldn't matter," said Junior; "nobody'd miss 'em. Give me a hammer, and I'll keep you goin'."

And he did, on one of the stones of the hearth, with such a lively rat-tat-snap! that it seemed a regular rhythm.

"Cracked in my life well-nigh on to fifty bushel, I guess," he explained, in answer to our wonder at his skill.

And so the evening passed, around the genial old fireplace; and before the children retired they smacked their lips over sirup sweet enough to satisfy them.

The following morning—Saturday—I vibrated between the sugar-camp and the barn and other out-buildings, giving, however, most of the time to the help of my wife in getting the house more to her mind, and in planning some work that would require a brief visit from a carpenter; for I felt that I must soon bestow nearly all my attention on the outdoor work. I managed to keep Bobsey under my eye for the most part, and in the afternoon I left him for only a few moments at the sugar-bush while I carried up some sap. A man called to see me on business, and I was detained. Knowing the little fellow's proneness to mischief, and forgetfulness of all commands, I at last hastened back with a half guilty and worried feeling.

I reached the brow of the hill just in time to see him throw a stick into the creek, lose his balance, and fall in.

With an exclamation of terror, his own cry forming a faint echo, I sprang forward frantically, but the swift current caught and bore him away.

CHAPTER XIX

JOHN JONES, JUN

My agonized shout as I saw Bobsey swept away by the swollen current of the Moodna Creek was no more prompt than his own shrill scream. It so happened, or else a kind Providence so ordered it, that Junior was further down the stream, tapping a maple that had been overlooked the previous day. He sprang to his feet, whirled around in the direction of the little boy's cry, with the quickness of thought rushed to the bank and plunged in with a headlong leap like a Newfoundland dog. I paused, spellbound, to watch him, knowing that I was much too far away to be of aid, and that all now depended on the hardy country lad. He disappeared for a second beneath the tide, and then his swift strokes proved that he was a good swimmer. In a moment or two he caught up with Bobsey, for the current was too swift to permit the child to sink. Then, with a wisdom resulting from experience, he let the torrent carry him in a long slant toward the shore, for it would have been hopeless to try to stem the tide. Running as I never ran before, I followed, reached the bank where there was an eddy in the stream, sprang in up to my waist, seized them both as they approached and dragged them to solid ground. Merton and Winnie meanwhile stood near with white, scared faces.

Bobsey was conscious, although he had swallowed some water, and I was soon able to restore him, so that he could stand on his feet and cry: "I—I—I w-won't d-do so any—any more."

Instead of punishing him, which he evidently expected, I clasped him to my heart with a nervous force that almost made him cry out with pain.

Junior, meanwhile, had coolly seated himself on a rock, emptied the water out of his shoes, and was tying them on again, at the same time striving with all his might to maintain a stolid composure under Winnie's grateful embraces and Merton's interrupting hand-shakings. But when, having become assured of Bobsey's safety, I rushed forward and embraced Junior in a transport of gratitude, his lip began to quiver and two great tears mingled with the water that was dripping from his hair. Suddenly he broke away, took to his heels, and ran toward his home, as if he had been caught in some mischief and the constable were after him. I believe that he would rather have had at once all the strappings his father had ever given him than to have cried in our presence.

I carried Bobsey home, and his mother, with many questionings and exclamations of thanksgiving, undressed the little fellow, wrapped him in flannel, and put him to bed, where he was soon sleeping as quietly as if nothing had happened.

Mrs. Jones came over, and we made her rubicund face beam and grow more round, if possible, as we all praised her boy. I returned with her, for I felt that I wished to thank Junior again and again. But he saw me coming, and slipped out at the back door. Indeed, the brave, bashful boy was shy of us for several days. When at last my wife got hold of him, and spoke to him in a manner natural to mothers, he pooh-poohed the whole affair.

"I've swum in that crick so often that it was nothin' to me. I only had to keep cool, and that was easy enough in snow water, and the swift current would keep us both up. I wish you wouldn't say anything more about it. It kinder makes me feel—I don't know how—all over, you know."

But Junior soon learned that we had adopted him into our inmost hearts, although he compelled us to show our good-will after his own off-hand fashion.

Sunday was ushered in with another storm, and we spent a long, quiet, restful day, our hearts full of thankfulness that the great sorrow, which might have darkened the beginning of our country life, had been so happily averted.

On Sunday night the wind veered around to the north, and on Monday morning the sky had a clear metallic hue and the ground was frozen hard. Bobsey had not taken cold, and was his former self, except that he was somewhat chastened in spirit and his bump of caution was larger. I was resolved that the day should witness a good beginning of our spring work, and told Winnie and Bobsey that they could help me. Junior, although he yet avoided the house, was ready enough to help Merton with the sap. Therefore soon after breakfast we all were busy.

Around old country places, especially where there has been some degree of neglect, much litter gathers. This was true of our new home and its surroundings. All through the garden were dry, unsightly weeds, about the house was shrubbery that had become tangled masses of unpruned growth, in the orchard the ground was strewn with fallen branches, and I could see dead limbs on many of the trees.

Therefore I said to my two little helpers: "Here in this open space in the garden we will begin our brush-pile, and we will bring to it all the refuse that we wish to burn. You see that we can make an immense heap, for the place is so far away from any buildings that, when the wind goes down, we can set the pile on fire in safety, and the ashes will do the garden good."

During the whole forenoon I pruned the shrubbery, and raked up the rubbish which the children carried by armfuls to our prospective bonfire. They soon wished to see the blaze, but I told them that the wind was too high, and that I did not propose to apply the match until we had a heap half as big as the house; that it might be several days before we should be ready, for I intended to have a tremendous fire.

Thus with the lesson of restraint was given the hope of something wonderful. For a long time they were pleased with the novelty of the work, and then they wanted to do something else, but I said: "No, no; you are gardeners now, and I'm head gardener. You must both help me till dinner-time. After that you can do something else, or play if you choose; but each day, even Bobsey must do some steady work to earn his dinner. We didn't come to the country on a picnic, I can tell you. All must do their best to help make a living;" and so without scruple I kept my little squad busy, for the work was light, although it had become monotonous.

Mousie sometimes aided her mother, and again watched us from the window with great interest. I rigged upon the barrow a rack, in which I wheeled the rubbish gathered at a distance; and by the time my wife's mellow voice called, "Come to dinner"—how sweet her voice and summons were after long hours in the keen March wind!—we had a pile much higher than my head, and the place began to wear a tidy aspect.

Such appetites, such red cheeks and rosy noses as the outdoor workers brought to that plain meal! Mousie was much pleased with the promise that the bonfire should not be lighted until some still, mild day when she could go out and stand with me beside it.

Merton admitted that gathering the sap did not keep him busy more than half the time; so after dinner I gave him a hatchet, and told him to go on with the trimming out of the fallen branches in our wood lot—a task that I had begun—and to carry all wood heavy enough for our fireplace to a spot where it could be put into a wagon.

"Your next work, Merton, will be to collect all your refuse trimmings, and the brush lying about, into a few great heaps; and by and by we'll burn these, too, and gather up the ashes carefully, for I've read and heard all my life that there is nothing better for fruit then wood-ashes. Some day, I hope, we can begin to put money in the bank; for I intend to give all a chance to earn money for themselves, after they have done their share toward our general effort to live and thrive. The next best thing to putting money in the bank is the gathering and saving of everything that

will make the ground richer. In fact, all the papers and books that I've read this winter agree that as the farmer's land grows rich he grows rich."

CHAPTER XX

RASPBERRY LESSONS

It must be remembered that I had spent all my leisure during the winter in reading and studying the problem of our country life. Therefore I knew that March was the best month for pruning trees, and I had gained a fairly correct idea how to do this work. Until within the last two or three years of his life, old Mr. Jamison had attended to this task quite thoroughly; and thus little was left for me beyond sawing away the boughs that had recently died, and cutting out the useless sprouts on the larger limbs. Before leaving the city I had provided myself with such tools as I was sure I should need; and finding a ladder under a shed, I attacked the trees vigorously. The wind had almost died out, and I knew I must make the most of all still days in this gusty month. After playing around for a time, Winnie and Bobsey concluded that gathering and piling up my prunings would be as good fun as anything else; and so I had helpers again.

By the middle of the afternoon Mr. Jones appeared, and I was glad to see him, for there were some kinds of work about which I wanted his advice. At one end of the garden were several rows of blackcap raspberry bushes, which had grown into an awful snarl. The old canes that had borne fruit the previous season were still standing, ragged and unsightly; the new stalks that would bear the coming season sprawled in every direction; and I had found that many tips of the branches had grown fast in the ground. I took my neighbor to see this briery wilderness, and asked his advice.

"Have you got a pair of pruning-nippers?" he asked.

Before going to the house to get them, I blew a shrill whistle to summon Merton, for I wished him also to hear all that Mr. Jones might say. I carried a little metallic whistle one blast on which was for Merton, two for Winnie, and three for Bobsey. When they heard this call they were to come as fast as their feet could carry them.

Taking the nippers, Mr. Jones snipped off from one-third to one-half the length of the branches from one of the bushes and cut out the old dead cane.

"I raise these berries myself for home use," he said; "and I can tell you they go nice with milk for a July supper. You see, after taking off so much from these long branches the canes stand straight up, and will be self-supporting, no matter how many berries they bear; but here and there's a bush that has grown slant-wise, or is broken off. Now, if I was you, I'd take a crow-bar 'n' make a hole 'longside these weakly and slantin' fellers, put in a stake, and tie 'em up strong. Then, soon as the frost yields, if you'll get out the grass and weeds that's started among 'em, you'll have a dozen bushel or more of marketable berries from this 'ere wilderness, as you call it. Give Merton a pair of old gloves, and he can do most of the job. Every tip that's fast in the ground is a new plant. If you want to set out another patch, I'll show you how later on."

"I think I know pretty nearly how to do that."

"Yes, yes, I know. Books are a help, I s'pose, but after you've seen one plant set out right, you'll know more than if you'd 'a' read a month."

"Well, now that you're here, Mr. Jones, I'm going to make the most of you. How about those other raspberries off to the southeast of the house?"

"Those are red ones. Let's take a look at 'em."

Having reached the patch, we found almost as bad a tangle as in the blackcap patch, except that the canes were more upright in their growth and less full of spines or briers.

"It's plain enough," continued Mr. Jones, "that old man Jamison was too poorly to take much care of things last year. You see, these red raspberries grow different from those black ones yonder. Those increase by the tips of the branches takin' root; these by suckers. All these young shoots comin' up between the rows are suckers, and they ought to be dug out. As I said before, you can set them out somewhere else if you want to. Dig 'em up, you know; make a trench in some out-of-the-way place, and bury the roots till you want 'em. Like enough the neighbors will buy some if they know you have 'em to spare. Only be sure to cut these long canes back to within six inches of the ground."

"Yes," I said, "that's all just as I have read in the books."

"So much the better for the books, then. I haven't lived in this fruit-growin' region all my life without gettin' some ideas as to what's what. I give my mind to farmin'; but Jamison and I were great cronies, and I used to be over here every day or two, and so it's natural to keep comin'."

"That's my good luck."

"Well, p'raps it'll turn out so. Now Merton's just the right age to help you in all this work. Jamison, you see, grew these raspberries in a continuous bushy row; that is, say, three good strong canes every eighteen inches apart in the row, and the rows five feet apart, so he could run a horse-cultivator between. Are you catchin' on, Merton?"

"Yes, sir," said the boy, with much interest.

"Well, all these suckers and extra plants that are swampin' the ground are just as bad as weeds. Dig 'em all out, only don't disturb the roots of the bearin' canes you leave in the rows much."

"How about trimming these?" I asked.

"Well, that depends. If you want early fruit, you'll let 'em stand as they be; if you want big berries, you'll cut 'em back one-third. Let me see. Here's five rows of Highland Hardy; miserable poor-tastin' kind; but they come so early that they often pay the best. Let them stand with their whole length of cane, and if you can scatter a good top-dressin' of fine manure scraped up from the barnyard, you'll make the berries larger. Those other rows of Cuthbert, Reliance, and Turner, cut back the canes one-third, and you'll get a great deal more fruit than if you left more wood on 'em. Cuttin' back'll make the berries big; and so they'll bring as much, p'raps, as if they were early."

"Well, Merton, this all accords with what I've read, only Mr. Jones makes it much clearer. I think we know how to go to work now, and surely there's plenty to do."

"Yes, indeed," resumed Mr. Jones; "and you'll soon find the work crowdin' you. Now come to the big raspberry patch back of the barn, the patch where the canes are all laid down, as I told you. These are Hudson River Antwerps. Most people have gone out of 'em, but Jamison held on, and he was makin' money on 'em. So may you. They are what we call tender, you see, and in November they must be bent down close to the ground and covered with earth, or else every cane would be dead from frost by spring. About the first week in April, if the weather's mild, you must uncover 'em, and tie 'em to stakes durin' the month."

"Now, Mr. Jones, one other good turn and we won't bother you any more to-day. All the front of the house is covered by two big grape-vines that have not been trimmed, and there are a great many other vines on the place. I've read and read on the subject, but I declare I'm afraid to touch them."

"Now, you're beyond my depth. I've got a lot of vines home, and I trim 'em in my rough way, but I know I ain't scientific, and we have pretty poor, scraggly bunches. They taste just as good, though, and I don't raise any to sell. There's a clever man down near the landin' who has a big vineyard, and he's trimmed it as your vines ought to have been long ago. I'd advise you to go and see him, and he can show you all the latest

wrinkles in prunin'. Now, I'll tell you what I come for, in the first place. You'll remember that I said there'd be a vandoo to-morrow. I've been over and looked at the stock offered. There's a lot of chickens, as I told you; a likely-looking cow with a calf at her side; a fairish and quiet old horse that ought to go cheap, but he'd answer well the first year. Do you think you'll get more'n one horse to start with?"

"No; you said I could hire such heavy plowing as was needed at a moderate sum, and I think we can get along with one horse for a time. My plan is to go slow, and, I hope, sure."

"That's the best way, only it ain't common. I'll be around in the mornin' for you and such of the children as you'll take."

"On one condition, Mr. Jones. You must let me pay you for your time and trouble. Unless you'll do this in giving me my start, I'll have to paddle my own canoe, even if I sink it."

"Oh, I've no grudge against an honest penny turned in any way that comes handy. You and I can keep square as we go along. You can give me what you think is right, and if I ain't satisfied, I'll say so."

I soon learned that my neighbor had no foolish sensitiveness. I could pay him what I thought the value of his services, and he pocketed the money without a word. Of course, I could not pay him what his advice was really worth, for his hard common-sense stood me in good stead in many ways.

CHAPTER XXI

THE "VANDOO"

The next morning at about eight o'clock Mr. Jones arrived in a long farm-wagon on springs, with one seat in it; but Junior had half filled its body with straw, and he said to Merton, "I thought that p'raps, if you and the children could go, you'd like a straw-ride."

The solemnity with which Winnie and Bobsey promised to obey orders gave some hope of performance; so I tossed them into the straw, and we drove away, a merry party, leaving Mousie consoled with the hope of receiving something from the vendue.

"There's allers changes and breakin's up in the spring," said Mr. Jones, as we drove along; "and this family's goin' out West. Everything is to be sold, in doors and out."

The farmhouse in question was about two miles away. By the time we arrived, all sorts of vehicles were converging to it on the muddy roads, for the weather had become mild again. Stylish-looking people drove up in top-buggies, and there were many heavy, springless wagons driven by rusty-looking countrymen, whose trousers were thrust into the top of their cowhide boots. I strolled through the house before the sale began, thinking that I might find something there which would please Mousie and my wife. The rooms were already half filled with the housewives from the vicinity; red-faced Irish women, who stalked about and examined everything with great freedom; placid, peach-cheeked dames

in Quaker bonnets, who softly cooed together, and took every chance they could to say pleasant words to the flurried, nervous family that was being thrust out into the world, as it were, while still at their own hearth.

I marked with my eye a low, easy sewing-chair for my wife, and a rose geranium, full of bloom, for Mousie, purposing to bid on them. I also observed that Junior was examining several pots of flowers that stood in the large south window. Then giving Merton charge of the children, with directions not to lose sight of them a moment, I went to the barn-yard and stable, feeling that the day was a critical one in our fortunes. True enough, among the other stock there was a nice-looking cow with a calf, and Mr. Jones said she had Jersey blood in her veins. This meant rich, creamy milk. I thought the animal had a rather ugly eye, but this might be caused by anxiety for her calf, with so many strangers about. We also examined the old bay horse and a market wagon and harness. Then Mr. Jones and I drew apart and agreed upon the limit of his bids, for I proposed to act solely through him. Every one knew him and was aware that he would not go a cent beyond what a thing was worth. He had a word and a jest for all, and "How ARE YOU, JOHN?" greeted him wherever he went.

At ten o'clock the sale began. The auctioneer was a rustic humorist, who knew the practical value of a joke in his business. Aware of the foibles and characteristics of the people who flocked around and after him, he provoked many a ripple and roar of laughter by his telling hits and droll speeches. I found that my neighbor, Mr. Jones, came in for his full share, but he always sent back as good as he received. The sale, in fact, had the aspect of a country merrymaking, at which all sorts and conditions of people met on common ground, Pat bidding against the best of the landed gentry, while boys and dogs innumerable played around and sometimes verged on serious quarrels.

Junior, I observed, left his mark before the day was over. He was standing, watching the sale with his usual impassive expression, when a big, hulking fellow leered into his face and cried.

"Tow head, white-head, Thick-head, go to bed."

The last word was scarcely out of his mouth before Junior's fist was between his eyes, and down he went.

"Want any more?" Junior coolly asked, as the fellow got up.

Evidently he didn't, for he slunk off, followed by jeers and laughter.

At noon there was an immense pot of coffee with crackers and cheese, placed on a table near the kitchen door, and we had a free lunch. To this Bobsey paid his respects so industriously that a great, gawky mountaineer looked down at him and said, with a grin, "I say, young 'un, you're gettin' outside of more fodder than any critter of your size I ever knowed."

"'Tain't your fodder," replied Bobsey, who had learned, in the streets, to be a little pert.

The day came to an end at last, and the cow and calf, the old bay horse, the wagon, and the harness were mine. On the whole, Mr. Jones had bought them at reasonable rates. He also bid in for me, at one dollar per pair, two cocks and twenty hens that looked fairly well in their coop.

For my part, I had secured the chair and blooming geranium. To my surprise, when the rest of the flowers were sold, Junior took part in the bidding for the first time, and, as a result, carried out to the wagon several other pots of house-plants.

"Why, Junior," I said, "I didn't know you had such an eye for beauty."

He blushed, but made no reply.

The chickens and the harness were put into Mr. Jones's conveyance, the wagon I had bought was tied on behind, and we jogged homeward, the children exulting over our new possessions. When I took in the geranium bush and put it on the table by the sunny kitchen window, Junior followed with an armful of his plants.

"They're for Mousie," he said; and before the delighted child could thank him, he darted out.

Indeed, it soon became evident that Mousie was Junior's favorite. She never said much to him, but she looked a great deal. To the little invalid girl he seemed the embodiment of strength and cleverness, and, perhaps because he was so strong, his sympathies went out toward the feeble child.

The coop of chickens was carried to the basement that we had made ready, and Winnie declared that she meant to "hear the first crow and get the first egg."

The next day the horse and the cow and calf were brought over, and we felt that we were fairly launched in our country life.

"You have a bigger family to look after outdoors than I have indoors," my wife said, laughingly.

I was not long in learning that some of my outdoor family were anything but amiable. The two cocks fought and fought until Junior, who had run over before night, showed Merton that by ducking their heads in cold water their belligerent spirit could be partially quenched. Then he proceeded to give me a lesson in milking. The calf was shut up away from the cow, which was driven into a corner, where she stood with signs of impatience while Junior, seated on a three-legged stool, essayed to obtain the nectar we all so dearly loved. At first he did not succeed very well.

"She won't let it down—she's keepin' it for the calf," said the boy. But at last she relented, and the white streams flowed. "Now," said Junior to me, "you see how I do it. You try."

As I took his place, I noticed that Brindle turned on me a vicious look. No doubt I was awkward and hurt her a little, also; for the first thing I knew the pail was in the air, I on my back, and Brindle bellowing around the yard, switching her tail, Junior and Merton meanwhile roaring with laughter. I got up in no amiable mood and said, roughly, to the boys, "Quit that nonsense."

But they couldn't obey, and at last I had to join in the laugh.

"Why, she's ugly as sin," said Junior. "I'll tell you what to do. Let her go with her calf now, and in the morning we'll drive her down to one of the stalls in the basement of the barn and fasten her by the head. Then we can milk her without risk. After her calf is gone she'll be a great deal tamer."

This plan was carried out, and it worked pretty well, although it was evident that, from some cause, the cow was wild and vicious. One of my theories is, that all animals can be subdued by kindness. Mr. Jones advised me to dispose of Brindle, but I determined to test my theory first. Several times a day I would go to the barn-yard and give her a carrot or a whisp of hay from my hand, and she gradually became accustomed to me, and would come at my call. A week later I sold her calf to a butcher, and for a few days she lowed and mourned deeply, to Mousie's great distress. But carrots consoled her, and within three weeks she would let me stroke her, and both Merton and I could milk her without trouble. I believe she had been treated harshly by her former owners.

CHAPTER XXII

EARLY APRIL GARDENING

Spring was coming on apace, and we all made the most of every pleasant hour. The second day after the auction proved a fine one; and leaving Winnie and Merton in charge of the house, I took my wife, with Bobsey and Mousie, who was well bundled up, to see the scientific grape-grower, and to do some shopping. At the same time we assured ourselves that we were having a pleasure-drive; and it did me good to see how the mother and daughter, who had been kept indoors so long, enjoyed themselves. Mr. Jones was right. I received better and clearer ideas of vine-pruning in half an hour from studying work that had been properly done, and by asking questions of a practical man, than I could ever have obtained by reading. We found that the old bay horse jogged along, at as good a gait as we could expect, over the muddy road, and I was satisfied that he was quiet enough for my wife to drive him after she had learned how, and gained a little confidence. She held the reins as we drove home, and, in our own yard, I gave her some lessons in turning around, backing, etc.

"Some day," I said, "you shall have a carriage and a gay young horse." When we sat down to supper, I was glad to see that a little color was dawning in Mousie's face.

The bundles we brought home supplemented our stores of needful articles, and our life began to take on a regular routine. The carpenter came and put up the shelves, and made such changes as my wife desired; then he aided me in repairing the out-buildings. I finished pruning the

trees, while Merton worked manfully at the raspberries, for we saw that this was a far more pressing task than gathering wood, which could be done to better advantage in the late autumn. Every morning Winnie and Bobsey were kept steadily busy in carrying our trimmings to the brush heap, which now began to assume vast proportions, especially as the refuse from the grape-vine and raspberry bushes was added to it. As the ground became settled after the frost was out, I began to set the stakes by the side of such raspberry canes as needed tying up; and here was a new light task for the two younger children. Bobsey's little arms could go around the canes and hold them close to the stake, while Winnie, a sturdy child, quickly tied them with a coarse, cheap string that I had bought for the purpose. Even my wife came out occasionally and helped us at this work. By the end of the last week in March I had all the fruit-trees fairly pruned and the grape-vines trimmed and tied up, and had given Merton much help among the raspberries. In shallow boxes of earth on the kitchen table, cabbage, lettuce, and tomato seeds were sprouting beside Mousie's plants. The little girl hailed with delight every yellowish green germ that appeared above the soil.

The hens had spent their first few days in inspecting their quarters and becoming familiar with them; but one morning there was a noisy cackle, and Winnie soon came rushing in with three fresh-laid eggs. A week later we had all we could use, and my wife began to put some by for the first brooding biddies to sit upon.

The first day of April promised to be unusually dry and warm, and I said at the breakfast table: "This is to be a great day. We'll prove that we are not April-fools by beginning our garden. I was satisfied yesterday that a certain warm slope was dry enough to dig and plant with hardy vegetables, and I've read and studied over and over again which to plant first, and how to plant them. I suppose I shall make mistakes, but I wish you all to see how I do it, and then by next spring we shall have learned from experience how to do better. No doubt, some things might have been planted before, but we've all been too busy. Now, Merton, you go

and harness old Bay to the cart I bought with the place, and I'll get out my treasure of seeds. Mousie, by ten o'clock, if the sun keeps out of the clouds, you can put on your rubbers and join us."

Soon all was bustle and excitement. Among my seeds were two quarts of red and two of white onion sets, or little bits of onions, which I had kept in a cool place, so that they should not sprout before their time. These I took out first. Then with Merton I went to the barn-yard and loaded up the cart with the finest and most decayed manure we could find, and this was dumped on the highest part of the slope that I meant to plant.

"Now, Merton, I guess you can get another load, while I spread this heap and begin to dig;" and he went off with the horse and cart, having an increased idea of his importance. I marked a long strip of the sunny slope, fifteen feet wide, and spread the manure evenly and thickly, for I had read, and my own sense confirmed the view, that a little ground well enriched would yield more than a good deal of poor land. I then dug till my back ached; and I found that it began to ache pretty soon, for I was not accustomed to such toil.

"After the first seeds are in," I muttered, "I'll have the rest of the garden plowed."

When I had dug down about four feet of the strip, I concluded to rest myself by a change of labor; so I took the rake and smoothed off the ground, stretched a garden line across it, and, with a sharp-pointed hoe, made a shallow trench, or drill.

"Now, Winnie and Bobsey," I said, "it is time for you to do your part. Just stick these little onions in the trench about four inches apart;" and I gave each of them a little stick of the right length to measure the distance; for they had vague ideas of four inches. "Be sure," I continued, "that you get the bottom of the onion down. This is the top, and this is the bottom. Press the onion in the soil just enough to make it stand firm, so. That's right. Oh, you're learning fast. Now I can rest, you see, while you do the planting."

In a few moments they had stuck the fifteen feet of shallow trench, or drill, full of onions, which I covered with earth, packing it lightly with my hoe. I then moved the line fourteen inches further down and made another shallow drill. In this way we soon had all the onion sets in the ground. Merton came back with his load in time to see how it was done, and nodded his head approvingly. I now felt rested enough to dig awhile, and Merton started off to the barn-yard again. We next sowed, in even shallower drills, the little onion seed that looked like gunpowder, for my garden book said that the earlier this was planted the better. We had completed only a few rows when Mr. Jones appeared, and said: "Plantin' onions here? Why, neighbor, this ground is too dry and light for onions."

"Is it? Well, I knew I'd make mistakes. I haven't used near all my onion seed yet, however."

"Oh, well, no great harm's done. You've made the ground rich, and, if we have a moist season, like enough they'll do well. P'raps it's the best thing, after all, 'specially if you've put in the seed thick, as most people do. Let 'em all grow, and you'll have a lot of little onions, or sets, of your own raisin' to plant early next spring. Save the rest of your seed until you have some rich, strong, deep soil ready. I came over to say that if this weather holds a day or two longer I'll plow the garden; and I thought I'd tell you, so that you might get ready for me. The sooner you get your early pertaters in the better."

"Your words almost take the ache out of my back," I said. "I fear we shouldn't have much of a garden if I had to dig it all, but I thought I'd make a beginning with a few early vegetables."

"That's well enough, but a plow beats a fork all hollow. You'll know what I mean when you see my plow going down to the beam and loosenin' the ground from fifteen to twenty inches. So burn your big brush-pile, and get out what manure you're goin' to put in the garden, and I'll be ready when you are."

"All right. Thank you. I'll just plant some radishes, peas, and beans."

"Not beans yet, Mr. Durham. Don't put those in till the last of the month, and plant them very shallow when you do."

"How one forgets when there's not much experience to fall back upon! I now remember that my book said that beans, in this latitude, should not be planted until about the 1st of May."

"And lima beans not till the 10th of May," added Mr. Jones. "You might put in a few early beets here, although the ground is rather light for 'em. You could put your main crop somewhere else. Well, let me know when you're ready. Junior and me are drivin' things, too, this mornin';" and he stalked away, whistling a hymn-tune in rather lively time.

I said: "Youngsters, I think I'll get my garden book and be sure I'm right about sowing the radish and beet seed and the peas. Mr. Jones has rather shaken my confidence."

When Merton came with the next load I told him that he could put the horse in the stable and help us. As a result, we soon had several rows of radishes and beets sown, fourteen inches apart. We planted the seed only an inch deep, and packed the ground lightly over it. Mousie, to her great delight, was allowed to drop a few of the seeds. Merton was ambitious to take the fork, but I soon stopped him, and said: "Digging is too heavy work for you, my boy. There is enough that you can do without overtaxing yourself. We must all act like good soldiers. The campaign of work is just opening, and it would be very foolish for any of us to disable ourselves at the start. We'll plant only half a dozen rows of these dwarf peas this morning, and then this afternoon we'll have the bonfire and get ready for Mr. Jones's plow."

At the prospect of the bonfire the younger children set up shouts of exultation, which cheered me on as I turned over the soil with the fork, although often stopping to rest. My back ached, but my heart was light. In my daily work now I had all my children about me, and their smaller hands were helping in the most practical way. Their voices were as joyous as the notes of the robins, song-sparrows, and bluebirds that were singing all about us. A soft haze half obscured the mountains, and

mellowed the sunshine. From the springing grass and fresh-turned soil came odors sweet as those which made Eden fragrant after "a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground."

All the children helped to plant the peas, which we placed carefully and evenly, an inch apart, in the row, and covered with two inches of soil, the rows being two feet distant one from another. I had decided to plant chiefly McLean's Little Gem, because they needed no stakes or brush for support. We were almost through our task when, happening to look toward the house, I saw my wife standing in the doorway, a framed picture.

"Dinner," she called, in a voice as sweet to me as that of the robin singing in the cherry-tree over her head.

The children stampeded for the house, Winnie crying: "Hurry up, mamma, for right after dinner papa will set the great brush-pile on fire, and we're going to dance round it like Indians. You must come out, too."

CHAPTER XXIII

A BONFIRE AND A FEAST

It amused and interested me to see upon the children's faces such an eager expectancy as they hurried through our midday meal. Nothing greater than a bonfire was in prospect, yet few costly pleasures could have afforded them such excitement. I found myself sharing in their anticipation to a degree that surprised me, and was led to ask myself why it is that outdoor pursuits often take so strong a hold upon the fancy. I recalled traits shown by one of my former employers. He was a gray-headed man, possessing great wealth and an elegant city home, while his mind was occupied by a vast and complicated business. When he learned that I was going to the country, he would often come to me, and, with kindling eyes and animated tones, talk of his chickens, cows, fruit-trees and crops. He proved that the best product of his farm was the zest it brought him into his life—a zest that was failing in his other occupations and interests. What was true of him I knew to be equally so of many others to whom wealth brings no greater luxury than the ability to indulge in expensive farming. A lifetime in the city does not destroy the primal instinct which leads men to the soil nor does a handsome dividend from stocks give the unalloyed pleasure awakened by a basket of fresh eggs or fruit. This love of the earth is not earthiness, but has been the characteristic of the best and greatest minds. Washington would turn from the anxieties of a campaign and the burdens of state to read, with absorbing interest, the reports of the agent who managed his plantation, and to write out the minutest details for the overseer's guidance.

In my limited way and sphere I was under the influence of the same impulses; and, as I looked around the table at those so dear to me, I felt that I had far more at stake. I had not come back to Nature merely to amuse myself or to gratify a taste, but to co-work with her in fulfilling the most sacred duties. With the crops of the coming years these children must be nourished and fitted for their part in life, and I felt that all my faculties must be employed to produce the best results from my open-air toil.

Therefore, why should not I also be interested in the prospective bonfire? It would transmute the unsightly rubbish of the place into fertilizing ashes, and clear the ground for the plow. The mellow soil would produce that which would give brain and muscle—life to those whose lives were dear.

He who spreads his table with food secured by his own hands direct from nature should feel a strong incentive to do his best. The coarse, unvaried diet, common to many farmers' homes, is the result of stolid minds and plodding ways. A better manhood and womanhood will be developed when we act upon the truth that varied and healthful sustenance improves blood and brain, and therefore character.

I was growing abstracted, when my wife remarked, "Robert, will you deign to come back from a remote region of thought and take some rice pudding?"

"You may all fare the better for my thoughts," I replied.

The children, however, were bolting their pudding at railroad speed, and I perceived that the time demanded action. Winnie and Bobsey wished me to light the fire at once, but I said: "No, not till mamma and Mousie are ready to come out. You must stay and help them clear away the things. When all is ready, you two shall start the blaze."

Very soon we were all at the brush-pile, which towered above our heads, and I said: "Merton, it will burn better if we climb over it and trample it down a little. It is too loose now. While we do this, Winnie and Bobsey

can gather dry grass and weeds that will take fire quickly. Now which way is the wind?"

"There isn't any wind, papa," Merton replied.

"Let us see. Put your forefingers in your mouths, all of you, then hold them up and note which side feels the coolest."

"This side!" cried one and another.

"Yes; and this side is toward the west; therefore, Winnie, put the dry grass here on the western side of the heap, and what air is stirring will carry the blaze through the pile."

Little hands that trembled with eagerness soon held lighted matches to the dry grass; there was a yellow flicker in the sunshine, then a blaze, a crackle, a devouring rush of flames that mounted higher and higher until, with the surrounding column of smoke, there was a conflagration which, at night, would have alarmed the country-side. The children at first gazed with awe upon the scenes as they backed farther away from the increasing heat. Our beacon-fire drew Junior, who came bounding over the fences toward us; and soon he and Merton began to see how near they could dash in toward the blaze without being scorched. I soon stopped this.

"Show your courage, Merton, when there is need of it," I said. "Rash venturing is not bravery, but foolishness, and often costs people dear."

When the pile sank down into glowing embers, I turned to Bobsey, and added: "I have let you light a fire under my direction. Never think of doing anything of the kind without my permission, for if you do, you will certainly sit in a chair, facing the wall, all day long, with nothing to cheer you but bread and water and a sound whipping. There is one thing which you children must learn from the start, and that is, you can't play with fire except under my eyes."

At this direful threat Bobsey looked as grave as his round little face permitted, and, with the memory of his peril in the creek fresh in mind, was ready enough with the most solemn promises. A circle of unburned brush was left around the embers. This I raked in on the hot coals, and soon all was consumed.

"Now I have a suggestion," cried my wife. "We'll have some roast potatoes, for here are lots of hot coals and ashes." Away scampered Winnie to the cellar for the tubers. Our bonfire ended in a feast, and then the ashes were spread far and wide. When the exciting events were past, Winnie and Bobsey amused themselves in other ways, Mousie venturing to stay with them while the sun remained high. Merton and I meanwhile put the horse to the cart and covered all the ground, especially the upper and poorer portions, with a good dressing from the barnyard.

In the evening Junior gave Merton a good hint about angle-worms. "Follow the plow," he said, "and pick 'em up and put 'em in a tight box. Then sink the box in a damp place and nearly fill it with fine earth, and you always have bait ready when you want to go a-fishing. After a few more warm days the fish will begin to bite first-rate."

Early the next morning Mr. Jones was on hand with his stout team, and, going twice in every furrow, he sunk his plow to the beam. "When you loosen the soil deep in this style," he said, "ye needn't be afraid of dry weather unless it's an amazin' long spell. Why, bless you, Mr. Durham, there's farmers around here who don't scratch their ground much deeper than an old hen would, and they're always groanin' over droughts. If I can get my plow down eighteen inches, and then find time to stir the surface often in the growin' season, I ain't afraid of a month of dry weather."

We followed Mr. Jones for a few turns around the garden, I inhaling the fresh wholesome odors of the soil with pleasure, and Merton and the two younger children picking up angle-worms.

Our neighbor soon paused and resumed: "I guess I'll give you a hint that'll add bushels of pertaters to yer crop. After I've plowed the garden, I'll furrow out deep a lot of rows, three feet apart. Let Merton take a hoe and scrape up the fine old manure in the barnyard. Don't use any other kind. Then sprinkle it thickly in the furrows, and draw your hoe through 'em to mix the fertilizer well with the soil. Drop your seed then, eight inches apart in the row, and cover with four inches of dirt. One can't do this very handy by the acre, but I've known such treatment to double the crop and size of the pertaters in a garden or small patch."

I took the hint at once, and set Merton at work, saying that Winnie and Bobsey could gather all the worms he wanted. Then I went for a half-bushel of early potatoes, and Mr. Jones showed me how to cut them so as to leave at least two good "eyes" to each piece. Half an hour later it occurred to me to see how Merton was getting on. I found him perspiring, and almost panting with fatigue, and my conscience smote me. "There, my boy," I said, "this is too hard work for you. Come with me and I'll show you how to cut the potatoes. But first go into the house, and cool off while you drink a glass of milk."

"Well, papa," he replied, gratefully, "I wouldn't mind a change like that. I didn't want you to think I was shirking, but, to tell the truth, I was getting played out."

"Worked out, you mean. It's not my wish that you should ever be either played or worked out, nor will you if you take play and work in the right degree. Remember," I added, seriously, "that you are a growing boy, and it's not my intention to put you at anything beyond your strength. If, in my inexperience, I do give you too hard work, tell me at once. There's plenty to do that won't overtax you."

So we exchanged labors, and by the time the garden was plowed and the furrows were made I had scraped up enough fine material in the barnyard to give my tubers a great start. I varied my labor with lessons in plowing, for running in my head was an "old saw" to the effect that "he who would thrive must both hold the plow and drive."

The fine weather lasted long enough for us to plant our early potatoes in the most approved fashion, and then came a series of cold, wet days and frosty nights. Mr. Jones assured us that the vegetable seeds already in the ground would receive no harm. At such times as were suitable for work we finished trimming and tying up the hardy raspberries, cleaning up the barnyard, and carting all the fertilizers we could find to the land that we meant to cultivate.

CHAPTER XXIV

"NO BLIND DRIFTING"

One long, stormy day I prepared an account-book. On its left-hand pages I entered the cost of the place and all expenses thus far incurred. The right-hand pages were for records of income, as yet small indeed. They consisted only of the proceeds from the sale of the calf, the eggs that Winnie gathered, and the milk measured each day, all valued at the market price. I was resolved that there should be no blind drifting toward the breakers of failure—that at the end of the year we should know whether we had made progress, stood still, or gone backward. My system of keeping the accounts was so simple that I easily explained it to my wife, Merton, and Mousie, for I believed that, if they followed the effort at country living understandingly, they would be more willing to practice the self-denial necessary for success. Indeed, I had Merton write out most of the items, even though the record, as a result, was not very neat. I stopped his worrying over blots and errors, by saying, "You are of more account than the account-book, and will learn by practice to be as accurate as any one."

My wife and Mousie also started another book of household expenses, that we might always know just where we stood and what our prospects were.

Weeks would elapse before our place would be food-producing to any great extent. In the meantime we must draw chiefly on our capital in order to live. Winifred and I resolved to meet this necessity in no

careless way, feeling that not a penny should be spent which might be saved. The fact that I had only my family to support was greatly in our favor. There was no kitchen cabinet, that ate much and wasted more, to satisfy. Therefore, our revenue of eggs and milk went a long way toward meeting the problem. We made out a list of cheap, yet wholesome, articles of food, and found that we could buy oatmeal at four cents per pound, Indian meal at two and a half cents, rice at eight cents, samp at four, mackerel at nine, pork at twelve, and ham at fifteen cents. The last two articles were used sparingly, and more as relishes and for flavoring than as food. Flour happened to be cheap at the time, the best costing but seven dollars a barrel; of vegetables, we had secured abundance at slight cost; and the apples still added the wholesome element of fruit. A butcher drove his wagon to our door three times a week and, for cash, would give us, at very reasonable rates, certain cuts of beef and mutton. These my wife conjured into appetizing dishes and delicious soups.

Thus it can be seen that we had a varied diet at a surprisingly small outlay. Such details may appear to some very homely, yet our health and success depended largely upon thoughtful attention to just such prosaic matters. The children were growing plump and ruddy at an expense less than would be incurred by one or two visits from a fashionable physician in the city.

In the matter of food, I also gave more thought to my wife's time and strength than to the little people's wishes. While we had variety and abundance, we did not have many dishes at any one meal.

"We shall not permit mamma to be over the hot range any more than is necessary," I said. "She and Mousie must give us, from day to day, what costs little in time as well as money."

Fortunately, plain, wholesome food does not require much time in preparation. There would be better health in many homes if there was more economy in labor. For instance, the children at first clamored for griddle-cakes, but I said, "Isn't it nicer to have mamma sit down quietly

with us at breakfast than to see her running back and forth from the hot stove?" and even Bobsey, though rather ruefully, voted against cakes, except on rare occasions.

The wash-tub I forbade utterly, and the services of a stout Irishwoman were secured for one day in the week. Thus, by a little management, my wife was not overtaxed. Indeed, she had so much leisure that she and Mousie began giving Winnie and Bobsey daily lessons, for we had decided that the children should not go to school until the coming autumn. Early in April, therefore, our country life was passing into a quiet routine, not burdensome, at least within doors; and I justly felt that if all were well in the citadel of home, the chances of the outdoor campaign were greatly improved.

CHAPTER XXV

OWLS AND ANTWERPS

Each day at dawn, unless it was stormy, Merton patrolled the place with his gun, looking for hawks and other creatures which at this season he was permitted to shoot. He had quite as serious and important an air as if he were sallying forth to protect us from deadlier foes. For a time he saw nothing to fire at, since he had promised me not to shoot harmless birds. He always indulged himself, however, in one shot at a mark, and was becoming sure in his aim at stationary objects. One evening, however, when we were almost ready to retire, a strange sound startled us. At first it reminded me of the half-whining bark of a young dog, but the deep, guttural trill that followed convinced me that it was a screech-owl, for I remembered having heard these birds when a boy.

The moment I explained the sound, Merton darted for his gun, and my wife exclaimed: "O dear! what trouble is coming now? Mother always said that the hooting of an owl near a house was a bad omen."

I did not share in the superstition, although I disliked the uncanny sounds, and was under the impression that all owls, like hawks, should be destroyed. Therefore, I followed Merton out, hoping that he would get a successful shot at the night prowler.

The moonlight illumined everything with a soft, mild radiance; and the trees, with their tracery of bough and twig, stood out distinctly. Before we could discover the creature, it flew with noiseless wing from a maple

near the door to another perch up the lane, and again uttered its weird notes.

Merton was away like a swift shadow, and, screening himself behind the fence, stole upon his game. A moment later the report rang out in the still night. It so happened that Merton had fired just as the bird was about to fly, and had only broken a wing. The owl fell to the ground, but led the boy a wild pursuit before he was captured. Merton's hands were bleeding when he brought the creature in. Unless prevented, it would strike savagely with its beak, and the motions of its head were as quick as lightning. It was, indeed, a strange captive, and the children looked at it in wondering and rather fearful curiosity. My wife, usually tender-hearted, wished the creature, so ill-omened in her eyes, to be killed at once, but I granted Merton's request that he might put it in a box and keep it alive for a while.

"In the morning," I said, "we will read all about it, and can examine it more carefully."

My wife yielded, and I am not sure but that she thought we might avert misfortune by showing mercy.

Among my purchases was a recent work on natural history. But our minds had been engrossed with too many practical questions to give it much attention. Next morning we consulted it, and found our captive variously described as the little red, the mottled, or the screech owl. Then followed an account of its character and habits. We learned that we had made war upon a useful friend, instead of an ill-boding, harmful creature. We were taught that this species is a destroyer of mice, beetles, and vermin, thus rendering the agriculturist great services, which, however are so little known that the bird is everywhere hunted down without mercy or justice.

"Surely, this is not true of all owls," I said, and by reading further we learned that the barred, or hoot owl, and the great horned owl, were deserving of a surer aim of Merton's gun. They prey not only upon useful game, but also invade the poultry-yard, the horned species being

especially destructive. Instances were given in which these freebooters had killed every chicken upon a farm. As they hunt only at night, they are hard to capture. Their notes and natures are said to be in keeping with their deeds of darkness; for their cry is wild, harsh, and unearthly, while in temper they are cowardly, savage, and untamable, showing no affection even for each other. A female has been known to kill and eat the male.

"The moral of this owl episode," I concluded, "is that we must learn to know our neighbors, be they birds, beasts, or human beings, before we judge them. This book is not only full of knowledge, but of information that is practical and useful. I move that we read up about the creatures in our vicinity. What do you say, Merton? wouldn't it be well to learn what to shoot, as well as how to shoot?"

Protecting his hands with buckskin gloves, the boy applied mutton suet to our wounded owl's wing. It was eventually healed, and the bird was given its liberty. It gradually became sprightly and tame, and sociable in the evening, affording the children and Junior much amusement.

By the 7th of April there was a prospect of warmer and more settled weather, and Mr. Jones told us to lose no time in uncovering our Antwerp raspberries. They had been bent down close to the ground the previous winter and covered with earth. To remove this without breaking the canes, required careful and skilful work. We soon acquired the knack, however, of pushing and throwing aside the soil, then lifting the canes gently through what remained, and shaking them clear.

"Be careful to level the ground evenly," Mr. Jones warned us, "for it won't do at all to leave hummocks of dirt around the hills;" and we followed his instructions.

The canes were left until a heavy shower of rain washed them clean; then Winnie and Bobsey tied them up. We gave steady and careful attention to the Antwerps, since they would be our main dependence for income. I also raked in around the hills of one row a liberal dressing of wood ashes, intending to note its effect.

CHAPTER XXVI

A COUNTRY SUNDAY

Hitherto the Sabbaths had been stormy and the roads bad, and we had given the days to rest and family sociability. But at last there came a mild, sunny morning, and we resolved to find a church-home. I had heard that Dr. Lyman, who preached in the nearest village had the faculty of keeping young people awake. Therefore we harnessed the old bay-horse to our market-wagon, donned our "go-ter-meetin's," as Junior called his Sunday clothes, and started. Whatever might be the result of the sermon, the drive promised to do us good. The tender young grass by the roadside, and the swelling buds of trees, gave forth delicious odors; a spring haze softened the outline of the mountains, and made them almost as beautiful as if clothed with foliage; robins, song-sparrows, and other birds were so tuneful that Mousie said she wished they might form the choir at the church. Indeed, the glad spirit of Spring was abroad, and it found its way into our hearts. We soon learned that it entered largely also into Dr. Lyman's sermon. We were not treated as strangers and intruders, but welcomed and shown to a pew in a way that made us feel at home. I discovered that I, too, should be kept awake and given much to think about. We remained until Sunday-school, which followed the service, was over, and then went home, feeling that life both here and hereafter was something to be thankful for. After dinner, without even taking the precaution of locking the door, we all strolled down the lane and the steeply sloping meadow to our wood lot and the banks of the Moodna Creek. My wife had never seen this portion of our place before,

and she was delighted with its wild beauty and seclusion. She shivered and turned a little pale, however, as she saw the stream, still high and swift, that had carried Bobsey away.

Junior joined us, and led the children to a sunny bank, from which soon came shouts of joy over the first wildflowers of the season. I placed my wife on a rock, and we sat quietly for a time, inhaling the fresh woody odors, and listening to the murmurs of the creek and the song of the birds. Then I asked: "Isn't this better than a city flat and a noisy street? Are not these birds pleasanter neighbors than the Daggetts and the Ricketts?"

Her glad smile was more eloquent than words could have been. Mousie came running to us, holding in her hand, which trembled from excitement, a little bunch of liverworts and anemones. Tears of happiness actually stood in her eyes, and she could only falter, "O mamma! just look!" and then she hastened away to gather more.

"That child belongs to nature," I said, "and would always be an exile in the city. How greatly she has improved in health already!"

The air grew damp and chill early, and we soon returned to the house. Monday was again fair, and found us absorbed in our busy life, each one having plenty to do. When it was safe to uncover the raspberries, Merton and I had not lost a moment in the task. At the time of which I write we put in stakes where they were missing, obtaining not a few of them from the wood lot. We also made our second planting of potatoes and other hardy vegetables in the garden. The plants in the kitchen window were thriving, and during mild, still days we carried them to a sheltered place without, that they might become inured to the open air.

Winnie already had three hens sitting on their nests full of eggs, and she was counting the days until the three weeks of incubation should expire, and the little chicks break their shells. One of the hens proved a fickle biddy, and left her nest, much to the child's anger and disgust. But the others were faithful, and one morning Winnie came bounding in, saying she had heard the first "peep." I told her to be patient and leave the

brood until the following day, since I had read that the chicks were stronger for not being taken from the nest too soon. She had treated the mother hens so kindly that they were tame, and permitted her to throw out the empty shells, and exult over each new-comer into a brief existence.

Our radishes had come up nicely; but no sooner had the first green leaves expanded than myriads of little flea-like beetles devoured them. A timely article in my horticultural paper explained that if little chickens were allowed to run in the garden they would soon destroy these and other insects. Therefore I improvised a coop by laying down a barrel near the radishes and driving stakes in front of it to confine the hen, which otherwise, with the best intentions, would have scratched up all my sprouting seeds. Hither we brought her the following day, with her downy brood of twelve, and they soon began to make themselves useful. Winnie fed them with Indian-meal and mashed potatoes and watched over them with more than their mother's solicitude, while Merton renewed his vigilance against hawks and other enemies.

With this new attraction, and wildflowers in the woods, the tying up of raspberries became weary prose to Winnie and Bobsey; but I kept them at it during most of the forenoon of every pleasant day and if they performed their task carelessly, I made them do it over. I knew that the time was coming when many kinds of work would cease to be play to us all, and that we might as well face the fact first as last. After the morning duties were over, and the afternoon lessons learned, there was plenty of time for play, and the two little people enjoyed it all the more.

Merton, also, had two afternoons in the week and he and Junior began to bring home strings of sweet little sunfish and winfish. Boys often become disgusted with country life because it is made hard and monotonous for them.

CHAPTER XXVII

STRAWBERRY VISIONS AND "PERTATERS"

I had decided that I would not set out any more raspberries until I had learned the comparative value of those already on the place. After I had seen my varieties in bearing and marketed the crop, I should be better able to make a wise selection, "Why not plant only the best and most profitable?" I reasoned. At Mr. Jones's suggestion I had put up notices at public resorts, and inserted a brief advertisement in a local paper, stating that I had plants for sale. As a result, I sold, at a low price, it is true, the greater part of the young plants that had been trenched in, and the ready money they brought was very acceptable.

From the first, my mind had often turned toward strawberries as one of our chief crops. They promised well for several reasons, the main one being that they would afford a light and useful form of labor for all the children. Even Bobsey could pick the fruit almost as well as any of us, for he had no long back to ache in getting down to it. The crop, also, could be gathered and sold before the raspberry season began, and this was an important fact. We should also have another and earlier source of income. I had read a great deal about the cultivation of the strawberry, and I had visited a Maizeville neighbor who grew them on a large scale, and had obtained his views. To make my knowledge more complete I wrote to my Washington-Market friend, Mr. Bogart, and his prompt letter in reply was encouraging.

"Don't go into too many kinds," he advised, "and don't set too much ground. A few crates of fine berries will pay you better than bushels of small, soft, worthless trash. Steer clear of high-priced novelties and fancy sorts, and begin with only those known to pay well in your region. Try Wilson's (they're good to sell if not to eat) and Duchess for early, and Sharpless and Champion for late. Set the last two kinds out side by side, for the Champions won't bear alone. A customer of mine runs on these four sorts. He gives them high culture, and gets big crops and big berries, which pay big. When you want crates, I can furnish them, and take my pay out of the sales of your fruit. Don't spend much money for plants. Buy a few of each kind, and set 'em in moist ground and let 'em run. By winter you'll have enough plants to cover your farm."

I found that I could buy these standard varieties in the vicinity; and having made the lower part of the garden very rich, I procured, one cloudy day, two hundred plants of each kind and set them in rows, six feet apart, so that by a little watchfulness I could keep them separate. I obtained my whole stock for five dollars; therefore, counting our time and everything, the cost of entering on strawberry culture was slight. A rainy night followed, and every plant started vigorously.

In spite of occasional frosts and cold rains, the days grew longer and warmer. The cherry, peach, plum, and pear buds were almost ready to burst into bloom, but Mr. Jones shook his head over the orchard.

"This ain't apple year," he said. "Well, no matter. If you can make it go this season, you will be sure of better luck next year."

He had come over to aid me in choosing a two-acre plot of ground for corn and potatoes. This we marked out from the upper and eastern slope of a large meadow. The grass was running out and growing weedy.

"It's time it was turned over," my neighbor remarked; "and by fall it'll be in good condition for fruit."

I proposed to extend my fruit area gradually, with good reason, fearing that much hired help would leave small profits.

That very afternoon Mr. Jones, with his sharp steel plow, began to turn over clean, deep, even furrows; for we had selected the plot in view of the fact that it was not stony, as was the case with other portions of our little farm.

When at last the ground was plowed, he said: "I wouldn't harrow the part meant for corn till you are ready to plant it, say about the tenth of next month. We'd better get the pertater ground ready and the rows furrowed out right off. Early plantin' is the best. How much will ye give to 'em?"

"Half the plot," I said.

"Why, Mr. Durham, that's a big plantin' for pertaters."

"Well, I've a plan, and would like your opinion. If I put Early Rose potatoes right in, when can I harvest them?"

"Say the last of July or early August, accordin' to the season."

"If we keep the ground clean and well worked the sod will then be decayed, won't it?"

"Yes, nigh enough. Ye want to grow turnips or fodder corn, I s'pose?"

"No, I want to set out strawberries. I've read more about this fruit than any other, and, if the books are right, I can set strong plants on enriched ground early in August and get a good crop next June. Won't this pay better than planting next spring and waiting over two years from this time for a crop?"

"Of course it will, if you're right. I ain't up on strawberries."

"Well," I continued, "it looks reasonable. I shall have my young plants growing right here in my own garden. Merton and I can take them up in the cool of the evening and in wet weather, and they won't know they've been moved. I propose to get these early potatoes out of the ground as soon as possible, even if I have to sell part of them before they are fully ripe; then have the ground plowed deep and marked out for

strawberries, put all the fertilizers I can scrape together in the rows and set the plants as fast as possible. I've read again and again that many growers regard this method as one of the best."

"Well, you're comin' on for a beginner. I'm kind o' shy of book-plans, though. But try it. I'll come over, as I used to when old man Jamison was here, and sit on the fence and make remarks."

Planting an acre of potatoes was no light task for us, even after the ground was plowed and harrowed, and the furrows for the rows were marked out. I also had to make a half-day's journey to the city of Newtown to buy more seed, since the children's appetites had greatly reduced the stock in the root-cellar. For a few days we worked like beavers. Even Winnie helped Merton to drop the seed; and in the evening we had regular potato-cutting "bees," Junior coming over to aid us, and my wife and Mousie helping also. Songs and stories enlivened these evening hours of labor. Indeed, my wife and Mousie performed, during the day, a large part of this task, and they soon learned to cut the tubers skilfully. I have since known this work to be done so carelessly that some pieces were cut without a single eye upon them. Of course, in such cases there is nothing to grow.

One Saturday night, the last of April, we exulted over the fact that our acre was planted and the seed well covered.

Many of the trees about the house, meantime, had clothed themselves with fragrant promises of fruit. All, especially Mousie, had been observant of the beautiful changes, and, busy as we had been, she, Winnie and Bobsey had been given time to keep our table well supplied with wildflowers. Now that they had come in abundance, they seemed as essential as our daily food. To a limited extent I permitted blooming sprays to be taken from the fruit-trees, thinking, with Mousie, that "cherry blossoms are almost as nice as cherries." Thus Nature graced our frugal board, and suggested that, as she accompanied her useful work with beauty and fragrance, so we also could lift our toilsome lives above the coarse and sordid phase too common in country homes.

CHAPTER XXVIII

CORN, COLOR, AND MUSIC

In early May the grass was growing lush and strong, and Brindle was driven down the lane to the meadow, full of thickets, which bordered on the creek. Here she could supply herself with food and water until the late autumn.

With the first days of the month we planted, on a part of the garden slope, where the soil was dry and warm, very early, dwarf sweet corn, a second early variety, Burr's Mammoth, and Stowell's Evergreen.

"These several kinds," I said, "will give us a succession of boiling ears for weeks together. When this planting is up a few inches high, we will make another, for, by so doing, my garden book says we may have this delicious vegetable till frost comes."

After reading and some inquiry during the winter I had decided to buy only McLean's Gem peas for seed. This low-growing kind required no brush and, therefore, far less labor. By putting in a row every ten days till the last of June, we should enjoy green peas of the sweet, wrinkled sort till tired, if that were possible. We also planted early dwarf wax-beans, covering the seed, as directed, only two inches deep. It was my ambition to raise a large crop of Lima beans, having read that few vegetables yield more food to a small area than they. So, armed with an axe and a hatchet, Merton and I went into some young growth on the edge of our wood lot and cut thirty poles, lopping off the branches so as to leave little crotches on which the vines could rest for support. Having sharpened

these poles we set them firmly in the garden, four feet apart each way, then dug in some very fine and decayed manure around each pole, and left the soil for a day or two to grow warm and light. My book said that, if the earth was cold, wet, or heavy the beans would decay instead of coming up. The 10th of the month being fine and promising, I pressed the eye or germ side of the beans into the soil and covered them only one inch deep. In the evening we set out our cabbage and cauliflower plants where they should be allowed to mature. The tomato plants, being more tender than their companions started in the kitchen window, were set about four inches apart in a sheltered place. We could thus cover them at night and protect them a little from the midday sun for a week or two longer.

Nor were Mousie's flowering plants forgotten. She had watched over them from the seed with tireless care, and now we made a bed and helped the happy child to put her little nurslings in the open ground where they were to bloom. The apple-trees made the air fragrant, and some of the delicate pink of their blossoms was in Mousie's cheeks.

"Truly," I thought, as I looked into her sparkling eyes, "if we can but barely live in the country, I am glad we came."

The next morning Merton and I began our great undertaking—the planting of the other acre of ground, next to the potatoes, with field corn. Mr. Jones had harrowed it comparatively smooth, I had a light plow with which to mark out the furrows four feet apart each way. At the intersection of these furrows the seed was to be dropped. I found I could not drive our old bay straight across the field to save my life, and neighbor Jones laughed till his sides ached at the curves and crooks I first left behind me.

"Here, Merton," I cried, nothing daunted, "we must work together again. Get a pole and stand it on the farther side of the plot four feet in from the edge of the sod. That's right. Now come here; take old Bay by the head, and, with your eyes fixed on the pole, lead him steadily toward it."

A furrow was now made of which Mr. Jones himself need not have been ashamed; and he laughed as he said, at parting "You'll do. I see you've got enough Yankee in you to try more ways than one."

We kept at work manfully, although the day was warm, and by noon the plot was furrowed one way. After dinner we took an hour's partial rest in shelling our corn and then resumed our work, and in the same manner began furrowing at right angles with the first rows. The hills were thus about four feet apart each way. Merton dropped the corn after we had run half a dozen furrows.

"Drop five kernels," I said; for Mr. Jones had told us that four stalks were enough and that three would do, but had added: "I plant five kernels, for some don't come up, and the crows and other vermints take others. If all of 'em grow, it's easier to pull up one stalk at the first hoeing than to plant over again."

We found that putting in the corn was a lighter task than planting the potatoes even though we did our own furrowing; and by the middle of May we were complacent over the fact that we had succeeded with our general spring work far better than we had hoped, remembering that we were novices who had to take so much counsel from books and from our kind, practical neighbor.

The foliage of the trees was now out in all its delicately shaded greenery, and midday often gave us a foretaste of summer heat. The slight blaze kindled in the old fireplace, after supper, was more for the sake of good cheer than for needed warmth, and at last it was dispensed with. Thrushes and other birds of richer and fuller song had come, and morning and evening we left the door open that we might enjoy the varied melody.

Our first plantings of potatoes and early vegetables were now up and looked promising. So a new phase of labor—that of cultivation—began. New broods of chickens were coming off, and Winnie had many families to look after. Nevertheless, although there was much to attend to, the season was bringing a short breathing-spell, and I resolved to take

advantage of it. So I said one Friday evening: "If to-morrow is fair, we'll take a vacation. What do you say to a day's fishing and sailing on the river?"

A jubilant shout greeted this proposal, and when it had subsided, Mousie asked, "Can't Junior go with us?"

"Certainly," I replied; "I'll go over right after supper, and make sure that his father consents."

Mr. Jones said, "Yes," and Merton and Junior were soon busy with their preparations, which were continued until the long twilight deepened into dusk.

CHAPTER XXIX

WE GO A-FISHING

The following day, happily, proved all that we could desire. The children were up with the dawn, and Junior was not long in joining us. By eight o'clock we had finished breakfast and the morning work, our lunch-basket was packed, and the market-wagon stood at the door. Mr. Jones had good-naturedly promised to take a look at the premises occasionally to see that all was right. I had put but one seat in the wagon for my wife and myself, since the young people decided that a straw-ride to the river would be "more fun than a parlor-car."

My wife entered into the spirit of this little outing with a zest which gave me deep content. Her face indicated no regretful thoughts turning toward the Egypt of the city; her mother love was so strong that she was happy with the children. The robins, of which there seemed no end about the house, gave us a tuneful and hilarious send-off; the grown people and children whom we met smiled and cheered, following us with envious eyes. Each of the children held a pole aloft, and Merton said that "the wagon looked as if our Lima-bean patch was off on a visit."

In the village we increased our stock of lines and hooks, and bought a few corks for floats. We soon reached the mouth of the Moodna Creek, where stood a weather-beaten boat-house, with a stable adjoining, in which old Bay could enjoy himself in his quiet, prosaic way. A good-sized boat was hired, and, as the tide was in, we at first decided to go up the creek as far as possible and float down with the ebb. This, to the

children, was like a voyage of discovery, and there was a general airing of geography, each little bay, point, and gulf receiving some noted name. At last we reached a deep, shaded pool, which was eventually dubbed "Bobsey's Luck;" for he nearly fell into it in his eagerness to take off a minnow that had managed to fasten itself to his hook.

Merton and Junior, being more experienced anglers, went ashore to make some casts on the ripples and rapids of the stream above, and secured several fine "winfish." The rest of us were content to take it easy in the shade and hook an occasional cat and sun fish. At last the younger children wanted variety, so I permitted them to land on the wooded bank, kindle a little fire, and roast some clams that we had bought at the boat-house. The smoke and the tempting odors lured Merton and Junior, who soon proved that boys' appetites can always be depended upon.

Time passed rapidly, and I at last noticed that the tide had fallen to such a degree as to fill me with alarm.

"Come, youngsters," I cried, "we must go back at once, or we shall have to stay here till almost night."

They scrambled on board, and we started down-stream, but soon came to shallow water, as was proved by the swift current and the ripples. A moment later we were hard aground. In vain we pushed with the oars; the boat would not budge. Then Junior sat down and coolly began to take off shoes and stockings. In a flash Merton followed his example. There was no help for it, and we had no time to lose. Over they splashed, lightening the boat, and taking the "painter," or tie-rope, at the bow, they pulled manfully. Slowly at first, but with increasing progress, the keel grated over the stones, and at last we were again afloat. A round of applause greeted the boys as they sprung back into the boat, and away we went, cautiously avoiding shoals and sand-bars, until we reached Plum Point, where we expected to spend the remainder of the day. Here, for a time, we had excellent sport, and pulled up sunfish and white perch

of a very fair size. Bobsey caught so large a specimen of the former variety that he had provided himself with a supper equal even to his capacity.

The day ended in unalloyed pleasure, and never had the old farm-house looked so like home as when it greeted us again in the evening glow of the late spring sun. Merton and Junior divided the finny spoils to their satisfaction, while Winnie and I visited the chicken-coops and found that there had been no mishaps during our absence. I told my boy that I would milk the cow while he cleaned the fish for supper, and when at last we sat down we formed a tired, hilarious, and hungry group. Surely, if fish were created to be eaten, our enjoyment of their browned sweetness must have rounded out their existence completely.

"O papa!" exclaimed Merton, at the breakfast table, on Monday morning; "we haven't planted any musk and water melons!"

"That is true," I replied. "I find that I overlooked melons in making out my list of seeds. Indeed, I passed them over, I imagine, as a luxury that we could dispense with the first year."

"I'll take care of 'em if you will only let us have some," persisted the boy; and the other children joined in his request.

"But the garden is all filled up," I said, thoughtfully; "and I fear it is too late to plant now."

Looks of disappointment led me to think further and I got one of my seed catalogues.

"Here are some early kinds named and perhaps they would mature; but where shall we put them?"

"Seems to me we had better have a little less corn, if room can be made for melons," was Merton's suggestion.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," I continued. "We've had such good fortune in accomplishing our early work, and you have helped so nicely, that you shall try your hand at melons. Drive your mother and Mousie down to the village this morning, and get some seeds of the nutmeg musk-melon and Phinney's early watermelon. I'll take two rows in the early corn on the warm garden slope, pull up every third hill, and make, in their places, nice, warm, rich beds for the seed which we will plant as soon as you come back. I don't believe the corn will shade the melon vines too much; and as soon as we have taken off the green ears we will cut away the stalks. Thus we shall get two crops from the same ground."

This plan was carried out, and the melon seed came up in a very promising way.

CHAPTER XXX

WEEDS AND WORKING FOR DEAR LIFE

The beautiful transition period of spring passing into summer would have filled us with delight had we not found a hostile army advancing on us—annual weeds. When we planted the garden, the soil was brown and clean. The early vegetables came up in well-defined green rows, the weeds appearing with them, too few and scattered to cause anxiety. Now all was changed. Weeds seemed created by magic in a night. The garden was becoming evenly green throughout; and the vegetables, in some cases, could scarcely be distinguished from the ranker growth of crowding, unknown plants among and around them. I also saw that our corn and potato field would soon become, if left alone, as verdant as the meadow beyond. I began to fear that we could not cope with these myriads of foes, little now, but growing while we slept, and stealing a march on us in one part of the place while we destroyed them in another.

With something like dismay I called Mr. Jones's attention to these silent forces, invading, not only the garden and fields, but the raspberries and, indeed, all the ground now devoted to fruit.

He laughed and said: "The Philistines are on you, sure enough. I'm busy whackin' them over myself, but I guess I'll have to come and give you a lift, for you must get these weeds well under before hayin' and raspberry-pickin'-time comes. It's warm to-day, and the ground's middlin' dry. I'll show you what can be done in short metre. By the way, I'll give you a little wrinkle worth knowin'. I've observed that you didn't bring the

children to the country to be like weeds—just ter grow and run ter seed, ye know. It's 'stonishin' how soon weeds, whether they're people or pusley, get seedy. Well, now, call the children and come with me to the garden."

We were all soon there, including my wife, who shared my solicitude.

"You see," resumed Mr. Jones, "that these weakly little rows of carrots, beets, and onions would soon be choked by these weeds, not an inch high yet. The same is true of the corn and peas and other sags. The pertaters are strong enough to take care of themselves for a time, but not long. I see you and Merton have been tryin' to weed and hoe them out at the same time. Well, you can't keep up with the work in that way. Take now this bed of beets; the weeds are gettin' even all over it, and they're thicker, if anywhere, right in the row, so that it takes a good eye to see the beets. But here they are, and here they run across the bed. Now look at me. One good showin' is worth all the tellin' and readin' from now to Christmas. You see, I begin with my two hands, and pull out all the weeds on each side of the little row, and I pull 'em away from the young beets so as not to disturb them, but to leave 'em standin' straight and saucy. Careless hands will half pull out the vegetables at the same time with the weeds. I had to strap Junior once before he learned that fact, and it was amazin' how I helped his eyesight and trained his fingers through his back. Well, now, you see, I've cleared out this row of beets half across the bed and the ground for an inch or two on each side of it. I drop the weeds right down in the spaces between the rows, for the sun will dry 'em up before dinner-time. Now I'll take another row."

By this time Merton and I were following his example, and in a few moments a part of three more rows had been treated in the same way.

"Now," continued Mr. Jones, "the weeds are all out of the rows that we've done, and for a little space on each side of 'em. The beets have a chance to grow unchoked, and to get ahead. These other little green varmints in the ground, between the rows, are too small to do any harm yet. Practically the beets are cleaned out, and will have all the ground

they need to themselves for three or four days; but these weeds between the rows would soon swamp everything. Now, give me a hoe, and I'll fix THEM."

He drew the useful tool carefully and evenly through the spaces between the rows, and our enemies were lying on their sides ready to wither away in the morning sun.

"You see after the rows are weeded out how quickly you can hoe the spaces between 'em," my neighbor concluded. "Now the children can do this weedin'. Your and Merton's time's too valyble. When weeds are pulled from right in and around vegetables, the rest can stand without harm for a while, till you can get around with the hoe and cultivator. This weedin' out business is 'specially important in rainy weather, for it only hurts ground to hoe or work it in wet, showery days, and the weeds don't mind it a bit. Warm, sunny spells, when the soil's a little dry, is the time to kill weeds. But you must be careful in weedin' then, or you'll so disturb the young, tender sass that it'll dry up, too. See, I'll pull some weeds carelessly. Now obsarve that the beets are half jerked up also. Of course that won't answer. I'll come over this afternoon with my cultivator, and we'll tackle the corn and pertaters, and make such a swath among these green Philistines that you'll sleep better to-night. But ye're goin' to come out right, mind, I tell ye so; and I've seen mor'n one city squash come to the country with the idee that they were goin' to beat us punkins all holler."

And he left us laughing and hopeful.

"Come, Winnie and Bobsey, begin here on each side of me. I'll show you this morning and then I trust you can be left to do the weeding carefully by yourselves to-morrow. Pressing as the work is, you shall have your afternoons until the berries are ripe."

"Can't I help, too?" asked Mousie.

I looked into her eager, wistful face, but said, firmly: "Not now, dear. The sun is too hot. Toward night, perhaps, I'll let you do a little. By helping mamma in the house you are doing your part."

We made good progress, and the two younger children speedily learned the knack of working carefully, so as not to disturb the little vegetables. I soon found that weeding was back-aching work for me, and therefore "spelled" myself by hoeing out the spaces between the rows. By the time the music of the dinner-bell sounded, hosts of our enemies were slain.

Mr. Jones, true to his promise, was on hand at one o'clock with his cultivator, and began with the corn, which was now a few inches high. Merton and I followed with hoes, uncovering the tender shoots on which earth had been thrown, and dressing out the soil into clean flat hills. As our neighbor had said, it was astonishing how much work the horse-cultivator performed in a short time. I saw that it would be wise for us, another year, to plant in a way that would permit the use of horse-power. Even in the garden this method should be followed as far as possible.

Mr. Jones was not a man of half-way measures. He remained helping us, till he had gone through the corn, once each way, twice between the long rows of potatoes, then twice through all the raspberry rows, giving us two full days of his time altogether.

I handed him a dollar in addition to his charge, saying that I had never paid out money with greater satisfaction.

"Well," he said, with a short, dry laugh, "I'll take it this time, for my work is sufferin' at home, but I didn't want you to get discouraged. Now, keep the hoes flyin', and you're ahead once more. Junior's at it early and late, I can tell ye."

"So I supposed, for we've missed him."

"Good reason. When I'm through with him he's ready enough to crawl into his little bed."

So were we for a few days, in our winning fight with the weeds. One hot afternoon, about three o'clock, I saw that Merton was growing pale, and beginning to lag, and I said, decidedly: "Do you see that tree there? Go and lie down under it till I call you."

"I guess I can stand it till night," he began, his pride a little touched.

"Obey orders! I am captain."

In five minutes he was fast asleep. I threw my coat over him, and sat down, proposing to have a half-hour's rest myself. My wife came out with a pitcher of cool butter-milk and nodded her head approvingly at us.

"Well, my thoughtful Eve," I said, "I find that our modern Eden will cost a great many back-aches."

"If you will only be prudent like this, you may save me a heart-ache. Robert, you are ambitious, and unused to this kind of work. Please don't ever be so foolish as to forget the comparative value of vegetables and yourselves. Honestly now" (with one of her saucy looks), "I'd rather do with a few bushels less, than do without you and Merton;" and she sat down and kept me idle for an hour.

Then Merton got up, saying that he felt as "fresh as if he had had a night's rest," and we accomplished more in the cool of the day than if we had kept doggedly at work.

I found that Winnie and Bobsey required rather different treatment. For a while they got on very well, but one morning I set them at a bed of parsnips about which I was particular. In the middle of the forenoon I went to the garden to see how they were getting on. Shouts of laughter made me fear that all was not well, and I soon discovered that they were throwing lumps of earth at each other. So absorbed were they in their untimely and mischievous fun that I was not noticed until I found Bobsey sitting plump on the vegetables, and the rows behind both the children very shabbily cleaned, not a few of the little plants having been pulled up with the weeds.

Without a word I marched them into the house, then said: "Under arrest till night. Winnie, you go to your room. I shall strap Bobsey in his chair, and put him in the parlor by himself."

The exchange of the hot garden for the cool rooms seemed rather an agreeable punishment at first, although Winnie felt the disgrace somewhat. When, at dinner, nothing but a cup of water and a piece of dry bread was taken to them, Bobsey began to howl, and Winnie to look as if the affair was growing serious. Late in the afternoon, when she found that she was not to gather the eggs or feed her beloved chickens, she, too, broke down and sobbed that she "wouldn't do so any more." Bobsey also pleaded so piteously for release, and promised such saint-like behavior, that I said: "Well, I will remit the rest of your punishment and put you on trial. You had no excuse for your mischief this morning, for I allow you to play the greater part of every afternoon, while Merton must stand by me the whole of the week."

My touch of discipline brought up the morale of my little squad effectually for a time. The next afternoon even the memory of trouble was banished by the finding of the first wild strawberries. Exultation and universal interest prevailed as clusters of green and red berries were handed around to be smelled and examined. "Truly," my wife remarked, "even roses can scarcely equal the fragrance of the wild strawberry."

From that day forward, for weeks, it seemed as if we entered on a diet of strawberries and roses. The old-fashioned bushes of the latter, near the house, had been well trimmed, and gave large, fine buds in consequence, while Mousie, Winnie, and Bobsey gleaned every wild berry that could be found, beginning with the sunny upland slopes and following the aromatic fruit down to the cool, moist borders of the creek.

"Another year," I said, "I think you will be tired even of strawberries, for we shall have to pick early and late."

CHAPTER XXXI

NATURE SMILES AND HELPS

The Saturday evening which brought us almost to the middle of June was welcomed indeed. The days preceding had been filled with hard, yet successful labor, and the weeds had been slaughtered by the million. The greater part of our crops had come up well and were growing nicely. In hoeing the corn, we had planted over the few missing hills, and now, like soldiers who had won the first great success of the campaign, we were in a mood to enjoy a rest to the utmost.

This rest seemed all the more delightful when we awoke on the following morning, to the soft patter of rain. The preceding days had been unusually dry and warm, so that the grass and tender vegetables were beginning to suffer. I was worrying about the raspberries also, which were passing out of blossom. The cultivator had been through them, and Merton and I, only the evening before, had finished hoeing out the sprouting weeds and surplus suckers. I had observed, with dread, that just as the fruit was forming, the earth, especially around the hills, was getting dry.

Now, looking out, I saw that the needful watering was not coming from a passing shower. The clouds were leaden from horizon to horizon; the rain fell with a gentle steadiness of a quiet summer storm, and had evidently been falling some hours already. The air was so fragrant that I threw wide open the door and windows. It was a true June incense, such as no art could distil, and when, at last, we all sat down to breakfast, of

which crisp radishes taken a few moments before from our own garden formed a part, we felt that nature was carrying on our work of the past week in a way that filled our hearts with gratitude. The air was so warm that we did not fear the dampness. The door and windows were left open that we might enjoy the delicious odors and listen to the musical patter of the rain, which fell so softly that the birds were quite as tuneful as on other days.

The children joined me in the porch, and my wife came out laughing, and put her hand on my shoulder as she said, "You are not through with July and August yet."

Mousie held her hands out in the warm rain, saying: "I feel as if it would make me grow, too. Look at the green cherries up there, bobbing as the drops hit them."

"Rain isn't good for chickens," Winnie remarked, doubtfully.

"It won't hurt them," I replied, "for I have fed them so well that they needn't go out in the wet for food."

The clouds gave us a more and more copious downfall as the day advanced, and I sat on the porch, resting and observing with conscious gratitude how beautifully nature was furthering all our labor, and fulfilling our hopes. This rain would greatly increase the hay-crops for the old horse and the cow; it would carry my vegetables rapidly toward maturity; and, best of all, would soak the raspberry ground so thoroughly that the fruit would be almost safe. What was true of our little plot was equally so of neighbor Jones's farm, and thousands of others. My wife sat with me much of the day, and I truly think that our thoughts were acceptable worship. By four in the afternoon the western horizon lightened, the clouds soon broke away, and the sun shone out briefly in undiminished splendor, turning the countless raindrops on foliage and grass into gems, literally, of the purest water. The bird-songs seemed almost ecstatic, and the voices of the children, permitted at last to go out of doors, vied with them in gladness.

"Let July and August—yes, and bleak January—bring what they may," I said to my wife, "nevertheless, this is Eden."

In spite of the muddy walks, we picked our way around the garden, exclaiming in pleased wonder at the growth made by our vegetable nurslings in a few brief hours, while, across the field, the corn and potato rows showed green, strong outlines.

I found that Brindle in the pasture hadn't minded the rain, but only appeared the sleeker for it. When at last I came in to supper, I gave my wife a handful of berries, at which she and the children exclaimed. I had permitted a dozen plants of each variety of my garden strawberries to bear, that I might get some idea of the fruit. The blossoms on the other plants had been picked off as soon as they appeared, so that all the strength might go toward forming new plants. I found that a few of the berries of the two early kinds were ripe, also that the robins had been sampling them. In size, at least, they seemed wonderful compared with the wild fruit from the field, and I said:

"There will be lively times for us when we must get a dozen bushels a day, like these, off to Mr. Bogart."

The children, then, thought it would be the greatest fun in the world. By the time supper was over, Mr. Jones and Junior appeared, and my neighbor said in hearty good-will:

"You got your cultivatin' done in the nick of time, Mr. Durham. This rain is a good hundred dollars in your pocket and mine, too."

I soon perceived that our enemies, the weeds, had millions in reserve, and on Monday—the day after the rain—with all the children helping, even Mousie part of the time, we went at the garden again. To Mousie, scarcely an invalid any longer, was given the pleasure of picking the first green peas and shelling them for dinner. We had long been enjoying the succulent lettuce and the radishes, and now I said to Winnie: "To-morrow you can begin thinning out the beets, leaving the plants three inches apart. What you pull up can be cooked as spinach, or 'greens,' as country people say. Our garden will soon enable us to live like princes."

As the ground dried after the rain, a light crust formed on the surface, and in the wetter portions it was even inclined to bake or crack. I was surprised at the almost magical effect of breaking up the crust and making the soil loose and mellow by cultivation. The letting in of air and light caused the plants to grow with wonderful vigor.

On Wednesday morning Merton came running in, exclaiming, "O papa! there's a green worm eating all the leaves off the currant and gooseberry bushes."

I followed him hastily, and found that considerable mischief had already been done, and I went to one of my fruit books in a hurry to find out how to cope with this new enemy.

As a result, I said: "Merton, mamma wishes to go to the village. You drive her and Mousie down, and at the drug-store get two pounds of white hellebore, also a pound of Paris green, for I find that the potato bugs are getting too thick to be managed by hand. Remember that these are poisons, the Paris green a deadly one. Have them carefully wrapped up, and keep them from everything else. When you return I'll take charge of them. Also, get a new large watering-can."

That afternoon I mixed a heaping tablespoonful of the hellebore through the contents of the watering-can, on which I had painted the word "Poison." With this infusion I sprinkled thoroughly every bush on which I could find a worm, and the next morning we had the pleasure of finding most of these enemies dead. But some escaped or new ones were hatched, and we found that we could save our currants only by constant vigilance. Every evening, until the fruit was nearly ripe, we went over the bushes, and gave the vile little pests a dose wherever we found them. Our other can I also labelled "Poison," with dashes under it to show that it was to be used for Paris green alone. A teaspoonful of this deadly agent was enough, according to my book, for the amount of water held by the ordinary wooden pail. I kept this poison out of Bobsey's reach, and, indeed, where no one but myself could get at it, and, by its aid, destroyed

the potato beetles and their larvae also. Whatever may be true in other parts of the world, in our region, certainly, success can be secured only by prompt, intelligent effort.

CHAPTER XXXII

CHERRIES, BERRIES, AND BERRY-THIEVES

An evening or two after this we were taught that not even in our retired nook had we escaped the dangers of city life. Winnie and Bobsey, in their rambles after strawberries, had met two other children, and, early in the acquaintance, fortunately brought them to the house. The moment I saw the strange girl, I recognized a rural type of Melissa Daggett, while the urchin of Bobsey's age did not scruple to use vile language in my hearing. I doubt whether the poor little savage had any better vernacular. I told them kindly but firmly that they must not come on the place again without my permission.

After supper I went over and asked Mr. Jones about these children, and he replied, significantly, looking around first to make sure that no one heard him:

"Mr. Durham, steer clear of those people. You know there are certain varmints on a farm to which we give a wide berth and kill 'em when we can. Of course we can't kill off this family, although a good contribution could be taken up any day to move 'em a hundred miles away. Still about everybody gives 'em a wide berth, and is civil to their faces. They'll rob you more or less, and you might as well make up your mind to it, and let 'em alone."

"Suppose I don't let them alone?"

"Well—remember, now, this is wholly between ourselves—there's been barns burned around here. Everybody's satisfied who sot 'em afire, but nothin' can be proved. Your cow or horse, too, might suddenly die. There's no tellin' what accidents would happen if you got their ill-will."

"I can't take the course you suggest toward this family," I said, after a little thought. "It seems to me wrong on both sides. On one hand, they are treated as outlaws, and that would go far to make them such; on the other, they are permitted to levy a sort of blackmail and commit crime with impunity. Of course I must keep my children away from them; but, if the chance offers, I shall show the family kindness, and if they molest me I shall try to give them the law to the utmost."

"Well," concluded Mr. Jones, with a shrug, "I've warned you, if they git down on yer, yer'll find 'em snakes in the grass."

Returning home, I said nothing to Winnie and Bobsey against their recent companions, but told them that if they went with them again, or made the acquaintance of other strangers without permission, they would be put on bread and water for an entire day—that all such action was positively forbidden.

It was evident, however, that the Melissa Daggett element was present in the country, and in an aggravated form. That it was not next door, or, rather, in the next room, was the redeeming feature. Residents in the country are usually separated by wide spaces from evil association.

It must not be thought that my wife and children had no society except that afforded by Mr. Jones's family. They were gradually making pleasant and useful acquaintances, especially among those whom we met at church; but as these people have no material part in this simple history, they are not mentioned.

The most important activities of the season were now drawing very near. The cherries were swelling fast; the currants were growing red, and were already pronounced "nice for pies;" and one morning Merton came rushing in with a red raspberry from the Highland Hardy variety. I was glad the time was at hand when I should begin to receive something

besides advice from Mr. Bogart; for, careful as we had been, the drain on my capital had been long and steady, and were eager for the turn of the tide.

I had bought a number of old Mr. Jamison's crates, had painted out his name and replaced it with mine. I now wrote to Mr. Bogart for packages best adapted to the shipping of cherries, currants, and raspberries. For the first he sent me baskets that held about a peck. These baskets were so cheap that they could be sold with the fruit. For currants, crates containing twenty-four quart baskets were forwarded. These, he wrote, would also do for black-caps this season, and for strawberries next year. For the red raspberries he sent me quite different crates, filled with little baskets holding only half a pint of fruit. Limited supplies of these packages were sent, for he said that a telegram would bring more the same day.

The corn and potatoes were becoming weedy again. This time I made use of a light plow, Merton leading old Bay as at first. Then, with our hoes, we gave the rows a final dressing out. By the time we had finished, some of our grass was fit to cut, the raspberries needed a careful picking over, and the cherries on one tree were ready for market. The children and robins had already feasted, but I was hungry for a check from New York.

I had long since decided not to attempt to carry on haying alone at this critical season, but had hired a man, too aged to hold his own among the harvesters on the neighboring farms. Mr. Jones had said of him: "He's a careful, trusty old fellow, who can do a good day's work yet if you don't hurry him. Most of your grass is in the meadow, some parts fit to cut before the others. Let the old man begin and mow what he can, every day. Then you won't have to cure and get in a great lot of hay all at once, and perhaps, too, when your raspberries most need pickin'."

So, during the last days of June, old Mr. Jacox, who came at moderate wages, put in his scythe on the uplands. I spread the grass and raked it up when dry, and, with the aid of Merton and a rude, extemporized rack

on the market-wagon, got the hay gradually into the barn. This labor took only part of the day; the rest of the time was employed in the garden and in picking fruit.

On the last day of June we gathered a crate of early raspberries and eight baskets of cherries. In the cool of the afternoon, these were placed in the wagon, and with my wife and the three younger children, I drove to the Maizeville Landing with our first shipment to Mr. Bogart.

"We are 'p'oducers,' at last, as Bobsey said," I cried, joyously. "And I trust that this small beginning will end in such big loads as will leave us no room for wife and children, but will eventually give them a carriage to ride in."

Merton remained on guard to watch our precious ripening fruit.

After our departure he began a vigilant patrol of the place, feeling much like a sentinel left on guard. About sun-down, he told me, as he was passing through the raspberry field, he thought he caught a glimpse of an old straw hat dodging down behind the bushes. He bounded toward the spot, a moment later confronting three children with tin pails. The two younger proved to be Winnie's objectionable acquaintances that I had told to keep off the place. The eldest was a boy, not far from Merton's age, and had justly won the name of being the worst boy in the region. All were the children of the dangerous neighbor against whom Mr. Jones had warned me.

The boy at first regarded Merton with a sullen, defiant look, while his brother and sister coolly continued to steal the fruit.

"Clear out," cried Merton. "We'll have you put in jail if you come here again."

"You shut up and clear out yerself," said the boy, threateningly, "or I'll break yer head. Yer pap's away, and we ain't afraid of you. What's more, we're goin' ter have some cherries before—"

Now Merton had a quick temper, and at this moment sprang at the fellow who was adding insult to injury, so quickly that he got in a blow that blackened one of the thief's eyes.

Then they clinched, and, although his antagonist was the heavier, Merton thinks he could have whipped him had not the two younger marauders attacked him, tooth and nail, like cats. Finding himself getting the worst of it, he instinctively sent out a cry for his stanch friend Junior.

Fortunately, this ally was coming along the road toward our house, and he gave an answering halloo.

The vagrants, apparently, had a wholesome fear of John Jones, junior, for, on hearing his voice, they beat a hurried retreat; but knowing that no one was at the house, and in the spirit of revengeful mischief, they took their flight in that direction. Seeing Mousie's flower-bed, they ran and jumped upon that, breaking down half the plants, then dashed off through the coops, releasing the hens, and scattering the broods of chickens. Merton and Junior, who for a few moments had lost sight of the invaders in the thick raspberry bushes, were now in hot pursuit, and would have caught them again, had they not seen a man coming up the lane, accompanied by a big dog. Junior laid a hand on headlong Merton, whose blood was now at boiling heat, and said, "Stop."

CHAPTER XXXIII

GIVEN HIS CHOICE

Junior had good reason for bringing Merton to a sudden halt in his impetuous and hostile advance. The man coming up the lane, with a savage dog, was the father of the ill-nurtured children. He had felt a little uneasy as to the results of their raid upon our fruit, and had walked across the fields to give them the encouragement of his presence, or to cover their retreat, which he now did effectually.

It took Junior but a moment to explain to my boy that they were no match "for the two brutes," as he expressed himself, adding, "The man is worse than the dog."

Merton, however, was almost reckless from anger and a sense of unprovoked wrong, and he darted into the house for his gun.

"See here, Merton," said Junior, firmly, "shoot the dog if they set him on us, but never fire at a human being. You'd better give me the gun; I am cooler than you are."

They had no occasion to use the weapon, however. The man shook his fist at them, while his children indulged in taunts and coarse derision. The dog, sharing their spirit and not their discretion, started for the boys, but was recalled, and our undesirable neighbors departed leisurely.

All this was related to me after nightfall, when I returned with my wife and younger children from the Maizeville Landing. I confess that I fully shared Merton's anger, although I listened quietly.

"You grow white, Robert, when you are angry," said my wife. "I suppose that's the most dangerous kind of heat—white-heat. Don't take the matter so to heart. We can't risk getting the ill-will of these ugly people. You know what Mr. Jones said about them."

"This question shall be settled in twenty-four hours!" I replied. "That man and his family are the pest of the neighborhood, and everyone lives in a sort of abject dread of them. Now, the neighbors must say 'yes' or 'no' to the question whether we shall have decency, law, and order, or not. Merton, unharness the horse. Junior, come with me; I'm going to see your father."

I found Mr. Jones sleepy and about to retire, but his blue eyes were soon wide open, with an angry fire in them.

"You take the matter very quietly, Mr. Durham;" he said; "more quietly than I could."

"I shall not fume about the affair a moment. I prefer to act. The only question for you and the other neighbors to decide is, Will you act with me? I am going to this man Bagley's house to-morrow, to give him his choice. It's either decency and law-abiding on his part, now, or prosecution before the law on mine. You say that you are sure that he has burned barns, and made himself generally the terror of the region. Now, I won't live in a neighborhood infested by people little better than wild Indians. My feelings as a man will not permit me to submit to insult and injury. What's more, it's time the people about here abated this nuisance."

"You are right, Robert Durham!" said Mr. Jones, springing up and giving me his hand. "I've felt mean, and so have others, that we've allowed ourselves to be run over by this rapscallion. If you go to-morrow, I'll go with you, and so will Rollins. His hen-roost was robbed t'other night, and he tracked the thieves straight toward Bagley's house. He says his

patience has given out. It only needs a leader to rouse the neighborhood, but it ain't very creditable to us that we let a new-comer like you face the thing first."

"Very well," I said, "it's for you and your neighbors to show now how much grit and manhood you have. I shall start for Bagley's house at nine to-morrow. Of course I shall be glad to have company, and if he sees that the people will not stand any more of his rascality, he'll be more apt to behave himself or else clear out."

"He'll have to do one or the other," said Mr. Jones, grimly. "I'll go right down to Rolling's. Come, Junior, we may want you."

At eight o'clock the next morning, a dozen men, including the constable, were in our yard. My wife whispered, "Do be prudent, Robert." She was much reassured, however, by the largeness of our force.

We soon reached the dilapidated hovel, and were so fortunate as to find Bagley and all his family at home. Although it was the busiest season, he was idle. As I led my forces straight toward the door, it was evident that he was surprised and disconcerted, in spite of his attempt to maintain a sullen and defiant aspect. I saw his evil eye resting on one and another of our group, as if he was storing up grudges to be well paid on future dark nights. His eldest son stood with the dog at the corner of the house, and as I approached, the cur, set on by the boy, came toward me with a stealthy step. I carried a heavy cane, and just as the brute was about to take me by the leg, I struck him a blow on the head that sent him howling away.

The man for a moment acted almost as if he had been struck himself. His bloated visage became inflamed, and he sprang toward me.

"Stop!" I thundered. My neighbors closed around me, and he instinctively drew back.

"Bagley," I cried, "look me in the eye." And he fixed upon me a gaze full of impotent anger. "Now," I resumed, "I wish you and your family to understand that you've come to the end of your rope. You must become

decent, law-abiding people, like the rest of us, or we shall put you where you can't harm us. I, for one, am going to give you a last chance. Your children were stealing my fruit last night, and acting shamefully afterward. You also trespassed, and you threatened these two boys; you are idle in the busiest time, and think you can live by plunder. Now, you and yours must turn the sharpest corner you ever saw. Your two eldest children can come and pick berries for me at the usual wages, if they obey my orders and behave themselves. One of the neighbors here says he'll give you work, if you try to do it well. If you accept these terms, I'll let the past go. If you don't, I'll have the constable arrest your boy at once, and I'll see that he gets the heaviest sentence the law allows, while if you or your children make any further trouble, I'll meet you promptly in every way the law permits. But, little as you deserve it, I am going to give you and your family one chance to reform, before proceeding against you. Only understand one thing, I am not afraid of you. I've had my say."

"I haven't had mine," said Rollins, stepping forward excitedly. "You, or your scapegrace boy there, robbed my hen-roost the other night, and you've robbed it before. There isn't a man in this region but believes that it was you who burned the barns and hay-stacks. We won't stand this nonsense another hour. You've got to come to my hay-fields and work out the price of those chickens, and after that I'll give you fair wages. But if there's any more trouble, we'll clean you out as we would a family of weasels."

"Yes, neighbor Bagley," added Mr. Jones, in his dry, caustic way, "think soberly. I hope you are sober. I'm not one of the threatening barkin' sort, but I've reached the p'int where I'll bite. The law will protect us, an' the hull neighborhood has resolved, with Mr. Durham here, that you and your children shall make no more trouble than he and his children. See?"

"Look-a-here," began the man, blusteringly, "you needn't come threatenin' in this blood-and-thunder style. The law'll protect me as well as—"

Ominous murmurs were arising from all my neighbors, and Mr. Jones now came out strong.

"Neighbors," he said, "keep cool. The time to act hasn't come yet. See here, Bagley, it's hayin' and harvest. Our time's vallyble, whether yours is or not. You kin have just three minutes to decide whether you'll take your oath to stop your maraudin' and that of your children;" and he pulled out his watch.

"Let me add my word," said a little man, stepping forward. "I own this house, and the rent is long overdue. Follow neighbor Jones's advice or we'll see that the sheriff puts your traps out in the middle of the road."

"Oh, of course," began Bagley. "What kin one feller do against a crowd?"

"Sw'ar, as I told you," said Mr. Jones, sharply and emphatically. "What do you mean by hangin' fire so? Do you s'pose this is child's play and make-believe? Don't ye know that when quiet, peaceable neighbors git riled up to our pitch, they mean what they say? Sw'ar, as I said, and be mighty sudden about it."

"Don't be a fool," added his wife, who stood trembling behind him. "Can't you see?"

"Very well, I sw'ar it," said the man, in some trepidation.

"Now, Bagley," said Mr. Jones, putting back his watch, "we want to convert you thoroughly this mornin'. The first bit of mischief that takes place in this borough will bring the weight of the law on you;" and, wheeling on his heel, he left the yard, followed by the others.

CHAPTER XXXIV

GIVEN A CHANCE

"Come in, Mr. Bagley," I said, "and bring the children. I want to talk with you all. Merton, you go home with Junior."

"But, papa—" he objected.

"Do as I bid you," I said, firmly, and I entered the squalid abode.

The man and the children followed me wonderingly. I sat down and looked the man steadily in the eye for a moment.

"Let us settle one thing first," I began. "Do you think I am afraid of you?"

"S'pose not, with sich backin' as yer got," was the somewhat nervous reply.

"I told Mr. Jones after I came home last night that I should fight this thing alone if no one stood by me. But you see that your neighbors have reached the limit of forbearance. Now, Mr. Bagley, I didn't remain to threaten you. There has been enough of that, and from very resolute, angry men, too. I wish to give you and yours a chance. You've come to a place where two roads branch; you must take one or the other. You can't help yourself. You and your children won't be allowed to steal or prowl about any more. That's settled. If you go away and begin the same wretched life elsewhere, you'll soon reach the same result; you and your son will be lodged in jail and put at hard labor. Would you not better make up your mind to work for yourself and family, like an honest man?

Look at these children. How are you bringing them up?—Take the road to the right. Do your level best, and I'll help you. I'll let bygones be bygones, and aid you in becoming a respectable citizen."

"Oh, Hank, do be a man, now that Mr. Durham gives you a chance," sobbed his wife; "you know we've been living badly."

"That's it, Bagley. These are the questions you must decide. If you'll try to be a man, I'll give you my hand to stand by you. My religion, such as it is, requires that I shall not let a man go wrong if I can help it. If you'll take the road to the right and do your level best, there's my hand."

The man showed his emotion by a slight tremor only, and after a moment's thoughtful hesitation he took my hand and said, in a hoarse, choking voice: "You've got a claim on me now which all the rest couldn't git, even if they put a rope around my neck. I s'pose I have lived like a brute, but I've been treated like one, too."

"If you'll do as I say, I'll guarantee that within six months you'll be receiving all the kindness that a self-respecting man wants," I answered.

Then, turning to his wife, I asked, "What have you in the house to eat?"

"Next to nothin'," she said, drying her eyes with her apron, and then throwing open their bare cupboard.

"Put on your coat, Bagley, and come with me," I said.

He and his wife began to be profuse with thanks.

"No, no!" I said, firmly. "I'm not going to give you a penny's worth of anything while you are able to earn a living. You shall have food at once; but I shall expect you to pay for it in work. I am going to treat you like a man and a woman, and not like beggars."

A few minutes later, some of the neighbors were much surprised to see Bagley and myself going up the road together.

My wife, Merton, and tender-hearted Mousie were at the head of the lane watching for me. Reassured, as we approached, they returned wonderingly to the house, and met us at the door.

"This is Mrs. Durham," I said. "My dear, please give Mr. Bagley ten pounds of flour and a piece of pork. After you're had your dinner, Mr. Bagley, I shall expect you, as we've agreed. And if you'll chain up that dog of yours, or, better still, knock it on the head with an axe, Mrs. Durham will go down and see your wife about fixing up your children."

Winifred gave me a pleased, intelligent look, and said, "Come in, Mr. Bagley;" while Merton and I hastened away to catch up with neglected work.

"Your husband's been good to me," said the man, abruptly.

"That's because he believes you are going to be good to yourself and your family," was her smiling reply.

"Will you come and see my wife?" he asked.

"Certainly, if I don't have to face your dog," replied Winifred.

"I'll kill the critter soon's I go home," muttered Bagley.

"It hardly pays to keep a big, useless dog," was my wife's practical comment.

In going to the cellar for the meat, she left him alone for a moment or two with Mousie; and he, under his new impulses, said: "Little gal, ef my children hurt your flowers agin, let me know, and I'll thrash 'em!"

The child stole to his side and gave him her hand, as she replied, "Try being kind to them."

Bagley went home with some new ideas under his tattered old hat. At half-past twelve he was on hand, ready for work.

"That dog that tried to bite ye is dead and buried," he said, "and I hope I buried some of my dog natur' with 'im."

"You've shown your good sense. But I haven't time to talk now. The old man has mown a good deal of grass. I want you to shake it out, and, as soon as he says it's dry enough, to rake it up. Toward night I'll be out with the wagon, and we'll stow all that's fit into the barn. To-morrow I want your two eldest children to come and pick berries."

"I'm in fer it, Mr. Durham. You've given me your hand, and I'll show yer how that goes furder with me than all the blood-and-thunder talk in Maizeville," said Bagley, with some feeling.

"Then you'll show that you can be a man like the rest of us," I said, as I hastened to our early dinner.

My wife beamed and nodded at me. "I'm not going to say anything to set you up too much," she said. "You are great on problems, and you are solving one even better than I hoped."

"It isn't solved yet," I replied. "We have only started Bagley and his people on the right road. It will require much patience and good management to keep them there. I rather think you'll have the hardest part of the problem yet on your hands. I have little time for problems now, however, except that of making the most of this season of rapid growth and harvest. I declare I'm almost bewildered when I see how much there is to be done on every side. Children, we must all act like soldiers in the middle of a fight. Every stroke must tell. Now, we'll hold a council of war, so as to make the most of the afternoon's work. Merton, how are the raspberries?"

"There are more ripe, papa, than I thought there would be."

"Then, Winnie, you and Bobsey must leave the weeding in the garden and help Merton pick berries this afternoon."

"As soon as it gets cooler," said my wife, "Mousie and I are going to pick, also."

"Very well," I agreed. "You can give us raspberries and milk to-night, and so you will be getting supper at the same time. Until the hay is ready to come in, I shall keep on hoeing in the garden, the weeds grow so rapidly. Tomorrow will be a regular fruit day all around, for there are two more cherry-trees that need picking."

Our short nooning over, we all went to our several tasks. The children were made to feel that now was the chance to win our bread for months to come, and that there must be no shirking. Mousie promised to clear away the things while my wife, protected by a large sun-shade, walked slowly down to the Bagley cottage. Having seen that Merton and his little squad were filling the baskets with raspberries properly, I went to the garden and slaughtered the weeds where they threatened to do the most harm.

At last I became so hot and wearied that I thought I would visit a distant part of the upland meadow, and see how Bagley was progressing. He was raking manfully, and had accomplished a fair amount of work, but it was evident that he was almost exhausted. He was not accustomed to hard work, and had rendered himself still more unfit for it by dissipation.

"See here, Bagley," I said, "you are doing well, but you will have to break yourself into harness gradually. I don't wish to be hard upon you. Lie down under this tree for half an hour, and by that time I shall be out with the wagon."

"Mr. Durham, you have the feelin's of a man for a feller," said Bagley, gratefully. "I'll make up the time arter it gets cooler."

Returning to the raspberry patch, I found Bobsey almost asleep, the berries often falling from his nerveless hands. Merton, meanwhile, with something of the spirit of a martinet, was spurring him to his task. I remembered that the little fellow had been busy since breakfast, and decided that he also, of my forces, should have a rest. He started up when he saw me coming through the bushes, and tried to pick with vigor again. As I took him up in my arms, he began, apprehensively, "Papa, I will pick faster, but I'm so tired!"

I reassured him with a kiss which left a decided raspberry flavor on my lips, carried him into the barn, and, tossing him on a heap of hay, said, "Sleep there, my little man, till you are rested."

He was soon snoring blissfully, and when I reached the meadow with the wagon, Bagley was ready to help with the loading.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed, "a little breathin'-spell does do a feller good on a hot day."

"No doubt about it," I said. "So long as you are on the right road, it does no harm to sit down a bit, because when you start again it's in the right direction."

After we had piled on as much of a load as the rude, extemporized rack on my market wagon could hold, I added, "You needn't go to the barn with me, for I can pitch the hay into the mow. Rake up another load, if you feel able."

"Oh, I'm all right now," he protested.

By the time I had unloaded the hay, I found that my wife and Mousie were among the raspberries, and that the number of full, fragrant little baskets was increasing rapidly.

"Winifred, isn't this work, with your walk to the Bagley cottage, too much for you?"

"Oh, no," she replied, lightly. "An afternoon in idleness in a stifling city flat would have been more exhausting. It's growing cool now. What wretched, shiftless people those Bagleys are! But I have hopes of them. I'm glad Bobsey's having a nap."

"You shall tell me about your visit to-night. We are making good progress. Bagley is doing his best. Winnie," I called, "come here."

She brought her basket, nearly filled, and I saw that her eyes were heavy with weariness also.

"You've done well to-day, my child. Now go and look after your chickens, big and little. Then your day's work is done, and you can do what you please;" and I started for the meadow again.

By six o'clock, we had in the barn three loads of hay, and Merton had packed four crates of berries ready for market. Bobsey was now running about, as lively as a cricket, and Winnie, with a child's elasticity, was nearly as sportive. Bagley, after making up his half-hour, came up the lane with a rake, instead of his ugly dog as on the evening before. A few moments later, he helped me lift the crates into the market wagon; and then, after a little awkward hesitation, began:

"I say, Mr. Durham, can't ye give a feller a job yerself? I declar' to you, I want to brace up; but I know how it'll be down at Rollins's. He'll be savage as a meat-axe to me, and his men will be a-gibin'. Give me a job yerself, and I'll save enough out o' my wages to pay for his chickens, or you kin keep 'nuff back to pay for 'em."

I thought a moment, and then said, promptly: "I'll agree to this if Rollins will. I'll see him to-night."

"Did yer wife go to see my wife?"

"Yes, and she says she has hopes of you all. You've earned your bread to-day as honestly as I have, and you've more than paid for what my wife gave you this morning. Here's a quarter to make the day square, and here's a couple of baskets of raspberries left over. Take them to the children." "Well, yer bring me right to the mark," he said, emphasizing his words with a slap on his thigh. "I've got an uphill row to hoe, and it's good ter have some human critters around that'll help a feller a bit."

I laughed as I clapped him on the shoulder, and said: "You're going to win the fight, Bagley. I'll see Rollins at once, for I find I shall need another man awhile."

"Give me the job then," he said, eagerly, "and give me what you think I'm wuth;" and he jogged off home with that leaven of all good in his heart—the hope of better things.

Chapter XXXV

"WE SHALL ALL EARN OUR SALT"

Raspberries and milk, with bread and butter and a cup of tea, made a supper that we all relished, and then Merton and I started for the boat-landing. I let the boy drive and deliver the crates to the freight agent, for I wished him to relieve me of this task occasionally. On our way to the landing I saw Rollins, who readily agreed to Bagley's wish, on condition that I guaranteed payment for the chickens. Stopping at the man's cottage further on, I told him this, and he, in his emphatic way, declared: "I vow ter you, Mr. Durham, ye shan't lose a feather's worth o' the chickens."

Returning home, poor Merton was so tired and drowsy that he nearly fell off the seat. Before long I took the reins from his hands, and he was asleep with his head on my shoulder. Winifred was dozing in her chair, but brightened up as we came in. A little judicious praise and a bowl of bread and milk strengthened the boy wonderfully. He saw the need of especial effort at this time, and also saw that he was not being driven unfeelingly.

As I sat alone with my wife, resting a few minutes before retiring, I said: "Well, Winifred, it must be plain to you by this time that the summer campaign will be a hard one. How are we going to stand it?"

"I'll tell you next fall," she replied, with a laugh. "No problems to-night, thank you."

"I'm gathering a queer lot of helpers in my effort to live in the country," I continued. "There's old Mr. Jacox, who is too aged to hold his own in other harvest-fields. Bagley and his tribe—"

"And a city wife and a lot of city children," she added.

"And a city greenhorn of a man at the head of you all," I concluded.

"Well," she replied, rising with an odd little blending of laugh and yawn, "I'm not afraid but that we shall all earn our salt."

Thus came to an end the long, eventful day, which prepared the way for many others of similar character, and suggested many of the conditions of our problem of country living.

Bagley appeared bright and early the following morning with his two elder children, and I was now confronted with the task of managing them and making them useful. Upon one thing I was certainly resolved—there should be no quixotic sentiment in our relations, and no companionship between his children and mine.

Therefore, I took him and his girl and boy aside, and said: "I'm going to be simple and outspoken with you. Some of my neighbors think I'm a fool because I give you work when I can get others. I shall prove that I am not a fool, for the reason that I shall not permit any nonsense, and you can show that I am not a fool by doing your work well and quietly. Bagley, I want you to understand that your children do not come here to play with mine. No matter whom I employed, I should keep my children by themselves. Now, do you understand this?"

They nodded affirmatively.

"Are you all willing to take simple, straightforward directions, and do your best? I'm not asking what is unreasonable, for I shall not be more strict with you than with my own children."

"No use o' beatin' around the bush, Mr. Durham," said Bagley, good-naturedly; "we've come here to 'arn our livin', and to do as you say."

"I can get along with you, Bagley, but your children will find it hard to follow my rules, because they are children, and are not used to restraint. Yet they must do it, or there'll be trouble at once. They must work quietly and steadily while they do work, and when I am through with them, they must go straight home. They mustn't lounge about the place. If they will obey, Mrs. Durham and I will be good friends to them, and by fall we will fix them up so that they can go to school."

The little arabs looked askance at me and made me think of two wild animals that had been caught, and were intelligent enough to understand that they must be tamed. They were submissive, but made no false pretences of enjoying the prospect.

"I shall keep a gad handy," said their father, with a significant nod at them.

"Well, youngsters," I concluded, laughing, "perhaps you'll need it occasionally. I hope not, however. I shall keep no gad, but I shall have an eye on you when you least expect it; and if you go through the picking-season well, I shall have a nice present for you both. Now, you are to receive so much a basket, if the baskets are properly filled, and therefore it will depend on yourselves how much you earn. You shall be paid every day. So now for a good start toward becoming a man and a woman."

I led them to one side of the raspberry patch and put them under Merton's charge saying, "You must pick exactly as he directs."

Winnie and Bobsey were to pick in another part of the field, Mousie aiding until the sun grew too warm for the delicate child. Bagley was to divide his time between hoeing in the garden and spreading the grass after the scythe of old Mr. Jacox. From my ladder against a cherry-tree, I was able to keep a general outlook over my motley forces, and we all made good progress till dinner, which, like the help we employed, we now had at twelve o'clock. Bagley and his children sat down to their lunch under the shade of an apple-tree at some distance, yet in plain

view through our open door. Their repast must have been meagre, judging from the time in which it was despatched, and my wife said, "Can't I send them something?"

"Certainly; what have you to send?"

"Well, I've made a cherry pudding; I don't suppose there is much more than enough for us, though."

"Children," I cried, "let's take a vote. Shall we share our cherry pudding with the Bagleys?"

"Yes," came the unanimous reply, although Bobsey's voice was rather faint.

Merton carried the delicacy to the group under the tree, and it was gratefully and speedily devoured.

"That is the way to the hearts of those children," said my wife, at the same time slyly slipping her portion of the pudding upon Bobsey's plate.

I appeared very blind, but asked her to get me something from the kitchen. While she was gone, I exchanged my plate of pudding, untouched as yet, for hers, and gave the children a wink. We all had a great laugh over mamma's well-assumed surprise and perplexity. How a little fun will freshen up children, especially when, from necessity, their tasks are long and heavy!

We were startled from the table by a low mutter of thunder. Hastening out, I saw an ominous cloud in the west. My first thought was that all should go to the raspberries and pick till the rain drove us in; but Bagley now proved a useful friend, for he shambled up and said: "If I was you, I'd have those cherries picked fust. You'll find that a thunder-shower'll rot 'em in one night. The wet won't hurt the berries much."

His words reminded me of what I had seen when a boy—a tree full of split, half-decayed cherries—and I told him to go to picking at once. I also sent his eldest boy and Merton into the trees. Old Jacox was told to

get the grass he had cut into as good shape as possible before the shower. My wife and Mousie left the table standing, and, hastening to the raspberry field, helped Winnie and Bobsey and the other Bagley child to pick the ripest berries. We all worked like beavers till the vivid flashes and great drops drove us to shelter.

Fortunately, the shower came up slowly, and we nearly stripped the cherry-trees, carrying the fruit into the house, there to be arranged for market in the neat peck-baskets with coarse bagging covers which Mr. Bogart had sent me. The little baskets of raspberries almost covered the barn floor by the time the rain began, but they were safe. At first, the children were almost terrified by the vivid lightning, but this phase of the storm soon passed, and the clouds seemed to settle down for a steady rain.

"'Tisn't goin' to let up," said Bagley, after a while. "We might as well jog home now as any time."

"But you'll get wet," I objected.

"It won't be the fust time," answered Bagley. "The children don't mind it any more'n ducks."

"Well, let's settle, then," I said. "You need some money to buy food at once."

"I reckon I do," was the earnest reply.

"There's a dollar for your day's work, and here is what your children have earned. Are you satisfied?" I asked.

"I be, and I thank you, sir. I'll go down to the store this evenin'," he added.

"And buy food only," I said, with a meaning look.

"Flour and pork only, sir. I've given you my hand on't;" and away they all jogged through the thick-falling drops.

We packed our fruit for market, and looked vainly for clearing skies in the west.

"There's no help for it," I said. "The sooner I start for the landing the better, so that I can return before it becomes very dark."

My wife exclaimed against this, but I added: "Think a moment, my dear. By good management we have here, safe and in good order, thirty dollars' worth of fruit, at least. Shall I lose it because I am afraid of a summer shower? Facing the weather is a part of my business; and I'd face a storm any day in the year if I could make thirty dollars."

Merton wished to go also, but I said, "No; there must be no risks of illness that can possibly be avoided."

I did not find it a dreary expedition, after all, for I solaced myself with thoughts like these, "Thirty dollars, under my wife's good management, will go far toward providing warm winter clothing, or paying the interest, or something else."

Then the rain was just what was needed to increase and prolong the yield of the raspberry bushes, on which there were still myriads of immature berries and even blossoms. Abundant moisture would perfect these into plump fruit; and upon this crop rested our main hope.

CHAPTER XXXVI

A THUNDERBOLT

From the experiences just related, it can be seen how largely the stress and strain of the year centred in the month of July. Nearly all our garden crops needed attention; the grass of the meadow had to be cured into hay, the currants and cherries to be picked, and fall crops, like winter cabbages, turnips, and celery, to be put in the ground. Of the latter vegetable, I set out only a few short rows, regarding it as a delicious luxury to which not very much time could be given.

Mr. Jones and Junior, indeed all our neighbors, were working early and late, like ourselves. Barns were being filled, conical hay-stacks were rising in distant meadows, and every one was busy in gathering nature's bounty.

We were not able to make much of the Fourth of July. Bobsey and Winnie had some firecrackers, and, in the evening, Merton and Junior set off a few rockets, and we all said, "Ah!" appreciatively, as they sped their brief fiery course; but the greater part of the day had to be spent in gathering the ripening black-caps and raspberries. By some management, however, I arranged that Merton and Junior should have a fine swim in the creek, by Brittle Rock, while Mousie, Winnie, and Bobsey waded in sandy shallows, further down the stream. They all were promised holidays after the fruit season was over, and they submitted to the necessity of almost constant work with fairly good grace.

The results of our labor were cheering. Our table was supplied with delicious vegetables, which, in the main, it was Mousie's task to gather and prepare. The children were as brown as little Indians, and we daily thanked God for health. Checks from Mr. Bogart came regularly, the fruit bringing a fair price under his good management. The outlook for the future grew brighter with the beginning of each week; for on Monday he made his returns and sent me the proceeds of the fruit shipped previously. I was able to pay all outstanding accounts for what had been bought to stock the place, and I also induced Mr. Jones to receive the interest in advance on the mortgage he held. Then we began to hoard for winter.

The Bagleys did as well as we could expect, I suppose. The children did need the "gad" occasionally and the father indulged in a few idle, surly, drinking days; but, convinced that the man was honestly trying, I found that a little tact and kindness always brought him around to renewed endeavor. To expect immediate reform and unvaried well-doing would be asking too much of such human nature as theirs.

As July drew to a close, my wife and I felt that we were succeeding better than we had had reason to expect. In the height of the season we had to employ more children in gathering the raspberries, and I saw that I could increase the yield in coming years, as I learned the secrets of cultivation. I also decided to increase the area of this fruit by a fall-planting of some varieties that ripened earlier and later, thus extending the season and giving me a chance to ship to market for weeks instead of days. My strawberry plants were sending out a fine lot of new runners, and our hopes for the future were turning largely toward the cultivation of this delicious fruit.

Old Jacox had plodded faithfully over the meadow with his scythe, and the barn was now so well filled that I felt our bay horse and brindle cow were provided for during the months when fields are bare or snowy.

Late one afternoon, he was helping me gather up almost the last load down by the creek, when the heavy roll of thunder warned us to hasten. As we came up to the high ground near the house, we were both

impressed by the ominous blackness of a cloud rising in the west. I felt that the only thing to do was to act like the captain of a vessel before a storm, and make everything "snug and tight." The load of hay was run in upon the barn floor, and the old horse led with the harness on him to the stall below. Bagley and the children, with old Jacox, were started off so as to be at home before the shower, doors and windows were fastened, and all was made as secure as possible.

Then we gathered in our sitting-room, where Mousie and my wife had prepared supper; but we all were too oppressed with awe of the coming tempest to sit down quietly, as usual. There was a death-like stillness in the sultry air, broken only at intervals by the heavy rumble of thunder. The strange, dim twilight soon passed into the murkiest gloom, and we had to light the lamp far earlier than our usual hour. I had never seen the children so affected before. Winnie and Bobsey even began to cry with fear, while Mousie was pale and trembling. Of course, we laughed at them and tried to cheer them; but even my wife was nervously apprehensive, and I admit that I felt a disquietude hard to combat.

Slowly and remorselessly the cloud approached, until it began to pass over us. The thunder and lightning were simply terrific. Supper remained untasted on the table, and I said: "Patience and courage! A few moments more and the worst will be over!"

But my words were scarcely heard, so violent was the gust that burst upon us. For a few moments it seemed as if everything would go down before it, but the old house only shook and rocked a little.

"Hurrah!" I cried. "The bulk of the gust has gone by, and now we are all right!"

At that instant a blinding gleam and an instantaneous crash left us stunned and bewildered. But as I recovered my senses, I saw flames bursting from the roof of our barn.

CHAPTER XXXVII

RALLYING FROM THE BLOW

Our house was far enough from the barn to prevent the shock of the thunderbolt from disabling us beyond a moment or two. Merton had fallen off his chair, but was on his feet almost instantly; the other children were soon sobbing and clinging to my wife and myself.

In tones that I sought to render firm and quiet, I said: "No more of this foolish fear. We are in God's hands, and He will take care of us. Winifred, you must rally and soothe the children, while Merton and I go out and save what we can. All danger to the house is now over, for the worst of the storm has passed."

In a moment my wife, although very pale, was reassuring the younger children, and Merton and I rushed forth.

"Lead the horse out of the barn basement, Merton," I cried, "and tie him securely behind the house. If he won't go readily, throw a blanket over his eyes."

I spoke these words as we ran through the torrents of rain precipitated by the tremendous concussion which the lightning had produced.

I opened the barn doors and saw that the hay was on fire. There was not a second to lose, and excitement doubled my strength. The load of hay on the wagon had not yet caught. Although nearly stifled with sulphurous smoke, I seized the shafts and backed the wagon with its

burden out into the rain. Then, seizing a fork, I pushed and tossed off the load so that I could draw our useful market vehicle to a safe distance. There were a number of crates and baskets in the barn, also some tools, etc. These I had to let go. Hastening to the basement, I found that Merton had succeeded in getting the horse away. There was still time to smash the window of the poultry-room and toss the chickens out of doors. Our cow, fortunately, was in the meadow.

By this time Mr. Jones and Junior were on the ground, and they were soon followed by Rollins, Bagley, and others. There was nothing to do now, however, but to stand aloof and witness the swift destruction. After the first great gust had passed, there was fortunately but little wind, and the heavy downpour prevented the flames from spreading. In this we stood, scarcely heeding it in the excitement of the hour. After a few moments I hastened to assure my trembling wife and crying children that the rain made the house perfectly safe, and that they were in no danger at all. Then I called to the neighbors to come and stand under the porch-roof.

From this point we could see the great pyramid of fire and smoke ascending into the black sky. The rain-drops glittered like fiery hail in the intense light and the still vivid flashes from the clouds.

"This is hard luck, neighbor Durham," said Mr. Jones, with a long breath.

"My wife and children are safe," I replied, quietly.

Then we heard the horse neighing and tugging at his halter. Bagley had the good sense and will to jerk off his coat, tie it around the animal's eyes, and lead him to a distance from the fatal fascination of the flames.

In a very brief space of time the whole structure, with my summer crop of hay, gathered with so much labor, sunk down into glowing, hissing embers. I was glad to have the ordeal over, and to be relieved from fear that the wind would rise again. Now I was assured of the extent of our loss, as well as of its certainty.

"Well, well," said the warm-hearted and impulsive Rollins, "when you are ready to build again, your neighbors will give you a lift. By converting Bagley into a decent fellow, you've made all our barns safer, and we owe you a good turn. He was worse than lightning."

I expressed my thanks, adding, "This isn't as bad as you think; I'm insured."

"Well, now, that's sensible," said Mr. Jones. "I'll sleep better for that fact, and so will you, Robert Durham. You'll make a go of it here yet."

"I'm not in the least discouraged," I answered; "far worse things might have happened. I've noticed in my paper that a good many barns have been struck this summer, so my experience is not unusual. The only thing to do is to meet such things patiently and make the best of them. As long as the family is safe and well, outside matters can be remedied. Thank you, Bagley," I continued, addressing him, as he now led forward the horse. "You had your wits about you. Old Bay will have to stand under the shed to-night."

"Well, Mr. Durham, the harness is still on him, all 'cept the head-stall; and he's quiet now."

"Yes," I replied, "in our haste we didn't throw off the harness before the shower, and it has turned out very well."

"Tell ye what it is, neighbors," said practical Mr. Jones; "'tisn't too late for Mr. Durham to sow a big lot of fodder corn, and that's about as good as hay. We'll turn to and help him get some in."

This was agreed to heartily, and one after another they wrung my hand and departed, Bagley jogging in a companionable way down the road with Rollins, whose chickens he had stolen, but had already paid for.

I looked after them and thought: "Thank Heaven I have not lost my barn as some thought I might at one time! As Rollins suggested, I'd rather take my chances with the lightning than with a vicious neighbor. Bagley acted the part of a good friend to-night."

Then, seeing that we could do nothing more, Merton and I entered the house.

I clapped the boy on the shoulder as I said: "You acted like a man in the emergency, and I'm proud of you. The bringing out a young fellow strong is almost worth the cost of a barn."

My wife came and put her arm around my neck and said:

"You bear up bravely, Robert, but I fear you are discouraged at heart. To think of such a loss, just as we were getting started!" and there were tears in her eyes.

"Yes," I replied, "it will be a heavy loss for us, and a great inconvenience, but it might have been so much worse! All sit down and I'll tell you something. You see my training in business led me to think of the importance of insurance, and to know the best companies. As soon as the property became yours, Winifred, I insured the buildings for nearly all they were worth. The hay and the things in the barn at the time will prove a total loss; but it is a loss that we can stand and make good largely before winter. I tell you honestly that we have no reason to be discouraged. We shall soon have a better barn than the one lost; for, by good planning, a better one can be built for the money that I shall receive. So we will thank God that we are all safe ourselves, and go quietly to sleep."

With the passing of the storm, the children had become quiet, and soon we lost in slumber all thought of danger and loss.

In the morning the absence of the barn made a great gap in our familiar outlook, and brought many and serious thoughts; but with the light came renewed hopefulness. All the scene was flooded with glorious sunlight, and only the blackened ruins made the frightful storm of the previous evening seem possible. Nearly all the chickens came at Winnie's call, looking draggled and forlorn indeed, but practically unharmed, and ready to resume their wonted cheerfulness after an hour in the sunshine. We fitted up for them the old coop in the orchard, and a part of the ancient and dilapidated barn which was to have been used for corn-

stalks only. The drenching rain had saved this and the adjoining shed from destruction, and now in our great emergency they proved useful indeed.

The trees around the site of the barn were blackened, and their foliage was burned to a crisp. Within the stone foundations the smoke from the still smouldering debris rose sluggishly.

I turned away from it all, saying: "Let us worry no more over that spilled milk. Fortunately the greater part of our crates and baskets were under the shed. Take the children, Merton, and pick over the raspberry patches carefully once more, while I go to work in the garden. That has been helped rather than injured by the storm, and, if we will take care of it, will give us plenty of food for winter. Work there will revive my spirits."

The ground was too wet for the use of the hoe, but there was plenty of weeding to be done, while I answered the questions of neighbors who came to offer their sympathy. I also looked around to see what could be sold, feeling the need of securing every dollar possible. I found much that was hopeful and promising. The Lima-bean vines had covered the poles, and toward their base the pods were filling out. The ears on our early corn were fit to pull; the beets and onions had attained a good size; the early peas had given place to turnips, winter cabbages, and celery; there were plenty of green melons on the vines, and more cucumbers than we could use. The remaining pods on the first planting of bush-beans were too mature for use, and I resolved to let them stand till sufficiently dry to be gathered and spread in the attic. All that we had planted had done, or was doing, fairly well, for the season had been moist enough to ensure a good growth. We had been using new potatoes since the first of the month, and now the vines were so yellow that all in the garden could be dug at once and sold. They would bring in some ready money, and I learned from my garden book that strap-leaved turnips, sown on the cleared spaces, would have time to mature.

After all, my strawberry beds gave me the most hope. There were hundreds of young plants already rooted, and still more lying loosely on the ground; so I spent the greater part of the morning in weeding these

out and pressing the young plants on the ends of the runners into the moist soil, having learned that with such treatment they form roots and become established in a very few days.

After dinner Mr. Jones appeared with his team and heavy plow, and we selected an acre of upland meadow where the sod was light and thin.

"This will give a fair growth of young corn-leaves," he said, "by the middle of September. By that time you'll have a new barn up, I s'pose; and after you have cut and dried the corn, you can put a little of it into the mows in place of the hay. The greater part will keep better if stacked out-doors. A horse will thrive on such fodder almost as well as a cow, 'specially if ye cut it up and mix a little bran-meal with it. We'll sow the corn in drills a foot apart, and you can spread a little manure over the top of the ground after the seed is in. This ground is a trifle thin; a top-dressin' will help it 'mazin'ly."

Merton succeeded in getting several crates of raspberries, but said that two or three more pickings would finish them. Since the time we had begun to go daily to the landing, we had sent the surplus of our vegetables to a village store, with the understanding that we would trade out the proceeds. We thus had accumulated a little balance in our favor, which we could draw against in groceries, etc.

On the evening of this day I took the crates to the landing, and found a purchaser for my garden potatoes, at a dollar a bushel. I also made arrangements at a summer boarding-house, whose proprietor agreed to take the largest of our spring chickens, our sweet corn, tomatoes, and some other vegetables, as we had them to spare. Now that our income from raspberries was about to cease, it was essential to make the most of everything else on the place that would bring money, even if we had to deny ourselves. It would not do for us to say, "We can use this or that ourselves." The question to be decided was, whether, if such a thing were sold, the proceeds would not go further toward our support than the things themselves. If this should be true of sweet corn, Lima-beans, and even the melons on which the children had set their hearts, we must be chary of consuming them ourselves. This I explained in such a way that

all except Bobsey saw the wisdom of it, or, rather, the necessity. As yet, Bobsey's tendencies were those of a consumer, and not of a producer or saver.

Rollins and one or two others came the next day, and with Bagley's help the corn was soon in the ground.

Then I set Bagley to work with the cart spreading upon the soil the barn-yard compost that had accumulated since spring. There was not enough to cover all the ground, but that I could not help. The large pile of compost that I had made near the poultry-house door could not be spared for this purpose, since it was destined for my August planting of strawberries.

Perhaps I may as well explain about these compost heaps now as at any other time. I had watched their rapid growth with great satisfaction. Some may dislike such homely details, but since the success of the farm and garden depend on them I shall not pass them over, leaving the fastidious reader to do this for himself.

It will be remembered that I had sought to prepare myself for country life by much reading and study during the previous winter. I had early been impressed with the importance of obtaining and saving everything that would enrich the soil, and had been shown that increasing the manure-pile was the surest way to add to one's bank account. Therefore all rakings of leaves had been saved. At odd times Merton and I had gone down to the creek with the cart and dug a quantity of rich black earth from near its bank. One pile of this material had been placed near the stable door, and another at the entrance to the poultry-room in the basement of our vanished barn. The cleanings of the horse-stable had been spread over a layer of this black soil. When the layer of such cleanings was about a foot thick, spread evenly, another layer of earth covered all from sun and rain. Thus I had secured a pile of compost which nearly top-dressed an acre for fodder corn.

In the poultry-room we managed in this fashion. A foot of raked-up leaves and rich earth was placed under the perches of the fowls. Every two or three weeks this layer was shovelled out and mixed thoroughly, and was replaced by a new layer. As a result I had, by the 1st of August, a large heap of fertilizer almost as good as guano, and much safer to use, for I had read that unless the latter was carefully managed it would burn vegetation like fire. I believe that this compost-heap by the poultry-room window would give my young strawberry plantation a fine start, and, as has been shown, we were making great calculations on the future fruit.

I also resolved that the burning of the barn should add to our success in this direction. All the books said that there was nothing better for strawberries than wood ashes, and of these there was a great heap within the foundations of the destroyed building. At one time I proposed to shovel out these ashes and mix them with the compost, but fortunately I first consulted my book on fertilizers, and read there that this would not do at all—that they should be used separately.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

AUGUST WORK AND PLAY

I was now eager to begin the setting of the strawberry plants in the field where we had put potatoes, but the recent heavy shower had kept the latter still green and growing. During the first week in August, however, I found that the tubers had attained a good size, and I began to dig long rows on the upper side of the patch, selling in the village three or four barrels of potatoes a week for immediate use. By this course I soon had space enough cleared for ten rows of strawberries; and on the 6th of August Mr. Jones came and plowed the land deeply, going twice in a furrow. Then I harrowed the ground, and, with a corn-plow, marked out the space with shallow furrows three feet apart. Through five of these furrows Merton sprinkled a good dressing of the poultry compost, and in the remaining five drills we scattered wood ashes. Thus we should learn the comparative value of these fertilizers. Then I made a rude tray with two handles, so that it could be carried between Merton and myself. When the sun declined, we went to the strawberry bed, and having selected the Duchess variety to set out first, soaked with water a certain portion of the ground that was thick with plants. Half an hour later, we could dig up these plants with a ball of earth attached to their roots. These were carried carefully on the tray to the field, and set out in the furrows. We levelled the ground first, so that the crown of the plant should be even with the surrounding surface. We set the plants a foot apart in the rows, and by dusk had three rows out. Early the next morning we gave these plants a good soaking in their new starting place, and, although the weather was now dry and warm, not a leaf withered,

and all began to grow as if they had not been moved. It seemed slow work, but I believed it would pay in the end, especially as Merton, Winnie, and I performed nearly all the labor.

We had now dispensed with Bagley's services, a good word from me having secured him work elsewhere. I found that I could not make arrangements for rebuilding the barn before the last of August, and we now began to take a little much-needed rest. Our noonings were two or three hours long. Merton and Junior had time for a good swim every day, while the younger children were never weary of wading in the shallows. I insisted, however, that they should not remain long in the water on any one occasion, and now and then we each took a grain or two of quinine to fortify our systems against any malarial influences that might be lurking around at this season.

The children were also permitted to make expeditions to mountain-sides for huckleberries and blackberries. As a result, we often had these wholesome fruits on the table, while my wife canned the surplus for winter use. A harvest apple tree also began to be one of the most popular resorts, and delicious pies made the dinner-hour more welcome than ever. The greater part of the apples were sold, however, and this was true also of the Lima-beans, sweet corn, and melons. We all voted that the smaller ears and melons tasted just as good as if we had picked out the best of everything, and my account-book showed that our income was still running well ahead of our expenses.

Bobsey and Winnie had to receive another touch of discipline and learn another lesson from experience. I had marked with my eye a very large, perfect musk-melon, and had decided that it should be kept for seed. They, too, had marked it; and one morning, when they thought themselves unobserved, they carried it off to the seclusion of the raspberry bushes, proposing a selfish feast by themselves.

Merton caught a glimpse of the little marauders, and followed them. They cut the melon in two, and found it green and tasteless as a pumpkin. He made me laugh as he described their dismay and disgust,

then their fears and forebodings. The latter were soon realized; for seeing me in the distance, he beckoned. As I approached, the children stole out of the bushes, looking very guilty.

Merton explained, and I said: "Very well, you shall have your melon for dinner, and little else. I intend you shall enjoy this melon fully. So sit down under that tree and each of you hold half the melon till I release you. You have already learned that you can feast your eyes only."

There they were kept, hour after hour, each holding half of the green melon. The dinner-bell rang, and they knew that we had ripe melons and green corn; while nothing was given them but bread and water. Bobsey howled, and Winnie sobbed, but my wife and I agreed that such tendencies toward dishonesty and selfishness merited a lasting lesson. At supper the two culprits were as hungry as little wolves; and when I explained that the big melon had been kept for seed, and that if it had been left to ripen they should have had their share, they felt that they had cheated themselves completely.

"Don't you see, children," I concluded, "that acting on the square is not only right, but that it is always best for us in the end?"

Then I asked, "Merton, what have the Bagley children been doing since they stopped picking raspberries for us?"

"I'm told they've been gathering blackberries and huckleberries in the mountains, and selling them."

"That's promising. Now I want you to pick out a good-sized water-melon and half a dozen musk-melons, and I'll leave them at Bagley's cottage to-morrow night as I go down to the village. In old times they would have stolen our crop; now they shall share in it."

When I carried the present on the following evening, the children indulged in uncouth cries and gambols over the gift, and Bagley himself was touched.

"I'll own up ter yer," he said, "that yer melon patch was sore temptin' to the young uns, but I tole 'em that I'd thrash 'em if they teched one. Now yer see, youngsters, ye've got a man of feelin' ter deal with, and yer've got some melons arter all, and got 'em squar', too."

"I hear good accounts of you and your children," I said, "and I'm glad of it. Save the seeds of these melons and plant a lot for yourself. See here, Bagley, we'll plow your garden for you this fall, and you can put a better fence around it. If you'll do this, I'll share my garden seeds with you next spring, and you can raise enough on that patch of ground to half feed your family."

"I'll take yer up," cried the man, "and there's my hand on it ag'in."

"God bless you and Mrs. Durham!" added his wife "We're now beginning to live like human critters."

I resumed my journey to the village, feeling that never before had melons been better invested.

The Moodna Creek had now become very low, and not more than half its stony bed was covered with water. At many points, light, active feet could find their way across and not be wet. Junior now had a project on hand, of which he and Merton had often spoken lately. A holiday was given to the boys and they went to work to construct an eel weir and trap. With trousers well rolled up, they selected a point on one side of the creek where the water was deepest, and here they left an open passage-way for the current. On each side of this they began to roll large stones, and on these placed smaller ones, raising two long obstructions to the natural flow. These continuous obstructions ran obliquely up-stream, directing the main current to the open passage, which was only about two feet wide, with a post on either side, narrowing it still more. In this they placed the trap, a long box made of lath, sufficiently open to let the water run through it, and having a peculiar opening at the upper end where the current began to rush down the narrow passage-way. The box rested closely on the gravelly bottom, and was fastened to the posts. Short, close-fitting slats from the bottom and top of the box, at its upper end,

sloped inward, till they made a narrow opening. All its other parts were eel-tight. The eels coming down with the current which had been directed toward the entrance of the box, as has been explained, passed into it, and there they would remain. They never had the wit to find the narrow aperture by which they had entered. This turned out to be useful sport, for every morning the boys lifted their trap and took out a goodly number of eels; and when the squirmers were nicely dressed and browned, they proved delicious morsels.

CHAPTER XXXIX

A TRIP TO THE SEASHORE

In the comparative leisure which the children enjoyed during August, they felt amply repaid for the toil of the previous months. We also managed to secure two great gala-days. The first was spent in a trip to the seashore; and this was a momentous event, marred by only one slight drawback. The "Mary Powell," a swift steamer, touched every morning at the Maizeville Landing. I learned that, from its wharf, in New York, another steamer started for Coney Island, and came back in time for us to return on the "Powell" at 3.30 P.M. Thus we could secure a delightful sail down the river and bay, and also have several hours on the beach. My wife and I talked over this little outing, and found that if we took our lunch with us, it would be inexpensive. I saw Mr. Jones, and induced him and his wife, with Junior, to join us. Then the children were told of our plan, and their hurrahs made the old house ring. Now that we were in for it, we proposed no half-way measures. Four plump spring chickens were killed and roasted, and to these were added so many ham sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs, that I declared that we were provisioned for a week. My wife nodded at Bobsey, and said, "Wait and see!"

Whom do you think we employed to mount guard during our absence? No other than Bagley. Mr. Jones said that it was like asking a wolf to guard the flock, for his prejudices yielded slowly; but I felt sure that this proof of trust would do the man more good than a dozen sermons.

Indeed, he did seem wonderfully pleased with his task, and said, "Ye'll find I've 'arned my dollar when ye git back."

The children scarcely slept in their glad anticipation, and were up with the sun. Mr. and Mrs. Jones drove down in their light wagon, while Junior joined our children in another straw-ride, packed in between the lunch-baskets. We had ample time after reaching the landing to put our horses and vehicles in a safe place, and then we watched for the "Powell." Soon we saw her approaching Newtown, four miles above, then speeding toward the wharf, and rounding into it, with the ease and grace of a swan. We scrambled aboard, smiled at by all. I suppose we did not form, with our lunch-baskets, a very stylish group, but that was the least of our troubles. I am satisfied that none of the elegant people we brushed against were half so happy as we were.

We stowed away our baskets and then gave ourselves up to the enjoyment of the lovely Highland scenery, and to watching the various kinds of craft that we were constantly passing. Winnie and Bobsey had been placed under bonds for good behavior, and were given to understand that they must exercise the grace of keeping moderately still. The sail down the river and bay was a long, grateful rest to us older people, and I saw with pleasure that my wife was enjoying every moment, and that the fresh salt breeze was fanning color into her cheeks. Plump Mrs. Jones dozed and smiled, and wondered at the objects we passed, for she had never been much of a traveller; while her husband's shrewd eyes took in everything, and he often made us laugh by his quaint remarks. Junior and Merton were as alert as hawks. They early made the acquaintance of deck-hands who good-naturedly answered their numerous questions. I took the younger children on occasional exploring expeditions, but never allowed them to go beyond my reach, for I soon learned that Bobsey's promises sat lightly on his conscience.

At last we reached the great Iron Pier at Coney Island, which we all traversed with wondering eyes.

We established ourselves in a large pavilion, fitted up for just such picnic parties as ours. Beneath us stretched the sandy beach. We elderly people were glad enough to sit down and rest, but the children forgot even the lunch-baskets, so eager were they to run upon the sand in search of shells.

All went well until an unusually high wave came rolling in. The children scrambled out of its way, with the exception of Bobsey, who was caught and tumbled over, and lay kicking in the white foam. In a moment I sprang down the steps, picked him up, and bore him to his mother.

He was wet through; and now what was to be done?

After inquiry and consultation, I found that I could procure for him a little bathing-dress which would answer during the heat of the day, and an old colored woman promised to have his clothing dry in an hour. So the one cloud on our pleasure proved to have a very bright lining, for Bobsey, since he was no longer afraid of the water, could roll in the sand and the gentle surf to his heart's content.

Having devoured a few sandwiches to keep up our courage, we all procured bathing-dresses, even Mrs. Jones having been laughingly compelled by her husband to follow the general example. When we all gathered in the passage-way leading to the water, we were convulsed with laughter at our ridiculous appearance; but there were so many others in like plight that we were scarcely noticed. Mrs. Jones's dress was a trifle small, and her husband's immensely large. He remarked that if we could now take a stroll through Maizeville, there wouldn't be a crow left in town.

Mrs. Jones could not be induced to go beyond a point where the water was a foot or two deep, and the waves rolled her around like an amiable porpoise. Merton and Junior were soon swimming fearlessly, the latter wondering, meanwhile, at the buoyant quality of the salt water. My wife, Mousie, and Winnie allowed me to take them beyond the breakers, and soon grew confident. In fifteen minutes I sounded recall, and we all

emerged, lank Mr. Jones now making, in very truth, an ideal scarecrow. Bobsey's dry garments were brought, and half an hour later we were all clothed, and, as Mr. Jones remarked, "For a wonder, in our right minds."

The onslaught then made on the lunch-baskets was never surpassed, even at that place of hungry excursionists. In due time we reached home, tired, sleepy, yet content with the fact that we had filled one day with enjoyment and added to our stock of health.

The next morning proved that Bagley had kept his word. Everything was in order, and the amount of work accomplished in the garden showed that he had been on his mettle. Hungry as we had been, we had not emptied our lunch-baskets, and my wife made up a nice little present from what remained, to which was added a package of candy, and all was carried to the Bagley cottage.

Juvenile experiences had not exactly taught the Bagley children that "the way of the transgressor is hard,"—they had not gone far enough for that,—and it certainly was our duty to add such flowers as we could to the paths of virtue.

The month of August was now well advanced. We had been steadily digging the potatoes in the field and selling them in their unripened condition, until half the acre had been cleared. The vines in the lower half of the patch were now growing very yellow, and I decided to leave them, until the tubers should thoroughly ripen, for winter use. By the 20th of the month we had all the space that had been cleared, that is, half an acre, filled with Duchess and Wilson strawberries; and the plants first set were green and vigorous, with renewed running tendencies. But the runners were promptly cut off, so that the plants might grow strong enough to give a good crop of fruit in the following June.

I now began to tighten the reins on the children, and we all devoted more hours to work.

During the month we gathered a few bushels of plums on the place. My wife preserved some, and the rest were sold at the boarding-houses and village stores, for Mr. Bogart had written that when I could find a home

market for small quantities of produce, it would pay me better than to send them to the city. I kept myself informed as to city prices, and found that he had given me good and disinterested advice. Therefore, we managed to dispose of our small crop of early pears and peaches as we had done with the plums. Every day convinced me of the wisdom of buying a place already stocked with fruit; for, although the first cost was greater, we had immediately secured an income which promised to leave a margin of profit after meeting all expenses.

During the last week of August the potatoes were fully ripe, and Merton, Winnie, Bobsey, and I worked manfully, sorting the large from the small, as they were gathered. The crop turned out very well, especially on the lower side of the field, where the ground had been rather richer and moister than in the upper portion.

I did not permit Merton to dig continuously, as it was hard work for him; but he seemed to enjoy throwing out the great, smooth, white-coated fellows, and they made a pretty sight as they lay in thick rows behind us, drying, for a brief time, in the sun. They were picked up, put into barrels, drawn to the dry, cool shed, and well covered from the light. Mr. Jones had told me that as soon as potatoes had dried off after digging, they ought to be kept in the dark, since too much light makes them tough and bitter. Now that they were ripe, it was important that they should be dug promptly, for I had read that a warm rain is apt to start the new potatoes to growing, and this spoils them for table use.

So I said: "We will stick to this task until it is finished, and then we shall have another outing. I am almost ready to begin rebuilding the barn; but before I do so, I wish to visit Houghton Farm, and shall take you all with me. I may obtain some ideas which will be useful, even in my small outlay of money."

CHAPTER XL

A VISIT TO HOUGHTON FARM

Houghton Farm, distant a few miles, is a magnificent estate of about one thousand acres, and the outbuildings upon it are princely in comparison with anything I could erect. They had been constructed, however, on practical and scientific principles, and I hoped that a visit might suggest to me some useful points. Sound principles might be applied, in a modest way, to even such a structure as would come within my means. At any rate, a visit to such a farm would be full of interest and pleasure. So we dug away at the potatoes, and worked like ants in gathering them, until we had nearly a hundred bushels stored. As they were only fifty cents a bushel, I resolved to keep them until the following winter and spring, when I might need money more than at present, and also get better prices.

Then, one bright day toward the end of August, we all started, after an early dinner, for the farm, Junior going with us as usual. We had been told that the large-minded and liberal owner of this model farm welcomed visitors, and so we had no doubts as to our reception. Nor were we disappointed when, having skirted broad, rich fields for some distance, we turned to the right down a long, wide lane, bordered by beautiful shrubbery, and leading to the great buildings, which were numbered conspicuously. We were courteously met by Major Alvord, the agent in charge of the entire estate. I explained the object of my visit, and he kindly gave us a few moments, showing us through the different barns and stables. Our eyes grew large with wonder as we saw the complete

appliances for carrying on an immense stock-farm. The summer crops had been gathered, and we exclaimed at the hundreds of tons of hay, fodder, and straw stored in the mows.

"We use a ton of hay daily, after the pasture season is over," remarked our guide.

When we came to look at the sleek Jersey cows and calves, with their fawn-like faces, our admiration knew no bounds. We examined the stalls in which could stand thirty-four cows. Over each was the name of the occupant, all blood animals of the purest breed, with a pedigree which might put to shame many newly rich people displaying coats-of-arms. The children went into ecstasies over the pretty, innocent faces of the Jersey calves, and Mousie said they were "nice enough to kiss." Then we were shown the great, thick-necked, black-headed Jersey bull, and could scarcely believe our ears when told that he, his mother, and six brothers represented values amounting to about a hundred thousand dollars.

We next visited a great Norman mare, as big as two ordinary horses, and the large, clumsy colt at her side; then admired beautiful stallions with fiery eyes and arching necks; also the superb carriage-horses, and the sleek, strong work animals. Their stalls were finely finished in Georgia pine. Soon afterward, Bobsey went wild over the fat little Essex pigs, black as coals, but making the whitest and sweetest of pork.

"Possess your soul in patience, Bobsey," I said. "With our barn, I am going to make a sty, and then we will have some pigs."

I had had no good place for them thus far, and felt that we had attempted enough for beginners. Moreover, I could not endure to keep pigs in the muddy pens in ordinary use, feeling that we could never eat the pork produced under such conditions.

The milk-house and dairy were examined, and we thought of the oceans of milk that had passed through them.

A visit to "Crusoe Island" entertained the children more than anything else. A mountain stream had been dammed so as to make an island. On the surrounding waters were fleets of water-fowl, ducks and geese of various breeds, and, chief in interest, a flock of Canada wild-geese, domesticated. Here we could look closely at these great wild migrants that, spring and fall, pass and repass high up in the sky, in flocks, flying in the form of a harrow or the two sides of a triangle, meanwhile sending out cries that, in the distance, sound strange and weird.

Leaving my wife and children admiring these birds and their rustic houses on the island, I went with Major Alvord to his offices, and saw the fine scientific appliances for carrying on agricultural experiments designed to extend the range of accurate and practical knowledge. Not only was the great farm planted and reaped, blood stock grown and improved by careful breeding, but, accompanying all this labor, was maintained a careful system of experiments tending to develop and establish that supreme science—the successful culture of the soil. Major Alvord evidently deserved his reputation for doing the work thoroughly and intelligently, and I was glad to think that there were men in the land, like the proprietor of Houghton Farm, who are willing to spend thousands annually in enriching the rural classes by bringing within their reach the knowledge that is power.

After a visit to the sheep and poultry departments, each occupying a large farm by itself, we felt that we had seen much to think and talk over.

It was hard to get Winnie away from the poultry-houses and yards, where each celebrated breed was kept scrupulously by itself. There were a thousand hens, besides innumerable young chickens. We were also shown incubators, which, in spring, hatch little chickens by hundreds.

"Think of fifteen hundred eggs at a sitting, Winnie!" I cried; "that's quite a contrast to the number that you put under one of your biddies at home."

"I don't care," replied the child; "we've raised over a hundred chickens since we began."

"Yes, indeed," I said. "That for you—for you have seen to it all chiefly—is a greater success than anything here."

I was thoughtful as we drove home, and at last my wife held out a penny.

"No," I said, laughing; "my thoughts shall not cost you even that. What I have seen to-day has made clearer what I have believed before. There are two distinct ways of securing success in outdoor work. One is ours, and the other is after the plan of Houghton Farm. Ours is the only one possible for us—that of working a small place and performing the labor, as far as possible, ourselves. If I had played 'boss,' as Bagley sometimes calls me, and hired the labor which we have done ourselves, the children meanwhile idle, we should soon come to a disastrous end in our country experiment. The fact that we have all worked hard, and wisely, too, in the main, and have employed extra help only when there was more than we could do, will explain our account-book; that is, the balance in our favor. I believe that one of the chief causes of failure on the part of people in our circumstances is, that they employ help to do what they should have done themselves, and that it doesn't and can't pay small farmers and fruit-growers to attempt much beyond what they can take care of, most of the year, with their own hands. Then there's the other method—that of large capital carrying things on as we have seen to-day. The farm then becomes like a great factory or mercantile house. There must be at the head of everything a large organizing brain capable of introducing and enforcing thorough system, and of skilfully directing labor and investment, so as to secure the most from the least outlay. A farm such as we have just seen would be like a bottomless pit for money in bungling, careless hands."

"I'm content with our own little place and modest ways," said my wife. "I never wish our affairs to grow so large that we can't talk them over every night, if so inclined."

"Well," I replied, "I feel as you do. I never should have made a great merchant in town, and I am content to be a small farmer in the country, sailing close to shore in snug canvas, with no danger of sudden wreck

keeping me awake nights. The insurance money will be available in a few days, and we shall begin building at once."

The next day Merton and I cleared away the rest of the debris in and around the foundations of the barn, and before night the first load of lumber arrived from the carpenter who had taken the contract.

This forerunner of bustling workmen, and all the mystery of fashioning crude material into something looking like the plan over which we had all pored so often, was more interesting to the children than the construction of Solomon's temple.

"To-morrow the stone-masons come," I said at supper, "and by October we are promised a new barn."

CHAPTER XLI

HOARDING FOR WINTER

As was stated early in this simple history the original barn was built on a hillside, the rear facing the southeast; and since the foundations were still in a fair condition, and the site was convenient, I determined to build on the same spot, somewhat modifying the old plan. I had read of the importance of keeping manure under cover, and now arranged that by a trap door the cleanings of the horse and cow stable should be thrown into the basement, which, by a solid brick partition, should be so divided as to leave ample room for a dark cellar in which to store roots and apples. Through this trap door in the stable rich earth and muck from the banks of the creek could be thrown down also, covering the manure, and all could be worked over and mixed on rainy days. By this method I could make the most of my fertilizers, which may be regarded as the driving-wheel of the farm.

I had decided that the poultry-house and pigsty should form an extension to the barn, and that both should be built in the side of the bank also. They would thus have an exposure to the south, and at the same time, being formed in part by an excavation, would be cool in summer. The floor of the sty should have a slight downward slope, and be cemented. Therefore it could be kept perfectly clean. This residence of Bobsey's future pets should be at the extreme end of the extension, and above it should be a room in which I could store picked-up apples, corn, and other food adapted to their needs, also a conduit by which swill could be poured into the trough below without the necessity of entering

the pen. I proposed to keep only two or three pigs at a time, buying them when young from neighboring farmers, and fattening them for our own use according to my own ideas.

The poultry-house, between the barn and sty, was to be built so that its side, facing the south, should be chiefly of glass. It was so constructed as to secure the greatest amount of light and warmth. Eggs in winter form the most profitable item in poultry keeping, and these depend on warmth, food, shelter, and cleanliness, with the essential condition that the hens are young. All the pullets of Winnie's early broods therefore had been kept, and only the young cockerels eaten or sold. We had the prospect of wintering about fifty laying hens; and the small potatoes we had saved would form a large portion of their food. Indeed, for some weeks back, such small tubers, boiled and mashed with meal, had formed the main feed of our growing chickens.

I learned that Bagley was out of work, and employed him to excavate the bank for these new buildings. We saved the surface earth carefully for compost purposes, and then struck some clean, nice gravel, which was carted away to a convenient place for our roads and walks. On a hillside near the creek were large stones and rocks in great quantity, and some of these were broken up for the foundations. Along the edge of the creek we also found some excellent sand, and therefore were saved not a little expense in starting our improvements.

It did not take the masons long to point up and strengthen the old foundations, and early in September everything was under full headway, the sound of hammer, saw, and plane resounding all day long. It was Winnie's and Bobsey's task to gather up the shavings and refuse bits of lumber, and carry them to the woodhouse.

"The ease and quickness with which we can build fires next winter," I said, "is a pleasant thing to think of."

Meanwhile the garden was not neglected. The early flight of summer-boarders had greatly reduced the demand for vegetables, and now we began to hoard them for our own use. The Lima-beans were allowed to

dry on the vines; the matured pods of the bush-beans were spread in the attic; thither also the ripened onions were brought and placed in shallow boxes. As far as possible we had saved our own seed, and I had had a box made and covered with tin, so as to be mouse-proof, and in this we placed the different varieties, carefully labelled. Although it was not "apple year," a number of our trees were in bearing. The best of the windfalls were picked up, and, with the tomatoes and such other vegetables as were in demand, sent to the village twice a week. As fast as crops matured, the ground was cleared, and the refuse, such as contained no injurious seeds, was saved as a winter covering for the strawberry plants.

Our main labor, however, after digging the rest of the potatoes, was the setting of the remaining half-acre in the later varieties of the strawberry. Although the early part of September was very dry and warm, we managed to set out, in the manner I have described, two or three rows nearly every afternoon. The nights had now grown so long and cool that one thorough watering seemed to establish the plants. This was due chiefly to the fact that nearly every plant had a ball of earth attached to the roots, and had never been allowed to wilt at all in the transition. About the middle of the month there came a fine rain, and we filled the remainder of the ground in one day, all the children aiding me in the task. The plants first set out were now strong and flourishing. Each had a bunch of foliage six inches in diameter.

Thus, with helping on the new barn and other work, September saw a renewal of our early-summer activity.

"The winds in the trees are whispering of winter," I said to the children, "and all thrifty creatures—ants, bees, and squirrels—are laying up their stores. So must we."

I had watched our maturing corn with great satisfaction. For a long time Merton had been able to walk through it without his straw hat being seen above the nodding tassels. One day, about the 20th of the month, Mr. Jones came over with some bundles of long rye straw in his wagon, and said, "Yer can't guess what these are fer."

"Some useful purpose, or you wouldn't have brought them," I replied.

"We'll see. Come with me to the corn patch."

As we started he took a bundle under his arm, and I saw that he had in his hand a tool called a corn-knife. Going through the rows he occasionally stripped down the husks from an ear.

Finally he said: "Yes, it's ready. Don't yer see that the kernels are plump and glazed? Junior and I are going to tackle our corn ter-morrow, and says I to myself, 'If ourn is ready to cut, so is neighbor Durham's,' The sooner it's cut after it's ready, the better. The stalks are worth more for fodder, and you run no risk from an early frost, which would spile it all. You and Merton pitch in as yer allers do, and this is the way ter do it."

With his left hand gathering the stalks of a hill together above the ears, he cut them all olf with one blow of the corn-knife within six inches of the ground, and then leaned them against the stalks of an uncut hill. This he continued to do until he had made what he called a "stout," or a bunch of stalks as large as he could conveniently reach around, the uncut hill of stalks forming a support in the centre. Then he took a wisp of the rye-straw, divided it evenly, and putting the ends together, twisted it speedily into a sort of rope. With this he bound the stout tightly above the ears by a simple method which one showing made plain to me.

"Well, you are a good neighbor!" I exclaimed.

"Pshaw! What does this amount to? If a man can't do a good turn when it costs as little as this, he's a mighty mean feller. You forget that I've sold you a lot of rye-straw, and so have the best of yer after all."

"I don't forget anything, Mr. Jones. As you say, I believe we shall 'make a go' of it here, but we always remember how much we owe to you and Junior. You've taken my money in a way that saved my self-respect, and made me feel that I could go to you as often as I wished; but you have never taken advantage of me, and you have kept smart people from doing it. Do you know, Mr. Jones, that in every country village there are keen, weasel-like people who encourage new-comers by bleeding their

pocket-books at every chance? In securing you as a neighbor our battle was half won, for no one needs a good practical friend more than a city man beginning life in the country."

"Jerusalem! how you talk! I'm goin' right home and tell my wife to call me Saint Jones. Then I'll get a tin halo and wear it, for my straw hat is about played out;" and away he went, chuckling over his odd conceits, but pleased, as all men are, when their goodwill is appreciated. If there is one kind of meanness that disgusts average human-nature more than another it is a selfish, unthankful reception of kindness, a swinish return for pearls.

After an early supper I drove to the village with what I had to sell, and returned with two corn-hooks. At dusk of the following day, Bagley and I had the corn cut and tied up, my helper remarking more than once, "Tell you what it is, Mr. Durham, there hain't a better eared-out patch o' corn in Maizeville."

On the following day I helped Bagley sharpen one of the hooks, and we began to cut the fodder-corn which now stood, green and succulent, averaging two feet in height throughout the field.

CHAPTER XLII

AUTUMN WORK AND SPORT

The barn was now up, and the carpenters were roofing it in, while two days more of work would complete the sty and poultry-house. Every stroke of the hammer told rapidly now, and we all exulted over our new and better appliances for carrying out our plan of country life. Since the work was being done by contract, I contented myself with seeing that it was done thoroughly. Meanwhile Merton was busy with the cart, drawing rich earth from the banks of the creek. I determined that the making of great piles of compost should form no small part of my fall and winter labor. The proper use of fertilizers during the present season had given such a marked increase to our crops that it became clear that our best prospect of growing rich was in making the land rich.

During the last week of September the nights were so cool as to suggest frost, and I said to Mousie: "I think we had better take up your geraniums and other window plants, and put them in pots or boxes. We can then stand them under a tree which would shelter them from a slight frost. Should there be serious danger it would take us only a few minutes to bring them into the house. You have taken such good care of them all summer that I do not intend that you shall lose them now. Take your flower book and read what kind of soil they grow best in during the winter, and then Merton can help you get it."

The child was all solicitude about her pets, and after dinner she and Merton, the latter trundling a wheelbarrow, went down to the creek and obtained a lot of fine sand and some leaf-mould from under the trees in the woods. These ingredients we carefully mixed with rich soil from the flower-bed and put the compound in the pots and boxes around the roots of as many plants as there was room for on the table by the sunny kitchen window. Having watered them thoroughly, we stood them under a tree, there to remain until a certain sharpness in the air should warn us to carry them to their winter quarters.

The Lima-beans, as fast as the pods grew dry, or even yellow, were picked and spread in the attic. They could be shelled at our leisure on stormy winter days.

Early in September my wife had begun to give Mousie, Winnie, and Bobsey their lessons again. Since we were at some distance from a schoolhouse we decided to continue this arrangement for the winter with the three younger children. I felt that Merton should go to school as soon as possible, but he pleaded hard for a reprieve until the last of October, saying that he did not wish to begin before Junior. As we still had a great deal to do, and as the boy had set his heart on some fall shooting, I yielded, he promising to study all the harder when he began.

I added, however: "The evenings have grown so long that you can write for half an hour after supper, and then we will review your arithmetic together. It will do me good as well as you."

During the ensuing weeks we carried out this plan partially, but after a busy day in the open air we were apt to nod over our tasks. We were both taught the soundness of the principle that brain work should precede physical exercise.

The 1st day of October was bright, clear, and mild, and we welcomed the true beginning of fall in our latitude most gladly. This month competes with May in its fitness for ideal country life. The children voted it superior to all other months, feeling that a vista of unalloyed delights was opening before them. Already the butternuts were falling from

several large trees on the place, and the burrs on the chestnuts were plump with their well-shielded treasures. Winnie and Bobsey began to gather these burrs from the lower limbs of an immense tree, eighteen feet in circumference, and to stamp out the half-brown nuts within.

"One or two frosts will ripen them and open the burrs," I said, and then the children began to long for the frost which I dreaded.

While I still kept the younger children busy for a few hours every clear morning in the garden, and especially at clipping the runners from the strawberry plants in the field, they were given ample time to gather their winter hoards of nuts. This pursuit afforded them endless items for talk, Bobsey modestly assuring us that he alone would gather about a million bushels of butternuts, and almost as many chestnuts and walnuts. "What will the squirrels do then?" I asked.

"They must do as I do," he cried; "pick up and carry off as fast as they can. They'll have a better chance than me, too, for they can work all day long. The little scamps are already taking the nuts off the trees—I've seen 'em, and I wish Merton would shoot 'em all."

"Well, Merton," said I, laughing, "I suppose that squirrels are proper game for you; but I hope that you and Junior won't shoot robins. They are too useful a bird to kill, and I feel grateful for all the music they've given us during the past summer. I know the law permits you to shoot them now, but you and Junior should be more civilized than such a law."

"If we don't get 'em, everybody else will, and we might as well have our share," he replied.

I knew that there was no use in drawing the reins too tight, and so I said: "I have a proposition to make to you and Junior. I'd like you both to promise not to shoot robins except on the wing. That will teach you to be expert and quick-eyed. A true sportsman is not one who tries to kill as much game as possible, but to kill scientifically, skilfully. There is more pleasure in giving your game a chance, and in bringing it down with a fine long shot, than in slaughtering the poor creatures like chickens in a coop. Anybody can shoot a robin, sitting on a bough a few yards off, but

to bring one down when in rapid flight is the work of a sportsman. Never allow yourself to be known as a mere 'pot-hunter.' For my part, I had rather live on pork than on robins or any useful birds."

He readily agreed not to fire at robins except when flying, and to induce Junior to do likewise. I was satisfied that not many of my little favorites would suffer.

"Very well," I said, "I'll coax Mr. Jones to let Junior off to-morrow, and you can have the entire day to get your hands in. This evening you can go down to the village and buy a stock of ammunition."

The boy went to his work happy and contented.

"Papa, where can we dry our butternuts?" Winnie asked.

"I'll fix a place on the roof of the shed right away," I said. "Its slope is very gradual, and if I nail some slats on the lower side you can spread the millions of bushels that you and Bobsey will gather."

Now Bobsey had a little wagon, and, having finished his morning stint of work, he, with Mousie and Winnie, started off to the nearest butternut-tree; and during the remainder of the day, with the exception of the time devoted to lessons, loads came often to the shed, against which I had left a ladder. By night they had at least one of the million bushels spread and drying.

As they brought in their last load about five o'clock in the afternoon I said to them, "Come and see what I've got."

I led the way to the sty, and there were grunting three half-grown pigs. Now that the pen was ready I had waited no longer, and, having learned from Rollins that he was willing to sell some of his stock, had bought three sufficiently large to make good pork by the 1st of December.

The children welcomed the new-comers with shouts; but I said: "That won't do. You'll frighten them so that they'll try to jump out of the pen. Run now and pick up a load of apples in your wagon and throw them to

the pigs. They'll understand and like such a welcoming better;" and so it proved.

At supper I said: "Children, picking up apples, which was such fun this evening, will hereafter be part of your morning work, for a while. In the room over the sty is a bin which must be filled with the fallen apples before any nuts can be gathered."

Even Bobsey laughed at the idea that this was work; but I knew that it would soon become so. Then Mousie exclaimed, "Papa, do you know that the red squirrels are helping us to gather nuts?"

"If so, certainly without meaning it. How?"

"Well, as we were coming near one of the trees we saw a squirrel among the branches, and we hid behind a bush to watch him. We soon found that he was tumbling down the nuts, for he would go to the end of a limb and bite cluster after cluster. The thought that we would get the nuts so tickled Bobsey that he began to laugh aloud, and then the squirrel ran barking away."

"You needn't crow so loud, Bobsey," I said. "The squirrel will fill many a hole in hollow trees before winter, in spite of you."

"I'll settle his business before he steals many more of our nuts," spoke up Merton.

"You know the squirrel wasn't stealing, my boy. The nuts grew for him as truly as for you youngsters. At the same time I suppose he will form part of a pot-pie before long."

"I hate to think that such pretty little creatures should be killed," said Mousie.

"I feel much the same," I admitted; "and yet Merton will say we cannot indulge in too much sentiment. You know that we read that red squirrels are mischievous in the main. They tumble little birds out of their nests, carry off corn, and I have seen them gnawing apples for the sake of the

seeds. It wouldn't do for them to become too plentiful. Moreover, game should have its proper place as food, and as a means of recreation. We raise chickens and kill them. Under wise laws, well enforced, nature would fill the woods, fields, and mountains with partridges, quail, rabbits, and other wholesome food. Remember what an old and thickly settled land England is, yet the country is alive with game. There it is protected on great estates, but here the people must agree to protect it for themselves."

"Junior says," Merton explained, "that the partridges and rabbits in the mountains are killed off by foxes and wild-cats and wood-choppers who catch them in traps and snares."

"I fancy the wood-choppers do the most harm. If I had my way, there would be a big bounty for the destruction of foxes, and a heavy fine for all trappers of game. The country would be tenfold more interesting if it were full of wild, harmless, useful creatures. I hope the time will come when our streams will be again thoroughly stocked with fish, and our wild lands with game. If hawks, foxes, trappers, and other nuisances could be abolished, there would be space on yonder mountains for partridges to flourish by the million. I hope, as the country grows older, that the people will intelligently co-work with nature in preserving and increasing all useful wild life. Every stream, lake, and pond could be crowded with fish, and every grove and forest afford a shelter and feeding-ground for game. There should be a wise guardianship of wild life, such as we maintain over our poultry-yards, and skill exercised in increasing it. Then nature would supplement our labors, and furnish a large amount of delicious food at little cost."

"Well, papa, I fear I shall be gray before your fine ideas are carried out. From what Junior says, I guess that Bagley and his children, and others like them, will get more game this winter than we will, and without firing a shot. They are almost as wild as the game itself, and know just where to set their snares for it. I can't afford to wait until it's all killed off, or till that good time comes of which you speak, either. I hope to shoot enough for a pot-pie at least to-morrow, and to have very good sport while about it."

"I have good news about the Bagley children," said my wife. "I was down there to-day, and all the children begin school next Monday. Between clothes which our children have outgrown, and what Mrs. Bagley has been able to buy and make, all three of the young Bagleys make a very respectable appearance. I took it upon myself to tell the children that if they went to school regularly we would make them nice Christmas presents."

"And I confirm the bargain heartily," I cried. "Merton, look out for yourself, or the Bagley boy will get ahead of you at school."

He laughed and, with Junior, started for the village, to get their powder and shot.

The next morning after preparing a good lot of cartridges before breakfast, the two boys started, and, having all day before them, took their lunches with the intention of exploring Schunemunk Mountain. The squirrels, birds, and rabbits near home were reserved for odd times when the lads could slip away for a few hours only.

Our new barn, now about completed, gave my wife and me as much pleasure as the nuts and game afforded the children. I went through it, adding here and there some finishing touches and little conveniences, a painter meanwhile giving it a final coat of dark, cheap wash.

Our poultry-house was now ready for use, and I said to Winnie, "To-night we will catch the chickens and put them in it."

The old horse had already been established in the stable, and I resolved that the cow should come in from this time. In the afternoon I began turning over the fodder corn, and saw that a very tew more days would cure it. Although I decided not to begin the main husking until after the middle of the month, I gathered enough ears to start the pigs on the fattening process. Toward night I examined the apples, and determined to adopt old Mr. Jarmson's plan of picking the largest and ripest at once, leaving the smaller and greener fruit to mature until the last of the month. The dark cellar was already half filled with potatoes, but the space left for such apples as we should pick was ready. From time to time

when returning from the village I had brought up empty barrels; and in some of these, earlier kinds, like tall pippins and greenings, had been packed and shipped to Mr. Bogart. By his advice I had resolved to store the later varieties and those which would keep well, disposing of them gradually to the best advantage. I made up my mind that the morrow should see the beginning of our chief labor in the orchard. I had sold a number of barrels of windfalls, but they brought a price that barely repaid us. My examination of the trees now convinced me that there should be no more delay in taking off the large and fine-looking fruit.

With the setting sun Merton and Junior arrived, scarcely able to drag their weary feet down the lane. Nevertheless their fatigue was caused by efforts entirely after their own hearts, and they declared that they had had a "splendid time." Then they emptied their game-bags. Each of the boys had a partridge, Merton one rabbit, and Junior two. Merton kept up his prestige by showing two gray squirrels to Junior's one. Bed squirrels abounded, and a few robins, brought down on the wing as the boys had promised.

I was most interested in the rattles of the deadly snake which Junior had nearly stepped on and then shot.

"Schunemunk is full of rattlers," Junior said.

"Please don't hunt there any more then," I replied.

"No, we'll go into the main Highlands to the east'ard next time."

Merton had also brought down a chicken hawk; and the game, spread out on the kitchen table, suggested much interesting wild life, about which I said we should read during the coming winter, adding: "Well, boys, you have more than earned your salt in your sport to-day, for each of you has supplied two game dinners. We shall live like aldermen now, I suppose."

"Yes," cried Merton, "whether you call me 'pot-hunter' or not, I mean my gun to pay its way."

"I've no objections to that," was my laughing answer, "as long as you shoot like a sportsman, and not like a butcher. Your guns, boys, will pay best, however, in making you strong, and in giving you some well-deserved fun after your busy summer. I feel that you have both earned the right to a good deal of play this month, and that you will study all the harder for it by and by."

"I hope you'll talk father into that doctrine," said Junior, as he sat down to supper with us.

The boys were drowsy as soon as they had satisfied their keen appetites, and Mousie laughed at them, saying that she had been reading how the boa-constrictor gorged himself and then went to sleep, and that they reminded her of the snake.

"I guess I'll go home after that," said Junior.

"Now you know I was only poking a little fun," said Mousie, ruefully, as she ran into the kitchen and gathered up his game for him, looking into his face so archly and coaxingly that he burst out: "You beat all the game in the country. I'll shoot a blue jay, and give you its wings for your hat, see if I don't;" and with this compliment and promise he left the child happy.

Merton was allowed to sleep late the next morning, and was then set to work in the orchard, I dividing my time between aiding in picking the apples and turning over the fodder corn.

"You can climb like a squirrel, Merton, and I must depend on you chiefly for gathering the apples. Handle them like eggs, so as not to bruise them, and then they will keep better. After we have gone over the trees once and have stacked the fodder corn you shall have a good time with your gun."

For the next few days we worked hard, and nearly finished the first picking of the apples, also getting into shocks the greater part of the corn. Then came a storm of wind and rain, and the best of the apples on

one tree, which, we had neglected, were soon lying on the ground, bruised and unfit for winter keeping.

"You see, Merton," I said, "that we must manage to attend to the trees earlier next year. Live and learn."

The wind came out of the north the day after the storm, and Mr. Jones shouted, as he passed down the road, "Hard frost to-night!"

Then indeed we bustled around. Mousie's flowers were carried in, the Lima-bean poles, still hanging full of green pods more or less filled out, were pulled up and stacked together under a tree, some tomato-vines, with their green and partially ripe fruit, were taken up by the roots and hung under the shed, while over some other vines a covering was thrown toward night.

"We may thus keep a supply of this wholesome vegetable some weeks longer," I said.

Everything that we could protect was looked after; but our main task was the gathering of all the grapes except those hanging against the sides of the house. These I believed would be so sheltered as to escape injury. We had been enjoying this delicious fruit for some time, carrying out our plan, however, of reserving the best for the market. The berries on the small clusters were just as sweet and luscious, and the children were content.

Sure enough, on the following morning white hoar-frost covered the grass and leaves.

"No matter," cried Winnie, at the breakfast-table; "the chestnut burrs are opening."

By frequent stirring the rest of the corn-fodder was soon dried again, and was stacked like the rest. Then we took up the beets and carrots, and stored them also in the root cellar.

We had frost now nearly every night, and many trees were gorgeous in their various hues, while others, like the butternuts, were already losing their foliage.

The days were filled with delight for the children. The younger ones were up with the sun to gather the nuts that had fallen during the night, Merton accompanying them with his gun, bringing in squirrels daily, and now and then a robin shot while flying. His chief exploit however was the bagging of half a dozen quails that unwarily chose the lower part of our meadow as a resort. Then he and Junior took several long outings in the Highlands, with fair success; for the boys had become decidedly expert.

"If we only had a dog," said Merton, "we could do wonders."

"Both of you save your money next summer, and buy one," I replied; "I'll give you a chance, Merton."

By the middle of the month the weather became dry and warm, and the mountains were almost hidden in an Indian summer haze.

"Now for the corn-husking," I said, "and the planting of the ground in raspberries, and then we shall be through with our chief labors for the year."

Merton helped me at the husking, but I allowed him to keep his gun near, and he obtained an occasional shot which enlivened his toil. Two great bins over the sty and poultry-house received the yellow ears, the longest and fairest being stored in one, and in the other the "nubbin's," speedily to be transformed into pork. Part of the stalks were tied up and put in the old "corn-stalk barn," as we called it, and the remainder were stacked near. Our cow certainly was provided for.

Brindle now gave too little milk for our purpose, whereas a farmer with plenty of fodder could keep her over the winter to advantage. I traded her off to a neighboring farmer for a new milch cow, and paid twenty dollars to boot. We were all great milk-topers, while the cream nearly supplied us with butter.

Having removed the corn, Mr. Jones plowed the field deeply, and then Merton and I set out the varieties of raspberries which promised best in our locality, making the hills four feet apart in the row, and the rows five feet from one another. I followed the instructions of my fruit book closely, and cut back the canes of the plants to six inches, and sunk the roots so deep as to leave about four inches of soil above them, putting two or three plants in the hill. Then over and about the hills we put on the surface of the ground two shovelfuls of compost, finally covering the plants beneath a slight mound of earth. This would protect them from the severe frost of winter.

These labors and the final picking of the apples brought us to the last week of the month. Of the smaller fruit, kept clean and sound for the purpose, we reserved enough to make two barrels of cider, of which one should go into vinegar, and the other be kept sweet, for our nut-crackings around the winter fire. Bobsey's dream of "millions of bushels" of nuts had not been realized, yet enough had been dried and stored away to satisfy even his eyes. Not far away an old cider-mill was running steadily, and we soon had the barrels of russet nectar in our cellar. Then came Saturday, and Merton and Junior were given one more day's outing in the mountains with their guns. On the following Monday they trudged off to the nearest public school, feeling that they had been treated liberally, and that brain-work must now begin in earnest. Indeed from this time forth, for months to come, school and lessons took precedence of everything else, and the proper growing of boys and girls was the uppermost thought.

CHAPTER XLIII

THANKSGIVING DAY

November weather was occasionally so blustering and stormy that I turned schoolmaster in part, to relieve my wife. During the month, however, were bright, genial days, and others softened by a smoky haze, which gave me opportunity to gather and store a large crop of turnips, to trench in my celery on a dry knoll, and to bury, with their heads downward, all the cabbages for which I could not find a good market. The children still gave me some assistance, but, lessons over, they were usually permitted to amuse themselves in their own way. Winnie, however, did not lose her interest in the poultry, and Merton regularly aided in the care of the stock and in looking after the evening supply of fire-wood. I also spent a part of my time in the wood lot, but the main labor there was reserved for December. The chief task of the month was the laying down and covering of the tender raspberries; and in this labor Bagley again gave me his aid.

Thanksgiving Day was celebrated with due observance. In the morning we all heard Dr. Lyman preach, and came home with the feeling that we and the country at large were prosperous. Mr. and Mrs. Jones, with Junior, dined with us in great state, and we had our first four-course dinner since arriving in Maizeville, and at the fashionable hour of six in the evening. I had protested against my wife's purpose of staying at home in the morning, saying we would "browse around during the day and get up appetites, while in the afternoon we could all turn cooks and help her." Merton was excepted, and, after devouring a hasty cold lunch,

he and Junior were off with their guns. As for Bobsey, he appeared to browse steadily after church, but seemed in no wise to have exhausted his capacity when at last he attacked his soup, turkey drum-stick, and the climax of a pudding. Our feast was a very informal affair, seasoned with mirth and sauced with hunger. The viands, however, under my wife's skill, would compare with any eaten in the great city, which we never once had regretted leaving. Winifred looked after the transfers from the kitchen at critical moments, while Mousie and Winnie were our waitresses. A royal blaze crackled in the open fireplace, and seemed to share in the sparkle of our rustic wit and unforced mirth, which kept plump Mrs. Jones in a perpetual quiver, like a form of jelly.

Her husband came out strong in his comical resume of the past year's experience, concluding: "Well, we owe you and Mrs. Durham a vote of thanks for reforming the Bagley tribe. That appears to me an orthodox case of convarsion. First we gave him the terrors of the law. Tell yer what it is, we was a-smokin' in wrath around him that mornin', like Mount Sinai, and you had the sense to bring, in the nick of time, the gospel of givin' a feller a chance. It's the best gospel there is, I reckon."

"Well," I replied, becoming thoughtful for a moment with boyish memories, "my good old mother taught me that it was God's plan to give us a chance, and help us make the most of it."

"I remembered the Bagleys to-day," Mrs. Jones remarked, nodding to my wife. "We felt they ought to be encouraged."

"So did we," my wife replied, sotto voce.

We afterward learned that the Bagleys had been provisioned for nearly a month by the good-will of neighbors, who, a short time since, had been ready to take up arms against them.

By eight o'clock everything was cleared away, Mrs. Jones assisting my wife, and showing that she would be hurt if not permitted to do so. Then we all gathered around the glowing hearth, Junior's rat-a-tat-snap! proving that our final course of nuts and cider would be provided in the usual way.

How homely it all was! how free from any attempt at display of style! yet equally free from any trace of vulgarity or ill-natured gossip. Mousie had added grace to the banquet with her blooming plants and dried grasses; and, although the dishes had been set on the table by my wife's and children's hands, they were daintily ornamented and inviting. All had been within our means and accomplished by ourselves; and the following morning brought no regretful thoughts. Our helpful friends went home, feeling that they had not bestowed their kindness on unthankful people whose scheme of life was to get and take, but not to return.

CHAPTER XLIV

WE CAN MAKE A LIVING IN EDEN

Well, our first year was drawing to a close. The 1st of December was celebrated by an event no less momentous than the killing of our pigs, to Winnie's and Bobsey's intense excitement. In this affair my wife and I were almost helpless, but Mr. Jones and Bagley were on hand, and proved themselves veterans, while Mrs. Jones stood by my wife until the dressed animals were transformed into souse, head-cheese, sausage, and well-salted pork. The children feasted and exulted through all the processes, especially enjoying some sweet spareribs.

I next gave all my attention, when the weather permitted, to the proper winter covering of all the strawberries, and to the cutting and carting home of old and dying trees from the wood lot.

The increasing cold brought new and welcome pleasures to the children. There was ice on the neighboring ponds, and skates were bought as premature Christmas presents. The same was true of sleds after the first fall of snow. This white covering of the earth enabled Merton and Junior to track some rabbits in the vicinity, which thus far had eluded their search.

By the middle of the month we realized that winter had begun in all its rather stern reality; but we were sheltered and provided for. We had so far imitated the ants that we had abundant stores until the earth should again yield its bounty.

Christmas brought us more than its wonted joy, and a better fulfilment of the hopes and anticipations which we had cherished on the same day of the previous year. We were far from regretting our flight to the country, although it had involved us in hard toil and many anxieties. My wife was greatly pleased by my many hours of rest at the fireside in her companionship, caused by days too cold and wintry for outdoor work; but our deepest and most abiding content was expressed one evening as we sat alone after the children were asleep.

"You have solved the problem, Robert, that was worrying you. There is space here for the children to grow, and the Daggetts and the Ricketts and all their kind are not so near as to make them grow wrong, almost in spite of us. A year ago we felt that we were virtually being driven to the country. I now feel as if we had been led by a kindly and divine hand." I had given much attention to my account-book of late, and had said, "On New Year's morning I will tell you all the result of our first year's effort."

At breakfast, after our greetings and good wishes for the New Year, all looked expectantly at me as I opened our financial record. Carefully and clearly as possible, so that even Winnie might understand in part, I went over the different items, and the expense and proceeds of the different crops, so far as I was able to separate them. Bobsey's attention soon wandered, for he had an abiding faith that breakfast, dinner, and supper would follow the sun, and that was enough for him. But the other children were pleased with my confidence, and tried to understand me.

"To sum up everything," I said, finally, "we have done, by working all together, what I alone should probably have accomplished in the city—we have made our living. I have also taken an inventory or an account of stock on hand and paid for; that is, I have here a list on which are named the horse, wagon, harness, cow, crates and baskets, tools, poultry, and pigs. These things are paid for, and we are so much ahead. Now, children, which is better, a living in the city, I earning it for you all? or a living in the country toward which even Bobsey can do his share?"

"A living in the country," was the prompt chorus. "There is something here for a fellow to do without being nagged by a policeman," Merton added.

"Well, children, mamma and I agree with you. What's more, there wasn't much chance for me to get ahead in the city, or earn a large salary. Here, by pulling all together, there is almost a certainty of our earning more than a bare living, and of laying up something for a rainy day. The chief item of profit from our farm, however, is not down in my account-book, but we see it in your sturdier forms and in Mousie's red cheeks. More than all, we believe that you are better and healthier at heart than you were a year ago.

"Now for the New Year. Let us make the best and most of it, and ask God to help us."

And so my simple history ends in glad content and hope.

THE END

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