Queechy

Susan Warner



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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK QUEECHY ***

She stopped a moment when she came upon the bridge.
She stopped a moment when she came upon the bridge.

Queechy.

BY

Elizabeth Wetherell.

Illustrated

By Frederic Dielman.

"I hope I may speak of woman without offence to ladies."

The Guardian

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- She stopped a moment when she came upon the bridge. (*Frontispiece*)
- She made a long job of her bunch of holly.
- "I wasn't thinking of myself in particular."
- "Who's got it now, Cynthy?"
- Fleda coloured and looked at her grandfather.
- Fleda was sitting, her face bowed in her hands.
- She stood back and watched.
- Then he seated himself beside her.
- The children were always together.
- "He is not a pug."
- "They will expect me at home."
- "Well, sir, you know the road by Deacon Patterson's?"
- "O uncle Rolf, don't have anything to do with him."
- "Look at these roses, and don't ask me for papers!"
- She knelt down before him.
- "How lovely it is, Hugh!"
- Philetus was left to "shuck" and bring home a load of the fruit.
- "And there goes Mr. Carleton!" said Constance.
- Fleda saw with a start that it was Mr. Carleton.
- "I am sure Mr. Thorn will excuse me."
- "My dear child," he said, holding her face in both his hands.
- Mrs. Rossitur sat there alone.
- Barby's energies and fainting remedies were again put in use.

- Then he stood and watched her.
- "Well, take your place," said Thorn.
- "I told him, 'O you were not gone yet!'"
- "How are they all at home?"
- "Is this the gentleman that's to be your husband?"
- Slowly and lingeringly they moved away.

Queechy.

Chapter I.

A single cloud on a sunny day
  When all the rest of heaven is clear,
  A frown upon the atmosphere,
  That hath no business to appear,
When skies are blue and earth is gay.

Byron.

Come, dear grandpa!--the old mare and the wagon are at the gate--all ready."

"Well, dear!"--responded a cheerful hearty voice, "they must wait a bit; I haven't got my hat yet."

"O I'll get that."

And the little speaker, a girl of some ten or eleven years old, dashed past the old gentleman and running along the narrow passage which led to his room soon returned with the hat in her hand.

"Yes, dear,--but that ain't all. I must put on my great-coat--and I must look and see if I can find any money--"

"O yes--for the post-office. It's a beautiful day, grandpa. Cynthy!--won't you come and help grandpa on with his great-coat?--And I'll go out and keep watch of the old mare till you're ready."

A needless caution. For the old mare, though spirited enough for her years, had seen some fourteen or fifteen of them and was in no sort of danger of running away. She stood in what was called the back meadow, just without the little paling fence that enclosed a small courtyard round the house. Around this courtyard rich pasture-fields lay on every side, the high road cutting through them not more than a hundred or two feet from the house.

The little girl planted herself on the outside of the paling and setting her back to it eyed the old mare with great contentment; for besides other grounds for security as to her quiet behaviour, one of the men employed about the farm, who had harnessed the equipage, was at the moment busied in putting some clean straw in the bottom of the vehicle.

"Watkins," said the child presently to this person, "here is a strap that is just ready to come unbuckled."

"What do you know about straps and buckles?" said the man rather grumly. But he came round however to see what she meant, and while he drew the one and fastened the other took special good care not to let Fleda know that her watchful eyes had probably saved the whole riding party from ruin; as the loosing of the strap would of necessity have brought on a trial of the old mare's nerves which not all her philosophy could have been expected to meet. Fleda was satisfied to see the buckle made fast, and that Watkins, roused by her hint or by the cause of it, afterwards took a somewhat careful look over the whole establishment.

In high glee then she climbed to her seat in the little wagon, and her grandfather coming out coated and hatted with some difficulty mounted to his place beside her.

"I think Watkins might have taken the trouble to wash the wagon, without hurting himself," said Fleda; "it is all specked with mud since last time."

"Ha'n't he washed it!" said the old gentleman in a tone of displeasure. "Watkins!"--

"Well."--

"Why didn't you wash the wagon as I told you?"

"I did."

"It's all over slosh."

"That's Mr. Didenhover's work--he had it out day 'fore yesterday; and if you want it cleaned, Mr. Ringgan, you must speak to him about it. Mr. Didenhover may file his own doings; it's more than I'm a going to."

The old gentleman made no answer, except to acquaint the mare with the fact of his being in readiness to set out. A shade of annoyance and displeasure for a moment was upon his face; but the gate opening from the meadow upon the high road had hardly swung back upon its hinges after letting them out when he recovered the calm sweetness of demeanour that was habitual with him, and seemed as well as his little granddaughter to have given care the go-by for the time. Fleda had before this found out another fault in the harness, or rather in Mr. Didenhover, which like a wise little child she kept to herself. A broken place which her grandfather had ordered to be properly mended was still tied up with the piece of rope which had offended her eyes the last time they had driven out. But she said not a word of it, because "it would only worry grandpa for nothing;" and forgetting it almost immediately she

moved on with him in a state of joyous happiness that no mud-stained wagon nor untidy rope-bound harness could stir for an instant. Her spirit was like a clear still-running stream which quietly and surely deposits every defiling and obscuring admixture it may receive from its contact with the grosser elements around; the stream might for a moment be clouded; but a little while, and it would run as clear as ever. Neither Fleda nor her grandfather cared a jot for the want of elegancies which one despised, and the other if she had ever known had well nigh forgotten. What mattered it to her that the little old green wagon was rusty and worn, or that years and service had robbed the old mare of all the jauntiness she had ever possessed, so long as the sun shone and the birds sang? And Mr. Ringgan, in any imaginary comparison, might be pardoned for thinking that *he* was the proud man, and that his poor little equipage carried such a treasure as many a coach and four went without.

"Where are we going first, grandpa? to the post-office?"

"Just there!"

"How pleasant it is to go there always, isn't it, grandpa? You have the paper to get, and I--I don't very often get a letter, but I have always the *hope* of getting one; and that's something. Maybe I'll have one to-day, grandpa?" "We'll see. It's time those cousins of yours wrote to you."

"O *they* don't write to me--it's only Aunt Lucy; I never had a letter from a single one of them, except once from little Hugh,--don't you remember, grandpa? I should think he must be a very nice little boy, shouldn't you?"

"Little boy? why I guess he is about as big as you are, Fleda--he is eleven years old, ain't he?"

"Yes, but I am past eleven, you know, grandpa, and I am a little girl."

This reasoning being unanswerable Mr. Ringgan only bade the old mare trot on.

It was a pleasant day in autumn. Fleda thought it particularly pleasant for riding, for the sun was veiled with thin hazy clouds. The air was mild and still, and the woods, like brave men, putting the best face upon falling fortunes. Some trees were already dropping their leaves; the greater part standing in all the varied splendour which the late frosts had given them. The road, an excellent one, sloped gently up and down across a wide arable country, in a state of high cultivation and now shewing all the rich variety of autumn. The redish buckwheat patches, and fine wood tints of the fields where other grain had been; the bright green of young rye or winter wheat, then soberer coloured pasture or meadow lands, and ever and anon a tuft of gay woods crowning a rising ground, or a knot of the everlasting pines looking sedately and steadfastly upon the fleeting glories of the world around them, these were mingled and interchanged and succeeded each other in ever-varying fresh combinations. With its high picturesque beauty the whole scene had a look of thrift and plenty and promise which made it eminently cheerful. So Mr. Ringgan and his little granddaughter both felt it to be. For some distance the grounds on either hand the road were part of the old gentleman's farm; and many a remark was exchanged between him and Fleda as to the excellence or hopefulness of this or that crop or piece of soil; Fleda entering into all his enthusiasm, and reasoning of clover leys and cockle and the proper, harvesting of Indian corn and other like matters, with no lack of interest or intelligence.

"O grandpa," she exclaimed suddenly, "won't you stop a minute and let me get out. I want to get some of that beautiful bittersweet."

"What do you want that for?" said he. "You can't get out very well."

"O yes I can--please, grandpa! I want some of it *very* much--just one minute!"

He stopped, and Fleda got out and went to the roadside, where a bittersweet vine had climbed into a young pine tree and hung it as it were with red coral. But her one minute was at least four before she had

succeeded in breaking off as much as she could carry of the splendid creeper; for not until then could Fleda persuade herself to leave it. She came back and worked her way up into the wagon with one hand full as it could hold of her brilliant trophies.

"Now what good'll that do you?" inquired Mr. Ringgan good-humouredly, as he lent Fleda what help he could to her seat.

"Why grandpa, I want it to put with cedar and pine in a jar at home--it will keep for ever so long, and look beautiful. Isn't that handsome?--only it was a pity to break it."

"Why yes, it's handsome enough," said Mr. Ringgan, "but you've got something just by the front door there at home that would do just as well--what do you call it?--that naming thing there?"

"What, my burning bush? O grandpa! I wouldn't cut that for any thing in the world! It's the only pretty thing about the house; and besides," said Fleda, looking up with a softened mien, "you said that it was planted by my mother. O grandpa! I wouldn't cut that for any thing."

Mr. Ringgan laughed a pleased laugh. "Well, dear!" said he, "it shall grow till it's as big as the house, if it will."

"It won't do that," said Fleda. "But I am very glad I have got this bittersweet--this is just what I wanted. Now if I can only find some holly--"

"We'll come across some, I guess, by and by," said Mr. Ringgan; and Fleda settled herself again to enjoy the trees, the fields, the roads, and all the small handiwork of nature, for which her eyes had a curious intelligence. But this was not fated to be a ride of unbroken pleasure.

"Why what are those bars down for?" she said as they came up with a field of winter grain. "Somebody's been in here with a wagon. O grandpa! Mr. Didenhover has let the Shakers have my butternuts!--the

butternuts that you told him they mustn't have."

The old gentleman drew up his horse. "So he has!" said he.

Their eyes were upon the far end of the deep lot, where at the edge of one of the pieces of woodland spoken of, a picturesque group of men and boys in frocks and broad-brimmed white hats were busied in filling their wagon under a clump of the now thin and yellow leaved butternut trees.

"The scoundrel!" said Mr. Ringgan under his breath.

"Would it be any use, grandpa, for me to jump down and run and tell them you don't want them to take the butternuts?--I shall have so few."

"No, dear, no," said her grandfather, "they have got 'em about all by this time; the mischief's done. Didenhover meant to let 'em have 'em unknown to me, and pocket the pay himself. Get up!"

Fleda drew a long breath, and gave a hard look at the distant wagon where *her* butternuts were going in by handfuls. She said no more.

It was but a few fields further on that the old gentleman came to a sudden stop again.

"Ain't there some of my sheep over yonder there, Fleda,--along with Squire Thornton's?"

"I don't know, grandpa," said Fleda,--"I can't see--yes, I do see--yes, they are, grandpa; I see the mark."

"I thought so!" said Mr. Ringgan bitterly; "I told Didenhover, only three days ago, that if he didn't make up that fence the sheep would be out, or Squire Thornton's would be in;--only three days ago!--Ah well!" said he, shaking the reins to make the mare move on again,--"it's all of a piece.--Every thing goes--I can't help it."

"Why do you keep him, grandpa, if he don't behave right?" Fleda ventured to ask gently.

"'Cause I can't get rid of him, dear," Mr. Ringgan answered rather shortly.

And till they got to the post-office he seemed in a disagreeable kind of muse, which Fleda did not choose to break in upon. So the mile and a half was driven in sober silence.

"Shall I get out and go in, grandpa?" said Fleda when he drew up before the house.

"No, deary," said he in his usual kind tone; "you sit still. Holloa there!--Good-day, Mr. Sampion--have you got any thing for me?" The man disappeared and came out again.

"There's your paper, grandpa," said Fleda.

"Ay, and something else," said Mr. Ringgan: "I declare!--Miss Fleda Ringgan--care of E. Ringgan, Esq.'--There, dear, there it is."

"Paris!" exclaimed Fleda, as she clasped the letter and both her hands together. The butternuts and Mr Didenhover were forgotten at last. The letter could not be read in the jolting of the wagon, but, as Fleda said, it was all the pleasanter, for she had the expectation of it the whole way home.

"Where are we going now, grandpa?"

"To Queechy Run."

"That will give us a nice long ride. I am very glad. This has been a good day. With my letter and my bittersweet I have got enough, haven't I, grandpa?"

Queechy Run was a little village, a very little village, about half a mile from Mr. Ringgan's house. It boasted however a decent brick church of some size, a school-house, a lawyer's office, a grocery store, a dozen or two of dwelling-houses, and a post-office; though for some reason or other Mr. Ringgan always chose to have his letters come through the Sattlersville post-office, a mile and a half further off. At the door of the lawyer's office Mr. Ringgan again stopped, and again shouted "Holloa!"--

"Good-day, sir. Is Mr. Jolly within?"

"He is, sir."

"Will you ask him to be so good as to step here a moment? I cannot very well get out."

Mr. Jolly was a comfortable-looking little man, smooth and sleek, pleasant and plausible, reasonably honest too, as the world goes; a nice man to have to do with, the world went so easy with his affairs that you were sure he would make no unnecessary rubs in your own. He came now fresh and brisk to the side of the wagon, with that uncommon hilarity which people sometimes assume when they have a disagreeable matter on hand that must be spoken of.

"Good-morning, sir! Fine day, Mr. Jolly."

"Beautiful day, sir! Splendid season! How do you do, Mr. Ringgan?"

"Why, sir, I never was better in my life, barring this lameness, that disables me very much. I can't go about and see to things any more as I used to. However--we must expect evils at my time of life. I don't complain. I have a great deal to be thankful for."

"Yes, sir,--we have a great deal to be thankful for," said Mr. Jolly rather abstractedly, and patting the old mare with kind attention.

"Have you seen that fellow McGowan?" said Mr. Ringgan abruptly, and in a lower tone.

"I have seen him," said Mr. Jolly, coming back from the old mare to business.

"He's a hard customer I guess, ain't he?"

"He's as ugly a cur as ever was whelped!"

"What does he say?"

"Says he must have it."

"Did you tell him what I told you?"

"I told him, sir, that you had not got the returns from your farm that you expected this year, owing to one thing and 'nother; and that you couldn't make up the cash for him all at once; and that he would have to wait a spell, but that he'd be sure to get it in the long run. Nobody ever suffered by Mr. Ringgan yet, as I told him."

"Well?"

"Well, sir,--he was altogether refractible--he's as pig-headed a fellow as I ever see."

"What did he say?"

"He gave me names, and swore he wouldn't wait a day longer--said he'd waited already six months."

"He has so. I couldn't meet the last payment. There's a year's rent due now. I can't help it. There needn't have been an hour,--if I could go about and attend to things myself. I have been altogether disappointed in that Didenhover."

"I expect you have."

"What do you suppose he'll do, Mr. Jolly?--McGowan, I mean."

"I expect he'll do what the law'll let him, Mr. Ringgan; I don't know what'll hinder him."

"It's a worse turn than I thought my infirmities would ever play me," said the old gentleman after a short pause,--"first to lose the property altogether, and then not to be permitted to wear out what is left of life in the old place--there won't be much."

"So I told him, Mr. Ringgan. I put it to him. Says I, 'Mr. McGowan, it's a cruel hard business; there ain't a man in town that wouldn't leave Mr. Ringgan the shelter of his own roof as long as he wants any, and think it a pleasure,--if the rent was anyhow.'"

"Well--well!" said the old gentleman, with a mixture of dignity and bitterness,--"it doesn't much matter. My head will find a shelter somehow, above ground or under it. The Lord will provide.--Whey! stand still, can't ye! what ails the fool? The creature's seen years enough to be steady," he added with a miserable attempt at his usual cheerful laugh.

Fleda had turned away her head and tried not to hear when the lowered tones of the speakers seemed to say that she was one too many in the company. But she could not help catching a few bits of the conversation, and a few bits were generally enough for Fleda's wit to work upon; she had a singular knack at putting loose ends of talk together. If more had been wanting, the tones of her grandfather's voice would have filled up every gap in the meaning of the scattered words that came to her ear. Her heart sank fast as the dialogue went on, and she needed no commentary or explanation to interpret the bitter little laugh with which it closed. It was a chill upon all the rosy joys and hopes of a most joyful and hopeful little nature.

The old mare was in motion again, but Fleda no longer cared or had the curiosity to ask where they were going. The bittersweet lay listlessly in her lap; her letter, clasped to her breast, was not thought of; and tears

were quietly running one after the other down her cheeks and falling on her sleeve; she dared not lift her handkerchief nor turn her face towards her grandfather lest they should catch his eye. Her grandfather?--could it be possible that he must be turned out of his old home in his old age? could it be possible? Mr. Jolly seemed to think it might be, and her grandfather seemed to think it must. Leave the old house! But where would he go?--Son or daughter he had none left; resources be could have none, or this need not happen. Work he could not; be dependent upon the charity of any kin or friend she knew he would never; she remembered hearing him once say he could better bear to go to the almshouse than do any such thing. And then, if they went, he would have his pleasant room no more where the sun shone in so cheerfully, and they must leave the dear old kitchen where they had been so happy, and the meadows and hills would belong to somebody else; and she would gather her stores of buttercups and chestnuts under the loved old trees never again. But these things were nothing, though the image of them made the tears come hot and fast, these were nothing in her mind to the knowledge or the dread of the effect the change would have upon Mr. Ringgan. Fleda knew him and knew it would not be slight. Whiter his head could not be, more bowed it well might, and her own bowed in anticipation as her childish fears and imaginings ran on into the possible future. Of McGowan's tender mercies she had no hope. She had seen him once, and being unconsciously even more of a physiognomist than most children are, that one sight of him was enough to verify all Mr. Jolly had said. The remembrance of his hard sinister face sealed her fears. Nothing but evil could come of having to do with such a man. It was however still not so much any foreboding of the future that moved Fleda's tears as the sense of her grandfather's present pain,--the quick answer of her gentle nature to every sorrow that touched him. His griefs were doubly hers. Both from his openness of character and her penetration, they could rarely be felt unshared; and she shared them always in more than due measure.

In beautiful harmony, while the child had forgotten herself in keen sympathy with her grandfather's sorrows, he on the other hand had half lost sight of them in caring for her. Again, and this time not before any house but in a wild piece of woodland, the little wagon came to a stop.

"Ain't there some holly berries that I see yonder?" said Mr. Ringgan,--"there, through those white birch stems? That's what you were wanting, Fleda, ain't it? Give your bittersweet to me while you go get some,--and here, take this knife dear, you can't break it. Don't cut yourself."

Fleda's eyes were too dim to see white birch or holly, and she had no longer the least desire to have the latter; but with that infallible tact which assuredly is the gift of nature and no other, she answered, in a voice that she forced to be clear, "O yes, thank you, grandpa;"--and stealthily dashing away the tears clambered down from the rickety little wagon and plunged with a cheerful *step* at least through trees and underbrush to the clump of holly. But if anybody had seen Fleda's face!--while she seemed to be busied in cutting as large a quantity as possible of the rich shining leaves and bright berries. Her grandfather's kindness and her effort to meet it had wrung her heart; she hardly knew what she was doing, as she cut off sprig after sprig and threw them down at her feet; she was crying sadly, with even audible sobs. She made a long job of her bunch of holly. But when at last it must come to an end she choked back her tears, smoothed her face, and came back to Mr. Ringgan smiling and springing over the stones and shrubs in her way, and exclaiming at the beauty of her vegetable stores. If her cheeks were red he thought it was the flush of pleasure and exercise, and she did not let him get a good look at her eyes.

"Why you've got enough to dress up the front room chimney," said he. "That'll be the best thing you can do with 'em, won't it?"

"The front room chimney! No, indeed I won't, grandpa. I don't want 'em where nobody can see them, and you know we are never in there now it is cold weather."

"Well, dear! anyhow you like to have it. But you ha'n't a jar in the house big enough for them, have you?"

"O I'll manage--I've got an old broken pitcher without a handle, grandpa, that'll do very well."

"A broken pitcher! that isn't a very elegant vase," said he.

"O you wouldn't know it is a pitcher when I have fixed it. I'll cover up all the broken part with green, you know. Are we going home now, grandpa?"

"No, I want to stop a minute at uncle Joshua's."

Uncle Joshua was a brother-in-law of Mr. Ringgan, a substantial farmer and very well to do in the world! He was found not in the house but abroad in the field with his men, loading an enormous basket-wagon with corn-stalks. At Mr. Ringgan's shout he got over the fence and came to the wagon-side. His face showed sense and shrewdness, but nothing of the open nobility of mien which nature had stamped upon that of his brother.

She made a long job of her bunch of holly.
She made a long job of her bunch of holly.

"Fine morning, eh?" said he. "I'm getting in my corn stalks."

"So I see," said Mr. Ringgan. "How do you find the new way of curing them answer?"

"Fine as ever you see. Sweet as a nut. The cattle are mad after them. How are you going to be off for fodder this winter?"

"It's more than I can tell you," said Mr. Ringgan. "There ought to be more than plenty; but Didenhover contrives to bring everything out at the wrong end. I wish I was rid of him."

"He'll never get a berth with *me*, I can tell you," said uncle Joshua laughing.

"Brother," said Mr. Ringgan, lowering his tone again, "have you any loose cash you could let me have for six months or so?"

Uncle Joshua took a meditative look down the road, turned a quid of tobacco in his cheek, and finally brought his eyes again to Mr. Ringgan and answered.

"Well, I don't see as I can," said he. "You see Josh is just a going to set up for himself at Kenton, and he'll want some help of me; and I expect that'll be about as much as I can manage to lay my hands on."

"Do you know who has any that he would be likely to lend?" said Mr. Ringgan.

"No, I don't. Money is rather scarce. For your rent, eh?"

"Yes, for my rent! The farm brings me in nothing but my living. That Didenhover is ruining me, brother Joshua."

"He's feathering his own nest, I reckon."

"You may swear to that. There wa'n't as many bushels of grain, by one-fourth, when they were threshed out last year, as I had calculated there would be in the field. I don't know what on earth he could have done with it. I suppose it'll be the same thing over this year."

"Maybe he has served you as Deacon Travis was served by one of his help last season--the rascal bored holes in the granary floor and let out the corn so, and Travis couldn't contrive how his grain went till the floor was empty next spring, and then he see how it was."

"Ha!--did he catch the fellow?"

"Not he--he had made tracks before that. A word in your ear--I wouldn't let Didenhover see much of his salary till you know how he will come out at the end."

"He has got it already!" said Mr. Ringgan, with a nervous twitch at the old mare's head; "he wheedled me out of several little sums on one pretence and another,--he had a brother in New York that he wanted to send some to, and goods that he wanted to get out of pawn, and so on,--and I let him have it! and then there was one of those fatting steers that he proposed to me to let him have on account, and I thought it was as good a way of paying him as any; and that made up pretty near the half of what was due to him."

"I warrant you his'n was the fattest of the whole lot. Well, keep a tight hold of the other half, brother Elzevir, that's my advice to you."

"The other half he was to make upon shares."

"Whew I--well--I wish you well rid of him; and don't make such another bargain again. Good-day to ye!"

It was with a keen pang that little Fleda saw the down-hearted look of her grandfather as again he pave the old mare notice to move on. A few minutes passed in deep thought on both sides.

"Grandpa," said Fleda, "wouldn't Mr. Jolly perhaps know of somebody that might have some money to lend?"

"I declare!" said the old gentleman after a moment, "that's not a bad thought. I wonder I didn't have it myself."

They turned about, and without any more words measured back their way to Queechy Run. Mr. Jolly came out again, brisk and alert as ever; but after seeming to rack his brains in search of any actual or possible money-lender was obliged to confess that it was in vain; he could not think of one.

"But I'll tell you what, Mr. Ringgan," he concluded, "I'll turn it over in my mind to-night and see if I can think of any thing that'll do, and if I can I'll let you know. If we hadn't such a nether millstone to deal with, it would be easy enough to work it somehow."

So they set forth homewards again.

"Cheer up, dear!" said the old gentleman heartily, laying one hand on his little granddaughter's lap,--"it will be arranged somehow. Don't you worry your little head with business. God will take care of us."

"Yes, grandpa!" said the little girl, looking up with an instant sense of relief at these words; and then looking down again immediately to burst into tears.

Chapter II.

Have you seen but a bright lily grow,
  Before rude hands have touch'd it?
Ha' you mark'd but the fall o' the snow,
  Before the soil hath smutch'd it?

Ben Jonson.

Where a ray of light can enter the future, a child's hope can find a way--a way that nothing less airy and spiritual can travel. By the time they reached their own door Fleda's spirits were at par again.

"I am very glad we have got home, aren't you, grandpa?" she said as she jumped down; "I'm so hungry. I guess we are both of us ready for supper, don't you think so?"

She hurried up stairs to take off her wrappings and then came down to the kitchen, where standing on the broad hearth and warming herself at the blaze, with all the old associations of comfort settling upon her heart, it occurred to her that foundations so established *could not* be shaken. The blazing fire seemed to welcome her home and bid her dismiss fear; the kettle singing on its accustomed hook looked as if quietly ridiculing the idea that they could be parted company; her grandfather was in his cushioned chair at the corner of the hearth, reading the newspaper, as she had seen him a thousand times; just in the same position, with that collected air of grave enjoyment, one leg crossed over the other, settled back in his chair but upright, and scanning the columns with an intent but most un-careful face. A face it was that always had a rare union of fineness and placidness. The table stood spread in the usual place, warmth and comfort filled every corner of the room, and Pleda began to feel as if she had been in an uncomfortable dream, which was very absurd, but from which she was very glad she had awoke.

"What have you got in this pitcher, Cynthy?" said she. "Muffins!--O let me bake them, will you? I'll bake them."

"Now Fleda," said Cynthy, "just you be quiet. There ain't no place where you can bake 'em. I'm just going to clap 'em in the reflector--that's the shortest way I can take to do 'em. You keep yourself out o' muss."

"They won't be muffins if you bake 'em in the reflector, Cynthy; they aren't half so good. Ah, do let me I I won't make a bit of muss."

"Where'll you do 'em?"

"In grandpa's room--if you'll just clean off the top of the stove for me--now do, Cynthy! I'll do 'em beautifully and you won't have a bit of trouble.--Come!"

"It'll make an awful smoke, Flidda; you'll fill your grandpa's room with the smoke, and he won't like that, I guess."

"O he won't mind it," said Fleda. "Will you, grandpa?"

"What, dear?"--said Mr. Ringgan, looking up at her from his paper with a relaxing face which indeed promised to take nothing amiss that she might do.

"Will you mind if I fill your room with smoke?"

"No, dear!" said he, the strong heartiness of his acquiescence almost reaching a laugh,--"No, dear!--fill it with anything you like!"

There was nothing more to be said; and while Fleda in triumph put on an apron and made her preparations, Cynthy on her part, and with a very good grace, went to get ready the stove; which being a wood stove, made of sheet iron, with a smooth even top, afforded in Fleda's opinion the very best possible field for muffins to come to their perfection. Now Fleda cared little in comparison for the eating part of the business; her delight was by the help of her own skill and the stove-top to bring the muffins to this state of perfection; her greatest pleasure in them was over when they were baked.

A little while had passed, Mr. Ringgan was still busy with his newspaper, Miss Cynthia Gall going in and out on various errands, Fleda shut up in the distant room with the muffins and the smoke; when there came a knock at the door, and Mr. Ringgan's "Come in!"--was followed by the entrance of two strangers, young, well-dressed, and comely. They wore the usual badges of seekers after game, but their guns were left outside.

The old gentleman's look of grave expectancy told his want of enlightening.

"I fear you do not remember me, Mr. Ringgan," said the foremost of the two coming up to him,--"my name is Rossitur--Charlton Rossitur--a cousin of your little grand-daughter. I have only"--

"O I know you now!" said Mr. Ringgan, rising and grasping his hand heartily,--"you are very welcome, sir. How do you do? I recollect you perfectly, but you took me by surprise.--How do you do, sir? Sit down--sit down."

And the old gentleman had extended his frank welcome to the second of his visitors almost before the first had time to utter,

"My friend Mr. Carleton."

"I couldn't imagine what was coming upon me," said Mr. Ringgan, cheerfully, "for you weren't anywhere very near my thoughts; and I don't often see much of the gay world that is passing by me. You have grown since I saw you last, Mr. Rossitur. You are studying at West Point, I believe."

"No sir; I *was* studying there, but I had the pleasure of bringing that to an end last June."

"Ah!--Well, what are you now? Not a cadet any longer, I suppose."

"No sir--we hatch out of that shell lieutenants."

"Hum.--And do you intend to remain in the army?"

"Certainly sir, that is my purpose and hope."

"Your mother would not like that, I should judge. I do not understand how she ever made up her mind to let you become that thing which hatches out into a lieutenant. Gentle creatures she and her sister both were.--How was it, Mr. Rossitur? were you a wild young gentleman that wanted training?"

"I have had it sir, whether I wanted it or no."

"Hum!--How is he, Mr. Carleton?--sober enough to command men?"

"I have not seen him tried, sir," said this gentleman smiling; "but from tho inconsistency of the orders he issues to his dogs I doubt it exceedingly."

"Why Carleton would have no orders issued to them at all, I believe," said young Rossitur; "he has been saying 'hush' to me all day." The old gentleman laughed in a way that indicated intelligence with one of the speakers,--which, appeared not.

"So you've been following the dogs to-day," said he. "Been successful?"

"Not a bit of it," said Rossitur. "Whether we got on the wrong grounds, or didn't get on the right ones, or the dogs didn't mind their business, or there was nothing to fire at, I don't know; but we lost our patience and got nothing in exchange."

"Speak for yourself," said the other. "I assure you I was sensible of no ground of impatience while going over such a superb country as this."

"It *is* a fine country," said Mr. Ringgan,--"all this tract; and I ought to know it, for I have hunted every mile of it for many a mile around. There used to be more game than partridges in these hills when I was a young man;--bears and wolves, and deer, and now and then a panther, to say nothing of rattlesnakes."

"That last mentioned is an irregular sort of game, is it not?" said Mr. Carleton smiling.

"Well, game is what you choose to make it," said the old gentleman. "I have seen worse days' sport than I saw once when we were out after rattlesnakes and nothing else. There was a cave, sir, down under a mountain a few miles to the south of this, right at the foot of a bluff some four or five hundred feet sheer down,--it was known to be a resort of those creatures; and a party of us went out,--it's many years ago now,--to see if we couldn't destroy the nest--exterminate the whole horde. We had one dog with us,--a little dog, a kind of spaniel; a little white and yellow

fellow,--and he did the work! Well, sir,--how many of those vermin do you guess that little creature made a finish of that day?--of large and small, sir, there were two hundred and twelve."

"He must have been a gallant little fellow."

"You never saw a creature, sir, take to a sport better; he just dashed in among them, from one to another,--he would catch a snake by the neck and give it a shake, and throw it down and rush at another;--poor fellow, it was his last day's sport,--he died almost as soon as it was over; he must have received a great many bites. The place is known as the rattlesnakes' den to this day, though there are none there now, I believe."

"My little cousin is well, I hope," said Mr. Rossitur.

"She? yes, bless her I she is always well. Where is she? Fairy, where are you?--Cynthy, just call Elfieda here."

"She's just in the thick of the muffins, Mr. Ringgan."

"Let the muffins burn! Call her."

Miss Cynthia accordingly opened a little way the door of the passage, from which a blue stifling smoke immediately made its way into the room, and called out to Fleda. whose little voice was heard faintly responding from the distance.

"It's a wonder she can hear through all that smoke," remarked Cynthia.

"She," said Mr. Ringgan, laughing,--"she's playing cook or housekeeper in yonder, getting something ready for tea. She's a busy little spirit, if ever there was one. Ah! there she is. Come here, Fleda--here's your cousin Rossitur from West Point--and Mr. Carleton."

Fleda made her appearance flushed with the heat of the stove and the excitement of turning the muffins, and the little iron spatula she used for that purpose still in her hand; and a fresh and larger puff of the

unsavoury blue smoke accompanied her entrance. She came forward however gravely and without the slightest embarrassment to receive her cousin's somewhat unceremonious "How do, Fleda?"--and keeping the spatula still in one hand shook hands with him with the other. But at the very different manner in which Mr. Carleton *rose* and greeted her, the flush on Fleda's cheek deepened, and she cast down her eyes and stepped back to her grandfather's side with the demureness of a young lady just undergoing the ceremony of presentation.

"You come upon us out of a cloud, Fleda," said her cousin. "Is that the way you have acquired a right to the name of Fairy?"

"I am sure, no," said Mr. Carleton.

Fleda did not lift up her eyes, but her mounting colour shewed that she understood both speeches.

"Because if you are in general such a misty personage," Mr. Rossitur went on half laughing, "I would humbly recommend a choice of incense."

"O I forgot to open the windows!" exclaimed Fleda ingenuously. "Cynthy, won't you please go and do it? And take this with you," said she, holding out the spatula.

"She is as good a fairy as *I* want to see," said her grandfather, passing his arm fondly round her. "She carries a ray of sunshine in her right hand; and that's as magic-working a wand as any fairy ever wielded,--hey, Mr. Carleton?"

Mr. Carleton bowed. But whether the sunshine of affection in Fleda's glance and smile at her grandfather made him feel that she was above a compliment, or whether it put the words out of his head, certain it is that he uttered none.

"So you've had bad success to-day," continued Mr. Ringgan. "Where have you been? and what after? partridges?"

"No sir," said Mr. Carleton, "my friend Rossitur promised me a rare bag of woodcock, which I understand to be the best of American feathered game; and in pursuance of his promise led me over a large extent of meadow and swamp land this morning, with which in the course of several hours I became extremely familiar, without flushing a single bird."

"Meadow and swamp land?" said the old gentleman. "Whereabouts?"

"A mile or more beyond the little village over here where we left our horses," said Rossitur. "We beat the ground well, but there were no signs of them even."

"We had not the right kind of dog," said Mr. Carleton.

"We had the kind that is always used here," said Rossitur; "nobody knows anything about a Cocker in America."

"Ah, it was too wet," said Mr. Ringgan. "I could have told you that. There has been too much rain. You wouldn't find a woodcock in that swamp after such a day as we had a few days ago. But speaking of game, Mr. Rossitur, I don't know anything in America equal to the grouse. It is far before woodcock. I remember, many years back, going a grouse shooting, I and a friend, down in Pennsylvania,--we went two or three days running, and the birds we got were worth a whole season of woodcock.--But gentlemen, if you are not discouraged with your day's experience and want to try again, *I'll* put you in a way to get as many woodcock as will satisfy you--if you'll come here to-morrow morning I'll go out with you far enough to shew you the way to the best ground *I* know for shooting that game in all this country; you'll have a good chance for partridges too in the course of the day; and that ain't bad eating, when you can't get better--is it, Fairy?" he said, with a sudden smiling appeal to the little girl at his side. Her answer again was only an intelligent glance.

The young sportsmen both thanked him and promised to take advantage of his kind offer. Fleda seized the opportunity to steal another look at the strangers; but meeting Mr. Carleton's eyes fixed on her with a remarkably soft and gentle expression she withdrew her own again as fast as possible, and came to the conclusion that the only safe place for them was the floor.

"I wish I was a little younger and I'd take my gun and go along with you myself," said the old gentleman pleasantly; "but," he added sighing, "there is a time for everything, and my time for sporting is past."

"You have no right to complain, sir," said Mr. Carleton, with a meaning glance and smile which the old gentleman took in excellent good part.

"Well," said he, looking half proudly, half tenderly, upon the little demure figure at his side, "I don't say that I have. I hope I thank God for his mercies, and am happy. But in this world, Mr. Carleton, there is hardly a blessing but what draws a care after it. Well--well--these things will all be arranged for us!"

It was plain, however, even to a stranger, that there was some subject of care not vague nor undefined pressing upon Mr. Ringgan's mind as he said this.

"Have you heard from my mother lately, Fleda?" said her cousin.

"Why yes," said Mr. Ringgan,--"she had a letter from her only to-day. You ha'n't read it yet, have you, Fleda?"

"No grandpa," said the little girl; "you know I've been busy."

"Ay," said the old gentleman; "why couldn't you let Cynthia bake the cakes, and not roast yourself over the stove till you're as red as a turkey-cock?"

"This morning I was like a chicken," said Fleda laughing, "and now like a turkey-cock."

"Shall I tell mamma, Fleda," said young Rossitur, "that you put off reading her letter to bake muffins?"

Fleda answered without looking up, "Yes, if he pleased."

"What do you suppose she will think?"

"I don't know."

"She will think that you love muffins better than her."

"No," said Fleda, quietly but firmly,--"she will not think that, because it isn't true."

The gentlemen laughed, but Mr. Carleton declared that Fleda's reasoning was unanswerable.

"Well, I will see you to-morrow," said Mr. Rossitur, "after you have read the letter, for I suppose you will read it sometime. You should have had it before,--it came enclosed to me,--but I forgot unaccountably to mail it to you till a few days ago."

"It will be just as good now, sir," said Mr. Ringgan.

"There is a matter in it though," said Rossitur, "about which my mother has given me a charge. We will see you to-morrow. It was for that partly we turned out of our way this evening."

"I am very glad you did," said Mr. Ringgan. "I hope your way will bring you here often. Won't you stay and try some of these same muffins before you go?"

But this was declined, and the gentlemen departed; Fleda, it must be confessed, seeing nothing in the whole leave-taking but Mr. Carleton's look and smile. The muffins were a very tame affair after it.

When supper was over she sat down fairly to her letter, and read it twice through before she folded it up. By this time the room was clear both of the tea equipage and of Cynthia's presence, and Fleda and her grandfather were alone in the darkening twilight with the blazing wood fire; he in his usual place at the side, and she on the hearth directly before it; both silent, both thinking, for some time. At length Mr. Ringgan spoke, breaking as it were the silence and his seriousness with the same effort.

"Well dear!" said he cheerfully,--"what does she say?"

"O she says a great many things, grandpa; shall I read yon the letter?"

"No dear, I don't care to hear it; only tell me what she says."

"She says they are going to stay in Paris yet a good while longer."

"Hum!"--said Mr. Ringgan. "Well--that ain't the wisest thing I should like to hear of her doing."

"Oh but it's because uncle Rossitur likes to stay there, I suppose, isn't it, grandpa?"

"I don't know, dear. Maybe your aunt's caught the French fever. She used to be a good sensible woman; but when people will go into a whirligig, I think some of their wits get blown away before they come out. Well--what else?"

"I am sure she is very kind," said Fleda. "She wants to have me go out there and live with her very much. She says I shall have everything I like and do just as I please, and she will make a pet of me and give me all sorts of pleasant things. She says she will take as good care of me as ever I took of the kittens. And there's a long piece to you about it, that I'll give you to read as soon as we have a light. It is very good of her, isn't it, grandpa? I love aunt Lucy very much."

"Well," said Mr. Ringgan after a pause, "how does she propose to get you there?"

"Why," said Fleda,--"isn't it curious?--she says there is a Mrs. Carleton here who is a friend of hers, and she is going to Paris in a little while, and aunt Lucy asked her if she wouldn't bring me, if you would let me go, and she said she would with great pleasure, and aunt Lucy wants me to come out with her."

"Carleton!--Hum--" said Mr. Ringgan; "that must be this young man's mother?"

"Yes, aunt Lucy says she is here with her son,--at least she says they were coming." "A very gentlemanly young man, indeed," said Mr. Ringgan.

There was a grave silence. The old gentleman sat looking on the floor; Fleda sat looking into the fire, with all her might.

"Well," said Mr. Ringgan after a little, "how would you like it, Fleda?"

"What, grandpa?"

"To go out to Paris to your aunt, with this Mrs. Carleton?"

"I shouldn't like it at all," said Fleda smiling, and letting her eyes go back to the fire. But looking after the pause of a minute or two again to her grandfather's face, she was struck with its expression of stern anxiety. She rose instantly, and coming to him and laying one hand gently on his knee, said in tones that fell as light on the ear as the touch of a moonbeam on the water, "*You* do not want me to go, do you, grandpa?"

"No dear!" said the old gentleman, letting his hand fall upon hers,--"no dear!--that is the last thing I want!"

But Fleda's keen ear discerned not only the deep affection but something of *regret* in the voice, which troubled her. She stood, anxious and fearing, while her grandfather lifting his hand again and again let it fall

gently upon hers; and amid all the fondness of the action Fleda somehow seemed to feel in it the same regret.

"You'll not let aunt Lucy, nor anybody else, take me away from you, will you, grandpa?" said she after a little, leaning both arms affectionately on his knee and looking up into his face.

"No indeed, dear!" said he, with an attempt at his usual heartiness,--"not as long as I have a place to keep you. While I have a roof to put my head under, it shall cover yours."

To Fleda's hope that would have said enough; but her grandfather's face was so moved from its wonted expression of calm dignity that it was plain *his* hope was tasting bitter things. Fleda watched in silent grief and amazement the watering eye and unnerved lip; till her grandfather indignantly dashing away a tear or two drew her close to his breast and kissed her. But she well guessed that the reason why he did not for a minute or two say anything, was because he could not. Neither could she. She was fighting with her woman's nature to keep it down,--learning the lesson early!

"Ah well,"--said Mr Ringgan at length, in a kind of tone that might indicate the giving up a struggle which he had no means of carrying on, or the endeavour to conceal it from the too keen-wrought feelings of his little granddaughter,--"there will be a way opened for us somehow. We must let our Heavenly Father take care of us."

"And he will, grandpa," whispered Fleda.

"Yes dear!--We are selfish creatures. Your father's and your mother's child will not be forgotten."

"Nor you either, dear grandpa," said the little girl, laying her soft cheek alongside of his, and speaking by dint of a great effort.

"No," said he, clasping her more tenderly,--"no--it would he wicked in me to doubt it. He has blessed me all my life long with a great many more blessings than I deserved; and if he chooses to take away the sunshine of my last days I will bow my head to his will, and believe that he does all things well, though I cannot see it."

"Don't, dear grandpa," said Fleda, stealing her other arm round his neck and hiding her face there,--"please don't!--"

He very much regretted that he had said too much. He did not however know exactly how to mend it. He kissed her and stroked her soft hair, but that and the manner of it only made it more difficult for Fleda to recover herself, which she was struggling to do; and when he tried to speak in accents of cheering his voice trembled. Fleda's heart was breaking, but she felt that she was making matters worse, and she had already concluded on a mature review of circumstances that it was her duty to be cheerful. So after a few very heartfelt tears which she could not help, she raised her head and smiled, even while she wiped the traces of them away.

"After all, grandpa," said she, "perhaps Mr. Jolly will come here in the morning with some good news, and then we should be troubling ourselves just for nothing."

"Perhaps he will," said Mr. Ringgan, in a way that sounded much more like "Perhaps he won't!" But Fleda was determined now not to *seem* discouraged again. She thought the best way was to change the conversation.

"It is very kind in aunt Lucy, isn't it, grandpa, what she has written to me?"

"Why no," said Mr. Ringgan, decidedly, "I can't say I think it is any very extraordinary manifestation of kindness in anybody to want you."

Fleda smiled her thanks for this compliment.

"It might be a kindness in me to give you to her."

"It wouldn't be a kindness to me, grandpa."

"I don't know about that," said he gravely. They were getting back to the old subject. Fleda made another great effort at a diversion.

"Grandpa, was my father like my uncle Rossitur in any thing?"

The diversion was effected.

"Not he, dear!" said Mr. Ringgan. "Your father had ten times the man in him that ever your uncle was."

"Why what kind of a man is uncle Rossitur, grandpa?"

"Ho dear! I can't tell. I ha'n't seen much of him. I wouldn't judge a man without knowing more of him than I do of Mr. Rossitur. He seemed an amiable kind of man. But no one would ever have thought of looking at him, no more than at a shadow, when your father was by."

The diversion took effect on Fleda herself now. She looked up pleased.

"You remember your father, Fleda?"

"Yes grandpa, but not very well always;--I remember a great many things about him, but I can't remember exactly how he looked,--except once or twice."

"Ay, and he wa'n't well the last time you remember him. But he was a noble-looking man--in form and face too--and his looks were the worst part of him. He seemed made of different stuff from all the people around," said Mr. Ringgan sighing, "and they felt it too I used to notice, without knowing it. When his cousins were 'Sam' and 'Johnny' and 'Bill,' he was always, that is, after he grew up, '*Mr. Walter*.' I believe they were a little afeard of him. And with all his bravery and fire he could be as gentle as a woman."

"I know that," said Fleda, whose eyes were dropping soft tears and glittering at the same time with gratified feeling. "What made him be a soldier, grandpa?"

"Oh I don't know, dear!--he was too good to make a farmer of--or his high spirit wanted to rise in the world--he couldn't rest without trying to be something more than other folks. I don't know whether people are any happier for it."

"Did *he* go to West Point, grandpa?"

"No dear!--he started without having so much of a push as that; but he was one of those that don't need any pushing; he would have worked his way up, put him anywhere you would, and he did,--over the heads of West Pointers and all, and would have gone to the top, I verily believe, if he had lived long enough. He was as fine a fellow as there was in all the army. *I* don't believe there's the like of him left in it."

"He had been a major a good while, hadn't he, grandpa?"

"Yes. It was just after he was made captain that he went to Albany, and there he saw your mother. She and her sister, your aunt Lucy, were wards of the patroon. I was in Albany, in the legislature, that winter, and I knew them both very well; but your aunt Lucy had been married some years before. She was staying there that winter without her husband--he was abroad somewhere."

Fleda was no stranger to these details and had learned long ago what was meant by 'wards' and 'the patroon.'

"Your father was made a major some years afterwards," Mr. Ringgan went on, "for his fine behaviour out here at the West--what's the name of the place?--I forget it just now--fighting the Indians. There never was anything finer done."

"He was brave, wasn't he, grandpa?"

"Brave!--he had a heart of iron sometimes, for as soft as it was at others. And he had an eye, when he was roused, that I never saw anything that would stand against. But your father had a better sort of courage than the common sort--he had enough of *that*--but this is a rarer thing--he never was afraid to do what in his conscience he thought was right. Moral courage I call it, and it is one of the very noblest qualities a man can have."

"That's a kind of courage a woman may have," said Fleda.

"Yes--you may have that; and I guess it's the only kind of courage *you'll* ever be troubled with," said her grandfather looking laughingly at her. "However, any man may walk up to the cannon's mouth, but it is only one here and there that will walk out against men's opinions because he thinks it is right. That was one of the things I admired most in your father."

"Didn't my mother have it too?" said Fleda.

"I don't know--she had about everything that was good. A gweet, pretty creature she was, as I ever saw."

"Was she like aunt Lucy?"

"No, not much. She was a deal handsomer than your aunt is or ever could have been. She was the handsomest woman, I think, that ever I set eyes upon; and a sweet, gentle, lovely creature. *You*'ll never match her," said Mr. Ringgan, with a curious twist of his head and sly laughing twist of his eyes at Fleda;--"you may be as *good* as she was, but you'll never be as good-looking."

Fleda laughed, nowise displeased.

"You've got her hazel eyes though," remarked Mr. Ringgan, after a minute or two, viewing his little granddaughter with a sufficiently satisfied expression of countenance.

"Grandpa," said she, "don't you think Mr. Carleton has handsome eyes?"

"Mr. Carleton?--hum--I don't know; I didn't look at his eyes. A very well-looking young man though--very gentlemanly too."

Fleda had heard all this and much more about her parents some dozens of times before; but she and her grandfather were never tired of going it over. If the conversation that recalled his lost treasures had of necessity a character of sadness and tenderness, it yet bespoke not more regret that he had lost them than exulting pride and delight in what they had been,--perhaps not so much. And Fleda delighted to go back and feed her imagination with stories of the mother whom she could not remember, and of the father whose fair bright image stood in her memory as the embodiment of all that is high and noble and pure. A kind of guardian angel that image was to little Fleda. These ideal likenesses of her father and mother, the one drawn from history and recollection, the other from history only, had been her preservative from all the untoward influences and unfortunate examples which had surrounded her since her father's death some three or four years before had left her almost alone in her grandfather's house. They had created in her mind a standard of the true and beautiful in character, which nothing she saw around her, after of course her grandfather, and one other exception, seemed at all to meet; and partly from her own innate fineness of nature, and partly from this pure ideal always present with her, she had shrunk almost instinctively from the few varieties of human nature the country-side presented to her, and was in fact a very isolated little being, living in a world of her own, and clinging with all her strong outgoings of affection to her grandfather only; granting to but one other person any considerable share in her regard or esteem. Little Fleda was not in the least misanthropical; she gave her kindly sympathies to all who came in her way on whom they could possibly be bestowed; but these people were nothing to her: her spirit fell off from them, even in their presence; there was no affinity. She was in truth what her grandfather had affirmed of her father, made of different stuff from the

rest of the world. There was no tincture of pride in all this; there was no conscious feeling of superiority; she could merely have told you that she did not care to hear these people talk, that she did not love to be with them; though she *would* have said so to no earthly creature but her grandfather, if even to him.

'I wasn't thinking of myself in particular.'
"I wasn't thinking of myself in particular."

"It must be pleasant," said Fleda, after looking for some minutes thoughtfully into the fire,--"it must be a pleasant thing to have a father and mother."

"Yes dear!" said her grandfather, sighing,--"you have lost a great deal! But there is your aunt Lucy--you are not dependent altogether on me."

"Oh grandpa!" said the little girl laying one hand again pleadingly on his knee;--"I didn't mean--I mean--I was speaking in general--I wasn't thinking of myself in particular."

"I know, dear!" said he, as before taking the little hand in his own and moving it softly up and down on his knee. But the action was sad, and there was the same look of sorrowful stern anxiety. Fleda got up and put her arm over his shoulder, speaking from a heart filled too full.

"I don't want aunt Lucy--I don't care about aunt Lucy; I don't want anything but you, grandpa. I wish you wouldn't talk so."

"Ah well, dear," said he, without looking at her,--he couldn't bear to look at her,--"it's well it is so. I sha'n't last a great while--it isn't likely--and I am glad to know there is some one you can fall back upon when I am gone."

Pleda's next words were scarcely audible, but they contained a reproach to him for speaking so.

"We may as well look at it, dear," said he gravely; "it must come to that--sooner or later--but you mustn't distress yourself about it beforehand. Don't cry--don't, dear!" said he, tenderly kissing her. "I didn't mean to trouble you so. There--there--look up, dear--let's take the good we have and be thankful for it. God will arrange the rest, in his own good way. Fleda!--I wouldn't have said a word if I had thought it would have worried you so."

He would not indeed. But he had spoken as men so often speak, out of the depths of their own passion or bitterness, forgetting that they are wringing the cords of a delicate harp, and not knowing what mischief they have done till they find the instrument all out of tune,--more often not knowing it ever. It is pity,--for how frequently a discord is left that jars all life long; and how much more frequently still the harp, though retaining its sweetness and truth of tone to the end, is gradually unstrung.

Poor Fleda could hardly hold up her head for a long time, and recalling bitterly her unlucky innocent remark which had led to all this trouble she almost made up her mind with a certain heroine of Miss Edgeworth's, that "it is best never to mention things." Mr. Ringgan, now thoroughly alive to the wounds he had been inflicting, held his little pet in his arms, pillowed her head on his breast, and by every tender and soothing action and word endeavoured to undo what he had done. And after a while the agony was over, the wet eyelashes were lifted up, and the meek sorrowful little face lay quietly upon Mr. Ringgan's breast, gazing out into the fire as gravely as if the Panorama of life were there. She little heeded at first her grandfather's cheering talk, she knew it was for a purpose.

"Ain't it most time for you to go to bed?" whispered Mr. Ringgan when he thought the purpose was effected.

"Shall I tell Cynthy to get you your milk, grandpa?" said the little girl rousing herself.

"Yes dear.--Stop,--what if you and me was to have some roast apples?--wouldn't you like it?"

"Well--yes, I should, grandpa," said Fleda, understanding perfectly why he wished it, and wishing it herself for that same reason and no other.

"Cynthy, let's have some of those roast apples," said Mr. Ringgan, "and a couple of bowls of milk here."

"No, I'll get the apples myself, Cynthy," said Fleda.

"And you needn't take any of the cream off, Cynthy," added Mr. Ringgan.

One corner of the kitchen table was hauled up to the fire, to be comfortable, Fleda said, and she and her grandfather sat down on the opposite sides of it to do honour to the apples and milk; each with the simple intent of keeping up appearances and cheating the other into cheerfulness. There is however, deny it who can, an exhilarating effect in good wholesome food taken when one is in some need of it; and Fleda at least found the supper relish exceeding well. Every one furthermore knows the relief of a hearty flow of tears when a secret weight has been pressing on the mind. She was just ready for anything reviving. After the third mouthful she began to talk, and before the bottom of the bowls was reached she had smiled more than once. So her grandfather thought no harm was done, and went to bed quite comforted; and Fleda climbed the steep stairs that led from his door to her little chamber just over his head. It was small and mean, immediately under the roof, with only one window. There were plenty of better rooms in the house, but Fleda liked this because it kept her near her grandfather; and indeed she had always had it ever since her father's death, and never thought of taking any other.

She had a fashion, this child, in whom the simplicity of practical life and the poetry of imaginative life were curiously blended,--she had a fashion of going to her window every night when the moon or stars were shining to look out for a minute or two before she went to bed; and sometimes

the minutes were more than any good grandmother or aunt would have considered wholesome for little Fleda in the fresh night air. But there was no one to watch or reprimand; and whatever it was that Fleda read in earth or sky, the charm which held her one bright night was sure to bring her to her window the next. This evening a faint young moon lighted up but dimly the meadow and what was called the "east-hill," over-against which the window in question looked. The air was calm and mild; there was no frost to-night; the stillness was entire, and the stars shone in a cloudless sky. Fleda set open the window and looked out with a face that again bore tokens of the experiences of that day. She wanted the soothing speech of nature's voice; and child as she was she could hear it. She did not know, in her simplicity, what it was that comforted and soothed her, but she stood at her window enjoying.

It was so perfectly still, her fancy presently went to all those people who had hushed their various work and were now resting, or soon would be, in the unconsciousness and the helplessness of sleep. The *helplessness*,--and then that Eye that never sleeps; that Hand that keeps them all, that is never idle, that is the safety and the strength alike of all the earth and of them that wake or sleep upon it,--

"And if he takes care of them all, will he not take care of poor little me?" thought Fleda. "Oh how glad I am I know there is a God!--How glad I am I know he is such a God! and that I can trust in him; and he will make everything go right. How I forget this sometimes! But Jesus does not forget his children. Oh I am a happy little girl!--Grandpa's saying what he did don't make it so--perhaps I shall die the first--but I hope not, for what would become of him!--But this and everything will all be arranged right, and I have nothing to do with it but to obey God and please him, and he will take care of the rest. He has forbidden *us* to be careful about it too."

With grateful tears of relief Fleda shut the window and began to undress herself, her heart so lightened of its burden that her thoughts presently took leave to go out again upon pleasure excursions in various

directions; and one of the last things in Fleda's mind before sleep surprised her was, what a nice thing it was for any one to bow and smile so as Mr. Carleton did!

Chapter III.

> I know each lane, and every alley green,
> Dingle or bushy dell of this wild wood,
> And every bosky bourn from side to side
> My daily walks and ancient neighbourhood.
>
> Milton.

Fleda and her grandfather had but just risen from a tolerably early breakfast the next morning, when the two young sportsmen entered the room.

"Ha!" said Mr. Ringgan,--"I declare! you're stirring betimes. Come five or six miles this morning a'ready. Well--that's the stuff to make sportsmen of. Off for the woodcock, hey?--And I was to go with you and shew you the ground.--I declare I don't know how in the world I can do it this morning, I'm so very stiff--ten times as bad as I was yesterday. I had a window open in my room last night, I expect that must have been the cause. I don't see how I could have overlooked it, but I never gave it a thought, till this morning I found myself so lame I could hardly get out of bed.--I am very sorry, upon my word?"

"I am very sorry we must lose your company, sir," said the young Englishman, "and for such a cause; but as to the rest!--I dare say your directions will guide us sufficiently."

"I don't know about that," said the old gentleman. "It is pretty hard to steer by a chart that is only laid down in the imagination. I set out once to go in New York from one side of the city over into the other, and the first thing I knew I found myself travelling along half a mile out of town. I had to get in a stage and ride back and take a fresh start. Out at the West they say when you are in the woods you can tell which is north by the moss growing on that side of the trees; but if you're lost you'll be pretty apt to find the moss grows on *all* sides of the trees. I couldn't make out any waymarks at all, in such a labyrinth of brick corners. Well, let us see--if I tell you now it is so easy to mistake one hill for another--Fleda, child, you put on your sun-bonnet and take these gentlemen back to the twenty-acre lot, and from there you can tell 'em how to go so I guess they won't mistake it."

"By no means!" said Mr. Carleton; "we cannot give her so much trouble; it would be buying our pleasure at much too dear a rate."

"Tut, tut," said the old gentleman; "she thinks nothing of trouble, and the walk'll do her good. She'd like to be out all day, I believe, if she had any one to go along with, but I'm rather a stupid companion for such a spry little pair of feet. Fleda, look here,--when they get to the lot they can find their own way after that. You know where the place is--where your cousin Seth shot so many woodcock last year, over in Mr. Hurlbut's land,--when you get to the big lot you must tell these gentlemen to go straight over the hill, not Squire Thornton's hill, but mine, at the back of the lot,--they must go straight over it till they come to cleared land on the other side; then they must keep along by the edge of the wood, to the right, till they come to the brook; they must *cross the brook*, and follow up the opposite bank, and they'll know the ground when they come to it, or they don't deserve to. Do you understand?--now run and get your hat for they ought to be off."

Fleda went, but neither her step nor her look shewed any great willingness to the business.

"I am sure, Mr. Ringgan," said Mr. Carleton, "your little granddaughter has some reason for not wishing to take such a long walk this morning. Pray allow us to go without her."

"Pho, pho," said the old gentleman, "she wants to go."

"I guess she's skeered o' the guns," said Cynthy, happy to get a chance to edge in a word before such company;--"it's that ails her."

"Well, well,--she must get used to it," said Mr. Ringgan. "Here she is!"

Fleda had it in her mind to whisper to him a word of hope about Mr. Jolly; but she recollected that it was at best an uncertain hope, and that if her grandfather's thoughts were off the subject it was better to leave them so. She only kissed him for good-by, and went out with the two gentlemen.

As they took up their guns Mr. Carleton caught the timid shunning glance her eye gave at them.

"Do you dislike the company of these noisy friends of ours, Miss Fleda?" said he.

Fleda hesitated, and finally said "she didn't much like to be very near them when they were fired."

"Put that fear away then," said he, "for they shall keep a respectful silence so long as they have the honour to be in your company. If the woodcock come about us as tame as quails our guns shall not be provoked to say anything till your departure gives them leave."

Fleda smiled her thanks and set forward, privately much confirmed in her opinion that Mr. Carleton had handsome eyes.

At a little distance from the house Fleda left the meadow for an old apple-orchard at the left, lying on a steep side hill. Up this hill-side they toiled; and then found themselves on a ridge of table-land, stretching

back for some distance along the edge of a little valley or bottom of perfectly flat smooth pasture-ground. The valley was very narrow, only divided into fields by fences running from side to side. The table-land might be a hundred feet or more above the level of the bottom, with a steep face towards it. A little way back from the edge the woods began; between them and the brow of the hill the ground was smooth and green, planted as if by art with flourishing young silver pines and once in a while a hemlock, some standing in all their luxuriance alone, and some in groups. With now and then a smooth grey rock, or large boulder-stone which had somehow inexplicably stopped on the brow of the hill instead of rolling down into what at some former time no doubt was a bed of water,--all this open strip of the table-land might have stood with very little coaxing for a piece of a gentleman's pleasure-ground. On the opposite side of the little valley was a low rocky height, covered with wood, now in the splendour of varied red and green and purple and brown and gold; between, at their feet, lay the soft quiet green meadow; and off to the left, beyond the far end of the valley, was the glory of the autumn woods again, softened in the distance. A true October sky seemed to pervade all, mildly blue, transparently pure, with that clearness of atmosphere that no other month gives us; a sky that would have conferred a patent of nobility on any landscape. The scene was certainly contracted and nowise remarkable in any of its features, but Nature had shaken out all her colours over the land, and drawn a veil from the sky, and breathed through the woods and over the hill-side the very breath of health, enjoyment, and vigour.

When they were about over-against the middle of the valley, Mr. Carleton suddenly made a pause and stood for some minutes silently looking. His two companions came to a halt on either side of him, one not a little pleased, the other a little impatient.

"Beautiful!" Mr. Carleton said at length.

"Yes," said Fleda gravely, "I think it's a pretty place. I like it up here."

"We sha'n't catch many woodcock among these pines," said young Rossitur.

"I wonder," said Mr. Carleton presently, "how any one should have called these 'melancholy days.'"

"Who has?" said Rossitur.

"A countryman of yours," said his friend glancing at him. "If he had been a countryman of mine there would have been less marvel. But here is none of the sadness of decay--none of the withering--if the tokens of old age are seen at all it is in the majestic honours that crown a glorious life--the graces of a matured and ripened character. This has nothing in common, Rossitur, with those dull moralists who are always dinning decay and death into one's ears;--this speaks of Life. Instead of freezing all one's hopes and energies, it quickens the pulse with the desire to *do*.--'The saddest of the year'--Bryant was wrong."

"Bryant?--oh!"--said young Rossitur; "I didn't know who you were speaking of."

"I believe, now I think of it, he was writing of a somewhat later time of the year,--I don't know, how all this will look in November."

"I think it is very pleasant in November," said little Fleda sedately.

"Don't you know Bryant's 'Death of the Flowers,' Rossitur?" said his friend smiling. "What have you been doing all your life?"

"Not studying the fine arts at West Point, Mr. Carleton."

"Then sit down here and let me mend that place in your education. Sit down! and I'll give you something better than woodcock. You keep a game-bag for thoughts, don't you?"

Mr. Rossitur wished Mr. Carleton didn't. But he sat down, however, and listened with an unedified face; while his friend, more to please himself it must be confessed than for any other reason, and perhaps with half a notion to try Fleda, repeated the beautiful words. He presently saw they were not lost upon one of his hearers; she listened intently.

"It is very pretty," said Rossitur when he had done. "I believe I have seen it before somewhere."

"There is no 'smoky light' to day," said Fleda.

"No," said Mr. Carleton, smiling to himself. "Nothing but that could improve the beauty of all this, Miss Fleda."

"*I* like it better as it is," said Fleda.

"I am surprised at that," said young Rossitur. "I thought you lived on smoke."

There was nothing in the words, but the tone was not exactly polite. Fleda granted him neither smile nor look.

"I am glad you like it up here," she went on, gravely doing the honours of the place. "I came this way because we shouldn't have so many fences to climb."

"You are the best little guide possible, and I have no doubt would always lead one the right way," said Mr. Carleton.

Again the same gentle, kind, *appreciating* look. Fleda unconsciously drew a step nearer. There was a certain undefined confidence established between them.

"There's a little brook down there in spring," said she pointing to a small grass grown water-course in the meadow, hardly discernible from the height,--"but there's no water in it now. It runs quite full for a while after the snow breaks up; but it dries away by June or July."

"What are those trees so beautifully tinged with red and orange?--down there by the fence in the meadow."

"I am not woodsman enough to inform you," replied Rossitur.

"Those are maples," said Fleda, "sugar maples. The one all orange is a hickory."

"How do you know?" said Mr. Carleton, turning to her. "By your wit as a fairy?"

"I know by the colour," said Fleda modestly,--"and by the shape too."

"Fairy," said Mr. Rossitur, "if you have any of the stuff about you, I wish you would knock this gentleman over the head with your wand and put the spirit of moving into him. He is going to sit dreaming here all day."

"Not at all," said his friend springing up.--"I am ready for you--but I want other game than woodcock just now I confess."

They walked along in silence, and had near reached the extremity of the table-land, which towards the end of the valley descended into ground of a lower level covered with woods; when Mr. Carleton who was a little ahead was startled by Fleda's voice exclaiming in a tone of distress, "Oh not the robins!"--and turning about perceived Mr. Rossitur standing still with levelled gun and just in the act to shoot. Fleda had stopped her ears. In the same instant Mr. Carleton had thrown up the gun, demanding of Rossitur with a singular change of expression--"what he meant!"

"Mean?" said the young gentleman, meeting with an astonished face the indignant fire of his companion's eyes,--"why I mean not to meddle with other people's guns, Mr. Carleton. What do *you* mean?"

"Nothing but to protect myself."

"Protect yourself!" said Rossitur, heating as the other cooled,--from what, in the name of wonder?"

"Only from having my word blown away by your fire," said Carleton, smiling. "Come, Rossitur, recollect yourself--remember our compact."

"Compact! one isn't bound to keep compacts with unearthly personages," said Rossitur, half sulkily and half angrily; "and besides I made none."

Mr. Carleton turned from him very coolly and walked on.

They left the table-land and the wood, entered the valley again, and passed through a large orchard, the last of the succession of fields which stretched along it. Beyond this orchard the ground rose suddenly, and on the steep hill-side there had been a large plantation of Indian corn. The corn was harvested, but the ground was still covered with numberless little stacks of the corn-stalks. Half way up the hill stood three ancient chestnut trees; veritable patriarchs of the nut tribe they were, and respected and esteemed as patriarchs should be.

"There are no 'dropping nuts' to-day, either," said Fleda, to whom the sight of her forest friends in the distance probably suggested the thought, for she had not spoken for some time. "I suppose there hasn't been frost enough yet."

"Why you have a good memory, Fairy," said Mr. Carleton. "Do you give the nuts leave to fall of themselves?"

"Oh sometimes grandpa and I go a nutting," said the little girl getting lightly over the fence,--"but we haven't been this year."

"Then it is a pleasure to come yet?"

"No," said Fleda quietly, "the trees near the house have been stripped; and the only other nice place there is for us to go to, Mr. Didenhover let the Shakers have the nuts. I sha'n't get any this year."

"Live in the woods and not get any nuts! that won't do, Fairy. Here are some fine chestnuts we are coming to--what would hinder our reaping a good harvest from them?"

"I don't think there will be any on them," said Fleda; "Mr. Didenhover has been here lately with the men getting in the coin,--I guess they have cleared the trees."

"Who is Mr. Didenhover?"

"He is grandpa's man."

"Why didn't you bid Mr. Didenhover let the nuts alone?"

"O he wouldn't mind if he was told," said Fleda. "He does everything just as he has a mind to, and nobody can hinder him. Yes--they've cleared the trees--I thought so."

"Don't you know of any other trees that are out of this Mr. Didenhover's way?"

"Yes," said Fleda,--"I know a place where there used to be beautiful hickory trees, and some chestnuts too, I think; but it is too far off for grandpa, and I couldn't go there alone. This is the twenty-acre lot," said she, looking though she did not say it, "Here I leave you."

"I am glad to hear it," said her cousin. "Now give us our directions, Fleda, and thank you for your services."

"Stop a minute," said Mr. Carleton. "What if you and I should try to find those same hickory trees, Miss Fleda? Will you take me with you?--or is it too long a walk?"

"For me?--oh no!" said Fleda with a face of awakening hope; "but," she added timidly, "you were going a shooting, sir?"

"What on earth are you thinking of, Carleton?" said young Rossitur. "Let the nuts and Fleda alone, do!"

"By your leave, Mr. Rossitur," said Carleton. "My murderous intents have all left me, Miss Fleda,--I suppose your wand has been playing about me--and I should like nothing better than to go with you over the hills this morning. I have been a nutting many a time in my own woods at home, and I want to try it for once in the New World. Will you take me?"

"O thank you, sir!" said Fleda,--"but we have passed the turning a long way--we must go back ever so far the same way we came to get to the place where we turn off to go up the mountain."

"I don't wish for a prettier way,--if it isn't so far as to tire you, Fairy?"

"Oh it won't tire me!" said Fleda overjoyed.

"Carleton!" exclaimed young Kossitur. "Can you be so absurd! Lose this splendid day for the woodcock when we may not have another while we are here!"

"You are not a true sportsman, Mr. Rossitur," said the other coolly, "or you would know what it is to have some sympathy with the sports of others. But *you* will have the day for the woodcock, and bring us home a great many I hope. Miss Fleda, suppose we give this impatient young gentleman his orders and despatch him."

"I thought you were more of a sportsman," said the vexed West Pointer,--"or your sympathy would be with me."

"I tell you the sporting mania was never stronger on me," said the other carelessly. "Something less than a rifle however will do to bring down the game I am after. We will rendezvous at the little village over yonder, unless I go home before you, which I think is more probable. Au revoir!"

With careless gracefulness he saluted his disconcerted companion, who moved off with ungraceful displeasure. Fleda and Mr. Carleton then began to follow back the road they had come, in the highest good humour both. Her sparkling face told him with even greater emphasis than her words,

"I am so much obliged to you, sir."

"How you go over fences!" said he,--"like a sprite, as you are."

"O I have climbed a great many," said Fleda, accepting however, again with that infallible instinct, the help which she did not need--"I shall be so glad to get some nuts, for I thought I wasn't going to have any this year; and it is so pleasant to have them to crack in the long winter evenings."

"You must find them long evenings indeed, I should think."

"O no we don't," said Fleda. "I didn't mean they were long in *that* way. Grandpa cracks the nuts, and I pick them out, and he tells me stories; and then you know he likes to go to bed early. The evenings never seem long."

"But you are not always cracking nuts."

"O no, to be sure not; but there are plenty of other pleasant things to do. I dare say grandpa would have bought some nuts, but I had a great deal rather have those we get ourselves, and then the fun of getting them, besides, is the best part."

Fleda was tramping over the ground at a furious rate.

"How many do you count upon securing to-day?" said Mr. Carleton gravely.

"I don't know," said Fleda with a business face,--"there are a good many trees, and fine large ones, and I don't believe anybody has found them out--they are so far out of the way; there ought to be a good parcel of nuts."

"But," said Mr. Carleton with perfect gravity, "if we should be lucky enough to find a supply for your winter's store, it would be too much for you and me to bring home, Miss Fleda, unless you have a broomstick in the service of fairydom."

"A broomstick!" said Fleda.

"Yes,--did you never hear of the man who had a broomstick that would fetch pails of water at his bidding?"

"No," said Fleda laughing. "What a convenient broomstick! I wish we had one. But I know what I can do, Mr. Carleton,--if there should be too many nuts for us to bring home I can take Cynthy afterwards and get the rest of them. Cynthy and I could go--grandpa couldn't even if he was as well as usual, for the trees are in a hollow away over on the other side of the mountain. It's a beautiful place."

"Well," said Mr. Carleton smiling curiously to himself, "in that case I shall be even of more use than I had hoped. But sha'n't we want a basket, Miss Fleda?"

"Yes indeed," said Fleda,--"a good large one--I am going to run down to the house for it as soon as we get to the turning-off place, if you'll be so good as to sit down and wait for me, sir,--I won't be long after it."

"No," said he; "I will walk with you and leave my gun in safe quarters. You had better not travel so fast, or I am afraid you will never reach the hickory trees."

Fleda smiled and said there was no danger, but she slackened her pace, and they proceeded at a more reasonable rate till they reached the house.

Mr. Carleton would not go in, placing his gun in an outer shelter. Fleda dashed into the kitchen, and after a few minutes' delay came out again with a huge basket, which Mr. Carleton took from her without suffering his inward amusement to reach his face, and a little tin pail which she kept under her own guardianship. In vain Mr. Carleton offered to take it with the basket or even to put it in the basket, where he shewed her it would go very well; it must go nowhere but in Fleda's own hand.

Fleda was in restless haste till they had passed over the already twice trodden ground and entered upon the mountain road. It was hardly a road; in some places a beaten track was visible, in others Mr. Carleton wondered how his little companion found her way, where nothing but fresh-fallen leaves and scattered rocks and stones could be seen, covering the whole surface. But her foot never faltered, her eye read way-marks where his saw none, she went on, he did not doubt unerringly, over the leaf-strewn and rock-strewn way, over ridge and hollow, with a steady light swiftness that he could not help admiring. Once they came to a little brawling stream of spring water, hardly three inches deep anywhere but making quite a wide bed for itself in its bright way to the lowlands. Mr. Carleton was considering how he should contrive to get his little guide over it in safety, when quick,--over the little round stones which lifted their heads above the surface of the water, on the tips of her toes, Fleda tripped across before he had done thinking about it. He told her he had no doubt now that she was a fairy and had powers of walking that did not belong to other people. Fleda laughed, and on her little demure figure went picking out the way always with that little tin pail hanging at her side, like--Mr. Carleton busied himself in finding out similes for her. It wasn't very easy.

For a long distance their way was through a thick woodland, clear of underbrush and very pleasant walking, but permitting no look at the distant country. They wound about, now uphill and now down, till at last they began to ascend in good earnest; the road became better marked, and Mr. Carleton came up with his guide again. Both were obliged to walk more slowly. He had overcome a good deal of Fleda's reserve and she talked to him now quite freely, without however losing the grace of a most exquisite modesty in everything she said or did.

"What do you suppose I have been amusing myself with all this while, Miss Fleda?" said he, after walking for some time alongside of her in silence. "I have been trying to fancy what you looked like as you travelled on before me with that mysterious tin pail."

"Well what *did* I look like?" said Fleda laughing.

"Little Red Riding-Hood, the first thing, carrying her grandmother the pot of butter."

"Ah but I haven't got any butter in this as it happens," said Fleda, "and I hope you are not anything like the wolf, Mr. Carleton?"

"I hope not," said he laughing. "Well, then I thought you might be one of those young ladies the fairy-stories tell of, who set out over the world to seek their fortune. That might hold, you know, a little provision to last for a day or two till you found it."

"No," said Fleda,--"I should never go to seek my fortune."

"Why not, pray."

"I don't think I should find it any the sooner."

Mr. Carleton looked at her and could not make up his mind! whether or not she spoke wittingly.

"Well, but after all are we not seeking our fortune?" said he. "We are doing something very like it. Now up here on the mountain top perhaps we shall find only empty trees--perhaps trees with a harvest of nuts on them."

"Yes, but that wouldn't be like finding a fortune," said Fleda;--"if we were to come to a great heap of nuts all picked out ready for us to carry away, *that* would be a fortune; but now if we find the trees full we have got to knock them down and gather them up and shuck them."

"Make our own fortunes, eh?" said Mr. Carleton smiling. "Well people do say those are the sweetest nuts, I don't know how it may be. Ha! that is fine. What an atmosphere!"

They had reached a height of the mountain that cleared them a view, and over the tops of the trees they looked abroad to a very wide extent of country undulating with hill and vale,--hill and valley alike far below at their feet. Fair and rich,--the gently swelling hills, one beyond another, in the patchwork dress of their many-coloured fields,--the gay hues of the woodland softened and melted into a rich autumn glow,--and far away, beyond even where this glow was sobered and lost in the distance, the faint blue line of the Catskill; faint, but clear and distinct through the transparent air. Such a sky!--of such etherealized purity as if made for spirits to travel in and tempting them to rise and free themselves from the soil; and the stillness,--like nature's hand laid upon the soul, bidding it think. In view of all that vastness and grandeur, man's littleness does bespeak itself. And yet, for every one, the voice of the scene is not more humbling to pride than rousing to all that is really noble and strong in character. Not only "What thou art,"--but "What thou mayest be!" What place thou oughtest to fill,--what work thou hast to do,--in this magnificent world. A very extended landscape however genial is also sober in its effect on the mind. One seems to emerge from the narrowness of individual existence, and take a larger view of Life as well as of Creation.

Perhaps Mr. Carleton felt it so, for after his first expression of pleasure he stood silently and gravely looking for a long time. Little Fleda's eye loved it too, but she looked her fill and then sat down on a stone to await her companion's pleasure, glancing now and then up at his face which gave her no encouragement to interrupt him. It was gravely and even gloomily thoughtful. He stood so long without stirring that poor Fleda began to have sad thoughts of the possibility of gathering all the nuts from the hickory trees, and she heaved a very gentle sigh once or twice; but the dark blue eye which she with reason admired remained fixed on the broad scene below, as if it were reading or trying to read there a difficult lesson. And when at last he turned and began to go up the path again he kept the same face, and went moodily swinging his arm up and down, as if in disturbed thought. Fleda was too happy to be moving to care for her companion's silence; she would have compounded for no more conversation so they might but reach the nut trees. But before they had got quite so far Mr. Carleton broke the silence, speaking in precisely the same tone and manner he had used the last time.

"Look here, Fairy," said he, pointing to a small heap of chestnut burs piled at the foot of a tree,--"here's a little fortune for you already."

"That's a squirrel!" said Fleda, looking at the place very attentively.

"There has been nobody else here. He has put them together, ready to be carried off to his nest."

"We'll save him that trouble," said Mr. Carleton. "Little rascal! he's a Didenhover in miniature."

"Oh no!" said Fleda; "he had as good a right to the nuts I am sure as we have, poor fellow.--Mr. Carleton--"

Mr. Carleton was throwing the nuts into the basket. At the anxious and undecided tone in which his name was pronounced he stopped and looked up, at a very wistful face.

"Mightn't we leave these nuts till we come back? If we find the trees over here full we sha'n't want them; and if we don't, these would be only a handful--"

"And the squirrel would be disappointed?" said Mr. Carleton smiling. "You would rather we should leave them to him?"

Fleda said yes, with a relieved face, and Mr. Carleton still smiling emptied his basket of the few nuts he had put in, and they walked on.

In a hollow, rather a deep hollow, behind the crest of the hill, as Fleda had said, they came at last to a noble group of large hickory trees, with one or two chestnuts standing in attendance on the outskirts. And also as Fleda had said, or hoped, the place was so far from convenient access that nobody had visited them; they were thick hung with fruit. If the spirit of the game had been wanting or failing in Mr. Carleton, it must have roused again into full life at the joyous heartiness of Fleda's exclamations. At any rate no boy could have taken to the business better. He cut, with her permission, a stout long pole in the woods; and swinging himself lightly into one of the trees shewed that he was a master in the art of whipping them. Fleda was delighted but not surprised; for from the first moment of Mr. Carleton's proposing to go with her she bad been privately sure that he would not prove an inactive or inefficient ally. By whatever slight tokens she might read this, in whatsoever fine characters of the eye, or speech, or manner, she knew it; and knew it just as well before they reached the hickory trees as she did afterwards.

When one of the trees was well stripped the young gentleman mounted into another, while Fleda set herself to hull and gather up the nuts under the one first beaten. She could make but little headway however compared with her companion; the nuts fell a great deal faster than she could put them in her basket. The trees were heavy laden and Mr. Carleton seemed determined to have the whole crop; from the second tree he went to the third. Fleda was bewildered with her happiness; this

was doing business in style. She tried to calculate what the whole quantity would be, but it went beyond her; one basketful would not take it, nor two, not three,--it wouldn't *begin to*, Fleda said to herself. She went on hulling and gathering with all possible industry.

After the third tree was finished Mr. Carleton threw down his pole, and resting himself upon the ground at the foot told Fleda he would wait a few moments before he began again. Fleda thereupon left off her work too, and going for her little tin pail presently offered it to him temptingly stocked with pieces of apple-pie. When he had smilingly taken one, she next brought him a sheet of white paper with slices of young cheese.

"No, thank you," said he.

"Cheese is very good with apple-pie," said Fleda competently.

"Is it?" said he laughing. "Well--upon that--I think you would teach me a good many things, Miss Fleda, if I were to stay here long enough."

"I wish you would stay and try, sir," said Fleda, who did not know exactly what to make of the shade of seriousness which crossed his face. It was gone almost instantly.

"I think anything is better eaten out in the woods than it is at home," said Fleda.

"Well I don't know," said her friend. "I have no doubt that is the case with cheese and apple-pie, and especially under hickory trees which one has been contending with pretty sharply. If a touch of your wand, Fairy, could transform one of these shells into a goblet of Lafitte or Amontillado we should have nothing to wish for."

'Amontillado' was Hebrew to Fleda, but 'goblet' was intelligible.

"I am sorry!" she said,--"I don't know where there is any spring up here,--but we shall come to one going down the mountain."

"Do you know where all the springs are?"

"No, not all, I suppose," said Fleda, "but I know a good many. I have gone about through the woods so much, and I always look for the springs."

"And who roams about through the woods with you?"

"Oh nobody but grandpa," said Fleda. "He used to be out with me a great deal, but he can't go much now,--this year or two."

"Don't you go to school?"

"O no!" said Fleda smiling.

"Then your grandfather teaches you at home?"

"No,"--said Fleda,--"father used to teach me,--grandpa doesn't teach me much."

"What do you do with yourself all day long?"

"O plenty of things," said Fleda, smiling again. "I read, and talk to grandpa, and go riding, and do a great many things."

"Has your home always been here, Fairy?" said Mr. Carleton after a few minutes' pause.

Fleda said "No sir," and there stopped; and then seeming to think that politeness called upon her to say more, she added,

"I have lived with grandpa ever since father left me here when he was going away among the Indians,--I used to be always with him before."

"And how long ago is that?"

"It is--four years, sir;--more, I believe. He was sick when he came back, and we never went away from Queechy again."

Mr. Carleton looked again silently at the child, who had given him these pieces of information with a singular grave propriety of manner, and even as it were reluctantly.

"And what do you read, Fairy?" he said after a minute;--"stories of fairy-land?"

"No," said Fleda, "I haven't any. We haven't a great many books--there are only a few up in the cupboard, and the Encyclopædia; father had some books, but they are locked up in a chest. But there is a great deal in the Encyclopædia."

"The Encyclopædia!" said Mr. Carleton;--"what do you read in that? what can you find to like there?"

"I like all about the insects, and birds and animals; and about flowers,--and lives of people, and curious things. There are a great many in it."

"And what are the other books in the cupboard, which you read?"

"There's Quentin Durward," said Fleda,--"and Rob Roy, and Guy Mannering in two little bits of volumes; and the Knickerbocker, and the Christian's Magazine, and an odd volume of Redgauntlet, and the Beauties of Scotland."

"And have you read all these, Miss Fleda?" said her companion, commanding his countenance with difficulty.

"I haven't read quite all of the Christian's Magazine, nor all of the Beauties of Scotland."

"All the rest?"

"O yes," said Fleda,--"and two or three times over. And there are three great red volumes besides, Robertson's history of something, I believe. I haven't read that either."

"And which of them all do you like the best?"

"I don't know," said Fleda,--"I don't know but I like to read the Encyclopædia as well as any of them. And then I have the newspapers to read too."

"I think, Miss Fleda," said Mr. Carleton a minute after, "you had better let me take you with my mother over the sea, when we go back again,--to Paris."

"Why, sir?"

"You know," said he half smiling, "your aunt wants you, and has engaged my mother to bring you with her if she can."

"I know it," said Fleda. "But I am not going."

It was spoken not rudely but in a tone of quiet determination.

"Aren't you too tired, sir?" said she gently, when she saw Mr. Carleton preparing to launch into the remaining hickory trees.

"Not I!" said he. "I am not tired till I have done, Fairy. And besides, cheese is workingman's fare, you know, isn't it?"

"No," said Fleda gravely,--"I don't think it is."

"What then?" said Mr. Carleton, stopping as he was about to spring into the tree, and looking at her with a face of comical amusement.

"It isn't what *our* men live on," said Fleda, demurely eying the fallen nuts, with a head full of business.

They set both to work again with renewed energy, and rested not till the treasures of the trees had been all brought to the ground, and as large a portion of them as could be coaxed and shaken into Fleda's basket had been cleared from the hulls and bestowed there. But there remained a vast quantity. These with a good deal of labour Mr. Carleton and Fleda

gathered into a large heap in rather a sheltered place by the side of a rock, and took what measures they might to conceal them. This was entirely at Fleda's instance.

"You and your maid Cynthia will have to make a good many journeys, Miss Fleda, to get all these home, unless you can muster a larger basket."

"O *that's* nothing," said Fleda. "It will be all fun. I don't care how many times we have to come. You are *very* good, Mr. Carleton."

"Do you think so?" said he. "I wish I did. I wish you would make your wand rest on me, Fairy."

"My wand?" said Fleda.

"Yes--you know your grandfather says you are a fairy and carry a wand. What does he say that for, Miss Fleda?"

Fleda said she supposed it was because he loved her so much; but the rosy smile with which she said it would have let her hearer, if he had needed enlightening, far more into the secret than she was herself. And if the simplicity in her face had not been equal to the wit, Mr. Carleton would never have ventured the look of admiration he bestowed on her. He knew it was safe. *Approbation* she saw, and it made her smile the rosier; but the admiration was a step beyond her; Fleda could make nothing of it.

They descended the mountain now with a hasty step, for the day was wearing well on. At the spot where he had stood so long when they went up, Mr. Carleton paused again for a minute. In mountain scenery every hour makes a change. The sun was lower now, the lights and shadows more strongly contrasted, the sky of a yet calmer blue, cool and clear towards the horizon. The scene said still the same that it had said a few hours before, with a touch more of sadness; it seemed to whisper, "All

things have an end--thy time may not be for ever--do what thou wouldest do--'while ye have light believe in the light that ye may be children of the light.'"

Whether Mr. Carleton read it so or not, he stood for a minute motionless and went down the mountain looking so grave that Fleda did not venture to speak to him, till they reached the neighbourhood of the spring.

"What are you searching for, Miss Fleda?" said her friend.

She was making a busy quest here and there by the side of the little stream.

"I was looking to see if I could find a mullein leaf," said Fleda.

"A mullein leaf? what do you want it for?"

"I want it--to make a drinking cup of," said Fleda, her intent bright eyes peering keenly about in every direction.

"A mullein leaf! that is too rough; one of these golden leaves--what are they?--will do better, won't it?"

"That is hickory," said Fleda. "No; the mullein leaf is the best because it holds the water so nicely.--Here it is!--"

And folding up one of the largest leaves into a most artist-like cup, she presented it to Mr. Carleton.

"For me, was all that trouble?" said he. "I don't deserve it."

"You wanted something, sir," said Fleda. "The water is very cold and nice."

He stooped to the bright little stream and filled his rural goblet several times.

"I never knew what it was to have a fairy for my cup-bearer before," said he. "That was better than anything Bordeaux or Xeres ever sent forth."

He seemed to have swallowed his seriousness, or thrown it away with the mullein leaf. It was quite gone.

"This is the best spring in all grandpa's ground," said Fleda. "The water is as good as can be."

"How came you to be such a wood and water spirit? you must live out of doors. Do the trees ever talk to you? I sometimes think they do to me."

"I don't know--I think *I* talk to *them*," said Fleda.

"It's the same thing," said her companion smiling. "Such beautiful woods!"

"Were you never in the country before in the fall, sir?"

"Not here--in my own country often enough--but the woods in England do not put on such a gay face, Miss Fleda, when they are going to be stripped of their summer dress--they look sober upon it--the leaves wither and grow brown and the woods have a dull russet colour. Your trees are true Yankees--they 'never say die!'"

"Why, are the Americans more obstinate than the English?" said Fleda.

"It is difficult to compare unknown quantities," said Mr. Carleton laughing and shaking his head. "I see you have good ears for the key-note of patriotism."

Fleda looked a little hard at him, but he did not explain; and indeed they were hurrying along too much for talking, leaping from stone to stone, and running down the smooth orchard slope. When they reached the last fence, but a little way from the house, Fleda made a resolute pause.

"Mr. Carleton--" said she.

Mr. Carleton put down his basket, and looked in some surprise at the hesitating anxious little face that looked up at him.

"Won't you please not say anything to grandpa about my going away?"

"Why not, Fairy?" said he kindly.

"Because I don't think I ought to go."

"But may it not be possible," said he, "that your grandfather can judge better in the matter than you can do?"

"No," said Fleda, "I don't think he can. He would do anything he thought would be most for my happiness; but it wouldn't be for my happiness," she said with an unsteady lip,--"I don't know what he would do if I went!"

"You think he would have no sunshine if your wand didn't touch him?" said Mr. Carleton smiling.

"No sir," said Fleda gravely,--"I don't think that,--but won't you please, Mr. Carleton, not to speak about it?"

"But are you sure," he said, sitting down on a stone hard by and taking one of her hands, "are you sure that you would not like to go with us? I wish you would change your mind about it. My mother will love you very much, and I will take the especial charge of you till we give you to your aunt in Paris;--if the wind blows a little too rough I will always put myself between it and you," he added smiling.

Fleda smiled faintly, but immediately begged Mr. Carleton "not to say anything to put it into her grandfather's head."

"It must be there already, I think, Miss Fleda; but at any rate you know my mother must perform her promise to your aunt Mrs. Rossitur; and she would not do that without letting your grandfather know how glad she would be to take you."

Fleda stood silent a moment, and then with a touching look of waiting patience in her sweet face suffered Mr. Carleton to help her over the fence; and they went home.

To Fleda's unspeakable surprise it was found to be past four o'clock, and Cynthy had supper ready. Mr. Ringgan with great cordiality invited Mr. Carleton to stay with them, but he could not; his mother would expect him to dinner.

"Where is your mother?"

"At Montepoole, sir; we have been to Niagara, and came this way on our return; partly that my mother might fulfil the promise she made Mrs. Rossitur--to let you know, sir, with how much pleasure she will take charge of your little granddaughter and convey her to her friends in Paris, if you can think it best to let her go."

"Hum!--she is very kind." said Mr. Ringgan, with a look of grave and not unmoved consideration which Fleda did not in the least like;--"How long will you stay at Montepoole, sir?"

It might be several days, Mr. Carleton said.

"Hum--You have given up this day to Fleda, Mr. Carleton,--suppose you take to-morrow for the game, and come here and try our country fare when you have got through shooting?--you and young Mr. Rossitur?--and I'll think over this question and let you know about it."

Fleda was delighted to see that her friend accepted this invitation with apparent pleasure.

"You will be kind enough to give my respects to your mother," Mr. Ringgan went on, "and thanks for her kind offer. I may perhaps--I don't know--avail myself of it. If anything should bring Mrs. Carleton this way we should like to see her. I am glad to see my friends," he said, shaking the young gentleman's hand,--"as long as I have a house to ask 'em to!"

"That will be for many years, I trust," said Mr. Carleton respectfully, struck with something in the old gentleman's manner.

"I don't know, sir!" said Mr. Ringgan, with again the dignified look of trouble;--"it may not be!--I wish you good day, sir."

Chapter IV.

A mind that in a calm angelic mood
Of happy wisdom, meditating good,
Beholds, of all from her high powers required,
Much done, and much designed, and more desired.

Wordsworth.

"I've had such a delicious day, dear grandpa,"--said little Fleda as they sat at supper;--"you can't think how kind Mr. Carleton has been."

"Has he?--Well dear--I'm glad on't,--he seems a very nice young man."

"He's a smart-lookin' feller," said Cynthy, who was pouring out the tea.

"And we have got the greatest quantity of nuts!" Fleda went on,--"enough for all winter. Cynthy and I will have to make ever so many journeys to fetch 'em all; and they are splendid big ones. Don't you say anything to Mr. Didenhover, Cynthy."

"I don't desire to meddle with Mr. Didenhover unless I've got to," said Cynthy with an expression of considerable disgust. "You needn't give no charges to me."

"But you'll go with me, Cynthy?"

"I s'pose I'll have to," said Miss Gall dryly, after a short interval of sipping tea and helping herself to sweetmeats.

This lady had a pervading acidity of face and temper, but it was no more. To take her name as standing for a fair setting forth of her character would be highly injurious to a really respectable composition, which the world's neglect (there was no other imaginable cause) had soured a little.

Almost Fleda's first thought on coming home had been about Mr. Jolly. But she knew very well, without asking, that he had not been there; she would not touch the subject.

"I haven't had such a fine day of nutting in a great while, grandpa," she said again; "and you never saw such a good hand as Mr. Carleton is at whipping the trees."

"How came he to go with you?"

"I don't know,--I suppose it was to please me, in the first place; but I am sure he enjoyed it himself; and he liked the pie and cheese, too, Cynthy."

"Where did your cousin go?"

"O he went off after the woodcock. I hope he didn't find any."

"What do you think of those two young men, Fairy?"

"In what way, grandpa?"

"I mean, which of them do you like the best?"

"Mr. Carleton."

"But t'other one's your cousin," said Mr. Ringgan, bending forward and examining his little granddaughter's face with a curious pleased look, as he often did when expecting an answer from her.

"Yes," said Fleda, "but he isn't so much of a gentleman."

"How do you know that?"

"I don't think he is," said Fleda quietly.

"But why. Fairy?"

"He doesn't know how to keep his word as well, grandpa."

"Ay, ay? let's hear about that," said Mr. Ringgan.

A little reluctantly, for Cynthia was present, Fleda told the story of the robins, and how Mr. Carleton would not let the gun be fired.

"Wa'n't your cousin a little put out by that?"

"They were both put out," said Fleda, "Mr. Carleton was very angry for a minute, and then Mr. Rossitur was angry, but I think he could have been angrier if he had chosen."

Mr. Ringgan laughed, and then seemed in a sort of amused triumph about something.

"Well dear!" he remarked after a while,--"you'll never buy wooden nutmegs, I expect."

Fleda laughed and hoped not, and asked him why he said so. But he didn't tell her.

"Mr. Ringgan," said Cynthy, "hadn't I better run up the hill after supper, and ask Mis' Plumfield to come down and help to-morrow? I suppose you'll want considerable of a set out; and if both them young men comes you'll want some more help to entertain 'em than I can give you, it's likely?"

"Do so--do so," said the old gentleman. "Tell her who I expect, and ask her if she can come and help you, and me too."

"O and I'll go with you, Cynthy," said Fleda. "I'll get aunt Miriam to come, I know."

"I should think you'd be run off your legs already, Flidda," said Miss Cynthia; "what ails you to want to be going again?"

But this remonstrance availed nothing. Supper was hurried through, and leaving the table standing Cynthia and Fleda set off to "run up the hill."

They were hardly a few steps from the gate when they heard the clatter of horses' hoofs behind them, and the two young gentlemen came riding hurriedly past, having joined company and taken their horses at Queechy Run. Rossitur did not seem to see his little cousin and her companion; but the doffed cap and low inclination of the other rider as they flew by called up a smile and blush of pleasure to Fleda's face; and the sound of their horses' hoofs had died away in the distance before the light had faded from her cheeks or she was quite at home to Cynthia's observations. She was possessed with the feeling, what a delightful thing it was to have people do things in such a manner.

"That was your cousin, wa'n't it?" said Cynthy, when the spell was off.

"No," said Fleda, "the other one was my cousin." "Well--I mean one of them fellers that went by. He's a soldier, ain't he?'

"An officer," said Fleda.

"Well, it does give a man an elegant look to be in the militie, don't it? I should admire to have a cousin like that. It's dreadful becoming to have that--what is it they call it?--to let the beard grow over the mouth. I s'pose they can't do that without they be in the army can they?"

"I don't know," said Fleda. "I hope not. I think it is very ugly."

"Do you? Oh!--I admire it. It makes a man look so spry!"

A few hundred yards from Mr. Ringgan's gate the road began to wind up a very long heavy hill. Just at the hill's foot it crossed by a rude bridge the bed of a noisy brook that came roaring down from the higher grounds, turning sundry mill and factory wheels in its way. About half way up the hill one of these was placed, belonging to a mill for sawing boards. The little building stood alone, no other in sight, with a dark background of wood rising behind it on the other side of the brook; the stream itself running smoothly for a small space above the mill, and leaping down madly below, as if it disdained its bed and would clear at a bound every impediment in its way to the sea. When the mill was not going the quantity of water that found its way down the hill was indeed very small, enough only to keep up a pleasant chattering with the stones; but as soon as the stream was allowed to gather all its force and run free its loquacity was such that it would prevent a traveller from suspecting his approach to the mill, until, very near, the monotonous hum of its saw could be heard. This was a place Fleda dearly loved. The wild sound of the waters and the lonely keeping of the scene, with the delicious smell of the new-sawn boards, and the fascination of seeing the great logs of wood walk up to the relentless, tireless up-and-down-going steel; as the generations of men in turn present themselves to the course of those sharp events which are the teeth of Time's saw; until all of a sudden the master spirit, the man-regulator of this machinery, would perform some conjuration on lever and wheel,--and at once, as at the touch of an enchanter, the log would be still and the saw stay its work;--the business of life came to a stand, and the romance of the little brook sprang up again. Fleda never tired of it--never. She would watch the saw play and stop, and go on again; she would have her ears dinned with the hoarse clang of the machinery, and then listen to the laugh of the mill-stream; she would see with untiring patience one board after another cut and cast aside, and log succeed to log; and never turned weary away from that mysterious image of Time's doings. Fleda had besides, without knowing it, the eye of a painter. In the lonely hillside, the odd-shaped little mill, with its accompaniments of wood and water, and the great logs of timber lying about the ground in all directions and varieties of

position, there was a picturesque charm for her, where the country people saw nothing but business and a place fit for it. Their hands grew hard where her mind was refining. Where they made dollars and cents, she was growing rich in stores of thought and associations of beauty. How many purposes the same thing serves!

'Who's got it now, Cynthy?'
"Who's got it now, Cynthy?"

"That had ought to be your grandpa's mill this minute," observed Cynthy.

"I wish it was!" sighed Fleda. "Who's got it now, Cynthy?"

"O it's that chap McGowan, I expect;--he's got pretty much the hull of everything. I told Mr. Ringgan I wouldn't let him have it if it was me, at the time. Your grandpa'd be glad to get it back now, I guess."

Fleda guessed so too; but also guessed that Miss Gall was probably very far from being possessed of the whole rationale of the matter. So she made her no answer.

After reaching the brow of the hill the road continued on a very gentle ascent towards a little settlement half a quarter of a mile off; passing now and then a few scattered cottages or an occasional mill or turner's shop. Several mills and factories, with a store and a very few dwelling-houses were all the settlement; not enough to entitle it to the name of a village. Beyond these and the mill-ponds, of which in the course of the road there were three or four, and with a brief intervening space of cultivated fields, a single farm house stood alone; just upon the borders of a large and very fair sheet of water from which all the others had their supply.--So large and fair that nobody cavilled at its taking the style of a lake and giving its own pretty name of Deepwater both to the settlement and the farm that half embraced it. This farm was Seth Plumfield's.

At the garden gate Fleda quitted Cynthy and rushed forward to meet her aunt, whom she saw coming round the corner of the house with her gown pinned up behind her from attending to some domestic concern among the pigs, the cows, or the poultry.

"O aunt Miriam," said Fleda eagerly, "we are going to have company to tea to-morrow--won't you come and help us?"

Aunt Miriam laid her hands upon Fleda's shoulders and looked at Cynthy.

"I came up to see if you wouldn't come down to-morrow, Mis' Plumfield," said that personage, with her usual dry business tone, always a little on the wrong side of sweet;--"your brother has taken a notion to ask two young fellers from the Pool to supper, and they're grand folks I s'pose, and have got to have a fuss made for 'em. I don't know what Mr. Ringgan was thinkin' of, or whether he thinks I have got anything to do or not; but anyhow they're a comin', I s'pose, and must have something to eat; and I thought the best thing I could do would be to come and get you into the works, if I could. I should feel a little queer to have nobody but me to say nothin' to them at the table."

"Ah do come, aunt Miriam!" said Fleda; "it will be twice as pleasant if you do; and besides, we want to have everything very nice, you know."

Aunt Miriam smiled at Fleda, and inquired of Miss Gall what she had in the house.

"Why I don't know, Mis' Plumfield," said the lady, while Fleda threw her arms round her aunt and thanked her,--"there ain't nothin' particler--pork and beef and the old story. I've got some first-rate pickles. I calculated to make some sort o' cake in the morning."

"Any of those small hams left?"

"Not a bone of 'em--these six weeks, *I* don't see how they've gone, for my part. I'd lay any wager there were two in the smoke-house when I took the last one out. If Mr. Didenhover was a little more like a weasel I should think he'd been in."

"Have you cooked that roaster I sent down?"

"No, Mis' Plumfield, I ha'n't--it's such a plaguy sight of trouble!" said Cynthy with a little apologetic giggle;--"I was keepin' it for some day when I hadn't much to do."

"I'll take the trouble of it. I'll be down bright and early in the morning, and we'll see what's best to do. How's your last churning, Cynthy?"

"Well--I guess it's pretty middlin,' Mis' Plumfield."

"'Tisn't anything very remarkable, aunt Miriam," said Fleda shaking her head.

"Well, well," said Mrs. Plumfield smiling, "run away down home now, and I'll come to-morrow, and I guess we'll fix it. But who is it that grandpa has asked?"

Fleda and Cynthy both opened at once.

"One of them is my cousin, aunt Miriam, that was at West Point, and the other is the nicest English gentleman you ever saw--you will like him very much--he has been with me getting nuts all to-day."

"They're a smart enough couple of chaps," said Cynthia; "they look as if they lived where money was plenty."

"Well I'll come to-morrow," repeated Mrs. Plumfield, "and we'll see about it. Good night, dear!"

She took Fleda's head in both her hands and gave her a most affectionate kiss; and the two petitioners set off homewards again.

Aunt Miriam was not at all like her brother, in feature, though the moral characteristics suited the relationship sufficiently well. There was the expression of strong sense and great benevolence; the unbending uprightness, of mind and body at once; and the dignity of an essentially noble character, not the same as Mr. Ringgan's, but such as well became his sister. She had been brought up among the Quakers, and though now and for many years a staunch Presbyterian, she still retained a tincture of the calm efficient gentleness of mind and manner that belongs so inexplicably to them. More womanly sweetness than was in Mr. Ringgan's blue eye a woman need not wish to have; and perhaps his sister's had not so much. There was no want of it in her heart, nor in her manner, but the many and singular excellencies of her character were a little overshadowed by super-excellent housekeeping. Not a taint of the littleness that sometimes grows therefrom,--not a trace of the narrowness of mind that over-attention to such pursuits is too apt to bring;--on every important occasion aunt Miriam would come out free and unshackled from all the cobweb entanglements of housewifery; she would have tossed housewifery to the winds if need were (but it never was, for in a new sense she always contrived to make both ends meet). It was only in the unbroken everyday course of affairs that aunt Miriam's face shewed any tokens of that incessant train of *small cares* which had never left their impertinent footprints upon the broad high brow of her brother. Mr. Ringgan had no affinity with small cares; deep serious matters received his deep and serious consideration; but he had as dignified a disdain of trifling annoyances or concernments as any great mastiff or Newfoundlander ever had for the yelping of a little cur.

Chapter V.

Ynne London citye was I borne,
Of parents of grete note;
My fadre dydd a nobile arms
Emblazon onne hys cote.

Chatterton.

In the snuggest and best private room of the House at Montepoole a party of ladies and gentlemen were gathered, awaiting the return of the sportsmen. The room had been made as comfortable as any place could be in a house built for "the season," after the season was past. A splendid fire of hickory logs was burning brilliantly and making amends for many deficiencies; the closed wooden shutters gave the reality if not the look of warmth, for though the days might be fine and mild the mornings and evenings were always very cool up there among the mountains; and a table stood at the last point of readiness for having dinner served. They only waited for the lingering woodcock-hunters.

It was rather an elderly party, with the exception of one young man whose age might match that of the absent two. He was walking up and down the room with somewhat the air of having nothing to do with himself. Another gentleman, much older, stood warming his back at the fire, feeling about his jaws and chin with one hand and looking at the dinner-table in a sort of expectant reverie. The rest, three ladies, sat quietly chatting. All these persons were extremely different from one another in individual characteristics, and all had the unmistakable mark of the habit of good society; as difficult to locate and as easy to recognize as the sense of *freshness* which some ladies have the secret of diffusing around themselves;--no definable sweetness, nothing in particular, but making a very agreeable impression.

One of these ladies, the mother of the perambulating young officer (he was a class-mate of Rossitur's), was extremely plain in feature, even more than *ordinary*. This plainness was not however devoid of sense, and it was relieved by an uncommon amount of good-nature and kindness of heart. In her son the sense deepened into acuteness, and the kindness of heart retreated, it is to be hoped, into some hidden recess of his nature; for it very rarely shewed itself in open expression. That is, to an eye keen in reading the natural signs of emotion; for it cannot be said that his manner had any want of amenity or politeness.

The second lady, the wife of the gentleman on the hearth-rug, or rather on the spot where the hearth-rug should have been, was a strong contrast to this mother and son; remarkably pretty, delicate and even lovely; with a black eye however that though in general soft could shew a mischievous sparkle upon occasion; still young, and one of those women who always were and always will be pretty and delicate at any age.

The third had been very handsome, and was still a very elegant woman, but her face had seen more of the world's wear and tear. It had never known placidity of expression beyond what the habitual command of good-breeding imposed. She looked exactly what she was, a perfect woman of the world. A very good specimen,--for Mrs. Carleton had sense and cultivation and even feeling enough to play the part very gracefully; yet her mind was bound in the shackles of "the world's" tyrannical forging and had never been free; and her heart bowed submissively to the same authority.

"Here they are! Welcome home," exclaimed this lady, as her son and his friend at length made their appearance;--"Welcome home--we are all famishing; and I don't know why in the world we waited for you, for I am sure you don't deserve it. What success? What success, Mr. Rossitur?"

"'Faith ma'am, there's little enough to boast of, as far as I am concerned. Mr. Carleton may speak for himself."

"I am very sorry, ma'am, you waited for me," said that gentleman. "I am a delinquent I acknowledge. The day came to an end before I was at all aware of it."

"It would not do to flatter you so far as to tell you why we waited," said Mrs. Evelyn's soft voice. And then perceiving that the gentleman at whom she was looking gave her no answer she turned to the other. "How many woodcock, Mr. Rossitur?"

"Nothing to shew, ma'am," he replied. "Didn't see a solitary one. I heard some partridges, but I didn't mean to have room in my bag for them."

"Did you find the right ground, Rossitur?"

"I had a confounded long tramp after it if I didn't," said the discomfited sportsman, who did not seem to have yet recovered his good humour.

"Were you not together?" said Mrs. Carleton. "Where were you, Guy?"

"Following the sport another way, ma'am; I had very good success too."

"What's the total?" said Mr. Evelyn. "How much game did you bag?"

"Really, sir, I didn't count. I can only answer for a bag full."

"Ladies and gentlemen!" cried Rossitur, bursting forth,--"What will you say when I tell you that Mr. Carleton deserted me and the sport in a most unceremonious manner, and that he,--the cynical philosopher, the reserved English gentleman, the gay man of the world,--you are all of 'em by turns, aren't you, Carleton?--*he!*--has gone and made a very cavaliero servante of himself to a piece of rusticity, and spent all to-day in helping a little girl pick up chestnuts!" "Mr. Carleton would be a better man if he were to spend a good many more days in the same manner," said that gentleman, dryly enough. But the entrance of dinner put a stop to both laughter and questioning for a time, all of the party being well disposed to their meat.

When the pickerel from the lakes, and the poultry and half-kept joints had had their share of attention, and a pair of fine wild ducks were set on the table, the tongues of the party found something to do besides eating.

"We have had a very satisfactory day among the Shakers, Guy," said Mrs. Carleton; "and we have arranged to drive to Kenton to-morrow--I suppose you will go with us?"

"With pleasure, mother, but that I am engaged to dinner about five or six miles in the opposite direction."

"Engaged to dinner!--what with this old gentleman where you went last night? And you too, Mr. Rossitur?"

"I have made no promise, ma'am, but I take it I must go."

"Vexatious! Is the little girl going with us, Guy?"

"I don't know yet--I half apprehend, yes; there seems to be a doubt in her grandfather's mind, not whether he can let her go, but whether he can keep her, and that looks like it."

"Is it your little cousin who proved the successful rival of the woodcock to-day, Carleton?" said Mrs. Evelyn. "What is she?"

"I don't know, ma'am, upon my word. I presume Carleton will tell you she is something uncommon and quite remarkable."

"Is she, Mr. Carleton?"

"What, ma'am?"

"Uncommon?"

"Very."

"Come! That *is* something, from *you*," said Rossitur's brother officer, Lieut. Thorn.

"What's the uncommonness?" said Mrs. Thorn, addressing herself rather to Mr. Rossitur as she saw Mr. Carleton's averted eye;--"Is she handsome, Mr. Rossitur?"

"I can't tell you, I am sure, ma'am. I saw nothing but a nice child enough in a calico frock, just such as one would see in any farm-house. She rushed into the room when she was first called to see us, from somewhere in distant regions, with an immense iron ladle a foot and a half long in her hand with which she had been performing unknown feats of housewifery; and they had left her head still encircled with a halo of kitchen-smoke. If as they say 'coming events cast their shadows before,' she was the shadow of supper."

"Oh Carleton, Carleton!" said Mrs. Evelyn, but in a tone of very gentle and laughing reproof,--"for shame! What a picture! and of your cousin!"

"Is she a pretty child, Guy?" said Mrs. Carleton, who did not relish her son's grave face.

"No ma'am--something more than that."

"How old?"

"About ten or eleven."

"That's an ugly age."

"She will never be at an ugly age."

"What style of beauty?"

"The highest--that degree of mould and finish which belongs only to the finest material."

"That is hardly the kind of beauty one would expect to see in such a place," said Mrs. Carleton. "From one side of her family to be sure she has a right to it."

"I have seen very few examples of it anywhere," said her son.

"Who were her parents?" said Mrs. Evelyn.

"Her mother was Mrs. Rossitur's sister,--her father--"

"Amy Carleton!" exclaimed Mrs. Evelyn,--"O I knew her! Was Amy Carleton her mother? O I didn't know whom you were talking of. She was one of my dearest friends. Her daughter may well be handsome--she was one of the most lovely persons I ever knew; in body and mind both. O I loved Amy Carleton very much. I must see this child."

"I don't know who her father was," Mrs. Carleton went on.

"O her father was Major Ringgan," said Mrs. Evelyn. "I never saw him, but I have heard him spoken of in very high terms. I always heard that Amy married very well."

"Major Ringgan!" said Mrs. Thorn;--"his name is very well known; he was very distinguished."

"He was a self-made man entirely," said Mrs. Evelyn, in a tone that conveyed a good deal more than the simple fact.

"Yes, he was a self made man," said Mrs. Thorn, "but I should never think of that where a man distinguishes himself so much; he was very distinguished."

"Yes, and for more than officer-like qualities," said Mrs. Evelyn. "I have heard his personal accomplishments as a gentleman highly praised."

"So that little Miss Ringgan's right to be a beauty may be considered clearly made out," said Mr. Thorn.

"It is one of those singular cases," said Mr. Carleton, "where purity of blood proves itself, and one has no need to go back to past generations to make any inquiry concerning it."

"Hear him!" cried Rossitur;--"and for the life of me I could see nothing of all this wonder. Her face is not at all striking."

"The wonder is not so much in what it *is* as in what it indicates," said Mr. Carleton.

"What does it indicate?" said his mother.

"Suppose you were to ask me to count the shades of colour in a rainbow," answered he.

"Hear him!" cried Thorn again.

"Well, I hope she will go with us and we shall have a chance of seeing her," said Mrs. Carleton.

"If she were only a few years older it is my belief you would see enough of her, ma'am," said young Rossitur.

The haughty coldness of Mr. Carleton's look at this speech could not be surpassed.

"But she has beauty of feature too, has she not?" Mrs. Carleton asked again of her son.

"Yes, in very high degree. The contour of the eye and brow I never saw finer."

"It is a little odd," said Mrs. Evelyn with the slightest touch of a piqued air, (she had some daughters at home)--"that is a kind of beauty one is apt to associate with high breeding, and certainly you very rarely see it anywhere else; and Major Ringgan, however distinguished and estimable, as I have no doubt he was,--And this child must have been brought up with no advantages, here in the country."

"My dear madam," said Mr. Carleton smiling a little, "this high breeding is a very fine thing, but it can neither be given nor bequeathed; and we cannot entail it."

"But it can be taught, can't it?"

"If it could be taught it is to be hoped it would be oftener learned," said the young man dryly.

"But what do we mean, then, when we talk of the high breeding of certain classes--and families? and why are we not disappointed when we look to find it in connection with certain names and positions in society?"

"I do not know," said Mr. Carleton.

"You don't mean to say, I suppose, Mr. Carleton," said Thorn bridling a little, "that it is a thing independent of circumstances, and that there is no value in blood?"

"Very nearly--answering the question as you understand it."

"May I ask how you understand it?"

"As you do, sir."

"Is there no high breeding then in the world?" asked good-natured Mrs. Thorn, who could be touched on this point of family.

"There is very little of it. What is commonly current under the name is merely counterfeit notes which pass from hand to hand of those who are bankrupt in the article."

"And to what serve then," said Mrs. Evelyn colouring, "the long lists of good old names which even you, Mr. Carleton, I know, do not disdain?"

"To endorse the counterfeit notes," said Mr. Carleton smiling.

"Guy you are absurd!" said his mother. "I will not sit at the table and listen to you if you talk such stuff. What do you mean?"

"I beg your pardon, mother, you have misunderstood me," said he seriously. "Mind, I have been talking, not of ordinary conformity to what the world requires, but of that fine perfection of mental and moral constitution which in its own natural necessary acting leaves nothing to be desired, in every occasion or circumstance of life. It is the pure gold, and it knows no tarnish; it is the true coin, and it gives what it proffers to give; it is the living plant ever-blossoming, and not the cut and art-arranged flowers. It is a thing of the mind altogether; and where nature has not curiously prepared the soil it is in vain to try to make it grow. *This* is not very often met with?"

"No indeed," said Mrs. Carleton;--"but you are so fastidiously nice in all your notions!--at this rate nothing will ever satisfy you."

"I don't think it is so very uncommon," said Mrs. Thorn. "It seems to me one sees as much of it as can be expected, Mr. Carleton."

Mr. Carleton pared his apple with an engrossed air.

"O no, Mrs. Thorn," said Mrs. Evelyn, "I don't agree with you--I don't think you often see such a combination as Mr. Carleton has been speaking of--very rarely!--but, Mr. Carleton, don't you think it is generally found in that class of society where the habits of life are constantly the most polished and refined?"

"Possibly," answered he, diving into the core of his apple.

"No, but tell me;--I want to know what you think."

"Cultivation and refinement have taught people to recognize and analyze and imitate it; the counterfeits are most current in that society,--but as to the reality I don't know--it is nature's work and she is a little freaky about it."

"But Guy!" said his mother impatiently;--"this is not selling but giving away one's birthright. Where is the advantage of birth if breeding is not supposed to go along with it. Where the parents have had intelligence and refinement do we not constantly see them inherited by the children? and in an increasing degree from generation to generation?"

"Very extraordinary!" said Mrs. Thorn.

"I do not undervalue the blessings of inheritance, mother, believe me, nor deny the general doctrine; though intelligence does not always descend, and manners die out, and that invaluable legacy, *a name*, may be thrown away. But this delicate thing we are speaking of is not intelligence nor refinement, but comes rather from a happy combination of qualities, together with a peculiarly fine nervous constitution;--the *essence* of it may consist with an omission, even with an awkwardness, and with a sad ignorance of conventionalities."

"But even if that be so, do you think it can ever reach its full development but in the circumstances that are favourable to it?" said Mrs. Evelyn.

"Probably not often; the diamond in some instances wants the graver;--but it is the diamond. Nature seems now and then to have taken a princess's child and dropped it in some odd corner of the kingdom, while she has left the clown in the palace."

"From all which I understand," said Mr. Thorn, "that this little chestnut girl is a princess in disguise."

"Really, Carleton!"--Rossitur began.

Mrs. Evelyn leaned back in her chair and quietly eating a piece of apple eyed Mr. Carleton with a look half amused and half discontented, and behind all that, keenly attentive.

"Take for example those two miniatures you were looking at last night, Mrs. Evelyn," the young man went on;--"Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette--what would you have more unrefined, more heavy, more *animal*, than the face of that descendant of a line of kings?"

Mrs. Evelyn bowed her head acquiescingly and seemed to enjoy her apple.

"*He* had a pretty bad lot of an inheritance sure enough, take it all together," said Rossitur.

"Well," said Thorn,--"is this little stray princess as well-looking as t'other miniature?"

"Better, in some respects," said Mr. Carleton coolly.

"Better!" cried Mrs. Carleton.

"Not in the brilliancy of her beauty, but in some of its characteristics;--better in its promise."

"Make yourself intelligible, for the sake of my nerves, Guy," said his mother. "Better looking than Marie Antoinette!"

"My unhappy cousin is said to be a fairy, ma'am," said Mr. Rossitur; "and I presume all this may be referred to enchantment."

"That face of Marie Antoinette's," said Mr. Carleton smiling, "is an undisciplined one--uneducated."

"Uneducated!" exclaimed Mrs. Carleton.

"Don't mistake me, mother,--I do not mean that it shows any want of reading or writing, but it does indicate an untrained character--a mind unprepared for the exigencies of life."

"She met those exigencies indifferent well too," observed Mr. Thorn.

"Ay--but pride, and the dignity of rank, and undoubtedly some of the finer qualities of a woman's nature, might suffice for that, and yet leave her utterly unfitted to play wisely and gracefully a part in ordinary life."

"Well, she had no such part to play," said Mrs. Carleton.

"Certainly, mother--but I am comparing faces."

"Well--the other face?"

"It has the same style of refined beauty of feature, but--to compare them in a word, Marie Antoinette looks to me like a superb exotic that has come to its brilliant perfection of bloom in a hot-house--it would lose its beauty in the strong free air--it would change and droop if it lacked careful waiting upon and constant artificial excitement;--the other," said Mr. Carleton musingly,--is a flower of the woods, raising its head above frost and snow and the rugged soil where fortune has placed it, with an air of quiet patient endurance;--a storm wind may bring it to the ground, easily--but if its gentle nature be not broken, it will look up again, unchanged, and bide its time in unrequited beauty and sweetness to the end."

"The exotic for me!" cried Rossitur,--"if I only had a place for her. I don't like pale elegancies."

"I'd make a piece of poetry of that if I was you, Carleton," said Mr. Thorn.

"Mr. Carleton has done that already," said Mrs. Evelyn smoothly.

"I never heard you talk so before, Guy," said his mother looking at him. His eyes had grown dark with intensity of expression while he was speaking, gazing at visionary flowers or beauties through the dinner-table mahogany. He looked up and laughed as she addressed him, and rising turned off lightly with his usual sir.

"I congratulate you, Mrs. Carleton," Mrs. Evelyn whispered as they went from the table, "that this little beauty is not a few years older."

"Why?" said Mrs. Carleton. "If she is all that Guy says, I would give anything in the world to see him married."

"Time enough," said Mrs. Evelyn with a knowing smile.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Carleton,--"I think he would be happier. He is a restless spirit--nothing satisfies him--nothing fixes him. He cannot rest at home--he abhors politics--he flits way from country to country and doesn't remain long anywhere."

"And you with him."

"And I with him. I should like to see if a wife could not persuade him to stay at home."

"I guess you have petted him too much," said Mrs. Evelyn slyly.

"I cannot have petted him too much, for he has never disappointed me."

"No--of course not; but it seems you find it difficult to lead him."

"No one ever succeeded in doing that," said Mrs. Carleton, with a smile that was anything but an ungratified one. "He never wanted driving, and to lead him is impossible. You may try it, and while you think you are going to gain your end, if he thinks it worth while, you will suddenly find that he is leading you. It is so with everybody--in some inexplicable way."

Mrs. Evelyn thought the mystery was very easily explicable as far as the mother was concerned; and changed the conversation.

Chapter VI.

To them life was a simple art
  Of duties to be done,
A game where each man took his part,
  A race where all must run;
A battle whose great scheme and scope
  They little cared to know,
Content, as men-at-arms, to cope
  Each with his fronting foe.

Milnes.

On so great and uncommon an occasion as Mr. Ringgan's giving a dinner-party the disused front parlour was opened and set in order; the women-folks, as he called them, wanting the whole back part of the house for their operations. So when the visitors arrived, in good time, they were ushered into a large square bare-looking room--a strong contrast even to their dining-room at the Poolwhich gave them nothing of the welcome of the pleasant farmhouse kitchen, and where nothing of the comfort of the kitchen found its way but a very strong smell of roast pig. There was the cheerless air of a place where nobody lives, or thinks of living. The very chairs looked as if they had made up their minds to be forsaken for a term of months; it was impossible to imagine that a cheerful supper had ever been laid upon the stiff cold-looking table that stood with its leaves down so primly against the wall. All that a blazing fire could do to make amends for deficiencies, it did; but the wintry wind that swept round the house shook the paper window-shades in a remorseless way; and the utmost efforts of said fire could not prevent it from coming in and giving disagreeable impertinent whispers at the ears of everybody.

Mr. Ringgan's welcome, however, was and would have been the same thing anywhere--genial, frank, and dignified; neither he nor it could be changed by circumstances. Mr. Carleton admired anew, as he came forward, the fine presence and noble look of his old host; a look that it was plain had never needed to seek the ground; a brow that in large or small things had never been crossed by a shadow of shame. And to a discerning eye the face was not a surer index of a lofty than of a peaceful and pure mind; too peace-loving and pure perhaps for the best good of his affairs in the conflict with a selfish and unscrupulous world. At least now, in the time of his old age and infirmity; in former days his straightforward wisdom backed by an indomitable courage and strength had made Mr. Ringgan no safe subject for either braving or overreaching.

Fleda's keen-sighted affection was heartily gratified by the manner in which her grandfather was greeted by at least one of his guests, and that the one about whose opinion she cared the most. Mr. Carleton seemed as little sensible of the cold room as Mr. Ringgan himself. Fleda felt sure that her grandfather was appreciated; and she would have sat delightedly listening to what the one and the other were presently saying, if she had not taken notice that her cousin looked *astray*. He was eying the fire with a profound air and she fancied he thought it poor amusement. Little as Fleda in secret really cared about that, with an instant sacrifice of her own pleasure she quietly changed her position for one from which she could more readily bring to bear upon Mr. Rossitur's distraction the very light artillery of her conversation; and attacked him on the subject of the game he had brought home. Her motive and her manner both must have been lost upon the young gentleman. He forthwith set about amusing himself in a way his little entertainer had not counted upon, namely, with giving a chase to her wits; partly to pass away the time, and partly to gratify his curiosity, as he said, "to see what Fleda was made of." By a curious system of involved, startling, or absurd questions, he endeavoured to puzzle or confound or entrap her. Fleda however steadily presented a grave front to the enemy, and would every

now and then surprise him with an unexpected turn or clever doubling, and sometimes, when he thought he had her in a corner, jump over the fence and laugh at him from the other side. Mr. Rossitur's respect for his little adversary gradually increased, and finding that she had rather the best of the game he at last gave it up, just as Mr. Ringgan was asking Mr. Carleton if he was a judge of stock? Mr. Carleton saying with a smile "No, but he hoped Mr. Ringgan would give him his first lesson,"--the old gentleman immediately arose with that alacrity of manner he always wore when he had a visitor that pleased him, and taking his hat and cane led the way out; choosing, with a man's true carelessness of housewifery etiquette, the kitchen route, of all others. Not even admonished by the sight of the bright Dutch oven before the fire that he was introducing his visitors somewhat too early to the pig, he led the whole party through, Cynthia scuttling away in haste across the kitchen with something that must not be seen, while aunt Miriam looked out at the company through the crack of the pantry door, at which Fleda ventured a sly glance of intelligence.

It was a fine though a windy and cold afternoon; the lights and shadows were driving across the broad upland and meadows.

"This is a fine arable country," remarked Mr. Carleton.

"Capital, sir,--capital, for many miles round, if we were not so far from a market. I was one of the first that broke ground in this township,--one of the very first settlers--I've seen the rough and the smooth of it, and I never had but one mind about it from the first. All this--as far as you can see--I cleared myself; most of it with my own hand."

"That recollection must attach you strongly to the place, I should think, sir."

"Hum--perhaps I cared too much for it," he replied, "for it is taken away from me. Well--it don't matter now."

"Is it not yours?"

"No sir!--it *was* mine, a great many years; but I was obliged to part with it, two years ago, to a scoundrel of a fellow--McGowan up here--he got an advantage over me. I can't take care of myself any more as I used to do, and I don't find that other people deal by me just as I could wish--"

He was silent for a moment and then went on,--

"Yes sir! when I first set myself down here, or a little further that way my first house was,--a pretty rough house, too,--there wa'n't two settlers beside within something like ten miles round.--I've seen the whole of it cleared, from the cutting of the first forest trees till this day."

"You have seen the nation itself spring up within that time," remarked his guest.

"Not exactly--that question of our nationality was settled a little before I came here. I was born rather too late to see the whole of that play--I saw the best of it though--boys were men in those days. My father was in the thick of it from beginning to end."

"In the army, was he?"

"Ho yes, sir! he and every child he had that wasn't a girl--there wasn't a man of the name that wa'n't on the right side. I was in the army myself when I was fifteen. I was nothing but a fifer--but I tell you sir! there wasn't a general officer in the country that played his part with a prouder heart than I did mine!"

"And was that the general spirit of the ranks?"

"Not altogether," replied the old gentleman, passing his hand several times abstractedly over his white hair, a favourite gesture with him,--"not exactly that--there was a good deal of mixture of different materials, especially in this state; and where the feeling wasn't pretty strong it was no wonder if it got tired out; but the real stuff, the true Yankee blood, was pretty firm! Ay, and some of the rest! There was a good deal to try

men in those days. Sir, I have seen many a time when I had nothing to dine upon but my fife, and it was more than that could do to keep me from feeling very empty!"

"But was this a common case? did this happen often?" said Mr. Carleton.

"Pretty often--pretty often, sometimes," answered the old gentleman. "Things were very much out of order, you see, and in some parts of the country it was almost impossible to get the supplies the men needed. Nothing would have kept them together,--nothing under heaven--but the love and confidence they had in one name. Their love of right and independence wouldn't have been strong enough, and besides a good many of them got disheartened. A hungry stomach is a pretty stout arguer against abstract questions. I have seen my father crying like a child for the wants and sufferings he was obliged to see and couldn't relieve."

"And then you used to relieve yourselves, grandpa," said Fleda.

"How was that, Fairy?"

Fleda looked at her grandfather, who gave a little preparatory laugh and passed his hand over his head again.

"Why yes," said he,--"we used to think the tories, King George's men you know, were fair game; and when we happened to be in the neighbourhood of some of them that we knew were giving all the help they could to the enemy, we used to let them cook our dinners for us once in a while."

"How did you manage that, sir?"

"Why, they used to have little bake-ovens to cook their meats and so on, standing some way out from the house,--did you never gee one of them?--raised on four little heaps of stone; the bottom of the oven is one large flat stone, and the arch built over it;--they look like a great bee-hive.

Well--we used to watch till we saw the good woman of the house get her oven cleverly heated, and put in her batch of bread, or her meat pie, or her pumpkin and apple pies!--whichever it was--there didn't any of 'em come much amiss--and when we guessed they were pretty nigh done, three or four of us would creep in and whip off the whole--oven and all!--to a safe place. I tell you," said he with a knowing nod of his head at the laughing Fleda,--"those were first-rate pies!"

"And then did you put the oven back again afterwards, grandpa?"

"I guess not often, dear!" replied the old gentleman.

"What do you think of such lawless proceedings, Miss Fleda?" said Mr. Carleton, laughing at or with her.

"O I like it," said Fleda. "You liked those pies all the better, didn't you, grandpa, because you had got them from the tories?"

"That we did! If we hadn't got them maybe King George's men would, in some shape. But we weren't always so lucky as to get hold of an oven full. I remember one time several of us had been out on a foraging expedition---- there, sir, what do you think of that for a two and a half year old?"

They had come up with the chief favourite of his barn-yard, a fine deep-coloured Devon bull.

"I don't know what one might see in Devonshire," he remarked presently, "but I know *this* country can't shew the like of him!"

A discussion followed of the various beauties and excellencies of the animal; a discussion in which Mr. Carleton certainly took little part, while Mr. Ringgan descanted enthusiastically upon 'hide' and 'brisket' and 'bone,' and Rossitur stood in an abstraction, it might be scornful, it might be mazed. Little Fleda quietly listening and looking at the beautiful creature, which from being such a treasure to her grandfather

was in a sort one to her, more than half understood them all; but Mr. Ringgan was too well satisfied with the attention of one of his guests to miss that of the other.

"That fellow don't look as if *he* had ever known short commons," was Rossitur's single remark as they turned away.

"You did not give us the result of your foraging expedition, sir," said Mr. Carleton in a different manner.

"Do, grandpa," said Fleda softly.

"Ha!--Oh it is not worth telling," said the old gentleman, look ing gratified;--"Fleda has heard my stories till she knows them by heart--she could tell it as well herself. What was it?--about the pig?--We had been out, several of us, one afternoon to try to get up a supper--or a dinner, for we had had none--and we had caught a pig. It happened that I was the only one of the party that had a cloak, and so the pig was given to me to carry home, because I could hide it the best. Well sir!--we were coming home, and had set our mouths for a prime supper, when just as we were within a few rods of our shanty who should come along but our captain! My heart sank as it never has done at the thought of a supper before or since, I believe! I held my cloak together as well as I could, and kept myself back a little, so that if the pig shewed a cloven foot behind me, the captain might not see it. But I almost gave up all for lost when I saw the captain going into the hut with us. There was a kind of a rude bedstead standing there; and I set myself down upon the side of it, and gently worked and eased my pig off under my cloak till I got him to roll down behind the bed. I knew," said Mr. Ringgan laughing, "I knew by the captain's eye as well as I knew anything, that he smelt a rat; but he kept our counsel, as well as his own; and when he was gone we took the pig out into the woods behind the shanty and roasted him finely, and we sent and asked Capt. Sears to supper; and he came and helped us eat the pig with a great deal of appetite, and never asked no questions how we came by him!"

"I wonder your stout-heartedness did not fail, in the course of so long a time," said Mr. Carleton.

"Never sir!" said the old gentleman. "I never doubted for a moment what the end would be. My father never doubted for a moment. We trusted in God and in Washington!"

"Did you see actual service yourself?"

"No sir--I never did. I wish I had. I should like to have had the honour of striking one blow at the rascals. However they were hit pretty well. I ought to be contented. My father saw enough of fighting--he was colonel of a regiment--he was at the affair of Burgoyne. *That* gave us a lift in good time. What rejoicing there was everywhere when that news came! I could have fifed all day upon an empty stomach and felt satisfied. People reckoned everywhere that the matter was settled when that great piece of good fortune was given us. And so it was!--wa'n't it, dear?" said the old gentleman, with one of those fond, pleased, sympathetic looks to Fleda with which he often brought up what he was saying.

"General Gates commanded there?" said Mr. Carleton.

"Yes sir--Gates was a poor stick--I never thought much of him. That fellow Arnold distinguished himself in the actions before Burgoyne's surrender. He fought like a brave man. It seems strange that so mean a scamp should have had so much blood in him?"

"Why, are great fighters generally good men, grandpa?" said Fleda.

"Not exactly, dear!" replied her grandfather;--"but such little-minded rascality is not just the vice one would expect to find in a gallant soldier."

"Those were times that made men," said Mr. Carleton musingly.

"Yes," answered the old gentleman gravely,--"they were times that called for men, and God raised them up. But Washington was the soul of the country, sir!"

"Well, the time made him," said Mr. Carleton.

"I beg your pardon," said the old gentleman with a very decided little turn of his head,--"I think he made the time. I don't know what it would have been, sir, or what it would have come to, but for him. After all, it is rather that the things which try people shew what is in them;--I hope there are men enough in the country yet, though they haven't as good a chance to shew what they are."

"Either way," said his guest smiling; "it is a happiness, Mr. Ringgan, to have lived at a time when there was something worth living for."

"Well--I don't know--" said the old gentleman;--"those times would make the prettiest figure in a story or a romance, I suppose; but I've tried both, and on the whole," said he with another of his looks at Fleda,--"I think I like these times the best!"

Fleda smiled her acquiescence. His guest could not help thinking to himself that however pacific might be Mr. Ringgan's temper, no man in those days that tried men could have brought to the issue more stern inflexibility and gallant fortitude of bearing. His frame bore evidence of great personal strength, and his eye, with all its mildness, had an unflinching dignity that *could* never have quailed before danger or duty. And now, while he was recalling with great animation and pleasure the scenes of his more active life, and his blue eye was shining with the fire of other days, his manner had the self-possession and quiet sedateness of triumph that bespeak a man always more ready to do than to say. Perhaps the contemplation of the noble Roman-like old figure before him did not tend to lessen the feeling, even the sigh of regret, with which the young man said,

"There was something then for a man to do!"

"There is always that," said the old gentleman quietly. "God has given every man his work to do; and 'tain't difficult for him to find out what. No man is put here to be idle."

"But," said his companion, with a look in which not a little haughty reserve was mingled with a desire to speak out his thoughts, "half the world are busy about hum-drum concerns and the other half doing nothing, or worse."

"I don't know about that," said Mr. Ringgan;--"that depends upon the way you take things. 'Tain't always the men that make the most noise that are the most good in the world. Hum-drum affairs needn't be hum-drum in the doing of 'em. It is my maxim," said the old gentleman looking at his companion with a singularly open pleasant smile,--"that a man may be great about a'most anything--chopping wood, if he happens to be in that line. I used to go upon that plan, sir. Whatever I have set my hand to do, I have done it as well as I knew how to; and if you follow that rule out you'll not be idle, nor hum-drum neither. Many's the time that I have mowed what would be a day's work for another man, before breakfast."

Rossitur's smile was not meant to be seen. But Mr. Carleton's, to the credit of his politeness and his understanding both, was frank as the old gentleman's own, as he answered with a good-humoured shake of his head,

"I can readily believe it, sir, and honour both your maxim and your practice. But I am not exactly in that line."

"Why don't you try the army?" said Mr. Ringgan with a look of interest.

"There is not a cause worth fighting for," said the young man, his brow changing again. "It is only to add weight to the oppressor's hand, or throw away life in the vain endeavour to avert it. I will do neither."

"But all the world is open before such a young man as you," said Mr. Ringgan.

"A large world," said Mr. Carleton with his former mixture of expression,--"but there isn't much in it."

"Politics?" said Mr. Ringgan.

"It is to lose oneself in a seething-pot, where the scum is the most apparent thing."

"But there is society?" said Rossitur.

"Nothing better or more noble than the succession of motes that flit through a sunbeam into oblivion."

"Well, why not then sit down quietly on one's estates and enjoy them, one who has enough?"

"And be a worm in the heart of an apple."

"Well then," said Rossitur laughing, though not knowing exactly how far he might venture, "there is nothing left for you, as I don't suppose you would take to any of the learned professions, but to strike out some new path for yourself--hit upon some grand invention for benefiting the human race and distinguishing your own name at once."

But while he spoke his companion's face had gone back to its usual look of imperturbable coolness; the dark eye was even haughtily unmoved, till it met Fleda's inquiring and somewhat anxious glance. He smiled.

"The nearest approach I ever made to that," said he, "was when I went chestnuting the other day. Can't you find some more work for me, Fairy?"

Taking Fleda's hand with his wonted graceful lightness of manner he walked on with her, leaving the other two to follow together.

"You would like to know, perhaps," observed Mr. Rossitur in rather a low tone,--"that Mr. Carleton is an Englishman."

"Ay, ay?" said Mr. Ringgan. "An Englishman, is he?--Well sir,--what is it that I would like to know?"

"*That"* said Rossitur. "I would have told you before if I could. I supposed you might not choose to speak quite so freely, perhaps, on American affairs before him."

"I haven't two ways of speaking, sir, on anything," said the old gentleman a little dryly. "Is your friend very tender on that chapter?"

"O not that I know of at all," said Rossitur; "but you know there is a great deal of feeling still among the English about it--they have never forgiven us heartily for whipping them; and I know Carleton is related to the nobility and all that, you know; so I thought--"

"Ah well!" said the old gentleman,--"we don't know much about nobility and such gimcracks in this country. I'm not much of a courtier. I am pretty much accustomed to speak my mind as I think it.--He's wealthy, I suppose?"

"He's more than that, sir. Enormous estates! He's the finest fellow in the world--one of the first young men in England."

"You have been there yourself and know?" said Mr. Ringgan, glancing at his companion.

"If I have not, sir, others have told me that do."

"Ah well," said Mr. Ringgan placidly,--"we sha'n't quarrel, I guess. What did he come out here for, eh?"

"Only to amuse himself. They are going back again in a few weeks, and I intend accompanying them to join my mother in Paris. Will my little cousin be of the party?"

They were sauntering along towards the house. A loud calling of her name the minute before had summoned Fleda thither at the top of her speed; and Mr. Carleton turned to repeat the same question.

The old gentleman stopped, and striking his stick two or three times against the ground looked sorrowfully undetermined.

"Well, I don't know!--" he said at last,--"it's a pretty hard matter--she'd break her heart about it, I suppose,--"

"I dare urge nothing, sir," said Mr. Carleton. "I will only assure you that if you entrust your treasure to us she shall be cherished as you would wish, till we place her in the hands of her aunt."

"I know that, sir,--I do not doubt it," said Mr. Ringgan, "but--I'll tell you by and by what I conclude upon," he said with evident relief of manner as Fleda came bounding back to them. "Mr. Rossitur, have you made your peace with Fleda?"

"I was not aware that I had any to make, sir," replied the young gentleman. "I will do it with pleasure if my little cousin will tell me how. But she looks as if she needed enlightening as much as myself."

"She has something against you, I can tell you," said the old gentleman, looking amused, and speaking as if Fleda were a curious little piece of human mechanism which could hear its performances talked of with all the insensibility of any other toy. "She gives it as her judgment that Mr. Carleton is the most of a gentleman, because he keeps his promise."

"Oh grandpa!"--

Poor Fleda's cheek was hot with a distressful blush. Rossitur coloured with anger. Mr. Carleton's smile had a very different expression.

"If Fleda will have the goodness to recollect," said Rossitur, "I cannot be charged with breaking a promise, for I made none."

"But Mr. Carleton did," said Fleda.

"She is right, Mr. Rossitur, she is right," said that gentleman; "a fallacy might as well elude Ithuriel's spear as the sense of a pure spirit--there is no need of written codes. Make your apologies, man, and confess yourself in the wrong."

"Pho, pho," said the old gentleman,--"she don't take it very much to heart. I guess *I* ought to be the one to make the apologies," he added, looking at Fleda's face.

But Fleda commanded herself, with difficulty, and announced that dinner was ready.

"Mr. Rossitur tells me, Mr. Carleton, you are an Englishman," said his host. "I have some notion of that's passing through my head before, but somehow I had entirely lost sight of it when I was speaking so freely to you a little while ago--about our national quarrel--I know some of your countrymen owe us a grudge yet."

"Not I, I assure you," said the young Englishman. "I am ashamed of them for it. I congratulate you on being Washington's countryman and a sharer in his grand struggle for the right against the wrong."

Mr. Ringgan shook his guest's hand, looking very much pleased; and having by this time arrived at the house the young gentlemen were formally introduced at once to the kitchen, their dinner, and aunt Miriam.

It is not too much to say that the entertainment gave perfect satisfaction to everybody--better fate than attends most entertainments. Even Mr. Rossitur's ruffled spirit felt the soothing influence of good cheer, to which he happened to be peculiarly sensible, and came back to its average condition of amenity.

Doubtless that was a most informal table, spread according to no rules that for many generations at least have been known in the refined world; an anomaly in the eyes of certainly one of the company. Yet the board

had a character of its own, very far removed from vulgarity, and suiting remarkably well with the condition and demeanour of those who presided over it--a comfortable, well-to-do, substantial look, that could afford to dispense with minor graces; a self-respect that was not afraid of criticism. Aunt Miriam's successful efforts deserve to be celebrated.

In the middle of the table the polished amber of the pig's arched back elevated itself,--a striking object,--but worthy of the place he filled, as the honours paid him by everybody abundantly testified. Aunt Miriam had sent down a basket of her own bread, made out of the new flour, brown and white, both as sweet and fine as it is possible for bread to be; the piled-up slices were really beautiful. The superb butter had come from aunt Miriam's dairy too, for on such an occasion she would not trust to the very doubtful excellence of Miss Cynthia's doings. Every spare place on the table was filled with dishes of potatoes and pickles and sweetmeats, that left nothing to be desired in their respective kinds; the cake was a delicious presentment of the finest of material; and the pies, pumpkin pies, such as only aunt Miriam could make, rich compounds of everything *but* pumpkin, with enough of that to give them a name--Fleda smiled to think how pleased aunt Miriam must secretly be to see the homage paid her through them. And most happily Mrs. Plumfield had discovered that the last tea Mr. Ringgan had brought from the little Queechy store was not very good, and there was no time to send up on "the hill" for more, so she made coffee. Verily it was not Mocha, but the thick yellow cream with which the cups were filled readily made up the difference. The most curious palate found no want.

Everybody was in a high state of satisfaction, even to Miss Cynthia Grail; who, having some lurking suspicion that Mrs. Plumfield might design to cut her out of her post of tea-making, had slipped herself into her usual chair behind the tea-tray before anybody else was ready to sit down. No one at table bestowed a thought upon Miss Cynthia, but as she thought of nothing else she may be said to have had her fair share of attention. The most unqualified satisfaction however was no doubt little Fleda's.

Forgetting with a child's happy readiness the fears and doubts which had lately troubled her, she was full of the present, enjoying with a most unselfish enjoyment everything that pleased anybody else. *She* was glad that the supper was a fine one, and so approved, because it was her grandfather's hospitality and her aunt Miriam's housekeeping; little beside was her care for pies or coffee. She saw with secret glee the expression of both her aunt's and Mr. Ringgan's face; partly from pure sympathy, and partly because, as she knew, the cause of it was Mr. Carleton, whom privately Fleda liked very much. And after all perhaps he had directly more to do with her enjoyment than all other causes together.

Certainly that was true of him with respect to the rest of the dinner-table. None at that dinner-table had ever seen the like. With all the graceful charm of manner with which he would have delighted a courtly circle, he came out from his reserve and was brilliant, gay, sensible, entertaining, and witty, to a degree that assuredly has very rarely been thrown away upon an old farmer in the country and his un-polite sister. They appreciated him though, as well as any courtly circle could have done, and he knew it. In aunt Miriam's strong sensible face, when not full of some hospitable care, he could see the reflection of every play of his own; the grave practical eye twinkled and brightened, giving a ready answer to every turn of sense or humour in what he was saying. Mr. Ringgan, as much of a child for the moment as Fleda herself, had lost everything disagreeable and was in the full genial enjoyment of talk, rather listening than talking, with his cheeks in a perpetual dimple of gratification, and a low laugh of hearty amusement now and then rewarding the conversational and kind efforts of his guest with a complete triumph. Even the subtle charm which they could not quite recognise wrought fascination. Miss Cynthia declared afterwards, half admiring and half vexed, that he spoiled her supper, for she forgot to think how it tasted. Rossitur--his good humour was entirely restored; but whether even Mr. Carleton's power could have achieved that without the perfect seasoning of the pig and the smooth persuasion of the richly-

creamed coffee, it may perhaps be doubted. He stared, mentally, for he had never known his friend condescend to bring himself out in the same manner before; and he wondered what he could see in the present occasion to make it worth while.

But Mr. Carleton did not think his efforts thrown away. He understood and admired his fine old host and hostess; and with all their ignorance of conventionalities and absence of what is called *polish* of manner, he could enjoy the sterling sense, the good feeling, the true hearty hospitality, and the dignified courtesy which both of them shewed. No matter of the outside; this was in the grain. If mind had lacked much opportunity it had also made good use of a little; his host, Mr. Carleton found, had been a great reader, was well acquainted with history and a very intelligent reasoner upon it; and both he and his sister shewed a strong and quick aptitude for intellectual subjects of conversation. No doubt aunt Miriam's courtesy had not been taught by a dancing master, and her brown-satin gown had seen many a fashion come and go since it was made, but a *lady* was in both; and while Rossitur covertly smiled, Mr. Carleton paid his sincere respect where he felt it was due. Little Fleda's quick eye hardly saw, but more than half felt, the difference. Mr. Carleton had no more eager listener now than she, and perhaps none whose unaffected interest and sympathy gave him more pleasure.

Fleda coloured and looked at her grandfather.
Fleda coloured and looked at her grandfather.

When they rose from the table Mr. Ringgan would not be *insinuated* into the cold front room again.

"No, no," said he,--"what's the matter?--the table? Push the table back, and let it take care of itself,--come, gentlemen, sit down--draw up your chairs round the fire, and a fig for ceremony! Comfort, sister Miriam, against politeness, any day in the year;--don't you say so too, Fairy? Come here by me."

"Miss Fleda," said Mr. Carleton, "will you take a ride with me to Montepoole to-morrow? I should like to make you acquainted with my mother."

Fleda coloured and looked at her grandfather.

"What do you say, deary?" he inquired fondly; "will you go?--I believe, sir, your proposal will prove a very acceptable one. You will go, won't you, Fleda?"

Fleda would very much rather not! But she was always exceedingly afraid of hurting people's feelings; she could not bear that Mr. Carleton should think she disliked to go with him, so she answered yes, in her usual sober manner.

Just then the door opened and a man unceremoniously walked in, his entrance immediately following a little sullen knock that had made a mockery of asking permission. An ill-looking man, in the worst sense; his face being a mixture of cunning, meanness, and insolence. He shut the door and came with a slow leisurely step into the middle of the room without speaking a word. Mr. Carleton saw the blank change in Fleda's face. She knew him.

"Do you wish to see me, Mr. McGowan?" said Mr. Ringgan, not without something of the same change.

"I guess I ha'n't come here for nothing," was the gruff retort.

"Wouldn't another time answer as well?"

"I don't mean to find you here another time," said the man chuckling,--"I have given you notice to quit, and now I have come to tell you you'll clear out. I ain't a going to be kept out of my property for ever. If I can't get my money from you, Elzevir Ringgan, I'll see you don't get no more of it in your hands."

"Very well, sir," said the old gentleman;--"You have said all that is necessary."

"You have got to hear a little more, though," returned the other, "I've an idea that there's a satisfaction in speaking one's mind. I'll have that much out of you! Mr. Ringgan, a man hadn't ought to make an agreement to pay what he doesn't *mean* to pay, and what he has made an agreement to pay he ought to meet and be up to, if he sold his soul for it! You call yourself a Christian, do you, to stay in another man's house, month after month, when you know you ha'n't got the means to give him the rent for it! That's what *I* call stealing, and it's what I'd live in the County House before I'd demean myself to do I and so ought you."

"Well, well! neighbour," said Mr. Ringgan, with patient dignity,--"it's no use calling names. You know as well as I do how all this came about. I hoped to be able to pay you, but I haven't been able to make it out, without having more time."

"Time!" said the other. "Time to cheat me out of a little more houseroom. If I was agoing to live on charity, Mr. Ringgan, I'd come out and say so, and not put my hand in a man's pocket this way. You'll quit the house by the day after to morrow, or if you don't I'll let you hear a little more of me that you won't like!"

He stalked out, shutting the door after him with a bang. Mr. Carleton had quitted the room a moment before him.

Nobody moved or spoke at first, when the man was gone, except Miss Cynthia, who as she was taking something from the table to the pantry remarked, probably for Mr. Rossitur's benefit, that "Mr. Ringgan had to have that man punished for something he did a few years ago when he was justice of the peace, and she guessed likely that was the reason he had a grudge agin him ever since." Beyond this piece of dubious information nothing was said. Little Fleda stood beside her grandfather

with a face of quiet distress; the tears silently running over her flushed cheeks, and her eyes fixed upon Mr. Ringgan with a tender touching look of sympathy, most pure from self-recollection.

Mr. Carleton presently came in to take leave of the disturbed family. The old gentleman rose and returned his shake of the hand with even a degree more than usual of his manly dignity, or Mr. Carleton thought so.

"Good day to you, sir!" he said heartily. "We have had a great deal of pleasure in your society, and I shall always be very happy to see you--wherever I am." And then following him to the door and wringing his hand with a force he was not at all aware of, the old gentleman added in a lower tone, "I shall let her go with you!"

Mr. Carleton read his whole story in the stern self-command of brow, and the slight convulsion of feature which all the self-command could not prevent. He returned warmly the grasp of the hand answering merely, "I will see you again."

Fleda wound her arms round her grandfather's neck when they were gone, and did her best to comfort him, assuring him that "they would be just as happy somewhere else." And aunt Miriam earnestly proffered her own home. But Fleda knew that her grandfather was not comforted. He stroked her head with the same look of stern gravity and troubled emotion which had grieved her so much the other day. She could not win him to a smile, and went to bed at last feeling desolate. She had no heart to look out at the night. The wind was sweeping by in wintry gusts; and Fleda cried herself to sleep thinking how it would whistle round the dear old house when their ears would not be there to hear it.

Chapter VII.

He from his old hereditary nook
Must part; the summons came,--our final leave we took.

Wordsworth.

Mr. Carleton came the next day, but not early, to take Fleda to Montepoole. She had told her grandfather that she did not think he would come, because after last night he must know that she would not want to go. About twelve o'clock however he was there, with a little wagon, and Fleda was fain to get her sun bonnet and let him put her in. Happily it was her maxim never to trust to uncertainties, so she was quite ready when he came and they had not to wait a minute.

Though Fleda had a little dread of being introduced to a party of strangers and was a good deal disappointed at being obliged to keep her promise, she very soon began to be glad. She found her fear gradually falling away before Mr. Carleton's quiet kind reassuring manner; he took such nice care of her; and she presently made up her mind that he would manage the matter so that it would not be awkward. They had so much pleasant talk too. Fleda had found before that she could talk to Mr. Carleton, nay she could not help talking to him; and she forgot to think about it. And besides, it was a pleasant day, and they drove fast, and Fleda's particular delight was driving; and though the horse was a little gay she had a kind of intuitive perception that Mr. Carleton knew how to manage him. So she gave up every care and was very happy.

When Mr. Carleton asked after her grandfather, Fleda answered with great animation, "O he's very well! and such a happy thing--You heard what that man said last night, Mr. Carleton, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Well it is all arranged;--this morning Mr. Jolly--he's a friend of grandpa's that lives over at Queechy Run and knew about all this--he's a lawyer--he came this morning and told grandpa that he had found some one that could lend him the money he wanted and there was no trouble about it; and we are so happy, for we thought we should have to go away from where we live now, and I know grandpa would have felt it dreadfully. If it hadn't been for that,--I mean, for Mr. Jolly's coming--I couldn't have gone to Montepoole to-day."

"Then I am very glad Mr. Jolly made his appearance," said Mr. Carleton.

"So am I," said Fleda;--"but I think it was a little strange that Mr. Jolly wouldn't tell us who it was that he had got the money from. Grandpa said he never saw Mr. Jolly so curious."

When they got to the Pool Fleda's nervousness returned a little; but she went through the dreaded introduction with great demureness and perfect propriety. And throughout the day Mr. Carleton had no reason to fear rebuke for the judgment which he had pronounced upon his little paragon. All the flattering attention which was shewn her, and it was a good deal, could not draw Fleda a line beyond the dignified simplicity which seemed natural to her; any more than the witty attempts at raillery and endeavours to amuse themselves at her expense, in which some of the gentlemen shewed their wisdom, could move her from her modest self-possession. *Very* quiet, *very* modest, as she invariably was, awkwardness could not fasten upon her; her colour might come and her timid eye fall; it often did; but Fleda's wits were always in their place and within call. She would shrink from a stranger's eye, and yet when spoken to her answers were as ready and acute as they were marked for simplicity and gentleness. She was kept to dinner; and though the arrangement and manner of the service must have been strange to little Fleda, it was impossible to guess from word or look that it was the first time within her recollection that she had ever seen the like. Her native instincts took it all as quietly as any old liberalized traveller looks upon the customs of a new country. Mr. Carleton smiled as he now and then

saw a glance of intelligence or admiration pass between one and another of the company; and a little knowing nod from Mrs. Evelyn and many a look from his mother confessed he had been quite right.

Those two, Mrs. Evelyn and Mrs. Carleton, were by far the most kind and eager in their attention to Fleda. Mrs. Thorn did little else but look at her. The gentlemen amused themselves with her. But Mr. Carleton, true to the hopes Fleda had founded upon his good-nature, had stood her friend all the day, coming to her help if she needed any, and placing himself easily and quietly between her and anything that threatened to try or annoy her too much. Fleda felt it with grateful admiration. Yet she noticed, too, that he was a very different person at this dinner-table from what he had been the other day at her grandfather's. Easy and graceful, always, he filled his own place, but did not seem to care to do more; there was even something bordering on haughtiness in his air of grave reserve. He was not the life of the company here; he contented himself with being all that the company could possibly require of him.

On the whole Fleda was exceedingly well pleased with her day, and thought all the people in general very kind. It was quite late before she set out to go home again; and then Mrs. Evelyn and Mrs. Carleton were extremely afraid lest she should take cold, and Mr. Carleton without saying one word about it wrapped her up so very nicely after she got into the wagon, in a warm cloak of his mother's. The drive home, through the gathering shades of twilight, was to little Fleda thoroughly charming. It was almost in perfect silence, but she liked that; and all the way home her mind was full of a shadowy beautiful world that seemed to lie before and around her.

It was a happy child that Mr. Carleton lifted from the wagon when they reached Queechy. He read it in the utter lightheartedness of brow and voice, and the spring to the ground which hardly needed the help of his hands.

"Thank you, Mr. Carleton," she said when she had reached her own door; (he would not go in) "I have had a very nice time!"

He smiled.

"Good night," said he. "Tell your grandfather I will come to-morrow to see him about some business."

Fleda ran gayly into the kitchen. Only Cynthia was there.

"Where is grandpa, Cynthy?"

"He went off into his room a half an hour ago. I believe he's laying down. He ain't right well, I s'pect. What's made you so late?"

"O they kept me," said Fleda. Her gayety suddenly sobered, she took off her bonnet and coat and throwing them down in the kitchen stole softly along the passage to her grandfather's room. She stopped a minute at the door and held her breath to see if she could hear any movement which might tell her he was not asleep. It was all still, and pulling the iron latch with her gentlest hand Fleda went on tiptoe into the room. He was lying on the bed, but awake, for she had made no noise and the blue eyes opened and looked upon her as she came near.

"Are you not well, dear grandpa?" said the little girl.

Nothing made of flesh and blood ever spoke words of more spirit-like sweetness,--not the beauty of a fine organ, but such as the sweetness of angel-speech might be; a whisper of love and tenderness that was hushed by its own intensity. He did not answer, or did not notice her first question; she repeated it.

"Don't you feel well?"

"Not exactly, dear!" he replied.

There was the shadow of somewhat in his tone, that fell upon his little granddaughter's heart and brow at once. Her voice next time, though not suffered to be anything but clear and cheerful still, had in part the clearness of apprehension.

"What is the matter?"

"Oh--I don't know, dear!"

She felt the shadow again, and he seemed to say that time would shew her the meaning of it. She put her little hand in one of his which lay outside the coverlets, and stood looking at him; and presently said, but in a very different key from the same speech to Mr. Carleton,

"I have had a very nice time, dear grandpa."

Her grandfather made her no answer. He brought the dear little hand to his lips and kissed it twice, so earnestly that it was almost passionately; then laid it on the side of the bed again, with his own upon it, and patted it slowly and fondly and with an inexpressible kind of sadness in the manner. Fleda's lip trembled and her heart was fluttering, but she stood so that he could not see her face in the dusk, and kept still till the rebel features were calm again and she had schooled the heart to be silent.

Mr. Ringgan had closed his eyes, and perhaps was asleep, and his little granddaughter sat quietly down on a chair by the bedside to watch by him, in that gentle sorrowful patience which women often know but which hardly belongs to childhood. Her eye and thoughts, as she sat there in the dusky twilight, fell upon the hand of her grandfather which still fondly held one of her own; and fancy travelled fast and far, from what it was to what it had been. Rough, discoloured, stiff, as it lay there now, she thought how it had once had the hue and the freshness and the grace of youth, when it had been the instrument of uncommon strength and wielded an authority that none could stand against. Her fancy wandered over the scenes it had known; when it had felled trees in the wild forest, and those fingers, then supple and slight, had played the fife

to the struggling men of the Revolution; how its activity had outdone the activity of all other hands in clearing and cultivating those very fields where her feet loved to run; how in its pride of strength it had handled the scythe and the sickle and the flail, with a grace and efficiency that no other could attain; and how in happy manhood that strong hand had fondled and sheltered and led the little children that now had grown up and were gone!--Strength and activity, ay, and the fruits of them, were passed away;--his children were dead;--his race was run;--the shock of corn was in full season, ready to be gathered. Poor little Fleda! her thought had travelled but a very little way before the sense of these things entirely overcame her; her head bowed on her knees, and she wept tears that all the fine springs of her nature were moving to feed--many, many,--but poured forth as quietly as bitterly; she smothered every sound. That beautiful shadowy world with which she had been so busy a little while ago,--alas! she had left the fair outlines and the dreamy light and had been tracking one solitary path through the wilderness, and she saw how the traveller foot-sore and weather-beaten comes to the end of his way. And after all, he comes to *the end*.--"Yes, and I must travel through life and come to the end, too," thought little Fleda,--"life is but a passing through the world; my hand must wither and grow old too, if I live long enough, and whether or no, I must come to *the end*.--Oh, there is only one thing that ought to be very much minded in this world!"

That thought, sober though it was, brought sweet consolation. Fleda's tears, if they fell as fast, grew brighter, as she remembered with singular tender joy that her mother and her father had been ready to see the end of their journey, and were not afraid of it, that her grandfather and her aunt Miriam were happy in the same quiet confidence and she believed she herself was a lamb of the Good Shepherd's flock. "And he will let none of his lambs be lost," she thought. "How happy I am! How happy we all are!"

Her grandfather still lay quiet as if asleep, and gently drawing her hand from under his, Fleda went and got a candle and sat down by him again to read, carefully shading the light so that it might not awake him.

He presently spoke to her, and more cheerfully.

"Are you reading, dear?"

"Yes, grandpa!" said the little girl looking up brightly. "Does the candle disturb you?"

"No, dear!--What have you got there?"

"I just took up this volume of Newton that has the hymns in it."

"Read out."

Fleda read Mr. Newton's long beautiful hymn, "The Lord will provide;" but with her late thoughts fresh in her mind it was hard to get through the last verses;--

"No strength of our own,
  Or goodness we claim;
But since we have known
  The Saviour's great name,
In this, our strong tower,
  For safety we hide:
The Lord is our power,
  The Lord will provide.

"When life sinks apace,
  And death is in view,
This word of his grace
  Shall comfort us through.
No fearing nor doubting,--

With Christ on our side,
We hope to die shouting,
The Lord will provide."

The little reader's voice changed, almost broke, but she struggled through, and then was quietly crying behind her hand.

"Read it again," said the old gentleman after a pause.

There is no 'cannot' in the vocabulary of affection. Fleda waited a minute or two to rally her forces, and then went through it again, more steadily than the first time.

"Yes--" said Mr. Ringgan calmly, folding his hands,--"that will do! That trust won't fail, for it is founded upon a rock. 'He is a rock; and he knoweth them that put their trust in him!' I have been a fool to doubt ever that he would make all things work well--The Lord will provide!"

"Grandpa," said Fleda, but in an unsteady voice, and shading her face with her hand still,--"I can remember reading this hymn to my mother once when I was so little that 'suggestions' was a hard word to me."

"Ay, ay,--I dare say," said the old gentleman,--"your mother knew that Rock and rested her hope upon it,--where mine stands now. If ever there was a creature that might have trusted to her own doings, I believe she was one, for I never saw her do anything wrong,--as I know. But she knew Christ was all. Will you follow him as she did, dear?"

Fleda tried in vain to give an answer.

"Do you know what her last prayer for you was, Fleda?"

"No, grandpa."

"It was that you might be kept 'unspotted from the world.' I heard her make that prayer myself." And stretching out his hand the old gentleman laid it tenderly upon Fleda's bowed head, saying with strong earnestness

and affection, even *his* voice somewhat shaken, "God grant that prayer!--whatever else he do with her, keep my child from the evil!--and bring her to join her father and mother in heaven!--and me!"

He said no more;--but Fleda's sobs said a great deal. And when the sobs were hushed, she still sat shedding quiet tears, sorrowed and disturbed by her grandfather's manner. She had never known it so grave, so solemn; but there was that shadow of something else in it besides, and she would have feared if she had known what to fear. He told her at last that she had better go to bed, and to say to Cynthy that he wanted to see her. She was going, and had near reached the door, when he said,

"Elfleda!"

She hastened back to the bedside.

"Kiss me."

He let her do so twice, without moving, and then holding her to his breast he pressed one long earnest passionate kiss upon her lips, and released her,

Fleda told Cynthy that her grandfather wished her to come to him, and then mounted the stairs to her little bedroom. She went to the window and opening it looked out at the soft moonlit sky; the weather was mild again and a little hazy, and the landscape was beautiful. But little Fleda was tasting realities, and she could not go off upon dream-journeys to seek the light food of fancy through the air. She did not think to-night about the people the moon was shining on; she only thought of one little sad anxious heart,--and of another down stairs, more sad and anxious still, she feared;--what could it be about? Now that Mr. Jolly had settled all that troublesome business with McGowan?--

As she stood there at the window, gazing out aimlessly into the still night,--it was very quiet,--she heard Cynthy at the back of the house calling out, but as if she were afraid of making too much noise,

"Watkins!--Watkins!"

The sound had business, if not anxiety, in it. Fleda instinctively held her breath to listen. Presently she heard Watkins reply; but they were round the corner, she could not easily make out what they said. It was only by straining her ears that she caught the words,

"Watkins, Mr. Ringgan wants you to go right up on the hill to Mis' Plumfield's and tell her he wants her to come right down--he thinks"--the voice of the speaker fell, and Fleda could only make out the last words,--"Dr. James." More was said, but so thick and low that she could understand nothing.

She had heard enough. She shut the window, trembling, and fastened again the parts of her dress she had loosened; and softly and hastily went down the stairs into the kitchen.

"Cynthy!--what is the matter with grandpa?"

"Why ain't you in bed, Flidda?" said Cynthy with some sharpness. "That's what you had ought to be. I am sure your grandpa wants you to be abed."

"But tell me," said Fleda anxiously.

"I don't know as there's anything the matter with him," said Cynthy. "Nothing much, I suppose. What makes you think anything is the matter?"

"Because I heard you telling Watkins to go for aunt Miriam." Fleda could not say,--"and the doctor."

"Well your grandpa thought he'd like to have her come down, and he don't feet right well,--so I sent Watkins up; but you'd better go to bed, Flidda; you'll catch cold if you sit up o'night."

Fleda was unsatisfied, the more because Cynthy would not meet the keen searching look with which the little girl tried to read her face. She was not to be sent to bed, and all Cynthy's endeavours to make her change her mind were of no avail. Fleda saw in them but fresh reason for staying, and saw besides, what Cynthy could not hide, a somewhat of wandering and uneasiness in her manner which strengthened her resolution. She sat down in the chimney corner, resolved to wait till her aunt Miriam came; there would be satisfaction in her, for aunt Miriam always told the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

It was a miserable three-quarters of an hour. The kitchen seemed to wear a strange desolate look, though seen in its wonted bright light of fire and candles, and in itself nice and cheerful as usual. Fleda looked at it also through that vague fear which casts its own lurid colour upon everything. The very flickering of the candle blaze seemed of ill omen, and her grandfather's empty chair stood a signal of pain to little Fleda whenever she looked at it. She sat still, in submissive patience, her cheek pale with the working of a heart too big for that little body. Cynthia was going in and out of her grandfather's room, but Fleda would not ask her any more questions, to be disappointed with word-answers; she waited, but the minutes seemed very long,--and very sad.

The characteristic outward calm which Fleda had kept, and which belonged to a nature uncommonly moulded to patience and fortitude, had yet perhaps heightened the pressure of excited fear within. When at last she saw the cloak and hood of aunt Miriam coming through the moonlight to the kitchen door, she rushed to open it, and quite overcome for the moment threw her arms around her and was speechless. Aunt Miriam's tender and quiet voice comforted her.

"You up yet, Fleda! Hadn't you better go to bed? 'Tisn't good for you."

"That's what I've been a telling her," said Cynthy, "but she wa'n't a mind to listen to me."

But the two little arms embraced aunt Miriam's cloak and wrappers and the little face was hid there still, and Fleda's answer was a half smothered ejaculation.

"I am *so* glad you are come, dear aunt Miriam!"

Aunt Miriam kissed her again, and again repeated her request.

"O no--I can't go to bed," said Fleda crying;--"I can't till I know--I am *sure* something is the matter, or Cynthy wouldn't look so. *Do* tell me, aunt Miriam!"

"I can't tell you anything, dear, except that grandpa is not well--that is all I know--I am going in to see him. I will tell you in the morning how he is."

"No," said Fleda, "I will wait here till you come out. I couldn't sleep."

Mrs. Plumfield made no more efforts to persuade her, but rid herself of cloak and hood and went into Mr. Ringgan's room. Fleda placed herself again in her chimney corner. Burying her face in her hands, she sat waiting more quietly; and Cynthy, having finished all her business, took a chair on the hearth opposite to her. Both were silent and motionless, except when Cynthy once in a while got up to readjust the sticks of wood on the fire. They sat there waiting so long that Fleda's anxiety began to quicken again.

"Don't you think the doctor is a long time coming, Cynthy?" said she raising her head at last. Her question, breaking that forced silence, sounded fearful.

"It seems kind o' long," said Cynthy. "I guess Watkins ha'n't found him to hum."

Watkins indeed presently came in and reported as much, and that the wind was changing and it was coming off cold; and then his heavy boots were heard going up the stairs to his room overhead; but Fleda listened

in vain for the sound of the latch of her grandfather's door, or aunt Miriam's quiet foot-fall in the passage; listened and longed, till the minutes seemed like the links of a heavy chain which she was obliged to pass over from hand to hand, and the last link could not be found. The noise of Watkins' feet ceased overhead, and nothing stirred or moved but the crackling flames and Cynthia's elbows, which took turns each in resting upon the opposite arm, and now and then a tell-tale gust of wind in the trees. If Mr. Ringgan was asleep, why did not aunt Miriam come out and see them,--if he was better, why not come and tell them so. He had been asleep when she first went into his room, and she had come back for a minute then to try again to get Fleda to bed; why could she not come out for a minute once more. Two hours of watching and trouble had quite changed little Fleda; the dark ring of anxiety had come under each eye in her little pale face; she looked herself almost ill.

Aunt Miriam's grave step was heard coming out of the room at last,--it did not sound cheerfully in Fleda's ears. She came in, and stopping to give some direction to Cynthy, walked up to Fleda. Her face encouraged no questions. She took the child's head tenderly in both her hands, and told her gently, but it was in vain that she tried to make her voice quite as usual, that she had better go to bed--that she would be sick.

Fleda looked up anxiously in her face.

"How is he?"

But her next word was the wailing cry of sorrow,--"Oh grandpa!--"

The old lady took the little child in her arms and they both sat there by the fire until the morning dawned.

Chapter VIII.

Patience and sorrow strove
Who should express her goodliest.

King Lear.

When Mr. Carleton knocked at the front door the next day about two o'clock it was opened to him by Cynthy. He asked for his late host.

"Mr. Ringgan is dead."

"Dead!" exclaimed the young man much shocked;--"when? how?"

"Won't you come in, sir?" said Cynthy;--"maybe you'll see Mis' Plumfield."

"No, certainly," replied the visitor. "Only tell me about Mr. Ringgan."

"He died last night."

"What was the matter with him?"

"I don't know," said Cynthy in a business-like tone of voice,--"I s'pose the doctor knows, but he didn't say nothing about it. He died very sudden."

"Was he alone?"

"No--his sister was with him; he had been complaining all the evening that he didn't feel right, but I didn't think nothing of it and I didn't know as he did; and towards evening he went and laid down, and Flidda was with him a spell, talking to him; and at last he sent her to bed and called me in and said he felt mighty strange and he didn't know what it was going to be, and that he had as lieve I should send up and ask Mis' Plumfield to come down, and perhaps I might as well send for the doctor

too. And I sent right off, but the doctor wa'n't to hum, and didn't get here till long after. Mis' Plumfield, she come; and Mr. Ringgan was asleep then, and I didn't know as it was going to be anything more after all than just a turn, such as anybody might take; and Mis' Plumfield went in and sot by him; and there wa'n't no one else in the room; and after a while he come to, and talked to her, she said, a spell; but he seemed to think it was something more than common ailed him; and all of a sudden he just riz up half way in bed and then fell back and died,--with no more warning than that."

"And how is the little girl?"

"Why," said Cynthy, looking off at right angles from her visitor, "she's middling now, I s'pose, but she won't be before long, or else she must be harder to make sick than other folks.--We can't get her out of the room," she added, bringing her eyes to bear, for an instant, upon the young gentleman,--"she stays in there the hull time since morning--I've tried, and Mis' Plumfield's tried, and everybody has tried, and there can't none of us manage it; she will stay in there and it's an awful cold room when there ain't no fire."

Cynthy and her visitor were both taking the benefit of the chill blast which rushed in at the open door.

"*The room*?" said Mr. Carleton. "The room where the body lies?"

"Yes--it's dreadful chill in there when the stove ain't heated, and she sits there the hull time. And she ha'n't 'got much to boast of now: she looks as if a feather would blow her away."

The door at the further end of the hall opened about two inches and a voice called out through the crack,

"Cynthy!--Mis' Plumfield wants to know if that is Mr. Carleton?"

"Yes."

"Well she'd like to see him. Ask him to walk into the front room, she says."

Cynthy upon this shewed the way, and Mr. Carleton walked into the same room where a very few days before he had been so kindly welcomed by his fine old host. Cold indeed it was now, as was the welcome he would have given. There was no fire in the chimney, and even all the signs of the fire of the other day had been carefully cleared away; the clean empty fireplace looked a mournful assurance that its cheerfulness would not soon come back again. It was a raw disagreeable day, the paper window shades fluttered uncomfortably in the wind, which had its way now; and the very chairs and tables seemed as if they had taken leave of life and society for ever. Mr. Carleton walked slowly up and down, his thoughts running perhaps somewhat in the train where poor little Fleda's had been so busy last night, and wrapped up in broadcloth as he was to the chin, he shivered when he heard the chill wind moaning round the house and rustling the paper hangings and thought of little Fleda's delicate frame, exposed as Cynthia had described it. He made up his mind it must not be.

Mrs. Plumfield presently came in, and met him with the calm dignity of that sorrow which needs no parade and that truth and meekness of character which can make none. Yet there was nothing like stoicism, no affected or proud repression of feeling; her manner was simply the dictate of good sense borne out by a firm and quiet spirit. Mr. Carleton was struck with it, it was a display of character different from any he had ever before met with; it was something he could not quite understand. For he wanted the key. But all the high respect he had felt for this lady from the first was confirmed and strengthened.

After quietly receiving Mr. Carleton's silent grasp of the hand, aunt Miriam said,

"I troubled you to stop, sir, that I might ask you how much longer you expect to stop at Montepoole."

Not more than two or three days, he said.

"I understood," said aunt Miriam after a minute's pause, "that Mrs. Carleton was so kind as to say she would take care of Elfleda to France and put her in the hands of her aunt."

"She would have great pleasure in doing it," said Mr. Carleton. "I can promise for your little niece that she shall have a mother's care so long as my mother can render it."

Aunt Miriam was silent, and he saw her eyes fill.

"You should not have had the pain of seeing me to-day," said he gently, "if I could have known it would give you any; but since I am here, may I ask, whether it is your determination that Fleda shall go with us?"

"It was my brother's," said aunt Miriam, sighing;--"he told me--last night--that he wished her to go with Mrs. Carleton--if she would still be so good as to take her."

"I have just heard about her, from the housekeeper," said Mr, Carleton, "what has disturbed me a good deal. Will you forgive me, if I venture to propose that she should come to us at once. Of course we will not leave the place for several days--till you are ready to part with her."

Aunt Miriam hesitated, and again the tears flushed to her eyes.

"I believe it would be best," she said,--"since it must be--I cannot get the child away from her grandfather--I am afraid I want firmness to do it--and she ought not to be there--she is a tender little creature--"

For once self-command failed her--she was obliged to cover her face.

"A stranger's hands cannot be more tender of her than ours will be," said Mr. Carleton, his warm pressure of aunt Miriam's hand repeating the promise. "My mother will bring a carriage for her this afternoon, if you will permit."

"If you please, sir,--since it must be, it does not matter a day sooner or later," repeated aunt Miriam,--"if she can be got away.--I don't know whether it will be possible."

Mr. Carleton had his own private opinion on that point. He merely promised to be there again in a few hours and took his leave.

He came, with his mother, about five o'clock in the afternoon. They were shewn this time into the kitchen, where they found two or three neighbours and friends with aunt Miriam and Cynthy. The former received them with the same calm simplicity that Mr. Carleton had admired in the morning, but said she was afraid their coming would be in vain; she had talked with Fleda about the proposed plan and could not get her to listen to it. She doubted whether it would be possible to persuade her. And yet--

Aunt Miriam's self-possession seemed to be shaken when she thought of Fleda; she could not speak of her without watering eyes.

"She's fixing to be sick as fast as ever she can," remarked Cynthia dryly, in a kind of aside meant for the audience;--"there wa'n't a grain of colour in her face when I went in to try to get her out a little while ago; and Mis' Plumfield ha'n't the heart to do anything with her, nor nobody else."

"Mother, will you see what you can do?" said Mr. Carleton.

Mrs. Carleton went, with an expression of face that her son, nobody else, knew meant that she thought it a particularly disagreeable piece of business. She came back after the lapse of a few minutes, in tears.

"I can do nothing with her," she said hurriedly;--"I don't know what to say to her; and she looks like death. Go yourself, Guy; you can manage her if any one can."

Mr. Carleton went immediately.

The room into which a short passage admitted him was cheerless indeed. On a fair afternoon the sun's rays came in there pleasantly, but this was a true November day; a grey sky and a chill raw wind that found its way in between the loose window-sashes and frames. One corner of the room was sadly tenanted by the bed which held the remains of its late master and owner. At a little table between the windows, with her back turned towards the bed, Fleda was sitting, her face bowed in her hands, upon the old quarto bible that lay there open; a shawl round her shoulders.

Mr. Carleton went up to the side of the table and softly spoke her name. Fleda looked up at him for an instant, and then buried her face in her hands on the book as before. That look might have staggered him, but that Mr. Carleton rarely was staggered in any purpose when he had once made up his mind. It did move him,--so much that he was obliged to wait a minute or two before he could muster firmness to speak to her again. Such a look,--so pitiful in its sorrow, so appealing in its helplessness, so imposing in its purity,--he had never seen, and it absolutely awed him. Many a child's face is lovely to look upon for its innocent purity, but more commonly it is not like this; it is the purity of snow, unsullied, but not unsullyable; there is another kind more ethereal, like that of light, which you feel is from another sphere and will not know soil. But there were other signs in the face that would have nerved Mr. Carleton's resolution if he had needed it. Twenty-four hours had wrought a sad change. The child looked as if she had been ill for weeks. Her cheeks were colourless; the delicate brow would have seemed pencilled on marble but for the dark lines which weeping and watching, and still more sorrow, had drawn underneath; and the beautiful moulding of the features shewed under the transparent skin like the work of the sculptor. She was not crying then, but the open pages of the great bible had been wet with very many tears since her head had rested there.

Fleda was sitting, her face bowed in her hands.
Fleda was sitting, her face bowed in her hands.

"Fleda," said Mr. Carleton after a moment,--"you must come with me."

The words were gently and tenderly spoken, yet they had that tone which young and old instinctively know it is vain to dispute. Fleda glanced up again, a touching imploring look it was very difficult to bear, and her "Oh no--I cannot,"--went to his heart. It was not resistance but entreaty, and all the arguments she would have urged seemed to lie in the mere tone of her voice. She had no power of urging them in any other way, for even as she spoke her head went down again on the bible with a burst of sorrow. Mr. Carleton was moved, but not shaken in his purpose. He was silent a moment, drawing back the hair that fell over Fleda's forehead with a gentle caressing touch; and then he said, still lower and more tenderly than before, but without flinching, "You must come with me, Fleda."

"Mayn't I stay," said Fleda, sobbing, while he could see in the tension of the muscles a violent effort at self-control which he did not like to see,--"mayn't I stay till--till--the day after to-morrow?"

"No, dear Fleda," said he, still stroking her head kindly,--"I will bring you back, but you must go with me now, Your aunt wishes it and we all think it is best. I will bring you back."--

She sobbed bitterly for a few minutes. Then she begged in smothered words that he would leave her alone a little while. He went immediately.

She checked her sobs when she heard the door close upon him, or as soon as she could, and rising went and knelt down by the side of the bed. It was not to cry, though what she did could not be done without many tears,--it was to repeat with equal earnestness and solemnity her mother's prayer, that she might be kept pure from the world's contact. There beside the remains of her last dear earthly friend, as it were before going out of his sight forever, little Fleda knelt down to set the seal of faith and hope to his wishes, and to lay the constraining hand of Memory upon her conscience. It was soon done,--and then there was but one thing more to do. But oh, the tears that fell as she stood there before she

could go on; how the little hands were pressed to the bowed face, as if *they* would have borne up the load they could not reach; the convulsive struggle, before the last look could be taken, the last good-by said! But the sobs were forced back, the hands wiped off the tears, the quivering features were bidden into some degree of calmness; and she leaned forward, over the loved face that in death had kept all its wonted look of mildness and placid dignity. It was in vain to try to look through Fleda's blinded eyes; the hot tears dropped fast, while her trembling lips kissed--and kissed,--those cold and silent that could make no return; and then feeling that it was the last, that the parting was over, she stood again by the side of the bed as she had done a few minutes before, in a convulsion of grief, her face bowed down and her little frame racked with feeling too strong for it; shaken visibly, as if too frail to bear the trial to which it was put.

Mr. Carleton had waited and waited, as he thought long enough, and now at last came in again, guessing how it was with her. He put his arm round the child and gently drew her away, and sitting down took her on his knee; and endeavoured rather with actions than with words to soothe and comfort her; for he did not know what to say. But his gentle delicate way, the soft touch with which he again stroked back her hair or took her hand, speaking kindness and sympathy, the loving pressure of his lips once or twice to her brow, the low tones in which he told her that she was making herself sick,--that she must not do so,--that she must let him take care of her,--were powerful to soothe or quiet a sensitive mind, and Fleda felt them. It was a very difficult task, and if undertaken by any one else would have been more likely to disgust and distress her. But his spirit had taken the measure of hers, and he knew precisely how to temper every word and tone so as just to meet the nice sensibilities of her nature. He had said hardly anything, but she had understood all he meant to say, and when he told her at last, softly, that it was getting late and she must let him take her away, she made no more difficulty; rose up and let him lead her out of the room without once turning her head to look back.

Mrs. Carleton looked relieved that there was a prospect of getting away, and rose up with a happy adjusting of her shawl round her shoulders. Aunt Miriam came forward to say good-by, but it was very quietly said. Fleda clasped her round the neck convulsively for an instant, kissed her as if a kiss could speak a whole heartful, and then turned submissively to Mr. Carleton and let him lead her to the carriage.

There was no fault to be found with Mrs. Carleton's kindness when they were on the way. She held the forlorn little child tenderly in her arm, and told her how glad she was to have her with them, how glad she should be if she were going to keep her always; but her saying so only made Fleda cry, and she soon thought it best to say nothing. All the rest of the way Fleda was a picture of resignation; transparently pale, meek and pure, and fragile seemingly, as the delicatest wood-flower that grows. Mr. Carleton looked grieved, and leaning forward he took one of her hands in his own and held it affectionately till they got to the end of their journey. It marked Fleda's feeling towards him that she let it lie there without making a motion to draw it away. She was so still for the last few miles that her friends thought she had fallen asleep; but when the carriage stopped and the light of the lantern was flung inside, they saw the grave hazel eyes broad open and gazing intently out of the window.

"You will order tea for us in your dressing-room, mother?" said Mr. Carleton.

"*Us*--who is *us?*"

"Fleda and me,--unless you will please to make one of the party."

"Certainly I will, but perhaps Fleda might like it better down stairs. Wouldn't you, dear?"

"If you please, ma'am," said Fleda. "Wherever you please."

"But which would you rather, Fleda?" said Mr. Carleton.

"I would *rather* have it up-stairs," said Fleda gently, "but it's no matter."

"We will have it up-stairs," said Mrs. Carleton. "We will be a nice little party up there by ourselves. You shall not come down till you like."

"You are hardly able to walk up," said Mr. Carleton tenderly. "Shall I carry you?"

The tears rushed to Fleda's eyes, but she said no, and managed to mount the stairs, though it was evidently an exertion. Mrs. Carleton's dressing-room, as her son had called it, looked very pleasant when they got there. It was well lighted and warmed and something answering to curtains had been summoned from its obscurity in store-room or garret and hung up at the windows,--"them air fussy English folks had made such a pint of it," the landlord said. Truth was, that Mr. Carleton as well as his mother wanted this room as a retreat for the quiet and privacy which travelling in company as they did they could have nowhere else. Everything the hotel could furnish in the shape of comfort had been drawn together to give this room as little the look of a public house as possible. Easy chairs, as Mrs. Carleton remarked with a disgusted face, one could not expect to find in a country inn; there were instead as many as half a dozen of "those miserable substitutes" as she called rocking-chairs, and sundry fashions of couches and sofas, in various degrees of elegance and convenience. The best of these, a great chintz-covered thing, full of pillows, stood invitingly near the bright fire. There Mr. Carleton placed little Fleda, took off her bonnet and things, and piled the cushions about her just in the way that would make her most easy and comfortable. He said little, and she nothing, but her eyes watered again at the kind tenderness of his manner. And then he left her in peace till the tea came.

The tea was made in that room for those three alone. Fleda knew that Mr. and Mrs. Carleton staid up there only for her sake, and it troubled her, but she could not help it. Neither could she be very sorry so far as one of them was concerned. Mr. Carleton was too good to be wished

away. All that evening his care of her never ceased. At tea, which the poor child would hardly have shared but for him, and after tea, when in the absence of bustle she had leisure to feel more fully her strange circumstances and position, he hardly permitted her to feel either, doing everything for her ease and pleasure and quietly managing at the same time to keep back his mother's more forward and less happily adapted tokens of kind feeling. Though she knew he was constantly occupied with her Fleda could not feel oppressed; his kindness was as pervading and as unobtrusive as the summer air itself; she felt as if she was in somebody's hands that knew her wants before she did, and quietly supplied or prevented them, in a way she could not tell how. It was very rarely that she even got a chance to utter the quiet and touching "thank you," which invariably answered every token of kindness or thoughtfulness that permitted an answer. How greatly that harsh and sad day was softened to little Fleda'a heart by the good feeling and fine breeding of one person. She thought when she went to bed that night, thought seriously and gratefully, that since she must go over the ocean and take that long journey to her aunt, how glad she was, how thankful she ought to be, that she had so very kind and pleasant people to go with. Kind and pleasant she counted them both; but what more she thought of Mr. Carleton it would be hard to say. Her admiration of him was very high, appreciating as she did to the full all that charm of manner which she could neither analyze nor describe.

Her last words to him that night, spoken with a most wistful anxious glance into his face, were,

"You will take me back again, Mr. Carleton?"

He knew what she meant.

"Certainly I will. I promised you, Fleda."

"Whatever Guy promises you may be very sure he will do," said his mother with a smile.

Fleda believed it. But the next morning it was very plain that this promise he would not be called upon to perform; Fleda would not be well enough to go to the funeral. She was able indeed to get up, but she lay all day upon the sofa in the dressing-room. Mr. Carleton had bargained for no company last night; to-day female curiosity could stand it no longer; and Mrs. Thorn and Mrs. Evelyn came up to look and gossip openly and to admire and comment privately, when they had a chance. Fleda lay perfectly quiet and still, seeming not much to notice or care for their presence; they thought she was tolerably easy in body and mind, perhaps tired and sleepy, and like to do well enough after a few days. How little they knew! How little they could imagine the assembly of Thought which was holding in that child's mind; how little they deemed of the deep, sad, serious look into life which that little spirit was taking. How far they were from fancying while they were discussing all manner of trifles before her, sometimes when they thought her sleeping, that in the intervals between sadder and weighter things her nice instincts were taking the gauge of all their characters; unconsciously, but surely; how they might have been ashamed if they had known that while they were busy with all affairs in the universe but those which most nearly concerned them, the little child at their side whom they had almost forgotten was secretly looking up to her Father in heaven, and asking to be kept pure from the world! "Not unto the wise and prudent;"--how strange it may seem in one view of the subject,--in another, how natural, how beautiful, how reasonable!

Fleda did not ask again to be taken to Queechy. But as the afternoon drew on she turned her face away from the company and shielded it from view among the cushions, and lay in that utterly motionless state of body which betrays a concentrated movement of the spirits in some hidden direction. To her companions it betrayed nothing. They only lowered their tones a little lest they should disturb her.

It had grown dark, and she was sitting up again, leaning against the pillows and in her usual quietude, when Mr. Carleton came in. They had not seen him since before dinner. He came to her side and taking her hand made some gentle inquiry how she was.

"She has had a fine rest," said Mrs. Evelyn.

"She has been sleeping all the afternoon," said Mrs. Carleton,--"she lay as quiet as a mouse, without stirring;--you were sleeping, weren't you, dear?"

Fleda's lips hardly formed the word "no," and her features were quivering sadly. Mr. Carleton's were impenetrable.

"Dear Fleda," said he, stooping down and speaking with equal gravity and kindliness of manner,--"you were not able to go."

Fleda's shake of the head gave a meek acquiescence. But her face was covered, and the gay talkers around her were silenced and sobered by the heaving of her little frame with sobs that she could not keep back. Mr. Carleton secured the permanence of their silence for that evening. He dismissed them the room again and would have nobody there but himself and his mother.

Instead of being better the next day Fleda was not able to get up; she was somewhat feverish and exceedingly weak. She lay like a baby, Mrs. Carleton said, and gave as little trouble. Gentle and patient always, she made no complaint, and even uttered no wish, and whatever they did made no objection. Though many a tear that day and the following paid its faithful tribute to the memory of what she had lost, no one knew it; she was never seen to weep; and the very grave composure of her face and her passive unconcern as to what was done or doing around her alone gave her friends reason to suspect that the mind was not as quiet as the body. Mr. Carleton was the only one who saw deeper; the only one that guessed why the little hand often covered the eyes so carefully, and read the very, very grave lines of the mouth that it could not hide.

As soon as she could bear it he had her brought out to the dressing-room again, and laid on the sofa; and it was several days before she could be got any further. But there he could be more with her and devote himself more to her pleasure; and it was not long before he had made himself necessary to the poor child's comfort in a way beyond what he was aware of.

He was not the only one who shewed her kindness. Unwearied care and most affectionate attention were lavished upon her by his mother and both her friends; they all thought they could not do enough to mark their feeling and regard for her. Mrs. Carleton and Mrs. Evelyn nursed her by night and by day. Mrs. Evelyn read to her. Mrs. Thorn would come often to look and smile at her and say a few words of heart-felt pity and sympathy. Yet Fleda could not feel quite at home with any one of them. They did not see it. Her manner was affectionate and grateful, to the utmost of their wish; her simple natural politeness, her nice sense of propriety, were at every call; she seemed after a few days to be as cheerful and to enter as much into what was going on about her as they had any reason to expect she could; and they were satisfied. But while moving thus smoothly among her new companions, in secret her spirit stood aloof; there was not one of them that could touch her, that could understand her, that could meet the want of her nature. Mrs. Carleton was incapacitated for it by education; Mrs. Evelyn by character; Mrs. Thorn by natural constitution. Of them all, though by far the least winning and agreeable in personal qualifications, Fleda would soonest have relied on Mrs. Thorn, could soonest have loved her. Her homely sympathy and kindness made their way to the child's heart; Fleda felt them and trusted them. But there were too few points of contact. Fleda thanked her, and did not wish to see her again. With Mrs. Carleton Fleda had almost nothing at all in common. And that notwithstanding all this lady's politeness, intelligence, cultivation, and real kindness towards herself. Fleda would readily have given her credit for them all; and yet, the nautilus may as soon compare notes with the navigator, the canary might as well study Maelzel's Metronome, as a child of nature and a

woman of the world comprehend and suit each other. The nature of the one must change or the two must remain the world wide apart. Fleda felt it, she did not know why. Mrs. Carleton was very kind, and perfectly polite; but Fleda had no pleasure in her kindness, no trust in her politeness; or if that be saying too much, at least she felt that for some inexplicable reason both were unsatisfactory. Even the tact which each possessed in an exquisite degree was not the same in each; in one it was the self-graduating power of a clever machine,--in the other, the delicateness of the sensitive plant. Mrs. Carleton herself was not without some sense of this distinction; she confessed, secretly, that there was something in Fleda out of the reach of her discernment, and consequently beyond the walk of her skill; and felt, rather uneasily, that more delicate hands were needed to guide so delicate a nature. Mrs. Evelyn came nearer the point. She was very pleasant, and she knew how to do things in a charming way; and there were times, frequently, when Fleda thought she was everything lovely. But yet, now and then a mere word, or look, would contradict this fair promise, a something of *hardness* which Fleda could not reconcile with the soft gentleness of other times; and on the whole Mrs. Evelyn was unsure ground to her; she could not adventure her confidence there.

With Mr. Carleton alone Fleda felt at home. He only, she knew, completely understood and appreciated her. Yet she saw also that with others he was not the same as with her. Whether grave or gay there was about him an air of cool indifference, very often reserved and not seldom haughty; and the eye which could melt and glow when turned upon her, was sometimes as bright and cold as a winter sky. Fleda felt sure however that she might trust him entirely so far as she herself was concerned; of the rest she stood in doubt. She was quite right in both cases. Whatever else there might be in that blue eye, there was truth in it when it met hers; she gave that truth her full confidence and was willing to honour every draught made upon her charity for the other parts of his character.

He never seemed to lose sight of her. He was always doing something for which Fleda loved him, but so quietly and happily that she could neither help his taking the trouble nor thank him for it. It might have been matter of surprise that a gay young man of fashion should concern himself like a brother about the wants of a little child; the young gentlemen down stairs who were not of the society in the dressing-room did make themselves very merry upon the subject, and rallied Mr. Carleton with the common amount of wit and wisdom about his little sweetheart; a raillery which met the most flinty indifference. But none of those who saw Fleda ever thought strange of anything that was done for her; and Mrs. Carleton was rejoiced to have her son take up the task she was fain to lay down. So he really, more than any one else, had the management of her; and Fleda invariably greeted his entrance into the room with a faint smile, which even the ladies who saw agreed was well worth working for.

Chapter IX.

> If large possessions, pompous titles, honourable charges, and profitable commissions, could have made this proud man happy, there would have been nothing wanting.--L'Estrange.

Several days had passed. Fleda'a cheeks had gained no colour, but she had grown a little stronger, and it was thought the party might proceed on their way without any more tarrying; trusting that change and the motion of travelling would do better things for Fleda than could be hoped from any further stay at Montepoole. The matter was talked over in an evening consultation in the dressing-room, and it was decided that they would set off on the second day thereafter.

Fleda was lying quietly on her sofa, with her eyes closed, having had nothing to say during the discussion. They thought she had perhaps not heard it. Mr. Carleton's sharper eyes, however, saw that one or two tears were glimmering just under the eyelash. He bent down over her and whispered,

"I know what you are thinking of Fleda, do I not?"

"I was thinking of aunt Miriam," Fleda said in an answering whisper, without opening her eyes.

"I will take care of that."

Fleda looked up and smiled most expressively her thanks, and in five minutes was asleep. Mr. Carleton stood watching her, querying how long those clear eyes would have nothing to hide,--how long that bright purity could resist the corrosion of the world's breath; and half thinking that it would be better for the spirit to pass away, with its lustre upon it, than stay till self-interest should sharpen the eye, and the lines of diplomacy write themselves on that fair brow. "Better so; better so."

"What are you thinking of so gloomily, Guy?" said his Mother.

"That is a tender little creature to struggle with a rough world."

"She won't have to struggle with it," said Mrs. Carleton.

"She will do very well," said Mrs. Evelyn.

"I don't think she'd find it a rough world, where *you* were, Mr. Carleton," said Mrs. Thorn.

"Thank you ma'am," he said smiling. "But unhappily my power reaches very little way."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Evelyn with a sly smile,--"that might be arranged differently--Mrs. Rossitur--I have no doubt--would desire nothing better than a smooth world for her little niece--and Mr. Carleton's power might be unlimited in its extent."

There was no answer, and the absolute repose of all the lines of the young gentleman's face bordered too nearly on contempt to encourage the lady to pursue her jest any further.

The next day Fleda was well enough to bear moving. Mr. Carleton had her carefully bundled up, and then carried her down stairs and placed her in the little light wagon which had once before brought her to the Pool. Luckily it was a mild day, for no close carriage was to be had for love or money. The stage coach in which Fleda had been fetched from her grandfather's was in use, away somewhere. Mr. Carleton drove her down to aunt Miriam's, and leaving her there he went off again; and whatever he did with himself it was a good two hours before he came back. All too little yet they were for the tears and the sympathy which went to so many things both in the past and in the future. Aunt Miriam had not said half she wished to say, when the wagon was at the gate again, and Mr. Carleton came to take his little charge away.

He found her sitting happily in aunt Miriam's lap. Fleda was very grateful to him for leaving her such a nice long time, and welcomed him with even a brighter smile than usual. But her head rested wistfully on her aunt's bosom after that; and when he asked her if she was almost ready to go, she hid her face there and put her arms about her neck. The old lady held her close for a few minutes, in silence.

"Elfleda," said aunt Miriam gravely and tenderly,--"do you know what was your mother's prayer for you?"

"Yes,"--she whispered.

"What was it?"

"That I--might be kept--"

"Unspotted from the world!" repeated aunt Miriam, in a tone of tender and deep feeling;--"My sweet blossom!--how wilt thou keep so? Will you remember always your mother's prayer?"

"I will try."

"How will you try, Fleda?

"I will pray."

Aunt Miriam kissed her again and again, fondly repeating, "The Lord hear thee!--The Lord bless thee!--The Lord keep thee!--as a lily among thorns, my precious little babe;--though in the world, not of it.--"

"Do you think that is possible?" said Mr. Carleton significantly, when a few moments after they had risen and were about to separate. Aunt Miriam looked at him in surprise and asked,

"What, sir?"

"To live in the world and not be like the world?"

She cast her eyes upon Fleda, fondly smoothing down her soft hair with both hands for a minute or two before she answered,

"By the help of one thing sir, yes!"

"And what is that?" said he quickly.

"The blessing of God, with whom all things are possible."

His eyes fell, and there was a kind of incredulous sadness in his half smile which aunt Miriam understood better than he did. She sighed as she folded Fleda again to her breast and whisperingly bade her "Remember!" But Fleda knew nothing of it; and when she had finally

parted from aunt Miriam and was seated in the little wagon on her way home, to her fancy the best friend she had in the world was sitting beside her.

Neither was her judgment wrong, so far as it went. She saw true where she saw at all. But there was a great deal she could not see.

Mr. Carleton was an unbeliever. Not maliciously,--not wilfully,--not stupidly;--rather the fool of circumstance. His skepticism might be traced to the joint workings of a very fine nature and a very bad education. That is, education in the broad sense of the term; of course none of the means and appliances of mental culture had been wanting to him.

He was an uncommonly fine example of what nature alone can do for a man. A character of nature's building is at best a very ragged affair, without religion's finishing hand; at the utmost a fine ruin--no more. And if that be the *utmost*, of nature's handiwork, what is at the other end of the scale?--alas! the rubble stones of the ruin; what of good and fair nature had reared there was not strong enough to stand alone. But religion cannot work alike on every foundation; and the varieties are as many as the individuals. Sometimes she must build the whole, from the very ground; and there are cases where nature's work stands so strong and fair that religion's strength may be expended in perfecting and enriching and carrying it to an uncommon height of grace and beauty, and dedicating the fair temple to a new use.

Of religion Mr. Carleton had nothing at all, and a true Christian character had never crossed his path near enough for him to become acquainted with it. His mother was a woman of the world; his father had been a man of the world; and what is more, so deep-dyed a politician that to all intents and purposes, except as to bare natural affection, he was nothing to his son and his son was nothing to him. Both mother and father thought the son a piece of perfection, and mothers and fathers have very often indeed thought so on less grounds. Mr. Carleton saw,

whenever he took time to look at him, that Guy had no lack either of quick wit or manly bearing; that he had pride enough to keep him from low company and make him abhor low pursuits; if anything more than pride and better than pride mingled with it, the father's discernment could not reach so far. He had a love for knowledge too, that from a child made him eager in seeking it, in ways both regular and desultory; and tastes which his mother laughingly said would give him all the elegance of a woman, joined to the strong manly character which no one ever doubted he possessed. *She* looked mostly at the outside, willing if that pleased her to take everything else upon trust; and the grace of manner which a warm heart and fine sensibilities and a mind entirely frank and above board had given him, from his earliest years had more than met all her wishes. No one suspected the stubbornness and energy of will which was in fact the back-bone of his character. Nothing tried it. His father's death early left little Guy to his mother's guardianship. Contradicting him was the last thing she thought of, and of course it was attempted by no one else.

If she would ever have allowed that he had a fault, which she never would, it was one that grew out of his greatest virtue, an unmanageable truth of character; and if she ever unwillingly recognised its companion virtue, firmness of will, it was when she endeavoured to combat certain troublesome demonstrations of the other. In spite of all the grace and charm of manner in which he was allowed to be a model, and which was as natural to him as it was universal, if ever the interests of truth came in conflict with the dictates of society he flung minor considerations behind his back and came out with some startling piece of bluntness at which his mother was utterly confounded. These occasions were very rare; he never sought them. Always where it was possible he chose either to speak or be silent in an unexceptionable manner. But sometimes the barrier of conventionalities, or his mother's unwise policy, pressed too hard upon his integrity or his indignation; and he would then free the barrier and present the shut-out truth in its full size and proportions before his mother's shocked eyes. It was in vain to try to coax or blind

him; a marble statue is not more unruffled by the soft air of summer; and Mrs. Carleton was fain to console herself with the reflection that Guy's very next act after one of these breaks would be one of such happy fascination that the former would be forgotten; and that in this world of discordancies it was impossible on the whole for any one to come nearer perfection. And if there was inconvenience there were also great comforts about this character of truthfulness.

So nearly up to the time of his leaving the University the young heir lived a life of as free and uncontrolled enjoyment as the deer on his grounds, happily led by his own fine instincts to seek that enjoyment in pure and natural sources. His tutor was proud of his success; his dependants loved his frank and high bearing; his mother rejoiced in his personal accomplishments, and was secretly well pleased that his tastes led him another way from the more common and less safe indulgences of other young men. He had not escaped the temptations of opportunity and example. But gambling was not intellectual enough, jockeying was too undignified, and drinking too coarse a pleasure for him. Even hunting and coursing charmed him but for a few times; when he found he could out-ride and out leap all his companions, he hunted no more; telling his mother, when she attacked him on the subject, that he thought the hare the worthier animal of the two upon a chase; and that the fox deserved an easier death. His friends twitted him with his want of spirit and want of manliness; but such light shafts bounded back from the buff suit of cool indifference in which their object was cased; and his companions very soon gave over the attempt either to persuade or annoy him, with the conclusion that "nothing could be done with Carleton."

The same wants that had displeased him in the sports soon led him to decline the company of those who indulged in them. From the low-minded, from the uncultivated, from the unrefined in mind and manner, and such there are in the highest class of society as well as in the less-favoured, he shrank away in secret disgust or weariness. There was no affinity. To his books, to his grounds, which he took endless delight in

overseeing, to the fine arts in general, for which he had a great love and for one or two of them a great talent,--he went with restless energy and no want of companionship; and at one or the other, always pushing eagerly forward after some point of excellence or some new attainment not yet reached, and which sprang up after one another as fast as ever "Alps on Alps," he was happily and constantly busy. Too solitary, his mother thought,--caring less for society than she wished to see him; but that she trusted would mend itself. He would be through the University and come of age and go into the world as a matter of necessity.

But years brought a change--not the change his mother looked for. That restless active energy which had made the years of his youth so happy, became, in connection with one or two other qualities, a troublesome companion when he had reached the age of manhood and obeying manhood's law had "put away childish things." On what should it spend itself? It had lost none of its strength; while his fastidious notions of excellence and a far-reaching clear-sightedness which belonged to his truth of nature, greatly narrowed the sphere of its possible action. He could not delude himself into the belief that the oversight of his plantations and the perfecting his park scenery could be a worthy end of existence; or that painting and music were meant to be the stamina of life; or even that books were their own final cause. These things had refined and enriched him;--they might go on doing so to the end of his days;--but *for what*? For what?

It is said that everybody has his niche, failing to find which nobody fills his place or acts his part in society. Mr. Carleton could not find his niche, and he consequently grew dissatisfied everywhere. His mother's hopes from the University and the World, were sadly disappointed.

At the University he had not lost his time. The pride of character which joined with less estimable pride of birth was a marked feature in his composition, made him look with scorn upon the ephemeral pursuits of one set of young men; while his strong intellectual tastes drew him in the other direction; and the energetic activity which drove him to do

everything well that he once took in hand, carried him to high distinction. Being there he would have disdained to be anywhere but at the top of the tree. But out of the University and in possession of his estates, what should he do with himself and them?

A question easy to settle by most young men! very easy to settle by Guy, if he had had the clue of Christian truth to guide him through the labyrinth. But the clue was wanting, and the world seemed to him a world of confusion.

A certain clearness of judgment is apt to be the blessed handmaid of uncommon truth of character; the mind that knows not what it is to play tricks upon its neighbours is rewarded by a comparative freedom from self-deception. Guy could not sit down upon his estates and lead an insect life like that recommended by Rossitur. His energies wanted room to expend themselves. But the world offered no sphere that would satisfy him; even had his circumstances and position laid all equally open. It was a busy world, but to him people seemed to be busy upon trifles, or working in a circle, or working mischief; and his nice notions of what *ought to be* were shocked by what he saw *was*, in every direction around him. He was disgusted with what he called the drivelling of some unhappy specimens of the Church which had come in his way; he disbelieved the truth of what such men professed. If there had been truth in it, he thought, they would deserve to be drummed out of the profession. He detested the crooked involvments and double-dealing of the law. He despised the butterfly life of a soldier; and as to the other side of a soldier's life, again he thought, what is it for?--to humour the arrogance of the proud,--to pamper the appetite of the full,--to tighten the grip of the iron hand of power;--and though it be sometimes for better ends, yet the soldier cannot choose what letters of the alphabet of obedience he will learn. Politics was the very shaking of the government sieve, where if there were any solid result it was accompanied with a very great flying about of chaff indeed. Society was nothing but whip syllabub,--a mere conglomeration of bubbles,--as hollow and as

unsatisfying. And in lower departments of human life, as far as he knew, he saw evils yet more deplorable. The Church played at shuttlecock with men's credulousness, the law with their purses, the medical profession with their lives, the military with their liberties and hopes. He acknowledged that in all these lines of action there was much talent, much good intention, much admirable diligence and acuteness brought out--but to what great general end? He saw in short that the machinery of the human mind, both at large and in particular, was out of order. He did not know what was the broken wheel the want of which set all the rest to running wrong.

This was a strange train of thought for a very young man, but Guy had lived much alone, and in solitude one is like a person who has climbed a high mountain; the air is purer about him, his vision is freer; the eye goes straight and clear to the distant view which below on the plain a thousand things would come between to intercept. But there was some morbidness about it too. Disappointment in two or three instances where he had given his full confidence and been obliged to take it back had quickened him to generalize unfavourably upon human character, both in the mass and in individuals. And a restless dissatisfaction with himself and the world did not tend to a healthy view of things. Yet truth was at the bottom; truth rarely arrived at without the help of revelation. He discerned a want he did not know how to supply. His fine perceptions felt the jar of the machinery which other men are too busy or too deaf to hear. It seemed to him hopelessly disordered.

This habit of thinking wrought a change very unlike what his mother had looked for. He mingled more in society, but Mrs. Carleton saw that the eye with which he looked upon it was yet colder than it wont to be. A cloud came over the light gay spirited manner he had used to wear. The charm of his address was as great as ever where he pleased to shew it, but much more generally now he contented himself with a cool reserve, as impossible to disturb as to find fault with. His temper suffered the same eclipse. It was naturally excellent. His passions were not hastily

moved. He had never been easy to offend; his careless good-humour and an unbounded proud self-respect made him look rather with contempt than anger upon the things that fire most men; though when once moved to displeasure it was stern and abiding in proportion to the depth of his character. The same good-humour and cool self-respect forbade him even then to be eager in shewing resentment; the offender fell off from his esteem and apparently from the sphere of his notice as easily as a drop of water from a duck's wing, and could with as much ease regain his lost lodgment, but unless there were wrong to be righted or truth to be vindicated he was in general safe from any further tokens of displeasure. In those cases Mr. Carleton was an adversary to be dreaded. As cool, as unwavering, as persevering there as in other things, he there as in other things no more failed of his end. And at bottom these characteristics remained the same; it was rather his humour than his temper that suffered a change. That grew more gloomy and less gentle. He was more easily irritated and would shew it more freely than in the old happy times had ever been.

Mrs. Carleton would have been glad to have those times back again. It could not be. Guy could not be content any longer in the Happy Valley of Amhara. Life had something for him to do beyond his park palings. He had carried manly exercises and personal accomplishments to an uncommon point of perfection; he knew his library well and his grounds thoroughly, and had made excellent improvement of both; it was in vain to try to persuade him that seed-time and harvest were the same thing, and that he had nothing to do but to rest in what he had done; shew his bright colours and flutter like a moth in the sunshine, or sit down like a degenerate bee in the summer time and eat his own honey. The power of action which he knew in himself could not rest without something to act upon. It longed to be doing.

But what?

Conscience is often morbidly far-sighted. Mr. Carleton had a very large tenantry around him and depending upon him, in bettering whose condition, if he had but known it, all those energies might have found full play. It never entered into his head. He abhorred *business*,--the detail of business; and his fastidious taste especially shrank from having anything to do among those whose business was literally their life. The eye sensitively fond of elegance, the extreme of elegance, in everything, and permitting no other around or about him, could not bear the tokens of mental and bodily wretchedness among the ignorant poor; he escaped from them as soon as possible; thought that poverty was one of the irregularities of this wrong-working machine of a world, and something utterly beyond his power to do away or alleviate; and left to his steward all the responsibility that of right rested on his own shoulders.

And at last unable to content himself in the old routine of things he quitted home and England, even before he was of age, and roved from place to place, trying, and trying in vain, to soothe the vague restlessness that called for a very different remedy.

"On change de ciel,--l'on ne change point du sol."

Chapter X.

Faire Christabelle, that ladye bright,
Was had forth of the towre:
But ever she droopeth in her minde,
As, nipt by an ungentle winde,
Doth some faire lillye flowre.

Syr Cauline

That evening, the last of their stay at Montepoole, Fleda was thought well enough to take her tea in company. So Mr. Carleton carried her down, though she could have walked, and placed her on the sofa in the parlour.

Whatever disposition the young officers might have felt to renew their pleasantry on the occasion, it was shamed into silence. There was a pure dignity about that little pale face which protected itself. They were quite struck, and Fleda had no reason to complain of want of attention from any of the party. Mr. Evelyn kissed her. Mr. Thorn brought a little table to the side of the sofa for her cup of tea to stand on, and handed her the toast most dutifully; and her cousin Rossitur went back and forth between her and the tea-urn. All of the ladies seemed to take immense satisfaction in looking at her, they did it so much; standing about the hearth-rug with their cups in their hands, sipping their tea. Fleda was quite touched with everybody's kindness, but somebody at the back of the sofa whom she did not see was the greatest comfort of all.

"You must let me carry you up-stairs when you go, Fleda," said her cousin. "I shall grow quite jealous of your friend Mr. Carleton."

"No," said Fleda smiling a little,--"I shall not let any one but him carry me up,--if he will."

"We shall all grow jealous of Mr. Carleton," said Thorn "He means to monopolize you, keeping you shut up there up-stairs."

"He didn't keep me shut up," said Fleda.

Mr. Carleton was welcome to monopolize her, if it depended on her vote.

"Not fair play, Carleton," continued the young officer, wisely shaking his head,--"all start alike, or there's no fun in the race. You've fairly distanced us--left us nowhere."

He might have talked Chinese and been as intelligible to Fleda, and as interesting to Guy, for all that appeared.

"How are we going to proceed to-morrow, Mr. Evelyn?" said Mrs. Carleton. "Has the missing stage-coach returned yet? or Will it be forthcoming in the morning?"

"Promised, Mrs. Carleton. The landlord's faith stands pledged for it."

"Then it won't disappoint us, of course. What a dismal way of travelling!"

"This young country hasn't grown up to post-coaches yet," said Mrs. Evelyn.

"How many will it hold?" inquired Mrs. Carleton.

"Hum!--Nine inside, I suppose."

"And we number ten, with the servants.

"Just take us," said Mr. Evelyn. "There's room on the box for one."

"It will not take me," said Mr. Carleton.

"How will you go? ride?" said his mother "I should think you would, since you have found a horse you like so well."

"By George! I wish there was another that *I* liked," said Rossitur, "and I'd go on horseback too. Such weather. The landlord says it's the beginning of Indian summer."

"It's too early for that," said Thorn.

"Well, eight inside will do very well for one day," said Mrs. Carleton. "That will give little Fleda a little more space to lie at her ease."

"You may put Fleda out of your calculations too, mother," said Mr. Carleton. "I will take care of her."

"How in the world," exclaimed his mother,--"if you are on horseback?"

And Fleda twisted herself round so as to give a look of bright inquiry at his face. She got no answer beyond a smile, which however completely satisfied her. As to the rest he told his mother that he had arranged it and they should see in the morning. Mrs. Carleton was far from being at ease on the subject of his arrangements, but she let the matter drop.

Fleda was secretly very much pleased. She thought she would a great deal rather go with Mr. Carleton in the little wagon than in the stage-coach with the rest of the people. Privately she did not at all admire Mr. Thorn or her cousin Rossitur. They amused her though; and feeling very much better and stronger in body, and at least quiet in mind, she sat in tolerable comfort on her sofa, looking and listening to the people who were gayly talking around her.

In the gaps of talk she sometimes thought she heard a distressed sound in the hall. The buzz of tongues covered it up,--then again she heard it,--and she was sure at last that it was the voice of a dog. Never came an appeal in vain from any four-footed creature to Fleda's heart. All the rest being busy with their own affairs, she quietly got up and opened the door and looked out, and finding that she was right went softly into the hall. In one corner lay her cousin Rossitur's beautiful black pointer, which she well remembered and had greatly admired several times. The poor creature was every now and then uttering short cries, in a manner as if he would not, but they were forced from him.

"What is the matter with him?" asked Fleda, stepping fearfully towards the dog, and speaking to Mr. Carleton who had come out to look after her. As she spoke the dog rose and came crouching and wagging his tail to meet them.

"O Mr. Carleton!" Fleda almost screamed,--"look at him! O what is the matter with him! he's all over bloody! Poor creature!"--

"You must ask your cousin, Fleda," said Mr. Carleton, with as much cold disgust in his countenance as it often expressed; and that is saying a good deal.

Fleda could speak in the cause of a dog, where she would have been silent in her own. She went back to the parlour and begged her cousin with a face of distress to come out into the hall,--she did not say for what. Both he and Thorn followed her. Rossitur's face darkened as Fleda repeated her inquiry, her heart so full by this time as hardly to allow her to make any.

"Why the dog didn't do his duty and has been punished," he said gloomily.

"Punished?" said Fleda.

"Shot," said Mr. Carleton coolly.

"Shot!" exclaimed Fleda, bursting into heart-wrung tears,--"Shot!--O how *could* any one do it! Oh how could you, how could you, cousin Charlton?"

It was a picture. The child was crying bitterly, her fingers stroking the poor dog's head with a touch in which lay, O what tender healing, if the will had but had magnetic power. Carleton's eye glanced significantly from her to the young officers. Rossitur looked at Thorn.

"It was not Charlton--it was I, Miss Fleda," said the latter. "Charlton lent him to me to-day, and he disobeyed me, and so I was angry with him and punished him a little severely; but he'll soon get over it."

But all Fleda's answer was, "I am very sorry!--I am very sorry!--poor dog!!"--and to weep such tears as made the young gentlemen for once ashamed of themselves. It almost did the child a mischief. She did not get over it all the evening. And she never got over it as far as Mr. Thorn was concerned.

Mrs. Carleton hoped, faintly, that Guy would come to reason by the next morning and let Fleda go in the stage-coach with the rest of the people. But he was as unreasonable as ever, and stuck to his purpose. She had supposed however, with Fleda, that the difference would be only an open vehicle and his company instead of a covered one and her own. Both of them were sadly discomfited when on coming to the hall door to take their carriages it was found that Mr. Carleton's meaning was no less than to take Fleda before him on horseback. He was busy even then in arranging a cushion on the pommel of the saddle for her to sit upon. Mrs. Carleton burst into indignant remonstrances; Fleda silently trembled.

But Mr. Carleton had his own notions on the subject, and they were not moved by anything his mother could say. He quietly went on with his preparations; taking very slight notice of the raillery of the young officers, answering Mrs. Evelyn with polite words, and silencing his mother as he came up with one of those looks out of his dark eyes to which she always forgave the wilfulness for the sake of the beauty and the winning power. She was completely conquered, and stepped back with even a smile.

"But, Carleton!" cried Rossitur impatiently,--"you can't ride so! you'll find it deucedly inconvenient."

"Possibly," said Mr. Carleton.

"Fleda would be a great deal better off in the stage-coach."

"Have you studied medicine, Mr. Rossitur?" said the young man. "Because I am persuaded of the contrary."

"I don't believe your horse will like it," said Thorn.

"My horse is always of my mind, sir; or if he be not I generally succeed in convincing him."

"But there is somebody else that deserves to be consulted," said Mrs. Thorn. "I wonder how little Fleda will like it."

"I will ask her when we get to our first stopping-place," said Mr. Carleton smiling. "Come, Fleda!"

Fleda would hardly have said a word if his purpose had been to put her under the horse's feet instead of on his back. But she came forward with great unwillingness and a very tremulous little heart. He must have understood the want of alacrity in her face and manner, though he took no notice of it otherwise than by the gentle kindness with which he led her to the horse-block and placed her upon it. Then mounting, and riding the horse up close to the block, he took Fleda in both hands and bidding her spring, in a moment she was safely seated before him.

At first it seemed dreadful to Fleda to have that great horse's head so near her, and she was afraid that her feet touching him would excite his most serious disapprobation. However a minute or so went by and she could not see that his tranquillity seemed to be at all ruffled, or even that he was sensible of her being upon his shoulders. They waited to see the stage-coach off, and then gently set forward. Fleda feared very much again when she felt the horse moving under her, easy as his gait was, and looking after the stagecoach in the distance, now beyond call, she felt a little as if she was a great way from help and dry land, cast away on a horse's back. But Mr. Carleton's arm was gently passed round her, and she knew it held her safely and would not let her fall, and he bent down his face to her and asked her so kindly and tenderly, and with such a look too, that seemed to laugh at her fears, whether she felt afraid?--and with such a kind little pressure of his arm that promised to take care of her,--that Fleda's courage mounted twenty degrees at once. And it rose higher every minute; the horse went very easily, and Mr. Carleton held her so that she could not be tired, and made her lean against him; and before they had gone a mile Fleda began to be delighted. Such a charming way of travelling! Such a free view of the country!--and in this pleasant weather too, neither hot nor cold, and when all nature's

features were softened by the light veil of haze that hung over them and kept off the sun's glare. Mr. Carleton was right. In the stage-coach Fleda would have sat quiet in a corner and moped the time sadly away, now she was roused, excited, interested, even cheerful; forgetting herself, which was the very thing of all others to be desired for her. She lost her fears; she was willing to have the horse trot or canter as fast as his rider pleased; but the trotting was too rough for her, so they cantered or paced along most of the time, when the hills did not oblige them to walk quietly up and down, which happened pretty often. For several miles the country was not very familiar to Fleda. It was however extremely picturesque; and she sat silently and gravely looking at it, her head lying upon Mr. Carleton's breast, her little mind very full of thoughts and musings, curious, deep, sometimes sorrowful, but not unhappy.

"I am afraid I tire you, Mr. Carleton!" said she in a sudden fit of recollection, starting up.

His look answered her, and his arm drew her back to her place again.

"Are *you* not tired, Elfie?"

"Oh no!----You have got a new name for me, Mr. Carleton,' said she a moment after, looking up and smiling.

"Do you like it?"

"Yes."

"You are my good genius," said he,--"so I must have a peculiar title for you, different from what other people know you by."

"What is a genius, sir?" said Fleda.

"Well a sprite then," said he smiling.

"A sprite!" said Fleda.

"I have read a story of a lady, Elfie, who had a great many little unearthly creatures, a kind of sprites, to attend upon her. Some sat in the ringlets of her hair and took charge of them; some hid in the folds of her dress and made them lie gracefully; another lodged in a dimple in her cheek, and another perched on her eyebrows, and so on."

"To take care of her eyebrows?" said Fleda laughing.

"Yes--to smooth out all the ill-humoured wrinkles and frowns, I suppose."

"But am I such a sprite?" said Fleda.

"Something like it."

"Why what do I do?" said Fleda, rousing herself in a mixture of gratification and amusement that was pleasant to behold.

"What office would you choose, Elfie? what good would you like to do me?"

It was a curious wistful look with which Fleda answered his question, an innocent look, in which Mr. Carleton read perfectly that she felt something was wanting in him, and did not know exactly what. His smile almost made her think she had been mistaken.

"You are just the sprite you would wish to be, Elfie," he said.

Fleda's head took its former position, and she sat for some time musing over his question and answer, till a familiar waymark put all such thoughts to flight. They were passing Deepwater Lake, and would presently be at aunt Miriam's. Fleda looked now with a beating heart. Every foot of ground was known to her. She was seeing it perhaps for the last time. It was with even an intensity of eagerness that she watched every point and turn of the landscape, endeavouring to lose nothing in her farewell view, to give her farewell look at every favourite clump of trees and old rock, and at the very mill-wheels, which for years whether

working or at rest had had such interest for her. If tears came to bid their good-by too, they were hastily thrown off, or suffered to roll quietly down; *they* might bide their time; but eyes must look now or never. How pleasant, how pleasant, the quiet old country seemed to Fleda as they went long!--in that most quiet light and colouring; the brightness of the autumn glory gone, and the sober warm hue which the hills still wore seen under that hazy veil. All the home-like peace of the place was spread out to make it hard going away. Would she ever see any other so pleasant again? Those dear old hills and fields, among which she had been so happy,--they were not to be her home any more; would she ever have the same sweet happiness anywhere else?--"The Lord will provide!" thought little Fleda with swimming eyes.

It was hard to go by aunt Miriam's. Fleda eagerly looked, as well as she could, but no one was to be seen about the house. It was just as well. A sad gush of tears must come then, but she got rid of them as soon as possible, that she might not lose the rest of the way, promising them another time. The little settlement on "the hill" was passed,--the factories and mills and mill-ponds, one after the other; they made Fleda feel very badly, for here she remembered going with her grandfather to see the work, and there she had stopped with him at the turner's shop to get a wooden bowl turned, and there she had been with Cynthy when she went to visit an acquaintance; and there never was a happier little girl than Fleda had been in those old times. All gone!--It was no use trying to help it; Fleda put her two hands to her face and cried at last a silent but not the less bitter leave-taking of the shadows of the past.

She forced herself into quiet again, resolved to look to the last. As they were going down the hill past the saw-mill Mr. Carleton noticed that her head was stretched out to look back at it, with an expression of face he could not withstand. He wheeled about immediately and went back and stood opposite to it. The mill was not working to-day. The saw was standing still, though there were plenty of huge trunks of trees lying about in all directions waiting to be cut up. There was a desolate look of

the place. No one was there; the little brook, most of its waters cut oft', did not go roaring and laughing down the hill, but trickled softly and plaintively over the stones. It seemed exceeding sad to Fleda.

"Thank you, Mr. Carleton," she said after a little earnest fond looking at her old haunt;--"you needn't stay any longer."

But as soon as they had crossed the little rude bridge at the foot of the hill they could see the poplar trees which skirted the courtyard fence before her grandfather's house. Poor Fleda's eyes could hardly serve her. She managed to keep them open till the horse had made a few steps more and she had caught the well-known face of the old house looking at her through the poplars. Her fortitude failed, and bowing her little head she wept so exceedingly that Mr. Carleton was fain to draw bridle and try to comfort her.

"My dear Elfie!--do not weep so," he said tenderly. "Is there anything you would like?--Can I do anything for you?"

He had to wait a little. He repeated his first query.

"O--it's no matter," said Fleda, striving to conquer her tears, which found their way again,--"if I only could have gone into the house once more!--but it's no matter--you needn't wait, Mr. Carleton--"

The horse however remained motionless.

"Do you think you would feel better, Elfie, if you had seen it again?"

"Oh yes!--But never mind, Mr. Carleton,--you may go on."

Mr. Carleton ordered his servant to open the gate, and rode up to the back of the house.

"I am afraid there is nobody here, Elfie," he said; "the house seems all shut up."

"I know how I can get in," said Fleda,--"there's a window down stairs--I don't believe it is fastened,--if you wouldn't mind waiting, Mr. Carleton,--I won't keep you long?"

The child had dried her tears, and there was the eagerness of something like hope in her face. Mr. Carleton dismounted and took her off.

"I must find a way to get in too, Elfie,--I cannot let you go alone."

"O I can open the door when I get in," said Fleda.

"But you have not the key."

"There's no key--it's only hoi ted on the inside, that door. I can open it."

She found the window unfastened, as she had expected; Mr. Carleton held it open while she crawled in and then she undid the door for him. He more than half questioned the wisdom of his proceeding. The house had a dismal look; cold, empty, deserted,--it was a dreary reminder of Fleda's loss, and he feared the effect of it would be anything but good. He followed and watched her, as with an eager business step she went through the hall and up the stairs, putting her head into every room and giving an earnest wistful look all round it. Here and there she went in and stood a moment, where associations were more thick and strong; sometimes taking a look out of a particular window, and even opening a cupboard door, to give that same kind and sorrowful glance of recognition at the old often resorted to hiding place of her own or her grandfather's treasures and trumpery. Those old corners seemed to touch Fleda more than all the rest; and she turned away from one of them with a face of such extreme sorrow that Mr. Carleton very much regretted he had brought her into the house. For her sake,--for his own, it was a curious show of character. Though tears were sometimes streaming, she made no delay and gave him no trouble; with the calm steadiness of a woman she went regularly through the house, leaving no place unvisited, but never obliging him to hasten her away. She said not a word during the whole time; her very crying; was still; the light tread of

her little feet was the only sound in the silent empty rooms; and the noise of their footsteps in the halls and of the opening and shutting doors echoed mournfully through the house.

She had left her grandfather's room for the last. Mr. Carleton did not follow her in there, guessing that she would rather be alone. But she did not come back, and he was forced to go to fetch her.

The chill desolateness of that room had been too much for poor little Fleda. The empty bedstead, the cold stove, the table bare of books, only one or two lay upon the old bible,--the forlorn order of the place that bespoke the master far away, the very sunbeams that stole in at the little windows and met now no answering look of gladness or gratitude,--it had struck the child's heart too heavily, and she was standing crying by the window. A second time in that room Mr. Carleton sat down and drew his little charge to his breast and spoke words of soothing and sympathy.

"I am very sorry I brought you here, dear Elfie," he said kindly. "It was too hard for you."

"O no!"--even through her tears Fleda said,--"she was very glad."

"Hadn't we better try to overtake our friends?" he whispered after another pause.

She immediately, almost immediately, put away her tears, and with a quiet obedience that touched him went with him from the room; fastened the door and got out again at the little window.

"O Mr. Carleton!" she said with great earnestness when they had almost reached the horses, "won't you wait for me *one* minute more?--I just want a piece of the burning bush "--

She stood back and watched.
She stood back and watched.

Drawing her hand from him she rushed round to the front of the house. A little more slowly Mr. Carleton followed, and found her under the burning bush, tugging furiously at a branch beyond her strength to break off.

"That's too much for you, Elfie," said he, gently taking her hand from the tree,--"let my hand try."

She stood back and watched, tears running down her face, while he got a knife from his pocket and cut off the piece she had been trying for, nicely, and gave it to her. The first movement of Fleda's head was down, bent over the pretty spray of red berries; but by the time she stood at the horse's side she looked up at Mr. Carleton and thanked him with a face of more than thankfulness.

She was crying however, constantly till they had gone several miles on their way again, and Mr. Carleton doubted he had done wrong. It passed away, and she had been sitting quite peacefully for some time, when he told her they were near the place where they were to stop and join their friends. She looked up most gratefully in his face.

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Carleton, for what you did!"

"I was afraid I had made a mistake, Elfie."

"Oh, no, you didn't."

"Do you think you feel any easier after it, Elfie?"

"Oh yes!--indeed I do," said she looking up again,--"thank you, Mr. Carleton."

A gentle kind pressure of his arm answered her thanks.

"I ought to be a good sprite to you, Mr. Carleton," Fleda said after musing a little while,--"you are so very good to me!"

Perhaps Mr. Carleton felt too much pleasure at this speech to make any answer, for he made none.

"It is only selfishness, Elfie," said he presently, looking down to the quiet sweet little face which seemed to him, and was, more pure than anything of earth's mould he had ever seen.--"You know I must take care of you for my own sake."

Fleda laughed a little.

"But what will you do when we get to Paris?"

"I don't know. I should like to have you always, Elfie."

"You'll have to get aunt Lucy to give me to you," said Fleda.

"Mr. Carleton," said she a few minutes after, "is that story in a book?"

"What story?"

"About the lady and the little sprites that waited on her."

"Yes, it is in a book; you shall see it, Elfie.--Here we are!"

And here it was proposed to stay till the next day, lest Fleda might not be able to bear so much travelling at first. But the country inn was not found inviting; the dinner was bad and the rooms were worse; uninhabitable, the ladies said; and about the middle of the afternoon they began to cast about for the means of reaching Albany that night. None very comfortable could be had; however it was thought better to push on at any rate than wear out the night in such a place. The weather was very mild; the moon at the full.

"How is Fleda to go this afternoon?" said Mrs. Evelyn.

"She shall decide herself," said Mrs. Carleton. "How will you go, my sweet Fleda?"

Fleda was lying upon a sort of rude couch which had been spread for her, where she had been sleeping incessantly ever since she arrived, the hour of dinner alone excepted. Mrs. Carleton repeated her question.

"I am afraid Mr. Carleton must be tired," said Fleda, without opening her eyes.

"That means that you are, don't it?" said Rossitur.

"No," said Fleda gently.

Mr. Carleton smiled and went out to press forward the arrangements. In spite of good words and good money there was some delay. It was rather late before the cavalcade left the inn; and a journey of several hours was before them. Mr. Carleton rode rather slowly too, for Fleda's sake, so the evening had fallen while they were yet a mile or two from the city.

His little charge had borne the fatigue well, thanks partly to his admirable care, and partly to her quiet pleasure in being with him. She had been so perfectly still for some distance that he thought she had dropped asleep. Looking down closer however to make sure about it he saw her thoughtful clear eyes most unsleepily fixed upon the sky.

"What are you gazing at, Elfie?"

The look of thought changed to a look of affection as the eyes were brought to bear upon him, and she answered with a smile,

"Nothing,--I was looking at the stars."

"What are you dreaming about?"

"I wasn't dreaming," said Fleda,--"I was thinking."

"Thinking of what?"

"O of pleasant things."

"Mayn't I know them?--I like to hear of pleasant things."

"I was thinking,--" said Fleda, looking up again at the stars, which shone with no purer ray than those grave eyes sent back to them,--"I was thinking--of being ready to die."

The words, and the calm thoughtful manner in which they were said, thrilled upon Mr. Carleton with a disagreeable shock.

"How came you to think of such a thing?" said he lightly.

"I don't know,"--said Fleda, still looking at the stars,--"I suppose--I was thinking--"

"What?" said Mr. Carleton, inexpressibly curious to get at the workings of the child's mind, which was not easy, for Fleda was never very forward to talk of herself;--"what were you thinking? I want to know how you could get such a thing into your head."

"It wasn't very strange," said Fleda. "The stars made me think of heaven, and grandpa's being there, and then I thought how he was ready to go there and that made him ready to die--"

"I wouldn't think of such things, Elfie," said Mr. Carleton after a few minutes.

"Why not, sir?" said Fleda quickly.

"I don't think they are good for you."

"But Mr. Carleton," said Fleda gently,--"if I don't think about it, how shall *I* ever be ready to die?"

"It is not fit for you," said he, evading the question,--"it is not necessary now,--there's time enough. You are a little body and should have none but gay thoughts."

"But Mr. Carleton," said Fleda with timid earnestness,--"don't you think one could have gay thoughts better if one knew one was ready to die?"

"What makes a person ready to die, Elfie?" said her friend, disliking to ask the question, but yet more unable to answer hers, and curious to hear what she would say.

"O--to be a Christian," said Fleda.

"But I have seen Christians," said Mr. Carleton, "who were no more ready to die than other people."

"Then they were make-believe Christians," said Fleda decidedly.

"What makes you think so?" said her friend, carefully guarding his countenance from anything like a smile.

"Because," said Fleda, "grandpa was ready, and my father was ready, and my mother too; and I know it was because they were Christians."

"Perhaps your kind of Christians are different from my kind," said Mr. Carleton, carrying on the conversation half in spite of himself. "What do you mean by a Christian, Elfie?"

"Why, what the Bible means," said Fleda, looking at him with innocent earnestness.

Mr. Carleton was ashamed to tell her he did not know what that was, or he was unwilling to say what he felt would trouble the happy confidence she had in him. He was silent; but as they rode on, a bitter wish crossed his mind that he could have the simple purity of the little child in his arms; and he thought he would give his broad acres supposing it possible that religion could be true,--in exchange for that free happy spirit that looks up to all its possessions in heaven.

Chapter XI.

> Starres are poore books and oftentimes do misse;
> This book of starres lights to eternall blisse.
>
> George Herber.

The voyage across the Atlantic was not, in itself, at all notable. The first half of the passage was extremely unquiet, and most of the passengers uncomfortable to match. Then the weather cleared; and the rest of the way, though lengthened out a good deal by the tricks of the wind, was very fair and pleasant.

Fifteen days of tossing and sea-sickness had brought little Fleda to look like the ghost of herself. So soon as the weather changed and sky and sea were looking gentle again, Mr. Carleton had a mattress and cushions laid in a sheltered corner of the deck for her, and carried her up. She had hardly any more strength than a baby.

"What are you looking at me so for, Mr. Carleton?" said she, a little while after he had carried her up, with a sweet serious smile that seemed to know the answer to her question.

He stooped down and clasped her little thin hand, as reverentially as if she really had not belonged to the earth.

"You are more like a sprite than I like to see you just now," said he, unconsciously fastening the child's heart to himself with the magnetism of those deep eyes.--"I must get some of the sailors' salt beef and sea biscuit for you--they say that is the best thing to make people well."

"O I feel better already," said Fleda, and settling her little face upon the cushion and closing her eyes, she added,--"thank you, Mr. Carleton!"

The fresh air began to restore her immediately; she was no more sick, her appetite came back; and from that time, without the help of beef and sea-biscuit, she mended rapidly. Mr. Carleton proved himself as good a nurse on the sea as on land. She seemed to be never far from his thoughts. He was constantly finding out something that would do her good or please her; and Fleda could not discover that he took any trouble about it; she could not feel that she was a burden to him; the things seemed to come as a matter of course. Mrs. Carleton was not wanting in any shew of kindness or care, and yet, when Fleda looked back upon the day, it somehow was Guy that had done everything for her; she thought little of thanking anybody but him.

There were other passengers that petted her a great deal, or would have done so, if Fleda's very timid retiring nature had not stood in the way. She was never bashful, nor awkward; but yet it was only a very peculiar, sympathetic, style of address that could get within the wall of reserve which in general hid her from other people. Hid, what it could; for through that reserve a singular modesty, sweetness, and gracefulness of spirit would shew themselves. But there was much more behind. There were no eyes however on board that did not look kindly on little Fleda, excepting only two pair. The Captain shewed her a great deal of flattering attention, and said she was a pattern of a passenger; even the sailors noticed and spoke of her and let slip no occasion of shewing the respect and interest she had raised. But there were two pair of eyes, and one of them Fleda thought most remarkably ugly, that were an exception to the rest; these belonged to her cousin Rossitur and Lieut. Thorn. Rossitur had never forgiven her remarks upon his character as a gentleman and declared preference of Mr. Carleton in that capacity; and Thorn was mortified at the invincible childish reserve which she opposed to all his advances; and both, absurd as it seems, were jealous of the young Englishman's advantage over them. Both not the less, because their sole reason for making her a person of consequence was that he had thought fit to do so. Fleda would permit neither of them to do anything for her that she could help.

They took their revenge in raillery, which was not always good-natured. Mr. Carleton never answered it in any other way than by his look of cold disdain,--not always by that; little Fleda could not be quite so unmoved. Many a time her nice sense of delicacy confessed itself hurt, by the deep and abiding colour her cheeks would wear after one of their ill mannered flings at her. She bore them with a grave dignity peculiar to herself, but the same nice delicacy forbade her to mention the subject to any one; and the young gentlemen contrived to give the little child in the course of the voyage a good deal of pain. She shunned them at last as she would the plague. As to the rest Fleda liked her life on board ship amazingly. In her quiet way she took all the good that offered and seemed not to recognise the ill.

Mr. Carleton had bought for her a copy of The Rape of the Lock, and Bryant's poems. With these, sitting or lying among her cushions, Fleda amused herself a great deal; and it was an especial pleasure when he would sit down by her and read and talk about them. Still a greater was to watch the sea, in its changes of colour and varieties of agitation, and to get from Mr. Carleton, bit by bit, all the pieces of knowledge concerning it that he had ever made his own. Even when Fleda feared it she was fascinated; and while the fear went off the fascination grew deeper. Daintily nestling among her cushions she watched with charmed eyes the long rollers that came up in detachments of three to attack the good ship, that like a slandered character rode patiently over them; or the crested green billows, or sometimes the little rippling waves that shewed old Ocean's placidest face; while with ears as charmed as if he had been delivering a fairy tale she listened to all Mr. Carleton could tell her of the green water where the whales feed, or the blue water where Neptune sits in his own solitude, the furtherest from land, and the pavement under his feet outdoes the very canopy overhead in its deep colouring; of the transparent seas where the curious mysterious marine plants and animals may be clearly seen many feet down, and in the North where hundreds of feet of depth do not hide the bottom; of the icebergs; and whirling great fields of ice, between which if a ship gets she

had as good be an almond in a pair of strong nut crackers. How the water grows colder and murkier as it is nearer the shore; how the mountain waves are piled together; and how old Ocean, like a wise man, however roughened and tumbled outwardly by the currents of Life, is always calm at heart. Of the signs of the weather; the out-riders of the winds, and the use the seaman makes of the tidings they bring; and before Mr. Carleton knew where he was he found himself deep in the science of navigation, and making a star-gazer of little Fleda. Sometimes kneeling beside him as he sat on her mattress, with her hand leaning on his shoulder, Fleda asked, listened, and looked; as engaged, as rapt, as interested, as another child would be in Robinson Crusoe, gravely drinking in knowledge with a fresh healthy taste for it that never had enough. Mr. Carleton was about as amused and as interested as she. There is a second taste of knowledge that some minds get in imparting it, almost as sweet as the first relish. At any rate Fleda never felt that she had any reason to fear tiring him; and his mother complaining of his want of sociableness said she believed Guy did not like to talk to anybody but that little pet of his and one or two of the old sailors. If left to her own resources Fleda was never at a loss; she amused herself with her books, or watching the sailors, or watching the sea, or with some fanciful manufacture she had learned from one of the ladies on board, or with what the company about her were saying and doing.

One evening she had been some time alone, looking out upon the restless little waves that were tossing and tumbling in every direction. She had been afraid of them at first and they were still rather fearful to her imagination. This evening as her musing eye watched them rise and fall her childish fancy likened them to the up-springing chances of life,--uncertain, unstable, alike too much for her skill and her strength to manage. She was not more helpless before the attacks of the one than of the other. But then--that calm blue Heaven that hung over the sea. It was like the heaven of power and love above her destinies; only this was far higher and more pure and abiding. "He knoweth them that trust in him." "There shall not a hair of your head perish."

Not these words perhaps, but something like the sense of them was in little Fleda's head. Mr. Carleton coming up saw her gazing out upon the water with an eye that seemed to see nothing.

"Elfie!--Are you looking into futurity?"

"No,--yes,--not exactly," said Fleda smiling.

"No, yes, and not exactly!" said he throwing himself down beside her.--" What does all that mean?"

"I wasn't exactly looking into futurity," said Fleda.

"What then?--Don't tell me you were 'thinking;' I know that dready. What?"

Fleda was always rather shy of opening her cabinet of thoughts. She glanced at him, and hesitated, and then yielded to a fascination of eye and smile that rarely failed of its end. Looking off to the sea again, as if she had left her thoughts there, she said,

"I was only thinking of that beautiful hymn of Mr. Newton's."

"What hymn?"

"That long one, 'The Lord will provide.'"

"Do you know it?--Tell it to me, Elfie--let us see whether I shall think it beautiful."

Fleda knew the whole and repeated it.

> "Though troubles assail,
> And dangers affright,
> Though friends should all fall,
> And foes all unite;
> Yet one thing secures us

Whatever betide,
The Scripture assures us
'The Lord will provide.'

"The birds without barn
Or storehouse are fed;
From them let us learn
To trust for our bread.
His saints what is fitting
Shall ne'er be denied,
So long as 'tis written,
'The Lord will provide.'

"His call we obey,
Like Abraham of old,
Not knowing our way,
But faith makes us bold.
And though we are strangers,
We have a good guide,
And trust in all dangers
'The Lord will provide.'

"We may like the ships
In tempests be tossed
On perilous deeps,
But cannot be lost.
Though Satan enrages
The wind and the tide,
The promise engages
'The Lord will provide.'

"When Satan appears
To stop up our path,
And fills us with fears,
We triumph by faith.

He cannot take from us,
Though oft he has tried,
This heart-cheering promise,
'The Lord will provide.'

"He tells us we're weak,
Our hope is in vain,
The good that we seek
We ne'er shall obtain;
But when such suggestions
Our spirits have tried,
This answers all questions.
'The Lord will provide.'

"No strength of our own,
Or goodness we claim;
But since we have known
The Saviour's great name
In this, our strong tower,
For safety we hide;
The Lord is our power!
'The Lord will provide.'

"When life sinks apace,
And death is in view,
This word of his grace
Shall comfort us through.
No fearing nor doubting,
With Christ on our side,
We hope to die shouting,
'The Lord will provide.'"

Guy listened very attentively to the whole. He was very far from understanding the meaning of several of the verses, but the bounding expression of confidence and hope he did understand, and did feel.

"Happy to be so deluded!" he thought.--"I almost wish I could share the delusion!"

He was gloomily silent when she had done, and little Fleda's eyes were so full that it was a little while before she could look towards him and ask in her gentle way, "Do you like it, Mr. Carleton?"

She was gratified by his grave, "Yes!"

"But, Elfie," said he smiling again, "you have not told me your thoughts yet. What had these verses to do with the sea you were looking at so hard?"

"Nothing--I was thinking," said Fleda slowly,--"that the sea seemed something like the world,--I don't mean it was like, but it made me think of it; and I thought how pleasant it is to know that God takes care of his people."

"Don't he take care of everybody?"

"Yes--in one sort of way," said Fleda; "but then it is only his children that he has promised to keep from everything that will hurt them."

"I don't see how that promise is kept, Elfie. I think those who call themselves so meet with as many troubles as the rest of the world, and perhaps more."

"Yes," said Fleda quickly, "they have troubles, but then God won't let the troubles do them any harm."

A subtle evasion, thought Mr. Carleton.--"Where did you learn that, Elfie?"

"The Bible says so," said Fleda.

"Well, how do you know it from that?" aid Mr. Carleton, impelled, he hardly knew whether by his bad or his good angel, to carry on the conversation.

"Why," said Fleda, looking as if it were a very simple question and Mr. Carleton were catechising her,--"you know, Mr. Carleton, the Bible was written by men who were taught by God exactly what to say, so there could be nothing in it that is not true."

"How do you know those men were so taught?"

"The Bible says so."

A child's answer!--but with a child's wisdom in it, not learnt of the schools. "He that is of God heareth God's words." To little Fleda, as to every simple and humble intelligence, the Bible proved itself; she had no need to go further.

Mr. Carleton did not smile, for nothing would have tempted him to hurt her feelings; but he said, though conscience did not let him do it without a twinge,

"But don't you know, Elfie, there are some people who do not believe the Bible?"

"Ah but those are bad people," replied Fleda quickly;--"all good people believe it."

A child's reason again, but hitting the mark this time. Unconsciously, little Fleda had brought forward a strong argument for her cause. Mr. Carleton felt it, and rising up that he might not be obliged to say anything more, he began to pace slowly up and down the deck, turning the matter over.

Was it so? that there were hardly any good men (he thought there might be a few) who did not believe in the Bible and uphold its authority? and that all the worst portion of society was comprehended in the other

class?--and if so, how had he overlooked it? He had reasoned most unphilosophically from a few solitary instances that had come under his own eye; but applying the broad principle of induction it could not be doubted that the Bible was on the side of all that is sound, healthful, and hopeful, in this disordered world. And whatever might be the character of a few exceptions, it was not supposable that a wide system of hypocrisy should tell universally for the best interests of mankind. Summoning history to produce her witnesses, as he went on with his walk up and down, he saw with increasing interest, what he had never seen before, that the Bible had come like the breath of spring upon the moral waste of mind; that the ice-bound intellect and cold heart of the world had waked into life under its kindly influence and that all the rich growth of the one and the other had come forth at its bidding. And except in that sun-lightened tract, the world was and had been a waste indeed. Doubtless in that waste, intellect had at different times put forth sundry barren shoots, such as a vigorous plant can make in the absence of the sun, but also like them immature, unsound, and groping vainly after the light in which alone they could expand and perfect themselves; ripening no seed for a future and richer growth. And flowers the wilderness had none. The affections were stunted and overgrown.

All this was so,--how had he overlooked it? His unbelief had come from a thoughtless, ignorant, one-sided view of life and human things. The disorder and ruin which he saw, where he did not also see the adjusting hand at work, had led him to refuse his credit to the Supreme Fabricator. He thought the waste would never be reclaimed, and did not know how much it already owed to the sun of revelation; but what was the waste where that light had not been!--Mr. Carleton was staggered. He did not know what to think. He began to think he had been a fool.

Poor little Fleda was meditating less agreeably the while. With the sure tact of truth she had discerned that there was more than jest in the questions that had been put to her. She almost feared that Mr. Carleton shared himself the doubts he had so lightly spoken of, and the thought

gave her great distress. However, when he came to take her down to tea, with all his usual manner, Fleda's earnest look at him ended in the conviction that there was nothing very wrong under that face.

For several days Mr. Carleton pondered the matter of this evening's conversation, characteristically restless till he had made up his mind. He wished very much to draw Fleda to speak further upon the subject, but it was not easy; she never led to it. He sought in vain an opportunity to bring it in easily, and at last resolved to make one.

"Elfie," said he one morning when all the rest of the passengers were happily engaged at a distance with the letter-bags,--"I wish you would let me hear that favourite hymn of yours again,--I like it very much."

Fleda was much gratified, and immediately with great satisfaction repeated the hymn. Its peculiar beauty struck him yet more the second time than the first.

"Do you understand those two last verses?" said he when she had done.

Fleda said "Yes!" rather surprised.

"I do not," he said gravely.

Fleda paused a minute or two, and then finding that it depended on her to enlighten him, said in her modest way,

"Why it means that we have no goodness of our own, and only expect to be forgiven and taken to heaven for the Saviour's sake."

Mr. Carleton asked, "How*for his sake*?"

"Why you know, Mr. Carleton, we don't deserve to go there, and if we are forgiven at all it must be for what he has done."

"And what is that, Elfie?"

"He died for us," said Fleda, with a look of some anxiety into Mr. Carleton's face.

"Died for us!--And what end was that to serve, Elfie?" said he, partly willing to hear the full statement of the matter, and partly willing to see how far her intelligence could give it.

"Because we are sinners," said Fleda, "and God has said that sinners shall die."

"Then how can he keep his word and forgive at all?"

"Because Christ has died *for us*," said Fleda eagerly;--"instead of us."

"Do you understand the justice of letting one take the place of others?"

"He was willing, Mr. Carleton," said Fleda, with a singular wistful expression that touched him.

"Still, Elfie," said he after a minute's silence,--"how could the ends of justice be answered by the death of one man in the place of millions?"

"No, Mr. Carleton, but he was God as well as man," Fleda said, with a sparkle in her eye which perhaps delayed her companion's rejoinder.

"What should induce him, Elfie," he said gently, "to do such a thing for people who had displeased him?"

"Because he loved us, Mr. Carleton."

She answered with so evident a strong and clear appreciation of what she was saying that it half made its way into Mr. Carleton's mind by the force of sheer sympathy. Her words came almost as something new.

Certainly Mr. Carleton had heard these things before, though perhaps never in a way that appealed so directly to his intelligence and his candour. He was again silent an instant, pondering, and so was Fleda.

"Do you know, Elfie," said Mr. Carleton, "there are some people who do not believe that the Saviour was anything more than a man?"

"Yes I know it," said Fleda;--"it is very strange!"

"Why is it strange?"

"Because the Bible says it so plainly."

"But those people hold I believe that the Bible does not say it?"

"I don't see how they could have read the Bible," said Fleda. "Why he said so himself."

"Who said so?"

"Jesus Christ. Don't *you* believe it, Mr. Carleton?"

She saw he did not, and the shade that had come over her face was reflected in his before he said "No."

"But perhaps I shall believe it yet, Elfie," he said kindly. "Can you shew me the place in your Bible where Jesus says this of himself?"

Fleda looked in despair. She hastily turned over the leaves of her Bible to find the passages he had asked for, and Mr. Carleton was cut to the heart to see that she twice was obliged to turn her face from him and brush her hand over her eyes, before she could find them. She turned to Matt. xxvi. 63, 64, 65, and without speaking gave him the book, pointing to the passage. He read it with great care, and several times over. "You are right, Elfie," he said. "I do not see how those who honour the authority of the Bible and the character of Jesus Christ can deny the truth of his own declaration. If that is false so must those be."

Fleda took the Bible and hurriedly sought out another passage.

"Grandpa shewed me these places," she said, "once when we were talking about Mr. Didenhover--*he* didn't believe that. There are a great many other places, grandpa said; but one is enough;"--

She gave him the latter part of the twentieth chapter of John.--

"You see, Mr. Carleton, he let Thomas fall down and worship him and call him God; and if he had *not* been, you know----God is more displeased with that than with any thing.'

"With what, Elfie?"

"With men's worshipping any other than himself. He says he 'will not give his glory to another.'"

"Where is that?"

"I am afraid I can't find it," said Fleda,--"it is somewhere in Isaiah, I know"--

She tried in vain; and failing, then looked up in Mr. Carleton's face to see what impression had been made.

"You see Thomas believed when he *saw*" said he, answering her;--"I will believe too when I see."

"Ah if you wait for that--" said Fleda.

Her voice suddenly checked, she bent her face down again to her little Bible, and there was a moment's struggle with herself.

"Are you looking for something more to shew me?" said Mr. Carleton kindly, stooping his face down to hers.

"Not much," said Fleda hurriedly; and then making a great effort she raised her head and gave him the book again.

"Look here, Mr. Carleton,--Jesus said, 'Blessed are they that have *not* seen and yet have believed.'"

Mr. Carleton was profoundly struck, and the thought recurred to him afterwards and was dwelt upon.--"Blessed are they that have *not* seen, and yet have believed." It was strange at first, and then he wondered that it should ever have been so. His was a mind peculiarly open to conviction, peculiarly accessible to truth; and his attention being called to it he saw faintly now what he had never seen before, the beauty of the principle of *faith*;--how natural, how reasonable, how *necessary*, how honourable to the Supreme Being, how happy even for man, that the grounds of his trust in God being established, his acceptance of many other things should rest on that trust alone.

Mr. Carleton now became more reserved and unsociable than ever. He wearied himself with thinking. If be could have got at the books, he would have spent his days and nights in studying the evidences of Christianity, but the ship was bare of any such books, and he never thought of turning to the most obvious of all, the Bible itself. His unbelief was shaken; it was within an ace of falling in pieces to the very foundation; or rather he began to suspect how foundationless it had been. It came at last to one point with him;--If there were a God, he would not have left the world without a revelation,--no more would he have suffered that revelation to defeat its own end by becoming corrupted or alloyed, if there was such a revelation it could be no other than the Bible;--and his acceptance of the whole scheme of Christianity now hung upon the turn of a hair. Yet he could not resolve himself. He balanced the counter-doubts and arguments, on one side and on the other, and strained his mind to the task;--he could not weigh them nicely enough. He was in a maze; and seeking to clear and calm his judgment that he might see the way out, it was in vain that he tried to shake his dizzied head from the effect of the turns it had made. By dint of anxiety to find the right path reason had lost herself in the wilderness.

Fleda was not, as Mr. Carleton had feared she would be, at all alienated from him by the discovery that had given her so much pain. It wrought in another way, rather to add a touch of tender and anxious interest to the affection she had for him. It gave her however much more pain than he thought. If he had seen the secret tears that fell on his account he would have been grieved; and if he had known of the many petitions that little heart made for him--he could hardly have loved her more than he did.

One evening Mr. Carleton had been a long while pacing up and down the deck in front of little Fleda's nest, thinking and thinking, without coming to any end. It was a most fair evening, near sunset, the sky without a cloud except two or three little dainty strips which set off its blue. The ocean was very quiet, only broken into cheerful mites of waves that seemed to have nothing to do but sparkle. The sun's rays were almost level now, and a long path of glory across the sea led off towards his sinking disk. Fleda sat watching and enjoying it all in her happy fashion, which always made the most of everything good, and was especially quick in catching any form of natural beauty.

Mr. Carleton's thoughts were elsewhere; too busy to take note of things around him. Fleda looked now and then as he passed at his gloomy brow, wondering what he was thinking of, and wishing that he could have the same reason to be happy that she had. In one of his turns his eye met her gentle glance; and vexed and bewildered as he was with study there was something in that calm bright face that impelled him irresistibly to ask the little child to set the proud scholar right. Placing himself beside her, he said,

"Elfie, how do you know there is a God?--what reason have you for thinking so, out of the Bible?"

It was a strange look little Fleda gave him. He felt it at the time, and he never forgot it. Such a look of reproach, sorrow, and *pity*, he afterwards thought, as an angel's face might have worn. The *question* did not seem

to occupy her a moment. After this answering look she suddenly pointed to the sinking sun and said,

"Who made that, Mr. Carleton?"

Mr. Carleton's eyes, following the direction of hers, met the long bright rays whose still witness-bearing was almost too powerful to be borne. The sun was just dipping majestically into the sea, and its calm self-assertion seemed to him at that instant hardly stronger than its vindication of its Author.

A slight arrow may find the joint in the armour before which many weightier shafts have fallen powerless. Mr. Carleton was an unbeliever no more from that time.

Chapter XII.

> He borrowed a box of the ear of the Englishman, and swore he would pay him again when he was able.--Merchant of Venice.

One other incident alone in the course of the voyage deserves to be mentioned; both because it served to bring out the characters of several people, and because it was not,--what is?--without its lingering consequences.

Thorn and Rossitur had kept up indefatigably the game of teasing Fleda about her "English admirer," as they sometimes styled him. Poor Fleda grew more and more sore on the subject. She thought it was very strange that two grown men could not find enough to do to amuse themselves without making sport of the comfort of a little child. She wondered they could take pleasure in what gave her so much pain; but so it was; and they had it up so often that at last others caught it from them; and

though not in malevolence yet in thoughtless folly many a light remark was made and question asked of her that set little Fleda's sensitive nerves a quivering. She was only too happy that they were never said before Mr. Carleton; that would have been a thousand times worse. As it was, her gentle nature was constantly suffering from the pain or the fear of these attacks.

"Where's Mr. Carleton?" said her cousin coming up one day.

"I don't know," said Fleda,--"I don't know but he is gone up into one of the tops."

"Your humble servant leaves you to yourself a great while this morning, it seems to me. He is growing very inattentive."

"I wouldn't permit it, Miss Fleda, if I were you," said Thorn maliciously. "You let him have his own way too much."

"I wish you wouldn't talk so, cousin Charlton!" said Fleda.

"But seriously," said Charlton, "I think you had better call him to account. He is very suspicious lately. I have observed him walking by himself and looking very glum indeed. I am afraid he has taken some fancy into his head that would not suit you. I advise you to enquire into it."

"I wouldn't give myself any concern about it!" said Thorn lightly, enjoying the child's confusion and his own fanciful style of backbiting,--"I'd let him go if he has a mind to, Miss Fleda. He's no such great catch. He's neither lord nor knight--nothing in the world but a private gentleman, with plenty of money I dare say, but you don't care for that;--and there's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it. I don't think much of him!"

He is wonderfully better than *you*, thought Fleda as she looked in the young gentleman's face for a second, but she said nothing.

"Why, Fleda," said Charlton laughing, "it wouldn't be a killing affair, would it? How has this English admirer of yours got so far in your fancy? --praising your pretty eyes, eh?--Eh?" he repeated, as Fleda kept a dignified silence.

"No," said Fleda in displeasure,--"he never says such things."

"No?" said Charlton. "What then? What does he say? I wouldn't let him make a fool of me if I were you. Fleda!--did he ever ask you for a kiss?"

"No!" exclaimed Fleda half beside herself and bursting into tears;--"I wish you wouldn't talk so! How can you?"

They had carried the game pretty far that time, and thought best to leave it. Fleda stopped crying as soon as she could, lest somebody should see her; and was sitting quietly again, alone as before, when one of the sailors whom she had never spoken to came by, and leaning over towards her with a leer as he passed, said,

"Is this the young English gentleman's little sweetheart?"

Poor Fleda! She had got more than she could bear. She jumped up and ran down into the cabin; and in her berth Mrs. Carleton found her some time afterwards, quietly crying, and most sorry to be discovered. She was exceeding unwilling to tell what had troubled her. Mrs. Carleton, really distressed, tried coaxing, soothing, reasoning, promising, in a way the most gentle and kind that she could use.

"Oh it's nothing--it's nothing," Fleda said at last eagerly,--"it's because I am foolish--it's only something they said to me."

"Who, love?"

Again was Fleda most unwilling to answer, and it was after repeated urging that she at last said,

"Cousin Charlton and Mr. Thorn."

"Charlton and Mr. Thorn!--What did they say? What did they say, darling Fleda?"

"O it's only that they tease me," said Fleda, trying hard to put an end to the tears which caused all this questioning, and to speak as if they were about a trifle. But Mrs. Carleton persisted.

"What do they say to tease you, love? what is it about?--Guy, come in here and help me to find out what is the matter with Fleda."

Fleda hid her face in Mrs. Carleton's neck, resolved to keep her lips sealed. Mr. Carleton came in, but to her great relief his question was directed not to her but his mother.

"Fleda has been annoyed by something those young men, her cousin and Mr. Thorn, have said to her;--they tease her, she says, and she will not tell me what it is."

Mr. Carleton did not ask, and he presently left the state-room.

"O I am afraid he will speak to them!" exclaimed Fleda as soon as he was gone.--"O I oughtn't to have said that!"--

Mrs. Carleton tried to soothe her and asked what she was afraid of. But Fleda would not say any more. Her anxious fear that she had done mischief helped to dry her tears, and she sorrowfully resolved she would keep her griefs to herself next time.

Rossitur and Thorn were in company with a brother officer and friend of the latter when Mr. Carleton approached them.

"Mr. Rossitur and Mr. Thorn," said he, "you have indulged yourselves in a style of conversation extremely displeasing to the little girl under my mother's care. You will oblige me by abandoning it for the future."

There was certainly in Mr. Carleton's manner a sufficient degree of the cold haughtiness with which he usually expressed displeasure; though his words gave no other cause of offence. Thorn retorted rather insolently,

"I shall oblige myself in the matter, and do as I think proper."

"I have a right to speak as I please to my own cousin," said Rossitur sulkily,--"without asking anybody's leave. I don't see what you have to do with it."

"Simply that she is under my protection and that I will not permit her to be annoyed."

"I don't see how she is under your protection," said Rossitur.

"And I do not see how the potency of it will avail in this case,' said his companion.

"Neither position is to be made out in words," said Mr. Carleton calmly. "You see that I desire there be no repetition of the offence. The rest I will endeavour to make clear if I am compelled to it."

"Stop, sir!" said Thorn, as the young Englishman was turning away, adding with an oath,--"I won't bear this! You shall answer this to me, sir!"

"Easily," said the other.

"And me too," said Rossitur. "You have an account to settle with me, Carleton."

"I will answer what you please," said Carleton carelessly,--"and as soon as we get to land--provided you do not in the mean time induce me to refuse you the honour."

However incensed, the young men endeavoured to carry it off with the same coolness that their adversary shewed. No more words passed. But Mrs. Carleton, possibly quickened by Fleda's fears, was not satisfied with the carriage of all parties, and resolved to sound her son, happy in knowing that nothing but truth was to be had from him. She found an opportunity that very afternoon when he was sitting alone on the deck. The neighbourhood of little Fleda she hardly noticed. Fleda was curled up among her cushions, luxuriously bending over a little old black Bible which was very often in her hand at times when she was quiet and had no observation to fear.

"Reading!--always reading?" said Mrs. Carleton, as she came up and took a place by her son.

"By no means!" he said, closing his book with a smile;--"not enough to tire any one's eyes on this voyage, mother."

"I wish you liked intercourse with living society," said Mrs. Carleton, leaning her arm on his shoulder and looking at him rather wistfully.

"You need not wish that,--when it suits me," he answered.

"But none suits you. Is there any on board?"

"A small proportion," he said, with the slight play of feature which always effected a diversion of his mother's thoughts, no matter in what channel they had been flowing.

"But those young men," she said, returning to the charge,--"you hold yourself very much aloof from them?"

He did not answer, even by a look, but to his mother the perfectly quiet composure of his face was sufficiently expressive.

"I know what you think, but Guy, you always had the same opinion of them?"

"I have never shewn any other."

"Guy," she said speaking low and rather anxiously,--"have you got into trouble with those young men?"

"*I* am in no trouble, mother," he answered somewhat haughtily; "I cannot speak for them."

Mrs. Carleton waited a moment.

"You have done something to displease them, have you not?"

"They have displeased me, which is somewhat more to the purpose.

"But their folly is nothing to you?"

"No,--not their folly."

"Guy," said his mother, again pausing a minute, and pressing her hand more heavily upon his shoulder, "you will not suffer this to alter the friendly terms you have been on?--whatever it be,--let it pass."

"Certainly--if they choose to apologize and behave themselves."

"What, about Fleda?"

"Yes."

"I have no idea they meant to trouble her--I suppose they did not at all know what they were doing,--thoughtless nonsense,--and they could have had no design to offend you. Promise me that you will not take any further notice of this!"

He shook off her beseeching hand as he rose up, and answered haughtily, and not without something like an oath, that he *would*.

Mrs. Carleton knew him better than to press the matter any further; and her fondness easily forgave the offence against herself, especially as her son almost immediately resumed his ordinary manner.

It had well nigh passed from the minds of both parties, when in the middle of the next day Mr. Carleton asked what had become of Fleda?--he had not seen her except at the breakfast table. Mrs. Carleton said she was not well.

"What's the matter?"

"She complained of some headache--I think she made herself sick yesterday--she was crying all the afternoon, and I could not get her to tell me what for. I tried every means I could think of, but she would not give me the least clue--she said 'no' to everything I guessed--I can't bear to see her do so--it makes it all the worse she does it so quietly--it was only by a mere chance I found she was crying at all, but I think she cried herself ill before she stopped. She could not eat a mouthful of breakfast."

Mr. Carleton said nothing and with a changed countenance went directly down to the cabin. The stewardess, whom he sent in to see how she was, brought back word that Fleda was not asleep but was too ill to speak to her. Mr. Carleton went immediately into the little crib of a state-room. There he found his little charge, sitting bolt upright, her feet on the rung of a chair and her hands grasping the top to support herself. Her eyes were closed, her face without a particle of colour, except the dark shade round the eyes which bespoke illness and pain. She made no attempt to answer his shocked questions and words of tender concern, not even by the raising of an eyelid, and he saw that the intensity of pain at the moment was such as to render breathing itself difficult. He sent off the stewardess with all despatch after iced water and vinegar and brandy, and himself went on an earnest quest of restoratives among the lady passengers in the cabin, which resulted in sundry supplies of salts and cologne; and also offers of service, in greater plenty still, which he all refused. Most tenderly and judiciously he himself applied various

remedies to the suffering child, who could not direct him otherwise than by gently putting away the things which she felt would not avail her. Several were in vain. But there was one bottle of strong aromatic vinegar which was destined to immortalize its owner in Fleda's remembrance. Before she had taken three whiffs of it her colour changed. Mr. Carleton watched the effect of a few whiffs more, and then bade the stewardess take away all the other things and bring him a cup of fresh strong coffee. By the time it came Fleda was ready for it, and by the time Mr. Carleton had administered the coffee he saw it would do to throw his mother's shawl round her and carry her up on deck, which he did without asking any questions. All this while Fleda had not spoken a word, except once when he asked her if she felt better. But she had given him, on finishing the coffee, a full look and half smile of such pure affectionate gratitude that the young gentleman's tongue was tied for some time after.

With happy skill, when he had safely bestowed Fleda among her cushions on deck, Mr. Carleton managed to keep off the crowd of busy inquirers after her well-doing, and even presently to turn his mother's attention another way, leaving Fleda to enjoy all the comfort of quiet and fresh air at once. He himself, seeming occupied with other things, did no more but keep watch over her, till he saw that she was able to bear conversation again. Then he seated himself beside her and said softly,

Then he seated himself beside her.
Then he seated himself beside her.

"Elfie,--what were you crying about all yesterday afternoon?"

Fleda changed colour, for soft and gentle as the tone was she heard in it a determination to have the answer; and looking up beseechingly into his face she saw in the steady full blue eye that it was a determination she could not escape from. Her answer was an imploring request that he would not ask her. But taking one of her little hands and carrying it to his lips, he in the same tone repeated his question. Fleda snatched away

her hand and burst into very frank tears; Mr. Carleton was silent, but she knew through silence that he was only quietly waiting for her to answer him.

"I wish you wouldn't ask me, sir," said poor Fleda, who still could not turn her face to meet his eye;--"It was only something that happened yesterday."

"What was it, Elfie?--You need not be afraid to tell me."

"It was only--what you said to Mrs. Carleton yesterday,--when she was talking--"

"About my difficulty with those gentlemen?"

"Yes," said Fleda, with a new gush of tears, as if her grief stirred afresh at the thought.

Mr. Carleton was silent a moment; and when he spoke there was no displeasure and more tenderness than usual in his voice.

"What troubled you in that, Elfie? tell me the whole."

"I was sorry, because,--it wasn't right," said Fleda, with a grave truthfulness which yet lacked none of her universal gentleness and modesty.

"What wasn't right?"

"To speak--I am afraid you won't like me to say it, Mr. Carleton."

"I will, Elfie,--for I ask you."

"To speak to Mrs. Carleton so, and besides,--you know what you said, Mr. Carleton--"

"It was *not* right," said he after a minute,--"and I very seldom use such an expression, but you know one cannot always be on one's guard, Elfie?"

"But," said Fleda with gentle persistence, "one can always do what is right."

The deuce one can!--thought Mr, Carleton to himself. "Elfie,--was that all that troubled you?--that I had said what was not right?"

"It wasn't quite that only," said Fleda hesitating,--"What else?"

She stooped her face from his sight and he could but just understand her words.

"I was disappointed--"

"What, in me!"

Her tears gave the answer; she could add to them nothing but an assenting nod of her head.

They would have flowed in double measure if she had guessed the pain she had given. Her questioner heard her with a keen pang which did not leave him for days. There was some hurt pride in it, though other and more generous feelings had a far larger share. He, who had been admired, lauded, followed, cited, and envied, by all ranks of his countrymen and countrywomen;--in whom nobody found a fault that could be dwelt upon amid the lustre of his perfections and advantages;--one of the first young men in England, thought so by himself as well as by others;--this little pure being had been *disappointed* in him. He could not get over it. He reckoned the one judgment worth all the others. Those whose direct or indirect flatteries had been poured at his feet were the proud, the worldly, the ambitious, the interested, the corrupted;--their praise was given to what they esteemed, and that, his candour said, was the least estimable part of him. Beneath all that, this truth-loving,

truth-discerning little spirit had found enough to weep for. She was right and they were wrong. The sense of this was so keen upon him that it was tea or fifteen minutes before he could recover himself to speak to his little reprover. He paced up and down the deck, while Fleda wept more and more from the fear of having offended or grieved him. But she was soon reassured on the former point. She was just wiping away her tears, with the quiet expression of patience her face often wore, when Mr. Carleton sat down beside her and took one of her hands.

"Elfie," said he,--"I promise you I will never say such a thing again."

He might well call her his good angel, for it was an angelic look the child gave him. So purely humble, grateful, glad,--so rosy with joyful hope,--the eyes were absolutely sparkling through tears. But when she saw that his were not dry, her own overflowed. She clasped her other hand to his hand and bending down her face affectionately upon it, she wept,--if ever angels weep,--such tears as they.

"Elfie," said Mr. Carleton, as soon as he could,--"I want you to go down stairs with me; so dry those eyes, or my mother will be asking all sorts of difficult questions."

Happiness is a quick restorative. Elfie was soon ready to go where he would.

They found Mrs. Carleton fortunately wrapped up in a new novel, some distance apart from the other persons in the cabin. The novel was immediately laid aside to take Fleda on her lap and praise Guy's nursing.

"But she looks more like a wax figure yet than anything else, don't she, Guy?"

"Not like any that ever I saw," said Mr. Carleton gravely. "Hardly substantial enough. Mother, I have come to tell you I am ashamed of myself for having given you such cause of offence yesterday."

Mrs. Carleton's quick look, as she laid her hand on her son's arm, said sufficiently well that she would have excused him from making any apology rather than have him humble himself in the presence of a third person.

"Fleda heard me yesterday," said he; "it was right she should hear me to-day."

"Then my dear Guy," said his mother with a secret eagerness which she did not allow to appear,--"if I may make a condition for my forgiveness, which you had before you asked for it,--will you grant me one favour?"

"Certainly, mother,--if I can."

"You promise me?"

"As well in one word as in two."

"Promise me that you will never, by any circumstances, allow yourself to be drawn into--what is called *an affair of honour*."

Mr. Carleton's brow changed, and without making any reply, perhaps to avoid his mother's questioning gaze, he rose up and walked two or three times the length of the cabin. His mother and Fleda watched him doubtfully.

"Do you see how you have got me into trouble, Elfie?" said he, stopping before them.

Fleda looked wonderingly, and Mrs. Carleton exclaimed, "What trouble?"

"Elfie," said he, without immediately answering his mother, "what would your conscience do with two promises both of which cannot be kept?"

"What such promises have you made?" said Mrs Carleton eagerly.

"Let me hear first what Fleda says to my question."

"Why," said Fleda, looking a little bewildered,--"I would keep the right one."

"Not the one first made?" said he smiling.

"No," said Fleda,--"not unless it was the right one."

"But don't you think one ought to keep one's word, in any event?"

"I don't think anything can make it right to do wrong," Fleda said gravely, and not without a secret trembling consciousness to what point she was speaking.

He left them and again took several turns up and down the cabin before he sat down.

"You have not given me your promise yet, Guy," said his mother, whose eye had not once quitted him. "You said you would."

"I said, if I could."

"Well?--you can?"

"I have two honourable meetings of the proscribed kind now on hand, to which I stand pledged."

Fleda hid her face in an agony. Mrs. Carleton's agony was in every line of hers as she grasped her son's wrist exclaiming, "Guy, promise me!" She had words for nothing else. He hesitated still a moment, and then meeting his mother's look he said gravely and steadily,

"I promise you, mother, I never will."

His mother threw herself upon his breast and hid her face there, too much excited to have any thought of her customary regard to appearances; sobbing out thanks and blessings even audibly. Fleda's

gentle head was bowed in almost equal agitation; and Mr. Carleton at that moment had no doubt that he had chosen well which promise to keep.

There remained however a less agreeable part of the business to manage. After seeing his mother and Fleda quite happy again, though without satisfying in any degree the curiosity of the former, Guy went in search of the two young West Point officers. They were together, but without Thorn's friend, Capt. Beebee. Him Carleton next sought and brought to the forward deck where the others were enjoying their cigars; or rather Charlton Rossitur was enjoying his, with the happy self satisfaction of a pair of epaulettes off duty. Thorn had too busy a brain to be much of a smoker. Now, however, when it was plain that Mr. Carleton had something to say to them, Charlton's cigar gave way to his attention; it was displaced from his mouth and held in abeyance; while Thorn puffed away more intently than ever.

"Gentlemen," Carleton began,--"I gave you yesterday reason to expect that so soon as circumstances permitted, you should have the opportunity which offended honour desires of trying sounder arguments than those of reason upon the offender. I have to tell you to-day that I will not give it you. I have thought further of it."

"Is it a new insult that you mean by this, sir?" exclaimed Rossitur in astonishment. Thorn's cigar did not stir.

"Neither new nor old. I mean simply that I have changed my mind."

"But this is very extraordinary!" said Rossitur. "What reason do you give?"

"I give none, sir."

"In that case," said Capt. Beebee, "perhaps Mr. Carleton will not object to explain or unsay the things which gave offence yesterday."

"I apprehend there is nothing to explain, sir,--I think I must have been understood; and I never take back my words, for I am in the habit of speaking the truth."

"Then we are to consider this as a further, unprovoked, unmitigated insult for which you will give neither reason nor satisfaction!" cried Rossitur.

"I have already disclaimed that, Mr. Rossitur."

"Are we, on mature deliberation, considered unworthy of tha *honour* you so condescendingly awarded to us yesterday?"

"My reasons have nothing to do with you, sir, nor with your friend; they are entirely personal to myself."

"Mr. Carleton must be aware," said Capt. Beebee, "that his conduct, if unexplained, will bear a very strange construction."

Mr. Carleton was coldly silent.

"It never was heard of," the Captain went on,--"that a gentleman declined both to explain and to give satisfaction for any part of his conduct which had called for it."

"It never was heard that a *gentleman* did," said Thorn, removing his cigar a moment for the purpose of supplying the emphasis which his friend had carefully omitted to make.

"Will you say, Mr. Carleton," said Rossitur, "that you did not mean to offend us yesterday in what you said?"

"No, Mr. Rossitur."

"You will not!" cried the Captain.

"No, sir; for your friends had given me, as I conceived, just cause of displeasure; and I was, and am, careless of offending those who have done so."

"You consider yourself aggrieved, then, in the first place?" said Beebee.

"I have said so, sir."

"Then," said the Captain, after a puzzled look out to sea, "supposing that my friends disclaim all intention to offend you in that case--"

"In that case I should be glad, Capt. Beebee, that they had changed their line of tactics--there is nothing to change in my own."

"Then what are we to understand by this strange refusal of a meeting, Mr. Carleton? what does it mean?"

"It means one thing in my own mind, sir, and probably another in yours; but the outward expression I choose to give it is that I will not reward uncalled-for rudeness with an opportunity of self-vindication."

"You are," said Thorn sneeringly, "probably careless as to the figure your own name will cut in connection with this story?"

"Entirely so," said Mr. Carleton, eying him steadily.

"You are aware that your character is at our mercy?"

A slight bow seemed to leave at their disposal the very small portion of his character he conceived to lie in that predicament.

"You will expect to hear yourself spoken of in terms that befit a man who has cowed out of an engagement he dared not fulfil?"

"Of course," said Carleton haughtily, "by my present refusal I give you leave to say all that, and as much more as your ingenuity can furnish in the same style; but not in my hearing, sir."

"You can't help yourself," said Thorn, with the same sneer. "You have rid yourself of a gentleman's means of protection,--what others will you use?

"I will leave that to the suggestion of the moment. I do not doubt it will be found fruitful."

Nobody doubted it who looked just then on his steady sparkling eye.

"I consider the championship of yesterday given up of course," Thorn went on in a kind of aside, not looking at anybody, and striking his cigar against the guards to clear it of ashes;--"the champion has quitted the field; and the little princess but lately so walled in with defences must now listen to whatever knight and squire may please to address to her. Nothing remains to be seen of her defender but his spurs."

"They may serve for the heels of whoever is disposed to annoy her," said Mr. Carleton. "He will need them."

He left the group with the same air of imperturbable self-possession which he had maintained during the conference. But presently Rossitur, who had his private reasons for wishing to keep friends with an acquaintance who might be of service in more ways than one, followed him and declared himself to have been, in all his nonsense to Fleda, most undesirous of giving displeasure to her temporary guardian, and sorry that it had fallen out so. He spoke frankly, and Mr. Carleton, with the same cool gracefulness with which he had carried on the quarrel, waived his displeasure, and admitted the young gentleman apparently to stand as before in his favour. Their reconciliation was not an hour old when Capt. Beebee joined them.

"I am sorry I must trouble you with a word more on this disagreeable subject, Mr. Carleton," he began, after a ceremonious salutation,--"My friend, Lieut. Thorn, considers himself greatly outraged by your determination not to meet him. He begs to ask, by me, whether it is your purpose to abide by it at all hazards?"

"Yes, sir."

"There is some misunderstanding here, which I greatly regret.--I hope you will see and excuse the disagreeable necessity I am under of delivering the rest of my friend's message."

"Say on, sir."

"Mr. Thorn declares that if you deny him the common courtesy which no gentleman refuses to another, he will proclaim your name with the most opprobrious adjuncts to all the world, and in place of his former regard he will hold you in the most unlimited contempt, which he will have no scruple about shewing on all occasions."

Mr. Carleton coloured a little, but replied coolly,

"I have not lived in Mr. Thorn's favour. As to the rest, I forgive him!--except indeed he provoke me to measures for which I never will forgive him."

"Measures!" said the Captain.

"I hope not! for my own self-respect would be more grievously hurt than his. But there is an unruly spring somewhere about my composition that when it gets wound up is once in a while too much for me."

"But," said Rossitur, "pardon me,--have you no regard to the effect of his misrepresentations?"

"You are mistaken, Mr. Rossitur," said Carleton slightly;--this is but the blast of a bellows,--not the Simoom."

"Then what answer shall I have the honour of carrying back to my friend?" said Capt. Beebee, after a sort of astounded pause of a few minutes.

"None, of my sending, sir."

Capt. Beebee touched his cap, and went back to Mr. Thorn, to whom he reported that the young Englishman was thoroughly impracticable, and that there was nothing to be gained by dealing with him; and the vexed conclusion of Thorn's own mind, in the end, was in favour of the wisdom of letting him alone.

In a very different mood, saddened and disgusted, Mr. Carleton shook himself free of Rossitur and went and stood alone by the guards looking out upon the sea. He did not at all regret his promise to his mother, nor wish to take other ground than that he had taken. Both the theory and the practice of duelling he heartily despised, and he was not weak enough to fancy that he had brought any discredit upon either his sense or his honour by refusing to comply with an unwarrantable and barbarous custom. And he valued mankind too little to be at all concerned about their judgment in the matter. His own opinion was at all times enough for him. But the miserable folly and puerility of such an altercation as that in which he had just been engaged, the poor display of human character, the little low passions which bad been called up, even in himself, alike destitute of worthy cause and aim, and which had perhaps but just missed ending in the death of some and the living death of others,--it all wrought to bring him back to his old wearying of human nature and despondent eying of the everywhere jarrings, confusions, and discordances in the moral world. The fresh sea-breeze that swept by the ship, roughening the play of the waves, and brushing his own cheek with its health-bearing wing, brought with it a sad feeling of contrast. Free, and pure, and steadily directed, it sped on its way, to do its work. And like it all the rest of the natural world, faithful to the law of its Maker, was stamped with the same signet of perfection. Only man, in all the universe, seemed to be at cross purposes with the end of his being. Only man, of all animate or inanimate things, lived an aimless, fruitless, broken life,--or fruitful only in evil. How was this? and whence? and when would be the end? and would this confused mass of warring elements ever be at peace? would this disordered machinery ever work smoothly, without let or stop any more, and work out the beautiful

something for which sure it was designed? And could any hand but its first Maker mend the broken wheel or supply the spring that was wanting?

Has not the Desire of all nations been often sought of eyes that were never taught where to look for him.

Mr. Carleton was standing still by the guards, looking thoughtfully out to windward to meet the fresh breeze, as if the Spirit of the Wilderness were in it and could teach him the truth that the Spirit of the World knew not and had not to give, when he became sensible of something close beside him; and looking down met little Fleda's upturned face, with such a look of purity, freshness, and peace, it said as plainly as ever the dial-plate of a clock that *that* little piece of machinery was working right. There was a sunlight upon it, too, of happy confidence and affection. Mr. Carleton's mind experienced a sudden revulsion. Fleda might see the reflection of her own light in his face as he helped her up to a stand where she could be more on a level with him; putting his arm round her to guard against any sudden roll of the ship.

"What makes you wear such a happy face?" said he, with an expression half envious, half regretful.

"I don't know!" said Fleda innocently. "You, I suppose."

He looked as bright as she did, for a minute.

"Were you ever angry, Elfie?"

"I don't know--" said Fleda. "I don't know but I have."

He smiled to see that although evidently her memory could not bring the charge, her modesty would not deny it.

"Were you not angry yesterday with your cousin and that unmannerly friend of his?"

"No," said Fleda, a shade crossing her face,--"I was not *angry* "--

And as she spoke her hand was softly put upon Mr. Carleton's; as if partly in the fear of what might have grown out of *his* anger, and partly in thankfulness to him that he had rendered it unnecessary. There was a singular delicate timidity and tenderness in the action.

"I wish I had your secret, Elfie," said Mr. Carleton, looking wistfully into the clear eyes that met his.

"What secret?" said Fleda smiling.

"You say one can always do right--is that the reason you are happy?--because you follow that out?"

"No," said Fleda seriously. "But I think it is a great deal pleasanter."

"I have no doubt at all of that, neither, I dare say, have the rest of the world; only somehow when it comes to the point they find it is easier to do wrong. What's your secret, Elfie?"

"I haven't any secret," said Fleda. But presently, seeming to bethink herself, she added gently and gravely,

"Aunt Miriam says--"

"What?"

"She says that when we love Jesus Christ it is easy to please him."

"And do you love him, Elfie?" Mr Carleton asked after a minute.

Her answer was a very quiet and sober "Yes."

He doubted still whether she were not unconsciously using a form of speech the spirit of which she did not quite realize. That one might "not see and yet believe," he could understand; but for *affection* to go forth

towards an unseen object was another matter. His question was grave and acute.

"By what do you judge that you do, Elfie?"

"Why, Mr. Carleton," said Fleda, with an instant look of appeal, "who else *should* I love?"

"If not him "--her eye and her voice made sufficiently plain. Mr. Carleton was obliged to confess to himself that she spoke intelligently, with deeper intelligence than he could follow. He asked no more questions. Yet truth shines by its own light, like the sun. He had not perfectly comprehended her answers, but they struck him as something that deserved to be understood, and he resolved to make the truth of them his own.

The rest of the voyage was perfectly quiet. Following the earnest advice of his friend Capt. Beebee, Thorn had given up trying to push Mr. Carleton to extremity; who on his part did not seem conscious of Thorn's existence.

Chapter XIII.

There the most daintie paradise on ground
Itselfe doth offer to his sober eye,--
-----The painted flowres, the trees upshooting hye,
The dales for shade, the hills for breathing space,
The trembling groves, the christall running by;
And that, which all faire works doth most aggrace,
The art which all that wrought appeared in no place.

Færy Queene.

They had taken ship for London, as Mr. and Mrs. Carleton wished to visit home for a day or two before going on to Paris. So leaving Charlton to carry news of them to the French capital, so soon as he could persuade himself to leave the English one, they with little Fleda in company posted down to Carleton, in ----shire.

It was a time of great delight to Fleda, that is, as soon as Mr. Carleton had made her feel at home in England; and somehow he had contrived to do that and to scatter some clouds of remembrance that seemed to gather about her, before they had reached the end of their first day's journey. To be out of the ship was itself a comfort, and to be alone with kind friends was much more. With great joy Fleda put her cousin Charlton and Mr. Thorn at once out of sight and out of mind; and gave herself with even more than her usual happy readiness to everything the way and the end of the way had for her. Those days were to be painted days in Fleda's memory.

She thought Carleton was a very odd place. That is, the house, not the village which went by the same name. If the manner of her two companions had not been such as to put her entirely at her ease she would have felt strange and shy. As it was she felt half afraid of losing herself in the house, to Fleda's unaccustomed eyes it was a labyrinth of halls and staircases, set with the most unaccountable number and variety of rooms; old and new, quaint and comfortable, gloomy and magnificent; some with stern old-fashioned massiveness of style and garniture; others absolutely bewitching (to Fleda's eyes and understanding) in the rich beauty and luxuriousness of their arrangements. Mr. Carleton's own particular haunts were of these; his private room, the little library as it was called, the library, and the music-room, which was indeed rather a gallery of fine arts, so many treasures of art were gathered there. To an older and nice-judging person these rooms would have given no slight indications of their owner's mind--it had been at work on every corner of them. No particular fashion had been followed in anything, nor any model consulted but that which fancy

had built to the mind's order. The wealth of years had drawn together an enormous assemblage of matters, great and small, every one of which was fitted either to excite fancy, or suggest thought, or to satisfy the eye by its nice adaptation. And if pride had had the ordering of them, all these might have been but a costly museum, a literary alphabet that its possessor could not put together, an ungainly confession of ignorance on the part of the intellect that could do nothing with this rich heap of material. But pride was not the genius of the place. A most refined taste and curious fastidiousness had arranged and harmonized all the heterogeneous items; the mental hieroglyphics had been ordered by one to whom the reading of them was no mystery. Nothing struck a stranger at first entering, except the very rich effect and faultless air of the whole, and perhaps the delicious facilities for every kind of intellectual cultivation which appeared on every hand; facilities which it must be allowed do seem in general *not* to facilitate the work they are meant to speed. In this case however it was different. The mind that wanted them bad brought them together to satisfy its own craving.

These rooms were Guy's peculiar domain. In other parts of the house, where his mother reigned conjointly with him, their joint tastes had struck out another style of adornment which might be called a style of superb elegance. Not superb alone, for taste had not permitted so heavy a characteristic to be predominant; not merely elegant, for the fineness of all the details would warrant an ampler word. A larger part of the house than both these together had been left as generations past had left it, in various stages of, refinement, comfort and comeliness. It was a day or two before Fleda found out that it was all one; she thought at first that it was a collection of several houses that had somehow inexplicably sat down there with their backs to each other; it was so straggling and irregular a pile of building, covering so much ground, and looking so very unlike the different parts to each other. One portion was quite old; the other parts ranged variously between the present and the far past. After she once understood this it was a piece of delicious wonderment and musing and great admiration to Fleda; she never grew weary of

wandering round it and thinking about it, for from a child fanciful meditation was one of her delights. Within doors she best liked Mr. Carleton's favourite rooms. Their rich colouring and moderated light and endless stores of beauty and curiosity made them a place of fascination.

Out of doors she found still more to delight her. Morning, noon, and night she might be seen near the house gazing, taking in pictures of natural beauty which were for ever after to hang in Fleda's memory as standards of excellence in that sort. Nature's hand had been very kind to the place, moulding the ground in beautiful style. Art had made happy use of the advantage thus given her; and now what appeared was neither art nor nature, but a perfection that can only spring from the hands of both. Fleda's eyes were bewitched. She stood watching the rolling slopes of green turf, *so* soft and lovely, and the magnificent trees, that had kept their ground for ages and seen generations rise and fall before their growing strength and grandeur. They were scattered here and there on the lawn, and further back stood on the heights and stretched along the ridges of the undulating ground, the outposts of a wood of the same growth still beyond them.

"How do you like it, Elfie?" Mr. Carleton asked her the evening of the first day, as he saw her for a length of time looking out gravely and intently from before the hall door.

"I think it is beautiful!" said Fleda. "The ground is a great deal smoother here than it was at home."

"I'll take you to ride to-morrow," said he smiling, "and shew you rough ground enough."

"As you did when we came from Montepoole?" raid Fleda rather eagerly.

"Would you like that?"

"Yes, very much,--if *you* would like it, Mr. Carleton."

"Very well," said he. "So it shall be."

And not a day passed during their short stay that he did not give her one of those rides. He shewed her rough ground, according to his promise, but Fleda still thought it did not look much like the mountains "at home." And indeed unsightly roughnesses had been skilfully covered or removed; and though a large part of the park, which was a very extensive one, was wildly broken and had apparently been left as nature left it, the hand of taste had been there; and many an unsuspected touch instead of hindering had heightened both the wild and the beautiful character. Landscape gardening had long been a great hobby of its owner.

"How far does your ground come, Mr Carleton?" inquired Fleda on one of these rides, when they had travelled a good distance from home.

"Further than you can see, Elfie."

"Further than I can see!--It must be a very large farm!"

"This is not a farm where we are now," said he;--"did you mean that?--this is the park; we are almost at the edge of it on this side."

"What is the difference between a farm and a park?" said Fleda.

"The grounds of a farm are tilled for profit; a park is an uncultivated enclosure kept merely for men and women and deer to take pleasure in."

"*I* have taken a good deal of pleasure in it," said Fleda. "And have you a farm besides, Mr. Carleton?"

"A good many, Elfie."

Fleda looked surprised, and then remarked that it must be very nice to have such a beautiful piece of ground just for pleasure.

She enjoyed it to the full during the few days she was there. And one thing more, the grand piano in the music-room. The first evening of their arrival she was drawn by the far-off sounds, and Mrs. Carleton seeing it went immediately to the music-room with her. The room had no light, except from the moonbeams that stole in through two glass doors which opened upon a particularly private and cherished part of the grounds, in summer-time full of flowers; for in the very refinement of luxury delights had been crowded about this favourite apartment. Mr. Carleton was at the instrument, playing. Fleda sat down quietly in one corner and listened,--in a rapture of pleasure she had hardly ever known from any like source. She did not think it could be greater, till after a time, in a pause of the music, Mrs. Carleton asked her son to sing a particular ballad, and that one was followed by two or three more. Fleda left her corner, she could not contain herself, and favoured by the darkness came forward and stood quite near; and if the performer bad bad light to see by, he would have been gratified with the tribute paid to his power by the unfeigned tears that ran down her cheeks. This pleasure was also repeated from evening to evening.

"Do you know we set off for Paris to-morrow?" said Mrs. Carleton the last evening of their stay, as Fleda came up to the door after a prolonged ramble in the park, leaving Mr. Carleton with one or two gardeners at a little distance.

"Yes!" said Fleda, with a sigh that was more than half audible.

"Are you sorry?" said Mrs. Carleton smiling.

"I cannot be glad," said Fleda, giving a sober look over the lawn.

"Then you like Carleton?"

"Very much!--It is a prettier place than Queechy."

"But we shall have you here again, dear Fleda," said Mrs. Carleton restraining her smile at this, to her, very moderate complement.

"Perhaps not," said Fleda quietly.--"Mr. Carleton said," she added a minute after with more animation, "that a park was a place for men and women and deer to take pleasure in. I am sure it is for children too!"

"Did you have a pleasant ride this morning?"

"O very!--I always do. There isn't anything I like so well."

"What, as to ride on horseback with Guy?" said Mrs. Carleton looking exceedingly benignant.

"Yes,--unless--"

"Unless what, my dear Fleda?"

"Unless, perhaps,--I don't know,--I was going to say, unless perhaps to hear him sing."

Mrs. Carleton's delight was unequivocally expressed; and she promised Fleda that she should have both rides and songs there in plenty another time; a promise upon which Fleda built no trust at all.

The short journey to Pans was soon made. The next morning Mrs. Carleton making an excuse of her fatigue left Guy to end the care he had rather taken upon himself by delivering his little charge into the hands of her friends. So they drove to the Hotel------, Rue------, where Mr. Rossitur had apartments in very handsome style. The found him alone in the saloon.

"Ha! Carleton--come back again. Just in time--very glad to see you. And who is this?--Ah, another little daughter for aunt Lucy."

Mr. Rossitur, who gave them this greeting very cordially, was rather a fine looking man, decidedly agreeable both in person and manner. Fleda was pleasantly disappointed after what her grandfather had led her to expect. There might be something of sternness in his expression; people gave him credit for a peremptory, not to say imperious temper; but if

truly, it could not often meet with opposition. The sense and gentlemanly character which marked his face and bearing had an air of smooth politeness which seemed habitual. There was no want of kindness nor even of tenderness in the way he drew Fleda within his arm and held her there, while he went on talking to Mr. Carleton; now and then stooping his face to look in at her bonnet and kiss her, which was his only welcome. He said nothing to her after his first question.

He was too busy talking to Guy. He seemed to have a great deal to tell him. There was this for him to see, and that for him to hear, and charming new things which had been done or doing since Mr. Carleton left Paris. The impression upon Fleda's mind after listening awhile was that the French capital was a great Gallery of the Fine Arts, with a magnified likeness of Mr. Carleton's music room at one end of it. She thought her uncle must be most extraordinarily fond of pictures and works of art in general, and must have a great love for seeing company and hearing people sing. This latter taste Fleda was disposed to allow might be a very reasonable one. Mr. Carleton, she observed, seemed much more cool on the whole subject. But meanwhile where was aunt Lucy?--and had Mr. Rossitur forgotten the little armful that he held so fast and so perseveringly? No, for here was another kiss, and another look into her face, so kind that Fleda gave him a piece of her heart from that time.

"Hugh!" said Mr. Rossitur suddenly to somebody she had not seen before,--"Hugh!--here is your little cousin. Take her off to your mother."

A child came forward at this bidding hardly larger than herself. He was a slender graceful little figure, with nothing of the boy in his face or manner; delicate as a girl, and with something almost melancholy in the gentle sweetness of his countenance. Fleda's confidence was given to it on the instant, which had not been the case with anything in her uncle, and she yielded without reluctance the hand he took to obey his father's command. Before two steps had been taken however, she suddenly broke away from him and springing to Mr. Carleton's side silently laid

her hand in his. She made no answer whatever to a ligit word or two of kindness that he spoke just for her ear. She listened with downcast eyes and a lip that he saw was too unsteady to be trusted, and then after a moment more, without looking, pulled away her hand and followed her cousin. Hugh did not once get a sight of her face on the way to his mother's room, but owing to her exceeding efforts and quiet generalship he never guessed the cause. There was nothing in her face to raise suspicion when he reached the door and opening it announced her with,

"Mother, here's cousin Fleda come."

Fleda had seen her aunt before, though several years back, and not long enough to get acquainted with her. But no matter;--it was her mother's sister sitting there, whose face gave her so lovely a welcome at that speech of Hugh's, whose arms were stretched out so eagerly towards her; and springing to them as to a very haven of rest Fleda wept on her bosom those delicious tears that are only shed where the heart is at home. And even before they were dried the ties were knit that bound her to her new sphere.

"Who came with you, dear Fleda?" said Mrs. Rossitur then. "Is Mrs. Carleton here? I must go and thank her for bringing you to me."

"*Mr*. Carleton is here," said Hugh.

"I must go and thank him then. Jump down, dear Fleda--I'll be back in a minute."

Fleda got off her lap, and stood looking in a kind of enchanted maze, while her aunt hastily arranged her hair at the glass. Looking, while fancy and memory were making strong the net in which her heart was caught. She was trying to see something of her mother in one who had shared her blood and her affection so nearly. A miniature of that mother was left to Fleda, and she had studied it till she could hardly persuade herself that she had not some recollection of the original; and now she thought she caught a precious shadow of something like it in her aunt

Lucy. Not in those pretty bright eyes which had looked through kind tears so lovingly upon her; but in the graceful ringlets about the temples, the delicate contour of the face, and a something, Fleda could only have said it was "a something," about the mouth *when at rest*, the shadow of her mother's image rejoiced her heart. Rather that faint shadow of the loved lost one for little Fleda, than any other form or combination of beauty on earth. As she stood fascinated, watching the movements of her aunt's light figure, Fleda drew a long breath with which went off the whole burden of doubt and anxiety that had lain upon her mind ever since the journey began. She had not known it was there, but she felt it go. Yet even when that sigh of relief was breathed, and while fancy and feeling were weaving their rich embroidery into the very tissue of Fleda's happiness, most persons would have seen merely that the child looked very sober, and have thought probably that she felt very tired and strange. Perhaps Mrs. Rossitur thought so, for again tenderly kissing her before she left the room she told Hugh to take off her things and make her feel at home.

Hugh upon this made Fleda sit down and proceeded to untie her tippet strings and take off her coat with an air of delicate tenderness which shewed he had great pleasure in his task, and which made Fleda take a good deal of pleasure in it too.

"Are you tired, cousin Fleda?" said he gently.

"No," said Fleda. "O no."

"Charlton said you were tired on board ship."

"I wasn't tired," said Fleda, in not a little surprise; "I liked it very much."

"Then maybe I mistook. I know Charlton said *he* was tired, and I thought he said you were too. You know my brother Charlton, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Are you glad to come to Paris?"

"I am glad now," said Fleda. "I wasn't glad before."

"I am very glad," said Hugh. "I think you will like it. We didn't know you were coming till two or three days ago when Charlton got here. Do you like to take walks?"

"Yes, very much."

"Father and mother will take us delightful walks in the Tuileries, the gardens you know, and the Champs Elysées, and Versailles, and the Boulevards, and ever so many places; and it will be a great deal pleasanter now you are here. Do you know French?"

"No."

"Then you'll have to learn. I'll help you if you will let me. It is very easy. Did you get my last letter?"

"I don't know," said Fleda,--"the last one I had came with one of aunt Lucy's, telling me about Mrs. Carleton--I got it just before "--

Alas! before what? Fleda suddenly remembered, and was stopped short. From all the strange scenes and interests which lately had whirled her along, her spirit leaped back with strong yearning recollection to her old home and her old ties; and such a rain of tears witnessed the dearness of what she had lost and the tenderness of the memory that had let them slip for a moment, that Hugh was as much distressed as startled. With great tenderness and touching delicacy he tried to soothe her and at the same time, though guessing to find out what was the matter, lest he should make a mistake.

"Just before what?" said he, laying his hand caressingly on his little cousin's shoulder;--"Don't grieve so, dear Fleda!"

"It was only just before grandpa died," said Fleda.

Hugh had known of that before, though like her he had forgotten it for a moment. A little while his feeling was too strong to permit any further attempt at condolence; but as he saw Fleda grow quiet he took courage to speak again.

"Was he a good man?" he asked softly.

"Oh yes!"

"Then," said Hugh, "you know he is happy now, Fleda. If he loved Jesus Christ he is gone to be with him. That ought to make you glad as well as sorry."

Fleda looked up, though tears were streaming yet, to give that full happy answer of the eye that no words could do. This was consolation and sympathy. The two children had a perfect understanding of each other from that time forward; a fellowship that never knew a break nor a weakening.

Mrs. Rossitur found on her return that Hugh had obeyed her charge to the letter. He had made Fleda feel at home. They were sitting close together, Hugh's hand affectionately clasping hers, and he was holding forth on some subject with a gracious politeness that many of his elders might have copied; while Fleda listened and assented with entire satisfaction. The rest of the morning she passed in her aunt's arms; drinking draughts of pleasure from those dear bright eyes; taking in the balm of gentlest words of love, and soft kisses, every one of which was felt at the bottom of Fleda's heart, and the pleasure of talking over her young sorrows with one who could feel them all and answer with tears as well as words of sympathy. And Hugh stood by the while looking at his little orphan cousin as if she might have dropped from the clouds into his mother's lap, a rare jewel or delicate flower, but much more delicate and precious than they or any other possible gift.

Hugh and Fleda dined alone. For as he informed her his father never would have children at the dinner-table when he had company; and Mr. and Mrs. Carleton and other people were to be there to-day, Fleda made no remark on the subject, by word or look, but she thought none the less. She thought it was a very mean fashion. *She* not come to the table when strangers were there! And who would enjoy them more? When Mr. Rossitur and Mr Carleton had dined with her grandfather, had she not taken as much pleasure in their society, and in the whole thing, as any other one of the party? And at Carleton, had she not several times dined with a tableful, and been unspeakably amused to watch the different manners and characteristics of people who were strange to her? However, Mr. Rossitur had other notions. So she and Hugh had their dinner in aunt Lucy's dressing-room, by themselves; and a very nice dinner it was, Fleda thought; and Rosaline, Mrs. Rossitur's French maid, was well affected and took admirable care of them. Indeed before the close of the day Rosaline privately informed her mistress, "qu'elle serait entˆtée sûrement de cet enfant dans trois jours;" and "que son regard vraiment lui serrait le coeur." And Hugh was excellent company, failing all other, and did the honours of the table with the utmost thoughtfulness, and amused Fleda the whole time with accounts of Paris and what they would do and what she should see; and how his sister Marion was at school at a convent, and what kind of a place a convent was; and how he himself always staid at home and learned of his mother and his father; "or by himself," he said, "just as it happened;" and he hoped they would keep Fleda at home too. So Fleda hoped exceedingly, but this stern rule about the dining had made her feel a little shy of her uncle; she thought perhaps he was not kind and indulgent to children like her aunt Lucy; and if he said she must go to a convent she would not dare to ask him to let her stay. The next time she saw him however, she was obliged to change her opinion again, in part; for he was very kind and indulgent, both to her and Hugh; and more than that he was very amusing. He shewed her pictures, and told her new and interesting things; and finding that she listened eagerly he seemed pleased to prolong her pleasure, even at the expense of a good deal of his own time.

Mr. Rossitur was a man of cultivated mind and very refined and fastidious taste. He lived for the pleasures of Art and Literature and the society where these are valued. For this, and not without some secret love of display, he lived in Paris; not extravagant in his pleasures, nor silly in his ostentation, but leading, like a gentleman, as worthy and rational a life as a man can lead who lives only to himself, with no further thought than to enjoy the passing hours. Mr. Rossitur enjoyed them elegantly, and for a man of the world, moderately, bestowing however few of those precious hours upon his children. It was his maxim that they should be kept out of the way whenever their presence might by any chance interfere with the amusements of their elders; and this maxim, a good one certainly in some hands, was in his reading of it a very broad one. Still when he did take time to give his family he was a delightful companion to those of them who could understand him. If they shewed no taste for sensible pleasure he had no patience with them nor desire of their company. Report had done him no wrong in giving him a stern temper; but this almost never came out in actual exercise; Fleda knew it only from an occasional hint now and then, and by her childish intuitive reading of the lines it had drawn round the mouth and brow. It had no disagreeable bearing on his everyday life and manner; and the quiet fact probably served but to heighten the love and reverence in which his family held him very high.

Mr. Rossitur did once moot the question whether Fleda should not join Marion at her convent. But his wife looked very grave and said that she was too tender and delicate a little thing to be trusted to the hands of strangers; Hugh pleaded, and argued that she might share all his lessons; and Fleda's own face pleaded more powerfully. There was something appealing in its extreme delicacy and purity which seemed to call for shelter and protection from every rough breath of the world; and Mr. Rossitur was easily persuaded to let her remain in the stronghold of home. Hugh had never quitted it. Neither father nor mother ever thought of such a thing. He was the cherished idol of the whole family. Always a delicate child, always blameless in life and behaviour, his

loveliness of mind and person, his affectionateness, the winning sweetness that was about him like a halo, and the slight tenure by which they seemed to hold him, had wrought to bind the hearts of father and mother to this child, as it were, with the very life-strings of both. Not his mother was more gentle with Hugh than his much sterner father. And now little Fleda, sharing somewhat of Hugh's peculiar claims upon their tenderness and adding another of her own, was admitted, not to the same place in their hearts,--that could not be,--but to their honour be it spoken, to the same place in all outward shew of thought and feeling. Hugh had nothing that Fleda did not have, even to the time, care, and caresses of his parents. And not Hugh rendered them a more faithful return of devoted affection.

The children were always together.
The children were always together.

Once made easy on the question of school, which was never seriously stirred again, Fleda's life became very happy. It was easy to make her happy; affection and sympathy would have done it almost anywhere; but in Paris she had much more; and after time had softened the sorrow she brought with her, no bird ever found existence less of a burden, nor sang more light-heartedly along its life. In her aunt she had all but the name of a mother; in her uncle, with kindness and affection, she had amusement, interest, and improvement; in Hugh everything;--love, confidence, sympathy, society, help; their tastes, opinions, pursuits, went hand in hand. The two children were always together. Fleda's spirits were brighter than Hugh's, and her intellectual tastes stronger and more universal. That might be as much from difference of physical as of mental constitution. Hugh's temperament led him somewhat to melancholy, and to those studies and pleasures which best side with subdued feeling and delicate nerves. Fleda's nervous system was of the finest too, but, in short, she was as like a bird as possible. Perfect health, which yet a slight thing was enough to shake to the foundation;--joyous spirits, which a look could quell;--happy energies, which a harsh hand

might easily crush for ever. Well for little Fleda that so tender a plant was permitted to unfold in so nicely tempered an atmosphere. A cold wind would soon have killed it. Besides all this there were charming studies to be gone through every day with Hugh; some for aunt Lucy to hear, some for masters and mistresses. There were amusing walks in the Boulevards, and delicious pleasure taking in the gardens of Paris, and a new world of people and manners and things and histories for the little American. And despite her early rustic experience Fleda had from nature an indefeasible taste for the elegancies of life; it suited her well to see all about her, in dress, in furniture, in various appliances, as commodious and tasteful as wealth and refinement could contrive it; and she very soon knew what was right in each kind. There were now and then most gleeful excursions in the environs of Paris, when she and Hugh found in earth and air a world of delights more than they could tell anybody but each other. And at home, what peaceful times they two had,--what endless conversations, discussions, schemes, air-journeys of memory and fancy, backward and forward; what sociable dinners alone, and delightful evenings with Mr. and Mrs. Rossitur in the saloon when nobody or only a very few people were there; how pleasantly in those evenings the foundations were laid of a strong and enduring love for the works of art, painted, sculptured, or engraven, what a multitude of curious and excellent bits of knowledge Fleda's ears picked up from the talk of different people. They were capital ears; what they caught they never let fall. In the course of the year her gleanings amounted to more than many another person's harvest.

Chapter XIV.

Heav'n bless thee;
Thou hast the sweetest face I ever look'd on.

Shakspeare.

One of the greatest of Fleda's pleasures was when Mr. Carleton came to take her out with him. He did that often. Fleda only wished he would have taken Hugh too, but somehow he never did. Nothing but that was wanting to make the pleasure of those times perfect. Knowing that she saw the *common things* in other company, Guy was at the pains to vary the amusement when she went with him. Instead of going to Versailles or St. Cloud, he would take her long delightful drives into the country and shew her some old or interesting place that nobody else went to see. Often there was a history belonging to the spot, which Fleda listened to with the delight of eye and fancy at once. In the city, where they more frequently walked, still he shewed her what she would perhaps have seen under no other guidance. He made it his business to give her pleasure; and understanding the inquisitive active little spirit he had to do with he went where his own tastes would hardly have led him. The Quai aux Fleurs was often visited, but also the Halle aux Blés, the great Halle aux Vins, the Jardin des Plantes, and the Marché des Innocens. Guy even took the trouble, more for her sake than his own, to go to the latter place once very early in the morning, when the market-bell had not two hours sounded, while the interest and prettiness of the scene were yet in their full life. Hugh was in company this time, and the delight of both children was beyond words, as it would have been beyond anybody's patience that had not a strong motive to back it. They never discovered that Mr. Carleton was in a hurry, as indeed he was not. They bargained for fruit with any number of people, upon all sorts of inducements, and to an extent of which they had no competent notion, but Hugh had his mother's purse, and Fleda was skilfully commissioned to purchase what she pleased for Mrs. Carleton. Verily the two children that morning bought pleasure, not peaches. Fancy and Benevolence held the purse strings, and Economy did not even look on. They revelled too, Fleda especially, amidst the bright pictures of the odd, the new, and the picturesque, and the varieties of character and incident, that were displayed around them; even till the country people began to go away

and the scene to lose its charm. It never lost it in memory; and many a time in after life Hugh and Fleda recurred to something that was seen or done "that morning when we bought fruit at the Innocens."

Besides these scenes of everyday life, which interested and amused Fleda to the last degree, Mr. Carleton shewed her many an obscure part of Paris where deeds of daring and of blood had been, and thrilled the little listener's ear with histories of the Past. He judged her rightly. She would rather at any time have gone to walk with him, than with anybody else to see any show that could be devised. His object in all this was in the first place to give her pleasure, and in the second place to draw out her mind into free communion with his own, which he knew could only be done by talking sense to her. He succeeded as he wished. Lost in the interest of the scenes he presented to her eye and mind, she forgot everything else and shewed him herself; precisely what he wanted to see.

It was strange that a young man, an admired man of fashion, a flattered favourite of the gay and great world, and furthermore a reserved and proud repeller of almost all who sought his intimacy, should seek and delight in the society of a little child. His mother would have wondered if she had known it. Mrs. Rossitur did marvel that even Fleda should have so won upon the cold and haughty young Englishman; and her husband said he probably chose to have Fleda with him because he could make up his mind to like nobody else. A remark which perhaps arose from the utter failure of every attempt to draw him and Charlton nearer together. But Mr. Rossitur was only half right. The reason lay deeper.

Mr. Carleton had admitted the truth of Christianity, upon what he considered sufficient grounds, and would now have steadily fought for it, as he would for anything else that he believed to be truth. But there he stopped. He had not discovered nor tried to discover whether the truth of Christianity imposed any obligation upon him. He had cast off his unbelief, and looked upon it now as a singular folly. But his belief was almost as vague and as fruitless as his infidelity had been. Perhaps, a little, his bitter dissatisfaction with the world and human things, or

rather his despondent view of them, was mitigated. If there was, as he now held, a Supreme Orderer of events, it might be, and it was rational to suppose there would be, in the issues of time, an entire change wrought in the disordered and dishonoured state of his handiwork. There might be a remedial system somewhere,--nay, it might be in the Bible; he meant to look some day. But that *he* had anything to do with that change--that the working of the remedial system called for hands--that *his* had any charge in the matter had never entered into his imagination or stirred his conscience. He was living his old life at Paris, with his old dissatisfaction, perhaps a trifle less bitter. He was seeking pleasure in whatever art, learning, literature, refinement, and luxury can do for a man who has them all at command; but there was something within him that spurned this ignoble existence and called for higher aims and worthier exertion. He was not vicious, he never had been vicious, or, as somebody else said, his vices were all refined vices; but a life of mere self-indulgence although pursued without self-satisfaction, is constantly lowering the standard and weakening the forces of virtue,--lessening the whole man. He felt it so; and to leave his ordinary scenes and occupations and lose a morning with little Fleda was a freshening of his better nature; it was like breathing pure air after the fever heat of a sick room; it was like hearing the birds sing after the meaningless jabber of Bedlam. Mr. Carleton indeed did not put the matter quite so strongly to himself. He called Fleda his good angel. He did not exactly know that the office this good angel performed was simply to hold a candle to his conscience. For conscience was not by any means dead in him; it only wanted light to see by. When he turned from the gay and corrupt world in which he lived, where the changes were rung incessantly upon self-interest, falsehood, pride, and the various more or less refined forms of sensuality, and when he looked upon that pure bright little face, so free from selfishness, those clear eyes so innocent of evil, the peaceful brow under which a thought of double-dealing had never hid, Mr. Carleton felt himself in a healthier region. Here as elsewhere, he honoured and loved the image of truth; in the broad sense of truth;--that which suits the perfect standard of right. But his pleasure in this case was invariably

mixed with a slight feeling of self-reproach; and it was this hardly recognised stir of his better nature, this clearing of his mental eye-sight under the light of a bright example, that made him call the little torch-bearer his good angel. If this were truth, this purity, uprightness, and singleness of mind, as conscience said it was, where was he? how far wandering from his beloved Idol!

One other feeling saddened the pleasure he had in her society--a belief that the ground of it could not last. "If she could grow up so!"--he said to himself. "But it is impossible. A very few years, and all that clear sunshine of the mind will be overcast;--there is not a cloud now!"--

Under the working of these thoughts Mr. Carleton sometimes forgot to talk to his little charge, and would walk for a length of way by her side wrapped up in sombre musings. Fleda never disturbed him then, but waited contentedly and patiently for him to come out of them, with her old feeling wondering what he could be thinking of and wishing he were as happy as she. But he never left her very long; he was sure to waive his own humour and give her all the graceful kind attention which nobody else could bestow so well. Nobody understood and appreciated it better than Fleda.

One day, some months after they had been in Paris, they were sitting in the Place de la Concorde, Mr. Carleton was in one of these thinking fits. He had been giving Fleda a long detail of the scenes that had taken place in that spot--a history of it from the time when it had lain an unsightly waste;--such a graphic lively account as he knew well how to give. The absorbed interest with which she had lost everything else in what he was saying had given him at once reward and motive enough as he went on. Standing by his side, with one little hand confidingly resting on his knee, she gazed alternately into his face and towards the broad highly-adorned square by the side of which they had placed themselves, and where it was hard to realize that the ground had once been soaked in blood while madness and death filled the air; and her changing face like a mirror gave him back the reflection of the times he held up to her view. And still

standing there in the same attitude after he had done she had been looking out towards the square in a fit of deep meditation. Mr. Carleton had forgotten her for awhile in his own thoughts, and then the sight of the little gloved hand upon his knee brought him back again.

"What are you musing about, Elfie, dear?" he said cheerfully, taking the hand in one of his.

Fleda gave a swift glance into his face, as if to see whether it would be safe for her to answer his question; a kind of exploring look, in which her eyes often acted as scouts for her tongue. Those she met pledged their faith for her security; yet Fleda's look went back to the square and then again to his face in silence.

"How do you like living in Paris?" said he. "You should know by this time."

"I like it very much indeed," said Fleda.

"I thought you would."

"I like Queechy better though," she went on gravely, her eyes turning again to the square.

"Like Queechy better! Were you thinking of Queechy just now when I spoke to you?"

"Oh no!"--with a smile.

"Were you going over all those horrors I have been distressing you with?"

"No," said Fleda;--"I *was* thinking of them, awhile ago."

"What then?" said he pleasantly. "You were looking so sober I should like to know how near your thoughts were to mine."

"I was thinking," said Fleda, gravely, and a little unwillingly, but Guy's manner was not to be withstood,--"I was wishing I could be like the disciple whom Jesus loved."

Mr. Carleton let her see none of the surprise he felt at this answer.

"Was there one more loved than the rest?" "Yes--the Bible calls him 'the disciple whom Jesus loved.' That was John."

"Why was he preferred above the others?"

"I don't know. I suppose he was more gentle and good than the others, and loved Jesus more. I think aunt Miriam said so when I asked her once."

Mr. Carleton thought Fleda had not far to seek for the fulfilment of her wish.

"But how in the world, Elfie, did you work round to this gentle and good disciple from those scenes of blood you set out with?"

"Why," said Elfie,--"I was thinking how unhappy and bad people are, especially people here, I think; and how much must be done before they will all be brought right;--and then I was thinking of the work Jesus gave his disciples to do; and so I wished I could be like *that* disciple.--Hugh and I were talking about it this morning."

"What is the work he gave them to do?" said Mr. Carleton, more and more interested.

"Why," said Fleda, lifting her gentle wistful eyes to his and then looking away,--"to bring everybody to be good and happy."

"And how in the world are they to do that?" said Mr. Carleton, astonished to see his own problem quietly handled by this child.

"By telling them about Jesus Christ, and getting them to believe and love him," said Fleda, glancing at him again,--"and living so beautifully that people cannot help believing them."

"That last is an important clause," said Mr. Carleton thoughtfully. "But suppose people will not hear when they are spoken to, Elfie?"

"Some will, at any rate," said Fleda,--"and by and by everybody will."

"How do you know?"

"Because the Bible says so."

"Are you sure of that, Elfie?"

"Why yes, Mr. Carleton--God has promised that the world shall be full of good people, and then they will be all happy. I wish it was now."

"But if that be so, Elfie, God can make them all good without our help?"

"Yes, but I suppose he chooses to do it with our help, Mr. Carleton," said Fleda with equal naïveté and gravity.

"But is not this you speak of," said he, half smiling,--"rather the business of clergymen? you have nothing to do with it?"

"No," said Fleda,--"everybody has something to do with it, the Bible says so; ministers must do it in their way and other people in other ways; everybody has his own work. Don't you remember the parable of the ten talents, Mr. Carleton?"

Mr. Carleton was silent for a minute.

"I do not know the Bible quite as well as you do, Elfie," he said then,--"nor as I ought to do."

Elfie's only answer was by a look somewhat like that he well remembered on shipboard he had thought was angel-like,--a look of gentle sorrowful wistfulness which she did not venture to put into words. It had not for that the less power. But he did not choose to prolong the conversation. They rose up and began to walk homeward, Elfie thinking with all the warmth of her little heart that she wished very much Mr. Carleton knew the Bible better; divided between him and "that disciple" whom she and Hugh had been talking about.

"I suppose you are very busy now, Elfie," observed her companion, when they had walked the length of several squares in silence.

"O yes!" said Fleda. "Hugh and I are as busy as we can be. We are busy every minute."

"Except when you are on some chase after pleasure?"

"Well," said Fleda laughing,--"that is a kind of business; and all the business is pleasure too. I didn't mean that we were always busy about *work*. O Mr. Carleton we had such a nice time the day before yesterday!"--And she went on to give him the history of a very successful chase after pleasure which they had made to St. Cloud.

"And yet you like Queechy better?"

"Yes," said Fleda, with a gentle steadiness peculiar to herself,--if I had aunt Lucy and Hugh and uncle Rolf there and everybody that I care for, I should like it a great deal better."

"Unspotted" yet, he thought.

"Mr. Carleton," said Fleda presently,--"do you play and sing every day here in Paris?"

"Yes," said he smiling,--"about every day. Why?"

"I was thinking how pleasant it was at your house, in England."

"Has Carleton the honour of rivalling Queechy in your liking?"

"I haven't lived there so long, you know," said Fleda. "I dare say it would if I had. I think it is quite as pretty a place."

Mr. Carleton smiled with a very pleased expression. Truth and politeness had joined hands in her answer with a child's grace.

He brought Fleda to her own door and there was leaving her.

"Stop!--O Mr. Carleton," cried Fleda, "come in just for one minute--I want to shew you something."

He made no resistance to that. She led him to the saloon, where it happened that nobody was, and repeating "One minute!"--rushed out of the room. In less than that time she came running back with a beautiful half-blown bud of a monthly rose in her hand, and in her face such a bloom of pleasure and eagerness as more than rivalled it. The rose was fairly eclipsed. She put the bud quietly but with a most satisfied air of affection into Mr. Carleton's hand. It had come from a little tree which he had given her on one of their first visits to the Quai aux Fleurs. She had had the choice of what she liked best, and had characteristically taken a flourishing little rose-bush that as yet shewed nothing but leaves and green buds; partly because she would have the pleasure of seeing its beauties come forward, and partly because she thought having no flowers it would not cost much. The former reason however was all that she had given to Mr. Carleton's remonstrances.

"What is all this, Elfie?" said he. "Have you been robbing your rose tree?"

"No," said Elfie;--"there are plenty more buds! Isn't it lovely? This is the first one. They've been a great while coming out."

His eye went from the rose to her; he thought the one was a mere emblem of the other. Fleda was usually very quiet in her demonstrations; it was as if a little green bud had suddenly burst into a flush of loveliness; and he saw, it was as plain as possible, that good-will to him had been the moving power. He was so much struck and moved that his thanks, though as usual perfect in their kind, were far shorter and graver than he would have given if he had felt less. He turned away from the house, his mind full of the bright unsullied purity and single-hearted good-will that had looked out of that beaming little face; he seemed to see them again in the flower held in his hand, and he saw nothing else as he went.

Mr. Carleton preached to himself all the way home, and his text was a rose.

Laugh who will. To many it may seem ridiculous, and to most minds it would have been impossible, but to a nature very finely wrought and highly trained, many a voice that grosser senses cannot hear comes with an utterance as clear as it is sweet-spoken; many a touch that coarser nerves cannot heed reaches the springs of the deeper life; many a truth that duller eyes have no skill to see shews its fair features, hid away among the petals of a rose, or peering out between the wings of a butterfly, or reflected in a bright drop of dew. The material is but a veil for the spiritual; but then eyes must be quickened, or the veil becomes an impassable cloud.

That particular rose was to Mr. Carleton's eye a most perfect emblem and representative of its little giver. He traced out the points of resemblance as he went along. The delicacy and character of refinement for which that kind of rose is remarkable above many of its more superb kindred; a refinement essential and unalterable by decay or otherwise, as true a characteristic of the child as of the flower; a delicacy that called for gentle handling and tender cherishing;--the sweetness, rare indeed, but asserting itself as it were timidly, at least with equally rare modesty,--the very style of the beauty, that with all its loveliness would not startle

nor even catch the eye among its more showy neighbours; and the breath of purity that seemed to own no kindred with earth, nor liability to infection.

As he went on with his musing, and drawing out this fair character from the type before him, the feeling of *contrast*, that he had known before, pressed upon Mr. Carleton's mind, the feeling of self-reproach, and the bitter wish that he could be again what he once had been, something like this. How changed now he seemed to himself--not a point of likeness left. How much less honourable, how much less worth, how much less dignified, than that fair innocent child. How much better a part she was acting in life--what an influence she was exerting,--as pure, as sweet-breathed, and as unobtrusive, as the very rose in his hand. And he--doing no good to an earthly creature and losing himself by inches.

He reached his room, put the flower in a glass on the table, and walked up and down before it. It had come to a struggle between the sense of what was and the passionate wish for what might have been.

"It is late, sir," said his servant opening the door,--"and you were--"

"I am not going out."

"This evening, sir?"

"No--not at all to-day. Spenser!--I don't wish to see any body--let no one come near me."

The servant retired and Guy went on with his walk and his meditations, looking back over his life and reviewing, with a wiser ken now, the steps by which he had come. He compared the selfish disgust with which he had cast off the world with the very different spirit of little Fleda's look upon it that morning, the useless, self-pleasing, vain life he was leading, with her wish to be like the beloved disciple and do something to heal

the troubles of those less happy than herself. He did not very well comprehend the grounds of her feeling or reasoning, but he began to see, mistily, that his own had been mistaken and wild.

His steps grew slower, his eye more intent, his brow quiet.

"She is right and I am wrong," he thought. "She is by far the nobler creature--worth, many such as I. *Like her* I cannot be--I cannot regain what I have lost,--I cannot undo what years have done. But I can be something other than I am! If there be a system of remedy, as there well may, it may as well take effect on myself first. She says everybody has his work, I believe her. It must in the nature of things be so. I will make it my business to find out what mine is, and when I have made that sure I will give myself to the doing of it. An Allwise Governor must look for service of me. He shall have it. Whatever my life be, it shall be to some end. If not what I would, what I can. If not the purity of the rose, that of tempered steel!"

Mr. Carleton walked his room for three hours; then rung for his servant and ordered him to prepare everything for leaving Paris the second day thereafter.

The next morning over their coffee he told his mother of his purpose.

"Leave Paris!--To-morrow!--My dear Guy, that is rather a sudden notice."

"No mother--for I am going alone."

His mother immediately bent an anxious and somewhat terrified look upon him. The frank smile she met put half her suspicions out of her head at once.

"What is the matter?"

"Nothing at all--if by 'matter' you mean mischief."

"You are not in difficulty with those young men again?"

"No mother," said he coolly. "I am in difficulty with no one but myself."

"With yourself! But why will you not let me go with you?"

"My business will go on better if I am quite alone."

"What business?"

"Only to settle this question with myself," said he smiling.

"But Guy! you are enigmatical this morning. Is it the question that of all others I wish to see settled?"

"No mother," said he laughing and colouring a little,--"I don't want another half to take care of till I have this one under management."

"I don't understand you," said Mrs. Carleton "There is no hidden reason under all this that you are keeping from me?"

"I won't say that. But there is none that need give you the least uneasiness. There are one or two matters I want to study out--I cannot do it here, so I am going where I shall be free."

"Where?"

"I think I shall pass the summer between Switzerland and Germany."

"And when and where shall I meet you again?"

"I think at home;--I cannot say when."

"At home!" said his mother with a brightening face. "Then you are beginning to be tired of wandering at last?"

"Not precisely, mother,--rather out of humour."

"I shall be glad of anything," said his mother, gazing at him admiringly, "that brings you home again, Guy."

"Bring me home a better man, I hope, mother," said he kissing her as he left the room. "I will see you again by and by."

"'A better man!'" thought Mrs. Carleton, as she sat with full eyes, the image of her son filling the place where his presence had been;--"I would be willing never to see him better and be sure of his never being worse!"

Mr. Carleton's farewell visit found Mr. and Mrs. Rossitur not at home. They had driven out early into the country to fetch Marion from her convent for some holiday. Fleda came alone into the saloon to receive him.

"I have your rose in safe keeping, Elfie," he said. "It has done me more good than ever a rose did before."

Fleda smiled an innocently pleased smile. But her look changed when he added,

"I have come to tell you so and to bid you good-bye."

"Are you going away, Mr. Carleton?"

"Yes."

"But you will be back soon?"

"No, Elfie,--I do not know that I shall ever come back."

He spoke gravely, more gravely than he was used; and Fleda's acuteness saw that there was some solid reason for this sudden determination. Her face changed sadly, but she was silent, her eyes never wavering from those that read hers with such gentle intelligence.

"You will be satisfied to have me go, Elfie, when I tell you that I am going on business which I believe to be duty. Nothing else takes me away. I am going to try to do right," said he smiling.

Elfie could not answer the smile. She wanted to ask whether she should never see him again, and there was another thought upon her tongue too; but her lip trembled and she said nothing.

"I shall miss my good fairy," Mr. Carleton went on lightly;--"I don't know how I shall do without her. If your wand was long enough to reach so far I would ask you to touch me now and then, Elfie."

Poor Elfie could not stand it. Her head sank. She knew she had a wand that could touch him, and well and gratefully she resolved that its light blessing should "now and then" rest on his head; but he did not understand that; he was talking, whether lightly or seriously, and Elfie knew it was a little of both,--he was talking of wanting her help, and was ignorant of the help that alone could avail him. "Oh that he knew but that!"--What with this feeling and sorrow together the child's distress was exceeding great; and the tokens of grief in one so accustomed to hide them were the more painful to see. Mr. Carleton drew the sorrowing little creature within his arm and endeavoured with a mixture of kindness and lightness in his tone to cheer her.

"I shall often remember you, dear Elfie," he said;--"I shall keep your rose always and take it with me wherever I go.--You must not make it too hard for me to quit Paris--you are glad to have me go on such an errand, are you not?"

She presently commanded herself, bade her tears wait till another time as usual, and trying to get rid of those that covered her face, asked him, "What errand?"

He hesitated.

"I have been thinking of what we were talking of yesterday, Elfie," he said at length. "I am going to try to discover my duty, and then to do it."

But Fleda at that clasped his hand, and squeezing it in both hers bent down her little head over it to hide her face and the tears that streamed again. He hardly knew how to understand or what to say to her. He half suspected that there were depths in that childish mind beyond his fathoming. He was not however left to wait long. Fleda, though she might now and then be surprised into shewing it, never allowed her sorrow of any kind to press upon the notice or the time of others. She again checked herself and dried her face.

"There is nobody else in Paris that will be so sorry for my leaving it," said Mr. Carleton, half tenderly and half pleasantly.

"There is nobody else that has so much cause," said Elfie, near bursting out again, but she restrained herself.

"And you will not come here again, Mr. Carleton?" she said after a few minutes.

"I do not say that--it is possible--if I do, it will be to see you, Elfie."

A shadow of a smile passed over her face at that. It was gone instantly.

"My mother will not leave Paris yet," he went on,--"you will see her often."

But he saw that Fleda was thinking of something else; she scarce seemed to hear him. She was thinking of something that troubled her.

"Mr. Carleton--" she began, and her colour changed.

"Speak, Elfie."

Her colour changed again. "Mr. Carleton--will you be displeased if I say something?"

"Don't you know me better than to ask me that, Elfie?" he said gently.

"I want to ask you something,--if you won't mind my saying it."

"What is it?" said he, reading in her face that a request was behind. "I will do it."

Her eyes sparkled, but she seemed to have some difficulty in going on.

"I will do it, whatever it is," he said watching her.

"Will you wait for one moment, Mr. Carleton?"

"Half an hour."

She sprang away, her face absolutely flashing pleasure through her tears. It was much soberer, and again doubtful and changing colour, when a few minutes afterwards she came back with a book in her hand. With a striking mixture of timidity, modesty, and eagerness in her countenance she came forward, and putting the little volume, which was her own Bible, into Mr. Carleton's hands said under her breath, "Please read it." She did not venture to look up.

He saw what the book was; and then taking the gentle hand which had given it, he kissed it two or three times. If it had been a princess's he could not with more respect.

"You have my promise, Elfie," he said. "I need not repeat it?"

She raised her eyes and gave him a look so grateful, so loving, so happy, that it dwelt for ever in his remembrance. A moment after it had faded, and she stood still where he had left her, listening to his footsteps as they went down the stairs. She heard the last of them, and then sank upon her knees by a chair and burst into a passion of tears. Their time was now and she let them come. It was not only the losing a loved and pleasant friend, it was not only the stirring of sudden and disagreeable excitement;--poor Elfie was crying for her Bible. It had been her father's

own--it was filled with his marks--it was precious to her above price--and Elfie cried with all her heart for the loss of it. She had done what she had on the spur of the emergency--she was satisfied she had done right; she would not take it back if she could; but not the less her Bible was gone, and the pages that loved eyes had looked upon were for hers to look upon no more. Her very heart was wrung that she should have parted with it,--and yet,--what could she do?--It was as bad as the parting with Mr. Carleton.

That agony was over, and even that was shortened, for "Hugh would find out that she had been crying." Hours had passed, and the tears were dried, and the little face was bending over the wonted tasks with a shadow upon its wonted cheerfulness,--when Rosaline came to tell her that Victor said there was somebody in the passage who wanted to see her and would not come in.

It was Mr. Carleton himself. He gave her a parcel, smiled at her without saying a word, kissed her hand earnestly, and was gone again. Fleda ran to her own room, and took the wrappers off such a beauty of a Bible as she had never seen; bound in blue velvet, with clasps of gold and her initials in letters of gold upon the cover. Fleda hardly knew whether to be most pleased or sorry; for to have its place so supplied seemed to put her lost treasure further away than ever. The result was another flood of very tender tears; in the very shedding of which however the new little Bible was bound to her heart with cords of association as bright and as incorruptible as its gold mountings.

Chapter XV.

> Her sports were such as carried riches of knowledge upon the stream of light.--Sidney.

Fleda had not been a year in Paris when her uncle suddenly made up his mind to quit it and go home. Some trouble in money affairs, felt or feared, brought him to this step, which a month before he had no definite purpose of ever taking. There was cloudy weather in the financial world of New York and he wisely judged it best that his own eyes should be on the spot to see to his own interests. Nobody was sorry for this determination. Mrs. Rossitur always liked what her husband liked, but she had at the same time a decided predilection for home. Marion was glad to leave her convent for the gay world, which her parents promised she should immediately enter. And Hugh and Fleda had too lively a spring of happiness within themselves to care where its outgoings should be.

So home they came, in good mood, bringing with them all manner of Parisian delights that Paris could part with. Furniture, that at home at least they might forget where they were; dresses, that at home or abroad nobody might forget where they had been; pictures and statuary and engravings and books, to satisfy a taste really strong and well cultivated. And indeed the other items were quite as much for this purpose as for any other. A French cook for Mr. Rossitur, and even Rosaline for his wife, who declared she was worth all the rest of Paris. Hugh cared little for any of these things; he brought home a treasure of books and a flute, to which he was devoted. Fleda cared for them all, even Monsieur Emile and Rosaline, for her uncle's and aunt's sake; but her special joy was a beautiful little King Charles which had been sent her by Mr. Carleton a few weeks before. It came with the kindest of letters, saying that some matters had made it inexpedient for him to pass through Paris on his way home, but that he hoped nevertheless to see her soon. That intimation was the only thing that made Fleda sorry to leave Paris. The little dog was a beauty, allowed to be so not only by his mistress but by every one else; of the true black and tan colours; and Fleda's dearly loved and constant companion.

The life she and Hugh led was little changed by the change of place. They went out and came in as they had done in Paris, and took the same quiet but intense happiness in the same quiet occupations and pleasures; only the Tuileries and Champs Elysées had a miserable substitute in the Battery, and no substitute at all anywhere else. And the pleasant drives in the environs of Paris were missed too and had nothing in New York to supply their place. Mrs. Rossitur always said it was impossible to get out of New York by land, and not worth the trouble to do it by water. But then in the house Fleda thought there was a great gain. The dirty Parisian Hotel was well exchanged for the bright, clean, well-appointed house in State street. And if Broadway was disagreeable, and the Park a weariness to the eyes, after the dressed gardens of the French capital, Hugh and Fleda made it up in the delights of the luxuriously furnished library and the dear at-home feeling of having the whole house their own.

They were left, those two children, quite as much to themselves as ever. Marion was going into company, and she and her mother were swallowed up in the consequent necessary calls upon their time. Marion never had been anything to Fleda. She was a fine handsome girl, outwardly, but seemed to have more of her father than her mother in her composition, though colder-natured and more wrapped up in self than Mr. Rossitur would be called by anybody that knew him. She had never done anything to draw Fleda towards her, and even Hugh had very little of her attention. They did not miss it. They were everything to each other.

Everything,--for now morning and night there was a sort of whirlwind in the house which carried the mother and daughter round and round and permitted no rest; and Mr. Rossitur himself was drawn in. It was worse than it had been in Paris. There, with Marion in her convent, there were often evenings when they did not go abroad nor receive company and

spent the time quietly and happily in each other's society. No such evenings now; if by chance there were an unoccupied one Mrs. Rossitur and her daughter were sure to be tired and Mr. Rossitur busy.

Hugh and Fleda in those bustling times retreated to the library; Mr. Rossitur would rarely have that invaded; and while the net was so eagerly cast for pleasure among the gay company below, pleasure had often slipped away and hid herself among the things on the library table, and was dancing on every page of Hugh's book and minding each stroke of Fleda's pencil and cocking the spaniel's ears whenever his mistress looked at him. King, the spaniel, lay on a silk cushion on the library table, his nose just touching Fleda's fingers. Fleda's drawing was mere amusement; she and Hugh were not so burthened with studies that they had not always their evenings free, and to tell truth, much more than their evenings. Masters indeed they had; but the heads of the house were busy with the interests of their grown-up child, and perhaps with other interests; and took it for granted that all was going right with the young ones.

"Haven't we a great deal better time than they have down stairs, Fleda?" said Hugh one of these evenings.

"Hum--yes--" answered Fleda abstractedly, stroking into order some old man in her drawing with great intentness.--"King!--you rascal--keep back and be quiet, sir!--"

Nothing could be conceived more gentle and loving than Fleda's tone of fault-finding, and her repulse only fell short of a caress.

"What's he doing?"

"Wants to get into my lap."

"Why don't you let him?"

"Because I don't choose to--a silk cushion is good enough for his majesty. King!--" (laying her soft cheek against the little dog's soft head and forsaking her drawing for the purpose.)

"How you do love that dog!" said Hugh.

"Very well--why shouldn't I?--provided he steals no love from anybody else," said Fleda, still caressing him.

"What a noise somebody is making down stairs!" said Hugh. "I don't think I should ever want to go to large parties, Fleda, do you?"

"I don't know," said Fleda, whose natural taste for society was strongly developed;--"it would depend upon what kind of parties they were."

"I shouldn't like them, I know, of whatever kind," said Hugh. "What are you smiling at?"

"Only Mr. Pickwick's face, that I am drawing here."

Hugh came round to look and laugh, and then began again.

"I can't think of anything pleasanter than this room as we are now."

"You should have seen Mr. Carleton's library," said Fleda in a musing tone, going on with her drawing.

"Was it so much better than this?"

Fleda's eyes gave a slight glance at the room and then looked down again with a little shake of her head sufficiently expressive.

"Well," said Hugh, "you and I do not want any better than this, do we, Fleda?"

Fleda's smile, a most satisfactory one, was divided between him and King.

"I don't believe," said Hugh, "you would have loved that dog near so well if anybody else had given him to you."

"I don't believe I should!--not a quarter," said Fleda with sufficient distinctness.

"I never liked that Mr. Carleton as well as you did."

"That is because you did not know him," said Fleda quietly.

"Do you think he was a good man, Fleda?"

"He was very good to me," said Fleda, "always. What rides I did have on that great black horse of his!"--

"A black horse?"

"Yes, a great black horse, strong, but so gentle, and he went so delightfully. His name was Harold. Oh I should like to see that horse!--When I wasn't with him, Mr. Carleton used to ride another, the greatest beauty of a horse, Hugh; a brown Arabian--so slender and delicate--her name was Zephyr, ind she used to go like the wind, to be sure. Mr. Carleton said he wouldn't trust me on such a fly-away thing."

"But you didn't use to ride alone?" said Hugh.

"Oh no!--and *I* wouldn't have been afraid if he had chosen to take me on any one."

"But do you think, Fleda, he was a *good* man? as I mean?"

"I am sure he was better than a great many others," answered Fleda evasively;--"the worst of him was infinitely better than the best of half the people down stairs,--Mr. Sweden included."

"Sweden"--you don't call his name right."

"The worse it is called the better, in my opinion," said Fleda.

"Well, I don't like him; but what makes you dislike him so much?"

"I don't know--partly because uncle Rolf and Marion like him so much, I believe--I don't think there is any moral expression in his face."

"I wonder why they like him," said Hugh.

It was a somewhat irregular and desultory education that the two children gathered under this system of things. The masters they had were rather for accomplishments and languages than for anything solid; the rest they worked out for themselves. Fortunately they both loved books, and rational books; and hours and hours, when Mrs. Rossitur and her daughter were paying or receiving visits, they, always together, were stowed away behind the book-cases or in the library window poring patiently over pages of various complexion; the soft turning of the leaves or Fleda's frequent attentions to King the only sound in the room. They walked together, talking of what they had read, though indeed they ranged beyond that into nameless and numberless fields of speculation, where if they sometimes found fruit they as often lost their way. However the habit of ranging was something. Then when they joined the rest of the family at the dinner-table, especially if others were present, and most especially if a certain German gentleman happened to be there who the second winter after their return Fleda thought came very often, she and Hugh would be sure to find the strange talk of the world that was going on unsuited and wearisome to them, and they would make their escape up stairs again to handle the pencil and to play the flute and to read, and to draw plans for the future, while King crept upon the skirts of his mistress's gown and laid his little head on her feet. Nobody ever thought of sending them to school. Hugh was a child of frail health, and though not often very ill was often near it; and as for Fleda, she and Hugh were inseparable; and besides by this time her uncle and aunt would almost as soon have thought of taking the mats off their delicate shrubs in winter as of exposing her to any atmosphere less genial than that of home.

For Fleda this doubtful course of mental training wrought singularly well. An uncommonly quick eye and strong memory and clear head, which she had even in childhood, passed over no field of truth or fancy without making their quiet gleanings; and the stores thus gathered, though somewhat miscellaneous and unarranged, were both rich and uncommon, and more than any one or she herself knew. Perhaps such a mind thus left to itself knew a more free and luxuriant growth than could ever have flourished within the confinement of rules. Perhaps a plant at once so strong and so delicate was safest without the hand of the dresser. At all events it was permitted to spring and to put forth all its native gracefulness alike unhindered and unknown. Cherished as little Fleda dearly was, her mind kept company with no one but herself,--and Hugh. As to externals,--music was uncommonly loved by both the children, and by both cultivated with great success. So much came under Mrs. Rossitur's knowledge. Also every foreign Signor and Madame that came into the house to teach them spoke with enthusiasm of the apt minds and flexile tongues that honoured their instructions. In private and in public the gentle, docile, and affectionate children answered every wish both of taste and judgment. And perhaps, in a world where education is *not* understood, their guardians might be pardoned for taking it for granted that all was right where nothing appeared that was wrong; certainly they took no pains to make sure of the fact. In this case, one of a thousand, their neglect was not punished with disappointment. They never found out that Hugh's mind wanted the strengthening that early skilful training might have given it. His intellectual tastes were not so strong as Fleda's; his reading was more superficial; his gleanings not so sound and in far fewer fields, and they went rather to nourish sentiment and fancy than to stimulate thought or lay up food for it. But his parents saw nothing of this.

The third winter had not passed, when Fleda's discernment saw that Mr. Sweden, as she called him, the German gentleman, would not cease coming to the house till he had carried off Marion with him. Her opinion on the subject was delivered to no one but Hugh.

That winter introduced them to a better acquaintance. One evening Dr. Gregory, an uncle of Mrs. Rossitur's, had been dining with her and was in the drawing-room. Mr. Schweden had been there too, and he and Marion and one or two other young people had gone out to some popular entertainment. The children knew little of Dr. Gregory but that he was a very respectable-looking elderly gentleman, a little rough in his manners; the doctor had not long been returned from a stay of some years in Europe where he had been collecting rare books for a fine public library, the charge of which was now entrusted to him. After talking some time with Mr. and Mrs. Rossitur the doctor pushed round his chair to take a look at the children.

"So that's Amy's child," said he. "Come here, Amy."

"That is not my name," said the little girl coming forward.

"Isn't it? It ought to be. What is then?"

"Elfleda."

"Elfleda!--Where in the name of all that is auricular did you get such an outlandish name?"

"My father gave it to me, sir," said Fleda, with a dignified sobriety which amused the old gentleman.

"Your father!--Hum--I understand. And couldn't your father find a cap that fitted you without going back to the old-fashioned days of King Alfred?"

"Yes sir; it was my grandmother's cap."

"I am afraid your grandmother's cap isn't all of her that's come down to you," said he, tapping his snuff-box and looking at her with a curious twinkle in his eyes. "What do you call yourself? Haven't you some variations of this tongue-twisting appellative to serve for every day and save trouble?"

"They call me Fleda," said the little girl, who could not help laughing.

"Nothing better than that?"

Fleda remembered two prettier nick-names which had been hers; but one had been given by dear lips long ago, and she was not going to have it profaned by common use; and "Elfie" belonged to Mr. Carleton. She would own to nothing but Fleda.

"Well, Miss Fleda," said the doctor, "are you going to school?"

"No sir."

"You intend to live without such a vulgar thing as learning?"

"No sir--Hugh and I have our lessons at home."

"Teaching each other, I suppose?"

"O no, sir," said Fleda laughing;--"Mme. Lascelles and Mr. Schweppenhesser and Signor Barytone come to teach us, besides our music masters."

"Do you ever talk German with this Mr. What's-his-name who has just gone out with your cousin Marion?"

"I never talk to him at all, sir."

"Don't you? why not? Don't you like him?"

Fleda said "not particularly," and seemed to wish to let the subject pass, but the doctor was amused and pressed it.

"Why, why don't you like him?" said he; "I am sure he's a fine looking dashing gentleman,--dresses as well as anybody, and talks as much as most people,--why don't you like him? Isn't he a handsome fellow, eh?"

"I dare say he is, to many people," said Fleda.

"She said she didn't think there was any moral expression in his face," said Hugh, by way of settling the matter.

"Moral expression!" cried the doctor,--"moral expression!--and what if there isn't, you Elf!--what if there isn't?"

"I shouldn't care what other kind of expression it had," said Fleda, colouring a little.

Mr. Rossitur 'pished' rather impatiently. The doctor glanced at his niece, and changed the subject.

"Well who teaches you English, Miss Fleda? you haven't told me that yet."

"O that we teach ourselves," said Fleda, smiling as if it was a very innocent question.

"Hum! you do! Pray how do you teach yourselves?"

"By reading, sir."

"Reading! And what do you read? what have you read in the last twelve months, now?"

"I don't think I could remember all exactly," said Fleda.

"But you have got a list of them all," said Hugh, who chanced to have been looking over said list of a day or two before and felt quite proud of it.

"Let's have it--let's have it," said the doctor. And Mrs. Rossitur laughing said "Let's have it;" and even her husband commanded Hugh to go and fetch it; so poor Fleda, though not a little unwilling, was obliged to let the list be forthcoming. Hugh brought it, in a neat little book covered with pink blotting paper.

"Now for it," said the doctor;--"let us see what this English amounts to. Can you stand fire, Elfleda?"

'Jan. 1. Robinson Crusoe.' [Footnote: A true list made by a child of that age.]

"Hum--that sounds reasonable, at all events."

"I had it for a New Year present," remarked Fleda, who stood by with down-cast eyes, like a person undergoing an examination.

'Jan. 2. Histoire de France.'

"What history of France is this?"

Fleda hesitated and then said it was by Lacretelle.

"Lacretelle?--what, of the Revolution?"

"No sir, it is before that; it is in five or six large volumes."

"What, Louis XV's time!" said the doctor muttering to himself.

'Jan. 27. 2. ditto, ditto.'

"'Two' means the second volume I suppose?"

"Yes sir."

"Hum--if you were a mouse you would gnaw through the wall in time at that rate. This is in the original?"

"Yes sir."

'Feb. 3. Paris. L. E. K.'

"What do these hieroglyphics mean?"

"That stands for the 'Library of Entertaining Knowledge,'" said Fleda.

"But how is this?--do you go hop, skip, and jump through these books, or read a little and then throw them away? Here it is only seven days since you began the second volume of Lacretelle--not time enough to get through it."

"O no, sir," said Fleda smiling,--"I like to have several books that I am reading in at once,--I mean--at the same time, you know; and then if I am not in the mood of one I take up another."

"She reads them all through," said Hugh,--"always, though she reads them very quick."

"Hum--I understand," said the old doctor with a humorous expression, going on with the list.

'March 3. 3 Hist. de France.'

"But you finish one of these volumes, I suppose, before you begin another; or do you dip into different parts of the same work at once?"

"O no, sir;--of course not!"

'Mar. 5. Modern Egyptians. L. E. K. Ap. 13.'

"What are these dates on the right as well as on the left?"

"Those on the right shew when I finished the volume."

"Well I wonder what you were cut out for?" said the doctor. "A Quaker!--you aren't a Quaker, are you?"

"No sir," said Fleda laughing.

"You look like it," said he.

'Feb. 24. Five Penny Magazines, finished Mar. 4,'

"They are in paper numbers, you know, sir."

'April 4. 4 Hist. de F.'

"Let us see--the third volume was finished March 29--I declare you keep it up pretty well."

'Ap. 19. Incidents of Travel'

"Whose is that?"

"It is by Mr. Stephens."

"How did you like it?"

"O very much indeed."

"Ay, I see you did; you finished it by the first of May. 'Tour to the Hebrides'--what? Johnson's?"

"Yes sir."

"Read it all fairly through?"

"Yes sir, certainly."

He smiled and went on.

'May 12. Peter Simple!'

There was quite a shout at the heterogeneous character of Fleda's reading, which she, not knowing exactly what to make of it, heard rather abashed.

"' Peter Simple'!" said the doctor, settling himself to go on with his list;--"well, let us see.--' World without Souls.' Why you Elf! read in two days."

"It is very short, you know, sir."

"What did you think of it?"

"I liked parts of it very much."

He went on, still smiling.

'June 15. Goldsmith's Animated Nature.'

'June 18. 1 Life of Washington.'

"What Life of Washington?"

"Marshall's."

"Hum.--'July 9. 2 Goldsmith's An. Na.' As I live, begun the very day the first volume was finished, did you read the whole of that?"

"O yes, sir. I liked that book very much."

'4 July 12. 5 Hist, de France.'

"Two histories on hand at once! Out of all rule, Miss Fleda! We must look after you."

"Yes sir; sometimes I wanted to read one, and sometimes I wanted to read the other."

"And you always do what you want to do, I suppose?"

"I think the reading does me more good in that way."

'July 15. Paley's Natural Theology!'

There was another shout. Poor Fleda's eyes filled with tears.

"What in the world put that book into your head, or before your eyes?" said the doctor.

"I don't know, sir,--I thought I should like to read it," said Fleda, drooping her eyelids that the bright drops under them might not be seen.

"And finished in eleven days, as I live!" said the doctor wagging his head. 'July 19. 3 Goldsmith's A. N.' 'Aug. 6. 4 Do. Do.'"

"That is one of Fleda's favourite books," put in Hugh.

"So it seems. '6 Hist. de France.'--What does this little cross mean?"

"That shews when the book is finished," said Fleda, looking on the page,--"the last volume, I mean."

"'Retrospect of Western Travel'--'Goldsmith's A. N., last vol.'--'Memoirs de Sully'--in the French?"

"Yes sir."

"'Life of Newton'--What's this?--'Sep. 8. 1 Fairy Queen!'--not Spenser's?"

"Yes sir, I believe so--the Fairy Queen, in five volumes."

The doctor looked up comically at his niece and her husband, who were both sitting or standing close by.

"'Sep. 10. Paolo e Virginia.'--In what language?"

"Italian, sir; I was just beginning, and I haven't finished it yet."

"'Sep. 16. Milner's Church History'!--What the deuce!--'Vol. 2. Fairy Queen.'--Why this must have been a favourite book too."

"That's one of the books Fleda loves best," said Hugh;--"she went through that very fast."

"*Over* it, you mean, I reckon; how much did you skip, Fleda?"

"I didn't skip at all," said Fleda; "I read every word of it."

"'Sep. 20. 2 Mem. de Sully.'--Well, you're an industrious mouse, I'll say that for you.--What's this--'Don Quixotte!'--'Life of Howard.'--'Nov. 17. 3 Fairy Queen.'--'Nov. 29. 4 Fairy Queen.'--'Dec. 8. 1 Goldsmith's

England.'--Well if this list of books is a fair exhibit of your taste and capacity, you have a most happily proportioned set of intellectuals. Let us see--History, fun, facts, nature, theology, poetry and divinity!--upon my soul!--and poetry and history the leading features!--a little fun,--as much as you could lay your hand on I'll warrant, by that pinch in the corner of your eye. And here, the eleventh of December, you finished the Fairy Queen;--and ever since, I suppose, you have been imagining yourself the 'faire Una,' with Hugh standing for Prince Arthur or the Red-cross knight,--haven't you?"

"No sir. I didn't imagine anything about it."

"Don't tell me! What did you read it for?"

"Only because I liked it, sir. I liked it better than any other book I read last year."

"You did! Well, the year ends, I see, with another volume of Sully. I won't enter upon this year's list. Pray how much of all these volumes do you suppose you remember? I'll try and find out, next time I come to see you. I can give a guess, if you study with that little pug in your lap."

"He is not a pug!" said Fleda, in whose arms King was lying luxuriously,--"and he never gets into my lap besides."

'He is not a pug.'
"He is not a pug."

"Don't he! Why not?"

"Because I don't like it, sir. I don't like to see dogs in laps."

"But all the ladies in the land do it, you little Saxon! it is universally considered a mark of distinction."

"I can't help what all the ladies in the land do," said Fleda. "That won't alter my liking, and I don't think a lady's lap is a place for a dog."

"I wish you were *my* daughter!" said the old doctor, shaking his head at her with a comic fierce expression of countenance, which Fleda perfectly understood and laughed at accordingly. Then as the two children with the dog went off into the other room, he said, turning to his niece and Mr. Rossitur,

"If that girl ever takes a wrong turn with the bit in her teeth, you'll be puzzled to hold her. What stuff will you make the reins of?"

"I don't think she ever will take a wrong turn," said Mr. Rossitur.

"A look is enough to manage her, if she did," said his wife. "Hugh is not more gentle."

"I should be inclined rather to fear her not having stability of character enough," said Mr. Rossitur. "She is so very meek and yielding, I almost doubt whether anything would give her courage to take ground of her own and keep it."

"Hum------well, well!" said the old doctor, walking off after the children. "Prince Arthur, will you bring this damsel up to my den some of these days?--the 'faire Una' is safe from the wild beasts, you know;--and I'll shew her books enough to build herself a house with, if she likes."

The acceptance of this invitation led to some of the pleasantest hours of Fleda's city life. The visits to the great library became very frequent. Dr. Gregory and the children were little while in growing fond of each other; he loved to see them and taught them to come at such times as the library was free of visitors and his hands of engagements. Then he delighted himself with giving them pleasure, especially Fleda, whose quick curiosity and intelligence were a constant amusement to him. He would establish the children in some corner of the large apartments, out of the way behind a screen of books and tables; and there shut out from the world they would enjoy a kind of fairyland pleasure over some volume or set of engravings that they could not see at home. Hours and hours were spent so. Fleda would stand clasping her hands before

Audubon, or rapt over a finely illustrated book of travels, or going through and through with Hugh the works of the best masters of the pencil and the graver. The doctor found he could trust them, and then all the treasures of the library were at their disposal. Very often he put chosen pieces of reading into their hands; and it was pleasantest of all when he was not busy and came and sat down with them; for with all his odd manner he was extremely kind and could and did put them in the way to profit greatly by their opportunities. The doctor and the children had nice times there together.

They lasted for many months, and grew more and more worth. Mr. Schweden carried off Marion, as Fleda had foreseen he would, before the end of spring; and after she was gone something like the old pleasant Paris life was taken up again. They had no more company now than was agreeable, and it was picked not to suit Marion's taste but her father's,--a very different matter. Fleda and Hugh were not forbidden the dinner-table, and so had the good of hearing much useful conversation from which the former, according to custom, made her steady precious gleanings. The pleasant evenings in the family were still better enjoyed than they used to he; Fleda was older; and the snug handsome American house had a home-feeling to her that the wide Parisian saloons never knew. She had become bound to her uncle and aunt by all but the ties of blood; nobody in the house ever remembered that she was not born their daughter; except indeed Fleda herself, who remembered everything, and with whom the forming of any new affections or relations somehow never blotted out or even faded the register of the old. It lived in all its brightness; the writing of past loves and friendships was as plain as ever in her heart; and often, often, the eye and the kiss of memory fell upon it. In the secret of her heart's core; for still, as at the first, no one had a suspicion of the movings of thought that were beneath that childish brow. No one guessed how clear a judgment weighed and decided upon many things. No one dreamed, amid their busy, hustling, thoughtless

life, how often, in the street, in her bed, in company and alone, her mother's last prayer was in Fleda's heart; well cherished; never forgotten.

Her education and Hugh's meanwhile went on after the old fashion. If Mr. Rossitur had more time he seemed to have no more thought for the matter; and Mrs. Rossitur, fine-natured as she was, had never been trained to self-exertion, and of course was entirely out of the way of training others. Her children were pieces of perfection, and needed no oversight; her house was a piece of perfection too. If either had not been, Mrs. Rossitur would have been utterly at a loss how to mend matters,--except in the latter instance by getting a new housekeeper; and as Mrs. Renney, the good woman who held that station, was in everybody's opinion another treasure, Mrs. Rossitur's mind was uncrossed by the shadow of such a dilemma. With Mrs. Renney as with every one else Fleda was held in highest regard; always welcome to her premises and to those mysteries of her trade which were sacred from other intrusion.

Fleda's natural inquisitiveness carried her often to the housekeeper's room, and made her there the same curious and careful observer that she had been in the library or at the Louvre.

"Come," said Hugh one day when he had sought and found her in Mrs. Renney's precincts,--"come away, Fleda! What do you want to stand here and see Mrs. Renney roll butter and sugar for?"

"My dear Mr. Rossitur!" said Fleda,--"you don't understand quelquechoses. How do you know but I may have to get my living by making them, some day."

"By making what?" said Hugh.

"Quelquechoses,--anglicé, kickshaws,--alias, sweet trifles denominated merrings."

"Pshaw, Fleda!"

"Miss Fleda is more likely to get her living by eating them, Mr. Hugh, isn't she?" said the housekeeper.

"I hope to decline both lines of life," said Fleda laughingly as she followed Hugh out of the room. But her chance remark had grazed the truth sufficiently near.

Those years in New York were a happy time for little Fleda, a time when mind and body flourished under the sun of prosperity. Luxury did not spoil her; and any one that saw her in the soft furs of her winter wrappings would have said that delicate cheek and frame were never made to know the unkindliness of harsher things.

Chapter XVI.

> Whereunto is money good?
> Who has it not wants hardihood,
> Who has it has much trouble and care,
> Who once has had it has despair.
>
> Longfellow. *From the German*.

It was the middle of winter. One day Hugh and Fleda had come home from their walk. They dashed into the parlour, complaining that it was bitterly cold, and began unrobing before the glowing grate, which was a mass of living fire from end to end. Mrs. Rossitur was there in an easy chair, alone and doing nothing. That was not a thing absolutely unheard of, but Fleda had not pulled off her second glove before she bent down towards her and in a changed tone tenderly asked if she did not feel well?

Mrs. Rossitur looked up in her face a minute, and then drawing her down kissed the blooming cheeks one and the other several times. But as she looked off to the fire again Fleda saw that it was through watering eyes. She dropped on her knees by the side of the easy chair that she might have a better sight of that face, and tried to read it as she asked again what was the matter; and Hugh coming to the other side repeated her question. His mother passed an arm round each, looking wistfully from one to the other and kissing them earnestly, but she said only, with a very heart-felt emphasis, "Poor children!"

Fleda was now afraid to speak, but Hugh pressed his inquiry.

"Why 'poor' mamma? what makes you say so?"

"Because you are poor really, dear Hugh. We have lost everything we have in the world."

"Mamma! What do you mean?"

"Your father has failed."

"Failed!--But, mamma, I thought he wasn't in business?"

"So I thought," said Mrs. Rossitur;--"I didn't know people could fail that were not in business; but it seems they can. He was a partner in some concern or other, and it's all broken to pieces, and your father with it, he says."

Mrs. Rossitur's face was distressful. They were all silent for a little; Hugh kissing his mother's wet cheeks. Fleda had softly nestled her head in her bosom. But Mrs. Rossitur soon recovered herself.

"How bad is it, mother?" said Hugh.

"As bad as can possibly be."

"Is *everything* gone?"

"Everything."

"You don't mean the house, mamma?"

"The house, and all that is in it."

The children's hearts were struck, and they were silent again, only a trembling touch of Fleda's lips spoke sympathy and patience if ever a kiss did.

"But mamma," said Hugh, after he had gathered breath for it,--"do you mean to say that *everything*, literally *everything*, is gone? is there nothing left?"

"Nothing in the world--not a sou."

"Then what are we going to do?"

Mrs. Rossitur shook her head, and had no words.

Fleda *looked* across to Hugh to ask no more, and putting her arms round her aunt's neck and laying cheek to cheek, she spoke what comfort she could.

"Don't, dear aunt Lucy!--there will be some way--things always turn out better than at first--I dare say we shall find out it isn't so bad by and by. Don't you mind it, and then we won't. We can be happy anywhere together."

If there was not much in the reasoning there was something in the tone of the words to bid Mrs. Rossitur bear herself well. Its tremulous sweetness, its anxious love, was without a taint of self-recollection; its sorrow was for *her*. Mrs. Rossitur felt that she must not shew herself overcome. She again kissed and blessed and pressed closer in her arms her little comforter, while her other hand was given to Hugh.

"I have only heard about it this morning. Your uncle was here telling me just now,--a little while before you came. Don't say anything about it before him."

Why not? The words struck Fleda disagreeably.

"What will be done with the house, mamma?" said Hugh.

"Sold--sold, and everything in it."

"Papa's books, mamma! and all the things in the library!" exclaimed Hugh, looking terrified.

Mrs. Rossitur's face gave the answer; do it in words she could not.

The children were a long time silent, trying hard to swallow this bitter pill; and still Hugh's hand was in his mother's and Fleda's head lay on her bosom. Thought was busy, going up and down, and breaking the companionship they had so long held with the pleasant drawing-room and the tasteful arrangements among which Fleda was so much at home;--the easy chairs in whose comfortable arms she had had so many an hour of nice reading; the soft rug where in the very wantonness of frolic she had stretched herself to play with King; that very luxurious, bright grateful of fire, which had given her so often the same warm welcome home, an apt introduction to the other stores of comfort which awaited her above and below stairs; the rich-coloured curtains and carpet, the beauty of which had been such a constant gratification to Fleda's eye; and the exquisite French table and lamps they had brought out with them, in which her uncle and aunt had so much pride and which could nowhere be matched for elegance;--they must all be said 'good-bye' to; and as yet fancy had nothing to furnish the future with; it looked very bare.

King had come in and wagged himself up close to his mistress, but even he could obtain nothing but the touch of most abstracted finger ends. Yet, though keenly recognized, these thoughts were only passing

compared with the anxious and sorrowful ones that went to her aunt and uncle; for Hugh and her, she judged, it was less matter. And Mrs. Rossitur's care was most for her husband; and Hugh's was for them all. His associations were less quick and his tastes less keen than Fleda's and less a part of himself. Hugh lived in his affections; with a salvo to them, he could bear to lose anything and go anywhere.

"Mamma," said he after a long time,--"will anything be done with Fleda's books?"

A question that had been in Fleda's mind before, but which she had patiently forborne just then to ask.

"No indeed!" said Mrs. Rossitur, pressing Fleda more closely and kissing in a kind of rapture the sweet thoughtful face;--"not yours, my darling; they can't touch anything that belongs to you--I wish it was more--and I don't suppose they will take anything of mine either."

"Ah, well!" said Fleda raising her head, "you have got quite a parcel of books, aunt Lucy, and I have a good many--how well it is I have had so many given me since I have been here!--That will make quite a nice little library, both together, and Hugh has some; I thought perhaps we shouldn't have one at all left, and that would have been rather bad."

'Rather bad'! Mrs. Rossitur looked at her, and was dumb.

"Only don't you wear a sad face for anything!" Fleda went on earnestly;--"we shall be perfectly happy if you and uncle Rolf only will be."

"My dear children!" said Mrs. Rossitur wiping her eyes,--"it is for you I am unhappy--you and your uncle;--I do not think of myself."

"And we do not think of ourselves, mamma," said Hugh.

"I know it--but having good children don't make one care less about them," said Mrs. Rossitur, the tears fairly raining over her fingers.

Hugh pulled the fingers down and again tried the efficacy of his lips.

"And you know papa thinks most of you, mamma."

"Ah, your father!"--said Mrs. Rossitur shaking her head,--"I am afraid it will go hard with him!--But I will be happy as long as I have you two, or else I should be a very wicked woman. It only grieves me to think of your education and prospects--"

"Fleda's piano, mamma!" said Hugh with sudden dismay.

Mrs. Rossitur shook her head again and covered her eyes, while Fleda stretching across to Hugh gave him by look and touch an earnest admonition to let that subject alone. And then with a sweetness and gentleness like nothing but the breath of the south wind, she wooed her aunt to hope and resignation. Hugh held back, feeling, or thinking, that Fleda could do it better than he, and watching her progress, as Mrs. Rossitur took her hand from her face, and smiled, at first mournfully and then really mirthfully in Fleda's face, at some sally that nobody but a nice observer would have seen was got up for the occasion. And it was hardly that, so completely had the child forgotten her own sorrow in ministering to that of another. "Blessed are the peacemakers"! It is always so.

"You are a witch or a fairy," said Mrs. Rossitur, catching her again in her arms,--"nothing else! You must try your powers of charming upon your uncle."

Fleda laughed, without any effort; but as to trying her slight wand upon Mr. Rossitur she had serious doubts. And the doubts became certainty when they met at dinner; he looked so grave that she dared not attack him. It was a gloomy meal, for the face that should have lighted the whole table cast a shadow there.

Without at all comprehending the whole of her husband's character the sure magnetism of affection had enabled Mrs. Rossitur to divine his thoughts. Pride was his ruling passion; not such pride as Mr. Carleton's, which was rather like exaggerated self-respect, but wider and more indiscriminate in its choice of objects. It was pride in his family name; pride in his own talents, which were considerable; pride in his family, wife and children and all of which he thought did him honour,--if they had not his love for them assuredly would have known some diminishing; pride in his wealth and in the attractions with which it surrounded him; and lastly, pride in the skill, taste and connoisseurship which enabled him to bring those attractions together. Furthermore, his love for both literature and art was true and strong; and for many years he had accustomed himself to lead a life of great luxuriousness; catering for body and mind in every taste that could be elegantly enjoyed; and again proud of the elegance of every enjoyment. The change of circumstances which touched his pride wounded him at every point where he was vulnerable at all.

Fleda had never felt so afraid of him. She was glad to see Dr. Gregory come in to tea. Mr. Rossitur was not there. The doctor did not touch upon affairs, if he had heard of their misfortune; he went on as usual in a rambling cheerful way all tea-time, talking mostly to Fleda and Hugh. But after tea he talked no more but sat still and waited till the master of the house came in.

Fleda thought Mr. Rossitur did not look glad to see him. But how could he look glad about anything? He did not sit down, and for a few minutes there was a kind of meaning silence. Fleda sat in the corner with the heartache, to see her uncle's gloomy tramp up and down the rich apartment, and her aunt Lucy gaze at him.

"Humph!--well--So!" said the doctor at last,--"You've all gone overboard with a smash, I understand?"

The walker gave him no regard.

"True, is it?" said the doctor.

Mr. Rossitur made no answer, unless a smothered grunt might be taken for one.

"How came it about?"

"Folly and Devilry."

"Humph!--bad capital to work upon. I hope the principal is gone with the interest. What's the amount of your loss?"

"Ruin."

"Humph.--French ruin, or American ruin? because there's a difference. What do you mean?"

"I am not so happy as to understand you sir, but we shall not pay seventy cents on the dollar."

The old gentleman got up and stood before the fire with his back to Mr. Rossitur, saying "that was rather bad."

"What are you going to do?"

Mr. Rossitur hesitated a few moments for an answer and then said,

"Pay the seventy cents and begin the world anew with nothing."

"Of course!" said the doctor. "I understand that; but where and how? What end of the world will you take up first?"

Mr. Rossitur writhed in impatience or disgust, and after again hesitating answered dryly that he had not determined.

"Have you thought of anything in particular?"

"Zounds! no sir, except my misfortune. That's enough for one day."

"And too much," said the old doctor, "unless you can mix some other thought with it. That's what I came for. Will you go into business?"

Fleda was startled by the vehemence with which her uncle said, "No, never!"--and he presently added, "I'll do nothing here."

"Well,--well," said the doctor to himself;--"Will you go into the country?"

"Yes!--anywhere!--the further the better."

Mrs. Rossitur startled, but her husband's face did not encourage her to open her lips.

"Ay but on a farm, I mean?"

"On anything, that will give me a standing."

"I thought that too," said Dr. Gregory, now whirling about. "I have a fine piece of land that wants a tenant. You may take it at an easy rate, and pay me when the crops come in. I shouldn't expect so young a farmer, you know, to keep any closer terms."

"How far is it?"

"Far enough--up in Wyandot County."

"How large?"

"A matter of two or three hundred acres or so. It is very fine, they say. It came into a fellow's hands that owed me what I thought was a bad debt, so for fear he would never pay me I thought best to take it and pay him; whether the place will ever fill my pockets again remains to be seen; doubtful, I think."

"I'll take it, Dr. Gregory, and see if I cannot bring that about."

"Pooh, pooh! fill your own. I am not careful about it; the less money one has the more it jingles, unless it gets *too* low indeed."

"I will take it, Dr. Gregory, and feel myself under obligation to you."

"No, I told you, not till the crops come in. No obligation is binding till the term is up. Well, I'll see you further about it."

"But Rolf!" said Mrs. Rossitur,--"stop a minute, uncle, don't go yet,--Rolf don't know anything in the world about the management of a farm, neither do I."

"The 'faire Una' can enlighten you," said the doctor, waving his hand towards his little favourite in the corner,--"but I forgot!--Well, if you don't know, the crops won't come in--that's all the difference."

But Mrs. Rossitur looked anxiously at her husband. "Do you know exactly what you are undertaking, Rolf?" she said.

"If I do not, I presume I shall discover in time."

"But it may be too late," said Mrs Rossitur, in the tone of sad remonstrance that had gone all the length it dared.

"It *can not* be too late!" said her husband impatiently. "If I do not know what I am taking up, I know very well what I am laying down; and it does not signify a straw what comes after--if it was a snail-shell, that would cover my head!"

"Hum--" said the old doctor,--"the snail is very well in his way, but I have no idea that he was ever cut out for a farmer."

"Do you think you will find it a business you would like, Mr. Rossitur?" said his wife timidly.

"I tell you," said he facing about, "it is not a question of liking. I will like anything that will bury me out of the world!"

Poor Mrs. Rossitur. She had not yet come to wishing herself buried alive, and she had small faith in the permanence of her husband's taste for it. She looked desponding.

"You don't suppose," said Mr. Rossitur stopping again in the middle of the floor after another turn and a half,--"you do not suppose that I am going to take the labouring of the farm upon myself? I shall employ some one of course, who understands the matter, to take all that off my hands."

The doctor thought of the old proverb and the alternative the plough presents to those who would thrive by it; Fleda thought of Mr. Didenhover; Mrs. Rossitur would fain have suggested that such an important person must be well paid; but neither of them spoke.

"Of course," said Mr. Rossitur haughtily as he went on with his walk, "I do not expect any more than you to live in the back-woods the life we have been leading here. That is at an end."

"Is it a very wild country?" asked Mrs. Rossitur of the doctor.

"No wild beasts, my dear, if that is your meaning,--and I do not suppose there are even many snakes left by this time."

"No, but dear uncle, I mean, is it in an unsettled state?"

"No my dear, not at all,--perfectly quiet."

"Ah but do not play with me," exclaimed poor Mrs. Rossitur between laughing and crying;--"I mean is it far from any town and not among neighbours?"

"Far enough to be out of the way of morning calls," said the doctor;--"and when your neighbours come to see you they will expect tea by four o'clock. There are not a great many near by, but they don't mind coming from five or six miles off."

Mrs. Rossitur looked chilled and horrified. To her he had described a very wild country indeed. Fleda would have laughed if it had not been for her aunt's face; but that settled down into a doubtful anxious look that pained her. It pained the old doctor too.

"Come," said he touching her pretty chin with his forefinger,--"what are you thinking of? folks may be good folks and yet have tea at four o'clock, mayn't they?"

"When do they have dinner!" said Mrs. Rossitur.

"I really don't know. When you get settled up there I'll come and see."

"Hardly," said Mrs. Rossitur. "I don't believe it would be possible for Emile to get dinner before the tea-time; and I am sure I shouldn't like to propose such a thing to Mrs. Renney."

The doctor fidgeted about a little on the hearth-rug and looked comical, perfectly understood by one acute observer in the corner.

"Are you wise enough to imagine, Lucy," said Mr. Rossitur sternly, "that you can carry your whole establishment with you? What do you suppose Emile and Mrs. Renney would do in a farmhouse?"

"I can do without whatever you can," said Mrs. Rossitur meekly. "I did not know that you would be willing to part with Emile, and I do not think Mrs. Renney would like to leave us."

"I told you before, it is no more a question of liking," answered he.

"And if it were," said the doctor, "I have no idea that Monsieur Emile and Madame Renney would be satisfied with the style of a country kitchen, or think the interior of Yankee land a hopeful sphere for their energies."

"What sort of a house is it?" said Mrs. Rossitur.

"A wooden frame house, I believe."

"No but, dear uncle, do tell me."

"What sort of a house?--Humph--Large enough, I am told. It will accommodate you, in one way."

"Comfortable?"

"I don't know," said the doctor shaking his head;--"depends on who's in it. No house is that per se. But I reckon there isn't much plate glass. I suppose you'll find the doors all painted blue, and every fireplace with a crane in it."

"A crane!" said Mrs. Rossitur, to whose imagination the word suggested nothing but a large water-bird with a long neck.

"Ay!" said the doctor. "But it's just as well. You won't want hanging lamps there,--and candelabra would hardly be in place either, to hold tallow candles."

"Tallow candles!" exclaimed Mrs. Rossitur. Her husband winced, but said nothing.

"Ay," said the doctor again,--"and make them yourself if you are a good housewife. Come, Lucy," said he taking her hand, "do you know how the wild fowl do on the Chesapeake?--duck and swim under water till they can shew their heads with safety? O spoil your eyes to see by a tallow candle."

Mrs. Rossitur half smiled, but looked anxiously towards her husband.

"Pooh, pooh! Rolf won't care what the light burns that lights him to independence,--and when you get there you may illuminate with a whole whale if you like. By the way, Rolf, there is a fine water power up yonder,

and a saw-mill in good order, they tell me, but a short way from the house. Hugh might learn to manage it, and it would be fine employment for him."

"Hugh!" said his mother disconsolately. Mr. Rossitur neither spoke nor looked an answer. Fleda sprang forward.

"A saw-mill!--Uncle Orrin!--where is it?"

"Just a little way from the house, they say. *You* can't manage it, fair Saxon!--though you look as if you would undertake all the mills in creation, for a trifle."

"No but the place, uncle Orrin;--where is the place?"

"The place? Hum--why it's up in Wyandot County--some five or six miles from the Montepoole Spring--what's this they call it?--Queechy!--By the way!" said he, reading Fleda's countenance, "it is the very place where your father was born!--it is! I didn't think of that before."

Fleda's hands were clasped.

"O I am very glad!" she said. "It's my old home. It is the most lovely place, aunt Lucy!--most lovely--and we shall have some good neighbours there too. O I am very glad!--The dear old saw-mill!--"

"Dear old saw-mill!" said the doctor looking at her. "Rolf, I'll tell you what, you shall give me this girl. I want her. I can take better care of her, perhaps, now than you can. Let her come to me when you leave the city--it will be better for her than to help work the saw-mill; and I have as good a right to her as anybody, for Amy before her was like my own child."

The doctor spoke not with his usual light jesting manner but very seriously. Hugh's lips parted,--Mrs. Rossitur looked with a sad thoughtful look at Fleda,--Mr. Rossitur walked up and down looking at nobody. Fleda watched him.

"What does Fleda herself say?" said he stopping short suddenly. His face softened and his eye changed as it fell upon her, for the first time that day. Fleda saw her opening; she came to him, within his arms, and laid her head upon his breast.

"What does Fleda say?" said he, softly kissing her.

Fleda's tears said a good deal, that needed no interpreter. She felt her uncle's hand passed more and more tenderly over her head, so tenderly that it made it all the more difficult for her to govern herself and stop her tears. But she did stop them, and looked up at him then with such a face--so glowing through smiles and tears--it was like a very rainbow of hope upon the cloud of their prospects. Mr. Rossitur felt the power of the sunbeam wand, it reached his heart; it was even with a smile that he said as he looked at her,

"Will you go to your uncle Orrin, Fleda?"

"Not if uncle Rolf will keep me."

"Keep you!" said Mr. Rossitur;--"I should like to see who wouldn't keep you!--There, Dr. Gregory, you have your answer."

"Hum!--I might have known," said the doctor, "that the 'faire Una' would abjure cities.--Come here, you Elf!"--and he wrapped her in his arms so tight she could not stir,--"I have a spite against you for this. What amends will you make me for such an affront?"

"Let me take breath," said Fleda laughing, "and I'll tell you. You don't want any amends, uncle Orrin."

"Well," said he, gazing with more feeling than he cared to shew into that sweet face, so innocent of apology-making,--"you shall promise me that you will not forget uncle Orrin and the old house in Bleecker street."

Fleda's eyes grew more wistful.

"And will you promise me that if ever you want anything you will come or send straight there?"

"If ever I want anything I can't get nor do without," said Fleda.

"Pshaw!" said the doctor letting her go, but laughing at the same time. "Mind my words, Mr. and Mrs. Rossitur;--if ever that girl takes the wrong bit in her mouth--Well, well! I'll go home."

Home he went. The rest drew together particularly near, round the fire; Hugh at his father's shoulder, and Fleda kneeling on the rug between her uncle and aunt with a hand on each; and there was not one of them whose gloom was not lightened by her bright face and cheerful words of hope that in the new scenes they were going to, "they would all be so happy."

The days that followed were gloomy; but Fleda's ministry was unceasing. Hugh seconded her well, though more passively. Feeling less pain himself, he perhaps for that very reason was less acutely alive to it in others; not so quick to foresee and ward off, not so skilful to allay it. Fleda seemed to have intuition for the one and a charm for the other. To her there was pain in every parting; her sympathies clung to whatever wore the livery of habit. There was hardly any piece of furniture, there was no book or marble or picture, that she could take leave of without a pang. But it was kept to herself; her sorrowful good-byes were said in secret; before others, in all those weeks she was a very Euphrosyne; light, bright, cheerful, of eye and foot and hand; a shield between her aunt and every annoyance that *she* could take instead; a good little fairy, that sent her sunbeam wand, quick as a flash, where any eye rested gloomily. People did not always find out where the light came from, but it was her witchery.

The creditors would touch none of Mrs. Rossitur's things, her husband's honourable behaviour had been so thorough. They even presented him with one or two pictures which he sold for a considerable sum; and to

Mrs. Rossitur they gave up all the plate in daily use; a matter of great rejoicing to Fleda who knew well how sorely it would have been missed. She and her aunt had quite a little library too, of their own private store; a little one it was indeed, but the worth of every volume was now trebled in her eyes. Their furniture was all left behind; and in its stead went some of neat light painted wood which looked to Fleda deliciously countryfied. A promising cook and housemaid were engaged to go with them to the wilds; and about the first of April they turned their backs upon the city.

Chapter XVII.

The thresher's weary flingin-tree
The lee-lang day had tired me:
And whan the day bad closed his e'e,
Far i' the west,
Ben i' the spence, right pensivelie,
I 'gaed to rest.

Burns.

Queechy was reached at night. Fleda had promised herself to be off almost with the dawn of light the next morning to see aunt Miriam, but a heavy rain kept her fast at home the whole day. It was very well; she was wanted there.

Despite the rain and her disappointment it was impossible for Fleda to lie abed from the time the first grey light began to break in at her windows,--those old windows that had rattled their welcome to her all night. She was up and dressed and had had a long consultation with herself over matters and prospects, before anybody else had thought of leaving the indubitable comfort of a feather bed for the doubtful

contingency of happiness that awaited them down stairs. Fleda took in the whole length and breadth of it, half wittingly and half through some finer sense than that of the understanding.

The first view of things could not strike them pleasantly; it was not to be looked for. The doors did not happen to be painted blue; they were a deep chocolate colour; doors and wainscot. The fireplaces were not all furnished with cranes, but they were all uncouthly wide and deep. Nobody would have thought them so indeed in the winter, when piled up with blazing hickory logs, but in summer they yawned uncomfortably upon the eye. The ceilings were low; the walls rough papered or rougher white-washed; the sashes not hung; the rooms, otherwise well enough proportioned, stuck with little cupboards, in recesses and corners and out of the way places, in a style impertinently suggestive of housekeeping, and fitted to shock any symmetrical set of nerves. The old house had undergone a thorough putting in order, it is true; the chocolate paint was just dry, and the paper hangings freshly put up; and the bulk of the new furniture had been sent on before and unpacked, though not a single article of it was in its right place. The house was clean and tight, that is, as tight as it ever was. But the colour had been unfortunately chosen--perhaps there was no help for that;--the paper was *very* coarse and countryfied; the big windows were startling, they looked so bare, without any manner of drapery; and the long reaches of wall were unbroken by mirror or picture-frame. And this to eyes trained to eschew ungracefulness and that abhorred a vacuum as much as nature is said to do! Even Fleda felt there was something disagreeable in the change, though it reached her more through the channel of other people's sensitiveness than her own. To her it was the dear old house still, though her eyes had seen better things since they loved it. No corner or recess had a pleasanter filling, to her fancy, than the old brown cupboard or shelves which had always been there. But what *would* her uncle say to them! and to that dismal paper! and what would aunt Lucy think of those rattling window sashes! this cool raw day too, for the first!--

Think as she might Fleda did not stand still to think. She had gone softly all over the house, taking a strange look at the old places and the images with which memory filled them, thinking of the last time, and many a time before that;--and she had at last come back to the sitting-room, long before anybody else was down stairs; the two tired servants were just rubbing their eyes open in the kitchen and speculating themselves awake. Leaving them, at their peril, to get ready a decent breakfast, (by the way she grudged them the old kitchen) Fleda set about trying what her wand could do towards brightening the face of affairs in the other part of the house. It was quite cold enough for a fire, luckily. She ordered one made, and meanwhile busied herself with the various stray packages and articles of wearing apparel that lay scattered about giving the whole place a look of discomfort. Fleda gathered them up and bestowed them in one or two of the impertinent cupboards, and then undertook the labour of carrying out all the wrong furniture that had got into the breakfast-room and bringing in that which really belonged there from the hall and the parlour beyond; moving like a mouse that she might not disturb the people up stairs. A quarter of an hour was spent in arranging to the best advantage these various pieces of furniture in the room; it was the very same in which Mr. Carleton and Charlton Rossitur had been received the memorable day of the roast pig dinner, but that was not the uppermost association in Fleda's mind. Satisfied at last that a happier effect could not be produced with the given materials, and well pleased too with her success, Fleda turned to the fire. It was made, but not by any means doing its part to encourage the other portions of the room to look their best. Fleda knew something of wood fires from old times; she laid hold of the tongs, and touched and loosened and coaxed a stick here and there, with a delicate hand, till, seeing the very opening it had wanted,--without which neither fire nor hope can keep its activity,--the blaze sprang up energetically, crackling through all the piled oak and hickory and driving the smoke clean out of sight. Fleda had done her work. It would have been a misanthropical person indeed that could have come into the room then and not felt his face brighten. One other thing remained,--setting the breakfast table; and Fleda would let no

hands but hers do it this morning; she was curious about the setting of tables. How she remembered or divined where everything had been stowed; how quietly and efficiently her little fingers unfastened hampers and pried into baskets, without making any noise; till all the breakfast paraphernalia of silver, china, and table-linen was found, gathered from various receptacles, and laid in most exquisite order on the table. State street never saw better. Fleda stood and looked at it then, in immense satisfaction, seeing that her uncle's eye would miss nothing of its accustomed gratification. To her the old room, shining with firelight and new furniture, was perfectly charming. If those great windows were staringly bright, health and cheerfulness seemed to look in at them. And what other images of association, with "nods and becks and wreathed smiles," looked at her out of the curling flames in the old wide fireplace! And one other angel stood there unseen,--the one whose errand it is to see fulfilled the promise, "Give and it shall be given to you; full measure, and pressed down, and heaped up, and running over."

A little while Fleda sat contentedly eying her work; then a new idea struck her and she sprang up. In the next meadow, only one fence between, a little spring of purest water ran through from the woodland; water cresses used to grow there. Uncle Rolf was very fond of them. It was pouring with rain, but no matter. Her heart beating between haste and delight, Fleda slipped her feet into galoches and put an old cloak of Hugh's over her head, and ran out through the kitchen, the old accustomed way. The servants exclaimed and entreated, but Fleda only flashed a bright look at them from under her cloak as she opened the door, and ran off, over the wet grass, under the fence, and over half the meadow, till she came to the stream. She was getting a delicious taste of old times, and though the spring water was very cold and with it and the rain one-half of each sleeve was soon thoroughly wetted, she gathered her cresses and scampered back with a pair of eyes and cheeks that might have struck any city belle chill with envy.

"Then but that's a sweet girl!" said Mary the cook to Jane the housemaid.

"A lovely countenance she has," answered Jane, who was refined in her speech.

"Take her away and you've taken the best of the house, I'm a thinking."

"Mrs. Rossitur is a lady," said Jane in a low voice.

"Ay, and a very proper-behaved one she is, and him the same, that is, for a gentleman I maan; but Jane! I say, I'm thinking he'll have eat too much sour bread lately! I wish I knowed how they'd have their eggs boiled, till I'd have 'em ready."

"Sure it's on the table itself they'll do 'em," said Jane. "They've an elegant little fixture in there for the purpose."

"Is that it!"

Nobody found out how busy Fleda's wand had been in the old breakfast room. But she was not disappointed; she had not worked for praise. Her cresses were appreciated; that was enough. She enjoyed her breakfast, the only one of the party that did. Mr. Rossitur looked moody; his wife looked anxious; and Hugh's face was the reflection of theirs. If Fleda's face reflected anything it was the sunlight of heaven.

"How sweet the air is after New York!" said she.

They looked at her. There was a fresh sweetness of another kind about that breakfast-table. They all felt it, and breathed more freely.

"Delicious cresses!" said Mrs. Rossitur.

"Yes, I wonder where they came from," said her husband. "Who got them?"

"I guess Fleda knows," said Hugh.

"They grow in a little stream of spring water over here in the meadow," said Fleda demurely.

"Yes, but you don't answer my question," said her uncle, putting his hand under her chin and smiling at the blushing face he brought round to view;--"Who got them?"

"I did."

"You have been out in the rain?"

"O Queechy rain don't hurt me, uncle Rolf."

"And don't it wet you either?"

"Yes sir--a little."

"How much?"

"My sleeves,--O I dried them long ago."

"Don't you repeat that experiment, Fleda," said he seriously, but with a look that was a good reward to her nevertheless.

"It is a raw day!" said Mrs. Rossitur, drawing her shoulders together as an ill-disposed window sash gave one of its admonitory shakes.

"What little panes of glass for such big windows!" said Hugh.

"But what a pleasant prospect through them," said Fleda,--"look, Hugh!--worth all the Batteries and Parks in the world."

"In the world!--in New York you mean," said her uncle. "Not better than the Champs Elysées?"

"Better to me," said Fleda.

"For to-day I must attend to the prospect in-doors," said Mrs. Rossitur.

"Now aunt Lucy," said Fleda, "you are just going to put yourself down in the corner, in the rocking-chair there, with your book, and make yourself comfortable; and Hugh and I will see to all these things. Hugh and I and

Mary and Jane,--that makes quite an army of us, and we can do everything without you, and you must just keep quiet. I'll build you up a fine fire, and then when I don't know what to do I will come to you for orders. Uncle Rolf, would you be so good as just to open that box of books in the hall? because I am afraid Hugh isn't strong enough. I'll take care of you, aunt Lucy."

Fleda's plans were not entirely carried out, but she contrived pretty well to take the brunt of the business on her own shoulders. She was as busy as a bee the whole day. To her all the ins and outs of the house, its advantages and disadvantages, were much better known than to anybody else; nothing could be done but by her advice; and more than that, she contrived by some sweet management to baffle Mrs. Rossitur's desire to spare her, and to bear the larger half of every burden that should have come upon her aunt. What she had done in the breakfast room she did or helped to do in the other parts of the house; she unpacked boxes and put away clothes and linen, in which Hugh was her excellent helper; she arranged her uncle's dressing-table with a scrupulosity that left nothing uncared-for;--and the last thing before tea she and Hugh dived into the book-box to get out some favourite volumes to lay upon the table in the evening, that the room might not look to her uncle quite so dismally bare. He had been abroad notwithstanding the rain near the whole day.

It was a weary party that gathered round the supper-table that night, weary it seemed as much in mind as in body; and the meal exerted its cheering influence over only two of them; Mr. and Mrs. Rossitur sipped their cups of tea abstractedly.

"I don't believe that fellow Donohan knows much about his business," remarked the former at length.

"Why don't you get somebody else, then?" said his wife.

"I happen to have engaged him, unfortunately."

A pause.--

"What doesn't he know?"

Mr. Rossitur laughed, not a pleasant laugh.

"It would take too long to enumerate. If you had asked me what part of his business he *does* understand, I could have told you shortly that I don't know."

"But you do not understand it very well yourself. Are you sure?"

"Am I sure of what?"

"That this man does not know his business?"

"No further sure than I can have confidence in my own common sense."

"What will you do?" said Mrs. Rossitur after a moment

A question men are not fond of answering, especially when they have not made up their minds. Mr. Rossitur was silent, and his wife too, after that.

"If I could get some long-headed Yankee to go along with him"--he remarked again, balancing his spoon on the edge of his cup in curious illustration of his own mental position at the moment; Donohan being the only fixed point and all the rest wavering in uncertainty. There were a few silent minutes before anybody answered.

"If you want one and don't know of one, uncle Rolf," said Fleda, "I dare say cousin Seth might."

That gentle modest speech brought his attention round upon her. His face softened.

"Cousin Seth? who is cousin Seth?"

"He is aunt Miriam's son," said Fleda. "Seth Plumfield. He's a very good farmer, I know; grandpa used to say he was; and he knows everybody."

"Mrs. Plumfield," said Mrs. Rossitur, as her husband's eyes went inquiringly to her,--"Mrs. Plumfield was Mr. Ringgan's sister, you remember. This is her son."

"Cousin Seth, eh?" said Mr. Rossitur dubiously. "Well--Why Fleda, your sweet air don't seem to agree with you, as far as I see; I have not known you look so--so *triste*--since we left Paris. What have you been doing, my child?"

"She has been doing everything, father," said Hugh.

"O! it's nothing," said Fleda, answering Mr. Rossitur's look and tone of affection with a bright smile. "I'm a little tired, that's all."

'A little tired!' She went to sleep on the sofa directly after supper and slept like a baby all the evening; but her power did not sleep with her; for that quiet, sweet, tired face, tired in their service, seemed to bear witness against the indulgence of anything harsh or unlovely in the same atmosphere. A gentle witness-bearing, but strong in its gentleness. They sat close together round the fire, talked softly, and from time to time cast loving glances at the quiet little sleeper by their side. They did not know that she was a fairy, and that though her wand had fallen out of her hand it was still resting upon them.

Chapter XVIII.

Gon. Here is everything advantageous to lift.

Ant. True; save means to live.

Tempest.

Fleda's fatigue did not prevent her being up before sunrise the next day. Fatigue was forgotten, for the light of a fair spring morning was shining in at her windows and she meant to see aunt Miriam before breakfast. She ran out to find Hugh, and her merry shout reached him before she did, and brought him to meet her.

"Come, Hugh!--I'm going off up to aunt Miriam's, and I want you. Come! Isn't this delicious?"

"Hush!--" said Hugh. "Father's just here in the barn. I can't go, Fleda."

Fleda's countenance clouded.

"Can't go! what's the matter?--can't you go, Hugh?"

He shook his head and went off into the barn.

A chill came upon Fleda. She turned away with a very sober step. What if her uncle was in the barn, why should she hush? He never had been a check upon her merriment, never; what was coming now? Hugh too looked disturbed. It was a spring morning no longer. Fleda forgot the glittering wet grass that had set her own eyes a sparkling but a minute ago; she walked along, cogitating, swinging her bonnet by the strings in thoughtful vibration,--till by the help of sunlight and sweet air, and the loved scenes, her spirits again made head and swept over the sudden hindrance they had met. There were the blessed old sugar maples, seven in number, that fringed the side of the road,--how well Fleda knew them. Only skeletons now, but she remembered how beautiful they looked after the October frosts; and presently they would be putting out their new green leaves and be beautiful in another way. How different in their free-born luxuriance from the dusty and city-prisoned elms and willows she had left. She came to the bridge then, and stopped with a thrill of pleasure and pain to look and listen, Unchanged!--all but herself. The mill was not going; the little brook went by quietly chattering to itself,

just as it had done the last time she saw it, when she rode past on Mr. Carleton's horse. Four and a half years ago!--And now how strange that she had come to live there again.

Drawing a long breath, and swinging her bonnet again, Fleda softly went on up the hill; past the saw-mill, the ponds, the factories, the houses of the settlement. The same, and not the same!--Bright with the morning sun, and yet somehow a little browner and homelier than of old they used to be. Fleda did not care for that; she would hardly acknowledge it to herself; her affection never made any discount for infirmity. Leaving the little settlement behind her thoughts as behind her back, she ran on now towards aunt Miriam's, breathlessly, till field after field was passed and her eye caught a bit of the smooth lake and the old farmhouse in its old place. Very brown it looked, but Fleda dashed on, through the garden and in at the front door.

Nobody at all was in the entrance room, the common sitting-room of the family. With trembling delight Fleda opened the well-known door and stole noiselessly through the little passage-way to the kitchen. The door of that was only on the latch and a gentle movement of it gave to Fleda's eye the tall figure of aunt Miriam, just before her, stooping down to look in at the open mouth of the oven which she was at that moment engaged in supplying with more work to do. It was a huge one, and beyond her aunt's head Fleda could see in the far end the great loaves of bread, half baked, and more near a perfect squad of pies and pans of gingerbread just going in to take the benefit of the oven's milder mood. Fleda saw all this as it were without seeing it; she stood still as a mouse and breathless till her aunt turned; and then, a spring and a half shout of joy, and she had clasped her in her arms and was crying with her whole heart. Aunt Miriam was taken all aback; she could do nothing but sit down and cry too and forget her oven door.

"Ain't breakfast ready yet, mother?" said a manly voice coming in. "I must be off to see after them ploughs. Hollo!--why mother!--"

The first exclamation was uttered as the speaker put the door to the oven's mouth; the second as he turned in quest of the hand that should have done it. He stood wondering, while his mother and Fleda between laughing and crying tried to rouse themselves and look up.

"What is all this?"

"Don't you see, Seth?"

"I see somebody that had like to have spoiled your whole baking--I don't know who it is, yet."

"Don't you now, cousin Seth?" said Fleda shaking away her tears and getting up.

"I ha'n't quite lost my recollection. Cousin, you must give me a kiss.--How do you do? You ha'n't forgot how to colour, I see, for all you've been so long among the pale city-folks."

"I haven't forgotten any thing, cousin Seth," said Fleda, blushing indeed but laughing and shaking his hand with as hearty good-will.

"I don't believe you have,--anything that is good," said he. "Where have you been all this while?"

"O part of the time in New York, and part of the time in Paris, and some other places."

"Well you ha'n't seen anything better than Queechy, or Queechy bread and butter, have you?"

"No indeed!"

"Come, you shall give me another kiss for that," said he, suiting the action to the word;--"and now sit down and eat as much bread and butter as you can. It's just as good as it used to be. Come mother!--I guess breakfast is ready by the looks of that coffee-pot."

"Breakfast ready!" said Fleda.

"Ay indeed; it's a good half hour since it ought to ha' been ready. If it ain't I can't stop for it. Them boys will be running their furrows like sarpents 'f I ain't there to start them."

"Which like serpents," said Fleda,--"the furrows or the men?"

"Well, I was thinking of the furrows," said he glancing at her;--"I guess there ain't cunning enough in the others to trouble them. Come sit down, and let me see whether you have forgotten a Queechy appetite."

"I don't know," said Fleda doubtfully,--"they will expect me at home."

"I don't care who expects you--sit down! you ain't going to eat any bread and butter this morning but my mother's--you haven't got any like it at your house. Mother, give her a cup of coffee, will you, and set her to work."

Fleda was too willing to comply with the invitation, were it only for the charm of old times. She had not seen such a table for years, and little as the conventionalities of delicate taste were known there, it was not without a comeliness of its own in its air of wholesome abundance and the extreme purity of all its arrangements. If but a piece of cold pork were on aunt Miriam's table, it was served with a nicety that would not have offended the most fastidious; and amid irregularities that the fastidious would scorn, there was a sound excellence of material and preparation that they very often fail to know. Fleda made up her mind she would be wanted at home; all the rather perhaps for Hugh's mysterious "hush"; and there was something in the hearty kindness and truth of these friends that she felt particularly genial. And if there was a lack of silver at the board its place was more than filled with the pure gold of association. They sat down to table, but aunt Miriam's eyes devoured Fleda. Mr. Plum field set about his more material breakfast with all despatch.

'They will expect me at home.'
"They will expect me at home."

"So Mr. Rossitur has left the city for good," said aunt Miriam. "How does he like it?"

"He hasn't been here but a day, you know, aunt Miriam," said Fleda evasively.

"Is he anything of a farmer?" asked her cousin.

"Not much," said Fleda.

"Is he going to work the farm himself?"

"How do you mean?"

"I mean, is he going to work the farm himself, or hire it out, or let somebody else work it on shares?"

"I don't know," said Fleda;--"I think he is going to have a farmer and oversee things himself."

"He'll get sick o' that," said Seth; "unless he's the luck to get hold of just the right hand."

"Has he hired anybody yet?" said aunt Miriam, after a little interval of supplying Fleda with 'bread and butter.'

"Yes ma'am, I believe so."

"What's his name?"

"Donohan,--an Irishman, I believe; uncle Rolf hired him in New York."

"For his head man?" said Seth, with a sufficiently intelligible look.

"Yes," said Fleda. "Why?"

But he did not immediately answer her.

"The land's in poor heart now," said he, "a good deal of it; it has been wasted; it wants first-rate management to bring it in order and make much of it for two or three years to come. I never see an Irishman's head yet that was worth more than a joke. Their hands are all of 'em that's good for anything."

"I believe uncle Rolf wants to have an American to go with this man," said Fleda.

Seth said nothing, but Fleda understood the shake of his head as he reached over after a pickle.

"Are you going to keep a dairy, Fleda?" said her aunt.

"I don't know, ma'am;--I haven't heard anything about it."

"Does Mrs. Rossitur know anything about country affairs?"

"No--nothing," Fleda said, her heart sinking perceptibly with every new question.

"She hasn't any cows yet?"

She!--any cows!--But Fleda only said they had not come; she believed they were coming.

"What help has she got?"

"Two women--Irishwomen," said Fleda.

"Mother you'll have to take hold and learn her," said Mr. Plumfield.

"Teach *her*?" cried Fleda, repelling the idea;--"aunt Lucy? she cannot do anything--she isn't strong enough;--not anything of that kind."

"What did she come here for?" said Seth.

"You know," said his mother, "that Mr. Rossitur's circumstances obliged him to quit New York."

"Ay, but that ain't my question. A man had better keep his fingers off anything he can't live by. A farm's one thing or t'other, just as it's worked. The land won't grow specie--it must be fetched out of it. Is Mr. Rossitur a smart man?"

"Very," Fleda said, "about everything but farming."

"Well if he'll put himself to school maybe, he'll learn," Seth concluded as he finished his breakfast and went off. Fleda rose too, and was standing thoughtfully by the fire, when aunt Miriam came up and put her arms round her. Fleda's eyes sparkled again.

"You're not changed--you're the same little Fleda," she said.

"Not quite so little," said Fleda smiling.

"Not quite so little, but my own darling. The world hasn't spoiled thee yet."

"I hope not, aunt Miriam."

"You have remembered your mother's prayer, Fleda?"

"Always!"--

How tenderly aunt Miriam's hand was passed over the bowed head,--how fondly she pressed her. And Fleda's answer was as fond.

"I wanted to bring Hugh up to see you, aunt Miriam, with me, but he couldn't come. You will like Hugh. He is so good!"

"I will come down and see him," said aunt Miriam; and then she went to look after her oven's doings. Fleda stood by, amused to see the quantities of nice things that were rummaged out of it. They did not look like Mrs. Renney's work, but she knew from old experience that they were good.

"How early you must have been up, to put these things in," said Fleda.

"Put them in! yes, and make them. These were all made this morning, Fleda."

"This morning!--before breakfast! Why the sun was only just rising when I set out to come up the hill; and I wasn't long coming, aunt Miriam."

"To be sure; that's the way to get things done. Before breakfast!--What time do you breakfast, Fleda?"

"Not till eight or nine o'clock."

"Eight or nine!--*Here?*"

"There hasn't been any change made yet, and I don't suppose there will be. Uncle Rolf is always up early, but he can't bear to have breakfast early."

Aunt Miriam's face showed what she thought; and Fleda went away with all its gravity and doubt settled like lead upon her heart. Though she had one of the identical apple pies in her hands, which aunt Miriam had quietly said was "for her and Hugh," and though a pleasant savour of old times was about it, Fleda could not get up again the bright feeling with which she had come up the hill. There was a miserable misgiving at heart. It would work off in time.

It had begun to work off, when at the foot of the hill she met her uncle. He was coming after her to ask Mr. Plumfield about the desideratum of a Yankee. Fleda put her pie in safety behind a rock, and turned back with him, and aunt Miriam told them the way to Seth's ploughing ground.

A pleasant word or two had get Fleda's spirits a bounding again, and the walk was delightful. Truly the leaves were not on the trees, but it was April, and they soon would be; there was promise in the light, and hope in the air, and everything smelt of the country and spring-time. The soft tread of the sod, that her foot had not felt for so long,--the fresh look of

the newly-turned earth,--here and there the brilliance of a field of winter grain,--and that nameless beauty of the budding trees, that the full luxuriance of summer can never equal,--Fleda's heart was springing for sympathy. And to her, with whom association was everywhere so strong, there was in it all a shadowy presence of her grandfather, with whom she had so often seen the spring-time bless those same hills and fields long ago. She walked on in silence, as her manner commonly was when deeply pleased; there were hardly two persons to whom she would speak her mind freely then. Mr. Kossitur had his own thoughts.

"Can anything equal the spring-time!" she burst forth at length.

Her uncle looked at her and smiled. "Perhaps not; but it is one thing," said he sighing, "for taste to enjoy and another thing for calculation to improve."

"But one can do both, can't one?" said Fleda brightly.

"I don't know," said he sighing again. "Hardly."

Fleda knew he was mistaken and thought the sighs out of place. But they reached her; and she had hardly condemned them before they set her off upon a long train of excuses for him, and she had wrought herself into quite a fit of tenderness by the time they reached her cousin.

They found him on a gentle side-hill, with two other men and teams, both of whom were stepping away in different parts of the field. Mr. Plumfield was just about setting off to work his way to the other side of the lot when they came up with him.

Fleda was not ashamed of her aunt Miriam's son, even before such critical eyes as those of her uncle. Farmer-like as were his dress and air, they shewed him nevertheless a well-built, fine-looking man, with the independent bearing of one who has never recognised any but mental or moral superiority. His face might have been called handsome; there was at least manliness in every line of it; and his excellent dark eye shewed

an equal mingling of kindness and acute common sense. Let Mr. Plumfield wear what clothes he would one felt obliged to follow Burns' notable example and pay respect to the *man* that was in them.

"A fine day, sir," he remarked to Mr. Rossitur after they had shaken hands.

"Yes, and I will not interrupt you but a minute. Mr. Plumfield, I am in want of hands,--hands for this very business you are about, ploughing,--and Fleda says you know everybody; so I have come to ask if you can direct me."

"Heads or hands, do you want?" said Seth, clearing his boot-sole from some superfluous soil upon the share of his plough.

"Why both, to tell you the truth. I want hands, and teams, for that matter, for I have only two, and I suppose there is no time to be lost. And I want very much to get a person thoroughly acquainted with the business to go along with my man. He is an Irishman, and I am afraid not very well accustomed to the ways of doing things here."

"Like enough," said Seth;--"and the worst of 'em is you can't learn 'em."

"Well!--can you help me?"

"Mr. Douglass!"--said Seth, raising his voice to speak to one of his assistants who was approaching them,--"Mr. Douglass!--you're holding that 'ere plough a little too obleekly for my grounds."

"Very good, Mr. Plumfield!" said the person called upon, with a quick accent that intimated, "If you don't know what is best it is not my affair!"--the voice very peculiar, seeming to come from no lower than the top of his throat, with a guttural roll of the words.

"Is that Earl Douglass?" said Fleda.

"You remember him?" said her cousin smiling. "He's just where he was, and his wife too.--Well Mr. Rossitur, 'tain't very easy to find what you want just at this season, when most folks have their hands full and help is all taken up. I'll see if I can't come down and give you a lift myself with the ploughing, for a day or two, as I'm pretty beforehand with the spring, but you'll want more than that. I ain't sure--I haven't more hands than I'll want myself, but I think it is possible Squire Springer may spare you one of his'n. He ain't taking in any new land this year, and he's got things pretty snug; I guess he don't care to do any more than common--anyhow you might try. You know where uncle Joshua lives, Fleda? Well Philetus--what now?"

They had been slowly walking along the fence towards the furthest of Mr. Plumfield's coadjutors, upon whom his eye had been curiously fixed as he was speaking; a young man who was an excellent sample of what is called "the raw material." He had just come to a sudden stop in the midst of the furrow when his employer called to him; and he answered somewhat lack-a-daisically,

"Why I've broke this here clevis--I ha'n't touched anything nor nothing, and it broke right in teu!"

"What do you s'pose'll be done now?" said Mr. Plumfield gravely going up to examine the fracture.

"Well 'twa'n't none of my doings," said the young man. "I ha'n't touched anything nor nothing--and the mean thing broke right in teu. 'Tain't so handy as the old kind o' plough, by a long jump."

"You go 'long down to the house and ask my mother for a new clevis; and talk about ploughs when you know how to hold 'em," said Mr. Plumfield.

"It don't look so difficult a matter," said Mr. Rossitur,--"but I am a novice myself. What is the principal thing to be attended to in ploughing, Mr. Plumfield?"

There was a twinkle in Seth's eye, as he looked down upon a piece of straw he was breaking to bits, which Fleda, who could see, interpreted thoroughly.

"Well," said he, looking up,--"the breadth of the stitches and the width and depth of the farrow must be regulated according to the nature of the soil and the lay of the ground, and what you're ploughing for;--there's stubble ploughing, and breaking up old lays, and ploughing for fallow crops, and ribbing, where the land has been some years in grass,--and so on; and the plough must be geared accordingly, and so as not to take too much land nor go out of the land; and after that the best part of the work is to guide the plough right and run the furrows straight and even."

He spoke with the most impenetrable gravity, while Mr. Rossitur looked blank and puzzled. Fleda could hardly keep her countenance.

"That row of poles," said Mr. Rossitur presently,--"are they to guide you in running the furrow straight?"

"Yes sir--they are to mark out the crown of the stitch. I keep 'em right between the horses and plough 'em down one after another. It's a kind of way country folks play at ninepins," said Seth, with a glance half inquisitive, half sly, at his questioner.

Mr. Rossitur asked no more. Fleda felt a little uneasy again. It was rather a longish walk to uncle Joshua's, and hardly a word spoken on either side.

The old gentleman was "to hum;" and while Fleda went back into some remote part of the house to see "aunt Syra," Mr. Rossitur set forth his errand.

"Well,--and so you're looking for help, eh?" said uncle Joshua when he had heard him through.

"Yes sir,--I want help."

"And a team too?"

"So I have said, sir," Mr. Rossitur answered rather shortly. "Can you supply me?"

"Well,--I don't know as I can," said the old man, rubbing his hands slowly over his knees.--"You ha'n't got much done yet, I s'pose?"

"Nothing. I came the day before yesterday."

"Land's in rather poor condition in some parts, ain't it?"

"I really am not able to say, sir,--till I have seen it."

"It ought to be," said the old gentleman shaking his head,--the fellow that was there last didn't do right by it--he worked the land too hard, and didn't put on it anywhere near what he had ought to--I guess you'll find it pretty poor in some places. He was trying to get all he could out of it, I s'pose. There's a good deal of fencing to be done too, ain't there?"

"All that there was, sir,--I have done none since I came."

"Seth Plumfield got through ploughing yet?"

"We found him at it."

"Ay, he's a smart man. What are you going to do, Mr. Rossitur, with that piece of marsh land that lies off to the south-east of the barn, beyond the meadow, between the hills? I had just sich another, and I"--

"Before I do anything with the wet land, Mr. ---- I am so unhappy as to have forgotten your name?--"

"Springer, sir," said the old gentleman,--"Springer--Joshua Springer. That is my name, sir."

"Mr. Springer, before I do anything with the wet land I should like to have something growing on the dry; and as that is the present matter in hand will you be so good as to let me know whether I can have your assistance."

"Well I don't know,--" said the old gentleman; "there ain't anybody to send but my boy Lucas, and I don't know whether he would make up his mind to go or not."

"Well sir!"--said Mr. Rossitur rising,--"in that case I will bid you good morning. I am sorry to have given you the trouble."

"Stop," said the old man,--"stop a bit. Just sit down--I'll go in and see about it."

Mr. Rossitur sat down, and uncle Joshua left him to go into the kitchen and consult his wife, without whose counsel, of late years especially, he rarely did anything. They never varied in opinion, but aunt Syra's wits supplied the steel edge to his heavy metal.

"I don't know but Lucas would as leave go as not," the old gentleman remarked on coming back from this sharpening process,--"and I can make out to spare him, I guess. You calculate to keep him, I s'pose?"

"Until this press is over; and perhaps longer, if I find he can do what I want."

"You'll find him pretty handy at a' most anything; but I mean,--I s'pose he'll get his victuals with you."

"I have made no arrangements of the kind," said Mr. Rossitur controlling with some effort his rebelling muscles. "Donohan is boarded somewhere else, and for the present it will be best for all in my employ to follow the same plan."

"Very good," said uncle Joshua, "it makes no difference,--only of course in that case it is worth more, when a man has to find himself and his team."

"Whatever it is worth I am quite ready to pay, sir."

"Very good! You and Lucas can agree about that. He'll be along in the morning."

So they parted; and Fleda understood the impatient quick step with which her uncle got over the ground.

"Is that man a brother of your grandfather?"

"No sir--Oh no! only his brother-in-law. My grandmother was his sister, but they weren't in the least like each other."

"I should think they could not," said Mr. Rossitur.

"Oh they were not!" Fleda repeated. "I have always heard that."

After paying her respects to aunt Syra in the kitchen she had come back time enough to hear the end of the discourse in the parlour, and had felt its full teaching. Doubts returned, and her spirits were sobered again. Not another word was spoken till they reached home; when Fleda seized upon Hugh and went off to the rock after her forsaken pie.

"Have you succeeded!' asked Mrs. Rossitur while they were gone.

"Yes--that is, a cousin has kindly consented to come and help me."

"A cousin!" said Mrs. Rossitur.

"Ay,--we're in a nest of cousins."

"In a *what*, Mr. Rossitur?"

"In a nest of cousins; and I had rather be in a nest of rooks. I wonder if I shall be expected to ask my ploughmen to dinner! Every second man is a cousin, and the rest are uncles."

Chapter XIX.

Whilst skies are blue and bright.
  Whilst flowers are gay,
Whilst eyes that change ere night
  Make glad the day;
Whilst yet the calm hours creep,
Dream thou--and from thy sleep
  Then wake to weep.

Shelley.

The days of summer flew by, for the most part lightly, over the heads of Hugh and Fleda. The farm was little to them but a place of pretty and picturesque doings and the scene of nameless delights by wood and stream, in all which, all that summer, Fleda rejoiced; pulling Hugh along with her even when sometimes he would rather have been poring over his books at home. She laughingly said it was good for him; and one half at least of every fine day their feet were abroad. They knew nothing practically of the dairy but that it was an inexhaustible source of the sweetest milk and butter, and indirectly of the richest custards and syllabubs. The flock of sheep that now and then came in sight running over the hill-side, were to them only an image of pastoral beauty and a soft link with the beauty of the past. The two children took the very cream of country life. The books they had left were read with greater eagerness than ever. When the weather was "too lovely to stay in the house," Shakspeare or Massillon or Sully or the "Curiosities of Literature" or "Corinne" or Milner's Church History, for Fleda's reading

was as miscellaneous as ever, was enjoyed under the flutter of leaves and along with the rippling of the mountain spring; whilst King curled himself up on the skirt of his mistress's gown and slept for company; hardly more thoughtless and fearless of harm than his two companions. Now and then Fleda opened her eyes to see that her uncle was moody and not like himself, and that her aunt's gentle face was clouded in consequence; and she could not sometimes help the suspicion that he was not making a farmer of himself; but the next summer wind would blow these thoughts away, or the next look of her flowers would put them out of her head. The whole courtyard in front of the house had been given up to her peculiar use as a flower-garden, and there she and Hugh made themselves very busy.

But the summer-time came to an end.

It was a November morning, and Fleda had been doing some of the last jobs in her flower-beds. She was coming in with spirits as bright as her cheeks, when her aunt's attitude and look, more than usually spiritless, suddenly checked them. Fleda gave her a hopeful kiss and asked for the explanation.

"How bright you look, darling!" said her aunt, stroking her cheek.

"Yes, but you don't, aunt Lucy. What has happened?"

"Mary and Jane are going away."

"Going away!--What for?"

"They are tired of the place--don't like it, I suppose."

"Very foolish of them! Well, aunt Lucy, what matter? we can get plenty more in their room."

"Not from the city--not possible; they would not come at this time of year."

"Sure?--Well, then here we can at any rate."

"Here! But what sort of persons shall we get here? And your uncle--just think!"--

"O but I think we can manage," said Fleda. "When do Mary and Jane want to go?"

"Immediately!--to-morrow--they are not willing to wait till we can get somebody. Think of it!"

"Well let them go," said Fleda,--"the sooner the better."

"Yes, and I am sure I don't want to keep them; but--" and Mrs. Rossitur wrung her hands--"I haven't money enough to pay them quite,--and they won't go without it."

Fleda felt shocked--so much that she could not help looking it.

"But can't uncle Rolf give it you?"

Mrs. Rossitur shook her head. "I have asked him."

"How much is wanting?"

"Twenty-five. Think of his not being able to give me that!"--Mrs. Rossitur burst into tears.

"Now don't, aunt Lucy!"--said Fleda, guarding well her own composure;--"you know he has had a great deal to spend upon the farm and paying men, and all, and it is no wonder that he should be a little short just now,--now cheer up!--we can get along with this anyhow."

"I asked him," said Mrs. Rossitur through her tears, "when he would be able to give it to me; and he told me he didn't know!--"

Fleda ventured no reply but some of the tenderest caresses that lips and arms could give; and then sprang away and in three minutes was at her aunt's side again.

"Look here, aunt Lucy," said she gently,--"here is twenty dollars, if you can manage the five."

"Where did you get this?" Mrs. Rossitur exclaimed.

"I got it honestly. It is mine, aunt Lucy," said Fleda smiling. "Uncle Orrin gave me some money just before we came away, to do what I liked with; and I haven't wanted to do anything with it till now."

But this seemed to hurt Mrs. Rossitur more than all the rest. Leaning her head forward upon Fleda's breast and clasping her arms about her she cried worse tears than Fleda had seen her shed. If it had not been for the emergency Fleda would have broken down utterly too.

"That it should have come to this!--I can't take it, dear Fleda!"--

"Yes you must, aunt Lucy," said Fleda soothingly. "I couldn't do anything else with it that would give me so much pleasure. I don't want it--it would lie in my drawer till I don't know when. We'll let these people be off as soon as they please. Don't take it so--uncle Rolf will have money again--only just now he is out, I suppose--and we'll get somebody else in the kitchen that will do nicely--you see if we don't."

Mrs. Rossitur's embrace said what words were powerless to say.

"But I don't know how we're to find any one here in the country--I don't know who'll go to look--I am sure your uncle won't want to,--and Hugh wouldn't know--"

"I'll go," said Fleda cheerfully;--"Hugh and I. We can do famously--if you'll trust me. I won't promise to bring home a French cook."

"No indeed--we must take what we can get. But you can get no one to-day, and they will be off by the morning's coach--what shall we do to-morrow,--for dinner? Your uncle--"

"I'll get dinner," said Fleda caressing her;--"I'll take all that on myself. It sha'n't be a bad dinner either. Uncle Rolf will like what I do for him I dare say. Now cheer up, aunt Lucy!--do--that's all I ask of you. Won't you?--for me?"

She longed to speak a word of that quiet hope with which in every trouble she secretly comforted herself--she wanted to whisper the words that were that moment in her own mind, "Truly I know that it shall be well with them that fear God;"--but her natural reserve and timidity kept her lips shut; to her grief.

The women were paid off and dismissed and departed in the next day's coach from Montepoole. Fleda stood at the front door to see them go, with a curious sense that there was an empty house at her back, and indeed upon her back. And in spite of all the cheeriness of her tone to her aunt, she was not without some shadowy feeling that soberer times might be coming upon them.

"What is to be done now?" said Hugh close beside her.

"O we are going to get somebody else," said Fleda.

"Where?"

"I don't know!--You and I are going to find out."

"You and I!--"

"Yes. We are going out after dinner, Hugh dear," said she turning her bright merry face towards him,--"to pick up somebody."

Linking her arm within his she went back to the deserted kitchen premises to see how her promise about taking Mary's place was to be fulfilled.

"Do you know where to look?" said Hugh.

"I've a notion;--but the first thing is dinner, that uncle Rolf mayn't think the world is turning topsy turvy. There is nothing at all here, Hugh!--nothing in the world but bread--it's a blessing there is that. Uncle Rolf will have to be satisfied with a coffee dinner to-day, and I'll make him the most superb omelette--that my skill is equal to! Hugh dear, you shall set the table.--You don't know how?--then you shall make the toast, and I will set it the first thing of all. You perceive it is well to know how to do everything, Mr. Hugh Rossitur."

"Where did you learn to make omelettes?" said Hugh with laughing admiration, as Fleda bared two pretty arms and ran about the very impersonation of good-humoured activity. The table was set; the coffee was making; and she had him established at the fire with two great plates, a pile of slices of bread, and a toasting-iron.

"Where? Oh don't you remember the days of Mrs. Renney? I have seen Emile make them. And by dint of trying to teach Mary this summer I have taught myself. There is no knowing, you see, what a person may come to."

"I wonder what father would say if he knew you had made all the coffee this summer!"

"That is an unnecessary speculation, my dear Hugh, as I have no intention of telling him. But see!--that is the way with speculators! 'While they go on refining'--the toast burns!"

The coffee and the omelette and the toast and Mr. Rossitur's favourite French salad, were served with beautiful accuracy; and he was quite satisfied. But aunt Lucy looked sadly at Fleda's flushed face and saw that

her appetite seemed to have gone off in the steam of her preparations. Fleda had a kind of heart-feast however which answered as well.

Hugh harnessed the little wagon, for no one was at hand to do it, and he and Fleda set off as early as possible after dinner. Fleda's thoughts had turned to her old acquaintance Cynthia Gall, who she knew was out of employment and staying at home somewhere near Montepoole. They got the exact direction from aunt Miriam who approved of her plan.

It was a pleasant peaceful drive they had. They never were alone together, they two, but vexations seemed to lose their power or be forgotten; and an atmosphere of quietness gather about them, the natural element of both hearts. It might refuse its presence to one, but the attraction of both together was too strong to be resisted.

Miss Cynthia's present abode was in an out of the way place, and a good distance off; they were some time in reaching it. The barest-looking and dingiest of houses, set plump in a green field, without one softening or home-like touch from any home-feeling within; not a flower, not a shrub, not an out-house, not a tree near. One would have thought it a deserted house, but that a thin wreath of smoke lazily stole up from one of the brown chimneys; and graceful as that was it took nothing from the hard stern barrenness below which told of a worse poverty than that of paint and glazing.

"Can this be the place?" said Hugh.

"It must be. You stay here with the horse, and I'll go in and seek my fortune.--Don't promise much," said Fleda shaking her head.

The house stood back from the road. Fleda picked her way to it along a little footpath which seemed to be the equal property of the geese. Her knock brought an invitation to "come in."

An elderly woman was sitting there whose appearance did not mend the general impression. She had the same dull and unhopeful look that her house had.

"Does Mrs. Gall live here?"

"I do," said this person.

"Is Cynthia at home?"

The woman upon this raised her voice and directed it at an inner door.

"Lucindy!" said she in a diversity of tones,--"Lucindy!--tell Cynthy here's somebody wants to see her."--But no one answered, and throwing the work from her lap the woman muttered she would go and see, and left Fleda with a cold invitation to sit down.

Dismal work! Fleda wished herself out of it. The house did not look poverty-stricken within, but poverty must have struck to the very heart, Fleda thought, where there was no apparent cherishing of anything. There was no absolute distress visible, neither was there a sign of real comfort or of a happy home. She could not fancy it was one.

She waited so long that she was sure Cynthia did not hold herself in readiness to see company. And when the lady at last came in it was with very evident marks of "smarting up" about her.

"Why it's Flidda Ringgan!" said Miss Gall after a dubious look or two at her visitor. "How *do* you do? I didn't 'spect to see *you*. How much you have growed!"

She looked really pleased and gave Fleda's hand a very strong grasp as she shook it.

"There ain't no fire here to-day," pursued Cynthy, paying her attentions to the fireplace,--"we let it go down on account of our being all busy out at the back of the house. I guess you're cold, ain't you?"

Fleda said no, and remembered that the woman she had first seen was certainly not busy at the back of the house nor anywhere else but in that very room, where she had found her deep in a pile of patchwork.

"I heerd you had come to the old place. Were you glad to be back again?" Cynthy asked with a smile that might be taken to express some doubt upon the subject.

"I was very glad to see it again."

"I hain't seen it in a great while. I've been staying to hum this year or two. I got tired o' going out," Cynthy remarked, with again a smile very peculiar and Fleda thought a little sardonical. She did not know how to answer.

"Well, how do you come along down yonder?" Cynthy went on, making a great fuss with the shovel and tongs to very little purpose. "Ha' you come all the way from Queechy?"

"Yes. I came on purpose to see you, Cynthy."

Without staying to ask what for, Miss Gall now went out to "the back of the house" and came running in again with a live brand pinched in the tongs, and a long tail of smoke running after it. Fleda would have compounded for no fire and no choking. The choking was only useful to give her time to think. She was uncertain how to bring in her errand.

"And how is Mis' Plumfield?" said Cynthy, in an interval of blowing the brand.

"She is quite well; but Cynthy, you need not have taken all that trouble for me. I cannot stay but a few minutes."

"There is wood enough!" Cynthia remarked with one of her grim smiles; an assertion Fleda could not help doubting. Indeed she thought Miss Gall had grown altogether more disagreeable than she used to be in old

times. Why, she could not divine, unless the souring effect had gone on with the years.

"And what's become of Earl Douglass and Mis' Douglass? I hain't heerd nothin' of 'em this great while. I always told your grandpa he'd ha' saved himself a great deal o' trouble if he'd ha' let Earl Douglass take hold of things. You ha'n't got Mr. Didenhover into the works again I guess, have you? He was there a good spell after your grandpa died."

"I haven't seen Mrs. Douglass," said Fleda. "But Cynthy, what do you think I have come here for?"

"I don't know," said Cynthy, with another of her peculiar looks directed at the fire. "I s'pose you want someh'n nother of me."

"I have come to see if you wouldn't come and live with my aunt, Mrs. Rossitur. We are left alone and want somebody very much; and I thought I would find you out and see if we couldn't have you, first of all,--before I looked for anybody else."

Cynthy was absolutely silent. She sat before the fire, her feet stretched out towards it as far as they would go and her arms crossed, and not moving her steady gaze at the smoking wood, or the chimney-back, whichever it might be; but there was in the corners of her mouth the threatening of a smile that Fleda did not at all like.

"What do you say to it, Cynthy?"

"I reckon you'd best get somebody else," said Miss Gall with a kind of condescending dryness, and the smile shewing a little more.

"Why?" said Fleda, "I would a great deal rather have an old friend than a stranger."

"Be you the housekeeper?" said Cynthy a little abruptly.

"O I am a little of everything," said Fleda;--"cook and housekeeper and whatever comes first. I want you to come and be housekeeper, Cynthy."

"I reckon Mis' Rossitur don't have much to do with her help, does she?" said Cynthy after a pause, during which the corners of her mouth never changed. The tone of piqued independence let some light into Fleda's mind.

"She is not strong enough to do much herself, and she wants some one that will take all the trouble from her. You'd have the field all to yourself, Cynthy."

"Your aunt sets two tables I calculate, don't she?"

"Yes--my uncle doesn't like to have any but his own family around him."

"I guess I shouldn't suit!" said Miss Gall, after another little pause, and stooping very diligently to pick up some scattered shreds from the floor. But Fleda could see the flushed face and the smile which pride and a touch of spiteful pleasure in the revenge she was taking made particularly hateful. She needed no more convincing that Miss Gall "wouldn't suit;" but she was sorry at the same time for the perverseness that had so needlessly disappointed her; and went rather pensively back again down the little foot-path to the waiting wagon.

"This is hardly the romance of life, dear Hugh," she said as she seated herself.

"Haven't you succeeded?"

Fleda shook her head.

"What's the matter?"

"O--pride,--injured pride of station! The wrong of not coming to our table and putting her knife into our butter."

"And living in such a place!" said Hugh.

"You don't know what a place. They are miserably poor, I am sure; and yet--I suppose that the less people have to be proud of the more they make of what is left. Poor people!--"

"Poor Fleda!" said Hugh looking at her. "What will you do now?"

"O we'll do somehow," said she cheerfully. "Perhaps it is just as well after all, for Cynthy isn't the smartest woman in the world. I remember grandpa used to say he didn't believe she could get a bean into the middle of her bread."

"A bean into the middle of her bread!" said Hugh.

But Fleda's sobriety was quite banished by his mystified look, and her laugh rang along over the fields before she answered him.

That laugh had blown away all the vapours, for the present at least, and they jogged on again very sociably.

"Do you know," said Fleda, after a while of silent enjoyment in the changes of scene and the mild autumn weather,--"I am not sure that it wasn't very well for me that we came away from New York."

"I dare say it was," said Hugh,--"since we came; but what makes you say so?"

"I don't mean that it was for anybody else, but for me. I think I was a little proud of our nice things there."

"*You,* Fleda!" said Hugh with a look of appreciating affection.

"Yes I was, a little. It didn't make the greatest part of my love for them, I am sure; but I think I had a little, undefined, sort of pleasure in the feeling that they were better and prettier than other people had."

"You are sure you are not proud of your little King Charles now?" said Hugh.

"I don't know but I am," said Fleda laughing. "But how much pleasanter it is here on almost every account. Look at the beautiful sweep of the ground off among those hills--isn't it? What an exquisite horizon line, Hugh!"

"And what a sky over it!"

"Yes--I love these fall skies. Oh I would a great deal rather be here than in any city that ever was built!"

"So would I," said Hugh. "But the thing is--"

Fleda knew quite well what the thing was, and did not answer.

"But my dear Hugh," she said presently,--"I don't remember that sweep of hills when we were coming?"

"You were going the other way," said Hugh.

"Yes but, Hugh,--I am sure we did not pass these grain fields. We must have got into the wrong road."

Hugh drew the reins, and looked, and doubted.

"There is a house yonder," said Fleda,--"we had better drive on and ask."

"There is no house--"

"Yes there is--behind that piece of wood. Look over it--don't you see a light curl of blue smoke against the sky?--We never passed that house and wood, I am certain. We ought to make haste, for the afternoons are short now, and you will please to recollect there is nobody at home to get tea."

"I hope Lucas will get upon one of his everlasting talks with father," said Hugh.

"And that it will hold till we get home," said Fleda. "It will be the happiest use Lucas has made of his tongue in a good while."

Just as they stopped before a substantial-looking farm-house a man came from the other way and stopped there too, with his hand upon the gate.

"How far are we from Queechy, sir?" said Hugh.

"You're not from it at all, sir," said the man politely. "You're in Queechy, sir, at present."

"Is this the right road from Montepoole to Queechy village?"

"It is not, sir. It is a very tortuous direction indeed. Have I not the pleasure of speaking to Mr. Rossitur's young gentleman?"

Mr. Rossitur's young gentleman acknowledged his relationship and begged the favour of being set in the right way home.

"With much pleasure! You have been shewing Miss Rossitur the picturesque country about Montepoole?"

"My cousin and I have been there on business, and lost our way coming back."

"Ah I dare say. Very easy. First time you have been there?"

"Yes sir, and we are in a hurry to get home."

"Well sir,--you know the road by Deacon Patterson's?--comes out just above the lake?"

Hugh did not remember.

"Well--you keep this road straight on,--I'm sorry you are in a hurry,--you keep on till--do you know when you strike Mr. Harris's ground?"

No, Hugh knew nothing about it, nor Fleda.

"Well I'll tell you now how it is," said the stranger, "if you'll permit me. You and your--a--cousin--come in and do us the pleasure of taking some refreshment--I know my sister'll have her table set out by this time--and I'll do myself the honour of introducing you to--a--these strange roads afterwards."

"Thank you, sir, but that trouble is unnecessary--cannot you direct us?"

"No trouble--indeed sir, I assure you, I should esteem it a favour--very highly. I--I am Dr. Quackenboss, sir; you may have heard--"

"Thank you, Dr. Quackenboss, but we have no time this afternoon--we are very anxious to reach home as soon as possible; if you would be be so good as to put us in the way."

'Well, sir, you know the road by Deacon Patterson's?'
"Well, sir, you know the road by Deacon Patterson's?"

"I--really sir, I am afraid--to a person ignorant of the various localities--You will lose no time--I will just hitch your horse here, and I'll have mine ready by the time this young lady has rested. Miss--a--won't you join with me? I assure you I will not put you to the expense of a minute--Thank you!--Mr. Harden!--Just clap the saddle on to Lollypop and have him up here in three seconds.--Thank you!--My dear Miss--a--won't you take my arm? I am gratified, I assure you."

Yielding to the apparent impossibility of getting anything out of Dr. Quackenboss, except civility, and to the real difficulty of disappointing such very earnest good will, Fleda and Hugh did what older persons would not have done,--alighted and walked up to the house.

"This is quite a fortuitous occurrence," the doctor went on:--"I have often had the pleasure of seeing Mr Rossitur's family in church--in the little church at Queechy Run--and that enabled me to recognise your cousin as soon as I saw him in the wagon. Perhaps Miss--a--you may have possibly heard of my name?--Quackenboss--I don't know that you understood--"

"I have heard it, sir."

"My Irishmen, Miss--a--my Irish labourers, can't get hold of but one end of it; they call me Boss--ha, ha, ha!"

Fleda hoped his patients did not get hold of the other end of it, and trembled, visibly.

"Hard to pull a man's name to pieces before his face,--ha, ha! but I am--a--not one thing myself,--a kind of heterogynous--I am a piece of a physician and a little in the agricultural line also; so it's all fair."

"The Irish treat my name as hardly, Dr. Quackenboss--they call me nothing but Miss Ring-again."

And then Fleda could laugh, and laugh she did, so heartily that the doctor was delighted.

"Ring-again! ha, ha!--Very good!--Well, Miss--a--I shouldn't think that anybody in your service would ever--a--ever let you put your name in practice."

But Fleda's delight at the excessive gallantry and awkwardness of this speech was almost too much; or, as the doctor pleasantly remarked, her nerves were too many for her; and every one of them was dancing by the time they reached the hall-door. The doctor's flourishes lost not a bit of their angularity from his tall ungainly figure and a lantern-jawed face, the lower member of which had now and then a somewhat lateral play

when he was speaking, which curiously aided the quaint effect of his words. He ushered his guests into the house, seeming in a flow of self-gratulation.

The supper-table was spread, sure enough, and hovering about it was the doctor's sister; a lady in whom Fleda only saw a Dutch face, with eyes that made no impression, disagreeable fair hair, and a string of gilt beads round her neck. A painted yellow floor under foot, a room that looked excessively *wooden* and smelt of cheese, bare walls and a well-filled table, was all that she took in besides.

"I have the honour of presenting you to my sister," said the doctor with suavity. "Flora, the Irish domestics of this young lady call her name Miss Ring-again--if she will let us know how it ought to be called we shall be happy to be informed."

Dr. Quackenboss was made happy.

"Miss *Ringgan*--and this young gentleman is young Mr. Rossitur--the gentleman that has taken Squire Ringgan's old place. We were so fortunate as to have them lose their way this afternoon, coming from the Pool, and they have just stepped in to see if you can't find 'em a mouthful of something they can eat, while Lollypop is a getting ready to see them home."

Poor Miss Flora immediately disappeared into the kitchen, to order a bit of superior cheese and to have some slices of ham put on the gridiron, and then coming back to the common room went rummaging about from cupboard to cupboard, in search of cake and sweetmeats. Fleda protested and begged in vain.

"She was so sorry she hadn't knowed," Miss Flora said,--"she'd ha' had some cakes made that maybe they could have eaten, but the bread was dry; and the cheese wa'n't as good somehow as the last one they cut, maybe Miss Ringgan would prefer a piece of newer-made, if she liked it; and she hadn't had good luck with her preserves last summer--the most

of 'em had fomented--she thought it was the damp weather, but there was some stewed pears that maybe she would be so good as to approve--and there was some ham! whatever else it was it was hot!--"

It was impossible, it was impossible, to do dishonour to all this hospitality and kindness and pride that was brought out for them. Early or late, they must eat, in mere gratitude. The difficulty was to avoid eating everything. Hugh and Fleda managed to compound the matter with each other, one taking the cake and pears, and the other the ham and cheese. In the midst of all this over flow of good will Fleda bethought her to ask if Miss Flora knew of any girl or woman that would go out to service. Miss Flora took the matter into grave consideration as soon as her anxiety on the subject of their cups of tea had subsided. She did not commit herself, but thought it possible that one of the Finns might be willing to go out.

"Where do they live?"

"It's--a--not far from Queechy Run," said the doctor, whose now and then hesitation in the midst of his speech was never for want of a thought but simply and merely for the best words to clothe it in.

"Is it in our way to-night?"

He could make it so, the doctor said, with pleasure, for it would give him permission to gallant them a little further.

They had several miles yet to go, and the sun went down as they were passing through Queechy Run. Under that still cool clear autumn sky Fleda would have enjoyed the ride very much, but that her unfulfilled errand was weighing upon her, and she feared her aunt and uncle might want her services before she could be at home. Still, late as it was, she determined to stop for a minute at Mrs. Finn's and go home with a clear conscience. At her door, and not till there, the doctor was prevailed upon to part company, the rest of the way being perfectly plain.

"Not I!--at least I think not. But, Hugh, don't say anything about all this to aunt Lucy. She would be troubled."

Fleda had certainly when she came away no notion of improving her acquaintance with Miss Anastasia; but the supper, and the breakfast and the dinner of the next day, with all the nameless and almost numberless duties of housework that filled up the time between, wrought her to a very strong sense of the necessity of having some kind of "help" soon. Mrs. Rossitur wearied herself excessively with doing very little, and then looked so sad to see Fleda working on, that it was more disheartening and harder to bear than the fatigue. Hugh was a most faithful and invaluable coadjutor, and his lack of strength was like her own made up by energy of will; but neither of them could bear the strain long; and when the final clearing away of the dinner-dishes gave her a breathing-time she resolved to dress herself and put her thimble in her pocket and go over to Miss Finn's quilting. Miss Lucy might not be like Miss Anastasia; and if she were, anything that had hands and feet to move instead of her own would be welcome.

Hugh went with her to the door and was to come for her at sunset.

Chapter XX.

> With superfluity of breeding
> First makes you sick, and then with feeding.
>
> Jenyns.

Miss Anastasia was a little surprised and a good deal gratified, Fleda saw, by her coming, and played the hostess with great benignity. The quilting-frame was stretched in an upper room, not in the long kitchen, to Fleda's joy; most of the company were already seated at it, and she

had to go through a long string of introductions before she was permitted to take her place. First of all Earl Douglass's wife, who rose up and taking both Fleda's hands squeezed and shook them heartily, giving her with eye and lip a most genial welcome. This lady had every look of being a very *clever* woman; "a manager" she was said to be; and indeed her very nose had a little pinch which prepared one for nothing superfluous about her. Even her dress could not have wanted another breadth from the skirt and had no fulness to spare about the body. Neat as a pin though; and a well-to-do look through it all. Miss Quackenboss Fleda recognised as an old friend, gilt beads and all. Catherine Douglass had grown up to a pretty girl during the five years since Fleda had left Queechy, and gave her a greeting half smiling, half shy. There was a little more affluence about the flow of her drapery, and the pink ribbon round her neck was confined by a little dainty Jew's harp of a brooch; she had her mother's pinch of the nose too. Then there were two other young ladies;--Miss Letitia Ann Thornton, a tall grown girl in pantalettes, evidently a would-be aristocrat from the air of her head and lip, with a well-looking face and looking well knowing of the same, and sporting neat little white cuffs at her wrists, the only one who bore such a distinction. The third of these damsels, Jessie Healy, impressed Fleda with having been brought up upon coarse meat and having grown heavy in consequence; the other two were extremely fair and delicate, both in complexion and feature. Her aunt Syra Fleda recognised without particular pleasure and managed to seat herself at the quilt with the sewing-woman and Miss Hannah between them. Miss Lucy Finn she found seated at her right hand, but after all the civilities she had just gone through Fleda had not courage just then to dash into business with her, and Miss Lucy herself stitched away and was dumb.

So were the rest of the party--rather. The presence of the new-comer seemed to have the effect of a spell. Fleda could not think they had been as silent before her joining them as they were for some time afterwards. The young ladies were absolutely mute, and conversation seemed to flag even among the elder ones; and if Fleda ever raised her eyes from the

quilt to look at somebody she was sure to see somebody's eyes looking at her, with a curiosity well enough defined and mixed with a more *or less* amount of benevolence and pleasure. Fleda was growing very industrious and feeling her cheeks grow warm, when the checked stream of conversation began to take revenge by turning its tide upon her.

"Are you glad to be back to Queechy, Fleda?" said Mrs. Douglass from the opposite far end of the quilt.

"Yes ma'am," said Fleda, smiling back her answer,--"on some accounts."

"Ain't she growed like her father, Mis' Douglass?" said the sewing woman. "Do you recollect Walter Ringgan--what a handsome feller he was?"

The two opposite girls immediately found something to say to each other.

"She ain't a bit more like him than she is like her mother," said Mrs. Douglass, biting off the end of her thread energetically. "Amy Ringgan was a sweet good woman as ever was in this town."

Again her daughter's glance and smile went over to the speaker.

"You stay in Queechy and live like Queechy folks do," Mrs. Douglass added, nodding encouragingly, "and you'll beat both on 'em."

But this speech jarred, and Fleda wished it had not been spoken.

"How does your uncle like farming?" said aunt Syra.

A home-thrust, which Fleda parried by saying he had hardly got accustomed to it yet.

"What's been his business? what has he been doing all his life till now?" said the sewing-woman.

Fleda replied that he had had no business; and after the minds of the company had had time to entertain this statement she was startled by Miss Lucy's voice at her elbow.

"It seems kind o' curious, don't it, that a man should live to be forty or fifty years old and not know anything of the earth he gets his bread from?"

"What makes you think he don't?" said Miss Thornton rather tartly.

"She wa'n't speaking o' nobody," said aunt Syra.

"I was--I was speaking of *man*--I was speaking abstractly," said Fleda's right hand neighbour.

"What's abstractly?" said Miss Anastasia scornfully.

"Where do you get hold of such hard words, Lucy?" said Mrs. Douglass.

"I don't know, Mis' Douglass;--they come to me;--it's practice, I suppose. I had no intention of being obscure."

"One kind o' word's as easy as another I suppose, when you're used to it, ain't it?" said the sewing-woman.

"What's abstractly?" said the mistress of the house again.

"Look in the dictionary, if you want to know," said her sister.

"I don't want to know--I only want you to tell."

"When do you get time for it, Lucy? ha'n't you nothing else to practise?" pursued Mrs. Douglass.

"Yes, Mis' Douglass; but then there are times for exertion, and other times less disposable; and when I feel thoughtful, or low, I commonly retire to my room and contemplate the stars or write a composition."

The sewing-woman greeted this speech with an unqualified ha! ha! and Fleda involuntarily raised her head to look at the last speaker; but there was nothing to be noticed about her, except that she was in rather nicer order than the rest of the Finn family.

"Did you get home safe last night?" inquired Miss Quackenboss, bending forward over the quilt to look down to Fleda.

Fleda thanked her, and replied that they had been overturned and had several ribs broken.

"And where have you been, Fleda, all this while?" said Mrs. Douglass.

Fleda told, upon which all the quilting-party raised their heads simultaneously to take another review of her.

"Your uncle's wife ain't a Frenchwoman, be she?" asked the sewing-woman.

Fleda said "oh no"--and Miss Quackenboss remarked that "she thought she wa'n't;" whereby Fleda perceived it had been a subject of discussion.

"She lives like one, don't she?" said aunt Syra.

Which imputation Fleda also refuted to the best of her power.

"Well, don't she have dinner in the middle of the afternoon?" pursued aunt Syra.

Fleda was obliged to admit that.

"And she can't eat without she has a fresh piece of roast meat on table every day, can she?"

"It is not always roast," said Fleda, half vexed and half laughing.

"I'd rather have a good dish o' bread and 'lasses than the hull on't;" observed old Mrs. Finn; from the corner where she sat manifestly turning up her nose at the far-off joints on Mrs. Rossitur's dinner-table.

The girls on the other side of the quilt again held counsel together, deep and low.

"Well didn't she pick up all them notions in that place yonder?--where you say she has been?" aunt Syra went on.

"No," said Fleda; "everybody does so in New York."

"I want to know what kind of a place New York is, now," said old Mrs. Finn drawlingly. "I s'pose it's pretty big, ain't it?"

Fleda replied that it was.

"I shouldn't wonder if it was a'most as far as from here to Queechy Run, now, ain't it?"

The distance mentioned being somewhere about one-eighth of New York's longest diameter, Fleda answered that it was quite as far.

"I s'pose there's plenty o' mighty rich folks there, ain't there?"

"Plenty, I believe," said Fleda.

"I should hate to live in it awfully!" was the old woman's conclusion.

"I should admire to travel in many countries," said Miss Lucy, for the first time seeming to intend her words particularly for Fleda's ear. "I think nothing makes people more genteel. I have observed it frequently."

Fleda said it was very pleasant; but though encouraged by this opening could not muster enough courage to ask if Miss Lucy had a "notion" to come and prove their gentility. Her next question was startling,--if Fleda had ever studied mathematics?

"No," said Fleda. "Have you?"

"O my, yes! There was a lot of us concluded we would learn it; and we commenced to study it a long time ago. I think it's a most elevating--"

The discussion was suddenly broken off, for the sewing-woman exclaimed, as the other sister came in and took her seat,

"Why Hannah! you ha'n't been makin' bread with that crock on your hands!"

"Well Mis' Barnes!" said the girl,--"I've washed 'em, and I've made bread with 'em, and even *that* didn't take it off!"

"Do you look at the stars, too, Hannah?" said Mrs. Douglass.

Amidst a small hubbub of laugh and talk which now became general, poor Fleda fell back upon one single thought--one wish; that Hugh would come to fetch her home before tea-time. But it was a vain hope. Hugh was not to be there till sundown, and supper was announced long before that. They all filed down, and Fleda with them, to the great kitchen below stairs; and she found herself placed in the seat of honour indeed, but an honour she would gladly have escaped, at Miss Anastasia's right hand.

A temporary locked-jaw would have been felt a blessing. Fleda dared hardly even look about her; but under the eye of her hostess the instinct of good-breeding was found sufficient to swallow everything; literally and figuratively. There was a good deal to swallow. The usual variety of cakes, sweetmeats, beef, cheese, biscuits, and pies, was set out with some peculiarity of arrangement which Fleda had never seen before, and which left that of Miss Quackenboss elegant by comparison. Down each side of the table ran an advanced guard of little sauces, in Indian file, but in companies of three, the file leader of each being a saucer of custard, its follower a ditto of preserves, and the third keeping a sharp look-out in the shape of pickles; and to Fleda's unspeakable horror she discovered

that the guests were expected to help themselves at will from these several stores with their own spoons, transferring what they took either to their own plates or at once to its final destination, which last mode several of the company preferred. The advantage of this plan was the necessary great display of the new silver tea-spoons which Mrs. Douglass slyly hinted to aunt Syra were the moving cause of the tea-party. But aunt Syra swallowed sweetmeats and would not give heed.

There was no relief for poor Fleda. Aunt Syra was her next neighbour, and opposite to her, at Miss Anastasia's left hand, was the disagreeable countenance and peering eyes of the old crone her mother. Fleda kept her own eyes fixed upon her plate and endeavoured to see nothing but that.

"Why here's Fleda ain't eating anything," said Mrs. Douglass. "Won't you have some preserves? take some custard, do!--Anastasy, she ha'n't a spoon--no wonder!"

Fleda had secretly conveyed hers under cover.

"There *was* one," said Miss Anastasia, looking about where one should have been,--"I'll get another as soon as I give Mis' Springer her tea."

"Ha'n't you got enough to go round?" said the old woman plucking at her daughter's sleeve,--"Anastasy!--ha'n't you got enough to go round?"

This speech which was spoken with a most spiteful simplicity Miss Anastasia answered with superb silence, and presently produced spoons enough to satisfy herself and the company. But Fleda! No earthly persuasion could prevail upon her to touch pickles, sweetmeats, or custard, that evening; and even in the bread and cakes she had a vision of hands before her that took away her appetite. She endeavoured to make a shew with hung beef and cups of tea, which indeed was not Pouchong; but her supper came suddenly to an end upon a remark of her hostess, addressed to the whole table, that they needn't be surprised

if they found any bite of pudding in the gingerbread, for it was made from the molasses the children left the other day. Who "the children" were Fleda did not know, neither was it material.

It was sundown, but Hugh had not come when they went to the upper rooms again. Two were open now, for they were small and the company promised not to be such. Fathers and brothers and husbands began to come, and loud talking and laughing and joking took place of the quilting chit-chat. Fleda would fain have absorbed herself in the work again, but though the frame still stood there the minds of the company were plainly turned aside from their duty, or perhaps they thought that Miss Anastasia had had admiration enough to dispense with service. Nobody shewed a thimble but one or two old ladies; and as numbers and spirits gathered strength, a kind of romping game was set on foot in which a vast deal of kissing seemed to be the grand wit of the matter. Fleda shrank away out of sight behind the open door of communication between the two rooms, pleading with great truth that she was tired and would like to keep perfectly quiet; and she had soon the satisfaction of being apparently forgotten.

In the other room some of the older people were enjoying themselves more soberly. Fleda's ear was too near the crack of the door not to have the benefit of more of their conversation than she cared for. It soon put quiet of mind out of the question.

"He'll twist himself up pretty short; that's my sense of it; and he won't take long to do it, nother," said Earl Douglass's voice.

Fleda would have known it anywhere from its extreme peculiarity. It never either rose or fell much from a certain pitch; and at that level the words gurgled forth, seemingly from an ever-brimming fountain; he never wanted one; and the stream had neither let nor stay till his modicum of sense had fairly run out. People thought he had not a greater stock of that than some of his neighbours; but he issued an amount of word-currency sufficient for the use of the county.

"He'll run himself agin a post pretty quick," said uncle Joshua in a confirmatory tone of voice.

Fleda had a confused idea that somebody was going to hang himself.

"He ain't a workin' things right," said Douglass,--"he ain't a workin' things right; he's takin' hold o' everything by the tail end. He ain't studied the business; he doesn't know when things is right, and he doesn't know when things is wrong;--and if they're wrong he don't know how to set 'em right. He's got a feller there that ain't no more fit to be there than I am to be Vice President of the United States; and I ain't a going to say what I think I *am* fit for, but I ha'n't studied for *that* place and I shouldn't like to stand an examination for't; and a man hadn't ought to be a farmer no more if he ha'n't qualified himself. That's my idee. I like to see a thing done well if it's to be done at all; and there ain't a stitch o' land been laid right on the hull farm, nor a furrow driv' as it had ought to be, since he come on to it; and I say, Squire Springer, a man ain't going to get along in that way, and he hadn't ought to. I work hard myself, and I calculate to work hard; and I make a livin by't; and I'm content to work hard. When I see a man with his hands in his pockets, I think he'll have nothin' else in 'em soon. I don't believe he's done a hand's turn himself on the land the hull season!"

And upon this Mr. Douglass brought up.

"My son Lucas has been workin' with him, off and on, pretty much the hull time since he come; and *he* says he ha'n't begun to know how to spell farmer yet."

"Ay, ay! My wife--she's a little harder on folks than I be--I think it ain't worth while to say nothin' of a man without I can say some good of him--that's my idee--and it don't do no harm, nother,--but my wife, she says he's got to let down his notions a peg or two afore they'll hitch just in the right place; and I won't say but what I think she ain't maybe fur from right. If a man's above his business he stands a pretty fair chance to be

below it some day. I won't say myself, for I haven't any acquaintance with him, and a man oughtn't to speak but of what he is knowing to,--but I have heerd say, that he wa'n't as conversationable as it would ha' been handsome in him to be, all things considerin'. There seems to be a good many things said of him, somehow, and I always think men don't talk of a man if he don't give 'em occasion; but anyhow I've been past the farm pretty often myself this summer, workin' with Seth Plumfield; and I've took notice of things myself; and I know he's been makin' beds o' sparrowgrass when he had ought to ha' been makin' fences, and he's been helpin' that little girl o' his'n set her flowers, when he would ha' been better sot to work lookin' after his Irishman; but I don't know as it made much matter nother, for if he went wrong Mr. Rossitur wouldn't know how to set him right, and if he was a going right Mr. Rossitur would ha' been just as likely to ha' set him wrong. Well I'm sorry for him!"

"Mr. Rossitur is a most gentlemanlike man," said the voice of Dr. Quackenboss.

"Ay,--I dare say he is," Earl responded in precisely the same tone. "I was down to his house one day last summer to see him.--He wa'n't to hum, though."

"It would be strange if harm come to a man with such a guardian angel in the house as that man has in his'n," said Dr. Quackenboss.

"Well she's a pretty creetur'!" said Douglass, looking up with some animation. "I wouldn't blame any man that sot a good deal by her. I will say I think she's as handsome as my own darter; and a man can't go no furder than that I suppose."

"She won't help his farming much, I guess," said uncle Joshua,--"nor his wife, nother."

Fleda heard Dr. Quackenboss coming through the doorway and started from her corner for fear he might find her out there and know what she had heard.

He very soon found her out in the new place she had chosen and came up to pay his compliments. Fleda was in a mood for anything but laughing, yet the mixture of the ludicrous which the doctor administered set her nerves a twitching. Bringing his chair down sideways at one angle and his person at another, so as to meet at the moment of the chair's touching the floor, and with a look and smile slanting to match, the doctor said,

"Well, Miss Ringgan, has--a--Mrs. Rossitur,--does she feel herself reconciled yet?"

"Reconciled, sir?" said Fleda.

"Yes--a--to Queechy?"

"She never quarrelled with it, sir," said Fleda, quite unable to keep from laughing.

"Yes,--I mean--a--she feels that she can sustain her spirits in different situations?"

"She is very well, sir, thank you."

"It must have been a great change to her--and to you all--coming to this place."

"Yes, sir; the country is very different from the city."

"In what part of New York was Mr. Rossitur's former residence?"

"In State street, sir."

"State street,--that is somewhere in the direction of the Park?"

"No, sir, not exactly."

"Was Mrs. Rossitur a native of the city?"

"Not of New York. O Hugh, my dear Hugh," exclaimed Fleda in another tone,--"what have you been thinking of?"

"Father wanted me," said Hugh. "I could not help it, Fleda."

"You are not going to have the cruelty to take your--a--cousin away, Mr. Rossitur?" said the doctor.

But Fleda was for once happy to be cruel; she would hear no remonstrances. Though her desire for Miss Lucy's "help" had considerably lessened she thought she could not in politeness avoid speaking on the subject, after being invited there on purpose. But Miss Lucy said she "calculated to stay at home this winter," unless she went to live with somebody at Kenton for the purpose of attending a course of philosophy lectures that she heard were to be given there. So that matter was settled; and clasping Hugh's arm Fleda turned away from the house with a step and heart both lightened by the joy of being out of it.

"I couldn't come sooner, Fleda," said Hugh.

"No matter--O I'm so glad to be away! Walk a little faster, dear Hugh.--Have you missed me at home?"

"Do you want me to say no or yes?" said Hugh smiling. "We did very well--mother and I--and I have left everything ready to have tea the minute you get home. What sort of a time have you had?"

In answer to which Fleda gave him a long history; and then they walked on awhile in silence. The evening was still and would have been dark but for the extreme brilliancy of the stars through the keen clear atmosphere. Fleda looked up at them and drew large draughts of bodily and mental refreshment with the bracing air.

"Do you know to-morrow will be Thanksgiving day?"

"Ye--what made you think of it?"

"They were talking about it--they make a great fuss here Thanksgiving day."

"I don't think we shall make much of a fuss," said Hugh.

"I don't think we shall. I wonder what I shall do--I am afraid uncle Rolf will get tired of coffee and omelettes in the course of time; and my list of receipts is very limited."

"It is a pity you didn't beg one of Mrs. Renney's books," said Hugh laughing. "If you had only known--"

"'Tisn't too late!" said Fleda quickly,--"I'll send to New York for one. I will! I'll ask uncle Orrin to get it for me. That's the best thought!--"

"But, Fleda! you're not going to turn cook in that fashion?"

"It would be no harm to have the book," said Fleda. "I can tell you we mustn't expect to get anybody here that can make an omelette, or even coffee, that uncle Rolf will drink. Oh Hugh!--"

"What?"

"I don't know where we are going to get anybody!--But don't say anything to aunt Lucy about it."

"Well, we can keep Thanksgiving day, Fleda, without a dinner," said Hugh cheerfully.

"Yes indeed; I am sure I can--after being among these people to-night. How much I have that they want! Look at the Great Bear over there!--isn't that better than New York?"

"The Great Bear hangs over New York too," Hugh said with a smile.

"Ah but it isn't the same thing. Heaven hasn't the same eyes for the city and the country."

As Hugh and Fleda went quick up to the kitchen door they overtook a dark figure, at whom looking narrowly as she passed, Fleda recognised Seth Plumfield. He was joyfully let into the kitchen, and there proved to be the bearer of a huge dish carefully covered with a napkin.

"Mother guessed you hadn't any Thanksgiving ready," he said,--"and she wanted to send this down to you; so I thought I would come and fetch it myself."

"O thank her! and thank you, cousin Seth;--how good you are?"

"Mother ha'n't lost her old trick at 'em," said he, "so I hope *that's* good."

"O I know it is," said Fleda. "I remember aunt Miriam's Thanksgiving chicken-pies. Now, cousin Seth, you must come in and see aunt Lucy."

"No," said he quietly,--"I've got my farm-boots on--I guess I won't see anybody but you."

But Fleda would not suffer that, and finding she could not move him she brought her aunt out into the kitchen. Mrs. Rossitur's manner of speaking and thanking him quite charmed Seth, and he went away with a kindly feeling towards those gentle bright eyes which he never forgot.

"Now we've something for to-morrow, Hugh!" said Fleda;--"and such a chicken-pie I can tell you as *you* never saw. Hugh, isn't it odd how different a thing is in different circumstances? You don't know how glad I was when I put my hands upon that warm pie-dish and knew what it was; and when did I ever care in New York about Emile's doings?"

"Except the almond gauffres," said Hugh smiling.

"I never thought to be so glad of a chicken-pie," said Fleda, shaking her head.

Aunt Miriam's dish bore out Fleda's praise, in the opinion of all that tasted it; for such fowls, such butter, and such cream, as went to its composition could hardly be known but in an unsophisticated state of society. But one pie could not last for ever; and as soon as the signs of dinner were got rid of, Thanksgiving day though it was, poor Fleda was fain to go up the hill to consult aunt Miriam about the possibility of getting "help."

"I don't know, dear Fleda," said she;--"if you cannot get Lucy Finn--I don't know who else there is you can get. Mrs. Toles wants both her daughters at home I know this winter, because she is sick; and Marietta Winchel is working at aunt Syra's;--I don't know--Do you remember Barby Elster, that used to live with me?"

"O yes!"

"She *might* go--she has been staying at home these two years, to take care of her old mother, that's the reason she left me; but she has another sister come home now,--Hetty, that married and went to Montepoole,--she's lost her husband and come home to live; so perhaps Barby would go out again. But I don't know,--how do you think your aunt Lucy would get along with her?"

"Dear aunt Miriam! you know we must do as we can. We *must* have somebody."

"Barby is a little quick," said Mrs. Plumfield, "but I think she is good-hearted, and she is thorough, and faithful as the day is long. If your aunt and uncle can put up with her ways."

"I am sure we can, aunt Miriam. Aunt Lucy's the easiest person in the world to please, and I'll try and keep her away from uncle Rolf. I think we can get along. I know Barby used to like me."

"But then Barby knows nothing about French cooking, my child; she can do nothing but the common country things. What will your uncle and aunt say to that?"

"I don't know," said Fleda, "but anything is better than nothing. I must try and do what she can't do. I'll come up and get you to teach me, aunt Miriam."

Aunt Miriam hugged and kissed her before speaking.

"I'll teach you what I know, my darling;--and now we'll go right off and see Barby--we shall catch her just in a good time."

It was a poor little unpainted house, standing back from the road, and with a double row of boards laid down to serve as a path to it. But this board-walk was scrubbed perfectly clean. They went in without knocking. There was nobody there but an old woman seated before the fire shaking all over with the St. Vitus's Dance. She gave them no salutation, calling instead on "Barby!"--who presently made her appearance from the inner door.

"Barby!--who's this?"

"That's Mis' Plumfield, mother," said the daughter, speaking loud as to a deaf person.

The old lady immediately got up and dropped a very quick and what was meant to be a very respect-shewing curtsey, saying at the same time with much deference and with one of her involuntary twitches,--"I "maun' to know!"--The sense of the ludicrous and the feeling of pity together were painfully oppressive. Fleda turned away to the daughter who came forward and shook hands with a frank look of pleasure at the sight of her elder visitor.

"Barby," said Mrs. Plumfield, "this is little Fleda Ringgan--do you remember her?"

"I 'mind to know!" said Barby, transferring her hand to Fleda's and giving it a good squeeze.--"She's growed a fine gal, Mis' Plumfield. You ha'n't lost none of your good looks--ha' you kept all your old goodness along with 'em?"

Fleda laughed at this abrupt question, and said she didn't know.

"If you ha'n't, I wouldn't give much for your eyes," said Barby letting go her hand.

Mrs. Plumfield laughed too at Barby's equivocal mode of complimenting.

"Who's that young gal, Barby?" inquired Mrs. Elster.

"That's Mis' Plumfield's niece, mother!"

"She's a handsome little creetur, ain't she?"

They all laughed at that, and Fleda's cheeks growing crimson, Mrs. Plumfield stepped forward to ask after the old lady's health; and while she talked and listened Fleda's eyes noted the spotless condition of the room--the white table, the nice rag-carpet, the bright many-coloured patch-work counterpane on the bed, the brilliant cleanliness of the floor where the small carpet left the boards bare, the tidy look of the two women; and she made up her mind that *she* could get along with Miss Barbara very well. Barby was rather tall, and in face decidedly a fine-looking woman, though her figure had the usual scantling proportions which nature or fashion assigns to the hard-working dwellers in the country. A handsome quick grey eye and the mouth were sufficiently expressive of character, and perhaps of temper, but there were no lines of anything sinister or surly; you could imagine a flash, but not a cloud.

"Barby, you are not tied at home any longer, are you?" said Mrs. Plumfield, coming back from the old lady and speaking rather low;--"now that Hetty is here, can't your mother spare you?"

"Well I reckon she could, Mis' Plumfield,--if I could work it so that she'd be more comfortable by my being away."

"Then you'd have no objection to go out again?"

"Where to?"

"Fleda's uncle, you know, has taken my brother's old place, and they have no help. They want somebody to take the whole management--just you, Barby. Mrs. Rossitur isn't strong."

"Nor don't want to be, does she? I've heerd tell of her. Mis' Plumfield, I should despise to have as many legs and arms as other folks and not be able to help myself!"

"But you wouldn't despise to help other folks, I hope," said Mrs. Plumfield smiling.

"People that want you very much too," said Fleda; for she quite longed to have that strong hand and healthy eye to rely upon at home. Barby looked at her with a relaxed face, and after a little consideration said "she guessed she'd try."

"Mis' Plumfield," cried the old lady as they were moving,--"Mis' Plumfield, you said you'd send me a piece of pork."

"I haven't forgotten it, Mrs. Elster--you shall have it."

"Well you get it out for me yourself," said the old woman speaking very energetically,--"don't you send no one else to the barrel for't; because I know you'll give me the biggest piece."

Mrs. Plumfield laughed and promised.

"I'll come up and work it out some odd day," said the daughter nodding intelligently as she followed them to the door.

"We'll talk about that," said Mrs. Plumfield.

"She was wonderful pleased with the pie," said Barby, "and so was Hetty; she ha'n't seen anything so good, she says, since she quit Queechy."

"Well, Barby," said Mrs. Plumfield, as she turned and grasped her hand, "did you remember your Thanksgiving over it?"

"Yes, Mis' Plumfield," and the fine grey eyes fell to the floor,--"but I minded it only because it had come from you. I seemed to hear you saying just that out of every bone I picked."

"You minded *my* message," said the other gently.

"Well I don't mind the things I had ought to most," said Barby in a subdued voice,--"never!--'cept mother--I ain't very apt to forget her."

Mrs. Plumfield saw a tell-tale glittering beneath the drooping eye-lid. She added no more but a sympathetic strong squeeze of the hand she held, and turned to follow Fleda who had gone on ahead.

"Mis' Plumfield!" said Barby, before they had reached the stile that led into the road, where Fleda was standing,--"Will I be sure of having the money regular down yonder? You know I hadn't ought to go otherways, on account of mother."

"Yes, it will be sure," said Mrs. Plumfield,--"and regular;" adding quietly, "I'll make it so."

There was a bond for the whole amount in aunt Miriam's eyes; and quite satisfied, Barby went back to the house.

"Will she expect to come to our table, aunt Miriam?" said Fleda when they had walked a little way.

"No--she will not expect that--but Barby will want a different kind of managing from those Irish women of yours. She won't bear to be spoken to in a way that don't suit her notions of what she thinks she deserves;

and perhaps your aunt and uncle will think her notions rather high--I don't know."

"There is no difficulty with aunt Lucy," said Fleda;--"and I guess I can manage uncle Rolf--I'll try. *I* like her very much."

"Barby is very poor," said Mrs. Plumfield; "she has nothing but her own earnings to support herself and her old mother, and now I suppose her sister and her child; for Hetty is a poor thing--never did much, and now I suppose does nothing."

"Are those Finns poor, aunt Miriam?"

"O no--not at all--they are very well off."

"So I thought--they seemed to have plenty of everything, and silver spoons and all. But why then do they go out to work?"

"They are a little too fond of getting money I expect," said aunt Miriam. "And they are a queer sort of people rather--the mother is queer and the children are queer--they ain't like other folks exactly--never were."

"I am very glad we are to have Barby instead of that Lucy Finn," said Fleda. "O aunt Miriam! you can't think how much easier my heart feels."

"Poor child!" said aunt Miriam looking at her. "But it isn't best, Fleda, to have things work too smooth in this world."

"No, I suppose not," said Fleda sighing. "Isn't it very strange, aunt Miriam, that it should make people worse instead of better to have everything go pleasantly with them?"

"It is because they are apt then to be so full of the present that they forget the care of the future."

"Yes, and forget there is anything better than the present, I suppose," said Fleda.

"So we mustn't fret at the ways our Father takes to keep us from hurting ourselves?" said aunt Miriam cheerfully.

"O no!" said Fleda, looking up brightly in answer to the tender manner in which these words were spoken;--"and I didn't mean that *this* is much of a trouble--only I am very glad to think that somebody is coming to-morrow."

Aunt Miriam thought that gentle unfretful face could not stand in need of much discipline.

Chapter XXI.

> Wise men alway
> Affyrme and say,
> That best is for a man
> Diligently,
> For to apply,
> The business that he can.
>
> More.

Fleda waited for Barby's coming the next day with a little anxiety. The introduction and installation however were happily got over. Mrs. Rossitur, as Fleda knew, was most easily pleased; and Barby Elster's quick eye was satisfied with the unaffected and universal gentleness and politeness of her new employer. She made herself at home in half an hour; and Mrs. Rossitur and Fleda were comforted to perceive, by unmistakeable signs, that their presence was not needed in the kitchen and they might retire to their own premises and forget there was another part of the house. Fleda had forgotten it utterly, and deliciously enjoying the rest of mind and body she was stretched upon the sofa, luxuriating

over some volume from her remnant of a library; when the inner door was suddenly pushed open far enough to admit the entrance of Miss Elster's head.

"Where's the soft soap?"

Fleda's book went down and her heart jumped to her mouth, for her uncle was sitting over by the window. Mrs. Rossitur looked up in a maze and waited for the question to be repeated.

"I say, where's the soft soap?"

"Soft soap!" said Mrs. Rossitur,--"I don't know whether there is any.--Fleda, do you know?"

"I was trying to think, aunt Lucy. I don't believe there is any."

"*Where* is it?" said Barby.

"There is none, I believe," said Mrs. Rossitur.

"Where *was* it, then?"

"Nowhere--there has not been any in the house," said Fleda, raising herself up to see over the back of her sofa.

"There ha'n't been none!" said Miss Elster, in a tone more significant than her words, and shutting the door as abruptly as she had opened it.

"What upon earth does the woman mean?" exclaimed Mr. Rossitur, springing up and advancing towards the kitchen door. Fleda threw herself before him.

"Nothing at all, uncle Rolf--she doesn't mean anything at all--she doesn't know any better."

"I will improve her knowledge--get out the way, Fleda."

"But uncle Rolf, just hear me one moment--please don't!--she didn't mean any harm--these people don't know any manners--just let me speak to her, please uncle Rolf!--" said Fleda laying both hands upon her uncle's arms,--"I'll manage her."

Mr. Rossitur's wrath was high, and he would have run over or knocked down anything less gentle that had stood in his way; but even the harshness of strength shuns to set itself in array against the meekness that does not *oppose*; if the touch of those hands had been a whit less light, or the glance of her eye less submissively appealing, it would have availed nothing. As it was, he stopped and looked at her, at first scowling, but then with a smile.

"*You* manage her!" said he.

"Yes," said Fleda laughing, and now exerting her force she gently pushed him back towards the seat he had quitted,--"yes. uncle Rolf--you've enough else to manage--don't undertake our 'help.' Deliver over all your displeasure upon me when anything goes wrong--I will be the conductor to carry it off safely into the kitchen and discharge it just at that point where I think it will do most execution. Now will you, uncle Rolf?--Because we have got a new-fashioned piece of firearms in the other room that I am afraid will go off unexpectedly if it is meddled with by an unskilful hand;--and that would leave us without arms, you see, or with only aunt Lucy's and mine, which are not reliable."

"You saucy girl!"--said her uncle, who was laughing partly at and partly with her,--"I don't know what you deserve exactly.--Well--keep this precious new operative of yours out of my way and I'll take care to keep out of hers. But mind, you must manage not to have your piece snapping in my face in this fashion, for I won't stand it."

And so, quieted, Mr. Rossitur sat down to his book again; and Fleda leaving hers open went to attend upon Barby.

"There ain't much yallow soap neither," said this personage,--"if this is all. There's one thing--if we ha'n't got it we can make it. I must get Mis' Rossitur to have a leach-tub sot up right away. I'm a dreadful hand for havin' plenty o' soap."

"What is a leach-tub?" said Fleda.

"Why, a leach-tub, for to leach ashes in. That's easy enough. I'll fix it, afore we're any on us much older. If Mr. Rossitur'll keep me in good hard wood I sha'n't cost him hardly anything for potash."

"I'll see about it," said Fleda, "and I will see about having the leach-tub, or whatever it is, put up for you. And Barby, whenever you want anything, will you just speak to me about it?--and if I am in the other room ask me to come out here. Because my aunt is not strong, and does not know where things are as well as I do; and when my uncle is in there he sometimes does not like to be disturbed with hearing any such talk. If you'll tell me I'll see and have everything done for you."

"Well--you get me a leach sot up--that's all I'll ask of you just now," said Barby good-humouredly; "and help me to find the soap-grease, if there is any. As to the rest, I don't want to see nothin' o' him in the kitchen so I'll relieve him if he don't want to see much o' me in the parlour.--I shouldn't wonder if there wa'n't a speck of it in the house."

Not a speck was there to be found.

"Your uncle's pockets must ha' had a good hole in 'em by this time," remarked Barby as they came back from the cellar. "However, there never was a crock so empty it couldn't be filled. You get me a leach-tub sot up, and I'll find work for it."

From that time Fleda had no more trouble with her uncle and Barby. Each seemed to have a wholesome appreciation of the other's combative qualities and to shun them. With Mrs. Rossitur Barby was soon all-powerful. It was enough that she wanted a thing, if Mrs Rossitur's own

resources could compass it. For Fleda, to say that Barby had presently a perfect understanding with her and joined to that a most affectionate careful regard, is not perhaps saying much; for it was true of every one without exception with whom Fleda had much to do. Barby was to all of them a very great comfort and stand-by.

It was well for them that they had her within doors to keep things, as she called it, "right and tight;" for abroad the only system in vogue was one of fluctuation and uncertainty. Mr. Rossitur's Irishman, Donohan, staid his year out, doing as little good and as much at least negative harm as he well could; and then went, leaving them a good deal poorer than he found them. Dr. Gregory's generosity had added to Mr. Rossitur's own small stock of ready money, giving him the means to make some needed outlays on the farm. But the outlay, ill-applied, had been greater than the income; a scarcity of money began to be more and more felt; and the comfort of the family accordingly drew within more and more narrow bounds. The temper of the head of the family suffered in at least equal degree.

From the first of Barby's coming poor Fleda had done her utmost to prevent the want of Mons. Emile from being felt. Mr. Rossitur's table was always set by her careful hand, and all the delicacies that came upon it were, unknown to him, of her providing. Even the bread. One day at breakfast Mr. Rossitur had expressed his impatient displeasure at that of Miss Elster's manufacture. Fleda saw the distressed shade that came over her aunt's face, and took her resolution. It was the last time. She had followed her plan of sending for the receipts, and she studied them diligently, both at home and under aunt Miriam. Natural quickness of eye and hand came in aid of her affectionate zeal, and it was not long before she could trust herself to undertake any operation in the whole range of her cookery book. But meanwhile materials were growing scarce and hard to come by. The delicate French rolls which were now always ready for her uncle's plate in the morning had sometimes nothing to back them, unless the unfailing water cress from the good little spring

in the meadow. Fleda could not spare her eggs, for perhaps they might have nothing else to depend upon for dinner. It was no burden to her to do these things; she had a sufficient reward in seeing that her aunt and Hugh eat the better and that her uncle's brow was clear; but it *was* a burden when her hands were tied by the lack of means; for she knew the failure of the usual supply was bitterly felt, not for the actual want, but for that other want which it implied and prefigured.

On the first dismissal of Donohan Fleda hoped for a good turn of affairs. But Mr. Rossitur, disgusted with his first experiment, resolved this season to be his own head man; and appointed Lucas Springer the second in command, with a posse of labourers to execute his decrees. It did not work well. Mr. Rossitur found he had a very tough prime minister, who would have every one of his plans to go through a kind of winnowing process by being tossed about in an argument. The arguments were interminable, until Mr. Rossitur not unfrequently quit the field with, "Well, do what you like about it!"--not conquered, but wearied. The labourers, either from want of ready money or of what they called "manners" in their employer, fell off at the wrong times, just when they were most wanted. Hugh threw himself then into the breach and wrought beyond his strength; and that tried Fleda worst of all. She was glad to see haying and harvest pass over; but the change of seasons seemed to bring only a change of disagreeableness, and she could not find that hope had any better breathing-time in the short days of winter than in the long days of summer. Her gentle face grew more gentle than ever, for under the shade of sorrowful patience which was always there now its meekness had no eclipse.

Mrs. Rossitur was struck with it one morning. She was coming down from her room and saw Fleda standing on the landing-place gazing out of the window. It was before breakfast one cold morning in winter. Mrs. Rossitur put her arms round her softly and kissed her.

"What are you thinking about, dear Fleda?--you ought not to be standing here."

"I was looking at Hugh," said Fleda, and her eye went back to the window. Mrs. Rossitur's followed it. The window gave them a view of the ground behind the house; and there was Hugh, just coming in with a large armful of heavy wood which he had been sawing.

"He isn't strong enough to do that, aunt Lucy," said Fleda softly.

"I know it," said his mother in a subdued tone, and not moving her eye, though Hugh had disappeared.

"It is too cold for him--he is too thinly clad to bear this exposure," said Fleda anxiously.

"I know it," said his mother again.

"Can't you tell uncle Rolf?--can't you get him to do it? I am afraid Hugh will hurt himself, aunt Lucy."

"I did tell him the other day--I did speak to him about it," said Mrs. Rossitur; "but he said there was no reason why Hugh should do it,--there were plenty of other people--"

"But how can he say so when he knows we never can ask Lucas to do anything of the kind, and that other man always contrives to be out of the way when he is wanted?--Oh what is he thinking of?" said Fleda bitterly, as she saw Hugh again at his work.

It was so rarely that Fleda was seen to shed tears that they always were a signal of dismay to any of the household. There was even agony in Mrs. Rossitur's voice as she implored her not to give way to them. But notwithstanding that, Fleda's tears came this time from too deep a spring to be stopped at once.

"It makes me feel as if all was lost, Fleda, when I see you do so,"--

Fleda put her arms about her neck and whispered that "she would not"--that "she should not"--

Yet it was a little while before she could say any more.

"But, aunt Lucy, he doesn't know what he is doing!"

"No--and I can't make him know. I cannot say anything more, Fleda--it would do no good. I don't know what is the matter--he is entirely changed from what he used to be--"

"I know what is the matter," said Fleda, now turning comforter in her turn as her aunt's tears fell more quietly, because more despairingly, than her own,--"I know what it is--he is not happy;--that is all. He has not succeeded well in these farm doings, and he wants money, and he is worried--it is no wonder if he don't seem exactly as he used to."

"And oh, that troubles me most of all!" said Mrs. Rossitur. "The farm is bringing in nothing, I know,--he don't know how to get along with it,--I was afraid it would be so;--and we are paying nothing to uncle Orrin--and it is just a dead weight on his hands;--and I can't bear to think of it!--And what will it come to!--"

Mrs. Rossitur was now in her turn surprised into shewing the strength of her sorrows and apprehensions. Fleda was fain to put her own out of sight and bend her utmost powers to soothe and compose her aunt, till they could both go down to the breakfast table. She had got ready a nice little dish that her uncle was very fond of; but her pleasure in it was all gone; and indeed it seemed to be thrown away upon the whole table. Half the meal was over before anybody said a word.

"I am going to wash my hands of these miserable farm affairs," said Mr. Rossitur.

"Are you?" said his wife.

"Yes,--of all personal concern in them, that is. I am wearied to death with the perpetual annoyances and vexations, and petty calls upon my time--life is not worth having at such a rate! I'll have done with it."

"You will give up the entire charge to Lucas?" said Mrs. Rossitur.

'O uncle Rolf, don't have anything to do with him.'
"O uncle Rolf, don't have anything to do with him."

"Lucas!--No!--I wouldn't undergo that man's tongue for another year if he would take out his wages in talking. I could not have more of it in that case than I have had the last six months. After money, the thing that man loves best is certainly the sound of his own voice; and a most insufferable egotist! No,--I have been talking with a man who wants to take the whole farm for two years upon shares--that will clear me of all trouble."

There was sober silence for a few minutes, and then Mrs. Rossitur asked who it was.

"His name is Didenhover."

"O uncle Rolf, don't have anything to do with him!" exclaimed Fleda.

"Why not?"

"Because he lived with grandpa a great while ago, and behaved very ill. Grandpa had a great deal of trouble with him."

"How old were you then?"

"I was young, to be sure," said Fleda hanging her head, "but I remember very well how it was."

"You may have occasion to remember it a second time," said Mr. Rossitur dryly, "for the thing is done. I have engaged him."

Not another word was spoken.

Mr. Rossitur went out after breakfast, and Mrs. Rossitur busied herself with the breakfast cups and a tub of hot water, a work she never would let Fleda share with her and which lasted in consequence long enough,

Barby said, to cook and eat three breakfasts. Fleda and Hugh sat looking at the floor and the fire respectively.

"I am going up the hill to get a sight of aunt Miriam," said Fleda, bringing her eyes from the fire upon her aunt.

"Well, dear, do. You have been shut up long enough by the snow. Wrap yourself up well, and put on my snow-boots."

"No indeed!" said Fleda. "I shall just draw on another pair of stockings over my shoes, within my India-rubbers--I will take a pair of Hugh's woollen ones."

"What has become of your own?" said Hugh.

"My own what? Stockings?"

"Snow-boots."

"Worn out, Mr. Rossitur! I have run them to death, poor things. Is that a slight intimation that you are afraid of the same fate for your socks?"

"No," said Hugh, smiling in spite of himself at her manner,--"I will lend you anything I have got, Fleda."

His tone put Fleda in mind of the very doubtful pretensions of the socks in question to be comprehended under the term; she was silent a minute.

"Will you go with me, Hugh?"

"No dear, I can't;--I must get a little ahead with the wood while I can; it looks as if it would snow again; and Barby isn't provided for more than a day or two."

"And how for this fire?"

Hugh shook his head, and rose up to go forth into the kitchen. Fleda went too, linking her arm in his and bearing affectionately upon it, a sort of tacit saying that they would sink or swim together. Hugh understood it perfectly.

"I am very sorry you have to do it, dear Hugh--Oh that wood-shed!--If it had only been made!--"

"Never mind--can't help it now--we shall get through the winter by and by."

"Can't you get uncle Rolf to help you a little?" whispered Fleda;--"It would do him good." But Hugh only shook his head.

"What are we going to do for dinner, Barby?" said Fleda, still holding Hugh there before the fire.

"Ain't much choice," said Barby. "It would puzzle anybody to spell much more out of it than pork and ham. There's plenty o' them. *I* shan't starve this some time."

"But we had ham yesterday and pork the day before yesterday and ham Monday," said Fleda. "There is plenty of vegetables, thanks to you and me, Hugh," she said with a little reminding squeeze of his arm. "I could make soups nicely, if I had anything to make them of!"

"There's enough to be had for the catching," said Barby. "If I hadn't a man-mountain of work upon me, I'd start out and shoot or steal something."

"*You* shoot, Barby!" said Fleda laughing.

"I guess I can do most anything I set my hand to. If I couldn't I'd shoot myself. It won't do to kill no more o' them chickens."

"O no,--now they are laying so finely. Well, I am going up the hill, and when I come home I'll try and make up something, Barby."

"Earl Douglass'll go out in the woods now and then, of a day when he ha'n't no work particular to do, and fetch hum as many pigeons and woodchucks as you could shake a stick at."

"Hugh, my dear," said Fleda laughing, "it's a pity you aren't a hunter--I would shake a stick at you with great pleasure. Well, Barby, we will see when I come home."

"I was just a thinkin," said Barby;--"Mis' Douglass sent round to know if Mis' Rossitur would like a piece of fresh meat--Earl's been killing a sheep--there's a nice quarter, she says, if she'd like to have it."

"A quarter of mutton?"--said Fleda,--"I don't know--no, I think not, Barby; I don't know when we should be able to pay it back again.--And yet--Hugh, do you think uncle Rolf will kill another sheep this winter?"

"I am sure he will not," said Hugh;--"there have so many died."

"If he only knowed it, that is a reason for killing more," said Barby,--" and have the good of them while he can."

"Tell Mrs. Douglass we are obliged to her, but we do not want the mutton, Barby."

Hugh went to his chopping and Fleda set out upon her walk; the lines of her face settling into a most fixed gravity so soon as she turned away from the house. It was what might be called a fine winter's day; cold and still, and the sky covered with one uniform grey cloud. The snow lay in uncompromising whiteness thick over all the world; a kindly shelter for the young grain and covering for the soil; but Fleda's spirits just then in another mood saw in it only the cold refusal to hope and the barren check to exertion. The wind had cleared the snow from the trees and fences, and they stood in all their unsoftened blackness and nakedness, bleak and stern. The high grey sky threatened a fresh fall of snow in a few hours; it was just now a lull between two storms; and Fleda's spirits,

that sometimes would have laughed in the face of nature's soberness, to-day sank to its own quiet. Her pace neither slackened nor quickened till she reached aunt Miriam's house and entered the kitchen.

Aunt Miriam was in high tide of business over a pot of boiling lard, and the enormous bread-tray by the side of the fire was half full of very tempting light-brown cruller, which however were little more than a kind of sweet bread for the workmen. In the bustle of putting in and taking out aunt Miriam could give her visitor but a word and a look. Fleda pulled off her hood and sitting down watched in unusual silence the old lady's operations.

"And how are they all at your house to-day?" aunt Miriam asked as she was carefully draining her cruller out of the kettle.

Fleda answered that they were as well as usual, but a slight hesitation and the tell-tale tone of her voice made the old lady look at her more narrowly. She came near and kissed that gentle brow and looking in her eyes asked her what the matter was?

"I don't know,--" said Fleda, eyes and voice wavering alike,--"I am foolish, I believe,--"

Aunt Miriam tenderly put aside the hair from her forehead and kissed it again, but the cruller was burning and she went back to the kettle.

"I got down-hearted somehow this morning," Fleda went on, trying to steady her voice and school herself.

"*You* down-hearted, dear? About what?"

There was a world of sympathy in these words, in the warmth of which Fleda's shut-up heart unfolded itself at once.

"It's nothing new, aunt Miriam,--only somehow I felt it particularly this morning,--I have been kept in the house so long by this snow I have got dumpish I suppose.--"

Aunt Miriam looked anxiously at the tears which seemed to come involuntarily, but she said nothing.

"We are not getting along well at home."

"I supposed that," said Mrs. Plumfield quietly. "But anything new?"

"Yes--uncle Rolf has let the farm--only think of it!--he has let the farm to that Didenhover."

"Didenhover!"

"For two years."

"Did you tell him what you knew about him?"

"Yes, but it was too late--the mischief was done."

Aunt Miriam went on skimming out her cruller with a very grave face.

"How came your uncle to do so without learning about him first?"

"O I don't know!--he was in a hurry to do anything that would take the trouble of the farm off his hands,--he don't like it."

"On what terms has he let him have it?"

"On shares--and I know, I know, under that Didenhover it will bring us in nothing, and it has brought us in nothing all the time we have been here; and I don't know what we are going to live upon."--

"Has your uncle nor your aunt no property at all left?"

"Not a bit--except some waste lands in Michigan I believe, that were left to aunt Lucy a year or two ago; but they are as good as nothing."

"Has he let Didenhover have the saw-mill too?"

"I don't know--he didn't say--if he has there will be nothing at all left for us to live upon. I expect nothing from Didenhover,--his face is enough. I should have thought it might have been for uncle Rolf. O if it wasn't for aunt Lucy and Hugh I shouldn't care!--"

"What has your uncle been doing all this year past?"

"I don't know, aunt Miriam,--he can't bear the business and he has left the most of it to Lucas; and I think Lucas is more of a talker than a doer. Almost nothing has gone right. The crops have been ill managed--I do not know a great deal about it, but I know enough for that; and uncle Rolf did not know anything about it but what he got from books. And the sheep are dying off--Barby says it is because they were in such poor condition at the beginning of winter, and I dare say she is right."

"He ought to have had a thorough good man at the beginning, to get along well."

"O yes!--but he hadn't, you see; and so we have just been growing poorer every month. And now, aunt Miriam, I really don't know from day to day what to do to get dinner. You know for a good while after we came we used to have our marketing brought every few days from Albany; but we have run up such a bill there already at the butcher's as I don't know when in the world will get paid; and aunt Lucy and I will do anything before we will send for any more; and if it wasn't for her and Hugh I wouldn't care, but they haven't much appetite, and I know that all this takes what little they have away--this, and seeing the effect it has upon uncle Rolf----"

"Does he think so much more of eating than of anything else?" said aunt Miriam.

"Oh no, it is not that!" said Fleda earnestly,--"it is not that at all--he is not a great eater--but he can't bear to have things different from what they used to be and from what they ought to be--O no, don't think that! I

don't know whether I ought to have said what I have said, but I couldn't help it--"

Fleda's voice was lost for a little while.

"He is changed from what he used to be--a little thing vexes him now, and I know it is because he is not happy;--he used to be so kind and pleasant, and he is still, sometimes; but aunt Lucy's face--Oh aunt Miriam!--"

"Why, dear?" said aunt Miriam, tenderly.

"It is so changed from what it used to be!"

Poor Fleda covered her own, and aunt Miriam came to her side to give softer and gentler expression to sympathy than words could do; till the bowed face was raised again and hid in her neck.

"I can't see thee do so my child--my dear child!--Hope for brighter days, dear Fleda."

"I could bear it," said Fleda after a little interval, "if it wasn't for aunt Lucy and Hugh--oh that is the worst!--"

"What about Hugh?" said aunt Miriam, soothingly.

"Oh he does what he ought not to do, aunt Miriam, and there is no help for it,--and he did last summer--when we wanted men; and in the hot haying-time, he used to work, I know, beyond his strength,--and aunt Lucy and I did not know what to do with ourselves!--"

Fleda's head which had been raised sunk again and more heavily.

"Where was his father?" said Mrs. Plumfield.

"Oh he was in the house--he didn't know it--he didn't think about it."

"Didn't think about it!"

"No--O he didn't think Hugh was hurting himself, but he was--he shewed it for weeks afterward.--I have said what I ought not now," said Fleda looking up and seeming to check her tears and the spring of them at once.

"So much security any woman has in a man without religion!" said aunt Miriam, going back to her work. Fleda would have said something if she could; she was silent; she stood looking into the fire while the tears seemed to come as it were by stealth and ran down her face unregarded.

"Is Hugh not well?"

"I don't know,--" said Fleda faintly,--"he is not ill--but he never was very strong, and he exposes himself now I know in a way he ought not.--I am sorry I have just come and troubled you with all this now, aunt Miriam," she said after a little pause,--"I shall feel better by and by--I don't very often get such a fit."

"My dear little Fleda!"--and there was unspeakable tenderness in the old lady's voice, as she came up and drew Fleda's head again to rest upon her;--"I would not let a rough wind touch thee if I had the holding of it.--But we may be glad the arranging of things is not in my hand--I should be a poor friend after all, for I do not know what is best. Canst thou trust him who does know, my child?"

"I do, aunt Miriam,--O I do," said Fleda, burying her face in her bosom;--"I don't often feel so as I did to-day."

"There comes not a cloud that its shadow is not wanted," said aunt Miriam. "I cannot see why,--but it is that thou mayest bloom the brighter, my dear one."

"I know it,--" Fleda's words were hardly audible,--"I will try--"

"Remember his own message to every one under a cloud--'cast all thy care upon him, for he careth for thee;'--thou mayest keep none of it;--and then the peace that passeth understanding shall keep thee. 'So he giveth his beloved sleep.'"

Fleda wept for a minute on the old lady's neck, and then she looked up, dried her tears, and sat down with a face greatly quieted and lightened of its burden; while aunt Miriam once more went back to her work. The one wrought and the other looked on in silence.

The cruller were all done at last; the great bread-trough was filled and set away; the remnant of the fat was carefully disposed of, and aunt Miriam's handmaid was called in to "take the watch." She herself and her visitor adjourned to the sitting-room.

"Well," said Fleda, in a tone again steady and clear,--"I must go home to see about getting up a dinner. I am the greatest hand at making something out of nothing, aunt Miriam, that ever you saw. There is nothing like practice. I only wish the man uncle Orrin talks about would come along once in a while."

"Who was that?" said aunt Miriam.

"A man that used to go about from house to house," said Fleda laughing, "when the cottages were making soup, with a ham-bone to give it a relish, and he used to charge them so much for a dip, and so much for a wallop."

"Come, come, I can do as much for you as that," said aunt Miriam, proceeding to her store-pantry,--"see here--wouldn't this be as good as a ham-bone?" said she, bringing out of it a fat fowl;--"how would a wallop of this do?"

"Admirably!--only--the ham-bone used to come out again,--and I am confident this never would."

"Well I guess I'll stand that," said aunt Miriam smiling,--"you wouldn't mind carrying this under your cloak, would you?"

"I have no doubt I shall go home lighter with it than without it, ma'am,--thank you, dear aunty!--dear aunt Miriam!"

There was a change of tone, and of eye, as Fleda sealed each thank with a kiss.

"But how is it?--does all the charge of the house come upon you, dear?"

"O, this kind of thing, because aunt Lucy doesn't understand it and can't get along with it so well. She likes better to sew, and I had quite as lief do this."

"And don't you sew too?"

"O--a little. She does as much as she can," said Fleda gravely.

"Where is your other cousin?" said Mrs. Plumfield abruptly.

"Marion?--she is in England I believe;--we don't hear from her very often."

"No, no, I mean the one who is in the army?"

"Charlton!--O he is just ordered off to Mexico," said Fleda sadly, "and that is another great trouble to aunt Lucy. This miserable war!--"

"Does he never come home?"

"Only once since we came from Paris--while we were in New York. He has been stationed away off at the West."

"He has a captain's pay now, hasn't he?"

"Yes, but he doesn't know at all how things are at home--he hasn't an idea of it,--and he will not have. Well good-bye, dear aunt Miriam--I must run home to take care of my chicken."

She ran away; and if her eyes many a time on the way down the hill filled and overflowed, they were not bitter nor dark tears; they were the gushings of high and pure and generous affections, weeping for fulness, not for want.

That chicken was not wasted in soup; it was converted into the nicest possible little fricassee, because the toast would make so much more of it; and to Fleda's own dinner little went beside the toast, that a greater portion of the rest might be for her aunt and Hugh.

That same evening Seth Plumfield came into the kitchen while Fleda was there.

"Here is something belongs to you, I believe," said he with a covert smile, bringing out from under his cloak the mate to Fleda's fowl;--"mother said somethin' had run away with t'other one and she didn't know what to do with this one alone. Your uncle at home?"

The next news that Fleda heard was that Seth had taken a lease of the saw-mill for two years.

Mr. Didenhover did not disappoint Fleda's expectations. Very little could be got from him or the farm under him beyond the immediate supply wanted for the use of the family; and that in kind, not in cash. Mrs. Rossitur was comforted by knowing that some portion of rent had also gone to Dr. Gregory--how large or how small a portion she could not find out. But this left the family in increasing straits, which narrowed and narrowed during the whole first summer and winter of Didenhover's administration. Very straitened they would have been but for the means of relief adopted by the two *children*, as they were always called. Hugh, as soon as the spring opened, had a quiet hint, through Fleda, that if he had a mind to take the working of the saw-mill he might, for a

consideration merely nominal. This offer was immediately and gratefully closed with; and Hugh's earnings were thenceforward very important at home. Fleda had her own ways and means. Mr. Rossitur, more low-spirited and gloomy than ever, seemed to have no heart to anything. He would have worked perhaps if he could have done it alone; but to join Didenhover and his men, or any other gang of workmen, was too much for his magnanimity. He helped nobody but Fleda. For her he would do anything, at any time; and in the garden and among her flowers in the flowery courtyard he might often be seen at work with her. But nowhere else.

Chapter XXII.

> Some bring a capon, some a rurall cake,
> Some nuts, some apples; some that thinke they make
> The better cheeses, bring 'hem; or else send
> By their ripe daughters, whom they would commend
> This way to husbands; and whose baskets beare
> An embleme of themselves, in plum or peare.
>
> Ben Jonson.

So the time walked away, for this family was not now of those "whom time runneth withal,"--to the second summer of Mr. Didenhover's term.

One morning Mrs. Rossitur was seated in the breakfast-room at her usual employment, mending and patching; no sinecure now. Fleda opened the kitchen door and came in folding up a calico apron she had just taken off.

"You are tired, dear," said Mrs. Rossitur sorrowfully;--"you look pale."

"Do I?"--said Fleda, sitting down. "I am a little tired!"

"Why do you do so?"

"O it's nothing" said Fleda cheerfully;--"I haven't hurt myself. I shall be rested again in a few minutes."

"What have you been doing?"

"O I tired myself a little before breakfast in the garden, I suppose. Aunt Lucy, don't you think I had almost a bushel of peas?--and there was a little over a half bushel last time, so I shall call it a bushel. Isn't that fine?"

"You didn't pick them all yourself?"

"Hugh helped me a little while; but he had the horse to get ready, and I was out before him this morning--poor fellow, he was tired from yesterday, I dare say."

Mrs. Rossitur looked at her, a look between remonstrance and reproach, and cast her eyes down without saying a word, swallowing a whole heartful of thoughts and feelings. Fleda stooped forward till her own forehead softly touched Mrs. Rossitur's, as gentle a chiding of despondency as a very sunbeam could have given.

"Now aunt Lucy!--what do you mean? Don't you know it's good for me?--And do you know, Mr. Sweet will give me four shillings a bushel; and aunt Lucy, I sent three dozen heads of lettuce this morning besides. Isn't that doing well? and I sent two dozen day before yesterday. It is time they were gone, for they are running up to seed, this set; I have got another fine set almost ready."

Mrs. Rossitur looked at her again, as if she had been a sort of terrestrial angel.

"And how much will you get for them?"

"I don't know exactly--threepence, or sixpence perhaps,--I guess not so much--they are so easily raised; though I don't believe there are so fine as mine to be seen in this region.--If I only had somebody to water the strawberries!--we should have a great many. Aunt Lucy, I am going to send as many as I can without robbing uncle Rolf--he sha'n't miss them; but the rest of us don't mind eating rather fewer than usual? I shall make a good deal by them. And I think these morning rides do Hugh good; don't you think so?"

"And what have you been busy about ever since breakfast, Fleda?"

"O--two or three things," said Fleda lightly.

"What?"

"I had bread to make--and then I thought while my hands were in I would make a custard for uncle Rolf."

"You needn't have done that, dear! it was not necessary."

"Yes it was, because you know we have only fried pork for dinner to-day, and while we have the milk and eggs it doesn't cost much--the sugar is almost nothing. He will like it better, and so will Hugh. As for you," said Fleda, gently touching her forehead again, "you know it is of no consequence!"

"I wish you would think yourself of some consequence," said Mrs. Rossitur.

"Don't I think myself of consequence!" naid Fleda affectionately. "I don't know how you'd all get on without me. What do you think I have a mind to do now, by way of resting myself?"

"Well?" said Mrs Rossitur, thinking of something else.

"It is the day for making presents to the minister, you know?"

"The minister?"--

"Yes, the new minister--they expect him to-day;--you have heard of it;--the things are all to be carried to his house to-day. I have a great notion to go and see the fun--if I only had anything in the world I could possibly take with me--"

"Aren't you too tired, dear?"

"No--it would rest me--it is early yet--if I only had something to take!--I couldn't go without taking something----"

"A basket of eggs?" said Mrs. Rossitur.

"Can't, aunt Lucy--I can't spare them; so many of the hens are setting now.--A basket of strawberries!--that's the thing! I've got enough picked for that and to-night too. That will do!"

Fleda's preparations were soon made, and with her basket on her arm she was ready to set forth.

"If pride had not been a little put down in me," she said smiling, "I suppose I should rather stay at home than go with such a petty offering. And no doubt every one that sees it or hears of it will lay it to anything but the right reason. So much the world knows about the people it judges!--It is too bad to leave you all alone, aunt Lucy."

Mrs. Rossitur pulled her down for a kiss, a kiss in which how much was said on both sides!--and Fleda set forth, choosing as she very commonly did the old-time way through the kitchen.

"Off again?" said Barby, who was on her knees scrubbing the great flag-stones of the hearth.

"Yes, I am going up to see the donation party."

"Has the minister come?"

"No, but he is coming to-day, I understand."

"He ha'n't preached for 'em yet, has he?"

"Not yet; I suppose he will next Sunday."

"They are in a mighty hurry to give him a donation party!" said Barby. "I'd ha' waited till he was here first. I don't believe they'd be quite so spry with their donations if they had paid the last man up as they ought. I'd rather give a man what belongs to him, and make him presents afterwards."

"Why, so I hope they will, Barby," said Fleda laughing. But Barby said no more.

The parsonage-house was about a quarter of a mile, a little more, from the saw-mill, in a line at right angles with the main road. Fleda took Hugh from his work to see her safe there. The road ran north, keeping near the level of the mid-hill where it branched off a little below the saw-mill; and as the ground continued rising towards the east and was well clothed with woods, the way at this hour was still pleasantly shady. To the left the same slope of ground carried down to the foot of the hill gave them an uninterrupted view over a wide plain or bottom, edged in the distance with a circle of gently swelling hills. Close against the hills, in the far corner of the plain, lay the little village of Queechy Run, hid from sight by a slight intervening rise of ground; not a chimney shewed itself in the whole spread of country. A sunny landscape just now; but rich in picturesque associations of hay-cocks and winnows, spotting it near and far; and close by below them was a field of mowers at work; they could distinctly hear the measured rush of the scythes through the grass, and then the soft clink of the rifles would seem to play some old delicious tune of childish days. Fleda made Hugh stand still to listen. It was a warm day, but "the sweet south that breathes upon a bank of violets," could hardly be more sweet than the air which coming to them over the whole breadth of the valley had been charged by the new-made hay.

"How good it is, Hugh," said Fleda, "that one can get out of doors and forget everything that ever happened or ever will happen within four walls!"

"Do you?" said Hugh, rather soberly.

"Yes I do,--even in my flower-patch, right before the house-door; but *here*--" said Fleda, turning away and swinging her basket of strawberries as she went, "I have no idea I ever did such a thing as make bread!--and how clothes get mended I do not comprehend in the least!"

"And have you forgotten the peas and the asparagus too?"

"I am afraid you haven't, dear Hugh," said Fleda, linking her arm within his. "Hugh,--I must find some way to make money."

"More money?" said Hugh smiling.

"Yes--this garden business is all very well, but it doesn't come to any very great things after all, if you are aware of it; and, Hugh, I want to get aunt Lucy a new dress. I can't bear to see her in that old merino, and it isn't good for her. Why, Hugh, she couldn't possibly see anybody, if anybody should come to the house."

"Who is there to come?" said Hugh.

"Why nobody; but still, she ought not to be so."

"What more can you do, dear Fleda? You work a great deal too hard already," said Hugh sighing. "You should have seen the way father and mother looked at you last night when you were asleep on the sofa."

Fleda stifled her sigh, and went on.

"I am sure there are things that might be done--things for the booksellers--translating, or copying, or something,--I don't know exactly--I have heard of people's doing such things. I mean to write to

uncle Orrin and ask him. I am sure he can manage it for me."

"What were you writing the other night?" said Hugh suddenly.

"When?"

"The other night--when you were writing by the firelight? I saw your pencil scribbling away at a furious rate over the paper, and you kept your hand up carefully between me and your face, but I could see it was something very interesting. Ha?--" said Hugh, laughingly trying to get another view of Fleda's face which was again kept from him. "Send *that* to uncle Orrin, Fleda;--or shew it to me first and then I will tell you."

Fleda made no answer; and at the parsonage door Hugh left her.

Two or three wagons were standing there, but nobody to be seen. Fleda went up the steps and crossed the broad piazza, brown and unpainted, but picturesque still, and guided by the sound of tongues turned to the right where she found a large low room, the very centre of the stir. But the stir had not by any means reached the height yet. Not more than a dozen people were gathered. Here were aunt Syra and Mrs. Douglass, appointed a committee to receive and dispose the offerings as they were brought in.

"Why there is not much to be seen yet," said Fleda. "I did not know I was so early."

"Time enough," said Mrs. Douglass. "They'll come the thicker when they do come. Good-morning, Dr. Quackenboss!--I hope you're a going to give us something else besides a bow? and I won't take none of your physic, neither."

"I humbly submit," said the doctor graciously, "that nothing ought to be expected of gentlemen that--a--are so unhappy as to be alone; for they really--a--have nothing to give,--but themselves."

There was a shout of merriment.

"And suppos'n that's a gift that nobody wants?" said Mrs, Douglass's sharp eye and voice at once.

"In that case," said the doctor, "I really--Miss Ringgan, may I--a--may I relieve your hand of this fair burden?"

"It is not a very fair burden, sir," said Fleda, laughing and relinquishing her strawberries.

"Ah but, fair, you know, I mean,--we speak--in that sense----Mrs Douglass, here is by far the most elegant offering that your hands will have the honour of receiving this day."

"I hope so," said Mrs. Douglass, "or there won't be much to eat for the minister. Did you never take notice how elegant things somehow made folks grow poor?"

"I guess he'd as leave see something a little substantial," said aunt Syra.

"Well now," said the doctor, "here is Miss Ringgan, who is unquestionably--a--elegant!--and I am sure nobody will say that she--looks poor!"

In one sense, surely not! There could not be two opinions. But with all the fairness of health, and the flush which two or three feelings had brought to her cheeks, there was a look as if the workings of the mind had refined away a little of the strength of the physical frame, and as if growing poor in Mrs. Douglass's sense, that is, thin, might easily be the next step.

"What's your uncle going to give us, Fleda?" said aunt Syra.

But Fleda was saved replying; for Mrs. Douglass, who if she was sharp could be good-natured too, and had watched to see how Fleda took the double fire upon elegance and poverty, could beat no more trial of that

sweet gentle face. Without giving her time to answer she carried her off to see the things already stored in the closet, bidding the doctor over her shoulder "be off after his goods, whether he had got 'em or no."

There was certainly a promising beginning made for the future minister's comfort. One shelf was already completely stocked with pies, and another shewed a quantity of cake, and biscuits enough to last a good-sized family for several meals.

"That is always the way," said Mrs. Douglass;--"it's the strangest thing that folks has no sense! Now one-half o' them pies'll be dried up afore they can eat the rest;--'tain't much loss, for Mis' Prin sent 'em down, and if they are worth anything it's the first time anything ever come out of her house that was. Now look at them biscuit!"--

"How many are coming to eat them?" said Fleda.

"How?"

"How large a family has the minister?"

"He ha'n't a bit of a family! He ain't married."

"Not!"

At the grave way in which Mrs. Douglass faced around upon her and answered, and at the idea of a single mouth devoted to all that closetful, Fleda's gravity gave place to most uncontrollable merriment.

"No," said Mrs. Douglass, with a curious twist of her mouth but commanding herself,--"he ain't to be sure--not yet. He ha'n't any family but himself and some sort of a housekeeper, I suppose; they'll divide the house between 'em."

"And the biscuits, I hope," said Fleda. "But what will he do with all the other things, Mrs. Douglass?"

"Sell 'em if he don't want 'em," said Mrs. Douglass quizzically. "Shut up, Fleda, I forget who sent them biscuit--somebody that calculated to make a shew for a little, I reckon.--My sakes! I believe it was Mis' Springer herself!--she didn't hear me though," said Mrs. Douglass peeping out of the half-open door. "It's a good thing the world ain't all alike;--there's Mis' Plumfield--stop now, and I'll tell you all she sent;--that big jar of lard, there's as good as eighteen or twenty pound,--and that basket of eggs, I don't know how many there is,--and that cheese, a real fine one I'll be bound, she wouldn't pick out the worst in her dairy,--and Seth fetched down a hundred weight of corn meal and another of rye flour; now that's what I call doing things something like; if everybody else would keep up their end as well as they keep up their'n the world wouldn't be quite so one-sided as it is. I never see the time yet when I couldn't tell where to find Mis' Plumfield."

"No, nor anybody else," said Fleda looking happy.

"There's Mis' Silbert couldn't find nothing better to send than a kag of soap," Mrs. Douglass went on, seeming very much amused;--"I *was* beat when I saw that walk in! I should think she'd feel streaked to come here by and by and see it a standing between Mis' Plumfield's lard and Mis' Clavering's pork--that's a handsome kag of pork, ain't it? What's that man done with your strawberries?--I'll put 'em up here afore somebody takes a notion to 'em.--I'll let the minister know who he's got to thank for 'em," said she, winking at Fleda. "Where's Dr. Quackenboss?"

"Coming, ma'am!" sounded from the hall, and forthwith at the open door entered the doctor's head, simultaneously with a large cheese which he was rolling before him, the rest of the doctor's person being thrown into the background in consequence. A curious natural representation of a wheelbarrow, the wheel being the only artificial part.

"Oh!--that's you, doctor, is it?" said Mrs. Douglass.

"This is me, ma'am," said the doctor, rolling up to the closet door,--"this has the honour to be--a--myself,--bringing my service to the feet of Miss Ringgan."

"'Tain't very elegant," said the sharp lady.

Fleda thought if his service was at her feet, her feet should be somewhere else, and accordingly stepped quietly out of the way and went to one of the windows, from whence she could have a view both of the comers and the come; and by this time thoroughly in the spirit of the thing she used her eyes upon both with great amusement. People were constantly arriving now, in wagons and on foot; and stores of all kinds were most literally pouring in. Bags and even barrels of meal, flour, pork, and potatoes; strings of dried apples, *salt*, hams and beef; hops, pickles, vinegar, maple sugar and molasses; rolls of fresh butter, cheese, and eggs; cake, bread, and pies, without end. Mr. Penny, the storekeeper, sent a box of tea. Mr. Winegar, the carpenter, a new ox-sled. Earl Douglass brought a handsome axe-helve of his own fashioning; his wife a quantity of rolls of wool. Zan Finn carted a load of wood into the wood-shed, and Squire Thornton another. Home-made candles, custards, preserves, and smoked liver, came in a batch from two or three miles off up on the mountain. Half a dozen chairs from the factory man. Half a dozen brooms from the other store-keeper at the Deepwater settlement. A carpet for the best room from the ladies of the township, who had clubbed forces to furnish it; and a home-made concern it was, from the shears to the loom.

The room was full now, for every one after depositing his gift turned aside to see what others had brought and were bringing; and men and women, the young and old, had their several circles of gossip in various parts of the crowd. Apart from them all Fleda sat in her window, probably voted "elegant" by others than the doctor, for they vouchsafed her no more than a transitory attention and sheered off to find

something more congenial. She sat watching the people; smiling very often as some odd figure, or look, or some peculiar turn of expression or tone of voice, caught her ear or her eye.

Both ear and eye were fastened by a young countryman with a particularly fresh face whom she saw approaching the house. He came up on foot, carrying a single fowl slung at his back by a stick thrown across his shoulder, and without stirring hat or stick he came into the room and made his way through the crowd of people, looking to the one hand and the other evidently in a maze of doubt to whom he should deliver himself and his chicken, till brought up by Mrs. Douglass's sharp voice.

"Well, Philetus! what are you looking for?"

"Do, Mis' Douglass!"--it is impossible to express the abortive attempt at a bow which accompanied this salutation,--"I want to know if the minister 'll be in town to-day?"

"What do you want of him?"

"I don't want nothin' of him. I want to know if he'll be in town to-day?"

"Yes--I expect he'll be along directly--why, what then?"

"Cause I've got ten chickens for him here, and mother said they hadn't ought to be kept no longer, and if he wa'n't to hum I were to fetch 'em back, straight."

"Well he'll be here, so let's have 'em," said Mrs. Douglass biting her lips.

"What's become o' t'other one?" said Earl, as the young man's stick was brought round to the table;--"I guess you've lost it, ha'n't you?"

"My gracious!" was all Philetus's powers were equal to. Mrs. Douglass went off into fits which rendered her incapable of speaking and left the unlucky chicken-bearer to tell his story his own way, but all he brought

forth was "Du tell!--I *am* beat!--"

"Where's t'other one?" said Mrs. Douglass between paroxysms.

"Why I ha'n't done nothin' to it," said Philetus dismally,--there was teu on 'em afore I started, and I took and tied 'em together and hitched 'em onto the stick, and that one must ha' loosened itself off some way.--I believe the darned thing did it o' purpose."

"I guess your mother knowed that one wouldn't keep till it got here," said Mrs. Douglass.

The room was now all one shout, in the midst of which poor Philetus took himself off as speedily as possible. Before Fleda had dried her eyes her attention was taken by a lady and gentleman who had just got out of a vehicle of more than the ordinary pretension and were coming up to the door. The gentleman was young, the lady was not, both had a particularly amiable and pleasant appearance; but about the lady there was something that moved Fleda singularly and somehow touched the spring of old memories, which she felt stirring at the sight of her. As they neared the house she lost them--then they entered the room and came through it slowly, looking about them with an air of good-humoured amusement. Fleda's eye was fixed but her mind puzzled itself in vain to recover what in her experience had been connected with that fair and lady-like physiognomy and the bland smile that was overlooked by those acute eyes. The eyes met hers, and then seemed to reflect her doubt, for they remained as fixed as her own while the lady quickening her steps came up to her.

"I am sure," she said, holding out her hand, and with a gentle graciousness that was very agreeable,--"I am sure you are somebody I know. What is your name?"

"Fleda Ringgan."

"I thought so!" said the lady, now shaking her hand warmly and kissing her,--"I knew nobody could have been your mother but Amy Charlton! How like her you look!--Don't you know me? don't you remember Mrs. Evelyn?"

"Mrs. Evelyn!" said Fleda, the whole coming back to her at once.

"You remember me now?--How well I recollect you! and all that old time at Montepoole. Poor little creature that you were! and dear little creature, as I am sure you have been ever since. And how is your dear aunt Lucy?"

Fleda answered that she was well.

"I used to love her very much--that was before I knew you--before she went abroad. *We* have just got home--this spring; and now we are staying at Montepoole for a few days. I shall come and see her to-morrow--I knew you were somewhere in this region, but I did not know exactly where to find you; that was one reason why I came here to-day--I thought I might hear something of you. And where are your aunt Lucy's children? and how are they?"

"Hugh is at home," said Fleda, "and rather delicate--Charlton is in the army.'

"In the army. In Mexico!"--

"In Mexico he has been"--

"Your poor aunt Lucy!"

--"In Mexico he has been, but he is just coming home now--he has been wounded, and he is coming home to spend a long furlough."

"Coming home. That will make you all very happy. And Hugh is delicate--and how are you, love? you hardly look like a country-girl. Mr. Olmney!--" said Mrs. Evelyn looking round for her companion, who was

standing quietly a few steps off surveying the scene,--"Mr. Olmney!--I am going to do you a favour, sir, in introducing you to Miss Ringgan--a very old friend of mine. Mr. Olmney,--these are not exactly the apple-cheeks and *robustious* demonstrations we are taught to look for in country-land?"

This was said with a kind of sly funny enjoyment which took away everything disagreeable from the appeal; but Fleda conceived a favourable opinion of the person to whom it was made from the fact that he paid her no compliment and made no answer beyond a very pleasant smile.

"What is Mrs. Evelyn's definition of a *very old* friend?" said he with with another smile, as that lady moved off to take a more particular view of what she had come to see. "To judge by the specimen before me I should consider it very equivocal."

"Perhaps Mrs. Evelyn counts friendships by inheritance," said Fleda. "I think they ought to be counted so."

"'Thine own friend and thy father's friend forsake not'?" said the young man.

Fleda looked up and smiled a pleased answer.

"There is something very lovely in the faithfulness of tried friendship--and very uncommon."

"I know that it is uncommon only by hearsay," said Fleda, "I have so many good friends."

He was silent for an instant, possibly thinking there might be a reason for that unknown only to Fleda herself.

"Perhaps one must be in peculiar circumstances to realize it," he said sighing;--"circumstances that leave one of no importance to any one in the world.--But it is a kind lesson I--one learns to depend more on the

one friendship that can never disappoint."

Fleda's eyes again gave an answer of sympathy, for she thought from the shade that had come upon his face that these circumstances had probably been known to himself.

"This is rather an amusing scene," he remarked presently in a low tone.

"Very," said Fleda. "I have never seen such a one before."

"Nor I," said he. "It is a pleasant scene too, it is pleasant to see so many evidences of kindness and good feeling on the part of all these people."

"There is all the more shew of it, I suppose, to-day," said Fleda, "because we have a new minister coming;--they want to make a favourable impression."

"Does the old proverb of the 'new broom' hold good here too?" said he, smiling. "What's the name of your new minister?"

"I am not certain," said Fleda,--"there were two talked of--the last I heard was that it was an old Mr. Carey; but from what I hear this morning I suppose it must be the other--a Mr. Ollum, or some such queer name, I believe."

Fleda thought her hearer looked very much amused, and followed his eye into the room, where Mrs. Evelyn was going about in all quarters looking at everything, and finding occasion to enter into conversation with at least a quarter of the people who were present. Whatever she was saying it seemed at that moment to have something to do with them, for sundry eyes turned in their direction; and presently Dr. Quackenboss came up, with even more than common suavity of manner.

"I trust Miss Ringgan will do me the favour of making me acquainted with--a--with our future pastor!" said the doctor, looking however not at all at Miss Ringgan but straight at the pastor in question. "I have great pleasure in giving you the first welcome, sir,--or, I should say, rather the

second; since no doubt Miss Ringgan has been in advance of me. It is not un--a--appropriate, sir, for I may say we--a--divide the town between us. You are, I am sure, a worthy representative of Peter and Paul; and I am--a--a pupil of Esculapus, sir! You are the intellectual physician, and I am the external."

"I hope we shall both prove ourselves good workmen, sir," said the young minister, shaking the doctor's hand heartily.

"This is Dr. Quackenboss, Mr. Olmney," said Fleda, making a tremendous effort. But though she could see corresponding indications about her companion's eyes and mouth, she admired the kindness and self-command with which he listened to the doctor's civilities and answered them; expressing his grateful sense of the favours received not only from him but from others.

"O--a little to begin with," said the doctor, looking round upon the room, which would certainly have furnished *that* for fifty people;--"I hope we ain't done yet by considerable--But here is Miss Ringgan, Mr.--a--Ummin, that has brought you some of the fruits of her own garden, with her own fair hands--a basket of fine strawberries--which I am sure--a--will make you forget everything else!"

Mr. Olmney had the good-breeding not to look at Fleda, as he answered, "I am sure the spirit of kindness was the same in all, Dr. Quackenboss, and I trust not to forget that readily."

Others now came up; and Mr. Olmney was walked off to be "made acquainted" with all or with all the chief of his parishioners then and there assembled. Fleda watched him going about, shaking hands, talking and smiling, in all directions, with about as much freedom of locomotion as a fly in a spider's web; till at Mrs. Evelyn's approach the others fell off a little, and taking him by the arm she rescued him.

"My dear Mr. Olmney!" she whispered, with an intensely amused face,--"I shall have a vision of you every day for a month to come, sitting down to dinner with a rueful face to a whortleberry pie; for there are so many of them your conscience will not let you have anything else cooked--you cannot manage more than one a day."

"Pies!" said the young gentleman, as Mrs. Evelyn left talking to indulge her feelings in ecstatic quiet laughing,--"I have a horror of pies!"

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Evelyn nodding her head delightedly as she drew him towards the pantry,--"I know!--Come and see what is in store for you. You are to do penance for a month to come with tin pans of blackberry jam fringed with pie-crust--no, they can't be blackberries, they must be raspberries--the blackberries are not ripe yet. And you may sup upon cake and custards--unless you give the custards for the little pig out there--he will want something."

"A pig!--" said Mr. Olmney in a maze; Mrs. Evelyn again giving out in distress. "A pig?" said Mr. Olmney.

"Yes--a pig--a very little one," said Mrs. Evelyn convulsively. "I am sure he is hungry now!--"

They had reached the pantry, and Mr. Olmney's face was all that was wanting to Mrs. Evelyn's delight. How she smothered it, so that it should go no further than to distress his self-command, is a mystery known only to the initiated. Mrs. Douglass was forthwith called into council.

"Mrs. Douglass," said Mr. Olmney, "I feel very much inclined to play the host, and beg my friends to share with me some of these good things they have been so bountifully providing."

"He would enjoy them much more than he would alone, Mrs. Douglass," said Mrs. Evelyn, who still had hold of Mr. Olmney's arm, looking round to the lady with a most benign face.

"I reckon some of 'em would be past enjoying by the time he got to 'em, wouldn't they?" said the lady. "Well, they'll have to take 'em in their fingers, for our crockery ha'n't come yet--I shall have to jog Mr. Flatt's elbow--but hungry folks ain't curious."

"In their fingers, or any way, provided you have only a knife to cut them with," said Mr. Olmney, while Mrs. Evelyn squeezed his arm in secret mischief;--"and pray if we can muster two knives let us cut one of these cheeses, Mrs. Douglass."

And presently Fleda saw pieces of pie walking about in all directions supported by pieces of cheese. And then Mrs. Evelyn and Mr. Olmney came out from the pantry and came towards her, the latter bringing her with his own hands a portion in a tin pan. The two ladies sat down in the window together to eat and be amused.

"My dear Fleda, I hope you are hungry!" said Mrs. Evelyn, biting her pie Fleda could not help thinking with an air of good-humoured condescension.

"I am, ma'am," she said laughing.

"You look just as you used to do," Mrs. Evelyn went on earnestly.

"Do I?" said Fleda, privately thinking that the lady must have good eyes for features of resemblance.

"Except that you have more colour in your cheeks and more sparkles in your eyes. Dear little creature that you were! I want to make you know my children. Do you remember that Mr. and Mrs. Carleton that took such care of you at Montepoole?"

"Certainly I do!--very well."

"We saw them last winter--we were down at their country-place in----shire. They have a magnificent place there--everything you can think of to make life pleasant. We spent a week with them. My dear Fleda!--I

wish I could shew you that place! you never saw anything like it."

Fleda eat her pie.

"We have nothing like it in this country--of course--cannot have. One of those superb English country-seats is beyond even the imagination of an American."

"Nature has been as kind to us, hasn't she?" said Fleda.

"O yes, but such fortunes you know. Mr. Olmney, what do you think of those overgrown fortunes? I was speaking to Miss Ringgan just now of a gentleman who has forty thousand pounds a year income--sterling, sir;--forty thousand pounds a year sterling. Somebody says, you know, that 'he who has more than enough is a thief of the rights of his brother,'--what do you think?"

But Mr. Olmney's attention was at the moment forcibly called off by the "income" of a parishioner.

"I suppose," said Fleda, "his thievish character must depend entirely on the use he makes of what he has."

"I don't know," said Mrs. Evelyn shaking her head,--"I think the possession of great wealth is very hardening."

"To a fine nature?" said Fleda.

Mrs. Evelyn shook her head again, but did not seem to think it worth while to reply; and Fleda was trying the question in her own mind whether wealth or poverty might be the most hardening in its effects; when Mr. Olmney having succeeded in getting free again came and took his station beside them; and they had a particularly pleasant talk, which Fleda who had seen nobody in a great while enjoyed very much. They had several such talks in the course of the day; for though the distractions caused by Mr. Olmney's other friends were many and engrossing, he generally contrived in time to find his way back to their

window. Meanwhile Mrs. Evelyn had a great deal to say to Fleda and to hear from her; and left her at last under an engagement to spend the next day at the Pool.

Upon Mr. Olmney's departure with Mrs. Evelyn the attraction which had held the company together was broken, and they scattered fast. Fleda presently finding herself in the minority was glad to set out with Miss Anastasia Finn and her sister Lucy, who would leave her but very little way from her own door. But she had more company than she bargained for. Dr. Quackenboss was pleased to attach himself to their party, though his own shortest road certainly lay in another direction; and Fleda wondered what he had done with his wagon, which beyond a question must have brought the cheese in the morning. She edged herself out of the conversation as much as possible, and hoped it would prove so agreeable that he would not think of attending her home. In vain. When they made a stand at the cross-roads the doctor stood on her side.

"I hope, now you've made a commencement, you will come to see us again, Fleda," said Miss Lucy.

"What's the use of asking?" said her sister abruptly. "If she has a mind to she will, and if she ha'n't I am sure we don't want her."

They turned off.

"Those are excellent people," said the doctor when they were beyond hearing;--"really respectable!"

"Are they?" said Fleda.

"But your goodness does not look, I am sure, to find--a--Parisian graces in so remote a circle?"

"Certainly not!" said Fleda.

"We have had a genial day!" said the doctor, quitting the Finns.

"I don't know," said Fleda, permitting a little of her inward merriment to work off,--"I think it has been rather too hot."

"Yes," said the doctor, "the sun has been ardent; but I referred rather to the--a--to the warming of affections, and the pleasant exchange of intercourse on all sides which has taken place. How do you like our--a--the stranger?"

"Who, sir?"

"The new-comer,--this young Mr. Ummin?"

Fleda answered, but she hardly knew what, for she was musing whether the doctor would go away or come in. They reached the door, and Fleda invited him, with terrible effort after her voice; the doctor having just blandly offered an opinion upon the decided polish of Mr. Olmney's manners!

Chapter XXIII.

> Labour is light, where lore (quoth I) doth pay;
> (Saith he) light burthens heavy, if far borne.
>
> Drayton.

Fleda pushed open the parlour door and preceded her convoy, in a kind of tip-toe state of spirits. The first thing that met her eyes was her aunt in one of the few handsome silks which were almost her sole relic of past wardrobe prosperity, and with a face uncommonly happy and pretty; and the next instant she saw the explanation of this appearance in her cousin Charlton, a little palish, but looking better than she had ever seen him, and another gentleman of whom her eye took in only the general outlines of fashion and comfortable circumstances; now too strange to it

to go unnoted. In Fleda's usual mood her next movement would have been made with a demureness that would have looked like bashfulness. But the amusement and pleasure of the day just passed had for the moment set her spirits free from the burden that generally bound them down; and they were as elastic as her step as she came forward and presented to her aunt "Dr. Quackenboss,--and then turned to shake her cousin's hand."

"Charlton!--Where did you come from? We didn't expect you so soon."

"You are not sorry to see me, I hope?"

"Not at all--very glad;"--and then as her eye glanced towards the other new-comer Charlton presented to her "Mr. Thorn;" and Fleda's fancy made a sudden quick leap on the instant to the old hall at Montepoole and the shot dog. And then Dr. Quackenboss was presented, an introduction which Capt. Rossitur received coldly, and Mr. Thorn with something more than frigidity.

The doctor's elasticity however defied depression, especially in the presence of a silk dress and a military coat. Fleda presently saw that he was agonizing her uncle. Mrs. Rossitur had drawn close to her son. Fleda was left to take care of the other visitor. The young men had both seemed more struck at the vision presented to them than she had been on her part. She thought neither of them was very ready to speak to her.

"I did not know," said Mr. Thorn softly, "what reason I had to thank Rossitur for bringing me home with him to-night--he promised me a supper and a welcome,--but I find he did not tell me the half of my entertainment."

"That was wise in him," said Fleda;--"the half that is not expected is always worth a great deal more than the other."

"In this case, most assuredly," said Thorn bowing, and Fleda was sure not knowing what to make of her.

"Have you been in Mexico too, Mr. Thorn?"

"Not I!--that's an entertainment I beg to decline. I never felt inclined to barter an arm for a shoulder-knot, or to abridge my usual means of locomotion for the privilege of riding on parade--or selling oneself for a name--Peter Schlemil's selling his shadow I can understand; but this is really lessening oneself that one's shadow may grow the larger."

"But you were in the army?" said Fleda.

"Yes--It wasn't my doing. There is a time, you know, when one must please the old folks--I grew old enough and wise enough to cut loose from the army before I had gained or lost much by it."

He did not understand the displeased gravity of Fleda's face, and went on insinuatingly;--

"Unless I have lost what Charlton has gained--something I did not know hung upon the decision--Perhaps you think a man is taller for having iron heels to his boots?"

"I do not measure a man by his inches," said Fleda.

"Then you have no particular predilection for shooting men?"

"I have no predilection for shooting anything, sir."

"Then I am safe!" said he, with an arrogant little air of satisfaction. "I was born under an indolent star, but I confess to you, privately, of the two I would rather gather my harvests with the sickle than the sword. How does your uncle find it?"

"Find what, sir?"

"The worship of Ceres?--I remember he used to be devoted to Apollo and the Muses."

"Are they rival deities?"

"Why--I have been rather of the opinion that they were too many for one house to hold," said Thorn glancing at Mr. Rossitur. "But perhays the Graces manage to reconcile them!"

"Did you ever hear of the Graces getting supper?" said Fleda. "Because Ceres sometimes sets them at that work. Uncle Rolf," she added as she passed him,--"Mr. Thorn is inquiring after Apollo--will you set him right, while I do the same for the tablecloth?"

Her uncle looked from her sparkling eyes to the rather puzzled expression of his guest's face.

"I was only asking your lovely niece," said Mr. Thorn coming down from his stilts,--"how you liked this country life?"

Dr. Quackenboss bowed, probably in approbation of the epithet.

"Well sir--what information did she give you on the subject?"

"Left me in the dark, sir, with a vague hope that you would enlighten me."

"I trust Mr. Rossitur can give a favourable report?" said the doctor benignly.

But Mr. Rossitur's frowning brow looked very little like it.

"What do you say to our country life, sir?"

"It's a confounded life, sir," said Mr. Rossitur, taking a pamphlet from the table to fold and twist as he spoke,--"it is a confounded life; for the head and the hands must either live separate, or the head must do no other work but wait upon the hands. It is an alternative of loss and waste, sir."

"The alternative seems to be of--a--limited application," said the doctor, as Fleda, having found that Hugh and Barby had been beforehand with her, now came back to the company. "I am sure this lady would not give such a testimony."

"About what?" said Fleda, colouring under the fire of so many eyes.

"The blighting influence of Ceres' sceptre," said Mr. Thorn.

"This country life," said her uncle;--"do you like it, Fleda?"

"You know, uncle," said she cheerfully, "I was always of the old Douglasses' mind--I like better to hear the lark sing than the mouse squeak."

"Is that one of Earl Douglass's sayings?" said the doctor.

"Yes sir," said Fleda with quivering lips,--"but not the one you know--an older man."

"Ah!" said the doctor intelligently. "Mr. Rossitur,--speaking of hands,--I have employed the Irish very much of late years--they are as good as one can have, if you do not want a head."

"That is to say,--if you have a head," said Thorn.

"Exactly" said the doctor, all abroad,--"and when there are not too many of them together. I had enough of that, sir, some years ago when a multitude of them were employed on the public works. The Irish were in a state of mutilation, sir, all through the country."

"Ah!" said Thorn,--"had the military been at work upon them?"

"No sir, but I wish they had, I am sure; it would have been for the peace of the town. There were hundreds of them. We were in want of an army."

"Of surgeons,--I should think," said Thorn.

Fleda saw the doctor's dubious air and her uncle's compressed lips; and commanding herself, with even a look of something like displeasure she quitted her seat by Mr. Thorn and called the doctor to the window to look at a cluster of rose acacias just then in their glory. He admired, and she expatiated, till she hoped everybody but herself had forgotten what they had been talking about. But they had no sooner returned to their seats than Thorn began again.

"The Irish in your town are not in the same mutilated state now, I suppose, sir?"

"No sir, no," said the doctor;--"there are much fewer of them to break each other's bones. It was all among themselves, sir."

"The country is full of foreigners," said Mr. Rossitur with praiseworthy gravity.

"Yes sir," said Dr. Quackenboss thoughtfully;--"we shall have none of our ancestors left in a short time, if they go on as they are doing."

Fleda was beaten from the field, and rushing into the breakfast-room astonished Hugh by seizing hold of him and indulging in a most prolonged and unbounded laugh. She did not shew herself again till the company came in to supper; but then she was found as grave as Minerva. She devoted herself particularly to the care and entertainment of Dr. Quackenboss till he took leave; nor could Thorn get another chance to talk to her through all the evening.

When he and Rossitur were at last in their rooms Fleda told her story.

"You don't know how pleasant it was, aunt Lucy--how much I enjoyed it--seeing and talking to somebody again. Mrs. Evelyn was so very kind."

"I am very glad, my darling," said Mrs. Rossitur, stroking away the hair from the forehead that was bent down towards her;--"I am glad you had it to-day and I am glad you will have it again to-morrow."

"You will have it too, aunt Lucy. Mrs. Evelyn will be here in the morning--she said so."

"I shall not see her."

"Why? Now aunt Lucy!--you will."

"I have nothing in the world to see her in--I cannot."

"You have this?"

"For the morning? A rich French silk?--It would be absurd. No, no,--it would be better to wear my old merino than that."

"But you will have to dress in the morning for Mr. Thorn?--he will be here to breakfast."

"I shall not come down to breakfast.--Don't look so, love!--I can't help it."

"Why was that calico got for me and not for you?" said Fleda, bitterly.

"A sixpenny calico," said Mrs. Rossitur smiling,--"it would be hard if you could not have so much as that, love."

"And you will not see Mrs. Evelyn and her daughters at all!--and I was thinking that it would do you so much good!--"

Mrs. Rossitur drew her face a little nearer and kissed it, over and over.

"It will do you good, my darling--that is what I care for much more."

"It will not do me half as much," said Fleda sighing.

Her spirits were in their old place again; no more a tip-toe to-night. The short light of pleasure was overcast. She went to bed feeling very quiet indeed; and received Mrs. Evelyn and excused her aunt the next day, almost wishing the lady had not been as good as her word. But though in

the same mood she set off with her to drive to Montepoole, it could not stand the bright influences with which she found herself surrounded. She came home again at night with dancing spirits.

It was some days before Capt. Rossitur began at all to comprehend the change which had come upon his family. One morning Fleda and Hugh having finished their morning's work were in the breakfast-room waiting for the rest of the family, when Charlton made his appearance, with the cloud on his brow which had been lately gathering.

"Where is the paper?" said he. "I haven't seen a paper since I have been here."

"You mustn't expect to find Mexican luxuries in Queechy, Capt. Rossitur," said Fleda pleasantly.--"Look at these roses, and don't ask me for papers!"

He did look a minute at the dish of flowers she was arranging for the breakfast table, and at the rival freshness and sweetness of the face that hung over them.

"You don't mean to say you live without a paper?"

'Look at these roses, and don't ask me for papers!'
"Look at these roses, and don't ask me for papers!"

"Well, it's astonishing how many things people can live without," said Fleda rather dreamily, intent upon settling an uneasy rose that would topple over.

"I wish you'd answer me really," said Charlton. "Don't you take a paper here?"

"We would take one thankfully if it would be so good as to come; but seriously, Charlton, we haven't any," she said changing her tone.

"And have you done without one all through the war?"

"No--we used to borrow one from a kind neighbour once in a while, to make sure, as Mr. Thorn says, that you had not bartered an arm for a shoulder-knot."

"You never looked to see whether I was killed in the meanwhile, I suppose?"

"No--never," said Fleda gravely, as she took her place on a low seat in the corner,--"I always knew you were safe before I touched the paper."

"What do you mean?"

"I am not an enemy, Charlton," said Fleda laughing. "I mean that I used to make aunt Miriam look over the accounts before I did."

Charlton walked up and down the room for a little while in sullen silence; and then brought up before Fleda.

"What are you doing?"

Fleda looked up,--a glance that as sweetly and brightly as possible half asked half bade him be silent and ask no questions.

"What *are* you doing?" he repeated.

"I am putting a patch on my shoe."

His look expressed more indignation than anything else.

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say," said Fleda, going on with her work.

"What in the name of all the cobblers in the land do you do it for?"

"Because I prefer it to having a hole in my shoe; which would give me the additional trouble of mending my stockings."

Charlton muttered an impatient sentence, of which Fleda only understood that "the devil" was in it, and then desired to know if whole shoes would not answer the purpose as well as either holes or patches?

"Quite--if I had them," said Fleda, giving him another glance which, with all its gravity and sweetness, carried also a little gentle reproach.

"But do you know," said he after standing still a minute looking at her, "that any cobbler in the country would do what you are doing much better for sixpence?"

"I am quite aware of that," said Fleda, stitching away.

"Your hands are not strong enough for that work!"

Fleda again smiled at him, in the very dint of giving a hard push to her needle; a smile that would have witched him into good humour if he had not been determinately in a cloud and proof against everything. It only admonished him that he could not safely remain in the region of sunbeams; and he walked up and down the room furiously again. The sudden ceasing of his footsteps presently made her look up.

"What have you got there?--Oh, Charlton, don't!--please put that down!--I didn't know I had left them there.--They were a little wet and I laid them on the chair to dry."

"What do you call this?" said he, not minding her request.

"They are only my gardening gloves--I thought I had put them away."

"Gloves!" said he, pulling at them disdainfully,--"why here are two--one within the other--what's that for?"

"It's an old-fashioned way of mending matters,--two friends covering each other's deficiencies. The inner pair are too thin alone, and the outer ones have holes that are past cobbling."

"Are we going to have any breakfast to-day?" said he flinging the gloves down. "You are very late!"

"No," said Fleda quietly,--"it is not time for aunt Lucy to be down yet."

"Don't you have breakfast before nine o'clock?"

"Yes--by half-past eight generally."

"Strange way of getting along on a farm!--Well I can't wait--I promised Thorn I would meet him this morning--Barby!--I wish you would bring me my boots!--"

Fleda made two springs,--one to touch Charlton's mouth, the other to close the door of communication with the kitchen.

"Well!--what is the matter?--can't I have them?"

"Yes, yes, but ask me for what you want. You mustn't call upon Barby in that fashion."

"Why not? is she too good to be spoken to? What is she in the kitchen for?"

"She wouldn't be in the kitchen long if we were to speak to her in that way," said Fleda. "I suppose she would as soon put your boots on for you as fetch and carry them. I'll see about it."

"It seems to me Fleda rules the house," remarked Capt. Rossitur when she had left the room.

"Well who should rule it?" said Hugh.

"Not she!"

"I don't think she does," said Hugh; "but if she did, I am sure it could not be in better hands."

"It shouldn't be in her hands at all. But I have noticed since I have been here that she takes the arrangement of almost everything. My mother seems to have nothing to do in her own family."

"I wonder what the family or anybody in it would do without Fleda!" said Hugh, his gentle eyes quite firing with indignation. "You had better know more before you speak, Charlton."

"What is there for me to know?"

"Fleda does everything."

"So I say; and that is what I don't like."

"How little you know what you are talking about!" said Hugh. "I can tell you she is the life of the house, almost literally; we should have had little enough to live upon this summer if it had not been for her."

"What do you mean?"--impatiently enough.

"Fleda--if it had not been for her gardening and management. She has taken care of the garden these two years and sold I can't tell you how much from it. Mr. Sweet, the hotel-man at the Pool, takes all we can give him."

"How much does her 'taking care of the garden' amount to?"

"It amounts to all the planting and nearly all the other work, after the first digging,--by far the greater part of it."

Charlton walked up and down a few turns in most unsatisfied silence.

"How does she get the things to Montepoole?"

"I take them."

"You!--When?"

"I ride with them there before breakfast. Fleda is up very early to gather them."

"You have not been there this morning?"

"Yes."

"With what?"

"Peas and strawberries."

"And Fleda picked them?"

"Yes--with some help from Barby and me."

"That glove of hers was wringing wet."

"Yes, with the pea-vines, and strawberries too; you know they get so loaded with dew. O Fleda gets more than her gloves wet. But she does not mind anything she does for father and mother."

"Humph!--And does she get enough when all is done to pay for the trouble?"

"I don't know," said Hugh rather sadly. "*She* thinks so. It is no trifle."

"Which?--the pay or the trouble?"

"Both. But I meant the pay. Why she made ten dollars last year from the asparagus beds alone, and I don't know how much more this year."

"Ten dollars!--The devil!"

"Why?"

"Have you come to counting your dollars by the tens?"

"We have counted our sixpences so a good while," said Hugh quietly.

Charlton strode about the room again in much perturbation. Then came in Fleda, looking as bright as if dollars had been counted by the thousand, and bearing his boots.

"What on earth did you do that for?" said he angrily. "I could have gone for them myself."

"No harm done," said Fleda lightly,--"only I have got something else instead of the thanks I expected."

"I can't conceive," said he, sitting down and sulkily drawing on his foot-gear, "why this piece of punctiliousness should have made any more difficulty about bringing me my boots than about blacking them."

A sly glance of intelligence, which Charlton was quick enough to detect, passed between Fleda and Hugh. His eye carried its question from one to the other. Fleda's gravity gave way.

"Don't look at me so, Charlton," said she laughing;--"I can't help it, you are so excessively comical!--I recommend that you go out upon the grass-plat before the door and turn round two or three times."

"Will you have the goodness to explain yourself? Who *did* black these boots?"

"Never pry into the secrets of families," said Fleda. "Hugh and I have a couple of convenient little fairies in our service that do things *unknownst*."

"I blacked them, Charlton," said Hugh.

Capt. Rossitur gave his slippers a fling that carried them clean into the corner of the room.

"I will see," he said rising, "whether some other service cannot be had more satisfactory than that of fairies!"

"Now Charlton," said Fleda with a sudden change of manner, coming to him and laying her hand most gently on his arm,--"please don't speak about these things before uncle Rolf or your mother--Please do not!--Charlton!--It would only do a great deal of harm and do no good."

She looked up in his face, but he would not meet her pleading eye, and shook off her hand.

"I don't need to be instructed how to speak to my father and mother; and I am not one of the household that has submitted itself to your direction."

Fleda sat down on her bench and was quiet, but with a lip that trembled a little and eyes that let fall one or two witnesses against him. Charlton did not see them, and he knew better than to meet Hugh's look of reproach. But for all that there was a certain consciousness that hung about the neck of his purpose and kept it down in spite of him; and it was not till breakfast was half over that his ill-humour could make head against this gentle thwarting and cast it off. For so long the meal was excessively dull. Hugh and Fleda had their own thoughts; Charlton was biting his resolution into every slice of bread and butter that occupied him; and Mr. Rossitur's face looked like anything but encouraging an inquiry into his affairs. Since his son's arrival he had been most uncommonly gloomy; and Mrs. Rossitur's face was never in sunshine when his was in shade.

"You'll have a warm day of it at the mill, Hugh," said Fleda, by way of saying something to break the dismal monotony of knives and forks.

"Does that mill make much?" suddenly inquired Charlton.

"It has made a new bridge to the brook, literally," said Fleda gayly; "for it has sawn out the boards; and you know you mustn't speak evil of what carries you over the water."

"Does that mill pay for the working?" said Charlton, turning with the dryest disregard from her interference and addressing himself determinately to his father.

"What do you mean? It does not work gratuitously," answered Mr. Rossitur, with at least equal dryness.

"But, I mean, are the profits of it enough to pay for the loss of Hugh's time?"

"If Hugh judges they are not, he is at liberty to let it alone."

"My time is not lost," said Hugh; "I don't know what I should do with it."

"I don't know what we should do without the mill," said Mrs. Rossitur.

That gave Charlton an unlucky opening.

"Has the prospect of farming disappointed you, father?"

"What is the prospect of your company?" said Mr. Rossitur, swallowing half an egg before he replied.

"A very limited prospect!" said Charlton,--"if you mean the one that went with me. Not a fifth part of them left."

"What have you done with them?"

"Shewed them where the balls were flying, sir, and did my best to shew them the thickest of it."

"Is it necessary to shew it to us too?" said Fleda.

"I believe there are not twenty living that followed me into Mexico," he went on, as if he had not heard her.

"Was all that havoc made in one engagement?" said Mrs. Rossitur, whose cheek had turned pale.

"Yes, mother--in the course of a few minutes."

"I wonder what would pay for *that* loss!" said Fleda indignantly.

"Why, the point was gained! and it did not signify what the cost was so we did that. My poor boys were a small part of it."

"What point do you mean?"

"I mean the point we had in view, which was taking the place."

"And what was the advantage of gaining the place."

"Pshaw!--The advantage of doing one's duty."

"But what made it duty?" said Hugh.

"Orders."

"I grant you," said Fleda,--"I understand that--but bear with me, Charlton,--what was the advantage to the army or the country?"

"The advantage of great honour if we succeeded, and avoiding the shame of failure."

"Is that all?" said Hugh.

"All!" said Charlton.

"Glory must be a precious thing when other men's lives are so cheap to buy it," said Fleda.

"We did not risk theirs without our own," said Charlton colouring.

"No,--but still theirs were risked for you."

"Not at all;--why this is absurd! you are saying that the whole war was for nothing."

"What better than nothing was the end of it? We paid Mexico for the territory she yielded to us, didn't we, uncle Rolf?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"Twenty millions, I believe."

"And what do you suppose the war has cost?"

"Hum--I don't know,--a hundred."

"A hundred million! besides--how much besides!--And don't you suppose, uncle Rolf, that for half of that sum Mexico would have sold us peaceably what she did in the end?"

"It is possible--I think it is very likely."

"What was the fruit of the war, Capt. Rossitur?"

"Why, a great deal of honour to the army and the nation at large."

"Honour again! But granting that the army gained it, which they certainly did, for one I do not feel very proud of the nation's share."

"Why they are one" said Charlton impatiently.

"In an unjust war"

"It was *not* an unjust war!"

"That's what you call a knock-downer," said Fleda laughing. "But I confess myself so simple as to have agreed with Seth Plumfield, when I heard him and Lucas disputing about it last winter, that it was a shame to a great and strong nation like ours to display its might in crushing a weak one."

"But they drew it upon themselves. *They* began hostilities."

"There is a diversity of opinion about that."

"Not in heads that have two grains of information."

"I beg your pardon. Mrs. Evelyn and Judge Sensible were talking over that very question the other day at Montepoole; and he made it quite clear to my mind that we were the aggressors." "Judge Sensible is a fool!" said Mr. Rossitur.

"Very well!" said Fleda laughing;--"but as I do not wish to be comprehended in the same class, will you shew me how he was wrong, uncle?"

This drew on a discussion of some length, to which Fleda listened with profound attention, long after her aunt had ceased to listen at all, and Hugh was thoughtful, and Charlton disgusted. At the end of it Mr. Rossitur left the table and the room, and Fleda subsiding turned to her cold coffee-cup.

"I didn't know you ever cared anything about politics before," said Hugh.

"Didn't you?" said Fleda smiling, "You do me injustice."

Their eyes met for a second, with a most appreciating smile on his part; and then he too went off to his work. There was a few minutes' silent pause after that.

"Mother," said Charlton looking up and bursting forth, "what is all this about the mill and the farm?--Is not the farm doing well?"

"I am afraid not very well," said Mrs. Rossitur, gently.

"What is the difficulty?"

"Why, your father has let it to a man by the name of Didenhover, and I am afraid he is not faithful; it does not seem to bring us in what it ought."

"What did he do that for?"

"He was wearied with the annoyances he had to endure before, and thought it would be better and more profitable to have somebody else take the whole charge and management. He did not know Didenhover's character at the time."

"Engaged him without knowing him!"

Fleda was the only third party present, and Charlton unwittingly allowing himself to meet her eye received a look of keen displeasure that he was not prepared for.

"That is not like him," he said in a much moderated tone. "But you must be changed too, mother, or you would not endure such anomalous service in your kitchen."

"There are a great many changes, dear Charlton," said his mother, looking at him with such a face of sorrowful sweetness and patience that his mouth was stopped. Fleda left the room.

"And have you really nothing to depend upon but that child's strawberries and Hugh's wood-saw?" he said in the tone he ought to have used from the beginning.

"Little else."

Charlton stifled two or three sentences that rose to his lips, and began to walk up and down the room again. His mother sat musing by the tea-board still, softly clinking her spoon against the edge of her tea-cup.

"She has grown up very pretty," he remarked after a pause.

"Pretty!" said Mrs. Rossitur.

"Why?"

"No one that has seen much of Fleda would ever describe her by that name."

Charlton had the candour to think he had seen something of her that morning.

"Poor child!" said Mrs. Rossitur sadly,--"I can't bear to think of her spending her life as she is doing--wearing herself out, I know, sometimes--and buried alive."

"Buried!" said Charlton in his turn.

"Yes--without any of the advantages and opportunities she ought to have. I can't bear to think of it. And yet how should I ever live without her!"--said Mrs. Rossitur, leaning her face upon her hands. "And if she were known she would not be mine long. But it grieves me to have her go without her music that she is so fond of, and the books she wants--she and Hugh have gone from end to end of every volume there is in the house, I believe, in every language, except Greek."

"Well, she looks pretty happy and contented, mother."

"I don't know!" said Mrs. Rossitur shaking her head.

"Isn't she happy?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Rossitur again;--"she has a spirit that is happy in doing her duty, or anything for those she loves; but I see her sometimes wearing a look that pains me exceedingly. I am afraid the way she lives and the changes in our affairs have worn upon her more than we know of--she feels doubly everything that touches me, or Hugh, or your father. She is a gentle spirit!--"

"She seems to me not to want character," said Charlton.

"Character! I don't know who has so much. She has at least fifty times as much character as I have. And energy. She is admirable at managing people--she knows how to influence them somehow so that everybody does what she wants."

"And who influences her?" said Charlton.

"Who influences her? Everybody that she loves. Who has the most influence over her, do you mean?--I am sure I don't know--Hugh, if anybody,--but *she* is rather the moving spirit of the household."

Capt. Rossitur resolved that he would be an exception to her rule.

He forgot, however, for some reason or other, to sound his father any more on the subject of mismanagement. His thoughts indeed were more pleasantly taken up.

Chapter XXIV.

> My lord Sebastian,
> The truth you speak doth lack some gentleness
> And time to speak it in: you rub the sore.
> When you should bring the plaster.
>
> Tempest.

The Evelyns spent several weeks at the Pool; and both mother and daughters conceiving a great affection for Fleda kept her in their company as much as possible For those weeks Fleda had enough of gayety. She was constantly spending the day with them at the Pool, or going on some party of pleasure, or taking quiet sensible walks and rides with them along or with only one or two more of the most rational and agreeable people that the place could command. And even Mrs. Rossitur

was persuaded, more times than one, to put herself in her plainest remaining French silk and entertain the whole party, with the addition of one or two of Charlton's friends, at her Queechy farm-house.

Fleda enjoyed it all with the quick spring of a mind habitually bent to the patient fulfilment of duty and habitually under the pressure of rather sobering thoughts. It was a needed and very useful refreshment. Charlton's being at home gave her the full good of the opportunity more than would else have been possible. He was her constant attendant, driving her to and from the Pool, and finding as much to call him there as she had; for besides the Evelyns his friend Thorn abode there all this time. The only drawback to Fleda's pleasure as she drove off from Queechy would be the leaving Hugh plodding away at his saw-mill. She used to nod and wave to him as they went by, and almost feel that she ought not to go on and enjoy herself while he was tending that wearisome machinery all day long. Still she went on and enjoyed herself; but the mere thought of his patient smile as she passed would have kept her from too much elation of spirits, if there had been any danger. There never was any.

"That's a lovely little cousin of yours," said Thorn one evening, when he and Rossitur, on horseback, were leisurely making their way along the up and down road between Montepoole and Queechy.

"She is not particularly little," said Rossitur with a dryness that somehow lacked any savour of gratification.

"She is of a most fair stature," said Thorn;--"I did not mean anything against that,--but there are characters to which one gives instinctively a softening appellative."

"Are there?" said Charlton.

"Yes. She is a lovely little creature."

"She is not to compare to one of those girls we have left behind us at Montepoole," said Charlton.

"Hum--well perhaps you are right; but which girl do you mean?--for I profess I don't know."

"The second of Mrs. Evelyn's daughters--the auburn-haired one."

"Miss Constance, eh?" said Thorn. "In what isn't the other one to be compared to her?"

"In anything! Nobody would ever think of looking at her in the same room?"

"Why not?" said Thorn coolly.

"I don't know why not," said Charlton, "except that she has not a tithe of her beauty. That's a superb girl!"

For a matter of twenty yards Mr. Thorn went softly humming a tune to himself and leisurely switching the flies off his horse.

"Well,"--said he,--"there's no accounting for tastes--

'I ask no red and white
To make up my delight,
No odd becoming graces,
Black eyes, or little know-not-what in faces.'"

"What *do* you want then?" said Charlton, half laughing at him, though his friend was perfectly grave.

"A cool eye, and a mind in it."

"A cool eye!" said Rossitur.

"Yes. Those we have left behind us are arrant will-o'the-wisps--dancing fires--no more."

"I can tell you there is fire sometimes in the other eyes," said Charlton.

"Very likely," said his friend composedly,--"I could have guessed as much; but that is a fire you may warm yourself at; no eternal phosphorescence;--it is the leaping up of an internal fire, that only shews itself upon occasion."

"I suppose you know what you are talking about," said Charlton, "but I can't follow you into the region of volcanos. Constance Evelyn has superb eyes. It is uncommon to see a light blue so brilliant."

"I would rather trust a sick head to the handling of the lovely lady than the superb one, at a venture."

"I thought you never had a sick head," said Charlton.

"That is lucky for me, as the hands do not happen to be at my service. But no imagination could put Miss Constance in Desdemona's place, when Othello complained of his headache,--you remember, Charlton,--

"Faith, that's with watching--'twill away again-- Let me but bind this handkerchief about it hard.'"

Thorn gave the intonation truly and admirably.

"Fleda never said anything so soft as that," said Charlton.

"No?"

"No."

"You speak--well, but *soft*!--do you know what you are talking about there?"

"Not very well," said Charlton. "I only remember there was nothing soft about Othello,--what you quoted of his wife just now seemed to me to smack of that quality."

"I forgive your memory," said Thorn, "or else I certainly would not forgive you. If there is a fair creation in all Shakespeare it is Desdemona, and if there is a pretty combination on earth that nearly matches it, I believe it is that one."

"What one?"

"Your pretty cousin."

Charlton was silent.

"It is generous in me to undertake her defence," Thorn went on, "for she bestows as little of her fair countenance upon me as she can well help. But try as she will, she cannot be so repellant as she is attractive."

Charlton pushed his horse into a brisker pace not favourable to conversation; and they rode forward in silence, till in descending the hill below Deepwater they came within view of Hugh's workplace, the saw mill. Charlton suddenly drew bridle.

"There she is."

"And who is with her?" said Thorn. "As I live!--our friend--what's his name?--who has lost all his ancestors.--And who is the other?"

"My brother," said Charlton.

"I don't mean your brother, Capt. Rossitur," said Thorn throwing himself off his horse.

He joined the party, who were just leaving the mill to go down towards the house. Very much at his leisure Charlton dismounted and came after him.

"I have brought Charlton safe home, Miss Ringgan," said Thorn, who leading his horse had quietly secured a position at her side.

"What's the matter?" said Fleda laughing. "Couldn't he bring himself home?"

"I don't know what's the matter, but he's been uncommonly dumpish--we've been as near as possible to quarrelling for half a dozen miles back."

"We have been--a--more agreeably employed," said Dr. Quackenboss looking round at him with a face that was a concentration of affability.

"I make no doubt of it, sir; I trust we shall bring no unharmonious interruption.--If I may change somebody else's words," he added more low to Fleda,--"disdain itself must convert to courtesy in your presence."

"I am sorry disdain should live to pay me a compliment," said Fleda. "Mr. Thorn, may I introduce to you Mr. Olmney?"

Mr. Thorn honoured the introduction with perfect civility, but then fell back to his former position and slightly lowered tone.

"Are you then a sworn foe to compliments?"

"I was never so fiercely attacked by them as to give me any occasion."

"I should be very sorry to furnish the occasion,--but what's the harm in them, Miss Ringgan?"

"Chiefly a want of agreeableness."

"Of agreeableness!--Pardon me--I hope you will be so good as to give me the rationale of that?"

"I am of Miss Edgeworth's opinion, sir," said Fleda blushing, "that a lady may always judge of the estimation in which she is held by the conversation which is addressed to her."

"And you judge compliments to be a doubtful indication of esteem?"

"I am sure you do not need information on that point, sir."

"As to your opinion, or the matter of fact?" said he somewhat keenly.

"As to the matter of fact," said Fleda, with a glance both simple and acute in its expression.

"I will not venture to say a word," said Thorn smiling. "Protestations would certainly fall flat at the gates where *les douces paroles* cannot enter. But do you know this is picking a man's pocket of all his silver pennies and obliging him to produce his gold."

"That *would* be a hard measure upon a good many people," said Fleda laughing. "But they're not driven to that. There's plenty of small change left."

"You certainly do not deal in the coin you condemn," said Thorn bowing. "But you will remember that none call for gold but those who can exchange it, and the number of them is few. In a world where cowrie passes current a man may be excused for not throwing about his guineas."

"I wish you'd throw about a few for our entertainment," said Charlton, who was close behind. "I haven't seen a yellow-boy in a good while."

"A proof that your eyes are not jaundiced," said his friend without turning his head, "whatever may be the case with you otherwise. Is he out of humour with the country life you like so well, Miss Ringgan, or has he left his domestic tastes in Mexico? How do you think he likes Queechy?"

"You might as well ask myself," said Charlton.

"How do you think he likes Queechy, Miss Ringgan?"

"I am afraid something after the fashion of Touchstone," said Fleda laughing;--"he thinks that 'in respect of itself it is a good life; but in respect that it is a shepherd's life it is naught. In respect that it is solitary, he likes it very well; but in respect that it is private, it is a very vile life. Now in respect it is in the fields, it pleaseth him well; but in respect it is not in the court, it is tedious.'"

"There's a guinea for you, Capt. Rossitur," said his friend. "Do you know out of what mint?"

"It doesn't bear the head of Socrates," said Charlton.

"'Hast no philosophy in thee,' Charlton?" said Fleda laughing back at him.

"Has not Queechy--a--the honour of your approbation, Capt. Rossitur?" said the doctor.

"Certainly sir--I have no doubt of its being a very fine country."

"Only he has imbibed some doubts whether happiness be an indigenous crop," said Thorn.

"Undoubtedly," said the doctor blandly,--"to one who has roamed over the plains of Mexico, Queechy must seem rather--a--rather flat place."

"If he could lose sight of the hills," said Thorn.

"Undoubtedly, sir, undoubtedly," said the doctor; "they are a marked feature in the landscape, and do much to relieve--a--the charge of sameness."

"Luckily," said Mr. Olmney smiling, "happiness is not a thing of circumstance; it depends on a man's self."

"I used to think so," said Thorn;--"that is what I have always subscribed to; but I am afraid I could not live in this region and find it so long."

"What an evening!" said Fleda. "Queechy is doing its best to deserve our regards under this light. Mr. Olmney, did you ever notice the beautiful curve of the hills in that hollow where the sun sets?"

"I do notice it now" he said.

"It is exquisite!" said the doctor. "Capt. Rossitur, do you observe, sir?--in that hollow where the sun sets?--"

Capt. Rossitur's eye made a very speedy transition from the hills to Fleda, who had fallen back a little to take Hugh's arm and placing herself between him and Mr. Olmney was giving her attention undividedly to the latter. And to him she talked perseveringly, of the mountains, the country, and the people, till they reached the courtyard gate. Mr. Olmney then passed on. So did the doctor, though invited to tarry, averring that the sun had gone down behind the firmament and he had something to attend to at home.

"You will come in, Thorn," said Charlton.

"Why--I had intended returning,--but the sun has gone down indeed, and as our friend says there is no chance of our seeing him again I may as well go in and take what comfort is to be had in the circumstances. Gentle Euphrosyne, doth it not become the Graces to laugh?"

"They always ask leave, sir," said Fleda hesitating.

"A most Grace-ful answer, though it does not smile upon me," said Thorn.

"I am sorry, sir," said Fleda, smiling now, "that you have so many silver pennies to dispose of we shall never get at the gold."

"I will do my very best," said he.

So he did, and made himself agreeable that evening to every one of the circle; though Fleda's sole reason for liking to see him come in had been that she was glad of everything that served to keep Charlton's attention from home subjects. She saw sometimes the threatening of a cloud that troubled her.

But the Evelyns and Thorn and everybody else whom they knew left the Pool at last, before Charlton, who was sufficiently well again, had near run out his furlough; and then the cloud which had only shewed itself by turns during all those weeks gathered and settled determinately upon his brow.

He had long ago supplied the want of a newspaper. One evening in September the family were sitting in the room where they had had tea, for the benefit of the fire, when Barby pushed open the kitchen door and came in.

"Fleda will you let me have one of the last papers? I've a notion to look at it."

Fleda rose and went to rummaging in the cupboards.

"You can have it again in a little while," said Barby considerately.

The paper was found and Miss Elster went out with it.

"What an unendurable piece of ill-manners that woman is!" said Charlton.

"She has no idea of being ill-mannered, I assure you," said Fleda.

His voice was like a brewing storm--hers was so clear and soft that it made a lull in spite of him. But he began again.

"There is no necessity for submitting to impertinence. I never would do it."

"I have no doubt you never will," said his father. "Unless you can't help yourself."

"Is there any good reason, sir, why you should not have proper servants in the house?"

"A very good reason," said Mr. Rossitur. "Fleda would be in despair."

"Is there none beside that?" said Charlton dryly.

"None--except a trifling one," Mr. Rossitur answered in the same tone.

"We cannot afford it, dear Charlton," said his mother softly.

There was a silence, during which Fleda moralized on the ways people take to make themselves uncomfortable.

"Does that man--to whom you let the farm--does he do his duty?"

"I am not the keeper of his conscience."

"I am afraid it would be a small charge to any one," said Fleda.

"But are you the keeper of the gains you ought to have from him? does he deal fairly by you?"

"May I ask first what interest it is of yours?"

"It is my interest, sir, because I come home and find the family living upon the exertions of Hugh and Fleda and find them growing thin and pale under it."

"You, at least, are free from all pains of the kind, Capt. Rossitur."

"Don't listen to him, uncle Rolf!" said Fleda going round to her uncle, and making as she passed a most warning impression upon Charlton's arm,--"don't mind what he says--that young gentleman has been among the Mexican ladies till he has lost an eye for a really proper complexion.

Look at me!--do I look pale and thin?--I was paid a most brilliant compliment the other day upon my roses--Uncle, don't listen to him!--he hasn't been in a decent humour since the Evelyns went away."

She knelt down before him and laid her hands upon his and looked up in his face to bring all her plea; the plea of most winning sweetness of entreaty in features yet flushed and trembling. His own did not unbend as he gazed at her, but he gave her a silent answer in a pressure of the hands that went straight from his heart to hers. Fleda's eye turned to Charlton appealingly.

"Is it necessary," he repeated, "that that child and this boy should spend their days in labour to keep the family alive?"

"If it were," replied Mr. Rossitur, "I am very willing that their exertions should cease. For my own part I would quite as lief be out of the world as in it."

"Charlton!--how can you!--" said Fleda, half beside herself,--you should know of what you speak or be silent!--Uncle, don't mind him! he is talking wildly--my work does me good."

"You do not understand yourself," said Charlton obstinately;--"it is more than you ought to do, and I know my mother thinks so too."

She knelt down before him.
She knelt down before him.

"Well!" said Mr. Rossitur,--"it seems there is an agreement in my own family to bring me to the bar--get up, Fleda,--let us hear all the charges to be brought against me, at once, and then pass sentence. What have your mother and you agreed upon, Charlton?--go on!"

Mrs. Rossitur, now beyond speech, left the room, weeping even aloud. Hugh followed her. Fleda wrestled with her agitation for a minute or two, and then got up and put both arms round her uncle's neck.

"Don't talk so, dear uncle Rolf!--you make us very unhappy--aunt Lucy did not mean any such thing--it is only Charlton's nonsense. Do go and tell her you don't think so,--you have broken her heart by what you said;--do go, uncle Rolf!--do go and make her happy again! Forget it all!--Charlton did not know what he was saying--won't you go, dear uncle Rolf?--"

The words were spoken between bursts of tears that utterly overcame her, though they did not hinder the utmost caressingness of manner. It seemed at first spent upon a rock. Mr. Rossitur stood like a man that did not care what happened or what became of him; dumb and unrelenting; suffering her sweet words and imploring tears, with no attempt to answer the one or stay the other. But he could not hold out against her beseeching. He was no match for it. He returned at last heartily the pressure of her arms, and unable to give her any other answer kissed her two or three times, such kisses as are charged with the heart's whole message; and disengaging himself left the room.

For a minute after he was gone Fleda cried excessively; and Charlton, now alone with her, felt as if he had not a particle of self-respect left to stand upon. One such agony would do her more harm than whole weeks of labour and weariness. He was too vexed and ashamed of himself to be able to utter a word, but when she recovered a little and was leaving the room he stood still by the door in an attitude that seemed to ask her to speak a word to him.

"I am sure, Charlton," she said gently, "you will be sorry to-morrow for what you have done."

"I am sorry now," he said. But she passed out without saying anything more.

Capt. Rossitur passed the night in unmitigated vexation with himself. But his repentance could not have been very genuine, since his most painful thought was, what Fleda must think of him.

He was somewhat reassured at breakfast to find no traces of the evening's storm; indeed the moral atmosphere seemed rather clearer and purer than common. His own face was the only one which had an unusual shade upon it. There was no difference in anybody's manner towards himself; and there was even a particularly gentle and kind pleasantness about Fleda, intended, he knew, to soothe and put to rest any movings of self-reproach he might feel. It somehow missed of its aim and made him feel worse; and after on his part a very silent meal he quitted the house and took himself and his discontent to the woods.

Whatever effect they had upon him, it was the middle of the morning before he came back again. He found Fleda alone in the breakfast-room, sewing; and for the first time noticed the look his mother had spoken of; a look not of sadness, but rather of settled patient gravity; the more painful to see because it could only have been wrought by long-acting causes, and might be as slow to do away as it must have been to bring. Charlton's displeasure with the existing state of things had revived as his remorse died away, and that quiet face did not have a quieting effect upon him.

"What on earth is going on!" he began rather abruptly as soon as he entered the room. "What horrible cookery is on foot?"

"I venture to recommend that you do not inquire," said Fleda. "It was set on foot in the kitchen and it has walked in here. If you open the window it will walk out."

"But you will be cold?"

"Never mind--in that case I will walk out too, into the kitchen."

"Into the thick of it!--No--I will try some other way of relief. This is unendurable!"

Fleda looked, but made no other remonstrance, and not heeding the look Mr. Charlton walked out into the kitchen, shutting the door behind him.

"Barby," said he, "you have got something cooking here that is very disagreeable in the other room."

"Is it?" said Barby. "I reckoned it would all fly up chimney I guess the draught ain't so strong as I thought it was."

"But I tell you it fills the house!"

"Well, it'll have to a spell yet," said Barby, "'cause if it didn't, you see, Capt. Rossitur, there'd be nothing to fill Fleda's chickens with."

"Chickens!--where's all the corn in the land?"

"It's some place besides in our barn," said Barby. "All last year's is out, and Mr. Didenhover ha'n't fetched any of this year's home; so I made a bargain with 'em they shouldn't starve as long as they'd eat boiled pursley."

"What do you give them?"

"'Most everything--they ain't particler now-a days--chunks o' cabbage, and scarcity, and pun'kin and that--all the sass that ain't wanted."

"And do they eat that?"

"Eat it!" said Barby. "They don't know how to thank me for't!"

"But it ought to be done out of doors," said Charlton, coming back from a kind of maze in which he had been listening to her. "It is unendurable!"

"Then I guess you'll have to go some place where you won't know it," said Barby;--"that's the most likely plan I can hit upon; for it'll have to stay on till it's ready."

Charlton went back into the other room really down-hearted, and stood watching the play of Fleda's fingers.

"Is it come to this!" he said at length. "Is it possible that you are obliged to go without such a trifle as the miserable supply of food your fowls want!" "That's a small matter!" said Fleda, speaking lightly though she smothered a sigh. "We have been obliged to do without more than that."

"What is the reason?"

"Why this man Didenhover is a rogue I suspect, and he manages to spirit away all the profits that should come to uncle Rolf's hands--I don't know how. We have lived almost entirely upon the mill for some time."

"And has my father been doing nothing all this while?"

"Nothing on the farm."

"And what of anything else?"

"I don't know," said Fleda, speaking with evident unwillingness. "But surely, Charlton, he knows his own business best. It is not our affair."

"He is mad!" said Charlton, violently striding up and down the floor.

"No," said Fleda with equal gentleness and sadness--"he is only unhappy;--I understand it all--he has had no spirit to take hold of anything ever since we came here."

"Spirit!" said Charlton;--"he ought to have worked off his fingers to their joints before he let you do as you have been doing!"

"Don't say so!" said Fleda, looking even pale in her eagerness--"don't think so, Charlton! it isn't right. We cannot tell what he may have had to trouble him--I know he has suffered and does suffer a great deal.--Do not speak again about anything as you did last night!--Oh," said Fleda, now shedding bitter tears,--"this is the worst of growing poor! the difficulty of keeping up the old kindness and sympathy and care for each other!--"

"I am sure it does not work so upon you," said Charlton in an altered voice.

"Promise me, dear Charlton," said Fleda looking up after a moment and drying her eyes again, "promise me you will not say any more about these things! I am sure it pains uncle Rolf more than you think. Say you will not,--for your mother's sake!"

"I will not, Fleda--for your sake. I would not give *you* any more trouble to bear. Promise me; that you will be more careful of yourself in future."

"O there is no danger about me," said Fleda with a faint smile and taking up her work again.

"Who are you making shirts for?" said Charlton after a pause.

"Hugh."

"You do everything for Hugh, don't you?"

"Little enough. Not half so much as he does for me."

"Is he up at the mill to-day?"

"He is always there," said Fleda sighing.

There was another silence.

"Charlton," said Fleda looking up with a face of the loveliest insinuation.--"isn't there something *you* might do to help us a little?"

"I will help you garden, Fleda, with pleasure."

"I would rather you should help somebody else," said she, still looking at him.

"What, Hugh?--You would have me go and work at the mill for him, I suppose!"

"Don't be angry with me, Charlton, for suggesting it," said Fleda looking down again.

"Angry!"--said he. "But is that what you would have me do?"

"Not unless you like,--I didn't know but you might take his place once in a while for a little, to give him a rest,--"

"And suppose some of the people from Montepoole that know me should come by? What are you thinking of?" said he in a tone that certainly justified Fleda's deprecation.

"Well!"--said Fleda in a kind of choked voice,--"there is a strange rule of honour in vogue in the world!"

"Why should I help Hugh rather than anybody else?"

"He is killing himself!--" said Fleda, letting her work fall and hardly speaking the words through thick tears. Her head was down and they came fast. Charlton stood abashed for a minute.

"You sha'n't do so, Fleda," said he gently, endeavouring to raise her,--"you have tired yourself with this miserable work!--Come to the window--you have got low-spirited, but I am sure without reason about Hugh,--but you shall set me about what you will--You are right, I dare say, and I am wrong; but don't make me think myself a brute, and I will do anything you please."

He had raised her up and made her lean upon him. Fleda wiped her eyes and tried to smile.

"I will do anything that will please you, Fleda."

"It is not to please *me*,--" she answered meekly.

"I would not have spoken a word last night if I had known it would have grieved you so."

"I am sorry you should have none but so poor a reason for doing right," said Fleda gently.

"Upon my word, I think you are about as good reason as anybody need have," said Charlton.

She put her hand upon his arm and looked up,--such a look of pure rebuke as carried to his mind the full force of the words she did not speak,--'Who art thou that carest for a worm which shall die, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker!'--Charlton's eyes fell. Fleda turned gently away and began to mend the fire. He stood watching her for a little.

"What do you think of me, Fleda?" he said at length.

"A little wrong-headed," answered Fleda, giving him a glance and a smile. "I don't think you are very bad."

"If you will go with me, Fleda, you shall make what you please of me!"

He spoke half in jest, half in earnest, and did not himself know at the moment which way he wished Fleda to take it. But she had no notion of any depth in his words.

"A hopeless task!" she answered lightly, shaking her head, as she got down on her knees to blow the fire;--"I am afraid it is too much for me. I have been trying to mend you ever since you came, and I cannot see the slightest change for the better!"

"Where is the bellows?" said Charlton in another tone.

"It has expired--its last breath," said Fleda. "In other words, it has lost its nose."

"Well, look here," said he laughing and pulling her away,--"you will stand a fair chance of losing your face if you put it in the fire. You sha'n't do it. Come and shew me where to find the scattered parts of that old wind instrument and I will see if it cannot be persuaded to play again."

Chapter XXV.

I dinna ken what I should want
  If I could get but a man.

Scotch Ballad.

Capt. Rossitur did no work at the saw-mill. But Fleda's words had not fallen to the ground. He began to shew care for his fellow-creatures in getting the bellows mended; his next step was to look to his gun; and from that time so long as he staid the table was plentifully supplied with all kinds of game the season and the country could furnish. Wild ducks and partridges banished pork and bacon even from memory; and Fleda joyfully declared she would not see another omelette again till she was in distress.

While Charlton was still at home came a very urgent invitation from Mrs. Evelyn that Fleda should pay them a long visit in New York, bidding her care for no want of preparation but come and make it there. Fleda demurred, however, on that very score. But before her answer was written, another missive came from Dr. Gregory, not asking so much as demanding her presence, and enclosing a fifty-dollar bill, for which he said he would hold her responsible till she had paid him with,--not her own hands,--but her own lips. There was no withstanding the manner of this entreaty. Fleda packed up some of Mrs. Rossitur's laid-by silks, to be refreshed with an air of fashion, and set off with Charlton at the end of his furlough.

To her simple spirit of enjoyment the weeks ran fast; and all manner of novelties and kindnesses helped them on. It was a time of cloudless pleasure. But those she had left thought it long. She wrote them how delightfully she kept house for the old doctor, whose wife had long been dead, and how joyously she and the Evelyns made time fly. And every

pleasure she felt awoke almost as strong a throb in the hearts at home. But they missed her, as Barby said, "dreadfully;" and she was most dearly welcomed when she came back. It was just before New Year.

For half an hour there was most gladsome use of eyes and tongues. Fleda had a great deal to tell them.

"How well--how well you are looking, dear Fleda!" said her aunt for the third or fourth time.

"That's more than lean say for you and Hugh, aunt Lucy. What have you been doing to yourself?"

"Nothing new," they said, as her eye went from one to the other.

"I guess you have wanted me!" said Fleda, shaking her head as she kissed them both again.

"I guess we have," said Hugh, "but don't fancy we have grown thin upon the want."

"But where's uncle Rolf? you didn't tell me."

"He is gone to look after those lands in Michigan."

"In Michigan!--When did he go?"

"Very soon after you."

"And you didn't let me know!--O why didn't you? How lonely you must have been."

"Let you know indeed!" said Mrs. Rossitur, wrapping her in her arms again;--"Hugh and I counted every week that you staid with more and pleasure each one."

"I understand!" said Fleda laughing under her aunt's kisses. "Well I am glad I am at home again to take care of you. I see you can't get along without me!"

"People have been very kind, Fleda," said Hugh.

"Have they?"

"Yes--thinking we were desolate I suppose. There has been no end to aunt Miriam's goodness and pleasantness."

"O aunt Miriam, always!" said Fleda. "And Seth."

"Catherine Douglass has been up twice to ask if her mother could do anything for us; and Mrs. Douglass sent us once a rabbit and once a quantity of wild pigeons that Earl had shot. Mother and I lived upon pigeons for I don't know how long. Barby wouldn't eat 'em--she said she liked pork better; but I believe she did it on purpose."

"Like enough," said Fleda, smiling, from her aunt's arms where she still lay.

"And Seth has sent you plenty of your favourite hickory nuts, very fine ones; and I gathered butternuts enough for you near home."

"Everything is for me," said Fleda. "Well, the first thing I do shall be to make some butternut candy for you. You won't despise that, Mr. Hugh?"--

Hugh smiled at her, and went on.

"And your friend Mr. Olmney has sent us a corn-basket full of the superbest apples you ever saw. He has one tree of the finest in Queechy, he says."

"*My* friend!" said Fleda, colouring a little.

"Well I don't know whose he is if he isn't yours," said Hugh. "And even the Finns sent us some fish that their brother had caught, because, they said, they had more than they wanted. And Dr. Quackenboss sent us a goose and a turkey. We didn't like to keep them, but we were afraid if we sent them back it would not be understood."

"Send them back!" said Fleda. "That would never do! All Queechy would have rung with it."

"Well, we didn't," said Hugh. "But so we sent one of them to Barby's old mother for Christmas."

"Poor Dr. Quackenboss!" said Fleda. "That man has as near as possible killed me two or three times. As for the others, they are certainly the oddest of all the finny tribes. I must go out and see Barby for a minute."

It was a good many minutes, however, before she could get free to do any such thing.

"You ha'n't lost no flesh," said Barby shaking hands with her anew. "What did they think of Queechy keep, down in York?"

"I don't know--I didn't ask them," said Fleda. "How goes the world with you, Barby?"

"I'm mighty glad you are come home, Fleda," said Barby lowering her voice.

"Why?" said Fleda in a like tone.

"I guess I ain't all that's glad of it," Miss Elster went on, with a glance of her bright eye.

"I guess not," said Fleda reddening a little;--"but what is the matter?"

"There's two of our friends ha'n't made us but one visit a piece since--oh, ever since some time in October!"

"Well never mind the people," said Fleda. "Tell me what you were going to say."

"And Mr. Olmney," said Barby not minding her, "he's took and sent us a great basket chock full of apples. Now wa'n't that smart of him, when he knowed there wa'n't no one here that cared about 'em?"

"They are a particularly fine kind," said Fleda.

"Did you hear about the goose and turkey?"

"Yes," said Fleda laughing.

"The doctor thinks he has done the thing just about right this time, I s'pect. He had ought to take out a patent right for his invention. He'd feel spry if he knowed who eat one on 'em."

"Never mind the doctor, Barby. Was this what you wanted to see me for?"

"No," said Barby changing her tone. "I'd give something it was. I've been all but at my wit's end; for you know Mis' Rossitur ain't no hand about anything--I couldn't say a word to her--and ever since he went away we have been just winding ourselves up. I thought I should clear out, when Mis' Rossitur said maybe you wa'n't a coming till next week."

"But what is it Barby? what is wrong?"

"There ha'n't been anything right, to my notions, for a long spell," said Barby, wringing out her dishcloth hard and flinging it down to give herself uninterruptedly to talk;--"but now you see, Didenhover nor none of the men never comes near the house to do a chore; and there ain't wood to last three days; and Hugh ain't fit to cut it if it was piled up in the yard; and there ain't the first stick of it out of the woods yet."

Fleda sat down and looked very thoughtfully into the fire.

"He had ought to ha' seen to it afore he went away, but he ha'n't done it, and there it is."

"Why who takes care of the cows?" said Fleda.

"O never mind the cows," said Barby;--"they ain't suffering; I wish we was as well off as they be;--but I guess when he went away he made a hole in our pockets for to mend his'n. I don't say he hadn't ought to ha' done it, but we've been pretty short ever sen, Fleda--we're in the last bushel of flour, and there ain't but a handful of corn meal, and mighty little sugar, white or brown.--I did say something to Mis' Rossitur, but all the good it did was to spile her appetite, I s'pose; and if there's grain in the floor there ain't nobody to carry it to mill,--nor to thresh it,--nor a team to draw it, fur's I know."

"Hugh cannot cut wood!" said Fleda;--"nor drive to mill either, in this weather."

"I could go to mill," said Barby, "now you're to hum, but that's only the beginning; and it's no use to try to do everything--flesh and blood must stop somewhere.--"

"No indeed!" said Fleda. "We must have somebody immediately."

"That's what I had fixed upon," said Barby. "If you could get hold o' some young feller that wa'n't sot up with an idee that he was a grown man and too big to be told, I'd just clap to and fix that little room up stairs for him and give him his victuals here, and we'd have some good of him; instead o' having him streakin' off just at the minute when he'd ought to be along."

"Who is there we could get, Barby?"

"I don't know," said Barby; "but they say there is never a nick that there ain't a jog some place; so I guess it can be made out. I asked Mis' Plumfield, but she didn't know anybody that was out of work; nor Seth

Plumfield. I'll tell you who does,--that is, if there *is* anybody,--Mis' Douglass. She keeps hold of one end of 'most everybody's affairs, I tell her. Anyhow she's a good hand to go to."

"I'll go there at once," said Fleda. "Do you know anything about making maple sugar, Barby?"

"That's the very thing!" exclaimed Barby ecstatically. "There's lots o' sugar maples on the farm and it's murder to let them go to loss; and they ha'n't done us a speck o' good ever since I come here. And in your grandfather's time they used to make barrels and barrels. You and me and Hugh, and somebody else we'll have, we could clap to and make as much sugar and molasses in a week as would last us till spring come round again. There's no sense into it! All we'd want would be to borrow a team some place. I had all that in my head long ago. If we could see the last of that man Didenhover oncet, I'd take hold of the plough myself and see if I couldn't make a living out of it! I don't believe the world would go now, Fleda, if it wa'n't for women. I never see three men yet that didn't try me more than they were worth."

"Patience, Barby!" said Fleda smiling. "Let us take things quietly."

"Well I declare I'm beat, to see how you take 'em," said Barby, looking at her lovingly.

"Don't you know why, Barby?"

"I s'pose I do," said Barby her face softening still more,--"or I can guess."

"Because I know that all these troublesome things will be managed in the best way and by my best friend, and I know that he will let none of them hurt me. I am sure of it--isn't that enough to keep me quiet?"

Fleda's eyes were filling and Barby looked away from them.

"Well it beats me," she said taking up her dishcloth again, "why *you* should have anything to trouble you. I can understand wicked folks being plagued, but I can't see the sense of the good ones."

"Troubles are to make good people better, Barby."

"Well," said Barby with a very odd mixture of real feeling and seeming want of it,--"it's a wonder I never got religion, for I will say that all the decent people I ever see were of that kind!--Mis' Rossitur ain't though, is she?"

"No," said Fleda, a pang crossing her at the thought that all her aunt's loveliness must tell directly and heavily in this case to lighten religion's testimony. It was that thought and no other which saddened her brow as she went back into the other room.

"Troubles already!" said Mrs. Rossitur. "You will be sorry you have come back to them, dear."

"No indeed!" said Fleda brightly; "I am very glad I have come home. We will try and manage the troubles, aunt Lucy."

There was no doing anything that day, but the very next afternoon Fleda and Hugh walked down through the snow to Mrs. Douglass's. It was a long walk and a cold one and the snow was heavy; but the pleasure of being together made up for it all. It was a bright walk, too, in spite of everything.

In a most thrifty-looking well-painted farm-house lived Mrs. Douglass.

"Why 'tain't you, is it?" she said when she opened the door,--"Catharine said it was, and I said I guessed it wa'n't, for I reckoned you had made up your mind not to come and see me at all.--How do you do?"

The last sentence in the tone of hearty and earnest hospitality. Fleda made her excuses.

"Ay, ay,--I can understand all that just as well as if you said it. I know how much it means too. Take off your hat."

Fleda said she could not stay, and explained her business.

"So you ha'n't come to see me after all. Well now take off your hat, 'cause I won't have anything to say to you till you do. I'll give you supper right away."

"But I have left my aunt alone, Mrs. Douglass;--and the afternoons are so short now it would be dark before we could get home."

"Serve her right for not coming along! and you sha'n't walk home in the dark, for Earl will harness the team and carry you home like a streak--the horses have nothing to do--Come, you sha'n't go."

And as Mrs. Douglass laid violent hands on her bonnet Fleda thought best to submit. She was presently rewarded with the promise of the very person she wanted--a boy, or young man, then in Earl Douglass's employ; but his wife said "she guessed he'd give him up to her;" and what his wife said, Fleda knew, Earl Douglass was in the habit of making good.

"There ain't enough to do to keep him busy," said Mrs. Douglass. "I told Earl he made me more work than he saved; but he's hung on till now."

"What sort of a boy is he, Mrs. Douglass?"

"He ain't a steel trap. I tell you beforehand," said the lady, with one of her sharp intelligent glances,--"he don't know which way to go till you shew him; but he's a clever enough kind of a chap--he don't mean no harm. I guess he'll do for what you want."

"Is he to be trusted?"

"Trust him with anything but a knife and fork," said she, with another look and shake of the head. "He has no idea but what everything on the supper-table is meant to be eaten straight off. I would keep two such men as my husband as soon as I would Philetus."

"Philetus!" said Fleda,--"the person that brought the chicken and thought he had brought two?"

"You've hit it," said Mrs. Douglass. "Now you know him. How do you like our new minister?"

"We are all very much pleased with him."

"He's very good-looking, don't you think so?"

"A very pleasant face."

"I ha'n't seen him much yet except in church; but those that know say he is very agreeable in the house."

"Truly, I dare say," answered Fleda, for Mrs. Douglass's face looked for her testimony.

"But I think he looks as if he was beating his brains out there among his books--I tell him he is getting the blues, living in that big house by himself."

"Do you manage to do all your work without help, Mrs. Douglass?" said Fleda, knowing that the question was "in order" and that the affirmative answer was not counted a thing to be ashamed of.

"Well I guess I'll know good reason," said Mrs. Douglass complacently, "before I'll have any help to spoil *my* work. Come along, and I'll let you see whether I want one."

Fleda went, very willingly, to be shewn all Mrs. Douglass's household arrangements and clever contrivances, of her own or her husband's devising, for lessening or facilitating labour. The lady was proud, and had some reason to be, of the very superb order and neatness of each part and detail. No corner or closet that might not be laid open fearlessly to a visitor's inspection. Miss Catharine was then directed to open her piano and amuse Fleda with it while her mother performed her promise of getting an early supper; a command grateful to one or two of the party, for Catharine had been carrying on all this while a most stately tête-à-tête with Hugh which neither had any wish to prolong. So Fleda filled up the time good-naturedly with thrumming over the two or three bits of her childish music that she could recall, till Mr. Douglass came in and they were summoned to sit down to supper; which Mrs. Douglass introduced by telling her guests "they must take what they could get, for she had made fresh bread and cake and pies for them two or three times, and she wa'n't a going to do it again."

Her table was abundantly spread however, and with most exquisite neatness, and everything was of excellent quality, saving only certain matters which call for a free hand in the use of material. Fleda thought the pumpkin pies must have been made from that vaunted stock which is said to want no eggs nor sugar, and the cakes she told Mrs. Rossitur afterwards would have been good if half the flour had been left out and the other ingredients doubled. The deficiency in one kind however was made up by superabundance in another; the table was stocked with such wealth of crockery that one could not imagine any poverty in what was to go upon it. Fleda hardly knew how to marshal the confusion of plates which grouped themselves around her cup and saucer, and none of them might be dispensed with. There was one set of little glass dishes for one kind of sweetmeat, another set of ditto for another kind; an army of tiny plates to receive and shield the tablecloth from the dislodged cups of tea, saucers being the conventional drinking vessels; and there were the standard bread and butter plates, which besides their proper charge of bread and butter and beef and cheese, were expected, Fleda knew, to

receive a portion of every kind of cake that might happen to be on the table. It was a very different thing however from Miss Anastasia's tea-table or that of Miss Flora Quackenboss. Fleda enjoyed the whole time without difficulty.

Mr. Douglass readily agreed to the transfer of Philetus's services.

"He's a good boy!" said Earl,--"he's a good boy; he's as good a kind of a boy as you need to have. He wants tellin'; most boys want tellin'; but he'll do when he *is* told, and he means to do right."

"How long do you expect your uncle will be gone?" said Mrs. Douglass.

"I do not know," said Fleda. "Have you heard from him since he left?"

"Not since I came home," said Fleda. "Mr. Douglass, what is the first thing to be done about the maple trees in the sugar season?"

"Why, you calculate to try makin' sugar in the spring?"

"Perhaps--at any rate I should like to know about it."

"Well I should think you would," said Earl, "and it's easy done--there ain't nothin' easier, when you know the right way to set to work about it; and there's a fine lot of sugar trees on the old farm--I recollect of them sugar trees as long ago as when I was a boy--I've helped to work them afore now, but there's a good many years since--has made me a leetle older--but the first thing you want is a man and a team, to go about and empty the buckets--the buckets must be emptied every day, and then carry it down to the house."

"Yes, I know," said Fleda, "but what is the first thing to be done to the trees?"

"Why la! 'tain't much to do to the trees--all you've got to do is to take an axe and chip a bit out and stick a chip a leetle way into the cut for to dreen the sap, and set a trough under, and then go on to the next one,

and so on;--you may make one or two cuts in the south side of the tree, and one or two cuts in the north side, if the tree's big enough, and if it ain't, only make one or two cuts in the south side of the tree; and for the sap to run good it had ought to be that kind o' weather when it freezes in the day and thaws by night;--I would say!--when it friz in the night and thaws in the day; the sap runs more bountifully in that kind o' weather."

It needed little from Fleda to keep Mr. Douglass at the maple trees till supper was ended; and then as it was already sundown he went to harness the sleigh.

It was a comfortable one, and the horses if not very handsome nor bright-curried were well fed and had good heart to their work. A two mile drive was before them, and with no troublesome tongues or eyes to claim her attention Fleda enjoyed it fully. In the soft clear winter twilight when heaven and earth mingle so gently, and the stars look forth brighter and cheerfuller than ever at another time, they slid along over the fine roads, too swiftly, towards home; and Fleda's thoughts as easily and swiftly slipped away from Mr. Douglass and maple sugar and Philetus and an unfilled wood-yard and an empty flour-barrel, and revelled in the pure ether. A dark rising ground covered with wood sometimes rose between her and the western horizon; and then a long stretch of snow, only less pure, would leave free view of its unearthly white light, dimmed by no exhalation, a gentle, mute, but not the less eloquent, witness to Earth of what Heaven must be.

But the sleigh stopped at the gate, and Fleda's musings came home.

"Good night!" said Earl, in reply to their thanks and adieus;--"'tain't anything to thank a body for--let me know when you're a goin' into the sugar making and I'll come and help you."

"How sweet a pleasant message may make an unmusical tongue," said Fleda, as she and Hugh made their way up to the house.

"We had a stupid enough afternoon," said Hugh.

"But the ride home was worth it all!"

Chapter XXVI.

'Tis merry, 'tis merry, in good green wood,
  So blithe Lady Alice is singing;
On the beech's pride, and the oak's brown side,
  Lord Richard's axe is ringing.

Lady of the Lake.

Philetus came, and was inducted into office and the little room immediately; and Fleda felt herself eased of a burden. Barby reported him stout and willing, and he proved it by what seemed a perverted inclination for bearing the most enormous logs of wood he could find into the kitchen.

"He will hurt himself!" said Fleda.

"I'll protect him!--against anything but buckwheat batter," said Barby with a grave shake of her head. "Lazy folks takes the most pains, I tell him. But it would be good to have some more ground, Fleda, for Philetus says he don't care for no dinner when he has griddles to breakfast, and there ain't anything much cheaper than that."

"Aunt Lucy, have you any change in the house?" said Fleda that same day.

"There isn't but three and sixpence," said Mrs. Rossitur with a pained conscious look. "What is wanting, dear?"

"Only candles--Barby has suddenly found we are out, and she won't have any more made before to-morrow. Never mind!"

"There is only that," repeated Mrs. Rossitur. "Hugh has a little money due to him from last summer, but he hasn't been able to get it yet. You may take that, dear."

"No," said Fleda,--"we mustn't. We might want it more."

"We can sit in the dark for once," said Hugh, "and try to make an uncommon display of what Dr. Quackenboss calls 'sociality.'"

"No," said Fleda, who had stood busily thinking,--"I am going to send Philetus down to the post-office for the paper, and when it comes I am not to be balked of reading it--I've made up my mind! We'll go right off into the woods and get some pine knots, Hugh--come! They make a lovely light. You get us a couple of baskets and the hatchet--I wish we had two--and I'll be ready in no time. That'll do!"

It is to be noticed that Charlton had provided against any future deficiency of news in his family. Fleda skipped away and in five minutes returned arrayed for the expedition, in her usual out-of-door working trim, namely,--an old dark merino cloak, almost black, the effect of which was continued by the edge of an old dark mousseline below, and rendered decidedly striking by the contrast of a large whitish yarn shawl worn over it; the whole crowned with a little close-fitting hood made of some old silver-grey silk, shaped tight to the head, without any bow or furbelow to break the outline. But such a face within side of it! She came almost dancing into the room.

"This is Miss Ringgan!--as she appeared when she was going to see the pine trees. Hugh, don't you wish you had a picture of me?"

"I have got a tolerable picture of you, somewhere," said Hugh.

"This is somebody very different from the Miss Ringgan that went to see Mrs. Evelyn, I can tell you," Fleda went on gayly.

"Do you know, aunt Lucy, I have made up my mind that my visit to New York was a dream, and the dream is nicely folded away with my silk dresses. Now I must go tell that precious Philetus about the post-office--I am *so* comforted, aunt Lucy, whenever I see that fellow staggering into the house under a great log of wood! I have not heard anything in a long time so pleasant as the ringing strokes of his axe in the yard. Isn't life made up of little things!"

"Why don't you put a better pair of shoes on?"

"Can't afford it, Mrs. Rossitur! You are extravagant!"

"Go and put on my India-rubbers."

"No ma'am!--the rocks would cut them to pieces. I have brought my mind down to--my shoes."

"It isn't safe, Fleda; you might see somebody."

"Well ma'am!--But I tell you I am not going to see anybody but the chick-a-dees and the snow-birds, and there is great simplicity of manners prevailing among them."

The shoes were changed, and Hugh and Fleda set forth, lingering awhile however to give a new edge to their hatchet, Fleda turning the grindstone. They mounted then the apple-orchard hill and went a little distance along the edge of the table-land before striking off into the woods. They had stood still a minute to look over the little white valley to the snow-dressed woodland beyond.

"This is better than New York, Hugh," said Fleda.

"I am very glad to hear you say that," said another voice. Fleda turned and started a little to see Mr. Olmney at her side, and congratulated herself instantly on her shoes.

"Mrs. Rossitur told me where you had gone and gave me permission to follow you, but I hardly hoped to overtake you so soon."

"We stopped to sharpen our tools," said Fleda. "We are out on a foraging expedition."

"Will you let me help you?"

"Certainly!--if you understand the business. Do you know a pine knot when you see it?"

He laughed and shook his head, but avowed a wish to learn.

"Well, it would be a charity to teach you anything wholesome," said Fleda, "for I heard one of Mr. Olmney's friends lately saying that he looked like a person who was in danger of committing suicide."

"Suicide!--One of my friends!"--he exclaimed in the utmost astonishment.

"Yes," said Fleda laughing;--"and there is nothing like the open air for clearing away vapours."

"You cannot have known that by experience," said he looking at her.

Fleda shook her head and advising him to take nothing for granted, set off into the woods.

They were in a beautiful state. A light snow but an inch or two deep had fallen the night before; the air had been perfectly still during the day; and though the sun was out, bright and mild, it had done little but glitter on the earth's white capping. The light dry flakes of snow had not stirred from their first resting-place. The long branches of the large pines were just tipped with snow at the ends; on the smaller evergreens every leaf and tuft had its separate crest. Stones and rocks were smoothly rounded over, little shrubs and sprays that lay along the ground were all doubled in white; and the hemlock branches, bending with their feathery

burthen, stooped to the foreheads of the party and gave them the freshest of salutations as they brushed by. The whole wood-scene was particularly fair and graceful. A light veil of purity, no more, thrown over the wilderness of stones and stumps and bare ground,--like the blessing of charity, covering all roughnesses and unsightlinesses--like the innocent unsullied nature that places its light shield between the eye and whatever is unequal, unkindly, and unlovely in the world.

"What do you think of this for a misanthropical man, Mr. Olmney? there's a better tonic to be found in the woods than in any remedies of man's devising."

"Better than books?" said he.

"Certainly!--No comparison."

"I have to learn that yet."

"So I suppose," said Fleda. "The very danger to be apprehended, as I hear, sir, is from your running a tilt into some of those thick folios of yours, head foremost.--There's no pitch there, Hugh--you may leave it alone. We must go on--there are more yellow pines higher up."

"But who could give such a strange character of me to you?" said Mr. Olmney.

"I am sure your wisdom would not advise me to tell you that, sir. You will find nothing there, Mr. Olmney."

They went gayly on, careering about in all directions and bearing down upon every promising stump or dead pine tree they saw in the distance. Hugh and Mr. Olmney took turns in the labour of hewing out the fat pine knots and splitting down the old stumps to get at the pitchy heart of the wood; and the baskets began to grow heavy. The whole party were in

excellent spirits, and as happy as the birds that filled the woods and whose cheery "chick-a-dee-dee-dee," was heard whenever they paused to rest and let the hatchet be still.

"How one sees everything in the colour of one's own spectacles," said Fleda.

"May I ask what colour yours are to-day?" said Mr. Olmney.

"Rose, I think," said Hugh.

"No," said Fleda, "they are better than that--they are no worse colour than the snow's own--they shew me everything just as it is. It could not be lovelier."

"Then we may conclude, may we not," said Mr. Olmney, "that you are not sorry to find yourself in Queechy again?"

"I am not sorry to find myself in the woods again. That is not pitch, Mr. Olmney."

"It has the same colour,--and weight."

"No, it is only wet--see this and smell of it--do you see the difference? Isn't it pleasant?"

"Everything is pleasant to-day," said he smiling.

"I shall report you a cure. Come, I want to go a little higher and shew you a view. Leave that, Hugh, we have got enough--"

But Hugh chose to finish an obstinate stump, and his companions went on without him. It was not very far up the mountain and they came to a fine look-out point; the same where Fleda and Mr. Carleton had paused long before on their quest after nuts. The wide spread of country was a white waste now; the delicate beauties of the snow were lost in the far view; and the distant Catskill shewed wintrily against the fair blue sky.

The air was gentle enough to invite them to stand still, after the exercise they had taken, and as they both looked in silence Mr. Olmney observed that his companion's face settled into a gravity rather at variance with the expression it had worn.

"I should hardly think," said he softly, "that you were looking through white spectacles, if you had not told us so."

"O--a shade may come over what one is looking at you know," said Fleda. But seeing that he still watched her inquiringly she added,

"I do not think a very wide landscape is ever gay in its effect upon the mind--do you?"

"Perhaps--I do not know," said he, his eyes turning to it again as if to try what the effect was.

"My thoughts had gone back," said Fleda, "to a time a good while ago, when I was a child and stood here in summer weather--and I was thinking that the change in the landscape is something like that which years make in the mind."

"But you have not, for a long time at least, known any very acute sorrow?"

"No--" said Fleda, "but that is not necessary. There is a gentle kind of discipline which does its work I think more surely."

"Thank God for *gentle* discipline!" said Mr. Olmney; "if you do not know what those griefs are that break down mind and body together."

"I am not unthankful, I hope, for anything," said Fleda gently; "but I have been apt to think that after a crushing sorrow the mind may rise up again, but that a long-continued though much lesser pressure in time breaks the spring."

He looked at her again with a mixture of incredulous and tender interest, but her face did not belie her words, strange as they sounded from so young and in general so bright-seeming a creature.

"'There shall no evil happen to the just,'" he said presently and with great sympathy.

Fleda flashed a look of gratitude at him--it was no more, for she felt her eyes watering and turned them away.

"You have not, I trust, heard any bad news?"

"No sir--not at all!"

"I beg pardon for asking, but Mrs. Rossitur seemed to be in less good spirits than usual."

He had some reason to say so, having found her in a violent fit of weeping.

"You do not need to be told," he went on, "of the need there is that a cloud should now and then come over this lower scene--the danger that if it did not our eyes would look nowhere else?"

There is something very touching in hearing a kind voice say what one has often struggled to say to oneself.

"I know it, sir," said Fleda, her words a little choked,--"and one may not wish the cloud away,--but it does not the less cast a shade upon the face. I guess Hugh has worked his way into the middle of that stump by this time, Mr. Olmney."

They rejoined him; and the baskets being now sufficiently heavy and arms pretty well tired they left the further riches of the pine woods unexplored and walked sagely homewards. At the brow of the table-land Mr. Olmney left them to take a shorter cut to the high-road, having a visit to make which the shortening day warned him not to defer.

"Put down your basket and rest a minute, Hugh," said Fleda. "I had a world of things to talk to you about, and this blessed man has driven them all out of my head."

"But you are not sorry he came along with us?"

"O no. We had a very good time. How lovely it is, Hugh! Look at the snow down there--without a track; and the woods have been dressed by the fairies. O look how the sun is glinting on the west side of that hillock!"

'How lovely it is, Hugh!'
"How lovely it is, Hugh!"

"It is twice as bright since you have come home," said Hugh.

"The snow is too beautiful to-day. O I was right! one may grow morbid over books--but I defy anybody in the company of those chick-a-dees. I should think it would be hard to keep quite sound in the city."

"You are glad to be here again, aren't you?" said Hugh.

"Very! O Hugh!--it is better to be poor and have one's feet on these hills, than to be rich and shut up to brick walls!"

"It is best as it is," said Hugh quietly.

"Once," Fleda went on,--"one fair day when I was out driving in New York, it did come over me with a kind of pang how pleasant it would be to have plenty of money again and be at ease; and then, as I was looking off over that pretty North river to the other shore, I bethought me, 'A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked.'"

Hugh did not answer, for the face she turned to him in its half tearful, half bright submission took away his speech.

"Why you cannot have enjoyed yourself as much as we thought, Fleda, if you dislike the city so much?"

"Yes I did. O I enjoyed a great many things. I enjoyed being with the Evelyns. You don't know how much they made of me,--every one of them,--father and mother and all the three daughters--and uncle Orrin. I have been well petted, I can tell you, since I have been gone."

"I am glad they shewed so much discrimination," said Hugh; "they would be puzzled to make too much of you."

"I must have been in a remarkably discriminating society," said Fleda, "for everybody was very kind!"

"How do you like the Evelyns on a nearer view?"

"Very much indeed; and I believe they really love me. Nothing could possibly be kinder, in all ways of shewing kindness. I shall never forget it."

"Who were you driving with that day?" said Hugh.

"Mr. Thorn."

"Did you see much of him?"

"Quite as much as I wished. Hugh--I took your advice."

"About what?" said Hugh.

"I carried down some of my scribblings and sent them to a Magazine."

"Did you!" said Hugh looking delighted. "And will they publish them?"

"I don't know," said Fleda, "that's another matter. I sent them, or uncle Orrin did, when I first went down; and I have heard nothing of them yet."

"You shewed them to uncle Orrin?"

"Couldn't help it, you know. I had to."

"And what did he say to them?"

"Come!--I'm not going to be cross-questioned," said Fleda laughing. "He did not prevent my sending them."

"And if they take them, do you expect they will give anything for them?--the Magazine people?"

"I am sure if they don't they shall have no more--that is my only possible inducement to let them be printed. For my own pleasure, I would far rather not."

"Did you sign with your own name?"

"My own name!--Yes, and desired it to be printed in large capitals. What are you thinking of? No--I hope you'll forgive me, but I signed myself what our friend the doctor calls 'Yugh.'"

"I'll forgive you if you'll do one thing for me."

"What?"

"Shew me all you have in your portfolio--Do, Fleda--to-night, by the light of the pitch-pine knots. Why shouldn't you give me that pleasure? And besides, you know Molière had an old woman?"

"Well," said Fleda with a face that to Hugh was extremely satisfactory,--"we'll see--I suppose you might as well read my productions in manuscript as in print. But they are in a terribly scratchy condition--they go sometimes for weeks in my head before I find time to put them down--you may guess polishing is pretty well out of the question. Suppose we try to get home with these baskets."

Which they did.

"Has Philetus got home?" was Fleda's first question.

"No," said Mrs. Rossitur, "but Dr. Quackenboss has been here and brought the paper--he was at the post-office this morning, he says. Did you see Mr. Olmney?"

"Yes ma'am, and I feel he has saved me from a lame arm--those pine knots are so heavy."

"He is a lovely young man!" said Mrs. Rossitur with uncommon emphasis.

"I should have been blind to the fact, aunt Lucy, if you had not made me change my shoes. At present, no disparagement to him, I feel as if a cup of tea would be rather more lovely than anything else."

"He sat with me some time," said Mrs. Rossitur; "I was afraid he would not overtake you."

Tea was ready, and only waiting for Mrs. Rossitur to come down stairs, when Fleda, whose eye was carelessly running along the columns of the paper, uttered a sudden shout and covered her face with it. Hugh looked up in astonishment, but Fleda was beyond anything but exclamations, laughing and flushing to the very roots of her hair.

"What *is* the matter, Fleda?"

"Why," said Fleda,--"how comical!--I was just looking over the list of articles in the January number of the 'Excelsior'"--

"The 'Excelsior'?" said Hugh.

"Yes--the Magazine I sent my things to--I was running over their advertisement here, where they give a special puff of the publication in general and of several things in particular, and I saw--here they speak of 'A tale of thrilling interest by Mrs. Eliza Lothbury, unsurpassed,' and so forth and so forth; 'another valuable communication from Mr.

Charleston, whose first acute and discriminating paper all our readers will remember; the beginning of a new tale from the infallibly graceful pen of Miss Delia Lawriston, we are sure it will be so and so; '"*The wind's voices," by our new correspondent "Hugh," has a delicate sweetness that would do no discredit to some of our most honoured names!*'--What do you think of that?"

What Hugh thought he did not say, but he looked delighted; and came to read the grateful words for himself.

"I did not know but they had declined it utterly," said Fleda,--"it was so long since I had sent it and they had taken no notice of it; but it seems they kept it for the beginning of a new volume."

"'Would do no discredit to some of our most honoured names'!" said Hugh. "Dear Fleda, I am very glad! But it is no more than I expected."

"Expected!" said Fleda. "When you had not seen a line! Hush--My dear Hugh, aren't you hungry?"

The tea, with this spice to their appetites, was wonderfully relished; and Hugh and Fleda kept making despatches of secret pleasure and sympathy to each other's eyes; though Fleda's face after the first flush had faded was perhaps rather quieter than usual. Hugh's was illuminated.

"Mr. Skillcorn is a smart man!" said Barby coming in with a package,--"he has made out to go two miles in two hours and get back again safe!"

"More from the post-office!" exclaimed Fleda pouncing upon it,--"oh yes, there has been another mail. A letter for you, aunt Lucy! from uncle Rolf!--We'll forgive him, Barby--And here's a letter for me, from uncle Orrin, and--yes--the 'Excelsior.' Hugh, uncle Orrin said he would send it. Now for those blessed pine knots! Aunt Lucy, you shall be honoured with the one whole candle the house contains."

The table soon cleared away, the basket of fat fuel was brought in; and one or two splinters being delicately insinuated between the sticks on the fire a very brilliant illumination sprang out. Fleda sent a congratulatory look over to Hugh on the other side of the fireplace as she cosily established herself on her little bench at one corner with her letter; he had the Magazine. Mrs. Rossitur between them at the table with her one candle was already insensible to all outward things.

And soon the other two were as delightfully absorbed. The bright light of the fire shone upon three motionless and rapt figures, and getting no greeting from them went off and danced on the old cupboard doors and paper hangings, in a kindly hearty joviality that would have put any number of stately wax candles out of countenance. There was no poverty in the room that night. But the people were too busy to know how cosy they were; till Fleda was ready to look up from her note and Hugh had gone twice carefully over the new poem,--when there was a sudden giving out of the pine splinters. New ones were supplied in eager haste and silence, and Hugh was beginning "The wind's voices" for the third time when a soft-whispered "Hugh!" across the fire made him look over to Fleda's corner. She was holding up with both hands a five-dollar bank note and just shewing him her eyes over it.

"What's that?" said Hugh in an energetic whisper.

"I don't know!" said Fleda, shaking her head comically;--"I am told 'The wind's voices' have blown it here, but privately I am afraid it is a windfall of another kind."

"What?" said Hugh laughing.

"Uncle Orrin says it is the first fruits of what I sent to the 'Excelsior,' and that more will come; but I do not feel at all sure that it is entirely the growth of that soil."

"I dare say it is," said Hugh; "I am sure it is worth more than that. Dear Fleda, I like it so much!"

Fleda gave him such a smile of grateful affection!--not at all as if she deserved his praise but as if it was very pleasant to have.

"What put it into your head? anything in particular?"

"No--nothing--I was looking out of the window one day and seeing the willow tree blow; and that looked over my shoulder; as you know Hans Andersen says his stories did."

"It is just like you!--exactly as it can be."

"Things put themselves in my head," said Fleda, tucking another splinter into the fire. "Isn't this better than a chandelier?"

"Ten times!"

"And so much pleasanter for having got it ourselves. What a nice time we had, Hugh?"

"Very. Now for the portfolio, Fleda--come!--mother is fast; she won't see or hear anything. What does father say, mother?"

In answer to this they had the letter read, which indeed contained nothing remarkable beyond its strong expressions of affection to each one of the little family; a cordial which Mrs. Rossitur drank and grew strong upon in the very act of reading. It is pity the medicine of kind words is not more used in the world--it has so much power. Then, having folded up her treasure and talked a little while about it, Mrs. Rossitur caught up the Magazine like a person who had been famished in that kind; and soon she and it and her tallow candle formed a trio apart from all the world again. Fleda and Hugh were safe to pass most mysterious-looking little papers from hand to hand right before her, though they had the care to read them behind newspapers, and exchanges of thought and feeling went on more swiftly still, and softly, across the fire.

Looks, and smiles, and whispers, and tears too, under cover of a Tribune and an Express. And the blaze would die down just when Hugh had got to the last verse of something, and then while impatiently waiting for the new pine splinters to catch he would tell Fleda how much he liked it, or how beautiful he thought it, and whisper enquiries and critical questions; till the fire reached the fat vein and leaped up in defiant emulation of gas-lights unknown, and then he would fall to again with renewed gusto. And Fleda hunted out in her portfolio what bits to give him first, and bade him as she gave them remember this and understand that, which was necessary to be borne in mind in the reading. And through all the brightening and fading blaze, and all the whispering, congratulating, explaining, and rejoicing going on at her side, Mrs. Rossitur and her tallow candle were devoted to each other, happily and engrossingly. At last, however, she flung the Magazine from her and turning from the table sat looking into the fire with a rather uncommonly careful and unsatisfied brow.

"What did you think of the second piece of poetry there, mother?" said Hugh;--"that ballad?--'The wind's voices' it is called."

"'The wind's voices'?--I don't know--I didn't read it, I believe."

"Why mother! I liked it very much. Do read it--read it aloud."

Mrs. Rossitur took up the Magazine again abstractedly, and read--

> "'Mamma, what makes your face so sad?
> The sound of the wind makes me feel glad;
> But whenever it blows, as grave you look,
> As if you were reading a sorrowful book.'
>
> "'A sorrowful book I am reading, dear,--
> A book of weeping and pain and fear,--
> A book deep printed on my heart,
> Which I cannot read but the tears will start.

"'That breeze to my ear was soft and mild,
Just so, when I was a little child;
But now I hear in its freshening breath
The voices of those that sleep in death.'

"'Mamma,' said the child with shaded brow,
'What is this book you are reading now?
And why do you read what makes you cry?'
'My child, it comes up before my eye.

"'Tis the memory, love, of a far-off day
When my life's best friend was taken away;--
Of the weeks and months that my eyes were dim
Watching for tidings--watching for him.

"'Many a year has come and past
Since a ship sailed over the ocean fast,
Bound for a port on England's shore,--
She sailed--but was never heard of more.'

"'Mamma'--and she closer pressed her side,--
'Was that the time when my father died?--
Is it his ship you think you see?--
Dearest mamma--won't you speak to me?'

"The lady paused, but then calmly said,
'Yes, Lucy--the sea was his dying bed,
And now whenever I hear the blast
I think again of that storm long past.

"'The winds' fierce bowlings hurt not me,
But I think how they beat on the pathless sea,--
Of the breaking mast--of the parting rope,--
Of the anxious strife and the failing hope.'

"'Mamma,' said the child with streaming eyes,
'My father has gone above the skies;
And you tell me this world is mean and base
Compared with heaven--that blessed place.'

"'My daughter, I know--I believe it all,--
I would not his spirit to earth recall.
The blest one he--his storm was brief,--
Mine, a long tempest of tears and grief.

"'I have you, my darling--I should not sigh.
I have one star more in my cloudy sky,--
The hope that we both shall join him there,
In that perfect rest from weeping and care.'"

"Well, mother,--how do you like it?" said Hugh whose eyes gave tender witness to *his* liking for it.

"It is pretty--" said Mrs. Rossitur.

Hugh exclaimed, and Fleda laughing took it out of her hand.

"Why mother!" said Hugh,--"it is Fleda's."

"Fleda's!" exclaimed Mrs. Rossitur, snatching the Magazine again. "My dear child, I was not thinking in the least of what I was reading. Fleda's!--"

She read it over anew, with swimming eyes this time, and then clasped Fleda in her arms and gave her, not words, but the better reward of kisses and tears. They remained so a long time, even till Hugh left them; and then Fleda released from her aunt's embrace still crouched by her side with one arm in her lap.

They both sat thoughtfully looking into the fire till it had burnt itself out and nothing but a glowing bed of coals remained.

"That is an excellent young man!" said Mrs. Rossitur.

"Who?"

"Mr. Olmney. He sat with me some time after you had gone."

"So you said before," said Fleda, wondering at the troubled expression of her aunt's face.

"He made me wish," said Mrs. Rossitur hesitating,--"that I could be something different from what I am--I believe I should be a great deal happier"--

The last word was hardly spoken. Fleda rose to her knees and putting both arms about her aunt pressed face to face, with a clinging sympathy that told how very near her spirit was; while tears from the eyes of both fell without measure.

"Dear aunt Lucy--*dear* aunt Lucy--I wish you would!--I am sure you would be a great deal happier--"

But the mixture of feelings was too much for Fleda; her head sank lower on her aunt's bosom and she wept aloud.

"But I don't know anything about it!" said Mrs. Rossitur, as well as she could speak,--"I am as ignorant as a child!--"

"Dear aunty! that is nothing--God will teach you if you ask him; he has promised. Oh ask him, aunt Lucy! I know you would be happier!--I know it is better--a million times!--to be a child of God than to have everything in the world--If they only brought us that, I would be very glad of all our troubles!--indeed I would!"

"But I don't think I ever did anything right in my life!" said poor Mrs. Rossitur.

"Dear aunt Lucy!" said Fleda, straining her closer and with her very heart gushing out at these words,--"*dear* aunty--Christ came for just such sinners!--for just such as you and I."

"*You,*"--said Mrs. Rossitur, but speech failed utterly, and with a muttered prayer that Fleda would help her, she sunk her head upon her shoulder and sobbed herself into quietness, or into exhaustion. The glow of the firelight faded away till only a faint sparkle was left in the chimney.

There was not another word spoken, but when they rose up, with such kisses as gave and took unuttered affection, counsel and sympathy, they bade each other good-night.

Fleda went to her window, for the moon rode high and her childish habit had never been forgotten. But surely the face that looked out that night was as the face of an angel. In all the pouring moonbeams that filled the air, she could see nothing but the flood of God's goodness on a dark world. And her heart that night had nothing but an unbounded and unqualified thanksgiving for all the "gentle discipline" they had felt; for every sorrow and weariness and disappointment;--except besides the prayer, almost too deep to be put into words, that its due and hoped-for fruit might be brought forth unto perfection.

Chapter XXVII.

I become not a cart as well as another man, a plague on my bringing up.

Shakspeare.

Every day could not be as bright as the last, even by the help of pitch pine knots. They blazed indeed, many a time, but the blaze shone upon faces that it could not sometimes light up. Matters drew gradually within a smaller and smaller compass. Another five dollars came from uncle Orrin, and the hope of more; but these were carefully laid by to pay Philetus; and for all other wants of the household excepting those the farm supplied the family were dependent on mere driblets of sums. None came from Mr. Rossitur. Hugh managed to collect a very little. That kept them from absolute distress; that, and Fleda's delicate instrumentality. Regular dinners were given up, fresh meat being now unheard-of, unless when a kind neighbour made them a present; and appetite would have lagged sadly but for Fleda's untiring care. She thought no time nor pains ill bestowed which could prevent her aunt and Hugh from feeling the want of old comforts; and her nicest skill was displayed in varying the combinations of their very few and simple stores. The diversity and deliciousness of her bread stuffs, Barby said, was "beyond everything!" and a cup of rich coffee was found to cover all deficiencies of removes and entremêts; and this was always served, Barby said further, as if the President of the United States was expected. Fleda never permitted the least slackness in the manner of doing this or anything else that she could control.

Mr. Plumfield had sent down an opportune present of a fine porker. One cold day in the beginning of February Fleda was busy in the kitchen making something for dinner, and Hugh at another table was vigorously chopping sausage meat.

"I should like to have some cake again," said Fleda.

"Well, why don't you?" said Hugh, chopping away.

"No eggs, Mr. Rossitur,--and can't afford 'em at two shillings a dozen. I believe I am getting discontented--I have a great desire to do something to distinguish myself--I would make a plum pudding if I had raisins, but there is not one in the house."

"You can get 'em up to Mr. Hemps's for sixpence a pound," said Barby.

But Fleda shook her head at the sixpence and went on moulding out her biscuits diligently.

"I wish Philetus would make his appearance with the cows--it is a very odd thing they should be gone since yesterday morning and no news of them."

"I only hope the snow ain't so bright it'll blind his eyes," said Barby.

"There he is this minute," said Hugh. "It is impossible to tell from his countenance whether successful or not."

"Well where are the cows, Mr. Skillcorn?" said Barby as he came in.

"I have went all over town," said the person addressed, "and they ain't no place."

"Have you asked news of them, Philetus?"

"I have asked the hull town, and I have went all over, 'till I was a'most beat out with the cold,--and I ha'n't seen the first sight of 'em yet!"

Fleda and Hugh exchanged looks, while Barby and Mr. Skillcorn entered into an animated discussion of probabilities and impossibilities.

"If we should be driven from our coffee dinners to tea with no milk in it!"--said Hugh softly in mock dismay.

"Wouldn't!" said Fleda. "We'd beat up an egg and put it in the coffee."

"We couldn't afford it," said Hugh smiling.

"Could!--cheaper than to keep the cows. I'll have some sugar at any rate, I'm determined. Philetus!"

"Marm."

"I wish, when you have got a good pile of wood chopped, you would make some troughs to put under the maple trees--you know how to make them, don't you?"

"I do!"

"I wish you would make some--you have pine logs out there large enough, haven't you?"

"They hadn't ought to want much of it--there's some gregious big ones!"

"I don't know how many we shall want, but a hundred or two at any rate; and the sooner the better. Do you know how much sugar they make from one tree?"

"Wall I don't," said Mr. Skillcorn, with the air of a person who was at fault on no other point;--"the big trees give more than the little ones--"

Fleda's eyes flashed at Hugh, who took to chopping in sheer desperation; and the muscles of both gave them full occupation for five minutes. Philetus stood comfortably warming himself at the fire, looking first at one and then at the other, as if they were a show and he had paid for it. Barby grew impatient.

"I guess this cold weather makes lazy people of me!" she said bustling about her fire with an amount of energy that was significant. It seemed to signify nothing to Philetus. He only moved a little out of the way.

"Didenhover's cleared out," he burst forth at length abruptly.

"What!" said Fleda and Barby at once, the broom and the biscuits standing still.

"Mr. Didenhover."

"What of him?"

"He has tuk himself off out o" town."

"Where to?"

"I can't tell you where teu--he ain't coming back, 'tain't likely."

"How do you know?"

"'Cause he's tuk all his traps and went, and he said farming didn't pay and he wa'n't a going to have nothin' more to deu with it;--he telled Mis' Simpson so--he lived to Mis' Simpson's; and she telled Mr. Ten Eyck."

"Are you sure, Philetus?"

"Sure as 'lection!--he telled Mis' Simpson so, and she telled Mr. Ten Eyck; and he's cleared out."

Fleda and Hugh again looked at each other. Mr. Skillcorn having now delivered himself of his news went out to the woodyard.

"I hope he ha'n't carried off our cows along with him," said Barby, as she too went out to some other part of her premises.

"He was to have made us quite a payment on the first of March," said Fleda. "Yes, and that was to have gone to uncle Orrin," said Hugh.

"We shall not see a cent of it. And we wanted a little of it for ourselves.--I have that money from the Excelsior, but I can't touch a penny of it for it must go to Philetus's wages. What Barby does without hers I do not know--she has had but one five dollars in six months. Why she stays I cannot imagine; unless it is for pure love."

"As soon as the spring opens I can go to the mill again," said Hugh after a little pause. Fleda looked at him sorrowfully and shook her head as she withdrew her eyes.

"I wish father would give up the farm," Hugh went on under his breath. "I cannot bear to live upon uncle Orrin so."

Fleda's answer was to clasp her hands. Her only words were, "Don't say anything to aunt Lucy."

"It is of no use to say anything to anybody," said Hugh. "But it weighs me to the ground, Fleda!"

"If uncle Rolf doesn't come home by spring--I hope, I hope he will!--but if he does not, I will take desperate measures. I will try farming myself, Hugh. I have thought of it, and I certainly will. I will get Earl Douglass or somebody else to play second fiddle, but I will have but one head on the farm and I will try what mine is worth."

"You could not do it, Fleda."

"One can do anything!--with a strong enough motive."

"I'm afraid you'd soon be tired, Fleda."

"Not if I succeeded--not so tired as I am now."

"Poor Fleda! I dare say you are tired."

"It wasn't *that* I meant," said Fleda, slightly drawing her breath;--"I meant this feeling of everything going wrong, and uncle Orrin, and all--"

"But you *are* weary," said Hugh affectionately. "I see it in your face."

"Not so much body as mind, after all. Oh Hugh! this is the worst part of being poor!--the constant occupation of one's mind on a miserable succession of trifles. I am so weary sometimes!--If I only had a nice book to rest myself for a while and forget all these things--I would give so much for it!--"

"Dear Fleda! I wish you had!"

"That was one delight of being in New York--I forgot all about money from one end of it to the other--I put all that away;--and not having to think of meals till I came to eat them. You can't think how tired I get of

ringing the changes on pork and flour and Indian meal and eggs and vegetables!--"

Fleda looked tired and pale; and Hugh looked sadly conscious of it.

"Don't tell aunt Lucy I have said all this!" she exclaimed after a moment rousing herself,--"I don't always feel so--only once in a while I get such a fit--And now I have just troubled you by speaking of it!"

"You don't trouble any one in that way very often, dear Fleda," said Hugh kissing her.

"I ought not at all--you have enough else to think of--but it is a kind of relief sometimes. I like to do these things in general,--only now and then I get tired, as I was just now, I suppose, and then one sees everything through a different medium."

"I am afraid it would tire you more to have the charge of Earl Douglass and the farm upon your mind;--and mother could be no help to you,--nor I, if I am at the mill."

"But there's Seth Plumfield. O I've thought of it all. You don't know what I am up to, Mr. Rossitur. You shall see how I will manage--unless uncle Rolf comes home, in which case I will very gladly forego all my honours and responsibilities together."

"I hope he will come!" said Hugh.

But this hope was to be disappointed. Mr. Rossitur wrote again about the first of March, saying that he hoped to make something of his lands in Michigan, and that he had the prospect of being engaged in some land agencies which would make it worth his while to spend the summer there. He bade his wife let anybody take the farm that could manage it and would pay; and to remit to Dr. Gregory whatever she should receive and could spare. He hoped to do something where he was.

It was just then the beginning of the sugar season; and Mrs. Douglass having renewed and urged Earl's offer of help, Fleda sent Philetus down to ask him to come the next day with his team. Seth Plumfield's, which had drawn the wood in the winter, was now busy in his own sugar business. On Earl Douglass's ground there happpened to be no maple trees. His lands were of moderate extent and almost entirely cultivated as a sheep farm; and Mr. Douglass himself though in very comfortable circumstances was in the habit of assisting, on advantageous terms, all the farmers in the neighbourhood.

Philetus came back again in a remarkably short time; and announced that he had met Dr. Quackenboss in the way, who had offered to come with *his* team for the desired service.

"Then you have not been to Mr. Douglass's?"

"I have not," said Philetus;--"I thought likely you wouldn't calculate to want him teu."

"How came the doctor to know what you were going for?"

"I told him."

"But how came you to tell him?"

"Wall I guess he had a mind to know," said Philetus, "so I didn't keep it no closer than I had teu."

"Well," said Fleda biting her lips, "you will have to go down to Mr. Douglass's nevertheless, Philetus, and tell him the doctor is coming to-morrow, but I should be very much obliged to him if he will be here next day. Will you?"

"Yes marm!"

"Now dear Hugh, will you make me those little spouts for the trees!--of some dry wood--you can get plenty out here. You want to split them up with a hollow chisel about a quarter of an inch thick, and a little more than half an inch broad. Have you got a hollow chisel?"

"No, but I can get one up the hill. Why must it be hollow?"

"To make little spouts, you know,--for the sap to run in. And then, my dear Hugh! they must be sharpened at one end so as to fit where the chisel goes in--I am afraid I have given you a day's work of it. How sorry I am you must go to-morrow to the mill!--and yet I am glad too."

"Why need you go round yourself with these people?" said Hugh. "I don't see the sense of it."

"They don't know where the trees are," said Fleda.

"I am sure I do not. Do you?"

"Perfectly well. And besides," said Fleda laughing, "I should have great doubts of the discreetness of Philetus's auger if it were left to his simple direction. I have no notion the trees would yield their sap as kindly to him as to me. But I didn't bargain for Dr. Quackenboss."

Dr. Quackenboss arrived punctually the next morning with his oxen and sled; and by the time it was loaded with the sap-troughs, Fleda in her black cloak, yarn shawl, and grey little hood came out of the house to the wood-yard. Earl Douglass was there too, not with his team, but merely to see how matters stood and give advice.

"Good day, Mr. Douglass!" said the doctor. "You see I'm so fortunate as to have got the start of you."

"Very good," said Earl contentedly,--"you may have it;--the start's one thing and the pull's another. I'm willin' anybody should have the start, but it takes a pull to know whether a man's got stuff in him or no."

"What do you mean?" said the doctor.

"I don't mean nothin' at all. You make a start to-day and I'll come ahint and take the pull to-morrow. Ha' you got anythin' to boil down in, Fleda? --there's a potash kittle somewheres, ain't there? I guess there is. There is in most houses."

"There is a large kettle--I suppose large enough," said Fleda.

"That'll do, I guess. Well what do you calculate to put the syrup in--ha' you got a good big cask, or plenty o' tubs and that? or will you sugar off the hull lot every night and fix it that way? You must do one thing or t'other, and it's good to know what you're a going to do afore you come to do it."

"I don't know, Mr. Douglass," said Fleda;--"whichever is the best way--we have no cask large enough, I am afraid."

"Well I tell you what I'll do--I know where there's a tub, and where they ain't usin' it nother, and I reckon I can get 'em to let me have it--I reckon I can--and I'll go round for't and fetch it here to-morrow mornin' when I come with the team. 'Twon't be much out of my way. It's more handier to leave the sugarin' off till the next day; and it had ought to have a settlin' besides. Where'll you have your fire built?--in doors or out?"

"Out--I would rather, if we can. But can we?"

"La, 'tain't nothin' easier--it's as easy out as in--all you've got to do is to take and roll a couple of pretty sized billets for your fireplace and stick a couple o' crotched sticks for to hang the kittle over--I'd as lieve have it out as in, and if anythin' a leetle liever. If you'll lend me Philetus, me and him'll fix it all ready agin you come back--'tain't no trouble at all--and if the sticks ain't here we'll go into the woods after 'em, and have it all sot up."

But Fleda represented that the services of Philetus were just then in requisition, and that there would be no sap brought home till to-morrow.

"Very good!" said Earl amicably,--"*very* good! it's just as easy done one day as another--it don't make no difference to me, and if it makes any difference to you, of course we'll leave it to-day, and there'll be time enough to do it to-morrow; me and him'll knock it up in a whistle.--What's them little shingles for?"

Fleda explained the use and application of Hugh's mimic spouts. He turned one about, whistling, while he listened to her.

"That's some o' Seth Plumfield's new jigs, ain't it. I wonder if he thinks now the sap's a goin to run any sweeter out o' that 'ere than it would off the end of a chip that wa'n't quite so handsome?"

"No, Mr. Douglass," said Fleda smiling,--"he only thinks that this will catch a little more."

"His sugar won't never tell where it come from," remarked Earl, throwing the spout down. "Well,--you shall see more o' me to-morrow. Good-bye, Dr. Quackenboss!"

"Do you contemplate the refining process?" said the doctor, as they moved off.

"I have often contemplated the want of it," said Fleda; "but it is best not to try to do too much. I should like to make sure of something worth refining in the first place."

"Mr. Douglass and I," said the doctor,--"I hope--a--he's a very good-hearted man, Miss Fleda, but, ha! ha!--he wouldn't suffer loss from a little refining himself.--Haw! you rascal--where are you going! Haw! I tell ye--"

"I am very sorry, Dr. Quackenboss," said Fleda when she had the power and the chance to speak again,--"I am very sorry you should have to take this trouble; but unfortunately the art of driving oxen is not among Mr. Skillcorn's accomplishments."

"My dear Miss Ringgan!" said the doctor, "I--I--nothing I assure you could give me greater pleasure than to drive my oxen to any place where you would like to have them go."

Poor Fleda wished she could have despatched them and him in one direction while she took another; the art of driving oxen *quietly* was certainly not among the doctor's accomplishments. She was almost deafened. She tried to escape from the immediate din by running before to shew Philetus about tapping the trees and fixing the little spouts, but it was a longer operation than she had counted upon, and by the time they were ready to leave the tree the doctor was gee-hawing alongside of it; and then if the next maple was not within sight she could not in decent kindness leave him alone. The oxen went slowly, and though Fleda managed to have no delay longer than to throw down a trough as the sled came up with each tree which she and Philetus had tapped, the business promised to make a long day of it. It might have been a pleasant day in pleasant company; but Fleda's spirits were down to set out with, and Dr. Quackenboss was not the person to give them the needed spring; his long-winded complimentary speeches had not interest enough even to divert her. She felt that she was entering upon an untried and most weighty undertaking; charging her time and thoughts with a burthen they could well spare. Her energies did not flag, but the spirit that should have sustained them was not strong enough for the task.

It was a blustering day of early March; with that uncompromising brightness of sky and land which has no shadow of sympathy with a heart overcast. The snow still lay a foot thick over the ground, thawing a little in sunny spots; the trees quite bare and brown, the buds even of the early maples hardly shewing colour; the blessed evergreens alone doing

their utmost to redeem the waste, and speaking of patience and fortitude that can brave the blast and outstand the long waiting and cheerfully bide the time when "the winter shall be over and gone." Poor Fleda thought they were like her in their circumstances, but she feared she was not like them in their strong endurance. She looked at the pines and hemlocks as she passed, as if they were curious preachers to her; and when she had a chance she prayed quietly that she might stand faithfully like them to cheer a desolation far worse and she feared far more abiding than snows could make or melt away. She thought of Hugh, alone in his mill-work that rough chilly day, when the wind stalked through the woods and over the country as if it had been the personification of March just come of ape and taking possession of his domains. She thought of her uncle, doing what?--in Michigan,--leaving them to fight with difficulties as they might,--why?--why? and her gentle aunt at home sad and alone, pining for the want of them all, but most of him, and fading with their fortunes. And Fleda's thoughts travelled about from one to the other and dwelt with them all by turns till she was heart-sick; and tears, tears, fell hot on the snow many a time when her eyes had a moment's shield from the doctor and his somewhat more obtuse coadjutor. She felt half superstitiously as if with her taking the farm were beginning the last stage of their falling prospects, which would leave them with none of hope's colouring. Not that in the least she doubted her own ability and success; but her uncle did not deserve to have his affairs prosper under such a system and she had no faith that they would.

"It is most grateful," said the doctor with that sideway twist of his jaw and his head at once, in harmony,--"it is a most grateful thing to see such a young lady--Haw I there now I--what are you about? haw,--haw then!--It is a most grateful thing to see--"

But Fleda was not at his side; she had bounded away and was standing under a great maple tree a little ahead, making sure that Philetus screwed his auger *up* into the tree instead of *down*, which he had several

times shewed an unreasonable desire to do. The doctor had steered his oxen by her little grey hood and black cloak all the day. He made for it now.

"Have we arrived at the termination of our--a--adventure?" said he as he came up and threw down the last trough.

"Why no, sir," said Fleda, "for we have yet to get home again."

"'Tain't so fur going that way as it were this'n," said Philetus. "My! ain't I glad."

"Glad of what?" said the doctor. "Here's Miss Ringgan's walked the whole way, and she a lady--ain't you ashamed to speak of being tired?"

"I ha'n't said the first word o' being tired!" said Philetus in an injured tone of voice,--"but a man ha'n't no right to kill hisself, if he ain't a gal!"

"I'll qualify to your being safe enough," said the doctor. "But Miss Ringgan, my dear, you are--a--you have lost something since you came out--"

"What?" said Fleda laughing. "Not my patience?"

"No," said the doctor, "no,--you're--a--you're an angel! but your cheeks, my dear Miss Ringgan, shew that you have exceeded your--a--"

"Not my intentions, doctor," said Fleda lightly. "I am very well satisfied with our day's work, and with my share of it, and a cup of coffee will make me quite up again. Don't look at my cheeks till then."

"I shall disobey you constantly," said the doctor;--"but, my dear Miss Fleda, we must give you some felicities for reaching home, or Mrs. Rossitur will be--a--distressed when she sees them. Might I propose--that you should just bear your weight on this wood-sled and let my oxen and me have the honour--The cup of coffee, I am confident, would be at your lips considerably earlier--"

"The sun won't be a great haighth by the time we get there," said Philetus in a cynical manner; "and I ha'n't took the first thing to-day!"

"Well who has?" said the doctor; "you ain't the only one. Follow your nose down hill, Mr. Skillcorn, and it'll smell supper directly. Now, my dear Miss Ringgan!--will you?"

Fleda hesitated, but her relaxed energies warned her not to despise a homely mode of relief. The wood-sled was pretty clean, and the road decently good over the snow. So Fleda gathered her cloak about her and sat down flat on the bottom of her rustic vehicle; too grateful for the rest to care if there had been a dozen people to laugh at her; but the doctor was only delighted, and Philetus regarded every social phenomenon as coolly and in the same business light as he would the butter to his bread, or any other infallible every-day matter.

Fleda was very glad presently that she had taken this plan, for besides the rest of body she was happily relieved from all necessity of speaking. The doctor though but a few paces off was perfectly given up to the care of his team, in the intense anxiety to shew his skill and gallantry in saving her harmless from every ugly place in the road that threatened a jar or a plunge. Why his oxen didn't go distracted was a question; but the very vehemence and iteration of his cries at last drowned itself in Fleda's ear and she could hear it like the wind's roaring, without thinking of it. She presently subsided to that. With a weary frame, and with that peculiar quietness of spirits that comes upon the ending of a days work in which mind and body have both been busily engaged, and the sudden ceasing of any call upon either, fancy asked no leave and dreamily roved hither and thither between the material and the spirit world; the will too subdued to stir. Days gone by came marshalling their scenes and their actors before her; again she saw herself a little child under those same trees that stretched their great black arms over her head and swaying their tops in the wind seemed to beckon her back to the past. They talked of their old owner, whose steps had so often passed beneath them with her own light tread,--light now, but how dancing then!--by his side; and

of her father whose hand perhaps had long ago tapped those very trees where she had noticed the old closed-up soars of the axe. At any rate his boyhood had rejoiced there, and she could look back to one time at least in his manhood when she had taken a pleasant walk with him in summer weather among those same woods, in that very ox-track she believed. Gone--two generations that she had known there; hopes and fears and disappointments, akin to her own, at rest,--as hers would be; and how sedately the old trees stood telling her of it, and waving their arms in grave and gentle commenting on the folly of anxieties that came and went with the wind. Fleda agreed to it all; she heard all they said; and her own spirit was as sober and quiet as their quaint moralizing. She felt as if it would never dance again.

The wind had greatly abated of its violence; as if satisfied with the shew of strength it had given in the morning it seemed willing to make no more commotion that day. The sun was far on his way to the horizon, and many a broad hill-side slope was in shadow; the snow had blown or melted from off the stones and rocks leaving all their roughness and bareness unveiled; and the white crust of snow that lay between them looked a cheerless waste in the shade of the wood and the hill. But there were other spots where the sunbeams struck and bright streams of light ran between the trees, smiling and making them smile. And as Fleda's eye rested there another voice seemed to say, "At evening-time it shall be light,"--and "Sorrow may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." She could have cried, but spirits were too absolutely at an ebb. She knew this was partly physical, because she was tired and faint, but it could not the better be overcome. Yet those streaks of sunlight were pleasant company, and Fleda watched them, thinking how bright they used to be once; till the oxen and sled came out from the woods, and she could see the evening colours on the hill-tops beyond the village, lighting up the whole landscape with promise of the morrow. She thought her day had seen its brightest; but she thought too that if she must know sorrows it was a very great blessing to know them at Queechy.

The smoke of the chimney-tops came in sight, and fancy went home,--a few minutes before her.

"I wonder what you'll take and do to yourself next!" said Barby in extreme vexation when she saw her come in. "You're as white as the wall,--and as cold, ain't you? I'd ha' let Philetus cut all the trees and drink all the sap afterwards. I wonder which you think is the worst, the want o' you or the want o' sugar."

A day's headache was pretty sure to visit Fleda after any over-exertion or exhaustion, and the next day justified Barby's fears. She was the quiet prisoner of pain. But Earl Douglass and Mr. Skillcorn could now do without her in the woods; and her own part of the trouble Fleda always took with speechless patience. She had the mixed comfort that love could bestow; Hugh's sorrowful kiss and look before setting off for the mill, Mrs. Rossitur's caressing care, and Barby's softened voice, and sympathizing hand on her brow, and hearty heart-speaking kiss, and poor little King lay all day with his head in her lap, casting grave wistful glances up at his mistress's face and licking her hand with intense affection when even in her distress it stole to his head to reward and comfort him. He never would budge from her side, or her feet, till she could move herself and he knew that she was well. As sure as King came trotting into the kitchen Barby used to look into the other room and say, "So you're better, ain't you, Fleda? I knowed it!"

After hours of suffering the fit was at last over; and in the evening, though looking and feeling racked, Fleda would go out to see the sap-boilers. Earl Douglass and Philetus had had a very good day of it, and now were in full blast with the evening part of the work. The weather was mild, and having the stay of Hugh's arm Fleda grew too amused to leave them.

It was a very pretty scene. The sap-boilers had planted themselves near the cellar door on the other side of the house from the kitchen door and the wood-yard; the casks and tubs for syrup being under cover there;

and there they had made a most picturesque work-place. Two strong crotched sticks were stuck in the ground some six or eight feet apart and a pole laid upon them, to which by the help of some very rustic hooks two enormous iron kettles were slung. Under them a fine fire of smallish split sticks was doing duty, kept in order by a couple of huge logs which walled it in on the one side and on the other. It was a dark night, and the fire painted all this in strong lights and shadows; threw a faint fading Aurora like light over the snow, beyond the shade of its log barriers; glimmered by turns upon the paling of the garden fence, whenever the dark figures that were passing and repassing between gave it a chance; and invested the cellar-opening and the outstanding corner of the house with striking and unwonted dignity, in a light that revealed nothing except to the imagination. Nothing was more fancifully dignified or more quaintly travestied by that light than the figures around it, busy and flitting about and shewing themselves in every novel variety of grouping and colouring. There was Earl Douglass, not a hair different from what he was every day in reality, but with his dark skin and eyes, and a hat that like its master had concluded to abjure all fashions and perhaps for the same reason, he looked now like any bandit and now in a more pacific view could pass for nothing less than a Spanish shepherd at least, with an iron ladle in lieu of crook. There was Dr. Quackenboss, who had come too, determined as Earl said, "to keep his eend up," excessively bland and busy and important, the fire would throw his one-sidedness of feature into such aspects of gravity or sternness that Fleda could make nothing of him but a poor clergyman or a poor schoolmaster alternately. Philetus, who was kept handing about a bucket of sap or trudging off for wood, defied all comparison; he was Philetus still; but when Barby came once or twice and peered into the kettle her strong features with the handkerchief she always wore about her head were lit up into a very handsome gypsy. Fleda stood some time unseen in the shadow of the house to enjoy the sight, and then went forward on the same principle that a sovereign princess shews herself to her army, to grace and reward the labours of her servants. The doctor was profuse in enquiries after her health and Earl informed her of the success of the day.

"We've had first rate weather," he said;--"I don't want to see no better weather for sugar-makin'; it's as good kind o' weather as you need to have. It friz everythin' up tight in the night, and it thew in the sun this mornin' as soon as the sun was anywhere; the trees couldn't do no better than they have done. I guess we ha'n't got much this side o' two hundred gallon--I ain't sure about it, but that's what I think; and there's nigh two hundred gallon we've fetched down; I'll qualify to better than a hundred and fifty, or a hundred and sixty either. We should ha' had more yet if Mr. Skillcorn hadn't managed to spill over one cask of it--I reckon he wanted it for sass for his chicken."

"Now, Mr. Douglass!"--said Philetus, in a comical tone of deprecation.

"It is an uncommonly fine lot of sugar trees," said the doctor, "and they stand so on the ground as to give great felicities to the oxen."

"Now, Fleda," Earl went on, busy all the while with his iron ladle in dipping the boiling sap from one kettle into the other,--"you know how this is fixed when we've done all we've got to do with it?--it must be strained out o' this biler into a cask or a tub or somethin' 'nother,--anythin' that'll hold it,--and stand a day or so;--you may strain it through a cotton cloth, or through a woollen cloth, or through any kind of a cloth!--and let it stand to settle; and then when it's biled down--Barby knows about bilin' down--you can tell when it's comin' to the sugar when the yellow blobbers rises thick to the top and puffs off, and then it's time to try it in cold water,--it's best to be a leetle the right side o' the sugar and stop afore it's done too much, for the molasses will dreen off afterwards--"

"It must be clarified in the commencement," put in the doctor.

"O' course it must be clarified," said Earl,--"Barby knows about clarifyin'--that's when you first put it on--you had ought to throw in a teeny drop o' milk fur to clear it,--milk's as good as a'most anything,--or if you can get it calf's blood's better "--

"Eggs would be a more preferable ingredient on the present occasion, I presume," said the doctor. "Miss Ringgan's delicacy would be--a--would shrink from--a--and the albumen of eggs will answer all the same purpose."

"Well anyhow you like to fix it," said Earl,--"eggs or calf's blood--I won't quarrel with you about the eggs, though I never heerd o' blue ones afore, 'cept the robin's and bluebird's--and I've heerd say the swamp black bird lays a handsome blue egg, but I never happened to see the nest myself;--and there's the chippin' sparrow,--but you'd want to rob all the birds' nests in creation to get enough of 'em, and they ain't here in sugar time, nother; but anyhow any eggs'll do I s'pose if you can get 'em--or milk'll do if you ha'n't nothin' else--and after it is turned out into the barrel you just let it stand still a spell till it begins to grain and look clean on top"--

"May I suggest an improvement?" said the doctor. "Many persons are of the opinion that if you take and stir it up well from the bottom for a length of time it will help the coagulation of the particles. I believe that is the practice of Mr. Plumfield and others."

"'Tain't the practice of as good men as him and as good sugar-bilers, besides," said Earl; "though I don't mean to say nothin' agin Seth Plumfield nor agin his sugar, for the both is as good as you'd need to have; he's a good man and he's a good farmer--there ain't no better man in town than Seth Plumfield, nor no better farmer, nor no better sugar nother; but I hope there's as good; and I've seen as handsome sugar that wa'n't stirred as I'd want to see or eat either."

"It would lame a man's arms the worst kind!" said Philetus.

Fleda stood listening to the discussion and smiling, when Hugh suddenly wheeling about brought her face to face with Mr. Olmney.

"I have been sitting some time with Mrs. Rossitur," he said, "and she rewarded me with permission to come and look at you. I mean!--not that I wanted a reward, for I certainly did not--"

"Ah Mr. Olmney!" said Fleda laughing, "you are served right. You see how dangerous it is to meddle with such equivocal things as compliments. But we are worth looking at, aren't we? I have been standing here this half hour."

He did not say this time what he thought.

"Pretty, isn't it?" said Fleda. "Stand a little further back, Mr. Olmney--isn't it quite a wild-looking scene, in that peculiar light and with the snowy background? Look at Philetus now with that bundle of sticks--Hugh! isn't he exactly like some of the figures in the old pictures of the martyrdoms, bringing billets to feed the fire?--that old martyrdom of St. Lawrence--whose was it--Spagnoletto!--at Mrs. Decatur's--don't you recollect? It is fine, isn't it, Mr. Olmney?"

"I am afraid," said he shaking his head a little, "my eye wants training. I have not been once in your company I believe without your shewing me something I could not see."

"That young lady, sir," said Dr. Quackenboss from the far side of the fire, where he was busy giving it more wood,--"that young lady, sir, is a pattron to her--a--to all young ladies."

"A patron!" said Mr. Olmney.

"Passively, not actively, the doctor means," said Fleda softly.

"Well I won't say but she's a good girl," said Mr. Douglass in an abstracted manner, busy with his iron ladle,--"she means to be a good girl--she's as clever a girl as you need to have!"

Nobody's gravity stood this, excepting Philetus, in whom the principle of fun seemed not to be developed.

"Miss Ringgan, sir," Dr. Quackenboss went on with a most benign expression of countenance,--"Miss Ringgan, sir, Mr. Olmney, sets an example to all ladies who--a--have had elegant advantages. She gives her

patronage to the agricultural interest in society."

"Not exclusively, I hope?" said Mr. Olmney smiling, and making the question with his eye of Fleda. But she did not meet it.

"You know," she said rather quickly, and drawing back from the fire, "I am of an agricultural turn perforce--in uncle Rolf's absence I am going to be a farmer myself."

"So I have heard--so Mrs. Rossitur told me,--but I fear--pardon me--you do not look fit to grapple with such a burden of care."

Hugh sighed, and Fleda's eyes gave Mr. Olmney a hint to be silent.

"I am not going to grapple with any thing, sir; I intend to take things easily."

"I wish I could take an agricultural turn too," said he smiling, "and be of some service to you."

"O I shall have no lack of service," said Fleda gayly;--"I am not going unprovided into the business. There is my cousin Seth Plumfield, who has engaged himself to be my counsellor and instructor in general; I could not have a better; and Mr. Douglass is to be my right hand; I occupying only the quiet and unassuming post of the will, to convey the orders of the head to the hand. And for the rest, sir, there is Philetus!"

Mr. Olmney looked, half laughing, at Mr. Skillcorn, who was at that moment standing with his hands on his sides, eying with concentrated gravity the movements of Earl Douglass and the doctor.

"Don't shake your head at him!" said Fleda. "I wish you had come an hour earlier, Mr. Olmney."

"Why?"

"I was just thinking of coming out here," said Fleda, her eyes flashing with hidden fun,--"and Hugh and I were both standing in the kitchen, when we heard a tremendous shout from the woodyard. Don't laugh, or I can't go on. We all ran out, towards the lantern which we saw standing there, and so soon as we got near we heard Philetus singing out, 'Ho, Miss Elster!--I'm dreadfully on't!'--Why he called upon Barby I don't know, unless from some notion of her general efficiency, though to be sure he was nearer her than the sap-boilers and perhaps thought her aid would come quickest. And he was in a hurry, for the cries came thick--'Miss Elster!--here!--I'm dreadfully on't'--"

"I don't understand--"

"No," said Fleda, whose amusement seemed to be increased by the gentleman's want of understanding,--"and neither did we till we came up to him. The silly fellow had been sent up for more wood, and splitting a log he had put his hand in to keep the cleft, instead of a wedge, and when he took out the axe the wood pinched him; and he had the fate of Milo before his eyes, I suppose, and could do nothing but roar. You should have seen the supreme indignation with which Barby took the axe and released him with 'You're a smart man, Mr. Skillcorn!'"

"What was the fate of Milo?" said Mr. Olmney presently.

"Don't you remember,--the famous wrestler that in his old age trying to break open a tree found himself not strong enough; and the wood closing upon his hands held him fast till the wild beasts came and made an end of him. The figure of our unfortunate wood-cutter though, was hardly so dignified as that of the old athlete in the statue.--Dr. Quackenboss, and Mr. Douglass,--you will come in and see us when this troublesome business is done?"

"It'll be a pretty spell yet," said Earl;--"but the doctor, he can go in,--he ha'n't nothin' to do. It don't take more'n half a dozen men to keep one pot a bilin'."

"Ain't there ten on 'em, Mr. Douglass?" said Philetus.

Chapter XXVIII.

> He that has light within his own clear breast,
> May sit i' the centre and enjoy bright day.
>
> Milton.

The farming plan succeeded beyond Fleda's hopes; thanks not more to her wisdom than to the nice tact with which the wisdom was brought into play. The one was eked out with Seth Plumfield's; the other was all her own. Seth was indefatigably kind and faithful. After his own day's work was done he used to walk down to see Fleda, go with her often to view the particular field or work just then in question, and give her the best counsel dictated by great sagacity and great experience. It was given too with equal frankness and intelligence, so that Fleda knew the steps she took and could maintain them against the prejudice or the ignorance of her subordinates. But Fleda's delicate handling stood her yet more in stead than her strength. Earl Douglass was sometimes unmanageable, and held out in favour of an old custom or a prevailing opinion in spite of all the weight of testimony and light of discovery that could be brought to bear upon him. Fleda would let the thing go. But seizing her opportunity another time she would ask him to try the experiment, on a piece of the ground; so pleasantly and skilfully that Earl could do nothing but shut his mouth and obey, like an animal fairly stroked into good humour. And as Fleda always forgot to remind him that she had been right and he wrong, he forgot it too, and presently took to the new way kindly. In other matters he could be depended on, and the seed-time and harvest prospered well. There was hope of making a good payment to Dr. Gregory in the course of a few months.

As the spring came forward Fleda took care that her garden should,--both gardens indeed. There she and Philetus had the game in their own hands, and beautifully it was managed. Hugh had full occupation at the mill. Many a dollar this summer was earned by the loads of fine fruit and vegetables which Philetus carried to Montepoole; and accident opened a new source of revenue. When the courtyard was in the full blaze of its beauty, one day an admiring passer-by modestly inquired if a few of those exquisite flowers might be had for money. They were given him most cheerfully that time; but the demand returned, accompanied by the offer, and Fleda obliged herself not to decline it. A trial it was to cut her roses and jessamines for anything but her own or her friends' pleasure, but according to custom she bore it without hesitation. The place became a resort for all the flower-lovers who happened to be staying at the Pool; and rose-leaves were changed into silver pennies as fast as in a fairy-tale.

But the delicate mainspring that kept all this machinery in order suffered from too severe a strain. There was too much running, too much considering, too much watchfulness. In the garden pulling peas and seeing that Philetus weeded the carrots right,--in the field or the woodyard consulting and arranging or maybe debating with Earl Douglass, who acquired by degrees an unwonted and concentrated respect for womankind in her proper person; breakfast waiting for her often before she came in; in the house her old housewifery concerns, her share in Barby's cares or difficulties, her sweet countenancing and cheering of her aunt, her dinner, her work;--then when evening came, budding her roses or tying her carnations or weeding or raking the ground between them, (where Philetus could do nothing,) or training her multiflora and sweet-briar branches;--and then often after all, walking up to the mill to give Hugh a little earlier a home smile and make his way down pleasant. No wonder if the energies which owed much of their strength to love's nerving, should at last give out, and Fleda's evening be passed in wearied slumbers. No wonder if many a day was given up to the forced quietude of a headache, the more grievous to Fleda because

she knew that her aunt and Hugh always found the day dark that was not lightened by her sunbeam. How brightly it shone out the moment the cloud of pain was removed, winning the shadow from their faces and a smile to their lips, though solitude always saw her own settle into a gravity as fixed as it was soft.

"You have been doing too much, Fleda," said Mrs. Rossitur one morning when she came in from the garden.

"I didn't know it would take me so long," said Fleda drawing a long breath;--"but I couldn't help it. I had those celery plants to prick out,--and then I was helping Philetus to plant another patch of corn."

"He might have done that without help I should think."

"But it must be put in to-day, and he had other things to do."

"And then you were at your flowers?--"

"O well!--budding a few roses--that's only play. It was time they were done. But I *am* tired; and I am going up to see Hugh--it will rest me and him too."

The gardening frock and gloves were exchanged for those of ordinary wear, and Fleda set off slowly to go up to the saw-mill.

She stopped a moment when she came upon the bridge, to look off to the right where the waters of the little run came hurrying along through a narrow wooded chasm in the hill, murmuring to her of the time when a little child's feet had paused there and a child's heart danced to its music. The freshness of its song was unchanged, the glad rush of its waters was as joyous as ever, but the spirits were quieted that used to answer it with sweeter freshness and lighter joyousness. Its faint echo of the old-time laugh was blended now in Fleda's ear with a gentle wail for the rushing days and swifter fleeing delights of human life;--gentle, faint, but clear,--she could hear it very well. Taking up her walk again with a step yet

slower and a brow yet more quiet, she went on till she came in sight of the little mill; and presently above the noise of the brook could hear the saw going. To her childish ears what a signal of pleasure that had always been; and now,--she sighed, and stopping at a little distance looked for Hugh. He was there; she saw him in a moment going forward to stop the machinery, the piece of timber in hand having walked its utmost length up to the saw; she saw him throwing aside the new-cut board, and adjusting what was left till it was ready for another march up to headquarters. When it stopped the second time Fleda went forward. Hugh must have been busy in his own thoughts, for he did not see her until he had again adjusted the log and set the noisy works in motion. She stood still. Several huge timbers lay close by, ready for the saw; and on one of them where he had been sitting Fleda saw his Bible lying open. As her eye went from it to him it struck her heart with a pang that he looked tired and that there was a something of delicacy, even of fragility, in the air of face and figure both.

He came to meet her and welcomed her with a smile that coming upon this feeling set Fleda's heart a quivering. Hugh's smile was always one of very great sweetness, though never unshadowed; there was often something ethereal in its pure gentleness. This time it seemed even sweeter than usual, but though not sadder, perhaps less sad, Fleda could hardly command herself to reply to it. She could not at the moment speak; her eye glanced at his open book.

"Yes, it rests me," he said, answering her.

"Rests you, dear Hugh!--"

He smiled again. "Here is somebody else that wants resting, I am afraid," said he, placing her gently on the log; and before she had found anything to say he went off again to his machinery. Fleda sat looking at him and trying to clear her bosom of its thick breathing.

"What has brought you up here through the hot sun?" said he, coming back after he had stopped the saw, and sitting down beside her.

Fleda's lip moved nervously and her eye shunned meeting his. Softly pushing back the wet hair from his temples, she said,

"I had one of my fits of doing nothing at home--I didn't feel very bright and thought perhaps you didn't,--so on the principle that two negatives make an affirmative--"

"I feel bright," said Hugh gently.

Fleda's eye came down to his, which was steady and clear as the reflection of the sky in Deepwater lake,--and then hers fell lower.

"Why don't you, dear Fleda?"

"I believe I am a little tired," Fleda said, trying but in vain to command herself and look up,--"and there are states of body when anything almost is enough to depress one--"

"And what depresses you now?" said he, very steadily and quietly.

"O--I was feeling a little down about things in general," said Fleda in a choked voice, trying to throw off her load with a long breath;--"it's because I am tired, I suppose--"

"I felt so too, a little while ago," said Hugh. "But I have concluded to give all that up, Fleda."

Fleda looked at him. Her eyes were swimming full, but his were clear and gentle as ever, only glistening a little in sympathy with hers.

"I thought all was going wrong with us," he went on. "But I found it was only I that was wrong; and since that I have been quite happy, Fleda."

Fleda could not speak to him; his words made her pain worse.

"I told you this rested me," said he reaching across her for his book; "and now I am never weary long. Shall I rest you with it? What have you been troubling yourself about to-day?"

She did not answer while he was turning over the leaves, and he then said,

"Do you remember this, Fleda?--'*Truly God is good to Israel, even to them that are of a clean heart*.'"

Fleda bent her head down upon her hands.

"I was moody and restless the other day," said Hugh,--"desponding of everything;--and I came upon this psalm; and it made me ashamed of myself. I had been disbelieving it, and because I could not see how things were going to work good I thought they were going to work evil. I thought we were wearing out our lives alone here in a wearisome way, and I forgot that it must be the very straightest way that we could get home. I am sure we shall not want anything that will do us good; and the rest I am willing to want--and so are you, Fleda?"

Fleda squeezed his hand,--that was all. For a minute he was silent, and then went on, without any change of tone.

"I had a notion awhile ago that I should like it if it were possible for me to go to college; but I am quite satisfied now. I have good time and opportunity to furnish myself with a better kind of knowledge, that I shall want where college learning wouldn't be of much use to me; and I can do it, I dare say, better here in this mill than if we had stayed in New York and I had lived in our favourite library."

"But dear Hugh," said Fleda, who did not like this speech in any sense of it,--"the two things do not clash. The better man the better Christian always, other things being equal. The more precious kind of knowledge should not make one undervalue the less?"

"No,"--he said; but the extreme quietness and simplicity of his reply smote Fleda's fears; it answered her words and waived her thought; she dared not press him further. She sat looking over the road with an aching heart.

"You haven't taken enough of my medicine," said Hugh smiling. "Listen, Fleda--'*All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies*.'"

But that made Fleda cry again.

"'All his paths,' Fleda--then, whatever may happen to you, and whatever may happen to me, or to any of us.--I can trust him. I am willing any one should have the world, if I may have what Abraham had--'*Fear not; I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward;*'--and I believe I shall, Fleda; for it is not the hungry that he has threatened to send empty away."

Fleda could say nothing, and Hugh just then said no more. For a little while, near and busy as thoughts might be, tongues were silent. Fleda was crying quietly, the utmost she could do being to keep it quiet; Hugh, more quietly, was considering again the strong pillars on which he had laid his hope, and trying their strength and beauty; till all other things were to him as the mist rolling off from the valley is to the man planted on a watch tower.

His meditations were interrupted by the tramp of horse, and a party of riders male and female came past them up the hill. Hugh looked on as they went by; Fleda's head was not raised.

"There are some people enjoying themselves," said Hugh. "After all, dear Fleda, we should be very sorry to change places with those gay riders. I would not for a thousand worlds give my hope and treasure for all other they can possibly have, in possession or prospect."

"No, indeed!" said Fleda energetically, and trying to rouse herself;--"and besides that, Hugh, we have as it is a great deal more to enjoy than most other people. We are so happy--"

In each other, she was going to say, but the words choked her.

"Those people looked very hard at us, or at one of us," said Hugh. "It must have been you, I think, Fleda"

"They are welcome," said Fleda; "they couldn't have made much out of the back of my sun bonnet."

"Well, dear Fleda, I must content myself with little more than looking at you now, for Mr. Winegar is in a hurry for his timber to be sawn, and I must set this noisy concern a going again."

Fleda sat and watched him, with rising and falling hopes and fears, forcing her lips to a smile when he came near her, and hiding her tears at other times; till the shadows stretching well to the east of the meridian, admonished her she had been there long enough; and she left him still going backward and forward tending the saw.

As she went down the hill she pressed involuntarily her hands upon her heart, for the dull heavy pain there. But that was no plaster for it; and when she got to the bridge the soft singing of the little brook was just enough to shake her spirits from the doubtful poise they had kept. Giving one hasty glance along the road and up the hill to make sure that no one was near she sat down on a stone in the edge of the woods, and indulged in such weeping as her gentle eyes rarely knew; for the habit of patience so cultivated for others' sake constantly rewarded her own life with its sweet fruits. But deep and bitter in proportion was the flow of the fountain once broken up. She struggled to remind herself that "Providence runneth not on broken wheels," she struggled to repeat to herself, what she did not doubt that "*all* the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth" to his people;--in vain. The slight check for a moment to the torrent of grief but gave it greater head to sweep over the barrier; and

the self-reproach that blamed its violence and needlessness only made the flood more bitter. Nature fought against patience for awhile; but when the loaded heart had partly relieved itself patience came in again and she rose up to go home. It startled her exceedingly to find Mr. Olmney standing before her, and looking so sorrowful that Fleda's eyes could not bear it.

"My dear Miss Ringgan!--forgive me--I hope you will forgive me,--but I could not leave you in such distress. I knew that in *you* it could only be from some very serious cause of grief."

"I cannot say it is from anything new, Mr. Olmney--except to my apprehensions."

"You are all *well*?" he said inquiringly, after they had walked a few steps in silence.

"Well?--yes, sir,--" said Fleda hesitatingly,--"but I do not think that Hugh looks very well."

The trembling of her voice told him her thought. But he remained silent.

"You have noticed it?" she said hastily, looking up.

"I think you have told me he always was delicate?"

"And you have noticed him looking so lately, Mr. Olmney?"

"I have thought so,--but you say he always was that. If you will permit me to say so, I have thought the same of you, Miss Fleda."

Fleda was silent; her heart ached again.

"We would gladly save each other from every threatening trouble," said Mr. Olmney again after a pause;--"but it ought to content us that we do not know how. Hugh is in good hands, my dear Miss Ringgan."

"I know it, sir," said Fleda unable quite to keep back her tears,--"and I know very well this thread of our life will not bear the strain always,--and I know that the strands must in all probability part unevenly,--and I know it is in the power of no blind fate,--but that--"

"Does not lessen our clinging to each other. Oh no!--it grows but the tenderer and the stronger for the knowledge."

Fleda could but cry.

"And yet," said he very kindly,--"we who are Christians may and ought to learn to take troubles hopefully; for 'tribulation worketh patience; and patience,' that is, quiet waiting on God, 'works experience' of his goodness and faithfulness; 'and experience worketh hope; and that hope, we know, 'maketh not ashamed.'"

"I know it," said Fleda;--"but, Mr. Olmney, how easily the brunt of a new affliction breaks down all that chain of reasoning!"

"Yes!--" he said sadly and thoughtfully;--"but my dear Miss Fleda, you know the way to build it up again. I would be very glad to bear all need for it away from you!"

They had reached the gate. Fleda could not look up to thank him; the hand she held out was grasped, more than kindly, and he turned away.

Fleda's tears came hot again as she went up the walk; she held her head down to hide them and went round the back way.

Chapter XXIX.

> Now, the melancholy god protect thee; and the tailor make thy doublet of changeable taffeta, for thy mind is a very opal!--Twelfth Night.

"Well what did you come home for?" was Barby's salutation;--"here's company been waiting for you till they're tired, and I am sure I be."

"Company!!--" said Fleda.

"Yes, and it's ungrateful in you to say so," said Barby, "for she's been in a wonderful hurry to see you,--or to get somethin' to eat; I don't know which; a little o' both, I hope in charity."

"Why didn't you give her something to eat? Who is it?"

"I don't know who it is! It's one of your highfliers, that's all I can make out. She 'a'n't a hat a bit better than a man's beaver,--one 'ud think she had stole her little brother's for a spree, if the rest of her was like common folks; but she's got a tail to her dress as long as from here to Queechy Run; and she's been tiddling in and out here with it puckered up under her arm sixty times. I guess she belongs to some company of female militie, for the body of it is all thick with braid and buttons. I believe she ha'n't sot still five minutes since she come into the house, till I don't know whether I am on my head or my heels."

"But why didn't you give her something to eat?" said Fleda, who was hastily throwing off her gloves and smoothing her disordered hair with her hands into something of composure.

"Did!" said Barby;--"I give her some o' them cold biscuit and butter and cheese and a pitcher of milk--sot a good enough meal for anybody--but she didn't take but a crumb, and she turned up her nose at that. Come,

go!--you've slicked up enough--you're handsome enough to shew yourself to her any time o' day, for all her jig-em-bobs."

"Where is aunt Lucy?"

"She's up stairs;--there's been nobody to see to her but me. She's had the hull lower part of the house to herself, kitchen and all, and she's done nothing but go out of one room into another ever since she come. She'll be in here again directly if you ain't spry."

Fleda went in, round to the west room, and there found herself in the arms of the second Miss Evelyn, who jumped to meet her and half stifled her with caresses.

"You wicked little creature! what have you been doing? Here have I been growing melancholy over the tokens of your absence, and watching the decline of the sun with distracted feelings these six hours."

"Six hours!" said Fleda smiling.

"My dear little Fleda!--it's so delicious to see you again!" said Miss Evelyn with another prolonged hug and kiss.

"My dear Constance!--I am very glad--But where are the rest?"

"It's unkind of you to ask after anybody but me, when I came here this morning on purpose to talk the whole day to you. Now dear little Fleda," said Miss Constance, executing an impatient little persuasive caper round her,--"won't you go out and order dinner? for I'm raging. Your woman did give me something, but I found the want of you had taken away all my appetite; and now the delight of seeing you has exhausted me, and I feel that nature is sinking. The stimulus of gratified affection is too much for me."

"You absurd child!" said Fleda,--"you haven't mended a bit. But I told Barby to put on the tea-kettle and I will administer a composing draught as soon as it can be got ready; we don't indulge in dinners here in the

wilderness. Meanwhile suppose that exhausted nature try the support of this easy-chair?"

She put her visitor gently into it, and seating herself upon the arm held her hand and looked at her, with a smiling face and yet with eyes that were almost too gentle in their welcoming.

"My dear little Fleda!--you're as lovely as you can be! Are you glad to see me?"

"Very."

"Why don't you ask after somebody else?"

"I was afraid of overtasking your exhausted energies."

"Come and sit down here upon my lap!--you shall, or I won't say another word to you. Fleda! you've grown thin! what have you been doing to yourself?"

"Nothing, with that particular purpose."

"I don't care, you've done something. You have been insanely imagining that it is necessary for you to be in three or four places at the same time, and in the distracted effort after ubiquity you are in imminent danger of being nowhere--there's nothing left of you."

"I don't wonder you were overcome at the sight of me," said Fleda.

"But you are looking charmingly for all that," Constance went on;--"so charmingly that I feel a morbid sensation creeping all over me while I sit regarding you. Really, when you come to us next winter if you persist in being,--by way of shewing your superiority to ordinary human nature,--a rose without a thorn, the rest of the flowers may all shut up at once. And the rose reddens in my very face, to spite me!"

"Is 'ordinary human nature' typified by a thorn? You give it rather a poor character."

"I never heard of a Thorn that didn't bear an excellent character!" said Constance gravely.

"Hush!" said Fleda laughing;--"I don't want to hear about Mr. Thorn.--Tell me of somebody else."

"I haven't said a word about Mr. Thorn!" said Constance ecstatically, "but since you ask about him I will tell you. He has not acted like himself since you disappeared from our horizon--that is, he has ceased to be at all pointed in his attentions to me; his conversation has lost all the acuteness for which I remember you admired it; he has walked Broadway in a moody state of mind all winter, and grown as dull as is consistent with the essential sharpness of his nature. I ought to except our last interview, though, for his entreaties to mamma that she would bring you home with her were piercing."

Fleda was unable in spite of herself to keep from laughing, but entreated that Constance would tell her of somebody else.

"My respected parents are at Montepoole, with all their offspring,--that is, Florence and Edith,--I am at present anxiously enquired after, being nobody knows where, and to be fetched by mamma this evening. Wasn't I good, little Fleda, to run away from Mr. Carleton to come and spend a whole day in social converse with you?"

"Carleton!" said Fleda.

"Yes--O you don't know who *he* is! he's a new attraction--there's been nothing like him this great while, and all New York is topsy-turvy about him; the mothers are dying with anxiety and the daughters with admiration; and it's too delightful to see the cool superiority with which he takes it all;--like a new star that all the people are pointing their telescopes at,--as Thorn said spitefully the other day. O he has turned

my head; I have looked till I cannot look at anything else. I can just manage to see a rose, but my dazzled powers of vision are equal to nothing more."

"My dear Constance!--"

"It's perfectly true! Why as soon as we knew he was coming to Montepoole I wouldn't let mamma rest till we all made a rush after him--and when we got here first and I was afraid he wasn't coming, nothing can express the state of my feelings!--But he appeared the next morning, and then I was quite happy," said Constance, rising and falling in her chair on what must have been ecstatic springs, for wire ones it had none.

"Constance!--" said Fleda with a miserable attempt at rebuke,--"how can you talk so!"

"And so we were all riding round here this morning and I had the self-denial to stop to see you and leave Florence and the Marlboroughs to monopolize him all the way home. You ought to love me for ever for it. My dear Fleda!--" said Constance, clasping her hands and elevating her eyes in mock ecstasy,--"if you had ever seen Mr. Carleton I--"

"I dare say I have seen somebody as good," said Fleda quietly.

"My dear Fleda!" said Constance, a little scornfully this time,--"you haven't the least idea what you are talking about! I tell you he is an Englishman--he's of one of the best families in England,--not such as you ever see here but once in an age,--he's rich enough to count Mr. Thorn over I don't know how many times."

"I don't like anybody the better for being an Englishman," said Fleda; "and it must be a small man whose purse will hold his measure."

Constance made an impatient gesture.

"But I tell you it isn't! We knew him when we were abroad, and we know what he is, and we know his mother very well. When we were in England we were a week with them down at their beautiful place in ----shire,--the loveliest time! You see she was over here with Mr. Carleton once before, a good while ago; and mamma and papa were polite to them, and so they shewed us a great deal of attention when we were in England. We had the loveliest time down there you can possibly conceive. And my dear Fleda he wears such a fur cloak!--lined with the most exquisite black fox."

"But, Constance!" said Fleda, a little vexed though laughing,--"any man may wear a fur cloak--the thing is, what is inside of it?"

"It is perfectly indifferent to me what is inside of it!" said Constance ecstatically. "I can see nothing but the edges of the black fox, especially when it is worn so very gracefully."

"But in some cases there might be a white fox within?"

"There is nothing of the fox about Mr. Carleton!" said Constance impatiently. "If it had been anybody else I should have said he was a bear two or three times; but he wears everything as he does his cloak, and makes you take what he pleases from him; what I wouldn't take from anybody else I know."

"With a fox lining?" said Fleda laughing.

"Then foxes haven't got their true character, that's all. Now I'll just tell you an instance--it was at a party somewhere--it was at that tiresome Mrs. Swinburne's, where the evenings are always so stupid, and there was nothing worth going or staying for but the supper,--except Mr. Carleton! and he never stays five minutes, except at two or three places; and it drives me crazy, because they are places I don't go to very often--"

"Suppose you keep your wits and tell me your story?"

"Well--don't interrupt me!--he was there, and he had taken me into the supper-room, when mamma came along and took it into her head to tell me not to take something--I forget what--punch, I believe,--because I had not been well in the morning. Now you know, it was absurd! I was perfectly well then, and I told her I shouldn't mind her; but do you believe Mr. Carleton wouldn't give it to me?--absolutely told me he wouldn't, and told me why, as coolly as possible, and gave me a glass of water and made me drink it; and if it had been anybody else I do assure you I would have flung it in his face and never spoken to him again; and I have been in love with him ever since. Now *is* that tea going to be ready?"

"Presently. How long have you been here?"

"O a day or two--and it has poured with rain every single day since we came, till this one;--and just think!"--said Constance with a ludicrously scared face,--"I must make haste and be back again. You see, I came away on principle, that I may strike with the effect of novelty when I appear again; but if I stay *too* long, you know,--there is a point--"

"On the principle of the ice-boats," said Fleda, "that back a little to give a better blow to the ice, where they find it tough?"

"Tough!" said Constance.

"Does Florence like this paragon of yours as well as you do?"

"I don't know--she don't talk so much about him, but that proves nothing; she's too happy to talk *to* him.--I expect our family concord will be shattered by and by!" said Constance shaking her head.

"You seem to take the prospect philosophically," said Fleda, looking amused. "How long are you going to stay at the Pool?"

Constance gave an expressive shrug, intimating that the deciding of that question did not rest with her.

"That is to say, you are here to watch the transit of this star over the meridian of Queechy?"

"Of Queechy!--of Montepoole."

"Very well--of Montepoole. I don't wonder that nature is exhausted. I will go and see after this refection."

The prettiest little meal in the world was presently set forth for the two,--Fleda knew her aunt would not come down, and Hugh was yet at the mill; so she led her visitor into the breakfast-room alone, Constance by the way again fondly embracing her and repeating, "My dear little Fleda!--how glad I am to see you!"

The lady was apparently hungry, for there was a minute of silence while the refection begun, and then Constance exclaimed, perhaps with a sudden appreciation of the delicious bread and butter and cream and strawberries,

"What a lovely old room this is!--and what lovely times you have here, don't you, Fleda?"

"Yes--sometimes," Fleda said with a sigh.

"But I shall tell mamma you are growing thin, and the first minute we get home I shall send for you to come to us. Mrs. Thorn will be amazingly glad to see you."

"Has she got back from Europe?" said Fleda.

"Ages!--and she's been entertaining the world as hard as she could ever since. I have no doubt Lewis has confided to the maternal bosom all his distresses; and there never was anything like the rush that I expect will be made to our greenhouse next winter. O Fleda, you should see Mr. Carleton's greenhouses!"

"Should I?" said Fleda.

"Dear me! I hope mamma will come!" said Constance with a comical fidgety shake of herself;--"when I think of those greenhouses I lose my self-command. And the park!--Fleda, it's the loveliest thing you ever saw in your life; and it's all that delightful man's doing; only he won't have a geometric flower-garden, as I did everything I could think of to persuade him. I pity the woman that will be his wife,--she won't have her own way in a single thing; but then he will fascinate her into thinking that his way is the best, so it will do just as well I suppose. Do you know I can't conceive what he has come over here for? He has been here before, you know, and he don't seem to me to know exactly what he means to do; at least I can't find out, and I have tried."

"How long has he been here?"

"O a month or two--since the beginning of April, I believe. He came over with some friends of his--a Sir George Egerton and his family;--he is going to Canada, to be established in some post there, I forget what; and they are spending part of the summer here before they fix themselves at the North. It is easy to see what *they* are here for,--they are strangers and amusing themselves; but Mr. Carleton is at home, and *not* amusing himself, at least he don't seem to be. He goes about with the Egertons, but that is just for his friendship for them; and he puzzles me. He don't snow whether he is going to Niagara,--he has been once already--and 'perhaps' he may go to Canada,--and 'possibly' he will make a journey to the West,--and I can't find out that he wants anything in particular."

"Perhaps he don't mean that you shall," said Fleda.

"Perhaps he don't; but you see that aggravates my state of mind to a distressing degree. And then I'm afraid he will go somewhere where I can't keep watch of him!--"

Fleda could not help laughing.

"Perhaps he was tired of home and came for mere weariness."

"Weariness! it's my opinion he has no idea there is such a word in the language,--I am certain if he heard it he would call for a dictionary the next minute. Why at Carleton it seems to me he was half the time on horseback, flying about from one end of the country to the other; and when he is in the house he is always at work at something; it's a piece of condescension to get him to attend to you at all; only when he does, my dear Fleda!--he is so enchanting that you live in a state of delight till next time. And yet I never could get him to pay me a compliment to this minute,--I tried two or three times, and he rewarded me with some very rude speeches."

"Rude!" said Fleda.

"Yes,--that is, they were the most graceful and fascinating things possible, but they would have been rudeness in anybody else. Where *is* mamma!" said Constance with another comic counterfeit of distress "My dear Fleda, it's the most captivating thing to breakfast at Carleton!--"

"I have no idea the bread and butter is sweeter there than in some other parts of the world," said Fleda.

"I don't know about the bread and butter," said Constance, "but those exquisite little sugar dishes! My dear Fleda, every one has his own sugar-dish and cream-ewer--the loveliest little things!--"

"I have heard of such things before," said Fleda.

"I don't care about the bread and butter," said Constance; "eating is immaterial, with those perfect little things right opposite to me. They weren't like any you ever saw, Fleda--the sugar-bowl was just a little plain oval box, with the lid on a hinge, and not a bit of chasing, only the arms on the cover; like nothing I ever saw but an old-fashioned silver tea-caddy; and the cream-jug a little straight up and down thing to match. Mamma said they were clumsy, but they bewitched me!--"

"I think everything bewitched you," said Fleda smiling. "Can't your head stand a sugar-dish and milk-cup?"

"My dear Fleda, I never had your superiority to the ordinary weaknesses of human nature--I can stand *one* sugar-bowl, but I confess myself overcome by a dozen. How we have all wanted to see you, Fleda! and papa; you have captivated papa; and he says--"

"Never mind--don't tell me what he says," said Fleda.

"There--that's your modesty, that everybody raves about--I wish I could catch it. Fleda, where did you get that little Bible?--while I was waiting for you I tried to soothe my restless anticipations with examining all the things in all the rooms;--where did you get it?"

"It was given me a long while ago," said Fleda.

"But it is real gold on the outside!--the clasps and all--do you know it? it is not washed."

"I know it," said Fleda smiling; "and it is better than gold inside."

"Wasn't that mamma's favourite Mr. Olmney that parted from you at the gate?" said Constance after a minute's silence.

"Yes."

"Is he a favourite of yours too?"

"You must define what you mean by a favourite?" said Fleda gravely.

"Well, how do you like him?"

"I believe everybody likes him," said Fleda, colouring and vexed at herself that she could not help it. The bright eyes opposite her took note of the fact with a sufficiently wide-awake glance.

"He's very good!" said Constance hugging herself, and taking a fresh supply of butter,--"but don't let him know I have been to see you or he'll tell you all sorts of evil things about me for fear you should innocently be contaminated. Don't you like to be taken care of?"

"Very much," said Fleda smiling,--"by people that know how."

"I can't bear it!" said Constance, apparently with great sincerity;--"I think it is the most impertinent thing in the world people can do. I can't endure it--except from--! Oh my dear Fleda! it is perfect luxury to have him put a shawl round your shoulders!--"

"Fleda," said Earl Douglass putting his head in from the kitchen, and before he said any more bobbing it frankly at Miss Evelyn, half in acknowledgment of her presence and half as it seemed in apology for his own,--"Fleda, will you let Barby pack up somethin' 'nother for the men's lunch?--my wife would ha' done it, as she had ought to, if she wa'n't down with the teeth-ache, and Catherine's away on a jig to Kenton, and the men won't do so much work on nothin', and I can't say nothin' to 'em if they don't; and I'd like to get that 'ere clover field down afore night--it's goin' to be a fine spell o' weather. I was a goin' to try to get along without it; but I believe we can't."

"Very well," said Fleda. "But, Mr. Douglass, you'll try the experiment of curing it in cocks?"

"Well I don't know," said Earl in a tone of very discontented acquiescence,--"I don't see how anythin' should be as sweet as the sun for dryin' hay--I know folks says it is, and I've heerd 'em say it is! and they'll stand to it and you can't beat 'em off the notion it is; but somehow or 'nother I can't seem to come into it. I know the sun makes sweet hay, and I think the sun was meant to make hay, and I don't want to see no sweeter hay than the sun makes; it's as good hay as you need to have."

"But you wouldn't mind trying it for once, Mr. Douglass, just for me?"

"I'll do just what you please," said he with a little exculpatory shake of his head;--"'tain't my concern--it's no concern of mine--the gain or the loss'll be your'n, and it's fair you should have the gain or the loss, which ever on 'em you choose to have. I'll put it in cocks--how much heft should be in 'em?"

"About a hundred pounds--and you don't want to cut any more than you can put up to-night, Mr. Douglass. We'll try it."

"Very good! And you'll send along somethin' for the men--Barby knows," said Earl bobbing his head again intelligently at Fleda,--"there's four on 'em and it takes somethin' to feed 'em--workin' men'll put away a good deal o' meat."

He withdrew his head and closed the door, happily for Constance, who went off into a succession of ecstatic convulsions.

"What time of day do your eccentric hay-makers prefer for the rest of their meals, if they lunch at three o'clock? I never heard anything so original in my life."

"This is lunch number two," said Fleda smiling; "lunch number one is about ten in the morning; and dinner at twelve."

"And do they gladden their families with their presence at the other ordinary convivial occasions?"

"Certainly."

"And what do they have for lunch?"

"Varieties. Bread and cheese, and pies, and Quirlcakes; at every other meal they have meat."

"Horrid creatures!"

"It is only during haying and harvesting."

"And you have to see to all this! poor little Fleda! I declare, if I was you--I'd do something!--"

"No," said Fleda quietly, "Mrs. Douglass and Barby manage the lunch between them. I am not at all desperate."

"But to have to talk to these people!"

"Earl Douglass is not a very polished specimen," said Fleda smiling, "but I assure you in some of 'these people' there is an amount of goodness and wit, and shrewd practical sense and judgment, that would utterly distance many of those that would call them bears."

Constance looked a good deal more than she said.

"My dear little Fleda! you're too sensible for anything; but as I don't like sense from anybody but Mr. Carleton I would rather look at you in the capacity of a rose, smiling a gentle rebuke upon me while I talk nonsense."

And she did talk, and Fleda did smile and laugh, in spite of herself, till Mrs. Evelyn and her other daughters made their appearance.

Then Barby said she thought they'd have talked the house down; and she expected there'd be nothing left of Fleda after all the kissing she got. But it was not too much for Fleda's pleasure. Mrs. Evelyn was so tenderly kind, and Miss Evelyn as caressing as her sister had been, and Edith, who was but a child, so joyously delighted, that Fleda's eyes were swimming in happiness as she looked from one to the other, and she could hardly answer kisses and questions fast enough.

"Them is good-looking enough girls," said Barby as Fleda came back to the house after seeing them to their carriage,--"if they knowed how to dress themselves. I never see this fly away one 'afore--I knowed the old one as soon as I clapped my eyes onto her. Be they stopping at the Pool again?"

"Yes."

"Well when are you going up there to see 'em?"

"I don't know," said Fleda quietly. And then sighing as the thought of her aunt came into her head she went off to find her and bring her down.

Fleda's brow was sobered, and her spirits were in a flutter that was not all of happiness and that threatened not to settle down quietly. But as she went slowly up the stairs faith's hand was laid, even as her own grasped the balusters, on the promise,

"All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies."

She set faith's foot down on those sure stepping-stones; and she opened her aunt's door and looked in with a face that was neither troubled nor afraid.

Chapter XXX.

> *Ant*. He misses not much.
>
> *Seb*. No; he doth but mistake the truth totally.
>
> Tempest.

It was the very next morning that several ladies and gentlemen were gathered on the piazza of the hotel at Montepoole, to brace minds or appetites with the sweet mountain air while waiting for breakfast. As they stood there a young countryman came by bearing on his hip a large basket of fruit and vegetables.

"O look at those lovely strawberries!" exclaimed Constance Evelyn running down the steps.--"Stop if you please--where are you going with these?"

"Marm!" responded the somewhat startled carrier.

"What are you going to do with them?"

"I ain't going to do nothin' with 'em."

"Whose are they? Are they for sale?"

"Well, 'twon't deu no harm, as I know," said the young man making a virtue of necessity, for the fingers of Constance were already hovering over the dainty little leaf-strewn baskets and her eyes complacently searching for the most promising;--"I ha'n't got nothin' to deu with 'em."

"Constance!" said Mrs. Evelyn from the piazza,--"don't take that! I dare say they are for Mr. Sweet."

"Well, mamma!--" said Constance with great equanimity,--"Mr. Sweet gets them for me, and I only save him the trouble of spoiling them. My taste leads me to prefer the simplicity of primitive arrangements this morning."

"Young man!" called out the landlady's reproving voice, "won't you never recollect to bring that basket round the back way?"

"'Tain't no handier than this way," said Philetus, with so much belligerent demonstration that the landlady thought best in presence of her guests to give over the question.

"Where do you get them?" said Mrs. Evelyn.

"How?--" said Philetus.

"Where do they come from? Are they fresh picked?"

"Just afore I started."

"Started from where?" said a gentleman standing by Mrs. Evelyn.

"From Mr. Rossitur's down to Queechy."

"Mr. Rossitur's!" said Mrs. Evelyn;--"does he send them here?"

"He doos not," said Philetus;--"he doosn't keep to hum for a long spell."

"Who does send them then?" said Constance.

"Who doos? It's Miss Fliddy Ringgan."

"Mamma!" exclaimed Constance looking up.

"What does she have to do with it?" said Mrs. Evelyn.

"There don't nobody else have nothin' to deu with it--I guess she's pretty much the hull," said her coadjutor. "Her and me was a picking 'em afore sunrise."

"All that basketful!"

"'Tain't all strawberries--there's garden sass up to the top."

"And does she send that too?"

"She sends that teu," said Philetus succinctly.

"But hasn't she any help in taking care of the garden?" said Constance.

"Yes marm--I calculate to help considerable in the back garden--she won't let no one into the front where she grows her posies."

"But where is Mr. Hugh?"

"He's to hum."

"But has he nothing to do with all this? does he leave it all to his cousin?"

"He's to the mill."

"And Miss Ringgan manages farm and garden and all?" said Mrs. Evelyn.

"She doos," said Philetus.

And receiving a gratuity which he accepted without demonstration of any kind whatever, the basket-bearer at length released moved off.

"Poor Fleda!" said Miss Evelyn as he disappeared with his load.

"She's a very clever girl," said Mrs. Evelyn dismissing the subject.

"She's too lovely for anything!" said Constance. "Mr. Carleton,--if you will just imagine we are in China, and introduct a pair of familiar chop-sticks into this basket, I shall be repaid for the loss of a strawberry by the expression of ecstasy which will immediately spread itself over your features. I intend to patronize the natural mode of eating in future. I find the ends of my fingers decidedly odoriferous."

He smiled a little as he complied with the young lady's invitation, but the expression of ecstasy did not come.

"Are Mr. Rossitur's circumstances so much reduced?" he said, drawing nearer to Mrs. Evelyn.

"Do you know them!" exclaimed both the daughters at once.

"I knew Mrs. Rossitur very well some years ago, when she was in Paris."

"They are all broken to pieces," said Mrs. Evelyn, as Mr. Carleton's eye went back to her for his answer;--"Mr. Rossitur failed and lost everything--bankrupt--a year or two after they came home."

"And what has he been doing since?'

"I don't know!--trying to farm it here; but I am afraid he has not succeeded well--I am afraid not. They don't look like it. Mrs. Rossitur will not see anybody, and I don't believe they have done any more than struggle for a living since they came here."

"Where is Mr. Rossitur now?"

"He is at the West somewhere--Fleda tells me he is engaged in some agencies there; but I doubt," said Mrs. Evelyn shaking her head compassionately,--"there is more in the name of it than anything else. He has gone down hill sadly since his misfortunes. I am very sorry for them."

"And his niece takes care of his farm in the meantime?"

"Do you know her?" asked both the Miss Evelyns again.

"I can hardly say that," he replied. "I had such a pleasure formerly. Do I understand that *she* is the person to fill Mr. Rossitur's place when he is away?"

"So she says."

"And so she acts," said Constance. "I wish you had heard her yesterday. It was beyond everything. We were conversing very amicably, regarding each other through a friendly vista formed by the sugar-bowl and tea-pot, when a horrid man, that looked as if he had slept all his life in a hay-cock and only waked up to turn it over, stuck his head in and immediately introduced a clover-field; and Fleda and he went to tumbling about the cocks till I do assure you I was deluded into a momentary belief that hay-making was the principal end of human nature, and looked upon myself as a burden to society; and after I had recovered my locality and ventured upon a sentence of gentle commiseration for her sufferings, Fleda went off into a eulogium upon the intelligence of hay-makers in general and the strength of mind barbarians are universally known to possess."

The manner still more than the matter of this speech was beyond the withstanding of any good-natured muscles, though the gentleman's smile was a grave one and quickly lost in gravity. Mrs. Evelyn laughed and reproved in a breath; but the laugh was admiring and the reproof was stimulative. The bright eye of Constance danced in return with the mischievous delight of a horse that has slipped his bridle and knows you can't catch him.

"And this has been her life ever since Mr. Rossitur lost his property?"

"Entirely,--sacrificed!--" said Mrs. Evelyn, with a compassionately resigned air;--"education, advantages and everything given up; and set down here where she has seen nobody from year's end to year's end but the country people about--very good people--but not the kind of people she ought to have been brought up among."

"Oh mamma!" said the eldest Miss Evelyn in a deprecatory tone,--"you shouldn't talk so--it isn't right--I am sure she is very nice--nicer now than anybody else I know; and clever too."

"Nice!" said Edith. "I wish *I* had such a sister!"

"She is a good girl--a very good girl," said Mrs. Evelyn, in a tone which would have deterred any one from wishing to make her acquaintance.

"And happy, mamma--Fleda don't look miserable--she seems perfectly happy and contented!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Evelyn,--"she has got accustomed to this state of things--it's her life--she makes delicious bread and puddings for her aunt, and raises vegetables for market, and oversees her uncle's farmers, and it isn't a hardship to her; she finds her happiness in it. She is a very good girl! but she might have been made something much better than a farmer's wife."

"You may set your mind at rest on that subject, mamma," said Constance, still using her chop-sticks with great complacency;--"it's my opinion that the farmer is not in existence who is blessed with such a conjugal futurity. I think Fleda's strong pastoral tastes are likely to develope themselves in a new direction."

Mrs. Evelyn looked with a partial smile at the pretty features which the business of eating the strawberries displayed in sundry novel and picturesque points of view; and asked what she meant?

"I don't know,--" said Constance, intent upon her basket,--"I feel a friend's distress for Mr. Thorn--it's all your doing, mamma,--you won't be able to look him in the face when we have Fleda next fall--I am sure I shall not want to look at his! He'll be too savage for anything."

"Mr. Thorn!" said Mr. Carleton.

"Yes," said Mrs. Evelyn in an indulgent tone,--"he was very attentive to her last winter when she was with us, but she went away before anything was decided. I don't think he has forgotten her."

"I shouldn't think anybody could forget her," said Edith.

"I am confident he would be here at this moment," said Constance, "if he wasn't in London."

"But what is 'all mamma's doing,' Constance?" inquired her sister.

"The destruction of the peace of the whole family of Thorns--shouldn't sleep sound in my bed if I were she with such a reflection. I look forward to heart-rending scenes,--with a very disturbed state of mind."

"But what have I done, my child?" said Mrs. Evelyn.

"Didn't you introduce your favourite Mr. Olmney to Miss Ringgan last summer? I don't know!--her native delicacy shrunk from making any disclosures, and of course the tongue of friendship is silent,--but they

were out ages yesterday while I was waiting for her, and their parting at the gate was--I feel myself unequal to the task of describing it!" said Constance ecstatically;--"and she was in the most elevated tone of mind during our whole interview afterwards, and took all my brilliant remarks with as much coolness as if they had been drops of rain--more, I presume, considering that it was hay-time."

"Did you see him?" said Mrs. Evelyn.

"Only at that impracticable distance, mamma; but I introduced his name afterwards in my usual happy manner and I found that Miss Ringgan's cheeks were by no means indifferent to it. I didn't dare go any further."

"I am very glad of it! I hope it is so!" said Mrs. Evelyn energetically. "It would be a most excellent match. He is a charming young man and would make her very happy."

"You are exciting gloomy feelings in Mr. Carleton's mind, mamma, by your felicitous suggestions. Mr. Carleton, did your ears receive a faint announcement of ham and eggs which went quite through and through mine just now?"

He bowed and handed the young lady in; but Constance declared that though he sat beside her and took care of her at breakfast he had on one of his intangible fits which drove her to the last extreme of impatience, and captivation.

The sun was not much more than two hours high the next morning when a rider was slowly approaching Mr. Rossitur's house from the bridge, walking his horse like a man who wished to look well at all he was passing. He paused behind a clump of locusts and rose-acacias in the corner of the courtyard as a figure bonneted and gloved came out of the house and began to be busy among the rose-bushes. Another figure presently appeared at the hall-door and called out,

"Fleda!--"

"Well, Barby--"

This second voice was hardly raised, but it came from so much nearer that the words could be distinctly heard.

"Mr. Skillcorn wants to know if you're going to fix the flowers for him to carry?"

"They're not ready, and it won't do for him to vait--Mr. Sweet must send for them if he wants them. Philetus must make haste back, for you know Mr. Douglass wants him to help in the barn meadow. Lucas won't be here and now the weather is so fine I want to make haste with the hay."

"Well, will you have the samp for breakfast?"

"No--we'll keep that for dinner. I'll come in and poach some eggs, Barby,--if you'll make me some thin pieces of toast--and call me when it's time. Thin, Barby."

The gentleman turned his horse and galloped back to Montepoole.

Some disappointment was created among a portion of Mr. Sweet's guests that afternoon by the intelligence that Mr. Carleton purposed setting off the next morning to join his English friends at Saratoga on their way to the falls and Canada. Which purpose was duly carried into effect.

Chapter XXXI.

> With your leave, sir, an' there were no more men living upon the face of the earth, I should not fancy him, by St. George.--Every Man Out of His Humour.

October had come; and a fair season and a fine harvest had enabled Fleda to ease her mind by sending a good remittance to Dr. Gregory. The family were still living upon her and Hugh's energies. Mr. Rossitur talked of coming home, that was all.

It sometimes happened that a pause in the urgency of business permitted Hugh to take a day's holiday. One of these falling soon after the frosts had opened the burrs of the chestnut trees and the shells of the hickories, Fleda seized upon it for a nutting frolic. They took Philetus and went up to the fine group of trees on the mountain, the most difficult to reach and the best worth reaching of all their nut wood. The sport was very fine; and after spoiling the trees Philetus was left to "shuck" and bring home a load of the fruit; while Fleda and Hugh took their way slowly down the mountain. She stopped him, as usual, on the old lookout place. The leaves were just then in their richest colouring; and the October sky in its strong vitality seemed to fill all inanimate nature with the breath of lile. If ever, then on that day, to the fancy, "the little hills rejoiced on every side." The woods stood thick with honours, and earth lay smiling under the tokens of the summer's harvest and the promise for the coming year; and the wind came in gusts over the lower country and up the hill-side with a hearty good-will that blew away all vapours, physical and mental, from its path, bidding everything follow its example and be up and doing. Fleda drew a long breath or two that seemed to recognize its freshening power.

Philetus was left to 'shuck' and bring home a load of the fruit.
Philetus was left to "shuck" and bring home a load of the fruit.

"How long it seems," she said,--"how very long--since I was here with Mr. Carleton;--just nine years ago. How changed everything is! I was a little child then. It seems such an age ago!--"

"It is very odd he didn't come to see us," said Hugh.

"He did--don't you know?--the very next day after we heard he was here--when most unluckily I was up at aunt Miriam's."

"I should think he might have come again, considering what friends you used to be."

"I dare say he would if he had not left Montepoole so soon. But dear Hugh! I was a mere child--how could he remember me much."

"You remember him," said Hugh.

"Ah but I have good reason. Besides I never forget anything. I would have given a great deal to see him--if I had it."

"I wish the Evelyns had staid longer," said Hugh. "I think you have wanted something to brighten you up. They did you a great deal of good last year. I am afraid all this taking care of Philetus and Earl Douglass is too much for you."

Fleda gave him a very bright smile, half affection, half fun.

"Don't you admire my management?" said she. "Because I do. Philetus is firmly persuaded that he is an invaluable assistant to me in the mystery of gardening; and the origin of Earl Douglass's new ideas is so enveloped in mist that he does not himself know where they come from. It was rich to hear him the other day descanting to Lucas upon the evil effects of earthing up corn and the advantages of curing hay in cocks, as to both which matters Lucas is a thorough unbeliever, and Earl was a year ago."

"But that doesn't hinder your looking pale and thin, and a great deal soberer than I like to see you," said Hugh. "You want a change, I know. I don't know how you are to get it. I wish they would send for you to New York again."

"I don't know that I should want to go if they did," said Fleda. "They don't raise my spirits, Hugh. I am amused sometimes,--I can't help that,--but such excessive gayety rather makes me shrink within myself; I am

too out of tone with it. I never feel more absolutely quiet than sometimes when I am laughing at Constance Evelyn's mad sallies--and sometimes I cannot laugh at them. I do not know what they must think of me; it is what they can have no means of understanding."

"I wish you didn't understand it either, Fleda."

"But you shouldn't say that. I am happier than they are, now, Hugh,--now that you are better,--with all their means of happiness. They know nothing of our quiet enjoyments, they must live in a whirl or they would think they are not living at all, and I do not believe that all New York can give them the real pleasure that I have in such a day as this. They would see almost nothing in all this beauty that my eyes 'drink in,' as Cowper says; and they would be certain to quarrel with the wind, that to me is like the shake of an old friend's hand. Delicious!--" said Fleda, at the wind rewarded this eulogium with a very hearty shake indeed.

"I believe you would make friends with everything, Fleda," said Hugh laughing.

"The wind is always that to me," said Fleda,--"not always in such a cheerful mood as to-day, though. It talks to me often of a thousand old-time things and sighs over them with me--a most sympathizing friend!--but to day he invites me to a waltz--Come!----"

And pulling Hugh after her away she went down the rocky path, with a step too light to care for the stones; the little feet capering down the mountain with a disdain of the ground that made Hugh smile to see her; and eyes dancing for company; till they reached the lower woodland.

"A most, spirited waltz!" said Hugh.

"And a most slack partner. Why didn't you keep me company?"

"I never was made for waltzing," said Hugh shaking his head.

"Not to the tune of the North wind? That has done me good, Hugh."

"So I should judge, by your cheeks."

"Poverty need not always make people poor," said Fleda taking breath and his arm together. "You and I are rich, Hugh."

"And our riches cannot take to themselves wings and flyaway," said Hugh.

"No, but besides those riches--there are the pleasures of the eye and the mind that one may enjoy everywhere--everywhere in the country at least--unless poverty bear one down very hard; and they are some of the purest and most satisfying of any. O the blessing of a good education! how it makes one independent of circumstances."

"And circumstances are education too," said Hugh smiling. "I dare say we should not appreciate our mountains and woods so well if we had had our old plenty of everything else."

"I always loved them," said Fleda. "But what good company they have been to us for years past, Hugh;--to me especially; I have more reason to love them."

They walked on quietly and soberly to the brow of the tableland, where they parted; Hugh being obliged to go home, and Fleda wishing to pay a visit to her aunt Miriam.

She turned off alone to take the way to the high road and went softly on, no longer certainly in the momentary spirits with which she had shaken hands with the wind and skipped down the mountain; but feeling, and thankful that she felt, a cheerful patience to tread the dusty highway of life.

The old lady had been rather ailing, and from one or two expressions she had let fall Fleda could not help thinking that she looked upon her ailments with a much more serious eye than anybody else thought was called for. It did not, however, appear to-day. She was not worse, and

Fleda's slight anxious feeling could find nothing to justify it, if it were not the very calm and quietly happy face and manner of the old lady; and that if it had something to alarm, did much more to sooth. Fleda had sat with her a long time, patience and cheerfulness all the while unconsciously growing in her company; when catching up her bonnet with a sudden haste very unlike her usual collectedness of manner Fleda kissed her aunt and was rushing away.

"But stop!--where are you going, Fleda?"

"Home, aunt Miriam--I must--don't keep me!"

"But what are you going that way for? you can't go home that way?"

"Yes I can."

"How?"

"I can cross the blackberry hill behind the barn and then over the east hill, and then there's nothing but the water-cress meadow."

"I sha'n't let you go that way alone--sit down and tell me what you mean,--what is this desperate hurry?"

But with equal precipitation Fleda had cast her bonnet out of sight behind the table, and the next moment turned with the utmost possible quietness to shake hands with Mr. Olmney. Aunt Miriam had presence of mind enough to make no remark and receive the young gentleman with her usual dignity and kindness.

He staid some time, but Fleda's hurry seemed to have forsaken her. She had seized upon an interminable long grey stocking her aunt was knitting, and sat in the corner working at it most diligently, without raising her eyes unless spoken to.

"Do you give yourself no rest at home or abroad, Miss Fleda?" said the gentleman.

"Put that stocking down, Fleda," said her aunt, "it is in no hurry."

"I like to do it, aunt Miriam."

But she felt with warming cheeks that she did not like to do it with two people sitting still and looking at her. The gentleman presently rose.

"Don't go till we have had tea, Mr. Olmney," said Mrs. Plumfield.

"Thank you, ma'am,--I cannot stay, I believe,--unless Miss Fleda will let me take care of her down the hill by and by."

"Thank you, Mr. Olmney," said Fleda, "but I am not going home before night, unless they send for me."

"I am afraid," said he looking at her, "that the agricultural turn has proved an over-match for your energies."

"The farm don't complain of me, does it?" said Fleda, looking up at him with a comic grave expression of countenance.

"No," said he laughing,--"certainly not; but--if you will forgive me for saying so--I think you complain of it,--tacitly,--and that will raise a good many complaints in other quarters--if you do not take care of yourself."

He shook hands and left them; and Mrs. Plumfield sat silently looking at Fleda, who on her part looked at nothing but the grey stocking.

"What is all this, Fleda?"

"What is what, aunt Miriam?" said Fleda, picking up a stitch with desperate diligence.

"Why did you want to run away from Mr. Olmney?"

"I didn't wish to be delayed--I wanted to get home."

"Then why wouldn't you let him go home with you?"

"I liked better to go alone, aunt Miriam."

"Don't you like him, Fleda?"

"Certainly, aunt Miriam--very much.'

"I think he likes you, Fleda," said her aunt smiling.

"I am very sorry for it," said Fleda with great gravity.

Mrs. Plumfield looked at her for a few minutes in silence and then said,

"Fleda, love, come over here and sit by me and tell me what you mean. Why are you sorry? It has given me a great deal of pleasure to think of it."

But Fleda did not budge from her seat or her stocking and seemed tongue-tied. Mrs. Plumfield pressed for an answer.

"Because, aunt Miriam," said Fleda, with the prettiest red cheeks in the world but speaking very clearly and steadily,--"my liking only goes to a point which I am afraid will not satisfy either him or you."

"But why?--it will go further."

"No ma'am."

"Why not? why do you say so?"

"Because I must if you ask me."

"But what can be more excellent and estimable, Fleda?--who could be more worth liking? I should have thought he would just please you. He is one of the most lovely young men I have ever seen."

"Dear aunt Miriam!" said Fleda looking up beseechingly,--"why should we talk about it?"

"Because I want to understand you, Fleda, and to be sure that you understand yourself."

"I do," said Fleda, quietly and with a quivering lip.

"What is there that you dislike about Mr. Olmney?"

"Nothing in the world, aunt Miriam."

"Then what is the reason you cannot like him enough?"

"Because, aunt Miriam," said Fleda speaking in desperation,--"there isn't enough of him. He is *very* good and excellent in every way--nobody feels that more than I do--I don't want to say a word against him--but I do not think he has a very strong mind; and he isn't cultivated enough."

"But you cannot have everything, Fleda."

"No ma'am--I don't expect it."

"I am afraid you have set up too high a standard for yourself," said Mrs. Plumfield, looking rather troubled.

"I don't think that is possible, aunt Miriam."

"But I am afraid it will prevent your ever liking anybody?"

"It will not prevent my liking the friends I have already--it may prevent my leaving them for somebody else," said Fleda, with a gravity that was touching in its expression.

"But Mr. Olmney is sensible,--and well educated."

"Yes, but his tastes are not. He could not at all enter into a great many things that give me the most pleasure. I do not think he quite understands above half of what I say to him."

"Are you sure? I know he admires you, Fleda."

"Ah, but that is only half enough, you see, aunt Miriam, unless I could admire him too."

Mrs. Plumfield looked at her in some difficulty;--Mr. Olmney was not the only one, clearly, whose powers of comprehension were not equal to the subject.

"Fleda," said her aunt inquiringly,--"is there anybody else that has put Mr. Olmney out of your head?"

"Nobody in the world!" exclaimed Fleda with a frank look and tone of astonishment at the question, and cheeks colouring as promptly. "How could you ask?--But he never was in my head, aunt Miriam."

"Mr. Thorn?" said Mrs. Plumfield.

"Mr. Thorn!" said Fleda indignantly. "Don't you know me better than that, aunt Miriam? But you do not know him."

"I believe I know you, dear Fleda, but I heard he had paid you a great deal of attention last year; and you would not have been the first unsuspecting nature that has been mistaken."

Fleda was silent, flushed and disturbed; and Mrs. Plumfield was silent and meditating; when Hugh came in. He came to fetch Fleda home. Dr. Gregory had arrived. In haste again Fleda sought her bonnet, and exchanging a more than usually wistful and affectionate kiss and embrace with her aunt, set off with Hugh down the hill.

Hugh had a great deal to say to her all the way home, of which Fleda's ears alone took the benefit, for her understanding received none of it; and when she at last came into the breakfast room where the doctor was sitting, the fact of his being there was the only one which had entered her mind.

"Here she is!--I declare!" said the doctor, holding her back to look at her after the first greetings had passed,--"I'll be hanged if you ain't handsome!--Now what's the use of pinking your cheeks any more at that, as if you didn't know it before?--eh?"

"I will always do my best to deserve your good opinion, sir," said Fleda laughing.

"Well sit down now," said he shaking his head, "and pour me out a cup of tea--your mother can't make it right."

And sipping his tea, for some time the old doctor sat listening to Mrs. Rossitur and eating bread and butter; saying little, but casting a very frequent glance at the figure opposite him behind the tea-board.

"I am afraid," said he after a while, "that your care for my good opinion won't outlast an occasion. Is *that* the way you look for every day?"

The colour came with the smile; but the old doctor looked at her in a way that made the tears come too. He turned his eyes to Mrs. Rossitur for an explanation.

"She is well," said Mrs. Rossitur fondly,--"she has been very well--except her old headaches now and then;--I think she has grown rather thin lately."

"Thin!" said the old doctor,--"etherealized to a mere abstract of herself; only that is a very bad figure, for an abstract should have all the bone and muscle of the subject; and I should say you had little left but pure spirit. You are the best proof I ever saw of the principle of the homoeopaths--I see now that though a little corn may fatten a man, a great deal may be the death of him."

"But I have tried it both ways, uncle Orrin," said Fleda laughing. "I ought to be a happy medium between plethora and starvation. I am pretty substantial, what there is of me."

"Substantial!" said the doctor; "you look as substantial a personage as your old friend the 'faire Una,' just about. Well prepare yourself, gentle Saxon, to ride home with me the day after to-morrow. I'll try a little humanizing regimen with you."

"I don't think that is possible, uncle Orrin," said Fleda gently.

"We'll talk about the possibility afterwards--at present all you have to do is to get ready. If you raise difficulties you will find me a very Hercules to clear them away--I'm substantial enough I can tell you--so it's just as well to spare yourself and me the trouble."

"There are no difficulties," Mrs. Rossitur and Hugh said both at once.

"I knew there weren't. Put a pair or two of clean stockings in your trunk--that's all you want--Mrs. Pritchard and I will find the rest. There's the people in Fourteenth street wants you the first of November and I want you all the time till then, and longer too.--Stop--I've got a missive of some sort here for you--"

He foisted out of his breast-pocket a little package of notes; one from Mrs. Evelyn and one from Florence begging Fleda to come to them at the time the doctor had named; the third from Constance.

"My darling little Fleda,

"I am dying to see you--so pack up and come down with Dr. Gregory if the least spark of regard for me is slumbering in your breast--Mamma and Florence are writing to beg you,--but though an insignificant member of the family, considering that instead of being 'next to head' only little Edith prevents my being at the less dignified end of this branch of the social system,--I could not prevail upon myself to let the representations of my respected elders go unsupported by mine--especially as I felt persuaded of the superior efficacy of the motives I had it in my power to present to your truly philanthropical mind.

"I am in a state of mind that baffles description--Mr. Carleton is going home!!----

"I have not worn earrings in my ears for a fortnight--my personal appearance is become a matter of indifference to me--any description of mental exertion is excruciating--I sit constantly listening for the ringing of the door-bell, and when it sounds I rush frantically to the head of the staircase and look over to see who it is--the mere sight of pen and ink excites delirious ideas--judge what I suffer in writing to you--

"To make the matter worse (if it could be) I have been informed privately that he is going home to crown at the altar of Hymen an old attachment to one of the loveliest of all England's daughters. Conceive the complication of my feelings!----

"Nothing is left me but the resources of friendship--so come darling Fleda, before a barrier of ice interposes itself between my chilled heart and your sympathy.

"Mr. Thorn's state would move my pity if I were capable of being moved by anything--by this you will comprehend he is returned. He has been informed by somebody that there is a wolf in sheep's clothing prowling about Queechy, and his head is filled with the idea that you have fallen a victim, of which in my calmer moments I have in vain endeavoured to dispossess him--Every morning we are wakened up at an unseasonable hour by a furious ringing at the door-bell--Joe Manton pulls off his nightcap and slowly descending the stairs opens the door and finds Mr. Thorn, who enquires distractedly whether Miss Ringgan has arrived; and being answered in the negative gloomily walks off towards the East river--The state of anxiety in which his mother is thereby kept is rapidly depriving her of all her flesh--but we have directed Joe lately to reply 'no sir, but she is expected,'--upon which Mr. Thorn regularly smiles faintly and rewards the 'fowling piece' with a quarter dollar--

"So make haste, dear Fleda, or I shall feel that we are acting the part of innocent swindlers.

"C.E."

There was but one voice at home on the point whether Fleda should go. So she went.

Chapter XXXII.

> *Host*. Now, my young guest! methinks you're allycholy; I pray you, why is it?
>
> *Jul*. Marry, mine host, because I cannot be merry.
>
> Two Gentlemen of Verona.

Some nights after their arrival the doctor and Fleda were seated at tea in the little snug old-fashioned back parlour, where the doctor's nicest of housekeepers, Mrs. Pritchard, had made it ready for them. In general Mrs. Pritchard herself poured it out for the doctor, but she descended most cheerfully from her post of elevation whenever Fleda was there to fill it.

The doctor and Fleda sat cosily looking at each other across the toast and chipped beef, their glances grazing the tea-urn which was just on one side of their range of vision. A comfortable Liverpool-coal fire in a state of repletion burned away indolently and gave everything else in the room somewhat of its own look of sousy independence. Except perhaps the delicate creature at whom the doctor between sips of his tea took rather wistful observations.

"When are you going to Mrs. Evelyn?" he said breaking the silence.

"They say next week, sir."

"I shall be glad of it!" said the doctor.

"Glad of it?" said Fleda smiling. "Do you want to get rid of me, uncle Orrin?"

"Yes!" said he. "This isn't the right place for you. You are too much alone."

"No indeed, sir. I have been reading voraciously, and enjoying myself as much as possible. I would quite as lieve be here as there, putting you out of the question."

"I wouldn't as lieve have you," said he shaking his head. "What were you musing about before tea? your face gave me the heart-ache."

"My face!" said Fleda, smiling, while an instant flush of the eyes answered him,--"what was the matter with my face?"

"That is the very thing I want to know."

"Before tea?--I was only thinking,--" said Fleda, her look going back to the fire from association,--"thinking of different things--not disagreeably--taking a kind of bird's-eye view of things, as one does sometimes."

"I don't believe you ever take other than a bird's-eye view of anything," said her uncle. "But what were you viewing just then, my little Saxon?"

"I was thinking of them at home," said Fleda smiling thoughtfully,--"and I somehow had perched myself on a point of observation and was taking one of those wider views which are always rather sobering."

"Views of what?"

"Of life, sir."

"As how?" said the doctor.

"How near the end is to the beginning, and how short the space between, and how little the ups and downs of it will matter if we take the right road and get home."

"Pshaw!" said the doctor.

But Fleda knew him too well to take his interjection otherwise than most kindly. And indeed though he whirled round and eat his toast at the fire discontentedly, his look came back to her after a little with even more than its usual gentle appreciation.

"What do you suppose you have come to New York for?" said he.

"To see you, sir, in the first place, and the Evelyns in the second."

"And who in the third?"

"I am afraid the third place is vacant," said Fleda smiling.

"You are, eh? Well--I don't know--but I know that I have been inquired of by two several and distinct people as to your coming. Ah, you needn't open your bright eyes at me, because I shall not tell you. Only let me ask,--you have no notion of fencing off my Queechy rose with a hedge of blackthorn,--or anything of that kind, have you?"

"I have no notion of any fences at all, except invisible ones, sir," said Fleda, laughing and colouring very prettily.

"Well those are not American fences," said the doctor, "so I suppose I am safe enough. Whom did I see you out riding with yesterday?"

"I was with Mrs. Evelyn," said Fleda,--"I didn't want to go, but I couldn't very well help myself."

"Mrs. Evelyn.--Mrs. Evelyn wasn't driving, was she?"

"No sir; Mr. Thorn was driving."

"I thought so. Have you seen your old friend Mr. Carleton yet?"

"Do you know him uncle Orrin?"

"Why shouldn't I? What's the difficulty of knowing people? Have you seen him?"

"But how did you know that he was an old friend of mine?"

"Question?--" said the doctor. "Hum--well, I won't tell you--so there's the answer. Now will you answer me?"

"I have not seen him, sir."

"Haven't met him in all the times you have been to Mrs. Evelyn's?"

"No sir. I have been there but once in the evening, uncle Orrin. He is just about sailing for England."

"Well, you're going there to-night, aren't you? Run and bundle yourself up and I'll take you there before I begin my work."

There was a small party that evening at Mrs. Evelyn's. Fleda was very early. She ran up to the first floor,--rooms lighted and open, but nobody there.

"Fleda Ringgan," called out the voice of Constance from over the stairs,--"is that you?"

"Yes," said Fleda.

"Well just wait till I come down to you.--My darling little Fleda, it's delicious of you to come so early. Now just tell me,--am I captivating?"

"Well,--I retain self-possession," said Fleda. "I cannot tell about the strength of head of other people."

"You wretched little creature!--Fleda, don't you admire my hair?--it's new style, my dear,--just come out,--the Delancys brought it out with them--Eloise Delancy taught it us--isn't it graceful? Nobody in New York has it yet, except the Delancys and we."

"How do you know but they have taught somebody else?" said Fleda.

"I won't talk to you!--Don't you like it?"

"I am not sure that I do not like you in your ordinary way better."

Constance made a gesture of impatience, and then pulled Fleda after her into the drawing-rooms.

"Come in here--I won't waste the elegancies of my toilet upon your dull perceptions--come here and let me shew you some flowers--aren't those lovely? This bunch came to-day, 'for Miss Evelyn,' so Florence will have it it is hers, and it's very mean of her, for I am perfectly certain it is mine--it's come from somebody who wasn't enlightened on the subject of my family circle and has innocently imagined that *two* Miss Evelyns could not belong to the same one! I know the floral representatives of all Florence's dear friends and admirers, and this isn't from any of them--I have been distractedly endeavouring all day to find who it came from, for if I don't I can't take the least comfort in it."

"But you might enjoy the flowers for their own sake, I should think," said Fleda, breathing the sweetness of myrtle and heliotrope.

"No I can't, for I have all the time the association of some horrid creature they might have come from, you know; but it will do just as well to humbug people--I shall make Cornelia Schenck believe that this came from my dear Mr. Carleton!"

"No you won't, Constance," said Fleda gently.

"My dear little Fleda, I shock you, don't I? but I sha'n't tell any lies--I shall merely expressively indicate a particular specimen and say, 'My dear Cornelia, do you perceive that this is an English rose?'--and then it's none of my business, you know, what she believes--and she will be dying with curiosity and despair all the rest of the evening."

"I shouldn't think there would be much pleasure in that, I confess," said Fleda gravely. "How very ungracefully and stiffly those are made up!"

"My dear little Queechy rose?" said Constance impatiently, "you are, pardon me, as fresh as possible. They can't cut the flowers with long stems, you know,--the gardeners would be ruined. That is perfectly elegant--it must have cost at least ten dollars. My dear little Fleda!" said Constance capering off before the long pier-glass,--"I am afraid I am not captivating!--Do you think it would be an improvement if I put drops in my ears?--or one curl behind them? I don't know which Mr. Carleton likes best!--"

And with her head first on one side and then on the other she stood before the glass looking at herself and Fleda by turns with such a comic expression of mock doubt and anxiety that no gravity but her own could stand it.

"She is a silly girl, Fleda, isn't she?" said Mrs. Evelyn coming up behind them.

"Mamma!--am I captivating?" cried Constance wheeling round.

The mother's smile said "Very!"

"Fleda is wishing she were out of the sphere of my influence, mamma.--Wasn't Mr. Olmney afraid of my corrupting you?" she said with a sudden pull-up in front of Fleda.--"My blessed stars!--there's somebody's voice I know.--Well I believe it is true that a rose without thorns is a desideratum.--Mamma, is Mrs. Thorn's turban to be an invariable *pendant* to your coiffure all the while Miss Ringgan is here?"

"Hush!--"

With the entrance of company came Constance's return from extravaganzas to a sufficiently graceful every-day manner, only enough touched with high spirits and lawlessness to free it from the charge of commonplace. But the contrast of these high spirits with her own rather made Fleda's mood more quiet, and it needed no quieting. Of the sundry people that she knew among those presently assembled there were none that she wanted to talk to; the rooms were hot and she felt nervous and fluttered, partly from encounters already sustained and partly from a little anxious expecting of Mr. Carleton's appearance. The Evelyns had not said he was to be there but she had rather gathered it; and the remembrance of old times was strong enough to make her very earnestly wish to see him and dread to be disappointed. She swung clear of Mr. Thorn, with some difficulty, and ensconced herself under the shadow of a large cabinet, between that and a young lady who was very good society for she wanted no help in carrying on the business of it. All Fleda had to do was to sit still and listen, or not listen, which she generally preferred. Miss Tomlinson discoursed upon varieties, with great sociableness and satisfaction; while poor Fleda's mind, letting all her sense and nonsense go, was again taking a somewhat bird's-eye view of things, and from the little centre of her post in Mrs. Evelyn's drawing-room casting curious glances over the panorama of her life--England, France, New York, and Queechy!--half coming to the conclusion that her place henceforth was only at the last and that the world and she had nothing to do with each other. The tide of life and gayety seemed to have thrown her on one side, as something that could not swim with it; and to be rushing past too strongly and swiftly for her slight bark ever to launch upon it again. Perhaps the shore might be the safest and happiest place; but it was sober in the comparison; and as a stranded bark might look upon the white sails flying by, Fleda saw the gay faces and heard the light tones with which her own could so little keep company. But as little they with her. Their enjoyment was not more foreign to her than the causes which moved it were strange. Merry?--she might like to be merry;

but she could sooner laugh with the North wind than with one of those vapid faces, or with any face that she could not trust. Conversation might be pleasant,--but it must be something different from the noisy cross-fire of nonsense that was going on in one quarter, or the profitless barter of nothings that was kept up on the other side of her. Rather Queechy and silence, by far, than New York and *this!*

And through it all Miss Tomlinson talked on and was happy.

"My dear Fleda!--what are you back here for?" said Florence coming up to her.

"I was glad to be at a safe distance from the fire."

"Take a screen--here! Miss Tomlinson, your conversation is too exciting for Miss Ringgan--look at her cheeks--I must carry you off--I want to shew you a delightful contrivance for transparencies, that I learned the other day--"

The seat beside her was vacated, and not casting so much as a look towards any quarter whence a possible successor to Miss Tomlinson might be arriving, Fleda sprang up and took a place in the far corner of the room by Mrs. Thorn, happily not another vacant chair in the neighbourhood. Mrs. Thorn had shewn a very great fancy for her and was almost as good company as Miss Tomlinson; not quite, for it was necessary sometimes to answer and therefore necessary always to hear. But Fleda liked her; she was thoroughly amiable, sensible, and good-hearted. And Mrs. Thorn, very much gratified at Fleda's choice of a seat, talked to her with a benignity which Fleda could not help answering with grateful pleasure.

"Little Queechy, what has driven you into the corner?" said Constance pausing a moment before her.

"It must have been a retiring spirit," said Fleda.

"Mrs. Thorn, isn't she lovely?"

Mrs. Thorn's smile at Fleda might almost have been called that, it was so full of benevolent pleasure. But she spoiled it by her answer.

"I don't believe I am the first one to find it out."

"But what are you looking so sober for?" Constance went on, taking Fleda's screen from her hand and fanning her diligently with it,--"you don't talk! The gravity of Miss Ringgan's face casts a gloom over the brightness of the evening. I couldn't conceive what made me feel chilly in the other room, till I looked about and found that the shade came from this corner; and Mr. Thorn's teeth, I saw, were chattering."

"Constance!" said Fleda laughing and vexed, and making the reproof more strongly with her eyes,--"how can you talk so!"

"Mrs. Thorn, isn't it true?"

Mrs. Thorn's look at Fleda was the essence of good-humour.

"Will you let Lewis come and take you a good long ride to-morrow?"

"No, Mrs. Thorn, I believe not--I intend to stay perseveringly at home to-morrow and see if it is possible to be quiet a day in New York."

"But you will go with me to the concert to-morrow night?--both of you--and hear Truffi;--come to my house and take tea and go from there? will you, Constance?"

"My dear Mrs. Thorn!" said Constance,--"I shall be in ecstacies, and Miss Ringgan was privately imploring me last night to find some way of getting her to it. We regard such material pleasures as tea and muffins with great indifference, but when you look up after swallowing your last cup you will see Miss Ringgan and Miss Evelyn, cloaked and hooded, anxiously awaiting your next movement. My dear Fleda!--there is a ring!--"

And giving her the benefit of a most comic and expressive arching of her eyebrows, Constance flung back the screen into Fleda's lap and skimmed away.

Fleda was too vexed for a few minutes to understand more of Mrs. Thorn's talk than that she was first enlarging upon the concert, and afterwards detailing to her a long shopping expedition in search of something which had been a morning's annoyance. She almost thought Constance was unkind, because she wanted to go to the concert herself to lug her in so unceremoniously; and wished herself back in her uncle's snug little quiet parlour,--unless Mr. Carleton would come.

And there he is!--said a quick beat of her heart, as his entrance explained Constance's "ring."

Such a rush of associations came over Fleda that she was in imminent danger of losing Mrs. Thorn altogether. She managed however by some sort of instinct to disprove the assertion that the mind cannot attend to two things at once, and carried on a double conversation, with herself and with Mrs. Thorn, for some time very vigorously.

"Just the same!--he has not altered a jot," she said to herself as he came forward to Mrs. Evelyn;--"it is himself!--his very self--he doesn't look a day older--I'm very glad!--(Yes, ma'am--it's extremely tiresome--) How exactly as when he left me in Paris,--and how much pleasanter than anybody else!--more pleasant than ever, it seems to me, but that is because I have not seen him in so long; he only wanted one thing. That same grave eye-- but quieter, isn't it,--than it used to be?--I think so--(It's the best store in town, I think, Mrs. Thorn, by far,--yes, ma'am--) Those eyes are certainly the finest I ever saw--How I have seen him stand and look just so when he was talking to his workmen--without that air of consciousness that all these people have, comparatively--what a difference! (I know very little about it, ma'am;--I am not learned in laces--I never bought any--) I wish he would look this way--I wonder if Mrs. Evelyn does not mean to bring him to see me--she must

remember;--now there is that curious old smile and looking down! how much better I know what it means than Mrs. Evelyn does--(Yes, ma'am, I understand--I mean!--it is very convenient--I never go anywhere else to get anything,--at least I should not if I lived here--) She does not know whom she is talking to.--She is going to walk him off into the other room! How very much more gracefully he does everything than anybody else--it comes from that entire high-mindedness and frankness, I think,--not altogether, a fine person must aid the effect, and that complete independence of other people.----I wonder if Mrs. Evelyn has forgotten my existence!--he has not, I am sure--I think she is a little odd--(Yes, ma'am, my face is flushed--the room is very warm--)"

"But the fire has gone down--it will be cooler now," said Mrs. Thorn.

Which were the first words that fairly entered Fleda's understanding. She was glad to use the screen to hide her face now, not the fire.

Apparently the gentleman and lady found nothing to detain them in the other room, for after sauntering off to it they sauntered back again and placed themselves to talk just opposite her. Fleda had an additional screen now in the person of Miss Tomlinson, who had sought her corner and was earnestly talking across her to Mrs. Thorn; so that she was sure even if Mr. Carleton's eyes should chance to wander that way they would see nothing but the unremarkable skirt of her green silk dress, most unlikely to detain them. The trade in nothings going on over the said green silk was very brisk indeed; but disregarding the buzz of tongues near at hand Fleda's quick ears were able to free the barrier and catch every one of the quiet tones beyond.

"And you leave us the day after to-morrow?" said Mrs. Evelyn.

"No, Mrs. Evelyn,--I shall wait another steamer."

The lady's brow instantly revealed to Fleda a trap setting beneath to catch his reason.

"I'm very glad!" exclaimed little Edith who in defiance of conventionalities and proprieties made good her claim to be in the drawing room on all occasions;--"then you will take me another ride, won't you, Mr. Carleton?"

"You do not flatter us with a very long stay," pursued Mrs. Evelyn.

"Quite as long as I expected--longer than I meant it to be," he answered rather thoughtfully.

"Mr. Carleton," said Constance sidling up in front of him,--"I have been in distress to ask you a question, and I am afraid----"

"Of what are you afraid, Miss Constance?"

"That you would reward me with one of your severe looks,--which would petrify me,--and then I am afraid I should feel uncomfortable--"

"I hope he will!" said Mrs. Evelyn, settling herself back in the corner of the sofa, and with a look at her daughter which was complacency itself,--"I hope Mr. Carleton will, if you are guilty of any impertinence."

"What is the question, Miss Constance?"

"I want to know what brought you out here?"

"Fie, Constance!" said her mother. "I am ashamed of you. Do not answer her, Mr. Carleton."

"Mr. Carleton will answer me, mamma,--he looks benevolently upon my faults, which are entirely those of education! What was it, Mr. Carleton?"

"I suppose," said he smiling, "it might be traced more or less remotely to the restlessness incident to human nature."

"But *you* are not restless, Mr. Carleton," said Florence, with a glance which might be taken as complimentary.

"And knowing that I am," said Constance in comic impatience,--"you are maliciously prolonging my agonies. It is not what I expected of you, Mr. Carleton."

"My dear," said her father, "Mr. Carleton, I am sure, will fulfil all reasonable expectations. What is the matter?"

"I asked him where a certain tribe of Indians was to be found, papa, and he told me they were supposed originally to have come across Behring's Straits one cold winter!"

Mr. Evelyn looked a little doubtfully and Constance with so unhesitating gravity that the gravity of nobody else was worth talking about.

"But it is so uncommon," said Mrs. Evelyn when they had done laughing, "to see an Englishman of your class here at all, that when he comes a second time we may be forgiven for wondering what has procured us such an honour."

"Women may always be forgiven for wondering, my dear," said Mr. Evelyn,--"or the rest of mankind must live at odds with them."

"Your principal object was to visit our western prairies, wasn't it, Mr. Carleton?" said Florence.

"No," he replied quietly,--"I cannot say that. I should choose to give a less romantic explanation of my movements. From some knowledge growing out of my former visit to this country I thought there were certain negotiations I might enter into here with advantage; and it was for the purpose of attending to these, Miss Constance, that I came."

"And have you succeeded?" said Mrs. Evelyn with an expression of benevolent interest.

"No, ma'am--my information had not been sufficient."

"Very likely!" said Mr. Evelyn. "There isn't one man in a hundred whose representations on such a matter are to be trusted at a distance."

"'On such a matter'!" repeated his wife funnily,--"you don't know what the matter was, Mr. Evelyn--you don't know what you are talking about."

"Business, my dear,--business--I take only what Mr. Carleton said;--it doesn't signify a straw what business. A man must always see with his own eyes."

Whether Mr. Carleton had seen or had not seen, or whether even he had his faculty of hearing in present exercise, a glance at his face was incompetent to discover.

"I never should have imagined," said Constance eying him keenly, "that Mr. Carleton's errand to this country was one of business and not of romance, *I* believe it's a humbug!"

For an instant this was answered by one of those looks of absolute composure in every muscle and feature which put an effectual bar to all further attempts from without or revelations from within; a look Fleda remembered well, and felt even in her corner. But it presently relaxed, and he said with his usual manner,

"You cannot understand then, Miss Constance, that there should be any romance about business?"

"I cannot understand," said Mrs. Evelyn, "why romance should not come after business. Mr. Carleton, sir, you have seen American scenery this summer--isn't American beauty worth staying a little while longer for?"

"My dear," said Mr. Evelyn, "Mr. Carleton is too much of a philosopher to care about beauty--every man of sense is."

"I am sure he is not," said Mrs. Evelyn smoothly. "Mr. Carleton,--you are an admirer of beauty, are you not, sir?"

"I hope so, Mrs. Evelyn," he said smiling,--"but perhaps I shall shock you by adding,--not of *beauties*."

"That sounds very odd," said Florence.

"But let us understand," said Mrs. Evelyn with the air of a person solving a problem,--"I suppose we are to infer that your taste in beauty is of a peculiar kind?"

"That may be a fair inference," he said.

"What is it then?" said Constance eagerly.

"Yes--what is it you look for in a face?" said Mrs. Evelyn.

"Let us hear whether America has any chance," said Mr. Thorn, who had joined the group and placed himself precisely so as to hinder Fleda's view.

"My fancy has no stamp of nationality, in this, at least," he said pleasantly.

"Now for instance, the Miss Delancys--don't you call them handsome, Mr. Carleton?" said Florence.

"Yes," he said, half smiling.

"But not beautiful?--Now what is it they want?"

"I do not wish, if I could, to make the want visible to other eyes than my own."

"Well, Cornelia Schenck,--how do you like her face?"

"It is very pretty-featured."

"Pretty-featured!--Why she is called beautiful. She has a beautiful smile, Mr. Carleton?"

"She has only one."

"Only one! and how many smiles ought the same person to have?" cried Florence impatiently. But that which instantly answered her said forcibly that a plurality of them was possible.

"I have seen one face," he said gravely, and his eye seeking the floor,--"that had I think a thousand."

"Different smiles?" said Mrs. Evelyn in a constrained voice.

"If they were not all absolutely that, they had so much of freshness and variety that they all seemed new."

"Was the mouth so beautiful?" said Florence.

"Perhaps it would not have been remarked for beauty when it was perfectly at rest; but it could not move with the least play of feeling, grave or gay, that it did not become so in a very high degree. I think there was no touch or shade of sentiment in the mind that the lips did not give with singular nicety; and the mind was one of the most finely wrought I have ever known."

"And what other features went with this mouth?" said Florence.

"The usual complement, I suppose," said Thorn. "'Item, two lips indifferent red; item, two grey eyes with lids to them; item, one neck, one chin, and so forth.'"

"Mr. Carleton, sir," said Mrs. Evelyn blandly--"as Mr. Evelyn says women may be forgiven for wondering, won't you answer Florence's question?"

"Mr. Thorn has done it, Mrs. Evelyn, for me."

"But I have great doubts of the correctness of Mr. Thorn's description, sir--won't you indulge us with yours?"

"Word-painting is a difficult matter, Mrs. Evelyn, in some instances;--if I must do it I will borrow my colours. In general, 'that which made her fairness much the fairer was that it was but an ambassador of a most fair mind.'"

"A most exquisite picture!" said Thorn, "and the original don't stand so thick that one is in any danger of mistaking them. Is the painter Shakspeare?--I don't recollect--"

"I think Sidney, sir--I am not sure."

"But still, Mr. Carleton," said Mrs Evelyn, "this is only in general--I want very much to know the particulars;--what style of features belonged to this face?"

"The fairest, I think, I have ever known," said Mr. Carleton. "You asked me, Miss Evelyn, what was my notion of beauty;--this face was a good illustration of it. Not perfection of outline, though it had that too in very uncommon degree;--but the loveliness of mind and character to which these features were only an index; the thoughts were invariably telegraphed through eye and mouth more faithfully than words could give them."

"What kind of eyes?" said Florence.

His own grew dark as he answered,--

"Clear and pure as one might imagine an angel's--through which I am sure my good angel many a time looked at me."

Good angels were at a premium among the eyes that were exchanging glances just then.

"And Mr. Carleton," said Mrs. Evelyn,--"is it fair to ask--this paragon--is she living still?"

"I hope so," he answered, with his old light smile, dismissing the subject.

"You spoke so much in the past tense," said Mrs. Evelyn apologetically.

"Yes, I have not seen it since it was a child's."

"A child's face!--Oh," said Florence, "I think you see a great many children's faces with that kind of look."

"I never saw but the one," said Mr. Carleton dryly.

So far Fleda listened, with cheeks that would certainly have excited Mrs. Thorn's alarm if she had not been happily engrossed with Miss Tomlinson's affairs; though up to the last two minutes the idea of herself had not entered Fleda's head in connection with the subject of conversation. But then feeling it impossible to make her appearance in public that evening, she quietly slipped out of the open window close by, which led into a little greenhouse on the piazza, and by another door gained the hall and the dressing-room.

When Dr. Gregory came to Mrs. Evelyn's an hour or two after, a figure all cloaked and hooded ran down the stairs and met him in the hall.

"Ready!" said the doctor in surprise.

"I have been ready some time, sir," said Fleda.

"Well," said he, "then we'll go straight home, for I've not done my work yet."

"Dear uncle Orrin!" said Fleda, "if I had known you had work to do I wouldn't have come."

"Yes you would!" said he decidedly.

She clasped her uncle's arm and walked with him briskly home through the frosty air, looking at the silent lights and shadows on the walls of the street and feeling a great desire to cry.

"Did you have a pleasant evening?" said the doctor when they were about half way.

"Not particularly, sir," said Fleda hesitating.

He said not another word till they got home and Fleda went up to her room. But the habit of patience overcame the wish to cry; and though the outside of her little gold-clasped Bible awoke it again, a few words of the inside were enough to lay it quietly to sleep.

"Well," said the doctor as they sat at breakfast the next morning,--"where are you going next?"

"To the concert, I must, to-night," said Fleda. "I couldn't help myself."

"Why should you want to help yourself?" said the doctor. "And to Mrs. Thorn's to-morrow night?"

"No sir, I believe not."

"I believe you will," said he looking at her.

"I am sure I should enjoy myself more at home, uncle Orrin. There is very little rational pleasure to be had in these assemblages."

"Rational pleasure!" said he. "Didn't you have any rational pleasure last night?"

"I didn't hear a single word spoken, sir, that was worth listening to,--at least that was spoken to me; and the hollow kind of rattle that one hears from every tongue makes me more tired than anything else, I believe;--I am out of tune with it, somehow."

"Out of tune!" said the old doctor, giving her a look made up of humourous vexation and real sadness,--"I wish I knew the right tuning-key to take hold of you!"

"I become harmonious rapidly, uncle Orrin, when I am in this pleasant little room alone with you."

"That won't do!" said he, shaking his head at the smile with which this was said,--"there is too much tension upon the strings. So that was the reason you were all ready waiting for me last night?--Well, you must tune up, my little piece of discordance, and go with me to Mrs. Thorn's to-morrow night--I won't let you off."

"With you, sir!" said Fleda.

"Yes," he said. "I'll go along and take care of you lest you get drawn into something else you don't like."

"But, dear uncle Orrin, there is another difficulty--it is to be a large party and I have not a dress exactly fit."

"What have you got?" said he with a comic kind of fierceness.

"I have silks, but they are none of them proper for this occasion--they are ever so little old-fashioned."

"What do you want?"

"Nothing, sir," said Fleda; "for I don't want to go."

"You mend a pair of stockings to put on," said he nodding at her, "and I'll see to the rest."

"Apparently you place great importance in stockings," said Fleda laughing, "for you always mention them first. But please don't get anything for me, uncle Orrin--please don't! I have plenty for common occasions, and I don't care to go to Mrs. Thorn's."

"I don't care either," said the doctor, working himself into his great coat. "By the by, do you want to invoke the aid of St. Crispin?"

He went off, and Fleda did not know whether to cry or to laugh at the vigorous way in which he trod through the hall and slammed the front door after him. Her spirits just kept the medium and did neither. But they were in the same doubtful mood still an hour after when he came back with a paper parcel he had brought home under his arm, and unrolled a fine embroidered muslin; her eyes were very unsteady in carrying their brief messages of thankfulness, as if they feared saying too much. The doctor, however, was in the mood for doing, not talking, by looks or otherwise. Mrs. Pritchard was called into consultation, and with great pride and delight engaged to have the dress and all things else in due order by the following night; *her* eyes saying all manner of gratulatory things as they went from the muslin to Fleda and from Fleda to Dr. Gregory.

The rest of the day was, not books, but needlefuls of thread; and from the confusion of laces and draperies Fleda was almost glad to escape and go to the concert,--but for one item; that spoiled it.

They were in their seats early. Fleda managed successfully to place the two Evelyns between her and Mr. Thorn, and then prepared herself to wear out the evening with patience.

"My dear Fleda!" whispered Constance, after some time spent in restless reconnoitring of everybody and everything,--"I don't see my English rose anywhere!"

"Hush!" said Fleda smiling. "That happened not to be an English rose, Constance."

"What was it?"

"American, unfortunately; it was a Noisette; the variety I think that they call 'Conque de Venus.'"

"My dear little Fleda, you're too wise for anything!" said Constance with a rather significant arching of her eyebrows. "You mustn't expect other people to be as rural in their acquirements as yourself. I don't pretend to know any rose by sight but the Queechy," she said, with a change of expression meant to cover the former one.

Fleda's face, however, did not call for any apology. It was perfectly quiet.

"But what has become of him?" said Constance with her comic impatience.--"My dear Fleda! if my eyes cannot rest upon that development of elegance the parterre is become a wilderness to me!"

"Hush, Constance!" Fleda whispered earnestly,--"you are not safe--he may be near you."

"Safe!--" ejaculated Constance; but a half backward hasty glance of her eye brought home so strong an impression that the person in question was seated a little behind her that she dared not venture another look, and became straightway extremely well-behaved.

He was there; and being presently convinced that he was in the neighbourhood of his little friend of former days he resolved with his own excellent eyes to test the truth of the opinion he had formed as to the natural and inevitable effect of circumstances upon her character; whether it could by possibility have retained its great delicacy and refinement under the rough handling and unkindly bearing of things seemingly foreign to both. He had thought not.

Truffi did not sing, and the entertainment was of a very secondary quality. This seemed to give no uneasiness to the Miss Evelyns, for if they pouted they laughed and talked in the same breath, and that incessantly. It was nothing to Mr. Carleton, for his mind was bent on something else. And with a little surprise he saw that it was nothing to the subject of his thoughts,--either because her own were elsewhere too, or because they were in league with a nice taste that permitted them to take no interest in what was going on. Even her eyes, trained as they had

been to recluse habits, were far less busy than those of her companions; indeed they were not busy at all; for the greater part of the time one hand was upon the brow, shielding them from the glare of the gas-lights. Ostensibly,--but the very quiet air of the face led him to guess that the mind was glad of a shield too. It relaxed sometimes. Constance and Florence and Mr. Thorn and Mr. Thorn's mother were every now and then making demands upon her, and they were met always with an intelligent well-bred eye, and often with a smile of equal gentleness and character; but her observer noticed that though the smile came readily, it went as readily, and the lines of the face quickly settled again into what seemed to be an habitual composure. There were the same outlines, the same characters, he remembered very well; yet there was a difference; not grief had changed them, but life had. The brow had all its fine chiselling and high purity of expression; but now there sat there a hopelessness, or rather a want of hopefulness, that a child's face never knows. The mouth was sweet and pliable as ever, but now often patience and endurance did not quit their seat upon the lip even when it smiled. The eye with all its old clearness and truthfulness had a shade upon it that nine years ago only fell at the bidding of sorrow; and in every line of the face there was a quiet gravity that went to the heart of the person who was studying it. Whatever causes had been at work he was very sure had done no harm to the character; its old simplicity had suffered no change, as every look and movement proved; the very unstudied careless position of the fingers over the eyes shewed that the thoughts had nothing to do there.

On one half of his doubt Mr. Carleton's mind was entirely made up;--but education? the training and storing of the mind?--how had that fared? He would know!--

Perhaps he would have made some attempt that very evening towards satisfying himself; but noticing that in coming out Thorn permitted the Evelyns to pass him and attached himself determinately to Fleda, he

drew back, and resolved to make his observations indirectly and on more than one point before he should seem to make them at all.

Chapter XXXIII

> Hark! I hear the sound of coaches,
> The hour of attack approaches.
>
> Gay.

Mrs. Pritchard had arrayed Fleda in the white muslin, with an amount of satisfaction and admiration that all the lines of her face were insufficient to express.

"Now," she said, "you must just run down and let the doctor see you--afore you take the shine off--or he won't be able to look at anything else when you get to the place."

"That would be unfortunate!" said Fleda, and she ran down laughing into the room where the doctor was waiting for her; but her astonished eyes encountering the figure of Dr. Quackenboss she stopped short, with an air that no woman of the world could have bettered. The physician of Queechy on his part was at least equally taken aback.

"Dr. Quackenboss!" said Fleda.

"I--I was going to say, Miss Ringgan!" said the doctor with a most unaffected obeisance,--"but--a--I am afraid, sir, it is a deceptive influence!"

"I hope not," said Dr. Gregory smiling, one corner of his mouth for his guest and the other for his niece. "Real enough to do real execution, or I am mistaken, sir."

"Upon my word, sir," said Dr. Quackenboss bowing again,--"I hope--a--Miss Ringgan!--will remember the acts of her executive power at home, and return in time to prevent an unfortunate termination!"

Dr. Gregory laughed heartily now, while Fleda's cheeks relieved her dress to admiration.

"Who will complain of her if she don't?" said the doctor. "Who will complain of her if she don't?"

But Fleda put in her question.

"How are you all at home, Dr. Quackenboss?"

"All Queechy, sir," answered the doctor politely, on the principle of 'first come, first served,'--"and individuals,--I shouldn't like to specify--"

"How are you all in Queechy, Dr. Quackenboss!" said Fleda.

"I--have the pleasure to say--we are coming along as usual," replied the doctor, who seemed to have lost his power of standing up straight;--"My sister Flora enjoys but poor health lately,--they are all holding their heads up at your house. Mr. Rossitur has come home."

"Uncle Rolf! Has he!" exclaimed Fleda, the colour of joy quite supplanting the other. "O I'm very glad!"

"Yes," said the doctor,--"he's been home now,--I guess, going on four days."

"I am very glad!" repeated Fleda. "But won't you come and see me another time, Dr. Quackenboss?--I am obliged to go out."

The doctor professed his great willingness, adding that he had only come down to the city to do two or three chores and thought she might perhaps like to take the opportunity--which would afford him such very great gratification.

"No indeed, faire Una," said Dr. Gregory, when they were on their way to Mrs. Thorn's,--"they've got your uncle at home now and we've got you; and I mean to keep you till I'm satisfied. So you may bring home that eye that has been squinting at Queechy ever since you have been here and make up your mind to enjoy yourself; I sha'n't let you go till you do."

"I ought to enjoy myself, uncle Orrin," said Fleda, squeezing his arm gratefully.

"See you do," said he.

The pleasant news from home had given Fleda's spirits the needed spur which the quick walk to Mrs. Thorn's did not take off.

"Did you ever see Fleda look so well, mamma?" said Florence, as the former entered the drawing-room.

"That is the loveliest and best face in the room," said Mr. Evelyn; "and she looks like herself to-night."

"There is a matchless simplicity about her," said a gentleman standing by.

"Her dress is becoming," said Mrs. Evelyn.

"Why where did you ever see her, Mr. Stackpole, except at our house?" said Constance.

"At Mrs. Decatur's--I have had that pleasure--and once at her uncle's."

"I didn't know you ever noticed ladies' faces, Mr. Stackpole," said Florence.

"How Mrs. Thorn does look at her!" said Constance, under her breath. "It is too much!"

It was almost too much for Fleda's equanimity, for the colour began to come.

"And there goes Mr. Carleton!" said Constance. "I expect momentarily to hear the company strike up 'Sparkling and Bright.'"

'And there goes Mr. Carleton!' said Constance.
"And there goes Mr. Carleton!" said Constance.

"They should have done that some time ago, Miss Constance," said the gentleman.

Which compliment, however, Constance received with hardly disguised scorn, and turned her attention again to Mr. Carleton.

"I trust I do not need presentation," said his voice and his smile at once, as he presented himself to Fleda.

How little he needed it the flash of feeling which met his eyes said sufficiently well. But apparently the feeling was a little too deep, for the colour mounted and the eyes fell, and the smile suddenly died on the lips. Mr. Thorn came up to them, and releasing her hand Mr. Carleton stepped back and permitted him to lead her away.

"What do think of *that* face?" said Constance finding herself a few minutes after at his side.

"'That' must define itself," said he, "or I can hardly give a safe answer."

"What face? Why I mean of course the one Mr. Thorn carried off just now."

"You are her friend, Miss Constance," he said coolly. "May I ask for your judgment upon it before I give mine?"

"Mine? why I expected every minute that Mr. Thorn would make the musicians play 'Sparkling and Bright,' and tell Miss Ringgan that to save trouble he had directed them to express what he was sure were the sentiments of the whole company in one burst."

He smiled a little, but in a way that Constance could not understand and did not like.

"Those are common epithets," he said.

"Must I use uncommon?" said Constance significantly.

"No--but these may say one thing or another."

"I have said one thing," said Constance; "and now you may say the other."

"Pardon me--you have said nothing. These epithets are deserved by a great many faces, but on very different grounds; and the praise is a different thing accordingly."

"Well what is the difference?" said Constance.

"On what do you think this lady's title to it rests?"

"On what?--why on that bewitching little air of the eyes and mouth, I suppose."

"Bewitching is a very vague term," said he smiling again more quietly. "But you have had an opportunity of knowing it much better of late than I--to which class of bright faces would you refer this one? Where does the light come from?"

"I never studied faces in a class," said Constance a little scornfully. "Come from?--a region of mist and clouds I should say, for it is sometimes pretty well covered up."

"There are some eyes whose sparkling is nothing more than the play of light upon a bright bead of glass."

"It is not that," said Constance, answering in spite of herself after delaying as long as she dared.

"There is the brightness that is only the reflection of outward circumstances, and passes away with them."

"It isn't that in Fleda Ringgan," said Constance, "for her outward circumstances have no brightness, I should think, that reflection would not utterly absorb."

She would fain have turned the conversation, but the questions were put so lightly and quietly that it could not be gracefully done. She longed to cut it short, but her hand was upon Mr. Carleton's arm and they were slowly sauntering down the rooms,--too pleasant a state of things to be relinquished for a trifle.

"There is the broad day-light of mere animal spirits," he went on, seeming rather to be suggesting these things for her consideration than eager to set forth any opinions of his own;--"there is the sparkling of mischief, and the fire of hidden passions,--there is the passing brilliance of wit, as satisfactory and resting as these gas-lights,--and there is now and then the light of refined affections out of a heart unspotted from the world, as pure and abiding as the stars, and like them throwing its soft ray especially upon the shadows of life."

"I have always understood," said Constance, "that cats' eyes are brightest in the dark."

"They do not love the light, I believe," said Mr. Carleton calmly.

"Well," said Constance, not relishing the expression of her companion's eye, which from glowing had suddenly become cool and bright,--"where would you put me, Mr. Carleton, among all these illuminators of the social system?"

"You may put yourself--where you please, Miss Constance," he said, again turning upon her an eye so deep and full in its meaning that her own and her humour fell before it; for a moment she looked most unlike the gay scene around her.

"Is not that the best brightness," he said speaking low, "that will last forever?--and is not that lightness of heart best worth having which does not depend on circumstances, and will find its perfection just when all other kinds of happiness fail utterly?"

"I can't conceive," said Constance presently, rallying or trying to rally herself,--"what you and I have to do in a place where people are enjoying themselves at this moment, Mr. Carleton!"

He smiled at that and led her out of it into the conservatory, close to which they found themselves. It was a large and fine one, terminating the suite of rooms in this direction. Few people were there; but at the far end stood a group among whom Fleda and Mr. Thorn were conspicuous. He was busying himself in putting together a quantity of flowers for her; and Mrs. Evelyn and old Mr. Thorn stood looking on; with Mr. Stackpole. Mr. Stackpole was an Englishman, of certainly not very prepossessing exterior but somewhat noted as an author and a good deal sought after in consequence. At present he was engaged by Mrs. Evelyn. Mr. Carleton and Constance sauntered up towards them and paused at a little distance to look at some curious plants.

"Don't try for that, Mr. Thorn," said Fleda, as the gentleman was making rather ticklish efforts to reach a superb Fuchsia that hung high,--"You are endangering sundry things besides yourself."

"I have learned, Miss Fleda," said Thorn as with much ado he grasped the beautiful cluster,--"that what we take the most pains for is apt to be reckoned the best prize,--a truth I should never think of putting into a lady's head if I believed it possible that a single one of them was ignorant of its practical value."

"I have this same rose in my garden at home," said Fleda.

"You are a great gardener, Miss Fleda, I hear," said the old gentleman. "My son says you are an adept in it."

"I am very fond of it, sir," said Fleda, answering *him* with an entirely different face.

"I thought the delicacy of American ladies was beyond such a masculine employment as gardening," said Mr. Stackpole, edging away from Mrs. Evelyn.

"I guess this young lady is an exception to the rule," said old Mr. Thorn.

"I guess she is an exception to most rules that you have got in your note-book, Mr. Stackpole," said the younger man. "But there is no guessing about the garden, for I have with my own eyes seen these gentle hands at one end of a spade and her foot at the other;--a sight that--I declare I don't know whether I was most filled with astonishment or admiration!"

"Yes," said Fleda half laughing and colouring,--"and he ingenuously confessed in his surprise that he didn't know whether politeness ought to oblige him to stop and shake hands or to pass by without seeing me; evidently shewing that he thought I was about something equivocal."

The laugh was now turned against Mr. Thorn, but he went on cutting his geraniums with a grave face.

"Well," said he at length, "I think it *is* something of very equivocal utility. Why should such gentle hands and feet spend their strength in clod-breaking, when rough ones are at command?"

There was nothing equivocal about Fleda's merriment this time.

"I have learned, Mr. Thorn, by sad experience, that the rough hands break more than the clods. One day I set Philetus to work among my flowers; and the first thing I knew he had pulled up a fine passion-flower which didn't make much shew above ground and was displaying it to me with the grave commentary, 'Well! that root did grow to a great haigth!'"

"Some mental clod-breaking to be done up there, isn't there?" said Thorn in a kind of aside. "I cannot express my admiration at the idea of your dealing with those boors, as it has been described to me."

"They do not deserve the name, Mr. Thorn," said Fleda. "They are many of them most sensible and excellent people, and friends that I value very highly."

"Ah, your goodness would made friends of everything."

"Not of boors, I hope," said Fleda coolly. "Besides, what do you mean by the name?"

"Anybody incapable of appreciating that of which you alone should be unconscious," he said softly.

Fleda stood impatiently tapping her flowers against her left hand.

"I doubt their power of appreciation reaches a point that would surprise you, sir."

"It does indeed--if I am mistaken in my supposition," he said with a glance which Fleda refused to acknowledge.

"What proportion do you suppose," she went on, "of all these roomfuls of people behind us,--without saying anything uncharitable,--what proportion of them, if compelled to amuse themselves for two hours at a bookcase, would pitch upon Macaulay's Essays, or anything like them, to spend the time?"

"Hum--really, Miss Fleda," said Thorn, "I should want to brush up my Algebra considerably before I could hope to find x, y, and z in such a confusion of the alphabet."

"Or extract the small sensible root of such a quantity of light matter," said Mr. Stackpole.

"Will you bear with my vindication of my country friends?--Hugh and I sent for a carpenter to make some new arrangement of shelves in a cupboard where we kept our books; he was one of these boors, Mr. Thorn, in no respect above the rest. The right stuff for his work was wanting, and while it was sent for he took up one of the volumes that were lying about and read perseveringly until the messenger returned. It was a volume of Macaulay's Miscellanies; and afterwards he borrowed the book of me."

"And you lent it to him?" said Constance.

"Most assuredly! and with a great deal of pleasure."

"And is this no more than a common instance, Miss Ringgan?" said Mr. Carleton.

"No, I think not," said Fleda; the quick blood in her cheeks again answering the familiar voice and old associations;--"I know several of the farmers' daughters around us that have studied Latin and Greek; and philosophy is a common thing; and I am sure there is more sense"--

She suddenly checked herself, and her eye which had been sparkling grew quiet.

"It is very absurd!" said Mr. Stackpole

"Why, sir?"

"O--these people have nothing to do with such things--do them nothing but harm!"

"May I ask again, what harm?" said Fleda gently.

"Unfit them for the duties of their station and make them discontented with it."

"By making it pleasanter?"

"No, no--not by making it pleasanter."

"By what then, Mr. Stackpole?" said Thorn, to draw him on and to draw her out, Fleda was sure.

"By lifting them out of it."

"And what objection to lifting them out of it?" said Thorn.

"You can't lift everybody out of it," said the gentleman with a little irritation in his manner,--"that station must be filled--there must always be poor people."

"And what degree of poverty ought to debar a man from the pleasures of education and a cultivated taste? such as he can attain?

"No, no, not that," said Mr. Stackpole;--"but it all goes to fill them with absurd notions about their place in society, inconsistent with proper subordination."

Fleda looked at him, but shook her head slightly and was silent.

"Things are in very different order on our side the water," said Mr. Stackpole hugging himself.

"Are they?" said Fleda.

"Yes--we understand how to keep things in their places a little better."

"I did not know," said Fleda quietly, "that it was by *design* of the rulers of England that so many of her lower class are in the intellectual condition of our slaves."

"Mr. Carleton," said Mrs. Evelyn laughing,--"what do you say to that, sir?"

Fleda's face turned suddenly to him with a quick look of apology, which she immediately knew was not needed.

"But this kind of thing don't make the people any happier," pursued Mr. Stackpole;--"only serves to give them uppish and dissatisfied longings that cannot be gratified."

"Somebody says," observed Thorn, "that 'under a despotism all are contented because none can get on, and in a republic none are contented because all can get on.'"

"Precisely," said Mr. Stackpole.

"That might do very well if the world were in a state of perfection," said Fleda. "As it is, commend me to discontent and getting on. And the uppishness I am afraid is a national fault, sir; you know our state motto is 'Excelsior.'"

"We are at liberty to suppose," said Thorn, "that Miss Ringgan has followed the example of her friends the farmers' daughters?--or led them in it?--"

"It is dangerous to make surmises," said Fleda colouring.

"It is a pleasant way of running into danger," said Mr. Thorn, who was leisurely pruning the prickles from the stem of a rose.

"I was talking to a gentleman once," said Fleda, "about the birds and flowers we find in our wilds; and he told me afterwards gravely that he was afraid I was studying too many things at once!--when I was innocent of all ornithology but what my eyes and ears had picked up in the woods; except some childish reminiscences of Audubon."

"That is just the right sort of learning for a lady," said Mr. Stackpole, smiling at her, however;--"women have nothing to do with books."

"What do you say to that, Miss Fleda?" said Thorn.

"Nothing, sir; it is one of those positions that are unanswerable."

"But Mr. Stackpole," said Mrs. Evelyn, "I don't like that doctrine, sir. I do not believe in it at all."

"That is unfortunate--for my doctrine," said the gentleman.

"But I do not believe it is yours. Why must women have nothing to do with books? what harm do they do, Mr. Stackpole?"

"Not needed, ma'am,--a woman, as somebody says, knows intuitively all that is really worth knowing."

"Of what use is a mine that is never worked?" said Mr. Carleton.

"It *is* worked," said Mr. Stackpole. "Domestic life is the true training for the female mind. One woman will learn more wisdom from the child on her breast than another will learn from ten thousand volumes."

"It is very doubtful how much wisdom the child will ever learn from her," said Mr. Carleton smiling.

"A woman who never saw a book," pursued Mr. Stackpole, unconsciously quoting his author, "may be infinitely superior, even in all those matters of which books treat, to the woman who has read, and read intelligently, a whole library."

"Unquestionably--and it is likewise beyond question that a silver sixpence may be worth more than a washed guinea."

"But a woman's true sphere is in her family--in her home duties, which furnish the best and most appropriate training for her faculties--pointed out by nature itself."

"Yes!" said Mr. Carleton,--"and for those duties, some of the very highest and noblest that are entrusted to human agency, the fine machinery that is to perform them should be wrought to its last point of perfectness. The wealth of a woman's mind, instead of lying in the rough, should be richly brought out and fashioned for its various ends, while yet those ends are

in the future, or it will never meet the demand. And for her own happiness, all the more because her sphere is at home, her home stores should be exhaustless--the stores she cannot go abroad to seek. I would add to strength beauty, and to beauty grace, in the intellectual proportions, so far as possible. It were ungenerous, in man to condemn the *best* half of human intellect to insignificance merely because it is not his own."

Mrs. Evelyn wore a smile of admiration that nobody saw, but Fleda's face was a study while Mr. Carleton was saying this. Her look was fixed upon him with such intent satisfaction and eagerness that it was not till he had finished that she became aware that those dark eyes were going very deep into hers, and suddenly put a stop to the inquisition.

"Very pleasant doctrine to the ears that have an interest in it!" said Mr. Stackpole rather discontentedly.

"The man knows little of his own interest," said Mr. Carleton, "who would leave that ground waste, or would cultivate it only in the narrow spirit of a utilitarian. He needs an influence in his family not more refreshing than rectifying; and no man will seek that in one greatly his inferior. He is to be pitied who cannot fall back upon his home with the assurance that he has there something better than himself."

"Why, Mr. Carleton, sir--" said Mrs. Evelyn, with every line of her mouth saying funny things,--"I am afraid you have sadly neglected your own interest--have you anything at Carleton better than yourself?"

Suddenly cool again, he laughed and said, "You were there, Mrs. Evelyn."

"But Mr. Carleton,--" pursued the lady with a mixture of insinuation and fun,--"why were you never married?"

"Circumstances have always forbade it," he answered with a smile which Constance declared was the most fascinating thing she ever saw in her life.

Fleda was arranging her flowers, with the help of some very unnecessary suggestions from the donor.

"Mr. Lewis," said Constance with a kind of insinuation very different from her mother's, made up of fun and daring,--"Mr. Carleton has been giving me a long lecture on botany; while my attention was distracted by listening to your *spirituel* conversation."

"Well, Miss Constance?"

"And I am morally certain I sha'n't recollect a word of it if I don't carry away some specimens to refresh my memory--and in that case he would never give me another!"

It was impossible to help laughing at the distressful position of the young lady's eyebrows, and with at least some measure of outward grace Mr. Thorn set about complying with her request. Fleda again stood tapping her left hand with her flowers, wondering a little that somebody else did not come and speak to her; but he was talking to Mrs. Evelyn and Mr. Stackpole. Fleda did not wish to join them, and nothing better occurred to her than to arrange her flowers over again; so throwing them all down before her on a marble slab, she began to pick them up one by one and put them together, with it must be confessed a very indistinct realization of the difference between myrtle and lemon blossoms, and as she seemed to be laying acacia to rose, and disposing some sprigs of beautiful heath behind them, in reality she was laying kindness alongside of kindness and looking at the years beyond years where their place had been. It was with a little start that she suddenly found the person of her thoughts standing at her elbow and talking to her in bodily presence. But while he spoke with all the ease and simplicity of old times, almost making Fleda think it was but last week they had been

strolling through the Place de la Concorde together, there was a constraint upon her that she could not get rid of and that bound eye and tongue. It might have worn off, but his attention was presently claimed again by Mrs. Evelyn; and Fleda thought best while yet Constance's bouquet was unfinished, to join another party and make her escape into the drawing-rooms.

Chapter XXXIV.

> Have you observed a sitting hare,
> List'ning, and fearful of the storm
> Of horns and hounds, clap back her ear,
> Afraid to keep or leave her form?
>
> Prior.

By the Evelyns' own desire Fleda's going to them was delayed for a week, because, they said, a furnace was to be brought into the house and they would be all topsy-turvy till that fuss was over. Fleda kept herself very quiet in the mean time, seeing almost nobody but the person whom it was her especial object to shun. Do her best she could not quite escape him, and was even drawn into two or three walks and rides; in spite of denying herself utterly to gentlemen at home, and losing in consequence a visit from her old friend. She was glad at last to go to the Evelyns and see company again, hoping that Mr. Thorn would be merged in a crowd.

But she could not merge him; and sometimes was almost inclined to suspect that his constant prominence in the picture must be owing to some mysterious and wilful conjuration going on in the background. She was at a loss to conceive how else it happened that despite her utmost endeavours to the contrary she was so often thrown upon his care and obliged to take up with his company. It was very disagreeable. Mr.

Carleton she saw almost as constantly, but though frequently near she had never much to do with him. There seemed to be a dividing atmosphere always in the way; and whenever he did speak to her she felt miserably constrained and unable to appear like herself. Why was it?--she asked herself in a very vexed state of mind. No doubt partly from the remembrance of that overheard conversation which she could not help applying, but much more from an indefinable sense that at these times there were always eyes upon her. She tried to charge the feeling upon her consciousness of their having heard that same talk, but it would not the more go off. And it had no chance to wear off, for somehow the occasions never lasted long; something was sure to break them up; while an unfortunate combination of circumstances, or of connivers, seemed to give Mr. Thorn unlimited facilities in the same kind. Fleda was quick witted and skilful enough to work herself out of them once in a while; more often the combination was too much for her simplicity and straight-forwardness.

She was a little disappointed and a little surprised at Mr. Carleton's coolness. He was quite equal to withstand or out-general the schemes of any set of manoeuvrers; therefore it was plain he did not care for the society of his little friend and companion of old time. Fleda felt it, especially as she now and then heard him in delightful talk with somebody else; making himself so interesting that when Fleda could get a chance to listen she was quite ready to forgive his not talking to her for the pleasure of hearing him talk at all. But at other times she said sorrowfully to herself, "He will be going home presently, and I shall not have seen him!"

One day she had successfully defended herself against taking a drive which Mr. Thorn came to propose, though the proposition had been laughingly backed by Mrs. Evelyn. Raillery was much harder to withstand than persuasion; but Fleda's quiet resolution had proved a match for both. The better to cover her ground, she declined to go out at all, and remained at home the only one of the family that fine day.

In the afternoon Mr. Carleton was there. Fleda sat a little apart from the rest, industriously bending over a complicated piece of embroidery belonging to Constance and in which that young lady had made a great blunder which she declared her patience unequal to the task of rectifying. The conversation went gayly forward among the others; Fleda taking no part in it beyond an involuntary one. Mr. Carleton's part was rather reserved and grave; according to his manner in ordinary society.

"What do you keep bothering yourself with that for?" said Edith coming to Fleda's side.

"One must be doing something, you know," said Fleda lightly.

"No you mustn't--not when you're tired--and I know you are. I'd let Constance pick out her own work."

"I promised her I would do it," said Fleda.

"Well, you didn't promise her when. Come!--everybody's been out but you, and you have sat here over this the whole day. Why don't you come over there and talk with the rest?--I know you want to, for I've watched your mouth going."

"Going!--how?"

"Going--off at the corners. I've seen it! Come."

But Fleda said she could listen and work at once, and would not budge. Edith stood looking at her a little while in a kind of admiring sympathy, and then went back to the group.

"Mr. Carleton," said the young lady, who was treading with laudable success in the steps of her sister Constance,--"what has become of that ride you promised to give me?"

"I do not know, Miss Edith," said Mr. Carleton smiling, "for my conscience never had the keeping of it."

"Hush, Edith!" said her mother; "do you think Mr. Carleton has nothing to do but to take you riding?"

"I don't believe he has much to do," said Edith securely. "But Mr. Carleton, you did promise, for I asked you and you said nothing; and I always have been told that silence gives consent; so what is to become of it?"

"Will you go now, Miss Edith?"

"Now?--O yes! And will you go out to Manhattanville, Mr. Carleton!--along by the river?"

"If you like. But Miss Edith, the carriage will hold another--cannot you persuade one of these ladies to go with us?"

"Fleda!" said Edith, springing off to her with extravagant capers of joy,--"Fleda, you shall go! you haven't been out to-day."

"And I cannot go out to-day," said Fleda gently.

"The air is very fine," said Mr. Carleton approaching her table, with no want of alacrity in step or tone, her ears knew;--"and this weather makes everything beautiful--has that piece of canvas any claims upon you that cannot be put aside for a little?"

"No sir," said Fleda,--"but--I am sorry I have a stronger reason that must keep me at home."

"She knows how the weather looks," said Edith,--"Mr. Thorn takes her out every other day. It's no use to talk to her, Mr. Carleton,--when she says she won't, she won't."

"Every other day!" said Fleda.

"No, no," said Mrs. Evelyn coming up, and with that smile which Fleda had never liked so little as at that minute,--"not *every other day*, Edith, what are you talking of? Go and don't keep Mr. Carleton waiting."

Fleda worked on, feeling a little aggrieved. Mr. Carleton stood still by her table, watching her, while his companions were getting themselves ready; but he said no more, and Fleda did not raise her head till the party were off. Florence had taken her resigned place.

"I dare say the weather will be quite as fine to-morrow, dear Fleda," said Mrs. Evelyn softly.

"I hope it will," said Fleda in a tone of resolute simplicity.

"I only hope it will not bring too great a throng of carriages to the door," Mrs. Evelyn went on in a tone of great internal amusement;--"I never used to mind it, but I have lately a nervous fear of collisions."

"To-morrow is not your reception-day," said Fleda.

"No, not mine," said Mrs. Evelyn softly,--"but that doesn't signify--it may be one of my neighbours'."

Fleda pulled away at her threads of worsted and wouldn't know anything else.

"I have read of the servants of Lot and the servants of Abraham quarrelling," Mrs. Evelyn went on in the same undertone of delight,--"because the land was too strait for them--I should be very sorry to have anything of the sort happen again, for I cannot imagine where Lot would go to find a plain that would suit him."

"Lot and Abraham, mamma!" said Constance from the sofa,--"what on earth are you talking about?"

"None of your business," said Mrs. Evelyn;--"I was talking of some country friends of mine that you don't know."

Constance knew her mother's laugh very well; but Mrs. Evelyn was impenetrable.

The next day Fleda ran away and spent a good part of the morning with her uncle in the library, looking over new books; among which she found herself quite a stranger, so many had made their appearance since the time when she had much to do with libraries or bookstores. Living friends, male and female, were happily forgotten in the delighted acquaintance-making with those quiet companions which, whatever their deficiencies in other respects, are at least never importunate nor unfaithful. Fleda had come home rather late and was dressing for dinner with Constance's company and help, when Mrs. Evelyn came into her room.

"My dear Fleda," said the lady, her face and voice as full as possible of fun,--"Mr. Carleton wants to know if you will ride with him this afternoon.--I told him I believed you were in general shy of gentlemen that drove their own horses--that I thought I had noticed you were,--but I would come up and see."

"Mrs. Evelyn!--you did not tell him that?"

"He said he was sorry to see you looked pale yesterday when he was asking you; and he was afraid that embroidery is not good for you. He thinks you are a very charming girl!--"

And Mrs. Evelyn went off into little fits of laughter which unstrung all Fleda's nerves. She stood absolutely trembling.

"Mamma!--don't plague her!" said Constance. "He didn't say so."

"He did!--upon my word!--" said Mrs. Evelyn, speaking with great difficulty;--"he said she was very charming, and it might be dangerous to see too much of her."

"You made him say that, Mrs. Evelyn!" said Fleda, reproachfully.

"Well I did ask him if you were not very charming, but he answered--without hesitation--" said the lady,--"I am only so afraid that Lot will make his appearance!--"

Fleda turned round to the glass, and went on arranging her hair, with a quivering lip.

"Lot, mamma!" said Constance somewhat indignantly.

"Yes," said Mrs. Evelyn in ecstacies,--"because the land will not bear both of them.--But Mr. Carleton is very much in earnest for his answer, Fleda my dear--what shall I tell him?--You need be under no apprehensions about going--he will perhaps tell you that you are charming, but I don't think he will say anything more. You know he is a kind of patriarch!--And when I asked him if he didn't think it might be dangerous to see too much of you, he said he thought it might to some people--so you see you are safe."

"Mrs. Evelyn, how could you use my name so!" said Fleda with a voice that carried a good deal of reproach.

"My dear Fleda, shall I tell him you will go?--You need not be afraid to go riding, only you must not let yourself be seen walking with him."

"I shall not go, ma'am," said Fleda quietly.

"I wanted to send Edith with you, thinking it would be pleasanter; but I knew Mr. Carleton's carriage would hold but two to-day. So what shall I tell him?"

"I am not going, ma'am," repeated Fleda.

"But what shall I tell him? I must give him some reason. Shall I say that you think a sea-breeze is blowing, and you don't like it?--or shall I say that prospects are a matter of indifference to you?"

Fleda was quite silent, and went on dressing herself with trembling fingers.

"My dear Fleda," said the lady bringing her face a little into order,--"won't you go?--I am very sorry--"

"So am I sorry," said Fleda. "I can't go, Mrs. Evelyn."

"I will tell Mr. Carleton you are very sorry," said Mrs. Evelyn, every line of her face drawing again,--"that will console him; and let him hope that you will not mind sea-breezes by and by, after you have been a little longer in the neighbourhood of them. I will tell him you are a good republican, and have an objection at present to an English equipage, but I have no doubt that it is a prejudice which will wear off."

She stopped to laugh, while Fleda had the greatest difficulty not to cry. The lady did not seem to see her disturbed brow; but recovering herself after a little, though not readily, she bent forward and touched her lips to it in kind fashion. Fleda did not look up; and saying again, "I will tell him, dear Fleda!"--Mrs. Evelyn left the room.

Constance after a little laughing and condoling, neither of which Fleda attempted to answer, ran off too, to dress herself; and Fleda after finishing her own toilette locked her door, sat down and cried heartily. She thought Mrs. Evelyn had been, perhaps unconsciously, very unkind; and to say that unkindness has not been meant is but to shift the charge from one to another vital point in the character of a friend, and one perhaps sometimes not less grave. A moment's passionate wrong may consist with the endurance of a friendship worth having, better than the thoughtlessness of obtuse wits that can never know how to be kind. Fleda's whole frame was still in a tremor from disagreeable excitement; and she had serious causes of sorrow to cry for. She was sorry she had lost what would have been a great pleasure in the ride,--and her great pleasures were not often,--but nothing would have been more impossible than for her to go after what Mrs. Evelyn had said;--she was

sorry Mr. Carleton should have asked her twice in vain; what must he think?--she was exceeding sorry that a thought should have been put into her head that never before had visited the most distant dreams of her imagination,--so needlessly, so gratuitously;--she was very sorry, for she could not be free of it again, and she felt it would make her miserably hampered and constrained in mind and manner both, in any future intercourse with the person in question. And then again what would he think of that? Poor Fleda came to the conclusion that her best place was at home; and made up her mind to take the first good opportunity of getting there.

She went down to dinner with no traces of either tears or unkindness on her sweet face, but her nerves were quivering all the afternoon; she could not tell whether Mrs. Evelyn and her daughters found it out. And it was impossible for her to get back even her old degree of freedom of manner before either Mr. Carleton or Mr Thorn. All the more because Mrs. Evelyn was every now and then bringing out some sly allusion which afforded herself intense delight and wrought Fleda to the last degree of quietness. Unkind.--Fleda thought now it was but half from ignorance of the mischief she was doing, and the other half from the mere desire of selfish gratification. The times and ways in which Lot and Abraham were walked into the conversation were incalculable,--and unintelligible except to the person who understood it only too well. On one occasion Mrs. Evelyn went on with a long rigmarole to Mr. Thorn about sea-breezes, with a face of most exquisite delight at his mystification and her own hidden fun; till Fleda was absolutely trembling. Fleda shunned both the gentlemen at length with a kind of nervous horror.

One steamer had left New York, and another, and still Mr. Carleton did not leave it. Why he staid, Constance was as much in a puzzle as ever, for no mortal could guess. Clearly, she said, he did not delight in New York society, for he honoured it as slightly and partially as might be, and it was equally clear if he had a particular reason for staying he didn't mean anybody should know it.

"If he don't mean it, you won't find it out, Constance," said Fleda.

"But it is that very consideration, you see, which inflames my impatience to a most dreadful degree. I think our house is distinguished with his regards, though I am sure I can't imagine why, for he never condescends to anything beyond general benevolence when he is here, and not always to that. He has no taste for embroidery, or Miss Ringgan's crewels would receive more of his notice--he listens to my spirited conversation with a self-possession which invariably deprives me of mine!--and his ear is evidently dull to musical sensibilities, or Florence's harp would have greater charms. I hope there is a web weaving somewhere that will catch him--at present he stands in an attitude of provoking independence of all the rest of the world. It is curious!" said Constance with an indescribable face,--"I feel that the independence of another is rapidly making a slave of me!--"

"What do you mean, Constance?" said Edith indignantly. But the others could do nothing but laugh.

Fleda did not wonder that Mr. Carleton made no more efforts to get her to ride, for the very next day after his last failure he had met her driving with Mr. Thorn. Fleda had been asked by Mr. Thorn's mother in such a way as made it impossible to get off; but it caused her to set a fresh seal of unkindness to Mrs. Evelyn's behaviour.

One evening when there was no other company at Mrs. Evelyn's, Mr. Stackpole was entertaining himself with a long dissertation upon the affairs of America, past, present, and future. It was a favourite subject; Mr. Stackpole always seemed to have more complacent enjoyment of his easy chair when he could succeed in making every American in the room sit uncomfortably. And this time, without any one to thwart him, he went on to his heart's content, disposing of the subject as one would strip a rose of its petals, with as much seeming nonchalance and ease, and with precisely the same design, to make a rose no rose. Leaf after leaf fell under Mr. Stackpole's touch, as if it had been a black frost. The

American government was a rickety experiment; go to pieces presently,--American institutions an alternative between fallacy and absurdity, the fruit of raw minds and precocious theories;--American liberty a contradiction;-- American character a compound of quackery and pretension;--American society (except at Mrs. Evelyn's) an anomaly;--American destiny the same with that of a Cactus or a volcano; a period of rest followed by a period of excitement; not however like the former making successive shoots towards perfection, but like the latter grounding every new face of things upon the demolition of that which went before. Smoothly and pleasantly Mr. Stackpole went on compounding this cup of entertainment for himself and his hearers, smacking his lips over it, and all the more, Fleda thought, when they made wry faces; throwing in a little truth, a good deal of fallacy, a great deal of perversion and misrepresentation; while Mrs. Evelyn listened and smiled, and half parried and half assented to his positions; and Fleda sat impatiently drumming upon her elbow with the fingers of her other hand, in the sheer necessity of giving some expression to her feelings. Mr. Stackpole at last got his finger upon the sore spot of American slavery, and pressed it hard.

"This is the land of the stars and the stripes!" said the gentleman in a little fit of virtuous indignation;--"This is the land where all are brothers!--where 'All men are born free and equal.'"

"Mr. Stackpole," said Fleda in a tone that called his attention,--"are you well acquainted with the popular proverbs of your country?"

"Not particularly," he said,--"he had never made it a branch of study."

"I am a great admirer of them."

He bowed, and begged to be excused for remarking that he didn't see the point yet.

"Do you remember this one, sir," said Fleda colouring a little,--"'Those that live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones?'"

"I have heard it; but pardon me,--though your remark seems to imply the contrary I am in the dark yet. What unfortunate points of vitrification have I laid open to your fire?"

"I thought they were probably forgotten by you, sir."

"I shall be exceedingly obliged to you if you will put me in condition to defend myself."

"I think nothing could do that, Mr. Stackpole. Under whose auspices and fostering care was this curse of slavery laid upon America?"

"Why--of course,--but you will observe, Miss Ringgan, that at that day the world was unenlightened on a great many points;--since then *we* have cast off the wrong which we then shared with the rest of mankind."

"Ay sir, but not until we had first repudiated it and Englishmen had desired to force it back upon us at the point of the sword. Four times"--

"But my dear Fleda," interrupted Mrs. Evelyn, "the English nation have no slaves nor slave-trade--they have put an end to slavery entirely everywhere under their flag."

"They were very slow about it," said Fleda. "Four times the government of Massachusetts abolished the slave-trade under their control, and four times the English government thrust it back upon them. Do you remember what Burke says about that?--in his speech on Conciliation with America?"

"It don't signify what Burke says about it," said Mr. Stackpole rubbing his chin,--"Burke is not the first authority--but Miss Ringgan, it is undeniable that slavery and the slave-trade, too, does at this moment exist in the interior of your own country."

"I will never excuse what is wrong, sir; but I think it becomes an Englishman to be very moderate in putting forth that charge."

"Why?" said he hastily;--"we have done away with it entirely in our own dominions;--wiped that stain clean off. Not a slave can touch British ground but he breathes free air from that minute."

"Yes, sir, but candour will allow that we are not in a condition in this country to decide the question by a *tour de force*."

"What is to decide it then?" said he a little arrogantly.

"The progress of truth in public opinion."

"And why not the government--as well as our government?"

"It has not the power, you know, sir."

"Not the power! well, that speaks for itself."

"Nothing against us, on a fair construction," said Fleda patiently. "It is well known to those who understand the subject"--

"Where did you learn so much about it, Fleda?" said Mrs. Evelyn humourously.

"As the birds pick up their supplies, ma'am--here and there.--It is well known, Mr. Stackpole, that our constitution never could have been agreed upon if that question of slavery had not been by common consent left where it was--with the separate state governments."

"The separate state governments--well, why do not *they* put an end to it? The disgrace is only shifted."

"Of course they must first have the consent of the public mind of those states."

"Ah!--their consent!--and why is their consent wanting?"

"We cannot defend ourselves there," said Mrs. Evelyn;--"I wish we could."

"The disgrace at least is shifted from the whole to a part. But will you permit me," said Fleda, "to give another quotation from my despised authority, and remind you of an Englishman's testimony, that beyond a doubt that point of emancipation would never have been carried in parliament had the interests of even a part of the electors been concerned in it."

"It was done, however,--and done at the expense of twenty millions of money."

"And I am sure that was very noble," said Florence.

"It was what no nation but the English would ever have done," said Mrs. Evelyn.

"I do not wish to dispute it," said Fleda; "but still it was doing what did not touch the sensitive point of their own well-being."

"*We* think there is a little national honour concerned in it," said Mr. Stackpole dryly, stroking his chin again.

"So does every right-minded person," said Mrs. Evelyn; "I am sure I do."

"And I am sure so do I," said Fleda; "but I think the honour of a piece of generosity is considerably lessened by the fact that it is done at the expense of another."

"Generosity!" said Mr. Stackpole,--"it was not generosity, it was justice;--there was no generosity about it."

"Then it deserves no honour at all," said Fleda, "if it was merely that--the tardy execution of justice is but the removal of a reproach."

"We Englishmen are of opinion, however," said Mr. Stackpole contentedly, "that the removers of a reproach are entitled to some honour which those who persist in retaining it cannot claim."

"Yes," said Fleda, drawing rather a long breath,--"I acknowledge that; but I think that while some of these same Englishmen have shewn themselves so unwilling to have the condition of their own factory slaves ameliorated, they should be very gentle in speaking of wrongs which we have far less ability to rectify."

"Ah!--I like consistency," said Mr. Stackpole. "America shouldn't dress up poles with liberty caps till all who walk under are free to wear them. She cannot boast that the breath of her air and the breath of freedom are one."

"Can England?" said Fleda gently,--"when her own citizens are not free from the horrors of impressment?"

"Pshaw!" said Mr. Stackpole, half in a pet and half laughing,--"why, where did you get such a fury against England?--you are the first *fair* antagonist I have met on this side of the water."

"I wish I was a better one, sir," said Fleda laughing.

"Miss Ringgan has been prejudiced by an acquaintance with one or two unfortunate specimens," said Mrs. Evelyn.

"Ay!" said Mr. Stackpole a little bitterly,--"America is the natural birthplace of prejudice,--always was."

"Displayed, first, in maintaining the rights against the swords of Englishmen;--latterly, how, Mr. Stackpole?"

"It isn't necessary to enlighten *you* on any part of the subject," said he a little pointedly.

"Fleda, my dear, you are answered!" said Mrs. Evelyn, apparently with great internal amusement.

"Yet you will indulge me so far as to indicate what part of the subject you are upon?" said Fleda quietly.

"You must grant so much as that to so gentle a requisition, Mr. Stackpole," said the older lady.

"I venture to assume that you do not say that on your own account, Mrs. Evelyn?"

"Not at all--I agree with you, that Americans are prejudiced; but I think it will pass off, Mr. Stackpole, as they learn to know themselves and other countries better."

"But how do they deserve such a charge and such a defence? or how have they deserved it?" said Fleda.

"Tell her, Mr. Stackpole," said Mrs. Evelyn.

"Why," said Mr. Stackpole,--"in their absurd opposition to all the old and tried forms of things, and rancorous dislike of those who uphold them; and in their pertinacity on every point where they might be set right, and impatience of hearing the truth."

"Are they singular in that last item?" said Fleda.

"Now," said Mr. Stackpole, not heeding her,--"there's your treatment of the aborigines of this country--what do you call that, for a *free* people?"

"A powder magazine, communicating with a great one of your own somewhere else; so if you are a good subject, sir, you will not carry a lighted candle into it."

"One of our own--where?" said he.

"In India," said Fleda with a glance,--"and there are I don't know how many trains leading to it,--so better hands off, sir."

"Where did you pick up such a spite against us?" said Mr. Stackpole, drawing a little back and eying her as one would a belligerent mouse or cricket. "Will you tell me now that Americans are not prejudiced?"

"What do you call prejudice?" said Fleda smiling.

"O there is a great deal of it, no doubt, here, Mr. Stackpole," said Mrs. Evelyn blandly;--"but we shall grow out of it in time;--it is only the premature wisdom of a young people."

"And young people never like to hear their wisdom rebuked," said Mr Stackpole bowing.

"Fleda, my dear, what for is that little significant shake of your head?" said Mrs. Evelyn in her amused voice.

"A trifle, ma'am."

"Covers a hidden rebuke, Mrs. Evelyn, I have no doubt, for both our last remarks. What is it, Miss Fleda?--I dare say we can bear it."

"I was thinking, sir, that none would trouble themselves much about our foolscap if we had not once made them wear it."

"Mr. Stackpole, you are worsted!--I only wish Mr. Carleton had been here!" said Mrs. Evelyn, with a face of excessive delight.

"I wish he had," said Fleda, "for then I need not have spoken a word."

"Why," said Mr. Stackpole a little irritated, "you suppose he would have fought for you against me?"

"I suppose he would have fought for truth against anybody, sir," said Fleda.

"Even against his own interests?"

"If I am not mistaken in him," said Fleda, "he reckons his own and those of truth identical."

The shout that was raised at this by all the ladies of the family, made her look up in wonderment.

"Mr. Carleton,"--said Mrs. Evelyn,--"what do you say to that, sir."

The direction of the lady's eye made Fleda spring up and face about. The gentleman in question was standing quietly at the back of her chair, too quietly, she saw, to leave any doubt of his having been there some time. Mr. Stackpole uttered an ejaculation, but Fleda stood absolutely motionless, and nothing could be prettier than her colour.

"What do you say to what you have heard, Mr. Carleton?" said Mrs. Evelyn.

Fleda's eyes were on the floor, but she thoroughly appreciated the tone of the question.

"I hardly know whether I have listened with most pleasure or pain, Mrs. Evelyn."

"Pleasure!" said Constance.

"Pain!" said Mr. Stackpole.

"I am certain Miss Ringgan was pure from any intention of giving pain," said Mrs. Evelyn with her voice of contained fun. "She has no national antipathies, I am sure,--unless in the case of the Jews,--she is too charming a girl for that."

"Miss Ringgan cannot regret less than I a word that she has spoken," said Mr. Carleton looking keenly at her as she drew back and took a seat a little off from the rest.

"Then why was the pain?" said Mr. Stackpole.

"That there should have been any occasion for them, sir."

"Well I wasn't sensible of the occasion, so I didn't feel the pain," said Mr. Stackpole dryly, for the other gentleman's tone was almost haughtily significant. "But if I had, the pleasure of such sparkling eyes would have

made me forget it. Good-evening, Mrs. Evelyn--good-evening, my gentle antagonist,--it seems to me you have learned, if it is permissible to alter one of your favorite proverbs, that it is possible to *break two windows* with one stone. However, I don't feel that I go away with any of mine shattered."--

"Fleda, my dear," said Mrs. Evelyn laughing,--"what do you say to that?"

"As he is not here I will say nothing to it, Mrs. Evelyn," said Fleda, quietly drawing off to the table with her work, and again in a tremor from head to foot.

"Why, didn't you see Mr. Carleton come in?" said Edith following her;--"I did--he came in long before you had done talking, and mamma held up her finger and made him stop; and he stood at the back of your chair the whole time listening. Mr. Stackpole didn't know he was there, either. But what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing--" said Fleda,--but she made her escape out of the room the next instant.

"Mamma," said Edith, "what ails Fleda?"

"I don't know, my love," said Mrs. Evelyn. "Nothing, I hope."

"There does, though," said Edith decidedly.

"Come here, Edith," said Constance, "and don't meddle with matters above your comprehension. Miss Ringgan has probably hurt her hand with throwing stones."

"Hurt her hand!" said Edith. But she was taken possession of by her eldest sister.

"That is a lovely girl, Mr. Carleton," said Mrs. Evelyn with an indescribable look--outwardly benign, but beneath that most keen in its scrutiny.

He bowed rather abstractedly.

"She will make a charming little farmer's wife, don't you think so?"

"Is that her lot, Mrs. Evelyn?" he said with a somewhat incredulous smile.

"Why no--not precisely,--" said the lady,--"you know in the country, or you do not know, the ministers are half farmers, but I suppose not more than half; just such a mixture as will suit Fleda, I should think. She has not told me in so many words, but it is easy to read so ingenuous a nature as hers, and I have discovered that there is a most deserving young friend of mine settled at Queechy that she is by no means indifferent to. I take it for granted that will be the end of it," said Mrs. Evelyn, pinching her sofa cushion in a great many successive places with a most composed and satisfied air.

But Mr. Carleton did not seem at all interested in the subject, and presently introduced another.

Chapter XXXV.

> It is a hard matter for friends to meet; but mountains may be removed with earthquakes, and so encounter.--As You Like It.

"What have we to do to-night?" said Florence at breakfast the next morning.

"You have no engagement, have you?" said her mother.

"No mamma," said Constance arching her eyebrows,--"we are to taste the sweets of domestic life--you as head of the family will go to sleep in the dormeuse, and Florence and I shall take turns in yawning by your side."

"And what will Fleda do?" said Mrs. Evelyn laughing.

"Fleda, mamma, will be wrapped in remorseful recollections of having enacted a mob last evening and have enough occupation in considering how she shall repair damages."

"Fleda, my dear, she is very saucy," said Mrs. Evelyn, sipping her tea with great comfort.

"Why should we yawn to-night any more than last night?" said Fleda; a question which Edith would certainly have asked if she had not been away at school. The breakfast was too late for both her and her father.

"Last night, my dear, your fractious disposition kept us upon half breath; there wasn't time to yawn. I meant to have eased my breast by laughing afterwards, but that expectation was stifled."

"What stifled it?"

"I was afraid!--" said Constance with a little flutter of her person up and down in her chair.

"Afraid of what?"

"And besides you know we can't have our drawing-rooms filled with distinguished foreigners *every* evening we are not at home. I shall direct the fowling-piece to be severe in his execution of orders to-night and let nobody in. I forgot!"--exclaimed Constance with another flutter,--"it is Mr. Thorn's night!--My dearest mamma, will you consent to have the dormeuse wheeled round with its back to the fire?--and Florence and I

will take the opportunity to hear little Edith's lessons in the next room--unless Mr Decatur comes. I must endeavour to make the Manton comprehend what he has to do."

"But what is to become of Mr. Evelyn?" said Fleda; "you make Mrs. Evelyn the head of the family very unceremoniously."

"Mr. Evelyn, my dear," said Constance gravely,--"makes a futile attempt semi-weekly to beat his brains out with a club; and every successive failure encourages him to try again; the only effect being a temporary decapitation of his family; and I believe this is the night on which he periodically turns a frigid eye upon their destitution."

"You are too absurd!" said Florence, reaching over for a sausage.

"Dear Constance!" said Fleda, half laughing, "why do you talk so?"

"Constance, behave yourself," said her mother.

"Mamma!" said the young lady,--"I am actuated by a benevolent desire to effect a diversion of Miss Ringgan's mind from its gloomy meditations, by presenting to her some more real subjects of distress."

"I wonder if you ever looked at such a thing," said Fleda.

"What 'such a thing'?"

"As a real subject of distress."

"Yes--I have one incessantly before me in your serious countenance. Why in the world, Fleda, don't you look like other people?"

"I suppose, because I don't feel like them."

"And why don't you? I am sure you ought to be as happy as most people."

"I think I am a great deal happier," said Fleda.

"Than I am?" said the young lady, with arched eyebrows. But they went down and her look softened in spite of herself at the eye and smile which answered her.

"I should be very glad, dear Constance, to know you were as happy as I."

"Why do you think I am not?" said the young lady a little tartly.

"Because no happiness would satisfy me that cannot last"

"And why can't it last?"

"It is not built upon lasting things."

"Pshaw!" said Constance, "I wouldn't have such a dismal kind of happiness as yours, Fleda, for anything."

"Dismal!" said Fleda smiling,--"because it can never disappoint me?--or because it isn't noisy?"

"My dear little Fleda!" said Constance in her usual manner,--"you have lived up there among the solitudes till you have got morbid ideas of life--which it makes me melancholy to observe. I am very much afraid they verge towards stagnation."

"No indeed!" said Fleda laughing; "but, if you please, with me the stream of life has flowed so quietly that I have looked quite to the bottom, and know how shallow it is, and growing shallower;--I could not venture my bark of happiness there; but with you it is like a spring torrent,--the foam and the roar hinder your looking deep into it."

Constance gave her a significant glance, a strong contrast to the earnest simplicity of Fleda's face, and presently inquired if she ever wrote poetry.

"Shall I have the pleasure some day of discovering your uncommon signature in the secular corner of some religious newspaper?"

"I hope not," said Fleda quietly.

Joe Manton just then brought in a bouquet for Miss Evelyn, a very common enlivener of the breakfast-table, all the more when, as in the present case, the sisters could not divine where it came from. It moved Fleda's wonder to see how very little the flowers were valued for their own sake; the probable cost, the probable giver, the probable éclat, were points enthusiastically discussed and thoroughly appreciated; but the sweet messengers themselves were carelessly set by for other eyes and seemed to have no attraction for those they were destined to. Fleda enjoyed them at a distance and could not help thinking that "Heaven sends almonds to those that have no teeth."

"This Camellia will just do for my hair to-morrow night!" said Florence;--"just what I want with my white muslin."

"I think I will go with you to-morrow, Florence," said Fleda;--"Mrs. Decatur has asked me so often."

"Well, my dear, I shall be made happy by your company," said Florence abstractedly, examining her bouquet,--"I am afraid it hasn't stem enough, Constance!--never mind--I'll fix it--where *is* the end of this myrtle?--I shall be very glad, of course, Fleda my dear, but--" picking her bouquet to pieces,--"I think it right to tell you, privately, I am afraid you will find it very stupid--"

"O I dare say she will not," said Mrs. Evelyn,--"she can go and try at any rate--she would find it very stupid with me here alone and Constance at the concert--I dare say she will find some there whom she knows."

"But the thing is, mamma, you see, at these conversaziones they never talk anything but French and German--I don't know--of *course* I should be delighted to have Fleda with me, and I have no doubt Mrs. Decatur would be very glad to have her--but I am afraid she won't enjoy herself."

"I do not want to go where I shall not enjoy myself," said Fleda quietly;--"that is certain."

"Of course, you know, dear, I would a great deal rather have you than not--I only speak for what I think would be for your pleasure."

"I would do just as I felt inclined, Fleda," said Mrs. Evelyn.

"I shall let her encounter the dullness alone, ma'am," said Fleda lightly.

But it was not in a light mood that she put on her bonnet after dinner and set out to pay a visit to her uncle at the library; she had resolved that she would not be near the dormeuse in whatsoever relative position that evening. Very, very quiet she was; her grave little face walked through the crowd of busy, bustling, anxious people, as if she had nothing in common with them; and Fleda felt that she had very little. Half unconsciously as she passed along the streets her eye scanned the countenances of that moving panorama; and the report it brought back made her draw closer within herself.

She wondered that her feet had ever tripped lightly up those library stairs.

"Ha! my fair Saxon," said the doctor;--"what has brought you down here to-day?"

"I felt in want of something fresh, uncle Orrin, so I thought I would come and see you."

"Fresh!" said he. "Ah you are pining for green fields, I know. But you little piece of simplicity, there are no green fields now at Queechy--they are two feet deep with snow by this time."

"Well I am sure *that* is fresh," said Fleda smiling.

The doctor was turning over great volumes one after another in a delightful confusion of business.

"When do you think you shall go north, uncle Orrin?"

"North?" said he--"what do you want to know about the north?"

"You said, you know, sir, that you would go a little out of your way to leave me at home."

"I won't go out of my way for anybody. If I leave you there, it will be in my way. Why you are not getting homesick?"

"No sir, not exactly,--but I think I will go with you when you go."

"That won't be yet awhile--I thought those people wanted you to stay till January."

"Ay, but suppose I want to do something else?"

He looked at her with a comical kind of indecision, and said,

"You don't know what you want!--I thought when you came in you needn't go further than the glass to see something fresh; but I believe the sea-breezes haven't had enough of you yet. Which part of you wants freshening?" he said in his mock-fierce way.

Fleda laughed and said she didn't know.

"Out of humour, I guess," said the doctor. "I'll talk to you!--Take this and amuse yourself awhile, with something that *isn't* fresh, till I get through, and then you shall go home with me."

Fleda carried the large volume into one of the reading rooms, where there was nobody, and sat down at the baize-covered table. But the book was not of the right kind--or her mood was notfor it failed to interest her. She sat nonchalantly turning over the leaves; but mentally she was busy turning over other leaves which had by far the most of her attention. The pages that memory read--the record of the old times passed in that very room, and the old childish light-hearted feelings that

were, she thought, as much beyond recall. Those pleasant times, when the world was all bright and friends all fair, and the light heart had never been borne down by the pressure of care, nor sobered by disappointment, nor chilled by experience. The spirit will not spring elastic again from under that weight; and the flower that has closed upon its own sweetness will not open a second time to the world's breath. Thoughtfully, softly, she was touching and feeling of the bands that years had fastened about her heart--they would not be undone,--though so quietly and almost stealthily they had been bound there. She was remembering the shadows that one after another had been cast upon her life, till now one soft veil of a cloud covered the whole; no storm cloud certainly, but also there was nothing left of the glad sunlight that her young eyes rejoiced in. At Queechy the first shadow had fallen;--it was a good while before the next one, but then they came thick. There was the loss of some old comforts and advantages,--that could have been borne;--then consequent upon that, the annoyances and difficulties that had wrought such a change in her uncle, till Fleda could hardly look back and believe that he was the same person. Once manly, frank, busy, happy and making his family so;--now reserved, gloomy, irritable, unfaithful to his duty and selfishly throwing down the burden they must take up, but were far less able to bear. And so Hugh was changed too; not in loveliness of character and demeanour, nor even much in the always gentle and tender expression of countenance; but the animal spirits and frame, that should have had all the strong cherishing and bracing that affection and wisdom together could have applied, had been left to wear themselves out under trials his father had shrunk from and other trials his father had made. And Mrs. Rossitur,--it was hard for Fleda to remember the face she wore at Paris,--the bright eye and joyous corners of the mouth, that now were so utterly changed. All by his fault--that made it so hard to bear. Fleda had thought all this a hundred times; she went over it now as one looks at a thing one is well accustomed to; not with new sorrow, only in a subdued mood of mind just fit to make the most of it. The familiar place took her back to the time when it became familiar; she compared herself sitting there and feeling the whole world

a blank, except for the two or three at home, with the child who had sat there years before in that happy time "when the feelings were young and the world was new."

Then the Evelyns--why should they trouble one so inoffensive and so easily troubled as her poor little self? They did not know all they were doing,--but if they had eyes they *must* see a little of it. Why could she not have been allowed to keep her old free simple feeling with everybody, instead of being hampered and constrained and miserable from this pertinacious putting of thoughts in her head that ought not to be there? It had made her unlike herself, she knew, in the company of several people. And perhaps *they* might be sharp-sighted enough to read it!--but even if not, how it had hindered her enjoyment. She had taken so much pleasure in the Evelyns last year, and in her visit,--well, she would go home and forget it, and maybe they would come to their right minds by the next time she saw them.

Fleda saw with a start that it was Mr. Carleton.
Fleda saw with a start that it was Mr. Carleton.

"What pleasant times we used to have here once, uncle Orrin!" she said with half a sigh, the other half quite made up by the tone in which she spoke. But it was not, as she thought, uncle Orrin that was standing by her side, and looking up as she finished speaking Fleda saw with a start that it was Mr. Carleton. There was such a degree of life and pleasantness in his eyes that, in spite of the start, her own quite brightened.

"That is a pleasure one may always command," he said, answering part of her speech.

"Ay, provided one has one's mind always under command," said Fleda. "It is possible to sit down to a feast with a want of appetite."

"In such a case, what is the best tonic?"

His manner, even in those two minutes, had put Fleda perfectly at her ease, ill-bred eyes and ears being absent. She looked up and answered, with such entire trust in him as made her forget that she had ever had any cause to distrust herself.

"For me," she said,--"as a general rule, nothing is better than to go out of doors--into the woods or the garden--they are the best fresheners I know of. I can do myself good there at times when books are a nuisance."

"You are not changed from your old self," he said.

The wish was strong upon Fleda to know whether *he* was, but it was not till she saw the answer in his face that she knew how plainly hers had asked the question. And then she was so confused that she did not know what the answer had been.

"I find it so too," he said. "The influences of pure nature are the best thing I know for some moods--after the company of a good horse."

"And you on his back, I suppose?"

"That was my meaning. What is the doubt thereupon?" said he laughing.

"Did I express any doubt?"

"Or my eyes were mistaken."

"I remember they never used to be that," said Fleda.

"What was it?"

"Why," said Fleda, thinking that Mr. Carleton had probably retained more than one of his old habits, for she was answering with her old obedience,--"I was doubting what the influence is in that case--worth analyzing, I think. I am afraid the good horse's company has little to do with it."

"What then do you suppose?" said he smiling.

"Why," said Fleda,--"it might be--but I beg your pardon, Mr. Carleton! I am astonished at my own presumption."

"Go on, and let me know why?" he said, with that happiness of manner which was never resisted. Fleda went on, reassuring her courage now and then with a glance.

"The relief *might* spring, sir, from the gratification of a proud feeling of independence,--or from a dignified sense of isolation,--or an imaginary riding down of opposition--or the consciousness of being master of what you have in hand."

She would have added to the general category, "the running away from oneself;" but the eye and bearing of the person before her forbade even such a thought as connected with him. He laughed, but shook his head.

"Perhaps then," said Fleda, "it may be nothing worse than the working off of a surplus of energy or impatience, that leaves behind no more than can be managed."

"You have learned something of human nature since I had the pleasure of knowing you," he said with a look at once amused and penetrating.

"I wish I hadn't," said Fleda.

Her countenance absolutely fell.

"I sometimes think," said he turning over the leaves of her book, "that these are the best companionship one can have--the world at large is very unsatisfactory."

"O how much!" said Fleda with a long breath. "The only pleasant thing that my eyes rested upon as I came through the streets this afternoon, was a huge bunch of violets that somebody was carrying. I walked behind them as long as I could."

"Is your old love for Queechy in full force?" said Mr. Carleton, still turning over the leaves, and smiling.

"I believe so--I should be very sorry to live here long--at home I can always go out and find society that refreshes me."

"You have set yourself a high standard," he said, with no displeased expression of the lips.

"I have been charged with that," said Fleda;--"but is it possible to set too high a standard, Mr. Carleton?"

"One may leave oneself almost alone in the world."

"Well, even then," said Fleda, "I would rather have only the image of excellence than be contented with inferiority."

"Isn't it possible to do both?" said he, smiling again.

"I don't know," said Fleda,--"perhaps I am too easily dissatisfied--I believe I have grown fastidious living alone--I have sometimes almost a disgust at the world and everything in it."

"I have often felt so," he said;--"but I am not sure that it is a mood to be indulged in--likely to further our own good or that of others."

"I am sure it is not," said Fleda;--"I often feel vexed with myself for it; but what can one do, Mr. Carleton?"

"Don't your friends the flowers help you in this?"

"Not a bit," said Fleda,--"they draw the other way; their society is so very pure and satisfying that one is all the less inclined to take up with the other."

She could not quite tell what to make of the smile with which he began to speak; it half abashed her.

"When I spoke a little while ago," said he, "of the best cure for an ill mood, I was speaking of secondary means simply--the only really humanizing, rectifying, peace-giving thing I ever tried was looking at time in the light of eternity, and shaming or melting my coldness away in the rays of the Sun of righteousness."

Fleda's eyes, which had fallen on her book, were raised again with such a flash of feeling that it quite prevented her seeing what was in his. But the feeling was a little too strong--the eyes went down, lower than ever, and the features shewed that the utmost efforts of self-command were needed to control them.

"There is no other cure," he went on in the same tone;--"but disgust and weariness and selfishness shrink away and hide themselves before a word or a look of the Redeemer of men. When we hear him say, 'I have bought thee--thou art mine,' it is like one of those old words of healing, 'Thou art loosed from thine infirmity,'--'Be thou clean,'--and the mind takes sweetly the grace and the command together, 'That he who loveth God love his brother also.'--Only the preparation of the gospel of peace can make our feet go softly over the roughness of the way."

Fleda did not move, unless her twinkling eyelashes might seem to contradict that.

"*I* need not tell you," Mr. Carleton went on a little lower, "where this medicine is to be sought."

"It is strange," said Fleda presently, "how well one may know and how well one may forget.--But I think the body has a great deal to do with it sometimes--these states of feeling, I mean."

"No doubt it has; and in these cases the cure is a more complicated matter. I should think the roses would be useful there?"

Fleda's mind was crossed by an indistinct vision of peas, asparagus, and sweet corn; she said nothing.

"An indirect remedy is sometimes the very best that can be employed. However it is always true that the more our eyes are fixed upon the source of light the less we notice the shadows that things we are passing fling across our way."

Fleda did not know how to talk for a little while; she was too happy. Whatever kept Mr. Carleton from talking, he was silent also. Perhaps it was the understanding of her mood.

"Mr. Carleton," said Fleda after a little time, "did you ever carry out that plan of a rose-garden that you were talking of a long while ago?"

"You remember it?" said he with a pleased look.--"Yes--that was one of the first things I set about after I went home--but I did not follow the regular fashion of arrangement that one of your friends is so fond of."

"I should not like that for anything," said Fleda,--"and least of all for roses."

"Do you remember the little shrubbery path that opened just in front of the library windows?--leading at the distance of half a mile to a long narrow winding glen?"

"Perfectly well!" said Fleda,--"through the wood of evergreens--I remember the glen very well."

"About half way from the house," said he smiling at her eyes, "a glade opens which merges at last in the head of the glen--I planted my roses there--the circumstances of the ground were very happy for disposing them according to my wish."

"And how far?"

"The roses?--O all the way, and some distance down the glen. Not a continuous thicket of them," he added smiling again,--"I wished each kind to stand so that its peculiar beauty should be fully relieved and appreciated; and that would have been lost in a crowd."

"Yes, I know it," said Fleda;--"one's eye rests upon the chief objects of attraction and the others are hardly seen,--they do not even serve as foils. And they must shew beautifully against that dark background of firs and larches!"

"Yes--and the windings of the ground gave me every sort of situation and exposure. I wanted room too for the different effects of masses of the same kind growing together and of fine individuals or groups standing alone where they could shew the full graceful development of their nature."

"What a pleasure!--What a beauty it must be!"

"The ground is very happy--many varieties of soil and exposure were needed for the plants of different habits, and I found or made them all. The rocky beginnings of the glen even furnished me with south walls for the little tea-roses, and the Macartneys and Musk roses,--the Banksias I kept nearer home."

"Do you know them all, Mr. Carleton?"

"Not quite," said he smiling at her.

"I have seen one Banksia--the Macartney is a name that tells me nothing."

"They are evergreens--with large white flowers--very abundant and late in the season, but they need the shelter of a wall with us."

"I should think you would say 'with *me*'," said Fleda. "I cannot conceive that the head-quarters of the Rose tribe should be anywhere else."

"One of the queens of the tribe is there, in the neighbourhood of the Macartneys--the difficult Rosa sulphurea--it finds itself so well accommodated that it condescends to play its part to perfection. Do you know that?"

"Not at all."

"It is one of the most beautiful of all, though not my favourite--it has large double yellow flowers shaped like the Provence--very superb, but as wilful as any queen of them all."

"Which is your favourite, Mr. Carleton?"

"Not that which shews itself most splendid to the eye, but which offers fairest indications to the fancy."

Fleda looked a little wistfully, for there was a smile rather of the eye than of the lips which said there was a hidden thought beneath.

"Don't you assign characters to your flowers?" said he gravely.

"Always!"

"That Rosa sulphurea is a haughty high-bred beauty that disdains even to shew herself beautiful unless she is pleased;--I love better what comes nearer home to the charities and wants of everyday life."

He had not answered her, Fleda knew; she thought of what he had said to Mrs. Evelyn about liking beauty but not *beauties*.

"Then," said he smiling again in that hidden way, "the head of the glen gave me the soil I needed for the Bourbons and French roses."--

"Bourbons?"--said Fleda.

"Those are exceeding fine--a hybrid between the Chinese and the Rose-à-quatre-saisons--I have not confined them all to the head of the glen; many of them are in richer soil, grafted on standards."

"I like standard roses," said Fleda, "better than any."

"Not better than climbers?"

"Better than any climbers I ever saw--except the Banksia."

"There is hardly a more elegant variety than that, though it is not strictly a climber; and indeed when I spoke I was thinking as much of the training roses. Many of the Noisettes are very fine. But I have the climbers all over--in some parts nothing else, where the wood closes in upon the path--there the evergreen roses or the Ayrshire cover the ground under the trees, or are trained up the trunks and allowed to find their own way through the branches down again--the Multiflora in the same manner. I have made the Boursault cover some unsightly rocks that were in my way.--Then in wider parts of the glade nearer home are your favourite standards--the Damask, and Provence, and Moss, which you know are varieties of the Centifolia, and the Noisette standards, some of them are very fine, and the Chinese roses, and countless hybrids and varieties of all these, with many Bourbons;--and your beautiful American yellow rose, and the Austrian briar and Eglantine, and the Scotch and white and Dog roses in their innumerable varieties change admirably well with the others, and relieve the eye very happily."

"Relieve the eye!" said Fleda,--"my imagination wants relieving! Isn't there--I have a fancy that there is--a view of the sea from some parts of that walk, Mr. Carleton?"

"Yes,--you have a good memory," said he smiling. "On one side the wood is rather dense, and in some parts of the other side; but elsewhere the trees are thinned off towards the south-west, and in one or two points the descent of the ground and some cutting have given free access to the air and free range to the eye, bounded only by the sea line in the distance--if indeed that can be said to bound anything."

"I haven't seen it since I was a child," said Fleda. "And for how long a time in the year is this literally a garden of roses, Mr. Carleton?"

"The perpetual roses are in bloom for eight months,--the Damask and the Chinese, and some of their varieties--the Provence roses are in blossom all the summer."

"Ah we can do nothing like that in this country," said Fleda shaking her head;--"our winters are unmanageable."

She was silent a minute, turning over the leaves of her book in an abstracted manner.

"You have struck out upon a grave path of reflection," said Mr. Carleton gently,--"and left me bewildered among the roses."

"I was thinking," said Fleda, looking up and laughing--"I was moralizing to myself upon the curious equalization of happiness in the world--I just sheered off from a feeling of envy, and comfortably reflected that one measures happiness by what one knows--not by what one does not know; and so that in all probability I have had near as much enjoyment in the little number of plants that I have brought up and cherished and know intimately, as you, sir, in your superb walk through fairyland."

"Do you suppose," said he laughing, "that I leave the whole care of fairyland to my gardener? No, you are mistaken--when the roses are to act as my correctors I find I must become theirs. I seldom go among them without a pruning knife and never without wishing for one. And you are certainly right so far,--that the plants on which I bestow most pains give me the most pleasure. There are some that no hand but mine ever touches, and those are by far the best loved of my eye."

A discussion followed, partly natural, partly moral,--on the manner of pruning various roses, and on the curious connection between care and complacency, and the philosophy of the same.

"The rules of the library are to shut up at sundown, sir," said one of the bookmen who had come into the room.

"Sundown!" exclaimed Fleda jumping up;--"is my uncle not here, Mr. Frost?"

"He has been gone half an hour, ma'am."

"And I was to have gone home with him--I have forgotten myself."

"If that is at all the fault of my roses,", said Mr. Carleton smiling, "I will do my best to repair it."

"I am not disposed to call it a fault," said Fleda tying her bonnet-strings,--"it is rather an agreeable thing once in a while. I shall dream of those roses, Mr. Carleton!"

"That would be doing them too much honour."

Very happily she had forgotten herself; and during all the walk home her mind was too full of one great piece of joy and indeed too much engaged with conversation to take up her own subject again. Her only wish was that they might not meet any of the Evelyns;--Mr. Thorn, whom they did meet, was a matter of entire indifference.

The door was opened by Dr. Gregory himself. To Fleda's utter astonishment Mr. Carleton accepted his invitation to come in. She went up stairs to take off her things in a kind of maze.

"I thought he would go away without my seeing him, and now what a nice time I have had!--in spite of Mrs. Evelyn--"

That thought slipped in without Fleda's knowledge, but she could not get it out again.

"I don't know how much it has been her fault either, but one thing is certain--I never could have had it at her house.--How very glad I am!--How *very* glad I am!--that I have seen him and heard all this from his own lips.--But how very funny that he will be here to tea--"

"Well!" said the doctor when she came down,--"you *do* look freshened up, I declare. Here is this girl, sir, was coming to me a little while ago, complaining that she wanted something *fresh*, and begging me to take her back to Queechy, forsooth, to find it, with two feet of snow on the ground. Who wants to see you at Queechy?" he said, facing round upon her with a look half fierce, half quizzical.

Fleda laughed, but was vexed to feel that she could not help colouring and colouring exceedingly; partly from the consciousness of his meaning, and partly from a vague notion that somebody else was conscious of it too. Dr. Gregory, however, dashed right off into the thick of conversation with his guest, and kept him busily engaged till tea-time. Fleda sat still on the sofa, looking and listening with simple pleasure; memory served her up a rich entertainment enough. Yet she thought her uncle was the most heartily interested of the two in the conversation; there was a shade more upon Mr. Carleton, not than he often wore, but than he had worn a little while ago. Dr. Gregory was a great bibliopole, and in the course of the hour hauled out and made his guest overhaul no less than several musty old folios; and Fleda could not help fancying that he did it with an access of gravity greater even than the occasion called for. The grace of his manner, however, was unaltered; and at tea she did not know whether she had been right or not. Demurely as she sat there behind the tea-urn, for Dr. Gregory still engrossed all the attention of his guest as far as talking was concerned, Fleda was again inwardly smiling to herself at the oddity and the pleasantness of the chance that had brought those three together in such a quiet way, after all the weeks she had been seeing Mr. Carleton at a distance. And she enjoyed the conversation too; for though Dr. Gregory was a little fond of his hobby it was still conversation worthy the name.

"I have been so unfortunate in the matter of the drives," Mr. Carleton said, when he was about to take leave and standing before Fleda,--"that I am half afraid to mention it again."

"I could not help it, both those time, Mr. Carleton," said Fleda earnestly.

"Both the last?--or both the first?" said he smiling.

"The last?--" said Fleda.

"I have had the honour of making such an attempt twice within the last ten days----to my disappointment."

"It was not by my fault then either, sir," Fleda said quietly.

But he knew very well from the expression of her face a moment before where to put the emphasis her tongue would not make.

"Dare I ask you to go with me to-morrow?"

"I don't know," said Fleda with the old childish sparkle of her eye,--"but if you ask me, sir, I will go."

He sat down beside her immediately, and Fleda knew by his change of eye that her former thought had been right.

"Shall I see you at Mrs. Decatur's to-morrow?"

"No, sir."

"I thought I understood," said he in an explanatory tone, "from your friends the Miss Evelyns, that they were going."

"I believe they are, and I did think of it; but I have changed my mind, and shall stay at home with Mrs. Evelyn."

After some further conversation the hour for the drive was appointed, and Mr. Carleton took leave.

"Come for me twice and Mrs. Evelyn refused without consulting me!" thought Fleda. "What could make her do so?--How very rude he must have thought me! And how glad I am I have had an opportunity of setting that right."

So quitting Mrs. Evelyn her thoughts went off upon a long train of wandering over the afternoon's talk.

"Wake up!" said the doctor, laying his hand kindly upon her shoulder,--"you'll want something fresh again presently. What mine of profundity are you digging into now?"

Fleda looked up and came back from her profundity with a glance and smile as simple as a child's.

"Dear uncle Orrin, how came you to leave me alone in the library?"

"Was that what you were trying to discover?"

"Oh no, sir! But why did you, uncle Orrin? I might have been left utterly alone."

"Why," said the doctor, "I was going out, and a friend that I thought I could confide in promised to take care of you."

"A friend!--Nobody came near me," said Fleda.

"Then I'll never trust anybody again," said the doctor. "But what were you hammering at, mentally, just now?--come, you shall tell me."

"O nothing, uncle Orrin," said Fleda, looking grave again however;--"I was thinking that I had been talking too much to-day."

"Talking too much?--why whom have you been talking to?"

"O, nobody but Mr. Carleton."

"Mr. Carleton! why you didn't say six and a quarter words while he was here."

"No, but I mean in the library, and walking home."

"Talking too much! I guess you did," said the doctor;--"your tongue is like

'the music of the spheres, So loud it deafens human ears.'

How came you to talk too much? I thought you were too shy to talk at all in company."

"No sir, I am not;--I am not at all shy unless people frighten me. It takes almost nothing to do that; but I am very bold if I am not frightened."

"Were you frightened this afternoon?"

"No sir."

"Well, if you weren't frightened, I guess nobody else was," said the doctor.

Chapter XXXVI.

> Whence came this?
> This is some token from a newer friend.
>
> Shakspeare.

The snow-flakes were falling softly and thick when Fleda got up the next morning.

"No ride for me to-day--but how very glad I am that I had a chance of setting that matter right. What could Mrs. Evelyn have been thinking of? --Very false kindness!--if I had disliked to go ever so much she ought to have made me, for my own sake, rather than let me seem so rude--it is true she didn't know *how* rude. O snow-flakes--how much purer and prettier you are than most things in this place!"

No one was in the breakfast parlour when Fleda came down, so she took her book and the dormeuse and had an hour of luxurious quiet before anybody appeared. Not a foot-fall in the house; nor even one outside to be heard, for the soft carpeting of snow which was laid over the streets. The gentle breathing of the fire the only sound in the room; while the very light came subdued through the falling snow and the thin muslin curtains, and gave an air of softer luxury to the apartment. "Money is pleasant," thought Fleda, as she took a little complacent review of all this before opening her book.--"And yet how unspeakably happier one may be without it than another with it. Happiness never was locked up in a purse yet. I am sure Hugh and I,--They must want me at home!--"

There was a little sober consideration of the lumps of coal and the contented looking blaze in the grate, a most essentially home-like thing,--and then Fleda went to her book and for the space of an hour turned over her pages without interruption. At the end of the hour "the fowling piece," certainly the noiseliest of his kind, put his head in, but seeing none of his ladies took it and himself away again and left Fleda in peace for another half hour. Then appeared Mrs. Evelyn in her morning wrapper, and only stopping at the bell-handle, came up to the dormeuse and stooping down kissed Fleda's forehead, with so much tenderness that it won a look of most affectionate gratitude in reply.

"Fleda my dear, we set you a sad example. But you won't copy it. Joe, breakfast. Has Mr. Evelyn gone down town?"

"Yes, ma'am, two hours ago."

"Did it ever occur to you, Fleda my dear," said Mrs. Evelyn, breaking the lumps of coal with the poker in a very leisurely satisfied kind of a way,--"Did it ever occur to you to rejoice that you were not born a business man? What a life!--"

"I wonder how it compares with that of a business woman," said Fleda laughing. "There is an uncompromising old proverb which says

'Man's work is from sun to sun-- But a woman's work is never done.'"

A saying which she instantly reflected was entirely beyond the comprehension of the person to whose consideration she had offered it.

And then came in Florence, rubbing her hands and knitting her eyebrows.

"Why don't you look as bright as the rest of the world, this morning," said Fleda.

"What a wretched storm!"

"Wretched! This beautiful snow! Here have I been enjoying it for this hour."

But Florence rubbed her hands and looked as if Fleda were no rule for other people.

"How horrid it will make the going out to-night, if it snows all day!"

"Then you can stay at home," said her mother composedly.

"Indeed I shall not, mamma!"

"Mamma!" said Constance now coming in with Edith,--"isn't breakfast ready? It strikes me that the fowling-piece wants polishing up. I have an indistinct impression that the sun would be upon the meridian if he was anywhere."

"Not quite so bad as that," said Fleda smiling;--"it is only an hour and a half since I came down stairs."

"You horrid little creature!--Mamma, I consider it an act of inhospitality to permit studious habits on the part of your guests. And I am surprised your ordinary sagacity has not discovered that it is the greatest impolicy towards the objects of your maternal care. We are labouring under

growing disadvantages; for when we have brought the enemy to at long shot there is a mean little craft that comes in and unmans him in a close fight before we can get our speaking-trumpets up."

"Constance!--Do hush!" said her sister. "You are too absurd."

"Fact," said Constance gravely. "Capt. Lewiston was telling me the other night how the thing is managed; and I recognized it immediately and told him I had often seen it done!"

"Hold your tongue, Constance," said her mother smiling,--"and come to breakfast."

Half and but half of the mandate the young lady had any idea of obeying.

"I can't imagine what you are talking about, Constance!" said Edith.

"And then being a friend, you see," pursued Constance, "we can do nothing but fire a salute, instead of demolishing her."

"Can't you?" said Fleda. "I am sure many a time I have felt as if you had left me nothing but my colours."

"Except your prizes, my dear. I am sure I don't know about your being a friend either, for I have observed that you engage English and American alike."

"She is getting up her colours now," said Mrs. Evelyn in mock gravity,--"you can tell what she is."

"Blood-red!" said Constance. "A pirate!--I thought so,"--she exclaimed, with an ecstatic gesture. "I shall make it my business to warn everybody!"

"Oh Constance!" said Fleda, burying her face in her hands. But they all laughed.

"Fleda my dear, I would box her ears," said Mrs. Evelyn commanding herself. "It is a mere envious insinuation,--I have always understood those were the most successful colours carried."

"Dear Mrs. Evelyn!--"

"My dear Fleda, that is not a hot roll--you sha'n't eat it--Take this. Florence give her a piece of the bacon--Fleda my dear, it is good for the digestion--you must try it. Constance was quite mistaken in supposing yours were those obnoxious colours--there is too much white with the red--it is more like a very different flag."

"Like what then, mamma?" said Constance;--"a good American would have blue in it."

"You may keep the American yourself," said her mother.

"Only," said Fleda trying to recover herself, "there is a slight irregularity--with you the stars are blue and the ground white."

"My dear little Fleda!" exclaimed Constance jumping up and capering round the table to kiss her, "you are too delicious for anything; and in future I will be blind to your colours; which is a piece of self-denial I am sure nobody else will practise."

"Mamma," said Edith, "what *are* you all talking about? Can't Constance sit down and let Fleda eat her breakfast?"

"Sit down, Constance, and eat your breakfast!"

"I will do it, mamma, out of consideration for the bacon.--Nothing else would move me."

"Are you going to Mrs. Decatur's to-night, Fleda?"

"No, Edith, I believe not"

"I'm very glad; then there'll be somebody at home. But why don't you?"

"I think on the whole I had rather not."

"Mamma," said Constance, "you have done very wrong in permitting such a thing. I know just how it will be. Mr. Thorn and Mr. Stackpole will make indefinite voyages of discovery round Mrs. Decatur's rooms, and then having a glimmering perception that the light of Miss Ringgan's eyes is in another direction they will sheer off; and you will presently see them come sailing blandly in, one after the other, and cast anchor for the evening; when to your extreme delight Mr. Stackpole and Miss Ringgan will immediately commence fighting. I shall stay at home to see!" exclaimed Constance, with little bounds of delight up and down upon her chair which this time afforded her the additional elasticity of springs,--"I will not go. I am persuaded how it will be, and I would not miss it for anything."

"Dear Constance!" said Fleda, unable to help laughing through all her vexation,--"please do not talk so! You know very well Mr. Stackpole only comes to see your mother."

"He was here last night," said Constance in an extreme state of delight,--"with all the rest of your admirers--ranged in the hall, with their hats in a pile at the foot of the staircase as a token of their determination not to go till you came home; and as they could not be induced to come up to the drawing-room Mr. Evelyn was obliged to go down, and with some difficulty persuaded them to disperse."

Fleda was by this time in a state of indecision betwixt crying and laughing, assiduously attentive to her breakfast.

"Mr. Carleton asked me if you would go to ride with him again the other day, Fleda," said Mrs. Evelyn, with her face of delighted mischief,--"and I excused you; for I thought you would thank me for it."

"Mamma," said Constance, "the mention of that name rouses all the bitter feelings I am capable of! My dear Fleda--we have been friends--but if I see you abstracting my English rose"--

"Look at those roses behind you!" said Fleda.

The young lady turned and sprang at the word, followed by both her sisters; and for some moments nothing but a hubbub of exclamations filled the air,

"Joe, you are enchanting!--But did you ever *see* such flowers?--Oh those rose-buds!--"

"And these Camellias," said Edith,--"look, Florence, how they are cut--with such splendid long stems."

"And the roses too--all of them--see mamma, just cut from the bushes with the buds all left on, and immensely long stems--Mamma, these must have cost an immensity!--"

"That is what I call a bouquet," said Fleda, fain to leave the table too and draw near the tempting shew in Florence's hand.

"This is the handsomest you have had all winter, Florence," said Edith.

"Handsomest!--I never saw anything like it. I shall wear some of these to-night, mamma."

"You are in a great hurry to appropriate it," said Constance,--"how do you know but it is mine?"

"Which of us is it for, Joe?"

"Say it is mine, Joe, and I will vote you--the best article of your kind!" said Constance, with an inexpressible glance at Fleda.

"Who brought it, Joe?" said Mrs. Evelyn.

"Yes, Joe, who brought it? where did it come from, Joe?"

Joe had hardly a chance to answer.

"I really couldn't say, Miss Florence,--the man wasn't known to me."

"But did he say it was for Florence or for me?"

"No ma'am--he"--

"*Which* did he say it was for?"

"He didn't say it was either for Miss Florence or for you, Miss Constance; he--"

"But didn't he say who sent it?"

"No ma'am. It's"--

"Mamma here is a white moss that is beyond everything! with two of the most lovely buds--Oh!" said Constance clasping her hands and whirling about the room in comic ecstasy--"I sha'n't survive if I cannot find out where it is from!--"

"How delicious the scent of these tea-roses is!" said Fleda. "You ought not to mind the snow storm to-day after this, Florence. I should think you would be perfectly happy."

"I shall be, if I can contrive to keep them fresh to wear to-night. Mamma how sweetly they would dress me."

"They're a great deal too good to be wasted so," said Mrs. Evelyn; "I sha'n't let you do it."

"Mamma!--it wouldn't take any of them at all for my hair and the bouquet de corsage too--there'd be thousands left--Well Joe,--what are you waiting for?"

"I didn't say," said Joe, looking a good deal blank and a little afraid,--"I should have said--that the bouquet--is--"

"What is it?"

"It is--I believe, ma'am,--the man said it was for Miss Ringgan."

"For me!" exclaimed Fleda, her cheeks forming instantly the most exquisite commentary on the gift that the giver could have desired. She took in her hand the superb bunch of flowers from which the fingers of Florence unclosed as if it had been an icicle.

"Why didn't you say so before?" she inquired sharply; but the "fowling-piece" had wisely disappeared.

"I am very glad!" exclaimed Edith. "They have had plenty all winter, and you haven't had one--I am very glad it is yours, Fleda."

But such a shadow had come upon every other face that Fleda's pleasure was completely overclouded. She smelled at her roses, just ready to burst into tears, and wishing sincerely that they had never come.

"I am afraid, my dear Fleda," said Mrs. Evelyn quietly going on with her breakfast,--"that there is a thorn somewhere among those flowers."

Fleda was too sure of it. But not by any means the one Mrs. Evelyn intended.

"He never could have got half those from his own greenhouse, mamma," said Florence,--"if he had cut every rose that was in it; and he isn't very free with his knife either."

"I said nothing about anybody's greenhouse," said Mrs. Evelyn,--"though I don't suppose there is more than one Lot in the city they could have come from."

"Well," said Constance settling herself back in her chair and closing her eyes,--"I feel extinguished!----Mamma, do you suppose it possible that a hot cup of tea might revive me? I am suffering from a universal sense of unappreciated merit!--and nobody can tell what the pain is that hasn't felt it."

"I think you are extremely foolish, Constance," said Edith. "Fleda hasn't had a single flower sent her since she has been here and you have had them every other day. I think Florence is the only one that has a right to be disappointed."

"Dear Florence," said Fleda earnestly,--"you shall have as many of them as you please to dress yourself,--and welcome!"

"Oh no--of course not!--" Florence said,--"it's of no sort of consequence--I don't want them in the least, my dear. I wonder what somebody would think to see his flowers in my head!"

Fleda secretly had mooted the same question and was very well pleased not to have it put to the proof. She took the flowers up stairs after breakfast, resolving that they should not be an eye-sore to her friends; placed them in water and sat down to enjoy and muse over them in a very sorrowful mood. She again thought she would take the first opportunity of going home. How strange--out of their abundance of tributary flowers to grudge her this one bunch! To be sure it was a magnificent one. The flowers were mostly roses, of the rarer kinds, with a very few fine Camellias; all of them cut with a freedom that evidently had known no constraint but that of taste, and put together with an exquisite skill that Fleda felt sure was never possessed by any gardener. She knew that only one hand had had anything to do with them, and that the hand that had bought, not the one that had sold; and "How very kind!"--presently quite supplanted "How very strange!"--"How exactly like him,--and how singular that Mrs. Evelyn and her daughters should have supposed they could have come from Mr. Thorn." It was a moral impossibility that *he* should have put such a bunch of flowers together; while to Fleda's eye they so bore the impress of another person's character that she had absolutely been glad to get them out of sight for fear they might betray him. She hung over their varied loveliness, tasted and studied it, till the soft breath of the roses had wafted away every cloud of disagreeable feeling and she was drinking in pure and strong pleasure from each leaf and bud. What a very apt emblem of kindness

and friendship she thought them; when their gentle preaching and silent sympathy could alone so nearly do friendship's work; for to Fleda there was both counsel and consolation in flowers. So she found it this morning. An hour's talk with them had done her a great deal of good, and when she dressed herself and went down to the drawing-room her grave little face was not less placid than the roses she had left; she would not wear even one of them down to be a disagreeable reminder. And she thought that still snowy day was one of the very pleasantest she had had in New York.

Florence went to Mrs. Decatur's; but Constance according to her avowed determination remained at home to see the fun. Fleda hoped most sincerely there would be none for her to see.

But a good deal to her astonishment, early in the evening Mr. Carleton walked in, followed very soon by Mr. Thorn. Constance and Mrs. Evelyn were forthwith in a perfect effervescence of delight, which as they could not very well give it full play promised to last the evening; and Fleda, all her nervous trembling awakened again, took her work to the table and endeavoured to bury herself in it. But ears could not be fastened as well as eyes; and the mere sound of Mrs. Evelyn's voice sometimes sent a thrill over her.

"Mr. Thorn," said the lady in her smoothest manner,--"are you a lover of floriculture, sir?"

"Can't say that I am, Mrs. Evelyn,--except as practised by others."

"Then you are not a connoisseur in roses?--Miss Ringgan's happy lot--sent her a most exquisite collection this morning, and she has been wanting to apply to somebody who could tell her what they are--I thought you might know.--O they are not here," said Mrs. Evelyn as she noticed the gentleman's look round the room;--"Miss Ringgan judges them too precious for any eyes but her own. Fleda, my dear, won't you bring down your roses to let Mr. Thorn tell us their names?"

"I am sure Mr. Thorn will excuse me, Mrs. Evelyn--I believe he would find it a puzzling task."

"The surest way, Mrs. Evelyn, would be to apply at the fountain head for information," said Thorn dryly.

"If I could get at it," said Mrs. Evelyn, (Fleda knew with quivering lips,)--"but it seems to me I might as well try to find the Dead Sea!"

"Perhaps Mr. Carleton might serve your purpose," said Thorn.

That gentleman was at the moment talking to Constance.

"Mr. Carleton--" said Mrs. Evelyn,--"are you a judge, sir?"

"Of what, Mrs. Evelyn?--I beg your pardon."

The lady's tone somewhat lowered.

"Are you a judge of roses, Mr. Carleton?"

"So far as to know a rose when I see it," he answered smiling, and with an imperturbable coolness that it quieted Fleda to hear.

'I am sure Mr. Thorn will excuse me.'
"I am sure Mr. Thorn will excuse me."

"Ay, but the thing is," said Constance, "do you know twenty roses when you see them?"

"Miss Ringgan, Mr. Carleton," said Mrs. Evelyn, "has received a most beautiful supply this morning; but like a true woman she is not satisfied to enjoy unless she can enjoy intelligently--they are strangers to us all, and she would like to know what name to give them--Mr. Thorn suggested that perhaps you might help us out of our difficulty."

"With great pleasure, so far as I am able,--if my judgment may be exercised by daylight. I cannot answer for shades of green in the night time."

But he spoke with an ease and simplicity that left no mortal able to guess whether he had ever heard of a particular bunch of roses in his life before.

"You give me more of Eve in my character, Mrs. Evelyn, than I think belongs to me," said Fleda from her work at the far centre-table, which certainly did not get its name from its place in the room. "My enjoyment to-day has not been in the least troubled by curiosity."

Which none of the rest of the family could have affirmed.

"Do you mean to say, Mr. Carleton," said Constance, "that it is necessary to distinguish between shades of green in judging of roses?"

"It is necessary to make shades of distinction in judging of almost anything, Miss Constance. The difference between varieties of the same flower is often extremely nice."

"I have read of magicians," said Thorn softly, bending down towards Fleda's work,--"who did not need to see things to answer questions respecting them."

Fleda thought that was a kind of magic remarkably common in the world; but even her displeasure could not give her courage to speak. It gave her courage to be silent, however; and Mr. Thorn's best efforts in a conversation of some length could gain nothing but very uninterested rejoinders. A sudden pinch from Constance then made her look up and almost destroyed her self-possession as she saw Mr. Stackpole make his way into the room.

"I hope I find my fair enemy in a mollified humour," he said approaching them.

"I suppose you have repaired damages, Mr. Stackpole," said Constance,--"since you venture into the region of broken windows again."

"Mr. Stackpole declared there were none to repair," said Mrs. Evelyn from the sofa.

"More than I knew of," said the gentleman laughing--"there were more than I knew of; but you see I court the danger, having rashly concluded that I might as well know all my weak points at once."

"Miss Ringgan will break nothing to-night, Mr. Stackpole--she promised me she would not."

"Not even her silence?" said the gentleman.

"Is she always so desperately industrious?" said Mr. Thorn.

"Miss Ringgan, Mr. Stackpole," said Constance, "is subject to occasional fits of misanthropy, in which cases her retreating with her work to the solitude of the centre-table is significant of her desire to avoid conversation,--as Mr. Thorn has been experiencing."

"I am happy to see that the malady is not catching, Miss Constance."

"Mr. Stackpole!" said Constance,--"I am in a morose state of mind!--Miss Ringgan this morning received a magnificent bouquet of roses which in the first place I rashly appropriated to myself; and ever since I discovered my mistake I have been meditating the renouncing of society--it has excited more bad feelings than I thought had existence in my nature."

"Mr. Stackpole," said Mrs. Evelyn, "would you ever have supposed that roses could be a cause of discord?"

Mr. Stackpole looked as if he did not exactly know what the ladies were driving at.

"There have five thousand emigrants arrived at this port within a week!" said he, as if that were something worth talking about.

"Poor creatures! where will they all go?" said Mrs. Evelyn comfortably.

"Country's large enough," said Thorn.

"Yes, but such a stream of immigration will reach the Pacific and come back again before long: and then there will be a meeting of the waters! This tide of German and Irish will sweep over everything."

"I suppose if the land will not bear both, one party will have to seek other quarters," said Mrs. Evelyn with an exquisite satisfaction which Fleda could hear in her voice. "You remember the story of Lot and Abraham, Mr. Stackpole,--when a quarrel arose between them?--not about roses."

Mr. Stackpole looked as if women were--to say the least--incomprehensible.

"Five thousand a week!" he repeated.

"I wish there was a Dead Sea for them all to sheer off into!" said Thorn.

"If you had seen the look of grave rebuke that speech called forth, Mr. Thorn," said Constance, "your feelings would have been penetrated--if you have any."

"I had forgotten," he said, looking round with a bland change of manner,--"what gentle charities were so near me."

"Mamma!" said Constance with a most comic shew of indignation,--"Mr. Thorn thought that with Miss Ringgan he had forgotten all the gentle charities in the room!--I am of no further use to society!--I will trouble you to ring that bell, Mr. Thorn, if you please. I shall request candles and retire to the privacy of my own apartment!"

"Not till you have permitted me to expiate my fault!" said Mr. Thorn laughing.

"It cannot be expiated!--My worth will be known at some future day.--Mr. Carleton, *will* you have the goodness to summon our domestic attendant?"

"If you will permit me to give the order," he said smiling, with his hand on the bell. "I am afraid you are hardly fit to be trusted alone."

"Why?"

"May I delay obeying you long enough to give my reasons?"

"Yes."

"Because," said he coming up to her, "when people turn away from the world in disgust they generally find worse company in themselves."

"Mr. Carleton!--I would not sit still another minute, if curiosity didn't keep me. I thought solitude was said to be such a corrector?"

"Like a clear atmosphere--an excellent medium if your object is to take an observation of your position--worse than lost if you mean to shut up the windows and burn sickly lights of your own."

"Then according to that one shouldn't seek solitude unless one doesn't want it."

"No," said Mr. Carleton, with that eye of deep meaning to which Constance always rendered involuntary homage,--"every one wants it;--if we do not daily take an observation to find where we are, we are sailing about wildly and do not know whither we are going."

"An observation?" said Constance, understanding part and impatient of not catching the whole of his meaning.

"Yes," he said with a smile of singular fascination,--"I mean, consulting the unerring guides of the way to know where we are and if we are sailing safely and happily in the right direction--otherwise we are in danger of striking upon some rock or of never making the harbour; and in either case, all is lost."

The power of eye and smile was too much for Constance, as it had happened more than once before; her own eyes fell and for a moment she wore a look of unwonted sadness and sweetness, at what from any other person would have roused her mockery.

"Mr. Carleton," said she, trying to rally herself but still not daring to look up, knowing that would put it out of her power,--"I can't understand how you ever came to be such a grave person."

"What is your idea of gravity?" said he smiling. "To have a mind so at rest about the future as to be able to enjoy thoroughly all that is worth enjoying in the present?"

"But I can't imagine how *you* ever came to take up such notions."

"May I ask again, why not I?"

"O you know--you have so much to make you otherwise."

"What degree of present contentment ought to make one satisfied to leave that of the limitless future an uncertain thing?"

"Do you think it can be made certain?"

"Undoubtedly!--why not? the tickets are free--the only thing is to make sure that ours has the true signature. Do you think the possession of that ticket makes life a sadder thing? The very handwriting of it is more precious to me, by far, Miss Constance, than everything else I have."

"But you are a very uncommon instance," said Constance, still unable to look up, and speaking without any of her usual attempt at jocularity.

"No, I hope not," he said quietly.

"I mean," said Constance, "that it is very uncommon language to hear from a person like you."

"I suppose I know your meaning," he said after a minute's pause;--"but, Miss Constance, there is hardly a graver thought to me than that power and responsibility go hand in hand."

"It don't generally work so," said Constance rather uneasily.

"What are you talking about, Constance?" said Mrs. Evelyn.

"Mr. Carleton, mamma,--has been making me melancholy."

"Mr. Carleton," said Mrs. Evelyn, "I am going to petition that you will turn your efforts in another direction--I have felt oppressed all the afternoon from the effects of that funeral service I was attending--I am only just getting over it. The preacher seemed to delight in putting together all the gloomy thoughts he could think of."

"Yes!" said Mr. Stackpole, putting his hands in his pockets,--"it is the particular enjoyment of some of them, I believe, to do their best to make other people miserable."

Mr. Thorn said nothing, being warned by the impatient little hammering of Fleda's worsted needle upon the marble, while her eye was no longer considering her work, and her face rested anxiously upon her hand.

"There wasn't a thing," the lady went on,--"in anything he said, in his prayer or his speech,--there wasn't a single cheering or elevating consideration,--all he talked and prayed for was that the people there might be filled with a sense of their wickedness--"

"It's their trade, ma'am," said Mr. Stackpole,--"it's their trade! I wonder if it ever occurs to them to include themselves in that petition."

"There wasn't the slightest effort made in anything he said or prayed for,--and one would have thought that would have been so natural!--there was not the least endeavour to do away with that superstitious fear of death which is so common--and one would think it was the very occasion to do it;--he never once asked that we might be led to look upon it rationally and calmly.--It's so unreasonable, Mr. Stackpole--it is so dissonant with our views of a benevolent Supreme Being--as if it could be according to *his* will that his creatures should live lives of tormenting themselves--it so shews a want of trust in his goodness!"

"It's a relic of barbarism, ma'am," said Mr. Stackpole;--"it's a popular delusion--and it is like to be, till you can get men to embrace wider and more liberal views of things."

"What do you suppose it proceeds from?" said Mr. Carleton, as if the question had just occurred to him.

"I suppose, from false notions received from education, sir."

"Hardly," said Mr. Carleton;--"it is too universal. You find it everywhere; and to ascribe it everywhere to education would be but shifting the question back one generation."

"It is a root of barbarous ages," said Mr. Stackpole,--"a piece of superstition handed down from father to son--a set of false ideas which men are bred up and almost born with, and that they can hardly get rid of."

"How can that be a root of barbarism, which the utmost degree of intelligence and cultivation has no power to do away, nor even to lessen, however it may afford motive to control? Men may often put a brave face upon it and shew none of their thoughts to the world; but I think no one capable of reflection has not at times felt the influence of that dread."

"Men have often sought death, of purpose and choice," said Mr. Stackpole dryly and rubbing his chin.

"Not from the absence of this feeling, but from the greater momentary pressure of some other."

"Of course," said Mr. Stackpole, rubbing his chin still,--there is a natural love of life--the world could not get on if there was not."

"If the love of life is natural, the fear of death must be so, by the same reason."

"Undoubtedly," said Mrs. Evelyn, "it is natural--it is part of the constitution of our nature."

"Yes," said Mr. Stackpole, settling himself again in his chair with his hands in his pockets--"it is not unnatural, I suppose,--but then that is the first view of the subject--it is the business of reason to correct many impressions and prejudices that are, as we say, natural."

"And there was where my clergyman of to-day failed utterly," said Mrs. Evelyn;--"he aimed at strengthening that feeling and driving it down as hard as he could into everybody's mind--not a single lisp of anything to do it away or lessen the gloom with which we are, naturally as you say, disposed to invest the subject."

"I dare say he has held it up as a bugbear till it has become one to himself," said Mr. Stackpole.

"It is nothing more than the mere natural dread of dissolution," said Mr. Carleton.

"I think it is that," said Mrs. Evelyn,--"I think that is the principal thing."

"Is there not besides an undefined fear of what lies beyond--an uneasy misgiving that there may be issues which the spirit is not prepared to meet?"

"I suppose there is," said Mrs. Evelyn,--"but sir--"

"Why that is the very thing," said Mr. Stackpole,--"that is the mischief of education I was speaking of--men are brought up to it."

"You cannot dispose of it so, sir, for this feeling is quite as universal as the other; and so strong that men have not only been willing to render life miserable but even to endure death itself, with all the aggravation of torture, to smooth their way in that unknown region beyond."

"It is one of the maladies of human nature," said Mr. Stackpole,--"that it remains for the progress of enlightened reason to dispel."

"What is the cure for the malady?" said Mr. Carleton quietly.

"Why sir!--the looking upon death as a necessary step in the course of our existence which simply introduces us from a lower to a higher sphere,--from a comparatively narrow to a wider and nobler range of feeling and intellect."

"Ay--but how shall we be sure that it is so?"

"Why Mr. Carleton, sir," said Mrs. Evelyn,--"do you doubt that? Do you suppose it possible for a moment that a benevolent being would make creatures to be anything but happy?"

"You believe the Bible, Mrs. Evelyn?" he said smiling slightly.

"Certainly, sir; but Mr. Carleton, the Bible I am sure holds out the same views of the goodness and glory of the Creator; you cannot open it but you find them on every page. If I could take such views of things as some people have," said Mrs. Evelyn, getting up to punch the fire in her extremity,--"I don't know what I should do!--Mr. Carleton, I think I would rather never have been born, sir!"

"Every one runs to the Bible!" said Mr. Stackpole. "It is the general armoury, and all parties draw from it to fight each other."

"True," said Mr. Carleton,--"but only while they draw partially. No man can fight the battle of truth but in the whole panoply; and no man so armed can fight any other."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean that the Bible is not a riddle, neither inconsistent with itself; but if you take off one leg of a pair of compasses the measuring power is gone."

"But Mr. Carleton, sir," said Mrs. Evelyn,--"do you think that reading the Bible is calculated to give one gloomy ideas of the future?"

"By no means," he said with one of those meaning-fraught smiles,--"but is it safe, Mrs. Evelyn, in such a matter, to venture a single grasp of hope without the direct warrant of God's word?"

"Well, sir?"

"Well, ma'am,--that says, 'the soul that sinneth, it shall die.'"

"That disposes of the whole matter comfortably at once," said Mr. Stackpole.

"But, sir," said Mrs. Evelyn,--"that doesn't stand alone--the Bible everywhere speaks of the fulness and freeness of Christ's salvation?"

"Full and free as it can possibly be," he answered with something of a sad expression of countenance;--"but, Mrs. Evelyn, *never offered but with conditions*."

"What conditions?" said Mr. Stackpole hastily.

"I recommend you to look for them, sir," answered Mr. Carleton, gravely;--"they should not be unknown to a wise man."

"Then you would leave mankind ridden by this nightmare of fear?--or what is your remedy?"

"There is a remedy, sir," said Mr. Carleton, with that dilating and darkening eye which shewed him deeply engaged in what he was thinking about;--"it is not mine. When men feel themselves lost and are willing to be saved in God's way, then the breach is made up--then hope can look across the gap and see its best home and its best friend on the other side--then faith lays hold on forgiveness and trembling is done--then, sin being pardoned, the sting of death is taken away and the fear of death is no more, for it is swallowed up in victory. But men will not apply to a physician while they think themselves well; and people will not seek the sweet way of safety by Christ till they know there is no other; and so, do you see, Mrs. Evelyn, that when the gentleman you were speaking of sought to-day to persuade his hearers that they were poorer than they thought they were, he was but taking the surest way to bring them to be made richer than they ever dreamed."

There was a power of gentle earnestness in his eye that Mrs Evelyn could not answer; her look fell as that of Constance had done, and there was a moment's silence.

Thorn had kept quiet, for two reasons--that he might not displease Fleda, and that he might watch her. She had left her work, and turning half round from the table had listened intently to the conversation, towards the last very forgetful that there might be anybody to observe her,--with eyes fixed, and cheeks flushing, and the corners of the mouth just indicating delight,--till the silence fell; and then she turned round to the table and took up her worsted-work. But the lips were quite grave now, and Thorn's keen eyes discerned that upon one or two of the artificial roses there lay two or three very natural drops.

"Mr. Carleton," said Edith, "what makes you talk such sober things?--you have set Miss Ringgan to crying."

"Mr. Carleton could not be better pleased than at such a tribute to his eloquence," said Mr. Thorn with a saturnine expression.

"Smiles are common things," said Mr. Stackpole a little maliciously; "but any man may be flattered to find his words drop diamonds."

"Fleda my dear," said Mrs. Evelyn, with that trembling tone of concealed ecstasy which always set every one of Fleda's nerves a jarring,--"you may tell the gentlemen that they do not always know when they are making an unfelicitous compliment--I never read what poets say about 'briny drops' and 'salt tears' without imagining the heroine immediately to be something like Lot's wife."

"Nobody said anything about briny drops, mamma," said Edith. "Why there's Florence!--"

Her entrance made a little bustle, which Fleda was very glad of. Unkind!--She was trembling again in every finger. She bent down over her canvas and worked away as hard as she could. That did not hinder her becoming aware presently that Mr. Carleton was standing close beside her.

"Are you not trying your eyes?" said he.

The words were nothing, but the tone was a great deal, there was a kind of quiet intelligence in it. Fleda looked up, and something in the clear steady self-reliant eye she met wrought an instant change in her feeling. She met it a moment and then looked at her work again with nerves quieted.

"Cannot I persuade them to be of my mind?" said Mr. Carleton, bending down a little nearer to their sphere of action.

"Mr. Carleton is unreasonable, to require more testimony of that this evening," said Mr. Thorn;--"his own must have been ill employed."

Fleda did not look up, but the absolute quietness of Mr. Carleton's manner could be felt; she felt it, almost with sympathetic pain. Thorn immediately left them and took leave.

"What are you searching for in the papers, Mr. Carleton?" said Mrs. Evelyn presently coming up to them.

"I was looking for the steamers, Mrs. Evelyn."

"How soon do you think of bidding us good-bye?"

"I do not know, ma'am," he answered coolly--"I expect my mother."

Mrs. Evelyn walked back to her sofa.

But in the space of two minutes she came over to the centre-table again, with an open magazine in her hand.

"Mr. Carleton," said the lady, "you must read this for me and tell me what you think of it, will you sir? I have been shewing it to Mr. Stackpole and he can't see any beauty in it, and I tell him it is his fault and there is some serious want in his composition. Now I want to know what you will say to it."

"An arbiter, Mrs. Evelyn, should be chosen by both parties."

"Read it and tell me what you think!" repeated the lady, walking away to leave him opportunity. Mr. Carleton looked it over.

"That is something pretty," he said putting it before Fleda. Mrs. Evelyn was still at a distance.

"What do you think of that print for trying the eyes?" said Fleda laughing as she took it. But he noticed that her colour rose a little.

"How do you like it?"

"I like it,--pretty well," said Fleda rather hesitatingly.

"You have seen it before?"

"Why?" Fleda said, with a look up at him at once a little startled and a little curious;--"what makes you say so?"

"Because--pardon me--you did not read it."

"Oh," said Fleda laughing, but colouring at the same time very frankly, "I can tell how I like some things without reading them very carefully."

Mr. Carleton looked at her, and then took the magazine again.

"What have you there, Mr. Carleton?" said Florence.

"A piece of English on which I was asking this lady's opinion, Miss Evelyn."

"Now, Mr. Carleton!" exclaimed Constance jumping up,--"I am going to ask you to decide a quarrel between Fleda and me about a point of English"--

"Hush, Constance!" said her mother,--"I want to speak to Mr. Carleton--Mr. Carleton, how do you like it?"

"Like what, mamma?" said Florence.

"A piece I gave Mr. Carleton to read. Mr. Carleton, tell how you like it, sir."

"But what is it, mamma?"

"A piece of poetry in an old Excelsior--'The Spirit of the Fireside.' Mr. Carleton, won't you read it aloud, and let us all hear--but tell me first what you think of it."

"It has pleased me particularly, Mrs. Evelyn."

"Mr. Stackpole says he does not understand it, sir."

"Fanciful," said Mr. Stackpole,--"it's a little fanciful--and I can't quite make out what the fancy is."

"It has been the misfortune of many good things before not to be prized, Mr. Stackpole," said the lady funnily.

"True, ma'am," said that gentleman rubbing his chin--"and the converse is also true unfortunately,--and with a much wider application."

"There is a peculiarity of mental development or training," said Mr. Carleton, "which must fail of pleasing many minds because of their wanting the corresponding key of nature or experience. Some literature has a hidden freemasonry of its own."

"Very hidden indeed!" said Mr. Stackpole;--"the cloud is so thick that I can't see the electricity!"

"Mr. Carleton," said Mrs. Evelyn laughing, "I take that remark as a compliment, sir. I have always appreciated that writer's pieces--I enjoy them very much."

"Well, won't you please read it, Mr. Carleton?" said Florence, "and let us know what we are talking about."

Mr. Carleton obeyed, standing where he was by the centre-table.

> "By the old hearthstone a Spirit dwells,
> The child of bygone years,--
> He lieth hid the stones amid,
> And liveth on smiles and tears.
>
> "But when the night is drawing on,
> And the fire burns clear and bright,
> He Cometh out and walketh about,
> In the pleasant grave twilight.

"He goeth round on tiptoe soft,
And scanneth close each face;
If one in the room be sunk in gloom,
By him he taketh his place.

"And then with fingers cool and soft,
(Their touch who does not know)
With water brought from the well of Thought,
That was dug long years ago,

"He layeth his hand on the weary eyes--
They are closed and quiet now;--
And he wipeth away the dust of the day
Which had settled on the brow.

"And gently then he walketh away
And sits in the corner chair;
And the closed eyes swim--it seemeth to *him*
The form that once sat there.

"And whispered words of comfort and love
Fall sweet on the ear of sorrow;--
'Why weepest thou?--thou art troubled now,
But there cometh a bright to-morrow.

"'We too have passed over life's wild stream
In a frail and shattered boat,
But the pilot was sure--and we sailed secure
When we seemed but scarce afloat.

"'Though tossed by the rage of waves and wind,
The bark held together still,--
One arm was strong--it bore us along,
And has saved from every ill.'

"The Spirit returns to his hiding-place,
But his words have been like balm.
The big tears start--but the fluttering heart
Is soothed and softened and calm."

"I remember that," said Florence;--"it is beautiful."

"Who's the writer?" said Mr. Stackpole.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Evelyn,--"it is signed 'Hugh'--there have been a good many of his pieces in the Excelsior for a year past--and all of them pretty."

"Hugh!" exclaimed Edith springing forward,--"that's the one that wrote the Chestnuts!--Fleda, won't you read Mr. Carleton the Chestnuts?"

"Why no, Edith, I think not."

"Ah do! I like it so much, and I want him to hear it,--and you know mamma says they're all pretty. Won't you?"

"My dear Edith, you have heard it once already to day."

"But I want you to read it for me again."

"Let me have it, Miss Edith," said Mr. Carleton smiling,--"I will read it for you."

"Ah but it would be twice as good if you could hear her read it," said Edith, fluttering over the leaves of the magazine,--"she reads it so well. It's so funny--about the coffee and buckwheat cakes."

"What is that, Edith?" said her mother.

"Something Mr. Carleton is going to read for me, mamma."

"Don't you trouble Mr. Carleton."

"It won't trouble him, mamma--he promised of his own accord."

"Let us all have the benefit of it, Mr. Carleton," said the lady.

It is worthy of remark that Fleda's politeness utterly deserted her during the reading of both this piece and the last. She as near as possible turned her back upon the reader.

"Merrily sang the crickets forth
One fair October night;--
And the stars looked down, and the northern crown
Gave its strange fantastic light.

"A nipping frost was in the air,
On flowers and grass it fell;
And the leaves were still on the eastern hill
As if touched by a fairy spell.

"To the very top of the tall nut-trees
The frost-king seemed to ride;
With his wand he stirs the chestnut burs,
And straight they are opened wide.

"And squirrels and children together dream
Of the coming winter's hoard;
And many, I ween, are the chestnuts seen
In hole or in garret stored.

"The children are sleeping in feather-beds--
Poor Bun in his mossy nest,--
He courts repose with his tail on his nose.
On the others warm blankets rest.

"Late in the morning the sun gets up
From behind the village spire;
And the children dream, that the first red gleam

Is the chestnut trees on fire!

"The squirrel had on when he first awoke
All the clothing he could command;
And his breakfast was light--he just took a bite
Of an acorn that lay at hand;

"And then he was off to the trees to work;--
While the children some time it takes
To dress and to eat what *they* think meet
Of coffee and buckwheat cakes.

"The sparkling frost when they first go out,
Lies thick upon all around;
And earth and grass, as they onward pass,
Give a pleasant crackling sound.

"O there is a heap of chestnuts, see!'
Cried the youngest of the train;
For they came to a stone where the squirrel had thrown
What he meant to pick up again.

"And two bright eyes from the tree o'erhead,
Looked down at the open bag
Where the nuts went in--and so to begin,
Almost made his courage flag.

"Away on the hill, outside the wood,
Three giant trees there stand;
And the chestnuts bright that hang in sight,
Are eyed by the youthful band.

"And one of their number climbs the tree,
And passes from bough to bough,--
And the children run--for with pelting fun
The nuts fall thickly now.

"Some of the burs are still shut tight,--
Some open with chestnuts three,--
And some nuts fall with no burs at all--
Smooth, shiny, as nuts should be.

"O who can tell what fun it was
To see the prickly shower!
To feel what a whack on head or back.
Was within a chestnut's power!--

"To run beneath the shaking tree,
And then to scamper away;
And with laughing shout to dance about
The grass where the chestnuts lay.

"With flowing dresses, and blowing hair,
And eyes that no shadow knew,--
Like the growing light of a morning bright---
The dawn of the summer blue!

"The work was ended--the trees were stripped--
The children were 'tired of play.'
And they forgot (but the squirrel did not)
The wrong they had done that day."

Whether it was from the reader's enjoyment or good giving of these lines, or from Edith's delight in them, he was frequently interrupted with bursts of laughter.

"I can understand *that*" said Mr. Stackpole, "without any difficulty."

"You are not lost in the mysteries of chestnuting in open daylight," said Mrs. Evelyn.

"Mr. Carleton," said Edith, "wouldn't you have taken the squirrel's chestnuts?"

"I believe I should, Miss Edith,--if I had not been hindered."

"But what would have hindered you? don't you think it was right?"

"Ask your friend Miss Ringgan what she thinks of it," said he smiling.

"Now Mr. Carleton," said Constance as he threw down the magazine, "will you decide that point of English between Miss Ringgan and me?"

"I should like to hear the pleadings on both sides, Miss Constance."

"Well, Fleda, will you agree to submit it to Mr. Carleton?"

"I must know by what standards Mr. Carleton will be guided before I agree to any such thing," said Fleda.

"Standards! but aren't you going to trust anybody in anything without knowing what standards they go by?"

"Would that be a safe rule to follow in general?" said Fleda smiling.

"You won't be a true woman if you don't follow it, sooner or later, my dear Fleda," said Mrs. Evelyn. "Every woman must."

"The later the better, ma'am, I cannot help thinking."

"You will change your mind," said Mrs. Evelyn complacently.

"Mamma's notions, Mr. Stackpole, would satisfy any man's pride, when she is expatiating upon the subject of woman's dependence," said Florence.

"The dependence of affection," said Mrs. Evelyn. "Of course! It's their lot. Affection always leads a true woman to merge her separate judgment, on anything, in the judgment of the beloved object."

"Ay," said Fleda laughing,--"suppose her affection is wasted on an object that has none?"

"My dear Fleda!" said Mrs. Evelyn with a funny expression,--"that can never be, you know--don't you remember what your favourite Longfellow says--'affection never is wasted'?--Florence, my love, just hand me 'Evangeline' there--I want you to listen to it, Mr. Stackpole--here it is--

> 'Talk not of wasted affection; affection never was wasted;
> If it enrich not the heart of another, its waters returning
> Back to their springs shall fill them full of refreshment.
> That which the fountain sends forth returns again to the fountain.'"

"How very plain it is that was written by a man!" said Fleda.

"Why?" said Mr. Carleton laughing.

"I always thought it was so exquisite!" said Florence.

"*I* was so struck with it," said Constance, "that I have been looking ever since for an object to waste *my* affections upon."

"Hush, Constance!" said her mother. "Don't you like it, Mr. Carleton?"

"I should like to hear Miss Ringgan's commentary," said Mr. Stackpole;--" I can't anticipate it. I should have said the sentiment was quite soft and tender enough for a woman."

"Don't you agree with it, Mr. Carleton," repeated Mrs. Evelyn.

"I beg leave to second Mr. Stackpole's motion," he said smiling.

"Fleda my dear, you must explain yourself,--the gentlemen are at a stand."

"I believe, Mrs. Evelyn," said Fleda smiling and blushing,--I am of the mind of the old woman who couldn't bear to see anything wasted."

"But the assertion is that it *isn't* wasted," said Mr. Stackpole.

"'That which the fountain sends forth returns again to the fountain,'" said Mrs. Evelyn.

"Yes, to flood and lay waste the fair growth of nature," said Fleda with a little energy, though her colour rose and rose higher.

"Did it never occur to you, Mrs. Evelyn, that the streams which fertilize as they flow do but desolate if their course be checked?"

"But your objection lies only against the author's figure," said Mr. Stackpole;--"come to the fact."

"I was speaking as he did, sir, of the fact under the figure--I did not mean to separate them."

Both the gentlemen were smiling, though with very different expression.

"Perhaps," said Mr. Carleton, "the writer was thinking of a gentler and more diffusive flow of kind feeling, which however it may meet with barren ground and raise no fruit there, is sure in due time to come back, heaven-refined, to refresh and replenish its source."

"Perhaps so," said Fleda with a very pleased answering look,--"I do not recollect how it is brought in--I may have answered rather Mrs. Evelyn than Mr. Longfellow."

"But granting that it is an error," said Mr. Stackpole, "as you understood it,--what shews it to have been made by a man?"

"Its utter ignorance of the subject, sir."

"You think *they* never waste their affections?" said he.

"By no means! but I think they rarely waste so much in any one direction as to leave them quite impoverished."

"Mr. Carleton, how do you bear that, sir?" said Mrs. Evelyn. "Will you let such an assertion pass unchecked?"

"I would not if I could help it, Mrs. Evelyn."

"That isn't saying much for yourself," said Constance;--"but Fleda my dear, where did you get such an experience of waste and desolation?"

"Oh, 'man is a microcosm,' you know," said Fleda lightly.

"But you make it out that only one-half of mankind can appropriate that axiom," said Mr. Stackpole. "How can a woman know *men's* hearts so well?"

"On the principle that the whole is greater than a part?" said Mr. Carleton smiling.

"I'll sleep upon that before I give my opinion," said Mr. Stackpole. "Mrs. Evelyn, good-evening!--"

"Well Mr. Carleton!" said Constance, "you have said a great deal for women's minds."

"Some women's minds," he said with a smile.

"And some men's minds," said Fleda. "I was speaking only in the general."

Her eye half unconsciously reiterated her meaning as she shook hands with Mr. Carleton. And without speaking a word for other people to hear, his look and smile in return were more than an answer. Fleda sat for some time after he was gone trying to think what it was in eye and lip which had given her so much pleasure. She could not make out anything but approbation,--the look of loving approbation that one gives to a good child; but she thought it had also something of that quiet intelligence--a silent communication of sympathy which the others in company could not share.

She was roused from her reverie by Mrs. Evelyn.

"Fleda my dear, I am writing to your aunt Lucy--have you any message to send?"

"No Mrs. Evelyn--I wrote myself to-day."

And she went back to her musings.

"I am writing about you, Fleda," said Mrs. Evelyn, again in a few minutes.

"Giving a good account, I hope, ma'am," said Fleda smiling.

"I shall tell her I think sea-breezes have an unfavourable effect upon you," said Mrs. Evelyn;--"that I am afraid you are growing pale; and that you have clearly expressed yourself in favour of a garden at Queechy rather than any lot in the city--or anywhere else;--so she had better send for you home immediately."

Fleda tried to find out what the lady really meant; but Mrs. Evelyn's delighted amusement did not consist with making the matter very plain. Fleda's questions did nothing but aggravate the cause of them, to her own annoyance; so she was fain at last to take her light and go to her own room.

She looked at her flowers again with a renewal of the first pleasure and of the quieting influence the giver of them had exercised over her that evening; thought again how very kind it was of him to send them, and to choose them so; how strikingly he differed from other people; how glad she was to have seen him again, and how more than glad that he was so happily changed from his old self. And then from that change and the cause of it, to those higher, more tranquilizing, and sweetening influences that own no kindred with earth's dust and descend like the dew of heaven to lay and fertilize it. And when she laid herself down to sleep it was with a spirit grave but simply happy; every annoyance and unkindness as unfelt now as ever the parching heat of a few hours before when the stars are abroad.

Chapter XXXVII.

> A snake bedded himself under the threshold of a country house.
>
> L'Estrange.

To Fleda's very great satisfaction Mr. Thorn was not seen again for several days. It would have been to her very great comfort too if he could have been permitted to die out of mind as well as out of sight; but he was brought up before her "lots of times," till poor Fleda almost felt as if she was really in the moral neighbourhood of the Dead Sea, every natural growth of pleasure was so withered under the barren spirit of raillery. Sea-breezes were never so disagreeable since winds blew; and nervous and fidgety again whenever Mr. Carleton was present, Fleda retreated to her work and the table and withdrew herself as much as she could from notice and conversation; feeling humbled,--feeling sorry and vexed and ashamed, that such ideas should have been put into her head, the absurdity of which, she thought, was only equalled by their needlessness. "As much as she could" she withdrew; but that was not entirely; now and then interest made her forget herself, and quitting her needle she would give eyes and attention to the principal speaker as frankly as he could have desired. Bad weather and bad roads for those days put riding out of the question.

One morning she was called down to see a gentleman, and came eschewing in advance the expected image of Mr. Thorn. It was a very different person.

"Charlton Rossitur! My dear Charlton, how do you do? Where did you come from?"

"You had better ask me what I have come for," he said laughing as he shook hands with her.

"What have you come for?"

"To carry you home."

"Home!" said Fleda.

"I am going up there for a day or two, and mamma wrote me I had better act as your escort, which of course I am most willing to do. See what mamma says to you."

"When are you going, Charlton?" said Fleda as she broke the seal of the note he gave her.

"To-morrow morning."

"That is too sudden a notice, Capt. Rossitur," said Mrs. Evelyn. "Fleda will hurry herself out of her colour, and then your mother will say there is something in sea-breezes that isn't good for her; and then she will never trust her within reach of them again,--which I am sure Miss Ringgan would be sorry for."

Fleda took her note to the window, half angry with herself that a kind of banter in which certainly there was very little wit should have power enough to disturb her. But though the shaft might be a slight one it was winged with a will; the intensity of Mrs. Evelyn's enjoyment in her own mischief gave it all the force that was wanting. Fleda's head was in confusion; she read her aunt's note three times over before she had made up her mind on any point respecting it.

"My Dearest Fleda,

Charlton is coming home for a day or two--hadn't you better take the opportunity to return with him? I feel as if you had been long away, my dear child--don't you feel so too? Your uncle is very desirous of seeing you; and as for Hugh and me we are but half ourselves. I would not still say a word about your coming home if it were for your good to stay; but I fancy from something in Mrs. Evelyn's letter that Queechy air will by this

time do you good again; and opportunities of making the journey are very uncertain. My heart has grown lighter since I gave it leave to expect you. Yours, my darling,

L. R.

"P.S. I will write to Mrs. E. soon."

"What string has pulled these wires that are twitching me home?" thought Fleda, as her eyes went over and over the words which the feeling of the lines of her face would alone have told her were unwelcome. And why unwelcome?--"One likes to be moved by fair means and not by foul," was the immediate answer. "And besides, it is very disagreeable to be taken by surprise. Whenever, in any matter of my staying or going, did aunt Lucy have any wish but my pleasure?" Fleda mused a little while; and then with a perfect understanding of the machinery that had been at work, though an extremely vague and repulsed notion of the spring that had moved it, she came quietly out from her window and told Charlton she would go with him.

"But not to-morrow?" said Mrs. Evelyn composedly. "You will not hurry her off so soon as that, Capt. Rossitur?"

"Furloughs are the stubbornest things in the world, Mrs. Evelyn; there is no spirit of accommodation about them. Mine lies between to-morrow morning and one other morning some two days thereafter; and you might as soon persuade Atlas to change his place. Will you be ready, coz?"

"I will be ready," said Fleda; and her cousin departed.

"Now my dear Fleda" said Mrs. Evelyn, but it was with that funny face, as she saw Fleda standing thoughtfully before the fire,--you must be very careful in getting your things together--"

"Why, Mrs. Evelyn?"

"I am afraid you will leave something behind you, my love."

"I will take care of that, ma'am, and that I may I will go and see about it at once."

Very busy till dinner-time; she would not let herself stop to think about anything. At dinner Mr. Evelyn openly expressed his regrets for her going and his earnest wishes that she would at least stay till the holidays were over.

"Don't you know Fleda better, papa," said Florence, "than to try to make her alter her mind? When she says a thing is determined upon, I know there is nothing to do but to submit, with as good a grace as you can."

"I tried to make Capt. Rossitur leave her a little longer," said Mrs. Evelyn; "but he says furloughs are immovable, and his begins to-morrow morning--so he was immovable too. I should keep her notwithstanding, though, if her aunt Lucy hadn't sent for her."

"Well see what she wants, and come back again," said Mr. Evelyn.

"Thank you, sir," said Fleda smiling gratefully,--"I think not this winter."

"There are two or three of my friends that will be confoundedly taken aback," said Mr. Evelyn, carefully helping himself to gravy.

"I expect that an immediate depopulation of New York will commence," said Constance,--"and go on till the heights about Queechy are all thickly settled with elegant country-seats,--which is the conventional term for a species of mouse trap!"

"Hush, you baggage!" said her father. "Fleda, I wish you could spare her a little of your common-sense, to go through the world with."

"Papa thinks, you see, my dear, that you have *more than enough*--which is not perhaps precisely the compliment he intended."

"I take the full benefit of his and yours," said Fleda smiling.

After dinner she had just time to run down to the library to bid Dr. Gregory good-bye; her last walk in the city. It wasn't a walk she enjoyed much.

"Going to-morrow," said he. "Why I am going to Boston in a week--you had better stay and go with me."

"I can't now, uncle Orrin--I am dislodged--and you know there is nothing to do then but to go."

"Come and stay with me till next week."

But Fleda said it was best not, and went home to finish her preparations.

She had no chance till late, for several gentlemen spent the evening with them. Mr. Carleton was there part of the time, but he was one of the first to go; and Fleda could not find an opportunity to say that she should not see him again. Her timidity would not allow her to make one. But it grieved her.

At last she escaped to her own room, where most of her packing was still to do. By the time half the floor and all the bed was strewn with neat-looking piles of things, the varieties of her modest wardrobe, Florence and Constance came in to see and talk with her, and sat down on the floor too; partly perhaps because the chairs were all bespoken in the service of boxes and baskets, and partly to follow what seemed to be the prevailing style of things.

"What do you suppose has become of Mr. Thorn?" said Constance. "I have a presentiment that you will find him cracking nuts sociably with Mr. Rossitur or drinking one of aunt Lucy's excellent cups of coffee--in comfortable expectation of your return."

"If I thought that I should stay here," said Fleda. "My dear, those were *my* cups of coffee!"

"I wish I could make you think it then," said Constance.

"But you are glad to go home, aren't you, Fleda?" said Florence.

"She isn't!" said her sister. "She knows mamma contemplates making a grand entertainment of all the Jews as soon as she is gone. What *does* mamma mean by that, Fleda?--I observe you comprehend her with most invariable quickness."

"I should be puzzled to explain all that your mother means," said Fleda gently, as she went on bestowing her things in the trunk. "No--I am not particularly glad to go home--but I fancy it is time. I am afraid I have grown too accustomed to your luxury of life, and want knocking about to harden me a little."

"Harden you!" said Constance. "My dear Fleda, you are under a delusion. Why should any one go through an indurating process?--will you inform me?"

"I don't say that every one should," said Fleda,--"but isn't it well for those whose lot does not lie among soft things?"

There was extreme sweetness and a touching insinuation in her manner, and both the young ladies were silent for sometime thereafter watching somewhat wistfully the gentle hands and face that were so quietly busy; till the room was cleared again and looked remarkably empty with Fleda's trunk standing in the middle of it. And then reminding them that she wanted some sleep to fit her for the hardening process and must therefore send them away, she was left alone.

One thing Fleda had put off till then--the care of her bunch of flowers. They were beautiful still. They had given her a very great deal of pleasure; and she was determined they should be left to no servant's hands to be flung into the street. If it had been summer she was sure she could have got buds from them; as it was, perhaps she might strike some cuttings; at all events they should go home with her. So carefully taking

them out of the water and wrapping the ends in some fresh earth she had got that very afternoon from her uncle's garden, Fleda bestowed them in the corner of her trunk that she had left for them, and went to bed, feeling weary in body, and in mind to the last degree quiet.

In the same mind and mood she reached Queechy the next afternoon. It was a little before January--just the same time that she had come home last year. As then, it was a bright day, and the country was again covered thick with the unspotted snow; but Fleda forgot to think how bright and fresh it was. Somehow she did not feel this time quite so glad to find herself there. It had never occurred to her so strongly before that Queechy could want anything.

This feeling flew away before the first glimpse of her aunt's smile, and for half an hour after Fleda would have certified that Queechy wanted nothing. At the end of that time came in Mr. Rossitur. His greeting of Charlton was sufficiently unmarked; but eye and lip wakened when he turned to Fleda.

"My dear child," he said, holding her face in both his hands,--how lovely you have grown!"

"That's only because you have forgotten her, father," said Hugh laughing.

'My dear child,' he said, holding her face in both his hands.
"My dear child," he said, holding her face in both his hands.

It was a very lovely face just then. Mr. Rossitur gazed into it a moment and again kissed first one cheek and then the other, and then suddenly withdrew his hands and turned away, with an air--Fleda could not tell what to make of it--an air that struck her with an immediate feeling of pain; somewhat as if for some cause or other he had nothing to do with her or her loveliness. And she needed not to see him walk the room for three minutes to know that Michigan agencies had done nothing to lighten his brow or uncloud his character. If this had wanted

confirmation Fleda would have found it in her aunt's face. She soon discovered, even in the course of the pleasant talkative hours before supper, that it was not brightened as she had expected to find it by her uncle's coming home; and her ears now caught painfully the occasional long breath, but half smothered, which told of a burden upon the heart but half concealed. Fleda supposed that Mr. Rossitur's business affairs at the West must have disappointed him; and resolved not to remember that Michigan was in the map of North America.

Still they talked on, through the afternoon and evening, all of them except him; he was moody and silent. Fleda felt the cloud overshadow sadly her own gayety; but Mrs. Rossitur and Hugh were accustomed to it, and Charlton was much too tall a light to come under any external obscuration whatever. He was descanting brilliantly upon the doings and prospects at Fort Hamilton where he was stationed, much to the entertainment of his mother and brother. Fleda could not listen to him while his father was sitting lost in something not half so pleasant as sleep in the corner of the sofa. Her eyes watched him stealthily till she could not bear it any longer. She resolved to bring the power of her sunbeam to bear, and going round seated herself on the sofa close by him and laid her hand on his arm. He felt it immediately. The arm was instantly drawn away to be put around her and Fleda was pressed nearer to his side, while the other hand took hers; and his lips were again on her forehead.

"And how do you like me for a farmer, uncle Rolf?" she said looking up at him laughingly, and then fearing immediately that she had chosen her subject ill. Not from any change in his countenance however,--that decidedly brightened up. He did not answer at once.

"My child--you make me ashamed of mankind!"

"Of the dominant half of them, sir, do you mean?" said Charlton,--"or is your observation a sweeping one?"

"It would sweep the greatest part of the world into the background, sir," answered his father dryly, "if its sense were the general rule."

"And what has Fleda done to be such a besom of desolation?"

Fleda's laugh set everybody else a going, and there was immediately more life and common feeling in the society than had been all day. They all seemed willing to shake off a weight, and even Fleda, in the endeavour to chase the gloom that hung over others, as it had often happened, lost half of her own.

"But still I am not answered," said Charlton when they were grave again. "What has Fleda done to put such a libel upon mankind?"

"You should call it a *label*, as Dr. Quackenboss does," said Fleda in a fresh burst,--"he says he never would stand being labelled!"--

"But come back to the point," said Charlton,--"I want to know what is the *label* in this case, that Fleda's doings put upon those of other people?"

"Insignificance," said his father dryly.

"I should like to know how bestowed," said Charlton.

"Don't enlighten him, uncle Rolf," said Fleda laughing,--"let my doings remain in safe obscurity,--please!"

"I stand as a representative of mankind," said Charlton, "and I demand an explanation."

"Look at what this slight frame and delicate nerves have been found equal to, and then tell me if the broad shoulders of all your mess would have borne half the burden or their united heads accomplished a quarter the results."

He spoke with sufficient depth of meaning, though now with no unpleasant expression. But Charlton notwithstanding rather gathered himself up.

"O uncle Rolf," said Fleda gently,--"nerves and muscles haven't much to do with it--after all you know I have just served the place of a mouth-piece. Seth was the head, and good Earl Douglass the hand."

"I am ashamed of myself and of mankind," Mr. Rossitur repeated, "when I see what mere weakness can do, and how proudly valueless strength is contended to be. You are looking, Capt. Rossitur,--but after all a cap and plume really makes a man taller only to the eye."

"When I have flung my plume in anybody's face, sir," said Charlton rather hotly, "it will be time enough to throw it back again."

Mrs. Rossitur put her hand on his arm and looked her remonstrance.

"Are you glad to be home again, dear Fleda?" she said turning to her.

But Fleda was making some smiling communications to her uncle and did not seem to hear.

"Fleda does it seem pleasant to be here again?"

"Very pleasant, dear aunt Lucy--though I have had a very pleasant visit too."

"On the whole you do not wish you were at this moment driving out of town in Mr. Thorn's cabriolet?" said her cousin.

"Not in the least," said Fleda coolly. "How did you know I ever did such a thing?"

"I wonder what should bring Mr. Thorn to Queechy at this time of year," said Hugh.

Fleda started at this confirmation of Constance's words; and what was very odd, she could not get rid of the impression that Mr. Rossitur had started too. Perhaps it was only her own nerves, but he had certainly taken away the arm that was round her.

"I suppose he has followed Miss Ringgan," said Charlton gravely.

"No," said Hugh, "he has been here some little time."

"Then he preceded her, I suppose, to see and get the sleighs in order."

"He did not know I was coming," said Fleda.

"Didn't!"

"No--I have not seen him for several days."

"My dear little cousin," said Charlton laughing,--"you are not a witch in your own affairs, whatever you may be in those of other people."

"Why, Charlton?"

"You are no adept in the art of concealment."

"I have nothing to conceal," said Fleda. "How do you know he is here, Hugh?"

"I was anxiously asked the other day," said Hugh with a slight smile, "whether you had come home; and then told that Mr. Thorn was in Queechy. There is no mistake about it, for my imformant had actually seen him, and given him the direction to Mr. Plumfield's, for which he was inquiring."

"The direction to Mr. Plumfield's!" said Fleda.

"What's your old friend Mr. Carleton doing in New York?" said Charlton.

"Is he there still?" said Mrs. Rossitur.

"As large as life," answered her son.

"Which, though you might not suppose it, aunt Lucy, is about the height of Capt. Rossitur, with--I should judge--a trifle less weight."

"Your eyes are observant!" said Charlton.

"Of a good many things," said Fleda lightly.

"He is *not* my height by half an inch," said Charlton;--"I am just six feet without my boots."

"An excellent height!" said Fleda,--"'your six feet was ever the only height.'"

"Who said that?" said Charlton.

"Isn't it enough that I say it?"

"What's he staying here for?"

"I don't know really," said Fleda. "It's very difficult to tell what people do things for."

"Have you seen much of him?" said Mrs. Rossitur.

"Yes ma'am--a good deal--he was often at Mrs. Evelyn's."

"Is he going to marry one of her daughters?"

"Oh no!" said Fleda smiling,--"he isn't thinking of such a thing;--not in America--I don't know what he may do in England."

"No!" said Charlton.--"I suppose he would think himself contaminated by matching with any blood in this hemisphere."

"You do him injustice," said Fleda, colouring;--"you do not know him, Charlton."

"You do?"

"Much better than that."

"And he is not one of the most touch-me-not pieces of English birth and wealth that ever stood upon their own dignity?"

"Not at all!" said Fleda;--"how people may be misunderstood!--he is one of the most gentle and kind persons I ever saw."

"To you!"

"To everybody that deserves it."

"Humph!--And not proud?"

"No, not as you understand it,"--and she felt it was very difficult to make him understand it, as the discovery involved a very offensive implication;--"he is too fine a character to be proud."

"That *is* arguing in a circle with a vengeance!" said Charlton.

"I know what you are thinking of," said Fleda, "and I suppose it passes for pride with a great many people who cannot comprehend it--he has a singular power of quietly rebuking wrong, and keeping impertinence at a distance--where Capt. Rossitur, for instance, I suppose, would throw his cap in a man's face, Mr. Carleton's mere silence would make the offender doff his and ask pardon."

The manner in which this was said precluded all taking offence.

"Well," said Charlton shrugging his shoulders,--"then I don't know what pride is--that's all!"

"Take care, Capt. Rossitur," said Fleda laughing,--"I have heard of such a thing as American pride before now."

"Certainly!" said Charlton, "and I'm quite willing--but it never reaches quite such a towering height on our side the water."

"I am sure I don't know how that may be," said Fleda, "but I know I have heard a lady, an enlightened, gentle-tempered American lady, so called,--I have heard her talk to a poor Irish woman with whom she had nothing in the world to do, in a style that moved my indignation--it stirred my blood!--and there was nothing whatever to call it out. 'All the blood of all the Howards,' I hope would not have disgraced itself so."

"What business have you to 'hope' anything about it?"

"None--except from the natural desire to find what one has a right to look for. But indeed I wouldn't take the blood of all the Howards for any security--pride as well as high-breeding is a thing of natural not adventitious growth--it belongs to character, not circumstance."

"Do you know that your favourite Mr. Carleton is nearly connected with those same Howards, and quarters their arms with his own?"

"I have a very vague idea of the dignity implied in that expression of 'quartering arms,' which comes so roundly out of your mouth, Charlton," said Fleda laughing. "No, I didn't know it. But in general I am apt to think that pride is a thing which reverses the usual rules of architecture, and builds highest on the narrowest foundations."

"What do you mean?"

"Never mind," said Fleda,--"if a meaning isn't plain it isn't worth looking after. But it will not do to measure pride by its supposed materials. It does not depend on them but on the individual. You everywhere see people assert that most of which they feel least sure, and then it is easy for them to conclude that where there is so much more of the reality there must be proportionably more of the assertion. I wish some of our gentlemen, and ladies, who talk of pride where they see and can see nothing but the habit of wealth--I wish they could see the universal

politeness with which Mr. Carleton returns the salutes of his inferiors. Not more respectfully they lift their hats to him than he lifts his to them--unless when he speaks."

"You have seen it?"

"Often."

"Where?"

"In England--at his own place--among his own servants and dependents. I remember very well--it struck even my childish eyes."

"Well, after all, that is nothing still but a refined kind of haughtiness."

"It is a kind that I wish some of our Americans would copy," said Fleda.

"But dear Fleda," said Mrs. Rossitur, "all Americans are not like that lady you were talking of--it would be very unfair to make her a sample. I don't think I ever heard any one speak so in my life--you never heard me speak so."

"Dear aunt Lucy!--no,--I was only giving instance for instance. I have no idea that Mr. Carleton is a type of Englishmen in general--I wish he were. But I think it is the very people that cry out against superiority, who are the most happy to assert their own where they can; the same jealous feeling that repines on the one hand, revenges itself on the other."

"Superiority of what kind?" said Charlton stiffly.

"Of any kind--superiority of wealth, or refinement, or name, or standing. Now it does not follow that an Englishman is proud because he keeps liveried servants, and it by no means follows that an American lacks the essence of haughtiness because he finds fault with him for doing so."

"I dare say some of our neighbours think we are proud," said Hugh, "Because we use silver forks instead of steel."

"Because we're *too good for steel forks*, you ought to say," said Fleda. "I am sure they think so. I have been given to understand as much. Barby, I believe, has a good opinion of us and charitably concludes that we mean right; but some other of our country friends would think I was far gone in uppishness if they knew that I never touch fish with a steel knife; and it wouldn't mend the matter much to tell them that the combination of flavours is disagreeable to me--it hardly suits the doctrine of liberty and equality that my palate should be so much nicer than theirs."

"Absurd!" said Charlton.

"Very," said Fleda; "but on which side, in all probability, is the pride?"

"It wasn't for liveried servants that I charged Mr. Carleton," said her cousin. "How do the Evelyns like this paragon of yours?"

"O everybody likes him," said Fleda smiling,--"except you and your friend Mr. Thorn."

"Thorn don't like him, eh?"

"I think not."

"What do you suppose is the reason?" said Charlton gravely.

"I don't think Mr. Thorn is particularly apt to like anybody," said Fleda, who knew very well the original cause of both exceptions but did not like to advert to it.

"Apparently you don't like Mr. Thorn?" said Mr. Rossitur, speaking for the first time.

"I don't know who does, sir, much,--except his mother."

"What is he?"

"A man not wanting in parts, sir, and with considerable force of character,--but I am afraid more for ill than for good. I should be very sorry to trust him with anything dear to me."

"How long were you in forming that opinion?" said Charlton looking at her curiously.

"It was formed, substantially, the first evening I saw him, and I hare never seen cause to alter it since."

The several members of the family therewith fell into a general muse, with the single exception of Hugh, whose eyes and thoughts seemed to be occupied with Fleda's living presence. Mr. Rossitur then requested that breakfast might be ready very early--at six o'clock.

"Six o'clock!" exclaimed Mrs. Rossitur.

"I have to take a long ride, on business, which must be done early in the day."

"When will you be back?"

"Not before night-fall."

"But going on *another* business journey!" said Mrs. Rossitur. "You have but just these few hours come home from one."

"Cannot breakfast be ready?"

"Yes, uncle Rolf," said Fleda bringing her bright face before him,--"ready at half-past five if you like--now that *I* am to the fore, you know."

He clasped her to his breast and kissed her again; but with a face so very grave that Fleda was glad nobody else saw it.

Then Charlton went, averring that he wanted at least a night and a half of sleep between two such journeys as the one of that day and the one before him on the next,--especially as he must resign himself to going

without anything to eat. Him also Fleda laughingly promised that precisely half an hour before the stage time a cup of coffee and a roll should be smoking on the table, with whatever substantial appendages might be within the bounds of possibility, or the house.

"I will pay you for that beforehand with a kiss," said he.

"You will do nothing of the kind," said Fleda stepping back;--"a kiss is a favour taken, not given; and I am entirely ignorant what you have done to deserve it."

"You make a curious difference between me and Hugh," said Charlton, half in jest, half in earnest.

"Hugh is my brother, Capt. Rossitur," said Fleda smiling,--and that is an honour you never made any pretensions to."

"Come, you shall not say that any more," said he, taking the kiss that Fleda had no mind to give him.

Half laughing, but with eyes that were all too ready for something else, she turned again to Hugh when his brother had left the room and looked wistfully in his face, stroking back the hair from his temples with a caressing hand.

"You are just as you were when I left you!--" she said, with lips that seemed too unsteady to say more, and remained parted.

"I am afraid so are you," he replied;--"not a bit fatter. I hoped you would be."

"What have you been smiling at so this evening?"

"I was thinking how well you talked."

"Why Hugh!--You should have helped me--I talked too much."

"I would much rather listen," said Hugh. "Dear Fleda, what a different thing the house is with you in it!"

Fleda said nothing, except an inexplicable little shake of her head which said a great many things; and then she and her aunt were left alone. Mrs. Rossitur drew her to her bosom with a look so exceeding fond that its sadness was hardly discernible. It was mingled however with an expression of some doubt.

"What has made you keep so thin?"

"I have been very well, aunt Lucy,--thinness agrees with me."

"Are you glad to be home again, dear Fleda?"

"I am very glad to be with you, dear aunt Lucy!"

"But not glad to be home?"

"Yes I am," said Fleda,--"but somehow--I don't know--I believe I have got a little spoiled--it is time I was at home I am sure.--I shall be quite glad after a day or two, when I have got into the works again. I am glad now, aunt Lucy."

Mrs. Rossitur seemed unsatisfied, and stroked the hair from Fleda's forehead with an absent look.

"What was there in New York that you were so sorry to leave?"

"Nothing ma'am, in particular,"--said Fleda brightly,--"and I am not sorry, aunt Lucy--I tell you I am a little spoiled with company and easy living--I am glad to be with you again."

Mrs. Rossitur was silent.

"Don't you get up to uncle Rolf's breakfast to-morrow, aunt Lucy."

"Nor you."

"I sha'n't unless I want to--but there'll be nothing for you to do, and you must just lie still. We will all have our breakfast together when Charlton has his."

"You are the veriest sunbeam that ever came into a house," said her aunt kissing her.

Chapter XXXVIII.

> My flagging soul flies under her own pitch.
>
> Dryden.

Fleda mused as she went up stairs whether the sun were a luminous body to himself or no, feeling herself at that moment dull enough. Bright, was she, to others? nothing seemed bright to her. Every old shadow was darker than ever. Her uncle's unchanged gloom,--her aunt's unrested face,--Hugh's unaltered delicate sweet look, which always to her fancy seemed to write upon his face, "Passing away!"--and the thickening prospects whence sprang the miasm that infected the whole moral atmosphere--alas, yes!--"Money is a good thing," thought Fleda;--"and poverty need not be a bad thing, if people can take it right;--but if they take it wrong!--"

With a very drooping heart indeed she went to the window. Her old childish habit had never been forgotten; whenever the moon or the stars were abroad Fleda rarely failed to have a talk with them from her window. She stood there now, looking out into the cold still night, with eyes just dimmed with tears--not that she lacked sadness enough, but she did lack spirit enough to cry. It was very still;--after the rattle and confusion of the city streets, that extent of snow-covered country where the very shadows were motionless--the entire absence of soil and of

disturbance--the rest of nature--the breathlessness of the very wind--all preached a quaint kind of sermon to Fleda. By the force of contrast they told her what should be;--and there was more yet,--she thought that by the force of example they shewed what might be. Her eyes had not long travelled over the familiar old fields and fences before she came to the conclusion that she was home in good time,--she thought she had been growing selfish, or in danger of it; and she made up her mind she was glad to be back again among the rough things of life, where she could do so much to smooth them for others and her own spirit might grow to a polish it would never gain in the regions of ease and pleasure. "To do life's work!"--thought Fleda clasping her hands,--"no matter where--and mine is here. I am glad I am in my place again--I was forgetting I had one."

It was a face of strange purity and gravity that the moon shone upon, with no power to brighten as in past days; the shadows of life were upon the child's brow. But nothing to brighten it from within? One sweet strong ray of other light suddenly found its way through the shadows and entered her heart. "The Lord reigneth! let the earth be glad!"--and then the moonbeams pouring down with equal ray upon all the unevennesses of this little world seemed to say the same thing over and over. Even so! Not less equally his providence touches all,--not less impartially his faithfulness guides. "The Lord reigneth! let the earth be glad!" There was brightness in the moonbeams now that Fleda could read this in them; she went to sleep, a very child again, with these words for her pillow.

It was not six, and darkness yet filled the world, when Mr. Rossitur came down stairs and softly opened the sitting-room door. But the home fairy had been at work; he was greeted with such a blaze of cheerfulness as seemed to say what a dark place the world was everywhere but at home; his breakfast-table was standing ready, well set and well supplied; and

even as he entered by one door Fleda pushed open the other and came in from the kitchen, looking as if she had some strange spirit-like kindred with the cheery hearty glow which filled both rooms.

"Fleda!--you up at this hour!"

"Yes, uncle Rolf," she said coming forward to put her hands upon his,--"you are not sorry to see me, I hope."

But he did not say he was glad; and he did not speak at all; he busied himself gravely with some little matters of preparation for his journey. Evidently the gloom of last night was upon him yet. But Fleda had not wrought for praise, and could work without encouragement; neither step nor hand slackened, till all she and Barby had made ready was in nice order on the table and she was pouring out a cup of smoking coffee.

"You are not fit to be up," said Mr. Rossitur, looking at her,---"you are pale now, Put yourself in that arm chair, Fleda, and go to sleep--I will do this for myself."

"No indeed, uncle Rolf," she answered brightly,--"I have enjoyed getting breakfast very much at this out-of-the-way hour, and now I am going to have the pleasure of seeing you eat it. Suppose you were to take a cup of coffee instead of my shoulder."

He took it and sat down, but Fleda found that the pleasure of seeing him was to be a very qualified thing. He ate like a business man, in unbroken silence and gravity; and her cheerful words and looks got no return. It became an effort at length to keep either bright. Mr. Rossitur's sole remarks during breakfast were to ask if Charlton was going back that day, and if Philetus was getting the horse ready.

Mr. Skillcorn had been called in good time by Barby at Fleda's suggestion, and coming down stairs had opined discontentedly that "a man hadn't no right to be took out of bed in the morning afore he could

see himself." But this, and Barby's spirited reply, that "there was no chance of his doing *that* at any time of day, so it was no use to wait,"--Fleda did not repeat. Her uncle was in no humour to be amused.

She expected almost that he would go off without speaking to her. But he came up kindly to where she stood watching him.

"You must bid me good-bye for all the family, uncle Rolf, as I am the only one here," she said laughing.

But she was sure that the embrace and kiss which followed were very exclusively for her. They made her face almost as sober as his own.

"There will be a blessing for you," said he,--"if there is a blessing anywhere!"

"If, uncle Rolf?" said Fleda, her heart swelling to her eyes.

He turned away without answering her.

Fleda sat down in the easy chair then and cried. But that lasted very few minutes; she soon left crying for herself to pray for him, that he might have the blessing he did not know. That did not stop tears. She remembered the poor man sick of the palsy who was brought in by friends to be healed, and that "Jesus seeing *their* faith, said unto the sick of the palsy, 'Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.'" It was a handle that faith took hold of and held fast while love made its petition. It was all she could do, she thought; *she* never could venture to speak to her uncle on the subject.

Weary and tired, tears and longing at length lost themselves in sleep. When she awaked she found the daylight broadly come, little King in her lap, the fire, instead of being burnt out, in perfect preservation, and Barby standing before it and looking at her.

"You ha'n't got one speck o' good by *this* journey to New York," was Miss Elster's vexed salutation.

"Do you think so?" said Fleda rousing herself. "*I* wouldn't venture to say as much as that, Barby."

"If you have, 'tain't in your cheeks," said Barby decidedly. "You look just as if you was made of anything that wouldn't stand wear, and that isn't the way you used to look."

"I have been up a good while without breakfast--my cheeks will be a better colour when I have had that, Barby--they feel pale."

The second breakfast was a cheerfuller thing. But when the second traveller was despatched, and the rest fell back upon their old numbers, Fleda was very quiet again. It vexed her to be so, but she could not change her mood. She felt as if she had been whirled along in a dream and was now just opening her eyes to daylight and reality. And reality--she could not help it--looked rather dull after dreamland. She thought it was very well she was waked up; but it cost her some effort to appear so. And then she charged herself with ingratitude, her aunt and Hugh were so exceedingly happy in her company.

"Earl Douglass is quite delighted with the clover hay, Fleda," said Hugh, as the three sat at an early dinner.

"Is he?" said Fleda.

"Yes,--you know he was very unwilling to cure it in your way--and he thinks there never was anything like it now."

"Did you ever see finer ham, Fleda?" inquired her aunt. "Mr. Plumfield says it could not be better."

"Very good!" said Fleda, whose thoughts had somehow got upon Mr. Carleton's notions about female education and were very busy with them.

"I expected you would have remarked upon our potatoes, before now," said Hugh. "These are the Elephants--have you seen anything like them in New York?"

"There cannot be more beautiful potatoes," said Mrs. Rossitur.

"We had not tried any of them before you went away, Fleda, had we?"

"I don't know, aunt Lucy!--no, I think not."

"You needn't talk to Fleda, mother," said Hugh laughing,--"she is quite beyond attending to all such ordinary matters--her thoughts have learned to take a higher flight since she has been in New York."

"It is time they were brought down then," said Fleda smiling; "but they have not learned to fly out of sight of home, Hugh."

"Where were they, dear Fleda?" said her aunt.

"I was thinking a minute ago of something I heard talked about in New York, aunt Lucy; and afterwards I was trying to find out by what possible or imaginable road I had got round to it."

"Could you tell?"

Fleda said no, and tried to bear her part in the conversation. But she did not know whether to blame the subjects which had been brought forward, or herself, for her utter want of interest in them. She went into the kitchen feeling dissatisfied with both.

"Did you ever see potatoes that would beat them Elephants?" said Barby.

"Never, certainly," said Fleda with a most involuntary smile.

"I never did," said Barby. "They beat all, for bigness and goodness both. I can't keep 'em together. There's thousands of 'em, and I mean to make Philetus eat 'em for supper--such potatoes and milk is good enough for

him, or anybody. The cow has gained on her milk wonderful, Fleda, since she begun to have them roots fed out to her."

"Which cow?" said Fleda.

"Which cow?--why--the blue cow--there ain't none of the others that's giving any, to speak of," said Barby looking at her. "Don't you know,--the cow you said them carrots should be kept for?"

Fleda half laughed, as there began to rise up before her the various magazines of vegetables, grain, hay, and fodder, that for many weeks had been deliciously distant from her imagination.

"I made butter for four weeks, I guess, after you went away," Barby went on;--"just come in here and see--and the carrots makes it as yellow and sweet as June--I churned as long as I had anything to churn, and longer; and now we live on cream--you can make some cheesecakes just as soon as you're a mind to,--see! ain't that doing pretty well?--and fine it is,--put your nose down to it--"

"Bravely, Barby--and it is very sweet."

"You ha'n't left nothing behind you in New York, have you?" said Barby when they returned to the kitchen.

"Left anything! no,--what do you think I have left?"

"I didn't know but you might have forgotten to pack up your memory," said Barby dryly.

Fleda laughed; and then in walked Mr. Douglass.

"How d'ye do?" said he. "Got back again. I heerd you was hum, and so I thought I'd just step up and see. Been getting along pretty well?"

Fleda answered, smiling internally at the wide distance between her "getting along" and his idea of it.

"Well the hay's first-rate!" said Earl, taking off his hat and sitting down in the nearest chair;--"I've been feedin' it out, now, for a good spell, and I know what to think about it. We've been feedin' it out ever since some time this side o' the middle o' November;--I never see nothin' sweeter, and I don't want to see nothin' sweeter than it is! and the cattle eats it like May roses--they don't know how to thank you enough for it."

"To thank *you*, Mr. Douglass," said Fleda smiling.

"No," said he in a decided manner,--"I don't want no thanks for it, and I don't deserve none! 'Twa'n't thanks to none of *my* fore-sightedness that the clover wa'n't served the old way. I didn't like new notions--and I never did like new notions! and I never see much good of 'em;--but I suppose there's some on 'em that ain't moon-shine--my woman says there is, and I suppose there is, and after this clover hay I'm willin' to allow that there is! It's as sweet as a posie if you smell to it,--and all of it's cured alike; and I think, Fleda, there's a quarter more weight of it. I ha'n't proved it nor weighed it, but I've an eye and a hand as good as most folks', and I'll qualify to there being a fourth part more weight of it;--and it's a beautiful colour. The critters is as fond of it as you and I be of strawberries."

"Well that is satisfactory, Mr. Douglass," said Fleda. "How is Mrs. Douglass? and Catherine?"

"I ha'n't heerd 'em sayin' nothin' about it," he said,--"and if there was anythin' the matter I suppose they'd let me know. There don't much go wrong in a man's house without his hearin' tell of it. So I think. Maybe 'tain't the same in other men's houses. That's the way it is in mine."

"Mrs. Douglass would not thank you," said Fleda, wholly unable to keep from laughing. Earl's mouth gave way a very little, and then he went on.

"How be you?" he said. "You ha'n't gained much, as I see. I don't see but you're as poor as when you went away."

"I am very well, Mr. Douglass."

"I guess New York ain't the place to grow fat. Well, Fleda, there ha'n't been seen in the whole country, or by any man in it, the like of the crop of corn we took off that 'ere twenty-acre lot--they're all beat to hear tell of it--they won't believe me--Seth Plumfield ha'n't shewed as much himself--he says you're the best farmer in the state."

"I hope he gives you part of the credit, Mr. Douglass;--how much was there?

"I'll take my share of credit whenever I can get it," said Earl, "and I think it's right to take it, as long as you ha'n't nothing to be ashamed of; but I won't take no more than my share; and I will say I thought we was a goin' to choke the corn to death when we seeded the field in that way.--Well, there's better than two thousand bushel--more or less--and as handsome corn as I want to see;--there never was handsomer corn. Would you let it go for five shillings?--there's a man I've heerd of wants the hull of it."

"Is that a good price, Mr. Douglass? Why don't you ask Mr. Rossitur?"

"Do you s'pose Mr. Rossitur knows much about it?" inquired Earl with a curious turn of feature, between sly and contemptuous. "The less he has to do with that heap of corn the bigger it'll be--that's my idee, *I* ain't agoin' to ask him nothin'--you may ask him what you like to ask him--but I don't think he'll tell you much that'll make you and me wiser in the matter o' farmin'."

"But now that he is at home, Mr. Douglass, I certainly cannot decide without speaking to him."

"Very good!" said Earl uneasily,--"'tain't no affair of mine--as you like to have it so you'll have it--just as you please!--But now, Fleda, there's another thing I want to speak to you about--I want you to let me take

hold of that 'ere piece of swamp land and bring it in. I knew a man that fixed a piece of land like that and cleared nigh a thousand dollars off it the first year."

"Which piece?" said Fleda.

"Why you know which 'tis--just the other side of the trees over there--between them two little hills. There's six or seven acres of it--nothin' in the world but mud and briars--will you let me take hold of it? I'll do the hull job if you'll give me half the profits for one year.--Come over and look at it, and I'll tell you--come! the walk won't hurt you, and it ain't fur."

All Fleda's inclinations said no, but she thought it was not best to indulge them. She put on her hood and went off with him; and was treated to a long and most implicated detail of ways and means, from which she at length disentangled the rationale of the matter and gave Mr. Douglass the consent he asked for, promising to gain that of her uncle.

The day was fair and mild, and in spite of weariness of body a certain weariness of mind prompted Fleda when she had got rid of Earl Douglass, to go and see her aunt Miriam. She went questioning with herself all the way for her want of good-will to these matters. True, they were not pleasant mind-work; but she tried to school herself into taking them patiently as good life-work. She had had too much pleasant company and enjoyed too much conversation, she said. It had unfitted her for home duties.

Mrs. Plumfield, she knew, was no better. But her eye found no change for the worse. The old lady was very glad to see her, and very cheerful and kind as usual.

"Well are you glad to be home again?" said aunt Miriam after a pause in the conversation.

"Everybody asks me that question," said Fleda smiling.

"Perhaps for the same reason I did--because they thought you didn't look very glad."

"I am glad--" said Fleda,--"but I believe not so glad as I was last year."

"Why not

"I suppose I had a pleasanter time, I have got a little spoiled, I believe, aunt Miriam," Fleda said with glistening eyes and an altering voice,--"I don't take up my old cares and duties kindly at first--I shall be myself again in a few days."

Aunt Miriam looked at her with that fond, wistful, benevolent look which made Fleda turn away.

"What has spoiled you, love?"

"Oh!--easy living and pleasure, I suppose--" Fleda said, but said with difficulty.

"Pleasure?"--said aunt Miriam, putting one arm gently round her. Fleda struggled with herself.

"It is so pleasant, aunt Miriam, to forget these money cares!--to lift one's eyes from the ground and feel free to stretch out one's hand--not to be obliged to think about spending sixpences, and to have one's mind at liberty for a great many things that I haven't time for here. And Hugh--and aunt Lucy--somehow things seem sad to me--"

Nothing could be more sympathizingly kind than the way in which aunt Miriam brought Fleda closer to her side and wrapped her in her arms.

"I am very foolish--" Fleda whispered,--"I am very wrong--I shall get over it--"

"I am afraid, dear Fleda," Mrs. Plumfield said after a pause,--"it isn't best for us always to be without sad things--though I cannot bear to see your dear little face look sad--but it wouldn't fit us for the work we have to do--it wouldn't fit us to stand where I stand now and look forward happily."

"Where you stand?" said Fleda raising her head.

"Yes, and I would not be without a sorrow I have ever known. They are bitter now, when they are present,--but the sweet fruit comes after."

"But what do you mean by 'where you stand'?"

"On the edge of life."

"You do not think so, aunt Miriam!" Fleda said with a terrified look. "You are not worse?"

"I don't expect ever to be better," said Mrs. Plumfield with a smile. "Nay, my love," she said, as Fleda's head went down on her bosom again,--"not so! I do not wish it either, Fleda. I do not expect to leave you soon, but I would not prolong the time by a day. I would not have spoken of it now if I had recollected myself,--but I am so accustomed to think and speak of it that it came out before I knew it.--My darling child, it is nothing to cry for."

"I know it, aunt Miriam."

"Then don't cry," whispered aunt Miriam, when she had stroked Fleda's head for five minutes.

"I am crying for myself, aunt Miriam," said Fleda. "I shall be left alone."

"Alone, my dear child?"

"Yes--there is nobody but you that I feel I can talk to." She would have added that she dared not say a word to Hugh for fear of troubling him. But that pain at her heart stopped her, and pressing her hands together

she burst into bitter weeping.

"Nobody to talk to but me?" said Mrs. Plumfield after again soothing her for some time,--"what do you mean, dear?"

"O--I can't say anything to them at home," said Fleda with a forced effort after voice;--"and you are the only one I can look to for help--Hugh never says anything--almost never--anything of that kind;--he would rather others should counsel him--"

"There is one friend to whom you may always tell everything, with no fear of wearying him,--of whom you may at all times ask counsel without any danger of being denied,--more dear, more precious, more rejoiced in, the more he is sought unto. Thou mayest lose friend after friend, and gain more than thou losest,--in that one."

"I know it," said Fleda;--"but dear aunt Miriam, don't you think human nature longs for some human sympathy and help too?"

"My sweet blossom!--yes--" said Mrs. Plumfield caressingly stroking her bowed head,--"but let him do what he will;--he hath said, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.'"

"I know that too," said Fleda weeping. "How do people bear life that do not know it!"

"Or that cannot take the comfort of it. Thou art not poor nor alone while thou hast him to go to, little Fleda.--And you are not losing me yet, my child; you will have time, I think, to grow as well satisfied as I with the prospect."

"Is that possible,--for *others*?" said Fleda.

The mother sighed, as her son entered the room.

He looked uncommonly grave, Fleda thought. That did not surprise her, but it seemed that it did his mother, for she asked an explanation. Which however he did not give.

"So you've got back from New York," said he.

"Just got back, yesterday," said Fleda.

"Why didn't you stay longer?"

"I thought my friends at home would be glad to see me," said Fleda. "Was I mistaken?"

He made no answer for a minute, and then said,

"Is your uncle at home?"

"No," said Fleda, "he went away this morning on business, and we do not expect him home before night-fall. Do you want to see him?"

"No," said Seth very decidedly. "I wish he had staid in Michigan, or gone further west,--anywhere that Queechy'd never have heard of him."

"Why what has he done?" said Fleda, looking up half laughing and half amazed at her cousin. But his face was disagreeably dark, though she could not make out that the expression was one of displeasure. It did not encourage her to talk.

"Do you know a man in New York of the name of Thorn?" he said after standing still a minute or two.

"I know two men of that name," said Fleda, colouring and wondering.

"Is either on 'em a friend of your'n?"

"No."

"He ain't?" said Mr. Plumfield, giving the forestick on the fire an energetic kick which Fleda could not help thinking was mentally aimed at the said New Yorker.

"No certainly. What makes you ask?"

"O," said Seth dryly, "folks' tongues will find work to do;--I heerd say something like that--I thought you must take to him more than I do."

"Why what do you know of him?"

"He's been here a spell lately," said Seth,--"poking round; more for ill than for good, I reckon."

He turned and quitted the room abruptly; and Fleda bethought her that she must go home while she had light enough.

Chapter XXXIX.

> Nothing could be more obliging and respectful than the lion's letter was, in appearance; but there was death in the true intent.--L'Estrange.

The landscape had grown more dark since Fleda came up the hill,--or else the eyes that looked at it. Both probably. It was just after sundown, and that is a very sober time of day in winter, especially in some states of the weather. The sun had left no largesses behind him; the scenery was deserted to all the coming poverty of night and looked grim and threadbare already. Not one of the colours of prosperity left. The land was in mourning dress; all the ground and even the ice on the little mill-ponds a uniform spread of white, while the hills were draperied with black stems, here just veiling the snow, and there on a side view making a thick fold of black. Every little unpainted workshop or mill shewed

uncompromisingly all its forbidding sharpness of angle and outline darkening against the twilight. In better days perhaps some friendly tree had hung over it, shielding part of its faults and redeeming the rest. Now nothing but the gaunt skeleton of a friend stood there,--doubtless to bud forth again as fairly as ever should the season smile. Still and quiet all was, as Fleda's spirit, and in too good harmony with it; she resolved to choose the morning to go out in future. There was as little of the light of spring or summer in her own mind as on the hills, and it was desirable to catch at least a cheering reflection. She could rouse herself to no bright thoughts, try as she would; the happy voices of nature that used to speak to her were all hushed,--or her ear was deaf; and her eye met nothing that did not immediately fall in with the train of sad images that were passing through her mind and swell the procession. She was fain to fall back and stay herself upon these words, the only stand-by she could lay hold of;--

"To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life!"--

They toned with the scene and with her spirit exactly; they suited the darkening sky and the coming night; for "glory, honour, and immortality" are not now. They filled Fleda's mind, after they had once entered, and then nature's sympathy was again as readily given; each barren stern-looking hill in its guise of present desolation and calm expectancy seemed to echo softly, "patient continuance in well-doing." And the tears trembled then in Fleda's eyes; she had set her face, as the old Scotchman says, "in the right airth. [Footnote: quarter, direction]" "How sweet is the wind that bloweth out of the airth where Christ is!"

"Well," said Hugh, who entered the kitchen with her, "you have been late enough. Did you have a pleasant walk? You are pale, Fleda!"

"Yes, it was pleasant," said Fleda with one of her winning smiles,--"a kind of pleasant. But have you looked at the hills? They are exactly as if they had put on mourning--nothing but white and black--a crape-like

dressing of black tree-stems upon the snowy face of the ground, and on every slope and edge of the hills the crape lies in folds. Do look at it when you go out! It has a most curious effect."

"Not pleasant, I should think," said Hugh.

"You'll see it is just as I have described it. No--not pleasant exactly--the landscape wants the sun to light it up just now--it is cold and wilderness looking. I think I'll take the morning in future. Whither are you bound?"

"I must go over to Queechy Run for a minute, on business--I'll be home before supper--I should have been back by this time but Philetus has gone to bed with a headache and I had to take care of the cows."

"Three times and out," said Barby. "I won't try again. I didn't know as anything would be too powerful for his head; but I find as sure as he has apple dumplin' for dinner he goes to bed for his supper and leaves the cows without none. And then Hugh has to take it. It has saved so many Elephants--that's one thing."

Hugh went out by one door and Fleda by another entered the breakfast-room; the one generally used in winter for all purposes. Mrs. Rossitur sat there alone in an easy-chair; and Fleda no sooner caught the outline of her figure than her heart sank at once to an unknown depth,--unknown before and unfathomable now. She was *cowering* over the fire,--her head sunk in her hands, so crouching, that the line of neck and shoulders instantly conveyed to Fleda the idea of fancied or felt degradation--there was no escaping it--how, whence, what, was all wild confusion. But the language of mere attitude was so unmistakable,--the expression of crushing pain was so strong, that after Fleda had fearfully made her way up beside her she could do no more. She stood there tongue-tied, spell-bound, present to nothing but a nameless chill of fear and heart-sinking. She was afraid to speak--afraid to touch her aunt, and

abode motionless in the grasp of that dread for minutes. But Mrs. Rossitur did not stir a hair, and the terror of that stillness grew to be less endurable than any other.

Mrs. Rossitur sat there alone.
Mrs. Rossitur sat there alone.

Fleda spoke to her,--it did not win the shadow of a reply,--again and again. She laid her hand then upon Mrs. Rossitur's shoulder, but the very significant answer to that was a shrinking gesture of the shoulder and neck, away from the hand. Fleda growing desperate then implored an answer in words--prayed for an explanation--with an intensity of distress in voice and manner, that no one whose ears were not stopped with a stronger feeling could have been deaf to; but Mrs. Rossitur would not raise her head, nor slacken in the least the clasp of the fingers that supported it, that of themselves in their relentless tension spoke what no words could. Fleda's trembling prayers were in vain, in vain. Poor nature at last sought a woman's relief in tears--but they were heart-breaking, not heart-relieving tears--racking both mind and body more than they ought to bear, but bringing no cure. Mrs. Rossitur seemed as unconscious of her niece's mute agony as she had been of her agony of words; and it was from Fleda's own self-recollection alone that she fought off pain and roused herself above weakness to do what the time called for.

"Aunt Lucy," she said laying her hand upon her shoulder, and this time the voice was steady and the hand would not be shaken off,--"Aunt Lucy,--Hugh will be in presently--hadn't you better rouse yourself and go up stairs--for awhile?--till you are better?--and not let him see you so?--"

How the voice was broken and quivering before it got through!

The answer this time was a low long-drawn moan, so exceeding plaintive and full of pain that it made Fleda shake like an aspen. But after a moment she spoke again, bearing more heavily with her hand to mark her words.

"I am afraid he will be in presently--he ought not to see you now--Aunt Lucy, I am afraid it might do him an injury he might not get over--"

She spoke with the strength of desperation; her nerves were unstrung by fear, and every joint weakened so that she could hardly support herself. She had not however spoken in vain; one or two convulsive shudders passed over her aunt, and then Mrs. Rossitur suddenly rose turning her face from Fleda; neither would she permit her to follow her. But Fleda thought she had seen that one or two unfolded letters or papers of some kind, they looked like letters, were in her lap when she raised her head.

Left alone, Fleda sat down on the floor by the easy-chair and rested her head there; waiting,--she could do nothing else,--till her extreme excitement of body and mind should have quieted itself. She had a kind of vague hope that time would do something for her before Hugh came in. Perhaps it did; for though she lay in a kind of stupor, and was conscious of no change whatever, she was able when she heard him coming to get up and sit in the chair in an ordinary attitude. But she looked like the wraith of herself an hour ago.

"Fleda!" Hugh exclaimed as soon as he looked from the fire to her face,--"what is the matter?--what is the matter with you?"

"I am not very well--I don't feel very well," said Fleda speaking almost mechanically,--"I shall have a headache to-morrow--"

"Headache! But you look shockingly! what has happened to you? what is the matter, Fleda?"

"I am not ill--I shall be better by and by. There is nothing the matter with me that need trouble you, dear Hugh."

"Nothing the matter with you!" said he,--and Fleda might see how she looked in the reflection of his face,--"where's mother?"

"She is up-stairs--you mustn't go to her, Hugh!" said Fleda laying a detaining hand upon him with more strength than she thought she had,--"I don't want anything."

"Why mustn't I go to her?"

"I don't think she wants to be disturbed--"

"I must disturb her--"

"You musn't!--I know she don't--she isn't well--something has happened to trouble her--"

"What?"

"I don't know."

"And is that what has troubled you too?" said Hugh, his countenance changing as he gained more light on the subject;--"what is it, dear Fleda?"

"I don't know," repeated Fleda, bursting into tears. Hugh was quiet enough now, and sat down beside her, subdued and still, without even desiring to ask a question. Fleda's tears flowed violently, for a minute,--then she checked them, for his sake; and they sat motionless, without speaking to one another, looking into the fire and letting it die out before them into embers and ashes, neither stirring to put a hand to it. As the fire died the moonlight streamed in,--how very dismal the room looked!

"What do you think about having tea?" said Barby opening the door of the kitchen.

Neither felt it possible to answer her.

"Mr. Rossitur ain't come home, is he?"

"No," said Fleda shuddering.

"So I thought, and so I told Seth Plumfield just now--he was asking for him--My stars! ha'n't you no fire here? what did you let it go out for?"

Barby came in and began to build it up.

"It's growing cold I can tell you, so you may as well have something in the chimney to look at. You'll want it shortly if you don't now."

"Was Mr. Plumfield here, did you say, Barby?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't he come in?"

"I s'pose he hadn't a mind to," said Barby. "Twa'n't for want of being asked. I did the civil thing by him if he didn't by me;--but he said he didn't want to see anybody but Mr. Rossitur."

Did not wank to see anybody but Mr. Rossitur, when he had distinctly said he did not wish to see him? Fleda felt sick, merely from the mysterious dread which could fasten upon nothing and therefore took in everything.

"Well what about tea?" concluded Barby, when the fire was going according to her wishes. "Will you have it, or will you wait longer?"

"No--we won't wait--we will have it now, Barby," said Fleda, forcing herself to make the exertion; and she went to the window to put down the hangings.

The moonlight was very bright, and Fleda's eye was caught in the very act of letting down the curtain, by a figure in the road slowly passing before the courtyard fence. It paused a moment by the horse-gate, and turning paced slowly back till it was hid behind the rose acacias. There was a clump of shrubbery in that corner thick enough even in winter to

serve for a screen. Fleda stood with the curtain in her hand, half let down, unable to move, and feeling almost as if the very currents of life within her were standing still too. She thought, she was almost sure, she knew the figure; it was on her tongue to ask Hugh to come and look, but she checked that. The form appeared again from behind the acacias, moving with the same leisurely pace the other way towards the horse-gate. Fleda let down the curtain, then the other two quietly, and then left the room and stole noiselessly out at the front door, leaving it open that the sound of it might not warn Hugh what she was about, and stepping like a cat down the steps ran breathlessly over the snow to the courtyard gate. There waited, shivering in the cold but not feeling it for the cold within,--while the person she was watching stood still a lew moments by the horse-gate and came again with leisurely steps towards her.

"Seth Plumfield!"--said Fleda, almost as much frightened at the sound of her own voice as he was. He stopped immediately, with a start, and came up to the little gate behind which she was standing. But said nothing.

"What are you doing here?"

"You oughtn't to be out without anything on," said he,--"you're fixing to take your death."

He had good reason to say so. But she gave him no more heed than the wind.

"What are you waiting here for? What do you want?"

"I have nothing better to do with my time," said he;--"I thought I'd walk up and down here a little. You go in!"

"Are you waiting to see uncle Rolf?" she said, with teeth chattering.

"You mustn't stay out here," said he earnestly--"you're like nothing but a spook this minute--I'd rather see one, or a hull army of 'em. Go in, go in!"

"Tell me if you want to see him, Seth."

"No I don't--I told you I didn't."

"Then why are you waiting for him?"

"I thought I'd see if he was coming home to-night--I had a word to say if I could catch him before he got into the house."

"*Is* he coming home to-night?" said Fleda.

"I don't know!" said he looking at her. "Do you?"

Fleda burst open the gate between them and putting her hands on his implored him to tell her what was the matter. He looked singularly disturbed; his fine eye twinkled with compassion; but his face, never a weak one, shewed no signs of yielding now.

"The matter is," said he pressing hard both her hands, "that you are fixing to be down sick in your bed by to-morrow. You mustn't stay another second."

"Come in then."

"No--not to-night."

"You won't tell me!--"

"There is nothing I can tell you--Maybe there'll be nothing to tell--Run in, run in, and keep quiet."

Fleda hurried back to the house, feeling that she had gone to the limit of risk already. Not daring to show herself to Hugh in her chilled state of body and mind she went into the kitchen.

"Why what on earth's come over you?" was Barby's terrified ejaculation when she saw her.

"I have been out and got myself cold--"

"Cold!" said Barby,--"you're looking dreadful! What on earth ails you, Fleda?"

"Don't ask me, Barby," said Fleda hiding her face in her hands and shivering,--"I made myself very cold just now--Aunt Lucy doesn't feel very well and I got frightened," she added presently.

"What's the matter with her?"

"I don't know--if you'll make me a cup of tea I'll take it up to her, Barby."

"You put yourself down there," said Barby placing her with gentle force in a chair,--"you'll do no such a thing till I see you look as if there was some blood in you. I'll take it up myself."

But Fleda held her, though with a hand much too feeble indeed for any but moral suasion. It was enough. Barby stood silently and very anxiously watching her, till the fire had removed the outward chill at least. But even that took long to do, and before it was well done Fleda again asked for the cup of tea. Barby made it without a word, and Fleda went to her aunt with it, taking her strength from the sheer emergency. Her knees trembled under her as she mounted the stairs, and once a glimpse of those words flitted across her mind,--"patient continuance in well-doing." It was like a lightning flash in a dark night shewing the way one must go. She could lay hold of no other stay. Her mind was full of one intense purpose--to end the suspense.

She gently tried the door of her aunt's room; it was unfastened, and she went in. Mrs. Rossitur was lying on the bed; but her first mood had changed, for at Fleda's soft word and touch she half rose up and putting both arms round her waist laid her face against her. There were no tears still, only a succession of low moans, so inexpressibly weak and plaintive that Fleda's nature could hardly bear them without giving way. A more fragile support was never clung to. Yet her trembling fingers, in their

agony moved caressingly among her aunt's hair and over her brow as she begged her--when she could, she was not able at first--to let her know the cause that was grieving her. The straightened clasp of Mrs. Rossitur's arms and her increased moaning gave only an answer of pain. But Fleda repeated the question. Mrs. Rossitur still neglecting it, then made her sit down upon the bed, so that she could lay her head higher, on Fleda's bosom; where she hid it, with a mingling of fondness given and asked, a poor seeking for comfort and rest, that wrung her niece's heart.

They sat so for a little time; Fleda hoping that her aunt would by degrees come to the point herself. The tea stood cooling on the table, not even offered; not wanted there.

"Wouldn't you feel better if you told me, dear aunt Lucy?" said Fleda, when they had been for a little while perfectly still. Even the moaning had ceased.

"Is your uncle come home?" whispered Mrs. Rossitur, but so low that Fleda could but half catch the words.

"Not yet."

"What o'clock is it?"

"I don't know--not early--it must be near eight.--Why?"

"You have not heard anything of him?"

"No--nothing."

There was silence again for a little, and then Mrs. Rossitur said in a low fearful whisper,

"Have you seen anybody round the house?"

Fleda's thoughts flew to Seth, with that nameless fear to which she could give neither shape nor direction, and after a moment's hesitation she said,

"What do you mean?"

"Have you?" said Mrs. Rossitur with more energy.

"Seth Plumfield was here a little while ago."

Her aunt had the clew that she had not, for with a half scream, half exclamation, she quitted Fleda's arms and fell back upon the pillows, turning from her and hiding her face there. Fleda prayed again for her confidence, as well as the weakness and the strength of fear could do; and Mrs. Rossitur presently grasping a paper that lay on the bed held it out to her, saying only as Fleda was about quitting the room, "Bring me a light."

Fleda left the letter there and went down to fetch one. She commanded herself under the excitement and necessity of the moment,--all but her face; that terrified Barby exceedingly. But she spoke with a strange degree of calmness; told her Mrs. Rossitur was not alarmingly ill; that she did not need Barby's services and wished to see nobody but herself and didn't want a fire. As she was passing through the hall again Hugh came out of the sitting-room to ask after his mother. Fleda kept the light from her face.

"She does not want to be disturbed--I hope she will be better to-morrow."

"What is the matter, Fleda?"

"I don't know yet."

"And you are ill yourself, Fleda!--you are ill!--"

"No--I shall do very well--never mind me. Hugh, take some tea--I will be down by and by."

He went back, and Fieda went up stairs. Mrs. Rossitur had not moved. Fleda set down the light and herself beside it, with the paper her aunt had given her. It was a letter.

"Queechy, *Thursday*--

"It gives me great concern, my dear madam, to be the means of bringing to you a piece of painful information--but it cannot be long kept from your knowledge and you may perhaps learn it better from me than by any other channel. May I entreat you not to be too much alarmed, since I am confident the cause will be of short duration.

"Pardon me for what I am about to say.

"There are proceedings entered into against Mr. Rossitur--there are writs out against him--on the charge of having, some years ago, endorsed my father's name upon a note of his own giving.--Why it has lain so long I cannot explain. There is unhappily no doubt of the fact.

"I was in Queechy some days ago, on business of my own, when I became aware that this was going on--my father had made no mention of it to me. I immediately took strict measures--I am happy to say I believe with complete success,--to have the matter kept a profound secret. I then made my way as fast as possible to New York to confer on the subject with the original mover of it--unfortunately I was disappointed. My father had left for a neighbouring city, to be absent several days. Finding myself too late to prevent, as I had hoped to do, any open steps from being taken at Queechy, I returned hither immediately to enforce secrecy of proceedings and to assure you, madam, that my utmost exertions shall not be wanting to bring the whole matter to a speedy and satisfactory termination. I entertain no doubt of being able to succeed entirely--even to the point of having the

whole transaction remain unknown and unsuspected by the world. It is so entirely as yet, with the exception of one or two law-officers whose silence I have means of procuring.

"May I confess that I am not entirely disinterested? May the selfishness of human nature ask its reward, and own its moving spring? May I own that my zeal in this cause is quickened by the unspeakable excellencies of Mr. Rossitur's lovely niece--which I have learned to appreciate with my whole *heart*--and be forgiven?--And may I hope for the kind offices and intercession of the lady I have the honour of addressing, with her niece Miss Ringgan, that my reward,--the single word of encouragement I ask for,--may be given me?--Having that, I will promise anything--I will guaranty the success of any enterprise, however difficult, to which she may impel me,--and I will undertake that the matter which furnishes the painful theme of this letter shall never more be spoken or thought of, by the world, or my father, or by Mrs. Rossitur's

obliged, grateful, and faithful servant, Lewis Thorn."

Fleda felt as she read as if icicles were gathering about her heart. The whirlwind of fear and distress of a little while ago which could take no definite direction, seemed to have died away and given place to a dead frost--the steady bearing down of disgrace and misery, inevitable, unmitigable, unchangeable; no lessening, no softening of that blasting power, no, nor ever any rising up from under it; the landscape could never be made to smile again. It was the fall of a bright star from their home constellation; but alas! the star was fallen long ago, and the failure of light which they had deplored was all too easily accounted for; yet now they knew that no restoration was to be hoped. And the mother and son--what would become of them? And the father--what would become of him? what further distress was in store?--*Public* disgrace?--and Fleda bowed her head forward on her clasped hands with the mechanical, vain endeavour to seek rest or shelter from thought. She made nothing of Mr. Thorn's professions; she took only the facts of his letter; the rest her eye had glanced over as if she had no concern with it, and it hardly occurred

to her that she had any. But the sense of his words she had taken in, and knew, better perhaps than her aunt, that there was nothing to look for from his kind offices. The weight on her heart was too great just then for her to suspect as she did afterwards that he was the sole mover of the whole affair.

As the first confusion of thought cleared away, two images of distress loomed up and filled the view,--her aunt, broken under the news, and Hugh still unknowing to them; her own separate existence Fleda was hardly conscious of. Hugh especially,--how was he to be told, and how could he bear to hear? with his most sensitive conformation of both physical and moral nature. And if an arrest should take place there that night!--Fleda shuddered, and unable to go on thinking rose up and went to her aunt's bedside. It had not entered her mind till the moment she read Mr. Thorn's letter that Seth Plumfield was sheriff for the county. She was shaking again from head to foot with fear. She could not say anything--the touch of her lips to the throbbing temples, soft and tender as sympathy itself, was all she ventured.

"Have you heard anything of him?" Mrs. Rossitur whispered.

"No--I doubt if we do at all to-night."

There was a half breathed "Oh!--" of indescribable pain and longing; and with a restless change of position Mrs. Rossitur gathered herself up on the bed and sat with her head leaning on her knees. Fleda brought a large cloak and put it round her.

"I am in no danger," she said,--"I wish I were!"

Again Fleda's lips softly, tremblingly, touched her cheek.

Mrs. Rossitur put her arm round her and drew her down to her side, upon the bed; and wrapped half of the big cloak about her; and they sat there still in each other's arms, without speaking or weeping, while

quarter after quarter of an hour passed away,--nobody knew how many. And the cold bright moonlight streamed in on the floor, mocking them.

"Go!" whispered Mrs. Rossitur at last,--"go down stairs and take care of yourself--and Hugh."

"Won't you come?"

Mrs. Rossitur shook her head.

"Mayn't I bring you something?--do let me!"

But Mrs. Rossitur's shake of the head was decisive. Fleda crawled off the bed, feeling as if a month's illness had been making its ravages upon her frame and strength. She stood a moment to collect her thoughts; but alas, thinking was impossible; there was a palsy upon her mind. She went into her own room and for a minute kneeled down,--not to form a petition in words, she was as much beyond that; it was only the mute attitude of appeal, the pitiful outward token of the mind's bearing, that could not be forborne, a silent uttering of the plea she had made her own in happy days. There was something of comfort in the mere feeling of doing it; and there was more in one or two words that even in that blank came to her mind;--"*Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him*;" and she again recollected that "Providence runneth not upon broken wheels." Nothing could be darker than the prospect before her, and these things did not bring light; but they gave her a sure stay to hold on by and keep her feet; a bit of strength to preserve from utterly fainting. Ah! the storehouse must be filled and the mind well familiarized with what is stored in it while yet the days are bright, or it will never be able to find what it wants in the dark.

Fleda first went into the kitchen to tell Barby to fasten the doors and not sit up.

"I don't believe uncle Rolf will be home to-night; but if he comes I will let him in."

Barby looked at her with absolutely a face of distress; but not daring to ask and not knowing how to propose anything, she looked in silence.

"It must be nine o'clock now," Fleda went on.

"And how long be you going to sit up?" said Barby.

"I don't know--a while yet."

"You look proper for it!" said Barby half sorrowfully and half indignantly;--"you look as if a straw would knock you down this minute. There's sense into everything. You catch me a going to bed and leaving you up! It won't do me no hurt to sit here the hull night; and I'm the only one in the house that's fit for it, with the exception of Philetus, and the little wit he has by day seems to forsake him at night. All the light that ever gets into his head, *I* believe, comes from the outside; as soon as ever that's gone he shuts up his shutters. He's been snoozing a'ready now this hour and a half. Go yourself off to bed, Fleda," she added with a mixture of reproach and kindness, "and leave me alone to take care of myself and the house too."

Fleda did not remonstrate, for Barby was as determined in her way as it was possible for anything to be. She went into the other room without a particle of notion what she should say or do.

Hugh was walking up and down the floor--a most unusual sign of perturbation with him. He met and stopped her as she came in.

"Fleda, I cannot bear it. What is the matter?--Do you know?'" he said as her eyes fell.

"Yes.----"

"What is it?"

She was silent and tried to pass on to the fire. But he stayed her.

"What is it?" he repeated.

"Oh I wish I could keep it from you!" said Fleda bursting into tears.

He was still a moment, and then bringing her to the arm-chair made her sit down, and stood himself before her, silently waiting, perhaps because he could not speak, perhaps from the accustomed gentle endurance of his nature. But Fleda was speechless too.

"You are keeping me in distress," he said at length.

"I cannot end the distress, dear Hugh," said Fleda.

She saw him change colour and he stood motionless still.

"Do you remember," said Fleda, trembling even to her voice,--"what Rutherford says about Providence 'not running on broken wheels'?"

He gave her no answer but the intent look of expectation. Its intentness paralyzed Fleda. She did not know how to go on. She rose from her chair and hung upon his shoulder.

"Believe it now, if you can--for oh, dear Hugh!--we have something to try it."

"It is strange my father don't come home," said he, supporting her with tenderness which had very little strength to help it,--"we want him very much."

Whether or not any unacknowledged feeling prompted this remark, some slight involuntary movement of Fleda's made him ask suddenly,

"Is it about him?"

He had grown deadly pale and Fleda answered eagerly,

"Nothing that has happened to-day--it is not anything that has happened to-day--he is perfectly well, I trust and believe."

"But it is about him?"

Fleda's head sank, and she burst into such an agony of tears that Hugh's distress was for a time divided.

"When did it happen, Fleda?"

"Years ago."

"And what?"

Fleda hesitated still, and then said,

"It was something he did, Hugh."

"What?"

"He put another person's name on the back of a note he gave."

She did not look up, and Hugh was silent for a moment.

"How do you know?"

"Mr. Thorn wrote it to aunt Lucy--it was Mr. Thorn's father."

Hugh sat down and leaned his head on the table. A long, long, time passed,--unmeasured by the wild coursing of thought to and fro. Then Fleda came and knelt down at the table beside him, and put her arm round his neck.

"Dear Hugh," she said--and if ever love and tenderness and sympathy could be distilled in tones, such drops were those that fell upon the mind's ear,--"can't you look up at me?"

He did then, but he did not give her a chance to look at him. He locked his arms about her, bringing her close to his breast; and for a few minutes, in utter silence, they knew what strange sweetness pure

affection can mingle even in the communion of sorrow. There were tears shed in those minutes that, bitter as they seemed at the time, Memory knew had been largely qualified with another admixture.

"Dear Hugh," said Fleda,--"let us keep what we can--won't you go to bed and rest?"

He looked dreadfully as if he needed it. But the usual calmness and sweetness of his face was not altered;--it was only deepened to very great sadness. Mentally, Fleda thought, he had borne the shock better than his mother; for the bodily frame she trembled. He had not answered and she spoke again.

"You need it worse than I, poor Fleda"

"I will go too presently--I do not think anybody will be here tonight."

"Is--Are there--Is this what has taken him away?" said Hugh.

Her silence and her look told him, and then laying her cheek again alongside of his she whispered, how unsteadily, "We have only one help, dear Hugh."

They were still and quiet again for minutes, counting the pulses of pain; till Fleda came back to her poor wish "to keep what they could." She mixed a restorative of wine and water, which however little desired, she felt was necessary for both of them, and Hugh went up stairs. She staid a few minutes to prepare another glass with particular care for her aunt. It was just finished, and taking her candle she had bid Barby good-night, when there came a loud rap at the front door. Fleda set down candle and glass, from the quick inability to hold them as well as for other reasons; and she and Barby stood and looked at each other, in such a confusion of doubt and dread that some little time had passed before either stirred even her eyes. Barby then threw down the tongs with which she had begun to make preparations for covering up the fire and set off to the front.

"You mustn't open the door, Barby," cried Fleda, following her. "Come in here and let us look out of one of the windows."

Before this could be reached however, there was another prolonged repetition of the first thundering burst. It went through Fleda's heart, because of the two up stairs who must hear it.

Barby threw up the sash.

"Who's there?"

"Is this Mr. Rossitur's place?" enquired a gruff voice.

"Yes, it is."

"Well will you come round and open the door?"

"Who wants it open?"

"A lady wants it open?"

"A lady!--what lady?"

"Down yonder in the carriage."

"What lady? who is she?"

"I don't know who she is--she wanted to come to Mr. Rossitur's place--will you open the door for her?"

Barby and Fleda both now saw a carriage standing in the road.

"We must see who it is first," whispered Fleda.

"When the lady comes I'll open the door," was Barby's ultimatum.

The man withdrew to the carriage; and after a few moments of intense watching Fleda and Barby certainly saw something in female apparel enter the little gate of the court-yard and come up over the bright

moonlit snow towards the house, accompanied by a child; while the man with whom they had had the interview came behind transformed into an unmistakeable baggage-carrier.

Chapter XL.

Zeal was the spring whence flowed her hardiment.

Fairfax.

Barby undid bolt and lock and Fleda met the traveller in the hall. She was a lady; her air and dress shewed that, though the latter was very plain.

"Does Mr. Rossitur live here?" was her first word.

Fleda answered it, and brought her visitor into the sitting room. But the light falling upon a form and face that had seen more wear and tear than time, gave her no clue as to the who or what of the person before her. The stranger's hurried look round the room seemed to expect something.

"Are they all gone to bed?"

"All but me," said Fleda.

"We have been delayed--we took a wrong road--we've been riding for hours to find the place--hadn't the right direction."--Then looking keenly at Fleda, from whose vision an electric spark of intelligence had scattered the clouds, she said;

"I am Marion Rossitur."

"I knew it!" said Fleda, with lips and eyes that gave her already a sister's welcome; and they were folded in each other's arms almost as tenderly and affectionately, on the part of one at least, as if there had really been the relationship between them. But more than surprise and affection struck Fleda's heart.

"And where are they all, Fleda? Can't I see them?"

"You must wait till I have prepared them--Hugh and aunt Lucy are not very well. I don't know that it will do for you to see them at all to-night, Marion."

"Not to-night! They are not ill?"

"No--only enough to be taken care of--not ill. But it would be better to wait"

"And my father?"

"He is not at home."

Marion exclaimed in sorrow, and Fleda to hide the look that she felt was on her face stooped down to kiss the child. He was a remarkably fine-looking manly boy.

"That is your cousin Fleda," said his mother.

"No--*aunt* Fleda," said the person thus introduced--"don't put me off into cousindom, Marion. I am uncle Hugh's sister--and so I am your aunt Fleda. Who are you?"

"Rolf Rossitur Schwiden."

Alas how wide are the ramifications of evil! How was what might have been very pure pleasure utterly poisoned and turned into bitterness. It went through Fleda's heart with a keen pang when she heard that name and looked on the very fair brow that owned it, and thought of the

ineffaceable stain that had come upon both. She dared look at nobody but the child. He already understood the melting eyes that were making acquaintance with his, and half felt the pain that gave so much tenderness to her kiss, and looked at her with a grave face of awakening wonder and sympathy. Fleda was glad to have business to call her into the kitchen.

"Who is it?" was Barby's immediate question.

"Aunt Lucy's daughter."

"She don't look much like her!" said Barby intelligently.

"They will want something to eat, Barby."

"I'll put the kettle on. It'll boil directly. I'll go in there and fix up the fire."

A word or two more, and then Fleda ran up to speak to her aunt and Hugh.

Her aunt she found in a state of agitation that was frightful. Even Fleda's assurances, with all the soothing arts she could bring to bear were some minutes before they could in any measure tranquillize her. Fleda's own nerves were in no condition to stand another shock when she left her and went to Hugh's door. But she could get no answer from him though she spoke repeatedly.

She did not return to her aunt's room. She went down stairs and brought up Barby and a light from thence.

Hugh was lying senseless and white; not whiter than his adopted sister as she stood by his side. Her eye went to her companion.

"Not a bit of it!" said Barby--"he's in nothing but a faint--just run down stairs and get the vinegar bottle, Fleda--the pepper vinegar.--Is there any water here?--"

Fleda obeyed; and watched, she could do little more, the efforts of Barby, who indeed needed no help, with the cold water, the vinegar, and rubbing of the limbs. They were for sometime unsuccessful; the fit was a severe one; and Fleda was exceedingly terrified before any signs of returning life came to reassure her.

"Now you go down stairs and keep quiet!" said Barby, when Hugh was fairly restored and had smiled a faint answer to Fleda's kiss and explanations,--"Go, Fleda! you ain't fit to stand. Go and sit down some place, and I'll be along directly and see how the fire burns. Don't you s'pose Mis' Rossitur could come in and sit in this easy-chair a spell without hurting herself?"

It occurred to Fleda immediately that it might do more good than harm to her aunt if her attention were diverted even by another cause of anxiety. She gently summoned her, telling her no more than was necessary to fit her for being Hugh's nurse; and in a very few minutes she and Barby were at liberty to attend to other claims upon them. But it sank into her heart, "Hugh will not get over this!"--and when she entered the sitting-room, what Mr. Carleton years before had said of the wood-flower was come true in its fullest extent--"a storm-wind had beaten it to the ground."

She was able literally to do no more than Barby had said, sit down and keep herself quiet. Miss Elster was in her briskest mood; flew in and out; made up the fire in the sitting-room and put on the kettle in the kitchen, which she had been just about doing when called to see Hugh. The much-needed supper of the travellers must be still waited for; but the fire was burning now, the room was cosily warm and bright, and Marion drew up her chair with a look of thoughtful contentment. Fleda felt as if some conjuror had been at work here for the last few hours--the room looked so like and felt so unlike itself.

"Are you going to be ill too, Fleda?" said Marion suddenly. "You are looking--very far from well!"

"I shall have a headache to-morrow," said Fleda quietly. "I generally know the day beforehand."

"Does it always make you look so?"

"Not always--I am somewhat tired."

"Where is my father gone?"

"I don't know.--Rolf, dear," said Fleda bending forward to the little fellow who was giving expression to some very fidgety impatience,--"what is the matter? what do you want?"

The child's voice fell a little from its querulousness towards the sweet key in which the questions had been put, but he gave utterance to a very decided wish for "bread and butter."

"Come here," said Fleda, reaching out a hand and drawing him, certainly with no force but that of attraction, towards her easy-chair,--"come here and rest yourself in this nice place by me--see, there is plenty of room for you;--and you shall have bread and butter and tea, and something else too, I guess, just as soon as Barby can get it ready."

"Who is Barby?" was the next question, in a most uncompromising tone of voice.

"You saw the woman that came in to put wood on the fire--that was Barby--she is very good and kind and will do anything for you if you behave yourself."

The child muttered, but so low as to shew some unwillingness that his words should reach the ears that were nearest him, that "he wasn't going to behave himself."

Fleda did not choose to hear; and went on with composing observations till the fair little face she had drawn to her side was as bright as the sun and returned her smile with interest.

"You have an admirable talent at moral suasion, Fleda," said the mother half smiling;--"I wish I had it."

"You don't need it so much here."

"Why not?"

"It may do very well for me, but I think not so well for you."

"Why?--what do you mean? I think it is the only way in the world to bring up children--the only way fit for rational beings to be guided."

Fleda smiled, though the faintest indication that lips could give, and shook her head,--ever so little.

"Why do you do that?--tell me."

"Because in my limited experience," said Fleda as she passed her fingers through the boy's dark locks of hair,--"in every household where 'moral suasion' has been the law, the children have been the administrators of it. Where is your husband?"

"I have lost him--years ago--" said Marion with a quick expressive glance towards the child. "I never lost what I at first thought I had, for I never had it. Do you understand?"

Fleda's eyes gave a sufficient answer.

"I am a widow--these five years--in all but what the law would require," Marion went on. "I have been alone since then--except my child. He was two years old then; and since then I have lived such a life, Fleda!--"

"Why didn't you come home?"

"Couldn't--the most absolute reason in the world. Think of it!--Come home! It was as much as I could do to stay there!"

Those sympathizing eyes were enough to make her go on.

"I have wanted everything--except trouble. I have done everything--except ask alms. I have learned, Fleda, that death is not the worst form in which distress can come."

Fleda felt stung, and bent down her head to touch her lips to the brow of little Rolf.

"Death would have been a trifle!" said Marion. "I mean,--not that *I* should have wished to leave Rolf alone in the world; but if I had been left--I mean I would rather wear outside than inside mourning."

Fleda looked up again, and at her.

"O I was so mistaken, Fleda!" she said clasping her hands,--"so mistaken!--in everything;--so disappointed,--in all my hopes. And the loss of my fortune was the cause of it all."

Nay verily! thought Fleda; but she said nothing; she hung her head again; and Marion after a pause went on to question her about an endless string of matters concerning themselves and other people, past doings and present prospects, till little Rolf soothed by the uninteresting soft murmur of voices fairly forgot bread and butter and himself in a sound sleep, his head resting upon Fleda.

"Here is one comfort for you, Marion," she said looking down at the dark eyelashes which lay on a cheek rosy and healthy as ever seven years old knew;--"he is a beautiful child, and I am sure, a fine one."

"It is thanks to his beauty that I have ever seen home again," said his mother.

Fleda had no heart this evening to speak words that were not necessary; her eyes asked Marion to explain herself.

"He was in Hyde Park one day--I had a miserable lodging not far from it, and I used to let him go in there, because he must go somewhere, you know,--I couldn't go with him--"

"Why not?"

"Couldn't!--Oh Fleda!--I have seen changes!--He was there one afternoon, alone, and had got into difficulty with some bigger boys--a little fellow, you know,--he stood his ground man-fully, but his strength wasn't equal to his spirit, and they were tyrannizing over him after the fashion of boys, who are I do think the ugliest creatures in creation!" said Mme. Schwiden, not apparently reckoning her own to be of the same gender,--"and a gentleman who was riding by stopped and interfered and took him out of their hands, and then asked him his name,--struck I suppose with his appearance. Very kind, wasn't it? men so seldom bother themselves about what becomes of children, I suppose there were thousands of others riding by at the same time."

"Very kind," Fleda said.

"When he heard what his name was he gave his horse to his servant and walked home with Rolf; and the next day he sent me a note, speaking of having known my father and mother and asking permission to call upon me.--I never was so mortified, I think, in my life," said Marion after a moment's hesitation.

"Why?" said Fleda, not a little at a loss to follow out the chain of her cousin's reasoning.

"Why I was in such a sort of a place--you don't know, Fleda; I was working then for a fancy store-keeper, to support myself--living in a miserable little two rooms.--If it had been a stranger I wouldn't have cared so much, but somebody that had known us in different times--I hadn't a thing in the world to answer the note upon but a half sheet of letter paper."

Fleda's lips sought Rolf's forehead again, with a curious rush of tears and smiles at once. Perhaps Marion had caught the expression of her countenance, for she added with a little energy,

"It is nothing to be surprised at--you would have felt just the same; for I knew by his note, the whole style of it, what sort of a person it must be."

"My pride has been a good deal chastened," Fleda said gently.

"I never want *mine* to be, beyond minding everything," said Marion; "and I don't believe yours is. I don't know why in the world I did not refuse to see him--I had fifty minds to--but he had won Rolf's heart, and I was a little curious, and it was something strange to see the face of a friend, any better one than my old landlady, so I let him come."

"Was *she* a friend?" said Fleda.

"If she hadn't been I should not have lived to be here--the best soul that ever was; but still, you know, she could do nothing for me but be as kind as she could live;--this was something different. So I let him come, and he came the next day."

Fleda was silent, a little wondering that Marion should be so frank with her, beyond what she had ever been in former years; but as she guessed, Mme. Schwiden's heart was a little opened by the joy of finding herself at home and the absolute necessity of talking to somebody; and there was a further reason which Fleda could not judge of, in her own face and manner. Marion needed no questions and went on again after stopping a moment.

"I was so glad in five minutes,--I can't tell you, Fleda,--that I had let him come. I forget entirely about how I looked and the wretched place I was in. He was all that I had supposed, and a great deal more, but somehow he hadn't been in the room three minutes before I didn't care at all for all the things I had thought would trouble me. Isn't it strange what a witchery some people have to make you forget everything but themselves!"

"The reason is, I think, because that is the only thing they forget," said Fleda, whose imagination however was entirely busy with the *singular* number.

"I shall never forget him," said Marion. "He was very kind to me--I cannot tell how kind--though I never realized it till afterwards; at the time it always seemed only a sort of elegant politeness which he could not help. I never saw so elegant a person. He came two or three times to see me and he took Rolf out with him I don't know how often, to drive; and he sent me fruit--such fruit!--and game, and flowers; and I had not had anything of the kind, not even seen it, for so long--I can't tell you what it was to me. He said he had known my father and mother well when they were abroad."

"What, was his name?" said Fleda quickly.

"I don't know--he never told me--and I never could ask him. Don't you know there are some people you can't do anything with but just what they please? There wasn't the least thing like stiffness--you never saw anybody less stiff,--but I never dreamed of asking him questions except when he was out of sight. Why, do you know him?" she said suddenly.

"When you tell me who he was I'll tell you," said Fleda smiling.

"Have you ever heard this story before?"

"Certainly not!"

"He is somebody that knows us very well," said Marion, "for he asked after every one of the family in particular."

"But what had all this to do with your getting home?"

"I don't wonder you ask. The day after his last visit came a note saying that he owed a debt in my family which it had never been in his power to repay; that he could not give the enclosure to my father, who would not

recognize the obligation; and that if I would permit him to place it in my hands I should confer a singular favour upon him."

"And what was the enclosure?"

"Five hundred pounds."

Fleda's head went down again and tears dropped fast upon little Rolf's shoulder.

"I suppose my pride has been a little broken too," Marion went on, "or I shouldn't have kept it. But then if you saw the person, and the whole manner of it--I don't know how I could ever have sent it back. Literally I couldn't, though, for I hadn't the least clue. I never saw or heard from him afterwards."

"When was this, Marion?"

"Last spring."

"Last spring!--then what kept you so long?"

"Because of the arrival of eyes that I was afraid of. I dared not make the least move that would show I could move. I came off the very first packet after I was free."

"How glad you must be!" said Fleda.

"Glad!--"

"Glad of what, mamma?" said Rolf, whose dreams the entrance of Barby had probably disturbed.

"Glad of bread and butter," said his mother; "wake up--here it is."

The young gentleman declared, rubbing his eyes, that he did not want it now; but however Fleda contrived to dispel that illusion, and bread and butter was found to have the same dulcifying properties at Queechy that

it owns in all the rest of the world. Little Rolf was completely mollified after a hearty meal and was put with his mother to enjoy most unbroken slumbers in Fleda's room. Fleda herself, after a look at Hugh, crept to her aunt's bed; whither Barby very soon despatched Mrs. Rossitur, taking in her place the arm-chair and the watch with most invincible good-will and determination; and sleep at last took the joys and sorrows of that disturbed household into its kind custody.

Fleda was the first one awake, and was thinking how she should break the last news to her aunt, when Mrs. Rossitur put her arms round her and after a most affectionate look and kiss, spoke to what she supposed had been her niece's purpose.

"You want taking care of more than I do, poor Fleda!"

"It was not for that I came," said Fleda;--"I had to give up my room to the travellers."

"Travellers!--"

A very few words more brought out the whole, and Mrs. Rossitur sprang out of bed and rushed to her daughter's room.

Fleda hid her face in the bed to cry--for a moment's passionate indulgence in weeping while no one could see. But a moment was all. There was work to do and she must not disable herself. She slowly got up, feeling thankful that her headache did not announce itself with the dawn, and that she would be able to attend to the morning affairs and the breakfast, which was something more of a circumstance now with the new additions to the family. More than that she knew from sure signs she would not be able to accomplish.

It was all done and done well, though with what secret flagging of mind and body nobody knew or suspected. The business of the day was arranged, Barby's course made clear, Hugh visited and smiled upon; and then Fleda set herself down in the breakfast-room to wear out the rest of

the day in patient suffering. Her little spaniel, who seemed to understand her languid step and faint tones and know what was coming, crept into her lap and looked up at her with a face of equal truth and affection; and after a few gentle acknowledging touches from the loved hand, laid his head on her knees, and silently avowed his determination of abiding her fortunes for the remainder of the day.

They had been there for some hours. Mrs. Rossitur and her daughter were gathered in Hugh's room; whither Rolf also after sundry expressions of sympathy for Fleda's headache, finding it a dull companion, had departed. Pain of body rising above pain of mind had obliged as far as possible even thought to be still; when a loud rap at the front door brought the blood in a sudden flush of pain to Fleda's face. She knew instinctively what it meant.

She heard Barby's distinct accents saying that somebody was "not well." The other voice was more smothered. But in a moment the door of the breakfast-room opened and Mr. Thorn walked in.

The intensity of the pain she was suffering effectually precluded Fleda from discovering emotion of any kind. She could not move. Only King lifted up his head and looked at the intruder, who seemed shocked, and well he might. Fleda was in her old headache position; bolt upright on the sofa, her feet on the rung of a chair while her hands supported her by their grasp upon the back of it. The flush had passed away leaving the deadly paleness of pain, which the dark rings under her eyes shewed to be well seated.

"Miss Ringgan!" said the gentleman, coming up softly as to something that frightened him,--"my dear Miss Fleda!--I am distressed!--You are very ill--can nothing be done to relieve you?"

Fleda's lips rather than her voice said, "Nothing."

"I would not have come in on any account to disturb you if I had known--I did not understand you were more than a trifle ill--"

Fleda wished he would mend his mistake, as his understanding certainly by this time was mended. But that did not seem to be his conclusion of the best thing to do.

"Since I am here,--can you bear to hear me say three words? without too much pain?--I do not ask you to speak"--

A faint whispered "yes" gave him leave to go on. She had never looked at him. She sat like a statue; to answer by a motion of her head was more than could be risked.

He drew up a chair and sat down, while King looked at him with eyes of suspicious indignation.

"I am not surprised," he said gently, "to find you suffering. I knew how your sensibilities must feel the shock of yesterday--I would fain have spared it you--I will spare you all further pain on the same score if possible--Dear Miss Ringgan, since I am here and time is precious may I say one word before I cease troubling you--take it for granted that you were made acquainted with the contents of my letter to Mrs. Rossitur?--with *all* the contents?--were you?"

Again Fleda's lips almost voicelessly gave the answer.

"Will you give me what I ventured to ask for?" said he gently,--"the permission to work *for you?* Do not trouble those precious lips to speak--the answer of these fingers will be as sure a warrant to me as all words that could be spoken that you do not deny my request."

He had taken one of her hands in his own. But the fingers lay with unanswering coldness and lifelessness for a second in his clasp and then were drawn away and took determinate hold of the chair-back. Again the flush came to Fleda's cheeks, brought by a sharp pain,--oh, bodily and mental too!--and after a moment's pause, with a distinctness of utterance that let him know every word, she said,

"A generous man would not ask it, sir."

Thorn sprang up, and several times paced the length of the room, up and down, before he said anything more. He looked at Fleda, but the flush was gone again, and nothing could seem less conscious of his presence. Pain and patience were in every line of her face, but he could read nothing more, except a calmness as unmistakably written. Thorn gave that face repeated glances as he walked, then stood still and read it at leisure. Then he came to her side again and spoke in a different voice.

"You are so unlike anybody else," he said, "that you shall make me unlike myself. I will do freely what I hoped to do with the light of your smile before me. You shall hear no more of this affair, neither you nor the world--I have the matter perfectly in my own hands--it shall never raise a whisper again. I will move heaven and earth rather than fail--but there is no danger of my failing. I will try to prove myself worthy of your esteem even where a man is most excusable for being selfish."

Barby's energies and fainting remedies were again put in use.
Barby's energies and fainting remedies were again put in use.

He took one of her cold hands again,--Fleda could not help it without more force than she cared to use, and indeed pain would by this time almost have swallowed up other sensation if every word and touch had not sent it in a stronger throb to her very finger ends. Thorn bent his lips to her hand, twice kissed it fervently, and then left her; much to King's satisfaction, who thereupon resigned himself to quiet slumbers.

His mistress knew no such relief. Excitement had dreadfully aggravated her disorder, at a time when it was needful to banish even thought as far as possible. Pain effectually banished it now, and Barby coming in a little after Mr. Thorn had gone found her quite unable to speak and scarce able to breathe, from agony. Barby's energies and fainting remedies were

again put in use; but pain reigned triumphant for hours, and when its hard rule was at last abated Fleda was able to do nothing but sleep like a child for hours more.

Towards a late tea-time she was at last awake, and carrying on a very one-sided conversation with Rolf, her own lips being called upon for little more than a smile now and then. King, not able to be in her lap, had curled himself up upon a piece of his mistress's dress and as close within the circle of her arms as possible, where Fleda's hand and his head were on terms of mutual satisfaction.

"I thought you wouldn't permit a dog to lie in your lap," said Marion.

"Do you remember that?" said Fleda with a smile. "Ah I have grown tender-hearted, Marion, since I have known what it was to want comfort myself. I have come to the conclusion that it is best to let everything have all the enjoyment it can in the circumstances. King crawled into my lap one day when I had not spirits enough to turn him out, and he has kept the place ever since.--Little King!"--In answer to which word of intelligence King looked in her face and wagged his tail, and then earnestly endeavoured to lick all her fingers. Which however was a piece of comfort she would not give him.

"Fleda," said Barby putting her head in, "I wish you'd just step out here and tell me which cheese you'd like to have cut."

"What a fool!" said Marion. "Let her cut them all if she likes."

"She is no fool," said Fleda. She thought Barby's punctiliousness however a little ill-timed, as she rose from her sofa and went into the kitchen.

"Well you *do* look as if you wa'n't good for nothing but to be taken care of!" said Barby. "I wouldn't have riz you up if it hadn't been just tea-time, and I knowed you couldn't stay quiet much longer;"--and with a look

which explained her tactics she put into Fleda's hand a letter directed to her aunt.

"Philetus gave it to me," she said, without a glance at Fleda's face,--"he said it was give to him by a spry little shaver who wa'n't a mind to tell nothin' about himself."

"Thank you, Barby!" was Fleda's most grateful return; and summoning her aunt up-stairs she took her into her own room and locked the door before she gave her the letter which Barby's shrewdness and delicacy had taken such care should not reach its owner in a wrong way. Fleda watched her as her eye ran over the paper and caught it as it fell from her fingers.

"My Dear Wife,

"That villain Thorn has got a handle of me which he will not fail to use--you know it all I suppose, by this time--It is true that in an evil hour, long ago, when greatly pressed, I did what I thought I should surely undo in a few days--The time never came--I don't know why he has let it lie so long, but he has taken it up now, and he will push it to the extreme--There is but one thing left for me--I shall not see you again. The rascal would never let me rest, I know, in any spot that calls itself American ground.

"You will do better without me than with me.

"R. R."

Fleda mused over the letter for several minutes, and then touched her aunt who had fallen on a chair with her head sunk in her hands.

"What does he mean?" said Mrs. Rossitur, looking up with a perfectly colourless face.

"To leave the country."

"Are you sure? is that it?" said Mrs. Rossitur, rising and looking over the words again;--"He would do anything, Fleda--"

"That is what he means, aunt Lucy;--don't you see he says he could not be safe anywhere in America?"

Mrs. Rossitur stood eying with intense eagerness for a minute or two the note in her niece's hand.

"Then he is gone! now that it is all settled!--And we don't know where--and we can't get word to him--"

Her cheek which had a little brightened became perfectly white again.

"He isn't gone yet--he can't be--he cannot have left Queechy till to-day--he will be in New York for several days yet probably."

"New York!--it may be Boston?"

"No, he would be more likely to go to New York--I am sure he would--he is accustomed to it."

"We might write to both places," said poor Mrs. Rossitur. "I will do it and send them off at once."

"But he might not get the letters," said Fleda thoughtfully,--"he might not dare to ask at the post-office."

His wife looked at that possibility, and then wrung her hands.

"Oh why didn't he give us a clew!"

Fleda put an arm round her affectionately and stood thinking; stood trembling might as well be said, for she was too weak to be standing at all.

"What can we do, dear Fleda?" said Mrs. Rossitur in great distress. "Once out of New York and we can get nothing to him! If he only knew that there is no need, and that it is all over!--"

"We must do everything, aunt Lucy," said Fleda thoughtfully, "and I hope we shall succeed yet. We will write, but I think the most hopeful other thing we could do would be to put advertisements in the newspapers--he would be very likely to see them."

"Advertisements!--But you couldn't--what would you put in?"

"Something that would catch his eye and nobody's else--*that* is easy, aunt Lucy."

"But there is nobody to put them in, Fleda,--you said uncle Orrin was going to Boston--"

"He wasn't going there till next week, but he was to be in Philadelphia a few days before that--the letter might miss him."

"Mr. Plumfield!--Couldn't he?"

But Fleda shook her head.

"Wouldn't do, aunt Lucy--he would do all he could, but he don't know New York nor the papers--he wouldn't know how to manage it--he don't know uncle Rolf--shouldn't like to trust it to him."

"Who then?--there isn't a creature we could ask--"

Fleda laid her cheek to her poor aunt's and said,

"I'll do it."

"But you must be in New York to do it, dear Fleda,--you can't do it here."

"I will go to New York."

"When?"

"To-morrow morning."

"But dear Fleda, you can't go alone! I can't let you, and you're not fit to go at all, my poor child!--" and between conflicting feelings Mrs. Rossitur sat down and wept without measure.

"Listen, aunt Lucy," said Fleda, pressing a hand on her shoulder,--"listen, and don't cry so!--I'll go and make all right, if efforts can do it. I am not going alone--I'll get Seth to go with me; and I can sleep in the cars and rest nicely in the steamboat--I shall feel happy and well when I know that I am leaving you easier and doing all that can be done to bring uncle Rolf home. Leave me to manage, and don't say anything to Marion,--it is one blessed thing that she need not know anything about all this. I shall feel better than if I were at home and had trusted this business to any other hands."

"*You* are the blessing of my life," said Mrs. Rossitur.

"Cheer up, and come down and let us have some tea," said Fleda, kissing her; "I feel as if that would make me up a little; and then I'll write the letters. I sha'n't want but very little baggage; there'll be nothing to pack up."

Philetus was sent up the hill with a note to Seth Plumfield, and brought home a favorable answer. Fleda thought as she went to rest that it was well the mind's strength could sometimes act independently of its servant the body, hers felt so very shattered and unsubstantial.

Chapter XLI.

> I thank you for your company; but good faith, I had as lief have been myself alone.--As You Like It.

The first thing next morning Seth Plumfield came down to say that he had seen Dr. Quackenboss the night before and had chanced to find out that he was going to New York too, this very day; and knowing that the doctor would be just as safe an escort as himself, Seth had made over the charge of his cousin to him; "calculating," he said, "that it would make no difference to Fleda and that he had better stay at home with his mother."

Fleda said nothing and looked as little as possible of her disappointment, and her cousin went away wholly unsuspecting of it.

"Seth Plumfield ha'n't done a smarter thing than that in a good while," Barby remarked satirically as he was shutting the door. "I should think he'd ha' hurt himself."

"I dare say the doctor will take good care of me," said Fleda;--"as good as he knows how."

"Men beat all!" said Barby impatiently.--"The little sense there is into them!--"

Fleda's sinking heart was almost ready to echo the sentiment; but nobody knew it.

Coffee was swallowed, her little travelling bag and bonnet on the sofa; all ready. Then came the doctor.

"My dear Miss Ringgan!--I am most happy of this delightful opportunity--I had supposed you were located at home for the winter. This is a sudden start."

"Is it sudden to you, Dr. Quackenboss?" said Fleda.

"Why--a--not disagreeably so," said the doctor smiling;--"nothing could be that in the present circumstances,--but I--a--I hadn't calculated upon it for much of a spell beforehand."

Fleda was vexed, and looked,--only unconversable.

"I suppose," said the doctor after a pause,--"that we have not much time to waste--a--in idle moments. Which route do you intend to travel?"

"I was thinking to go by the North River, sir."

"But the ice has collected,--I am afraid,--"

"At Albany, I know; but when I came up there was a boat every other day, and we could get there in time by the stage--this is her day."

"But we have had some pretty tight weather since, if you remember," said the doctor; "and the boats have ceased to connect with the stage. We shall have to go to Greenfield to take the Housatonic which will land us at Bridgeport on the Sound"

"Have we time to reach Greenfield this morning?"

"Oceans of time?" said the doctor delightedly; "I've got my team here and they're jumping out of their skins with having nothing to do and the weather--they'll carry us there as spry as grasshoppers--now, if you're ready, my dear Miss Ringgan!"

There was nothing more but to give and receive those speechless lip-messages that are out of the reach of words, and Mrs. Rossitur's half-spoken last charge, to take care of *herself*; and with these seals upon her mission Fleda set forth and joined the doctor; thankful for one foil to curiosity in the shape of a veil and only wishing that there were any invented screen that she could place between her and hearing.

"I hope your attire is of a very warm description," said the doctor as he helped her into the wagon;--"it friz pretty hard last night and I don't think it has got out of the notion yet. If I had been consulted in any other--a--form, than that of a friend, I should have disapprobated, if you'll excuse me, Miss Ringgan's travelling again before her 'Rose of Cassius' there was in blow. I hope you have heard no evil tidings? Dr.--a--Gregory, I hope, is not taken ill?"

"I hope not, sir," said Fleda.

"He didn't look like it. A very hearty old gentleman. Not very old either, I should judge. Was he the brother of your mother or your father?"

"Neither, sir."

"Ah!--I misunderstood--I thought, but of course I was mistaken,--I thought I heard you speak to him under the title of uncle. But that is a title we sometimes give to elderly people as a term of familiarity--there is an old fellow that works for me,--he has been a long time in our family, and we always call him 'uncle Jenk.'"

Fleda was ready to laugh, cry, and be angry, in a breath. She looked straight before her and was mum.

"That 'Rose of Cassius' is a most exquisite thing!" said the doctor, recurring to the cluster of bare bushy stems in the corner of the garden. "Did Mr. Rossitur bring it with him when he came to his present residence?"

"Yes sir."

"Where is Mr. Rossitur now?"

Fleda replied, with a jump of her heart, that business affairs had obliged him to be away for a few days.

"And when does he expect to return?" said the doctor.

"I hope he will be home as soon as I am," said Fleda.

"Then you do not expect to remain long in the city this time?"

"I shall not have much of a winter at home if I do," said Fleda. "We are almost at January."

"Because," said the doctor, "in that case I should have no higher gratification than in attending upon your motions. I--a--beg you to believe, my dear Miss Ringgan, that it would afford me the--a--most particular--it would be most particularly grateful to me to wait upon you to--a--the confines of the world."

Fleda hastened to assure her officious friend that the time of her return was altogether uncertain; resolving rather to abide a guest with Mrs. Pritchard than to have Dr. Quackenboss hanging upon her motions every day of her being there. But in the mean time the doctor got upon Capt. Rossitur's subject; then came to Mr. Thorn; and then wanted to know the exact nature of Mr. Rossitur's business affairs in Michigan; through all which matters poor Fleda had to run the gauntlet of questions, interspersed with gracious speeches which she could bear even less well. She was extremely glad to reach the cars and take refuge in seeming sleep from the mongrel attentions, which if for the most part prompted by admiration owned so large a share of curiosity. Her weary head and heart would fain have courted the reality of sleep, as a refuge from more painful thoughts and a feeling of exhaustion that could scarcely support itself; but the restless roar and jumble of the rail-cars put it beyond her power. How long the hours were--how hard to wear out, with no possibility of a change of position that would give rest; Fleda would not even raise her head when they stopped, for fear of being talked to; how trying that endless noise to her racked nerves. It came to an end at last, though Fleda would not move for fear they might be only taking in wood and water.

"Miss Ringgan!" said the doctor in her ear,--"my dear Miss Ringgan!--we are here!--"

"Are we?" said Fleda, looking up;--"what other name has the place, doctor?"

"Why Bridgeport," said the doctor,--"we're at Bridgeport--now we have leave to exchange conveyances. A man feels constrained after a prolonged length of time in a place. How have you enjoyed the ride?"

"Not very well--it has seemed long. I am glad we are at the end of it!"

But as she rose and threw back her veil the doctor looked startled.

"My dear Miss Ringgan!--are you faint?"

"No sir."

"You are not well, indeed!--I am very sorry--the ride has been--Take my arm!--Ma'am," said the doctor touching a black satin cloak which filled the passage-way,--"will you have the goodness to give this lady a passport?"

But the black satin cloak preferred a straightforward manner of doing this, so their egress was somewhat delayed. Happily faintness was not the matter.

"My dear Miss Ringgan!" said the doctor as they reached the ground and the outer air,--"what was it?--the stove too powerful? You are looking--you are of a dreadfully delicate appearance!"

"I had a headache yesterday," said Fleda; "it always leaves me with a disagreeable reminder the next day. I am not ill."

But he looked frightened, and hurried her, as fast as he dared, to the steamboat; and there proposed half a dozen restoratives; the simplest of which Fleda took, and then sought delicious rest from him and from

herself on the cushions of a settee. Delicious!--though she was alone, in the cabin of a steamboat, with strange forms and noisy tongues around her, the closed eyelids shut it out all; and she had time but for one resting thought of "patient continuance in well-doing," and one happy heart-look up to him who has said that he cares for his children, a look that laid her anxieties down there,--when past misery and future difficulty faded away before a sleep that lasted till the vessel reached her moorings and was made fast.

She was too weary and faint even to think during the long drive up to Bleecker-st. She was fain to let it all go--the work she had to do and the way she must set about it, and rest in the assurance that nothing could be done that night. She did not so much as hear Dr. Quackenboss's observations, though she answered a few of them, till, at the door, she was conscious of his promising to see her to-morrow and of her instant conclusion to take measures to see nobody.

How strange everything seemed. She walked through the familiar hall, feeling as if her acquaintance with every old thing was broken. There was no light in the back parlour, but a comfortable fire.

"Is my--is Dr. Gregory at home?" she asked of the girl who had let her in.

"No ma'am; he hasn't got back from Philadelphia."

"Tell Mrs. Pritchard a lady wants to see her."

Good Mrs. Pritchard was much more frightened than Dr. Quackenboss had been when she came into the back parlour to see "a lady" and found Fleda in the great arm-chair taking off her things. She poured out questions, wonderings and lamentings, not "in a breath" but in a great many; quite forgot to be glad to see her, she looked so dreadfully; and "what *had* been the matter?" Fleda answered her,--told of yesterday's illness and to-day's journey; and met all her shocked enquiries with so composed a face and such a calm smile and bearing, that Mrs. Pritchard was almost persuaded not to believe her eyes.

"My uncle is not at home?"

"O no, Miss Fleda! I suppose he's in Philadelphy--but his motions is so little to be depended on that I never know when I have him; maybe he'll stop going through to Boston, and maybe no, and I don't know when; so anyhow I had to have a fire made and this room all ready; and ain't it lucky it was ready for you to-night!--and now he ain't here you can have the great chair all to yourself and make yourself comfortable--we can keep warmer here, I guess, than you can in the country," said the good housekeeper, giving some skilful admonishing touches to the fire;--"and you must just sit there and read and rest, and see if you can't get back your old looks again. If I thought it was *that* you came for I'd be happy. I never *did* see such a change in any one in five days!--"

She stood looking down at her guest with a face of very serious concern, evidently thinking much more than she chose to give utterance to.

"I am tired, Mrs. Pritchard," said Fleda, smiling up at her.

"I wish you had somebody to take care of you, Miss Fleda, that wouldn't let you tire yourself. It's a sin to throw your strength away so--and you don't care for looks nor nothing else when it's for other people. You're looking just as handsome, too, for all," she said, her mouth giving way a little, as she stooped down to take off Fleda's overshoes, "but that's only because you can't help it. Now what is there you'd like to have for supper!--just say and you shall have it--whatever would seem best--because I mightn't hit the right thing?"

Fleda declared her indifference to everything but a cup of tea, and her hostess bustled away to get that and tax her own ingenuity and kindness for the rest. And leaning her weary head back in the lounge Fleda tried to think,--but it was not time yet; she could only feel; feel what a sad change had come over her since she had sat there last; shut her eyes and wish she could sleep again.

But Mrs. Pritchard's hospitality must be gone through with first.

The nicest of suppers was served in the bright little parlour and her hostess was a compound of care and good will; nothing was wanting to the feast but a merry heart. Fleda could not bring that, so her performance was unsatisfactory and Mrs. Pritchard was distressed. Fleda went to her own room promising better doings to-morrow.

She awoke in the morning to the full burden of care and sorrow which sheer weakness and weariness the day before had in part laid down; to a quicker sense of the state of things than she had had yet. The blasting evil that had fallen upon them,--Fleda writhed on her bed when she thought of it. The sternest, cruellest, most inflexible, grasp of distress. Poverty may be borne, death may be sweetened, even to the survivors; but *disgrace*--Fleda hid her head, as if she would shut the idea out with the light. And the ruin it had wrought. Affection killed at the root,--her aunt's happiness withered, for this world,--Hugh's life threatened,--the fair name of his family gone,--the wear and weariness of her own spirit,--but that had hardly a thought. Himself?--oh no one could tell what a possible wreck, now that self-respect and the esteem of others, those two safe-guards of character, were lost to him. "So much security has any woman in a man without religion;" she remembered those words of her aunt Miriam now; and she thought if Mr. Thorn had sought an ill wind to blow upon his pretensions he could not have pitched them better. What fairer promise, without religion, could be than her uncle had given? Reproach had never breathed against his name, and no one less than those who knew him best could fancy that he had ever given it occasion. And who could have more at stake?--and the stake was lost--that was the summing up thought.

No, it was not,--for Fleda's mind presently sprang beyond,--to the remedy; and after a little swift and earnest flitting about of thought over feasibilities and contingencies, she jumped up and dressed herself with a prompt energy which shewed a mind made up to its course. And yet when she came down to the parlour, though bending herself with

nervous intentness to the work she had to do, her fingers and her heart were only stayed in their trembling by some of the happy assurances she had been fleeing to;--

"Commit thy works unto the Lord, and all thy thoughts shall be established."--

"In all thy ways acknowledge Him: He shall direct they paths."--

--Assurances, not indeed that her plans should meet with success, but that they should have the issue best for them.

She was early, but the room was warm and in order and the servant had left it. Fleda sought out paper and pencil and sat down to fashion the form of an advertisement,--the first thing to be done. She had no notion how difficult a thing till she came to do it.

"*R. R. is entreated to communicate with his niece at the old place in Bleecker-street, on business of the greatest importance*."

"It will not do," said Fleda to herself as she sat and looked at it,--"there is not enough to catch his eye; and there is *too much* if it caught anybody else's eye;--'R. R.', and 'his niece,' and 'Bleecker-street,'--that would tell plain enough."

"*Dear uncle, F. has followed you here on business of the greatest importance. Pray let her see you--she is at the old place*."

"It will not do," thought Fleda again,--"there is still less to catch his eye--I cannot trust it. And if I were to put 'Queechy' over it, that would give the clue to the Evelyns and everybody. But I had better risk anything rather than his seeing it--"

The miserable needlessness of the whole thing, the pitiful weighing of sorrow against sorrow, and shame against shame overcame her for a little; and then dashing away the tears she had no time for and locking up the strong box of her heart, she took her pencil again.

"*Queechy*.

"*Let me see you at the old place. I have come here on urgent business* for you. *Do not deny me, for H---'s sake*!"

With a trifle of alteration she thought this would do; and went on to make a number of fair copies of it for so many papers, This was done and all traces of it out of the way before Mrs. Pritchard came in and the breakfast; and after bracing herself with coffee, though the good housekeeper was still sadly dissatisfied with her indifference to some more substantial brace in the shape of chickens and ham, Fleda prepared herself inwardly and outwardly to brave the wind and the newspaper offices, and set forth. It was a bright keen day; she was sorry; she would it had been cloudy. It seemed as if she could not hope to escape some eyes in such an atmosphere.

She went to the library first, and there requested the librarian, whom she knew, to bring her from the reading-room the files of morning and evening papers. They were many more than she had supposed; she had not near advertisements enough. Paper and ink were at hand however, and making carefully her list of the various offices, morning and evening separate, she wrote out a copy of the notice for each of them.

The morning was well on by the time she could leave the library. It was yet far from the fashionable hour, however, and sedulously shunning the recognition of anybody, in hopes that it would be one step towards her escaping theirs, she made her way down the bright thoroughfare as far as the City Hall, and then crossed over the Park and plunged into a region where it was very little likely she would see a face that she knew. She saw nothing else either that she knew; in spite of having studied the map of the city in the library she was forced several times to ask her way, as she visited office after office, of the evening papers first, till she had placed her notice with each one of them. Her courage almost failed her, her heart did quite, after two or three. It was a trial from which her whole nature shrank, to go among the people, to face the eyes, to

exchange talk with the lips, that were at home in those purlieus; look at them she did not. Making her slow way through the choked narrow streets, where the mere confusion of business was bewildering,--very, to any one come from Queechy; among crowds, of what mixed and doubtful character, hurrying along and brushing with little ceremony past her; edging by loitering groups that filled the whole sidewalk, or perhaps edging through them, groups whose general type of character was sufficiently plain and unmixed; entering into parley with clerk after clerk who looked at such a visiter as an anomaly,--poor Fleda almost thought so too, and shrank within herself; venturing hardly her eyes beyond her thick veil, and shutting her ears resolutely as far as possible to all the dissonant rough voices that helped to assure her she was where she ought not to be. Sometimes she felt that it was *impossible* to go on and finish her task; but a thought or two nerved her again to plunge into another untried quarter or make good her entrance to some new office through a host of loungers and waiting news-boys collected round the door. Sometimes in utter discouragement she went on and walked to a distance and came back, in the hope of a better opportunity. It was a long business; and she often had to wait. The end of her list was reached at last, and the paper was thrown away; but she did not draw free breath till she had got to the west side of Broadway again, and turned her back upon them all.

It was late then, and the street was thinned of a part of its gay throng. Completely worn, in body as well as mind, with slow faltering steps, Fleda moved on among those still left; looking upon them with a curious eye as if they and she belonged to different classes of beings; so very far her sobered and saddened spirit seemed to herself from their stir of business and gayety; if they had been a train of lady-flies or black ants Fleda would hardly have felt that she had less in common with them. It was a weary long way up to Bleecker-street, as she was forced to travel it.

The relief was unspeakable to find herself within her uncle's door with the sense that her dreaded duty was done, and well and thoroughly. Now her part was to be still and wait. But with the relief came also a reaction from the strain of the morning. Before her weary feet had well mounted the stairs her heart gave up its control; and she locked herself in her room to yield to a helpless outpouring of tears which she was utterly unable to restrain, though conscious that long time could not pass before she would be called to dinner. Dinner had to wait.

"Miss Fleda," said the housekeeper in a vexed tone when the meal was half over,--"I didn't know you ever did any thing wrong."

"You are sadly mistaken, Mrs. Pritchard," said Fleda half lightly, half sadly.

"You're looking not a bit better than last night, and if anything rather worse," Mrs. Pritchard went on. "It isn't right, Miss Fleda. You oughtn't to ha' set the first step out of doors, I know you oughtn't, this blessed day; and you've been on your feet these seven hours,--and you shew it! You're just ready to drop."

"I will rest to-morrow," said Fleda,--"or try to."

"You are fit for nothing but bed," said the housekeeper,--"and you've been using yourself, Miss Fleda, as if you had the strength of an elephant. Now do you think you've been doing right?"

Fleda would have made some cheerful answer, but she was not equal to it; she had lost all command of herself, and she dropped knife and fork to burst into a flood of exceeding tears. Mrs. Pritchard equally astonished and mystified, hurried questions, apologies, and consolations, one upon another; and made up her mind that there was something mysterious on foot about which she had better ask no questions. Neither did she, from that time. She sealed up her mouth, and contented herself with taking the best care of her guest that she possibly could. Needed enough, but all of little avail.

The reaction did not cease with that day. The next, Sunday, was spent on the sofa, in a state of utter prostration. With the necessity for exertion the power had died. Fleda could only lie upon the cushions, and sleep helplessly, while Mrs. Pritchard sat by, anxiously watching her; curiosity really swallowed up in kind feeling. Monday was little better, but towards the after part of the day the stimulant of anxiety began to work again, and Fleda sat up to watch for a word from her uncle, But none came, and Tuesday morning distressed Mrs. Pritchard with its want of amendment. It was not to be hoped for, Fleda knew, while this fearful watching lasted. Her uncle might not have seen the advertisement--he might not have got her letter--he might be even then setting sail to quit home forever. And she could do nothing but wait. Her nerves were alive to every stir; every touch of the bell made her tremble; it was impossible to read, to lie down, to be quiet or still anywhere. She had set the glass of expectancy for one thing in the distance; and all things else were a blur or a blank.

They had sat down to dinner that Tuesday, when a ring at the door which had made her heart jump was followed--yes, it was,--by the entrance of the maid-servant holding a folded bit of paper in her hand. Fleda did not wait to ask whose it was; she seized it and saw; and sprang away up stairs. It was a sealed scrap of paper, that had been the back of a letter, containing two lines without signature.

"I will meet you *at Dinah's*--if you come there alone about sundown."

Enough! Dinah was an old black woman who once had been a very attached servant in Mr. Rossitur's family, and having married and become a widow years ago, had set up for herself in the trade of a washerwoman, occupying an obscure little tenement out towards Chelsea. Fleda had rather a shadowy idea of the locality, though remembering very well sundry journeys of kindness she and Hugh had made to it in days gone by. But she recollected it was in Sloman-street and she knew she could find it; and dropping upon her knees poured out thanks too deep to be uttered and too strong to be even thought without

a convulsion of tears. Her dinner after that was but a mental thanksgiving; she was hardly conscious of anything beside; and a thankful rejoicing for all her weary labours. Their weariness was sweet to her now. Let her but see him;--the rest was sure.

Chapter XLII.

> How well appaid she was her bird to find.
>
> Sidney.

Fleda counted the minutes till it wanted an hour of sundown; and then avoiding Mrs. Pritchard made her escape out of the house. A long walk was before her and the latter part of it through a region which she wished to pass while the light was good. And she was utterly unable to travel at any but a very gentle rate. So she gave herself plenty of time.

It was a very bright afternoon and all the world was astir. Fleda shielded herself with a thick veil and went up one of the narrow streets, not daring to venture into Broadway; and passing Waverly Place which was almost as bright, turned down Eighth-street. A few blocks now and she would be out of all danger of meeting any one that knew her. She drew her veil close and hurried on. But the proverb saith "a miss is as good as a mile," and with reason; for if fate wills the chances make nothing. As Fleda set her foot down to cross Fifth Avenue she saw Mr. Carleton on the other side coming up from Waverly Place. She went as slowly as she dared, hoping that he would pass without looking her way, or be unable to recognize her through her thick wrapper. In vain,--she soon saw that she was known; he was waiting for her, and she must put up her veil and speak to him.

"Why I thought you had left New York," said he;--"I was told so."

"I had left it--I have left it, sir," said Fleda;--"I have only come back for a day or two--"

"Have you been ill?" he said with a sudden change of tone, the light in his eye and smile giving place to a very marked gravity.

Fleda would have answered with a half smile, but such a sickness of heart came over her that speech failed and she was very near bursting into tears. Mr. Carleton looked at her earnestly a moment, and then put the hand which Fleda had forgotten he still held, upon his arm and began to walk forward gently with her. Something in the grave tenderness with which this was done reminded Fleda irresistibly of the times when she had been a child under his care; and somehow her thoughts went off on a tangent back to the further days of her mother and father and grandfather, the other friends from whom she had had the same gentle protection, which now there was no one in the world to give her. And their images did never seem more winning fair than just then,--when their place was left most especially empty. Her uncle she had never looked up to in the same way, and whatever stay he had been was cut down. Her aunt leaned upon *her*; and Hugh had always been more of a younger than an elder brother. The quick contrast of those old happy childish days was too strong; the glance back at what she had had, made her feel the want. Fleda blamed herself, reasoned and fought with herself;--but she was weak in mind and body, her nerves were unsteady yet, her spirits unprepared for any encounter or reminder of pleasure; and though vexed and ashamed she *could* not hold her head up, and she could not prevent tear after tear from falling as they went along; she could only hope that nobody saw them.

Nobody spoke of them. But then nobody said anything; and the silence at last frightened her into rousing herself She checked her tears and raised her head; she ventured no more; she dared not turn her face towards her companion. He looked at her once or twice, as if in doubt whether to speak or not.

"Are you not going beyond your strength?" he said at length gently.

Fleda said no, although in a tone that half confessed his suspicion. He was silent again, however, and she cast about in vain for something to speak of; it seemed to her that all subjects of conversation in general had been packed up for exportation, neither eye nor memory could light upon a single one. Block after block was passed, the pace at which he walked, and the manner of his care for her, alone shewing that he knew what a very light hand was resting upon his arm.

"How pretty the curl of blue smoke is from that chimney," he said.

It was said with a tone so carelessly easy that Fleda's heart jumped for one instant in the persuasion that he had seen and noticed nothing peculiar about her.

"I know it," she said eagerly,--"I have often thought of it--especially here in the city--"

"Why is it? what is it?--"

Fleda's eye gave one of its exploratory looks at his, such as he remembered from years ago, before she spoke.

"Isn't it contrast?--or at least I think that helps the effect here."

"What do you make the contrast?" he said quietly.

"Isn't it," said Fleda with another glance, "the contrast of something pure and free and upward-tending, with what is below it. I did not mean the mere painter's contrast. In the country smoke is more picturesque, but in the city I think it has more character."

"To how many people do you suppose it ever occurred that smoke had a character?" said he smiling.

"You are laughing at me, Mr. Carleton? perhaps I deserve it."

"You do not think that," said he with a look that forbade her to think it. "But I see you are of Lavater's mind, that everything has a physiognomy?"

"I think he was perfectly right," said Fleda. "Don't you, Mr. Carleton?"

"To some people, yes!--But the expression is so subtle that only very nice sensibilities, with fine training, can hope to catch it; therefore to the mass of the world Lavater would talk nonsense."

"That is a gentle hint to me. But if I talk nonsense I wish you would set me right, Mr. Carleton;--I am very apt to amuse myself with tracing out fancied analogies in almost everything, and I may carry it too far--too far--to be spoken of wisely. I think it enlarges one's field of pleasure very much. Where one eye is stopped, another is but invited on."

"So," said Mr. Carleton, "while that puff of smoke would lead one person's imagination only down the chimney to the kitchen fire, it would take another's----where did yours go?" said he suddenly turning round upon her.

Fleda met his eye again, without speaking; but her look had perhaps more than half revealed her thought, for she was answered with a smile so intelligent and sympathetic that she was abashed.

"How very much religion heightens the enjoyments of life," Mr. Carleton said after a while.

Fieda's heart throbbed an answer; she did not speak.

"Both in its direct and indirect action. The mind is set free from influences that narrowed its range and dimmed its vision; and refined to a keener sensibility, a juster perception, a higher power of appreciation, by far, than it had before. And then, to say nothing of religion's own peculiar sphere of enjoyment, technically religious,--what a field of pleasure it opens to its possessor in the world of moral beauty, most

partially known to any other,--and the fine but exquisite analogies of things material with things spiritual,--those *harmonies of Nature*, to which, talk as they will, all other ears are deaf!"

"You know," said Fleda with full eyes that she dared not shew, "how Henry Martyn said that he found he enjoyed painting and music so much more after he became a Christian."

"I remember. It is the substituting a just medium for a false one--it is putting nature within and nature without in tune with each other, so that the chords are perfect now which were jarring before."

"And yet how far people would be from believing you, Mr. Carleton."

"Yes--they are possessed with the contrary notion. But in all the creation nothing has a one-sided usefulness;--what a reflection it would be upon the wisdom of its author if godliness alone were the exception--if it were not 'profitable for the life that now is, as well as for that which is to come'!"

"They make that work the other way, don't they?" said Fleda.--"Not being able to see how thorough religion should be for anybody's happiness, they make use of your argument to conclude that it is not what the Bible requires. How I have heard that urged--that God intended his creatures to be happy--as a reason why they should disobey him. They lay hold on the wrong end of the argument and work backwards."

"Precisely.

"'God intended his creatures to be happy.

"'Strict obedience would make them unhappy.

"'Therefore, he does not intend them to obey.'"

"They never put it before them quite so clearly," said Fleda.

"They would startle at it a little. But so they would at the right stating of the case."

"And how would that be, Mr. Carleton?"

"It might be somewhat after this fashion--

"'God requires nothing that is not for the happiness of his people--

"'He requires perfect obedience--

"'Therefore perfect obedience is for their happiness'

"But unbelief will not understand that. Did it ever strike you how much there is in those words 'Come and see'?--All that argument can do, after all, is but to persuade to that. Only faith will submit to terms and enter the narrrow gate; and only obedience knows what the prospect is on the other side."

"But isn't it true, Mr. Carleton, that the world have some cause for their opinion?--judging as they do by the outside? The peculiar pleasures of religion, as you say, are out of sight, and they do not always find in religious people that enlargement and refinement of which you were speaking."

"Because they make unequal comparisons. Recollect that, as God has declared, the ranks of religion are not for the most part filled from the wise and the great. In making your estimate you must measure things equal in other respects. Compare the same man with himself before he was a Christian or with his unchristianized fellows--and you will find invariably the refining, dignifying, ennobling, influence of true religion; the enlarged intelligence and the greater power of enjoyment."

"And besides those causes of pleasure-giving that you mentioned," said Fleda,--"there is a mind at ease; and how much that is alone. If I may judge others by myself,--the mere fact of being unpoised--unresting--

disables the mind from a thousand things that are joyfully relished by one entirely at ease."

"Yes," said he,--"do you remember that word--'The stones of the field shall be at peace with thee'?"

"I am afraid people would understand you as little as they would me, Mr. Carleton," said Fleda laughing.

He smiled, rather a prolonged smile, the expression of which Fleda could not make out; she felt that *she* did not quite understand him.

"I have thought," said he after a pause, "that much of the beauty we find in many things is owing to a hidden analogy--the harmony they make with some unknown string of the mind's harp which they have set a vibrating. But the music of that is so low and soft that one must listen very closely to find out what it is."

"Why that is the very theory of which I gave you a smoky illustration a little while ago," said Fleda. "I thought I was on safe ground, after what you said about the characters of flowers, for that was a little--"

"Fanciful?" said he smiling.

"What you please," said Fleda colouring a little,--"I am sure it is true. The theory, I mean. I have many a time felt it, though I never put it in words. I shall think of that."

"Did you ever happen to see the very early dawn of a winter's morning?" said he.

But he laughed the next instant at the comical expression of Fleda's face as it was turned to him.

"Forgive me for supposing you as ignorant as myself. I have seen it--once."

"Appreciated it, I hope, that time?" said Fleda.

"I shall never forget it."

"And it never wrought in you a desire to see it again?"

"I might see many a dawn," said he smiling, "without what I saw then. It was very early--and a cloudy morning, so that night had still almost undisturbed possession of earth and sky; but in the south-eastern quarter, between two clouds, there was a space of fair white promise, hardly making any impression upon the darkness but only set off by it. And upon this one bright spot in earth or heaven, rode the planet of the morning--the sun's forerunner--bright upon the brightness. All else was dusky--except where overhead the clouds had parted again and shewed a faint old moon, glimmering down upon the night it could no longer be said to 'rule'."

"Beautiful!" said Fleda. "There is hardly any time I like so well as the dawn of a winter morning with an old moon in the sky. Summer weather has no beauty like it--in some things."

"Once," continued Mr, Carleton, "I should have seen no more than I have told you--the beauty that every cultivated eye must take in. But now, methought I saw the dayspring that has come upon a longer night--and from out of the midst of it there was the fair face of the morning star looking at me with its sweet reminder and invitation--looking over the world with its aspect of triumphant expectancy;--there was its calm assurance of the coming day,--its promise that the star of hope which now there were only a few watching eyes to see, should presently be followed by the full beams of the Sun of righteousness making the kingdoms of the world his own.--Your memory may bring to you the words that came to mine,--the promise 'to him that overcometh', and the beauty of the lips that made it--the encouragement to 'patient continuance in well-doing', 'till the day break and the shadows flee

away.'--And there on the other hand was the substituted light of earth's wisdom and inventions, dominant yet, but waning and soon to be put out for ever."

Fleda was crying again, and perhaps that was the reason why Mr. Carleton was silent for some time. She was very sorry to shew herself so weak, but she could not help it; part of his words had come too close. And when she had recovered again she was absolutely silent too, for they were nearing Sloman-street and she could not take him there with her. She did not know what to say, nor what he would think; and she said not another word till they came to the corner. There she must stop and speak.

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Carleton," she said drawing her hand from his arm, "for taking care of me all this disagreeable way--I will not give you any more trouble."

"You are not going to dismiss me?" said he looking at her with a countenance of serious anxiety.

"I must," said Fleda ingenuously,--"I have business to attend to here--"

"But you will let me have the pleasure of waiting for you?"

"O no," said Fleda hesitating and flushing,--"thank you, Mr. Carleton,--but pray do not--I don't know at all how long I may be detained."

He bowed, she thought gravely, and turned away, and she entered the little wretched street; with a strange feeling of pain that she could not analyze. She did not know where it came from, but she thought if there only had been a hiding-place for her she could have sat down and wept a whole heartful. The feeling must be kept back now, and it was soon forgotten in the throbbing of her heart at another thought which took entire possession.

The sun was not down, there was time enough, but it was with a step and eye of hurried anxiety that Fleda passed along the little street, for fear of missing her quest or lest Dinah should have changed her domicil. Yet would her uncle have named it for their meeting if he had not been sure of it? It was very odd he should have appointed that place at all, and Fleda was inclined to think he must have seen Dinah by some chance, or it never would have come into his head. Still her eye passed unheeding over all the varieties of dinginess and misery in her way, intent only upon finding that particular dingy cellar-way which used to admit her to Dinah's premises. It was found at last, and she went in.

The old woman, herself most unchanged, did not know the young lady, but well remembered the little girl whom Fleda brought to her mind. And then she was overjoyed to see her, and asked a multitude of questions, and told a long story of her having met Mr. Rossitur in the street the other day "in the last place where she'd have looked to see him;" and how old he had grown, and how surprised she had been to see the grey hairs in his head. Fleda at last gave her to understand that she expected him to meet her there and would like to see him alone; and the good woman immediately took her work into another apartment, made up the fire and set up the chairs, and leaving her assured Fleda she would lock up the doors "and not let no one come through."

It was sundown, and later, Fleda thought, and she felt as if every pulse was doing double duty. No matter--if she were shattered and the work done. But what work!--Oh the needlessness, the cruelty, the folly of it! And how much of the ill consequences she might be unable after all to ward off. She took off her hat, to relieve a nervous smothered feeling; and walked, and sat down; and then sat still, from trembling inability to do anything else. Dinah's poor little room, clean though it was, looked to her the most dismal place in the world from its association with her errand; she hid her face on her knees that she might have no disagreeableness to contend with but that which could not be shut out.

It had lain there some time, till a sudden felling of terror at the growing lateness made her raise it to look at the window. Mr. Rossitur was standing still before her, he must have come in very softly,--and looking,--oh Fleda had not imagined him looking so changed. All was forgotten,--the wrong, and the needlessness, and the indignation with which she had sometimes thought of it; Fleda remembered nothing but love and pity, and threw herself upon his neck with such tears of tenderness and sympathy, such kisses of forgiveness and comfort-speaking, as might have broken a stouter heart than Mr. Rossitur's. He held her in his arms for a few minutes, passively suffering her caresses, and then gently unloosing her hold placed her on a seat; sat down a little way off, covered his face and groaned aloud.

Fleda could not recover herself at once. Then shaking off her agitation she came and knelt down by his side and putting one arm over his shoulder laid her cheek against his forehead. Words were beyond reach, but his forehead was wet with her tears; and kisses, of soft entreaty, of winning assurance, said all she could say.

"What did you come here for, Fleda?" said Mr. Rossitur at length, without changing his position.

"To bring you home, uncle Rolf."

"Home!" said he, with an accent between bitterness and despair.

"Yes, for it's all over, it's all forgotten--there is no more to be said about it at all," said Fleda, getting her words out she didn't know how.

"What is forgotten?" said he harshly.

"All that you would wish, sir," replied Fleda softly and gently;--"there is no more to be done about it; and I came to tell you if possible before it was too late. Oh I'm so glad!--" and her arms and her cheek pressed closer as fresh tears stopped her voice.

"How do you know, Fleda?" said Mr. Rossitur raising his head and bringing hers to his shoulder, while his arms in turn enclosed her.

Fleda whispered, "He told me so himself."

"Who?"

"Mr. Thorn."

The words were but just spoken above her breath. Mr. Rossitur was silent for some time.

"Are you sure you understood him?"

"Yes, sir; it could not have been spoken plainer."

"Are you quite sure he meant what he said, Fleda?"

"Perfectly sure, uncle Rolf! I know he did."

"What stipulation did he make beforehand?"

"He did it without any stipulation, sir."

"What was his inducement then? If I know him he is not a man to act without any."

Fleda's cheek was dyed, but except that she gave no other answer.

"Why has it been left so long?" said her uncle presently.

"I don't know, sir--he said nothing about that. He promised that neither we nor the world should hear anything more of it."

"The world?" said Mr. Rossitur.

"No sir, he said that only one or two persons had any notion of it and that their secrecy he had the means of securing."

"Did he tell you anything more?"

"Only that he had the matter entirely under his control and that never a whisper of it should be heard again, No promise could be given more fully and absolutely."

Mr. Rossitur drew a long breath, speaking to Fleda's ear very great relief, and was silent.

"And what reward is he to have for this, Fleda?" he said after some musing.

"All that my hearty thanks and gratitude can give, as far as I am concerned, sir."

"Is that what he expects, Fleda?"

"I cannot help what he expects," said Fleda, in some distress.

"What have you engaged yourself to, my child?"

"Nothing in the world, uncle Rolf!" said Fleda earnestly--"nothing in the world. I haven't engaged myself to anything. The promise was made freely, without any sort of stipulation."

Mr. Rossitur looked thoughtful and disquieted. Fleda's tears were pouring again.

"I will not trust him," he said,--"I will not stay in the country!"

"But you will come home, uncle?" said Fleda, terrified.

"Yes my dear child--yes my dear child!" he said tenderly, putting his arms round Fleda again and kissing, with an earnestness of acknowledgment that went to her heart, her lips and brow,--"you shall do what you will with me; and when I go, we will all go together."

From Queechy! From America!--But she had no time for that thought now.

"You said 'for Hugh's sake,'" Mr. Rossitur observed after a pause, and with some apparent difficulty;--"what of him?"

"He is not well, uncle Rolf," said Fleda,--"and I think the best medicine will be the sight of you again."

Mr. Rossitur looked pale and was silent a moment.

"And my wife?" he said.

His face, and the thought of those faces at home, were too much for Fleda; she could not help it; "Oh, uncle Rolf," she said, hiding her face, "they only want to see you again now!"

Mr. Rossitur leaned his head in his hands and groaned; and Fleda could but cry; she felt there was nothing to say.

"It was for Marion," he said at length;--"it was when I was hard pressed and I was fearful if it were known that it might ruin her prospects.--I wanted that miserable sum--only four thousand dollars--that fellow Schwiden asked to borrow it of me for a few days, and to refuse would have been to confess all. I dared not try my credit, and I just madly took that step that proved irretrievable--I counted at the moment upon funds that were coming to me only the next week, sure, I thought, as possible,--but the man cheated me, and our embarrassments thickened from that time; that thing has been a weight--oh a weight of deadening power!--round my neck ever since. I have died a living death these six years!--"

"I know it, dear uncle--I know it all!" said Fleda, bringing the sympathizing touch of her cheek to his again.

"The good that it did has been unspeakably overbalanced by the evil--even long ago I knew that."

"The good that it did"! It was no time *then* to moralize, but he must know that Marion was at home, or he might incautiously reveal to her what happily there was no necessity for her ever knowing. And the story must give him great and fresh pain----

"Dear uncle Rolf!" said Fleda pressing closer to him, "we may be happier than we have been in a long time, if you will only take it so. The cloud upon you has been a cloud upon us."

"I know it!" he exclaimed,--"a cloud that served to shew me that my jewels were diamonds!"

"You have an accession to your jewels, uncle Rolf."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Fleda trembling, "that there are two more at home."

He held her back to look at her.

"Can't you guess who?"

"No!" said he. "What do you mean?"

"I must tell you, because they know nothing, and needn't know, of all this matter."

"What are you talking about?"

"Marion is there----"

"Marion!" exclaimed Mr. Rossitur, with quick changes of expression,--" Marion!--At Queechy!--and her husband?"

"No sir,--a dear little child."

"Marion!--and her husband--where is he?"

Fleda hesitated.

"I don't know--I don't know whether she knows--"

"Is he dead?"

"No sir--"

Mr. Rossitur put her away and got up and walked, or strode, up and down, up and down, the little apartment. Fleda dared not look at him, even by the faint glimmer that came from the chimney.

But abroad it was perfectly dark--the stars were shining, the only lamps that illumined the poor little street, and for a long time there had been no light in the room but that of the tiny wood fire. Dinah never could be persuaded of the superior cheapness of coal. Fleda came at last to her uncle's side and putting her arm within his said,

"How soon will you set off for home, uncle Rolf?"

"To-morrow morning."

"You must take the boat to Bridgeport now--you know the river is fast."

"Yes I know----"

"Then I will meet you at the wharf, uncle Rolf,--at what o'clock?"

"My dear child," said he, stopping and passing his hand tenderly over her cheek, "are you fit for it to-morrow? You had better stay where you are quietly for a few days--you want rest."

"No, I will go home with you," said Fleda, "and rest there. But hadn't we better let Dinah in and bid her good bye? for I ought to be somewhere else to get ready."

Dinah was called, and a few kind words spoken, and with a more substantial remembrance, or reward, from Fleda's hand, they left her.

Fleda had the support of her uncle's arm till they came within sight of the house, and then he stood and watched her while she went the rest of the way alone.

Then he stood and watched her.
Then he stood and watched her.

Anything more white and spirit-looking, and more spirit-like in its purity and peacefulness, surely did not walk that night. There was music in her ear, and abroad in the star-light, more ethereal than Ariel's, but she knew where it came from; it was the chimes of her heart that were ringing; and never a happier peal, nor never had the mental atmosphere been more clear for their sounding. Thankfulness,--that was the oftenest note,--swelling thankfulness for her success,--joy for herself and for the dear ones at home,--generous delight at having been the instrument of their relief,--the harmonies of pure affections, without any grating now,--the hope well grounded she thought, of improvement in her uncle and better times for them all,--a childlike peace that was at rest with itself and the world,--these were mingling and interchanging their music, and again and again in the midst of it all, faith rang the last chime in heaven.

Chapter XLIII.

> As some lone bird at day's departing hour
> Sings in the sunbeam of the transient shower,
> Forgetful though its wings are wet the while.
>
> Bowles.

Happily possessed with the notion that there was some hidden mystery in Fleda's movements, Mrs. Pritchard said not a word about her having gone out, and only spoke in looks her pain at the imprudence of which

she had been guilty. But when Fleda asked to have a carriage ordered to take her to the boat in the morning, the good housekeeper could not hold any longer.

"Miss Fleda," said she with a look of very serious remonstrance,--"I don't know what you're thinking of, but *I* know you're fixing to kill yourself. You are no more fit to go to Queechy to-morrow than you were to be out till seven o'clock this evening; and if you saw yourself you wouldn't want me to say any more. There is not the least morsel of colour in your face, and you look as if you had a mind to get rid of your body altogether as fast as you can! You want to be in bed for two days running, now this minute."

"Thank you, dear Mrs. Pritchard," said Fleda smiling; "you are very careful of me; but I must go home to-morrow, and go to bed afterwards."

The housekeeper looked at her a minute in silence, and then said, "Don't, dear Miss Fleda!"--with an energy of entreaty which brought the tears into Fleda's eyes. But she persisted in desiring the carriage; and Mrs. Pritchard was silenced, observing however that she shouldn't wonder if she wasn't able to go after all. Fleda herself was not without a doubt on the subject before the evening was over. The reaction, complete now, began to make itself felt; and morning settled the question. She was not able even to rise from her bed.

The housekeeper was, in a sort, delighted; and Fleda was in too passive a mood of body and mind to have any care on the subject. The agitation of the past days had given way to an absolute quiet that seemed as if nothing could ever ruffle it again, and this feeling was seconded by the extreme prostration of body. She was a mere child in the hands of her nurse, and had, Mrs. Pritchard said, "if she wouldn't mind her telling,--the sweetest baby-face that ever had so much sense belonging to it."

The morning was half spent in dozing slumbers, when Fleda heard a rush of footsteps, much lighter and sprightlier than good Mrs. Pritchard's, coming up the stairs and pattering along the entry to her room; and with little ceremony in rushed Florence and Constance Evelyn. They almost smothered Fleda with their delighted caresses, and ran so hard their questions about her looks and her illness, that she was well nigh spared the trouble of answering.

"You horrid little creature!" said Constance,--"why didn't you come straight to our house? just think of the injurious suspicions you have exposed us to!--to say nothing of the extent of fiction we have found ourselves obliged to execute. I didn't expect it of you, little Queechy."

Fleda kept her pale face quiet on the pillow, and only smiled her incredulous curiosity.

"But when did you come back, Fleda?" said Miss Evelyn.

"We should never have known a breath about your being here," Constance went on. "We were sitting last night in peaceful unconsciousness of there being any neglected calls upon our friendship in the vicinity, when Mr. Carleton came in and asked for you. Imagine our horror!--we said you had gone out early in the afternoon and had not returned."

"You didn't say that!" said Fleda colouring.

"And he remarked at some length," said Constance, "upon the importance of young ladies having some attendance when they are out late in the evening, and that you in particular were one of those persons--he didn't say, but he intimated, of a slightly volatile disposition,--whom their friends ought not to lose sight of."

"But what brought you to town again, Fleda?" said the elder sister.

"What makes you talk so, Constance?" said Fleda.

"I haven't told you the half!" said Constance demurely. "And then mamma excused herself as well as she could, and Mr. Carleton said very seriously that he knew there was a great element of head-strongness in your character--he had remarked it, he said, when you were arguing with Mr. Stackpole."

"Constance, be quiet!" said her sister. "*Will* you tell me, Fleda, what you have come to town for? I am dying with curiosity."

"Then it's inordinate curiosity, and ought to be checked, my dear," said Fleda smiling.

"Tell me!"

"I came to take care of some business that could not very well be attended to at a distance."

"Who did you come with?"

"One of our Queechy neighbours that I heard was coming to New York."

"Wasn't your uncle at home?"

"Of course not. If he had been, there would have been no need of my stirring."

"But was there nobody else to do it but you?"

"Uncle Orrin away, you know; and Charlton down at his post--Fort Hamilton, is it?--I forget which fort--he is fast there."

"He is not so very fast," said Constance, "for I see him every now and then in Broadway shouldering Mr. Thorn instead of a musket; and he has taken up the distressing idea that it is part of his duty to oversee the progress of Florence's worsted-work--(I've made over that horrid thing to her, Fleda)--or else his precision has been struck with the anomaly of blue stars on a white ground, and he is studying that,--I don't know

which,--and so every few nights he rushes over from Governor's Island, or somewhere, to prosecute enquiries. Mamma is quite concerned about him--she says he is wearing himself out."

The mixture of amusement, admiration, and affection, with which the other sister looked at her and laughed with her was a pretty thing to see.

"But where is your other cousin,--Hugh?" said Florence.

"He was not well."

"Where is your uncle?"

"He will be at home to-day I expect; and so should I have been--I meant to be there as soon as he was,--but I found this morning that I was not well enough,--to my sorrow."

"You were not going alone!"

"O no--a friend of ours was going to-day."

"I never saw anybody with so many friends!" said Florence. "But you are coming to us now, Fleda. How soon are you going to get up?"

"O by to-morrow," said Fleda smiling;--"but I had better stay where I am the little while I shall be here--I must go home the first minute I can find an opportunity."

"But you sha'n't find an opportunity till we've had you," said Constance. "I'm going to bring a carriage for you this afternoon. I could bear the loss of your friendship, my dear, but not the peril of my own reputation. Mr. Carleton is under the impression that you are suffering from a momentary succession of fainting fits, and if we were to leave you here in an empty house to come out of them at your leisure, what would he think of us?"

What would he think!--Oh world! Is this it?

But Fleda was not able to be moved in the afternoon; and it soon appeared that nature would take more revenge than a day's sleep for the rough handling she had had the past week. Fleda could not rise from her bed the next morning; and instead of that a kind of nondescript nervous fever set in; nowise dangerous, but very wearying. She was nevertheless extremely glad of it, for it would serve to explain to all her friends the change of look which had astonished them. They would make it now the token of coming, not of past, evil. The rest she took with her accustomed patience and quietness, thankful for everything after the anxiety and the relief she had just before known.

Dr. Gregory came home from Philadelphia in the height of her attack, and aggravated it for a day or two with the fear of his questioning. But Fleda was surprised at his want of curiosity. He asked her indeed what she had come to town for, but her whispered answer of "Business," seemed to satisfy him, for he did not inquire what the business was. He did ask her furthermore what had made her get sick; but this time he was satisfied more easily still, with a very curious sweet smile which was the utmost reply Fleda's wits at the moment could frame. "Well, get well," said he kissing her heartily once or twice, "and I won't quarrel with you about it."

The getting well however promised to be a leisurely affair. Dr. Gregory staid two or three days, and then went on to Boston, leaving Fleda in no want of him.

Mrs. Pritchard was the tenderest and carefullest of nurres. The Evelyns did everything *but* nurse her. They sat by her, talked to her, made her laugh, and not seldom made her look sober too, with their wild tales of the world and the world's doings. But they were indeed very affectionate and kind, and Fleda loved them for it. If they wearied her sometimes with their talk, it was a change from the weariness of fever and silence that on the whole was useful.

She was quieting herself one morning, as well as she could, in the midst of both, lying with shut eyes against her pillow, and trying to fix her mind on pleasant things, when she heard Mrs. Pritchard open the door and come in. She knew it was Mrs. Pritchard, so she didn't move nor look. But in a moment, the knowledge that Mrs. Pritchard's feet had stopped just by the bed, and a strange sensation of something delicious saluting her made her open her eyes; when they lighted upon a huge bunch of violets, just before them and in most friendly neighbourhood to her nose. Fleda started up, and her "Oh!" fairly made the housekeeper laugh; it was the very quintessence of gratification.

"Where did you get them?"

"I didn't get them indeed, Miss Fleda," said the housekeeper gravely, with an immense amount of delighted satisfaction.

"Delicious!--Where did they come from?"

"Well they must have come from a greenhouse, or hot-house, or something of that kind, Miss Fleda,--these things don't grow nowhere out o' doors at this time."

Mrs. Pritchard guessed Fleda had got the clue, from her quick change of colour and falling eye. There was a quick little smile too; and "How kind!" was upon the end of Fleda's tongue, but it never got any further. Her energies, so far as expression was concerned, seemed to be concentrated in the act of smelling. Mrs. Pritchard stood by.

"They must be put in water," said Fleda,--"I must have a dish for them--Dear Mrs. Pritchard, will you get me one?"

The housekeeper went smiling to herself. The dish was brought, the violets placed in it, and a little table at Fleda's request was set by the side of the bed close to her pillow, for them to stand upon. And Fleda lay on her pillow and looked at them.

There never were purer-breathed flowers than those. All the pleasant associations of Fleda's life seemed to hang about them, from the time when her childish eyes had first made acquaintance with violets, to the conversation in the library a few days ago; and painful things stood aloof; they had no part. The freshness of youth, and the sweetness of spring-time, and all the kindly influences which had ever joined with both to bless her, came back with their blessing in the violets' reminding breath. Fleda shut her eyes and she felt it; she opened her eyes, and the little double blue things smiled at her good humouredly and said, "Here we are--you may shut them again." And it was curious how often Fleda gave them a smile back as she did so.

Mrs. Pritchard thought Fleda lived upon the violets that day rather than upon food and medicine; or at least, she said, they agreed remarkably well together. And the next day it was much the same.

"What will you do when they are withered?" she said that evening. "I shall have to see and get some more for you."

"Oh they will last a great while," said Fleda smiling.

But the next morning Mrs. Pritchard came into her room with a great bunch of roses, the very like of the one Fleda had had at the Evelyns'. She delivered them with a sort of silent triumph, and then as before stood by to enjoy Fleda and the flowers together. But the degree of Fleda's wonderment, pleasure, and gratitude, made her reception of them, outwardly at least, this time rather grave.

"You may throw the others away now, Miss Fleda," said the housekeeper smiling.

"Indeed I shall not!--"

"The violets, I suppose, is all gone," Mrs. Pritchard went on;--but I never *did* see such a bunch of roses as that since I lived anywhere.--They have made a rose of you, Miss Fleda."

"How beautiful!--" was Fleda's answer.

"Somebody--he didn't say who--desired to know particularly how Miss Ringgan was to-day."

"Somebody is *very* kind!" said Fleda from the bottom of her heart. "But dear Mrs. Pritchard, I shall want another dish."

Somebody was kind, she thought more and more; for there came every day or two the most delicious bouquets, every day different. They were *at least* equal in their soothing and refreshing influences to all the efforts of all the Evelyns and Mrs. Pritchard put together. There never came any name with them, and there never was any need. Those bunches of flowers certainly had a physiognomy; and to Fleda were (not the flowers but the choosing, cutting, and putting of them together) the embodiment of an amount of grace, refined feeling, generosity, and kindness, that her imagination never thought of in connection with but one person. And his kindness was answered, perhaps Mrs. Pritchard better than Fleda guessed how well, from the delighted colour and sparkle of the eye with which every fresh arrival was greeted as it walked into her room. By Fleda's order the bouquets were invariably put out of sight before the Evelyns made their first visit in the morning, and not brought out again till all danger of seeing them any more for the day was past. The regular coming of these floral messengers confirmed Mrs. Pritchard in her mysterious surmises about Fleda, which were still further strengthened by this incomprehensible order; and at last she got so into the spirit of the thing that if she heard an untimely ring at the door she would catch up a glass of flowers and run as if they had been contraband, without a word from anybody.

The Evelyns wrote to Mrs. Rossitur, by Fleda's desire, so as not to alarm her; merely saying that Fleda was not quite well, and that they meant to keep her a little while to recruit herself; and that Mrs. Rossitur must send her some clothes. This last clause was tha particular addition of Constance.

The fever lasted a fortnight, and then went off by degrees, leaving her with a very small portion of her ordinary strength. Fleda was to go to the Evelyns as soon as she could bear it; at present she was only able to come down to the little back parlour and sit in the doctor's arm chair, and eat jelly, and sleep, and look at Constance, and when Constance was not there look at her flowers. She could hardly bear a book as yet. She hadn't a bit of colour in her face, Mrs. Pritchard said, but she looked better than when she came to town; and to herself the good housekeeper added, that she looked happier too. No doubt that was true. Fleda's principal feeling, ever since she lay down in her bed, had been thankfulness; and now that the ease of returning health was joined to this feeling, her face with all its subdued gravity was as untroubled in its expression as the faces of her flowers.

She was disagreeably surprised one day, after she had been two or three days down stairs, by a visit from Mrs. Thorn. In her well-grounded dread of seeing one person Fleda had given strict orders that no *gentleman* should be admitted; she had not counted upon this invasion. Mrs. Thorn had always been extremely kind to her, but though Fleda gave her credit for thorough good-heartedness, and a true liking for herself, she could not disconnect her attentions from another thought, and therefore always wished them away; and never had her kind face been more thoroughly disagreeable to Fleda than when it made its appearance in the doctor's little back parlour on this occasion. With even more than her usual fondness, or Pleda's excited imagination fancied so, Mrs. Thorn lavished caresses upon her, and finally besought her to go out and take the air in her carriage. Fleda tried most earnestly to get rid of this invitation, and was gently unpersuadable, till the lady at last was brought to promise that she should see no creature during the drive but herself. An ominous promise! but Fleda did not know any longer how, to refuse without hurting a person for whom she had really a grateful regard. So she went. And doubted afterwards exceedingly whether she had done well.

She took special good care to see nobody again till she went to the Evelyns. But then precautions were at an end. It was no longer possible to keep herself shut up. She had cause, poor child, the very first night of her coming, to wish herself back again.

This first evening she would fain have pleaded weakness as her excuse and gone to her room, but Constance laid violent hands on her and insisted that she should stay at least a little while with them. And she seemed fated to see all her friends in a bevy. First came Charlton; then followed the Decaturs, whom she knew and liked very well, and engrossed her, happily before her cousin had time to make any enquiries; then came Mr. Carleton; then Mr. Stackpole. Then Mr. Thorn, in expectation of whom Fleda's breath had been coming and going painfully all the evening. She could not meet him without a strange mixture of embarrassment and confusion with the gratitude she wished to express, an embarrassment not at all lessened by the air of happy confidence with which he came forward to her. It carried an intimation that almost took away the little strength she had. And if anything could have made his presence more intolerable, it was the feeling she could not get rid of that it was the cause why Mr. Carleton did not come near her again; though she prolonged her stay in the drawing-room in the hope that he would. It proved to be for Mr. Thorn's benefit alone.

"Well you staid all the evening after all," said Constance as they were going up stairs.

"Yes--I wish I hadn't," said Fleda. "I wonder when I shall be likely to find a chance of getting back to Queechy."

"You're not fit yet, so you needn't trouble yourself about it," said Constance. "We'll find you plenty of chances."

Fleda could not think of Mr. Thorn without trembling. His manner meant--so much more than it had any right, or than she had counted upon. He seemed--she pressed her hands upon her face to get rid of the

impression--he seemed to take for granted precisely that which she had refused to admit; he seemed to reckon as paid for that which she had declined to set a price upon. Her uncle's words and manner came up in her memory. She could see nothing best to do but to get home as fast as possible. She had no one here to fall back upon. Again that vision of father and mother and grandfather flitted across her fancy; and though Fleda's heart ended by resting down on that foundation to which it always recurred, it rested with a great many tears.

For several days she denied herself absolutely to morning visitors of every kind. But she could not entirely absent herself from the drawing-room in the evening; and whenever the family were at home there was a regular levee. Mr. Thorn could not be avoided then. He was always there, and always with that same look and manner of satisfied confidence. Fleda was as grave, as silent, as reserved, as she could possibly be and not be rude; but he seemed to take it in excellent good part, as being half indisposition and half timidity. Fleda set her face earnestly towards home, and pressed Mrs. Evelyn to find her an opportunity, weak or strong, of going there; but for those days as yet none presented itself.

Mr. Carleton was at the house almost as often as Mr. Thorn, seldom staying so long however, and never having any more to do with Fleda than he had that first evening. Whenever he did come in contact with her, he was, she thought, as grave as he was graceful. That was to be sure his common manner in company, yet she could not help thinking there was some difference since the walk they had taken together, and it grieved her.

Chapter XLIV.

The beat-laid schemes o' mice and men
Gang aft agley.

Burns.

After a few days Charlton verified what Constance had said about his not being very *fast* at Fort Hamilton, by coming again to see them one morning. Fleda asked him if he could not get another furlough to go with her home, but he declared he was just spending one which was near out; and he could not hope for a third in some time; he must be back at his post by the day after to-morrow.

"When do you want to go, coz?"

"I would to-morrow, if I had anybody to go with me," said Fleda sighing.

"No you wouldn't," said Constance,--"you are well enough to go out now, and you forget we are all to make Mrs. Thorn happy to-morrow night."

"I am not," said Fleda.

"Not? you can't help yourself; you must; you said you would."

"I did not indeed."

"Well then I said it for you, and that will do just as well. Why my dear, if you don't--just think!--the Thorns will be in a state--I should prefer to go through a hedge of any description rather than meet the trying demonstrations which will encounter me on every side."

"I am going to Mrs. Decatur's," said Fleda;--"she invited me first, and I owe it to her, she has asked me so often and so kindly."

"I shouldn't think you'd enjoy yourself there," said Florence; "they don't talk a bit of English these nights. If I was going, my dear, I would act as your interpreter, but my destiny lies in another direction."

"If I cannot make anybody understand my French I will get somebody to condescend to my English," said Fleda.

"Why do you talk French?" was the instant question from both mouths.

"Unless she has forgotten herself strangely," said Charlton. "Talk! she will talk to anybody's satisfaction--that happens to differ from her; and I think her tongue cares very little which language it wags in. There is no danger about Fleda's enjoying herself, where people are talking."

Fleda laughed at him, and the Evelyns rather stared at them both.

"But we are all going to Mrs. Thorn's? you can't go alone?"

"I will make Charlton take me," said Fleda,--"or rather I will take him, if he will let me. Will you, Charlton? will you take care of me to Mrs. Decatur's to-morrow night?"

"With the greatest pleasure, my dear coz, but I have another engagement in the course of the evening."

"Oh that is nothing," said Fleda;--"if you will only go with me, that is all I care for. You needn't stay but ten minutes. And you can call for me," she added, turning to the Evelyns,--"as you come back from Mrs. Thorn's."

To this no objection could be made, and the ensuing raillery Fleda bore with steadiness at least if not with coolness; for Charlton heard it, and she was distressed.

She went to Mrs. Decatur's the next evening in greater elation of spirits than she had known since she left her uncle's; delighted to be missing from the party at Mrs. Thorn's, and hoping that Mr. Lewis would be satisfied with this very plain hint of her mind. A little pleased too to feel quite free, alone from too friendly eyes, and ears that had too lively a concern in her sayings and doings. She did not in the least care about going to Mrs. Decatur's; her joy was that she was not at the other place. But there never was elation so outwardly quiet. Nobody would have suspected its existence.

The evening was near half over when Mr. Carleton came in. Fleda had half hoped he would be there, and now immediately hoped she might have a chance to see him alone and to thank him for his flowers; she had not been able to do that yet. He presently came up to speak to her just as Charlton, who had found attraction enough to keep him so long, came to tell he was going.

"You are looking better," said the former, as gravely as ever, but with an eye of serious interest that made the word something.

"I am better," said Fleda gratefully.

"So much better that she is in a hurry to make herself worse," said her cousin. "Mr. Carleton, you are a professor of medicine, I believe,--I have an indistinct impression of your having once prescribed a ride on horseback for somebody;--wouldn't you recommend some measure of prudence to her consideration?"

"In general," Mr. Carleton answered gravely; "but in the present case I could not venture upon any special prescription, Capt. Rossitur."

"As for instance, that she should remain in New York till she is fit to leave it?--By the way, what brought you here again in such a hurry, Fleda? I haven't heard that yet."

The question was rather sudden. Fleda was a little taken by surprise; her face shewed some pain and confusion both. Mr. Carleton prevented her answer, she could not tell whether with design.

"What imprudence do you charge your cousin with, Capt. Rossitur?"

"Why she is in a great hurry to get back to Queechy, before she is able to go anywhere--begging me to find an escort for her. It is lucky I can't. I didn't know I ever should be glad to be 'posted up' in this fashion, but I am."

"You have not sought very far, Capt. Rossitur," said the voice of Thorn behind him. "Here is one that will be very happy to attend Miss Fleda, whenever she pleases."

Fleda's shocked start and change of countenance was seen by more eyes than one pair. Thorn's fell, and a shade crossed his countenance too, for an instant, that Fleda's vision was too dazzled to see. Mr. Carleton moved away.

"Why are *you* going to Queechy?" said Charlton astonished.

His friend was silent a moment, perhaps for want of power to speak. Fleda dared not look at him.

"It is not impossible,--unless this lady forbid me. I am not a fixture."

"But what brought you here, man, to offer your services?" said Charlton;--"most ungallantly leaving so many pairs of bright eyes to shine upon your absence."

"Mr. Thorn will not find himself in darkness here, Capt. Rossitur," said Mrs. Decatur.

"It's my opinion he ought, ma'am," said Charlton.

"It is my opinion every man ought, who makes his dependance on gleams of sunshine," said Mr. Thorn rather cynically. "I cannot say I was thinking of brightness before or behind me."

"I should think not," said Charlton;--"you don't look as if you had seen any in a good while."

"A light goes out every now and then," said Thorn, "and it takes one's eyes some time to get accustomed to it. What a singular world we live in, Mrs. Decatur!"

"That is so new an idea," said the lady laughing, "that I must request an explanation."

"What new experience of its singularity has your wisdom made?" sid his friend. "I thought you and the world knew each other's faces pretty well before."

"Then you have not heard the news?"

"What news?"

"Hum--I suppose it is not about yet," said Thorn composedly. "No--you haven't heard it."

"But what, man?" said Charlton,--"let's hear your news, for I must be off."

"Why--but it is no more than rumour yet--but it is said that strange things are coming to light about a name that used to be held in very high respect."

"In this city?"

"In this city?--yes--it is said proceedings are afoot against one of our oldest citizens, on charge of a very grave offence."

"Who?--and what offence? what do you mean?"

"Is it a secret, Mr. Thorn?" said Mrs. Decatur.

"If you have not heard, perhaps it is as well not to mention names too soon;--if it comes out it will be all over directly; possibly the family may hush it up, and in that case the less said the better; but those have it in hand that will not let it slip through their fingers."

Mrs. Decatur turned away, saying "how shocking such things were;" and Thorn, with a smile which did not however light up his face, said,

"You may be off, Charlton, with no concern for the bright eyes you leave behind you--I will endeavour to atone for my negligence elsewhere, by my mindfulness of them."

"Don't excuse you," said Charlton;--but his eye catching at the moment another attraction opposite in the form of man or woman, instead of quitting the room he leisurely crossed it to speak to the new-comer; and Thorn with an entire change of look and manner pressed forward and offered his arm to Fleda, who was looking perfectly white. If his words had needed any commentary it was given by his eye as it met hers in speaking the last sentence to Mrs. Decatur. No one was near whom she knew and Mr. Thorn led her out to a little back room where the gentlemen had thrown off their cloaks, where the air was fresher, and placing her on a seat stood waiting before her till she could speak to him.

"What do you mean, Mr. Thorn?" Fleda looked as much as said, when she could meet his face.

"I may rather ask you what *you* mean, Miss Fleda," he answered gravely.

Fleda drew breath painfully.

"I mean nothing," she said lowering her head again,--"I have done nothing--"

"Did you think I meant nothing when I agreed to do all you wished?"

"I thought you said you would do it freely," she said, with a tone of voice that might have touched anybody, there was such a sinking of heart in it.

"Didn't you understand me?"

"And is it all over now?" said Fleda after a pause.

"Not yet--but it soon may be. A weak hand may stop it now,--it will soon be beyond the power of the strongest."

"And what becomes of your promise that it should no more be heard of?" said Fleda, looking up at him with a colourless face but eyes that put the question forcibly nevertheless.

"Is any promise bound to stand without its conditions?"

"I made no conditions," said Fleda quickly.

"Forgive me,--but did you not permit me to understand them?"

"No!--or if I did I could not help it."

"Did you say that you wished to help it?" said he gently.

"I must say so now, then, Mr. Thorn," said Fleda withdrawing the hand he had taken;--"I did not mean or wish you to think so, but I was too ill to speak--almost to know what I did--It was not my fault--"

"You do not make it mine, that I chose such a time, selfishly, I grant, to draw from your lips the words that are more to me than life?"

"Cannot you be generous?"--*for once*, she was very near saying.

"Where you are concerned, I do not know how."

Fleda was silent a moment, and then bowed her face in her hands.

"May I not ask that question of you?" said he, bending down and endeavouring to remove them;--"will you not say--or look--that word that will make others happy beside me?"

"I cannot, sir."

"Not for their sakes?" he said calmly.

"Can you ask me to do for theirs what I would not for my own?"

"Yes--for mine," he said, with a meaning deliberateness.

Fleda was silent, with a face of white determination.

"It will be beyond *eluding*, as beyond recall, the second time. I may seem selfish--I am selfish--but dear Miss Ringgan you do not see all,--you who make me so can make me anything else with a touch of your hand--it is selfishness that would be bound to your happiness, if you did but entrust it to me."

Fleda neither spoke nor looked at him and rose up from her chair.

"Is this *your* generosity?" he said, pointedly though gently.

"That is not the question now, sir," said Fleda, who was trembling painfully. "I cannot do evil that good may come."

"But *evil*?" said he detaining her,--"what evil do I ask of you?--to *remove* evil, I do."

Fleda clasped her hands, but answered calmly,

"I cannot make any pretences, sir;--I cannot promise to give what is not in my power."

"In whose power then?" said he quickly.

A feeling of indignation came to Fleda's aid, and she turned away. But he stopped her still.

"Do you think I do not understand?" he said with a covert sneer that had the keenness and hardness, and the brightness, of steel.

"*I* do not, sir," said Fleda.

"Do you think I do not know whom you came here to meet?"

Fleda's glance of reproach was a most innocent one, but it did not check him.

"Has that fellow renewed his old admiration of you?" he went on in the same tone.

"Do not make me desire his old protection," said Fleda, her gentle face roused to a flush of displeasure.

"Protection!" said Charlton coming in,--"who wants protection? here it is--protection from what? my old friend Lewis? what the deuce does this lady want of protection, Mr. Thorn?"

It was plain enough that Fleda wanted it, from the way she was drooping upon his arm.

"You may ask the lady herself," said Thorn, in the same tone he had before used,--"I have not the honour to be her spokesman."

"She don't need one," said Charlton,--"I addressed myself to you--speak for yourself, man."

"I am not sure that it would be her pleasure I should," said Thorn. "Shall I tell this gentleman, Miss Ringgan, who needs protection, and from what?--"

Fleda raised her head, and putting her hand on his arm looked a concentration of entreaty--lips were sealed.

"Will you give me," said he gently taking the hand in his own, "your sign manual for Capt. Rossitur's security? It is not too late.--Ask it of her, sir!"

"What does this mean?" said Charlton looking from his cousin to his friend.

"You shall have the pleasure of knowing, sir, just so soon as I find it convenient."

"I will have a few words with you on this subject, my fine fellow," said Capt. Rossitur, as the other was preparing to leave the room.

"You had better speak to somebody else," said Thorn. "But I am ready."

Charlton muttered an imprecation upon his absurdity, and turned his attention to Fleda, who needed it. And yet desired anything else. For a moment she had an excuse for not answering his questions in her inability; and then opportunely Mrs. Decatur came in to look after her; and she was followed by her daughter. Fleda roused all her powers to conceal and command her feelings; rallied herself; said she had been a little weak and faint; drank water, and declared herself able to go back into the drawing-room. To go home would have been her utmost desire, but at the instant her energies were all bent to the one point of putting back thought and keeping off suspicion. And in the first hurry and bewilderment of distress the dread of finding herself alone with Charlton till she had had time to collect her thoughts would of itself have been enough to prevent her accepting the proposal.

She entered the drawing-room again on Mrs. Decatur's arm, and had stood a few minutes talking or listening, with that same concentration of all her faculties upon the effort to bear up outwardly, when Charlton came up to ask if he should leave her. Fleda made no objection, and he was out of her sight, far enough to be beyond reach or recall, when it suddenly struck her that she ought not to have let him go without speaking to him,--without entreating him to see her in the morning before he saw Thorn. The sickness of this new apprehension was too much for poor Fleda's power of keeping up. She quietly drew her arm from Mrs. Decatur's, saying that she would sit down; and sought out a place for herself apart from the rest by an engraving stand; where for a little while, not to seem unoccupied, she turned over print after print that she did not see. Even that effort failed at last; and she sat gazing at one of Sir Thomas Lawrence's bright-faced children, and feeling as if in

herself the tides of life were setting back upon their fountain preparatory to being still forever. She became sensible that some one was standing beside the engravings, and looked up at Mr. Carleton.

"Are you ill?" he said, very gently and tenderly.

The answer was a quick motion of Fleda's hand to her head, speaking sudden pain, and perhaps sudden difficulty of self-command. She did not speak.

"Will you have anything?"

A whispered "no."

"Would you like to return to Mrs. Evelyn's?--I have a carriage here."

With a look of relief that seemed to welcome him as her good angel, Pleda instantly rose up, and took the arm he offered her. She would have hastened from the room then, but he gently checked her pace; and Fleda was immediately grateful for the quiet and perfect shielding from observation that his manner secured her. He went with her up the stairs, and to the very door of the dressing-room. There Fleda hurried on her shoes and mufflers in trembling fear that some one might come and find her, gained Mr. Carleton's arm again, and was placed in the carriage.

The drive was in perfect silence, and Fleda's agony deepened and strengthened with every minute. She had freedom to think, and thought did but carry a torch into chamber after chamber of misery. There seemed nothing to be done. She could not get hold of Charlton; and if she could?--Nothing could be less amenable than his passions to her gentle restraints. Mr. Thorn was still less approachable or manageable, except in one way, that she did not even think of. His insinuations about Mr. Carleton did not leave even a tinge of embarrassment upon her mind; they were cast from her as insulting absurdities, which she could not think of a second time without shame.

The carriage rolled on with them a long time without a word being said. Mr. Carleton knew that she was not weeping nor faint. But as the light of the lamps was now and then cast within the carriage he saw that her face looked ghastly; and he saw too that its expression was not of a quiet sinking under sorrow, nor of an endeavour to bear up against it, but a wild searching gaze into the darkness of *possibilities*. They had near reached Mrs. Evelyn's.

"I cannot see you so," he said, gently touching the hand which lay listlessly beside him. "You are ill!"

Again the same motion of the other hand to her face, the quick token of great pain suddenly stirred.

"For the sake of old times, let me ask," said he, "can nothing be done?"

Those very gentle and delicate tones of sympathy and kindness Were too much to bear. The hand was snatched away to be pressed to her face. Oh that those old times were back again, and she a child that could ask his protection!--No one to give it now.

He was silent a moment. Fleda's head bowed beneath the mental pressure.

"Has Dr. Gregory returned?"

The negative answer was followed by a half-uttered exclamation of longing,--checked midway, but sufficiently expressive of her want.

"Do you trust me?" he said after another second of pausing.

"Perfectly!" said Fleda amidst her tears, too much excited to know what she was saying, and in her simplicity half forgetting that she was not a child still;--"more than any one in the world!"

The few words he had spoken, and the manner of them, had curiously borne her back years in a minute; she seemed to be under his care more than for the drive home. He did not speak again for a minute; when he did his tone was very quiet and lower than before.

"Give me what a friend *can* have in charge to do for you, and it shall be done."

Fleda raised her head and looked out of the window in a silence of doubt. The carriage stopped at Mrs. Evelyn's.

"Not now," said Mr. Carleton, as the servant was about to open the door;--"drive round the square--till I speak to you."

Fleda was motionless and almost breathless with uncertainty. If Charlton could be hindered from meeting Mr. Thorn--But how, could Mr. Carleton effect it?--But there was that in him or in his manner which invariably created confidence in his ability, or fear of it, even in strangers; and how much more in her who had a childish but very clear recollection of several points in his character which confirmed the feeling. And might not something be done, through his means, to facilitate her uncle's escape? of whom she seemed to herself now the betrayer.--But to tell him the story I--a person of his high nice notions of character--what a distance it would put even between his friendship and her,--but that thought was banished instantly, with one glance at Mr. Thorn's imputation of ungenerousness. To sacrifice herself to *him* would not have been generosity,--to lower herself in the esteem of a different character, she felt, called for it. There was time even then too for one swift thought of the needlessness and bitter fruits of wrong-doing. But here they were;--should she make them known?--and trouble Mr. Carleton, friend though he were, with these miserable matters in which he had no concern?--She sat with a beating heart and a very troubled brow, but a brow as easy to read as a child's. It was the trouble of anxious questioning. Mr. Carleton watched it for a little while,--undecided as ever, and more pained.

"You said you trusted me," he said quietly, taking her hand again.

"But--I don't know what you could do, Mr. Carleton," Fleda said with a trembling voice.

"Will you let me be the judge of that?"

"I cannot bear to trouble you with these miserable things--"

"You cannot," said he with that same quiet tone, "but by thinking and saying so. I can have no greater pleasure than to take pains for you."

Fleda heard these words precisely and with the same simplicity as a child would have heard them, and answered with a very frank burst of tears,--soon, as soon as possible, according to her custom, driven back; though even in the act of quieting herself they broke forth again as uncontrollably as at first. But Mr. Carleton had not long to wait. She raised her head again after a short struggle, with the wonted look of patience sitting upon her brow, and wiping away her tears paused merely for breath and voice. He was perfectly silent.

"Mr. Carleton, I will tell you," she began;--"I hardly know whether I ought or ought not,--" and her hand went to her forehead for a moment,--"but I cannot think to-night--and I have not a friend to apply to--"

She hesitated; and then went on, with a voice that trembled and quavered sadly.

"Mr. Thorn has a secret--of my uncle's--in his power--which he promised--without conditions--to keep faithfully; and now insists that he will not--but upon conditions--"

"And cannot the conditions be met?"

"No--and--O I may as well tell you at once?" said Fleda in bitter sorrow,--"it is a crime that he committed--"

"Mr. Thorn?"

"No--oh no!" said Fleda weeping bitterly,--"not he--"

Her agitation was excessive for a moment; then she threw it off, and spoke more collectedly, though with exceeding depression of manner.

"It was long ago--when he was in trouble--he put Mr. Thorn's name to a note, and never was able to take it up;--and nothing was ever heard about it till lately; and last week he was going to leave the country, and Mr. Thorn promised that the proceedings should be entirely given up; and that was why I came to town, to find uncle Rolf and bring him home; and I did, and he is gone; and now Mr. Thorn says it is all going on again and that he will not escape this time;--and I have done it!--"

Fleda writhed again in distress.

"Thorn promised without conditions?"

"Certainly--he promised freely--and now he insists upon them; and you see uncle Rolf would have been safe out of the country now, if it hadn't been for me--"

"I think I can undo this snarl," said Mr. Carleton calmly.

"But that is not all," said Fleda, a little quieted;--"Charlton came in this evening when we were talking, and he was surprised to find me so, and Mr. Thorn was in a very ill humour, and some words passed between them; and Charlton threatened to see him again; and Oh if he does!" said poor Fleda,--"that will finish our difficulties!--for Charlton is very hot, and I know how it will end--how it must end--"

"Where is your cousin to be found?"

"I don't know where he lodges when he is in town."

"You did not leave him at Mrs. Decatur's. Do you know where he is this evening?"

"Yes!" said Fleda, wondering that she should have heard and remembered,--"he said he was going to meet a party of his brother officers at Mme. Fouché's--a sister-in-law of his Colonel, I believe."

"I know her. This note--was it the name of the young Mr. Thorn, or of his father that was used?"

"Of his father!--"

"Has *he* appeared at all in this business?"

"No," said Fleda, feeling for the first time that there was something notable about it.

"What sort of person do you take him to be?"

"Very kind--very pleasant, always, he has been to me, and I should think to everybody,--very unlike the son"

Mr. Carleton had ordered the coachman back to Mrs. Evelyn's.

"Do you know the amount of the note? It may be desirable that I should not appear uninformed."

"It was for four thousand dollars" Fleda said in the low voice of shame.

"And when given?"

"I don't know exactly--but six years ago--some time in the winter of '43, it must have been."

He said no more till the carriage stopped; and then before handing her out of it, lifted her hand to his lips. That carried all the promise Fleda wanted from him. How oddly, how curiously, her hand kept the feeling of that kiss upon it all night.

Chapter XLV.

Heat not a furnace for your friend so hot
That it may singe yourself.

Shakspeare.

Mr. Carleton went to Mme. Fouché's, who received most graciously, as any lady would, his apology for introducing himself unlooked-for, and begged that he would commit the same fault often. As soon as practicable he made his way to Charlton, and invited him to breakfast with him the next morning.

Mrs. Carleton always said it never was known that Guy was refused anything he had a mind to ask. Charlton, though taken by surprise, and certainly not too much prepossessed in his favour, was won by an influence that where its owner chose to exert it was generally found irresistible; and not only accepted the invitation, but was conscious to himself of doing it with a good deal of pleasure. Even when Mr. Carleton made the further request that Capt. Rossitur would in the mean time see no one on business, of any kind, intimating that the reason would then be given, Charlton though startling a little at this restraint upon his freedom of motion could do no other than give the desired promise, and with the utmost readiness.

Guy then went to Mr. Thorn's.--It was by this time not early.

"Mr. Lewis Thorn--is he at home?"

"He is, sir," said the servant admitting him rather hesitatingly.

"I wish to see him a few moments on business."

"It is no hour for business," said the voice of Mr. Lewis from over the balusters;--"I can't see anybody to-night."

"I ask but a few minutes," said Mr. Carleton. "It is important."

"It may be any thing!" said Thorn. "I won't do business after twelve o'clock."

Mr. Carleton desired the servant to carry his card, with the same request, to Mr, Thorn the elder.

"What's that?" said Thorn as the man came up stairs,--"my father?--Pshaw! *he* can't attend to it--Well, walk up, sir, if you please!--may as well have it over and done with it."

Mr. Carleton mounted the stairs and followed the young gentleman into an apartment to which he rapidly led the way.

"You've no objections to this, *I* suppose?" Thorn remarked as he locked the door behind them.

"Certainly not," said Mr. Carleton coolly, taking out the key and putting it in his pocket;--"my business is private--it needs no witnesses."

"Especially as it so nearly concerns yourself," said Thorn sneeringly.

"Which part of it, sir?" said Mr. Carleton with admirable breeding. It vexed at the same time that it constrained Thorn.

"I'll let you know presently!" he said, hurriedly proceeding to the lower end of the room where some cabinets stood, and unlocking door after door in mad haste.

The place had somewhat the air of a study, perhaps Thorn's private room. A long table stood in the middle of the floor, with materials for writing, and a good many books were about the room, in cases and on the tables, with maps and engravings and portfolios, and a nameless collection of articles, the miscellaneous gathering of a man of leisure and some literary taste.

Their owner presently came back from the cabinets with tokens of a very different kind about him.

"There, sir!" he said, offering to his guest a brace of most inhospitable-looking pistols,--"take one and take your stand, as soon as you please--nothing like coming to the point at once!"

He was heated and excited even more than his manner indicated. Mr. Carleton glanced at him and stood quietly examining the pistol he had taken. It was all ready loaded.

"This is a business that comes upon me by surprise," he said calmly,--"I don't know what I have to do with this, Mr. Thorn."

"Well I do," said Thorn, "and that's enough. Take your place, sir! You escaped me once, but"--and he gave his words dreadful emphasis,--"you won't do it the second time!"

"You do not mean," said the other, "that your recollection of such an offence has lived out so many years?"

"No sir! no sir!" said Thorn,--"it is not that. I despise it, as I do the offender. You have touched me more nearly."

"Let me know in what," said Mr. Carleton turning his pistol's mouth down upon the table and leaning on it.

"You know already,--what do you ask me for?" said Thorn who was foaming,--"if you say you don't you lie heartily. I'll tell you nothing but out of *this*--"

"I have not knowingly injured you, sir,--in a whit."

"Then a Carleton may be a liar," said Thorn, "and you are one--dare say not the first. Put yourself there, sir, will you?"

"Well," said Guy carelessly,--"if it is decreed that I am to fight of course there's no help for it; but as I have business on hand that might not be so well done afterwards I must beg your attention to that in the first place."

"No, sir," said Thorn,--"I'll attend to nothing--I'll hear nothing from you. I know you!--I'll not hear a word. I'll see to the business!--Take your stand."

"I will not have anything to do with pistols," said Mr. Carleton coolly, laying his out of his hand;--"they make too much noise."

"Who cares for the noise?" said Thorn. "It won't hurt you; and the door is locked."

"But people's ears are not," said Guy.

Neither tone nor attitude nor look had changed in the least its calm gracefulness. It began to act upon Thorn.

"Well, in the devil's name, have your own way," said he, throwing down his pistol too, and going back to the cabinets at the lower end of the room,--"there are rapiers here, if you like them better--*I* don't,--the shortest the best for me,--but here they are--take your choice."

Guy examined them carefully for a few minutes, and then laid them both, with a firm hand upon them, on the table.

"I will choose neither, Mr. Thorn, till you have heard me. I came here to see you on the part of others--I should be a recreant to my charge if I allowed you or myself to draw me into anything that might prevent my fulfilling it. That must be done first."

Thorn looked with a lowering brow on the indications of his opponent's eye and attitude; they left him plainly but one course to take.

"Well speak and have done," he said as in spite of himself;--but I know it already."

"I am here as a friend of Mr. Rossitur."

"Why don't you say a friend of somebody else, and come nearer the truth?" said Thorn.

There was an intensity of expression in his sneer, but pain was there as well as anger; and it was with even a feeling of pity that Mr. Carleton answered,

"The truth will be best reached, sir, if I am allowed to choose my own words."

There was no haughtiness in the steady gravity of this speech, whatever there was in the quiet silence he permitted to follow. Thorn did not break it.

"I am informed of the particulars concerning this prosecution of Mr. Rossitur--I am come here to know if no terms can be obtained."

"No!" said Thorn,--"no terms--I won't speak of terms. The matter will be followed up now till the fellow is lodged in jail, where he deserves to be."

"Are you aware, sir, that this, if done, will be the cause of very great distress to a family who have *not* deserved it?"

"That can't be helped," said Thorn. "Of course!--it must cause distress, but you can't act upon that. Of course when a man turns rogue he ruins his family--that's part of his punishment--and a just one."

"The law is just," said Mr. Carleton,--"but a friend may be merciful."

"I don't pretend to be a friend," said Thorn viciously,--"and I have no cause to be merciful. I like to bring a man to public shame when he has forfeited his title to anything else; and I intend that Mr. Rossitur shall become intimately acquainted with the interior of the State's Prison."

"Did it ever occur to you that public shame *might* fall upon other than Mr. Rossitur? and without the State Prison?"

Thorn fixed a somewhat startled look upon the steady powerful eye of his opponent, and did not like its meaning.

"You must explain yourself, sir," he said haughtily.

"I am acquainted with *all* the particulars of this proceeding, Mr. Thorn. If it goes abroad, so surely will they."

"She told you, did she?" said Thorn in a sudden flash of fury.

Mr. Carleton was silent, with his air of imperturbable reserve, telling and expressing nothing but a cool independence that put the world at a distance.

"Ha!" said Thorn,--"it is easy to see why our brave Englishman comes here to solicit 'terms' for his honest friend Rossitur--he would not like the scandal of franking letters to Sing Sing. Come, sir," he said snatching up the pistol,--"our business is ended--come, I say! or I won't wait for you."

But the pistol was struck from his baud.

"Not yet," said Mr. Carleton calmly,--"you shall have your turn at these,--mind, I promise you;--but my business must be done first--till then, let them alone!"

"Well what is it?" said Thorn impatiently. "Rossitur will be a convict, I tell you; so you'll have to give up all thoughts of his niece, or pocket her shame along with her. What more have you got to say? that's all your business, I take it."

"You are mistaken, Mr. Thorn," said Mr. Carleton gravely.

"Am I? In what?"

"In every position of your last speech."

"It don't affect your plans and views, I suppose, personally, whether this prosecution is continued or not?"

"It does not in the least."

"It is indifferent to you, I suppose, what sort of a Queen consort you carry to your little throne of a provinciality down yonder?"

"I will reply to you, sir, when you come back to the subject," said Mr. Carleton coldly.

"You mean to say that your pretensions have not been in the way of mine?"

"I have made none, sir."

"Doesn't she like you?"

"I have never asked her."

"Then what possessed her to tell you all this to-night?"

"Simply because I was an old friend and the only one at hand, I presume."

"And you do not look for any reward of your services, of course?"

"I wish for none, sir, but her relief."

"Well, it don't signify," said Thorn with a mixture of expressions in his face,--"if I believed you, which I don't,--it don't signify a hair what you do, when once this matter is known. I should never think of advancing *my* pretensions into a felon's family."

"You know that the lady in whose welfare you take so much interest will in that case suffer aggravated distress as having been the means of hindering Mr. Rossitur's escape,"

"Can't help it," said Thorn, beating the table with a ruler;--"so she has; she must suffer for it. It isn't my fault."

"You are willing then to abide the consequences of a full disclosure of all the circumstances?--for part will not come out without the whole?"

"There is happily nobody to tell them," said Thorn with a sneer.

"Pardon me--they will not only be told, but known thoroughly in all the circles in this country that know Mr. Thorn's name."

"*The lady*" said Thorn in the same tone, "would hardly relish such a publication of *her* name--*her welfare* would be scantily advantaged by it."

"I will take the risk of that upon myself," said Mr. Carleton quietly; "and the charge of the other."

"You dare not!" said Thorn. "You shall not go alive out of this room to do it! Let me have it, sir! you said you would--"

His passion was at a fearful height, for the family pride which had been appealed to felt a touch of fear, and his other thoughts were confirmed again, besides the dim vision of a possible thwarting of all his plans. Desire almost concentrated itself upon revenge against the object that threatened them. He had thrown himself again towards the weapons which lay beyond his reach, but was met and forcibly withheld from them.

"Stand back!" said Mr. Carleton. "I said I would, but I am not ready;--finish this business first."

"What is there to finish?" said Thorn furiously;--"you will never live to do anything out of these doors again--you are mocking yourself."

"My life is not in your hands, sir, and I will settle this matter before I put it in peril. If not with you, with Mr. Thorn your father, to whom it more properly belongs."

"You cannot leave the room to see him," said Thorn sneeringly.

"That is at my pleasure," said the other,--"unless hindered by means I do not think you will use."

Thorn was silent.

"Will you yield anything of justice, once more, in favour of this distressed family?"

"That is, yield the whole, and let the guilty go free."

"When the punishment of the offender would involve that of so many unoffending, who in this case would feel it with peculiar severity."

"He deserves it, if it was only for the money he has kept me out of--he ought to be made to refund what he has stolen, if it took the skin off his back!"

"That part of his obligation," said Mr. Carleton, "I am authorized to discharge, on condition of having the note given up. I have a cheque with me which I am commissioned to fill up, from one of the best names here. I need only the date of the note, which the giver of the cheque did not know."

Thorn hesitated, again tapping the table with the ruler in a troubled manner. He knew by the calm erect figure before him and the steady eye he did not care to meet that the threat of disclosure would be kept. He was not prepared to brave it,--in case his revenge should fail;--and if it did not----

"It is deuced folly," he said at length with a half laugh,--"for I shall have it back again in five minutes, if my eye don't play me a trick,--however, if you will have it so--I don't care. There are chances in all things--"

He went again to the cabinets, and presently brought the endorsed note. Mr. Carleton gave it a cool and careful examination, to satisfy himself of its being the true one; and then delivered him the cheque; the blank duly filled up.

"There are chances in nothing, sir," he said, as he proceeded to burn the note effectually in the candle.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that there is a Supreme Disposer of all things, who among the rest has our lives in his hand. And now, sir, I will give you that chance at my life for which you have been so eagerly wishing."

'Well, take your place,' said Thorn.
"Well, take your place," said Thorn.

"Well take your place," said Thorn seizing his pistol,--"and take your arms--put yourself at the end of the table----!"

"I shall stand here," said Mr. Carleton, quietly folding his arms;--"you may take your place where you please."

"But you are not armed!" said Thorn impatiently,--"why don't you get ready? what are you waiting for?"

"I have nothing to do with arms," said Mr. Carleton smiling; "I have no wish to hurt you, Mr. Thorn; I bear you no ill-will. But you may do what you please with me."

"But you promised!" said Thorn in desperation.

"I abide by my promise, sir."

Thorn's pistol hand fell; he looked *dreadfully*. There was a silence of several minutes.

"Well?"--said Mr. Carleton looking up and smiling.

"I can do nothing unless you will," said Thorn hoarsely, and looking hurriedly away.

"I am at your pleasure, sir! But on my own part I have none to gratify."

There was silence again, during which Thorn's face was pitiable in its darkness. He did not stir.

"I did not come here in enmity, Mr. Thorn," said Guy after a little approaching him;--"I have none now. If you believe me you will throw away the remains of yours and take my hand in pledge of it."

Thorn was ashamed and confounded, in the midst of passions that made him at the moment a mere wreck of himself. He inwardly drew back exceedingly from the proposal. But the grace with which the words were said wrought upon all the gentlemanly character that belonged to him, and made it impossible not to comply. The pistol was exchanged for Mr. Carleton's hand.

"I need not assure you," said the latter, "that nothing of what we have talked of to-night shall ever be known or suspected, in any quarter, unless by your means."

Thorn's answer was merely a bow, and Mr. Carleton withdrew, his quondam antagonist lighting him ceremoniously to the door.

It was easy for Mr. Carleton the next morning to deal with his guest at the break fast-table.

The appointments of the service were such as of themselves to put Charlton in a good humour, if he had not come already provided with that happy qualification; and the powers of manner and conversation

which his entertainer brought into play not only put them into the background of Capt. Rossitur's perceptions but even made him merge certain other things in fascination, and lose all thought of what probably had called him there. Once before, he had known Mr. Carleton come out in a like manner, but this time he forgot to be surprised.

The meal was two thirds over before the business that had drawn them together was alluded to.

"I made an odd request of you last night, Capt. Rossitur," said his host;--"you haven't asked for an explanation."

"I had forgotten all about it," said Rossitur candidly. "I am *inconséquent* enough myself not to think everything odd that requires an explanation."

"Then I hope you will pardon me if mine seem to touch upon what is not my concern. You had some cause to be displeased with Mr. Thorn's behaviour last night?"

Who told you as much?--was in Rossitur's open eyes, and upon his tongue; but few ever asked naughty questions of Mr Carleton. Charlton's eyes came back, not indeed to their former dimensions, but to his plate, in silence.

"He was incomprehensible," he said after a minute,--"and didn't act like himself--I don't know what was the matter. I shall call him to account for it."

"Capt. Rossitur, I am going to ask you a favour."

"I will grant it with the greatest pleasure," said Charlton,--"if it lie within my power."

"A wise man's addition," said Mr. Carleton,--"but I trust you will not think me extravagant. I will hold myself much obliged to you if you will let Mr. Thorn's folly, or impertinence, go this time without notice."

Charlton absolutely laid down his knife in astonishment; while at the same moment this slight let to the assertion of his dignity roused it to uncommon pugnaciousness.

"Sir--Mr. Carleton--" he stammered,--"I would be very happy to grant anything in my power,--but this, sir,--really goes beyond it."

"Permit me to say," said Mr. Carleton, "that I have myself seen Thorn upon the business that occasioned his discomposure, and that it has been satisfactorily arranged; so that nothing more is to be gained or desired from a second interview."

Who gave you authority to do any such thing?--was again in Charlton's eyes, and an odd twinge crossed his mind; but as before his thoughts were silent.

"*My* part of the business cannot have been arranged," he said,--"for it lies in a question or two that I must put to the gentleman myself."

"What will that question or two probably end in?" said Mr. Carleton significantly.

"I can't tell!" said Rossitur,--"depends on himself--it will end according to his answers."

"Is his offence so great that it cannot be forgiven upon my entreaty?"

"Mr. Carleton!" said Rossitur,--"I would gladly pleasure you, sir, but you see, this is a thing a man owes to himself."

"What thing, sir?"

"Why, not to suffer impertinence to be offered him with impunity."

"Even though the punishment extend to hearts at home that must feel it far more heavily than the offender?"

"Would you suffer yourself to be insulted, Mr. Carleton?" said Rossitur, by way of a mouth stopper.

"Not if I could help it," said Mr. Carleton smiling;--"but if such a misfortune happened, I don't know how it would be repaired by being made a matter of life and death."

"But honour might," said Rossitur.

"Honour is not reached, Capt. Rossitur. Honour dwells in a strong citadel, and a squib against the walls does in no wise affect their security."

"But also it is not consistent with honour to sit still and suffer it."

"Question. The firing of a cracker, I think, hardly warrants a sally."

"It calls for chastisement though," said Rossitur a little shortly.

"I don't know that," said Mr. Carleton gravely. "We have it on the highest authority that it is the glory of man to *pass by* a transgression."

"But you can't go by that," said Charlton a little fidgeted;--"the world wouldn't get along so;--men must take care of themselves."

"Certainly. But what part of themselves is cared for in this resenting of injuries?"

"Why, their good name!"

"As how affected?--pardon me."

"By the world's opinion," said Rossitur,--"which stamps every man with something worse than infamy who cannot protect his own standing."

"That is to say," said Mr. Carleton seriously,--"that Capt. Rossitur will punish a fool's words with death, or visit the last extremity of distress upon those who are dearest to him, rather than leave the world in any

doubt of his prowess."

"Mr. Carleton!" said Rossitur colouring. "What do you mean by speaking so, sir?"

"Not to displease you, Capt. Rossitur."

"Then you count the world's opinion for nothing?"

"For less than nothing--compared with the regards I have named."

"You would brave it without scruple?"

"I do not call him a brave man who would not, sir."

"I remember," said Charlton half laughing,--"you did it yourself once; and I must confess I believe nobody thought you lost anything by it."

"But forgive me for asking," said Mr. Carleton,--"is this terrible world a party to *this* matter? In the request which I made,--and which I have not given up, sir,--do I presume upon any more than the sacrifice of a little private feeling?"

"Why, yes,--" said Charlton looking somewhat puzzled, "for I promised the fellow I would see to it, and I must keep my word."

"And you know how that will of necessity issue."

"I can't consider that, sir; that is a secondary matter. I must do what I told him I would."

"At all hazards?" said Mr. Carleton.

"What hazards?"

"Not hazard, but certainty,--of incurring a reckoning far less easy to deal with."

"What, do you mean with yourself?" said Rossitur.

"No sir," said Mr. Carleton, a shade of even sorrowful expression crossing his face;--"I mean with one whose displeasure is a more weighty matter;--one who has declared very distinctly, 'Thou shalt not kill.'"

"I am sorry for it," said Rossitur after a disturbed pause of some minutes,--"I wish you had asked me anything else; but we can't take this thing in the light you do, sir. I wish Thorn had been in any spot of the world but at Mrs. Decatur's last night, or that Fleda hadn't taken me there; but since he was, there is no help for it,--I must make him account for his behaviour, to her as well as to me. I really don't know how to help it, sir."

"Let me beg you to reconsider that," Mr. Carleton said with a smile which disarmed offence,--"for if you will not help it, I must."

Charlton looked in doubt for a moment and then asked "how he would help it?"

"In that case, I shall think it my duty to have you bound over to keep the peace."

He spoke gravely now, and with that quiet tone which always carries conviction. Charlton stared unmistakably and in silence.

"You are not in earnest?" he then said.

"I trust you will permit me to leave you forever in doubt on that point," said Mr. Carleton, with again a slight giving way of the muscles of his face.

"I cannot indeed," said Rossitur. "Do you mean what you said just now?"

"Entirely."

"But Mr. Carleton," said Rossitur, flushing and not knowing exactly how to take him up,--"is this the manner of one gentleman towards another?"

He had not chosen right, for he received no answer but an absolute quietness which needed no interpretation. Charlton was vexed and confused, but somehow it did not come into his head to pick a quarrel with his host, in spite of his irritation. That was perhaps because he felt it to be impossible.

"I beg your pardon," he said, most unconsciously verifying Fleda's words in his own person,--"but Mr. Carleton, do me the favour to say that I have misunderstood your words. They are incomprehensible to me, sir."

"I must abide by them nevertheless, Capt. Rossitur," Mr. Carleton answered with a smile. "I will not permit this thing to be done, while, as I believe, I have the power to prevent it. You see," he said, smiling again,--"I put in practice my own theory."

Charlton looked exceedingly disturbed, and maintained a vexed and irresolute silence for several minutes, realizing the extreme disagreeableness of having more than his match to deal with.

"Come, Capt. Kossitur," said the other turning suddenly round upon him,--"say that you forgive me what you know was meant in no disrespect to you?"

"I certainly should not," said Rossitur, yielding however with a half laugh, "if it were not for the truth of the proverb that it takes two to make a quarrel."

"Give me your hand upon that. And now that the question of honour is taken out of your hands, grant not to me but to those for whom I ask it, your promise to forgive this man."

Charlton hesitated, but it was difficult to resist the request, backed as it was with weight of character and grace of manner, along with its intrinsic reasonableness; and he saw no other way so expedient of getting out of his dilemma.

"I ought to be angry with somebody," he said, half laughing and a little ashamed;--"if you will point out any substitute for Thorn I will let him go--since I cannot help myself--with pleasure."

"I will bear it," said Mr. Carleton lightly. "Give me your promise for Thorn and hold me your debtor in what amount you please."

"Very well--I forgive him," said Rossitur;--"and now Mr. Carleton I shall have a reckoning with you some day for this."

"I will meet it. When you are next in England you shall come down to----shire, and I will give you any satisfaction you please."

They parted in high good-humour; but Charlton looked grave as he went down the staircase; and very oddly all the way down to Whitehall his head was running upon the various excellencies and perfections of his cousin Fleda.

Chapter XLVI

There is a fortune coming
Towards you, dainty, that will take thee thus,
And set thee aloft.

Ben Jonson.

That day was spent by Fleda in the never-failing headache which was sure to visit her after any extraordinary nervous agitation or too great mental or bodily trial. It was severe this time, not only from the anxiety of the preceding night but from the uncertainty that weighed upon her all day long. The person who could have removed the uncertainty came indeed to the house, but she was too ill to see anybody.

The extremity of pain wore itself off with the day, and at evening she was able to leave her room and come down stairs. But she was ill yet, and could do nothing but sit in the corner of the sofa, with her hair unbound, and Florence gently bathing her head with cologne.

Anxiety as well as pain had in some measure given place to exhaustion, and she looked a white embodiment of endurance which gave a shock to her friends' sympathy. Visitors were denied,--and Constance and Edith devoted their eyes and tongues at least to her service, if they could do no more.

It happened that Joe Manton was out of the way, holding an important conference with a brother usher next door, a conference that he had no notion would be so important when he began it; when a ring on his own premises summoned one of the maid-servants to the door. She knew nothing about "not at home," and unceremoniously desired the gentleman to "walk up,"--"the ladies were in the drawing-room."

The door had been set wide open for the heat, and Fleda was close in the corner behind it; gratefully permitting Florence's efforts with the cologne, which yet she knew could avail nothing but the kind feelings of the operator; for herself patiently waiting her enemy's time. Constance was sitting on the floor looking at her.

"I can't conceive how you can bear so much," she said at length.

Fleda thought, how little she knew what was borne!

"Why you could bear it I suppose if you had to," said Edith philosophically.

"She knows she looks most beautiful," said Florence, softly passing her cologned hands down over the smooth hair;--"she knows

"'Il faut souffrir pour être belle.'"

"La migraine ne se guérit avec les douceurs," said Mr. Carleton entering;--"try something sharp, Miss Evelyn."

"Where are we to get it?" said Constance springing up, and adding in a most lack-a-daisical aside to her mother, "(Mamma!--the fowling piece!)--Our last vinegar hardly comes under the appellation; and you don't expect to find anything volatile in this house, Mr. Carleton?"

He smiled.

"Have you none for grave occasions, Miss Constance?"

"I won't retort the question about 'something sharp,'" said Constance arching her eyebrows, "because it is against my principles to make people uncomfortable; but you have certainly brought in some medicine with you, for Miss Ringgan's cheeks a little while ago were as pure as her mind--from a tinge of any sort--and now, you see--"

"My dear Constance," said her mother, "Miss Ringgan's cheeks will stand a much better chance if you come away and leave her in peace. How can she get well with such a chatter in her ears."

"Mr. Carleton and I, mamma, are conferring upon measures of relief,--and Miss Ringgan gives token of improvement already."

"For which I am very little to be thanked," said Mr. Carleton. "But I am not a bringer of bad news, that she should look pale at the sight of me."

"Are you a bringer of any news?" said Constance, "O do let us have them, Mr. Carleton!--I am dying for news--I haven't heard a bit to-day."

"What is the news, Mr. Carleton?" said her mother's voice, from the more distant region of the fire.

"I believe there are no general news, Mrs. Evelyn."

"Are there any particular news?" said Constance.--"I like particular news infinitely the best!"

"I am sorry, Miss Constance, I have none for you. But--will this headache yield to nothing?"

"Fleda prophesied that it would to time," said Florence;--"she Would not let us try much beside."

"And I must confess there has been no volatile agency employed at all," said Constance;--"I never knew time have less of it; and Fleda seemed to prefer him for her physician."

"He hasn't been a good one to-day," said Edith nestling affectionately to her side. "Isn't it better, Fleda?"--for she had covered her eyes with her hand.

"Not just now," said Fleda softly.

"It is fair to change physicians if the first fails," said Mr. Carleton. "I have had a slight experience in headache-curing,--if you will permit me, Miss Constance, I will supersede time and try a different prescription."

He went out to seek it; and Fleda leaned her head in her hand and tried to quiet the throbbing heart every pulsation of which was felt so keenly at the seat of pain. She knew from Mr. Carleton's voice and manner,--she *thought* she knew,--that he had exceeding good tidings for her; once assured of that she would soon be better; but she was worse now.

"Where is Mr. Carleton gone?" said Mrs. Evelyn.

"I haven't the least idea, mamma--he has ventured upon an extraordinary undertaking and has gone off to qualify himself, I suppose. I can't conceive why he didn't ask Miss Ringgan's permission to change her physician, instead of mine."

"I suppose he knew there was no doubt about that." said Edith, hitting the precise answer of Fleda's thoughts.

"And what should make him think there was any doubt about mine?" said Constance tartly.

"O you know," said her sister, "you are so odd nobody can tell what you will take a fancy to."

"You are--extremely liberal in your expressions, at least, Miss Evelyn,--I must say," said Constance, with a glance of no doubtful meaning.--"Joe--did you let Mr. Carleton in?"

"No, ma'am."

"Well let him in next time; and don't let in anybody else."

Whereafter the party relapsed into silent expectation.

It was not many minutes before Mr. Carleton returned.

"Tell your friend, Miss Constance," he said putting an exquisite little vinaigrette into her hand,--"that I have nothing worse for her than that."

"Worse than this!" said Constance examining it. "Mr. Carleton--I doubt exceedingly whether smelling this will afford Miss Ringgan any benefit."

"Why, Miss Constance?"

"Because--it has made me sick only to look at it!"

"There will be no danger for her," be said smiling.

"Won't there?--Well, Fleda my dear--here, take it," said the young lady;--"I hope you are differently constituted from me, for I feel a sudden pain since I saw it;--but as you keep your eyes shut and so escape the sight of this lovely gold chasing, perhaps it will do you no mischief."

"It will do her all the more good for that," said Mrs. Evelyn.

The only ears that took the benefit of this speech were Edith's and Mr. Carleton's; Fleda's were deafened by the rush of feeling. She very little knew what she was holding. Mr. Carleton stood with rather significant gravity watching the effect of his prescription, while Edith beset her mother to know why the outside of the vinaigrette being of gold should make it do Fleda any more good; the disposing of which question effectually occupied Mrs. Evelyn's attention for some time.

"And pray how long is it since you took up the trade of a physician, Mr. Carleton?" said Constance.

"It is--just about nine years, Miss Constance," he answered gravely.

But that little reminder, slight as it was, overcame the small remnant of Fleda's self-command; the vinaigrette fell from her hands and her face was hid in them; whatever became of pain, tears must flow.

"Forgive me," said Mr. Carleton gently, bending down towards her, "for speaking when I should have been silent.--Miss Evelyn, and Miss Constance, will you permit me to order that my patient be left in quiet."

And he took them away to Mrs. Evelyn's quarter, and kept them all three engaged in conversation, too busily to trouble Fleda with any attention; till she had had ample time to try the effect of the quiet and of the vinegar both. Then he went himself to look after her.

"Are you better?" said he, bending down and speaking low.

Fleda opened her eyes and gave him, what a look!--of grateful feeling. She did not know the half that was in it; but he did. That she was better was a very small item.

"Ready for the coffee?" said he smiling.

"O no," whispered Fleda,--"it don't matter about that--never mind the coffee!"

But he went back with his usual calmness to Mrs. Evelyn and begged that she would have the goodness to order a cup of rather strong coffee to be made.

"But Mr. Carleton, sir," said that lady,--"I am not at all sure that it would be the best thing for Miss Ringgan--if she is better,--I think it would do her far more good to go to rest and let sleep finish her cure, before taking something that will make sleep impossible."

"Did you ever hear of a physician, Mrs. Evelyn," he said smiling, "that allowed his prescriptions to be interfered with? I must beg you will do me this favour."

"I doubt very much whether it will be a favour to Miss Ringgan," said Mrs. Evelyn,--"however--"

And she rang the bell and gave the desired order, with a somewhat disconcerted face. But Mr. Carleton again left Fleda to herself and devoted his attention to the other ladies, with so much success, though with his usual absence of effort, that good humour was served long before the coffee.

Then indeed he played the physician's part again; made the coffee himself and saw it taken, according to his own pleasure; skilfully however seeming all the while, except to Fleda, to be occupied with everything else. The group gathered round her anew; she was well enough to bear their talk by this time; by the time the coffee was drunk quite well.

"Is it quite gone?" asked Edith.

"The headache?--yes."

"You will owe your physician a great many thanks, my dear Fleda," said Mrs. Evelyn.

Fleda's only answer to this, however, was by a very slight smile; and she presently left the room to go up stairs and arrange her yet disarranged hair.

"That is a very fine girl," remarked Mrs. Evelyn, preparing half a cup of coffee for herself in a kind of amused abstraction,--"my friend Mr. Thorn will have an excellent wife of her."

"Provided she marries him," said Constance somewhat shortly.

"I am sure I hope she won't," said Edith,--"and I don't believe she will."

"What do you think of his chances of success, Mr. Carleton?"

"Your manner of speech would seem to imply that they are very good, Mrs. Evelyn," he answered coolly.

"Well don't you think so?" said Mrs. Evelyn, coming back to her seat with her coffee-cup, and apparently dividing her attention between it and her subject,--"It's a great chance for her--most girls in her circumstances would not refuse it--*I* think he's pretty sure of his ground."

"So I think," said Florence.

"It don't prove anything, if he is," said Constance dryly. "I hate people who are always sure of their ground!"

"What do you think, Mr. Carleton?" said Mrs. Evelyn, taking little satisfied sips of her coffee.

"May I ask, first, what is meant by the 'chance' and what by the 'circumstances.'"

"Why Mr. Thorn has a fine fortune, you know, and he is of an excellent family--there is not a better family in the city--and very few young men of such pretensions would think of a girl that has no name nor standing."

"Unless she had qualities that would command them," said Mr. Carleton.

"But Mr. Carleton, sir," said the lady,--"do you think that can be? do you think a woman can fill gracefully a high place in society if she has had disadvantages in early life to contend with that were calculated to unfit her for it?"

"But mamma," said Constance,--"Fleda don't shew any such thing."

"No, she don't shew it," said Mrs. Evelyn,--"but I am not talking of Fleda--I am talking of the effect of early disadvantages. What do you think, Mr. Carleton?"

"Disadvantages of what kind, Mrs. Evelyn?"

"Why, for instance--the strange habits of intercourse, on familiar terms, with rough and uncultivated people,--such intercourse for years--in all sorts of ways,--in the field and in the house,--mingling with them as one of them--it seems to me it must leave its traces on the mind and on the habits of acting and thinking?"

"There is no doubt it does," he answered with an extremely unconcerned face.

"And then there's the actual want of cultivation," said Mrs. Evelyn, warming;--"time taken up with other things, you know,--usefully and properly, but still taken up,--so as to make much intellectual acquirement and accomplishments impossible; it can't be otherwise, you know,--neither opportunity nor instructors; and I don't think anything can supply the want in after life--it isn't the mere things themselves which may be acquired--the mind should grow up in the atmosphere of them--don't you think so, Mr. Carleton?"

He bowed.

"Music, for instance, and languages, and converse with society, and a great many things, are put completely beyond reach;--Edith, my dear, you are not to touch the coffee,--nor Constance either,--no I will not let you,--And there could not be even much reading, for want of books if for nothing else. Perhaps I am wrong, but I confess I don't see how it is possible in such a case"--

She checked herself suddenly, for Fleda with the slow noiseless step that weakness imposed had come in again and stood by the centre-table.

"We are discussing a knotty question, Miss Ringgan," said Mr. Carleton with a smile, as he brought a bergère for her; "I should like to have your voice on it."

There was no seconding of his motion. He waited till she had seated herself and then went on.

"What in your opinion is the best preparation for wearing prosperity well?"

A glance at Mrs. Evelyn's face which was opposite her, and at one or two others which had undeniably the air of being *arrested*, was enough for Fleda's quick apprehension. She knew they had been talking of her. Her eyes stopped short of Mr. Carleton's and she coloured and hesitated. No one spoke.

"By prosperity you mean--?"

"Rank and fortune," said Florence, without looking up.

"Marrying a rich man, for instance," said Edith, "and having one's hands full."

This peculiar statement of the case occasioned a laugh all round, but the silence which followed seemed still to wait upon Fleda's reply.

"Am I expected to give a serious answer to that question?" she said a little doubtfully.

"Expectations are not stringent things," said her first questioner smiling. "That waits upon your choice."

"They are horridly stringent, *I* think," said Constance. "We shall all be disappointed if you don't, Fleda my dear."

"By wearing it 'well' you mean, making a good use of it?"

"And gracefully," said Mrs. Evelyn.

"I think I should say then," said Fleda after some little hesitation and speaking with evident difficulty,--"Such an experience as might teach one both the worth and the worthlessness of money."

Mr. Carleton's smile was a sufficiently satisfied one; but Mrs. Evelyn retorted,

"The *worth* and the *worthlessness!*--Fleda my dear, I don't understand--"

"And what experience teaches one the worth and what the worthlessness of money?" said Constance;--"Mamma is morbidly persuaded that I do not understand the first--of the second I have an indefinite idea from never being able to do more than half that I want with it."

Fleda smiled and hesitated again, in a way that shewed she would willingly be excused, but the silence left her no choice but to speak.

"I think," she said modestly, "that a person can hardly understand the true worth of money,--the ends it can best subserve,--that has not been taught it by his own experience of the want; and--"

"What follows?" said Mr. Carleton.

"I was going to say, sir, that there is danger, especially when people have not been accustomed to it, that they will greatly overvalue and misplace the real worth of prosperity; unless the mind has been steadied by another kind of experience, and has learnt to measure things by a higher scale."

"And how when they *have* been accustomed to it?" said Florence.

"The same danger, without the 'especially'," said Fleda, with a look that disclaimed any assuming.

"One thing is certain," said Constance,--"you hardly ever see *les nouveaux riches* make a graceful use of anything.--Fleda my dear, I am seconding all of your last speech that I understand. Mamma, I perceive, is at work upon the rest."

"I think we ought all to be at work upon it," said Mrs. Evelyn, "for Miss Ringgan has made it out that there is hardly anybody here that is qualified to wear prosperity well."

"I was just thinking so," said Florence.

Fleda said nothing, and perhaps her colour rose a little.

"I will take lessons of her," said Constance, with eyebrows just raised enough to neutralize the composed gravity of the other features,--"as soon as I have an amount of prosperity that will make it worth while."

"But I don't think," said Florence, "that a graceful use of things is consistent with such a careful valuation and considering of the exact worth of everything--it's not my idea of grace."

"Yet *propriety* is an essential element of gracefulness, Miss Evelyn."

"Well," said Florence,--"certainly; but what then?"

"Is it attainable, in the use of means, without a nice knowledge of their true value?"

"But, Mr. Carleton, I am sure I have seen improper things--things improper in a way--gracefully done?"

"No doubt; but, Miss Evelyn," said he smiling "the impropriety did not in those cases, I presume, attach itself to the other quality. The graceful *manner* was strictly proper to its ends, was it not, however the ends might be false?"

"I don't know," said Florence;--"you have gone too deep for me. But do you think that close calculation, and all that sort of thing, is likely to make people use money, or anything else, gracefully? I never thought it did."

"Not close calculation alone," said Mr. Carleton.

"But do you think it is *consistent* with gracefulness?"

"The largest and grandest views of material things that man has ever taken, Miss Evelyn, stand upon a basis of the closest calculation."

Florence worked at her worsted and looked very dissatisfied.

"O Mr. Carleton," said Constance as he was going,--"don't leave your vinaigrette--there it is on the table."

He made no motion to take it up.

"Don't you know, Miss Constance, that physicians seldom like to have anything to do with their own prescriptions?"

"It's very suspicious of them," said Constance;--"but you must take it, Mr. Carleton, if you please, for I shouldn't like the responsibility of its being left here; and I am afraid it would be dangerous to our peace of mind, besides."

"I shall risk that," he said laughing. "Its work is not done."

"And then, Mr. Carleton," said Mrs. Evelyn, and Fleda knew with what a look,--"you know physicians are accustomed to be paid when their prescriptions are taken."

But the answer to this was only a bow, so expressive in its air of haughty coldness that any further efforts of Mrs. Evelyn's wit were chilled for some minutes after he had gone.

Fleda had not seen this. She had taken up the vinaigrette, and was thinking with acute pleasure that Mr. Carleton's manner last night and to-night had returned to all the familiar kindness of old times. Not as it had been during the rest of her stay in the city. She could be quite contented now to have him go back to England, with this pleasant remembrance left her. She sat turning over the vinaigrette, which to her fancy was covered with hieroglyphics that no one else could read; of her uncle's affair, of Charlton's danger, of her own distress, and the kindness which had wrought its relief, more penetrating and pleasant than even the fine aromatic scent which fairly typified it,--Constance's voice broke in upon her musings.

"Isn't it awkward?" she said as she saw Fleda handling and looking at the pretty toy,--"Isn't it awkward? I sha'n't have a bit of rest now for fear something will happen to that. I hate to have people do such things!"

"Fleda my dear," said Mrs. Evelyn,--"I wouldn't handle it, my love; you may depend there is some charm in it--some mischievous hidden influence,--and if you have much to do with it I am afraid you will find a gradual coldness stealing over you, and a strange forgetfulness of Queechy, and you will perhaps lose your desire ever to go back there any more."

The vinaigrette dropped from Fleda's fingers, but beyond a heightened colour and a little tremulous gravity about the lip, she gave no other sign of emotion.

"Mamma," said Florence laughing,--"you are too bad!"

"Mamma," said Constance, "I wonder how any tender sentiment for you can continue to exist in Fleda's breast!--By the way, Fleda, my dear, do you know that we have heard of two escorts for you? but I only tell you because I know you'll not be fit to travel this age."

"I should not be able to travel to-morrow," said Fleda.

"They are not going to-morrow," said Mrs. Evelyn quietly.

"Who are they?"

"Excellent ones," said Mrs. Evelyn. "One of them is your old friend Mr. Olmney,"

"Mr. Olmney!" said Fleda. "What has brought him to New York?"

"Really," said Mrs. Evelyn laughing,--"I do not know. What should keep him away? I was very glad to see him, for my part. Maybe he has come to take you home."

"Who is the other?" said Fleda.

"That's another old friend of yours--Mrs. Renney."

"Mrs. Renney?--who is she?" said Fleda.

"Why don't you know? Mrs. Renney--she used to live with your aunt Lucy in some capacity--years ago,--when she was in New York,--housekeeper, I think; don't you remember her?"

"Perfectly, now," said Fleda. "Mrs. Renney!--"

"She has been housekeeper for Mrs. Schenck these several years, and she is going somewhere out West to some relation, her brother, I believe, to take care of his family; and her road leads her your way."

"When do they go, Mrs. Evelyn?"

"Both the same day, and both the day after to-morrow. Mr. Olmney takes the morning train, he says, unless you would prefer some other,--I told him you were very anxious to go,--and Mrs. Renney goes in the afternoon. So there's a choice for you."

"Mamma," said Constance, "Fleda is not fit to go at all, either time."

"I don't think she is," said Mrs. Evelyn. "But she knows best what she likes to do."

Thoughts and resolutions came swiftly one after another into Fleda's mind and were decided upon in as quick succession. First, that she must go the day after to-morrow, at all events. Second, that it should not be with Mr. Olmney. Third, that to prevent that, she must not see him in the mean time, and therefore--yes, no help for it,--must refuse to see any one that called the next day; there was to be a party in the evening, so then she would be safe. No doubt Mr. Carleton would come, to give her a more particular account of what he had done, and she wished unspeakably to hear it; but it was not possible that she should make an exception in his favour and admit him alone. That could not be. If friends would only be simple and straightforward and kind,--one could afford to be straightforward too;--but as it was she must not do what she longed to do and they would be sure to misunderstand. There was indeed the morning of the day following left her if Mr. Olmney did not take it into his head to stay. And it might issue in her not seeing Mr. Carleton at all, to bid good-bye and thank him? He would not think her ungrateful, he knew better than that, but still--Well! so much for kindness!--

"What *are* you looking so grave about?" said Constance.

"Considering ways and means," Fleda said with a slight smile.

"Ways and means of what?"

"Going."

"You don't mean to go the day after to-morrow?"

"Yes."

"It's too absurd for anything! You sha'n't do it."

"I must indeed."

"Mamma," said Constance, "if you permit such a thing, I shall hope that memory will be a fingerboard of remorse to you, pointing to Miss Ringgan's pale cheeks."

"I shall charge it entirely upon Miss Ringgan's own fingerboard," said Mrs. Evelyn, with her complacently amused face. "Fleda, my dear,--shall I request Mr. Olmney to delay his journey for a day or two, my love, till you are stronger?"

"Not at all, Mrs. Evelyn! I shall go then;--if I am not ready in the morning I will take Mrs. Renney in the afternoon--I would quite as lief go with her."

"Then I will make Mr. Olmney keep to his first purpose," said Mrs. Evelyn.

Poor Fleda, though with a very sorrowful heart, kept her resolutions, and for very forlornness and weariness slept away a great part of the next day. Neither would she appear in the evening, for fear of more people than one. It was impossible to tell whether Mrs. Evelyn's love of mischief would not bring Mr. Olmney there, and the Thorns, she knew, were invited. Mr. Lewis would probably absent himself, but Fleda could not endure even the chance of seeing his mother. She wanted to know, but dared not ask, whether Mr. Carleton had been to see her. What if to-morrow morning should pass without her seeing him? Fleda pondered this uncertainty a little, and then jumped out of bed and wrote him the

heartiest little note of thanks and remembrance that tears would let her write; sealed it, and carried it herself to the nearest branch of the despatch post the first thing next morning.

She took a long look that same morning at the little vinaigrette which still lay on the centre-table, wishing very much to take it up stairs and pack it away among her things. It was meant for her she knew, and she wanted it as a very pleasant relic from the kind hands that had given it; and besides, he might think it odd if she should slight his intention. But how odd it would seem to him if he knew that the Evelyns had half appropriated it. And appropriate it anew, in another direction, she could not. She could not without their knowledge, and they would put their own absurd construction on what was a simple matter of kindness; she could not brave it.

'I told him, 'O you were not gone yet!"
"I told him, 'O you were not gone yet!'"

The morning, a long one it was, had passed away; Fleda had just finished packing her trunk, and was sitting with a faint-hearted feeling of body and mind, trying to rest before being called to her early dinner, when Florence came to tell her it was ready.

"Mr. Carleton was here awhile ago," she said, "and he asked for you; but mamma said you were busy; she knew you had enough to tire you without coming down stairs to see him. He asked when you thought of going."

"What did you tell him?"

"I told him, 'O you were not gone yet!'--it's such a plague to be bidding people good-bye--*I* always want to get rid of it. Was I right?"

Fleda said nothing, but in her heart she wondered what possible concern it could be of her friends if Mr. Carleton wanted to see her before she went away. She felt it was unkind--they did not know how unkind, for

they did not understand that he was a very particular friend and an old friend--they could not tell what reason there was for her wishing to bid him good-bye. She thought she should have liked to do it, very much.

Chapter XLVII.

> Methought I was--there is no man can tell what. Methought I was, and methought I had,--But man is but a patched fool, if he will offer to say what methought I had.--Midsummer Night's Dream.

Mrs. Evelyn drove down to the boat with Fleda and did not leave her till she was safely put in charge of Mrs. Renney. Fleda immediately retreated to the innermost depths of the ladies' cabin, hoping to find some rest for the body at least if not forgetfulness for the mind.

The latter was not to be. Mrs. Renney was exceeding glad to see her and bent upon knowing what had become of her since those days when they used to know each other.

"You're just the same, Miss Fleda, that you used to be--you're very little altered--I can see that--though you're looking a good deal more thin and pale--you had very pretty roses in your cheeks in those times.--Yes, I know, I understood Mrs. Evelyn to say you had not been well; but allowing for that I can see you are just yourself still--I'm glad of it. Do you recollect, Miss Fleda, what a little thing you was then?"

"I recollect, very well," said Fleda.

"I'm sure of another thing--you're just as good as you used to be," said the housekeeper looking at her complacently. "Do you remember how you used to come into my room to see me make jelly? I see it as well as if it was yesterday;--and you used to beg me to let you squeeze the lemons;

and I never could refuse you, because you never did anything I didn't want you to; and do you mind how I used to tie you up in a big towel for fear you would stain your dress with the acid, and I'd stand and watch to see you putting all your strength to squeeze 'em clean, and be afraid that Mrs. Rossitur would be angry with me for letting you spoil your hands, but you used to look up and smile at me so, I couldn't help myself but let you do just whatever you had a mind. You don't look quite so light and bright as you did in those times; but to be sure, you ain't feeling well! See here--just let me pull some of these things onto this settee, and you put yourself down there and rest--pillows--let's have another pillow,--there, how's that?"

Oh if Fleda might have silenced her! She thought it was rather hard that she should have two talkative companions on this journey of all others. The housekeeper paused no longer than to arrange her couch and see her comfortably laid down.

"And then Mr. Hugh would come in to find you and carry you away--he never could bear to be long from you. How is Mr. Hugh, Miss Fleda? he used to be always a very delicate looking child. I remember you and him used to be always together--he was a very sweet boy! I have often said I never saw such another pair of children. How does Mr. Hugh have his health, Miss Fleda?"

"Not very well, just now," said Fleda gently, and shutting her eyes that they might reveal less.

There was need; for the housekeeper went on to ask particularly after every member of the family, and where they had been living, and as much as she conveniently could about how they had been living. She was very kind through it all, or she tried to be; but Fleda felt there was a difference since the time when her aunt kept house in State street and Mrs. Renney made jellies for her. When her neighbours' affairs were exhausted Mrs. Renney fell back upon her own, and gave Fleda a very circumstantial account of the occurrences that were drawing her

westward; how so many years ago her brother had married and removed thither; how lately his wife had died; what in general was the character of his wife, and what, in particular, the story of her decease; how many children were left without care, and the state of her brother's business which demanded a great deal; and how finally, she, Mrs. Renney, had received and accepted an invitation to go on to Belle Rivière and be housekeeper de son chef. And as Fleda's pale worn face had for some time given her no sign of attention the housekeeper then hoped she was asleep, and placed herself so as to screen her and have herself a good view of everything that was going on in the cabin.

But poor Fleda was not asleep, much as she rejoiced in being thought so. Mind and body could get no repose, sadly as the condition of both called for it. Too worn to sleep, perhaps;--too down-hearted to rest. She blamed herself for it, and told over to herself the causes, the recent causes, she had of joy and gratitude; but it would not do. Grateful she could be and was; but tears that were not the distillation of joy came with her gratitude; came from under the closed eyelid in spite of her; the pillow was wet with them. She excused herself, or tried to, with thinking that she was weak and not very well, and that her nerves had gone through so much for a few days past it was no wonder if a reaction left her without her usual strength of mind. And she could not help thinking there had been a want of kindness in the Evelyns to let her come away to-day to make such a journey, at such a season, under such guardianship. But it was not all that; she knew it was not. The journey was a small matter; only a little piece of disagreeableness that was well in keeping with her other meditations. She was going home and home had lost all its fair-seeming; its honours were withered. It would be pleasant indeed to be there again to nurse Hugh; but nurse him for what?--life or death?--she did not like to think; and beyond that she could fix upon nothing at all that looked bright in the prospect; she almost thought herself wicked, but she could not. If she might hope that her uncle would take hold of his farm like a man, and redeem his character and his family's happiness on the old place,--that would have

been something; but he had declared a different purpose, and Fleda knew him too well to hope that he would be better than his word. Then they must leave the old homestead, where at least the associations of happiness clung, and go to a strange land. It looked desolate to Fleda, wherever it might be. Leave Queechy!--that she loved unspeakably beyond any other place in the world; where the very hills had been the friends of her childhood, and where she had seen the maples grow green and grow red through as many-coloured changes of her own fortunes; the woods where the shade of her grandfather walked with her and where the presence even of her father could be brought back by memory; where the air was sweeter and the sunlight brighter, by far, than in any other place, for both had some strange kindred with the sunny days of long ago. Poor Fleda turned her face from Mrs. Renney, and leaving doubtful prospects and withering comforts for a while as it were out of sight, she wept the fair outlines and the red maples of Queechy as if they had been all she had to regret. They had never disappointed her. Their countenance had comforted her many a time, under many a sorrow. After all, it was only fancy choosing at which shrine the whole offering of sorrow should be made. She knew that many of the tears that fell were due to some other. It was in vain to tell herself they were selfish; mind and body were in no condition to struggle with anything.

It had fallen dark some time, and she had wept and sorrowed herself into a half-dozing state, when a few words spoken near aroused her.

"It is snowing,"--was said by several voices.

"Going very slow, ain't we?" said Fleda's friend in a suppressed voice.

"Yes, 'cause it's so dark, you see; the Captain dursn't let her run."

Some poor witticism followed from a third party about the 'Butterfly's' having run herself off her legs the first time she ever ran at all; and then Mrs. Renney went on.

"Is the storm so bad, Hannah?"

"Pretty thick--can't see far ahead--I hope we'll make out to find our way in--that's all *I* care for."

"How far are we?"

"Not half way yet--I don't know--depends on what headway we make, you know;--there ain't much wind yet, that's a good thing."

"There ain't any danger, is there?"

This of course the chambermaid denied, and a whispered colloquy followed which Fleda did not try to catch. A new feeling came upon her weary heart,--a feeling of fear. There was a sad twinge of a wish that she were out of the boat and safe back again with the Evelyns, and a fresh sense of the unkindness of letting her come away that afternoon so attended. And then with that sickness of heart the forlorn feeling of being alone, of wanting some one at hand to depend upon, to look to. It is true that in case of real danger none such could be a real protection,--and yet not so neither, for strength and decision can live and make live where a moment's faltering will kill, and weakness must often falter of necessity. "All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth" to his people; she thought of that, and yet she feared, for his ways are often what we do not like. A few moments of sick-heartedness and trembling,--and then Fleda mentally folded her arms about a few other words of the Bible and laid her head down in quiet again.--"*The Lord is my refuge and my fortress; my God; in him will I trust*."

And then what comes after,--"*He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust; his truth shall be thy shield and buckler*."

Fleda lay quiet till she was called to tea.

"Bless me, how pale you are!" said the housekeeper, as Fleda raised herself up at this summons,--"do you feel very bad, Miss Fleda?"

Fleda said no.

"Are you frighted?" said the housekeeper;--"there's no need of that--Hannah says there's no need--we'll be in by and by."

"No, Mrs. Renney," said Fleda smiling. "I believe I am not very strong yet."

The housekeeper and Hannah both looked at her with strangely touched faces, and again begged her to try the refreshment of tea. But Fleda would not go down, so they served her up there with great zeal and tenderness. And then she waited patiently and watched the people in the cabin, as they sat gossiping in groups or stupefying in solitude; and thought how miserable a thing is existence where religion and refinement have not taught the mind to live in somewhat beyond and above its every-day concern.

Late at night the boat arrived safe at Bridgeport. Mrs. Renney and Fleda had resolved to stay on board till morning, when the former promised to take her to the house of a sister she had living in the town; as the cars would not leave the place till near eleven o'clock. Kest was not to be hoped for meantime in the boat, on the miserable couch which was the best the cabin could furnish; but Fleda was so thankful to have finished the voyage in safety that she took thankfully everything else, even lying awake. It was a wild night. The wind rose soon after they reached Bridgeport, and swept furiously over the boat, rattling the tiller chains and making Fleda so nervously alive to possibilities that she got up two or three times to see if the boat were fast to her moorings. It was very dark, and only by a fortunately placed lantern she could see a bit of the dark wharf and one of the posts belonging to it, from which the lantern never budged; so at last, quieted or tired out, nature had her rights, and she slept.

It was not refreshing rest after all, and Fleda was very glad that Mrs. Renney's impatience for something comfortable made her willing to be astir as early as there was any chance of finding people up in the town. Few were abroad when they left the boat, they two. Not a foot had printed the deep layer of snow that covered the wharf. It had fallen thick during the night. Just then it was not snowing; the clouds seemed to have taken a recess, for they hung threatening yet; one uniform leaden canopy was over the whole horizon.

"The snow ain't done yet," said Mrs. Renney.

"No, but the worst of our journey is over," said Fleda. "I am glad to be on the land."

"I hope we'll get something to eat here," said Mrs. Renney as they stepped along over the wharf. "They ought to be ashamed to give people such a mess, when it's just as easy to have things decent. My! how it has snowed. I declare, if I'd ha' known I'd ha' waited till somebody had tracked a path for us. But I guess it's just as well we didn't,--you look as like a ghost as you can, Miss Fleda. You'll be better when you get some breakfast. You'd better catch on to my arm--I'll waken up the seven sleepers but what I'll have something to put life into you directly."

Fleda thanked her but declined the proffered accommodation, and followed her companion in the narrow beaten path a few travellers had made in the street, feeling enough like a ghost, if want of flesh and blood reality were enough. It seemed a dream that she was walking through the grey light and the empty streets of the little town; everything looked and felt so wild and strange.

If it was a dream she was soon waked out of it. In the house where they were presently received and established in sufficient comfort, there was such a little specimen of masculine humanity as never shewed his face in dream land yet; a little bit of reality enough to bring any dreamer to his senses. He seemed to have been brought up on stove heat, for he was ail

glowing yet from a very warm bed he had just tumbled out of somewhere, and he looked at the pale thin stranger by his mother's fireplace as if she were an anomaly in the comfortable world. If he could have contented himself with looking!--but he planted himself firmly on the rug just two feet from Fleda, and with a laudable and most persistent desire to examine into the causes of what he could not understand he commenced inquiring,

"Are you cold?--say! Are you cold?--say!"--in a tone most provokingly made up of wonder and dulness. In vain Fleda answered him, that she was not very cold and would soon not be cold at all by that good fire;--the question came again, apparently in all its freshness, from the interrogator's mind,--"Are you cold?--say!--"

And silence and words, looking grave and laughing, were alike thrown away. Fleda shut her eyes at length and used the small remnant of her patience to keep herself quiet till she was called to breakfast. After breakfast she accepted the offer of her hostess to go up stairs and lie down till the cars were ready; and there got some real and much needed refreshment of sleep and rest.

It lasted longer than she bad counted upon. For the cars were not ready at eleven o'clock; the snow last night had occasioned some perplexing delays. It was not till near three o'clock that the often-despatched messenger to the dépôt brought back word that they might go as soon as they pleased. It pleased Mrs. Renney to be in a great hurry, for her baggage was in the cars she said, and it would be dreadful if she and it went different ways; so Fleda and her companion hastened down to the station house and choose their places some time before anybody else thought of coming. They had a long, very tiresome waiting to go through, and room for some uneasy speculations about being belated and a night journey. But Fleda was stronger now, and bore it all with her usual patient submission. At length, by degrees the people dropped in and filled the cars, and they get off.

"How early do you suppose we shall reach Greenfield?" said Fleda.

"Why we ought to get there between nine and ten o'clock, I should think," said her companion. "I hope the snow will hold up till we get there,"

Fleda thought it a hope very unlikely to be fulfilled. There were as yet no snow-flakes to be seen near by, but at a little distance the low clouds seemed already to enshroud every clump of trees and put a mist about every hill. They surely would descend more palpably soon.

It was pleasant to be moving swiftly on again towards the end of their journey, if Fleda could have rid herself of some qualms about the possible storm and the certain darkness; they might not reach Greenfield by ten o'clock; and she disliked travelling in the night at any time. But she could do nothing, and she resigned herself anew to the comfort and trust she had built upon last night. She had the seat next the window, and with a very sober kind of pleasure watched the pretty landscape they were flitting by--misty as her own prospects,--darkening as they?--no, she would not allow that thought. "'Surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God;' and I can trust him." And she found a strange sweetness in that naked trust and clinging of faith, that faith never tried never knows. But the breath of daylight was already gone, though the universal spread of snow gave the eye a fair range yet, white, white, as far as the view could reach, with that light misty drapery round everything in the distance and merging into the soft grey sky; and every now and then as the wind served, a thick wreath of white vapour came by from the engine and hid all, eddying past the windows and then skimming off away over the snowy ground from which it would not lift; a more palpable veil for a moment of the distant things,--and then broken, scattered, fragmentary, lovely in its frailty and evanishing. It was a pretty afternoon, but a sober; and the bare black solitary trees near hand which the cars flew by, looked to Fleda constantly like finger-posts of the past; and back at their bidding her thoughts and her spirits went, back and forward, comparing, in her own mental view, what had once been so

gay and genial with its present bleak and chill condition. And from this, in sudden contrast, came a strangely fair and bright image of Heaven--its exchange of peace for all this turmoil,--of rest for all this weary bearing up of mind and body against the ills that beset both,--of its quiet home for this unstable strange world where nothing is at a stand-still--of perfect and pure society for the unsatisfactory and wearying friendships that the most are here. The thought came to Fleda like one of those unearthly clear Northwestern skies from which a storm cloud has rolled away, that seem almost to mock Earth with their distance from its defilement and agitations. "Truly I know that it shall be well with them that fear God!"--She could remember Hugh,--she could not think of the words without him,--and yet say them with the full bounding assurance. And in that weary and uneasy afternoon her mind rested and delighted itself with two lines of George Herbert, that only a Christian can well understand,--

"Thy power and love,--my love and trust, Make one place everywhere."

But the night fell, and Fleda at last could see nothing but the dim rail fences they were flying by, and the reflection from some stationary lantern on the engine or one of the forward cars, that always threw a bright spot of light on the snow. Still she kept her eyes fastened out of the window; anything but the view *inboard*. They were going slowly now, and frequently stopping; for they were out of time, and some other trains were to be looked out for. Nervous work; and whenever they stopped the voices which at other times were happily drowned in the rolling of the car-wheels, rose and jarred in discords far less endurable. Fleda shut her ears to the words, but it was easy enough without words to understand the indications of coarse and disagreeable natures in whose neighbourhood she disliked to find herself; of whose neighbourhood she exceedingly disliked to be reminded. The muttered oath, the more than muttered jest, the various laughs that tell so much of head or heart emptiness,--the shadowy but sure tokens of that in human nature which one would not realize and which one strives to forget;--

Fleda shrank within herself and would gladly have stopped her ears; did sometimes covertly. Oh if home could be but reached, and she out of this atmosphere! how well she resolved that never another time, by any motive, of delicacy or otherwise, she would be tempted to trust herself in the like again without more than womanly protection. The hours rolled wearily on; they heard nothing of Greenfield yet.

They came at length to a more obstinate stop than usual. Fleda took her hands from her ears to ask what was the matter.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Renney. "I hope they won't keep us a great while waiting here."

The door swung open and the red comforter and tarpaulin hat of one of the brakemen shewed itself a moment. Presently after "Can't get on"--was repeated by several voices in the various tones of assertion, interrogation, and impatience. The women folks, having nobody to ask questions of, had nothing for it but to be quiet and use their ears.

"Can't get on!" said another man coming in,--"there's nothing but snow out o' doors--track's all foul."

A number of people instantly rushed out to see.

"Can't get on any further to-night?" asked a quiet old gentleman of the news-bringer.

"Not another inch, sir;--worse off than old Dobbs was in the mill-pond,--we've got half way but we can't turn and go back."

"And what are we going to do?" said an unhappy wight not quick in drawing conclusions.

"I s'pose we'll all be stiff by the morning," answered the other gravely,--"unless the wood holds out, which ain't likely."

How much there is in even a cheery tone of voice, Fleda was sorry when this man took his away with him. There was a most uncheering confusion of tongues for a few minutes among the people he had left, and then the car was near deserted; everybody went out to bring his own wits to bear upon the obstacles in the way of their progress. Mrs. Renney observed that she might as well warm her feet while she could, and went to the stove for the purpose.

Poor Fleda felt as if she had no heart left. She sat still in her place and leaned her head upon the back of the deserted chair before her, in utter inability to keep it up. The night journey was bad enough, but *this* was more than she had counted upon. Danger, to be sure, there might be none in standing still there all night, unless perhaps the danger of death from the cold;--she had heard of such things;--but to sit there till morning among all those people and obliged to hear their unloosed tongues,--Fleda felt almost that she could not bear it,--a most forlorn feeling, with which came anew a keen reflection upon the Evelyns for having permitted her to run even the hazard of such trouble. And in the morning, if well it came, who would take care of them in all the subsequent annoyance and difficulty of getting out of the snow?--

It must have taken very little time for these thoughts to run through her head, for half a minute had not flown when the vacant seat beside her was occupied and a hand softly touched one of hers which lay in her lap. Fleda started up in terror,--to have the hand taken and her eye met by Mr. Carleton.

"Mr. Carleton!--O sir, how glad I am to see you!"--was said by eye and cheek as unmistakably as by word.

"Have you come from the clouds?"

"I might rather ask that question of you," said he smiling.

"You have been invisible ever since the night when I had the honour of playing the part of your physician."

"I could not help it, sir,--I was sure you would believe it. I wanted exceedingly to see you and to thank you--as well as I could--but I was obliged to leave it--"

She could hardly say so much. Her swimming eye gave him more thanks than he wanted. But she scolded herself vigorously and after a few minutes was able to look and speak again.

"I hoped you would not think me ungrateful, sir, but in case you might, I wrote to let you know that you were mistaken."

"You wrote to me!" said he.

"Yes, sir--yesterday morning--at least it was put in the post yesterday morning."

"It was more unnecessary than you are aware off," he said with a smile and turning one of his deep looks away from her.

"Are we fast here for all night, Mr. Carleton?" she said presently.

"I am afraid so--I believe so--I have been out to examine and the storm is very thick."

"You need not look so about it for me," said Fleda;--"I don't care for it at all now."

And a long-drawn breath half told how much she had cared for it, and what a burden was gone.

"You look very little like breasting hardships," said Mr. Carleton, bending on her so exactly the look of affectionate care that she had often had from him when she was a child, that Fleda was very near overcome again.

"O you know," she said, speaking by dint of great force upon herself,--"You know the will is everything, and mine is very good--"

But he looked extremely unconvinced and unsatisfied.

"I am so comforted to see you sitting there, sir," Fleda went on gratefully,--"that I am sure I can bear patiently all the rest."

His eye turned away and she did not know what to make of his gravity. But a moment after he looked again and spoke with his usual manner.

"That business you entrusted to me," he said in a lower tone,--"I believe you will have no more trouble with it."

"So I thought!--so I gathered--the other night,--" said Fleda, her heart and her face suddenly full of many things.

"The note was given up--I saw it burned."

Fleda's two hands clasped each other mutely.

"And will he be silent?"

"I think he will choose to be so--for his own sake."

The only sake that would avail in that quarter, Fleda knew. How had Mr. Carleton ever managed it!

"And Charlton?" she said after a few minutes' tearful musing.

"I had the pleasure of Capt. Rossitur's company to breakfast, the next morning,--and I am happy to report that there is no danger of any trouble arising there."

"How shall I ever thank you, sir!" said Fleda with trembling lips.

His smile was so peculiar she almost thought he was going to tell her. But just then Mrs. Renney having accomplished the desirable temperature of her feet, came back to warm her ears, and placed herself

on the next seat; happily not the one behind but the one before them, where her eyes were thrown away; and the lines of Mr. Carleton's mouth came back to their usual quiet expression.

"You were in particular haste to reach home?" he asked.

Fleda said no, not in the abstract; it made no difference whether to-day or to-morrow.

"You had heard no ill news of your cousin?"

"Not at all, but it is difficult to find an opportunity of making the journey, and I thought I ought to come yesterday."

He was silent again; and the baffled seekers after ways and means who had gone out to try arguments upon the storm, began to come pouring back into the car. And bringing with them not only their loud and coarse voices with every shade of disagreeableness aggravated by ill-humour, but also an average amount of snow upon their hats and shoulders, the place was soon full of a reeking atmosphere of great coats. Fleda was trying to put up her window, but Mr. Carleton gently stopped her and began bargaining with a neighbouring fellow-traveller for the opening of his.

"Well, sir, I'll open it if you wish it," said the man civilly, "but they say we sha'n't have nothing to make fires with more than an hour or two longer;--so maybe you'll think we can't afford to let any too much cold in."

The gentleman however persisting in his wish and the wish being moreover backed with those arguments to which every grade of human reason is accessible, the window was opened. At first the rush of fresh air was a great relief; but it was not very long before the raw snowy atmosphere which made its way in was felt to be more dangerous, if it was more endurable, than the close pent-up one it displaced. Mr. Carleton ordered the window closed again; and Fleda's glance of meek

grateful patience was enough to pay any reasonable man for his share of the suffering. *Her* share of it was another matter. Perhaps Mr. Carleton thought so, for he immediately bent himself to reward her and to avert the evil, and for that purpose brought into play every talent of manner and conversation that could beguile the time and make her forget what she was among. If success were his reward he had it. He withdrew her attention completely from all that was around her, and without tasking it; she could not have borne that. He did not seem to task himself; but without making any exertion he held her eye and ear and guarded both from communication with things disagreeable. He knew it. There was not a change in her eye's happy interest, till in the course of the conversation Fleda happened to mention Hugh, and he noticed the saddening of the eye immediately afterwards.

"Is he ill?" said Mr. Carleton.

"I don't know," said Fleda faltering a little,--"he was not--very,--but a few weeks ago--"

Her eye explained the broken sentences which there in the neighbourhood of other ears she dared not finish.

"He will be better after he has seen you," said Mr. Carleton gently.

"Yes--"

A very sorrowful and uncertain "yes," with an "if" in the speaker's mind which she did not bring out.

"Can you sing your old song yet,--" said Mr. Carleton softly,--

"'Yet one thing secures us. Whatever betide?'"

But Fleda burst into tears.

"Forgive me," he whispered earnestly,--"for reminding you of that,--you did not need it, and I have only troubled you."

"No sir, you have not," said Fleda,--"it did not trouble me--and Hugh knows it better than I do. I cannot bear anything to-night, I believe--"

"So you have remembered that, Mr. Carleton?" she said a minute after.

"Do you remember that?" said he, putting her old little Bible into her hand.

Fleda seized it, but she could hardly bear the throng of images that started up around it. The smooth worn cover brought so back the childish happy days when it had been her constant companion--the shadows of the Queechy of old, and Cynthia and her grandfather; and the very atmosphere of those times when she had led a light-hearted strange wild life all alone with them, reading the Encyclopædia and hunting out the wood-springs. She opened the book and slowly turned over the leaves where her father's hand had drawn those lines, of remark and affection, round many a passage,--the very look of them she knew; but she could not see it now, for her eyes were dim and tears were dropping fast into her lap,--she hoped Mr. Carleton did not see them, but she could not help it; she could only keep the book out of the way of being blotted. And there were other and later associations she had with it too,--how dear!--how tender!--how grateful!

Mr. Carleton was quite silent for a good while--till the tears had ceased; then he bent towards her so as to be heard no further off.

"It has been for many years my best friend and companion," he said in a low tone.

Fleda could make no answer, even by look.

"At first," he went on softly, "I had a strong association of you with it; but the time came when I lost that entirely, and itself quite swallowed up the thought of the giver."

A quick glance and smile told how well Fleda understood, how heartily she was pleased with that. But she instantly looked away again.

"And now," said Mr. Carleton after a pause,--"for some time past, I have got the association again; and I do not choose to have it so. I have come to the resolution to put the book back into your hands and not receive it again, unless the giver go with the gift."

Fleda looked up, a startled look of wonder, into his face, but the dark eye left no doubt of the meaning of his words; and in unbounded confusion she turned her own and her attention, ostensibly, to the book in her hand, though sight and sense were almost equally out of her power. For a few minutes poor Fleda felt as if all sensation had retreated to her finger-ends. She turned the leaves over and over, as if willing to cheat herself or her companion into the belief that she had something to think of there, while associations and images of the past were gone with a vengeance, swallowed up in a tremendous reality of the present; and the book, which a minute ago was her father's Bible, was now--what was it?--something of Mr. Carleton's which she must give back to him. But still she held it and looked at it--conscious of no one distinct idea but that, and a faint one besides that he might like to be repossessed of his property in some reasonable time--time like everything else was in a whirl; the only steady thing in creation seemed to be that perfectly still and moveless figure by her side--till her trembling fingers admonished her they would not be able to hold anything much longer; and gently and slowly, without looking, her hand put the book back towards Mr. Carleton. That both were detained together she knew but hardly felt;--the thing was that she had given it!--

There was no other answer; and there was no further need that Mr. Carleton should make any efforts for diverting her from the scene and the circumstances where they were. Probably he knew that, for he made none. He was perfectly silent for a long time, and Fleda was deaf to any other voice that could be raised, near or far. She could not even think.

Mrs. Renney was happily snoring, and most of the other people had descended into their coat collars, or figuratively speaking had lowered their blinds, by tilting over their hats in some uncomfortable position that signified sleep; and comparative quiet had blessed the place for some time; as little noticed indeed by Fleda as noise would have been. The sole thing that she clearly recognized in connection with the exterior world was that clasp in which one of her hands lay. She did not know that the car had grown quiet, and that only an occasional grunt of ill-humour, or waking-up colloquy, testified that it was the unwonted domicile of a number of human beings who were harbouring there in a disturbed state of mind. But this state of things could not last. The time came that had been threatened, when their last supply of extrinsic warmth was at an end. Despite shut windows, the darkening of the stove was presently followed by a very sensible and fast-increasing change of temperature; and this addition to their causes of discomfort roused every one of the company from his temporary lethargy. The growl of dissatisfied voices awoke again, more gruff than before; the spirit of jesting had long languished and now died outright, and in its stead came some low and deep and bitter-spoken curses. Poor Mrs. Renney shook off her somnolency and shook her shoulders, a little business shake, admonitory to herself to keep cool; and Fleda came to the consciousness that some very disagreeable chills were making their way over her.

"Are you warm enough?" said Mr. Carleton suddenly, turning to her.

"Not quite," said Fleda hesitating,--"I feel the cold a little. Please don't, Mr. Carleton!--" she added earnestly as she saw him preparing to throw off his cloak, the identical black fox which Constance had described with so much vivacity;--"pray do not! I am not very cold--I can bear a little--I am not so tender as you think me; I do not need it, and you would feel the want very much after wearing it.--I won't put it on."

But he smilingly bade her "stand up," stooping down and taking one of her hands to enforce his words, and giving her at the same time the benefit of one of those looks of good humoured wilfulness to which his

mother always yielded, and to which Fleda yielded instantly, though with a colour considerably heightened at the slight touch of peremptoriness in his tone.

"You are not offended with me, Elfie?" he said in another manner, when she had sat down again and he was arranging the heavy folds of the cloak.

Offended!--A glance answered.

"You shall have everything your own way," he whispered gently, as he stooped down to bring the cloak under her feet,--"*except yourself*."

What good care should be taken of that exception was said in the dark eye at which Fleda hardly ventured half a glance. She had much ado to command herself.

She was shielded again from all the sights and sounds within reach. She was in a maze. The comfort of the fur cloak was curiously mixed with the feeling of something else, of which that was an emblem,--a surrounding of care and strength which would effectually be exerted for her protection,--somewhat that Fleda had not known for many a long day,--the making up of the old want. Fleda had it in her heart to cry like a baby. Such a dash of sunlight had fallen at her feet that she hardly dared look at it for fear of being dazzled; but she could not look anywhere that she did not see the reflection.

In the mean time the earful of people settled again into sullen quietude. The cold was not found propitious to quarrelling. Those who could subsided anew into lethargy, those who could not gathered in their outposts to make the best defence they might of the citadel. Most happily it was not an extreme night; cold enough to be very disagreeable and even (without a fur cloak) dangerous; but not enough to put even noses and ears in immediate jeopardy. Mr. Carleton had contrived to procure a comfortable wrapper for Mrs. Renney from a Yankee who for the sake of being "a warm man" as to his pockets was willing to be cold otherwise

for a time. The rest of the great coats and cloaks which were so alert and erect a little while ago were doubled up on every side in all sorts of despondent attitudes. A dull quiet brooded over the assembly; and Mr. Carleton walked up and down the vacant space. Once he caught an anxious glance from Fleda, and came immediately to her side.

"You need not be troubled about me," be said with a most genial smile;--"I am not suffering--never was further from it in my life."

Fleda could neither answer nor look.

"There are not many hours of the night to wear out," he said. "Can't you follow your neighbour's example?"

She shook her head.

"This watching is too hard for you. You will have another headache to-morrow."

"No--perhaps not," she said with a grateful look up.

"You do not feel the cold now, Elfie?"

"Not at all--not in the least--I am perfectly comfortable--I am doing very well--"

He stood still, and the changing lights and shades on Fleda's cheek grew deeper.

"Do you know where we are, Mr. Carleton?"

"Somewhere between a town the name of which I have forgotten and a place called Quarrenton, I think; and Quarrenton, they tell me, is but a few miles from Greenfield. Our difficulties will vanish, I hope, with the darkness."

He walked again, and Fleda mused, and wondered at herself in the black fox. She did not venture another look, though her eye took in nothing very distinctly but the outlines of that figure passing up and down through the car. He walked perseveringly; and weariness at last prevailed over everything else with Fleda; she lost herself with her head leaning against the bit of wood between the windows.

The rousing of the great coats, and the growing gray light, roused her before her uneasy sleep had lasted an hour. The lamps were out, the car was again spotted with two long rows of window-panes, through which the light as yet came but dimly. The morning had dawned at last, and seemed to have brought with it a fresh accession of cold, for everybody was on the stir. Fleda put up her window to get a breath of fresh air and see how the day looked.

A change of weather had come with the dawn. It was not fine yet. The snowing had ceased, but the clouds hung overhead still, though not with the leaden uniformity of yesterday; they were higher and broken into many a soft grey fold, that promised to roll away from the sky by and by. The snow was deep on the ground; every visible thing lapped in a thick white covering; a still, very grave, very pretty winter landscape, but somewhat dreary in its aspect to a trainful of people fixed in the midst of it out of sight of human habitation. Fleda felt that, but only in the abstract; to her it did not seem dreary; she enjoyed the wild solitary beauty of the scene very much, with many a grateful thought of what might have been. As it was, she left difficulties entirely to others.

As soon as it was light the various inmates of the strange dormitory gathered themselves up and set out on foot for Quarrenton. By one of them Mr. Carleton sent an order for a sleigh, which in as short a time as possible arrived, and transported him and Fleda and Mrs. Renney, and one other ill-bestead woman, safely to the little town of Quarrenton.

Chapter XLVIII.

> Welcome the sour cup of prosperity! Affliction may one day smile again, and till then, Sit thee down, sorrow!--Love's Labour Lost.

It had been a wild night, and the morning looked scared. Perhaps it was only the particular locality, for if ever a place shewed bleak and winter stricken the little town of Quarrenton was in that condition that morning. The snow overlaid and enveloped everything, except where the wind had been at work; and the wind and the grey clouds seemed the only agencies abroad. Nor a ray of sunlight to relieve the uniform sober tints, the universal grey and white, only varied where a black house-roof, partially cleared, or a blacker bare-branched tree, gave it a sharp interruption. There was not a solitary thing that bore an indication of comfortable life, unless the curls of smoke that went up from the chimneys; and Fleda was in no condition to study their physiognomy.

A little square hotel, perched alone on a rising ground, looked the especial bleak and unpromising spot of the place. It bore however the imposing title of the Pocahontas; and there the sleigh set them down.

They were ushered up-stairs into a little parlour furnished in the usual style, with one or two articles a great deal too showy for the place and a general dearth as to the rest. A lumbering mahogany sofa, that shewed as much wood and as little promise as possible; a marble-topped centre-table; chairs in the minority and curtains minus; and the hearth-rug providently turned bottom upwards. On the centre-table lay a pile of Penny Magazines, a volume of selections of poetry from various good authors, and a sufficient complement of newspapers. The room was rather cold, but of that the waiter gave a reasonable explanation in the fact that the fire had not been burning long.

Furs however might be dispensed with, or Fleda thought so; and taking off her bonnet she endeavoured to rest her weary head against the sharp-cut top of the sofa-back, which seemed contrived expressly to punish and forbid all attempts at ease-seeking. The mere change of position was still comparative ease. But the black fox had not done duty yet. Its ample folds were laid over the sofa, cushion-back and all, so as at once to serve for pillow and mattress, and Fleda being gently placed upon it laid her face down again upon the soft fur, which gave a very kindly welcome not more to the body than to the mind. Fleda almost smiled as she felt that. The furs were something more than a pillow for her cheek--they were the soft image of somewhat for her mind to rest on. But entirely exhausted, too much for smiles or tears, though both were near, she resigned herself as helplessly as an infant to the feeling of rest; and in five minutes was in a state of dreamy unconsciousness.

Mrs. Renney, who had slept a great part of the night, courted sleep anew in the rocking-chair, till breakfast should be ready; the other woman had found quarters in the lower part of the house; and Mr. Carleton stood still with folded arms to read at his leisure the fair face that rested so confidingly upon the black fur of his cloak, looking so very fair in the contrast. It was the same face he had known in time past,--the same, with only an alteration that had added new graces but had taken away none of the old. Not one of the soft outlines had grown hard under Time's discipline; not a curve had lost its grace or its sweet mobility; and yet the hand of Time had been there; for on brow and lip and cheek and eyelid there was that nameless grave composure which said touchingly that hope had long ago clasped hands with submission. And perhaps, that if hope's anchor had not been well placed, ay, even where it could not be moved, the storms of life might have beaten even hope from her ground and made a clean sweep of desolation over all she had left. Not the storms of the last few weeks. Mr. Carleton saw and understood their work in the perfectly colourless and thin cheek. But these other finer

drawn characters had taken longer to write. He did not know the instrument, but he read the hand-writing, and came to his own resolutions therefrom.

Yet if not untroubled she had remained unspotted by the world; that was as clear as the other. The slight eyebrow sat with its wonted calm purity of outline just where it used; the eyelid fell as quietly; the forehead above it was as unruffled; and if the mouth had a subdued gravity that it had taken years to teach, it had neither lost any of the sweetness nor any of the simplicity of childhood. It was a strange picture that Mr. Carleton was looking at,--strange for its rareness. In this very matter of simplicity, that the world will never leave those who belong to it. Half sitting and half reclining, she had given herself to rest with the abandonment and self-forgetfulness of a child; her attitude had the very grace of a child's unconsciousness; and her face shewed that even in placing herself there she had lost all thought of any other presence or any other eyes than her own; even of what her hand and cheek lay upon, and what it betokened. It meant something to Mr. Carleton too; and if Fleda could have opened her eyes she would have seen in those that were fixed upon her a happy promise for her future life. She was beyond making any such observations; and Mrs. Renney gave no interruption to his till the breakfast bell rang.

Mr. Carleton had desired the meal to be served in a private room. But he was met with a speech in which such a confusion of arguments endeavoured to persuade him to be of another mind, that he had at last given way. It was asserted that the ladies would have their breakfast a great deal quicker and a great deal hotter with the rest of the company; and in the same breath that it would be a very great favour to the house if the gentleman would not put them to the inconvenience of setting a separate table; the reasons of which inconvenience were set forth in detail, or would have been if the gentleman would have heard them; and

desirous especially of haste, on Fleda's account, Mr. Carleton signified his willingness to let the house accommodate itself. Following the bell a waiter now came to announce and conduct them to their breakfast.

Down the stairs, through sundry narrow turning passages, they went to a long low room at one corner of the house; where a table was spread for a very nondescript company, as it soon proved, many of their last night's companions having found their way thither. The two *ladies*, however, were given the chief posts at the head, as near as possible to a fiery hot stove, and served with tea and coffee from a neighbouring table by a young lady in long ringlets who was there probably for their express honour. But alas for the breakfast! They might as good have had the comfort of a private room, for there was none other to be had. Of the tea and coffee it might be said as once it was said of two bad roads--"whichever one you take you will wish you had taken the other;" the beefsteak was a problem of impracticability; and the chickens--Fleda could not help thinking that a well-to-do rooster which she saw flapping his wings in the yard, must in all probability be at that very moment endeavouring to account for a sudden breach in his social circle; and if the oysters had been some very fine ladies they could hardly have retained less recollection of their original circumstances. It was in vain to try to eat or to drink; and Fleda returned to her sofa with even an increased appetite for rest, the more that her head began to take its revenge for the trials to which it had been put the past day and night.

She had closed her eyes again in her old position. Mrs. Renney was tying her bonnet-strings. Mr. Carleton was pacing up and down.

"Aren't you going to get ready, Miss Ringgan?" said the former.

"How soon will the cars be here?" exclaimed Fleda starting up.

"Presently," said Mr. Carleton; "but," said he, coming up to her and taking her hands,--"I am going to prescribe for you again--will you let me?"

Fleda's face gave small promise of opposition.

"You are not fit to travel now. You need some hours of quiet rest before we go any further."

"But when shall we get home?" said Fleda.

"In good time--not by the railroad--there is a nearer way that will take us to Queechy without going through Greenfield. I have ordered a room to be made ready for you--will you try if it be habitable?"

Fleda submitted; and indeed there was in his manner a sort of gentle determination to which few women would have opposed themselves; besides that her head threatened to make a journey a miserable business.

"You are ill now," said Mr. Carleton. "Cannot you induce your companion to stay and attend you?"

"I don't want her," said Fleda.

Mr. Carleton however mooted the question himself with Mrs. Renney, but she represented to him, though with much deference, that the care of her property must oblige her to go where and when it went. He rang and ordered the housekeeper to be sent.

Presently after a young lady in ringlets entered the room, and first taking a somewhat leisurely survey of the company, walked to the window and stood there looking out. A dim recollection of her figure and air made Fleda query whether she were not the person sent for; but it was several minutes before it came into Mr. Carleton's head to ask if she belonged to the house.

"I do, sir," was the dignified answer.

"Will you shew this lady the room prepared for her? And take care that she wants nothing."

The owner of the ringlets answered not, but turning the front view of them full upon Fleda seemed to intimate that she was ready to act as her guide. She hinted however that the rooms were very *airy* in winter and that Fleda would stand a better chance of comfort where she was. But this Fleda would not listen to, and followed her adviser to the half warmed and certainly very airy apartment which had been got ready for her. It was probably more owing to something in her own appearance than to Mr. Carleton's word of admonition on the subject that her attendant was really assiduous and kind.

"Be you of this country?" she said abruptly, after her good offices as Fleda thought were ended, and she had just closed her eyes.

She opened them again and said "yes."

"Well, that ain't in the parlour, is he?"

"What?" said Fleda.

"One of our folks?"

"An American, you mean?--No."

"I thought he wa'n't--What is he?"

"He is English."

"Is he your brother?"

"No."

The young lady gave her a good look out of her large dark eyes, and remarking that "she thought they didn't look much like," left the room.

The day was spent by poor Fleda between pain and stupor, each of which acted in some measure to check the other; too much exhausted for nervous pain to reach the height it sometimes did, while yet that was sufficient to prevent stupor from sinking into sleep. Beyond any power of

thought or even fancy, with only a dreamy succession of images flitting across her mind, the hours passed she knew not how; that they did pass she knew from her handmaid in the long curls who was every now and then coming in to look at her and give her fresh water; it needed no ice. Her handmaid told her that the cars were gone by--that it was near noon--then that it was past noon. There was no help for it; she could only lie still and wait; it was long past noon before she was able to move; and she was looking ill enough yet when she at last opened the door of the parlour and slowly presented herself.

Mr. Carleton was there alone, Mrs. Renney having long since accompanied her baggage. He came forward instantly and led Fleda to the sofa, with such gentle grave kindness that she could hardly bear it; her nerves had been in an unsteady state all day. A table was set and partially spread with evidently much more care than the one of the morning; and Fleda sat looking at it afraid to trust herself to look anywhere else. For years she had been taking care of others; and now there was something so strange in this feeling of being cared for, that her heart was full. Whatever Mr. Carleton saw or suspected of this, it did not appear. On the contrary his manner and his talk on different matters was as cool, as quiet, as graceful, as if neither he nor Fleda had anything particular to think of; avoiding even an allusion to whatever might in the least distress her. Fleda thought she had a great many reasons to be grateful to him, but she never thanked him for anything more than at that moment she thanked him for the delicacy which so regarded her delicacy and put her in a few minutes completely at her ease as she could be.

The refreshments were presently brought, and Fleda was served with them in a way that went as far as possible towards making them satisfactory; but though a great improvement upon the morning they furnished still but the substitute for a meal. There was a little pause then after the horses were ordered.

"I am afraid you have wanted my former prescription to-day," said Mr. Carleton, after considering the little-improved colour of Fleda's face.

"I have indeed."

"Where is it?"

Fleda hesitated, and then in a little confusion said she supposed it was lying on Mrs. Evelyn's centre-table.

"How happens that?" said he smiling.

"Because--I could not help it, Mr. Carleton," said Fleda with no little difficulty;--"I was foolish--I could not bring it away."

He understood and was silent.

"Are you fit to bear a long ride in the cold?" he said compassionately a few minutes after.

"Oh yes!--It will do me good."

"You have had a miserable day, have you not?"

"My head has been pretty bad,--" said Fleda a little evasively.

"Well, what would you have?" said he lightly;--"doesn't that make a miserable day of it?"

Fleda hesitated and coloured,--and then conscious that her cheeks were answering for her, coloured so exceedingly that she was fain to put both her hands up to hide what they only served the more plainly to shew. No advantage was taken. Mr. Carleton said nothing; she could not see what answer might be in his face. It was only by a peculiar quietness in his tone whenever he spoke to her afterwards that Fleda knew she had been thoroughly understood. She dared not lift her eyes.

They had soon employment enough around her. A sleigh and horses better than anything else Quarrenton had been known to furnish, were carrying her rapidly towards home; the weather had perfectly cleared off, and in full brightness and fairness the sun was shining upon a brilliant world. It was cold indeed, though the only wind was that made by their progress; but Fleda had been again unresistingly wrapped in the furs and was for the time beyond the reach of that or any other annoyance. She eat silently and quietly enjoying; so quietly that a stranger might have questioned there being any enjoyment in the case. It was a very picturesque broken country, fresh-covered with snow; and at that hour, late in the day, the lights and shadows were a constantly varying charm to the eye. Clumps of evergreens stood out in full disclosure against the white ground; the bare branches of neighbouring trees, in all their barrenness, had a wild prospective or retrospective beauty peculiar to themselves. On the wavy white surface of the meadow-land, or the steep hill-sides, lay every variety of shadow in blue and neutral tint; where they lay not the snow was too brilliant to be borne. And afar off, through a heaven bright and cold enough to hold the canopy over Winter's head, the ruler of the day was gently preparing to say good-bye to the world. Fleda's eye seemed to be new set for all forms of beauty, and roved from one to the other, as grave and bright as nature itself.

For a little way Mr. Carleton left her to her musings and was as silent as she. But then he gently drew her into a conversation that broke up the settled gravity of her face and obliged her to divide her attention between nature and him, and his part of it he knew how to manage. But though eye and smile constantly answered him he could win neither to a straightforward bearing.

They were about a mile from Queechy when Pleda suddenly exclaimed,

"O Mr. Carleton, please stop the sleigh I--"

The horses were stopped.

"It is only Earl Douglass--our farmer," Fleda said in explanation,--"I want to ask how they are at home."

In answer to her nod of recognition Mr. Douglass came to the side of the vehicle; but till he was there, close, gave her no other answer by word or sign; when there, broke forth his accustomed guttural,

"How d'ye do!"

"How d'ye do, Mr. Douglass," said Fleda. "How are they all at home?"

"Well, there ain't nothin' new among 'em, as I've heerd on," said Earl, diligently though stealthily at the same time qualifying himself to make a report of Mr. Carleton,--"I guess they'll be glad to see you. *I* be."

"Thank you, Mr. Douglass. How is Hugh?"

"He ain't nothin' different from what he's been for a spell back--at least I ain't heerd that he was.--Maybe he is, but if he is I han't heerd speak of it, and if he was, I think I should ha' heerd speak of it. He *was* pretty bad a spell ago--about when you went away--but he's been better sen. So they say. I ha'n't seen him.--Well Flidda," he added with somewhat of a sly gleam in his eye,--"do you think you're going to make up your mind to stay to hum this time?"

"I have no immediate intention of running away, Mr. Douglass," said Fleda, her pale cheeks turning rose as she saw him looking curiously up and down the edges of the black fox. His eye came back to hers with a good-humoured intelligence that she could hardly stand.

"It's time you was back," said he. "Your uncle's to hum,--but he don't do me much good, whatever he does to other folks--nor himself nother, as far as the farm goes; there's that corn"--

"Very well, Mr. Douglass," said Fleda,--"I shall be at home now and I'll see about it."

"*Very* good!" said Earl as he stepped back,--"Queechy can't get along without you, that's no mistake."

They drove on a few minutes in silence.

"Aren't you thinking, Mr. Carleton," said Fleda, "that my countrymen are a strange mixture?"

"I was not thinking of them at all at this moment. I believe such a notion has crossed my mind."

"It has crossed mine very often," said Fleda.

"How do you read them? what is the basis of it?"

'How are they all at home?'
"How are they all at home?"

"I think,--the strong self-respect which springs from the security and importance that republican institutions give every man. But," she added colouring, "I have seen very little of the world and ought not to judge."

"I have no doubt you are quite right," said Mr. Carleton smiling. "But don't you think an equal degree of self-respect may consist with giving honour where honour is due?"

"Yes--" said Fleda a little doubtfully,--"where religion and not republicanism is the spring of it."

"Humility and not pride," said he. "Yes--you are right."

"My countrymen do yield honour where they think it is due," said Fleda; "especially where it is not claimed. They must give it to reality, not to pretension. And I confess I would rather see them a little rude in their independence than cringing before mere advantages of external position;--even for my own personal pleasure."

"I agree with you, Elfie,--putting perhaps the last clause out of the question."

"Now that man," said Fleda, smiling at his look,--"I suppose his address must have struck you as very strange; and yet there was no want of respect under it. I am sure he has a true thorough respect and even regard for me, and would prove it on any occasion."

"I have no doubt of that."

"But it does not satisfy you?"

"Not quite. I confess I should require more from any one under my control."

"Oh nobody is under control here," said Fleda. "That is, I mean, individual control. Unless so far as self-interest comes in. I suppose that is all-powerful here as elsewhere."

"And the reason it gives less power to individuals is that the greater freedom of resources makes no man's interest depend so absolutely on one other man. That is a reason you cannot regret. No--your countrymen have the best of it, Elfie. But do you suppose that this is a fair sample of the whole country?"

"I dare not say that," said Fleda. "I am afraid there is not so much intelligence and cultivation everywhere. But I am sure there are many parts of the land that will bear a fair comparison with it."

"It is more than I would dare say for my own land."

"I should think--" Fleda suddenly stopped.

"What?--" said Mr. Carleton gently.

"I beg your pardon, sir,--I was going to say something very presumptuous."

"You cannot," he said in the same tone.

"I was going to say," said Fleda blushing, "that I should think there might be a great deal of pleasure in raising the tone of mind and character among the people,--as one could who had influence over a large neighbourhood."

His smile was very bright in answer.

"I have been trying that, Elfie, for the last eight years."

Fleda's eye looked now eagerly in pleasure and in curiosity for more. But he was silent.

"I was thinking a little while ago," he said, "of the time once before when I rode here with you--when you were beginning to lead me to the problem I have been trying to work out ever since.--When I left you in Paris I went to resolve with myself the question, What I had to do in the world?--Your little Bible was my invaluable help. I had read very little of it when I threw aside all other books; and my problem was soon solved. I saw that the life has no honour nor value which is not spent to the glory of God. I saw the end I was made for--the happiness I was fitted for--the dignity to which even a fallen creature may rise, through his dear Redeemer and surety."

Fleda's eyes were down now. Mr. Carleton was silent a moment, watching one or two bright witnesses that fell from them.

"The next conclusion was easy,--that my work was at home.--I have wanted my good fairy," Mr. Carleton went on smiling. "But I hope she will be contented to carry the standard of Christianity, without that of republicanism."

"But Christianity tends directly to republicanism, Mr. Carleton," said Fleda, trying to laugh.

"I know that," said he smiling, "and I am willing to know it. But the leaven of truth is one thing, and the powder train of the innovator is another."

Fleda sat thinking that she had very little in common with the layers of powder trains. She did not know the sleigh was passing Deepwater Lake, till Mr. Carleton said,--

"I am glad, my dear Elfie, for your sake, that we are almost at the end of your journey."

"I should think you might be glad for your own sake, Mr. Carleton."

"No--my journey is not ended--"

"Not?"

"No--it will not be ended till I get back to New York, or rather till I find myself here again--I shall make very little delay there--"

"But you will not go any further to-night?" said Fleda, her eye this time meeting his fully.

"Yes--I must take the first train to New York. I have some reason to expect my mother by this steamer."

"Back to New York!" said Fleda. "Then taking care of me has just hindered you in your business."

But even as she spoke she read the truth in his eye and her own fell in confusion.

"My business?" said he smiling;--"you know it now, Elfie. I arrived at Mrs. Evelyn's just after you had quitted it, intending to ask you to take the long talked of drive; and learned to my astonishment that you had

left the city, and as Edith kindly informed me, under no better guardianship than that in which I found you. I was just in time to reach the boat."

"And you were in the boat night before last?"

"Certainly."

"I should have felt a great deal easier if I had known that," said Fleda.

"So should I," said he, "but you were invisible, till I discerned you in the midst of a crowd of people before me in the car."

Fleda was silent till the sleigh stopped and Mr. Carleton had handed her out.

"What's going to be done

"I will send somebody down to help you with it," said Fleda. "It is too heavy for one alone."

"Well I reckon it is," said he. "I guess you didn't know I was a cousin, did you?"

"No," said Fleda.

"I believe I be."

"Who are you?"

"I am Pierson Barnes. I live to Quarrenton for a year back. Squire Joshua Springer's your uncle, ain't he?"

"Yes, my father's uncle."

"Well he's mine too. His sister's my mother."

"I'll send somebody to help you, Mr. Barnes."

She took Mr. Carleton's arm and walked half the way up to the house without daring to look at him.

"Another specimen of your countrymen," he said smiling.

There was nothing but quiet amusement in the tone, and there was not the shadow of anything else in his face. Fleda looked, and thanked him mentally, and drew breath easier. At the house door he made a pause.

"You are coming in, Mr. Carleton?"

"Not now."

"It is a long drive to Greenfield, Mr. Carleton;--you must not turn away from a country house till we have shewn ourselves unworthy to live in it. You will come in and let us give you something more substantial than those Quarrenton oysters. Do not say no," she said earnestly as she saw a refusal in his eye,--"I know what you are thinking of, but they do not know that you have been told anything--it makes no difference."

She laid her gentle detaining hand, as irresistible in its way as most things, upon his arm, and he followed her in.

Only Hugh was in the sitting-room, and he was in a great easy-chair by the fire. It struck to Fleda's heart; but there was no time but for a flash of thought. He had turned his face and saw her. Fleda meant to have controlled herself and presented Mr. Carleton properly, but Hugh started up, he saw nothing but herself, and one view of the ethereal delicacy of his face made Fleda for a moment forget everything but him. They were in each other's arms, and then still as death. Hugh was unconscious that a stranger was there, and though Fleda was very conscious that one was there who was no stranger,--there was so much in both hearts, so much of sorrow and joy, and gratitude and tenderness, on the one part and on the other, so much that even if they had been

alone lips could only have said silently,--that for a little while they kissed each other and wept in a passionate attempt to speak what their hearts were too full of.

Fleda at last whispered to Hugh that somebody else was there and turned to make as well as she might the introduction. But Mr. Carleton did not need it, and made his own with that singular talent which in all circumstances, wherever he chose to exert it, had absolute power. Fleda saw Hugh's countenance change, with a kind of pleased surprise, and herself stood still under the charm for a minute; then she recollected she might be dispensed with. She took up her little spaniel who was in an agony of gratulation at her feet, and went out into the kitchen.

"Well do you mean to say you are here at last?" said Barby, her grey eyes flashing pleasure as she came forward to take the half hand which, owing to King's monopoly, was all Fleda had to give her. "Have you come home to stay, Fleda?"

"I am tired enough to be quiet," said Fleda. "But dear Barby, what have you got in the house?--I want supper as quickly as it can be had."

"Well you do look dreadful bad," said Barby eying her. "Why there ain't much particular, Fleda; nobody's had any heart to eat lately; I thought I might a'most as well save myself the fuss of getting victuals. Hugh lives like a bird, and Mis' Rossitur ain't much better, and I think all of 'em have been keeping their appetites till you came back; 'cept Philetus and me; we keep it up pretty well. Why you're come home hungry, ain't you?"

"No, not I," said Fleda, "but there's a gentleman here that came with me that must have something before he goes away again. What have you Barby?"

"Who is he?" said Barby.

"A friend that took care of me on the way--I'll tell you about it,--but in the mean time, supper, Barby."

"Is he a New Yorker, that one must be curious for?"

"As curious as you like," said Fleda, "but he is not a New Yorker."

"Where *is* he from, then?" said Barby, who was busily putting on the tea-kettle.

"England."

"England!" said Barby facing about. "Oh if he's an Englishman I don't care for him, Fleda."

"But you care for me," said Fleda laughing; "and for my sake don't let our hospitality fail to somebody who has been very kind to me, if he is an Englishman; and he is in haste to be off."

"Well I don't know what we're a going to give him," said Barby looking at her. "There ain't much in the pantry besides cold pork and beans that Philetus and me made our dinner on--they wouldn't have it in there, and eat nothing but some pickerel the doctor sent down--and cold fish ain't good for much."

"None of them left uncooked?"

"Yes, there's a couple--he sent a great lot--I guess he thought there was more in the family--but two ain't enough to go round; they're little ones."

"No, but put them down and I'll make an omelette. Just get the things ready for me, Barby, will you, while I run up to see aunt Lucy. The hens have begun to lay?"

"La yes--Philetus fetches in lots of eggs--he loves 'em, I reckon--but you ain't fit this minute to do a thing but rest, Fleda."

"I'll rest afterwards. Just get the things ready for me, Barby, and an apron; and the table--I'll be down in a minute. And Barby, grind some coffee, will you?"

But as she turned to run up stairs, her uncle stood in her way, and the supper vanished from Fleda's head. His arms were open and she was silently clasped in them, with so much feeling on both sides that thought and well nigh strength for anything else on her part was gone. His smothered words of deep blessing overcame her. Fleda could do nothing but sob, in distress, till she recollected Barby. Putting her arms round his neck then she whispered to him that Mr. Carleton was in the other room and shortly explained how he came to be there, and begged her uncle would go in and see him till supper should be ready. Enforcing this request with a parting kiss on his cheek, she ran off up stairs. Mr. Rossitur looked extremely moody and cloudy for a few minutes, and then went in and joined his guest. Mrs. Rossitur and her daughter could not be induced to shew themselves.

Little Rolf, however, had no scruples of any kind. He presently edged himself into the room to see the stranger whom he no sooner saw than with a joyous exclamation he bounded forward to claim an old friend.

"Why, Mr. Carleton," exclaimed Mr. Rossitur in surprise, "I was not aware that this young gentleman had the honour of your acquaintance."

"But I have!" said Rolf.

"In London, sir, I had that pleasure," said Mr. Carleton.

"I think it was *I* had the pleasure," said Rolf, pounding one hand upon Mr. Carleton's knee.

"Where is your mother?"

"She wouldn't come down," said Rolf,--"but I guess she will when she knows who is here--"

And he was darting away to tell her, when Mr. Carleton, within whose arms he stood, quietly restrained him, and told him he was going away presently, but would come again and see his mother another time.

"Are you going back to England, sir?"

"By and by."

"But you will come here again first?"

"Yes--if Mr. Rossitur will let me."

"Mr. Carleton knows he commands his own welcome," said that gentleman somewhat stately. "Go and tell your aunt Fleda that tea is ready, Rolf."

"She knows," said Rolf. "She was making an omelette--I guess it was for this gentleman!"

Whose name he was not clear of yet. Mr. Rossitur looked vexed, but Hugh laughed and asked if his aunt gave him leave to tell that. Rolf entered forthwith into discussion on this subject, while Mr. Carleton who had not seemed to hear it engaged Mr. Rossitur busily in another; till the omelette and Fleda came in. Rolf's mind however was ill at ease.

"Aunt Fleda," said he, as soon as she had fairly taken her place at the head of the table, "would you mind my telling that you made the omelette for this gentleman?"

Fleda cast a confused glance first at the person in question and then round the table, but Mr. Carleton without looking at her answered instantly,

"Don't you understand, Rolf, that the same kindness which will do a favour for a friend will keep him in ignorance of it?"

Rolf pondered a moment and then burst forth,

"Why, sir, wouldn't you like it as well for knowing she made it?"

It was hardly in human gravity to stand this. Fleda herself laughed, but Mr. Carleton as unmoved as possible answered him, "Certainly not!"--and Rolf was nonplussed.

The supper was over. Hugh had left the room, and Mr. Rossitur had before that gone out to give directions about Mr. Carleton's horses. He and Fleda were left alone.

"I have something against you, fairy," said he lightly, taking her hand and putting it to his lips. "You shall not again do me such honour as you have done me to-day--I did not deserve it, Elfie."

The last words were spoken half reproachfully. Fleda stood a moment motionless, and then by some curious revulsion of feeling put both her hands to her face and burst into tears.

She struggled against them, and spoke almost immediately,

"You will think me very foolish, Mr. Carleton,--I am ashamed of myself--but I have lived here so long in this way,--my spirits have grown so quieted by different things,--that it seems sometimes as if I could not bear anything.--I am afraid--"

"Of what, my dear Elfie?"

But she did not answer, and her tears came again.

"You are weary and spent," he said gently, repossessing himself of one of her hands. "I will ask you another time what you are afraid of, and rebuke all your fears."

"I deserve nothing but rebuke now," said Fleda.

But her hand knew, by the gentle and quiet clasp in which it lay, that there was no disposition to give it.

"Do not speak to me for a minute," she said hastily as she heard some one coming.

She went to the window and stood there looking out till Mr. Carleton came to bid her good-bye.

"Will you permit me to say to Mrs. Evelyn," he said in a low tone, "that you left a piece of your property in her house and have commissioned me to bring it you?"

"Yes--" said Fleda, hesitating and looking a little confused,--"but--will you let me write a note instead, Mr. Carleton?"

"Certainly!--but what are you thinking of, Elfie? what grave doubt is lying under your brow?"

All Fleda's shadows rolled away before that clear bright eye.

"I have found by experience," she said, smiling a little but looking down,--"that whenever I tell my secret thoughts to anybody I have some reason afterwards to be sorry for it."

"You shall make me an exception to your rule, however, Elfie."

Fleda looked up, one of her looks half questioning, half fearing, and then answered, a little hesitating,

"I was afraid, sir, that if you went to Mrs. Evelyn's on that errand--I was afraid you would shew them you were displeased."

"And what then?" said he quietly.

"Only--that I wanted to spare them what always gives me a cold chill."

"Gives you!" said Mr. Carleton.

"No sir--only by sympathy--I thought my agency would be the gentlest."

"I see I was right," she said, looking up as he did not answer,--"they don't deserve it,--not half so much as you think. They talk--they don't know what. I am sure they never meant half they said--never meant to annoy me with it, I mean,--and I am sure they have a true love for me; they have shewn it in a great many ways. Constance especially never shewed me anything else. They have been very kind to me; and as to letting me come away as they did, I suppose they thought I was in a greater hurry to get home than I really was--and they would very likely not have minded travelling so themselves; I am so different from them that they might in many things judge me by themselves and yet judge far wrong."

Fleda was going on, but she suddenly became aware that the eye to which she was speaking had ceased to look at the Evelyns, even in imagination, and she stopped short.

"Will you trust me, after this, to see Mrs. Evelyn without the note?" said he smiling.

But Fleda gave him her hand very demurely without raising her eyes again, and he went.

Barby who had come in to clear away the table took her stand at the window to watch Mr. Carleton drive off. Fleda had retreated to the fire. Barby looked in silence till the sleigh was out of sight.

"Is he going back to England now?" she said coming back to the table.

"No."

Barby gathered a pile of plates together and then enquired,

"Is he going to settle in America?"

"Why no, Barby! What makes you ask such a thing?"

"I thought he looked as if he had dressed himself for a cold climate," said Barby dryly.

Fleda sat down by Hugh's easy-chair and laid her head on his breast.

"I like your Mr. Carleton very much," Hugh whispered after awhile.

"Do you?" said Fleda, a little wondering at Hugh's choice of that particular pronominal adjective.

"Very much indeed. But he has changed, Fleda?"

"Yes--in some things--some great things."

"He says he is coming again," said Hugh.

Fleda's heart beat. She was silent.

"I am very glad," repeated Hugh, "I like him very much. But you won't leave me, Fleda,--will you?"

"Leave you?" said Fleda looking at him.

"Yes," said Hugh smiling, and drawing her head down again;--I always thought what he came over here for. But you will stay with me while I want you, Fleda?"

"While you want me!" said Fleda again.

"Yes.--It won't be long."

"What won't be long?"

"I," said Hugh quietly. "Not long. I am very glad I shall not leave you alone, dear Fleda--very glad!--promise me you will not leave me any more."

"Don't talk so, dear Hugh!"

"But it is true, Fleda," said Hugh gently. "I know it. I sha'n't be here but a little while. I am so glad you are come home, dear Fleda!--You will not let anybody take you away till I am gone first?"

Fleda drew her arm close around Hugh's neck and was still,--still even to his ear,--for a good while. A hard battle must be fought, and she must not be weak, for his sake and for everybody's sake. Others of the family had come or were coming into the room. Hugh waited till a short breath, but freer drawn, told him he might speak.

"Fleda--" he whispered.

"What?"

"I am very happy.--I only want your promise about that."

"I can't talk to you, Hugh."

"No, but promise me."

"What?"

"That you will not let anybody take you away while I want you."

"I am sure he would not ask it," said Fleda, hiding her cheeks and eyes at once in his breast.

Chapter XLIX.

> Do you think I shall not love a sad Pamela as well as a joyful?
>
> Sidney.

Mr. Carleton came back without his mother; she had chosen to put off her voyage till spring. He took up his quarters at Montepoole, which, far though it was, was yet the nearest point where his notions of ease could have freedom enough.

One would have thought that saw him,--those most nearly concerned almost did think,--that in his daily coming to Queechy Mr. Carleton sought everybody's pleasure rather than his own. He was Fleda's most gentle and kind assistant in taking care of Hugh, soon dearly valued by the sick one, who watched for and welcomed his coming as a bright spot in the day; and loved particularly to have Mr. Carleton's hand do anything for him. Rather than almost any other. His mother's was too feeling; Fleda's Hugh often feared was weary; and his father's, though gentle to him as to an infant, yet lacked the mind's training. And though Marion was his sister in blood, Guy was his brother in better bonds. The deep blue eye that little Fleda had admired Hugh learned to love and rest on singularly.

To the rest of the family Mr. Carleton's influence was more soothing and cheering than any cause beside. To all but the head of it. Even Mrs. Rossitur, after she had once made up her mind to see him, could not bear to be absent when he was in the house. The dreaded contrast with old times gave no pain, either to her or Marion. Mr. Carleton forgot so completely that there was any difference that they were charmed into forgetting it too. But Mr. Rossitur's pride lay deeper, or had been less humbled by sorrow; the recollections that his family let slip never failed to gall him when Mr. Carleton was present; and if now and then for a moment these were banished by his guest's graces of mind and manner, the next breath was a sigh for the circles and the pleasures they served to recall, now seeming for ever lost to him. Mr. Carleton perceived that his company gave pain and not pleasure to his host and for that reason was the less in the house, and made his visits to Hugh at times when Mr. Rossitur was not in the way. Fleda he took out of the house and away with him, for her good and his own.

To Fleda the old childish feeling came back, that she was in somebody's hands who had a marvellous happy way of managing things about her and even of managing herself. A kind of genial atmosphere, that was always doing her good, yet so quietly and so skilfully that she could only now and then get a chance even to look her thanks. Quietly and efficiently he was exerting himself to raise the tone of her mind, to brighten her spirits, to reach those sober lines that years of patience had drawn round her eye and mouth, and charm them away. So gently, so indirectly, by efforts so wisely and gracefully aimed, he set about it, that Fleda did not know what he was doing; but *he* knew. He knew when he saw her brow unbend and her eye catch its old light sparkle, that his conversation and the thoughts and interests with which he was rousing her mind or fancy, were working, and would work all he pleased. And though the next day he might find the old look of patient gravity again, he hardly wished it not there, for the pleasure of doing it away. Hugh's anxious question to Fleda had been very uncalled for, and Fleda's assurance was well-grounded; that subject was never touched upon.

Fleda's manner with Mr. Carleton was peculiar and characteristic. In the house, before others, she was as demure and reserved as though he had been a stranger; she never placed herself near him, nor entered into conversation with him, unless when he obliged her; but when they were alone there was a frank confidence and simplicity in her manner that most happily answered the high-bred delicacy that had called it out.

One afternoon of a pleasant day in March Fleda and Hugh were sitting alone together in the sick room. Hugh was weaker than usual, but not confined to his bed; he was in his great easy-chair which had been moved up-stairs for him again. Fleda had been repeating hymns.

"You are tired," Hugh said.

"No--"

"There's something about you that isn't strong," said Hugh fondly. "I wonder where is Mr. Carleton to-day. It is very pleasant, isn't it?"

"Very pleasant, and warm; it is like April; the snow all went off yesterday, and the ground is dry except in spots."

"I wish he would come and give you a good walk. I have noticed how you always come back looking so much brighter after one of your walks or rides with him."

"What makes you think so, dear Hugh?" said Fleda a little troubled.

"Only my eyes," said Hugh smiling. "It does me as much good as you, Fleda."

"I *never* want to go and leave you, Hugh."

"I am very glad there is somebody to take you. I wish he would come. You want it this minute."

"I don't think I shall let him take me if he comes."

"Whither? and whom?" said another voice.

"I didn't know you were there, sir," said Fleda suddenly rising.

"I am but just here--Rolf admitted me as he passed out."

Coming in between them and still holding the hand of one Mr. Carleton bent down towards the other.

"How is Hugh, to-day?"

It was pleasant to see, that meeting of eyes,--the grave kindliness on the one side, the confident affection on the other. But the wasted features said as plainly as the tone of Hugh's gentle reply, that he was passing away,--fast.

"What shall I do for you?"

"Take Fleda out and give her a good walk. She wants it."

"I will, presently. You are weary--what shall I do to rest you?"

"Nothing--" said Hugh, closing his eyes with a very placid look;--"unless you will put me in mind of something about heaven, Mr. Carleton."

"Shall I read to you?--Baxter,--or something else?"

"No--just give me something to think of while you're gone,--as you have done before, Mr. Carleton."

"I will give you two or three of the Bible bits on that subject; they are but hints and indications you know--rather rays of light that stream out from the place than any description of it; but you have only to follow one of these indications and see whither it will lead you. The first I recollect is that one spoken to Abraham, 'Fear not--I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.'"

"Don't go any further, Mr. Carleton," said Hugh with a smile. "Fleda--do you remember?"

They sat all silent, quite silent, all three, for nobody knew how long.

"You were going to walk," said Hugh without looking at them.

Fleda however did not move till a word or two from Mr. Carleton had backed Hugh's request; then she went.

"Is she gone?" said Hugh. "Mr. Carleton, will you hand me that little desk."

It was his own. Mr. Carleton brought it. Hugh opened it and took out a folded paper which he gave to Mr. Carleton, saying that he thought he ought to have it.

"Do you know the handwriting, sir?"

"No."

"Ah she has scratched it so. It is Fleda's."

Hugh shut his eyes again and Mr. Carleton seeing that he had settled himself to sleep went to the window with the paper. It hardly told him anything he did not know before, though set in a fresh light.

"Cold blew the east wind
And thick fell the rain,
I looked for the tops
Of the mountains in vain;
Twilight was gathering
And dark grew the west,
And the woodfire's crackling
Toned well with the rest.

"Speak fire and tell me--
Thy flickering flame
Fell on me in years past--
Say, am I the same?
Has my face the same brightness
In those days it wore?--
My foot the same lightness
As it crosses the floor?

"Methinks there are changes--
Am weary to-night,--
I once was as tireless
As the bird on her flight;
My bark in full measure
Threw foam from the prow;--
Not even for pleasure
Would I care to move now.

"Tis not the foot only
That lieth thus still,--
I am weary in spirit,
I am listless in will.
My eye vainly peereth
Through the darkness, to find
Some object that cheereth--
Some light for the mind.

"What shadows come o'er me--
What things of the past,--
Bright things of my childhood
That fled all too fast,
The scenes where light roaming
My foot wandered free,
Come back through the gloamin'--
Come all back to me.

"The cool autumn evening,
The fair summer morn,--
The dress and the aspect
Some dear ones have worn,--
The sunshiny places--
The shady hill-side--
The words and the faces
That might not abide.--

"Die out little fire--
Ay, blacken and pine!--
So have paled many lights
That were brighter than thine.
I can quicken thy embers
Again with a breath,
But the others lie cold
In the ashes of death."

Mr. Carleton had read near through the paper before Fleda came in.

"I have kept you a long time, Mr. Carleton," she said coming up to the window; "I found aunt Lucy wanted me."

But she saw with a little surprise the deepening eye which met her, and which shewed, she knew, the working of strong feeling. Her own eye went to the paper in search of explanation.

"What have you there?--Oh, Mr. Carleton," she said, putting her hand over it,--"Please to give it to me!"

Fleda's face was very much in earnest. He took the hand but did not give her the paper, and looked his refusal.

"I am ashamed you should see that!--who gave it to you?"

"You shall wreak your displeasure on no one but me," he said smiling.

"But have you read it?"

"Yes."

"I am very sorry!"

"I am very glad, my dear Elfie."

"You will think--you will think what wasn't true,--it was just a mood I used to get into once in a while--I used to be angry with myself for it, but I could not help it--one of those listless fits would take me now and then--"

"I understand it, Elfie."

"I am very sorry you should know I ever felt or wrote so."

"Why?"

"It was very foolish and wrong--"

"Is that a reason for my not knowing it?"

"No--not a good one--But you have read it now,--won't you let me have it?"

"No--I shall ask for all the rest of the portfolio, Elfie," he said as he put it in a place of security.

"Pray do not!" said Fleda most unaffectedly.

"Why?"

"Because I remember Mrs. Carleton says you always have what you ask for."

"Give me permission to put on your bonnet, then," said he laughingly, taking it from her hand.

The air was very sweet, the footing pleasant. The first few steps of the walk were made by Fleda in silence, with eager breath and a foot that grew lighter as it trod.

"I don't think it was a right mood of mind I had when I wrote that," she said. "It was morbid. But I couldn't help it.--Yet if one could keep possession of those words you quoted just now, I suppose one never would have morbid feelings, Mr. Carleton?"

"Perhaps not; but human nature has a weak hold of anything, and many things may make it weaker."

"Mine is weak," said Fleda. "But it is possible to keep firm hold of those words, Mr. Carleton?"

"Yes--by strength that is not human nature's--And after all the firm hold is rather that in which we are held, or ours would soon fail. The very hand that makes the promise its own must be nerved to grasp it. And so

it is best, for it keeps us looking off always to the Author and Finisher of our faith."

"I love those words," said Fleda. "But Mr. Carleton, how shall one be *sure* that one has a right to those other words--those I mean that you told to Hugh? One cannot take the comfort of them unless one is *sure*."

Her voice trembled.

"My dear Elfie, the promises have many of them their *double*--stamped with the very same signet--and if that sealed counterpart is your own, it is the sure earnest and title to the whole value of the promise."

"Well--in this case?" said Fleda eagerly.

"In this case,--God says, 'I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.' Now see if your own heart can give the countersign,--'*Thou art my portion, O Lord*!'"

Fleda's head sank instantly and almost lay upon his arm.

"If you have the one, my dear Elfie, the other is yours--it is the note of hand of the maker of the promise--sure to be honoured. And if you want proof here it is,--and a threefold cord is not soon broken.--'Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.'"

There was a pause of some length. Fleda had lifted up her head, but walked along very quietly, not seeming to care to speak.

"Have you the countersign, Elfie?"

Fleda flashed a look at him, and only restrained herself from weeping again.

"Yes.--But so I had then, Mr. Carleton--only sometimes I got those fits of feeling--I forgot it, I suppose."

"When were these verses written?"

"Last fall;--uncle Rolf was away, and aunt Lucy unhappy,--and I believe I was tired--I suppose it was that."

For a matter of several rods each was busy with his own musings. But Mr. Carleton bethought himself.

"Where are you, Elfie?"

"Where am I?"

"Yes--Not at Queechy?"

"No indeed," said Fleda laughing. "Far enough away."

"Where?"

"At Paris--at the Marché des Innocens."

"How did you get to Paris?"

"I don't know--by a bridge of associations, I suppose, resting one end on last year, and the other on the time when I was eleven years old."

"Very intelligible," said Mr. Carleton smiling.

"Do you remember that morning, Mr. Carleton?--when you took Hugh and me to the Marché des Innocens?"

"Perfectly."

"I have thanked you a great many times since for getting up so early that morning."

"I think I was well paid at the time. I remember I thought I had seen one of the prettiest sights I had even seen in Paris."

"So I thought!" said Fleda. "It has been a pleasant picture in my imagination ever since."

There was a curious curl in the corners of Mr. Carleton's mouth which made Fleda look an inquiry--a look so innocently wistful that his gravity gave way.

"My dear Elfie!" said he, "you are the very child you were then."

"Am I?" said Fleda. "I dare say I am, for I feel so. I have the very same feeling I used to have then, that I am a child, and you taking the care of me into your own hands."

"One half of that is true, and the other half nearly so."

"How good you always were to me!" Fleda said with a sigh.

"Not necessary to balance the debtor and creditor items on both sides," he said with a smile, "as the account bids fair to run a good while."

A silence again, during which Fleda is clearly *not* enjoying the landscape nor the fine weather.

"Elfie,--what are you meditating?"

She came back from her meditations with a very frank look.

"I was thinking,--Mr. Carleton,--of your notions about female education."

"Well?--"

They had paused upon a rising ground. Fleda hesitated, and then looked up in his face.

"I am afraid you will find me wanting, and when you do, will you put me in the way of being all you wish me to be?"

Her look was ingenuous and tender, equally. He gave her no answer, except by the eye of grave intentness that fixed hers till she could meet it no longer and her own fell. Mr. Carleton recollected himself.

"My dear Elfie," said he, and whatever the look had meant Elfie was at no loss for the tone now,--"what do you consider yourself deficient in?"

Fleda spoke with a little difficulty.

"I am afraid in a good many things--in general reading,--and in what are called accomplishments--"

"You shall read as much as you please by and by," said he, "provided you will let me read with you; and as for the other want, Elfie, it is rather a source of gratification to me."

Elfie very naturally asked why?

"Because as soon as I have the power I shall immediately constitute myself your master in the arts of riding and drawing, and in any other art or acquisition you may take a fancy to, and give you lessons diligently."

"And will there be gratification in that?" said Fleda.

His answer was by a smile. But he somewhat mischievously asked her, "Will there not?"--and Fleda was quiet.

Chapter L.

Friends, I sorrow not to leave ye;
If this life an exile be,
We who leave it do but journey
Homeward to our family.

Spanish Ballad.

The first of April came.

Mr. Rossitur had made up his mind not to abide at Queechy, which only held him now by the frail thread of Hugh's life. Mr. Carleton knew this, and had even taken some steps towards securing for him a situation in the West Indies. But it was unknown to Fleda; she had not heard her uncle say anything on the subject since she came home; and though aware that their stay was a doubtful matter, she still thought it might be as well to have the garden in order. Philetus could not be trusted to do everything wisely of his own head, and even some delicate jobs of hand could not be safely left to his skill; if the garden was to make any headway Fleda's head and hand must both be there, she knew. So as the spring opened she used to steal away from the house every morning for an hour or two, hardly letting her friends know what she was about, to make sure that peas and potatoes and radishes and lettuce were in the right places at the right times, and to see that the later and more delicate vegetables were preparing for. She took care to have this business well over before the time that Mr. Carleton ever arrived from the Pool.

One morning she was busy in dressing the strawberry beds, forking up the ground between the plants and filling the vacancies that the severe winter or some irregularities of fall dressing had made. Mr. Skillcorn was rendering a somewhat inefficient help, or perhaps amusing himself with seeing how she worked. The little old silver-grey hood was bending down over the strawberries, and the fork was going at a very energetic rate.

"Philetus--"

"Marm!"

"Will you bring me that bunch of strawberry plants that lies at the corner of the beds, in the walk?--and my trowel?"

"I will!--" said Mr. Skillcorn.

It was another hand however that brought them and laid them beside her; but Fleda very intent upon her work and hidden under her close hood did not find it out. She went on busily putting in the plants as she found room for them, and just conscious, as she thought, that Philetus was still standing at her side she called upon him from time to time, or merely stretched out her hand, for a fresh plant as she had occasion for it.

"Philetus," she said at length, raising her voice a little that it might win to him round the edge of her hood without turning her face,--"I wish you would get the ground ready for that other planting of potatoes--you needn't stay to help me any longer."

"'Tain't me, I guess," said the voice of Philetus on the other side of her.

Fleda looked in astonishment to make sure that it really was Mr. Skillcorn proceeding along the garden path in that quarter, and turning jumped up and dropped her trowel and fork, to have her hands otherwise occupied. Mr. Skillcorn walked off leisurely towards the potato ground, singing to himself in a kind of consolatory aside,--

> "I cocked up my beaver, and who but I!--
> The lace in my hat was so gallant and so gay,
> That I flourished like a king in his own coun*tray*."

"There is one of your countrymen that is an odd variety, certainly," said Mr. Carleton, looking after him with a very comic expression of eye.

"Is he not!" said Fleda. "And hardly a common one. There never was a line more mathematically straight than the course of Philetus's ideas; they never diverge, I think, to the right hand or the left, a jot from his own self-interest."

"You will be an invaluable help to me, Elfie, if you can read my English friends as closely."

"I am afraid you will not let me come as close to them," said Fleda laughing.

"Perhaps not. I shouldn't like to pay too high a premium for the knowledge. How is Hugh, to-day?"

Fleda answered with a quick change of look and voice that he was much as usual.

"My mother has written me that she will be here by the Europa, which is due to-morrow--I must set off for New York this afternoon; therefore I came so early to Queechy."

Fleda was instinctively pulling off her gardening gloves, as they walked towards the house.

"Aunt Miriam wants to see you, Mr. Carleton--she begged I would ask you to come there some time--"

"With great pleasure--shall we go there now, Elfie?"

"I will be ready in five minutes."

Mrs. Rossitur was alone in the breakfast-room when they went in. Hugh she reported was asleep, and would be just ready to see Mr. Carleton by the time they got back. They stood a few minutes talking, and then Fleda went to get ready.

Both pair of eyes followed her as she left the room and then met with perfect understanding.

"Will you give your child to me, Mrs. Rossitur?" said the gentleman.

"With all my heart!" exclaimed Mrs. Rossitur bursting into tears,--"even if I were left alone entirely--"

Her agitation was uncontrolled for a minute, and then she said, with feeling seemingly too strong to be kept in,

"If I were only sure of meeting her in heaven, I could be content to be without her till then!--"

"What is in the way, my dear madam?" said Mr. Carleton, with a gentle sympathy that touched the very spring he meant it should. Mrs. Rossitur waited a minute, but it was only till tears would let her speak, and then said like a child,--

"Oh, it is all darkness!--"

"Except this," said he, gently and clearly, "that Jesus Christ is a sun and a shield; and those that put themselves at his feet are safe from all fear, and they who go to him for light shall complain of darkness no more."

"But I do not know how--"

"Ask him and he will tell you."

"But I am unworthy even to look up towards him," said Mrs. Rossitur, struggling, it seemed, between doubts and wishes.

"He knows that, and yet he has bid you come to him. He knows that,--and knowing it, he has taken your responsibility and paid your debt, and offers you now a clean discharge, if you will take it at his hand;--and for the other part of this unworthiness, that blood cannot do away, blood

has brought the remedy--'Shall we who are evil give good things to our children, and shall not our Father which is in heaven give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him?'"

"But must I do nothing?" said Mrs. Rossitur, when she had remained quiet with her face in her hands for a minute or two after he had done speaking.

"Nothing but be willing--be willing to have Christ in all his offices, as your Teacher, your King, and your Redeemer--give yourself to him, dear Mrs. Rossitur, and he will take care of the rest."

"I am willing!" she exclaimed. Fresh tears came, and came freely. Mr. Carleton said no more, till hearing some noise of opening and shutting doors above stairs Mrs. Rossitur hurriedly left the room, and Fleda came in by the other entrance.

"May I take you a little out of the way, Mr. Carleton?" she said when they had passed through the Deepwater settlement.--"I have a message to carry to Mrs. Elster--a poor woman out here beyond the lake. It is not a disagreeable place."

"And what if it were?"

"I should not perhaps have asked you to go with me," said Fleda a little doubtfully.

"You may take me where you will, Elfie," he said gently. "I hope to do as much by you some day."

Fleda looked up at the piece of elegance beside her, and thought what a change must have come over him if *he* would visit poor places. He was silent and grave however, and so was she, till they arrived at the house they were going to.

Certainly it was not a disagreeable place. Barby's much less strong minded sister had at least a good share of her practical nicety. The little board path to the door was clean and white still, with possibly a trifle less brilliant effect. The room and its old inhabitants were very comfortable and tidy; the patchwork counterpane as gay as ever. Mrs. Elster was alone, keeping company with a snug little wood fire, which was near as much needed in that early spring weather as it had been during the winter.

Mr. Carleton had come back from his abstraction, and stood taking half unconscious note of these things, while Fleda was delivering her message to the old woman. Mrs. Elster listened to her implicitly with every now and then an acquiescing nod or ejaculation, but so soon as Fleda had said her say she burst out, with a voice that had never known the mufflings of delicacy and was now pitched entirely beyond its owner's ken. Looking hard at Mr. Carleton,

"Fleda!--Is *this* the gentleman that's to be your--*husband?*"

The last word elevated and brought out with emphatic distinctness of utterance.

If the demand had been whether the gentleman in question was a follower of Mahomet, it would hardly have been more impossible for Fleda to give an affirmative answer; but Mr. Carleton laughed and bringing his face a little nearer the old crone, answered,

"So she has promised, ma'am."

Is this the gentleman that's to be your husband?'
"Is this the gentleman that's to be your husband?"

It was curious to see the lines of the old woman's face relax as she looked at him.

"He's--worthy of you!--as far as looks goes," she said in the same key as before, apostrophizing Fleda who had drawn back, but not stirring her eyes from Mr. Carleton all the time. And then she added to him with a little satisfied nod, and in a very decided tone of information,

"She will make you a good wife!"

"Because she has made a good friend?" said Mr. Carleton quietly. "Will you let me be a friend too?"

He had turned the old lady's thoughts into a golden channel, whence, as she was an American, they had no immediate issue in words; and Fleda and Mr. Carleton left the house without anything more.

Fleda felt nervous. But Mr. Carleton's first words were as coolly and as gravely spoken as if they had just come out from a philosophical lecture; and with an immediate spring of relief she enjoyed every step of the way and every word of the conversation which was kept up with great life, till they reached Mrs. Plumfield's door.

No one was in the sitting-room. Fleda left Mr. Carleton there and passed gently into the inner apartment, the door of which was standing ajar.

But her heart absolutely leaped into her mouth, for Dr. Quackenboss and Mr. Olmney were there on either side of her aunt's bed. Fleda came forward and shook hands.

"This is quite a meeting of friends," said the doctor blandly, yet with a perceptible shading of the whilome broad sunshine of his face.--"Your--a--aunt, my dear Miss Ringgan,--is in a most extraordinary state of mind!"

Fleda was glad to hide her face against her aunt's and asked her how she did.

"Dr. Quackenboss thinks it extraordinary, Fleda," said the old lady with her usual cheerful sedateness,--"that one who has trusted God and had constant experience of his goodness and faithfulness for forty years should not doubt him at the end of it."

"You have no doubt--of any kind, Mrs. Plumfield?" said the clergyman.

"Not the shadow of a doubt!" was the hearty, steady reply.

"You mistake, my dear madam," said Dr. Quackenboss,--"pardon me--it is not that--I would be understood to say, merely, that I do not comprehend how such--a--such security--can be attained respecting what seems so--a--elevated--and difficult to know."

"Only by believing," said Mrs. Plumfield with a very calm smile. "'He that believeth on him shall not be ashamed;'--'shall *not* be ashamed!'" she repeated slowly.

Dr. Quackenboss looked at Fleda, who kept her eyes fixed upon her aunt.

"But it seems to me--I beg pardon--perhaps I am arrogant--" he said with a little bow,--"but it appears to me almost--in a manner--almost presumptuous, not to be a little doubtful in such a matter until the time comes. Am I--do you disapprove of me, Mr. Olmney?"

Mr. Olmney silently referred him for his answer to the person he had first addressed, who had closed her eyes while he was speaking.

"Sir," she said, opening them,--"it can't be presumption to obey God, and he tells me to rejoice. And I do--I do!--'Let all those that love thee rejoice in thee and be glad in thee!'--But mind!" she added energetically, fixing her strong grey eye upon him--"he does not tell *you* to rejoice--do not think it--not while you stand aloof from his terms of peace. Take God at his word, and be happy;--but if not, you have nothing to do with the song that I sing!"

The doctor stared at her till she had done speaking, and then slunk out of her range of vision behind the curtains of the bed-post. Not silenced however.

"But--a--Mr. Olmney," said he hesitating--"don't you think that there is in general--a--a becoming modesty, in--a--in people that have done wrong, as we all have,--putting off being sure until they are so? It seems so to me!"

"Come here, Dr. Quackenboss," said aunt Miriam.

She waited till he came to her side, and then taking his hand and looking at him very kindly, she said,

"Sir, forty years ago I found in the Bible, as you say, that I was a sinner, and that drove me to look for something else. I found then God's promise that if I would give my dependence entirely to the substitute he had provided for me and yield my heart to his service, he would for Christ's sake hold me quit of all my debts and be my father, and make me his child. And, sir, I did it. I abhor every other dependence--the things you count good in me I reckon but filthy rags. At the same time, I know that ever since that day, forty years ago, I have lived in his service and tried to live to his glory. And now, sir, shall I disbelieve his promise? do you think he would be pleased if I did?"

The doctor's mouth was stopped, for once. He drew back as soon as he could and said not another word.

Before anybody had broken the silence Seth came in; and after shaking hands with Fleda, startled her by asking whether that was not Mr. Carleton in the other room.

"Yes," Fleda said,--"he came to see aunt Miriam."

"Ain't you well enough to see him, mother?"

"Quite--and very happy," said she.

Seth immediately went back and invited him in. Fleda dared not look up while the introductions were passing,--of "the Rev. Mr. Olmney," and of "Dr. Quackenboss,"--the former of whom Mr. Carleton took cordially by the hand, while Dr. Quackenboss conceiving that his hand must be as acceptable, made his salutation with an indescribable air at once of attempted gracefulness and ingratiation. Fleda saw the whole in the advancing line of the doctor's person, a vision of which crossed her downcast eye. She drew back then, for Mr. Carleton came where she was standing to take her aunt's hand; Seth had absolutely stayed his way before to make the said introductions.

Mrs. Plumfield was little changed by years or disease since he had seen her. There was somewhat more of a look of bodily weakness than there used to be; but the dignified, strong-minded expression of the face was even heightened; eye and brow were more pure and unclouded in their steadfastness. She looked very earnestly at her visiter and then with evident pleasure from the manner of his look and greeting. Fleda watched her eye softening with a gratified expression and fixed upon him as he was gently talking to her.

Mr. Olmney presently came round to take leave, promising to see her another time, and passing Fleda with a frank grave pressure of the hand which gave her some pain. He and Seth left the room. Fleda was hardly conscious that Dr. Quackenboss was still standing at the foot of the bed making the utmost use of his powers of observation. He could use little else, for Mr. Carleton and Mrs. Plumfield after a few words on each side, had as it were by common consent come to a pause. The doctor, when a sufficient time had made him fully sensible of this, walked up to Fleda, who wished heartily at the moment that she could have presented the reverse end of the magnet to him. Perhaps however it was that very thing which by a perverse sort of attraction drew him towards her.

"I suppose--a--we may conclude," said he with a somewhat saturnine expression of mischief,--that Miss Ringgan contemplates forsaking the agricultural line before a great while."

"I have not given up my old habits, sir," said Fleda, a good deal vexed.

"No--I suppose not--but Queechy air is not so well suited for them--other skies will prove more genial," he said; she could not help thinking, pleased at her displeasure.

"What is the fault of Queechy air, sir?" said Mr. Carleton, approaching them.

"Sir!" said the doctor, exceedingly taken aback, though the words had been spoken in the quietest manner possible,--'it--a--it has no fault, sir,--that I am particularly aware of--it is perfectly salubrious. Mrs. Plumfield, I will bid you good-day;--I--a--I *hope* you will get well again!"

"I hope not, sir!" said aunt Miriam, in the same clear hearty tones which had answered him before.

The doctor took his departure and made capital of his interview with Mr. Carleton; who he affirmed he could tell by what he had seen of him was a very deciduous character, and not always conciliating in his manners.

Fleda waited with a little anxiety for what was to follow the doctor's leave-taking.

It was with a very softened eye that aunt Miriam looked at the two who were left, clasping Fleda's hand again; and it was with a very softened voice that she next spoke.

"Do you remember our last meeting, sir?"

"I remember it well," he said.

"Fleda tells me you are a changed man since that time?"

He answered only by a slight and grave bow.

"Mr. Carleton," said the old lady,--"I am a dying woman--and this child is the dearest thing in the world to me after my own,--and hardly after him.--Will you pardon me--will you bear with me, if that I may die in peace, I say, sir, what else it would not become me to say?--and it is for her sake."

"Speak to me freely as you would to her," he said with a look that gave her full permission.

Fleda had drawn close and hid her face in her aunt's neck. Aunt Miriam's hand moved fondly over her cheek and brow for a minute or two in silence; her eye resting there too.

"Mr. Carleton, this child is to belong to you--how will you guide her?"

"By the gentlest paths," he said with a smile.

A whispered remonstrance from Fleda to her aunt had no effect.

"Will her best interests be safe in your hands?"

"How shall I resolve you of that, Mrs. Plumfield?" he said gravely.

"Will you help her to mind her mother's prayer and keep herself unspotted from the world?"

"As I trust she will help me."

A rogue may answer questions, but an eye that has never known the shadow of double-dealing makes no doubtful discoveries of itself. Mrs. Plumfield read it and gave it her very thorough respect.

"Mr. Carleton--pardon me, sir,--I do not doubt you--but I remember hearing long ago that you were rich and great in the world--it is dangerous for a Christian to be so--Can she keep in your grandeur the simplicity of heart and life she has had at Queechy?"

"May I remind you of your own words, my dear madam? By the blessing of God all things are possible. These things you speak of are not in themselves evil; if the mind be set on somewhat else, they are little beside a larger storehouse of material to work with--an increased stewardship to account for."

"She has been taking care of others all her life," said aunt Miriam tenderly;--"it is time she was taken care of; and these feet are very unfit for rough paths; but I would rather she should go on struggling as she has done with difficulties and live and die in poverty, than that the lustre of her heavenly inheritance should be tarnished even a little.--I would, my darling!--"

"But the alternative is not, so," said Mr. Carleton with gentle grace, touching Fleda's hand who he saw was a good deal disturbed. "Do not make her afraid of me, Mrs. Plumfield."

"I do not believe I need," said aunt Miriam, "and I am sure I could not,--but sir, you will forgive me?"

"No madam--that is not possible."

"One cannot stand where I do," said the old lady, "without learning a little the comparative value of things; and I seek my child's good,--that is my excuse. I could not be satisfied to take her testimony--"

"Take mine, madam," said Mr. Carleton. "I have learned the comparative value of things too; and I will guard her highest interests as carefully as I will every other--as earnestly as you can desire."

"I thank you, sir," said the old lady gratefully. "I am sure of it. I shall leave her in good hands. I wanted this assurance. And if ever there was a tender plant that was not fitted to grow on the rough side of the world--I think this is one," said she, kissing earnestly the face that yet Fleda did not dare to lift up.

Mr. Carleton did not say what he thought. He presently took kind leave of the old lady and went into the next room, where Fleda soon rejoined him and they set off homewards.

Fleda was quietly crying all the way down the hill. At the foot of the hill Mr. Carleton resolutely slackened his pace.

"I have one consolation," he said, "my dear Elfie--you will have the less to leave for me."

She put her hand with a quick motion upon his, and roused her self.

"She is a beautiful rebuke to unbelief. But she is hardly to be mourned for, Elfie."

"Oh I was not crying for aunt Miriam," said Fleda.

"For what then?" he said gently.

"Myself."

"That needs explanation," he said in the same tone. "Let me have it, Elfie."

"O--I was thinking of several things," said Fleda, not exactly wishing to give the explanation.

"Too vague," said Mr. Carleton smiling. "Trust me with a little more of your mind, Elfie."

Fleda glanced up at him, half smiling, and yet with filling eyes, and then as usual, yielded to the winning power of the look that met her.

"I was thinking," she said, keeping her head carefully down,--"of some of the things you and aunt Miriam were saying just now,--and--how good for nothing I am."

"In what respect?" said Mr. Carleton with praiseworthy gravity.

Fleda hesitated, and he pressed the matter no further; but more unwilling to displease him than herself she presently went on, with some difficulty; wording what she had to say with as much care as she could.

"I was thinking--how gratitude--or not gratitude alone--but how one can be full of the desire to please another,--a fellow-creature,--and find it constantly easy to do or bear anything for that purpose; and how slowly and coldly duty has to move alone in the direction where it should be the swiftest and warmest."

She knew he would take her words as simply as she said them; she was not disappointed. He was silent a minute and then said gravely,--

"Is this a late discovery, Elfie?"

"No--only I was realizing it strongly just now."

"It is a complaint we may all make. The remedy is, not to love less what we know, but to know better that of which we are in ignorance. We will be helps and not hindrances to each other, Elfie."

"You have said that before," said Fleda still keeping her head down.

"What?"

"About my being a help to you!"

"It will not be the first time," said he smiling,--"nor the second. Your little hand first held up a glass to gather the scattered rays of truth that could not warm me into a centre where they must burn."

"Very innocently," said Fleda with a little unsteady feeling of voice.

"Very innocently," said Mr. Carleton smiling. "A veritable lens could hardly have been more unconscious of its work or more pure of design."

"I do not think that was quite so either, Mr. Carleton," said Fleda.

"It was so, my dear Elfie, and your present speech is nothing against it. This power of example is always unconsciously wielded; the medium ceases to be clear so soon as it is made anything but a medium. The bits of truth you aimed at me wittingly would have been nothing if they had not come through that medium."

"Then apparently one's prime efforts ought to be directed to oneself."

"One's first efforts, certainly. Your silent example was the first thing that moved me."

"Silent example!" said Fleda catching her breath a little. "Mine ought to be very good, for I can never do good in any other way."

"You used to talk pretty freely to me."

"It wasn't my fault, I am certain," said Fleda half laughing. "Besides, I was sure of my ground. But in general I never can speak to people about what will do them any good."

"Yet whatever be the power of silent example there are often times when a word is of incalculable importance."

"I know it," said Fleda earnestly,--"I have felt it very often, and grieved that I could not say it, even at the very moment when I knew it was wanting."

"Is that right, Elfie?"

"No," said Fleda, with quick watering eyes,--"It is not right at all;--but it is constitutional with me. I never can talk to other people of what concerns my own thoughts and feelings."

"But this concerns other people's thoughts and feelings."

"Yes, but there is an implied revelation of my own."

"Do you expect to include me in the denomination of 'other people'?"

"I don't know," said Fleda laughing.

"Do you wish it?"

Fleda looked down and up, and coloured, and said she didn't know.

"I will teach you," said he smiling.

The rest of the day by both was given to Hugh.

Chapter LI.

O what is life but a sum of love,
  And death but to lose it all?
Weeds be for those that are left behind,
  And not for those that fall!

Milnes.

"Here's something come, Fleda," said Barby walking into the sick room one morning a few days afterwards,--"a great bag of something--more than you can eat up in a fortnight--it's for Hugh."

"It's extraordinary that anybody should send *me* a great bag of anything eatable," said Hugh.

"Where did it come from?" said Fleda.

"Philetus fetched it--he found it down to Mr. Sampion's when he went with the sheep-skins."

"How do you know it's for me?" said Hugh.

"'Cause it's written on, as plain as a pikestaff. I guess it's a mistake though."

"Why?" said Fleda; "and what is it?"

"O I don't much think 'twas meant for him," said Barby. "It's oysters."

"Oysters!"

"Yes--come out and look at 'em--you never see such fine fellows. I've heerd say," said Barby abstractedly as Fleda followed her out and she displayed to view some magnificent Ostraceans,--"I've heerd say that an English shilling was worth two American ones, but I never understood it rightly till now."

To all intents and purposes those were English oysters, and worth twice as much as any others Fleda secretly confessed.

That evening, up in the sick room,--it was quite evening, and all the others of the family were taking rest or keeping Mr. Rossitur company down stairs,--Fleda was carefully roasting some of the same oysters for Hugh's supper. She had spread out a glowing bed of coals on the hearth, and there lay four or five of the big bivalves, snapping and sputtering in approbation of their quarters in a most comfortable manner; and Fleda standing before the fire tended them with a double kind of pleasure. From one friend, and for another, those were most odorous oysters. Hugh sat watching them and her, the same in happy simplicity that he had been at eleven years old.

"How pleasant those oysters smell," said he. "Fleda, they remind me so of the time when you and I used to roast oysters in Mrs. Renney's room for lunch--do you recollect?--and sometimes in the evening when everybody was gone out, you know; and what an airing we used to have to give the dining-room afterwards. How we used to enjoy them, Fleda--you and I all alone."

"Yes," said Fleda in a tone of doubtful enjoyment. She was shielding her face with a paper and making self-sacrificing efforts to persuade a large oyster-shell to stand so on the coals as to keep the juice.

"Don't!" said Hugh;--"I would rather the oysters should burn than you. Mr. Carleton wouldn't thank me for letting you do so."

"Never mind!" said Fleda arranging the oysters to her satisfaction,--"he isn't here to see. Now Hugh, my dear--these are ready as soon as I am."

"I am ready," said Hugh. "How long it is since we had a roast oyster, Fleda!"

"They look good, don't they?"

A little stand was brought up between them with the bread and butter and the cups; and Fleda opened oysters and prepared tea for Hugh, with her nicest, gentlest, busiest of hands; making every bit to be twice as sweet, for her sympathizing eyes and loving smile and pleasant word commenting. She shared the meal with him, but her own part was as slender as his and much less thought of. His enjoyment was what she enjoyed, though it was with a sad twinge of alloy which changed her face whenever it was where he could not see it; when turned upon him it was only bright and affectionate, and sometimes a little too tender; but Fleda was too good a nurse to let that often appear.

"Mr. Carleton did not bargain for your opening his oysters, Fleda. How kind it was of him to send them."

"Yes."

"How long will he be gone, Fleda?"

"I don't know--he didn't say. I don't believe many days."

Hugh was silent a little while she was putting away the stand and the oyster-shells. Then she came and sat down by him.

"You have burnt yourself over those things," said he sorrowfully;--"you - shouldn't have done it. It is not right."

"Dear Hugh," said Fleda lightly, laying her head on his shoulder,--"I like to burn myself for you."

"That's just the way you have been doing all your life."

"Hush!" she said softly.

"It is true,--for me and for everybody else. It is time you were taken better care of, dear Fleda."

"Don't, dear Hugh!"

"I am right though," said he. "You are pale and worn now with waiting upon me and thinking of me. It is time you were gone. But I think it is well I am going too, for what should I do in the world without you, Fleda?"

Fleda was crying now, intensely though quietly; but Hugh went on with feeling as calm as it was deep.

"What should I have done all these years?--or any of us? How you have tired yourself for everybody--in the garden and in the kitchen and with Earl Douglass--how we could let you I don't know, but I believe we could not help it."

Fleda put her hand upon his mouth. But he took it away and went on--

"How often I have seen you sleeping all the evening on the sofa with a pale face, tired out--Dear Fleda," said he kissing her cheek, "I am glad there's to be an end put to it. And all the day you went about with such a bright face that it made mother and me happy to look at you; and I knew then, many a time, it was for our sakes--

"Why do you cry so, Fleda? I like to think of it, and to talk of it, now that I know you won't do so any more. I knew the whole truth, and it went to the bottom of my heart; but I could do nothing but love you--I did that!--Don't cry so, Fleda!--you ought not.--You have been the sunshine of the

house. My spirit never was so strong as yours; I should have been borne to the ground, I know, in all these years, if it had not been for you; and mother--you have been her life."

"You have been tired too," Fleda whispered.

"Yes at the saw-mill. And then you would come up there through the sun to look at me, and your smile would make me forget everything sorrowful for the rest of the day--except that I couldn't help you."

"Oh you did--you did--you helped me always, Hugh."

"Not much. I couldn't help you when you were sewing for me and father till your fingers and eyes were aching, and you never would own that you were anything but 'a little' tired--it made my heart ache. Oh I knew it all, dear Fleda.--I am very, very glad that you will have somebody to take care of you now that will not let you burn your fingers for him or anybody else. It makes me happy!"

"You make me very unhappy, dear Hugh."

"I don't mean it," said Hugh tenderly. "I don't believe there is anybody else in the world that I could be so satisfied to leave you with."

Fleda made no answer to that. She sat up and tried to recover herself.

"I hope he will come back in time," said Hugh, settling himself back in the easy-chair with a weary look, and closing his eyes.

"In time for what?"

"To see me again."

"My dear Hugh!--he will to be sure, I hope."

"He must make haste," said Hugh. "But I want to see him again very much, Fleda."

"For anything in particular?"

"No--only because I love him. I want to see him once more."

Hugh slumbered; and Fleda by his side wept tears of mixed feeling till she was tired.

Hugh was right. But nobody else knew it, and his brother was not sent for.

It was about a week after this, when one night a horse and wagon came up to the back of the house from the road, the gentleman who had been driving leading the horse. It was late, long past Mr. Skillcorn's usual hour of retiring, but some errand of business had kept him abroad and he stood there looking on. The stars gave light enough.

"Can you fasten my horse where he may stand a little while, sir? without taking him out?"

"I guess I can," replied Philetus, with reasonable confidence,--"if there's a rope's end some place--"

And forthwith he went back into the house to seek it. The gentleman patiently holding his horse meanwhile, till he came out.

"How is Mr. Hugh to-night?"

"Well--he ain't just so smart, they say," responded Philetus, insinuating the rope's end as awkwardly as possible among the horse's head-gear,--"I believe he's dying."

Instead of going round now to the front of the house, Mr. Carleton knocked gently at the kitchen door and asked the question anew of Barby.

"He's--Come in, sir, if you please," she said, opening wide the door for him to enter,--"I'll tell 'em you're here."

"Do not disturb any one for me," said he.

"I won't disturb 'em!" said Barby, in a tone a little though unconsciously significant.

Mr. Carleton neglected the chair she had placed for him, and remained standing by the mantelpiece, thinking of the scenes of his early introduction to that kitchen. It wore the same look it had done then; under Barby's rule it was precisely the same thing it had been under Cynthia's.--The passing years seemed a dream, and the passing generations of men a vanity, before the old house more abiding than they. He stood thinking of the people he had seen gathered by that fireplace and the little household fairy whose childish ministrations had given such a beauty to the scene,--when a very light step crossed the painted floor and she was there again before him. She did not speak a word; she stood still a moment trying for words, and then put her hand upon Mr. Carleton's arm and gently drew him out of the room with her.

The family were all gathered in the room to which she brought him. Mr. Rossitur, as soon as he saw Mr. Carleton come in, shrunk back where he could be a little shielded by the bed-post. Marion's face was hid on the foot of the bed. Mrs. Rossitur did not move. Leaving Mr. Carleton on the near side of the bed Fleda went round to the place she seemed to have occupied before, at Hugh's right hand; and they were all still, for he was in a little doze, lying with his eyes closed, and the face as gently and placidly sweet as it had been in his boyhood. Perhaps Mr. Rossitur looked at it; but no other did just then, except Mr. Carleton. His eye rested nowhere else. The breathing of an infant could not be more gentle; the face of an angel not more peacefully at rest. "So he giveth his beloved sleep,"--thought the gentleman, as he gazed on the brow from which all care, if care there had ever been, seemed to have taken flight.

Not yet--not quite yet; for Hugh suddenly opened his eyes and without seeing anybody else, said,

"Father--"

Mr. Rossitur left the bed-post and came close to where Fleda was standing, and leaning forward, touched his son's head, but did not speak.

"Father--" said Hugh, in a voice so gentle that it seemed as if strength must be failing,--"what will you do when you come to lie here?"

Mr. Rossitur put his hands to his face.

"Father--I must speak now if I never did before--once I must speak to you,--what will you do when you come to lie where I do?--what will you trust to?"

The person addressed was as motionless as a statue. Hugh did not move his eyes from him.

"Father, I will be a living warning and example to you, for I know that I shall live in your memory--you shall remember what I say to you--that Jesus Christ is a dear friend to those that trust in him, and if he is not yours it will be because you will not let him. You shall remember my testimony, that he can make death sweeter than life--in his presence is fulness of joy--at his right hand there are pleasures for evermore. He is better,--he is more to me,--even than you all, and he will be to you a better friend than the poor child you are losing, though you do not know it now. It is he that has made my life in this world happy--only he--and I have nothing to look to but him in the world I am going to. But what will you do in the hour of death, as I am, if he isn't your friend, father?"

Mr. Rossitur's frame swayed, like a tree that one sees shaken by a distant wind, but he said nothing.

"Will you remember me happily, father, if you come to die without having done as I begged you? Will you think of me in heaven and not try to come there too? Father, will you be a Christian?--will you not?--for

my sake--for *little Hugh's* sake, as you used to call him?--Father?--"

Mr. Rossitur knelt down and hid his face in the coverings; but he did not utter a word.

Hugh's eye dwelt on him for a moment with unspeakable expression, and his lip trembled. He said no more; he closed his eyes; and for a little time there was nothing to be heard but the sobs which could not be restrained, from all but the two gentlemen. It probably oppressed Hugh, for after a while he said with a weary sigh and without opening his eyes,

"I wish somebody would sing."

Nobody answered at first.

"Sing what, dear Hugh?" said Fleda, putting aside her tears and leaning her face towards him.

"Something that speaks of my want," said Hugh.

"What do you want, dear Hugh?"

"Only Jesus Christ," he said with a half smile.

But they were silent as death. Fleda's face was in her hands and her utmost efforts after self-control wrought nothing but tears. The stillness had lasted a little while, when very softly and sweetly the notes of a hymn floated to their ears, and though they floated on and filled the room, the voice was so nicely modulated that its waves of sweetness broke gently upon the nearest ear.

> "Jesus, the sinner's friend, to Thee,
> Lost and undone, for aid I flee;
> Weary of earth, myself, and sin,
> Open thine arms and take me in.

"Pity and save my sin-sick soul,--
'Tis thou alone canst make me whole;
Dark, till in me thine image shine,
And lost I am, till thou art mine.

"At length I own it cannot be,
That I should fit myself for thee,
Here now to thee I all resign,--
Thine is the work, and only thine.

"What shall I say thy grace to move?--
Lord, I am sin, but thou art love!
I give up every plea beside,--
Lord, I am lost,--but thou hast died!"

They were still again after the voice had ceased; almost perfectly still; though tears might be pouring, as indeed they were from every eye, there was no break to the silence, other than a half-caught sob now and then from a kneeling figure whose head was in Marion's lap.

"Who was that?" said Hugh, when the singer had been silent a minute.

Nobody answered immediately; and then Mr. Carleton bending over him, said,

"Don't you know me, dear Hugh?"

"Is it Mr. Carleton?"

Hugh looked pleased, and clasped both of his hands upon Guy's which he laid upon his breast. For a second he closed his eyes and was silent.

"Was it you sang?"

"Yes."

"You never sang for me before," he remarked.

He was silent again.

"Are you going to take Fleda away?"

"By and by," said Mr. Carleton gently.

"Will you take good care of her?"

Mr. Carleton hesitated, and then said, so low that it could reach but one other person's ear,

"What hand and life can."

"I know it," said Hugh. "I am very glad you will have her. You will not let her tire herself any more."

Whatever became of Fleda's tears she had driven them away and leaning forward she touched her cheek to his, saying with a clearness and sweetness of voice that only intensity of feeling could have given her at the moment,

"I am not tired, dear Hugh."

Hugh clasped one arm round her neck and kissed her--again and again, seeming unable to say anything to her in any other way; still keeping his hold of Mr. Carleton's hand.

"I give all my part of her to you," he said at length. "Mr. Carleton, I shall see both of you in heaven?"

"I hope so," was the answer, in those very calm and clear tones that have a singular effect in quieting emotion, while they indicate anything but the want of it.

"I am the best off of you all," Hugh said.

He lay still for awhile with shut eyes. Fleda had withdrawn herself from his arms and stood at his side, with a bowed head, but perfectly quiet. He still held Mr. Carleton's hand, as something he did not want to part with.

"Fleda," said he, "who is that crying?--Mother--come here."

Mr. Carleton gave place to her. Hugh pulled her down to him till her face lay upon his, and folded both his arms around her.

"Mother," he said softly, "will you meet me in heaven?--say yes."

"How can I, dear Hugh?"

"You can, dear mother," said he kissing her with exceeding tenderness of expression,--"my Saviour will be yours and take you there. Say you will give yourself to Christ--dear mother!--sweet mother! promise me I shall see you again!--"

Mrs. Rossitur's weeping it was difficult to hear. But Hugh hardly shedding a tear still kissed her, repeating, "Promise me, dear mother--promise me that you will;"--till Mrs. Rossitur in an agony sobbed out the word he wanted,--and Hugh hid his face then in her neck.

Mr. Carleton left the room and went down stairs. He found the sitting-room desolate, untenanted and cold for hours; and he went again into the kitchen. Barby was there for some time, and then she left him alone.

He had passed a long while in thinking and walking up and down, and he was standing musing by the fire, when Fleda again came in. She came in silently, to his side, and putting her arm within his laid her face upon it with a simplicity of trust and reliance that went to his heart; and she wept there for a long hour. They hardly changed their position in all that time; and her tears flowed silently though incessantly, the only tokens of sympathy on his part being such a gentle caressing smoothing of her hair

or putting it from her brow as he had used when she was a child. The bearing of her hand and head upon his arm in time shewed her increasingly weary. Nothing shewed him so.

"Elfie--my dear Elfie," he said at last very tenderly, in the same way that he would have spoken nine years before--"Hugh gave his part of you to me--I must take care of it."

Fleda tried to rouse herself immediately.

"This is poor entertainment for you, Mr. Carleton," she said, raising her head and wiping away the tears from her face.

"You are mistaken," he said gently. "You never gave me such pleasure but twice before, Elfie."

Fleda's head went down again instantly, and this time there was something almost caressing in the motion.

"Next to the happiness of having friends on earth," he said soothingly, "is the happiness of having friends in heaven. Don't weep any more to-night, my dear Elfie."

"He told me to thank you--" said Fleda. But stopping short and clasping with convulsive energy the arm she held, she shed more violent tears than she had done that night before. The most gentle soothing, the most tender reproof, availed at last to quiet her; and she stood clinging to his arm still and looking down into the fire.

"I did not think it would be so soon," she said.

"It was not soon to him, Elfie."

"He told me to thank you for singing. How little while it seems since we were children together--how little while since before that--when I was a little child here--how different!"

"No, the very same," said he, touching his lips to her forehead,--"you are the very same child you were then; but it is time you were my child, for I see you would make yourself ill. No--" said he softly taking the hand Fleda raised to her face,--"no more tonight--tell me how early I may see you in the morning--for, Elfie, I must leave you after breakfast."

Fleda looked up inquiringly.

"My mother has brought news that determines me to return to England immediately."

"To England!"

"I have been too long from home--I am wanted there."

Fleda looked down again and did her best not to shew what she felt.

"I do not know how to leave you--and now--but I must. There are disturbances among the people, and my own are infected. I *must* be there without delay."

"Political disturbances?" said Fleda.

"Somewhat of that nature--but partly local. How early may I come to you?"

"But you are not going away tonight? It is very late."

"That is nothing--my horse is here."

Fleda would have begged in vain, if Barby had not come in and added her word, to the effect that it would be a mess of work to look for lodgings at that time of night, and that she had made the west room ready for Mr. Carleton. She rejected with great sincerity any claim to the thanks with which Fleda as well as Mr. Carleton repaid her; "there wa'n't

no trouble about it," she said. Mr. Carleton however found his room prepared for him with all the care that Barby's utmost ideas of refinement and exactness could suggest.

It was still very early the next morning; when he left it and came into the sitting-room, but he was not the first there. The firelight glimmered on the silver and china of the breakfast table, all set; everything was in absolute order, from the fire to the two cups and saucers which were alone on the board. A still silent figure was standing by one of the windows looking out. Not crying; but that Mr. Carleton knew from the unmistakable lines of the face was only because tears were waiting another time; quiet now, it would not be by and by. He came and stood at the window with her.

"Do you know," he said, after a little, "that Mr. Rossitur purposes to leave Queechy?"

"Does he?" said Fleda rather starting, but she added not another word, simply because she felt she could not safely.

"He has accepted, I believe, a consulship at Jamaica."

"Jamaica!" said Fleda. "I have heard him speak of the West Indies--I am not surprised--I know it was likely he would not stay here."

How tightly her fingers that were free grasped the edge of the window-frame. Mr. Carleton saw it and softly removed them into his own keeping.

"He may go before I can be here again. But I shall leave my mother to take care of you, Elfie."

"Thank you," said Fleda faintly. "You are very kind--"

"Kind to myself," he said smiling. "I am only taking care of my own. I need not say that you will see me again as early as my duty can make it possible;--but I may be detained, and your friends may be gone--Elfie--

give me the right to send if I cannot come for you. Let me leave my wife in my mother's care."

Fleda looked down, and coloured, and hesitated; but the expression in her face was not that of doubt.

"Am I asking too much?" he said gently.

"No sir," said Fleda,--"and--but--"

"What is in the way?"

But it seemed impossible for Fleda to tell him.

"May I not know?" he said, gently putting away the hair from Fleda's face, which looked distressed. "Is it only your feeling?"

"No sir," said Fleda,--"at least--not the feeling you think it is--but--I could not do it without giving great pain."

Mr. Carleton was silent.

"Not to anybody you know, Mr. Carleton," said Fleda, suddenly fearing a wrong interpretation of her words,--"I don't mean that--I mean somebody else--the person--the only person you could apply to--" she said, covering her face in utter confusion.

"Do I understand you?" said he smiling. "Has this gentleman any reason to dislike the sight of me?"

"No sir," said Fleda,--"but he thinks he has."

"That only I meant," said he. "You are quite right, my dear Elfie; I of all men ought to understand that."

The subject was dropped, and in a few minutes his gentle skill had well nigh made Fleda forget what they had been talking about. Himself and his wishes seemed to be put quite out of his own view, and out of hers as

far as possible; except that the very fact made Fleda recognize with unspeakable gratitude and admiration the kindness and grace that were always exerted for her pleasure. If her good-will could have been put into the cups of coffee she poured out for him, he might have gone in the strength of them all the way to England. There was strength of another kind to be gained from her face of quiet sorrow and quiet self-command which were her very childhood's own.

"You will see me at the earliest possible moment," he said when at last taking leave.--"I hope to be free in a short time; but it may not be. Elfie--if I should be detained longer than I hope--if I should not be able to return in a reasonable time, will you let my mother bring you out?--if I cannot come to you will you come to me?"

Fleda coloured a good deal, and said, scarce intelligibly, that she hoped he would be able to come. He did not press the matter. He parted from her and was leaving the room. Fleda suddenly sprang after him, before he had reached the door, and laid her hand on his arm.

"I did not answer your question, Mr. Carleton," she said with cheeks that were dyed now,--"I will do whatever you please--whatever you think best."

His thanks were most gratefully though silently spoken, and he went away.

Chapter LII.

Daughter, they seem to say,
  Peace to thy heart!
We too, yes, daughter,
  Have been as thou art.

Hope-lifted, doubt-depressed,
  Seeing in part,--
Tried, troubled, tempted,--
  Sustained,--as thou art.

Unknown.

Mr. Rossitur was disposed for no further delay now in leaving Queechy. The office at Jamaica, which Mr. Carleton and Dr. Gregory had secured for him, was immediately accepted; and every arrangement pressed to hasten his going. On every account he was impatient to be out of America, and especially since his son's death. Marion was of his mind. Mrs. Rossitur had more of a home feeling, even for the place where home had not been to her as happy as it might.

They were sad weeks of bustle and weariness that followed Hugh's death; less sad perhaps for the weariness and the bustle. There was little time for musing, no time for lingering regrets. If thought and feeling played their Eolian measures on Fleda's harpstrings, they were listened to only by snatches, and she rarely sat down and cried to them.

A very kind note had been received from Mrs. Carleton.

April gave place to May. One afternoon Fleda had taken an hour or two to go and look at some of the old places on the farm, that she loved and that were not too far to reach. A last look she guessed it might be, for it was weeks since she had had a spare afternoon, and another she might not he able to find. It was a doubtful pleasure she sought too, but she must have it.

She visited the long meadow and the height that stretched along it, and even went so far as the extremity of the valley, at the foot of the twenty-acre lot, and then stood still to gather up the ends of memory. There she had gone chestnutting with Mr. Ringgan--thither she had guided Mr. Carleton and her cousin Rossitur that day when they were going after wood-cock--there she had directed and overseen Earl Douglass's huge

crop of corn. How many pieces of her life were connected with it. She stood for a little while looking at the old chestnut trees, looking and thinking, and turned away soberly with the recollection, "The world passeth away,--but the word of our God shall stand forever." And though there was one thought that was a continual well of happiness in the depth of Fleda's heart, her mind passed it now, and echoed with great joy the countersign of Abraham's privilege,--"Thou art my portion, O Lord!"--And in that assurance every past and every hoped-for good was sweet with added sweetness. She walked home without thinking much of the long meadow.

It was a chill spring afternoon and Fleda was in her old trim, the black cloak, the white shawl over it, and the hood of grey silk. And in that trim she walked into the sitting-room.

A lady was there, in a travelling dress, a stranger. Fleda's eye took in her outline and feature one moment with a kind of bewilderment, the next with perfect intelligence. If the lady had been in any doubt, Fleda's cheeks alone would have announced her identity. But she came forward without hesitation after the first moment, pulling off her hood, and stood before her visiter, blushing in a way that perhaps Mrs. Carleton looked at as a novelty in her world. Fleda did not know how she looked at it, but she had nevertheless an instinctive feeling, even at the moment, that the lady wondered how her son should have fancied particularly anything that went about under such a hood.

Whatever Mrs. Carleton thought, her son's fancies she knew were unmanageable; and she had far too much good breeding to let her thoughts be known; unless to one of those curious spirit thermometers that can tell a variation of temperature through every sort of medium. There might have been the slightest want of forwardness to do it, but she embraced Fleda with great cordiality.

"This is for the old time--not for the new, dear Fleda," she said. "Do you remember me?"

"Perfectly!--very well," said Fleda, giving Mrs. Carleton for a moment a glimpse of her eyes.--"I do not easily forget."

"Your look promises me an advantage from that, which I do not deserve, but which I may as well use as another. I want all I can have, Fleda."

There was a half look at the speaker that seemed to deny the truth of that, but Fleda did not otherwise answer. She begged her visiter to sit down, and throwing off the white shawl and black cloak, took tongs in hand and began to mend the fire. Mrs. Carleton sat considering a moment the figure of the fire-maker, not much regardful of the skill she was bringing to bear upon the sticks of wood.

Fleda turned from the fire to remove her visitor's bonnet and wrappings, but the former was all Mrs. Carleton would give her; she threw off shawl and tippet on the nearest chair.

It was the same Mrs. Carleton of old,--Fleda saw while this was doing,--unaltered almost entirely. The fine figure and bearing were the same; time had made no difference; even the face had paid little tribute to the years that had passed by it; and the hair held its own without a change. Bodily and mentally she was the same. Apparently she was thinking the like of Fleda.

"I remember you very well," she said with kindly accent when Fleda sat down by her. "I have never forgotten you. A dear little creature you were. I always knew that."

Fleda hoped privately the lady would see no occasion to change her mind; but for the present she was bankrupt in words.

"I was in the same room this morning at Montepoole where we used to dine, and it brought back the whole thing to me--the time when you were sick there with us. I could think of nothing else. But I don't think I was your favourite, Fleda."

Such a rush of blood again answered her as moved Mrs. Carleton in common kindness to speak of common things. She entered into a long story of her journey--of her passage from England--of the steamer that brought her--of her stay in New York;--all which Fleda heard very indifferently well. She was more distinctly conscious of the handsome travelling dress which seemed all the while to look as its wearer had done, with some want of affinity upon the little grey hood which lay on the chair in the corner. Still she listened and responded as became her, though for the most part with eyes that did not venture from home. The little hood itself could never have kept its place with less presumption, nor with less flutter of self-distrust.

Mrs. Carleton came at last to a general account of the circumstances that had determined Guy to return home so suddenly, where she was more interesting. She hoped he would not be detained, but it was impossible to tell. It was just as it might happen.

"Are you acquainted with the commission I have been charged with?" she said, when her narrations had at last lapsed into silence and Fleda's eyes had returned to the ground.

"I suppose so, ma'am," said Fleda with a little smile.

"It is a very pleasant charge," said Mrs. Carleton softly kissing her cheek. Something in the face itself must have called forth that kiss, for this time there were no requisitions of politeness.

"Do you recognize my commission, Fleda?"

Fleda did not answer. Mrs. Carleton sat a few minutes thoughtfully drawing back the curls from her forehead, Mr. Carleton's very gesture, but not by any means with his fingers; and musing perhaps on the possibility of a hood's having very little to do with what it covered.

"Do you know," she said, "I have felt as if I were nearer to Guy since I have seen you."

The quick smile and colour that answered this, both very bright, wrought in Mrs Carleton an instant recollection that her son was very apt to be right in his judgments and that probably the present case might prove him so. The hand which had played with Fleda's hair was put round her waist, very affectionately, and Mrs. Carleton drew near her.

"I am sure we shall love each other, Fleda," she said.

It was said like Fleda, not like Mrs. Carleton, and answered as simply. Fleda had gained her place. Her head was in Mrs. Carleton's neck, and welcomed there.

"At least I am sure I shall love you," said the lady kissing her,--"and I don't despair on my own account,--for somebody else's sake."

"No--" said Fleda,--but she was not fluent to-day. She sat up and repeated, "I have not forgotten old times either, Mrs. Carleton."

"I don't want to think of the old time--I want to think of the new,"--she seemed to have a great fancy for stroking back those curls of hair;--"I want to tell you how happy I am, dear Fleda."

Fleda did not say whether she was happy or unhappy, and her look might have been taken for dubious. She kept her eyes on the ground, while Mrs. Carleton drew the hair off from her flushing cheeks, and considered the face laid bare to her view; and thought it was a fair face--a very presentable face--delicate and lovely--a face that she would have no reason to be ashamed of, even by her son's side. Her speech was not precisely to that effect.

"You know now why I have come upon you at such a time. I need not ask pardon?--I felt that I should be hardly discharging my commission if I did not see you till you arrived in New York. My wishes I could have made to wait, but not my trust. So I came."

"I am very glad you did!"

She could fain have persuaded the lady to disregard circumstances and stay with her, at least till the next day, but Mrs. Carleton was unpersuadable. She would return immediately to Montepoole.

"And how long shall you be here now?" she said.

"A few days--it will not be more than a week."

"Do you know how soon Mr. Rossitur intends to sail for Jamaica?"

"As soon as possible--he will make his stay in New York very short--not more than a fortnight perhaps,--as short as he can."

"And then, my dear Fleda, I am to have the charge of you--for a little while--am I not?"

Fleda hesitated and began to say, "Thank you," but it was finished with a burst of very hearty tears.

Mrs. Carleton knew immediately the tender spot she had touched. She put her arms about Fleda and caressed her as gently as her own mother might have done.

"Forgive me, dear Fleda!--I forgot that so much that is sad to you must come before what is so much pleasure to me.--Look up and tell me that you forgive me."

Fleda soon looked up, but she looked very sorrowful, and said nothing. Mrs. Carleton watched her face for a little while, really pained.

"Have you heard from Guy since he went away?" she whispered.

"No, ma'am."

"I have."

And therewith she put into Fleda's hand a letter,--not Mrs. Carleton's letter, as Fleda's first thought was. It had her own name and the seal was unbroken. But it moved Mrs. Carleton's wonder to see Fleda cry again, and longer than before. She did not understand it. She tried soothing, but she ventured no attempt at consoling, for she did not know what was the matter.

"You will let me go now, I know," she said smilingly, when Fleda was again recovered and standing before the fire with a face *not* so sorrowful, Mrs. Carleton saw. "But I must say something--I shall not hurt you again."

"Oh no, you did not hurt me at all--it was not what you said."

"You will come to me, dear Fleda? I feel that I want you very much."

"Thank you--but there is my uncle Orrin, Mrs. Carleton,--Dr. Gregory."

"Dr. Gregory? He is just on the eve of sailing for Europe--I thought you knew it."

"On the *eve?*--so soon?"

"Very soon, he told me. Dear Fleda--shall I remind you of my commission, and who gave it to me?"

Fleda hesitated still; at least she stood looking into the fire and did not answer.

"You do not own his authority yet," Mrs. Carleton went on,--"but I am sure his wishes do not weigh for nothing with you, and I can plead them."

Probably it was a source of some gratification to Mrs. Carleton to see those deep spots on Fleda's cheeks. They were a silent tribute to an invisible presence that flattered the lady's affection,--or her pride.

"What do you say, dear Fleda--to him and to me?" she said smiling and kissing her.

"I will come, Mrs. Carleton."

The lady was quite satisfied and departed on the instant, having got, she said, all she wanted; and Fleda--cried till her eyes were sore.

The days were few that remained to them in their old home; not more than a week, as Fleda had said. It was the first week in May.

The evening before they were to leave Queechy, Fleda and Mrs. Rossitur went together to pay their farewell visit to Hugh's grave. It was some distance off. They walked there arm in arm without a word by the way.

The little country grave-yard lay alone on a hill-side, a good way from any house, and out of sight even of any but a very distant one. A sober and quiet place, no tokens of busy life immediately near, the fields around it being used for pasturing sheep, except an instance or two of winter grain now nearing its maturity. A by-road not much travelled led to the grave-yard, and led off from it over the broken country, following the ups and downs of the ground to a long distance away, without a moving thing upon it in sight near or far. No sound of stirring and active humanity. Nothing to touch the perfect repose. But every lesson of the place could be heard more distinctly amid that silence of all other voices. Except indeed nature's voice; that was not silent; and neither did it jar with the other. The very light of the evening fell more tenderly upon the old grey stones and the thick grass in that place.

Fleda and Mrs. Rossitur went softly to one spot where the grass was not grown and where the bright white marble caught the eye and spoke of grief fresh too. Oh that that were grey and moss-grown like the others! The mother placed herself where the staring black letters of Hugh's name could not remind her so harshly that it no more belonged to the living; and sitting down on the ground hid her face; to struggle through the parting agony once more with added bitterness.

Fleda stood awhile sharing it, for with her too it was the last time, in all likelihood. If she had been alone, her grief might have witnessed itself bitterly and uncontrolled; but the selfish relief was foregone, for the sake of another, that it might be in her power by and by to minister to a heart yet sorer and weaker than hers. The tears that fell so quietly and so fast upon the foot of Hugh's grave were all the deeper-drawn and richer-fraught.

Awhile she stood there; and then passed round to a group a little way off, that had as dear and strong claims upon her love and memory. These were not fresh, not very; oblivion had not come there yet; only Time's softening hand. Was it softening?--for Fleda's head was bent down further here, and tears rained faster. It was hard to leave these! The cherished names that from early years had lived in her child's heart,--from this their last earthly abiding-place she was to part company. Her mother's and her father's graves were there, side by side; and never had Fleda's heart so clung to the old grey stones, never had the faded lettering seemed so dear,--of the dear names and of the words of faith and hope that were their dying or living testimony. And next to them was her grandfather's resting-place; and with that sunshiny green mound came a throng of strangely tender and sweet associations, more even than with the other two. His gentle, venerable, dignified figure rose before her, and her heart yearned towards it. In imagination Fleda pressed again to her breast the withered hand that had led her childhood so kindly; and overcome here for a little she kneeled down upon the sod and bent her head till the long grass almost touched it, in an agony of human sorrow. Could she leave them?--and for ever in this world? and be content to see no more these dear memorials till others like them should be raised for herself, far away?--But then stole in consolations not human, nor of man's devising,--the words that were written upon her mother's tombstone,--

"*Them that sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.*"--It was like the march of angel's feet over the turf. And her mother had been a meek child of faith, and her father and grandfather, though strong men, had bowed like little children to the same rule.--Fleda's head bent lower yet, and she wept, even aloud, but it was one half in pure thankfulness and a joy that the world knows nothing of. Doubtless they and she were one; doubtless though the grass now covered their graves, the heavenly bond in which they were held would bring them together again in light, to a new and more beautiful life that should know no severing. Asleep in Jesus;--and even as he had risen so should they,--they and others that she loved,--all whom she loved best. She could leave their graves; and with an unspeakable look of thanks to Him who had brought life and immortality to light, she did; but not till she had there once again remembered her mother's prayer, and her aunt Miriam's words, and prayed that rather anything might happen to her than that prosperity and the world's favour should draw her from the simplicity and humility of a life above the world. Rather than not meet them in joy at the last,--oh let her want what she most wished for in this world.

If riches have their poisonous snares, Fleda carried away from this place a strong antidote. With a spirit strangely simple, pure, and calm she went back to her aunt.

Poor Mrs. Rossitur was not quieted, but at Fleda's touch and voice, gentle and loving as the spirit of love and gentleness could make them, she tried to rouse herself; lifted up her weary head and clasped her arms about her niece. The manner of it went to Fleda's heart, for there was in it both a looking to her for support and a clinging to her as another dear thing she was about to lose. Fleda could not speak for the heart-ache.

"It is harder to leave this place than all the rest," Mrs. Rossitur murmured, after some little time had passed on.

"He is not here," said Fleda's soothing voice. It set her aunt to crying again.

"No--I know it--" she said.

"We shall see him again. Think of that."

"You will," said Mrs. Rossitur very sadly.

"And so will you, dear aunt Lucy,--*dear* aunt Lucy--you promised him?"

"Yes--" sobbed Mrs. Rossitur,--"I promised him--but I am such a poor creature--"

"So poor that Jesus cannot save you?--or will not?--No, dear aunt Lucy--you do not think that;--only trust him--you do trust him now, do you not?"

A fresh gush of tears came with the answer, but it was in the affirmative; and after a few minutes Mrs. Rossitur grew more quiet.

"I wish something were done to this," she said, looking at the fresh earth beside her;--"if we could have planted something--"

"I have thought of it a thousand times," said Fleda sighing;--I would have done it long ago if I could have got here;--but it doesn't matter, aunt Lucy,--I wish I could have done it."

"You?" said Mrs. Rossitur;--"my poor child! you have been wearing yourself out working for me,--I never was worth anything!"--she said, hiding her face again.

"When you have been the dearest and best mother to me? Now that is not right, aunt Lucy--look up and kiss me."

The pleading sweet tone of voice was not to be resisted. Mrs. Rossitur looked up and kissed her earnestly enough but with unabated self reproach.

"I don't deserve to kiss you, for I have let you try yourself beyond your strength.--How you look!--Oh how you look!--"

"Never mind how I look," said Fleda bringing her face so close that her aunt could not see it. "You helped me all you could, aunt Lucy--don't talk so--and I shall look well enough by and by. I am not so very tired."

"You always were so!" exclaimed Mrs. Rossitur clapping her in her arms again;--"and now I am going to lose you too--My dear Fleda!--that gives me more pleasure than anything else in the world!--"

But it was a pleasure well cried over.

"We shall all meet again, I hope,--I will hope,--" said Mrs. Rossitur meekly when Fleda had risen from her arms;

"Dear aunty!--but before that--in England--you will come to see me--Uncle Rolf will bring you."

Even then Fleda could not say even that without the blood mounting to her face. Mrs. Rossitur shook her head and sighed; but smiled a little too, as if that delightful chink of possibility let some light in.

"I shouldn't like to see Mr. Carleton now," she said, "for I could not look him in the face; and I am afraid he wouldn't want to look in mine, he would be so angry with me."

Slowly and lingeringly they moved away.
Slowly and lingeringly they moved away.

The sun was sinking low on that fair May afternoon and they had two miles to walk to get home. Slowly and lingeringly they moved away.

The talk with her aunt had shaken Fleda's calmness and she could have cried now with all her heart; but she constrained herself. They stopped a moment at the fence to look the last before turning their backs upon the place. They lingered, and still Mrs. Rossitur did not move, and Fleda could not take away her eyes.

It was that prettiest time of nature which while it shows indeed the shade side of everything, makes it the occasion of a fair contrast The grave-stones cast long shadows over the ground, foretokens of night where another night was resting already; the longest stretched away from the head of Hugh's grave. But the rays of the setting sun softly touching the grass and the face of the white tombstone seemed to say, "Thy brother shall rise again." Light upon the grave! The promise kissing the record of death!--It was impossible to look in calmness. Fleda bowed her head upon the paling and cried with a straitened heart, for grief and gratitude together.

Mrs. Rossitur had not moved when Fleda looked up again. The sun was yet lower; the sunbeams, more slant, touched not only that bright white stone--they passed on beyond, and carried the promise to those other grey ones, a little further off; that she had left--yes, for the last time; and Fleda's thoughts went forward swiftly to the time of the promise.--"*Then* shall be brought to pass the saying which is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."--And then as she looked, the sunbeams might have been a choir of angels in light singing, ever so softly, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men."

With a full heart Fleda clasped her aunt's arm, and they went gently down the lane without saying one word to each other, till they had left the graveyard far behind them and were in the high road again.

Fleda internally thanked Mr. Carleton for what he had said to her on a former occasion, for the thought of his words had given her courage, or strength, to go beyond her usual reserve in speaking to her aunt; and she thought her words had done good.

Chapter LIII.

> Use your pleasure: If your love do not persuade you to come, let not my letter.
>
> Merchant of Venice.

On the way home Mrs. Rossitur and Fleda went a trifle out of their road to say good-bye to Mrs. Douglass's family. Fleda had seen her aunt Miriam in the morning, and bid her a conditional farewell; for, as after Mrs. Rossitur's sailing she would be with Mrs. Carleton, she judged it little likely that she should see Queechy again.

They had time for but a minute at Mrs. Douglass's. Mrs. Rossitur had shaken hands and was leaving the house when Mrs. Douglass pulled Fleda back.

"Be you going to the West Indies too, Fleda?"

"No, Mrs. Douglass."

"Then why don't you stay here?"

"I want to be with my aunt while I can," said Fleda.

"And then do you calculate to stop in New York?"

"For awhile," said Fleda colouring.

"O go 'long!" said Mrs. Douglass, "I know all about it. Now do you s'pose you're agoing to be any happier among all those great folks than you would be if you staid among little folks?" she added tartly; while Catherine looked with a kind of incredulous admiration at the future lady of Carleton.

"I don't suppose that greatness has anything to do with happiness, Mrs. Douglass," said Fleda gently.

So gently,--and so calmly sweet the face was that said it that Mrs. Douglass's mood was overcome.

"Well you ain't agoing to forget Queechy?" she said, shaking Fleda's hand with a hearty grasp.

"Never--never!"

"I'll tell you what I think," said Mrs. Douglass, the tears in her eyes answering those in Fleda's.--"It'll be a happy house that gets you into it, wherever 'tis! I only wish it wa'n't out o' Queechy."

Fleda thought on the whole as she walked home that she did not wish any such thing. Queechy seemed dismantled, and she thought she would rather go to a new place now that she had taken such a leave of every thing here.

Two things remained however to be taken leave of; the house and Barby. Happily Fleda had little time for the former. It was a busy evening, and the morning would be more busy; she contrived that all the family should go to rest before her, meaning then to have one quiet look at the old rooms by herself; a leave-taking that no other eyes should interfere with. She sat down before the kitchen fire-place, but she had hardly realized that she was alone when one of the many doors opened and Barby's tall figure walked in.

"Here you be," she half whispered. "I knowed there wouldn't be a minute's peace to-morrow; so I thought I'd bid you good-bye to-night."

Fleda gave her a smile and a hand, but did not speak. Barby drew up a chair beside her, and they sat silent for some time, while quiet tears from the eyes of each said a great many things.

"Well, I hope you'll be as happy as you deserve to be,"--were Barby's first words, in a voice very altered from its accustomed firm and spirited accent.

"Make some better wish for me than that, dear Barby."

"I wouldn't want any better for myself," said Barby determinately.

"I would for you," said Fleda.

She thought of Mr. Carleton's words again, and went on in spite of herself.

"It is a mistake, Barby. The best of us do not deserve anything good; and if we have the sight of a friend's face, or the very sweet air we breathe, it is because Christ has bought it for us. Don't let us forget that, and forget him."

"I do, always," said Barby crying,--"forget everything. Fleda, I wish you'd pray for me when you are far away, for I ain't as good as you be."

"Dear Barby," said Fleda, touching her shoulder affectionately, "I haven't waited to be far away to do that."

Barby sobbed for a few minutes with the strength of a strong nature that rarely gave way in that manner; and then dashed her tears right and left, not at all as if she were ashamed of them, but with a resolution not to be overcome.

"There won't be nothing good left in Queechy, when you're gone, you and Mis' Plumfield--without I go and look at the place where Hugh lies--
"

"Dear Barby," said Fleda with softening eyes, "won't you be something good yourself?"

Barby put up her hand to shield her face. Fleda was silent for she saw that strong feeling was at work.

"I wish I could," Barby broke forth at last, "if it was only for your sake."

"Dear Barby," said Fleda, "you can do this for me--you can go to church and hear what Mr. Olmney says. I should go away happier if I thought you would, and if I thought you would follow what he says; for dear Barby there is a time coming when you will wish you were a Christian more than you do now; and not for my sake."

"I believe there is, Fleda."

"Then will you?--won't you give me so much pleasure?"

"I'd do a'most anything to do you a pleasure."

"Then do it, Barby."

"Well, I'll go," said Barby. "But now just think of that, Fleda, how you might have stayed in Queechy all your days and done what you liked with everybody. I'm glad you ain't, though; I guess you'll be better off."

Fleda was silent upon that.

"I'd like amazingly to see how you'll be fixed," said Barby after a trifle of ruminating. "If 'twa'n't for my old mother I'd be 'most a mind to pull up sticks and go after you."

"I wish you could, Barby; only I am afraid you would not like it so well there as here."

"Maybe I wouldn't. I s'pect them English folks has ways of their own, from what I've heerd tell; they set up dreadful, don't they?"

"Not all of them," said Fleda.

"No, I don't believe but what I could get along with Mr. Carleton well enough--I never see any one that knowed how to behave himself better."

Fleda gave her a smiling acknowledgment of this compliment.

"He's plenty of money, ha'n't he?"

"I believe so."

"You'll be sot up like a princess, and never have anything to do no more."

"O no," said Fleda laughing,--"I expect to have a great deal to do; if I don't find it, I shall make it."

"I guess it'll be pleasant work," said Barby. "Well, I don't care! you've done work enough since you've lived here that wa'n't pleasant, to play for the rest of your days; and I'm glad on't. I guess he don't hurt himself. You wouldn't stand it much longer to do as you have been doing lately."

"That couldn't be helped," said Fleda; "but that I may stand it to-morrow I am afraid we must go to bed, Barby."

Barby bade her good-night and left her. But Fleda's musing mood was gone. She had no longer the desire to call back the reminiscences of the old walls. All that page of her life, she felt, was turned over; and after a few minutes' quiet survey of the familiar things, without the power of moralizing over them as she could have done half an hour before, she left them--for the next day had no eyes but for business.

It was a trying week or two before Mr. Rossitur and his family were fairly on shipboard. Fleda as usual, and more than usual,--with the eagerness of affection that felt its opportunities numbered and would gladly have concentrated the services of years into days,--wrought, watched, and toiled, at what expense to her own flesh and blood Mrs. Rossitur never knew, and the others were too busy to guess. But Mrs. Carleton saw the signs of it, and was heartily rejoiced when they were fairly gone and Fleda was committed to her hands.

For days, almost for weeks, after her aunt was gone Fleda could do little but rest and sleep; so great was the weariness of mind and body, and the exhaustion of the animal spirits, which had been kept upon a strain to hide her feelings and support those of others. To the very last moment affection's sweet work had been done; the eye, the voice, the smile, to say

nothing of the hands, had been tasked and kept in play to put away recollections, to cheer hopes, to soften the present, to lighten the future; and hardest of all, to do the whole by her own living example. As soon as the last look and wave of the hand were exchanged and there was no longer anybody to lean upon her for strength and support, Fleda shewed how weak she was, and sank into a state of prostration as gentle and deep almost as an infant's.

As sweet and lovely as a child too, Mrs. Carleton declared her to be; sweet and lovely as *she* was when a child; and there was no going beyond that. As neither this lady nor Fleda had changed essentially since the days of their former acquaintanceship, it followed that there was still as little in common between them, except indeed now the strong ground of affection. Whatever concerned her son concerned Mrs. Carleton in almost equal degree; anything that he valued she valued; and to have a thorough appreciation of him was a sure title to her esteem. The consequence of all this was that Fleda was now the most precious thing in the world to her after himself; especially since her eyes, sharpened as well as opened by affection, could find in her nothing that she thought unworthy of him. In her personally, country and blood Mrs. Carleton might have wished changed; but her desire that her son should marry, the strongest wish she had known for years, had grown so despairing that her only feeling now on the subject was joy; she was not in the least inclined to quarrel with his choice. Fleda had from her the tenderest care, as well as the utmost delicacy that affection and good-breeding could teach. And Fleda needed both, for she was slow in going back to her old health and strength; and stripped on a sudden of all her old friends, on this turning-point of her life, her spirits were in that quiet mood that would have felt any jarring most keenly.

The weeks of her first languor and weariness were over, and she was beginning again to feel and look like herself. The weather was hot and the city disagreeable now, for it was the end of June; but they had pleasant rooms upon the Battery, and Fleda's windows looked out upon

the waving tops of green trees and the bright waters of the bay. She used to lie gazing out at the coming and going vessels with a curious fantastic interest in them; they seemed oddly to belong to that piece of her life, and to be weaving the threads of her future fate as they flitted about in all directions before her. In a very quiet, placid mood, not as if she wished to touch one of the threads, she lay watching the bright sails that seemed to carry the shuttle of life to and fro; letting Mrs. Carleton arrange and dispose of everything and of her as she pleased.

She was on her couch as usual, looking out one fair morning, when Mrs. Carleton came in to kiss her and ask how she did. Fleda said better.

"Better! you always say 'better'," said Mrs. Carleton; "but I don't see that you get better very fast. And sober;--this cheek is too sober," she added, passing her hand fondly over it;--"I don't like to see it so."

"That is just the way I have been feeling, ma'am--unable to rouse myself. I should be ashamed of it, if I could help it."

"Mrs. Evelyn has been here begging that we would join her in a party to the Springs--Saratoga--how would you like that?"

"I should like anything that you would like, ma'am," said Fleda, with a thought how she would like to read Montepoole for Saratoga.

"The city is very hot and dusty just now."

"Very, and I am sorry to keep you in it, Mrs. Carleton."

"Keep me, love?" said Mrs. Carleton bending down her face to her again;--" it's a pleasure to be kept anywhere by you."

Fleda shut her eyes, for she could hardly bear a little word now.

"I don't like to keep *you* here--it is not myself I am thinking of. I fancy a change would do you good."

"You are very kind, ma'am."

"Very interested kindness," said Mrs. Carleton. "I want to see you looking a little better before Guy comes--I am afraid he will look grave at both of us." But as she paused and stroked Fleda's cheek it came into her mind to doubt the truth of the last assertion, and she ended off with, "I wish he would come!--"

So Fleda wished truly; for now, cut off as she was from her old associations, she longed for the presence of the one friend that was to take place of them all.

"I hope we shall hear soon that there is some prospect of his getting free," Mrs. Carleton went on. "He has been gone now,--how many weeks?--I am looking for a letter to-day. And there it is!--"

The maid at this moment entered with the steamer despatches. Mrs. Carleton pounced upon the one she knew and broke it open.

"Here it is!--and there is yours, Fleda."

With kind politeness she went off to read her own and left Fleda to study hers at her leisure. An hour after she came in again. Fleda's face was turned from her.

"Well what does he say?" she asked in a lively tone.

"I suppose the same he has said to you, ma'am," said Fleda.

"I don't suppose it indeed," said Mrs. Carleton laughing, "He has given me sundry charges, which if he has given you it is morally certain we shall never come to an understanding."

"I have received no charges." said Fleda.

"I am directed to be very careful to find out your exact wish in the matter and to let you follow no other. So what is it, my sweet Fleda?"

"I promised--" said Fleda colouring and turning her letter over. But there she stopped.

"Whom and what?" said Mrs. Carleton after she had waited a reasonable time.

"Mr. Carleton."

"What did you promise, my dear Fleda?"

"That--I would do as he said."

"But he wishes you to do as you please."

Fleda brought her eyes quick out of Mrs. Carleton's view, and was silent.

"What do you say, dear Fleda?" said the lady, taking her hand and bending over her.

"I am sure we shall be expected," said Fleda. "I will go."

"You are a darling girl!" said Mrs. Carleton kissing her again and again. "I will love you forever for that. And I am sure it will be the best thing for you--the sea will do you good--and ne vous en déplaise, our own home is pleasanter just now than this dusty town. I will write by this steamer and tell Guy we will be there by the next. He will have everything in readiness, I know, at all events; and in half an hour after you get there, my dear Fleda, you will be established in all your rights--as well as if it had been done six months before. Guy will know how to thank you. But after all, Fleda, you might do him this grace--considering how long he has been waiting upon you."

Something in Fleda's eyes induced Mrs. Carleton to say, laughing,

"What's the matter?"

"He never waited for me," said Fleda simply.

"Didn't he?--But my dear Fleda I--" said Mrs. Carleton in amused extremity,--"how long is it since you knew what he came out here for?"

"I don't know now, ma'am," said Fleda. But she became angelically rosy the next minute.

"He never told you?"

"No."--

"And you never asked him?"

"Why no, ma'am!"

"He will be well suited in a wife," said Mrs. Carleton laughing. "But he can have no objection to your knowing now, I suppose. He never told me but at the latest. You must know, Fleda, that it has been my wish for a great many years that Guy would marry--and I almost despaired, he was so difficult to please--his taste in everything is so fastidious; but I am glad of it now," she added, kissing Fleda's cheek. "Last spring--not this last, but a year ago--one evening at home I was talking to him on this subject; but he met everything I said lightly--you know his way--and I saw my words took no hold. I asked him at last in a kind of desperation if he supposed there was a woman in the world that could please him; and he laughed, and said if there was he was afraid she was not in that hemisphere. And a day or two after he told me he was going to America."

"Did he say for what?"

"No,--but I guessed as soon as I found he was prolonging his stay, and I was sure when he wrote me to come out to him. But I never knew till I landed, Fleda my dear, any more than that. The first question I asked him was who he was going to introduce to me."

The interval was short to the next steamer, but also the preparations were few. A day or two after the foregoing conversation, Constance Evelyn coming into Fleda's room found her busy with some light

packing.

"My dear little creature!" she exclaimed ecstatically,--"are you going with us?"

"No," said Fleda.

"Where are you going then?"

"To England."

"England!--Has--I mean, is there any addition to my list of acquaintances in the city?"

"Not that I know of," said Fleda, going on with her work.

"And you are going to England!--Greenhouses will be a desolation to me!--"

"I hope not," said Fleda smiling;--"you will recover yourself, and your sense of sweetness, in time."

"It will have nothing to act upon!--And you are going to England!--I think it is very mean of you not to ask me to go too and be your bridesmaid."

"I don't expect to have such a thing," said Fleda.

"Not?--Horrid! I wouldn't be married so, Fleda. You don't know the world, little Queechy; the art *de vous faire valoir* I am afraid is unknown to you."

"So it may remain with my good will," said Fleda.

"Why?" said Constance.

"I have never felt the want of it," said Fleda simply.

"When are you going?" said Constance after a minute's pause.

"By the Europa."

"But this is a very sudden move!"

"Yes--very sudden."

"I should think you would want a little time to make preparations."

"That is all happily taken off my hands," said Fleda. "Mrs. Carleton has written to her sister in England to take care of it for me."

"I didn't know that Mrs. Carleton had a sister.--What's her name?"

"Lady Peterborough."

Constance was silent again.

"What are you going to do about mourning, Fleda? wear white, I suppose. As nobody there knows anything about you, you won't care."

"I do not care in the least," said Fleda calmly; "my feeling would quite as soon choose white as black. Mourning so often goes alone, that I should think grief might be excused for shunning its company."

"And as you have not put it on yet," said Constance, "you won't feel the change. And then in reality after all he was only a cousin."

Fleda's quiet mood, sober and tender as it was, could go to a certain length of endurance, but this asked too much. Dropping the things from her hands, she turned from the trunk beside which she was kneeling and hiding her face on a chair wept such tears as cousins never shed for each other. Constance was startled and distressed; and Fleda's quick sympathy knew that she must be, before she could see it.

"You needn't mind it at all, dear Constance," she said as soon as she could speak,--"it's no matter--I am in such a mood sometimes that I cannot bear anything. Don't think of it," she said kissing her.

Constance however could not for the remainder of her visit get back her wonted light mood, which indeed had been singularly wanting to her during the whole interview.

Mrs. Carleton counted the days to the steamer, and her spirits rose with each one. Fleda's spirits were quiet to the last degree, and passive, too passive, Mrs. Carleton thought. She did not know the course of the years that had gone, and could not understand how strangely Fleda seemed to herself now to stand alone, broken off from her old friends and her former life, on a little piece of time that was like an isthmus joining two continents. Fleda felt it all exceedingly; felt that she was changing from one sphere of life to another; never forgot the graves she had left at Queechy, and as little the thoughts and prayers that had sprung up beside them. She felt, with all Mrs. Carleton's kindness, that she was completely alone, with no one on her side the ocean to look to; and glad to be relieved from taking active part in anything she made her little Bible her companion for the greater part of the time.

"Are you going to carry that sober face all the way to Carleton?" said Mrs. Carleton one day pleasantly.

"I don't know, ma'am."

"What do you suppose Guy will think of it?"

But the thought of what he would think of it, and what he would say to it, and how fast he would brighten it, made Fleda burst into tears. Mrs. Carleton resolved to talk to her no more, but to get her home as fast as possible.

"I have one consolation," said Charlton Rossitur as he shook hands with her on board the steamer;--"I have received permission, from head-quarters, to come and see you in England; and to that I shall look forward constantly from this time."

Chapter LIV.

> The full sum of me
> Is sum of something; which to term in gross,
> Is an unlesson'd girl, unschool'd, unpractis'd;
> Happy in this, she is not yet so old
> But she may learn; and happier than this,
> She is not bred so dull but she can learn;
> Happiest of all, is that her gentle spirit
> Commits itself to yours to be directed,
> As from her lord, her governor, her king.
>
> Merchant of Venice.

They had a very speedy passage to the other side, and partly in consequence of that Mr. Carleton was *not* found waiting for them in Liverpool. Mrs. Carleton would not tarry there but hastened down at once to the country, thinking to be at home before the news of their arrival.

It was early morning of one fair day in July when they were at last drawing near the end of their journey. They would have reached it the evening before but for a storm which had constrained them to stop and wait over the night at a small town about eight miles off. For fear then of passing Guy on the road his mother sent a servant before, and making an extraordinary exertion was actually herself in the carriage by seven o'clock.

Nothing could be fairer than that early drive, if Fleda might have enjoyed it in peace. The sweet morning air was exceeding sweet, and the summer light fell upon a perfect luxuriance of green things. Out of the carriage Fleda's spirits were at home, but not within it; and it was sadly irksome to be obliged to hear and respond to Mrs. Carleton's talk, which was kept up, she knew, in the charitable intent to divert her. She was just in a

state to listen to nature's talk; to the other she attended and replied with a patient longing to be left free that she might steady and quiet herself. Perhaps Mrs. Carleton's tact discovered this in the matter-of-course and uninterested manner of her rejoinders; for as they entered the park gates she became silent, and the long drive from them to the house was made without a word on either side.

For a length of way the road was through a forest of trees of noble growth, which in some places closed their arms overhead and in all sentinelled the path in stately array. The eye had no scope beyond the ranks of this magnificent body; Carleton park was celebrated for its trees; but magnificent though they were and dearly as Fleda loved every form of forest beauty, she felt oppressed. The eye forbidden to range, so was the mind, shut in to itself; and she only felt under the gloom and shadow of those great trees the shadow of the responsibilities and of the change that were coming upon her. But after a while the ranks began to be thinned and the ground to be broken; the little touches of beauty with which the sun had enlivened the woodland began to grow broader and cheerfuller; and then as the forest scattered away to the right and left, gay streams of light came through the glades and touched the surface of the rolling ground, where in the hollows, on the heights, on the sloping sides of the dingles, knots of trees of yet more luxuriant and picturesque growth, planted or left by the cultivator's hand long ago and trained by no hand but nature's, stood so as to distract a painter's eye; and just now, in the fresh gilding of the morning and with all the witchery of the long shadows upon the uneven ground certainly charmed Fleda's eye and mind both. Fancy was dancing again, albeit with one hand upon gravity's shoulder, and the dancing was a little nervous too. But she looked and caught her breath as she looked, while the road led along the very edge of a dingle, and then was lost in a kind of enchanted open woodland--it seemed so--and then passing through a thicket came out upon a broad sweep of green turf that wiled the eye by its smooth facility to the distant screen of oaks and beeches and firs on its far border. It was all new. Fleda's memory had retained only an indistinct vision of beauty,

like the face of an angel in a cloud as painters have drawn it; now came out the beautiful features one after another, as if she had never seen them.

So far nature had seemed to stand alone. But now another hand appeared, not interfering with nature but adding to her. The road came upon a belt of the shrubbery where the old tenants of the soil were mingled with lighter and gayer companionship and in some instances gave it place; though in general the mingling was very graceful. There was never any crowding of effects; it seemed all nature still, only as if several climes had joined together to grace one. Then that was past; and over smooth undulating ground, bearing a lighter growth of foreign wood with here and there a stately elm or ash that disdained their rivalry, the carriage came under the brown walls and turrets of the house. Fleda's mood had changed again; and as the grave outlines rose above her, half remembered and all the more for that imposing, she trembled at the thought of what she had come there to do and to be. She felt very nervous and strange and out of place, and longed for the familiar free and voice that would bid her be at home. Mrs. Carleton, now, was not enough of a stand-by. With all that, Fleda descended from the carriage with her usual quiet demureness; no one that did not know her well would have seen in her any other token of emotion than a somewhat undue and wavering colour.

They were welcomed, at least one of them was, with every appearance of sincerity by the most respectable-looking personage who opened to them and whom Fleda remembered instantly. The array of servants in the hall would almost have startled her if she had not recollected the same thing on her first coming to Carleton. She stepped in with a curious sense of that first time, when she had come there a little child.

"Where is your master?' was Mrs. Carleton's immediate demand.

"Mr. Carleton set off this morning for Liverpool."

Mrs. Carleton gave a quick glance at Fleda, who kept her eyes at home.

"We did not meet him--we have not passed him--how long ago?" were her next rapid words.

"My master left Carleton as early as five o'clock--he gave orders to drive as fast as possible."

"Then he had gone through Hollonby an hour before we left it," said Mrs. Carleton looking again to her companion;--"but he will hear of us at Carstairs--we stopped there yesterday afternoon--he will be back again in a few hours I am sure. Then we have been expected?"

"Yes ma'am--my master gave orders that you should be expected."

"Is all well, Popham?"

"All is well, madam!"

"Is Lady Peterborough here?"

"His lordship and Lady Peterborough arrived the day before yesterday," was the succint reply.

Drawing Fleda's arm within hers and giving kind recognition to the rest who stood around, Mrs. Carleton led her to the stairs and mounted them, repeating in a whisper, "He will be here presently again." They went to Mrs. Carleton's dressing room, Fleda wondering in an interval fever whether "orders had been given" to expect her also; from the old butler's benign look at her as he said "All is well!" she could not help thinking it. If she maintained her outward quiet it was the merest external crust of seeming; there was nothing like quiet beneath it; and Mrs. Carleton's kiss and fond words of welcome were hardly composing.

Mrs. Carleton made her sit down, and with very gentle hands was busy arranging her hair, when the housekeeper came in; to pay her more particular respects and to offer her services. Fleda hardly ventured a

glance to see whether *she* looked benign. She was a dignified elderly person, as stately and near as handsome as Mrs. Carleton herself.

"My dear Fleda," said the latter when she had finished the hair,--"I am going to see my sister--will you let Mrs. Fothergill help you in anything you want, and take you then to the library--you will find no one, and I will come to you there. Mrs. Fothergill, I recommend you to the particular care of this lady."

The recommendation was not needed, Fleda thought, or was very effectual; the housekeeper served her with most assiduous care, and in absolute silence. Fleda hurried the finishing of her toilet.

"Are the people quiet in the country?" she forced herself to say.

"Perfectly quiet, ma'am. It needed only that my master should be at home to make them so."

"How is that?"

"He has their love and their ear, ma'am, and so it is that he can just do his pleasure with them."

"How is it in the neighbouring country?"

"They're quiet, ma'am, I believe,--mostly--there's been some little disturbance in one place and another, and more fear of it, as well as I can make out, but it's well got over, as it appears. The noblemen and gentlemen in the country around were very glad, all of them I am told, of Mr. Carleton's return. Is there nothing more I can do for you, ma'am?"

The last question was put with an indefinable touch of kindliness which had not softened the respect of her first words. Fleda begged her to show the way to the library, which Mrs. Fothergill immediately did, remarking as she ushered her in that "those were Mr. Carleton's favourite rooms."

Fleda did not need to be told that; she put the remark and the benignity together, and drew a nervous inference. But Mrs. Fothergill was gone and she was alone. Nobody was there, as Mrs. Carleton had said.

Fleda stood still in the middle of the floor, looking around her, in a bewildered effort to realize the past and the present; with all the mind in the world to cry, but there was too great a pressure of excitement and too much strangeness of feeling at work. Nothing before her in the dimly familiar place served at all to lessen this feeling, and recovering from her maze she went to one of the glazed doors, which stood open, and turned her back upon the room with its oppressive recollections. Her eye lighted upon nothing that was not quiet now. A secluded piece of smooth green, partially bordered with evergreens and set with light shrubbery of rare kinds, exquisitely kept; over against her a sweetbriar that seemed to have run wild, indicating, Fleda was sure, the entrance of the path to the rose garden, that her memory alone would hardly have helped her to find. All this in the bright early summer morning, and the sweet aromatic smell of firs and flowers coming with every breath. There were draughts of refreshment in the air. It composed her, and drinking it in delightedly Fleda stood with folded arms in the doorway, half forgetting herself and her position, and going in fancy from the firs and the roses over a very wide field of meditation indeed. So lost, that she started fearfully on suddenly becoming aware that a figure had come just beside her.

It was an elderly and most gentlemanly-looking man, as a glance made her know. Fleda was reassured and ashamed in a breath. The gentleman did not notice her confusion, however, otherwise than by a very pleasant and well-bred smile, and immediately entered into some light remarks on the morning, the place, and the improvements Mr. Carleton had made in the latter. Though he said the place was one of those which could bear very well to want improvement; but Carleton was always finding something to do which excited his admiration.

"Landscape gardening is one of the pleasantest of amusements," said Fleda.

"I have just knowledge enough in the matter to admire;--to originate any ideas is beyond me; I have to depend for them upon my gardener,--and my wife--and so I lose a pleasure, I suppose; but every man has his own particular hobby. Carleton, however, has more than his share--he has half a dozen, I think."

"Half a dozen hobbies!" said Fleda.

"Perhaps I should not call them hobbies, for he manages to ride them all skilfully; and a hobby-horse, I believe, always runs away with the man?"

Fleda could hardly return his smile. She thought people were possessed with an unhappy choice of subjects in talking to her that morning. But fancying that she had very ill kept up her part in the conversation and must have looked like a simpleton, she forced herself to break the silence which followed the last remark, and asked the same question she had asked Mrs. Fothergill,--if the country was quiet?

"Outwardly quiet," he said;--"O yes--there is no more difficulty--that is, none which cannot easily be handled. There was some danger a few months ago, but it is blown over; all was quiet on Carleton's estates so soon as he was at home, and that of course had great influence on the neighbourhood. No, there is nothing to be apprehended. He has the hearts of his people completely, and one who has their hearts can do what he pleases with their heads, you know. Well he deserves it--he has done a great deal for them."

Fleda was afraid to ask in what way,--but perhaps he read the question in her eyes.

"That's one of his hobbies--ameliorating the condition of the poorer classes on his estates. He has given himself to it for some years back; he has accomplished a great deal for them--a vast deal indeed! He has

changed the face of things, mentally and morally, in several places, with his adult schools, and agricultural systems, and I know not what; but the most powerful means I think after all has been the weight of his personal influence, by which he can introduce and carry through any measure; neither ignorance nor prejudice nor obstinacy seem to make head against him. It requires a peculiar combination of qualities, I think,--very peculiar and rare,--to deal successfully with the mind of the masses."

"I should think so indeed," said Fleda.

"He has it--I don't comprehend it--and I have not studied his machinery enough to understand that; but I have seen the effects. Never should have thought he was the kind of man either--but there it is!--I don't comprehend him. There is only one fault to be found with him though."

"What is that?" said Fleda smiling.

"He has built a fine dissenting chapel down here towards Hollonby," he said gravely, looking her in the face,--"and what is yet worse, his uncle tells me, he goes there half the time himself!"

Fleda could not help laughing, nor colouring, at his manner.

"I thought it was always considered a meritorious action to build a church," she said.

"Indubitably.--But you see, this was a chapel."

The laugh and the colour both grew more unequivocal--Fleda could not help it.

"I beg your pardon, sir--I have not learned such nice distinctions--Perhaps a chapel was wanted just in that place."

"That is presumable. But *he* might be wanted somewhere else. However," said the gentleman with a good-humoured smile,--"his uncle forgives him; and if his mother cannot influence him,--I am afraid nobody else will. There is no help for it. And I should be very sorry to stand ill with him. I have given you the dark side of his character."

"What is the other side in the contrast?" said Fleda, wondering at herself for her daring.

"It is not for me to say," he answered with a slight shrug of the shoulders and an amused glance at her;--"I suppose it depends upon people's vision,--but if you will permit me, I will instance a bright spot that was shewn to me the other day, that I confess, when I look at it, dazzles my eyes a little."

Fleda only bowed; she dared not speak again.

"There was a poor fellow--the son of one of Mr. Carleton's old tenants down here at Enchapel,--who was under sentence of death, lying in prison at Carstairs. The father, I am told, is an excellent man and a good tenant; the son had been a miserable scapegrace, and now for some crime--I forget what--had at last been brought to justice. The evidence against him was perfect and the offence was not trifling--there was not the most remote chance of a pardon, but it seemed the poor wretch had been building up his dependence upon that hope and was resting on it; and consequently was altogether indisposed and unfit to give his attention to the subjects that his situation rendered proper for him.

"The gentleman who gave me this story was requested by a brother clergyman to go with him to visit the prisoner. They found him quite stupid--unmovable by all that could be urged, or rather perhaps the style of the address, as it was described to me, was fitted to confound and bewilder the man rather than enlighten him. In the midst of all this Mr. Carleton came in--he was just then on the wing for America, and he had heard of the poor creature's condition in a visit to his father. He came,--

my informant said,--like a being of a different planet. He took the man's hand,--he was chained foot and wrist,--'My poor friend,' he said, 'I have been thinking of you here, shut out from the light of the sun, and I thought you might like to see the face of a friend';--with that singular charm of manner which he knows how to adapt to everybody and every occasion. The man was melted at once--at his feet, as it were;--he could do anything with him. Carleton began then, quietly, to set before him the links in the chain of evidence which had condemned him--one by one--in such a way as to prove to him, by degrees but irresistibly, that he had no hope in this world. The man was perfectly subdued--sat listening and looking into those powerful eyes that perhaps you know,--taking in all his words and completely in his hand. And then Carleton went on to bring before him the considerations that he thought should affect him in such a case, in a way that this gentleman said was indescribably effective and winning; till that hardened creature was broken down,--sobbing like a child,--actually sobbing!--"

Fleda did her best, but she was obliged to hide her face in her hands, let what would be thought of her.

"It was the finest exhibition of eloquence, this gentleman said, he had ever listened to.--For me it was an exhibition of another kind. I would have believed such an account of few men, but of all the men I know I would least have believed it of Guy Carleton a few years ago; even now I can hardly believe it. But it is a thing that would do honour to any man."--

Fleda felt that the tears were making their way between her fingers, but she could not help it; and she presently knew that her companion had gone and she was left alone again. Who was this gentleman? and how much did he know about her? More than that she was a stranger, Fleda was sure; and dreading his return, or that somebody else might come and find her with tokens of tears upon her face, she stepped out upon the greensward and made for the flaunting sweet-briar that seemed to beckon her to visit its relations.

The entrance of a green path was there, or a grassy glade, more or less wide, leading through a beautiful growth of firs and larches. No roses, nor any other ornamental shrubs; only the soft, well-kept footway through the woodland. Fleda went gently on and on, admiring, where the trees sometimes swept back, leaving an opening, and at other places stretched their graceful branches over her head. The perfect condition of everything to the eye, the rich coloured vegetation,--of varying colour above and below,--the absolute retirement, and the strong pleasant smell of the evergreens, had a kind of charmed effect upon senses and mind too. It was a fairyland sort of place. The presence of its master seemed everywhere; it was like him; and Fleda pressed on to see yet livelier marks of his character and fancy beyond. By degrees the wood began to thin on one side; then at once the glade opened into a bright little lawn rich with roses in full bloom. Fleda was stopped short at the sudden vision of loveliness. There was the least possible appearance of design; no dry beds were to be seen; the luxuriant clumps of Provence and white roses, with the varieties of the latter, seemed to have chosen their own places; only to have chosen them very happily. One hardly imagined that they had submitted to dictation, if it were not that Queen Flora never was known to make so effective a disposition of her forces without help. The screen of trees was very thin on the border of this opening, so thin that the light from beyond came through. On a slight rocky elevation which formed the further side of it sat an exquisite little Moorish temple, about which and the face of the rock below some Noisette and Multiflora climbers were vying with each other; and just at the entrance of the further path a white dog-rose had thrown itself over the way, covering the lower branches of the trees with its blossoms.

Fleda stood spell bound a good while, with a breath oppressed with pleasure. But what she had seen excited her to see more, and a dim recollection of the sea-view from somewhere in the walk drew her on. Roses met her now frequently. Now and then a climber, all alone, seemed to have sought protection in a tree by the path-side, and to have displayed itself thence in the very wantonness of security, hanging out its

flowery wreaths, fearless of hand or knife. Clusters of Noisettes, or of French or Damask roses, where the ground was open enough, stood without a rival and needing no foil, other than the beautiful surrounding of dark evergreen foliage. But the distance was not long before she came out upon a wider opening and found what she was seeking--the sight of the sea. The glade, here, was upon the brow of high ground, and the wood disappearing entirely for a space left the eye free to go over the lower tree-tops and the country beyond to the distant shore and sea-line. Roses were here too; the air was full of the sweetness of Damask and Bourbon varieties; and a few beautiful Banksias, happily placed, contrasted without interfering with them. It was very still;--it was very perfect;--the distant country was fresh-coloured with the yet early light which streamed between the trees and laid lines of enchantment upon the green turf; and the air came up from the sea-board and bore the breath of the roses to Fleda every now and then with a gentle puff of sweetness. Such light--she had seen none such light since she was a child. Was it the burst of mental sunshine that had made it so bright?--or was she going to be really a happy child again? No--no,--not that; and yet something very like it. So like it that she almost startled at herself. She went no further. She could not have borne, just then, to see any more; and feeling her heart too full she stood even there, with hands crossed upon her bosom, looking away from the roses to the distant sea-line.

That said something very different. That was very sobering; if she had needed sobering, which she did not. But it helped her to arrange the scattered thoughts which had been pressing confusedly upon her brain. "Look away from the roses" indeed she could not, for the same range of vision took in the sea and them,--and the same range of thought. These might stand for an emblem of the present; that, of the future,--grave, far-off, impenetrable;--and passing as it were the roses of time Fleda fixed upon that image of eternity; and weighing the one against the other, felt, never in her life more keenly, how wild it would be to forget in smelling the roses her preparations for that distant voyage that must

be made from the shores where they grow. With one eye upon this brightest bits of earth before her, the other mentally was upon Hugh's grave. The roses could not be sweeter to any one; but in view of the launching away into that distant sea-line, in view of the issues on the other shore, in view of the welcome that might be had there,--the roses might fade and wither, but her happiness could not go with their breath. They were something to be loved, to be used, to be thankful for,--but not to live upon; something too that whispered of an increased burden of responsibility, and never more deeply than at that moment did Fleda remember her mother's prayer; never more simply recognized that happiness could not be made of these things. She might be as happy at Queechy as here. It depended on the sunlight of undying hopes, which indeed would give wonderful colour to the flowers that might be in her way;--on the possession of resources the spring of which would never dry;--on the peace which secures the continual feast of a merry heart. Fleda could take her new honours and advantages very meekly, and very soberly, with all her appreciation of them. The same work of life was to be done here as at Queechy. To fulfil the trust committed to her, larger here--to keep her hope for the future--undeceived by the sunshine of earth to plant her roses where they would bloom everlastingly.

The weight of these things bowed Fleda to the ground and made her bury her face in her hands. But there was one item of happiness from which her thoughts never even in imagination dissevered themselves, and round it they gathered now in their weakness. A strong mind and heart to uphold hers,--a strong hand for here to rest in,--that was a blessing; and Fleda would have cried heartily but that her feelings were too high wrought. They made her deaf to the light sound of footsteps coming over the grass,--till two hands gently touched hers and lifted her up, and then Fleda was at home. But surprised and startled she could hardly lift up her face. Mr. Carleton's greeting was as grave and gentle as if she had been a stray child.

"Do not fancy I am going to thank you for the grace you have shewn me," said he lightly. "I know you would never have done it if circumstances had not been hard pleaders in my cause. I will thank you presently when you have answered one or two questions for me."

"Questions?" said Fleda looking up. But she blushed the next instant at her own simplicity.

He was leading her back on the path she had come. No further however than to the first opening, where the climbing dog-rose hung over the way. There he turned aside crossing the little plot of greensward, and they ascended some steps cut in the rock to the pavilion Fleda had looked at from a distance.

It stood high enough to command the same sea-view. On that side it was entirely open, and of very light construction on the others. Several people were there; Fleda could hardly tell how many; and when Lord Peterborough was presented to her she did not find out that he was her morning's acquaintance. Her eye only took in besides that there were one or two ladies, and a clergyman in the dress of the Church of England; she could not distinguish. Yet she stood beside Mr. Carleton with all her usual quiet dignity, though her eye did not leave the ground and her words were in no higher key than was necessary, and though she could hardly bear the unchanged easy tone of his. The birds were in a perfect ecstasy all about them; the soft breeze came through the trees, gently waving the branches and stirring the spray wreaths of the roses, the very fluttering of summer's drapery; some roses looked in at the lattice, and those which could not be there sent in their congratulations on the breath of the wind, while the words were spoken that bound them together.

Mr. Carleton then dismissing his guests to the house, went with Fleda again the other way. He had felt the extreme trembling of the hand which he took, and would not go in till it was quieted. He led her back to the very rose-bush where he had found her, and in his own way,

presently brought her spirit home from its trembling and made it rest; and then suffered her to stand a few minutes quite silent, looking out again over the fair rich spread of country that lay between them and the sea.

"Now tell me, Elfie," said he softly, drawing back with the same old caressing and tranquillizing touch the hair that hung over her brow,--"what you were thinking about when I found you here?--in the very luxury of seclusion--behind a rose-bush."

Fleda looked a quick look, smiled, and hesitated, and then said it was rather a confusion of thoughts.

"It will be a confusion no longer when you have disentangled them for me."

"I don't know--" said Fleda. And she was silent, but so was he, quietly waiting for her to go on.

"Perhaps you will wonder at me, Mr. Carleton," she said, hesitating and colouring.

"Perhaps," he said smiling;--"but if I do I will not keep you in ignorance, Elfie."

"I was almost bewildered, in the first place,--with beauty--and then--"

"Do you like the rose garden?"

"Like it!--I cannot speak of it!"

"I don't want you to speak of it," said he smiling at her. "What followed upon liking it, Elfie?"

"I was thinking," said Fleda, looking resolutely away from him,--"in the midst of all this,--that it is not these things which make people happy."

"There is no question of that," he replied. "I have realized it thoroughly for a few months past."

"No, but seriously, I mean," said Fleda pleadingly.

"And seriously you are quite right, dear Elfie. What then?"

"I was thinking," said Fieda, speaking with some difficulty, "of Hugh's grave,--and of the comparative value of things; and afraid, I believe,--especially--here--"

"Of making a wrong estimate?"

"Yes--and of not doing and being just what I ought."

Mr. Carleton was silent for a minute, considering the brow from which his fingers drew off the light screen.

"Will you trust me to watch over and tell you?"

Fleda did not trust her voice to tell him, but her eyes did it.

"As to the estimate--the remedy is to 'keep ourselves in the love of God;' and then these things are the gifts of our Father's hand and will never be put in competition with him. And they are never so sweet as when taken so."

"Oh I know that!"

"This is a danger I share with you. We will watch over each other."

Fleda was silent with filling eyes.

"We do not seek our happiness in these things," he said tenderly. "I never found it in them. For years, whatever others may have judged, I have felt myself a poor man; because I had not in the world a friend in whom I could have entire sympathy. And if I am rich now, it is not in any treasure that I look to enjoy in this world alone."

"Oh do not, Mr. Carleton!" exclaimed Fleda, bowing her head in distress, and giving his hand an earnest entreaty.

"What shall I not do?" said he half laughing and half gently, bringing her face near enough for his lips to try another kind of eloquence. "You shall not do this, Elfie, for any so light occasion.--Was this the whole burden of those grave thoughts?"

"Not quite--entirely--" she said stammering. "But grave thoughts are not always unhappy."

"Not always. I want to know what gave yours a tinge of that colour this morning."

"It was hardly that.--You know what Foster says about 'power to its very last particle being duty'--I believe it frightened me a little."

"If you feel that as strongly as I do, Elfie, it will act as a strong corrective to the danger of false estimates."

"I do feel it," said Fleda. "One of my fears was that I should not feel it enough."

"One of my cares will be that you do not act upon it too fiercely," said he smiling. "The power being limited so is the duty. But you shall have power enough, Elfie, and work enough. I have precisely what I have needed--my good sprite back again."

"With a slight difference."

"What difference?"

"She is to act under direction now."

"Not at all--only under safe control," he said laughing.

"I am very glad of the difference, Mr. Carleton," said Fleda, with a grave and grateful remembrance of it.

"If you think the sprite's old office is gone, you are mistaken," said he. "What were your other fears?--one was that you should not feel enough your responsibility, and the other that you might forget it."

"I don't know that there were any other particular fears," said Fleda;--"I had been thinking of all these things--"

"And what else?"

Her colour and her silence begged him not to ask. He said no more, and let her stand still again looking off through the roses, while her mind more quietly and lightly went over the same train of thoughts that had moved it before; gradually calmed; came back from being a stranger to being at home, at least in one presence; and ended, her action even before her look told him where, as her other hand unconsciously was joined to the one already on his arm. A mute expression of feeling the full import of which he read, even before her eye coming back from its musings was raised to him, perhaps unconsciously too, with all the mind in it; its timidity was not more apparent than its simplicity of clinging affection and dependence. Mr. Carleton's answer was in three words, but in the tone and manner that accompanied them there was a response to every part of her appeal; so perfect that Fleda was confused at her own frankness.

They began to move towards the house, but Fleda was in a maze again and could hardly realize anything. "His wife"!--was she that?--had so marvellous a change really been wrought in her?--the little asparagus cutter of Queechy transformed into the mistress of all this domain, and of the stately mansion of which they caught glimpses now and then, as they drew near it by another approach into which Mr. Carleton had diverged. And his wife!--that was the hardest to realize of all.

She was as far from realizing it when she got into the house. They entered now at once into the breakfast-room where the same party were gathered whom she had met once before that morning. Mr. Carleton the

elder, and Lord Peterborough and Lady Peterborough, she had met without seeing. But Fleda could look at them now; and if her colour came and went as frankly as when she was a child, she could speak to them and meet their advances with the same free and sweet self-possession as then; the rare dignity of a little wood-flower, that is moved by a breath, but recovers as easily and instantly its quiet standing. There were one or two who looked a little curiously at first to see whether this new member of the family were worthy of her place and would fill it to satisfy them. Not Mr. Carleton; he never sought to ascertain the value of anything that belonged to him by a popular vote; and his own judgment always stood carelessly alone. But Mrs. Carleton was less sure of her own ground or of others. For five minutes she noted Fleda's motions and words, her blushes and smiles, as she stood talking to one and another;--for five minutes, and then with a little smile at her sister Mrs. Carleton moved off to the breakfast-table, well pleased that Lady Peterborough was too engaged to answer her. Fleda had won them all. Mr. Carleton's intervening shield of grace and kindness was only needed here against the too much attention or attraction that might distress her. He was again, now they were in presence of others, exactly what he had been to her when she was a child, the same cool and efficient friend and protector. Nobody in the room shewed less thought of her *except* in action; a great many little things done for her pleasure or comfort, so quietly that nobody knew it but one person, and she hardly noticed it at the time. All could not have the same tact.

There was an uninterrupted easy flow of talk at the table, which Fleda heard just enough to join in where it was necessary; the rest of the time she sat in a kind of abstraction, dipping enormous strawberries one by one into white sugar, with a curious want of recognition between them and the ends of her fingers; it never occurred to her that they had picked baskets full.

"I have done something for which you will hardly thank me, Mr. Carleton," said Lord Peterborough. "I have driven this lady to tears within the first hour of her being in the house."

"If she will forgive you, I will, my lord," Mr. Carleton answered carelessly.

"I will confess myself though," continued his lordship looking at the face that was so intent over the strawberries. "I was under the impression when I first saw a figure in the window that it was Lady Peterborough. I own as soon as I found it was a stranger I had my suspicions--which did not lack confirmation in the course of the interview--I trust I am forgiven the means I used."

"It seems you had your curiosity too, my lord," said Mr. Carleton the uncle.

"Which ought in all justice to have lacked gratification," said Lady Peterborough. "I hope Fleda will not be too ready to forgive you."

"I expect forgiveness nevertheless," said he looking at Fleda. "Must I wait for it?"

"I am much obliged to you, sir."

And then she gave him a very frank smile and blush as she added, "I beg pardon--you know my tongue is American."

"I don't like that," said his lordship gravely.

"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," said the elder Carleton. "The heart being English, we may hope the tongue will become so too."

"I will not assure you of that, sir," Fleda said laughingly, though her cheeks showed the conversation was not carried on without effort. Oddly enough nobody saw it with any dissatisfaction.

"Of what, madam?" said Lord Peterborough.

"That I will not always keep a rag of the stars and stripes flying somewhere."

But that little speech had almost been too much for her equanimity.

"Like Queen Elizabeth who retained the crucifix when she gave up the profession of popery."

"Very unlike indeed!" said Fleda, endeavouring to understand what Mr. Carleton was saying to her about wood strawberries and hautbois.

"Will you allow that, Carleton?"

"What, my lord?"

"A rival banner to float alongside of St. George's?"

'"The flags are friendly, my lord."

"Hum--just now,--they may seem so.--Has your little standard-bearer anything of a rebellious disposition?"

"Not against any lawful authority, I hope," said Fleda.

"Then there is hope for you, Mr. Carleton, that you will be able to prevent the introduction of mischievous doctrines."

"For shame, Lord Peterborough!" said his wife,--"what atrocious suppositions you are making. I am blushing, I am sure, for your want of discernment."

"Why--yes--" said his lordship, looking at another face whose blushes were more unequivocal,--"it may seem so--there is no appearance of anything untoward, but she is a woman after all. I will try her. Mrs.

Carleton, don't you think with my Lady Peterborough that in the present nineteenth century women ought to stand more on that independent footing from which lordly monopoly has excluded them?"

The first name Fleda thought belonged to another person, and her downcast eyelids prevented her seeing to whom it was addressed. It was no matter, for any answer was anticipated.

"The boast of independence is not engrossed by the boldest footing, my lord."

"She has never considered the subject," said Lady Peterborough.

"It is no matter," said his lordship. "I must respectfully beg an answer to my question."

The silence made Fleda look up.

"Don't you think that the rights of the weak ought to be on a perfect equality with those of the strong?"

"The rights of the weak *as such*--yes, my lord."

The gentlemen smiled; the ladies looked rather puzzled.

"I have no more to say, Mr. Carleton," said his lordship, "but that we must make an Englishwoman of her!"

"I am afraid she will never be a perfect cure," said Mr. Carleton smiling.

"I conceive it might require peculiar qualities in the physician,--but I do not despair. I was telling her of some of your doings this morning, and happy to see that they met with her entire disapproval."

Mr. Carleton did not even glance towards Fleda and made no answer, but carelessly gave the conversation another turn; for which she thanked him unspeakably.

There was no other interruption of any consequence to the well-bred flow of talk and kindliness of manner on the part of all the company, that put Fleda as much as possible at her ease. Still she did not realize anything, and yet she did realize it so strongly that her woman's heart could not rest till it bad eased itself in tears. The superbly appointed table at which she sat,--her own, though Mrs. Carleton this morning presided,--the like of which she had not seen since she was at Carleton before; the beautiful room with its arrangements, bringing back a troop of recollections of that old time; all the magnificence about her, instead of elevating sobered her spirits to the last degree. It pressed home upon her that feeling of responsibility, of the change that come over her; and though beneath it all very happy, Fleda hardly knew it, she longed so to be alone and to cry. One person's eyes, however little seemingly observant of her, read sufficiently well the unusual shaded air of her brow and her smile. But a sudden errand of business called him abroad immediately after breakfast.

The ladies seized the opportunity to carry Fleda up and introduce her to her dressing-room and take account of Lady Peterborough's commission, and ladies and ladies' maids soon formed a busy committee of dress and decorations. It did not enliven Fleda, it wearied her, though she forgave them the annoyance in gratitude for the pleasure they took in looking at her. Even the delight her eye had from the first minute she saw it, in the beautiful room, and her quick sense of the carefulness with which it had been arranged for her, added to the feeling with which she was oppressed; she was very passive in the hands of her friends.

In the midst of all this the housekeeper was called in and formally presented, and received by Fleda with a mixture of frankness and bashfulness that caused Mrs. Fothergill afterwards to pronounce her "a lady of a very sweet dignity indeed."

"She is just such a lady as you might know my master would have fancied," said Mr. Spenser.

"And what kind of a lady is that?" said Mrs. Fothergill.

But Mr. Spenser was too wise to enter into any particulars and merely informed Mrs. Fothergill that she would know in a few days.

"The first words Mrs. Carleton said when Mr. Carleton got home," said the old butler,--"she put both her hands on his arms and cried out, 'Guy, I am delighted with her!'"

"And what did *he* say?" said Mrs. Fothergill.

"He!" echoed Mr. Spenser in a tone of indignant intelligence,--"what should *he* say?--He didn't say anything; only asked where she was, I believe."

In the midst of silks, muslins and jewels Mr. Carleton found Fleda still on his return; looking pale and even sad, though nobody but himself through her gentle and grateful bearing would have discerned it. He took her out of the hands of the committee and carried her down to the little library, adjoining the great one, but never thrown open,--*his* room, as it was called, where more particularly art and taste had accumulated their wealth of attractions.

"I remember this very well," said Fleda. "This beautiful room!"

"It is as free to you as to me, Elfie; and I never gave the freedom of it to any one else."

"I will not abuse it," said Fleda.

"I hope not, my dear Elfie," said he smiling,--"for the room will want something to me now when you are not in it; and a gift is abused that is not made free use of."

A large and deep bay window in the room looked upon the same green lawn and fir wood with the windows of the library. Like those this casement stood open, and Mr. Carleton leading Fleda there remained

quietly beside her for a moment, watching her face which his last words had a little moved from its outward composure. Then, gently and gravely as if she had been a child, putting his arm round her shoulders and drawing her to him he whispered,

"My dear Elfie,--you need not fear being misunderstood--"

Fleda started and looked up to see what he meant. But his face said it so plainly, in its perfect intelligence and sympathy with her, that her barrier of self-command and reserve was all broken down; and hiding her head in her hands upon his breast she let the pent-up burden upon her heart come forth in a flood of unrestrained tears. She could not help herself. And when she would fain have checked them after the first burst and bidden them, according to her habit to wait another time, it was out of her power; for the same kindness and tenderness that had set them a flowing, perhaps witting of her intent, effectually hindered its execution. He did not say a single word, but now and then a soft touch of his hand or of his lips upon her brow, in its expressive tenderness would unnerve all her resolution and oblige her to have no reserve that time at least in letting her secret thoughts and feelings be known, as far as tears could tell them. She wept, at first in spite of herself and afterwards in the very luxury of indulged feeling; till she was as quiet as a child, and the weight of oppression was all gone. Mr. Carleton did not move, nor speak, till she did.

"I never knew before how good you were, Mr. Carleton," said Fleda raising her head at length, as soon as she dared, but still held fast by that kind arm.

"What new light have you got on the subject?" said he, smiling.

"Why," said Fleda, trying as hard as ever did sunshine to scatter the remnants of a cloud,--it was a bright cloud too by this time, "I have always heard that men cannot endure the sight of a woman's tears."

"You shall give me a reward then. Elfie."

"What reward?" said Fleda.

"Promise me that you will shed them nowhere else."

"Nowhere else?--"

"But here--in my arms."

"I don't feel like crying any more now," said Fleda evasively;--at least."--for drops were falling rather fast again,--" not sorrowfully."

"Promise me, Elfie," said Mr. Carleton after a pause.

But Fleda hesitated still and looked dubious.

"Come!--" he said smiling,--"you know you promised a little while ago that you would have a particular regard to my wishes."

Fleda's cheeks answered that appeal with sufficient brightness, but she looked down and said demurely,

"I am sure one of your wishes is that I should not say anything rashly."

"Well?--"

"One cannot answer for such wilful things as tears."

"And for such wilful things as men?" said he smiling.

But Fleda was silent.

"Then I will alter the form of my demand. Promise me that no shadow of anything shall come over your spirit that you do not let me either share or remove."

There was no trifling in the tone,--full of gentleness as it was; there could be no evading its requisition. But the promise demanded was a grave one. Fleda was half afraid to make it. She looked up, in the very way he had seen her do when a child, to find a warrant for her words before she

uttered them. But the full, clear, steadfast eye into which she looked for two seconds, authorized as well as required the promise; and hiding her face again on his breast Fleda gave it, amid a gush of tears every one of which was illumined with heart-sunshine.

THE END.

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