

Hillsboro People eBook

Hillsboro People by Dorothy Canfield Fisher

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Contents

Hillsboro People eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	10
Page 1.....	12
Page 2.....	13
Page 3.....	14
Page 4.....	15
Page 5.....	16
Page 6.....	17
Page 7.....	18
Page 8.....	19
Page 9.....	20
Page 10.....	21
Page 11.....	22
Page 12.....	23
Page 13.....	25
Page 14.....	26
Page 15.....	28
Page 16.....	29
Page 17.....	30
Page 18.....	32
Page 19.....	34
Page 20.....	36
Page 21.....	37
Page 22.....	39

Page 23.....	40
Page 24.....	42
Page 25.....	43
Page 26.....	44
Page 27.....	46
Page 28.....	47
Page 29.....	48
Page 30.....	49
Page 31.....	51
Page 32.....	53
Page 33.....	55
Page 34.....	57
Page 35.....	58
Page 36.....	59
Page 37.....	60
Page 38.....	61
Page 39.....	62
Page 40.....	64
Page 41.....	66
Page 42.....	68
Page 43.....	69
Page 44.....	71
Page 45.....	73
Page 46.....	75
Page 47.....	76
Page 48.....	78

Page 49.....	80
Page 50.....	82
Page 51.....	84
Page 52.....	86
Page 53.....	88
Page 54.....	90
Page 55.....	92
Page 56.....	94
Page 57.....	96
Page 58.....	97
Page 59.....	98
Page 60.....	100
Page 61.....	101
Page 62.....	103
Page 63.....	104
Page 64.....	106
Page 65.....	108
Page 66.....	109
Page 67.....	111
Page 68.....	113
Page 69.....	114
Page 70.....	116
Page 71.....	117
Page 72.....	119
Page 73.....	121
Page 74.....	123

Page 75.....	125
Page 76.....	126
Page 77.....	128
Page 78.....	130
Page 79.....	132
Page 80.....	134
Page 81.....	136
Page 82.....	137
Page 83.....	138
Page 84.....	140
Page 85.....	142
Page 86.....	144
Page 87.....	146
Page 88.....	148
Page 89.....	150
Page 90.....	152
Page 91.....	154
Page 92.....	156
Page 93.....	158
Page 94.....	160
Page 95.....	162
Page 96.....	164
Page 97.....	166
Page 98.....	168
Page 99.....	169
Page 100.....	170

Page 101.....	171
Page 102.....	173
Page 103.....	174
Page 104.....	175
Page 105.....	177
Page 106.....	178
Page 107.....	179
Page 108.....	181
Page 109.....	182
Page 110.....	183
Page 111.....	184
Page 112.....	185
Page 113.....	186
Page 114.....	187
Page 115.....	188
Page 116.....	189
Page 117.....	190
Page 118.....	192
Page 119.....	194
Page 120.....	196
Page 121.....	198
Page 122.....	200
Page 123.....	201
Page 124.....	203
Page 125.....	204
Page 126.....	205

Page 127.....	207
Page 128.....	209
Page 129.....	210
Page 130.....	211
Page 131.....	213
Page 132.....	215
Page 133.....	217
Page 134.....	219
Page 135.....	221
Page 136.....	223
Page 137.....	225
Page 138.....	227
Page 139.....	229
Page 140.....	231
Page 141.....	233
Page 142.....	234
Page 143.....	236
Page 144.....	238
Page 145.....	240
Page 146.....	241
Page 147.....	243
Page 148.....	244
Page 149.....	245
Page 150.....	247
Page 151.....	249
Page 152.....	251

Page 153.....	253
Page 154.....	254
Page 155.....	256
Page 156.....	258
Page 157.....	259
Page 158.....	261
Page 159.....	262
Page 160.....	263
Page 161.....	265
Page 162.....	266
Page 163.....	267
Page 164.....	268
Page 165.....	269
Page 166.....	271
Page 167.....	273
Page 168.....	275
Page 169.....	277
Page 170.....	279
Page 171.....	280
Page 172.....	282
Page 173.....	283
Page 174.....	285
Page 175.....	286
Page 176.....	288
Page 177.....	289
Page 178.....	290

Page 179	291
--------------------------	---------------------

Table of Contents

Section	Page
Start of eBook	1
AT THE FOOT OF HEMLOCK MOUNTAIN	1
PETUNIAS—THAT’S FOR REMEMBRANCE	9
THE HEYDAY OF THE BLOOD	19
AS A BIRD OUT OF THE SNARE	26
THE BEDQUILT	34
PORTRAIT OF A PHILOSOPHER	41
I	41
II	44
III	47
FLINT AND FIRE	51
A SAINT’S HOURS	63
IN NEW NEW ENGLAND	72
I.	72
II.	74
III.	79
IV.	80
VI.	84
THE DELIVERER	85
I	86
II	88
III	90
IV	93
V	95
NOCTES AMBROSIANAE	96
SALEM HILLS TO ELLIS ISLAND	107
II	107
I	107
II	113
III	119
BY ABANA AND PHARPAR	120
A VILLAGE MUNCHAUSEN	130
I	130
II	133
III	135
THE ARTIST	137
WHO ELSE HEARD IT?	143
THE GOLDEN TONGUE OF	154

IRELAND	
I	154
II	157
III	160
IV	162
V.	165
ADESTE FIDELES!	167
I.	167
II	171
III	173
IV	177

Page 1

AT THE FOOT OF HEMLOCK MOUNTAIN

"In connection with this phase of the problem of transportation it must be remembered that the rush of population to the great cities was no temporary movement. It is caused by a final revolt against that malignant relic of the dark ages, the country village and by a healthy craving for the deep, full life of the metropolis, for contact with the vitalizing stream of humanity."—Pritchell's "Handbook of Economics," page 247.

Sometimes people from Hillsboro leave our forgotten valley, high among the Green Mountains, and "go down to the city," as the phrase runs, They always come back exclaiming that they should think New Yorkers would just die of lonesomeness, and crying out in an ecstasy of relief that it does seem so good to get back where there are some folks. After the desolate isolation of city streets, empty of humanity, filled only with hurrying ghosts, the vestibule of our church after morning service fills one with an exalted realization of the great numbers of the human race. It is like coming into a warmed and lighted room, full of friendly faces, after wandering long by night in a forest peopled only with flitting shadows. In the phantasmagoric pantomime of the city, we forget that there are so many real people in all the world, so diverse, so unfathomably human as those who meet us in the little post-office on the night of our return to Hillsboro.

Like any other of those gifts of life which gratify insatiable cravings of humanity, living in a country village conveys a satisfaction which is incommunicable. A great many authors have written about it, just as a great many authors have written about the satisfaction of being in love, but in the one, as in the other case, the essence of the thing escapes. People rejoice in sweethearts because all humanity craves love, and they thrive in country villages because they crave human life. Now the living spirit of neither of these things can be caught in a net of words. All the foolish, fond doings of lovers may be set down on paper by whatever eavesdropper cares to take the trouble, but no one can realize from that record anything of the glory in the hearts of the unconscious two. All the queer grammar and insignificant surface eccentricities of village character may be ruthlessly reproduced in every variety of dialect, but no one can guess from that record the abounding flood of richly human life which pours along the village street.

This tormenting inequality between the thing felt and the impression conveyed had vexed us unceasingly until one day Simple Martin, the town fool, who always says our wise things, said one of his wisest. He was lounging by the watering-trough one sunny day in June, when a carriage-load of "summer folk" from Windfield over the mountain stopped to water their horses. They asked him, as they always, always ask all of us, "For mercy's sake, what do you people *do* all the time, away off here, so far from everything."

Page 2

Simple Martin was not irritated, or perplexed, or rendered helplessly inarticulate by this question, as the rest of us had always been. He looked around him at the lovely, sloping lines of Hemlock Mountain, at the Necronett River singing in the sunlight, at the familiar, friendly faces of the people in the street, and he answered in astonishment at the ignorance of his questioners, "*Do? Why, we jes' live!*"

We felt that he had explained us once and for all. We had known that, of course, but we hadn't before, in our own phrase, "sensed it." We just live. And sometimes it seems to us that we are the only people in America engaged in that most wonderful occupation. We know, of course, that we must be wrong in thinking this, and that there must be countless other Hillsboros scattered everywhere, rejoicing as we do in an existence which does not necessarily make us care-free or happy, which does not in the least absolve us from the necessity of working hard (for Hillsboro is unbelievably poor in money), but which does keep us alive in every fiber of our sympathy and thrilling with the consciousness of the life of others.

A common and picturesque expression for a common experience runs, "It's so noisy I can't hear myself think." After a visit to New York we feel that its inhabitants are so deafened by the constant blare of confusion that they can't feel themselves live. The steady sufferers from this complaint do not realize their condition. They find it on the whole less trouble *not* to feel themselves live, and they are most uneasy when chance forces them to spend a few days (on shipboard, for instance) where they are not protected by ceaseless and aimless activity from the consciousness that they are themselves. They cannot even conceive the bitter-sweet, vital taste of that consciousness as we villagers have it, and they cannot understand how arid their existence seems to us without this unhurried, penetrating realization of their own existence and of the meaning of their acts. We do not blame city dwellers for not having it; we ourselves lose it when we venture into their maelstrom. Like them, we become dwarfed by overwhelming numbers, and shriveled by the incapacity to "sense" the humanity of the countless human simulacra about us. But we do not stay where we cannot feel ourselves live. We hurry back to the shadow of Hemlock Mountain, feeling that to love life one does not need to be what is usually called happy, one needs only to live.

It cannot be, of course, that we are the only community to discover this patent fact; but we know no more of the others than they of us. All that we hear from that part of America which is not Hillsboro is the wild yell of excitement going up from the great cities, where people seem to be doing everything that was ever done or thought of except just living. City dwellers make money, make reputations (good and bad), make museums and subways, make charitable institutions, make with a hysteric rapidity, like excited spiders, more and yet more complications in the mazy labyrinths of their lives, but they never make each others' acquaintances ... and that is all that is worth doing in the world.

Page 3

We who live in Hillsboro know that they are to be pitied, not blamed, for this fatal omission. We realize that only in Hillsboro and places like it can one have “deep, full life and contact with the vitalizing stream of humanity.” We know that in the very nature of humanity the city is a small and narrow world, the village a great and wide one, and that the utmost efforts of city dwellers will not avail to break the bars of the prison where they are shut in, each with his own kind. They may look out from the windows upon a great and varied throng, as the beggar munching a crust may look in at a banqueting hall, but the people they are forced to live with are exactly like themselves; and that way lies not only monomania but an ennui that makes the blessing of life savorless.

If this does not seem the plainest possible statement of fact take a concrete instance. Can a banker in the city by any possibility come to know what kind of an individual is the remote impersonal creature who waits on him in a department store? Most bankers recognize with a misguided joy this natural wall between themselves and people who are not bankers, and add to it as many stones of their own quarrying as possible; but they are not shut off from all the quickening diversity of life any more effectually than the college-settlement, boys’ Sunday-school, brand of banker. The latter may try as hard as he pleases, he simply cannot achieve real acquaintanceship with a “storekeeper,” as we call them, any more than the clerk can achieve real acquaintanceship with him.

Lack of any elements of common life form as impassable a barrier as lack of a common language, whereas with us in Hillsboro all the life we have is common. Everyone is needed to live it.

There can be no city dweller of experience who does not know the result of this herding together of the same kind of people, this intellectual and moral inbreeding. To the accountant who knows only accounts, the world comes to seem like one great ledger, and account-keeping the only vital pursuit in life. To the banker who knows only bankers, the world seems one great bank filled with money, accompanied by people. The prison doors of uniformity are closed inexorably upon them.

And then what happens? Why, when anything goes wrong with their trumpery account books, or their trashy money, these poor folk are like blind men who have lost their staves. With all the world before them they dare not continue to go forward. We in Hillsboro are sorry for the account-keepers who disappear forever, fleeing from all who know them because their accounts have come out crooked, we pity the banker who blows out his brains when something has upset his bank; but we can’t help feeling with this compassion an admixture of the exasperated impatience we have for those Prussian school boys who jump out of third-story windows because they did not reach a certain grade in their Latin examinations. Life

Page 4

is not accounts, or banks, or even Latin examinations, and it is a sign of inexperience to think it so. The trouble with the despairing banker is that he has never had a chance to become aware of the comforting vastness of the force which animates him in common with all the rest of humanity, to which force a bank failure is no apocalyptic end of Creation, but a mere incident or trial of strength like a fall in a slippery road. Absorbed in his solitary progress, the banker has forgotten that his business in life is not so much to keep from falling as to get up again and go forward.

If the man to whom the world was a bank had not been so inexorably shut away from the bracing, tonic shock of knowing men utterly diverse, to whom the world was just as certainly only a grocery store, or a cobbler's bench, he might have come to believe in a world that is none of these things and is big enough to take them all in; and he might have been alive this minute, a credit to himself, useful to the world, and doubtless very much more agreeable to his family than in the days of his blind arrogance.

The pathetic feature of this universal inexperience among city dwellers of real life and real people is that it is really entirely enforced and involuntary. At heart they crave knowledge of real life and sympathy with their fellow-men as starving men do food. In Hillsboro we explain to ourselves the enormous amount of novel-reading and play-going in the great cities as due to a perverted form of this natural hunger for human life. If people are so situated they can't get it fresh, they will take it canned, which is undoubtedly good for those in the canning business; but we feel that we who have better food ought not to be expected to treat their boughten canned goods very seriously. We can't help smiling at the life-and-death discussions of literary people about their preferences in style and plot and treatment ... their favorite brand on the can, so to speak.

To tell the truth, all novels seem to us badly written, they are so faint and faded in comparison to the brilliant colors of the life which palpitates up and down our village street, called by strangers, "so quaint and sleepy-looking." What does the author of a novel do for you, after all, even the best author? He presents to you people not nearly so interesting as your next-door neighbors, makes them do things not nearly so exciting as what happened to your grandfather, and doles out to you in meager paragraphs snatches of that comprehending and consolatory philosophy of life, which long ago you should have learned to manufacture for yourself out of every incident in your daily routine. Of course, if you don't know your next-door neighbors, and have never had time to listen to what happened to your grandfather and are too busy catching trains to philosophize on those subjects if you did know them, no more remains to be said. By all means patronize the next shop you see which displays in its show windows canned romances, adventures, tragedies, farces, and the like line of goods. Live vicariously, if you can't at first hand; but don't be annoyed at our pity for your method of passing blindfold through life.

Page 5

And don't expect to find such a shop in our village. To open one there would be like trying to crowd out the great trees on Hemlock Mountain by planting a Noah's Ark garden among them. Romances, adventures, tragedies, and farces ... why, we are the characters of those plots. Every child who runs past the house starts a new story, every old man whom we leave sleeping in the burying-ground by the Necronsett River is the ending of another ... or perhaps the beginning of a sequel. Do you say that in the city a hundred more children run past the windows of your apartment than along our solitary street, and that funeral processions cross your every walk abroad? True, but they are stories written in a tongue incomprehensible to you. You look at the covers you may even flutter the leaves and look at the pictures but you cannot tell what they are all about. You are like people bored and yawning at a performance of a tragedy by Sophocles, because the actors speak in Greek. So dreadful and moving a thing as a man's sudden death may happen before your eyes, but you do not know enough of what it means to be moved by it. For you it is not really a man who dies. It is the abstract idea of a man, leaving behind him abstract possibilities of a wife and children. You knew nothing of him, you know nothing of them, you shudder, look the other way, and hurry along, your heart a little more blunted to the sorrows of others, a little more remote from your fellows even than before.

All Hillsboro is more stirred than that, both to sympathy and active help, by the news that Mrs. Brownell has broken her leg. It means something unescapably definite to us, about which we not only can, but must take action. It means that her sickly oldest daughter will not get the care she needs if somebody doesn't go to help out; it means that if we do not do something that bright boy of hers will have to leave school, just when he is in the way of winning a scholarship in college; it means, in short, a crisis in several human lives, which by the mere fact of being known calls forth sympathy as irresistibly as sunshine in May opens the leaf buds.

Just as it is only one lover in a million who can continue to love his mistress during a lifetime of absolute separation from her, so it is one man in a million who can continue his sympathy and interest in his fellow-men without continual close contact with them. The divine feeling of responsibility for the well-being of others is diluted and washed away in great cities by the overwhelming impersonal flood of vast numbers; in villages it is strengthened by the sight, apparent to the dullest eyes, of immediate personal and visible application. In other words, we are not only the characters of our unwritten stories, but also part authors. Something of the final outcome depends upon us, something of the creative instinct of the artist is stirred to life within every one of us ... however unconscious of it in our countrified

Page 6

simplicity we may be. The sympathy we feel for a distressed neighbor has none of the impotent sterility of a reader's sympathy for a distressed character in a book. There is always a chance to try to help, and if that fail, to try again and yet again. Death writes the only *Finis* to our stories, and since a chance to start over again has been so unfailingly granted us here, we cannot but feel that Death may mean only turning over another page.

I suppose we do not appreciate the seriousness of fiction-writing, nor its importance to those who cannot get any nearer to real life. And yet it is not that we are unprogressive. Our young people, returning from college, or from visits to the city, freshen and bring up to date our ideas on literature as rigorously as they do our sleeves and hats; but after a short stay in Hillsboro even these conscientious young missionaries of culture turn away from the feeble plots of Ibsen and the tame inventions of Bernard Shaw to the really exciting, perplexing, and stimulating events in the life of the village grocer.

In "Ghosts," Ibsen preaches a terrible sermon on the responsibility of one generation for the next, but not all his relentless logic can move you to the sharp throb of horrified sympathy you feel as you see Nelse Pettingrew's poor mother run down the street, her shawl flung hastily over her head, framing a face of despairing resolve, such as can never look at you out of the pages of a book. Somebody has told her that Nelse has been drinking again and "is beginning to get ugly." For Hillsboro is no model village, but the world entire, with hateful forces of evil lying in wait for weakness. Who will not lay down "Ghosts" to watch, with a painfully beating heart, the progress of this living "Mrs. Alving" past the house, pleading, persuading, coaxing the burly weakling, who will be saved from a week's debauch if she can only get him safely home now, and keep him quiet till "the fit goes by."

At the sight everybody in Hillsboro realizes that Nelse "got it from his father," with a penetrating sense of the tragedy of heredity, quite as stimulating to self-control in the future as Ibsen is able to make us feel in "Ghosts." But we know something better than Ibsen, for Mrs. Pettingrew is no "Mrs. Alving." She is a plain, hard-featured woman who takes in sewing for a living, and she is quite unlettered, but she is a general in the army of spiritual forces. She does not despair, she does not give up like the half-hearted mother in "Ghosts," she does not waste her strength in concealments; she stands up to her enemy and fights. She fought the wild beast in Nelse's father, hand to hand, all his life, and he died a better man than when she married him. Undaunted, she fought it in Nelse as a boy, and now as a man; and in the flowering of his physical forces when the wind of his youth blows most wildly through the hateful thicket of inherited weaknesses she generally wins the battle.

Page 7

And this she has done with none of the hard, consistent strength and intelligence of your make-believe heroine in a book, so disheartening an example to our faltering impulses for good. She has been infinitely human and pathetically fallible; she has cried out and hesitated and complained and done the wrong thing and wept and failed and still fought on, till to think of her is, for the weakest of us, like a bugle call to high endeavor. Nelse is now a better man than his father, and we shut up "Ghosts" with impatience that Ibsen should have selected that story to tell out of all the tales there must have been in the village where *he* lived.

Now imagine if you can ... for I cannot even faintly indicate to you ... our excitement when Nelse begins to look about him for a wife. In the first place, we are saved by our enforced closeness to real people from wasting our energies in the profitless outcry of economists that people like Nelse should be prohibited from having children. It occurs to us that perhaps the handsome fellow's immense good-humor and generosity are as good inheritance as the selfishness and cold avarice of priggish young Horace Gallatin, who never drinks a drop. Perhaps at some future date all people who are not perfectly worthy to have children will be kept from it by law. In Hillsboro, we think, that after such a decree the human race would last just one generation; but that is not the point now. The question is, will Nelse find a wife who will carry on his mother's work, or will he not?

If you think you are excited over a serial story because you can't guess if "Lady Eleanor" really stole the diamonds or not, it is only because you have no idea of what excitement is. You are in a condition of stagnant lethargy compared to that of Hillsboro over the question whether Nelse will marry Ellen Brownell, "our Ellen," or Flossie Merton, the ex-factory girl, who came up from Albany to wait at the tavern, and who is said to have a taste for drink herself.

Old Mrs. Perkins, whom everybody had thought sunk in embittered discontent about the poverty and isolation of her last days, roused herself not long ago and gave Ellen her cherished tortoise-shell back-comb, and her pretty white silk shawl to wear to village parties; and racked with rheumatism, as the old woman is, she says she sits up at night to watch the young people go back from choir rehearsal so that she can see which girl Nelse is "beauing home." Could the most artfully contrived piece of fiction more blessedly sweep the self-centered complainings of old age into generous and vitalizing interest in the lives of others?

Page 8

As for the “pity and terror,” the purifying effects of which are so vaunted in Greek tragedies, could Aeschylus himself have plunged us into a more awful desolation of pity than the day we saw old Squire Marvin being taken along the street on his way to the insane asylum? All the self-made miseries of his long life were in our minds, the wife he had loved and killed with the harsh violence of a nature he had never learned to control, the children he had adored unreasonably and spoiled and turned against, and they on him with a violence like his own, the people he had tried to benefit with so much egotistic pride mixed in his kindness that his favors made him hated, his vanity, his generosity, his despairing outcries against the hostility he had so well earned ... at the sight of the end of all this there was no heart in Hillsboro that was not wrung with a pity and terror more penetrating and purifying even than Shakespeare has made the centuries feel for Lear.

Ah, at the foot of Hemlock Mountain we do not need books to help us feel the meaning of life!

Nor do we need them to help us feel the meaning of death. You, in the cities, living with a feverish haste in the present only, and clutching at it as a starving man does at his last crust, you cannot understand the comforting sense we have of belonging almost as much to the past and future as to the present. Our own youth is not dead to us as yours is, from the lack of anything to recall it to you, and people we love do not slip quickly into that bitter oblivion to which the dead are consigned by those too hurried to remember. They are not remembered perfunctorily for their “good qualities” which are carved on their tombstones, but all the quaint and dear absurdities which make up personality are embalmed in the leisurely, peaceable talk of the village, still enriched by all that they brought to it. We are not afraid of the event which men call death, because we know that, in so far as we have deserved it, the same homely immortality awaits us.

Every spring, at the sight of the first cowslip, our old people laugh and say to each other, “Will you ever forget how Aunt Dorcas used to take us children out cowslipping, and how she never thought it ‘proper’ to lift her skirt to cross the log by the mill, and always fell in the brook?” The log has moldered away a generation ago, the mill is only a heap of blackened timbers, but as they speak, they are not only children again, but Aunt Dorcas lives again for them and for us who never saw her ... dear, silly, kind old Aunt Dorcas, past-mistress in the lovely art of spoiling children. Just so the children we have spoiled, the people we have lived with, will continue to keep us living with them. We shall have time to grow quite used to whatever awaits us after the tangled rosebushes of Hillsboro burying-ground bloom over our heads, before we shall have gradually faded painlessly away from the life of men and women. We sometimes feel that, almost alone in the harassed and weary modern world, we love that life, and yet we are the least afraid to leave it.

Page 9

It is usually dark when the shabby little narrow-gauge train brings us home to Hillsboro from wanderings in the great world, and the big pond by the station is full of stars. Up on the hill the lights of the village twinkle against the blurred mass of Hemlock Mountain, and above them the stars again. It is very quiet, the station is black and deserted, the road winding up to the village glimmers uncertainly in the starlight, and dark forms hover vaguely about. Strangers say that it is a very depressing station at which to arrive, but we know better. There is no feeling in the world like that with which one starts up the white road, stars below him in the quiet pool, stars above him in the quiet sky, friendly lights showing the end of his journey is at hand, and the soft twilight full of voices all familiar, all welcoming.

Poor old Uncle Abner Rhodes, returning from an attempt to do business in the city, where he had lost his money, his health, and his hopes, said he didn't see how going up to Heaven could be so very different from walking up the hill from the station with Hemlock Mountain in front of you. He said it didn't seem to him as though even in heaven you could feel more than then that you had got back where there are some folks, that you had got back home.

Sometimes when the stars hang very bright over Hemlock Mountain and the Necronsett River sings loud in the dusk, we remember the old man's speech, and, though we smile at his simplicity, we think, too, that the best which awaits us can only be very much better but not so very different from what we have known here.

PETUNIAS—THAT'S FOR REMEMBRANCE

It was a place to which, as a dreamy, fanciful child escaping from nursemaid and governess, Virginia had liked to climb on hot summer afternoons. She had spent many hours, lying on the grass in the shade of the dismantled house, looking through the gaunt, uncovered rafters of the barn at the white clouds, like stepping-stones in the broad blue river of sky flowing between the mountain walls.

Older people of the summer colony called it forlorn and desolate—the deserted farm, lying high on the slope of Hemlock Mountain—but to the child there was a charm about the unbroken silence which brooded over the little clearing. The sun shone down warmly on the house's battered shell and through the stark skeleton of the barn. The white birches, strange sylvan denizens of door and barnyard, stood shaking their delicate leaves as if announcing sweetly that the kind forest would cover all the wounds of human neglect, and soon everything would be as though man had not lived. And everywhere grew the thick, strong, glistening grass, covering even the threshold with a cushion on which the child's foot fell as noiselessly as a shadow. It used to seem to her that nothing could ever have happened in this breathless spot.

Page 10

Now she was a grown woman, she told herself, twenty-three years old and had had, she often thought, as full a life as any one of her age could have. Her college course had been varied with vacations in Europe; she had had one season in society; she was just back from a trip around the world. Her busy, absorbing life had given her no time to revisit the narrow green Valley where she had spent so many of her childhood's holidays. But now a whim for self-analysis, a desire to learn if the old glamour about the lovely enchanted region still existed for her weary, sophisticated maturity, had made her break exacting social engagements and sent her back alone, from the city, to see how the old valley looked in the spring.

Her disappointment was acute. The first impression and the one which remained with her, coloring painfully all the vistas of dim woodland aisles and sunlit brooks, was of the meagerness and meanness of the desolate lives lived in this paradise. This was a fact she had not noticed as a child, accepting the country people as she did all other incomprehensible elders. They had not seemed to her to differ noticeably from her delicate, esthetic mother, lying in lavender silk negligees on wicker couches, reading the latest book of Mallarme, or from her competent, rustling aunt, guiding the course of the summer colony's social life with firm hands. There was as yet no summer colony, this week in May. Even the big hotel was not open. Virginia was lodged in the house of one of the farmers. There was no element to distract her mind from the narrow, unlovely lives of the owners of that valley of beauty.

They were grinding away at their stupefying monotonous tasks as though the miracle of spring were not taking place before their eyes. They were absorbed in their barnyards and kitchen sinks and bad cooking and worse dressmaking. The very children, grimy little utilitarians like their parents, only went abroad in the flood of golden sunshine, in order to rifle the hill pastures of their wild strawberries. Virginia was no longer a child to ignore all this. It was an embittering, imprisoning thought from which she could not escape even in the most radiant vision of May woods. She was a woman now, with a trained mind which took in the saddening significance of these lives, not so much melancholy or tragic as utterly neutral, featureless, dun-colored. They weighed on her heart as she walked and drove about the lovely country they spoiled for her.

What a heavenly country it was! She compared it to similar valleys in Switzerland, in Norway, in Japan, and her own shone out pre-eminent with a thousand beauties of bold skyline, of harmoniously "composed" distances, of exquisitely fairy-like detail of foreground. But oh! the wooden packing-boxes of houses and the dreary lives they sheltered!

Page 11

The Pritchard family, her temporary hosts, summed up for her the human life of the valley. There were two children, inarticulate, vacant-faced country children of eight and ten, out from morning till night in the sunny, upland pastures, but who could think of nothing but how many quarts of berries they had picked and what price could be exacted for them. There was Gran'ther Pritchard, a doddering, toothless man of seventy-odd, and his wife, a tall, lean, lame old woman with a crutch who sat all through the mealtimes speechlessly staring at the stranger, with faded gray eyes. There was Mr. Pritchard and his son Joel, gaunt Yankees, toiling with fierce concentration to "get the crops in" after a late spring. Finally there was Mrs. Pritchard, worn and pale, passing those rose-colored spring days grubbing in her vegetable garden. And all of them silent, silent as the cattle they resembled. There had been during the first few days of her week's stay some vague attempts at conversation, but Virginia was soon aware that they had not the slightest rudiments of a common speech.

A blight was on even those faint manifestations of the esthetic spirit which they had not killed out of their bare natures. The pictures in the house were bad beyond belief, and the only flowers were some petunias, growing in a pot, carefully tended by Grandma Pritchard. They bore a mass of blossoms of a terrible magenta, like a blow in the face to anyone sensitive to color. It usually stood on the dining-table, which was covered with a red cloth. "Crimson! Magenta! It is no wonder they are lost souls!" cried the girl to herself.

On the last day of her week, even as she was trying to force down some food at the table thus decorated, she bethought herself of her old haunt of desolate peace on the mountainside. She pushed away from the table with an eager, murmured excuse, and fairly ran out into the gold and green of the forest, a paradise lying hard by the pitiable little purgatory of the farmhouse. As she fled along through the clean-growing maple-groves, through stretches of sunlit pastures, azure with bluets, through dark pines, red-carpeted by last year's needles, through the flickering, shadowy-patterned birches, she cried out to all this beauty to set her right with the world of her fellows, to ease her heart of its burden of disdainful pity.

But there was no answer.

She reached the deserted clearing breathless, and paused to savor its slow, penetrating peace. The white birches now almost shut the house from view; the barn had wholly disappeared. From the finely proportioned old doorway of the house protruded a long, grayed, weather-beaten tuft of hay. The last utilitarian dishonor had befallen it. It had not even its old dignity of vacant desolation. She went closer and peered inside. Yes, hay, the scant cutting from the adjacent old meadows, had been piled high in the room which had been the gathering-place of the forgotten family life. She stepped in and sank down on it, struck by the far-reaching view from the window. As she lay looking out, the silence was as insistent as a heavy odor in the air.

Page 12

The big white clouds lay like stepping-stones in the sky's blue river, just as when she was a child. Their silver-gleaming brightness blinded her ... *"Ueber allen Gipfeln ist Ruh ... warte nur ... balde ... ruhest ... du ..."* she began to murmur, and stopped, awed by the immensity of the hush about her. She closed her eyes, pillowed her head on her upthrown arms, and sank into a wide, bright reverie, which grew dimmer and vaguer as the slow changeless hours filed by.

She did not know if it were from a doze, or but from this dreamy haze that she was wakened by the sound of voices outside the house, under the window by which she lay. There were the tones of a stranger and those of old Mrs. Pritchard, but now flowing on briskly with a volubility unrecognizable. Virginia sat up, hesitating Were they only passing by, or stopping? Should She show herself or let them go on? In an instant the question was settled for her. It was too late. She would only shame them if they knew her there. She had caught her own name. They were talking of her.

"Well, you needn't," said the voice of Mrs. Pritchard "You can just save your breath to cool your porridge You can't get nothin' out'n her."

"But she's traveled 'round so much, seems's though ..." began the other woman's voice.

"Don't it?" struck in old Mrs. Pritchard assentingly, "But 'tain't so!"

The other was at a loss. "Do you mean she's stuck-up and won't answer you?" Mrs. Pritchard burst into a laugh, the great, resonant good-nature of which amazed Virginia. She had not dreamed that one of these sour, silent people could laugh like that. "No, *land* no, Abby! She's as soft-spoken as anybody could be, poor thing! She ain't got nothin' to say. That's all. Why, I can git more out'n any pack-peddler that's only been from here to Rutland and back than out'n her ... and she's traveled all summer long for five years, she was tellin' us, and last year went around the world."

"Good land! Think of it!" cried the other, awestruck. "China! An' Afriky! An' London!"

"That's the way we felt! That's the reason we let her come. There ain't no profit in one boarder, and we never take boarders, anyhow. But I thought 'twould be a chance for the young ones to learn something about how foreign folks lived." She broke again into her epic laugh. "Why, Abby, 'twould ha' made you die to see us the first few days she was there, tryin' to get somethin' out'n her. Italy, now ... had she been there? 'Oh, yes, she *adored* Italy!" Virginia flushed at the echo of her own exaggerated accent. "Well, we'd like to know somethin' about Italy. What did they raise there? Honest, Abby, you'd ha' thought we'd hit her side th' head. She thought and she *thought*, and all she could say was 'olives,' Nothing else? 'Well, she'd never noticed anything else ... oh, yes, lemons.' Well, that seemed kind o' queer vittles, but you can't never tell how foreigners git along, so we thought maybe they just lived off'n olives and lemons; and Joel he asked her how they raised 'em, and if they manured heavy or trusted to phosphate, and

how long the trees took before they began to bear, and if they pruned much, and if they had the same trouble we do, come harvest time, to hire hands enough to git in th' crop."

Page 13

She paused. The other woman asked, "Well, what did she say?"

The echoes rang again to the old woman's great laugh. "We might as well ha' asked her 'bout the back side of th' moon! So we gave up on olives and lemons! Then Eben he asked her 'bout taxes there. Were they on land mostly and were they high and who 'sessed 'em and how 'bout school tax. Did the state pay part o' that? You see town meetin' being so all tore up every year 'bout taxes, Eben he thought 'twould be a chance to hear how other folks did, and maybe learn somethin'. Good land, Abby, I've set there and 'most died, trying to keep from yellin' right out with laugh to see our folks tryin' to learn somethin' 'bout foreign parts from that woman that's traveled in 'em steady for five years. I bet she was blind-folded and gagged and had cotton in her ears the hull time she was there!"

"Didn't she tell you anythin' 'bout taxes?"

"Taxes? You'd ha' thought 'twas bumble-bees' hind legs we was askin' 'bout! She ackshilly seemed s'prised to be asked. Land! What had she ever thought 'bout such triflin' things as taxes. She didn't know how they was taxed in Italy, or *if* they was ... nor anywhere else. That what it come down to, every time. She didn't know! She didn't know what kind of schools they had, nor what the roads was made of, nor who made 'em. She couldn't tell you what hired men got, nor *any* wages, nor what girls that didn't get married did for a living, nor what rent they paid, nor how they 'mused themselves, nor how much land was worth, nor if they had factories, nor if there was any lumberin' done, nor how they managed to keep milk in such awful hot weather without ice. Honest, Abby, she couldn't even say if the houses had cellars or not. Why, it come out she never was *in* a real house that anybody lived in ... only hotels. She hadn't got to know a single real person that b'longed there. Of course she never found out anything 'bout how they lived. Her mother was there, she said, and her aunt, and that Bilson family that comes to th' village summers, an' the Goodriches an' the Phippses an' the ... oh, sakes alive, you know that same old crowd that rides 'roun' here summers and thinks to be sociable by sayin' how nice an' yellow your oats is blossomin'! You could go ten times 'roun' the world with them and know less 'bout what folks is like than when you started. When I heard 'bout them being there, I called Eben and Joel and Em'ly off and I says, 'Now, don't pester that poor do-less critter with questions any more. How much do the summer folks down to th' village know 'bout the way we live?' Well, they burst out laughin', of course. Well, then,' I says, "'tis plain to be seen that all they do in winter is to go off to some foreign part and do the same as here,' so I says to them, same's I said to you, Abby, a while back, that they'd better save their breath to cool their porridge. But it's awful solemn eatin' now, without a word spoke."

Page 14

The other woman laughed. "Why, you don't have to talk 'bout foreign parts or else keep still, do ye?"

"Oh, it's just so 'bout everythin'. We heard she'd been in Washington last winter, so Eben he brisked up and tried her on politics. Well, she'd never heard of direct primaries, they're raisin' such a holler 'bout in York State; she didn't know what th' 'nsurgent senators are up to near as much as we did, and to judge by the way she looked, she'd only just barely heard of th' tariff." The word was pronounced with true New England reverence. "Then we tried bringin' up children, and lumberin' an' roads, an' cookin', an' crops, an' stock, an' wages, an' schools, an' gardenin', but we couldn't touch bottom nowhere. Never a word to be had out'n her. So we give up and now we just sit like stotin' bottles, an' eat—an' do our visitin' with each other odd minutes afterward."

"Why, she don't look to be half-witted," said the other.

"She ain't!" cried Mrs. Pritchard with emphasis. "She's got as good a headpiece, natchilly, as anybody. I remember her when she was a young one. It's the fool way they're brung up! Everythin' that's any fun or intrust, they hire somebody else to do it for 'em. Here she is a great strappin' woman of twenty-two or three, with nothing in the world to do but to traipse off 'cross the fields from mornin' to night—an' nobody to need her there nor here, nor anywhere. No wonder she looks peaked. Sometimes when I see her set and stare off, so sort o' dull and hopeless, I'm so sorry for her I could cry! Good land! I'd as lief hire somebody to chew my vittles for me and give me the dry cud to live off of, as do the way those kind of folks do."

The distant call of a steam-whistle, silvered by the great distance into a flute-like note, interrupted her. "That's the milk-train, whistling for the Millbrook cross in'," she said. "We must be thinkin' of goin' home before long. Where be those young ones?" She raised her voice in a call as unexpectedly strong and vibrant as her laugh. "*Susie! Eddie!* Did they answer? I'm gittin' that hard o' hearin' 'tis hard for me to make out."

"Yes, they hollered back," said the other. "An' I see 'em comin' through the pasture yonder. I guess they got their pails full by the way they carry 'em."

"That's good," said Mrs. Pritchard with satisfaction. "They can get twenty-five cents a quart hulled, off'n summer folks. They're savin' up to help Joel go to Middletown College in the fall."

"They think a lot o' Joel, don't they?" commented the other.

"Oh, the Pritchards has always been a family that knew how to set store by their own folks," said the old woman proudly, "and Joel he'll pay 'em back as soon as he gets ahead a little."

The children had evidently now come up, for Virginia heard congratulations over the berries and exclamations over their sun-flushed cheeks. "Why, Susie, you look like a pickled beet in your face. Set down, child, an' cool off. Grandma called you an' Eddie down to tell you an old-timey story."

Page 15

There was an outbreak of delighted cries from the children and Mrs. Pritchard said deprecatingly, "You know, Abby, there never was children yet that wasn't crazy 'bout old-timey stories. I remember how I used to hang onto Aunt Debby's skirts and beg her to tell me some more.

"The story I'm goin' to tell you is about this Great-aunt Debby," she announced formally to her auditors, "when she was 'bout fourteen years old and lived up here in this very house, pretty soon after th' Rev'lution. There was only just a field or two cleared off 'round it then, and all over th' mounting the woods were as black as any cellar with pines and spruce. Great-aunt Debby was the oldest one of five children and my grandfather—your great-great-grandfather—was the youngest. In them days there wa'n't but a few families in the valley and they lived far apart, so when Great-aunt Debby's father got awful sick a few days after he'd been away to get some grist ground, Aunt Debby's mother had to send her 'bout six miles through th' woods to the nearest house—it stood where the old Perkins barn is now. The man come back with Debby, but as soon as he saw great-grandfather he give one yell—'smallpox!'—and lit out for home. Folks was tur'ble afraid of it then an' he had seven children of his own an' nobody for 'em to look to if he died, so you couldn't blame him none. They was all like that then, every fam'ly just barely holdin' on, an' scratchin' for dear life.

"Well, he spread the news, and the next day, while Debby was helpin' her mother nurse her father the best she could, somebody called her over toward th' woods. They made her stand still 'bout three rods from 'em and shouted to her that the best they could do was to see that the fam'ly had vittles enough. The neighbors would cook up a lot and leave it every day in the fence corner and Debbie could come and git it.

"That was the way they fixed it. Aunt Debby said they was awful faithful and good 'bout it and never failed, rain or shine, to leave a lot of the best stuff they could git in them days. But before long she left some of it there, to show they didn't need so much, because they wasn't so many to eat.

"First, Aunt Debby's father died. Her mother an she dug the grave in th' corner of th' clearin', down there where I'm pointin'. Aunt Debby said she couldn't never forget how her mother looked as she said a prayer before they shoveled the dirt back in. Then the two of 'em took care of the cow and tried to get in a few garden seeds while they nursed one of the children—the boy that was next to Debby. That turned out to be smallpox, of course, and he died and they buried him alongside his father. Then the two youngest girls, twins they was, took sick, and before they died Aunt Debby's mother fell over in a faint while she was tryin' to spade up the garden. Aunt Debby got her into the house and put her to bed. She never said another thing, but just died without so much as knowin' Debby. She and the twins went the same day, and Debby buried 'em in one grave.

Page 16

"It took her all day to dig it, she said. They was afraid of wolves in them days and had to have their graves deep. The baby, the one that was to be my grandfather, played 'round while she was diggin', and she had to stop to milk the cow and git his meals for him. She got the bodies over to the grave, one at a time, draggin' 'em on the wood-sled. When she was ready to shovel the dirt back in, 'twas gettin' to be twilight, and she said the thrushes were beginnin' to sing—she made the baby kneel down and she got on her knees beside him and took hold of his hand to say a prayer. She was just about wore out, as you can think, and scared to death, and she'd never known any prayer, anyhow. All she could think to say was 'Lord—Lord—Lord!' And she made the baby say it, over and over. I guess 'twas a good enough prayer too. When I married and come up here to live, seems as though I never heard the thrushes begin to sing in the evening without I looked down there and could almost see them two on their knees.

"Well, there she was, fourteen years old, with a two-year-old baby to look out for, and all the rest of the family gone as though she'd dreamed 'em. She was sure she and little Eddie—you're named for him, Eddie, and don't you never forget it—would die, of course, like the others, but she wa'n't any hand to give up till she had to, and she wanted to die last, so to look out for the baby. So when she took sick she fought the smallpox just like a wolf, she used to tell us. She had to live, to take care of Eddie. She gritted her teeth and *wouldn't* die, though, as she always said, 'twould ha' been enough sight more comfortable than to live through what she did.

"Some folks nowadays say it couldn't ha' been smallpox she had, or she couldn't ha' managed. I don't know 'bout that. I guess 'twas plenty bad enough, anyhow. She was out of her head a good share of th' time, but she never forgot to milk the cow and give Eddie his meals. She used to fight up on her knees (there was a week when she couldn't stand without fallin' over in faint) and then crawl out to the cow-shed and sit down flat on the ground and reach up to milk. One day the fever was so bad she was clear crazy and she thought angels in silver shoes come right out there, in the manure an' all, and milked for her and held the cup to Eddie's mouth.

"An' one night she thought somebody, with a big black cape on, come and stood over her with a knife. She riz up in bed and told him to '*git out!* She'd *have* to stay to take care of the baby!' And she hit at the knife so fierce she knocked it right out'n his hand. Then she fainted away agin. She didn't come to till mornin', and when she woke up she knew she was goin' to live. She always said her hand was all bloody that morning from a big cut in it, and she used to show us the scar—a big one 'twas, too. But I guess most likely that come from something else. Folks was awful superstitious in them days, and Aunt Debby was always kind o' queer.

Page 17

"Well, an' so she did live and got well, though she never grew a mite from that time. A little wizened-up thing she was, always; but I tell you folks 'round here thought a nawful lot of Aunt Debby! And Eddie, if you'll believe it, never took the sickness at all. They say, sometimes, babies don't.

"They got a fam'ly to come and work the farm for 'em, and Debby she took care of her little brother, same as she always had. And he grew up and got married and come to live in this house and Aunt Debby lived with him. They did set great store by each other! Grandmother used to laugh and say grandfather and Aunt Debby didn't need no words to talk together. I was eight, goin' on nine—why, Susie, just your age—when Aunt Debby died. I remember as well the last thing she said. Somebody asked her if she was afraid. She looked down over the covers—I can see her now, like a old baby she looked, so little and so light on the big feather-bed, and she said, 'Is a grain o' wheat scared when you drop it in the ground?' I always thought that wa'n't such a bad thing for a child to hear said.

"She'd wanted to be buried there beside the others and grandfather did it so. While he was alive he took care of the graves and kept 'em in good order; and after I married and come here to live I did. But I'm gettin' on now, and I want you young folks should know 'bout it and do it after I'm gone.

"Now, here, Susie, take this pot of petunias and set it out on the head of the grave that's got a stone over it. And if you're ever inclined to think you have a hard time, just you remember Aunt Debby and shut your teeth and *hang on!* If you tip the pot bottom-side up, and knock on it with a stone, it'll all slip out easy. Now go along with you. We've got to be starting for home soon."

There was a brief pause and then the cheerful voice went on: "If there's any flower I do despise, it's petunias! But 'twas Aunt Debby's 'special favorite, so I always start a pot real early and have it in blossom when her birthday comes 'round."

By the sound she was struggling heavily to her feet. "Yes, do, for goodness' sakes, haul me up, will ye? I'm as stiff as an old horse. I don't know what makes me so rheumatically. My folks ain't, as a general thing."

There was so long a silence that the girl inside the house wondered if they were gone, when Mrs. Pritchard's voice began again: "I do like to come up here! It 'minds me of him an' me livin' here when we was young. We had a good time of it!"

"I never could see," commented the other, "how you managed when he went away t' th' war."

"Oh, I did the way you do when you *have* to! I'd felt he ought to go, you know, as much as he did, so I was willin' to put in my best licks. An' I was young too—twenty-three—

and only two of the children born then—and I was as strong as a ox. I never minded the work any. 'Twas the days after battles, when we couldn't get no news, that was the bad part. Why, I could go to the very spot, over there where the butternut tree stands—'twas our garden then—where I heard he was killed at Gettysburg."

Page 18

"What did you do?" asked the other.

"I went on hoein' my beans. There was the two children to be looked out for, you know. But I ain't mindin' tellin' you that I can't look at a bean-row since without gettin' sick to my stomach and feelin' the goose-pimples start all over me."

"How did you hear 'twan't so?"

"Why, I was gettin' in the hay—up there where the oaks stand was our hay-field. I remember how sick the smell of the hay made me, and when the sweat run down into my eyes I was glad to feel 'em smart and sting—well, Abby, you just wait till you hear your Nathan! is shot through the head and you'll know how it was—well, all of a sudden—somebody took the fork out'n my hand an'—an' said—'here, you drive an' I'll pitch '—and there—'twas—'twas——"

"Why, Grandma Pritchard! You're——"

"No, I ain't, either; I ain't such a fool, I hope! Why, see me cry like a old numskull! Ain't it ridic'lous how you can talk 'bout deaths and buryin's all right, and can't tell of how somebody come back from the grave without—where in th' nation is my handkerchief! Why, Abby, things ain't never looked the same to me from that minute on. I tell you—I tell you—I *was real glad to see him!*"

"Good land, what time o' day do you suppose it can be? Susie! Eddie! Come, git your berries and start home!"

The two voices began to sound more faintly as the old woman's crutch rang on the stones. "Well, Abby, when I come up here and remember how I farmed it alone for four years, I say to myself that 'twan't only th' men that set the slaves free. Them that stayed to home was allowed to have their share in the good——" The syllables blurred into an indistinguishable hum and there fell again upon the house its old mantle of silence.

As if aroused by this from an hypnotic spell, the girl on the hay sat up suddenly, pressing her hands over her eyes; but she did not shut out a thousand thronging visions. There was not a sound but the loud throbbing of the pulses at her temples; but never again could there be silence for her in that spot. The air was thick with murmurs which beat against her ears. She was trembling as she slipped down from the hay and, walking unsteadily to the door, stood looking half-wildly out into the haunted twilight.

The faint sound of the brook rose liquid in the quiet evening air.

There, where the butternut tree stood, had been the garden!

The white birches answered with a rustling stir in all their lightly poised leaves.



Up there, where the oaks were, had been the hay-field!

The twilight darkened. Through the forest, black on the crest of the overhanging mountain, shone suddenly the evening star.

There, before the door, had stood the waiting wood-sled!

The girl caught through the gathering dusk a gleam of magenta from the corner of the clearing.

Page 19

Two hermit thrushes, distant in the forest, began to send up their poignant antiphonal evening chant.

THE HEYDAY OF THE BLOOD

The older professor looked up at the assistant, fumbling fretfully with a pile of papers. "Farrar, what's the *matter* with you lately?" he said sharply.

The younger man started, "Why...why..." the brusqueness of the other's manner shocked him suddenly into confession. "I've lost my nerve, Professor Mallory, that's what the matter with me. I'm frightened to death," he said melodramatically.

"What *of*?" asked Mallory, with a little challenge in his tone.

The flood-gates were open. The younger man burst out in exclamations, waving his thin, nervous, knotted fingers, his face twitching as he spoke. "Of myself...no, not myself, but my body! I'm not well...I'm getting worse all the time. The doctors don't make out what is the matter...I don't sleep ... I worry...I forget things, I take no interest in life...the doctors intimate a nervous breakdown ahead of me...and yet I rest ... I rest...more than I can afford to! I never go out. Every evening I'm in bed by nine o'clock. I take no part in college life beyond my work, for fear of the nervous strain. I've refused to take charge of that summer-school in New York, you know, that would be such an opportunity for me ... if I could only sleep! But though I never do anything exciting in the evening ... heavens! what nights I have. Black hours of seeing myself in a sanitarium, dependent on my brother! I never ... why, I'm in hell ... that's what the matter with me, a perfect hell of ignoble terror!"

He sat silent, his drawn face turned to the window. The older man looked at him speculatively. When he spoke it was with a cheerful, casual quality in his voice which made the other look up at him surprised.

"You don't suppose those great friends of yours, the nerve specialists, would object to my telling you a story, do you? It's very quiet and unexciting. You're not too busy?"

"Busy! I've forgotten the meaning of the word! I don't dare to be!"

"Very well, then; I mean to carry you back to the stony little farm in the Green Mountains, where I had the extreme good luck to be born and raised. You've heard me speak of Hillsboro; and the story is all about my great-grandfather, who came to live with us when I was a little boy."

"Your great-grandfather?" said the other incredulously. "People don't remember their great-grandfathers!"

“Oh, yes, they do, in Vermont. There was my father on one farm, and my grandfather on another, without a thought that he was no longer young, and there was ‘gran’ther’ as we called him, eighty-eight years old and just persuaded to settle back, let his descendants take care of him, and consent to be an old man. He had been in the War of 1812—think of that, you mushroom!—and had lost an arm and a good deal of his health there. He had lately begun to get a pension of twelve dollars a month, so that for an old man he was quite independent financially, as poor Vermont farmers look at things; and he was a most extraordinary character, so that his arrival in our family was quite an event.

Page 20

“He took precedence at once of the oldest man in the township, who was only eighty-four and not very bright. I can remember bragging at school about Gran’ther Pendleton, who’d be eighty-nine come next Woodchuck day, and could see to read without glasses. He had been ailing all his life, ever since the fever he took in the war. He used to remark triumphantly that he had now outlived six doctors who had each given him but a year to live; ‘and the seventh is going downhill fast, so I hear!’ This last was his never-failing answer to the attempts of my conscientious mother and anxious, dutiful father to check the old man’s reckless indifference to any of the rules of hygiene.

“They were good disciplinarians with their children, and this naughty old man, who would give his weak stomach frightful attacks of indigestion by stealing out to the pantry and devouring a whole mince pie because he had been refused two pieces at the table—this rebellious, unreasonable, whimsical old madcap was an electric element in our quiet, orderly life. He insisted on going to every picnic and church sociable, where he ate recklessly of all the indigestible dainties he could lay his hands on, stood in drafts, tired himself to the verge of fainting away by playing games with the children, and returned home, exhausted, animated, and quite ready to pay the price of a day in bed, groaning and screaming out with pain as heartily and unaffectedly as he had laughed with the pretty girls the evening before.

“The climax came, however, in the middle of August, when he announced his desire to go to the county fair, held some fourteen miles down the valley from our farm. Father never dared let gran’ther go anywhere without himself accompanying the old man, but he was perfectly sincere in saying that it was not because he could not spare a day from the haying that he refused pointblank to consider it. The doctor who had been taking care of gran’ther since he came to live with us said that it would be crazy to think of such a thing. He added that the wonder was that gran’ther lived at all, for his heart was all wrong, his asthma was enough to kill a young man, and he had no digestion; in short, if father wished to kill his old grandfather, there was no surer way than to drive fourteen miles in the heat of August to the noisy excitement of a county fair.

“So father for once said ‘No,’ in the tone that we children had come to recognize as final. Gran’ther grimly tied a knot in his empty sleeve—a curious, enigmatic mode of his to express strong emotion—put his one hand on his cane, and his chin on his hand, and withdrew himself into that incalculable distance from the life about him where very old people spend so many hours.

Page 21

“He did not emerge from this until one morning toward the middle of fair-week, when all the rest of the family were away—father and the bigger boys on the far-off upland meadows haying, and mother and the girls off blackberrying. I was too little to be of any help, so I had been left to wait on gran’ther, and to set out our lunch of bread and milk and huckleberries. We had not been alone half an hour when gran’ther sent me to extract, from under the mattress of his bed, the wallet in which he kept his pension money. There was six dollars and forty-three cents—he counted it over carefully, sticking out his tongue like a schoolboy doing a sum, and when he had finished he began to laugh and snap his fingers and sing out in his high, cracked old voice:

“‘We’re goin’ to go a skylarkin’! Little Jo Mallory is going to the county fair with his Granther Pendleton, an’ he’s goin’ to have more fun than ever was in the world, and he —’

“‘But, gran’ther, father said we mustn’t!’ I protested, horrified.

“‘But I say we *shall*! I was your gre’t-gran’ther long before he was your feyther, and anyway I’m here and he’s not—so, *march*! Out to the barn!’

“He took me by the collar, and, executing a shuffling fandango of triumph, he pushed me ahead of him to the stable, where old white Peggy, the only horse left at home, looked at us amazed.

“‘But it’ll be twenty-eight miles, and Peg’s never driven over eight!’ I cried, my old-established world of rules and orders reeling before my eyes.

“‘Eight—and—twenty-eight! But I—am—*eighty-eight*!’

“Gran’ther improvised a sort of whooping chant of scorn as he pulled the harness from the peg. ‘It’ll do her good to drink some pink lemonade—old Peggy! An’ if she gits tired comin’ home, I’ll git out and carry her part way myself!’

“His adventurous spirit was irresistible. I made no further objection, and we hitched up together, I standing on a chair to fix the check-rein, and gran’ther doing wonders with his one hand. Then, just as we were—gran’ther in a hickory shirt, and with an old hat flapping over his wizened face, I bare-legged, in ragged old clothes—so we drove out of the grassy yard, down the steep, stony hill that led to the main valley road, and along the hot, white turnpike, deep with the dust which had been stirred up by the teams on their way to the fair. Gran’ther sniffed the air jubilantly, and exchanged hilarious greetings with the people who constantly overtook old Peg’s jogging trot. Between times he regaled me with spicy stories of the hundreds of thousands—they seemed no less numerous to me then—of county fairs he had attended in his youth. He was horrified to find that I had never been even to one.

“Why, Joey, how old be ye? ’Most eight, ain’t it? When I was your age I had run away and been to two fairs an’ a hangin’.” “But didn’t they lick you when you got home?” I asked shudderingly.

Page 22

“You *bet* they did!” cried gran’ther with gusto.

“I felt the world changing into an infinitely larger place with every word he said.

“Now, this is somethin’ *like!*” he exclaimed, as we drew near to Granville and fell into a procession of wagons all filled with country people in their best clothes, who looked with friendly curiosity at the little, shriveled cripple, his face shining with perspiring animation, and at the little boy beside him, his bare feet dangling high above the floor of the battered buckboard, overcome with the responsibility of driving a horse for the first time in his life, and filled with such a flood of new emotions and ideas that he must have been quite pale.”

Professor Mallory leaned back and laughed aloud at the vision he had been evoking—laughed with so joyous a relish in his reminiscences that the drawn, impatient face of his listener relaxed a little. He drew a long breath, he even smiled a little absently.

“Oh, that was a day!” went on the professor, still laughing and wiping his eyes. “Never will I have such another! At the entrance to the grounds gran’ther stopped me while he solemnly untied the knot in his empty sleeve. I don’t know what kind of hairbrained vow he had tied up in it, but with the little ceremony disappeared every trace of restraint, and we plunged head over ears into the saturnalia of delights that was an old-time county fair.

“People had little cash in those days, and gran’ther’s six dollars and forty-three cents lasted like the widow’s cruse of oil. We went to see the fat lady, who, if she was really as big as she looked to me then, must have weighed at least a ton. My admiration for gran’ther’s daredevil qualities rose to infinity when he entered into free-and-easy talk with her, about how much she ate, and could she raise her arms enough to do up her own hair, and how many yards of velvet it took to make her gorgeous, gold-trimmed robe. She laughed a great deal at us, but she was evidently touched by his human interest, for she confided to him that it was not velvet at all, but furniture covering; and when we went away she pressed on us a bag of peanuts. She said she had more peanuts than she could eat—a state of unbridled opulence which fitted in for me with all the other superlatives of that day.

“We saw the dog-faced boy, whom we did not like at all; gran’ther expressing, with a candidly outspoken cynicism, his belief that ‘them whiskers was glued to him.’ We wandered about the stock exhibit, gazing at the monstrous oxen, and hanging over the railings where the prize pigs lived to scratch their backs. In order to miss nothing, we even conscientiously passed through the Woman’s Building, where we were very much bored by the serried ranks of preserve jars.

“‘Sufferin’ Hezekiah!’ cried gran’ther irritably ‘Who cares how gooseberry jel *looks*. If they’d give a felly a taste, now—’

Page 23

"This reminded him that we were hungry, and we went to a restaurant under a tent, where, after taking stock of the wealth that yet remained of gran'ther's hoard, he ordered the most expensive things on the bill of fare."

Professor Mallory suddenly laughed out again. "Perhaps in heaven, but certainly not until then, shall I ever taste anything so ambrosial as that fried chicken and coffee ice-cream! I have not lived in vain that I have such a memory back of me!"

This time the younger man laughed with the narrator, settling back in his chair as the professor went on:

"After lunch we rode on the merry-go-round, both of us, gran'ther clinging desperately with his one hand to his red camel's wooden hump, and crying out shrilly to me to be sure and not lose his cane. The merry-go-round had just come in at that time, and gran'ther had never experienced it before. After the first giddy flight we retired to a lemonade-stand to exchange impressions, and finding that we both alike had fallen completely under the spell of the new sensation, gran'ther said that we 'sh'd keep on a-ridin' till we'd had enough! King Solomon couldn't tell when we'd ever git a chance again!' So we returned to the charge, and rode and rode and rode, through blinding clouds of happy excitement, so it seems to me now, such as I was never to know again. The sweat was pouring off from us, and we had tried all the different animals on the machine before we could tear ourselves away to follow the crowd to the race-track.

"We took reserved seats, which cost a quarter apiece, instead of the unshaded ten-cent benches, and gran'ther began at once to pour out to me a flood of horse-talk and knowing race-track aphorisms, which finally made a young fellow sitting next to us laugh superciliously. Gran'ther turned on him heatedly.

"'I bet-che fifty cents I pick the winner in the next race!' he said sportily, "'Done!' said the other, still laughing.

"Gran'ther picked a big black mare, who came in almost last, but he did not flinch. As he paid over the half-dollar he said: 'Everybody's likely to make mistakes about *some* things; King Solomon was a fool in the head about women-folks! I bet-che a dollar I pick the winner in *this* race!' and 'Done!' said the disagreeable young man, still laughing. I gasped, for I knew we had only eighty-seven cents left, but gran'ther shot me a command to silence out of the corner of his eyes, and announced that he bet on the sorrel gelding.

"If I live to be a hundred and break the bank at Monte Carlo three times a week," said Mallory, shaking his head reminiscently, "I could not know a tenth part of the frantic excitement of that race or of the mad triumph when our horse won. Gran'ther cast his hat upon the ground, screaming like a steam-calliope with exultation as the sorrel swept

past the judges' stand ahead of all the others, and I jumped up and down in an agony of delight which was almost more than my little body could hold.

Page 24

"After that we went away, feeling that the world could hold nothing more glorious. It was five o'clock and we decided to start back. We paid for Peggy's dinner out of the dollar we had won on the race—I say 'we,' for by that time we were welded into one organism—and we still had a dollar and a quarter left. 'While ye're about it, always go the whole hog!' said gran'ther and we spent twenty minutes in laying out that money in trinkets for all the folks at home. Then, dusty, penniless, laden with bundles, we bestowed our exhausted bodies and our uplifted hearts in the old buckboard, and turned Peg's head toward the mountains. We did not talk much during that drive, and though I thought at the time only of the carnival of joy we had left, I can now recall every detail of the trip—how the sun sank behind Indian Mountain, a peak I had known before only through distant views; then, as we journeyed on, how the stars came out above Hemlock Mountain—our own home mountain behind our house, and later, how the fireflies filled the darkening meadows along the river below us, so that we seemed to be floating between the steady stars of heaven and their dancing, twinkling reflection in the valley.

"Gran'ther's dauntless spirit still surrounded me. I put out of mind doubts of our reception at home, and lost myself in delightful ruminations on the splendors of the day. At first, every once in a while, gran'ther made a brief remark, such as, 'Twas the hind-quarters of the sorrel I bet on. He was the only one in the hull kit and bilin' of 'em that his quarters didn't fall away'; or, 'You needn't tell *me* that them Siamese twins ain't unpinned every night as separate as you and me!' But later on, as the damp evening air began to bring on his asthma, he subsided into silence, only broken by great gasping coughs.

"These were heard by the anxious, heart-sick watchers at home, and, as old Peg stumbled wearily up the hill, father came running down to meet us. 'Where you be'n?' he demanded, his face pale and stern in the light of his lantern. 'We be'n to the county fair!' croaked gran'ther with a last flare of triumph, and fell over sideways against me. Old Peg stopped short, hanging her head as if she, too, were at the limit of her strength. I was frightfully tired myself, and frozen with terror of what father would say. Gran'ther's collapse was the last straw. I began to cry loudly, but father ignored my distress with an indifference which cut me to the heart. He lifted gran'ther out of the buckboard, carrying the unconscious little old body into the house without a glance backward at me. But when I crawled down to the ground, sobbing and digging my fists into my eyes, I felt mother's arms close around me.

"'Oh, poor, naughty little Joey!' she said. 'Mother's bad, dear little boy!'"

Professor Mallory stopped short.

Page 25

"Perhaps that's something else I'll know again in heaven," he said soberly, and waited a moment before he went on: "Well, that was the end of our day. I was so worn out that I fell asleep over my supper, in spite of the excitement in the house about sending for a doctor for gran'ther, who was, so one of my awe-struck sisters told me, having some kind of 'fits,' Mother must have put me to bed, for the next thing I remember, she was shaking me by the shoulder and saying, 'Wake up, Joey Your great-grandfather wants to speak to you. He's been suffering terribly all night, and the doctor think's he's dying.'"

"I followed her into gran'ther's room, where the family was assembled about the bed. Gran'ther lay drawn up in a ball, groaning so dreadfully that I felt a chill like cold water at the roots of my hair; but a moment or two after I came in, all at once he gave a great sigh and relaxed, stretching out his legs and laying his arms down on the coverlid. He looked at me and attempted a smile.

"Well, it was wuth it, warn't it, Joey?" he said gallantly, and closed his eyes peacefully to sleep.

"Did he die?" asked the younger professor, leaning forward eagerly.

"Die? Gran'ther Pendleton? Not much! He came tottering down to breakfast the next morning, as white as an old ghost, with no voice left, his legs trembling under him, but he kept the whole family an hour and a half at the table, telling them in a loud whisper all about the fair, until father said really he would have to take us to the one next year. Afterward he sat out on the porch watching old Peg graze around the yard. I thought he was in one of his absent-minded fits, but when I came out, he called me to him, and, setting his lips to my ear, he whispered:

"'An' the seventh is a-goin' down-hill fast, so I hear!' He chuckled to himself over this for some time, wagging his head feebly, and then he said: 'I tell ye, Joey, I've lived a long time, and I've larned a lot about the way folks is made. The trouble with most of 'em is, they're fraid-cats! As Jeroboam Warner used to say—he was in the same rigiment with me in 1812—the only way to manage this business of livin' is to give a whoop and let her rip! If ye just about half-live, ye just the same as half-die; and if ye spend yer time half-dyin', some day ye turn in and die all over, without rightly meanin' to at all—just a kind o' bad habit ye've got yerself inter.' Gran'ther fell into a meditative silence for a moment. 'Jeroboam, he said that the evenin' before the battle of Lundy's Lane, and he got killed the next day. Some live, and some die; but folks that live all over die happy, anyhow! Now I tell you what's my motto, an' what I've lived to be eighty-eight on—'"

Professor Mallory stood up and, towering over the younger man, struck one hand into the other as he cried: "This was the motto he told me: 'Live while you live, and then die and be done with it!'"

Page 26

AS A BIRD OUT OF THE SNARE

After the bargain was completed and the timber merchant had gone away, Jehiel Hawthorn walked stiffly to the pine-tree and put his horny old fist against it, looking up to its spreading top with an expression of hostile exultation in his face. The neighbor who had been called to witness the transfer of Jehiel's woodland looked at him curiously.

"That was quite a sight of money to come in without your expectin', wa'n't it?" he said, fumbling awkwardly for an opening to the question he burned to ask.

Jehiel did not answer. The two old men stood silent, looking down the valley, lying like a crevasse in a glacier between the towering white mountains. The sinuous course of the frozen river was almost black under the slaty sky of March.

"Seems kind o' providential, havin' so much money come to you just now, when your sister-in-law's jest died, and left you the first time in your life without anybody you got to stay and see to, don't it?" commented the neighbor persistently.

Jehiel made a vague sign with his head.

"I s'pose likely you'll be startin' aout to travel and see foreign parts, same's you've always planned, won't you—or maybe you cal'late you be too old now?"

Jehiel gave no indication that he had heard. His faded old blue eyes were fixed steadily on the single crack in the rampart of mountains, through which the afternoon train was just now leaving the valley. Its whistle echoed back hollowly, as it fled away from the prison walls into the great world.

The neighbor stiffened in offended pride. "I bid you good-night, Mr. Hawthorn," he said severely, and stumped down the steep, narrow road leading to the highway in the valley.

After he had disappeared Jehiel turned to the tree and leaned his forehead against it. He was so still he seemed a part of the great pine. He stood so till the piercing chill of evening chilled him through, and when he looked again about him it was after he had lived his life all through in a brief and bitter review.

It began with the tree and it ended with the tree, and in spite of the fever of unrest in his heart it was as stationary as any rooted creature of the woods. When he was eleven and his father went away to the Civil War, he had watched him out of sight with no sorrow, only a burning envy of the wanderings that lay before the soldier. A little later, when it was decided that he should go to stay with his married sister, since she was left alone by her husband's departure to the war, he turned his back on his home with none of a child's usual reluctance, but with an eager delight in the day-long drive to the other

end of the valley. That was the longest journey he had ever taken, the man of almost three-score thought, with an aching resentment against Fate.

Page 27

Still, those years with his sister, filled with labor beyond his age as they were, had been the happiest of his life. In an almost complete isolation the two had toiled together five years, the most impressionable of his life; and all his affection centered on the silent, loving, always comprehending sister. His own father and mother grew to seem far away and alien, and his sister came to be like a part of himself. To her alone of all living souls had he spoken freely of his passion for adventuring far from home, which devoured, his boy-soul. He was six-teen when her husband finally came back from the war, and he had no secrets from the young matron of twenty-six, who listened with such wide tender eyes of sympathy to his half-frantic outpourings of longing to escape from the dark, narrow valley where his fathers had lived their dark, narrow lives.

The day before he went back to his own home, now so strange to him, he was out with her, searching for some lost turkey-chicks, and found one with its foot caught in a tangle of rusty wire. The little creature had beaten itself almost to death in its struggle to get away. Kneeling in the grass, and feeling the wild palpitations of its heart under his rescuing hand, he had called to his sister, "Oh, look! Poor thing! It's 'most dead, and yet it ain't really hurt a mite, only desperate, over bein' held fast." His voice broke in a sudden wave of sympathy: "Oh, ain't it *terrible* to feel so!"

For a moment the young mother put her little son aside and looked at her brother with brooding eyes. A little later she said with apparent irrelevance, "Jehiel, as soon as you're a man grown, I'll help you to get off. You shall be a sailor, if you like, and go around the world, and bring back coral to baby and me."

A chilling premonition fell on the lad. "I don't believe it!" he said, with tears in his eyes. "I just believe I've got to stay here in this hole all my life."

His sister looked off at the tops of the trees. Finally, "Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler," she quoted dreamily.

When she came to see him and their parents a few months later, she brought him a little square of crimson silk, on which she had worked in tiny stitches, "Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler." She explained to her father and mother that it was a "text-ornament" for Jehiel to hang up over his desk; but she drew the boy aside and showed him that the silk was only lightly caught down to the foundation.

"Underneath is another text," she said, "and when your day of freedom comes I want you should promise me to cut the stitches, turn back the silk, and take the second text for your motto, so you'll remember to be properly grateful. This is the second text." She put her hands on his shoulders and said in a loud, exultant voice, "My soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler. The snare is broken and I am escaped."

Page 28

For answer the boy pulled her eagerly to the window and pointed to a young pine-tree that stood near the house.

“Sister, that tree’s just as old as I be. I’ve prayed to God, and I’ve promised myself that before it’s as tall, as the ridge-pole of the house, I’ll be on my way.”

As this scene came before his eyes, the white-haired man, leaning against the great pine, looked up at the lofty crown of green wreathing the giant’s head and shook his fist at it. He hated every inch of its height, for every inch meant an enforced renunciation that had brought him bitterness and a sense of failure.

His sister had died the year after she had given him the double text, and his father the year after that. He was left thus, the sole support of his ailing mother, who transferred to the silent, sullen boy the irresistible rule of complaining weakness with which she had governed his father. It was thought she could not live long, and the boy stood in terror of a sudden death brought on by displeasure at some act of his. In the end, however, she died quietly in her bed, an old woman of seventy-three, nursed by her daughter-in-law, the widow of Jehiel’s only brother. Her place in the house was taken by Jehiel’s sister-in-law, a sickly, helpless woman, alone in the world except for Jehiel, and all the neighbors congratulated him on having a housekeeper ready to his hand. He said nothing.

By that time, indeed, he had sunk into a harsh silence on all topics. He went through the exhausting routine of farming with an iron-like endurance, watched with set lips the morning and afternoon trains leave the valley, and noted the growth of the pine-tree with a burning heart. His only recreation was collecting time-tables, prospectuses of steamship companies, and what few books of travel he could afford. The only society he did not shun was that of itinerant peddlers or tramps, and occasionally a returned missionary on a lecture tour.

And always the pine-tree had grown, insolent in the pride of a creature set in the right surroundings. The imprisoned man had felt himself dwarfed by its height. But now, he looked up at it again, and laughed aloud. It had come late, but it had come. He was fifty-seven years old, almost three-score, but all his life was still to be lived. He said to himself that some folks lived their lives while they did their work, but he had done all his tasks first, and now he could live. The unexpected arrival of the timber merchant and the sale of that piece of land he’d never thought would bring him a cent—was not that an evident sign that Providence was with him. He was too old and broken now to work his way about as he had planned at first, but here had come this six hundred dollars like rain from the sky. He would start as soon as he could sell his stock.

Page 29

The thought reminded him of his evening chores, and he set off for the barn with a fierce jubilation that it was almost the last time he would need to milk. How far he wondered, could he go on that money? He hurried through his work and into the house to his old desk. The faded text-ornament stood on the top shelf, but he did not see it, as he hastily tumbled out all the time tables and sailing-lists. The habit of looking at them with the yearning bitterness of unreconciled deprivation was still so strong on him that even as he handled them eagerly, he hated them for the associations of years of misery they brought back to him.

Where should he go? He was dazed by the unlimited possibilities before him. To Boston first, as the nearest seaport. He had taken the trip in his mind so many times that he knew the exact minute when the train would cross the State line and he would be really escaped from the net which had bound him all his life. From Boston to Jamaica as the nearest place that was quite quite different from Vermont. He had no desire to see Europe or England. Life there was too much like what he had known. He wanted to be in a country where nothing should remind him of his past. From Jamaica where? His stiff old fingers painfully traced out a steamship line to the Isthmus and thence to Colombia. He knew nothing about that country. All the better. It would be the more foreign. Only this he knew, that nobody in that tropical country "farmed it," and that was where he wanted to go. From Colombia around the Cape to Argentina. He was aghast at the cost, but instantly decided that he would go steerage. There would be more real foreigners to be seen that way, and his money would go twice as far.

To Buenos Ayres, then. He did not even attempt to pronounce this name, though its strange, inexplicable look on the page was a joy to him. From there by muleback and afoot over the Andes to Chile. He knew something about that trip. A woman who had taught in the Methodist missionary school in Santiago de Chile had taken that journey, and he had heard her give a lecture on it. He was the sexton of the church and heard all the lectures free. At Santiago de Chile (he pronounced it with a strange distortion of the school-teacher's bad accent) he would stay for a while and just live and decide what to do next. His head swam with dreams and visions, and his heart thumped heavily against his old ribs. The clock striking ten brought him back to reality. He stood up with a gesture of exultation almost fierce. "That's just the time when the train crosses the State line!" he said.

He slept hardly at all that night, waking with great starts, and imagining himself in strange foreign places, and then recognizing with a scornful familiarity the worn old pieces of furniture in his room. He noticed at these times that it was very cold, and lifelong habit made him reflect that he would better go early to the church because it would be hard to get up steam enough to warm the building before time for service. After he had finished his morning chores and was about to start he noticed that the thermometer stood at four above zero.

Page 30

That was certainly winter temperature; the snow lay like a heavy shroud on all the dead valley, but the strange blind instinct of a man who has lived close to the earth stirred within him. He looked at the sky and the mountains and held up his bare palm. "I shouldn't be surprised if the spring break-up was near," he said. "I guess this is about the last winter day we'll get."

The church was icy cold, and he toiled in the cellar, stuffing wood into the flaming maw of the steam-heater, till it was time to ring the bell. As he gave the last stroke, Deacon Bradley approached him. "Jehiel, I've got a little job of repairing I want you should do at my store," he said in the loud, slow speech of a man important in the community. "Come to the store to-morrow morning and see about it." He passed on into his pew, which was at the back of the church near a steam radiator, so that he was warm, no matter what the weather was.

Jehiel Hawthorn went out and stood on the front steps in the winter sunshine and his heart swelled exultingly as he looked across at the deacon's store. "I wish I'd had time to tell him I'd do no repairs for him to-morrow, nor any time—that I'm going to travel and see the world."

The last comers disappeared in the church and the sound of singing came faintly to Jehiel's ears. Although he was the sexton he rarely was in church for the service, using his duties as an excuse for absence. He felt that it was not for him to take part in prayer and thanksgiving. As a boy he had prayed for the one thing he wanted, and what had it come to?

A penetrating cold wind swept around the corner and he turned to go inside to see about the steam-pipes. In the outer hall he noticed that the service had progressed to the responsive readings. As he opened the door of the church the minister read rapidly, "Praised be the Lord who hath not given us over for a prey unto their teeth."

The congregation responded in a timid inarticulate gabble, above which rose Deacon Bradley's loud voice,—“Our soul is escaped even as a bird out of the snare of the fowler. The snare is broken and we are escaped.” He read the responses in a slow, booming roar, at least half a sentence behind the rest, but the minister always waited for him. As he finished, he saw the sexton standing in the open door. “A little more steam, Jehiel,” he added commandingly, running the words on to the end of the text.

Jehiel turned away silently, but as he stumbled through the dark, unfinished part of the cellar he thought to himself, “Well, that's the last time he'll give me an order for *one* while!”

Then the words of the text he had heard came back to his mind with a half-superstitious shock at the coincidence. He had forgotten all about that hidden part of the text-ornament. Why, now that had come true! He ought to have cut the stitches and torn off

the old text last night. He would, as soon as he went home. He wished his sister were alive to know, and suddenly, there in the dark, he wondered if perhaps she did know.

Page 31

As he passed the door to the rooms of the Ladies' Auxiliary Society he noticed that it was ajar, and saw through the crack that there was a sleeping figure on the floor near the stove—a boy about sixteen. When Jehiel stepped softly in and looked at him, the likeness to his own sister struck him even before he recognized the lad as his great-nephew, the son of the child he had helped his sister to care for all those years ago.

"Why, what's Nathaniel doin' here?" he asked himself, in surprise. He had not known that the boy was even in town, for he had been on the point of leaving to enlist in the navy. Family matters could not have detained him, for he was quite alone in the world since both his father and his mother were dead and his stepmother had married again. Under his great-uncle's gaze the lad opened his eyes with a start and sat up confused.

"What's the matter with you, Nat?" asked the older man not ungently. He was thinking that probably he had looked like that at sixteen. The boy stared at him a moment, and then, leaning his head on a chair, he began to cry. Sitting thus, crouched together, he looked like a child.

"Why, Natty, what's the trouble?" asked his uncle alarmed.

"I came off here because I couldn't hold in at home any longer," answered the other between sobs. "You see I can't go away. Her husband treats her so bad she can't stay with him. I don't blame her, she says she just *can't*! So she's come back and she ain't well, and she's goin' to have a baby, and I've got to stay and support her. Mr. Bradley's offered me a place in his store and I've got to give up goin' to the navy." He suddenly realized the unmanliness of his attitude, rose to his feet, closing his lips tightly, and faced the older man with a resolute expression of despair in his young eyes.

"Uncle Jehiel, it does seem to me I *can't* have it so! All my life I've looked forward to bein' a sailor and goin' around the world, and all. I just hate the valley and the mountains! But I guess I got to stay. She's only my stepmother, I know, but she was always awful good to me, and she hasn't got anybody else to look after her."

His voice broke, and he put his arm up in a crook over his face. "But it's awful hard! I feel like a bird that's got caught in a snare."

His uncle had grown very pale during this speech, and at the last words he recoiled with an exclamation of horror. There was a silence in which he looked at his nephew with the wide eyes of a man who sees a specter. Then he turned away into the furnace-room, and picking up his lunch-box brought it back. "Here, you," he said roughly, "part of what's troublin' you is that you ain't had any breakfast. You eat this and you'll feel better. I'll be back in a minute."

He went away blindly into the darkest part of the cellar. It was very black there, but his eyes stared wide before him. It was very cold, but drops of sweat stood on his forehead

as if he were in the hay-field. He was alone, but his lips moved from time to time, and once he called out in some loud, stifled exclamation which resounded hollowly in the vault-like place. He was there a long time.

Page 32

When he went back into the furnace cellar, he found Nathaniel sitting before the fire. The food and warmth had brought a little color into his pale face, but it was still set in a mask of tragic desolation.

As his uncle came in, he exclaimed, "Why, Uncle Jehiel, you look awful bad. Are you sick?"

"Yes, I be," said the other harshly, "but 'tain't nothin'. It'll pass after a while. Nathaniel, I've thought of a way you can manage. You know your uncle's wife died this last week and that leaves me without any house keeper. What if your stepmother sh'd come and take care of me and I'll take care of her. I've just sold a piece of timber land I never thought to get a cent out of and that'll ease things up so we can hire help if she ain't strong enough to do the work."

Nathaniel's face flushed in a relief which died quickly down to a somber hopelessness. He faced his uncle doggedly. "Not *much*, Uncle Jehiel!" he said heavily, "I ain't a-goin' to hear to such a thing. I know all about your wantin' to get away from the valley—you take that money and go yourself and I'll——"

Hopelessness and resolution were alike struck out of his face by the fury of benevolence with which the old man cut him short. "Don't you dare to speak a word against it, boy!" cried Jehiel in a labored anguish. "Good Lord! I'm only doin' it for you because I *have* to! I've been through what you're layin' out for yourself an' stood it, somehow, an' now I'm 'most done with it all. But 'twould be like beginnin' it all again to see you startin' in."

The boy tried to speak, but he raised his voice. "No, I couldn't stand it all over again. 'Twould cut in to the places where I've got calloused." Seeing through the other's stupor the beginnings of an irresolute opposition, he flung himself upon him in a strange and incredible appeal, crying out, "Oh, you must! You *got* to go!" commanding and imploring in the same incoherent sentence, struggling for speech, and then hanging on Nathaniel's answer in a sudden wild silence. It was as though his next breath depended on the boy's decision.

It was very still in the twilight where they stood. The faint murmur of a prayer came down from above, and while it lasted both were as though held motionless by its mesmeric monotony. Then, at the boom of the organ, the lad's last shred of self-control vanished. He burst again into muffled weary sobs, the light from the furnace glistening redly on his streaming cheeks. "It ain't right, Uncle Jehiel. I feel as though I was murderin' somethin'! But I can't help it. I'll go, I'll do as you say, but——"

His uncle's agitation went out like a wind-blown flame. He, too, drooped in an utter fatigue. "Never mind, Natty," he said tremulously, "it'll all come out right somehow. Just you do as Uncle Jehiel says."

A trampling upstairs told him that the service was over. “You run home now and tell her I’ll be over this afternoon to fix things up.”

Page 33

He hurried up the stairs to open the front doors, but Deacon Bradley was before him. "You're late, Jehiel," he said severely, "and the church was cold."

"I know, Deacon," said the sexton humbly, "but it won't happen again. And I'll be around the first thing in the morning to do that job for you." His voice sounded dull and lifeless.

"What's the matter?" asked the deacon. "Be you sick?"

"Yes, I be, but 'tain't nothin'. 'Twill pass after a while."

That evening, as he walked home after service, he told himself that he had never known so long a day. It seemed longer than all the rest of his life. Indeed he felt that some strange and racking change had come upon him since the morning, as though he were not the same person, as though he had been away on a long journey, and saw all things with changed eyes. "I feel as though I'd died," he thought with surprise, "and was dead and buried."

This brought back to his mind the only bitter word he had spoken throughout the endless day. Nathaniel had said, as an excuse for his haste (Jehiel insisted on his leaving that night), "You see, mother, it's really a service to Uncle Jehiel, since he's got nobody to keep house for him." He had added, in the transparent self-justification of selfish youth, "And I'll pay it back to him every cent." At this Jehiel had said shortly, "By the time you can pay it back what I'll need most will be a tombstone. Git a big one so's to keep me down there quiet."

But now, walking home under the frosty stars, he felt very quiet already, as though he needed no weight to lie heavy on his restless heart. It did not seem restless now, but very still, as though it too were dead. He noticed that the air was milder, and as he crossed the bridge below his house he stopped and listened. Yes, the fine ear of his experience caught a faint grinding sound. By tomorrow the river would begin to break up. It was the end of winter. He surprised himself by his pleasure in thinking of the spring.

Before he went into the house after his evening chores were done, he stopped for a moment and looked back at the cleft in the mountain wall through which the railroad left the valley. He had been looking longingly toward that door of escape all his life, and now he said goodbye to it. "Ah, well, 'twan't to be," he said, with an accent of weary finality; but then, suddenly out of the chill which oppressed his heart there sprang a last searing blast of astonished anguish. It was as if he realized for the first time all that had befallen him since the morning. He was racked by a horrified desolation that made his sturdy old body stagger as if under an unexpected blow. As he reeled he flung his arm about the pine-tree and so stood for a time, shaking in a paroxysm which left him breathless when it passed. For it passed as suddenly as it came. He lifted his head and looked again at the great cleft in the mountains, with new eyes. Somehow,

insensibly, his heart had been emptied of its fiery draught by more than mere exhaustion. The old bitter pain was gone, but there was no mere void in its place. He felt the sweet, weak light-headedness of a man in his first lucid period after a fever, tears stinging his eyelids in confused thanksgiving for an unrecognized respite from pain.

Page 34

He looked up at the lofty crown of the pine-tree, through which shone one or two of the brightest stars, and felt a new comradeship with it. It was a great tree, he thought, and they had grown up together. He laid his hardened palm on it, and fancied that he caught a throb of the silent vitality under the bark. How many kinds of life there were! Under its white shroud, how all the valley lived. The tree stretching up its head to the stars, the river preparing to throw off the icy armor which compressed its heart—they were all awakening in their own way. The river had been restless, like himself, the tree had been tranquil, but they passed together through the resurrection into quiet life.

When he went into the house, he found that he was almost fainting with fatigue. He sat down by the desk, and his head fell forward on the pile of pamphlets he had left there. For the first time in his life he thought of them without a sore heart. "I suppose Natty'll go to every one of them places," he murmured as he dropped to sleep.

He dreamed strange, troubled dreams that melted away before he could seize on them, and finally he thought his sister stood before him and called. The impression was so vivid that he started up, staring at the empty room. For an instant he still thought he heard a voice, and then he knew it was the old clock striking the hour. It was ten o'clock.

"Natty's just a-crossin' the State line," he said aloud. The text-ornament caught his eye. Still half asleep, with his sister's long-forgotten voice ringing in his ears, he remembered vaguely that he had meant to bring the second text to light. For a moment he hesitated, and then, "Well, it's come true for Natty, anyhow," he thought.

And clumsily using his heavy jackknife, he began to cut the tiny stitches which had so long hidden from his eyes the joyous exultation of the escaped prisoner.

THE BEDQUILT

Of all the Elwell family Aunt Mehetabel was certainly the most unimportant member. It was in the New England days, when an unmarried woman was an old maid at twenty, at forty was everyone's servant, and at sixty had gone through so much discipline that she could need no more in the next world. Aunt Mehetabel was sixty-eight.

She had never for a moment known the pleasure of being important to anyone. Not that she was useless in her Brother's family; she was expected, as a matter of course, to take upon herself the most tedious and uninteresting part of the household labors. On Mondays she accepted as her share the washing of the men's shirts, heavy with sweat and stiff with dirt from the fields and from their own hard-working bodies. Tuesdays she never dreamed of being allowed to iron anything pretty or even interesting, like the baby's white dresses or the fancy aprons of her young lady nieces. She stood all day pressing out a tiresome monotonous succession of dish-cloths and towels and sheets.

Page 35

In preserving-time she was allowed to have none of the pleasant responsibility of deciding when the fruit had cooked long enough, nor did she share in the little excitement of pouring the sweet-smelling stuff into the stone jars. She sat in a corner with the children and stoned cherries incessantly, or hulled strawberries until her fingers were dyed red to the bone.

The Elwells were not consciously unkind to their aunt, they were even in a vague way fond of her; but she was so utterly insignificant a figure in their lives that they bestowed no thought whatever on her. Aunt Mehetabel did not resent this treatment; she took it quite as unconsciously as they gave it. It was to be expected when one was an old-maid dependent in a busy family. She gathered what crumbs of comfort she could from their occasional careless kindnesses and tried to hide the hurt which even yet pierced her at her brother's rough joking. In the winter when they all sat before the big hearth, roasted apples, drank mulled cider, and teased the girls about their beaux and the boys about their sweethearts, she shrank into a dusky corner with her knitting, happy if the evening passed without her brother saying, with a crude sarcasm, "Ask your Aunt Mehetabel about the beaux that used to come a-sparkin' her!" or, "Mehetabel, how was't when you was in love with Abel Cummings." As a matter of fact, she had been the same at twenty as at sixty, a quiet, mouse-like little creature, too timid and shy for anyone to notice, or to raise her eyes for a moment and wish for a life of her own.

Her sister-in-law, a big hearty housewife, who ruled indoors with as autocratic a sway as did her husband on the farm, was rather kind in an absent, offhand way to the shrunken little old woman, and it was through her that Mehetabel was able to enjoy the one pleasure of her life. Even as a girl she had been clever with her needle in the way of patching bedquilts. More than that she could never learn to do. The garments which she made for herself were the most lamentable affairs, and she was humbly grateful for any help in the bewildering business of putting them together. But in patchwork she enjoyed a tepid importance. She could really do that as well as anyone else. During years of devotion to this one art she had accumulated a considerable store of quilting patterns. Sometimes the neighbors would send over and ask "Miss Mehetabel" for such and such a design. It was with an agreeable flutter at being able to help someone that she went to the dresser, in her bare little room under the eaves, and extracted from her crowded portfolio the pattern desired.

Page 36

She never knew how her great idea came to her. Sometimes she thought she must have dreamed it, sometimes she even wondered reverently, in the phraseology of the weekly prayer-meeting, if it had not been “sent” to her. She never admitted to herself that she could have thought of it without other help; it was too great, too ambitious, too lofty a project for her humble mind to have conceived. Even when she finished drawing the design with her own fingers, she gazed at it incredulously, not daring to believe that it could indeed be her handiwork. At first it seemed to her only like a lovely but quite unreal dream. She did not think of putting it into execution—so elaborate, so complicated, so beautifully difficult a pattern could be only for the angels in heaven to quilt. But so curiously does familiarity accustom us even to very wonderful things, that as she lived with this astonishing creation of her mind, the longing grew stronger and stronger to give it material life with her nimble old fingers.

She gasped at her daring when this idea first swept over her and put it away as one does a sinfully selfish notion, but she kept coming back to it again and again. Finally she said compromisingly to herself that she would make one “square,” just one part of her design, to see how it would look. Accustomed to the most complete dependence on her brother and his wife, she dared not do even this without asking Sophia’s permission. With a heart full of hope and fear thumping furiously against her old ribs, she approached the mistress of the house on churning-day, knowing with the innocent guile of a child that the country woman was apt to be in a good temper while working over the fragrant butter in the cool cellar.

Sophia listened absently to her sister-in-law’s halting, hesitating petition. “Why, yes, Mehetabel,” she said, leaning far down into the huge churn for the last golden morsels —“why, yes, start another quilt if you want to. I’ve got a lot of pieces from the spring sewing that will work in real good.” Mehetabel tried honestly to make her see that this would be no common quilt, but her limited vocabulary and her emotion stood between her and expression. At last Sophia said, with a kindly impatience: “Oh, there! Don’t bother me. I never could keep track of your quiltin’ patterns, anyhow. I don’t care what pattern you go by.”

With this overwhelmingly, although unconsciously, generous permission Mehetabel rushed back up the steep attic stairs to her room, and in a joyful agitation began preparations for the work of her life. It was even better than she hoped. By some heaven-sent inspiration she had invented a pattern beyond which no patchwork quilt could go.

Page 37

She had but little time from her incessant round of household drudgery for this new and absorbing occupation, and she did not dare sit up late at night lest she burn too much candle. It was weeks before the little square began to take on a finished look, to show the pattern. Then Mehetabel was in a fever of impatience to bring it to completion. She was too conscientious to shirk even the smallest part of her share of the work of the house, but she rushed through it with a speed which left her panting as she climbed to the little room. This seemed like a radiant spot to her as she bent over the innumerable scraps of cloth which already in her imagination ranged themselves in the infinitely diverse pattern of her masterpiece. Finally she could wait no longer, and one evening ventured to bring her work down beside the fire where the family sat, hoping that some good fortune would give her a place near the tallow candles on the mantelpiece. She was on the last corner of the square, and her needle flew in and out with inconceivable rapidity. No one noticed her, a fact which filled her with relief, and by bedtime she had but a few more stitches to add.

As she stood up with the others, the square fluttered out of her trembling old hands and fell on the table. Sophia glanced at it carelessly. "Is that the new quilt you're beginning on?" she asked with a yawn. "It looks like a real pretty pattern. Let's see it." Up to that moment Mehetabel had labored in the purest spirit of disinterested devotion to an ideal, but as Sophia held her work toward the candle to examine it, and exclaimed in amazement and admiration, she felt an astonished joy to know that her creation would stand the test of publicity.

"Land sakes!" ejaculated her sister-in-law, looking at the many-colored square. "Why, Mehetabel Elwell, where'd you git that pattern?"

"I made it up," said Mehetabel quietly, but with unutterable pride.

"No!" exclaimed Sophia incredulously. "*Did* you! Why, I never see such a pattern in my life. Girls, come here and see what your Aunt Mehetabel is doing."

The three tall daughters turned back reluctantly from the stairs. "I don't seem to take much interest in patchwork," said one listlessly.

"No, nor I neither!" answered Sophia; "but a stone image would take an interest in this pattern. Honest, Mehetabel, did you think of it yourself? And how under the sun and stars did you ever git your courage up to start in a-making it? Land! Look at all those tiny squinchy little seams! Why the wrong side ain't a thing *but* seams!"

The girls echoed their mother's exclamations, and Mr. Elwell himself came over to see what they were discussing. "Well, I declare!" he said, looking at his sister with eyes more approving than she could ever remember. "That beats old Mis' Wightman's quilt that got the blue ribbon so many times at the county fair."

Page 38

Mehetabel's heart swelled within her, and tears of joy moistened her old eyes as she lay that night in her narrow, hard bed, too proud and excited to sleep. The next day her sister-in-law amazed her by taking the huge pan of potatoes out of her lap and setting one of the younger children to peeling them. "Don't you want to go on with that quiltin' pattern?" she said; "I'd kind o' like to see how you're goin' to make the grape-vine design come out on the corner."

By the end of the summer the family interest had risen so high that Mehetabel was given a little stand in the sitting-room where she could keep her pieces, and work in odd minutes. She almost wept over such kindness, and resolved firmly not to take advantage of it by neglecting her work, which she performed with a fierce thoroughness. But the whole atmosphere of her world was changed. Things had a meaning now. Through the longest task of washing milk-pans there rose the rainbow of promise of her variegated work. She took her place by the little table and put the thimble on her knotted, hard finger with the solemnity of a priestess performing a sacred rite.

She was even able to bear with some degree of dignity the extreme honor of having the minister and the minister's wife comment admiringly on her great project. The family felt quite proud of Aunt Mehetael as Minister Bowman had said it was work as fine as any he had ever seen, "and he didn't know but finer!" The remark was repeated verbatim to the neighbors in the following weeks when they dropped in and examined in a perverse silence some astonishingly difficult *tour de force* which Mehetael had just finished.

The family especially plumed themselves on the slow progress of the quilt. "Mehetael has been to work on that corner for six weeks, come Tuesday, and she ain't half done yet," they explained to visitors. They fell out of the way of always expecting her to be the one to run on errands, even for the children. "Don't bother your Aunt Mehetael," Sophia would call. "Can't you see she's got to a ticklish place on the quilt?"

The old woman sat up straighter and looked the world in the face. She was a part of it at last. She joined in the conversation and her remarks were listened to. The children were even told to mind her when she asked them to do some service for her, although this she did but seldom, the habit of self-effacement being too strong.

One day some strangers from the next town drove up and asked if they could inspect the wonderful quilt which they had heard of, even down in their end of the valley. After that such visitations were not uncommon, making the Elwells' house a notable object. Mehetael's quilt came to be one of the town sights, and no one was allowed to leave the town without having paid tribute to its worth. The Elwells saw to it that their aunt was better dressed than she had ever been before, and one of the girls made her a pretty little cap to wear on her thin white hair.

Page 39

A year went by and a quarter of the quilt was finished, a second year passed and half was done. The third year Mehetabel had pneumonia and lay ill for weeks and weeks, overcome with terror lest she die before her work was completed. A fourth year and one could really see the grandeur of the whole design; and in September of the fifth year, the entire family watching her with eager and admiring eyes, Mehetabel quilted the last stitches in her creation. The girls held it up by the four corners, and they all looked at it in a solemn silence. Then Mr. Elwell smote one horny hand within the other and exclaimed: "By ginger! That's goin' to the county fair!"

Mehetabel blushed a deep red at this. It was a thought which had occurred to her in a bold moment, but she had not dared to entertain it. The family acclaimed the idea, and one of the boys was forthwith dispatched to the house of the neighbor who was chairman of the committee for their village. He returned with radiant face, "Of course he'll take it. Like's not it may git a prize, so he says; but he's got to have it right off, because all the things are goin' to-morrow morning."

Even in her swelling pride Mehetabel felt a pang of separation as the bulky package was carried out of the house. As the days went on she felt absolutely lost without her work. For years it had been her one preoccupation, and she could not bear even to look at the little stand, now quite bare of the litter of scraps which had lain on it so long. One of the neighbors, who took the long journey to the fair, reported that the quilt was hung in a place of honor in a glass case in "Agricultural Hall." But that meant little to Mehetabel's utter ignorance of all that lay outside of her brother's home. The family noticed the old woman's depression, and one day Sophia said kindly, "You feel sort o' lost without the quilt, don't you, Mehetabel?"

"They took it away so quick!" she said wistfully; "I hadn't hardly had one real good look at it myself."

Mr. Elwell made no comment, but a day or two later he asked his sister how early she could get up in the morning.

"I dun'no'. Why?" she asked.

"Well, Thomas Ralston has got to drive clear to West Oldton to see a lawyer there, and that is four miles beyond the fair. He says if you can git up so's to leave here at four in the morning he'll drive you over to the fair, leave you there for the day, and bring you back again at night."

Mehetabel looked at him with incredulity. It was as though someone had offered her a ride in a golden chariot up to the gates of heaven. "Why, you can't *mean* it!" she cried, paling with the intensity of her emotion. Her brother laughed a little uneasily. Even to his careless indifference this joy was a revelation of the narrowness of her life in his

home. "Oh, 'tain't so much to go to the fair. Yes, I mean it. Go git your things ready, for he wants to start to-morrow morning."

Page 40

All that night a trembling, excited old woman lay and stared at the rafters. She, who had never been more than six miles from home in her life, was going to drive thirty miles away—it was like going to another world. She who had never seen anything more exciting than church supper was to see the county fair. To Mehetabel it was like making the tour of the world. She had never dreamed of doing it. She could not at all imagine what would be like.

Nor did the exhortations of the family, as they bade good-by to her, throw any light on her confusion. They had all been at least once to the scene of gayety she was to visit, and as she tried to eat her breakfast they called out conflicting advice to her till her head whirled. Sophie told her to be sure and see the display of preserves. Her brother said not to miss inspecting the stock, her niece said the fancywork was the only thing worth looking at and her nephews said she must bring them home an account of the races. The buggy drove up to the door, she was helped in, and her wraps tucked about her. They all stood together and waved good-by to her as she drove out of the yard. She waved back, but she scarcely saw them. On her return home that evening she was very pale, and so tired and stiff that her brother had to lift her out bodily, but her lips were set in a blissful smile. They crowded around her with thronging questions, until Sophia pushed them all aside, telling them Aunt Mehetabel was too tired to speak until she had had her supper. This was eaten in an enforced silence on the part of the children, and then the old woman was helped into an easy-chair before the fire. They gathered about her, eager for news of the great world, and Sophia said, "Now, come, Mehetabel, tell us all about it!"

Mehetabel drew a long breath. "It was just perfect!" she said; "finer even than I thought. They've got it hanging up in the very middle of a sort o' closet made of glass, and one of the lower corners is ripped and turned back so's to show the seams on the wrong side."

"What?" asked Sophia, a little blankly.

"Why, the quilt!" said Mehetabel in surprise. "There are a whole lot of other ones in that room, but not one that can hold a candle to it, if I do say it who shouldn't. I heard lots of people say the same thing. You ought to have heard what the women said about that corner, Sophia. They said—well, I'd be ashamed to *tell* you what they said. I declare if I wouldn't!"

Mr. Elwell asked, "What did you think of that big ox we've heard so much about?"

"I didn't look at the stock," returned his sister indifferently. "That set of pieces you gave me, Maria, from your red waist, come out just lovely!" she assured one of her nieces. "I heard one woman say you could 'most smell the red silk roses."

"Did any of the horses in our town race?" asked young Thomas.

“I didn’t see the races.”

Page 41

"How about the preserves?" asked Sophia.

"I didn't see the preserves," said Mehetabel calmly.

"You see, I went right to the room where the quilt was and then I didn't want to leave it. It had been so long since I'd seen it. I had to look at it first real good myself and then I looked at the others to see if there was any that could come up to it. And then the people begin comin' in and I got so interested in hearin' what they had to say I couldn't think of goin' anywheres else. I ate my lunch right there too, and I'm as glad as can be I did, too; for what do you think?"—she gazed about her with kindling eyes—"while I stood there with a sandwich in one hand didn't the head of the hull concern come in and open the glass door and pin 'First Prize' right in the middle of the quilt!"

There was a stir of congratulation and proud exclamation. Then Sophia returned again to the attack, "Didn't you go to see anything else?" she queried.

"Why, no," said Mehetabel. "Only the quilt. Why should I?"

She fell into a reverie where she saw again the glorious creation of her hand and brain hanging before all the world with the mark of highest approval on it. She longed to make her listeners see the splendid vision with her. She struggled for words; she reached blindly after unknown superlatives. "I tell you it looked like——" she said, and paused, hesitating. Vague recollections of hymn-book phraseology came into her mind, the only form of literary expression she knew; but they were dismissed as being sacrilegious, and also not sufficiently forcible. Finally, "I tell you it looked real *well*!" she assured them, and sat staring into the fire, on her tired old face the supreme content of an artist who has realized his ideal.

PORTRAIT OF A PHILOSOPHER

I

The news of Professor Gridley's death filled Middletown College with consternation. Its one claim to distinction was gone, for in spite of the excessive quiet of his private life, he had always cast about the obscure little college the shimmering aura of greatness. There had been no fondness possible for the austere old thinker, but Middletown village, as well as the college, had been touched by his fidelity to the very moderate attractions of his birthplace. When, as often happened, some famous figure was seen on the streets, people used to say first, "Here to see old Grid, I suppose," and then, "Funny how he sticks here. They say he was offered seven thousand at the University of California." In the absence of any known motive for this steadfastness, the village legend-making instinct had evolved a theory that he did not wish to move away from a

State of which his father had been Governor, and where the name of Gridley was like a patent of nobility.

Page 42

And now he was gone, the last of the race. His disappearance caused the usual amount of reminiscent talk among his neighbors. The older people recalled the bygone scandals connected with his notorious and popular father and intimated with knowing nods that there were plenty of other descendants of the old Governor who were not entitled legally to bear the name; but the younger ones, who had known only the severely ascetic life and cold personality of the celebrated scholar, found it difficult to connect him with such a father. In their talk they brought to mind the man himself, his quiet shabby clothes, his big stooping frame, his sad black eyes absent almost to vacancy as though always fixed on high and distant thoughts; and those who had lived near him told laughing stories about the crude and countrified simplicity of his old aunt's housekeeping—it was said that the president of Harvard had been invited to join them once in a Sunday evening meal of crackers and milk—but the general tenor of feeling was, as it had been during his life, of pride in his great fame and in the celebrated people who had come to see him.

This pride warmed into something like affection when the day after his death, came the tidings that he had bequeathed to his college the Gino Sprague Falleres portrait of himself. Of course, at that time, no one in Middletown had seen the picture, for the philosopher's sudden death had occurred, very dramatically, actually during the last sitting. He had, in fact, had barely one glimpse of it himself, as, according to Falleres's invariable rule no one, not even the subject of the portrait, had been allowed to examine an unfinished piece of work. But though Middletown had no first-hand knowledge of the picture, there could be no doubt about the value of the canvas. As soon as it was put on exhibition in London, from every art-critic in the three nations who claimed Falleres for their own there rose a wail that this masterpiece was to be buried in an unknown college in an obscure village in barbarous America. It was confidently stated that it would be saved from such an unfitting resting-place by strong action on the part of an International Committee of Artists; but Middletown, though startled by its own good fortune, clung with Yankee tenacity to its rights. Raphael Collin, of Paris, commenting on this in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, cried out whimsically upon the woes of an art-critic's life, "as if there were not already enough wearisome pilgrimages necessary to remote and uncomfortable places with jaw-breaking names, which must nevertheless be visited for the sake of a single picture!" And a burlesque resolution to carry off the picture by force was adopted at the dinner in London given in honor of Falleres the evening before he set off for America to attend the dedicatory exercises with which Middletown planned to install its new treasure.

Page 43

For the little rustic college rose to its one great occasion. Bold in their confidence in their dead colleague's name, the college authorities sent out invitations to all the great ones of the country. Those to whom Gridley was no more than a name on volumes one never read came because the portrait was by Falleres, and those who had no interest in the world of art came to honor the moralist whose noble clear-thinking had simplified the intimate problems of modern life. There was the usual residuum of those who came because the others did, and, also as usual, they were among the most brilliant figures in the procession which filed along, one October morning, under the old maples of Middletown campus.

It was a notable celebration. A bishop opened the exercises with prayer, a United States senator delivered the eulogy of the dead philosopher, the veil uncovering the portrait was drawn away by the mayor of one of America's largest cities, himself an ardent Gridleyite, and among those who spoke afterward were the presidents of three great universities. The professor's family was represented but scantily. He had had one brother, who had disappeared many years ago under a black cloud of ill report, and one sister who had married and gone West to live. Her two sons, middle-aged merchants from Ohio, gave the only personal note to the occasion by their somewhat tongue-tied and embarrassed presence, for Gridley's aunt was too aged and infirm to walk with the procession from the Gymnasium, where it formed, to the Library building, where the portrait was installed.

After the inevitable photographers had made their records of the memorable gathering, the procession began to wind its many-colored way back to the Assembly Hall, where it was to lunch. Everyone was feeling relieved that the unveiling had gone off so smoothly, and cheerful at the prospect of food. The undergraduates began lustily to shout their college song, which was caught up by the holiday mood of the older ones. This cheerful tumult gradually died away in the distance, leaving the room of the portrait deserted in an echoing silence. A janitor began to remove the rows of folding chairs. The celebration was over.

Into the empty room there now limped forward a small, shabby old woman with a crutch. "I'm his aunt, that lived with him," she explained apologetically, "and I want to see the picture."

She advanced, peering nearsightedly at the canvas. The janitor continued stacking up chairs until he was stopped by a cry from the newcomer. She was a great deal paler than when she came in. She was staring hard at the portrait and now beckoned him wildly to do the same. "Look at it! Look at it!"

Surprised, he followed the direction of her shaking hand. "Sure, it's Professor Grid to the life!" he said admiringly.

"Look at it! Look at it!" She seemed not to be able to find any other words.



After a prolonged scrutiny he turned to her with a puzzled line between his eyebrows. "Since you've spoken of it, ma'am, I will say that there's a something about the expression of the eyes ... and mouth, maybe ... that ain't just the professor. He was more absent-like. It reminds me of somebody else ... of some face I've seen ..."

Page 44

She hung on his answer, her mild, timid old face drawn like a mask of tragedy. "Who? Who?" she prompted him.

For a time he could not remember, staring at the new portrait and scratching his head. Then it came to him suddenly: "Why, sure, I ought to ha' known without thinkin', seeing the other picture as often as every time I've swep' out the president's office. And Professor Grid always looked like him some, anyhow."

The old woman leaned against the wall, her crutch trembling in her hand. Her eyes questioned him mutely.

"Why, ma'am, who but his own father, to be sure ... the old Governor."

II

While they had been duly sensible of the luster reflected upon them by the celebration in honor of their distinguished uncle, Professor Gridley's two nephews could scarcely have said truthfully that they enjoyed the occasion. As one of them did say to the other, the whole show was rather out of their line. Their line was wholesale hardware and, being eager to return to it, it was with a distinct feeling of relief that they waited for the train at the station. They were therefore as much displeased as surprised by the sudden appearance to them of their great-aunt, very haggard, her usual extreme timidity swept away by overmastering emotion. She clutched at the two merchants with a great sob of relief: "Stephen! Eli! Come back to the house," she cried, and before they could stop her was hobbling away. They hurried after her, divided between the fear of losing their train and the hope that some inheritance from their uncle had been found. They were not mercenary men, but they felt a not unnatural disappointment that Professor Gridley had left not a penny, not even to his aunt, his one intimate.

They overtook her, scuttling along like some frightened and wounded little animal. "What's the matter, Aunt Amelia?" they asked shortly. "We've got to catch this train."

She faced them. "You can't go now. You've got to make them take that picture away."

"Away!" Their blankness was stupefaction.

She raged at them, the timid, harmless little thing, like a creature distraught. "Didn't you see it? Didn't you see it?"

Stephen answered: "Well, no, not to have a good square look at it. The man in front of me kept getting in the way."

Eli admitted: "If you mean you don't see anything in it to make all this hurrah about, I'm with you. It don't look half finished. I don't like that slap-dash style."

She was in a frenzy at their denseness. “Who did it look like?” she challenged them.

“Why, like Uncle Grid, of course. Who else?”

“Yes, yes,” she cried; “who else? Who else?”

They looked at each other, afraid that she was crazed, and spoke more gently: “Why, I don’t know, I’m sure, who else. Like Grandfather Gridley, of course; but then Uncle Grid always did look like his father.”

Page 45

At this she quite definitely put it out of their power to leave her by fainting away.

They carried her home and laid her on her own bed, where one of them stayed to attend her while the other went back to rescue their deserted baggage. As the door closed behind him the old woman came to herself. "Oh, Stephen," she moaned, "I wish it had killed me, the way it did your uncle."

"What is the matter?" asked her great-nephew wonderingly. "What do you think killed him?"

"That awful, awful picture! I know it now as plain as if I'd been there. He hadn't seen it all the time he was sitting for it, though he'd already put in his will that he wanted the college to have it, and when he did see it—" she turned on the merchant with a sudden fury: "How *dare* you say those are your uncle's eyes!"

He put his hand soothingly on hers. "Now, now, Aunt 'Melia, maybe the expression isn't just right, but the color is *fine*... just that jet-black his were ... and the artist has got in exact that funny stiff way uncle's hair stood up over his forehead."

The old woman fixed outraged eyes upon him. "Color!" she said. "And hair! Oh, Lord, help me!"

She sat up on the bed, clutching her nephew's hand, and began to talk rapidly. When, a half-hour later, the other brother returned, neither of them heard him enter the house. It was only when he called at the foot of the stairs that they both started and Stephen ran down to join him.

"You'll see the president ... you'll fix it?" the old woman cried after him.

"I'll see, Aunt 'Melia," he answered pacifyingly, as he drew his brother out of doors. He looked quite pale and moved, and drew a long breath before he could begin.

"Aunt Amelia's been telling me a lot of things I never knew, Eli. It seems that ... say, did you ever hear that Grandfather Gridley, the Governor, was such a bad lot?"

"Why, mother never said much about her father one way or the other, but I always sort of guessed he wasn't all he might have been from her never bringing us on to visit here until after he died. She used to look queer, too, when folks congratulated her on having such a famous man for father. All the big politicians of his day thought a lot of him. He was as smart as chain-lightning!"

"He was a disreputable old scalawag!" cried his other grandson. "Some of the things Aunt Amelia has been telling me make me never want to come back to this part of the country again. Do you know why Uncle Grid lived so poor and scrimped and yet left no money? He'd been taking care of a whole family grandfather had beside ours; and

paying back some people grandfather did out of a lot of money on a timber deal fifty years ago; and making it up to a little village in the backwoods that grandfather persuaded to bond itself for a railroad that he knew wouldn't go near it."

The two men stared at each other an instant, reviewing in a new light the life that had just closed. "That's why he never married," said Eli finally.

Page 46

"No, that's what I said, but Aunt Amelia just went wild when I did. She said ... gee!" he passed his hand over his eyes with a gesture of mental confusion. "Ain't it strange what can go on under your eyes and you never know it? Why, she says Uncle Grid was just like his father."

The words were not out of his mouth before the other's face of horror made him aware of his mistake. "No! No! Not that! Heavens, no! I mean ... made like him ... *wanted* to be that kind, 'specially drink ..." His tongue, unused to phrasing abstractions, stumbled and tripped in his haste to correct the other's impression. "You know how much Uncle Grid used to look like grandfather ... the same black hair and broad face and thick red lips and a kind of knob on the end of his nose? Well, it seems he had his father's insides, too ... *but his mother's conscience!* I guess, from what Aunt Amelia says, that the combination made life about as near Tophet for him ...! She's the only one to know anything about it, because she's lived with him always, you know, took him when grandmother died and he was a child. She says when he was younger he was like a man fighting a wild beast ... he didn't dare let up or rest. Some days he wouldn't stop working at his desk all day long, not even to eat, and then he'd grab up a piece of bread and go off for a long tearing tramp that'd last 'most all night. You know what a tremendous physique all the Gridley men have had. Well, Uncle Grid turned into work all the energy the rest of them spent in deviltry. Aunt Amelia said he'd go on like that day after day for a month, and then he'd bring out one of those essays folks are so crazy about. She said she never could bear to *look* at his books ... seemed to her they were written in his blood. She told him so once and he said it was the only thing to do with blood like his."

He was silent, while his listener made a clucking noise of astonishment. "My! My! I'd have said that there never was anybody more different from grandfather than uncle. Why, as he got on in years he didn't even look like him any more."

This reference gave Stephen a start. "Oh, yes, that's what all this came out for. Aunt Amelia is just wild about this portrait. It's just a notion of hers, of course, but after what she told me I could see, easy, how the idea would come to her. It looks this way, she says, as though Uncle Grid inherited his father's physical make-up complete, and spent all his life fighting it ... and won out! And here's this picture making him look the way he would if he'd been the worst old ... as if he'd been like the Governor. She says she feels as though she was the only one to defend uncle ... as if it could make any difference to him! I guess the poor old lady is a little touched. Likely it's harder for her, losing uncle, than we realized. She just about worshiped him. Queer business, anyhow, wasn't it? Who'd ha' thought he was like that?"

Page 47

He had talked his unwonted emotion quite out, and now looked at his brother with his usual matter-of-fact eye. "Did you tell the station agent to hold the trunk?"

The other, who was the younger, looked a little abashed. "Well, no; I found the train was so late I thought maybe we could ... you know there's that business to-morrow ...!"

His senior relieved him of embarrassment. "That's a good idea. Sure we can. There's nothing we could do if we stayed. It's just a notion of Aunt 'Melia's, anyhow. I agree with her that it don't look so awfully like Uncle Grid, but, then, oil-portraits are never any good. Give me a photograph!"

"It's out of our line, anyhow," agreed the younger, looking at his watch.

III

The president of Middletown College had been as much relieved as pleased by the success of the rather pretentious celebration he had planned. His annoyance was correspondingly keen at the disturbing appearance, in the afternoon reception before the new portrait, of the late professor's aunt, "an entirely insignificant old country woman," he hastily assured M. Falleres after she had been half forced, half persuaded to retire, "whose criticisms were as negligible as her personality."

The tall, Jove-like artist concealed a smile by stroking his great brown beard. When it came to insignificant country people, he told himself, it was hard to draw lines in his present company. He was wondering whether he might not escape by an earlier train.

To the president's remark he answered that no portrait-painter escaped unreasonable relatives of his sitters. "It is an axiom with our guild," he went on, not, perhaps, averse to giving his provincial hosts a new sensation, "that the family is never satisfied, and also that the family has no rights. A sitter is a subject only, like a slice of fish. The only question is how it's done. What difference does it make a century from now, if the likeness is good? It's a work of art or it's nothing." He announced this principle with a regal absence of explanation and turned away; but his thesis was taken up by another guest, a New York art-critic.

"By Jove, it's inconceivable, the ignorance of art in America!" he told the little group before the portrait. "You find everyone so incurably personal in his point of view ... always objecting to a masterpiece because the watch-chain isn't the kind usually worn by the dear departed."

Someone else chimed in. "Yes, it's incredible that anyone, even an old village granny, should be able to look at that canvas and not be struck speechless by its quality."

The critic was in Middletown to report on the portrait and he now began marshaling his adjectives for that purpose. "I never saw such use of pigment in my life ... it makes the Whistler 'Carlyle' look like burnt-out ashes ... the luminous richness of the blacks in the academic gown, the masterly generalization in the treatment of the hair, the placing of those great talons of hands on the canvas carrying out the vigorous lines of the composition, and the unforgettable felicity of those brutally red lips as the one ringing note of color. As for life-likeness, what's the old dame talking about! I never saw such eyes! Not a hint of meretricious emphasis on their luster and yet they fairly flame."

Page 48

The conversation spread to a less technical discussion as the group was joined by the professor of rhetoric, an ambitious young man with an insatiable craving for sophistication, who felt himself for once entirely in his element in the crowd of celebrities. "It's incredibly good luck that our little two-for-a-cent college should have so fine a thing," he said knowingly. "I've been wondering how such an old skinflint as Gridley ever got the money loose to have his portrait done by—"

A laugh went around the group at the idea. "It was Mackintosh, the sugar king, who put up for it. He's a great Gridleyite, and persuaded him to sit."

"*Persuade* a man to sit to Falleres!" The rhetoric professor was outraged at the idea.

"Yes, so they say. The professor was dead against it from the first. Falleres himself had to beg him to sit. Falleres said he felt a real inspiration at the sight of the old fellow ... knew he could make a good thing out of him. He was a good subject!"

The little group turned and stared appraisingly at the portrait hanging so close to them that it seemed another living being in their midst. The rhetoric professor was asked what kind of a man the philosopher had been personally, and answered briskly: "Oh, nobody knew him personally ... the silent old codger. He was a dry-as-dust, bloodless, secular monk—"

He was interrupted by a laugh from the art-critic, whose eyes were still on the portrait.

"Excuse me for my cynical mirth," he said, "but I must say he doesn't look it. I was prepared for any characterization but that. He looks like a powerful son of the Renaissance, who might have lived in that one little vacation of the soul after medievalism stopped hag-riding us, and before the modern conscience got its claws on us. And you say he was a blue-nosed Puritan!"

The professor of rhetoric looked an uneasy fear that he was being ridiculed. "I only repeated the village notion of him," he said airily. "He may have been anything. All I know is that he was as secretive as a clam, and about as interesting personally."

"Look at the picture," said the critic, still laughing; "you'll know all about him!"

The professor of rhetoric nodded. "You're right, he doesn't look much like my character of him. I never seem to have had a good, square look at him before. I've heard several people say the same thing, that they seemed to understand him better from the portrait than from his living face. There was something about his eyes that kept you from thinking of anything but what he was saying."

The critic agreed. "The eyes are wonderful ... ruthless in their power ... fires of hell." He laughed a deprecating apology for his overemphatic metaphor and suggested: "It's possible that there was more to the professorial life than met the eye. Had he a wife?"

“No; it was always a joke in the village that he would never look at a woman.”

Page 49

The critic glanced up at the smoldering eyes of the portrait and smiled. "I've heard of that kind of a man before," he said. "Never known to drink, either, I suppose?"

"Cold-water teetotaler," laughed the professor, catching the spirit of the occasion.

"Look at the color in that nose!" said the critic. "I fancy that the ascetic moralist—"

A very young man, an undergraduate who had been introduced as the junior usher, nodded his head. "Yep, a lot of us fellows always thought old Grid a little too good to be true."

An older man with the flexible mouth of a politician now ventured a contribution to a conversation no longer bafflingly esthetic: "His father, old Governor Gridley, wasn't he ... Well, I guess you're right about the son. No halos were handed down in *that* family!"

The laugh which followed this speech was stopped by the approach of Falleres, his commanding presence dwarfing the president beside him. He was listening with a good-natured contempt to the apparently rather anxious murmurs of the latter.

"Of course I know, Mr. Falleres, it is a great deal to ask, but she is so insistent ... she won't go away and continues to make the most distressing spectacle of herself ... and several people, since she has said so much about it, are saying that the expression is not that of the late professor. Much against my will I promised to speak to you—"

His mortified uneasiness was so great that the artist gave him a rescuing hand. "Well, Mr. President, what can I do in the matter? The man is dead. I cannot paint him over again, and if I could I would only do again as I did this time, choose that aspect which my judgment told me would make the best portrait. If his habitual vacant expression was not so interesting as another not so permanent a habit of his face ... why, the poor artist must be allowed some choice. I did not know I was to please his grandmother, and not posterity."

"His aunt," corrected the president automatically.

The portrait-painter accepted the correction with his tolerant smile. "His aunt," he repeated. "The difference is considerable. May I ask what it was you promised her?"

The president summoned his courage. It was easy to gather from his infinitely reluctant insistence how painful and compelling had been the scene which forced him to action. "She wants you to change it ... to make the expression of the—"

For the first time the artist's equanimity was shaken. He took a step backward. "Change it!" he said, and although his voice was low the casual chat all over the room stopped short as though a pistol had been fired.

"It's not *my* idea!" The president confounded himself in self-exoneration. "I merely promised, to pacify her, to ask you if you could not do some little thing that would—"

The critic assumed the role of conciliator. "My dear sir, I don't believe you quite understand what you are asking. It's as though you asked a priest to make just a little change in the church service and leave out the 'not' in the Commandments."

Page 50

"I only wish to know Mr. Falleres's attitude," said the president stiffly, a little nettled by the other's note of condescension. "I presume he will be willing to take the responsibility of it himself and explain to the professor's aunt that *I* have done—"

The artist had recovered from his lapse from Olympian to calm and now nodded, smiling: "Dear me, yes, Mr. President, I'm used to irate relatives."

The president hastened away and the knots of talkers in other parts of the room, who had been looking with expectant curiosity at the group before the portrait, resumed their loud-toned chatter. When their attention was next drawn in the same direction, it was by a shaky old treble, breaking, quavering with weakness. A small, shabby old woman, leaning on a crutch, stood looking up imploringly at the tall painter.

"My dear madam," he broke in on her with a kindly impatience, "all that you say about Professor Gridley is much to his credit, but what has it to do with me?"

"You painted his portrait," she said with a simplicity that was like stupidity. "And I am his aunt. You made a picture of a bad man. I know he was a good man."

"I painted what I saw," sighed the artist wearily. He looked furtively at his watch.

The old woman seemed dazed by the extremity of her emotion. She looked about her silently, keeping her eyes averted from the portrait that stood so vividly like a living man beside her. "I don't know what to do!" she murmured with a little moan. "I can't *bear* it to have it stay here—people forget so. Everybody'll think that Gridley looked like *that*! And there isn't anybody but me. He never had anybody but me."

The critic tried to clear the air by a roundly declaratory statement of principles. "You'll pardon my bluntness, madam; but you must remember that none but the members of Professor Gridley's family are concerned in the exact details of his appearance. Fifty years from now nobody will remember how he looked, one way or the other. The world is only concerned with portraits as works of art."

She followed his reasoning with a strained and docile attention and now spoke eagerly as though struck by an unexpected hope: "If that's all, why put his name to it? Just hang it up, and call it anything."

She shrank together timidly and her eyes reddened at the laughter which greeted this naive suggestion.

Falleres looked annoyed and called his defender off. "Oh, never mind explaining me," he said, snapping his watch shut. "You'll never get the rights of it through anybody's head who hasn't himself sweat blood over a composition only to be told that the other side of the sitter's profile is usually considered the prettier. After all, we have the last word, since the sitter dies and the portrait lives."

The old woman started and looked at him attentively.

“Yes,” said the critic, laughing, “immortality’s not a bad balm for pin-pricks.”

Page 51

The old woman turned very pale and for the first time looked again at the portrait. An electric thrill seemed to pass through her as her eyes encountered the bold, evil ones fixed on her. She stood erect with a rigid face, and "Immortality!" she said, under her breath.

Falleres moved away to make his adieux to the president, and the little group of his satellites straggled after him to the other end of the room. For a moment there no one near the old woman to see the crutch furiously upraised, hammer-like, or to stop her sudden passionate rush upon the picture.

At the sound of cracking cloth, they turned back, horrified. They saw her, with an insane violence, thrust her hands into the gaping hole that had been the portrait's face and, tearing the canvas from end to end, fall upon the shreds with teeth and talon.

All but Falleres flung themselves toward her, dragging her away. With a movement as instinctive he rushed for the picture, and it was to him, as he stood aghast before the ruined canvas, that the old woman's shrill treble was directed, above the loud shocked voices of those about her: "There ain't anything immortal but souls!" she cried.

FLINT AND FIRE

My husband's cousin had come up from the city, slightly more fagged and sardonic than usual, and as he stretched himself out in the big porch-chair he was even more caustic than was his wont about the bareness and emotional sterility of the lives of our country people.

"Perhaps they had, a couple of centuries ago, when the Puritan hallucination was still strong, a certain fierce savor of religious intolerance; but now that that has died out, and no material prosperity has come to let them share in the larger life of their century, there is a flatness, a mean absence of warmth or color, a deadness to all emotions but the pettiest sorts—"

I pushed the pitcher nearer him, clinking the ice invitingly, and directed his attention to our iris-bed as a more cheerful object of contemplation than the degeneracy of the inhabitants of Vermont. The flowers burned on their tall stalks like yellow tongues of flame. The strong, sword-like green leaves thrust themselves boldly up into the spring air like a challenge. The plants vibrated with vigorous life.

In the field beyond them, as vigorous as they, strode Adoniram Purdon behind his team, the reins tied together behind his muscular neck, his hands grasping the plow with the masterful sureness of the successful practitioner of an art. The hot, sweet spring sunshine shone down on 'Niram's head with its thick crest of brown hair, the ineffable odor of newly turned earth steamed up about him like incense, the mountain stream

beyond him leaped and shouted. His powerful body answered every call made on it with the precision of a splendid machine. But there was no elation in the grimly set face as 'Niram wrenched the plow around a big stone, or as, in a more favorable furrow, the gleaming share sped steadily along before the plowman, turning over a long, unbroken brown ribbon of earth.

Page 52

My cousin-in-law waved a nervous hand toward the sternly silent figure as it stepped doggedly behind the straining team, the head bent forward, the eyes fixed on the horses' heels.

"There!" he said. "There is an example of what I mean. Is there another race on earth which could produce a man in such a situation who would not on such a day sing, or whistle, or at least hold up his head and look at all the earthly glories about him?"

I was silent, but not for lack of material for speech. 'Niram's reasons for austere self-control were not such as I cared to discuss with a man of my cousin's mental attitude. As we sat looking at him the noon whistle from the village blew and the wise old horses stopped in the middle of a furrow. 'Niram unharnessed them, led them to the shade of a tree, and put on their nose-bags. Then he turned and came toward the house.

"Don't I seem to remember," murmured my cousin under his breath, "that, even though he is a New-Eng-lander, he has been known to make up errands to your kitchen to see your pretty Ev'leen Ann?"

I looked at him hard; but he was only gazing down, rather cross-eyed, on his grizzled mustache, with an obvious petulant interest in the increase of white hairs in it. Evidently his had been but a chance shot. 'Niram stepped up on the grass at the edge of the porch. He was so tall that he overtopped the railing easily, and, reaching a long arm over to where I sat, he handed me a small package done up in yellowish tissue-paper. Without hat-raisings, or good-mornings, or any other of the greetings usual in a more effusive civilization, he explained briefly:

"My stepmother wanted I should give you this. She said to thank you for the grape-juice." As he spoke he looked at me gravely out of deep-set blue eyes, and when he had delivered his message he held his peace.

I expressed myself with the babbling volubility of one whose manners have been corrupted by occasional sojourns in the city. "Oh, 'Niram!" I cried protestingly, as I opened the package and took out an exquisitely wrought old-fashioned collar. "Oh, 'Niram! How *could* your stepmother give such a thing away? Why, it must be one of her precious old relics. I don't *want* her to give me something every time I do some little thing for her. Can't a neighbor send her in a few bottles of grape-juice without her thinking she must pay it back somehow? It's not kind of her. She has never yet let me do the least thing for her without repaying me with something that is worth ever so much more than my trifling services."

When I had finished my prattling, 'Niram repeated, with an accent of finality, "She wanted I should give it to you."

The older man stirred in his chair. Without looking at him I knew that his gaze on the young rustic was quizzical and that he was recording on the tablets of his merciless memory the ungraceful abruptness of the other's action and manner.

Page 53

"How is your stepmother feeling to-day, 'Niram?" I asked.

"Worse."

'Niram came to a full stop with the word. My cousin covered his satirical mouth with his hand.

"Can't the doctor do anything to relieve her?" I asked.

'Niram moved at last from his Indian-like immobility. He looked up under the brim of his felt hat at the skyline of the mountain, shimmering iridescent above us. "He says maybe 'lectricity would help her some. I'm goin' to git her the batteries and things soon's I git the rubber bandages paid for."

There was a long silence. My cousin stood up, yawning, and sauntered away toward the door. "Shall I send Ev'leen Ann out to get the pitcher and glasses?" he asked in an accent which he evidently thought very humorously significant.

The strong face under the felt hat turned white, the jaw muscles set hard, but for all this show of strength there was an instant when the man's eyes looked out with the sick, helpless revelation of pain they might have had when 'Niram was a little boy of ten, a third of his present age, and less than half his present stature. Occasionally it is horrifying to see how a chance shot rings the bell.

"No, no! Never mind!" I said hastily. "I'll take the tray in when I go."

Without salutation or farewell 'Niram Purdon turned and went back to his work.

The porch was an enchanted place, walled around with starlit darkness, visited by wisps of breezes shaking down from their wings the breath of lilac and syringa, flowering wild grapes, and plowed fields. Down at the foot of our sloping lawn the little river, still swollen by the melted snow from the mountains, plunged between its stony banks and shouted its brave song to the stars.

We three middle-aged people—Paul, his cousin, and I—had disposed our uncomely, useful, middle-aged bodies in the big wicker chairs and left them there while our young souls wandered abroad in the sweet, dark glory of the night. At least Paul and I were doing this, as we sat, hand in hand, thinking of a May night twenty years before. One never knows what Horace is thinking of, but apparently he was not in his usual captious vein, for after a long pause he remarked, "It is a night almost indecorously inviting to the making of love."

My answer seemed grotesquely out of key with this, but its sequence was clear in my mind. I got up, saying: "Oh, that reminds me—I must go and see Ev'leen Ann. I'd forgotten to plan to-morrow's dinner."

“Oh, everlastingly Ev’leen Ann!” mocked Horace from his corner. “Can’t you think of anything but Ev’leen Ann and her affairs?”

I felt my way through the darkness of the house, toward the kitchen, both doors of which were tightly closed. When I stepped into the hot, close room, smelling of food and fire, I saw Ev’leen Ann sitting on the straight kitchen chair, the yellow light of the bracket-lamp beating down on her heavy braids and bringing out the exquisitely subtle modeling of her smooth young face. Her hands were folded in her lap. She was staring at the blank wall, and the expression of her eyes so startle and shocked me that I stopped short and would have retreated if it had not been too late. She had seen me, roused herself, and said quietly, as though continuing conversation interrupted the moment before:

Page 54

"I had been thinking that there was enough left of the roast to make hash-balls for dinner"—"hash-balls" is Ev'leen Ann's decent Anglo-Saxon name for croquette—"and maybe you'd like a rhubarb pie."

I knew well enough she had been thinking of no such thing, but I could as easily have slapped a reigning sovereign on the back as broken in on the regal reserve of Ev'leen Ann in her clean gingham.

"Well, yes, Ev'leen Ann," I answered in her own tone of reasonable consideration of the matter; "that would be nice, and your pie-crust is so flaky that even Mr. Horace will have to be pleased."

"Mr. Horace" is our title for the sardonic cousin whose carping ways are half a joke, and half a menace in our family.

Ev'leen Ann could not manage the smile which should have greeted this sally. She looked down soberly at the white-pine top of the kitchen table and said, "I guess there is enough sparrow-grass up in the garden for a mess, too, if you'd like that."

"That would taste very good," I agreed, my heart aching for her.

"And creamed potatoes," she finished bravely, thrusting my unspoken pity from her.

"You know I like creamed potatoes better than any other kind," I concurred.

There was a silence. It seemed inhuman to go and leave the stricken young thing to fight her trouble alone in the ugly prison, her work-place, though I thought I could guess why Ev'leen Ann had shut the doors so tightly. I hung near her, searching my head for something to say, but she helped me by no casual remark. Niram is not the only one of our people who possesses so the full the supreme gift of silence. Finally I mentioned the report of a case of measles in the village, and Ev'leen Ann responded in kind with the news that her Aunt Emma had bought a potato-planter. Ev'leen Ann is an orphan, brought up by a well-to-do spinster aunt, who is strong-minded and runs her own farm. After a time we glided by way of similar transitions to the mention of his name.

"Niram Purdon tells me his stepmother is no better," I said. "Isn't it too bad?" I thought it well for Ev'leen Ann to be dragged out of her black cave of silence once in a while, even if it could be done only by force. As she made no answer, I went on. "Everybody who knows Niram thinks it splendid of him to do so much for his stepmother."

Ev'leen Ann responded with a detached air, as though speaking of a matter in China: "Well, it ain't any more than what he should. She was awful good to him when he was little and his father got so sick. I guess 'Niram wouldn't ha' had much to eat if she hadn't ha' gone out sewing to earn it for him and Mr. Purdon." She added firmly, after a

moment's pause, "No, ma'am, I don't guess it's any more than what 'Niram had ought to do."

"But it's very hard on a young man to feel that he's not able to marry," I continued. Once in a great while we came so near the matter as this. Ev'leen Ann made no answer. Her face took on a pinched look of sickness. She set her lips as though she would never speak again. But I knew that a criticism of 'Niram would always rouse her, and said: "And really, I think 'Niram makes a great mistake to act as he does. A wife would be a help to him. She could take care of Mrs. Purdon and keep the house."

Page 55

Ev'leen Ann rose to the bait, speaking quickly with some heat: "I guess 'Niram knows what's right for him to do! He can't afford to marry when he can't even keep up with the doctor's bills and all. He keeps the house himself, nights and mornings, and Mrs. Purdon is awful handy about taking care of herself, for all she's bedridden. That's her way, you know. She can't bear to have folks do for her. She'd die before she'd let anybody do anything for her that she could anyways do for herself!"

I sighed acquiescingly. Mrs. Purdon's fierce independence was a rock on which every attempt at sympathy or help shattered itself to atoms. There seemed to be no other emotion left in her poor old work-worn shell of a body. As I looked at Ev'leen Ann it seemed rather a hateful characteristic, and I remarked, "It seems to me it's asking a good deal of 'Niram to spoil his life in order that his stepmother can go on pretending she's independent."

Ev'leen Ann explained hastily: "Oh, 'Niram doesn't tell her anything about—She doesn't know he would like to—he don't want she should be worried—and, anyhow, as 'tis, he can't earn enough to keep ahead of all the: doctors cost."

"But the right kind of a wife—a good, competent girl—could help out by earning something, too."

Ev'leen Ann looked at me forlornly, with no surprise. The idea was evidently not new to her. "Yes, ma'am, he could. But 'Niram says he ain't the kind of man to let his wife go out working." Even while she drooped under the killing verdict of his pride she was loyal to his standards and uttered no complaint. She went on, 'Niram wants Aunt Em'line to have things the way she wants 'em, as near as he can give 'em to her—and it's right she should."

"Aunt Emeline?" I repeated, surprised at her absence of mind. "You mean Mrs. Purdon, don't you?"

Ev'leen Ann looked vexed at her slip, but she scorned to attempt any concealment. She explained dryly, with the shy, stiff embarrassment our country people have in speaking of private affairs: "Well, she *is* my Aunt Em'line, Mrs. Purdon is, though I don't hardly ever call her that. You see, Aunt Emma brought me up, and she and Aunt Em'line don't have anything to do with each other. They were twins, and when they were girls they got edgeways over 'Niram's father, when 'Niram was a baby and his father was a young widower and come courting. Then Aunt Em'line married him, and Aunt Emma never spoke to her afterward."

Occasionally, in walking unsuspectingly along one of our leafy lanes, some such fiery geyser of ancient heat uprears itself in a boiling column. I never get used to it, and started back now.

“Why, I never heard of that before, and I’ve known your Aunt Emma and Mrs. Purdon for years!”

“Well, they’re pretty old now,” said Ev’leen Ann listlessly, with the natural indifference of self-centered youth to the bygone tragedies of the preceding generation.

Page 56

"It happened quite some time ago. And both of them were so touchy, if anybody seemed to speak about it, that folks got in the way of letting it alone. First Aunt Emma wouldn't speak to her sister because she'd married the man she'd wanted, and then when Aunt Emma made out so well farmin' and got so well off, why, then Mrs. Purdon wouldn't try to make it up because she was so poor. That was after Mr. Purdon had had his stroke of paralysis and they'd lost their farm and she'd taken to goin' out sewin'—not but what she was always perfectly satisfied with her bargain. She always acted as though she'd rather have her husband's old shirt stuffed with straw than any other man's whole body. He was a real nice man, I guess, Mr. Purdon was."

There I had it—the curt, unexpanded chronicle of two passionate lives. And there I had also the key to Mrs. Purdon's fury of independence. It was the only way in which she could defend her husband against the charge, so damning in her world, of not having provided for his wife. It was the only monument she could rear to her husband's memory. And her husband had been all there was in life for her!

I stood looking at her young kinswoman's face, noting the granite under the velvet softness of its youth, and divining the flame underlying the granite. I longed to break through her wall and to put my arms about her, and on the impulse of the moment I cast aside the pretense of casualness in our talk.

"Oh, my dear!" I said. "Are you and 'Niram always to go on like this? Can't anybody help you?"

Ev'leen Ann looked at me, her face suddenly old and gray. "No, ma'am; we ain't going to go on this way. We've decided, 'Niram and I have, that it ain't no use. We've decided that we'd better not go places together any more or see each other. It's too—If 'Niram thinks we can't"—she flamed so that I knew she was burning from head to foot—"it's better for us not—" She ended in a muffled voice, hiding her face in the crook of her arm.

Ah, yes; now I knew why Ev'leen Ann had shut out the passionate breath of the spring night!

I stood near her, a lump in my throat, but I divined the anguish of her shame at her involuntary self-revelation, and respected it. I dared do no more than to touch her shoulder gently.

The door behind us rattled. Ev'leen Ann sprang up and turned her face toward the wall. Paul's cousin came in, shuffling a little, blinking his eyes in the light of the unshaded lamp, and looking very cross and tired. He glanced at us without comment as he went over to the sink. "Nobody offered me anything good to drink," he complained, "so I came in to get some water from the faucet for my nightcap."

When he had drunk with ostentation from the tin dipper he went to the outside door and flung it open.

“Don’t you people know how hot and smelly it is in here?” he said, with his usual unceremonious abruptness.

Page 57

The night wind burst in, eddying, and puffed out the lamp with a breath. In an instant the room was filled with coolness and perfumes and the rushing sound of the river. Out of the darkness came Ev'leen Ann's young voice. "It seems to me," she said, as though speaking to herself, "that I never heard the Mill Brook sound loud as it has this spring."

I woke up that night with the start one has at a sudden call. But there had been no call. A profound silence spread itself through the sleeping house. Outdoors the wind had died down. Only the loud brawl of the river broke the stillness under the stars. But all through the silence and this vibrant song there rang a soundless menace which brought me out of bed and to my feet before I was awake. I heard Paul say, "What's the matter?" in a sleepy voice, and "Nothing," I answered, reaching for my dressing-gown and slippers. I listened for a moment, my head ringing with all the frightening tales of the morbid vein of violence which runs through the character of our reticent people. There was still no sound. I went along the hall and up the stairs to Ev'leen Ann room, and I opened the door without knocking. The room was empty.

Then how I ran! Calling loudly for Paul to join me, I ran down the two flights of stairs, out of the open door and along the hedged path which leads down to the little river. The starlight was clear. I could see everything as plainly as though in early dawn. I saw the river, and saw—Ev'leen Ann!

There was a dreadful moment of horror, which I shall never remember very clearly, and then Ev'leen Ann and I—both very wet—stood on the bank, shuddering in each other's arms.

Into our hysteria there dropped, like a pungent caustic the arid voice of Horace, remarking, "Well, are you two people crazy, or are you walking in your sleep?" I could feel Ev'leen Ann stiffen in my arms, and I nearly stepped back from her in astonished admiration as I heard her snatch at the straw thus offered, and still shuddering horribly from head to foot, force herself to say quite connectedly: "Why—yes—of course—I've always heard about my grandfather Parkman's walking in his sleep. Folks *said* 'twould come out in the family some time."

Paul was close behind Horace—I wondered a little at his not being first—and with many astonished and inane ejaculations, such as people always make on startling occasions, we made our way back into the house to hot blankets and toddies. But I slept no more that night. Some time after dawn, however, I did fall into a troubled unconsciousness full of bad dreams, and only awoke when the sun was quite high. I opened my eyes to see Ev'leen Ann about to close the door. "Oh, did I wake you up?" she said. "I didn't mean to. That little Harris boy is here with a letter for you."

Page 58

She spoke with a slightly defiant tone of self-possession. I tried to play up to her interpretation of her role. "The little Harris boy?" I said, sitting up in bed. "What in the world is he bringing me a letter for?" Ev'leen Ann, with her usual clear perception of the superfluous in conversation, vouchsafed no opinion on a matter where she had no information, but went downstairs and brought back the note. It was of four lines, and—surprisingly enough—from old Mrs. Purdon, who asked me abruptly if I would have my husband take me to see her. She specified, and underlined the specification, that I was to come "right off, and in the automobile." Wondering extremely at this mysterious bidding I sought out Paul, who obediently cranked up our small car and carried me off. There was no sign of Horace about the house, but some distance on the other side of the village we saw his tall, stooping figure swinging along the road. He carried a cane and was characteristically occupied in violently switching off the heads from the wayside weeds as he walked. He refused our offer to take him in, alleging that he was out for exercise and to reduce his flesh—an ancient jibe at his bony frame which made him for an instant show a leathery smile.

There was, of course, no one at Mrs. Purdon's to let us into the tiny, three-roomed house, since the bedridden invalid spent her days there alone while 'Niram worked his team on other people's fields. Not knowing what we might find, Paul stayed outside in the car, while I stepped inside in answer to Mrs. Purdon's "Come *in*, why don't you!" which sounded quite as dry as usual. But when I saw her I knew that things were not as usual.

She lay flat on her back, the little emaciated wisp of humanity, hardly raising the piecework quilt enough to make the bed seem occupied, and to account for the thin, worn old face on the pillow. But as I entered the room her eyes seized on mine, and I was aware of nothing but them and some fury of determination behind them. With a fierce heat of impatience at my first natural but quickly repressed exclamation of surprise she explained briefly that she wanted Paul to lift her into the automobile and take her into the next township to the Hulett farm. "I'm so shrunk away to nothin', I know I can lay on the back seat if I crook myself up," she said, with a cool accent but a rather shaky voice. Seeming to realize that even her intense desire to strike the matter-of-fact note could not take the place of any and all explanation of her extraordinary request, she added, holding my eyes steady with her own: "Emma Hulett's my twin sister. I guess it ain't so queer, my wanting to see her."

I thought, of course, we were to be used as the medium for some strange, sudden family reconciliation, and went out to ask Paul if he thought he could carry the old invalid to the car. He replied that, so far as that went, he could carry so thin an old body ten times around the town, but that he refused absolutely to take such a risk without authorization from her doctor. I remembered the burning eyes of resolution I had left inside, and sent him to present his objections to Mrs. Purdon herself.

Page 59

In a few moments I saw him emerge from the house with the old woman in his arms. He had evidently taken her up just as she lay. The piecework quilt hung down in long folds, flashing its brilliant reds and greens in the sunshine, which shone so strangely upon the pallid old countenance, facing the open sky for the first time in years.

We drove in silence through the green and gold lyric of the spring day, an elderly company sadly out of key with the triumphant note of eternal youth which rang through all the visible world. Mrs. Purdon looked at nothing, said nothing, seemed to be aware of nothing but the purpose in her heart, whatever that might be. Paul and I, taking a leaf from our neighbors' book, held, with a courage like theirs, to their excellent habit of saying nothing when there is nothing to say. We arrived at the fine old Hulett place without the exchange of a single word.

"Now carry me in," said Mrs. Purdon briefly, evidently hoarding her strength.

"Wouldn't I better go and see if Miss Hulett is at home?" I asked.

Mrs. Purdon shook her head impatiently and turned her compelling eyes on my husband, I went up the path before them to knock at the door, wondering what the people in the house would possibly be thinking of us. There was no answer to my knock. "Open the door and go in," commanded Mrs. Purdon from out her quilt.

There was no one in the spacious, white-paneled hall and no sound in all the big, many-roomed house.

"Emma's out feeding the hens," conjectured Mrs. Purdon, not, I fancied, without a faint hint of relief in her voice. "Now carry me up-stairs to the first room on the right."

Half hidden by his burden, Paul rolled wildly inquiring eyes at me; but he obediently staggered up the broad old staircase, and, waiting till I had opened the first door to the right, stepped into the big bedroom.

"Put me down on the bed, and open them shutters," Mrs. Purdon commanded.

She still marshaled her forces with no lack of decision, but with a fainting voice which made me run over to her quickly as Paul laid her down on the four-poster. Her eyes were still indomitable, but her mouth hung open slackly and her color was startling. "Oh, Paul, quick! quick! Haven't you your flask with you?"

Mrs. Purdon informed me in a barely audible whisper, "In the corner cupboard at the head of the stairs," and I flew down the hallway. I returned with a bottle, evidently of great age. There was only a little brandy in the bottom, but it whipped up a faint color into the sick woman's lips.

As I was bending over her and Paul was thrusting open the shutters, letting in a flood of sunshine and flecky leaf-shadows, a firm, rapid step came down the hall, and a vigorous woman, with a tanned face and a clean, faded gingham dress, stopped short in the doorway with an expression of stupefaction.

Page 60

Mrs. Purdon put me on one side, and although she was physically incapable of moving her body by a hair's breadth, she gave the effect of having risen to meet the newcomer. "Well, Emma, here I am," she said in a queer voice, with involuntary quavers in it. As she went on she had it more under control, although in the course of her extraordinarily succinct speech it broke and failed her occasionally. When it did, she drew in her breath with an audible, painful effort, struggling forward steadily in what she had to say. "You see, Emma, it's this way: My 'Niram and your Ev'leen Ann have been keeping company—ever since they went to school together—you know that's well as I do, for all we let on we didn't, only I didn't know till just now how hard they took it. They can't get married because 'Niram can't keep even, let alone get ahead any, because I cost so much bein' sick, and the doctor says I may live for years this way, same's Aunt Hettie did. An' 'Niram is thirty-one, an' Ev'leen Ann is twenty-eight, an' they've had 'bout's much waitin' as is good for folks that set such store by each other. I've thought of every way out of it—and there ain't any. The Lord knows I don't enjoy livin' any, not so's to notice the enjoyment, and I'd thought of cutting my throat like Uncle Lish, but that'd make 'Niram and Ev'leen Ann feel so—to think why I'd done it; they'd never take the comfort they'd ought in bein' married; so that won't do. There's only one thing to do. I guess you'll have to take care of me till the Lord calls me. Maybe I won't last so long as the doctor thinks."

When she finished, I felt my ears ringing in the silence. She had walked to the sacrificial altar with so steady a step, and laid upon it her precious all with so gallant a front of quiet resolution, that for an instant I failed to take in the sublimity of her self-immolation. Mrs. Purdon asking for charity! And asking the one woman who had most reason to refuse it to her.

Paul looked at me miserably, the craven desire to escape a scene written all over him. "Wouldn't we better be going, Mrs. Purdon?" I said uneasily. I had not ventured to look at the woman in the doorway.

Mrs. Purdon motioned me to remain, with an imperious gesture whose fierceness showed the tumult underlying her brave front. "No; I want you should stay. I want you should hear what I say, so's you can tell folks, if you have to. Now, look here, Emma," she went on to the other, still obstinately silent; "you must look at it the way 'tis. We're neither of us any good to anybody, the way we are—and I'm dreadfully in the way of the only two folks we care a pin about—either of us. You've got plenty to do with, and nothing to spend it on. I can't get myself out of their way by dying without going against what's Scripture and proper, but—" Her steely calm broke. She burst out in a screaming, hysterical voice: "You've just *got* to, Emma Hulett! You've just *got* to! If you don't,

Page 61

I won't never go back to 'Niram's house! I'll lie in the ditch by the roadside till the poor-master comes to git me—and I'll tell everybody that it's because my own twin sister, with a house and a farm and money in the bank, turned me out to starve—" A fearful spasm cut her short. She lay twisted and limp, the whites of her eyes showing between the lids.

"Good God, she's gone!" cried Paul, running to the bed.

I was aware that the woman in the doorway had relaxed her frozen immobility and was between Paul and me as we rubbed the thin, icy hands and forced brandy between the flaccid lips. We all three thought her dead or dying, and labored over her with the frightened thankfulness for one another's living presence which always marks that dreadful moment. But even as we fanned and rubbed, and cried out to one another to open the windows and to bring water, the blue lips moved to a ghostly whisper: "Em, listen—" The old woman went back to the nickname of their common youth. "Em—your Ev'leen Ann—tried to drown herself—in the Mill Brook last night ... That's what decided me—to—" And then we were plunged into another desperate struggle with Death for the possession of the battered old habitation of the dauntless soul before us.

"Isn't there any hot water in the house?" cried Paul, and "Yes, yes; a tea-kettle on the stove!" answered the woman who labored with us. Paul, divining that she meant the kitchen, fled down-stairs. I stole a look at Emma Hulett's face as she bent over the sister she had not seen in thirty years, and I knew that Mrs. Purdon's battle was won. It even seemed that she had won another skirmish in her never-ending war with death, for a little warmth began to come back into her hands.

When Paul returned with the tea-kettle, and a hot-water bottle had been filled, the owner of the house straightened herself, assumed her rightful position as mistress of the situation, and began to issue commands. "You git right in the automobile, and go git the doctor," she told Paul. "That'll be the quickest. She's better now, and your wife and I can keep her goin' till the doctor gits here."

As Paul left the room she snatched something white from a bureau-drawer, stripped the worn, patched old cotton nightgown from the skeleton-like body, and, handling the invalid with a strong, sure touch, slipped on a soft, woolly outing-flannel wrapper with a curious trimming of zigzag braid down the front. Mrs. Purdon opened her eyes very slightly, but shut them again at her sister's quick command, "You lay still, Em'line, and drink some of this brandy." She obeyed without comment, but after a pause she opened her eyes again and looked down at the new garment which clad her. She had that moment turned back from the door of death, but her first breath was used to set the scene for a return to a decent decorum.

“You’re still a great hand for rick-rack work, Em, I see,” she murmured in a faint whisper. “Do you remember how surprised Aunt Su was when you made up a pattern?”

Page 62

"Well, I hadn't thought of it for quite some time," returned Miss Hulett, in exactly the same tone of everyday remark. As she spoke she slipped her arm under the other's head and poked the pillow up to a more comfortable shape. "Now you lay perfectly still," she commanded in the hectoring tone of the born nurse; "I'm goin' to run down and make you up a good hot cup of sassafras tea."

I followed her down into the kitchen and was met by the same refusal to be melodramatic which I had encountered in Ev'leen Ann. I was most anxious to know what version of my extraordinary morning I was to give out to the world, but hung silent, positively abashed by the cool casualness of the other woman as she mixed her brew. Finally, "Shall I tell 'Niram—What shall I say to Ev'leen Ann? If anybody asks me—" I brought out with clumsy hesitation.

At the realization that her reserve and family pride were wholly at the mercy of any report I might choose to give, even my iron hostess faltered. She stopped short in the middle of the floor, looked at me silently, piteously, and found no word.

I hastened to assure her that I would attempt no hateful picturesqueness of narration. "Suppose I just say that you were rather lonely here, now that Ev'leen Ann has left you, and that you thought it would be nice to have your sister come to stay with you, so that 'Niram and Ev'leen Ann can be married?"

Emma Hulett breathed again. She walked toward the stairs with the steaming cup in her hand. Over her shoulder she remarked, "Well, yes, ma'am; that would be as good a way to put it as any, I guess."

'Niram and Ev'leen Ann were standing up to be married. They looked very stiff and self-conscious, and Ev'leen Ann was very pale. 'Niram's big hands, bent in the crook of a man who handles tools, hung down by his new black trousers. Ev'leen Ann's strong fingers stood out stiffly from one another. They looked hard at the minister and repeated after him in low and meaningless tones the solemn and touching words of the marriage service. Back of them stood the wedding company, in freshly washed and ironed white dresses, new straw hats, and black suits smelling of camphor. In the background, among the other elders, stood Paul and Horace and I—my husband and I hand in hand; Horace twiddling the black ribbon which holds his watch, and looking bored. Through the open windows into the stuffiness of the best room came an echo of the deep organ note of midsummer.

"Whom God hath joined together—" said the minister, and the epitome of humanity which filled the room held its breath—the old with a wonder upon their life-scarred faces, the young half frightened to feel the stir of the great wings soaring so near them.

Page 63

Then it was all over. 'Niram and Ev'leen Ann were married, and the rest of us were bustling about to serve the hot biscuit and coffee and chicken salad, and to dish up the ice-cream. Afterward there were no citified refinements of cramming rice down the necks of the departing pair or tying placards to the carriage in which they went away. Some of the men went out to the barn and hitched up for 'Niram, and we all went down to the gate to see them drive off. They might have been going for one of their Sunday afternoon "buggy-rides" except for the wet eyes of the foolish women and girls who stood waving their hands in answer to the flutter of Ev'leen Ann's handkerchief as the carriage went down the hill.

We had nothing to say to one another after they left, and began soberly to disperse to our respective vehicles. But as I was getting into our car a new thought suddenly struck me.

"Why," I cried, "I never thought of it before! However in the world did old Mrs. Purdon know about Ev'leen Ann—that night?"

Horace was pulling at the door, which was badly adjusted and shut hard. He closed it with a vicious slam. "*I* told her," he said crossly.

A SAINT'S HOURS

In the still cold before the sun
HER LAUDS Her brothers and her sisters small
She woke, and washed and dressed each one.

And through the morning hours all,
PRIME Singing above her broom, she stood
And swept the house from hall to hall.

At noon she ran with tidings good
TERCE Across the field and down the lane
To share them with the neighborhood.

Four miles she walked and home again,
SEXT To sit through half the afternoon
And hear a feeble crone complain;

But when she saw the frosty moon
NONES And lakes of shadow on the hill
Her maiden dreams grew bright as noon.



She threw her pitying apron frill
VESPERS Over a little trembling mouse
When the sleek cat yawned on the sill,

In the late hours and drowsy house.
COMPLINE At last, too tired, beside her bed
She fell asleep ... her prayers half said.

IN MEMORY OF L.H.W.

He began life characteristically, depreciated and disparaged. When he was a white, thin, big-headed baby, his mother, stripping the suds from her lean arms, used to inveigh to her neighbors against his existence. "Wa'n't it just like that *do-less* Lem Warren, not even to leave me foot-free when he died, but a baby coming!"

"*Do-less*," in the language of our valley, means a combination of shiftless and impractical, particularly to be scorned.

Later, as he began to have some resemblance to the appearance he was to wear throughout life, her resentment at her marriage, which she considered the one mistake of her life, kept pace with his growth. "Look at him!" she cried to anyone who would listen. "Ain't that Warren, all over? Did any of *my* folks ever look so like a born fool? Shut your mouth, for the Lord's sake, Lem, and maybe you won't scare folks quite so much."

Page 64

Lem had a foolish, apologetic grin with which he always used to respond to these personalities, hanging his head to one side and opening and shutting his big hands nervously.

The tumble-down, two-roomed house in which the Warrens lived was across the road from the schoolhouse, and Mrs. Warren's voice was penetrating. Lem was accepted throughout his school-life at the home estimate. The ugly, overgrown boy, clad in cast-off, misfit clothing was allowed to play with the other children only on condition that he perform all the hard, uninteresting parts of any game. Inside the schoolroom it was the same.

He never learned to shut his mouth, and his speech was always halting and indistinct, so that he not only did not recite well in class, but was never in one of the school entertainments. He chopped the wood and brought it in, swept the floor and made the fires, and then listened in grinning, silent admiration while the others, arrayed in their best, spoke pieces and sang songs.

He was not "smart at his books" and indeed did not learn even to read very fluently. This may have been partly because the only books he ever saw were old school books, the use of which was given him free on account of his mother's poverty. He was not allowed, of course to take them from the schoolroom. But if he was not good at book-learning he was not without accomplishments. He early grew large for his age, and strong from much chopping of wood and drawing of water for his mother's washings, and he was the best swimmer of all those who bathed in the cold, swift mountain stream which rushes near the schoolhouse. The chief consequence of this expertness was that in the summer he was forced to teach each succeeding generation of little boys to swim and dive. They tyrannized over him unmercifully—as, in fact, everyone did.

Nothing made his mother more furious than such an exhibition of what she called "Lem's meachin'ness." "Ain't you got no stand-up *in ye*?" she was wont to exhort him angrily. "If you don't look out for yourself in this world, you needn't think anybody else is gunto!"

The instructions in ethics he received at her hands were the only ones he ever knew, for, up to his fourteenth year, he never had clothes respectable enough to wear to church, and after that he had other things to think of. Fourteen years is what we call in our State "over school age." It was a date to which Mrs. Warren had looked forward with eagerness. After that, the long, unprofitable months of enforced schooling would be over, Lem would be earning steady wages, and she could sit back and "live decent."

It seemed to her more than she could bear, that, almost upon her son's birthday, she was stricken down with paralysis. It was the first calamity for which she could not hold her marriage responsible, and her bitterness thereupon extended itself to fate in

general. She cannot have been a cheerful house-mate during the next ten years, when Lem was growing silently to manhood.

Page 65

He was in demand as “help” on the farms about him, on account of his great strength and faithfulness, although the farmers found him exasperatingly slow and, when it was a question of animals, not always sure to obey orders. He could be trusted to be kind to horses, unlike most hired men we get nowadays, but he never learned “how to get the work out of their hide.” It was his way, on a steep hill with a heavy load, to lay down the whip, get out, and put his own powerful shoulder to the wheel. If this failed, he unloaded part of the logs and made two trips of it. The uncertainty of his progress can be imagined. The busy and impatient farmer and sawyer at the opposite ends of his route were driven to exhaust their entire vocabulary of objurgation on him. He was, they used to inform him in conclusion, “the most *do-less* critter the Lord ever made!”

He was better with cows and sheep—“feller-feelin,” his mother said scornfully, watching him feed a sick ewe—and he had here, even in comparison with his fellow-men, a fair degree of success. It was indeed the foundation of what material prosperity he ever enjoyed. A farmer, short of cash, paid him one year with three or four ewes and a ram. He worked for another farmer to pay for the rent of a pasture and had, that first year, as everybody admitted, almighty good luck with them. There were several twin lambs born that spring and everyone lived. Lem used to make frequent night visits during lambing-time to the pasture to make sure that all was well.

I remember as a little girl starting back from some village festivity late one spring night and seeing a lantern twinkle far up on the mountainside. “Lem Warren out fussin’ with his sheep,” some one of my elders remarked. Later, as we were almost home, we saw the lantern on the road ahead of us and stopped the horses, country-fashion, for an interchange of salutation. Looking out from under the shawl in which I was wrapped, I saw his tall figure stooping over something held under his coat. The lantern lighted his weather-beaten face and the expression of his eyes as he looked down at the little white head against his breast.

“You’re foolish, Lem,” said my uncle. “The ewe won’t own it if you take it away so long the first night.”

“I—I—know,” stuttered Lem, bringing out the words with his usual difficulty; “but it’s mortal cold up on the mounting for little fellers! I’ll bring him up as a cosset.”

The incident reminded me vaguely of something I had read about, and it has remained in my memory.

After we drove on I remember that there were laughing speculations about what language old Ma’am Warren would use at having another cosset brought to the house. Not that it could make any more work for her, since Lem did all that was done about the housekeeping. Chained to her chair by her paralyzed legs, as she was, she could accomplish nothing more than to sit and cavil at the management of the universe all day, until Lem came home, gave her her supper, and put her to bed.

Page 66

Badly run as she thought the world, for a time it was more favorable to her material prosperity than she had ever known it. Lem's flock of sheep grew and thrived. For years nobody in our valley has tried to do much with sheep because of dogs, and all Lem's neighbors told him that some fine morning he would find his flock torn and dismembered. They even pointed out the particular big collie dog who would most likely go "sheep-mad." Lena's heavy face drew into anxious, grotesque wrinkles at this kind of talk, and he visited the uplying pasture more and more frequently.

One morning, just before dawn, he came, pale and shamefaced, to the house of the owner of the collie. The family, roused from bed by his knocking, made out from his speech, more incoherent than usual, that he was begging their pardon for having killed their dog. "I saw wh-where he'd bit th-the throats out of two ewes that w-was due to lamb in a few days and I guess I—I—I must ha' gone kind o' crazy. They was ones I liked special. I'd brought 'em up myself. They—they was all over blood, you know."

They peered at him in the gray light, half-afraid of the tall apparition. "How *could* you kill a great big dog like Jack?" They asked wonderingly.

In answer he held out his great hands and his huge corded arms, red with blood up to the elbow. "I heard him worrying another sheep and I—I just—killed him."

One of the children now cried out: "But I shut Jackie up in the woodshed last night!"

Someone ran to open the door and the collie bounded out. Lem turned white in thankfulness, "I'm *mortal* glad," he stammered. "I felt awful bad—afterward. I knew your young ones thought a sight of Jack."

"But what dog did you kill?" they asked.

Some of the men went back up on the mountain with him and found, torn in pieces and scattered wide in bloody fragments, as if destroyed by some great revenging beast of prey, the body of a big gray wolf. Once in a while one wanders over the line from the Canada forests and comes down into our woods, following the deer.

The hard-headed farmers who looked on that savage scene drew back from the shambling man beside them in the only impulse of respect they ever felt for him. It was the one act of his life to secure the admiration of his fellow-men; it was an action of which he himself always spoke in horror and shame.

Certainly his marriage aroused no admiration. It was universally regarded as a most addle-pated, imbecile affair from beginning to end. One of the girls who worked at the hotel in the village "got into trouble," as our vernacular runs, and as she came originally from our district and had gone to school there, everyone knew her and was talking about the scandal. Old Ma'am Warren was of the opinion, spiritedly expressed, that

“Lottie was a fool not to make that drummer marry her. She could have, if she'd gone the right way to work.” But the drummer remained persistently absent.

Page 67

One evening Lem, starting for his sheep-pasture for his last look for the night, heard someone crying down by the river and then, as he paused to listen, heard it no more. He jumped from the bridge without stopping to set down his lantern, knowing well the swiftness of the water, and caught the poor cowardly thing as she came, struggling and gasping, down with the current. He took her home and gave her dry clothes of his mother's. Then leaving the scared and repentant child by his hearth, he set out on foot for the minister's house and dragged him back over the rough country roads.

When Ma'am Warren awoke the next morning, Lem did not instantly answer her imperious call, as he had done for so many years. Instead, a red-eyed girl in one of Mrs. Warren's own nightgowns came to the door and said shrinkingly: "Lem slept in the barn last night. He give his bed to me; but he'll be in soon. I see him fussin' around with the cow."

Ma'am Warren stared, transfixed with a premonition of irremediable evil. "What you doin' here?" she demanded, her voice devoid of expression through stupefaction.

The girl held down her head. "Lem and I were married last night," she said.

Then Mrs. Warren found her voice.

When Lem came in it was to a scene of the furious wrangling which was henceforth to fill his house.

"... to saddle himself with such trash as you!" his mother was saying ragingly.

His wife answered in kind, her vanity stung beyond endurance. "Well, you can be sure he'd never have got him a wife any other way! Nobody but a girl hard put to it would take up with a drivell-headed fool like Lem Warren!"

And then the bridegroom appeared at the door and both women turned their attention to him.

When the baby was born, Lottie was very sick. Lem took care of his mother, his wife, and the new baby for weeks and weeks. It was at lambing-time, and his flock suffered from lack of attention, although as much as he dared he left his sick women and tended his ewes. He ran in debt, too, to the grocery-stores, for he could work very little and earned almost nothing. Of course the neighbors helped out, but it was no cheerful morning's work to care for the vitriolic old woman, and Lottie was too sick for anyone but Lem to handle. We did pass the baby around from house to house during the worst of his siege, to keep her off Lem's hands; but when Lottie began to get better it was haying-time; everybody was more than busy, and the baby was sent back.

Lottie lingered in semi-invalidism for about a year and then died, Lem holding her hand in his. She tried to say something to him that last night, so the neighbors who were

there reported, but her breath failed her and she could only lie staring at him from eyes that seemed already to look from the other side of the grave.

He was heavily in debt when he was thus left with a year-old child not his own, but he gave Lottie a decent funeral and put up over her grave a stone stating that she was "Charlotte, loved wife of Lemuel Warren," and that she died in the eighteenth year of her life. He used to take the little girl and put flowers on the grave, I remember.

Page 68

Then he went to work again. His sandy hair was already streaked with gray, though he was but thirty. The doctor said the reason for this phenomenon was the great strain of his year of nursing; and indeed throughout that period of his life no one knew when he slept, if ever. He was always up and dressed when anyone else was, and late at night we could look across and see his light still burning and know that he was rubbing Lottie's back or feeding little Susie.

All that was changed now, of course. Susie was a strong, healthy child who slept all through the night in her little crib by her stepfather's corded bed, and in the daytime went everywhere he did. Wherever he "worked out" he used to give her her nap wrapped in a horse blanket on the hay in the barn; and he carried her in a sling of his own contrivance up to his sheep-pasture. Old Ma'am Warren disliked the pretty, laughing child so bitterly that he was loath to leave her at home; but when he was there with her, for the first time he asserted himself against his mother, bidding her, when she began to berate the child's parentage, to "be still!" with so strange and unexpected an accent of authority that she was quite frightened.

Susie was very fond of her stepfather at first, but when she came of school age, mixed more with the other children, and heard laughing, contemptuous remarks about him, the frank and devouring egotism of childhood made her ashamed of her affection, ashamed of him with his uncouth gait, his mouth always sagging open, his stammering, ignorant speech, which the other children amused themselves by mocking. Though he was prospering again with his sheep, owned the pasture and his house now, and had even built on another room as well as repairing the older part, he spent little on his own adornment. It all went for pretty clothes for Susie, for better food, for books and pictures, for tickets for Susie to go to the circus and the county fair. Susie knew this and loved him by stealth for it, but the intolerably sensitive vanity of her twelve years made her wretched to be seen in public with him.

Divining this, he ceased going with her to school-picnics and Sunday-school parties, where he had been a most useful pack-animal, and, dressing her in her best with his big calloused hands, watched her from the window join a group of the other children. His mother predicted savagely that his "spoilin' on that bad-blooded young one would bring her to no good end," and when, at fifteen, Susie began to grow very pretty and saucy and willful and to have beaux come to see her, the old woman exulted openly over Lem's helpless anxiety.

He was quite gray now, although not yet forty-five, and so stooped that he passed for an old man. He owned a little farm, his flock of sheep was the largest in the township, and Susie was expected to make a good marriage in spite of her antecedents.

Page 69

And then Frank Gridley's oldest son, Ed, came back from business college with store clothes and city hats and polished tan shoes, and began idling about, calling on the girls. From the first, he and Susie ran together like two drops of water. Bronson Perkins, a cousin of mine, a big, silent, ruminative lad who had long hung about Susie, stood no show at all. One night in county-fair week, Susie, who had gone to the fair with a crowd of girl friends, was not at home at ten o'clock. Lem, sitting in his doorway and watching the clock, heard the approach of the laughing, singing straw-ride in which she had gone, with a long breath of relief; but the big hay-wagon did not stop at his gate.

He called after it in a harsh voice and was told that "Ed Gridley and she went off to the hotel to get supper. He said he'd bring her home later."

Lem went out to the barn, hitched up the faster of his two heavy plow-horses and drove from his house to Woodville, eight miles and up-hill, in forty-five minutes. When he went into the hotel, the clerk told him that the two he sought had had supper served in a private room. Lem ascertained which room and broke the door in with one heave of his shoulders. Susie sprang up from the disordered supper-table and ran to him like a frightened child, clinging to him desperately and crying out that Ed scared her so!

"It's all right now, Susie," he said gently, not looking at the man. "Poppa's come to take you home."

The man felt his dignity wounded. He began to protest boisterously and to declare that he was ready to marry the girl—"now, this instant, if you choose!"

Lem put one arm about Susie. "I didn't come to make you marry her. I come to keep you from doin' it," he said, speaking clearly for once in his life. "Susie shan't marry a hound that'd do this." And as the other advanced threateningly on him, he struck him a great blow across the mouth that sent him unconscious to the ground.

Then Lem went out, paid for the broken lock, and drove home with Susie behind the foundered plow-horse.

The next spring her engagement to Bronson Perkins was announced, though everybody said they didn't see what use it was for folks to get engaged that couldn't ever get married. Mr. Perkins, Bronson's father, was daft, not enough to send him to the asylum, but so that he had to be watched all the time to keep him from doing himself a hurt. He had a horrid way, I remember, of lighting matches and holding them up to his bared arm until the smell of burning flesh went sickeningly through the house and sent someone in a rush to him. Of course it was out of the question to bring a young bride to such a home. Apparently there were years of waiting before them, and Susie was made of no stuff to endure a long engagement.

As a matter of fact, they were married that fall, as soon as Susie could get her things ready. Lem took old Mr. Perkins into the room Susie left vacant. "Twon't be much more trouble taking care of two old people than one," he explained briefly.

Page 70

Ma'am Warren's comments on this action have been embalmed forever in the delighted memories of our people. We have a taste for picturesque and forceful speech.

From that time we always saw the lunatic and the bent shepherd together. The older man grew quieter under Lem's care than he had been for years, and if he felt one of his insane impulses overtaking him, ran tottering to grasp his protector's arm until, quaking and shivering, he was himself again. Lem used to take him up to the sheep-pasture for the day sometimes. He liked it up there himself, he said, and maybe 'twould be good for Uncle Hi. He often reported with pride that the old man talked as sensible as anybody, "get him off where it's quiet." Indeed, when Mr. Perkins died, six years later, we had forgotten that he was anything but a little queer, and he had known many happy, lucid hours with his grandchildren.

Susie and Bronson had two boys—sturdy, hearty children, in whom Lem took the deepest, shyest pride. He loved to take them off into the woods with him and exulted in their quick intelligence and strong little bodies. Susie got into the way of letting him take a good deal of the care of them.

It was Lem who first took alarm about the fall that little Frank had, down the cellar stairs. He hurt his spine somehow—our local doctor could not tell exactly how—and as the injury only made him limp a little, nobody thought much about it, until he began to have difficulty in walking. Then Lem sent for a doctor from Rutland who, as soon as he examined the child, stuck out his lower lip and rubbed his chin ominously. He pronounced the trouble something with a long name which none of us had ever heard, and said that Frank would be a hopeless cripple if it, were not cured soon. There was, he said, a celebrated doctor from Europe now traveling in this country who had a wonderful new treatment for this condition. But under the circumstances—he looked about the plain farm sitting-room—he supposed that was out of the question.

"What did the doctor from foreign parts ask?" queried Bronson, and, being informed of some of the customary prices for major operations, fell back hopeless. Susie, her pretty, childish face drawn and blanched into a wan beauty, put her arms about her sick little son and looked at her stepfather. He had never failed her.

He did not fail her now. He sold the land he had accumulated field by field; he sold the great flock of sheep, every one of which he could call by name; he mortgaged the house over the protesting head of his now bedridden mother; he sold the horse and cow, and the very sticks of furniture from the room where Susie had grown up and where the crazy grandfather of Susie's children had known a peaceful old age and death. Little Frank was taken to New York to the hospital to have the great surgeon operate on him—he is there yet, almost completely recovered and nearly ready to come home.

Page 71

Back in Hillsboro, Lem now began life all over again, hiring out humbly to his neighbors and only stipulating that he should have enough free time to take care of his mother. Three weeks ago she had her last stroke of paralysis and, after lying speechless for a few days, passed away, grim to the last, by the expression in her fierce old eyes.

The day after her funeral Lem did not come to work as he was expected. We went over to his house and found, to our consternation, that he was not out of bed.

"Be ye sick, Lem?" asked my uncle.

He looked at us over the bedclothes with his old foolish, apologetic smile. "Kind o' lazy, I guess," he whispered, closing his eyes.

The doctor was put out by the irregularity of the case.

"I can't make out anything *really* the trouble!" he said. "Only the wheels don't go round as fast as they ought. Call it failing heart action if you want a label."

The wheels ran more and more slowly until it was apparent to all of us that before long they would stop altogether. Susie and Bronson were in New York with little Frank, so that Lem's care during his last days devolved on the haphazard services of the neighbors. He was out of his head most of the time, though never violent, and all through the long nights lay flat on his back, looking at the ceiling with bright, blank eyes, driving his ox-team, skidding logs, plowing in stony ground and remembering to favor the off-horse whose wind wasn't good, planting, hoeing, tending his sheep, and teaching obstinate lambs to drink. He used quaint, coaxing names for these, such as a mother uses for her baby. He was up in the mountain-pasture a good deal, we gathered, and at night, from his constant mention of how bright the stars shone. And sometimes, when he was in evident pain, his delusion took the form that Susie, or the little boys, had gone up with him, and got lost in the woods.

I was on duty the night he died. We thought a change was near, because he had lain silent all day, and we hoped he would come to himself when he awoke from this stupor. Near midnight he began to talk again, and I could not make out at first whether he was still wandering or not. "Hold on hard, Uncle Hi," I heard him whisper.

A spoon fell out of my hand and clattered against a plate. He gave a great start and tried to sit up. "Yes, mother—coming!" he called hoarsely, and then looked at me with his own eyes. "I must ha' forgot about mother's bein' gone," he apologized sheepishly.

I took advantage of this lucid interval to try to give him some medicine the doctor had left. "Take a swallow of this," I said, holding the glass to his lips.

"What's it for?" he asked.

“It’s a heart stimulant,” I explained. “The doctor said if we could get you through to-night you have a good chance.”

His face drew together in grotesque lines of anxiety. “Little Frank worse?”

Page 72

"Oh, no, he's doing finely."

"Susie all right?"

"Why, yes," I said wonderingly.

"Nothing the matter with her other boy?"

"Why, no, no," I told him. "Everybody's all right Here, just take this down."

He turned away his head on the pillow and murmured something I did not catch. When I asked him what he said, he smiled feebly as in deprecation of his well-known ridiculous ways. "I'm just as much obliged to you," he said, "but if everybody's all right, I guess I won't have any medicine." He looked at me earnestly. "I'm—I'm real tired," he said.

It came out in one great breath—apparently his last, for he did not move after that, and his ugly, slack-mouthed face was at once quite still. Its expression made me think of the time I had seen it as a child, by lantern-light, as he looked down at the new-born lamb on his breast.

IN NEW NEW ENGLAND

I.

This is a true story, for I have heard it ever so many times from my grandmother. She heard it from her grandmother, who told it about her own mother; and it began and ended right here in our village of Hillsboro, Vermont, in 1762.

Probably you think at once of the particular New England old town you know, and imagine Hillsboro of that date as an elm-shaded, well-kept street, with big, white, green-shuttered houses, full of shining mahogany furniture and quaint old silver. But my grandmother gives an entirely different picture of old times in this corner of Vermont. Conditions here, at that time, were more as they had been in Connecticut and Massachusetts a hundred and forty years before. Indeed, the Pilgrim Fathers endured no more hardships as pioneers in a wild, new country than did the first Vermonters.

Hillsboro had been settled only about fifteen years before this story begins, and the people had had to make for themselves whatever they possessed, since there was no way to reach our dark, narrow valley except by horseback over the ridge of the Green Mountains. There were no fine houses, because there was no sawmill. There were little, low log cabins of two rooms each, and the furniture, such as it was, was rough-

hewn out of native woods. Our great-grandfathers were too busy clearing the forest and planting their crops to spend much time designing or polishing table-legs.

And the number of things they did not have! No stoves, no matches, no books, no lamps, and very few candles; no doctors, no schools, no clocks, and so nearly no money that what they had is not worth mentioning But the fact that there were no schools did not mean that life was one long vacation for the children.

“No, indeedy!” as grandmother always says emphatically.

In the urgent bustle of pioneer life, the children could not be spared from work for long school-hours. They picked up what they could from the elders of their families, and worked, as grandmother puts it, “as tight as they could leg it” from morning to night. Everybody else worked that same way, so the children did not know that they were being abused. Indeed, grandmother seemed to doubt if they were.

Page 73

At any rate, they all ran about as fast as ants in an ant-hill, and the busiest of all was sixteen-year-old Hannah Sherwin. Since she was my grandmother's grand mother's mother, at last the story is really begun.

Hannah had been a baby of eighteen months when the Sherwins came over the mountains from the old home in Connecticut, so she knew nothing about any other way of living than what she saw in rough little Hillsboro. But her elder sister, Ann Mary, who was a tall girl of nineteen, remembered—or thought she remembered—big houses that were made all over of sawn planks, and chairs that were so shiny you could see your face in them or else stuffed and cushioned in brocade as soft—"as soft as a feather tick!" she told Hannah.

Her listener, having no idea of what brocade might be, and taking the feather-tick simile literally, must have imagined a very queer kind of chair.

Hannah was a short, fair, rosy-cheeked child, who passed for good-looking enough; but Ann Mary was slender and dark and a real beauty, although Hillsboro people did not realize it. She looked fragile, as if she could not do much hard work and that is always a serious blemish in feminine beauty to the eyes of pioneers.

So far in her life she had not been forced to do any hard work, because Hannah had done it all for her. Their mother had died when they were both little girls, and their father was so busy outdoors, every minute he was awake, that, for all his affection for them, he did not know or care which of his daughters cooked and washed, and swept and spun, so long as these things were done. And Hannah delighted to do them, because she adored Ann Mary, and could not bear to have her sister troubled with any of the coarse tasks which made up her own happy, busy day.

Now, all that grandmother ever tells me about the beginning of this story is that when the lovely Ann Mary was nineteen years old she "fell into a decline," as they called it. She grew pale and thin, never smiled, could not eat or sleep, and lay listlessly on the bed all day, looking sadly at Hannah as she bustled about.

A great many girls in those days fell into declines and died. Of course, nobody knows the reason for most of the cases, but it seems as plain as the nose on my face that Ann Mary's sickness was entirely Hannah's fault for not letting her sister do her share of the household work. There she was—pretty and ignorant and idle—with nothing to interest her, and nothing to look forward to, for in those days marriage was the only thing a girl could look forward to, and in the workaday little world of pioneer Hillsboro nobody would dare to think of marrying a girl who looked like a tea-rose and did not know how to make soft soap. No wonder she lost her appetite!

It might not have gone any further, however, if Hannah, distracted with anxiety, had not run to all the old women in town about her sick sister. Every one of them had had a

niece, or a daughter—or at least a granddaughter—who had died in a decline; so, of course, they knew just what to do for Ann Mary, and they came and did it.

Page 74

Then poor Ann Mary was sick, indeed, I promise you! They shut her up in the inner room of the little log house, although it was the end of May, and the weather was fit for the angels. They darkened the one window, and kept the door closed, and put the sick girl to bed between two mountains of feathers. They gave her “sut” (soot) tea and “herb-drink” and steeped butternut bark, and goodness knows what else; and they tiptoed in and out, and stared at her mournfully, and shook their heads and pursed up their lips, until it is a wonder to me that Ann Mary did not die at once.

II.

Very likely she would have died, if one day in June there had not come through Hillsboro a trader on his way from “over the mountain” up to Canada, looking for furs. That morning, when Hannah got up, she found the fire in their big fireplace completely extinguished. She snatched up the warming-pan—not a polished brass one with a smooth, turned handle, like those you see in Colonial museums, but a common iron pan, fastened to a hickory sapling; and she went as fast as she could, without running—for girls never ran “before folks” in those days—over to the nearest neighbor, to “borrow a handful of fire.”

The neighbors were just getting up, and their fire was too low to spare any, so Hannah had to wait until some hardwood sticks got well to burning. While she waited, the trader, who was staying overnight in that house, went on with a long story about an Indian herb-doctor, of whose cures he had heard marvelous tales, three days’ journey back. It seemed that the Indian’s specialty was curing girls who had gone into a decline, and that he had never failed in a single case he had undertaken.

You can imagine how Hannah’s loving, anxious heart leaped up, and how eagerly she questioned the trader about the road to the settlement where the Indian lived. It was in a place called Heath Falls, on the Connecticut River, the trader told her; but he could not find words strong enough to advise her against trying the trip.

The trail lay through thick woods, filled with all the terrors of early New Englanders—bears and wolves and catamounts. And when she got to Heath Falls, she would find it a very different place from Hillsboro, where people took you in gladly for the sake of the news you brought from the outside world. No, the folks in Heath Falls were very grand. They traveled themselves, and saw more strangers than a little. You had to pay good money for shelter and food, and, of course, the doctor did not cure for nothing. He was a kind man, the trader, and he did his best to keep Hannah from a wildly foolish enterprise.

But his best was not good enough. She went home and looked at her poor Ann Mary, as white as a snowdrift, her big dark eyes ringed with black circles, and Hannah knew only two things in the world—that there was a doctor who could cure her sister, and that

she must get her to him. She was only a child herself; she had no money, no horses, no experience; but nothing made any difference to her. Ann Mary should go to the doctor, if Hannah had to carry her every step!

Page 75

A spirit like that knows no obstacles. Although Hillsboro held up hands of horror, and implored John Sherwin to assert his parental authority and forbid his girl such a rash, unmaidenly, bold undertaking, the end of it was that Hannah got her father's permission. He loved his daughters dearly, did John Sherwin, and, although he could not see how the thing was to be managed, he told Hannah she might go if she could.

Now it happened that the wife of one of their neighbors had long coveted the two great feather-beds between which Ann Mary lay sweltering. Hannah went to her, and said that she could have them if she would loan her son, a sturdy boy of fourteen, and two horses, for the trip to Heath Falls. The neighbor-woman hesitated; but when Hannah threw in the two pewter candlesticks, which came from her mother's family, she could resist no longer. In her own family they had only spike-iron candlesticks, and it was her one chance of acquiring a pair of fine ones. So she wheedled her husband into agreeing to the bargain; and there was Hannah with her transportation provided.

As soon as it was definitely settled that she was to make the long journey, people began to; take rather a proud interest in her grit. As everybody liked her, they gave what they could toward helping her get ready—all but the old women, who were furious that Ann Mary was to be taken away from their care.

There was in town a saddle with a pillion back of it, and this was loaned for Remember Williams, the neighbor's boy, to ride and carry Ann Mary behind him. Hannah folded a blanket across her horse's back, and sat on sideways as best she could. Behind her was a big bundle of extra clothing, and food, and an iron pot—or, as she called it, a “kittle”—for cooking their noonday meals. Her father brought out all the money he had—one large four-shilling piece—and Hannah was sure that so much wealth as that would buy anything in the world. The old women had prophesied that Ann Mary would not be strong enough to sit upon a horse, even clinging to Remember Williams's thick waist; but, judging from what grandmother says, I surmise that Ann Mary, without being really aware of it, was a little sick of being sick. At any rate, she took a great interest in the preparations. She asked over and over again about the girls the herb-doctor had cured; and when the day for their departure came she was quite pleased and excited, and walked out through the crowd of sympathetic neighbors. To be sure, she leaned weakly on her father, but there was a little faint color in her cheeks.

“A very bad sign!” the old women whispered. “She'll never live the journey out. If only Hannah were not so headstrong and obstinate! But then you can't blame the child for it—all the Sherwins are that way!”

As for Ann Mary, she sat up quite straight and looked as pretty as possible when the little company rode off. After all, she had been “declining” only about a month, and people had vigorous constitutions in those days.

Page 76

You may think it odd that she was not afraid to make the long journey, but there are advantages in being of a dependent nature. Hannah had always done everything for her, and had kept her safe from harm. Hannah was with her now, so there was nothing to fear. She left all that to Hannah, who did it, poor child, with the greatest thoroughness!

Now that the excitement of overcoming Hillsboro opposition was passed; now that they were really started, with herself as sole leader and guide, responsibility fell like a black cloud upon her young heart. There was nothing she did *not* fear—for Ann Mary, of course—from wolves and Indians to fatigue or thunderstorms.

A dozen times that day, as they paced slowly over the rough trail, she asked her sister anxiously if she were not too hot or too cold, or too tired or too faint, imitating as best she could the matter and manner of the doctoring old women. However, Ann Mary surprised herself, as well as Hannah, by being none of the uncomfortable things that her sister kept suggesting to her she might very well be. It was perfect June weather, they were going over some of the loveliest country in the world, and Ann Mary was out of doors for the first time in four weeks or more.

She “kept up” wonderfully well, and they made good time, reaching by dusk, as they had hoped to do, a farmer’s house on the downward dip of the mountain to the east. Here, their story being told, they were hospitably received, and Ann Mary was clapped into the airless inner room and fed with gruel and dipped toast. But she had had fresh air and exercise all day, and a hearty meal of cold venison and corn bread at their noonday rest, so she slept soundly.

The next day they went across a wide, hilly valley, up another range of low mountains, and down on the other side. The country was quite strange to them, and somehow, before they knew it, they were not on the road recommended to them by their hosts of the night before. Night overtook them when they were still, as the phrase has come down in our family, “in a miserable, dismal place of wood.”

Hannah’s teeth chattered for very terror as she saw their plight; but she spoke cheerfully to Ann Mary and the boy, who looked to her for courage, and told them that they were to have the fun of sleeping under the stars.

Boys were the same then as now, and Remember Williams was partly shivering with dread of bears and Indians and things, and partly glowing with anticipatory glory of telling the Hillsboro boys all about the adventure. Hannah soothed the first and inflamed the second emotion until she had Remember strutting about gathering firewood, as brave as a lion.

Very probably Ann Mary would have been frightened to death, if she had not been so sleepy from her long day out of doors that she could not keep her eyes open. And then, of course, everything must be all right, because there was Hannah!

Page 77

This forlorn terrified little captain wrapped the invalid in all the extra clothing, managed to get a fire started, and cooked a supper of hot cornmeal mush in her big iron “kittle.” Ann Mary ate a great deal of this, sweetened as it was with maple sugar crumbled from the big lump Hannah Had brought along and immediately afterward she fell sound asleep.

Soon the soft night air of June was too strong a soporific for Remember’s desire to keep awake and hear the catamounts scream, as he had heard they did in those woods. Hannah was left quite alone to keep watch and to tend the fire, her heart in her mouth, jumping and starting at every shadow cast by the flames.

She knew that wild beasts would not come near them if a big fire burned briskly; and all that night she piled on the wood, scraped away the ashes, and watched Ann Mary to see that she did not grow chilly. Hannah does not seem to have been much inclined to talk about her own feelings, and there is no record of what she suffered that night; but I think we may be sure that it seemed a long time to her before the sky began to whiten in the east.

As soon as she could see plainly, she cooked a hearty breakfast of broiled bacon and fried mush, and wakened her two charges to eat it. They made a very early start, and there is nothing more to tell about their journey except that at about seven o’clock that evening the two tired horses crept into the main street of Heath Falls, and a very much excited girl asked the first passer-by where the Indian herb-doctor lived.

They found him in a little old house of logs—the only one that looked natural to them in the prosperous settlement. When Hannah knocked at the door, he opened it himself. He was a small, very old, dark-brown, and prodigiously wrinkled individual, who held up a candle and looked at Hannah with the most impassive eyes she had ever seen—like little pools of black water unstirred by any wind.

Hannah’s breath came fast.

“Is this the Indian herb-doctor?” she asked.

“Aye,” he answered.

When you remember that Hannah was only a little girl, and that she thought she had come to the end of a nightmare of responsibility, it will not surprise you to learn that she now began to cry a little, out of agitation.

“I have brought Ann Mary,” she said, “my sister, to be cured. She is in a decline. Will you cure her?”

The herb-doctor showed no surprise. He set the candle down on the shelf, and went out in the bright starlight to where Ann Mary clung to Remember Williams’s waist.

When he put up his brown old hands to her, she slid down into them and upon the ground. He still held one wrist, and this he continued to do for some moments, looking at the white, drooping girl without moving a muscle of his solemn old face. Then he turned to Hannah, who had stopped crying and was holding her breath in suspense.

“Aye,” he said.

Page 78

At this Hannah caught her sister around the neck, sobbing joyfully:

"He will cure you, Ann Mary; he will cure you!" Then she asked the doctor: "And how long will it take? We can stay but a few days, for the boy and the horses must get back soon."

The herb-doctor considered for a moment.

"It is now the end of June month. By the end of September month she will be cured—not before."

I think I know that that was a black moment for Hannah. She said nothing at all, but the sick girl fell to weeping.

"But, Master Doctor, we cannot stay—we cannot! And now, after all, I shall not be cured!"

Hannah could not bear to see her sweet Ann Mary in tears, and she cried out stoutly:

"Yes, you shall, too! Remember can take the horses back without us, and tell our father. Somehow—I can earn—oh, we *must*!" Then a new fear sprang into her heart. "Oh, sir," she cried to the doctor, "is it dear, your cure? Must one have much silver for it?"

The stolid little old gnome did not look toward her or change his position as he said:

"It costs time—no silver," He moved toward the house. "Go to the minister's to-night," he called from his doorstep. "It is the house of brick." Just before he closed his door he added: "Come here to-morrow morning."

When they reached the great brick house, the other two hung back, afraid of so much grandeur; but three days of travel through the dangers of a primitive forest had hardened Hannah to the lesser fear of strange people. To the old minister and his wife she told their story very briefly, with a desperate kind of self-possession, so concerned about poor Ann Mary, tired and hungry, waiting out in the night air, that she did not remember to be afraid of the minister's fine linen and smooth, white hands, or of the laces and dark silk of his handsome, white-haired wife, or of the gold braid and red coat of a dark young man with a quick eye who sat in the corner.

The young man said nothing until after the old people had gone out to bring in the wanderers. Then:

"You must be fond, indeed, of your sister, my little lass," he said kindly.

"Sir," said Hannah, "you should see my sister!"

And just then he did see her. Ann Mary came into the brightly lighted room, her eyes wide and dark from the dusk outside, her long black hair, shaken loose from its fastenings, curling up beautifully with the dew, and making a frame for the pearl-like oval of her face. I have seen a miniature of Ann Mary in her youth, and I can guess how she must have looked to the young officer that evening.

The minister's wife gave them all a hot supper, and hurried them off to bed with motherly authority. For the first time in her life, Hannah found herself between linen sheets. She tried to call her sister's attention to this astonishing magnificence, but fell asleep in the middle of the sentence, and did not wake until late the next morning. Ann Mary had been awake for some time, but did not dare get up, so overcome was she by shyness and reverence for the grandeur of the room and of her hosts.

Page 79

“Oh, Hannah! Would it not be like heaven to live always in such a place?” she said.

Hannah could not stop to be shy, or to think about how she would like mahogany beds all the time. She had too much on her mind. They must go at once to the herb-doctor’s—they should have been there before—and they must hurry through their breakfast. It is, perhaps, worthy of note that both girls came down the stairs backward, ladders having been, up to that time, their only means of reaching elevations.

During their breakfast, the dark young man, who turned out to be a cousin of the minister’s, sat in a corner, playing with his dog’s ears, and looking at Ann Mary until she was quite abashed, although the younger girl, at whom he glanced smilingly from time to time, thought he looked very good-natured. After this, Hannah sent Remember Williams home with the horses, giving him fresh and elaborate directions about the right road to take. Then she marched Ann Mary to the herb-doctor’s.

“Here, Master Necronsett,” she said, “here is Ann Mary to be cured!”

III.

When the doctor told them about his system, Hannah did not like the sound of it at all. Not a drop of “sut tea” or herb-drink was mentioned, but the invalid was to eat all the hearty food Hannah could earn for her. Then, so far from sleeping in a decently tight room, their bed was to stand in a little old shed, set up against Master Necronsett’s house. One side of the shed was gone entirely, so that the wind and the sun would come right in on poor, delicate Ann Mary, and there was only an awning of woven bark-withes to let down when it rained.

But even that was not the worst. Hannah listened with growing suspicion while Master Necronsett explained the rest of it. All his magic consisted in the use of a “witch plant,” the whole virtue of which depended on one thing. The sick person must be the only one to handle or care for it, from the seed up to the mature plant.

He took them up to his garret, where row after row of dried plants hung, heavy with seed-pods, and with the most careful precautions to avoid touching them himself, or having Hannah do so, he directed Ann Mary to fill a two-quart basin with the seed.

“That will plant a piece of ground about six paces square,” he said. “That will raise enough seed for you.”

“But who is to dig the ground, and plant, and weed, and water, and all?” asked Hannah. “If I am to be earning all day, when—”

“The sick person must do all,” said the herb-doctor.

Hannah could not believe her senses. Her Ann Mary, who could not even brush her own hair without fatigue, she to take a spade in her—

“Oh, Master Doctor,” she cried, “can I not do it for her?”

The old Indian turned his opaque black eyes upon her.

“Nay,” he said dryly, “you cannot.”

And with that he showed them where the witch garden was to be, close before their little sleeping-hut. That was why, he explained, the patient must spend all her time there, so that by night, as well as by day, she could absorb the magical virtues of the growing plant Hannah thought those were the first sensible words she had heard him say.

Page 80

She had promised the minister's wife to be back at a certain hour to see about employment, so she dared not stay longer, though it was with a sinking heart that she left her sister to that grim old savage, with his brusque lack of sympathy. However, the minister's wife reassured her with stories of all the other girls from far and near whom he had cured by that same foolish, silly method; so Hannah turned all her energies upon the spinning which a neighbor-woman had set her to do.

Hired workers have been the same from the days of the Psalmist down to our own, and Hannah, putting her whole heart into her work, accomplished, so her surprised employer told her, twice as much spinning as any serving-girl she had ever hired.

"And excellent good thread, too!" she said, examining it.

If Hannah kept up to *that*, she added, she could have all the work she had time for. She gave the little girl two pennies—two real pennies, the first money Hannah had ever earned. With a head spinning with triumph, she calculated that at that rate she could earn fourpence a day!

She spent a farthing for some fish a little boy brought up from the river, and a halfpenny for some fresh-baked bread, and a part of her precious four-shilling piece for an iron fry-pan, or "spider." Laden with these, she hurried back to see how Ann Mary had endured the old doctor's roughness. She found her sister very tired, but, proudly anxious to show a little spot, perhaps six feet; square, which she had spaded up with intervals of rest.

"The herb-doctor says that I have done well, and that I will finish the spading in a week, or perhaps even less," she said: "and I *like* Master Necronsett! He is a good old man, and I know that he will cure me. He makes me feel very rested when he comes near."

Hannah felt a little pang to think that her sister should not miss her own brooding care, but when Ann Mary cried out joyfully at the sight of the food, "Oh, how hungry I am!" everything but pleasure was immediately swept away from the little sister's loyal heart.

They cooked their supper—Hannah still had some of the cornmeal and the flitch of bacon their Hillsboro friends had given them—and went to bed directly on the queer, hard bed, with a straw tick and no feathers, which Dr. Necronsett had prescribed, warmly wrapped up in the pair of heavy Indian blankets he had loaned them. They were so close to the house that they heard the old doctor moving around inside, and they could see the light of his candle, so they were not afraid.

Indeed, the two sisters were so sleepy that even if they had been timorous it could scarcely have kept them from the deep slumber into which they fell at once, and which lasted until the sun shone in on them the next morning.

IV.

Page 81

That was the first day of that wonderful summer, and most of the days which followed were like it. Every morning Hannah rose early, made a little open fire, cooked their breakfast, and was off to her spinning. Just as her first employer had said, there was no lack of work for a spinner who worked as fast and yet as carefully as if it were for herself. In Hannah's thread there were never any thin places which broke as soon as the weaver stretched it on the loom, nor yet any thick lumps where the wool had insisted, in grandmother's phrase, "on going all kim-kam."

At first, she went about to people's houses; but, seeing her so neat and careful, the minister's wife loaned her one of her own wheels, and the minister had an old granary cleared out for her workroom. Here, day after day, the wheel whirred unceasingly, like a great bee, and Hannah stepped back and forth, back and forth, on her tireless young feet, only glancing out through the big door at the bright glories of the summer weather, and never once regretting her imprisonment.

Indeed, she said, all her life afterward, that she was so happy, that summer, it seemed heaven itself could hold no greater joy for her. Of course, first always in her thoughts was Ann Mary, pulling weeds and tending her witch garden, and growing plump and rosy, and so strong that she laughed and ran about and sang as never in her life before.

Hannah put very little faith in the agricultural part of the cure. She thought that very probably it was nothing more than a blind, and that Master Necronsett came out at night and said charms and things over Ann Mary as she slept. However that might be, she could have kissed his funny, splay feet every time she looked at her sister's bright eyes and red lips; and when she thought of the joy it would be to her father, she could have kissed his ugly, wrinkled old face.

But, besides her joy over her sister's health, the summer was for Hannah herself a continual feast of delight. Captain Winthrop, the minister's young cousin, was staying in Heath Falls to recover from an arrow-wound got in a skirmish with the Indians in Canada. He was very idle, and very much bored by the dullness of the little town, which seemed such a metropolis to the two girls from Hillsboro. One day, attracted by Hannah's shining face of content, he lounged over to the step of her granary, and began to talk to her through the open doorway.

It happened to come out that the little spinner, while she knew her letters from having worked them into a sampler, and could make shift to write her name, could not read or write, and had never had the slightest instruction in any sort of book-learning. Thereupon the young officer good-naturedly proposed to be her teacher, if Hannah would like.

Would she *like*! She turned to him a look of such utter ecstasy that he was quite touched, and went off at: once to get an old "A-B, ab" book.

Page 82

That was the beginning of a new world to Hannah. She took her young instructor's breath away by the avidity with which she devoured the lessons he set her. By the rapt air of exultation with which Hannah recited them, stepping back and forth by her wheel, you would have thought that "c-a-t, cat; r-a-t, rat," was the finest poetry ever written. And in no time at all it was no longer "c-a-t, cat," but "parallel," and "phthisis," and such orthographical atrocities, on which the eager scholar was feeding; for, Hannah's mind was as fresh as her round, rosy face, and as vigorous as her stout little body.

Captain Winthrop had several reasons for being interested in Hannah; and when he found her so quick at her spelling, he said he was willing to occupy some of his enforced leisure in giving her instruction in other branches. Hannah fell to at this feast of knowledge like a young bear in a bee-tree.

But there were some difficulties. Like the spelling, arithmetic was all very well, since she could do that in her head while she spun; but reading and writing were different. She would not stop her work for them, and so Captain Winthrop fell into the habit of going over to Master Necronsett's house in the afternoon with his books, and being there, all ready for a lesson, when Hannah came hurrying back after she had finished her day's "stint." As long as there was light to see, she pored over her writing and reading, while the young officer sat by, ready to help, and talking in a low tone to Ann Mary.

After a time there grew up a regular routine for Captain Winthrop. In the mornings he went out to the granary and read aloud to Hannah from a book called "The Universal Preceptor; being a General Grammar of Art, Science, and Useful Knowledge." Out of this he taught her about "mechanical powers" and "animated nature" and astronomy and history and geography—almost anything that came to his hand.

Up in our garret we have the very book he used, and modern research and science have proved that there is scarcely a true word in it. But don't waste any pity on Hannah for having such a mistaken teacher, for it is likely enough, don't you think, that research and science a hundred years from now will have proved that there is scarcely a word of truth in our school-books of to-day? It really doesn't seem to matter much.

At any rate, those were the things of which Captain Winthrop talked to Hannah in the mornings. In the afternoon, he went over to an apple-tree by the edge of the witch garden, and there he found Ann Mary; and what he talked to her about nobody knew but herself, although Master Necronsett passed back and forth so often in his herb-gathering that it is likely he may have caught something. It seems not improbable, from what happened afterward, that the young man was telling the young girl things which did not come out of a book, and which are consequently safe from science and research, for they are certainly as true to-day as they were then.

Page 83

Once, in her anxiety to have everything exactly right for her sister, Hannah asked Master Necronsett about Captain Winthrop's being there so much.

"Master Doctor, will not Captain Winthrop absorb, perchance, some of the great virtue of the plant away from Ann Mary? Will he not hurt her cure?"

Grandmother never says so, but I have always imagined that even that carven image of an old aborigine must, have smiled a little as he told her:

"Nay, the young man will not hurt your sister's cure."

At the end of September, something tremendously exciting happened to Hannah. She had been so busy learning the contents of that old calf-bound book that she had never noticed how a light seemed to shine right through Ann Mary's lovely face every time Captain Winthrop looked at her. The little student was the most surprised girl in the world when the young soldier told her, one morning in the granary, that he wanted her sister to marry him, and that Ann Mary wanted it, too, if Hannah would allow it.

He laughed a little as he said this last, but he looked anxiously at her, for Ann Mary, who was as sweet as she was pretty and useless, had felt it to be a poor return for Hannah's devotion, now after all, just to go off and desert her. She had said that, if Hannah thought she ought to, she would go back to Hillsboro, and they would have to wait ever so long. So now Captain Winthrop looked very nervously at Ann Mary's little sister.

But he did not know Hannah. She gave a little cry, as if someone had stabbed her, turned very pale, and, leaving her wheel still whirling, she ran like the wind toward Dr. Necronsett's. She wanted to see her sister; she wanted to see if this——

Close to the minister's house she met Ann Mary, who could not wait any longer, and was coming to meet her. After one glimpse of that beautiful, radiant face, Hannah fell a weeping for very joy that her dear Ann Mary was so happy, and was to marry the grand and learned and goodly Captain Winthrop.

There was not a thought in Hannah's mind, then or later, that she must lose Ann Mary herself. Grandmother explains here that the truth is that a heart like Hannah's cannot lose anything good; and perhaps that is so.

Thus, hand in hand, laughing and crying together, the two girls came back to the granary, where Ann Mary's lover took her in his arms and kissed her many times out of light-heartedness that Hannah would put no obstacle in the way. This made little Hannah blush and feel very queer. She looked away, and there was her wheel still languidly stirring a little. Dear me! How many, many times have I heard the next detail in the story told!

“And, without really, so to speak, sensing what she was doing, didn’t she put her hand to the rim and start it up again? And when the other two looked around at her, there she was, spinning and smiling, with the tears in her eyes. It had all happened in less time than it takes a spin-wheel to run down.”

Page 84

After that day things happened fast. Captain Winthrop rode off over the mountains to Hillsboro, to ask John Sherwin if he might marry his daughter; and when he came back, there was John Sherwin himself riding along beside him, like an old friend. And when he saw his two dear daughters—Ann Mary, who had gone away like a lily, now blooming like a rose, and Hannah, stout little Hannah, with her honest blue eyes shining—when he saw his two daughters, I say—well, I'm sure I have no idea what happened, for at this point grandmother always takes off her glasses, and sniffs hard, and wipes her eyes before she can go on.

So there was a wedding at the minister's house, and everybody in Heath Falls was invited, because Hannah said they had been so good to her. Everybody came, too, except old Master Necronsett, and that was nothing, because he never went anywhere except to the woods.

I know just what the bride and Hannah wore, for we have pieces of the material in our oldest cedar chest; but, of course, as they weren't your own great-great-great-grandmother and aunt, perhaps you wouldn't care to have me tell you all about their costumes. It was a grand occasion, however—that you can take from me; and the family tradition is that Ann Mary looked like a wonderful combination of an angel and a star.

And then Captain and Mrs. Winthrop rode off in one direction, and Hannah and her father in another, and there were a great many tears shed, for all everybody; was so happy.

VI.

Hannah went home with her head full of new ideas, and with four books in her saddlebags—which, for those days, was a large library. These were the Bible, the "Universal Preceptor," a volume of the Shakespeare comedies, and Plutarch's "Lives." Armed with these weapons, how she did stir things up in Hillsboro! She got the children together into a school, and taught them everything she had learned in Heath Falls; and that was so much—what with the studying which she always kept up by herself—that from our little scrap of a village three students went down to the college at William's Town, in Massachusetts, the first year it was started, and there has been a regular procession of them ever since.

After a time she married Giles Wheeler, and began to teach her own children—she had nine—and very well instructed they were. She was too busy, then, to go into the schoolroom to teach; but never, then or later, even when she was an old, old woman, did she take her vigilant eyes and her managing hand off the schools of our county.

It was due to her that Hillsboro could boast for so long that its percentage of illiterates was zero. If, by chance, anyone grew up without knowing how to read, Aunt Hannah pounced on him and made him learn, whether he would or not. She loaned about, to anyone who would read them, the books she brought from Heath Falls; and in time she started a little library. Remembering the days when Captain Winthrop had read aloud to her in the granary, she had her children go about to read aloud to sick people, and to busy seamstresses or spinners who had no time for books.

Page 85

And the number of girls in declines she cured by Master Necronsett's system! You would not believe it, if I told you. And she had our river named after that wise old heathen, and we think it the prettiest name possible for a river.

All this time, Ann Mary's position was getting grander and grander, for Captain Winthrop was on the American side when the Revolution came, and grew to be a very important man. Ann Mary dressed in brocade every day and all day, and went to Philadelphia, where she met General and Mrs. Washington, and ever so many more famous people.

Wherever she went, she was admired and loved for her beauty and gentleness; but she did not forget Hannah. Nearly every traveler from the South brought a message or a present from Madam Winthrop to Mistress Wheeler, and once she and General Winthrop came and made a long visit in Hillsboro.

Grandmother's grandmother was old enough, by that time, to remember the visit very clearly; and it was from talk between the two sisters that she learned all about this story. She said she never saw a more beautiful woman than Madam Winthrop, nor heard a sweeter voice. But how Hannah had to hush the unmannerly surprise of her brood of quick-witted youngsters when they found out that elegant Aunt Ann Mary did not know her letters, and had never heard of Julius Caesar or Oliver Cromwell! For marriage did not change Ann Mary very much; but as her husband was perfectly satisfied with her, I dare say it was just as well.

However, when the Winthrop cousins begin to put on airs, and to talk about autograph letters from Benjamin Franklin and Jefferson addressed to their great-great-great-grandmother, and to show beautiful carved fans and lace handkerchiefs which she carried at State balls in Philadelphia and New York, I have to bite my tongue to keep from reminding them that they have no autograph letters of *hers*!

Then I go up into our garret, and look at Hannah's shabby old books, and I ride over to the place on the road where she tended the fire that night, and I think of the number of Hillsboro boys and girls to whom she opened the great world of books, and—somehow, I am just as well pleased that it was not the lovely Ann Mary who came back to our town and became my great-great-great-grandmother.

THE DELIVERER

"I shall not die, but live; and declare the works of the Lord."

The great lady pointed with a sigh of pleasure to the canvas hung between a Greuze and a Watteau! "Ah, is there anyone like LeMaury! Alone in the eighteenth century he had eyes for the world of wood and stream. You poets and critics, why do you never write of him? Is it true that no one knows anything of his life?"

The young writer hesitated. "I do not think I exaggerate, madame, when I say that I alone in Paris know his history. He was a compatriot of mine."

Page 86

"Oh, come, Mr. Everett, LeMaury an American! With that name!"

"He called himself LeMaury after his protector, the man who brought him to France. His real name was Everett, like my own. He was cousin to one of my great-grandfathers."

"Ah, an old family story. That is the best kind. You must tell it to me."

"I will write it for you, madame."

I

At the foot of Hemlock Mountain spring came late that year, now a century and a half gone by, as it comes late still to the remote back valley, lying high among the Green Mountains; but when it came it had a savor of enchantment unknown to milder regions. The first day of spring was no uncertain date in Hillsboro, then as now. One morning generally about the middle of May, people woke up with the sun shining in their eyes, and the feeling in their hearts that something had happened in the night. The first one of the family dressed, who threw open the house-door, felt the odor of stirring life go to his head, was the Reverend Mr. Everett himself. In the little community of Puritans, whose isolation had preserved intact the rigidity of faith which had begun to soften somewhat in other parts of New England, there was no one who openly saluted the miracle of resurrection by more than the brief remark, "Warm weather's come"; but sometimes the younger men went back and kissed their wives. It was an event, the first day of spring, in old-time Hillsboro.

In the year of our Lord 1756 this event fell upon a Sabbath, a fact which the Reverend Mr. Everett commemorated by a grim look out at the budding trees, and by taking from his store of sermons a different one from that he had intended to preach. It was his duty to scourge natural man out of the flock committed to his charge by an angry and a jealous God, and he had felt deep within him a damnable stirring of sensual pleasure as the perfumed breath of the new season had blown across his face. If the anointed of the Lord had thus yielded to the insidious wiles of unregenerate nature what greater dangers lay in wait for the weaklings under his care! The face of his son Nathaniel, as he came back from the brook, his slender body leaning sideways from the weight of the dripping bucket, told the shepherd of souls that he must be on his guard against the snares of the flesh.

The boy's thin, dark face, so astonishingly like his father's, was lifted toward the sky as he came stumbling up the path, but his eyes were everywhere at once. Just before he reached the door, he set the bucket down with a cry of ecstasy and darted to the edge of the garden, where the peas were just thrusting green bowed heads through the crumbling earth. He knelt above them breathless, he looked up to the maple-twigs, over which a faint reddish bloom had been cast in the night, beyond to the lower slopes of



the mountain, delicately patterned with innumerable white stems of young birch-trees, and clasped his hands to see that a shimmer of green hung in their tops like a mist. His lips quivered, he laid his hand upon a tuft of grass with glossy, lance-like blades, and stroked it.

Page 87

His father came to the door and called him. "Nathaniel!"

He sprang up with guilty haste and went toward the house. A shriveling change of expression came over him.

The minister began, "A wise son heareth his father's instructions; but a scorner heareth not rebuke."

"I hear you, father."

"Why did you linger in the garden and forget your duty?"

"I—I cannot tell you, father."

"Do you mean you do not know why?"

"I cannot say I do not know."

"Then answer me."

Nathaniel broke out desperately, "I *cannot*, father—I know no words—I was—it is so warm—the sun shines—the birches are out—I was glad——"

The minister bowed his head sadly. "Aye, even as I thought. Sinful lust of the eye draggeth you down to destruction. You whose salvation even now hangs in the balance, for whose soul I wrestle every night in prayer that you may be brought to the conviction of sin, 'you were glad.' Remember the words, 'If I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy, may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth.'"

Nathaniel made no reply. He caught at the door, looking up wretchedly at his father. When the minister turned away without speaking again, he drew a long breath of relief.

Breakfast was always a silent meal in the Everett house, but on Sabbath mornings the silence had a heavy significance. The preacher was beginning then to work himself up to the pitch of storming fervor which made his sermons so notable, and his wife and son cowered under the unspoken emanations of the passion which later poured so terribly from the pulpit. The Reverend Mr. Everett always ate very heartily on Sabbath mornings, but Nathaniel usually pushed his plate away.

As a rule he walked to church between his father and his mother, like a little child, although he was now a tall lad of sixteen, but to-day he was sent back for a psalm-book, forgotten in the hurry of their early start. When he set out again the rest of the village folk were all in the meeting-house. The sight of the deserted street, walled in by the forest, lying drowsily in the spring sunshine, was like balm to him. He loitered along, free from observation, his eyes shining. A fat, old negro woman sat on a doorstep in the

sun, the only other person not in meeting. She was a worn-out slave, from a Connecticut seaport, who had been thrown in for good measure in a sharp bargain driven by the leading man of Hillsboro. A red turban-like cloth was bound above her black face, she rested her puffy black arms across her knees and crooned a monotonous refrain. Although the villagers regarded her as imbecile, they thought her harmless, and Nathaniel nodded to her as he passed. She gave him a rich laugh and a "Good morrow, Marse Natty, *good* morrow!"

Page 88

A hen clucking to her chicks went across the road before him. The little yellow balls ran briskly forward on their wiry legs, darting at invisible insects, turning their shiny black eyes about alertly and filling the air with their sweet, thin pipings. Nathaniel stopped to watch them, and as he noticed the pompously important air with which one of the tiny creatures scratched the ground with his ineffectual little feet, cocking his eye upon the spot afterward as if to estimate the amount of progress made, the boy laughed out loud. He started at the sound and glanced around him hurriedly, moving on to the meeting-house from which there now burst forth a harshly intoned psalm. He lingered for a moment at the door, gazing back at the translucent greens of the distant birches gleaming against the black pines. A gust of air perfumed with shad-blossom blew past him, and with this in his nostrils he entered the whitewashed interior and made his way on tiptoe up the bare boards of the aisle.

II

After meeting the women and children walked home to set out the cold viands for the Sabbath dinner, while the men stood in a group on the green before the door for a few minutes' conversation.

"Verily, Master Everett, the breath of the Almighty was in your words this day as never before," said one of them. "One more such visitation of the anger of God and your son will be saved."

"How looked he when they bore him out?" asked the minister faintly. His face was very white.

The other continued, "Truly, reverend sir, your setting forth of the devil lying in wait for the thoughtless, and the lake burning with brimstone, did almost affright me who for many years now have known myself to be of the elect. I could not wonder that terrors melted the soul of your son."

"How looked he when they bore him out?" repeated the minister impatiently.

The other answered encouragingly, "More like death than life, so the women say." The minister waved the men aside and went swiftly down the street. The hen and chickens fled with shrill cries at his approach, and the old negress stopped her song. After he had passed she chuckled slowly to herself, thrust her head up sideways to get the sun in a new place, and began her crooning chant afresh.

"How is the boy?" asked the minister of his wife as he stepped inside the door. "Not still screaming out and——"

Mistress Everett shook her head reassuringly. "Nay, he is quiet now, up in his room."



Nathaniel lay on his trundle bed, his eyes fixed on the rafters, his pale lips drawn back. At the sight his father sat down heavily on the edge of the bed. The boy sprang upon him with a cry, "Oh, father, I see fire always there—last winter when I burned my finger—oh, always such pain!"

The minister's voice broke as he said, "Oh, Nathaniel, the blessed ease when all this travail is gone by and thou knowest thyself to be of the elect."

Page 89

Nathaniel screamed out at this, a fleck of froth showing on his lips. "That is the horrible thing—I know I am not one of the saved. My heart is all full of carnal pleasures and desires. To look at the sun on the hillside—why I love it so that I forget my soul—hell—God—"

His father gave a deep shocked groan and put his hand over the quivering lips. "Be not a bitterness to him that begot you. Hush!"

The fever of excitement left the boy and he fell down with his face in the pillow to lie there motionless until his parents went out for second meeting, leaving him alone in the house. "Confidence must be rooted out of his tabernacle," said his father sternly. "The spirit of God is surely working in his heart in which I see many of my own besetting sins."

Nathaniel sprang up, when he heard the door shut, with a distracted idea of escape, now that his jailers were away, and felt an icy stirring in the roots of his hair at the realization that his misery lay within, that the walls of his own flesh and blood shut it inexorably into his heart forever. He threw open the window and leaned out.

The old negress came out of the woods at the other end of the street, her turban gleaming red. She moved in a cautious silence past the meeting-house, but when she came opposite the minister's house, thinking herself alone, she burst into a gay, rapid song, the words of which she so mutilated in her barbarous accent that only a final "Oh, Molly-oh!" could be distinguished. She carried an herb-basket on her arm now, into which, from time to time, she looked with great satisfaction.

Nathaniel ran down the stairs and out of the door calling. She paused, startled. "How can you sing and laugh and walk so lightly?" he cried out.

She cocked her head on one side with her turtle-like motion. "Why should she not sing?" she asked in her thick, sweet voice. She had never learned the difference between the pronouns. "She's be'n gatherin' yarbs in the wood, an' th' sun is warm," she blinked at it rapidly, "an' the winter it is pas', Marse Natty, no mo' winter!"

Nathaniel came close up to her, laying his thin fingers on her fat, black arm. His voice quivered. "But they say if you love those things and if they make you glad you are damned to everlasting brimstone fire. Tell me how you dare to laugh, so that I will dare too."

The old woman laughed, opening her mouth so widely that the red lining to her throat showed moistly, and all her fat shook on her bones. "Lord love ye, chile, dat's white folks' talk. Dat don't scare a old black woman!" She shifted her basket to the other arm and prepared to go on. "You're bleeched to be keerful 'bout losin' yo' soul. Black folks ain't got no souls, bless de Lord! When *d*ey dies dey *dies*!"

She shuffled along, laughing, and began to sing again. Nathaniel looked after her with burning eyes. After she had disappeared between the tree trunks of the forest, the breeze bore back to him a last joyous whoop of “*Oh, Molly-oh!*” He burst into sobs, and shivering, made his way back into his father’s darkening, empty house.

Page 90

III

At the breakfast table the next morning his father looked at him neutrally. "This day you shall go to salt the sheep in the Miller lot," he announced, "and you may have until the hour before sundown to walk in the wood."

"Oh, *father*, really!"

"That is what I said," repeated the minister dryly, pushing away from the table.

After the boy had gone, carrying the bag of salt and the little package of his noonday meal, the minister sighed heavily. "I fear my weak heart inclines me to too great softness to our son." To his wife he cried out a moment later, "Oh, that some instance of the wrath of Jehovah could come before us now, while our son's spirit is softened. Deacon Truitt said yesterday that one more visitation would save him."

Nathaniel walked along soberly, his eyes on the road at his feet, his face quite pale, a sleepless night evidently behind him. He came into the birches without noticing them at first, and when he looked up he was for a moment so taken by surprise that he was transfigured. The valley at his feet shimmered like an opal through the slender white pillars of the trees. The wood was like a many-columned chapel, unroofed and open to the sunlight. Nathaniel gave a cry of rapture, and dropped the bag of salt. "Oh!" he cried, stretching out his arms, and then again, "Oh!"

For a moment he stood so, caught into a joy that was almost anguish, and then at a sudden thought he shrank together, his arm crooked over his eyes. He sank forward, still covering his eyes, into a great bed of fern, just beginning to unroll their whitey-green balls into long, pale plumes. There he lay as still as if he were dead.

Two men came riding through the lane, their horses treading noiselessly over the leaf-mold. They had almost passed the motionless, prostrate figure when the older reined in and pointed with his whip. "What is that, LeMaury?"

At the unexpected sound the boy half rose, showing a face so convulsed that the other horseman cried out alarmed, "It ees a man crazed! Ride on, *mon colone!*" He put spurs to his horse and sprang forward as he spoke.

The old soldier laughed a little, and turned to Nathaniel. "Why, 'tis the minister his son. I know you by the look of your father in you. What bad dream have we waked you from, you pretty boy?"

"You have not waked me from it," cried Nathaniel. "I will never wake as long as I live, and when I die—!"

“Why, LeMaury is right. The poor lad is crazed. We must see to this.”

He swung himself stiffly from the saddle and came limping up to Nathaniel. Kneeling by the boy he brought him up to a sitting position, and at the sight of the ashen face and white, turned-back eyeballs he sat down hastily, drawing the young head upon his shoulder with a rough tenderness. “Why, so lads look under their first fire, when they die of fear. What frights you so?”

Page 91

Nathaniel opened great solemn eyes upon him. "I suppose it is the conviction of sin. That is what they call it."

For an instant the old man's face was blank with astonishment, and then it wrinkled into a thousand lines of mirth. He began to laugh as though he would never stop. Nathaniel had never heard anyone laugh like that. He clutched at the old man.

"How dare you laugh!"

The other wiped his eyes and rocked to and fro, "I laugh—who would not—that such a witless baby should talk of his sin. You know not what sin is, you silly innocent!"

At the kindness of the tone an aching knot in the boy's throat relaxed. He began to talk hurriedly, in a desperate whisper, his hands like little birds' claws gripping the other's great gauntleted fist. "You do not know how wicked I am—I am so wholly forward the wonder is the devil does not take me at once. I live only in what my father calls the lust of the eye. I—I would rather look at a haw-tree in bloom than meditate on the Almighty!" He brought out this awful confession with a gasp at its enormity, but hurried on to a yet more terrible climax. "I cannot be righteous, but many times there are those who cannot—but oh, worse than that, I cannot even *wish* to be! I can only wish to be a painter."

At this unexpected ending the old man gave an exclamation of extreme amazement.

"But, boy, lad, what's your name? However did you learn that there are painters in the world, here in this prison-house of sanctity?"

Nathaniel had burrowed into his protector's coat as though hiding from the imminent wrath of God. He now spoke in muffled tones. "Two years ago, when I was but a little child, there came a man to our town, a Frenchman, they said, and his horse fell lame, and he stopped two days at my Uncle Elzaphan's. My Uncle Elzaphan asked him what business did he in the world, and he said he put down on cloth or paper with brushes and colors all the fair and comely things he saw. And he showed a piece of paper with on it painted the row of willows along our brook. I sat in the chimney-corner and no one heeded me. I saw—oh, then I *knew*! I have no paint, but ever since I have made pictures with burnt sticks on birchbark—though my father says that of all the evil ways of evil men none lead down more swift to the chambers of death and the gates of hell than that. Every night I make a vow unto the Lord that I will sin no more; but in the morning the devil whispers in my ear and I rise up and sin again—no man knows this—and I am never glad unless I think I have done well with my pictures, and I hate the meeting-house and—" His voice died away miserably.

"Two years ago, was't?" asked the old man. "And the man was French?"

"Aye."

The old soldier shifted his position, stretched out a stiff knee with a grimace of pain, and pulled the tall lad bodily into his lap like a child. For some time the two were silent, the sun shining down warmly on them through the faint, vaporous green of the tiny leaves. The old horse cropped the young shoots with a contented, ruminative air, once in a while pausing to hang his head drowsily, and bask motionless in the warmth.

Page 92

Then the old man began to speak in a serious tone, quite different from his gentle laughter. “Young Everett, of all the people you have seen, is there one whom you would wish to have even a moment of the tortures of hell?”

Nathaniel looked at him horrified. “Why, no!” he cried indignantly.

“Then do you think your God less merciful than you?”

Nathaniel stared long into the steady eyes. “Oh, do you mean it is not *true*?” He leaned close in an agony of hope. “Sometimes I have thought it *could* not be true!”

The old soldier struck him on the shoulder inspiritingly, his weather-beaten face very grave. “Aye, lad, I mean it is not true. I am an old man and I have learned that they lie who say it is true. There is no hell but in our own hearts when we do evil; and we can escape a way out of that by repenting and doing good. There is no devil but our evil desires, and God gives to every man strength to fight with those. There is only good in your love for the fair things God made and put into the world for us to love. No man but only your own heart can tell you what is wrong and what is right. Only *do not fear*, for all is well.”

The scene was never to fade from Nathaniel Everett’s eyes. In all the after crises of his life the solemn words rang in his ears.

The old man suddenly smiled at him, all quaint drollery again. “And now wait.” He put hand to mouth and hallooed down the lane. “Ho there! LeMaury!”

As the Frenchman came into sight, the old man turned to Nathaniel, “Is this the gentleman who painted your willows?”

“Oh, aye!” cried Nathaniel.

The Frenchman dismounted near them with sparkling glances of inquiry. “See, LeMaury, this is young Master Everett, whom you have bewitched with your paint-pots. He would fain be an artist—*de gustibus*—! Perhaps you have in him an apprentice for your return to France.”

The artist looked sharply at Nathaniel. “Eh, so? Can young master draw? Doth he know aught of *chiaroscuro*?”

Nathaniel blushed at his ignorance and looked timidly at his protector.

“Nay, he knows naught of your painter’s gibberish. Give him a crayon and a bit of white bark and see can he make my picture. I’ll lean my head back and fold my hands to sleep.”

In the long sunny quiet that followed, the old man really slipped away into a light doze, from which he was awakened by a loud shout from LeMaury. The Frenchman had sprung upon Nathaniel and was kissing his cheeks, which were now crimson with excitement. “Oh, it is Giotto come back again. He shall be anything—Watteau.”

Nathaniel broke away and ran toward the old man, his eyes blazing with hope.

“What does he mean?” he demanded.

“He means that you’re to be a painter and naught else, though how a man can choose to daub paint when there are swords to be carried—well, well,” he pulled himself painfully to his feet, wincing at gouty twinges, “I will go and see your father about—”

Page 93

"Mais, Colonel Hall, dites! How can I arrange not to lose this pearl among artists?"

At the name, for he had not understood the title before, pronounced as it was in French, the boy fell back in horrified recognition. "Oh! you are Colonel Gideon Hall!"

"Aye, lad, who else?" The old soldier swung himself up to the saddle, groaning, "Oh, damn that wet ground! I fear I cannot sit the nag home."

"But then you are the enemy of God—the chosen one of Beelzebub——"

"Do they call me *that* in polite and pious Hillsboro?"

The Frenchman broke in, impatient of this incomprehensible talk. "See, boy, you—Everett—I go back to France now soon. I lie next Friday night at Woodburn. If you come to me there we will go together to France—to Paris—you will be the great artist ____"

He was silenced by a gesture from the colonel, who now sat very straight on his horse and beckoned to Nathaniel. The boy came timorously. "You have heard lies about me, Everett. Be man enough to trust your own heart." He broke into a half-sad little laugh at Nathaniel's face of fascinated repulsion.

"You can laugh now," whispered the boy, close at his knee, "but when you come to die? Why, even my father trembles at the thought of death. Oh, if I could but believe you!"

"Faugh! To fear death when one has done his best!"

He had turned his horse's head, but Nathaniel called after him, bringing out the awful words with an effort. "But they say—that you do not believe in God."

The colonel laughed again. "Why, lad, I'm the only man in this damn town who does." He put his horse into a trot and left Nathaniel under the birch-trees, the sun high over his head, the bag of salt forgotten at his feet.

IV

A little before sundown the next day the minister strode into his house, caught up his Bible, and called to his wife, "Deborah, the Lord hath answered me in my trouble. Call Nathaniel and bring him after me to the house of Gideon Hall."

Mistress Everett fell back, her hand at her heart, "To *that* house?"

"Aye, even there. He lieth at the point of death. So are the wicked brought into desolation. Yesterday, as he rode in the wood, his horse cast him down so that it is

thought he may not live till dark. I am sent for by his pious sisters to wrestle with him in prayer. Oh, Deborah, now is the time to strike the last blow for the salvation of our son. Let him see how the devil carries off the transgressor into the fires of hell, or let him see how, at the last, the proudest must make confession of his wicked unbelief——”

He hurled himself through the door like a javelin, while his wife turned to explain to Nathaniel the reason for the minister’s putting on his Sabbath voice of a week-day morning. He cried out miserably, “Oh, mother, *don’t* make me go there!”

Page 94

“Nay, Nathaniel, there is naught new. You have been with us before to many a sickbed and seen many a righteous death. This is an ill man, whose terrors at the reward of his unbelief will be like goodly medicine to your sick soul, and teach you to lay hold on righteousness while there is yet time.”

“But, mother, my Uncle Elzaphan said—I asked him this morning about Colonel Hall—that he had done naught but good to all men, that he had fought bravely with French and Indians, that the poor had half of his goods, that—”

She took him by the hand and dragged him relentlessly out upon the street. “Your Uncle Elzaphan is a man of no understanding, and does not know that the devil has no more subtle lure than a man who does good works but who is not of the true faith. Aye, he maketh a worse confusion to the simple than he who worketh iniquity by noonday.”

She led him through the village street, through a long curving lane where he had never been before, and down an avenue of maple-trees to a house at which he had always been forbidden even to look. Various of the neighbor women were hurrying along in the same direction. As they filed up the stairs he trembled to hear his father’s voice already raised in the terrible tones of one of his inspired hours. At the entrance to the sick chamber he clung for a moment to the door, gazing at the wild-eyed women who knelt about the room, their frightened eyes fixed on his father. His knees shook under him. He had a qualm of nausea at the slimy images of corruption and decay which the minister was trumpeting forth as the end to all earthly pride.

His mother pushed him inexorably forward into the room, and then, across the nightmare of frenzy, he met the calm gaze of the dying man. It was the turning-point of his life.

He ran to the bed, falling on his knees, clasping the great knotty hand and searching the eyes which were turned upon him, gently smiling. The minister, well pleased with this evidence of his son’s emotion, caught his breath for another flight of eloquence which should sear and blast the pretensions of good works as opposed to the true faith. “See how low the Lord layeth the man who thinks to bargain with the Almighty, and to ransom his soul from hell by deeds which are like dust and ashes to Jehovah.”

Nathaniel crept closer and whispered under cover of his father’s thunderings, “Oh, you are truly not afraid?”

The dying man looked at him, his eyes as steady as when they were in the woods. “Nay, little comrade, it is all a part of life.”

After that he seemed to sink into partial unconsciousness. Nathaniel felt his hand grow colder, but he still held it, grasping it more tightly when he felt the fumes of his father’s reeking eloquence mount to his brain. The women were all sobbing aloud. A young girl

was writhing on the floor, her groans stifled by her mother's hand. The air of the room was stifling with hysteria. The old sister of the dying man called out, "Oh, quick, Master Everett. He is going. Exhort him now to give us some token that at the last he repents of his unbelief."

Page 95

The minister whirled about, shaking with his own violence. The sweat was running down his face. "Gideon Hall, I charge you to say if you repent of your sins."

There was a pause. The silence was suffocating.

The old man gradually aroused himself from his torpor, although he did not open his eyes. "Aye, truly I repent me of my sins," he whispered mildly, "for any unkindness done to any man, or——"

The minister broke in, his voice mounting shrilly, "Nay, not so, thou subtle mocker. Dost thou repent thee of thy unbelief in the true faith?"

Colonel Gideon Hall opened his eyes. He turned his head slowly on the pillow until he faced the preacher, and at the sight of his terrible eyes and ecstatic pallor he began to laugh whimsically, as he had laughed in the wood with Nathaniel. "Why, man, I thought you did but frighten women with it—not yourself too. Nay, do not trouble about me. I don't believe in your damned little hell."

The smile on his face gradually died away into a still serenity, which was there later, when the minister lifted his son away from the dead man's bed.

V

The four old men walked sturdily forward with their burden, although at intervals they slipped their tall staves under the corners and rested, wiping their foreheads and breathing hard. As they stood thus silent, where the road passed through a thicket of sumac, a boy came rapidly around the curve and was upon them before he saw that he was not alone. He stopped short and made a guilty motion to hide a bundle that he carried. The old men stared at him, and reassured by this absence of recognition he advanced slowly, looking curiously at the great scarlet flag which hung in heavy folds from their burden.

"Is this the road to Woodburn?" he asked them.

"Aye," they answered briefly.

He had almost passed them when he stopped again, drawing in his breath.

"Oh, are you—is this Colonel——"

"Aye, lad," said the oldest of the bearers, "this is the funeral procession of the best commander and truest man who ever lived."

"But why——" began the boy, looking at the flag.



“He’s wrapped in the flag of the king that he was a loyal servant to, because the damned psalm-singing hypocrites in the town where he lived of late would not make a coffin for him—no, nor allow ground to bury him—no, nor men to bear him out to his grave! We be men who have served under him in three wars, and we come from over the mountain to do the last service for him. He saved our lives for us more than once—brave Colonel Gid!”

They all uncovered at the name, and the boy shyly and awkwardly took his cap off.

“May I—may I see him once again?” he asked, dropping his bundle. “He saved my life too.”

Two men put their gnarled old hands to the flag and drew it down from the head of the bier. The boy did not speak, but he went nearer and nearer with an expression on his face which one of the old men answered aloud. “Aye, is he not at peace! God grant we may all look so when the time comes.”

Page 96

They let the flag fall over the dead face again, set their shoulders to the bier, and moved forward, bringing down their great staves rhythmically as they walked. The boy stood still looking after them. When they passed out into the sunshine of the open hillside he ran to the edge of the thicket so that he could still follow them with his eyes. They plodded on, growing smaller and smaller in the distance, until as they paused on the crest of the hill only a spot of red could be seen, brilliant against the brilliant sky.

The boy went back and picked up his bundle. When he returned to the edge of the thicket the spot of red was disappearing over the hill. He took off his cap and stood there until there was nothing before him but the sun shining on the hillside.

Then he turned about, and walking steadily, Nathaniel Everett entered into his own world.

NOCTES AMBROSIANAE

From Hemlock Mountain's barren crest
The roaring gale flies down the west
And drifts the snow on Redmount's breast
In hollows dark with pine.

Full in its path from hill to hill
There stands, beside a ruined mill,
A lonely house, above whose sill
A brace of candles shine.

And there an ancient bachelor
And maiden sister, full three-score,
Sit all forgetful of the roar
Of wind and mountain stream;

Forgot the wind, forgot the snow,
What magic airs about them blow?
They read, in wondering voices low,
The Midsummer Night's Dream!

And, reading, past their frozen hill
In charmed woods they range at will
And hear the horns of Oberon shrill
Above the plunging Tam;—

Yea, long beyond the cock's first crow
In dreams they walk where windflowers blow;



Late do they dream, and liker grow
To Charles and Mary Lamb.

HILLSBORO'S GOOD LUCK

When the news of Hillsboro's good fortune swept along the highroad there was not a person in the other three villages of the valley who did not admit that Hillsboro deserved it. Everyone said that in this case Providence had rewarded true merit, Providence being represented by Mr. Josiah Camden, king of the Chicago wheat pit, whose carelessly bestowed bounty meant the happy termination of Hillsboro's long and arduous struggles.

The memory of man could not go back to the time when that town had not had a public library. It was the pride of the remote village, lost among the Green Mountains, that long before Carnegie ever left Scotland there had been a collection of books free to all in the wing of Deacon Bradlaugh's house. Then as now the feat was achieved by the united efforts of all inhabitants. They boasted that the town had never been taxed a cent to keep up the library, that not a person had contributed a single penny except

Page 97

of his own free will; and it was true that the public spirit of the village concentrated itself most harmoniously upon this favorite feature of their common life. Political strife might rage in the grocery-stores, religious differences flame high in the vestibule of the church, and social distinctions embitter the Ladies' Club, but the library was a neutral ground where all parties met, united by a common and disinterested effort.

Like all disinterested and generous actions it brought its own reward. The great social event of the year, not only for Hillsboro, but for all the outlying towns of Woodville, Greenford, and Windfield, was the annual "Entertainment for buying new books," as it was named on the handbills which were welcomed so eagerly by the snow-bound, monotony-ridden inhabitants of the Necronsett Valley. It usually "ran" three nights so that every one could get there, the people from over Hemlock Mountain driving twenty miles. There was no theater for forty miles, and many a dweller on the Hemlock slopes had never seen a nearer approach to one than the town hall of Hillsboro on the great nights of the "Library Show."

As for Hillsboro itself, the excitement of one effort was scarcely over before plans for the next year's were begun. Although the date was fixed by tradition on the three days after Candlemas (known as "Woodchuck Day" in the valley), they had often decided what the affair should be and had begun rehearsals before the leaves had turned in the autumn. There was no corner of the great world of dramatic art they had not explored, borne up to the loftiest regions of endeavor by their touchingly unworldly ignorance of their limitations. As often happens in such cases they believed so ingenuously in their own capacities that their faith wrought miracles.

Sometimes they gave a cantata, sometimes a nigger-minstrel show. The year the interior of the town hall was changed, they took advantage of the time before either the first or second floor was laid, and attempted and achieved an indoor circus. And the year that an orchestra conductor from Albany had to spend the winter in the mountains for his lungs, they presented *Il Trovatore*. Everybody sang, as a matter of course, and those whose best efforts in this direction brought them no glory had their innings the year it was decided to give a play.

They had done *East Lynne* and *Hamlet*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Macbeth*, and every once in a while the local literary man, who was also the undertaker, wrote a play based on local traditions. Of course they gave *The Village School* and *Memory's Garland*, and if you don't remember those delectable home-made entertainments, so much the worse for you. It is true that in the allegorical tableau at the end of *Memory's Garland* the wreath, which was of large artificial roses, had been made of such generous proportions that when the Muses placed it on the head of slender Elnathan Pritchett, representing "The Poet," it slipped over his ears, down over his narrow shoulders, and sliding rapidly toward the floor was only caught by him in time to hold it in place upon his stomach.

That happened only on the first night, of course. The other performances it was perfect, lodging on his ears with the greatest precision.

Page 98

It must not be supposed, however, that the responsibilities of Hillsboro for the library ended with the triumphant counting out of the money after the entertainment. This sum, the only actual cash ever handled by the committee, was exclusively devoted to the purchase of new books. It was the pride of the village that everything else was cared for without price, by their own enterprise, public spirit, and ingenuity. When the books, had overflowed the wing of Deacon Bradlaugh's house, back in 1869, they were given free lodging in the rooms of the then newly established and flourishing Post of the G.A.R. In 1896 they burst from this chrysalis into the whole lower floor of the town hall, newly done over for the purpose. From their shelves here the books looked down benignly on church suppers and sociables, and even an occasional dance. It was the center of village life, the big, low-ceilinged room, its windows curtained with white muslin, its walls bright with fresh paper and colored pictures, like any sitting-room in a village home. The firewood was contributed, a load apiece, by the farmers of the country about, and the oil for the lamps was the common gift of the three grocery-stores. There was no carpet, but bright-colored rag rugs lay about on the bare floor, and it was a point of honor with the Ladies' Aid Society of the church to keep these renewed.

The expense of a librarian's salary was obviated by the expedient of having no librarian. The ladies of Hillsboro took turns in presiding over the librarian's table, each one's day coming about once in three weeks. "Library Day" was as fixed an institution in Hillsboro as "wash day," and there was not a busy housewife who did not look forward to the long quiet morning spent in dusting and caring for the worn old books, which were like the faces of friends to her, familiar from childhood. The afternoon and evening were more animated, since the library had become a sort of common meeting-ground. The big, cheerful, sunlighted room full of grown-ups and children, talking together, even laughing out loud at times, did not look like any sophisticated idea of a library, for Hillsboro was as benighted on the subject of the need for silence in a reading-room as on all other up-to-date library theories. If you were so weak-nerved and sickly that the noise kept you from reading, you could take your book, go into Elzaphan Hall's room and shut the door, or you could take your book and go home, but you could not object to people being sociable.

Elzaphan Hall was the janitor, and the town's only pauper. He was an old G.A.R. man who had come back from the war minus an arm and a foot, and otherwise so shattered that steady work was impossible. In order not to wound him by making him feel that he was dependent on public charity, it had been at once settled that he should keep the fire going in the library, scrub the floor, and keep the room clean in return for his food and lodging. He "boarded

Page 99

round” like the school-teacher, and slept in a little room off the library. In the course of years he had grown pathetically and exasperatingly convinced of his own importance, but he had been there so long that his dictatorial airs and humors were regarded with the unsurprised tolerance granted to things of long standing, and were forgiven in view of his devotion to the best interests of the library, which took the place of a family to him.

As for the expenses of cataloguing, no one ever thought of such a thing. Catalogue the books? Why, as soon hang up a list of the family so that you wouldn’t forget how many children you had; as soon draw a plan of the village so that people should not lose their way about. Everybody knew what and where the books were, as well as they knew what and where the fields on their farms were, or where the dishes were on the pantry shelves. The money from the entertainment was in hand by the middle of February; by April the new books, usually about a hundred in number, had arrived; and by June any wide-awake, intelligent resident of Hillsboro would have been ashamed to confess that he did not know the location of every one.

The system of placing on the shelves was simplicity itself. Each year’s new acquisitions were kept together, regardless of subject, and located by the name of the entertainment which had bought them. Thus, if you wished to consult a certain book on geology, in which subject the library was rich, owing to the scientific tastes of Squire Pritchett, you were told by the librarian for the day, as she looked up from her darning with a friendly smile, that it was in the “Uncle Tom’s Cabin section.” The Shakespeare set, honorably worn and dog’s-eared, dated back to the unnamed mass coming from early days before things were so well systematized, and was said to be in the “Old Times section”; whereas Ibsen (for some of Hillsboro young people go away to college) was bright and fresh in the “East Lynne section.”

The books were a visible and sincere symbol of Hillsboro’s past and present. The honest, unpretending people had bought the books they wished to read, and everyone’s taste was represented, even a few French legends and pious tales being present as a concession to the Roman Catholic element among the French Canadians. There was a great deal of E.P. Roe, there was all of Mrs. Southworth—is it possible that anywhere else in the world there is a complete collection of that lady’s voluminous productions?—but beside them stood the Elizabethan dramatists and a translation of Dante. The men of the town, who after they were grown up did not care much for fiction, cast their votes for scientific treatises on agriculture, forestry, and the like; and there was an informal history club, consisting of the postmaster, the doctor, and the druggist, who bore down heavily on history books. The school-teacher, the minister, and the priest had each, ex officio, the choice of ten books with nobody to object, and the children in school were allowed another ten with no advice from elders.

Page 100

It would have made a scientific librarian faint, the Hillsboro system, but the result was that not a book was bought which did not find readers eager to welcome it. A stranger would have turned dizzy trying to find his way about, but there are no strangers in Hillsboro. The arrival even of a new French-Canadian lumberman is a subject of endless discussion.

It can be imagined, therefore, how electrified was the village by the apparition, on a bright June day, of an automobile creaking and wheezing its slow way to the old tavern. The irritated elderly gentleman who stepped out and began blaming the chauffeur for the delay announced himself to Zadok Foster, the tavern-keeper, as Josiah Camden, of Chicago, and was electrified in his turn by the calmness with which that mighty name was received.

During the two days he waited in Hillsboro for the repair of his machine he amused himself first by making sure of the incredible fact that nobody in the village had ever heard of him, and second by learning with an astounded and insatiable curiosity all the details of life in this forgotten corner of the mountains. It was newer and stranger to him than anything he had seen during his celebrated motor-car trip through the Soudan. He was stricken speechless by hearing that you could rent a whole house (of only five rooms, to be sure) and a garden for thirty-six dollars a year, and that the wealthiest man in the place was supposed to have inherited and accumulated the vast sum of ten thousand dollars. When he heard of the public library he inquired quickly how much it cost to run *that*? Mr. Camden knew from experience something about the cost of public libraries.

"Not a cent," said Zadok Foster proudly.

Mr. Camden came from Chicago and not from Missouri, but the involuntary exclamation of amazed incredulity which burst from his lips was, "Show *me*!"

So they showed him. The denizen of the great world entered the poor, low-ceilinged room, looked around at the dreadful chromos on the walls, at the cheap, darned muslin curtains, at the gaudy rag rugs, at the shabby, worn books in inextricable confusion on the shelves, and listened with gleaming eyes to the account given by the librarian for the day of the years of patient and uncomplaining struggles by which these poverty-stricken mountaineers had secured this meager result. He struck one hand into the other with a clap. "It's a chance in a million!" he cried aloud.

When his momentous letter came back from Chicago, this was still the recurrent note, that nowadays it is so hard for a poor millionaire to find a deserving object for his gifts, that it is the rarest opportunity possible when he really with his own eyes can make sure of placing his money where it will carry on a work already begun in the right spirit. He spoke in such glowing terms of Hillsboro's pathetic endeavors to keep their poor little enterprise going,

Page 101

that Hillsboro, very unconscious indeed of being pathetic, was bewildered. He said that owing to the unusual conditions he would break the usual rules governing his benefactions and ask no guarantee from the town. He begged, therefore, to have the honor to announce that he had already dispatched an architect and a contractor to Hillsboro, who would look the ground over, and put up a thoroughly modern library building with no expense spared to make it complete in equipment; that he had already placed to the credit of the "Hillsboro Camden Public Library" a sufficient sum to maintain in perpetuity a well-paid librarian, and to cover all expenses of fuel, lights, purchase of books, cataloguing, *etc.*; and that the Library School in Albany had already an order to select a perfectly well-balanced library of thirty thousand books to begin with.

Reason recoils from any attempt to portray the excitement of Hillsboro after this letter arrived. To say that it was as if a gold mine had been discovered under the village green is the feeblest of metaphors. For an entire week the town went to bed at night tired out with exclaiming, woke in the morning sure it had dreamed it all, rushed with a common impulse to the post-office where the letter was posted on the wall, and fell to exclaiming again.

Then the architect and contractor arrived, and Hillsboro drew back into its shell of somber taciturnity, and acted, the contractor told the architect, as though they were in the habit of having libraries given them three times a week regularly.

The architect replied that these mountaineers were like Indians. You *couldn't* throw a shock into them that would make them loosen up any.

Indeed, this characterization seemed just enough, in view of the passive way in which Hillsboro received what was done for it during the months which followed.

It was the passivity of stupefaction, however, as one marvel after another was revealed to them. The first evening the architect sketched the plans of a picturesque building in the old Norse style, to match the romantic scenery of the lovely valley. The next morning he located it upon a knoll cooled by a steady breeze. The contractor made hasty inquiries about lumber, labor, and houses for his men, found that none of these essentials were at hand, decided to import everything from Albany; and by noon of the day after they arrived these two brisk young gentlemen had departed, leaving Hillsboro still incredulous of its good fortune.

When they returned, ten days later, however, they brought solid and visible proof in the shape of a trainload of building materials and a crowd of Italian laborers, who established themselves in a boarding-car on a sidetrack near the station.

"We are going," remarked the contractor to the architect, "to make the dirt fly."

“We will make things hum,” answered the architect, “as they’ve never hummed before in this benighted spot.”

Page 102

And indeed, as up to this time they had never hummed at all, it is not surprising that Hillsboro caught its breath as the work went forward like Aladdin's palace. The cornerstone was laid on the third of July and on the first of October the building stood complete. By the first of November the books had come already catalogued by the Library School and arranged in boxes so that they could be put at once upon the shelves; and the last details of the interior decoration were complete. The architect was in the most naive ecstasy of admiration for his own taste. The outside was deliciously unhackneyed in design, the only reproduction of a Norwegian *Stave-Kirke* in America, he reported to Mr. Camden; and while that made the interior a little dark, the quaint wooden building was exquisitely in harmony with the landscape. As for the interior it was a dream! The reading-room was like the most beautiful drawing-room, an education in itself, done in dark oak, with oriental rugs, mission furniture, and reproductions of old masters on the walls. Lace sash-curtains hung at the windows, covered by rich draperies in oriental design, which subdued the light to a delightful soberness. The lamps came from Tiffany's.

When the young-lady librarian arrived from Albany and approved enthusiastically of the stack-room and cataloguing, the architect's cup of satisfaction fairly ran over; and when he went away, leaving her installed in her handsome oak-finished office, he could hardly refrain from embracing her, so exactly the right touch did she add to the whole thing with her fresh white shirt-waist and pretty, business-like airs. There had been no ceremony of opening, because Mr. Camden was so absorbed in an exciting wheat deal that he could not think of coming East, and indeed the whole transaction had been almost blotted from his mind by a month's flurried, unsteady market. So one day in November the pretty librarian walked into her office, and the Hillsboro Camden Public Library was open.

She was a very pretty librarian indeed, and she wore her tailor suits with an air which made the village girls look uneasily into their mirrors and made the village boys look after her as she passed. She was moreover as permeated with the missionary fervor instilled into her at the Library School as she was pretty, and she began at once to practice all the latest devices for automatically turning a benighted community into the latest thing in culture. When Mrs. Bradlaugh, wife of the deacon, and president of the Ladies' Aid Society, was confined to the house with a cold, she sent over to the library, as was her wont in such cases, for some entertaining story to while away her tedious convalescence. Miss Martin sent back one of Henry James's novels, and was surprised that Mrs. Bradlaugh made no second attempt to use the library. When the little girls in school asked for the Elsie books, she answered with a glow of pride that the library did not possess one of those silly stories, and offered as substitute, "Greek Myths for Children."

Page 103

Squire Pritchett came, in a great hurry, one morning, and asked for his favorite condensed handbook of geology, in order to identify a stone. He was told that it was entirely out of date and very incomplete, and the library did not own it, and he was referred to the drawer in the card catalogue relating to geology. For a time his stubbed old fingers rambled among the cards, with an ever-rising flood of baffled exasperation. How could he tell by looking at a strange name on a little piece of paper whether the book it represented would tell him about a stone out of his gravel-pit! Finally he appealed to the librarian, who proclaimed on all occasions her eagerness to help inquirers, and she referred him to a handsome great Encyclopedia of Geology in forty-seven volumes. He wandered around hopelessly in this for about an hour, and in the end retreated unenlightened. Miss Martin tried to help him in his search, but, half amused by his rustic ignorance, she asked him finally, with an air of gentle patience, "how, if he didn't know *any* of the scientific names, he expected to be able to look up a subject in an alphabetically arranged book?" Squire Pritchett never entered the library again. His son Elnathan might be caught by her airs and graces, he said rudely enough in the post-office, but he was "too old to be talked down to by a chit who didn't know granite from marble."

When the schoolboys asked for "Nick Carter" she gave them those classics, "The Rollo Books"; and to the French-Canadians she gave, reasonably enough, the acknowledged masters of their language, Voltaire, Balzac, and Flaubert, till the horrified priest forbade from the pulpit any of his simple-minded flock to enter "that temple of sin, the public library." She had little classes in art-criticism for the young ladies in town, explaining to them with sweet lucidity why the Botticellis and Rembrandts and Duerers were better than the chromos which still hung on the walls of the old library, now cold and deserted except for church suppers and sociables. These were never held in the new reading-room, the oriental rugs being much too fine to have doughnut crumbs and coffee spilled on them. After a time, however, the young ladies told her that they found themselves too busy getting the missionary barrels ready to continue absorbing information about Botticelli's rhythm and Duerer's line.

Miss Martin was not only pretty and competent, but she was firm of purpose, as was shown by her encounter with Elzaphan Hall, who had domineered over two generations of amateur librarians. The old man had received strict orders to preserve silence in the reading-room when the librarian could not be there, and yet one day she returned from the stack-room to find the place in a most shocking state of confusion. Everybody was laughing, Elzaphan himself most of all, and they did not stop when she brought her severe young face among them. Elzaphan explained, waving his hand

Page 104

at a dark Rembrandt looking gloomily down upon them, that Elnathan Pritchett had said that if *he* had such a dirty face as that he'd *wash* it, if he had to go as far as from here to the Eagle Rock Spring to get the water! This seemed the dullest of bucolic wit to Miss Martin, and she chilled Elnathan to the marrow by her sad gaze of disappointment in him. Jennie Foster was very jealous of Miss Martin (as were all the girls in town), and she rejoiced openly in Elnathan's witticism, continuing to laugh at intervals after the rest of the room had cowered into silence under the librarian's eye.

Miss Martin took the old janitor aside and told him sternly that if such a thing happened again she would dismiss him; and when the old man, crazily trying to show his spirit, allowed a spelling-match to go on, full blast, right in library hours, she did dismiss him, drawing on the endless funds at her disposal to import a young Irishman from Albany, who was soon playing havoc with the pretty French-Canadian girls. Elzaphan Hall, stunned by the blow, fell into bad company and began to drink heavily, paying for his liquor by exceedingly comic and disrespectful imitations of Miss Martin's talks on art.

It was now about the middle of the winter, and the knoll which in June had been the center of gratefully cool breezes was raked by piercing north winds which penetrated the picturesquely unplastered, wood-finished walls as though they had been paper. The steam-heating plant did not work very well, and the new janitor, seeing fewer and fewer people come to the reading-room, spent less and less time in struggling with the boilers, or in keeping the long path up the hill shoveled clear of snow. Miss Martin, positively frightened by the ferocity with which winter flings itself upon the high narrow valley, was helpless before the problem of the new conditions, and could think of nothing to do except to buy more fuel and yet more, and to beseech the elusive Celt, city-trained in plausible excuses for not doing his duty, to burn more wood. Once she remarked plaintively to Elnathan Pritchett, as she sat beside him at a church supper (for she made a great point of "mingling with the people"), that it seemed to her there must be something the *matter* with the wood in Hillsboro.

Everybody within earshot laughed, and the saying was repeated the next day with shameless mirth as the best joke of the season. For the wood for the library had had a history distinctly discreditable and as distinctly ludicrous, at which Hillsboro people laughed with a conscious lowering of their standards of honesty. The beginning had been an accident, but the long sequence was not. For the first time in the history of the library, the farmer who brought the first load of wood presented a bill for this service. He charged two dollars a cord on the scrawled memorandum, but Miss Martin mistook this figure for a seven, corrected his total with the kindest tolerance for his faulty arithmetic, and gave the countryman a check which reduced him for a time to a paralyzed silence. It was only on telling the first person he met outside the library that the richness of a grown person knowing no more than that about the price of wood came over him, and

the two screamed with laughter over the lady's beautifully formed figures on the dirty sheet of paper.

Page 105

Miss Martin took the hesitating awkwardness of the next man presenting himself before her, not daring to ask the higher price and not willing to take the lower, for rustic bashfulness, and put him at his ease by saying airily, "Five cords? That makes thirty-five dollars. I always pay seven dollars a cord." After that, the procession of grinning men driving lumber-sleds toward the library became incessant. The minister attempted to remonstrate with the respectable men of his church for cheating a poor young lady, but they answered roughly that it wasn't her money but Camden's, who had tossed them the library as a man would toss a penny to a beggar, who had now quite forgotten about them, and, finally, who had made his money none too honestly.

Since he had become of so much importance to them they had looked up his successful career in the Chicago wheat pit, and, undazzled by the millions involved, had penetrated shrewdly to the significance of his operations. The record of his colossal and unpunished frauds had put to sleep, so far as he was concerned, their old minute honesty. It was considered the best of satires that the man who had fooled all the West should be fooled in his turn by a handful of forgotten mountaineers, that they should be fleecing him in little things as he had fleeced Chicago in great. There was, however, an element which frowned on this shifting of standards, and, before long, neighbors and old friends were divided into cliques, calling each other, respectively, cheats and hypocrites. Hillsboro was intolerably dull that winter because of the absence of the usual excitement over the entertainment, and in that stagnation all attention was directed to the new joke on the wheat king. It was turned over and over, forward and back, and refurbished and made to do duty again and again, after the fashion of rustic jokes. This one had the additional advantage of lining the pockets of the perpetrators. They egged one another on to fresh inventions and variations, until even the children, not to be left out, began to have exploits of their own to tell. The grocers raised the price of kerosene, groaning all the time at the extortions of the oil trust, till the guileless guardian of Mr. Camden's funds was paying fifty cents a gallon for it. The boys charged a quarter for every bouquet of pine-boughs they brought to decorate the cold, empty reading-room. The washer-woman charged five dollars for "doing-up" the lace sash-curtains. As spring came on, and the damages wrought by the winter winds must be repaired, the carpenters asked wages which made the sellers of firewood tear their hair at wasted opportunities. They might have raised the price per cord! The new janitor, hearing the talk about town, demanded a raise in salary and threatened to leave without warning if it were not granted.

Page 106

It was on the fifth of June, a year to a day after the arrival of Mr. Camden in his automobile, that Miss Martin yielded to this last extortion, and her action made the day as memorable as that of the year before. The janitor, carried away by his victory, celebrated his good fortune in so many glasses of hard cider that he was finally carried home and deposited limply on the veranda of his boarding-house. Here he slept till the cold of dawn awoke him to a knowledge of his whereabouts, so inverted and tipsy that he rose, staggered to the library, cursing the intolerable length of these damn Vermont winters, and proceeded to build a roaring fire on the floor of the reading-room. As the varnished wood of the beautiful fittings took light like a well-constructed bonfire, realization of his act came to him, and he ran down the valley road, screaming and giving the alarm at the top of his lungs, and so passed out of Hillsboro forever.

The village looked out of its windows, saw the wooden building blazing like a great torch, hurried on its clothes and collected around the fire. No effort was made to save the library. People stood around in the chilly morning air, looking silently at the mountain of flame which burned as though it would never stop. They thought of a great many things in that silent hour as the sun rose over Hemlock Mountain, and there were no smiles on their faces. They are ignorant and narrow people in Hillsboro, but they have an inborn capacity unsparingly to look facts in the face.

When the last beam had fallen in with a crash to the blackened cellar-hole Miss Martin, very pale and shaken, stepped bravely forward. "I know how terribly you must be feeling about this," she began in her carefully modulated voice, "but I want to assure you that I *know* Mr. Camden will rebuild the library for you if—"

She was interrupted by the chief man of the town, Squire Pritchett, who began speaking with a sort of bellow only heard before in exciting moments in town-meeting. "May I never live to see the day!" he shouted; and from all the tongue-tied villagers there rose a murmur of relief at having found a voice. They pressed about him closely and drank in his dry, curt announcement: "As selectman I shall write Mr. Camden, tell him of the fire, thank him for his kindness, and inform him that we don't want any more of it" Everybody nodded. "I don't know whether his money is what they call tainted or not, but there's one thing sure, it ain't done us any good." He passed his hand over his unshaven jaw with a rasping wipe and smiled grimly as he concluded, "I'm no hand to stir up lawbreakin' and disorder, but I want to say right here that I'll never inform against any Hillsboro man who keeps the next automobile out of town, if he has to take a ax to it!"

People laughed, and neighbors who had not spoken to one another since the quarrel over the price of wood fell into murmured, approving talk.

Page 107

Elnathan Pritchett, blushing and hesitating, twitched at his father's sleeve. "But, father—Miss Martin—We're keeping her out of a position."

That young lady made one more effort to reach these impenetrable people. "I was about to resign," she said with dignity. "I am going to marry the assistant to the head of the Department of Bibliography at Albany."

The only answer to this imposing announcement was a giggle from Jennie Foster, to whose side Elnathan now fell back, silenced.

People began to move away in little knots, talking as they went. Elzaphan Hall stumped hastily down the street to the town hall and was standing in the open door as the first group passed him.

"Here, Mis' Foster, you're forgittin' somethin'," he said roughly, with his old surly, dictatorial air. "This is your day to the library."

Mrs. Foster hesitated, laughing at the old man's manner.

"It seems foolish, but I don't know why *not!*" she said. "Jennie, you run on over home and bring a broom for Elzaphan. The book must be in an *awful* state!"

When Jennie came back, a knot of women stood before the door, talking to her mother and looking back at the smoldering ruins. The girl followed the direction of their eyes and of their thoughts. "I don't believe but what we can plant woodbine and things around it so that in a month's time you won't know there's been anything there!" she said hopefully.

SALEM HILLS TO ELLIS ISLAND

A single sleighbell, tinkling down
The virgin road that skirts the wood,
Makes poignant to the lonely town
Its silence and its solitude.

A single taper's feeble flare
Makes darker by its lonely light
The cold and empty farmsteads square
That blackly loom to left and tight;

And she who sews, by that dim flame,
The patient quilt spread on her knees,
Hears from her heirloom quilting-frame
The frolic of forgotten bees.



Yea, all the dying village thrills
With echoes of its cheerful past,
The golden days of Salem Hills;
Its only golden days? Its last?

II

From Salem Hills a voiceless cry
Along the darkened valley rolls.
Hear it, great ship, and forward ply
With thy rich freight of venturous souls.

Hear it, O thronging lower deck,
Brave homestead-seekers come from far;
And crowd the rail, and crane the neck;
In Salem Hills your homesteads are!

Where flourish now the brier and thorn,
The barley and the wheat shall spring,
And valleys standing thick with corn
(Praise God, my heart!), shall laugh and sing.

AVUNCULUS

I

Page 108

The library of Middletown College had been founded, like the college itself, in 1818, and it was a firm article of undergraduate belief that the librarian, Mr. J.M. Atterworthy, had sat behind his battered desk from that date on to the present time. As a matter of fact, he was but just gliding down-hill from middle age, having behind him the same number of years as the active and high-spirited president of the college. And yet there was ground for the undergraduate conviction that "Old J.M." as he was always called, was an institution whose beginnings dated back into the mists of antiquity, for of his sixty years he had spent forty-four in Middletown, and forty as librarian of the college.

He had come down, a shy, lanky freshman of sixteen, from a little village in the Green Mountains, and had found the only consolation for his homesick soul in the reading-room of the library. During his sophomore and junior years, there had sprung up in the bookish lad, shrinking from the rough fun of his fellows, the first shoots of that passionate attachment to the library which was later to bind him so irrevocably to the old building. In those early days there was no regular librarian, the professors taking turn and turn about in keeping the reading-room open for a few hours, three or four days a week. In his senior year, "J.M." (even at that time his real name was sunk in the initials, the significance of which he jealously concealed) petitioned the faculty to be allowed to take charge of the reading-room. They gave a shrug of surprise at his eccentricity, investigated briefly his eminently sober-minded college career, and heaved a sigh of relief as they granted his extraordinary request.

On the evening of Commencement day, J.M. went to the president and made the following statement: He said that his father and his mother had both died during his senior year, leaving him entirely alone in the world, with a small inheritance yielding about fifty dollars a month. He had no leaning to any profession, he shrank with all his being from the savage struggles of the business world, and he could not bear to return to Woodville, to find himself lonely and bereaved in the spot where he had had such a cloudlessly happy childhood. In short, Middletown was the only place he knew and liked, except Woodville, which he loved too poignantly to live there with the soul gone out of things; and the library was the only home he now had. If the president could get the trustees, at their next meeting, to allow him the use of the three rooms in the library tower, and if they would vote him a small nominal salary, say thirty dollars a month, enough to make him a regular member of the college corps, he would like nothing better than to settle down and be the librarian of his *alma mater* for the rest of his life.

Page 109

The president of that date was, like all the other presidents of Middletown College, a florid, hearty old gentleman with more red blood than he knew what to do with, in spite of his seventy years. He was vastly amused at the inexperienced young fellow's simple-minded notion, and, clapping him on the shoulder, said with his cheerfully Johnsonian rotundity: "Why, my dear young sir, your recent sad bereavement must have temporarily deranged your mental faculties, that at your age you can contemplate adopting such a desiccated mode of existence. Your proposition is, however, a highly advantageous one to your college, and I shall see that it is accepted. However, I am willing to lay a wager with you that a year will not be out before you are asking to be freed from your contract."

J.M., trembling in suspense, took in nothing of the president's speech beyond the acceptance of his offer, and, pale with relief, he tried to stammer his thanks and his devotion to his chosen cause. He made no attempt to contradict the president's confident prophecies; he only made the greatest possible haste to the tower-rooms which were to be his home. His eyes filled with thankfulness at his lot as he paced about them, and, looking out of the windows upon the campus, he had a prophetic vision of his future, of the simple, harmless, innocent life which was to be his.

Of the two prophets he proved himself the truer. The head of his college and one generation after another of similar presidents laughed and joked him about the *Wanderlust* which would some day sweep him away from his old moorings, or the sensible girl who would some day get hold of him and make a man of him. He outlasted all these wiseacres, however, watching through mild, spectacled eyes the shifting changes of the college world, which always left him as immovable as the old elms before the library door. He never went away from Middletown, except on the most necessary trips to New York or Boston on business connected with book-buying for the library.

He explained this unheard-of stagnation by saying that the utter metamorphosis of the village after the college life stopped gave him change enough. Only once had he gone farther and, to one of the younger professors who had acquired an odd taste for old J.M.'s society, confessed hesitatingly that he did not go away because he had no place to which he could go, except to his childhood home. He said he couldn't bear to go there lest he find it so changed that the sight of it would rob him of his old memories, the dearest—in fact the only possessions of his heart. After a pause he had added to his young listener, who found the little old secular monk a tremendously pathetic figure: "Do you know, Layton, I sometimes feel that I have missed a great deal in life—and yet not at all what everybody thought I would miss, the stir of active life or the vulgar excitement of being in love. All that kind of thing seems as distasteful to me now as ever."

Page 110

There he stopped and poked the fire until the young professor, overcome with sympathetic curiosity, urged him to go on. He sighed at this, and said: "Why, fortune ought not to have made me an only child, although I can't say that I've ever longed for brothers or sisters.... But now I feel that I should like very much to have some nephews and nieces. I never could have stood having children of my own—I should have been crushed under the responsibility; but a nephew, now—a young creature with a brain and soul developing—to whom I could be a help ... I find as I get older that I have an empty feeling as the college year draws to a close. I have kept myself so remote from human life, for fear of being dragged into that feverish center of it which has always so repelled me, that now I do not touch it at all." He ended with a gentle resignation, taking off his glasses and rubbing them sadly: "I suppose I do not deserve anything more, because I was not willing to bear the burdens of common life ... and yet it almost seems that there should be some place for such as I—?"

The heart of his young friend had melted within him at this revelation of the submissive isolation of the sweet-tempered, cool-blooded old scholar. Carelessly confident, like all the young, that any amount or variety of human affection could be his for the asking, he promised himself to make the dear old recluse a sharer in his own wealth; but the next year he married a handsome, ambitious girl who made him accept an advantageous offer in the commercial world. With his disappearance, the solitary door in the prison walls which kept J.M. remote from his fellows swung shut.

He looked so hopelessly dull and becalmed after this that the president was moved to force on him a little outing. Stopping one day with his touring-car at the door of the library, he fairly swept the sedentary little man off his feet and out to the machine. J.M. did not catch his breath during the swift flight to the president's summer home in a trim, green, elm-shaded village in the Berkshires. When he recovered a little he was startled by the resemblance of the place to his old recollections of Woodville. There were the same white houses with green shutters, and big white pillars to the porches, the same green lawns and clumps of peonies and carefully tended rose-gardens, and the same old-New-England air of distance from the hurry and smoky energy of modern commercial life.

He spoke of this to the president's wife and she explained that it was no wonder. The village was virtually owned by a summer colony of oldish people who had lived there in their youth and who devoted themselves to keeping the old place just as it had been. "We haven't any children to bother about any more," she said, laughing, "so we take it out in putting knockers on the doors instead of bells and in keeping the grocery-stores out of sight so that the looks of the village green shan't be spoiled."

Page 111

After J.M. returned to deserted Middletown, he could not keep out of his mind the vision of the village he had just left, and the thought of the village like it which he had loved so well in his boyhood. It seemed to him that if Woodville kept its old aspect at all, he would find it a comfort to try to inspire the people now living there to preserve the old-timey look of it, as the president was doing for his old home. There was positively a thrill for J.M. in the thought of his possibly influencing other people, and before he knew it the plan had made itself the main interest of the interminably long, empty days of the summer vacation. His vague feeling of a lack in his life crystallized about a definite attempt at filling it. He was stirred from his inertia and, leaving word with the registrar of the college, a newcomer who was not at all surprised that the librarian should follow the example of all the rest of the faculty, J.M. made the three hours' journey which had separated him for so many years from the home of his youth.

As the train wound along the valley beside the river, and as the familiar outlines of the mountains rose up like the faces of dear, unforgotten friends, J.M. expanded and bloomed with delight in his new idea; but it was a very shriveled and dusty little old scholar who finally arrived at the farther end of the Main Street of Woodville and stood, in the hush of the noon hour, gazing back with a stricken face at the row of slovenly unlovely front yards separating the wretched old houses from the street.

He stood before the house that had been his home, and when he looked at it he turned very pale and sat down quickly as though his knees had failed him. Apparently the house had not been painted since his childhood, and certainly it had not been repaired. Broken, dangling shutters gave it a bleary-eyed look which it made him sick to see, and swarms of untidily pin-feathered chickens wandered about over the hard-beaten earth of the yard, which was without a spear of grass, littered with old boxes and crates and unsightly rags, and hung with a flapping, many-legged wash. From the three rural mail-delivery boxes at the gate, he gathered that three families were crowded into the house which had seemed none too large for his father, his mother, and himself. He put on his glasses and read the names shudderingly—Jean-Baptiste Loyette, Patrick McCarty, and S. Petrofsky.

“Good heavens!” he observed feebly to the vacant, dusty road beside him, and in answer a whistle from the big, barrack-like building at the other end of the street screamed so stridently that the heavy August air seemed to vibrate about him in hot waves.

Page 112

At once, as if all the houses on the street were toy barometers, every door swung open and a stream of men and boys in dirty shirts and overalls flowed out through the squalid yards along the sidewalks toward the factory. From the house before which the librarian of Middletown College sat in a crushed heap of resentment came three men to correspond to the three mail-boxes: one short and red-haired; one dark, thick-set, and grizzle-bearded; and the third tall, clumsily built, with an impassive face and dark, smoldering eyes. They stared at the woebegone old stranger before their gate, but evidently had no time to lose, as their house was the last on the street, and hurried away toward the hideous, many-windowed factory.

J.M. gazed after them, shaking his head droopingly, until a second eruption from the house made him look back. The cause of the hard-beaten bare ground of the yard was apparent at once, even to his inexperienced eyes. The old house seemed to be exuding children from a thousand pores—children red-haired and black-haired, and tow-headed, boys and girls, little and big, and apparently yelling on a wager about who owned the loudest voice, all dirty-faced, barelegged, and scantily clothed. J.M. mechanically set himself to counting them, but when he got as high as seventeen, he thought he must have counted some of them twice, and left off.

A draggle-tailed woman stepped to a door and threw out a pan of dish-water. J.M. resolved to overcome his squeamish disgust and make a few inquiries before he fled back to the blessed cleanliness and quiet of Middletown Library. Picking his way gingerly through the chickens and puppies and cats and children, the last now smitten into astonished silence by his appearance, he knocked on the door. The woman who came to answer him was dressed in what had been a black and purple percale, wrapper, she had a baby on her arm, and was making vain attempts to fasten up a great coil of hair at the back of her head. No, she told him volubly, she couldn't remember the town when it was any different, though she and Pat had lived there ever since they were married and came over from Ireland, and that was the whole of sixteen years ago.

"Oh!" with a sudden gush of sympathy, "and so it was your old home! Isn't that interring now! You must come in and sit awhile. Pat, git a chair for the gentleman, and Molly, take the baby so I can talk better. Oh, *won't* you come in? You'd *better*, now, and have a bite to eat and a sup of tea. I've some ready made." Of course, she went on, she knew the house didn't look so nice as in his day.... "It's all along of the children! Irish people can't kape so tidy, now, *can* they, with siven or eight, as Yankees can with one —" But it certainly was a grand house, she didn't wonder he came back to look at it. Wasn't it fairly like a palace, now, compared with anything her kin back in Ireland had, and such a fine big place for the children to play an' all.

Page 113

J.M. broke in to ask a final question, which she answered, making vain attempts to button her buttonless collar about a fat white neck, and following him as he retreated toward the street, through a lively game of baseball among the older boys. No, so far as she knew there wasn't one of the Yankees left that had lived here in old times. They had gone away when the factory had come in, she'd heard said. J.M. had expected this answer, but when it came, he turned a little sick for an instant, and felt giddy with the heat of the sun and lack of food and a desolation in his heart sharper and more searching than any emotion he had known since his boyhood. Through a mist before his eyes, he saw his hostess make a wild warning gesture, and heard a yell of dismay from the crowd of boys, but before he could turn his head, something cruelly hard struck him in the side. In the instant before he fell, his clearest impression was utter amazement that anything in the world could cause him such incredible pain, but then his head struck heavily against a stone, and he lay quite still in a little crumpled heap under the old elm which had sheltered his boyhood.

II

For an instant after he opened his eyes again, all his life after leaving Woodville seemed to have melted away, for there at the foot of his bed was the little, many-paned window out of which he had watched the seasons change all through his boyhood, and close above him hung the familiar slanting roof of his own little, old room. However, when he stirred, it was not his mother but a rosy-faced Irish woman who stopped her sewing and asked him in a thick, sweet brogue if he needed anything. As he stared at her, recollecting but dimly having seen her glossy brown hair and fair, matronly face before, she exclaimed: "Ah, I'm Bridget McCartey, you know, an' you were hurted by the lads throwin' a baseball into your ribs. It's lyin' here a week sick you've been, and, savin' your pardon, the sooner you tell me where your folks live the better. They'll be fair wild about you."

The sick man closed his eyes again. "I have no family at all," he said. It was the first time in years that the thoroughgoing extent of that fact had been brought home to him.

His nurse was moved to sympathy over so awful a fate. "Sure an' don't I know how 'tis. Pat an' I left every one of our kith behind us, mostly, when we come away, and it's that hungry for thim that I get. I dare say it ill becomes me to say it, but the first thing I says to myself when I see you was how like you are to one of my father's brothers in County Kerry. It's been a real comfort to have you here sick, as though I had some of my own kin near. *His* name was Jerry. It's not possible, is't, that the J. on your handkerchief stands for Jerry, too?"

For the first time since he had left Woodville J.M. disclosed the grotesque secret of his initials. In the flaccid indifference of convalescence it flowed from him painlessly. "My name is Jeroboam Mordecai."

Page 114

"Exactly to a hair like Uncle Jerry's!" cried Mrs. McCartney, overjoyed by the coincidence. "Except that his J. stood for Jeremiah and his M. for Michael. If you will tell me your last name, too, I'll try and lambaste the children into callin' you proper. Not havin' sorra name to speak of you by, and hearin' me say to Pat how you favored my father's brother, haven't they taken to callin' *you* Uncle Jerry—more shame to them!"

The mention of the children awoke to life J.M.'s old punctilious habits. He tried to sit up. "But you have so little space for all your family—you should not have taken me in; where can the children sleep?"

Mrs. McCartney pushed him back on the pillow with an affectionate firmness born of "the bringin' up of sivin." "Now lay still, Uncle Jerry, and kape yourself cool." The name slipped out unnoticed in her hospitable fervor "Wasn't it the least we could do when 'twas our own Mike's ball that came near killin' you? An' the children—the boys, that is, that this is their room—isn't it out in the barn they're sleepin' on the hay? An' that pleased with it. Pat and I were thinkin' that now was a good chance to teach them to give up things—when you've no old folks about you, the children are so apt to grow up selfish-like—but they think the barn's better nor the house, bless them, so don't *you* worry."

She pulled the bedclothes straight (J.M. noticed that they were quite clean), settled the pillow, and drew down the shade. "Now thin, you've talked enough," she said. "Take a sup of sleep for a while." And to J.M.'s feeble surprise he found himself doing exactly as he was told, dozing off with a curious weak-headed feeling of comfort.

He came to his strength slowly, the doctor forbidding him to think of taking a journey for a month at least. Indeed, J.M., thinking of his isolated tower-rooms in the deserted college town, was in no haste to leave Mrs. McCartney's kindly, dictatorial care. He had been very sick indeed, the doctor told him seriously, and he felt it in the trembling weakness of his first attempts at sitting up, and in the blank vacancy of his mind.

At first he could not seem to remember for more than an instant at a time how he came to be there, and later, as his capacity for thought came back, he found his surroundings grown insensibly familiar to him. He felt himself somehow to have slipped so completely into the inside of things that it was impossible to recover the remote, hostile point of view which had been his as he had looked over the gate a fortnight ago. For instance, knowing now, not only that the children's faces were scrubbed to a polished redness every morning, but being: cognizant through his window of most of the palpably unavoidable accidents of play which made them dirty half an hour later, he would have resented as unreasonable intolerance any undue emphasis on this phase of their appearance.

Page 115

The first day that he was well enough to sit out on the porch was a great event. The children, who before had made only shy, fleeting visits to his room with “little handfuls of bokays,” as their mother said, were as excited and elated over his appearance as though it reflected some credit on themselves. Indeed, J.M. found that he was the subject of unaccountable pride to all the family, and one of the first of those decisions of his between McCarty and Loyette occurred that very morning. The Loyette children insisted on being included in the rejoicing over the convalescent’s step forward, and soon Pierre, the oldest boy, was haled before J.M. himself to account for his having dared to use the McCarty name for the sick man.

“You’re *not* his Uncle Jerry, *are* you?” demanded Mike McCarty.

J.M. thought that now was the time to repress the too exuberant McCarty familiarity. “I’m his Uncle Jerry just as much as I am yours!” he said severely.

It took him a whole day to understand the jubilant triumph of the French-Canadians and to realize that he had apparently not only upheld the McCarteys in their preposterous nickname, but that he had added all the black-eyed Loyettes to his new family. Mrs. McCarty said to him that evening, with an innocent misconception of the situation, “Sure an’ mustn’t it sound fine to you, that name, when you’ve no kith of your own.” J.M. realized that that speech broke down the last bridge of retreat into his forsaken dignity. It is worthy of note that as he lay in bed that evening, meditating upon it, he suddenly broke into a little laugh of utter amusement, such as the assistants at Middletown Library had never heard from his lips.

The rapidity with which he was fitted into the routine of the place took his breath away. At first when he sat on the porch, which was the common ground of all the families, either Mrs. McCarty or Mrs. Loyette sewed near him to keep an eye on the children, but, as his strength came back, they made him, with a sigh of relief, their substitute, and disappeared into the house about neglected housework. “Oh, ain’t it lovely now!” cried Mrs. McCarty to Mrs. Loyette, “to have an old person of your own about the place that you can leave the children with a half-minute, while you snatch the wash-boiler off the fire or keep the baby from cuttin’ her throat with the butcher-knife.”

Mrs. Loyette agreed, shaking her sleek black head a great many times in emphasis. “Zose pippie,” she added, “zose lucky pippie who have all zere old pippie wiz zem, they can *not* know how hard is eet to be a mozzer, wizout a one grand’mere, or oncle.”

Page 116

So J.M. at the end of his first fortnight in Woodville found himself undisputed umpire in all the games, discussions, quarrels, and undertakings of seven young, Irish-Americans and more French-Canadian-Americans than he could count. He never did find out exactly how many Loyettes there were. The untidy front yard, littered with boxes and barrels, assumed a strangely different aspect to him as he learned its infinite possibilities, for games and buildings and imaginations generally. Sometimes it was a village with a box as house for each child, ranged in streets and lanes, and then Uncle Jerry was the mayor and had to make the laws. Sometimes the yard foamed and heaved in salt waves as, embarked in caravels, the expedition for the discovery of America (out of the older children's history-books) dashed over the Atlantic. It is needless to state that Uncle Jerry was Christopher Columbus.

Both the grateful mothers whom he was relieving cried out that never had there been such peace as since he came, not only because the children could appeal to him for decisions instead of running to their mothers, but because, the spectacular character in every game belonging to him as "company," there were no more quarrels between Mike and Pierre about the leadership. J.M. could not seem to find his old formal personality for weeks after Mike's baseball had knocked it out of him, and in the meantime he submitted, meekly at first and later with an absurd readiness, to being an Indian chieftain, and the head of the fire department, and the principal of a big public school, and the colonel of a regiment, and the owner of a cotton factory, and the leader of Arctic expeditions, and all the other characters which the fertile minds inhabiting the front yard forced upon him. He realized that he was a changed soul when he found himself rejoicing as the boys came tugging yet another big crate, obtained from the factory, to add to the collection before him. They needed it for the car for the elephant as the circus they were then performing moved from one end of the yard to the other.

He was often very, very tired when night came, but he surprised himself by never having a touch of his old enemy, insomnia. At first he went to bed when the children did, but as he progressed out of convalescence, he sat out on the porch with Pat and Bridget, as they insisted he should call them. It was very quiet then, when the cool summer dusk had hushed all the young life which made each day such an absorbing series of unexpected events. The puppies and kittens slept in their boxes, the hens had gathered the chickens under their wings, the children were sound asleep, and the great elms cast kindly shadows on the porch where the older people sat. The Loyettes often came out and joined them, and J.M. listened with an interest which surprised him as they told stories about hard times in their old homes, rejoiced in their present prosperity, and made humbly aspiring plans for their children.

Page 117

For the first time in his life J.M. felt himself to be a person of almost unlimited resources, both of knowledge and wealth, as the pitiful meagerness of his hosts supply of these commodities was revealed to him in these talks, more intimate than any he had known, more vitally human than any he had ever heard. The acquisition of rare first edition, perhaps the most stirring event in his life in Middletown, had never aroused him to anything like the eagerness with which he heard the Loyettes helplessly bemoaning their inability to do anything for their oldest child, Rosalie, a slim girl of seventeen. Her drawing-teacher at school had said that the child had an unusual gift for designing, and a manufacturer of wallpaper, who had seen some of her work on a visit to the Woodville factory, had confirmed this judgment and said that "something ought to be done for her."

"But *what?*" her parents wondered with an utter ignorance of the world outside of Woodville which astonished J.M.

"Why don't you send her to a school of design?" he asked.

"Vat is *zat?*" asked Papa Loyette blankly, and "We have no money," sighed Maman.

J.M. stirred himself, wrote to the director of a school of design in Albany, consulted the priest of the parish, sent some of Rosalie's work, and asked about scholarships. When a favorable answer came, he hurried to explain the matter to the Loyettes and offered to provide the four dollars a week necessary for her board at the Catholic Home for Working Girls, of which the priest had told him. He went to bed that night with his heart beating faster from the reflection of their agitated joy than it had done for years. He could not get to sleep for a long time, such a thrill of emotion did he get from each recollection of Maman Loyette's broad face bathed in tears of gratitude.

After this they fell into the way of asking him about all their problems, from the management of difficult children to what to do about an unjust foreman and whether to join the union. The childless, unpractical, academic old bachelor, forced to meditate on these new subjects, gave utterance to advice whose sagacity amazed himself. He had not known it was in him to have such sensible ideas about how to interest a growing boy in athletics to keep him from drinking; and as for the question of unions, he boiled at the memory of some of the half-baked, pedantic theories he had heard promulgated by the professor of political economy in Middletown.

On the other hand, he stood in wonder at the unconscious but profound wisdom which these ignorant people showed as to the fundamentals of life.

"No, we're not much for *clothes!*" said Mrs. McCartey, comfortably tucking up her worn and faded sleeves. "Haven't we all of us enough good clothes to go to Mass in, and that's a plenty! The rest of Pat's money goes to gettin' lots of good food for the children, bless their red faces and fat little bellies! and laying by a dollar or so a week against the

rainy day. Children can play better, anyhow, with only overalls and shirts. The best times for kids is the cheapest!"

Page 118

J.M. thought of the heavy-eyed, harassed professors of his acquaintance, working nights and Sundays at hack work to satisfy the nervous ambitions of their wives to keep up appearances, and gave a sudden swift embrace to the ragged child on his lap, little Molly, who had developed an especial cult for him, following him everywhere with great pansy eyes of adoring admiration.

On his first expedition out of the yard since his illness, he was touched by the enthusiastic interest which all Main Street took in his progress. Women with babies came down to nearly every gate to pass the time of day with Rosalie, on whose arm he leaned, and to say in their varying foreign accents that they were glad to see the sick gentleman able to be out. Since J.M. had had a chance at first-hand observation of the variety of occupation forced upon the mother of seven, he was not surprised that they wore more or less dilapidated wrappers and did not Marcel-wave their hair. Now he noticed the motherly look in their eyes, and the exuberant health of the children laughing and swarming about them. When he returned to the house he sat down on the porch to consider a number of new ideas which were springing up in his mind, beginning to return to its old vigor. Mrs. McCarty came out to see how he had stood the fatigue and said: "Sure you look smarter than before you went! It inter_est_ed you now, didn't it, to have a chance really to see the old place?"

"Yes," said J.M., "it did, very much."

Mrs. McCarty went on: "I've been thinkin' so many times since you come how much luckier you are than most Yankees that come back to their old homes. It must seem so good to you to see the houses just swarin' with young life and to know that the trees and yards and rocks and brooks that give you such a good time when you was a boy, are goin' on givin' good times to a string of other boys."

J.M. looked at her with attentive, surprised eyes. "Why, do you know," he cried, "it *does* seem good, to be sure!"

The other did not notice the oddness of his accent as she ended meditatively: "You can never get me to believe that it don't make old Yankees feel low in their minds to go back to their old homes and find just a few white-headed rheumatickers potterin' around, an' the grass growing over everything as though it was a molderin' graveyard that nobody iver walked in, and sorra sign of life anyway you look up and down the street."

J.M.'s mind flew back to the summer home of the president of Middletown. "Good gracious," he exclaimed, "you're right!"

Mrs. McCarty did not take in to the full this compliment, her mind being suddenly diverted by the appearance of a tall figure at the door of the farther wing of the house. "Say, Uncle Jerry," she said, lowering her voice, "Stefan Petrofsky asked me the other day if I thought you would let him talk to you about Ivan some evening?"

“Why, who are they, anyhow?” asked J.M. “I’ve often wondered why they kept themselves so separate from the rest of us.” As he spoke he noticed the turn of his phrase and almost laughed aloud.

Page 119

"Petrofsky's wife, poor thing, died since they come here, and now there's only Stefan, he's the father, and Ivan, he's the boy. He's awful smart they say, and Stefan, he's about kilt himself to get the boy through the high school. He graduated this spring and now Stefan he says he wants him to get some *more* education. He says their family, back in Russia, was real gentry and he wants Ivan to learn a lot so that he can help the poor Roosians who come here to do the right thing by the government—"

"_ What_?" asked J.M. "I don't seem to catch his idea."

"Well, no more do I, sorra bit," confessed Mrs. McCartney serenely. "Not a breath of what he meant got to me, but what he *said* was that Ivan's schoolin' had put queer ideas in his head to be an anarchist or somethin' and he thought that maybe more schoolin' would drive out *thim* ideas and put in other ones yet. Hasn't it a foolish sound, now?" She appealed to J .M. for a sympathy she did not get.

"It sounds like the most interesting case I ever heard of," he cried, with a generous looseness of superlative new to him. "Is Ivan that tall, shy, sad-looking boy who goes with his father to work?"

"That's *him*. An' plays the fiddle fit to tear the heart out of your body, and reads big books till God knows what hour in the mornin'. His father, he says *he* don't know what to do with him ... There's a big, bad devil of a Polack down to the works that wants him to join the anarchists in the fall and go to——"

J.M. rose to his feet and hurried down the porch toward the Petrofsky wing of the house, addressing himself to the tall, grave-faced figure in the doorway. "Oh, Mr. Petrofsky, may I have a few minutes' talk with you about your son?" he said.

III

The registrar of Middletown College, being a newcomer, saw nothing unusual in the fact that the librarian came to his office on matriculation day to enroll as a freshman a shy, dark-eyed lad with a foreign name; but the president and older professors were petrified into speechlessness by the news that old J.M. had returned from parts unknown with a queer-looking boy, who called the old man uncle. Their amazement rose to positive incredulity when they heard that the fastidious, finical old bachelor had actually installed a raw freshman in one of his precious tower-rooms, always before inexorably guarded from the mildest and most passing intrusion on their hallowed quiet.

The president made all haste to call on J.M. and see the phenomenon with his own eyes. As discreetly as his raging curiosity would allow him, he fell to questioning the former recluse. When he learned that J.M. had spent six weeks in Woodville, no more explanation seemed needed. "Oh, of course, your old home?"

“Yes,” said J.M., “my old home.”

“And you had a warm welcome there, I dare say?”

Page 120

"Yes, indeed," said J.M.

"Found the old town in good condition?"

"Excellent!" this with emphasis.

The president saw it all, explaining it competently to himself. "Yes, yes, I see it from here—vacation spent in renewing your youth playing with the children—promised to go back at Christmas, I suppose."

"Oh, yes, of course," said J.M.

"Children cried when you came away, and gave you dotty little things they'd made themselves?"

"Just like that," with a reminiscent smile.

"Well, well," the president got to his feet. "Of course, most natural thing in the world to take an interest in your brothers' and sisters' children."

J.M. did not contradict the president. He never contradicted the presidents. He outlasted them so consistently that it was not necessary. This time he took off his glasses and rubbed them on an awkwardly fashioned chamois spectacle-wiper made for him by little Molly McCartey. He noticed the pattern of the silk in his visitor's necktie and it made him think of one of Rosalie Loyette's designs. He smiled a little.

The president regarded this smiling silence with suspicion. He cocked his eye penetratingly upon his librarian. "But it is very queer, J.M., that as long as I have known you, I never heard that you *had* any family at all."

J.M. put his clean and polished spectacles back on his nose and looked through them into the next room, where Ivan Petrofsky sat devouring his first lesson in political economy. Then he turned, beaming like an amiable sphinx upon his interrogator. "Do you know—I never realized it myself until just lately," he said.

BY ABANA AND PHARPAR

Fields, green fields of Shining River,
Lightly left too soon
In the stormy equinoctial,
In the hunter's moon,—

Snow-blown fields of Shining River
I shall once more tread;

I shall walk their crested hollows,
Living or dead.

FINIS

To old Mrs. Prentiss, watching apprehensively each low mountain dawn, the long, golden days of the warm autumn formed a series of blessed reprieves from the loom which hung over her. With her inherited and trained sense of reality, she could not cheat herself into forgetting, even for a moment, that her fate was certain, but, nevertheless, she took a breathless enjoyment in each day, as it passed and did not bring the dreaded change in her life. She spoke to her husband about this feeling as they sat on the front step one October evening, when the air was as mild as in late May, breaking the calm silence, in which they usually sat, by saying, "Seems as though this weather was just made for us, don't it, father?"

Page 121

The old man stirred uneasily in his chair. "I dun'no'—seems sometimes to me as though I'd ruther have winter come and be done with it. If we've got to go as soon as cold weather sets in, we might as well go and have it over with. As 'tis, I keep on saying good-by in my mind to things and folks every minute, and then get up in the morning to begin it all again. This afternoon I was down the river where I saved Hiram's life when he was a little fellow—the old black whirl-hole. I got to thinking about that time, I never was real sure till then I wouldn't be a coward if it come right down *to* it. Seems as though I'd been more of a man ever since. It's been a real comfort to me to look at that whirl-hole, and that afternoon it come over me that after this there wouldn't be a single thing any more to remind us of anything *good* or bad, we've ever done. It'll be most as if we hadn't lived at all. I just felt as though I *couldn't* go away from everything and everybody I've ever known down to Hiram's stuffy little flat. And yet I suppose we are real lucky to have such a good son as Hiram now the others are all gone. I dun'no' what we'd do if 'tweren't for him."

"Do!" cried his wife bitterly. "We could go on living right in this valley where we belong, if 'twas only in the poor-house!"

The old man answered reasonably, as though trying to convince himself, "Well, I suppose it's really flying in the face of Providence to feel so. The doctor says your lungs ain't strong enough to stand another of our winters in the mountains, fussing over stove fires, and zero weather and all, and I'm so ailing I probably wouldn't last through, either. He says it's a special dispensation that we've got such a nice place to go where there's steam heat, and warm as summer, day and night."

"Nathaniel!" exclaimed his wife, attempting to turn her bulky body toward him in the energy of her protest, "how can you talk so! We've visited Hiram and we know what an awful place he lives in. I keep a-seeing that little narrow room that's to be all the place you and I'll have, with the one window that gets flapped by the wash of the Lord knows who, and that kitchen as big as the closet to my bedroom here, and that long narrow hall—why, it's as much as ever I can walk down that all without sticking fast—and Hiram's queer Dutch wife—"

She stopped, silenced by the scantiness of her vocabulary, but through her mind still whirled wordless outcries of rebellion. Her one brief visit to the city rose before her with all the horror of the inexplicable, strange, and repellent life which it had revealed to her. The very conveniences of the compact city apartment were included in her revulsion from all that it meant. The very kindnesses of the pretty, plump German woman who was her daughter-in-law startled and repelled her, as did the familiar, easy, loud-voiced affection of the blond young German-Americans who were her grandchildren. Even her own son, Hiram, become half Teutonic through the influence of his business and social relations among the Germans, seemed alien and remote to her. The stout, beer-drinking, good-natured and easygoing man seemed another person from the shy, stiff

lad who had gone away from them many years ago, looking so like his father at nineteen that his mother choked to see him.

Page 122

She passed in review all the small rooms of her son's home, "strung along the hall like buttons on a string," and thought of the three flights of stairs which were the only escape from them—three long, steep flights, which left her breathless, her knees trembling under her great weight, and which led out on the narrow side street, full of noisy, impertinent children and clattering traffic. Beyond that, nothing—a city full of strangers whose every thought and way of life were foreign to her, whose very breath came in hurried, feverish gasps, who exhaled, as they passed her, an almost palpable emanation of hostile indifference to her and her existence. It was no new vision to her. Ever since the doctor's verdict had made it impossible longer to resist her son's dutiful urging of his parents to make his home theirs she had spent scarcely an hour without a sudden sick wave of dread of what lay before her; but the picture was the none the less horrifying because of familiarity, and she struck her hands together with a sharp indrawn breath.

The gaunt old man turned toward her, a helpless sympathy twisting his seamed and weather-marked face. "It's too *bad*, mother," he said. "I know just how you feel about it. But Hiram's a good son, and"—he hesitated, casting about for a redeeming feature—"there's always the Natural History Museum and the birds."

"That's just it, Nathaniel," returned the old rebel against fate. "You have something there that's going on with *one* thing you've done here. You've always noticed birds and studied 'em in the woods, and you can go on doing it in a museum. But there ain't a thing for me! All I've ever done is to live right here in this house ever since I was born, and look out at the mountains and the big meadows and the river and the churchyard, and keep house and take care of you and the children.

"Now the children are all gone, and I haven't the strength to take care of you the way you need; my life is all done—there ain't no more to it!

"It's like a book—there's still a chapter *you* can write, or one you can finish up; but me—I've come right down to *Finis*, only the Lord won't write it for me. It's as if somebody wanted to scrawl on the back flyleaf something that hasn't a thing to do with the rest of the book, some scratching stuff in a furrin' language that I can't even understand."

Her husband did not contradict her. He sighed heavily and they both fell again into a cheerless silence. The moon rose with a strange, eerie swiftness over the wall of mountain before them, and its wavering reflection sprang at once to life in the swirling waters of the black hole in the Necronsett on the other side of the meadow. The old woman's heart gave a painful leap in her breast at the sight. It was probably one of the last times she would see it. Numberless occasions when she had noted it before hurried through her mind.

Page 123

She felt herself again the little girl who had sat in summer evenings, miles away from the talk of her elders in a happy child's reverie, and who had grown dizzy with watching the swimming reflection in the whirlpool. She had a strange fleeting hallucination that she was again sitting in the moonlight, her cheeks flushed and her strong young pulse beating high to hear Nathaniel's footfall draw nearer down the road. She felt again the warm, soft weight of her little son, the first-born, the one who had died young, as she remembered how proud she and Nathaniel had been when he first noticed the moon.

An odd passion of recollection possessed her. As the moon rose higher she seemed to be living over at one time a thousand hours of her busy, ardent life. She looked at the high, drooping line of the mountains with her childhood's delight in its clear outline against the sky; she saw the white stones of the old graveyard, next door, glimmer through the shadow cast by the church tower, with the half uneasy, fearful pleasure of her romantic girlhood; she felt about her the solidity and permanency of the old house, her father's and her grandfather's home, with the joy in protected security of her young married life; and through it all there ran a heavy sick realization that she was, in fact, a helpless old woman, grown too feeble to conduct her own life, and who was to be forced to die two deaths, one of the spirit and one of the body.

"Come, mother," said Nathaniel, rising, "we'd better go to bed. We both of us get notion sitting here in the moonlight."

He helped her raise her weighty body with the deftness of long practice and they both went dully into the house.

The knowledge of the sky and of the signs of weather which was almost an instinct with the descendant of generations of farmers, was put to an anxious use during the days which followed.

Not since the days when, as a young girl, she had roamed the mountains, as much a part of the forest and fields as any wild inhabitant, had she so scanned the face of the valley which was her world.

She had stopped hoping for any release from her sentence. She only prayed now for one more day of grace, and into each day she crowded a fullness of life which was like a renewal of her vigorous youth.

Of late years, existence had flowed so uniform a passage through the channels of habit that it had become but half sentient. The two old people had lived in almost as harmoniously vacant and vital a silence as the old trees in the forest back of the house. In the surroundings which generations of human use had worn to an exquisite fitness for their needs, and to which a long lifetime had adjusted their every action, they convicted their life with the unthinking sureness of a process of Nature. But now the old woman,

feeling exile close upon her, drew from every moment of the familiar life an essential savor.

Page 124

She knew there was no hope for her; the repeated visits of the doctor and his decided judgments left her no illusions as to the possibility of escape. "The very first cold snap you must certainly go," he said, with the inflexibility of the young. "Mr. Prentiss is likely to have one of his bad turns and you simply cannot give him the care he must have. Besides, when he is sick, you will have to look after the fires, and the slightest exposure would mean pneumonia. I've just written your son so." He drew on his overcoat. He was so recently from the hospital that it was still of a fashionable cut and texture. "I can't see anyway why you object to going. Your son can't afford to keep you both here, and hire somebody to look after you into the bargain. Think of the advantages you have there, theaters and museums and the like."

Mrs. Prentiss spoke sharply. "I've never been in a theater in my life and I hope I'll go to my grave without being; and as for museums and things, look at me! I'm so big I can hardly get into the cars, and my city grandchildren are ashamed to go out with me and have all the folks looking at the fat old woman from the country."

The doctor laughed involuntarily at this picture as he turned away.

"Do you think you are so big it takes the whole Necronsett valley to hold you?" he called lightly over his shoulder.

Mrs. Prentiss looked after him with burning eyes. What did *he* know about the continuity of human life? He had told her himself that he had never lived more than four years in one place. What did he know of ordering your life, not only for yourself, but for your parents and grandparents? She felt often as she looked upon the unchanging line of the mountains guarding the valley, as in her great-grandfather's time, that she saw with the eyes of her ancestors as well as her own. The room in which she stood had been her grandmother's bedroom, and her father had been born there, as she had been herself, and as her children had been. In her childhood she had looked up to the top of the tall chest of drawers as to a mountain peak, and her children had, after her. Every inequality in the floor was as familiar to her feet as to those of her great-grandmother. The big chest, where she had always kept her children's clothes, had guarded hers and her mother's, and as often as she had knelt by it, she had so vivid a recollection of seeing her mother and her grandmother in the same attitude, that she seemed to lose for a moment the small and confining sense of individual personality, and to become merged in a noble procession of mothers of the race.

Page 125

She had been an undisciplined girl, called a tomboy in those days, whose farmer forbears had given to her a pagan passion for the soil and the open sky. Although brought up with a rigid training in theology, religion had never meant more to her than a certainty of hell as a punishment for misdeeds which neither she nor any of the valley people were likely to commit—murder, suicide, false swearing, and the like. Of definite religious feeling, she had none, although the discipline of a hard if happy life had brought her spiritual life in an unconsciously profound form. She had shrunk from that discipline with all the force of her nature, and in her girl's heart had vowed that she would never marry and lead the slave's life of a New England farmer's wife. But then had arrived Nathaniel, the big, handsome lad who had taken her wild, shy heart and lost his own when they first met.

So, half rebellious, she had begun the life of a wife in the old house from which her mother had just gone to the churchyard next door, and which was yet filled with her brave and gentle spirit. The old woman, looking miserably about her, remembered how at every crisis of her life the old house had spoken to her of the line of submissive wives and mothers which lay back of her, and had tamed her to a happy resignation in the common fate of women. On her mother's bed she had borne the agony of childbirth without a murmur, she whose strong young body had never known pain of any kind. She had been a joyful prisoner to her little children, she who had always roamed so foot-free in her girlhood, and with a patience inspired by the thought of her place in the pilgrimage of her race, she had turned the great strength of her love for her husband toward a contented acceptance of the narrow life which was all he could give her.

Each smallest detail in the room had a significance running back over years. The ragged cuts in the window-sill moved her to a sudden recollection of how naughty little Hiram had cut them with his first knife. With what a repressed intensity she had loved the child while she had reproved him! How could she go away and leave every reminder of her children! With a quick and characteristic turn she caught herself in the flagrant contradiction involved in her reluctance to leave behind her mere senseless reminders of her son when she was going to his actual self. And then, with the despairing clear sight of one in a crisis of life, she knew that, in very fact, Hiram was no longer the boy who had left them years ago. Away from all that made up her life, under influences utterly foreign and alien, he had spent almost twice as many years as he had with her. Not only had the reaction from his severe training carried him to another extreme of laxness, but as result of his continued absence he had lost all contact with her world. He no longer consciously repudiated it, he had crossed the deeper gulf of forgetting it. He was a stranger to her.

Page 126

Always before the memories which clung about every corner of the dark old house had helped her, but now she was forced to face a crisis which none of her people had known. It was not one of the hardships of life which were to be accepted, and the hot rebellion of her girlhood burned in her aching old heart. She thought resentfully of the doctor's blind and stony lack of understanding. His last ironic sentence came to her mind and she flamed at the recollection. Yes, it did take the whole valley to hold her, the valley which was as much a part of her as her eyes which beheld it. There were moments when she stood under the hazy autumn sky, so acutely conscious of every line and color of the great wall of mountains surrounding her that she grew in very fact to be an indivisible portion of the whole—felt herself as actually rooted to that soil and as permanent under that sky as the great elm before the door.

She made no more outcries against fate to her husband, partly because of the anguish which came upon his gentle old face at the sight of her suffering, and partly because she felt herself to have no tangible reason for rebellion. During the last years they had gone drearily around and around the circle which they felt closing so inexorably upon them, and there was no longer any use to wear themselves out in futile discussions of impossible plans. They had both been trained to regard reasonableness as one of the cardinal virtues, and to the mild nature of the old man it was a natural one, so they tried conscientiously to force themselves not only to act, but to feel, "like sensible folks," as they put it bravely to themselves.

"Other folks have gone to live with their children, and not near such good sons as Hiram either, and they didn't make such a fuss about it," said Mr. Prentiss one evening, out of a long silence, as they sat in front of the hearth. He looked at his wife, hoping for a cheerful response, but her lips were set in a quivering line of pain, and the flickering light showed her fair broad face glistening with tears. "Oh, *mother!*" he cried, in a helpless misery of sympathy. "Oh, mother, don't! I can't stand it! If I could only do it for you! But we *can't* stay, you know."

The other nodded dumbly, although after a moment she said, "Every day I live all my life over again, and my mother's, and all my folks. It has never seemed as though they really died as long as we lived here same as they did. It's like killing them all again to go away and sell the house to strangers."

There was a silence and then, "Oh, Nathaniel, what was that?" she cried, her voice rising in a quaver of apprehension.

"The wind," said her husband, stirring the fire.

"I know. But *what* wind? It sounds like the first beginning of the wind over Eagle Rock, and that means snow!"

She hastened heavily to the window, and raised the shade. "There's a ring around the moon as plain as my wedding ring!" And then as she looked there clung to the window-pane a single flake of snow, showing ghastly white in the instant before it melted.

Page 127

"Nathaniel, the end has come," she said solemnly. "Help me get to bed."

The next morning there was a foot of snow and the thermometer was going steadily down. When the doctor arrived, red-nosed and gasping from the knife-like thrusts of the wind over Eagle Rock, he announced that it was only eight above zero, and he brought a kindly telegram from Hiram, saying that he had started for the mountains to accompany his parents back to the city. "I envy you!" said the doctor, blowing on his stiff fingers. "Think of the bliss of being where you have only to turn a screw in your steam-radiator to escape from this beastly cold. Your son will be here on the evening train, and I'll bring him right over. You'll be ready to start tomorrow, won't you? You've had all the autumn to get packed up in."

Mrs. Prentiss did not answer. She was so irrationally angry with him that she could not trust herself to speak. She stood looking out of the low window at the Necronsett, running swift and black between the white banks. She felt a wave of her old obsession that in her still lived the bygone dwellers in the old house, that through her eyes they still saw the infinitely dear and familiar scenes, something in her own attitude reminded her of how her father had looked as he stood every morning at that same window and speculated on the weather. For a moment she had an almost dizzy conviction that he did in all reality stand there again.

Then she heard the doctor saying, "I'm coming over there myself when you start for the station, to see that you're well wrapped up. The least exposure——" He looked at Mrs. Prentiss's broad and obstinate back, turned, to her husband, and tapped his chest significantly.

After he had gone the room was intensely quiet. Mr. Prentiss sat by the fire, looking vacantly at his withered old hands on his knees, and his wife did not stir from the window. Her heavy, wide figure was immovable, but a veritable whirlwind of despair raged within her. She had supposed she knew all along how bad it was going to be, but it had been a foolish child's play, like shutting your eyes to pretend you were blind. Now that utter darkness was upon her, it was as great a shock as though it came with the most extreme and cruel surprise. A thousand furious fancies went through her mind, although she continued to gaze out of the window with the same blank look of stunned incredulity. The whirlpool in the river caught her eye and she had a wild impulse to throw herself into it. Even in her frenzy, however, there came the thought, instantly dissuading, of the scandal in the village and family which such an action would cause.

No, there was no escape at all, since that simple and obvious one was closed.

The valley lay about her, the mountain walls iridescent with snow in sunshine, the river gleaming with its curious, rapid, serpentine life, in all the peaceful death of winter; everything was as it always had been. Her mind refused to accept the possibility of her

living under other conditions with as irresistible and final a certainty as if she had been called upon to believe she could live with her head separated from her body.

Page 128

And yet, battering at that instinctive feeling, came the knowledge that she was to start for New York the next day. She felt suddenly that she could not. "I can't! I can't!" she cried dumbly. "I can't, even if I *have* to!"

An instant later, like an echo, a fiercer gust than usual swept down off the ledge of rock above the little house, rattled the loose old window, and sent a sharp blade of icy air full in the old woman's eyes. She gasped and started back. And then, all in a breath, her face grew calm and smooth, and her eyes bright with a sudden resolve. Without a moment's hesitation, she turned to her husband and said in a tone more like her old self than he had heard for some time, "Father, I wish you'd go over to Mrs. Warner's and take back that pattern. If we're going to leave to-morrow, you know——"

The old man rose obediently, and began putting on his wraps. His wife helped him, and hurried him eagerly off. When she was alone, she tore at the fastening of her gown in a fury of haste, baring her wrinkled old throat widely. Then without a glance about her, she opened the door to the woodshed, stepped out, and closed it behind her. The cold clutched at her throat like a palpable hand of ice, and her first involuntary gasp set her into a fit of coughing.

She sat down on the stump where kindlings were always split and opened her gown wider. She noticed how fair and smooth the skin on her shoulders still was and remembered that her husband had always been proud of her pretty neck. She had worn a low-necked dress when he had told her he loved her. That had been in the garden, into which she could now look as she sat on the stump. She had been picking currants for tea, and he had gone out to see her. The scene came up before her so vividly that she heard his voice, and felt herself turn to him with the light grace of her girlhood and cry again, in an ecstasy of surprised joy, "Oh, *Nathaniel!*"

A gust of wind whirled a handful of snow against her and some of it settled on her bare shoulders. She watched it melt and felt the icy little trickle with a curious aloofness. Suddenly she began to shiver, gripped by a dreadful chill, which shook her like a strong hand. After that she was very still again, the death-like cold penetrating deeper and deeper until her breath came in constricted gasps. She did not stir until she heard the front door bang to her husband's return. Then she rose with infinite effort and struggled back into the kitchen. When he came in, she was standing by the sink, fumbling idly with the dishes. Already her head was whirling, and she scarcely knew what she was doing.

Page 129

In the nightmare of horror which his wife's sudden sickness brought upon him, old Mr. Prentiss felt that he could bear everything except the sight and sound of his wife's struggles for breath. He hardly saw the neighbor women who filled the house, taking advantage of this opportunity to inspect the furniture with an eye to the auction which would follow the removal of the old people to the city. He hardly heeded the doctor's desperate attempts with all varieties of new-fangled scientific contrivances to stay the hand of death. He hardly knew that his son had come, and in his competent, prosperous way was managing everything for him. He sat in one corner of the sick-room, and agonized over the unconscious sick woman, fighting for every breath.

On the third day he was left alone with her, by some chance, and suddenly the dreadful, heaving gasp was still. He sprang to the bedside, sick with apprehension, but his wife looked up at him with recognition in her eyes. "This is the end, Nathaniel," she said in so low a whisper that he laid his ear to her lips to hear. "Don't let anybody in till I'm gone. I don't want 'em to see how happy I look." Her face wore, indeed, an unearthly look of beatitude.

"Nathaniel," she went on, "I hope there's no life after this—for *me* anyway. I don't think I ever had very much soul. It was always enough for me to live in the valley with you. When I go back into the ground I'll be where I belong. I ain't fit for heaven, and, anyway, I'm tired. We've lived hard, you and I, Nathaniel; we loved hard when we were young, and we've lived all our lives right out to the end. Now I want to rest."

The old man sat down heavily in a chair by the bed. His lips quivered, but he said nothing. His wife's brief respite from pain had passed as suddenly as it came, and her huge frame began again to shake in the agony of straining breath. She managed to speak between gasps.

"Don't let a soul in here, Nathaniel. I'll be gone in a few minutes. I don't want 'em to see——"

The old man stepped to the door and locked it. As he came back, the sick woman motioned him to come closer.

"Natty, I thought I could keep it, but I never did have a secret from you, and I can't die without telling you, if there *is* a heaven and hell——Oh, Natty, I've done a wicked thing and I'm dying without repenting. I'd do it again. That time you went to Mrs. Warner's with the pattern—this cold I got that day I went out——"

Her husband interrupted her. For the first time in years he did not call her "mother," but used the pet name of their courtship. The long years of their parenthood had vanished. They had gone back to the days when each had made up all the world to the other. "I know, Matey," he said. "I met young Warner out in the road and give the pattern to him, and I come right back, and see you sitting out there. I knew what 'twas for."

Page 130

His wife stared at him, amazement silencing her.

"I thought it was the only thing left I could do for you, Matey, to let you stay there. You know I never wished for anything but that you should have what you wanted." He had spoken in a steady, even tone, which now broke into an irrepressible wail of selfish, human anguish. "But you leave me all *alone*, Matey! How can I get on without you! I thought I'd die myself as I sat inside the house watching you. You're all I ever had, Matey! All there has ever been in the world for me!"

The old woman stopped her gasping by a superhuman effort. "Why, Natty, I never supposed you thought so much of me still. I thought that had gone when we got old. But, oh, my dear! I'm afraid I've dragged you down with me to destruction. It wa'n't any matter about me, but I'm afraid you've lost your soul. That was a wicked thing for us to do!"

Her husband lifted his tear-stained, old face and laid it on the pillow beside her. He did not put his arms about her, as a younger lover or one of another country might have done, but because he was a man who had loved deeply all his life, his answer came with the solemn significance and sincerity of a speech before the Judgment Seat. "I ain't afraid of hell if you're there, Matey," he said.

His wife turned her head and looked at him, her whole face transfigured. She was no longer a fat old woman on her deathbed. Before his very eyes she grew again to be the girl among the currant bushes, and with the same amazed intonation of incredulous joy she cried his name aloud. "Oh, Nathaniel!" she said, and with the word the longed for *Finis* was written to her life.

A VILLAGE MUNCHAUSEN

I

When I was a little girl, and lived in Hillsboro with my grandparents, there were two Decoration Days in every year. One was when all we school-children took flowers put to the cemetery and decorated the graves of the soldiers; and the other was when the peonies and syringas bloomed, and grandfather and I went alone to put a bouquet on the grave of old Jedediah Chillingworth.

Grandfather did this as a sort of penance for a great mistake he had made, and I think it was with the idea of making an atonement by confession that he used always to tell me the story of his relations with the old man. At any rate, he started his narrative when we left the house and began to walk out to the cemetery, and ended it as he laid the flowers on the neglected grave. I trotted along beside him, faster and faster as he grew more

and more interested, and then stood breathless on the other side of the grave as he finished, in his cracked old voice, harsh with emotion.

The first part of his story happened a very long time ago, even before grandfather was born, when Jedediah Chillingworth first began to win for himself the combination title of town-fool and town-liar. By the time grandfather was a half-grown boy, big enough to join in the rough crowd of village lads who tormented Jed, the old dizzard had been for years the local butt. Of course I never saw him, but I have heard so much about him from all the gossips in the village, and grandfather used to describe him so vividly, that I feel as if I know all about him.

Page 131

For about ten years of his youth Jedediah had been way from our little Vermont town, wandering in the great world. From his stories, he had been everywhere on the map. In the evening, around the stove in the village post-office, when somebody read aloud from the newspaper a remarkable event, all the loafers turned to Jed with wide, malicious grins, to hear him cap it with a yet more marvelous tale of what had happened to him. They gathered around the simple-minded little old man, their tongues in their cheeks, and drew from him one silly, impossible, boastful story after another. They made him amplify circumstantially by clumsily artful questions, and poked one another in the ribs with delight over his deluded joy in their sympathetic interest.

As he grew older, his yarns solidified like folk-lore, into a consecrated and legendary form, which he repeated endlessly without variation. There were many of them—"How I drove a team of four horses over a falling bridge," "How I interviewed the King of Portugal," "How I saved big Sam Harden's life in the forest fire." But the favorite one was, "How I rode the moose into Kennettown, Massachusetts." This was the particular flaunting, sumptuous yarn which everybody made old Jed bring out for company. If a stranger remarked, "Old man Chillingworth can tell a tale or two, can't he?" everybody started up eagerly with the cry: "Oh, but have you heard him tell the story of how he rode the moose into Kennettown, Massachusetts?"

If the answer was negative; all business was laid aside until the withered little old man was found, pottering about some of the odd jobs by which he earned his living. He was always as pleased as Punch to be asked to perform, and laid aside his tools with a foolish, bragging grin on his face, of which grandfather has told me so many times that it seems as if I had really seen it.

This is how he told the story, always word for word the same way:

"Wa'al, sir, I've had queer things happen to me in my time, hain't I, boys?"—at which the surrounding crowd always wagged mocking heads—"but nothin' to beat that. When I was ashore wunst, from one of my long v'y'ges on the sea, I was to Kennettown, Massachusetts."

"How'd ye come to go there, Jed?" This was a question never to be omitted.

"Oh, I had a great sight of money to take to some folks that lived there. The captain of our ship had died at sea, and he give me nine thousand five hundred and seventy-two English gold guineas, to take to his brother and sister."

Here he always stared around at the company, and accepted credulously the counterfeit coin of grotesquely exaggerated amazement which was given him.

“Wa’al, sir, I done it. I give the gold to them as it belonged to, and I was to leave town on the noon stagecoach. I was stayin’ in the captain’s brother’s house. It was spang up against the woods, on the edge of town; and, I tell ye, woods was woods in them days.

Page 132

"The mornin' I was to leave I was up early, lookin' out of my window, when what should I see with these mortal eyes but a gre't bull moose, as big as two yoke o' oxen, comin' along toward the house. He sort o' staggered along, and then give a gre't sigh I could hear from my room—I was on the ground floor—fell down on his knees, and laid his head on the ground 's if he was too beat out to go another step. Wa'al, sir, I never waited not long enough even to fetch a holler to wake the folks I just dove out o' the window, and made for him as fast as I could lick in. As I went by the wood-pile, I grabbed up a big stick of wood——"

"What kind of wood?" everybody asked in chorus.

"'Twas a big stick of birch-wood, with the white bark on it as clean as writin'-paper. I grabbed that up for a club—'twas the only thing in sight—and when I got to the moose I hit him a clip on the side of the head as hard as I could lay on. He didn't so much as open an eye, but I saw he was still breathing and I climbed up on his back so's to get a good whack at the top of his head. And then, sir, by Jupiter! he riz right up like a earthquake under me, and started off at forty miles an hour. He threwed his head back as he run, and ketched me right between his horns, like a nut in a nutcracker. I couldn't have got out of them horns—no, sir, a charge of powder couldn't scarcely have loosened me."

There was another pause at this place for the outcries of astonishment and marvel which were never lacking. Then Jed went on, mumbling his toothless gums in delight over his importance.

"Wa'al, sir, I dassent tell ye how long we careered around them woods and pastures, for, after a while, he got so plumb crazy that he run right out into the open country. I'd hit him a whack over the head with my stick of wood every chanst I got and he was awful weak anyhow, so he'd kind o' stagger whenever he made a sharp turn. By an' by we got to goin' toward town. Somehow he'd landed himself in the road; an', sir, we rid up to the hotel like a coach and four, and he drapped dead in front of the steps, me stickin' as fast between his horns as if I'd 'a' growed to him. Yes, sir, they ackchally had to saw one of them horns off'n his head before they got me out."

He came to a full stop here, but this was not the end.

"What became of the horns, Jed? Why didn't ye bring 'em along?"

"I did take the one they sawed off, to give to my partner, big Sam Harden. He was the biggest man I ever see, Sam Harden was. I left th' other horn in Kennettown for the captain's sister. She was as smart an' handsome a widow-woman as ever I see, an' I wanted for her to have a keepsake from me."

This was really the end. The circle of inquisitors left their unconscious victim nodding and grinning to himself, and went on down the road. Grandfather said he still felt mean all over to remember how they laughed among themselves, and how they pointed out to the stranger the high lights in the story.

Page 133

“Not only ain’t there never been seen a moose in the State of Massachusetts, and not only are a moose’s horns set too wide to catch a little squinch of a man like Jed, but what do you think?—there ain’t no Kennettown in Massachusetts! No, nor in any other State. No, nor never was. Old Jed just made the town up out of his head, like the moose, an’ the money, and the birch-bark and the handsome widow. Don’t he beat *all*?”

II

My grandfather was one of these boys; in fact, he always used to say he was the ringleader, but that may have been another form of his penance. As he grew up he began to work into his father’s business of tanning leather, and by and by, when a man grown, he traveled down to a big tannery at Newtonville, in Massachusetts, to learn some new processes in leather-curing.

When grandfather got along to this part of the story he began stretching his long legs faster and faster, until I was obliged to trot along, panting. He always lived the hurried last part over again, and so did I, although it happened so long before I was born.

One evening he was asked to tea by the mother of the prettiest girl in the village—she afterward became my grandmother—and was taken into the “best room” to see all the family curiosities. There were wax flowers and silhouettes and relics of every description. Mrs. Hamilton spared him not one of these wonders.

“This,” she said, “is the chain that was made of my grandfather’s hair. It was finished and brought home on a Wednesday, and Thursday, the next day, grandfather was burned up in the great tannery fire, and this was all my grandmother had to remember him by. These are the front teeth of a savage that my uncle Josiah Abijah killed in the South Sea Islands. Uncle Josiah Abijah always said it was either him or the black man, but I have always felt that it was murder, just the same, and this is the stick of birch-wood that a sailor-man, who came here once to see my mother, killed a bull moose with.”

My grandmother has told me that never before or since did she see a human face change as did grandfather’s.

“What?” he shouted, and his voice cracked.

“Yes, it sounds queer, but it’s so. It’s the only time a moose was ever seen here, and folks thought the wolves must have chased it till it was crazy or tired out. This sailor-man, who happened to be here, saw it, ran out, snatched up a stick from the wood-pile, and went at that great animal all alone. Folks say he was the bravest man this town ever saw. He got right up on its back—”

Grandmother said grandfather had turned so pale by this time that she thought he was going to faint and he sat down as if somebody had knocked him down. On the dusty road to the cemetery, however, he only strode along the faster, half forgetting the little girl who dragged at his hand, and turned a sympathetically agitated face up to his narrative.

Page 134

Mrs. Hamilton went on through the whole incident, telling every single thing just the way old Jed did. She showed the dark places on the birch-bark where the blood had stained it, and she said the skull of the animal, with its one horn sawed off, was over among the relics in her aunt's home.

"My Aunt Maria was accounted a very good-looking woman in her day, and there were those that thought she might have taken a second husband, if the sailor had been so disposed. He was so brave and so honest, bringing all that money from my uncle, the sea-captain, when goodness knows, he might have run off with every cent of it, and nobody been any the wiser!"

At this grandfather gave a loud exclamation and stood up, shaking his head as if he had the ague. He just couldn't believe his ears, he said.

"No! No! No! It can't be the same!" he said over and over. "Why, he said it happened in Kennettown."

"Well, *now!*" said Mrs. Hamilton, surprised. "Where did you ever get hold of *that* old name? I didn't suppose a soul but some of our old folks remembered that. Why, Newtonville wasn't named that but six months. Folks got mad at the Kennetts for being so highfalutin' over having the town named after them, and so 'twas changed back."

Grandfather said he'd no notion of another word she said after that. When he went back to his room, he found a letter from home, telling him all the news, and mentioning, among other things, that old Jedediah Chillingworth wasn't expected to live much longer. Age had withered the little old man until there wasn't enough of him left to go on living. Grandfather usually reached this part of the story just as we arrived under the big maples that stand on each side of the cemetery gate, and always stopped short to say solemnly:

"Thank the *Lord!* I've two things to my credit. I never waited one minute to start back to Hillsboro, and from that time on I wanted to do what was right by the old man, even if it did turn out so different."

Then we went on into the cemetery, and paced slowly along the winding paths as he continued:

"I got to Hillsboro late one night, and I'd 'most killed my horse to do it. They said Jedediah was still alive, but wasn't expected to last till morning. I went right up to his little old shack, without waiting to see my folks or to get a mouthful to eat. A whole lot of the neighbors had come in to watch with him, and even then, with the old dizzard actually dying, they were making a fool of him.



“He was half propped up in bed—he wasn’t bigger than my fist by that time—with red spots in his cheeks, and his eyes like glass, and he was just ending up that moose story. The folks were laughing and winking and nudging one another in the ribs, just the way I used to. I was done up with my long, hard ride, and some nervous, I guess, for it fair turned my stomach to see them.

Page 135

"I waited till they were all through laughing, and then I broke loose. I just gave them a piece of my mind! 'Look-a-here, you fellows!' I said. 'You think you're awful smart, don't you, making fun of poor old Jed as he lies a-dying? Now, listen to me. I've ridden forty miles over the mountains to get here before he goes, and make every man jack of you beg the old man's pardon. *That story's true*. I've just found out that every word of it is absolutely, literally the way it happened. Newtonville, where I'm staying in Massachusetts, used to be called Kennettown, and Jedediah *did* take the money there—yes, that exact sum we've laughed at all these years. They call him the honestest man in the world over there. They've got the stick of birch-wood, with the bloodstains on it, and the moose's skull, with the horn sawed off, and there are lots of old people who remember all about it. And I'm here to say I believe old Jed's been telling the truth, not only about that, but about all his adventures. I don't believe he's ever lied to us!"

"I felt so grand and magnanimous," grandfather went on, "to think how I was making it up to the poor old man, and so set up over bringing a piece of news that just paralyzed everybody with astonishment. They all jumped up, yelling and carrying on. 'What? That story *true*! Well, did you ever! Wouldn't that beat all? To think old Jed's been telling—"

"And then we all thought of him, and started toward the bed to say how bad we felt.

"I'll never forget how he looked. His eyes were fairly coming out of his head, and his face was as white as paper. But that wasn't the dreadful thing. What always comes back to me whenever I think of him is the expression on his face. You could just see his heart breaking. He was so hurt, so surprised, so ashamed, that it wasn't decent to look at him. But we couldn't look away. We stood there, hanging our heads—I never felt so mean in my life—while he tried to get breath enough to say something. And then he screamed out—'twas dreadful to hear:

"'Why, didn't you fellers *believe* me? Did you think I was *lyin*?'"

Here grandfather stopped and blew his nose, and I choked.

"Those were his last words. He had some kind of a spasm, and never came to enough to know anything before he died. Those were the last words he said; and though they told us that in the coffin he looked just as he always had, only more quiet, with the foolish look gone, we were all of us ashamed to look the dead man in the face."

Here grandfather laid the flowers on the unkempt grave, as if to serve as an "Amen" to his confession.

After this I always went around and held his hand tightly, and we stood very still. It was the solemnest time of the year.

III

All this used to happen, as I said, when I was a little girl; but I, too, grew up, as grandfather grew bent and feeble. When he was an old, old man of eighty-five, and when I had been away from Hillsboro several years teaching school, the last of my grandmother's relatives in Newtonville died. I was sent for to decide what should be done with the few family relics, and one Saturday and Sunday I went all through the little old house, looking over the things.

Page 136

In the garret I came across the moose-skull with one horn. It made me feel queer to think what a part it had played in the development of my grandfather's honorable and tender old soul. There were a few sticks of furniture, some daguerrotypes and silhouettes, and a drawerful of yellow papers. The first I sent home to Hillsboro to grandmother. I took the papers back to the town where I was teaching, to look over them.

Among other things was a quaint old diary of my grandmother's great-aunt, she that was the buxom widow of Jed's story. It was full of homely items of her rustic occupations; what day she had "sett the broune hen," and how much butter was made the first month she had the "party-colored cove from over the mount'n." I glanced idly at these faded bits of insignificant news, when I was electrified by seeing the following entry:

#This day came to my Bro. Amos and Me, a sea-man, bringeing news of my Bro. Elijah's the capt'n's dethe, and allso mutch monie in gold, sent to us by our Bro. The sea-man is the greatest in size aver I saw. No man in towne his bed can reach so mutch as to his sholder. And comely withal#.

The words fairly whirled on the page before my astonished eyes. Where was the image of the ill-favored little old Jed, so present to my imagination? I read on breathlessly, skipping news of the hen-house and barnyard, until I came upon this, the only other reference, but quite sufficient:

This day the sea-man, Samuel Harden, left us.

The self-restrained woman had said nothing of any disappointment she might have felt. The item stood quite alone, however, in a significant isolation. At least on that day she had not noticed the number of eggs.

I doubt if grandfather himself had been more excited when he saw the birch-wood club than I was to read those few words. I could hardly wait till the next Saturday to rush back to Hillsboro, and relieve the poor old man of the burden of remorse he had carried so faithfully and so mistakenly all these years, and to snatch the specious crown of martyrdom from that shameless thief of another man's exploits.

And yet, when I finally arrived at Hillsboro, I found it not so easy to begin. Some strange spell, exhaled from the unchanging aspect of the old house and the old people, fell on me, and, though I tried several times, I could not find a suitable opening. On Sunday morning grandfather asked me if I would help him to get out to Jed's grave. The peonies and syringas were in bloom, and grandmother had the bouquet made up ready. Drawing me aside, she told me that grandfather was really too infirm to try to make the expedition at all, and certainly could not go alone. Even then I could find no words to tell her. I thought it might be easier to do so out of doors.

It was the middle of a bright spring morning, when we started off, grandfather leaning on his cane and holding to my arm, while I carried the great clump of red peonies and white syringas. The sun was warm, but a cool breeze blew down from the mountains, and grandfather hobbled along bravely.

Page 137

It made me feel like a little girl again to have him begin the story of the moose, and tell it word for word as he always had. He was forced to stop often now, and wait for breath to come back to him. At each of these halts beside the road, which was white in the clear spring sunshine, it was harder and harder to think of breaking in on him with my discovery.

As he finally told about Jedediah's wounded virtue on his deathbed—that outcry which seemed to me the most brazen part of the whole imposture—suddenly my heart softened, and I, too, believed that by that time of his life old Jed was—I really don't know just what it was that I believed, but it was something as comforting as the quiet warmth of the sunshine.

We were standing by the sunken old grave when grandfather finished. I looked at him, the sun shining down on his bent figure and bared white head, the flowers reflecting their brightness up into his withered old face, and a lump came into my throat. I could not have told him if I had wished to.

"We were ashamed to look the dead man in the face," he said humbly, and laid the flowers down on the young grass.

Then I went around and held his dear old hand tightly in mine; and we stood very still for a long, long time.

THE ARTIST

"After the sickening stench of personality in theatrical life," the great Madame Orloff told the doctor with her usual free-handed use of language, "it is like breathing a thin, pure air to be here again with our dear inhuman old Vieyra. He hypnotizes me into his own belief that nothing matters—not broken hearts, nor death, nor success, nor first love, nor old age—nothing but the chiaroscuro of his latest acquisition."

The picture-dealer looked at her in silence, bringing the point of his white beard up to his chin with a meditative fist. The big surgeon gazed about him with appreciative eyes, touched his mustache to his gold-lined coffee-cup, and sighed contentedly. "You're not the only one, my dear Olga," he said, "who finds Vieyra's hard heart a blessing. When I am here in his magnificent old den, listening to one of his frank accounts of his own artistic acumen and rejoicing in his beautiful possessions, why the rest of the world—real humanity—seems in retrospect like one great hospital full of shrieking incurables."

"Oh, humanity——!" The actress thrust it away with one of her startling, vivid gestures.

"You think it very clever, my distinguished friends, to discuss me before my face," commented the old picture-dealer indifferently. He fingered the bright-colored decorations on his breast, looking down at them with absent eyes. After a moment he

added, “and to show your in-ti-mate knowledge of my character.” Only its careful correctness betrayed the foreignness of his speech.

There was a pause in which the three gazed idly at the fire’s reflection in the brass of the superb old andirons. Then, “Haven’t you something new to show us?” asked the woman. “Some genuine Masaccio, picked up in a hill-town monastery—a real Ribera?”

Page 138

The small old Jew drew a long breath. "Yes, I have something new." He hesitated, opened his lips, closed them again and, looking at the fire, "Oh yes, very new indeed—new to me."

"Is it here?" The great surgeon looked about the picture-covered walls.

"No; I have it in—you know what you call the inner sanctuary—the light here is not good enough."

The actress stood up, her glittering dress flashing a thousand eyes at the fire. "Let me see it," she commanded. "Certainly I would like to see anything that was new to *you*!"

"You shall amuse yourself by identifying the artist without my aid," said old Vieyra.

He opened a door, held back a portiere, let his guests pass through into a darkened room, turned on a softly brilliant light, and: "Whom do you make the artist?" he said. He did not look at the picture. He looked at the faces of his guests, and after a long silent pause, he smiled faintly into his beard. "Let us go back to the fire," he said, and clicked them into darkness again.

"And what do you say?" he asked as they sat down.

"By Jove!" cried the doctor. "By Jove!"

Madame Orloff turned on the collector the somber glow of her deep-set eyes. "I have dreamed it," she said.

"It is real," said Vieyra. "You are the first to see it. I wished to observe how——"

"It's an unknown Vermeer!" The doctor brought his big white hand down loudly on this discovery. "Nobody but Vermeer could have done the plaster wall in the sunlight. And the girl's strange gray head-dress must be seventeenth-century Dutch of some province I don't——"

"I am a rich man, for a picture-dealer," said Vieyra, "but only national governments can afford to buy Vermeers nowadays."

"But you picked it up from some corner, some attic, some stable——"

"Yes, I picked it up from a stable," said the collector.

The actress laid her slender, burning fingers on his cool old hand. "Tell us—tell us," she urged. "There is something different here."

“Yes, there is something different,” he stirred in his chair and thrust out his lips. “So different that I don’t know if you——”

“Try me! try me!” she assured him ardently. “You have educated me well to your own hard standards all these years.”

At this he looked at her, startled, frowning, attentive, and ended by shaking off her hand. “No, I will not tell you.”

“You shall——” her eyes commanded, adjured him. There was a silence. “I will understand,” she said under her breath.

“You will not understand,” he said in the same tone; but aloud he began: “I heard of it first from an American picture-dealer over here scraping up a mock-Barbizon collection for a new millionaire. He wanted to get my judgment, he said, on a canvas that had been brought to him by a cousin of his children’s governess. I was to be sure to see it when I went to New York—you knew did you not, that I had been called to New York to testify in the prosecution of Paullsen for selling a signed copy?”

Page 139

"Did you really go?" asked the doctor. "I thought you swore that nothing could take you to America."

"I went," said the old man grimly. "Paullsen did me a bad turn once, thirty years ago. And while I was there I went to see the unknown canvas. The dealer half apologized for taking my time—said he did not as a rule pay any attention to freak things brought in from country holes by amateurs, but—I remember his wording—this thing, some ways he looked at it, didn't seem bad somehow."

The collector paused, passed his tongue over his lips, and said briefly: "Then he showed it to me. It was the young girl and kitten in there."

"By Jove!" cried the doctor.

"You have too exciting a profession, my good old dear," said the actress. "Some day you will die of a heart failure."

"Not after living through that!"

"What did you tell him?"

"I asked for the address of the cousin of his children's governess, of course. When I had it, I bought a ticket to the place, and when I reached there, I found myself at the end of all things—an abomination of desolation, a parched place in the wilderness. Do you know America, either of you?"

The doctor shook his head.

"I have toured there, three times," said the actress.

"Did you ever hear of a place called Vermont?"

Madame Orloff looked blank. "It sounds French, not English. Perhaps you do not pronounce it as they do."

"Heaven forbid that I should do anything as 'they' do! This place, then, call it what you will, is inhabited by a lean, tall, sullenly silent race who live in preposterously ugly little wooden houses of the most naked cleanliness ... God of my Fathers! the hideousness of the huddle of those huts where I finally found the cousin! He was a seller of letter-paper and cheap chromos and he knew nothing of the picture except that it was brought to him to sell by the countryman who sold him butter. So I found the address of the butter-maker and drove endless miles over an execrable road to his house, and encountered at last a person who could tell me something of what I wanted to know. It was the butter-maker's mother, a stolid, middle-aged woman, who looked at me out of the most uncanny quiet eyes ... all the people in that valley have extraordinary piercing

and quiet eyes ... and asked, 'Is it about the picture? For if it is, I don't want you should let on about it to anybody but me. Nobody but the family knows he paints 'em!"

At this the doctor burst out, "Gracious powers! You don't mean to say that the man who painted that picture is alive now ... in 1915!"

The actress frowned at the interruption and turned with a lithe petulance on the big Briton. "If you want to know, let him alone!" she commanded.

Page 140

"And soon I had it all," the narrator went on. "Almost more than I could bear. The old woman could tell me what I wished to know, she said. He was her uncle, the only brother of her mother, and he had brought up her and her brothers and sisters. She knew... oh, she knew with good reason, all of his life. All, that is, but the beginning. She had heard from the older people in the valley that he had been wild in his youth (he has always been, she told me gravely, 'queer') and she knew that he had traveled far in his young days, very, very far."

"To New York?' I ventured.

"Oh, no, beyond that. Across the water.'

"To Paris?'

"That she didn't know. It was a foreign country at least, and he had stayed there two, three years, until he was called back by her father's death—his brother-in-law's—to take care of his mother, and his sister and the children. Here her mind went back to my question, and she said she had something perhaps I could tell from, where he had been. She kept it in her Bible. He had given it to her when she was a child as a reward the day she had kept her little brother from falling in the fire. She brought it out. It was a sketch, hasty, vigorous, suggestive, haunting as the original itself, of the Leonardo da Vinci *Ste. Anne*.

"Yes, I told her, now I knew where he had been. And they had called him back from there—*here*?

"When my father died,' she repeated, 'my uncle was all my grandmother and my mother had. We were five little children, and the oldest not seven, and we were all very poor,'

"How old was your uncle then?' I asked.

"A young man—he was younger than my mother. Perhaps he was twenty-five,'

"I looked at the sketch in my hand. Twenty-five, and called back from Paris—*here*!

"When did he go back to Paris?'

"Oh, he never went back,' She told me this quite placidly, as she said everything else. 'He never went back at all.'

"He had stayed there the rest of his life, and worked the little farm that was all his sister had, and made a living for them—not large, the farm being poor and he not a first-class farmer, but still enough. He had always been kind to them—if he was quite queer and absent. She had heard her grandmother say that at first, the first ten years, perhaps, he had had strange, gloomy savage fits like a person possessed that you read of in the

Bible; but she herself could never remember him as anything but quiet and smiling. He had a very queer smile unlike anyone else, as I would notice for myself when I went to see him about the picture. You could tell him by that, and by his being very lame.

“That brought me back with a start. I rushed at her with questions. ‘How about the picture? Were there others? Were there many? Had he always painted? Had he never shown them to anyone? Was he painting now?

Page 141

“She could not tell me much. It had been a detail of their common life she had but absently remarked, as though she had lived with a man who collected snail-shells, or studied the post-marks on letters. She ‘had never noticed’—that was the answer to most of my questions. No, she did not think there were very many now, though he must have painted ‘most a million. He was always at it, every minute he could spare from farming. But they had been so poor he had not felt he could afford many canvases. The paints cost a good deal too. So he painted them over and over, first one thing and then another, as he happened to fancy. He painted in the horse-barn. ‘Had a place rigged up,’ in her phrase, in one corner of the room where the hay was stored, and had cut a big window in the roof that was apt to let in water on the hay if the rain came from the north.

“‘What did he paint?’ ‘Oh, anything. He was queer about that. He’d paint *anything*! He did one picture of nothing but the corner of the barnyard, with a big white sow and some little pigs in the straw, early in the morning, when the dew was on everything. He had thought quite a lot of that, but he had had to paint over it to make the picture of her little sister with the yellow kittie—the one she’d sent down to the village to try to sell, the one —’

“‘Yes, yes,’ I told her, ‘the one I saw. But did he never try to sell any himself? Did he never even show them to anyone?’

“She hesitated, tried to remember, and said that once when they were very poor, and there was a big doctor’s bill to pay, he *had* sent a picture down to New York. But it was sent back. They had made a good deal of fun of it, the people down there, because it wasn’t finished off enough. She thought her uncle’s feelings had been hurt by their letter. The express down and back had cost a good deal too, and the only frame he had got broken. Altogether, she guessed that discouraged him. Anyhow, he’d never tried again. He seemed to get so after a while that he didn’t care whether anybody liked them or even saw them or not—he just painted them to amuse himself, she guessed. He seemed to get a good real of comfort out of it. It made his face very still and smiling to paint. Nobody around there so much as knew he did it, the farm was so far from neighbors.

“‘Twas a real lonely place, she told me, and she had been glad to marry and come down in the valley to live closer to folks. Her uncle had given her her wedding outfit. He had done real well by them all, and they were grateful; and now he was getting feeble and had trouble with his heart, they wanted to do something for him. They had thought, perhaps, they could sell some of his pictures for enough to hire a man to help him with the farm work. She had heard that pictures were coming into fashion more than they had been, and she had borrowed that one of her little sister and the kittie, and without her uncle’s knowing anything about it, had sent it off. She was about discouraged waiting for somebody down in the city to make up his mind whether he’d buy it or not.

Page 142

"I asked her a thousand other questions but she could answer none of them. The only detail I could get from her being an account of her uncle's habit of 'staring' for sometimes a half an hour at something, without once looking away. She'd seen him stop that way, when he'd be husking corn maybe, and stare at a place where a sunbeam came in on a pile of corn. It put him back quite considerable in his work, that habit, but they had nothing to complain of. He'd done well by them, when you considered they weren't his own children.

"'Hadn't he ever tried to break away?' I asked her amazed. 'To leave them? To go back?'

"She told me: 'Oh, no, he was the only support his mother and his sister had, and there were all the little children. He *had* to stay.'"

The actress broke in fiercely: "Oh, stop! stop! it makes me sick to hear. I could boil them in oil, that family! Quick! You saw him? You brought him away? You—"

"I saw him," said Vieyra, "yes, I saw him."

Madame Orloff leaned toward him, her eyebrows a line of painful attention.

"I drove that afternoon up to a still tinier village in the mountains near where he lived, and there I slept that night—or, at least, I lay in a bed."

"Of course, you could not sleep," broke in the listening woman; "I shall not to-night."

"When dawn came I dressed and went out to wander until people should be awake. I walked far, through fields, and then through a wood as red as red-gold—like nothing I ever saw. It was in October, and the sun was late to rise. When I came out on an uplying heath, the mists were just beginning to roll away from the valley below. As I stood there, leaning against a tree in the edge of the wood, some cows came by, little, pinched, lean cows and a young dog bounding along, and then, after them, slowly, an old man in gray—very lame."

The actress closed her eyes.

"He did not see me. He whistled to the dog and stroked his head, and then as the cows went through a gate, he turned and faced the rising sun, the light full on his face. He looked at the valley coming into sight through the mists. He was so close to me I could have tossed a stone to him—I shall never know how long he stood there—how long I had that face before me."

The narrator was silent. Madame Orloff opened her eyes and looked at him piercingly.

"I cannot tell you—I cannot!" he answered her. 'Who can tell of life and death and a new birth? It was as though I were thinking with my finger-nails, or the hair of my head—a part of me I had never before dreamed had feeling. My eyes were dazzled. I could have bowed myself to the earth like Moses before the burning bush. How can I tell you—? How can I tell you?"

"He was—?" breathed the woman.

Page 143

“Hubert van Eyck might have painted God the Father with those eyes—that mouth—that face of patient power—of selfless, still beatitude.—Once the dog, nestling by his side, whimpered and licked his hand. He looked down, he turned his eyes away from his vision, and looked down at the animal and smiled. Jehovah! What a smile. It seemed to me then that if God loves humanity, he can have no kinder smile for us. And then he looked back across the valley—at the sky, at the mountains, at the smoke rising from the houses below us—he looked at the world—at some vision, some knowledge—what he saw—what he saw—!

“I did not know when he went. I was alone in that crimson wood.

“I went back to the village. I went back to the city. I would not speak to him till I had some honor worthy to offer him. I tried to think what would mean most to him. I remembered the drawing of the *Ste. Anne*. I remembered his years in Paris, and I knew what would seem most honor to him. I cabled Drouot of the Luxembourg Gallery. I waited in New York till he came. I showed him the picture. I told him the story. He was on fire!

“We were to go back to the mountains together, to tell him that his picture would hang in the Luxembourg, and then in the Louvre—that in all probability he would be decorated by the French government, that other pictures of his would live for all time in Paris, in London, in Brussels—a letter came from the woman, his niece. He was dead.”

The actress fell back in her chair, her hands over her face.

The surgeon stirred wrathfully. “Heavens and earth, Vieyra, what beastly, ghastly, brutally tragic horror are you telling us, anyhow?”

The old Jew moistened his lips and was silent. After a moment he said: “I should not have told you. I knew you could not understand.”

Madame Orloff looked up sharply. “Do you mean—is it possible that *you* mean that if we had seen him—had seen that look—we would—that he had had all that an artist—”

The picture-dealer addressed himself to her, turning his back on the doctor. “I went back to the funeral, to the mountains. The niece told me that before he died he smiled suddenly on them all and said: ‘I have had a happy life,’ I had taken a palm to lay on his coffin, and after I had looked long at his dead face, I put aside the palm. I felt that if he had lived I could never have spoken to him—could never have told him.”

The old Jew looked down at the decorations on his breast, and around at the picture-covered walls. He made a sweeping gesture.

“What had I to offer him?” he said.



WHO ELSE HEARD IT?

A lady walking through the square
With steamship tickets in her hand,
To spend her summer in the Alps,
Her winter in the Holy Land,

Heard (or else dreamed), as she passed by
The Orphan Home across the way,
A small and clear and wondering voice
From out a dormer window say,

Page 144

“And would you really rather climb
Mont Blanc alone, than walk with me
Out hunting Mayflowers in the woods
Of Westernburn and Cloverlea?”

“Alas! And would you rather hear
Cathedral choirs in cities far
Than one at bedtime, on your lap,
Say ‘Twinkle, twinkle, little star’?”

“A lonely Christmas would you spend
By Galilee or Jordan’s tide
When a child’s stocking you might fill
And hang it by your own fireside?”

A DROP IN THE BUCKET

There is no need to describe in detail the heroine of this tale, because she represents a type familiar to all readers of the conventional New-England-village dialect story. She was for a long time the sole inhabitant of Hillsboro, who came up to the expectations of our visiting friends from the city, on the lookout for Mary Wilkins characters. We always used to take such people directly to see Cousin Tryphena, as dwellers in an Italian city always take their foreign friends to see their one bit of ruined city wall or the heap of stones which was once an Inquisitorial torture chamber, never to see the new water-works or the modern, sanitary hospital.

On the way to the other end of the street, where Cousin Tryphena’s tiny, two-roomed house stood, we always laid bare the secrets of her somnolent, respectable, unprofitable life; we always informed our visitors that she lived and kept up a social position on two hundred and fifteen dollars a year, and that she had never been further from home than to the next village. We always drew attention to her one treasure, the fine Sheraton sideboard that had belonged to her great-grandfather, old Priest Perkins; and, when we walked away from the orderly and empty house, we were sure that our friends from the city would always exclaim with great insight into character, “What a charmingly picturesque life! Isn’t she perfectly delicious!”

Next door to Cousin Tryphena’s minute, snow-white house is a forlorn old building, one of the few places for rent in our village, where nearly everyone owns his own shelter. It stood desolately idle for some time, tumbling to pieces almost visibly, until, one day, two years ago, a burly, white-bearded tramp stopped in front of it, laid down his stick and bundle, and went to inquire at the neighbor’s if the place were for rent, then moved in with his stick and bundle and sent away for the rest of his belongings, that is to say, an outfit for cobbling shoes. He cut a big wooden boot out of the side of an empty box, painted it black with axle-grease and soot, hung it up over the door, and announced

himself as ready to do all the cobbling and harness-repairing he could get ... and a fine workman he showed himself to be.

Page 145

We were all rather glad to have this odd new member of our community settle down among us ... all, that is, except Cousin Tryphena, who was sure, for months afterward, that he would cut her throat some night and steal away her Sheraton sideboard. It was an open secret that Putnam, the antique-furniture dealer in Troy, had offered her two hundred and fifty dollars for it. The other women of the village, however, not living alone in such dangerous proximity to the formidable stranger, felt reassured by his long, white beard, and by his great liking for little children.

Although, from his name, as from his strong accent, it was evident that old Jombatiste belonged, by birth, to our French-Canadian colony, he never associated himself with that easy-going, devoutly Catholic, law-abiding, and rather unlettered group of our citizens. He allied himself with quite another class, making no secret of the fact that he was an out-and-out Socialist, Anti-clerical, Syndicalist, Anarchist, Nihilist. ... We in Hillsboro are not acute in distinguishing between the different shades of radicalism, and never have been able exactly to place him, except that, beside his smashing, loudly-voiced theories, young Arthur Robbins' Progressivism sounds like old Martin Pelham's continued jubilation over the Hayes campaign.

The central article of Jombatiste's passionately held creed seemed to be that everything was exactly wrong, and that, while the Socialist party was not nearly sweeping enough in its ideas, it was, as yet, the best means for accomplishing the inevitable, righteous overturning of society. Accordingly, he worked incessantly, not only at his cobbling, but at any odd job he could find to do, lived the life of an anchorite, went in rags, ate mainly crackers and milk, and sent every penny he could save to the Socialist Headquarters. We knew about this not only through his own trumpeting of the programme of his life, but because Phil Latimer, the postmaster, is cousin to us all and often told us about the money-orders, so large that they must have represented almost all the earnings of the fanatical old shoemaker.

And yet he was never willing to join in any of our charitable enterprises, although his ardent old heart was evidently as tender as it was hot. Nothing threw him into such bellowing fury as cruelty. He became the terror of all our boys who trapped rabbits, and, indeed, by the sole influence of his whirlwind descents upon them, and his highly illegal destruction of their traps, he practically made that boyish pastime a thing of the past in Hillsboro. Somehow, though the boys talked mightily about how they'd have the law of dirty, hot-tempered old Jombatiste, nobody cared really to face him. He had on tap a stream of red-hot vituperation astonishingly varied for a man of his evident lack of early education. Perhaps it came from his incessant reading and absorption of Socialist and incendiary literature.

Page 146

He took two Socialist newspapers, and nobody knows how many queer little inflammatory magazines from which he read aloud selections to anyone who did not run away.

Naturally enough, from his point of view, he began with his neighbor, fastidious Cousin Tryphena.

What Cousin Tryphena did not know about the way the world outside of Hillsboro was run would have made a complete treatise on modern civilization. She never took a newspaper, only borrowing, once in a while, the local sheet to read the news items from Greenford, where she had some distant cousins; and, though she occasionally looked at one of the illustrated magazines, it was only at the pictures.

It is therefore plain that old Jombatiste could not have found a worse listener for his bellowed statements that ninety per cent. of the money of this country was in the hands of two per cent. of the population; that the franchise was a farce because the government was controlled by a Wall Street clique; and that any man who could not earn a good living for his family had a moral right to shoot a millionaire. For the most part, Cousin Tryphena counted her tatting stitches and paid not the least attention to her malcontent neighbor. When she did listen, she did not believe a word he said. She had lived in Hillsboro for fifty-five years and she knew what made people poor. It was shiftlessness. There was always plenty of work to be had at the brush-back factory for any man who had the sense and backbone to keep at it. If they *would* stop work in deer-week to go hunting, or go on a spree Town-meeting day, or run away to fish, she'd like to know what business they had blaming millionaires because they lost their jobs. She did not expound her opinions of these points to Jombatiste because, in the first place, she despised him for a dirty Canuck, and, secondly, because opinions seemed shadowy and unsubstantial things to her. The important matters were to make your starch clear and not to be late to church.

It is proverbial that people who are mostly silent often keep for some time a reputation for more wisdom than is theirs. Cousin Tryphena unconsciously profited in the estimation of her neighbor by this fact of psychology. Old Jombatiste had thundered his per cents. of the distribution of capital for many months before he discovered that he was on the wrong track.

Then, one winter day, as Cousin Tryphena was hanging out her washing, he ran over to her, waving his favorite magazine. He read her a paragraph from it, striking the paper occasionally for emphasis with his horny, blackened, shoemaker's hand, and following her as she moved along the clothes-lines——

"And it is thus definitely *proved*," he shouted in conclusion, "that Senator Burlingame was in the pay of J.D. Darby, when he held up the Rouse Workingman's Bill in the Senate Committee...." He stopped and glared triumphantly at his neighbor. A rare

impulse of perversity rose in Cousin Tryphena's unawakened heart. She took a clothes-pin out of her mouth and asked with some exasperation, "Well, what *of* it!" a comment on his information which sent the old man reeling back as though she had struck him.

Page 147

In the conversation which followed, old Jombatiste, exploring at last Cousin Tryphena's mind, leaned giddily over the abyss of her ignorance of political economy and sociology, dropping one exploring plummet after another into its depths, only to find them fathomless. He went shakily back to his own house, silenced for once.

But, although for the first time he neglected work to do it, he returned to the attack the next day with a new weapon. He made no more remarks about industrial slavery, nor did he begin, as was his wont, with the solemnly enunciated axiom, "Wealth comes from labor alone!" He laid down, on the Sheraton sideboard, an armful of his little magazines, and settled himself in a chair, observing with a new comprehension how instinctively Cousin Tryphena reached for her tatting as he began to read aloud. He read the story of a man who was burned to death in molten steel because his employers did not install a rather expensive safety device, and who left a young widow and three children. These tried to earn their livings by making artificial flowers. They could earn, all of them working together, three cents an hour. When the last dollar of the dead father's savings was used up, and there was talk of separating the family so that the children could be put in an asylum, the mother drowned the three little ones and herself after them. Cousin Tryphena dropped her tatting, her country-bred mind reeling. "Didn't she have any *folks* to help her out?"

Jombatiste explained that she came from East Poland, so that her folks, if indeed she had any, were too far away to be of use. He struck one fist inside his palm with a fierce gesture, such as he used when he caught a boy trapping, and cried, "... and that in a country that produces three times the food it consumes." For the first time, a statistical statement awoke an echo in Cousin Tryphena's atrophied brain.

Old Jombatiste read on, this time about a girl of seventeen, left by her parents' death in charge of a small brother. She had been paid twenty cents for making crocheted lace which sold for a dollar and a half. By working twelve hours a day, she had been able to make forty-seven cents. Seeing her little brother grow pale from lack of food, she had, in desperation, taken the first, the awfully decisive first step downward, and had almost at once thereafter vanished, drawn down by the maelstrom of vice. The little brother, wild with grief over his sister's disappearance, had been taken to an orphan asylum where he had since twice tried to commit suicide.

Cousin Tryphena sat rigid, her tatting fallen to the floor, her breath coming with difficulty. It is impossible for the average modern mind, calloused by promiscuous reading, to conceive the effect upon her primitive organism of this attack from the printed page. She not only did not dream that these stories might not be true, they seemed as real to her as though she had seen the people. There was not a particle of blood in her haggard face.

Page 148

Jombatiste read on—the story of a decent, ambitious man, employed in a sweatshop tailoring establishment, who contracted tuberculosis from the foul air, and who dragged down with him, in his agonizing descent to the very depths of misery, a wife and two children. He was now dead, and his wife was living in a corner of a moldy, damp basement, a pile of rags the only bed for her and her children, their only heat what fire the mother could make out of paper and rubbish picked up on the streets.

Cousin Tryphena's horrified eyes fell on her well-blackened stove, sending out the aromatic breath of burning white-birch sticks. She recoiled from it with a shudder.

Jombatiste read on, the story of the woman who, when her three sons died in an accident due to negligence on their employer's part ... he read no more that day, for Cousin Tryphena put her gray head down on the center-table and wept as she never had done in her life. Jombatiste rose softly and tiptoed out of the room.

The tap-tap-tap of his hammer rang loud and fast the rest of that day. He was exulting over having aroused another bourgeois from the sleep of greasy complacency. He had made a convert. To his dire and utter pennilessness, Cousin Tryphena's tiny income seemed a fortune. He had a happy dream of persuading her to join him in his weekly contributions to the sacred funds! As he stood at midnight, in the open door, for the long draught of fresh air he always took before turning in on his pile of hay, he heard in the wood on the hill back of the house the shrill shriek of a trapped rabbit. He plowed furiously out through the deep snow to find it, gave the tortured animal a merciful death, carried the trap back to the river and threw it in with a furious splash. He strode home under the frosty stars, his dirty shirt open over his corded, old neck, his burning heart almost content. He had done a good day's work.

Early the next morning, his neighbor came to his door, very white, very hollow-eyed, evidently with a sleepless night back of her, and asked him for the papers he had read from. Jombatiste gave them to her in a tactful silence. She took them in one shaking hand, drawing her shawl around her wrinkled face with the other, and went back through the snow to her own house.

By noon that day, everyone in the village was thrilling with wild surmise. Cousin Tryphena had gone over to Graham and Sanders', asked to use their long-distance telephone and had telephoned to Putnam to come and get her sideboard. After this strange act, she had passed Albert Graham, then by chance alone in the store, with so wild a mien that he had not ventured to make any inquiries. But he took pains to mention the matter, to everyone who happened to come in, that morning; and, by dinner-time, every family in Hillsboro was discussing over its pie the possibility that the well-known *queer streak*, which had sent several of Cousin Tryphena's ancestors to the asylum, was suddenly making its appearance in her.

Page 149

I was detained, that afternoon, and did not reach her house until nearly four; and I was almost the last to arrive. I found Cousin Tryphena very silent, her usually pale face very red, the center of a group of neighbors who all at once began to tell me what had happened. I could make nothing out of their incoherent explanations. ... "Trypheny was crazy ... she'd ought to have a guardeen ... that Canuck shoemaker had addled her brains ... there'd ought to be a law against that kind of newspaper. ... Trypheny was goin' like her great-aunt, Lucilly, that died in the asylum. ..." I appealed directly to Cousin Tryphena for information as to what the trouble was.

"There ain't any trouble 's I know of," she answered in a shaking voice. "I've just heard of a widow-woman, down in the city, who's bringin' up her two children in the corner of a basement where the green mold stands out on the wall, and I'm goin' down to fetch her an' the children up here to live with me ... them an' a little orphan boy as don't like the 'sylum where they've put him——"

Somebody broke in on her to cry, "Why, Trypheny, you simple old critter, that's four people! Where you goin' to put 'em in this little tucked-up place?"

Cousin Tryphena answered doggedly and pointedly, "Your own grandmother, Rebecca Mason, brought up a family of seven in a house no bigger than this, and no cellar."

"But how, ..." another voice exclaimed, "air you goin' to get enough for 'em to eat? You ain't got but barely enough for yourself!"

Cousin Tryphena paled a little, "I'm a good sewer, I could make money sewing ... and I could do washings for city-folks, summer-times...." Her set mouth told what a price she paid for this voluntary abandonment of the social standing that had been hers by virtue of her idleness. She went on with sudden spirit, "You all act as though I was doin' it to spite you and to amuse myself! I don't *want* to! When I think of my things I've kept so nice always, I'm *wild* ... but how can I help it, now I know about 'em! I didn't sleep a wink last night. I'll go clean crazy if I don't do something! I saw those three children strugglin' in the water and their mother a-holdin' on 'em down, and then jumpin' in herself——Why, I give enough milk to the *cat* to keep a baby ... what else can I do?"

I was touched, as I think we all were, by her helpless simplicity and ignorance, and by her defenselessness against this first vision of life, the vision which had been spared her so long, only to burst upon her like a forest-fire. I hid an odd fancy that she had just awakened after a sleep of half a century.

"Dear Cousin Tryphena," I said as gently as I could, "you haven't had a very wide experience of modern industrial or city conditions and there are some phases of this matter which you don't take into consideration." Then I brought out the old, wordy, eminently reasonable arguments we all use to stifle the thrust of self-questioning: I told her that it was very likely that the editor of that newspaper had invented, or at least

greatly exaggerated those stories, and that she would find on investigation that no such family existed.

Page 150

"I don't see how that lets me out of *lookin'* for them," said Cousin Tryphena.

"Well, at least," I urged, "don't be in such a hurry about it. Take time to think it over! Wait till—"

"Wait!" cried Cousin Tryphena. "Why, another one may be jumpin' in the river this minute! If I'd ha' had the money, I'd ha' gone on the noon train!"

At this point, the man from Putnam's came with a team from our livery to carry away the Sheraton sideboard. Cousin Tryphena bore herself like a martyr at the stake, watching, with dry eyes, the departure of her one certificate to dear gentility and receiving with proud indifference the crisp bills of a denomination most of us had never seen before.

"You won't need all that just to go down to the city," I remonstrated.

She stopped watching the men load her shining old treasure into the wagon and turned her anguished eyes to me. "They'll likely be needing clothes and things."

I gave up. She had indeed thought it all out.

It was time for us to go home to prepare our several suppers and we went our different ways, shaking our heads over Tryphena's queerness. I stopped a moment before the cobbler's open door, watched him briskly sewing a broken halter and telling a folk-tale to some children by his knee. When he finished, I said with some acerbity, "Well, Jombatiste, I hope you're satisfied with what you've done to poor old Miss Tryphena ... spoiling the rest of her life for her!"

"Such a life, Madame," said Jombatiste dryly, "ought to be spoiled, the sooner the better."

"She's going to start for the city to-morrow," I said, supposing of course that he had heard the news.

Jombatiste looked up very quickly. "For what goes she to the city?"

"Why ... she's gone daft over those bogie-stories of yours ... she's looked the list over and picked out the survivors, the widow of the man who died of tuberculosis, and so on, and she's going to bring them back here to share her luxurious life."

Jombatiste bounded into the air as if a bomb had exploded under him, scattering his tools and the children, rushing past me out of the house and toward Cousin Tryphena's. ... As he ran, he did what I have never seen anyone do, out of a book; he tore at his bushy hair and scattered handfuls in the air. It seemed to me that some sudden madness had struck our dull little village, and I hastened after him to protect Cousin Tryphena.



She opened the door in answer to his battering knocks, frowned, and began to say something to him, but was fairly swept off her feet by the torrent of his reproaches....
“How dare you take the information I give you and use it to betray your fellow-man! How do you *dare* stand there, so mealy-mouthed, and face me, when you are planning a cowardly attack on the liberty of your country! You call yourself a nurse ... what would you think of a mother who hid

Page 151

an ulcer in her child's side from the doctor because it did not look pretty! What else are you planning to do? What would you think of a nurse who put paint and powder on her patient's face, to cover up a filthy skin disease? What else are you planning to do ... you with your plan to put court-plaster over one pustule in ten million and thinking you are helping cure the patient! You are planning simply to please yourself, you cowardly ... and you are an idiot too ..." he beat his hands on the door-jambs, "... if you had the money of forty millionaires, you couldn't do anything in that way ... how many people are you thinking to help ... two, three ... maybe four! But there are hundreds of others ... why, I could read you a thousand stories of worse—"

Cousin Tryphena's limit had been reached. She advanced upon the intruder with a face as excited as his own. ... "Jombatiste Ramotte, if you ever dare to read me another such story, I'll go right out and jump in the Necronsett River!"

The mania which had haunted earlier generations of her family looked out luridly from her eyes.

I felt the goose-flesh stand out on my arms, and even Jombatiste's hot blood was cooled. He stood silent an instant.

Cousin Tryphena slammed the door in his face.

He turned to me with a bewilderment almost pathetic so tremendous was it—"Did you hear that ... what sort of logic do you call—"

"Jombatiste," I counseled him, "if you take my advice you'll leave Miss Tryphena alone after this."

Cousin Tryphena started off on her crack-brained expedition, the very next morning, on the six-thirty train. I happened to be looking out sleepily and saw her trudging wearily past our house in the bleak gray of our mountain dawn, the inadequate little, yellow flame of her old fashioned lantern like a glowworm at her side. It seemed somehow symbolical of something, I did not know what.

It was a full week before we heard from her, and we had begun really to fear that we would never see her again, thinking that perhaps, while she was among strangers, her unsettled mind might have taken some new fancy which would be her destruction.

That week Jombatiste shut the door to his house. The children reported that he would not even let them in, and that they could see him through the window stitching away in ominous silence, muttering to himself.

Eight days after Cousin Tryphena had gone away, I had a telegram from her, which read, "Build fires in both my stoves to-morrow afternoon."

The dark comes early in the mountains, and so, although I dare say there was not a house in the village without a face at the pane after the late evening train came up, none of us saw anything but our usual impenetrable December darkness. That, too, seemed, to my perhaps overwrought consciousness of the problem, highly suggestive of the usual course of our lives. At least, I told myself, Cousin Tryphena had taken her absurd little lantern and gone forth.

Page 152

The next morning, soon after breakfast, I set off for the other end of the street. Cousin Tryphena saw me coming and opened the door. She did not smile, and she was still very pale, but I saw that she had regained her self-control, "Come right in," she said, in rather a tense voice, and, as I entered she added, in our rustic phrase for introduction, "Make you 'quainted with my friend, Mrs. Lindstrom. She's come up from the city to stay with me. And this is her little boy, Sigurd, and this is the baby."

Blinking somewhat, I shook hands with a small, stoop-shouldered woman, in a new, ready-made dress, with abundant yellow hair drawn back from the thinnest, palest, saddest little face I had ever seen. She was holding an immaculately clean baby, asleep, its long golden lashes lying on cheeks as white and sunken as her own. A sturdily built boy of about six scrambled up from where he lay on the floor, playing with the cat, and gave me a hand shyly, hanging down his head. His mother had glanced up at me with a quick, shrinking look of fright, the tears starting to her eyes.

Cousin Tryphena was evidently afraid that I would not take her cue and sound the right note, for she went on hastily, "Mrs. Lindstrom has been real sick and kind o' worried over the baby, so's she's some nervous. I tell her Hillsboro air is thought very good for people's nerves. Lots of city folks come here in summer time, just for that. Don't you think Sigurd is a real big boy for only six and a half? He knows his letters too! He's goin' to school as soon as we get settled down. I want you should bring over those alphabet blocks that your Peggy doesn't use any more—"

The other woman was openly crying now, clinging to her benefactress' hand and holding it against her cheek as she sobbed.

My heroic old cousin patted her hair awkwardly, but kept on talking in her matter-of-fact manner, looking at me sternly as though defying me to show, by look or word, any consciousness of anything unusual in the situation; and we fell at once, she and I, into a commonplace conversation about the incidents of the trip up.

When I came away, half an hour later, Cousin Tryphena slipped a shawl over her head and came down the walk with me to the gate. I was much affected by what seemed to me the dramatically fitting outcome of my old kinswoman's Quixotism. I saw Cousin Tryphena picturesquely as the Happy Fool of old folk-lore, the character who, through his very lack of worldly wisdom, attains without effort all that self-seeking folks try for in vain. The happy ending of her adventure filled me with a cheerful wonder at the ways of Providence, which I tried to pass on to her in the exclamation, "Why, Cousin Tryphena, it's like a story-book? You're going to *enjoy* having those people. The woman is as nice as she can be, and that's the brightest little boy! He's as smart as a whip!"

I was aware that the oddness of Cousin Tryphena's manner still persisted even now that we were alone. She sighed heavily and said, "I don't sleep much better nights now I've

done it!" Then facing me, "I hadn't ought to have brought them up here! I just did it to please myself! Once I saw 'em ... I wanted 'em!"

Page 153

This seemed to me the wildest possible perversion of the Puritan instinct for self-condemnation and, half-vexed, I attempted some expostulation.

She stopped me with a look and gesture Dante might have had, "You ain't seen what I've seen."

I was half-frightened by her expression but tried to speak coolly. "Why, was it as bad as that paper said?" I asked.

She laid her hand on my arm, "Child, it was nothing like what the paper said...it was so much worse!"

"Oh ..." I commented inadequately.

"I was five days looking for her...they'd moved from the address the paper give. And, in those five days, I saw so many others..._so many others_..." her face twitched. She put one lean old hand before her eyes. Then, quite unexpectedly, she cast out at me an exclamation which made my notion of the pretty picturesqueness of her adventure seem cheap and trivial and superficial. "Jombatiste is right!" she cried to me with a bitter fierceness: "Everything is wrong! Everything is wrong! If I can do anything, I'd ought to do it to help them as want to smash everything up and start over! What good does it do for me to bring up here just these three out of all I saw ..." Her voice broke into pitiful, self-excusing quavers, "but when I saw them ...the baby was so sick ... and little Sigurd is so cunning ... he took to me right away, came to me the first thing ... this morning he wouldn't pick up his new rubbers off the floor for his mother, but, when I asked him, he did, right off ... you ought to have seen what he had on ... such rags ... such dirt ... and 'twan't her fault either! She's ... why she's like anybody ... like a person's cousin they never happened to see before ...why, they were all *folks*!" she cried out, her tired old mind wandering fitfully from one thing to another.

"You didn't find the little boy in the asylum?" I asked.

"He was dead before I got there," she answered.

"Oh ... !" I said again, shocked, and then tentatively, "Had he ...?"

"I don't know whether he had or not," said Cousin Tryphena, "I didn't ask. I didn't want to know. I know too much now!" She looked up fixedly at the mountain line, high and keen against the winter sky. "Jombatiste is right," she said again unsparingly, "I hadn't ought to be enjoying them ... their father ought to be alive and with them. He was willing to work all he could, and yet he ... here I've lived for fifty-five years and never ained my salt a single day. What was I livin' on? The stuff these folks ought to ha' had to eat ... them and the Lord only knows how many more besides! Jombatiste is right ... what I'm doin' now is only a drop in the bucket!"

Page 154

She started from her somber reverie at the sound of a childish wail from the house. ...
“That’s Sigurd ...I *knew* that cat would scratch him!” she told me with instant, breathless agitation, as though the skies were falling, and darted back. After a moment’s hesitation I too, went back and watched her bind up with stiff, unaccustomed old fingers the little scratched hand, watched the frightened little boy sob himself quiet on her old knees that had never before known a child’s soft weight saw the expression in her eyes as she looked down at the sleeping baby and gazed about the untidy room so full of mire, which had always been so orderly and so empty.

She lifted the little boy up higher so that his tousled yellow hair rested against her bosom. He put an arm around her neck and she flushed with pleasure like a girl; but, although she held him close to her with a sudden wistful tenderness, there was in her eyes a gloomy austerity which forbade me to sentimentalize over the picture she made.

“But, Cousin Tryphena,” I urged, “it *is* a drop in the bucket, you know, and that’s something!”

She looked down at the child on her knee, she laid her cheek against his bright hair, but she told me with harsh, self-accusing rigor, “Tain’t right for me to be here alive enjoying that dead man’s little boy.”

* * * * *

That was eighteen months ago. Mrs. Lindstrom is dead of consumption; but the two children are rosy and hearty and not to be distinguished from the other little Yankees of the village. They are devotedly attached to their Aunt Tryphena and rule her despotically.

And so we live along, like a symbol of the great world, bewildered Cousin Tryphena toiling lovingly for her adopted children, with the memory of her descent into hell still darkening and confusing her kind eyes; Jomatiste clothing his old body in rags and his soul in flaming indignation as he batters hopefully at the ramparts of intrenched unrighteousness ... and the rest of us doing nothing at all.

THE GOLDEN TONGUE OF IRELAND

Tongue of spice and salt and wine and honey,
Magic, mystic, sweet, intemperate tongue!
Flower of lavish love and lyric fury,
Mixed on lips forever rash and young,
Wildly droll and quaintly tender;—

Hark, the hidden melodies of Elfland
In the under, in the over tone;

Clear faint wailing of the far-heard banshee,
Out of lands where never the sun shone,
Calling doom on chieftains dying....

PIPER TIM

I

When Moira O'Donnell was born, Timothy Moran was thirty-three years old, a faery number, as he often told himself afterward. When he was forty and she was seven, another mystic number, he dedicated his life to her and she gave him back his lost kingdom of enchantment. It was on the evening of her seventh birthday that she led him to the Land of Heart's Desire he thought he had left forever in green and desolate Donegal, and her birthday fell on the seventh of October, and October is the month when the little people are busiest. He never forgot what she did for him that evening, although her part in it was so brief.

Page 155

His own birthday was on the thirteenth of the month, and he often laid his sorrows to that unchancy date. On the seventh he sat on the old Round Stone, his pipes lying silent beside him, and brooded on his heavy ill. Father Delancey had just left him and had told him flatly that he had no ills at all. Hence he sat, his heart heavier than ever, drooping, under the great maple tree, the road white before him, leading away into the empty, half-translucent shadows of starlight. Father Delancey had said it was only the faery nonsense in his head that made him miserable, and had marshaled before him the irrefutable blessings of his life. Had he not been cared for from the first minute of his landing from Ireland, a penniless piper of nineteen, as though the holy saints themselves were about him? Had he not gone direct to Father Delancey, sent by the priest in Donegal, and had not Father Delancey at once placed him in the Wilcox family, kindest, heartiest, and most stirring of New England farmers? And had he not lived in prosperity with them ever since?

Timothy started at the faery number. "Twinty-one years? So 'tis, Father—an' more! 'Tis twinty-one years to-day since I came, aven and true—the seventh day of October. Sure, somethin' ought to happen on such a day—oughtn't it?"

"Happen?" queried Father Delancey.

"The seventh day of October, the twinty-first year and October bein' the month for thim," said Timothy, elucidating confidently.

Father Delancey frowned and broke into an angry exclamation, "'Tis simple mad ye are, Timothy Moran, with your faery foolishness, and I've a half a mind to take your pipes away from you as a penance for your ignorant superstition!"

"But, Father, I'm the seventh son and sure ye must admit 'tis a lonesome country, all this, that looks so like Donegal and Killarney mountains, an' is so dead-like, wi' no little people to fill up the big gap between the dead an' the livin', an' the good an' the bad. 'Tis empty, all this valley."

"Timothy Moran, that are my sister's husband's cousin's son, I'm ashamed of ye, an' I bid ye note that 'twas the hand of the Blessed Virgin herself that sent ye out o' Ireland, for if you'd 'a' stayed in th' ould country you'd 'a' been bewitched long before now—not, savin' us all th' blessed saints, that I belave in any of your nonsense!"

Timothy smiled at this with an innocent malice. "You see how 'tis, Father. You cannot kape yourself from belivin' in thim and you a man o' God."

"I do *not*, Timothy! 'Tis but a way of speech that I learned in my childhood. An' 'tis lucky for you that I have a knowledge of thim, for any other priest would have driven you out of the parish, you and your stubborn pipes that do naught but play faery music. An' you a man of forty in a trifle of six days, and no wife an' childer to keep you from foolish

notions. If ye had, now, you could be livin' in the proper tenant's house for the Wilcox's man, instead of Michael O'Donnell, who has no business livin' up here on the hill so far from his work that he can come home but once a week to look after his poor motherless child. I will say for you, Tim, that you do your duty by that bit of a slip of a girl baby, keepin' her so neat and clean an' all, times when Mike's not here."

Page 156

Timothy did not raise his drooping head at this praise, and something about his attitude struck sharp across the priest's trained observation. The big, shambling, red-headed man looked like a guilty child. There was a moment's silence, while Father Delancey speculated, and then his experienced instinct sped him to the bull's-eye. "Timothy Moran, you're not putting your foolish notions in the head of that innocent child o' God, Moira O'Donnell, are you?"

The red head sank lower.

"Answer me, man! Are ye fillin' her mind with your *sidhe*[A] and your red-hatted little people an' your stories of 'gentle places' an' the leprechaun?"

[Footnote A: Pronounced *shee* (as in Banshee), the fairies.]

Timothy arose suddenly and flung his long arms abroad in a gesture of revolt. "I am that, Father Delancey, 'tis th' only comfort of my life, livin' it, as I do, in a dead country—a valley where folks have lived and died for two hundred years such lumps of clay that they niver had wan man sharp enough to see the counts in between heaven and earth." He lapsed again into his listless position on the Round Stone. "But ye needn't be a-fearin' for her soul, Father—her wid th' black hair an' the big gray eyes like wan that cud see thim if she wud! She's as dead a lump as anny of th' rest—as thim meat-eatin' Protestants, the Wilcoxes, heaven save the kindly bodies, for they've no souls at all, at all." From the stone he picked up a curiously shaped willow whistle with white lines carved on it in an odd criss-cross pattern. "To-day's her seventh birthday, an' I showed her how to make the cruachan whistle, an' when I'd finished she blew on it a loud note that wud ha' wakened the *sidhe* for miles around in Donegal. An' then she looked at me as dumb as a fish, her big gray eyes blank as a plowed field wid nothin' sown in it. She niver has a word to show that she *hears* me, even, when I tell o' the gentle people." He added in a whisper to himself, "But maybe she's only waiting."

"'Tis the Virgin protectin' her from yer foolishness, Tim," returned the priest, rising with a relieved air. "She'll soon be goin' to district school along with all the other hard-headed little Yankees, and then your tales can't give her notions." With which triumphant meditation he walked briskly away, leaving Timothy to sit alone with his pipes under the maple-tree, flaming with a still heat of burning autumn red, like a faery fire.

His head sank heavily in his hands as his heart grew intolerably sad with the lack he felt in all the world, most of all in himself. He had often tried to tell himself what made the world so dully repellant, but he never could get beyond, "'Tis as though I was aslape an' yet not quite aslape—just half wakin', an' somethin' lovely is goin' on in the next room, an' I can't wake up to see what 'tis. The trouble's with th' people. They're all *dead* aslape here, an' there's nobody to wake me up."

Page 157

"Piper Tim! Piper Tim!" was breathed close to his ear. He sprang up, with wide, startled eyes.

"Piper Tim," said the little girl gravely, "*I've seen them.*"

The man stared at her in a breathless silence.

"A little wee woman with a red hat and kerchief around her neck, an' she said, 'Go straight to Piper Tim an' tell him to play 'The Call o' the Sidhe' as he sits on the Round Stone, for this is th' day of the Cruachan Whistle.'"

The child put out her hand, and drew him to the pipes, still keeping her deep eyes fixed on him, "Play, Piper Tim, an' shut your eyes an' I'll see what you should see an' tell you what 'tis."

The first notes were quavering as the man's big frame shook, but the little hands across his eyes seemed to steady him, and the final flourish was like a call of triumph. In the silence which followed the child spoke in her high little treble with a grave elation. "They're here, Piper Tim, all the river fog in the valley is full of them, dancin' and singin' so gay-like to cheer up the poor hills. An' whist! Here they come up the road, troops and troops of them, all so bright in the ferlie green; an' sure," with a little catch of merriment, "sure, they've no toes on their feet at all! They've danced them all away. And now, Piper Tim, hold your breath, for they'll be after comin' by, but all so still, so still! so you won't hear them and maybe think to open your eyes and see them—for that 'ud mean—sh! sh! Piper Tim, don't stir! *They're here! They're here!*"

His eyes ached with the pressure of the strong little hands across them, his ears ached with straining them into the silence which lay about them. His heart beat fast with hope and then with certainty. Yes, it was no longer the thin, dead silence of the New England woods he knew so unhappily well. It was the still that comes with activity suspended. It was like the quivering quiet of a dancer, suddenly stricken motionless to listen for the sound of intruding footsteps. There was not the faintest sound, but the silence was full of that rich consciousness of life which marks the first awakening of a profound sleeper.

The hands were withdrawn from before his eyes, but he did not open them. He reached blindly for his pipes, and played "The Song of Angus to the Stars," tears of joy running from between his closed eyelids, to recognize in his own music the quality he had been starving for; the sense of the futile, poignant beauty, of the lovely and harmless tragedy, of the sweet, moving, gay sad meaning of things.

When he looked about him he was quite alone. Moira was gone, and the road lay white and still before him.

II

He did not see her all the next day, although he went down to the little house to do the household tasks his big hands performed with so curious a skill. He wished to see her and clear his mind of a weight which the morning's light had put upon him; but she did not come in answer to his call. The little house seemed full of her in its apparent emptiness, and several times he had swung sharply about, feeling her back of him, but always the room had turned a blank face.



Page 158

That evening he was returning late from the upland pastures where he had been searching vainly for a lost cow. His path lay through a thick copse of maple saplings where it was quite dark. As he emerged into a stony pasture, he saw the child standing still in the center of a ring of fern, brown and crumpled by the early frosts. When he appeared she held him motionless by the sudden passion of her gestured appeal for silence. She did not stir after this, her hands laid along her cheeks as though to hold her head quite still, her eyes directed with a smiling eagerness toward a huge rock, looming dimly in the transparent twilight. The silence was oppressive. Timothy's blood ran chill as the expectancy grew more and more strained in the child's eyes. He did not dare look at the rock himself. He stared only at the elfin creature before him, and when her hands were finally flung out in a gesture of welcoming ardor, he broke the unearthly silence by crying out loud in a rapid whirl, "God save us. Christ save us! The Holy Virgin guard us! St. Patrick defend us! St. Columba—"

The little girl burst into a storm of tears and sank down on the ferns. Timothy stopped his hysterical litany and ran toward her. "Don't you come a-near me, bad Piper Tim!" she sobbed. "You don't dare step on the magic circle anyhow. It 'ud burn your wicked foot!"

The big farm laborer drew back in a terror he instantly disguised. "I was just lookin' for you, Moira aroon," he said propitiatingly. "I was wishin' to tell you—to tell you—why, that it's all pretend. There aren't any little people really, you know. 'Tis just old Tim's nonsense." He shivered at the blasphemy and crossed himself. "Or, if there are any, 'tis only in th' ould country." The child rose to her feet, eying him strangely, her eyes like deep pools.

He went on conscientiously, with a mental eye on Father Delancey, "An' if there *are* any, which they aren't, they're bad things for Christians to have aught to do with, because they know neither right nor wrong, and 'tisn't fit that mortals should iver be light an' gay wi' that burden gone! So they're bad for us—an' we shouldn't think of thim, and just cross ourselves whenever—"

The unspoken protest in the child's face was grown so passionate that he interrupted himself to answer it in a burst of sympathy. "Och, Moira, acushla, sure an' I know how 'tis to ye—" And then with a reaction to virtue, he said sternly, "An' if they're not bad, why do they go when you call on the blessed saints?"

At this the child's face twisted again for tears. "Och, bad Piper Tim, to scare them away from me! It's not that they're bad—only that good's too heavy for them. They're such *little* people! It's too heavy! It's too heavy." She ran away through the dusk, sobbing and calling this over her shoulder reproachfully.

Page 159

In the weeks which followed, old Timothy Moran, as he was called, could scarcely complain that he was but half awake. He seemed to be making up for the dull apathy of his long exile by the storminess of his days and nights. Mrs. Wilcox, bustling housewife, hastening about the kitchen, engaged in some late evening task, was moved to a sudden burst of hysterical tears, by the faint sound of Tim's pipes, dropping down to her from the Round Stone in a whirling roulade of ever-ascending merriness. "You, Ralph!" she cried angrily through her sobs, to her oldest boy, stricken open-mouthed and silent by his mother's amazing outburst, "you, Ralph, run up to the Round Stone and tell the Irishman to stop playing that jig over and over. I'm that tired to-night it drives me wild with nerves!" As she brushed away the tears she said fretfully, "My sakes! When my liver gets to tormenting me so I have the megrims like a girl, it's time to do something."

The boy came back to say that Old Tim had stopped playing "the jig" before he reached him, and was lying sobbing on the stone.

Moira was as approachable as a barn swallow, swooping into the house for a mouthful of food and off again to the sky apparently. Timothy's child-heart was guiltily heavy within him, for all his excitement, and when he finally caught her in the pine woods he spoke briefly and firmly, almost like Father Delancey himself. "Moira, Tim was a big fool to tell you lies. There aren't really any little people. Tis only a way of talkin'-like, to say how lovely the woods and stars an' all are."

"Why do you sit on the Round Stone evenings?" asked Moira defiantly.

"That's just it! I pretend all kind o' things, but it's really because the moon is like gold, and the white fog comes up in puffs like incense in the church, an' the valley's all bright wi' lamps like the sky wi' stars. That's all anybody means by fairies—just how lovely things are if we can but open our eyes to see them, an' take time from th' ugly business o' livin' to hear them, and get a place quiet enough to half see what everything means. I didn't know before, in Ireland, but now I'm like one born again to the ferie country, and now I think I know. There aren't any Little People really but just in your own head—"

Moira shook off his hand and faced him, laughing mockingly, her dark eyes wide with an elfin merriment. "Are there not, Piper Tim? Are there not? Listen! You'll see!" She held up a tiny forefinger to the great man towering above her. As he looked down on her, so pixy-like in the twilight of the pines, he felt his flesh creep. She seemed to be waiting for something infinitely comic which yet should startle her. She was poised, half turned as though for flight, yet hung so, without a quiver in an endless listening pause. The man tried in vain to remember the name of a single saint, so held was he by the breathless expectancy in the eyes of the little hobgoblin. His nerves gave way with a loud snap when she suddenly leaped up at him with snapping fingers and some whispered, half-heard exclamation of "Now! Now!" and turning he plunged down the hill in panic-stricken flight. And the next day Father Delancey took her down to the valley to begin her schooling.

Page 160

III

Upon her return she had adopted the attitude which she never changed during all the years until Timothy went away. She would not speak openly, nor allow Tim to discuss “their” existence. “They mind their business and we should mind ours,” she said, eying him hard; but she made his world over for him. Every spring she came back from the valley school and every autumn she went away; and the months in between were golden. After Timothy’s work was done in the evenings, he left the hot kitchen, redolent of food and fire and kindly human life, took his pipes up on the Round Stone and played one after another of the songs of the sidhe, until the child’s white face shone suddenly from the dusk.

Then their entertainment varied. Sometimes they sat and watched the white river fog rise toward them, translucent and distant at first, and then blowing upon them in gusty, impalpable billows. Timothy’s tongue was loosened by the understanding in the little girl’s eyes and he poured out to her the wise foolishness of his inconsequent and profound faery lore. He told her what was in the fog for him, the souls of mountain people long dead, who came back to their home heights thus. He related long tales of the doings of the leprechaun, with lovely, irrelevant episodes, and told her what he thought was their meaning.

Some nights the moon rode high and the air was clear and those were not the times for words—only for sitting quite still and playing every air in all the world on the pipes. Moira lay beside him, her strange, wide eyes fixed intently on the road and the shadows until she peopled them almost visibly to the musician with the folk of his melodies—with Angus, the beautiful and strong, with Maive, the sad, the happy, with Congal of the frightful Vision of War, and Mananan, strange wanderer on these mountain tops.

Sometimes it rained, the long steady downpour of summer nights, and they sat on the steps of Michael O’Donnell’s little cabin, Timothy’s pipes sounding sweet and shrill against the deep note of the rushing rain. This was the time of the wildest stories, when sheltering walls were close about them; of newly wed wives carried off by the fairies to live happy always, always without a moment of pain, and then to perish utterly on the Day of Judgment, like a last year’s butterfly, for souls cannot live without sorrow; of newly born babes whose souls were carried away by the sidhe because a cock was not killed on the night of their birth, and of the mystic meaning of vicarious sacrifice; of people who had lain down to sleep unaware in a fairy ring and were foolish ever afterward—that is, as people say, foolish, but really wise, for they saw how things are; of homes built unknowingly across a fairy path where the sidhe take their journeys, and how ill luck followed the inhabitants until they moved, and of the strange penalties for living out of harmony with the little-known currents of the soul’s life; of how blind men see more than others; of how a fool is one whose mind is so cleared of all futile commonplace traffic that it reflects untroubled and serene the stars and their courses; of

how wisdom is folly, and life, death. All these things and many more did Timothy say in words and play in music on his pipes, and to all of them Moira gave her wide comprehending silence.

Page 161

The best of all was on evenings when the stars came out first, and then as the two sat watching them from the Round Stone they suddenly began to pale, and the moon flashed into sight, rising swiftly over the mountain Moira called "The Hill o' Delights," because it was from a wide, white door in it that the rushing, light-footed little people came out every evening when the twilight fell and the harsh endeavor of human life was stilled to peace. There was neither talk nor music on those evenings, but a silence full, like the lovely world about them, of unsaid, quivering joy. Sometimes Timothy would turn after such a long time of deep and cheering mutual knowledge of how fair were all things, and find Moira slipped away from beside him; but so impalpable was the companionship she gave him in the strange and sweet confusion of his thoughts that he did not feel himself alone, though she might be already deep in the pines behind him.

The girl grew taller, but the cool whiteness of her face was untinged by any flush of young maidenhood. At seventeen she was a slender sprite of a girl, to reach whose unearthly aloofness the warm human hands of her companions strained unavailing. Each winter she descended to the valley and to school and church, a silent, remote child, moving like one in a dream. And every spring she came back to the hill, to Timothy and his pipes, to the pines and the uplands, to the Round Stone and the white road in front of it. Ralph Wilcox, hearty, kindly son of his hearty, kindly parents, tried to speak to her long enough to make her seem real, but she was rarely in the house except during the day and a half of each week when her father was there; and on their casual encounters out of doors she melted from before his eyes like a pixie, knowing the hiding places and turns of his own land better than he. Sometimes he caught a glimpse of her afterward, regarding him steadily and curiously from a nook in a hillside, and once as she darted away she had dropped a handkerchief and turned her head in time to see him pick it up; but she did not slacken her pace, or speak to him then or at all.

She rarely spoke, even to Timothy, but this was no barrier between them. All the winter Timothy lived on the thoughts of the spring, and when the arbutus and Moira came back he poured out to her the strange treasures he had found in his heart. Scarcely to her, for she only gazed silent at the stars as he talked. Rather she seemed to unlock in him the rich stores of his own understanding and emotion. He marveled that he could ever have found the valley empty. He felt within him a swelling flood, ever renewed, of significance to fill all his world with a sweet and comforting meaning.

And so his red hair grew threaded with white, and his foolish, idle heart happier and happier as the years went on. Then, one midwinter day, Father Delancey climbed the hill to say that Timothy's sister's husband was dead, and that Timothy was sent for to take his place, hold the Nebraska claim, work the land, and be a father to his sister's children. Timothy was stunned with horror, but the unbending will of the never-contradicted parish priest bore him along without question.

Page 162

“Sure, Tim, go! I tell you to! ’Tis the only thing to do! And ’twill be a man’s work and earn ye many hours out of purgatory. An’ ’twill be grand for ye, ye that never would have a family o’ your own—here’s the Blessed Virgin pushin’ ye into one, ready-made. ’Twill be the makin’ o’ ye, ’twill make ye rale human, an’ ye’ll have no more time for star-gazin’ an’ such foolishness. Ye can find out what people are in the world for, instead keepin’ yerself so outside o’ things. Sure, yes, man, yes, I’ll tell Moira ye said good-by to her, an’—yes, I give ye my word, and promise true and true, I’ll lave ye now if she moves away or if any harm comes to her.”

IV

His grizzled hair was turned quite white when his sister kissed him good-by, fresh tears in her eyes, scarcely dry from the excitement of her youngest daughter’s wedding. She had a moment of divination like his, and said sadly, “There’s no use trying to thank ye, Timmy, words can’t do it. If ye’d been anybody else, I cud ha’ said ye got ye’r pay for all these long, hard years in the love the childer bear ye. That’s the pay folks get for workin’ an’ livin’ for others—but ye’re not folks. Is’t that ye’re the seventh son? Is’t that ye’ve second sight? Is’t that—*what* is’t that makes ye so far away? An’ what *is* ye’r pay, Tim? Now that it’s over and the children all safe and grown up, ye look yerself like a child that’s done its lesson an’ run out to play. Is’t all just work or play with ye? Can’t ye niver just *live*?”

In truth her brother’s eagerness to be away was scarcely concealed at all from the grateful, wistful Irish eyes about him. He was breathless with haste to be off. The long trip to New England was a never-ending nightmare of delay to him, and although he had planned for years to walk up the hill, his trembling old legs dragged in a slow progress maddening to his impatience. A farmer, driving by, offered him a lift, which he accepted gratefully, sitting strained far forward on the high seat. At a turn of the road he looked back and saw that he had passed the cluster of pines where Moira had laughed at him, and where he had felt so thick about him the thronging rush of his newly awakened perceptions of the finer meaning of things, the gay, sweet crowd of gentle little people.

He stopped the farmer and, leaping down from the high seat, he took his pipes under his arm and fairly ran up the little path. His rheumatic knee creaked a little, but the color came up hard in his tired old face as the twilight of the pines and their pungent, welcoming breath fell about him. He cast him down and buried his face in the rust-red dried needles. He did not weep, but from time to time a long sigh heaved his shoulders. Then he turned over and lay on his back, looking at the sunset-yellow sky through the green, thick-clustered needles, noticing how the light made each one glisten as though dipped in molten

Page 163

gold. His hand strayed out to his pipes, lying beside him with mute, gaping mouths. "The Gold o' the Glamour," he murmured to himself, and as he broke the silence with the old tune faintly blown, he felt the wood peopled about him as of yore with twilight forms. Unseen bright eyes gazed at him from behind tree-trunks, and the branches were populous with invisible, kindly listeners. The very hush was symbolic of the consciousness of the wood that he was there again. There was none of the careless commonplace of rustling leaves, and snapping twigs, and indifferent, fearless bird-song. In the death-like still he felt life quivering and observant with a thousand innocent, curious, welcoming eyes.

When he had quavered through the last note he let the pipes fall and gazed about him with a smile, like a happy old child. The sun sank behind the mountain as he looked, and he pulled himself heavily up. His way to the farm lay over bare upland pastures where his feet, accustomed for years to the yielding prairie levels, stumbled and tripped among the loose stones. Twilight came on rapidly, so that he found himself several times walking blindly through fairy rings of fern. He crossed himself and bowed his head three times to the west, where the evening star now shone pale in the radiance of the glowing sky. Between two of the ridges he wandered into a bog where his feet, hot in their heavy boots, felt gratefully the oozing, cool brown water.

And then, as he stepped into the lane, dark with dense maple-trees and echoing faintly with the notes of the hermit thrush, he saw the light of the little house glimmer through the trees in so exactly the spot where his hungering eyes sought it that his heart gave a great hammering leap in his breast.

He knocked at the door, half doubtfully, for all his eagerness. It might be she lived elsewhere in the parish now. He had schooled himself to this thought so that it was no surprise, although a heavy disappointment, when the door was opened by a small dark man holding a sleeping baby on his arm. Timothy lowered his voice and the man gave a brief and hushed answer. He spoke in a strong French-Canadian accent. "Moirs O'Donnell? I nevaire heard before. Go to ze house on ze hill—mebbe zey know—"

He closed the door, and, through the open window, Timothy saw him sit down, still holding the baby and looking at it as though the interrupting episode were already forgotten. The old man shivered with a passing eerie sense of being like a ghost knocking vainly at the doors of the living. He limped up the hill, and knocked on the kitchen door of the old Wilcox house. To his eyes, dilated with the wide dusk of the early evening, the windows seemed to blaze with light, and when the door was opened to him he shaded his eyes, blinking fast against the rays of a lamp held high in the hand of a round, little woman who looked at him with an impersonal kindness. His heart beat so he could not speak.

Page 164

Suddenly from the past rang out his old name, the one he had almost lost in the dreary years of "Uncle Tim" which lay behind him.

"Why, Piper Tim!" cried the woman in a voice of exceeding warmth and affection. "Why, it's dear, dear, darling old Piper Tim come back to visit his old home. I knew ye in a minute by the pipes. Come in! Come in! There's not a soul livin' or dead that's welcomer in th' house of Moira Wilcox."

The name blazed high through all the confusion of his swimming senses. To his blank look she returned a mellow laugh. "Why sure, Timmy darlint, hasn't anybody; iver told ye I was married? I'd have written ye myself, only that I knew you couldn't read it, and 'twas hard to tell through other people. Though, saints preserve us, 'tis long since I thought anything about it, one way or th' other. 'Tis as nat'ral as breathing now."

She was pulling him into the warm, light room, taking his cap and pipes from him, and at the last she pushed him affectionately into a chair, and stood looking kindly at his pale agitation, her arms wide in a soft angle as she placed her hands on her rounded hips. "Oh, Timothy Moran, you darlint! Moira's that glad to see you! You mind me of the times when I was young and that's comin' to be long ago."

She turned and stepped hastily to the stove from which rose an appetizing smell of frying ham. As she bent her plump, flushed face over this, the door opened and two dark-eyed little girls darted in. On seeing a stranger, they were frozen in mid-flight with the shy gaze of country children.

"Here, childer, 'tis Piper Tim come back to visit us. Piper Tim that I've told ye so many tales about—an' the gran' tunes he can play on his pipes. He can play with ye better nor I—he niver has aught else to do!" She smiled a wide, friendly smile on the old man as she said this, to show she meant no harm, and turned the slices of ham deftly so that they sent a puff of blue savory smoke up to her face. "Don't th' ham smell good, ye spalpeens, fresh from runnin' th' hills? Go an' wash ye'r faces an' hands and call ye'r father an' brothers. I've four," she added proudly to the man by the table watching her with horrified eyes.

The fumes of the cooking made him sick, the close air suffocated him. He felt as though he were in some oppressive nightmare, and the talk at the supper-table penetrated but dully to his mind. The cordiality of Moira's husband, the shy, curious looks of the children at his pipes, even Moira's face rosy from brow to rounded chin, and beaming with indulgent, affectionate interest all melted together into a sort of indistinguishable confusion. This dull distress was rendered acute anguish by Moira's talk. In that hot, indoor place, with all those ignorant blank faces about her, she spoke of the pines and the upland bogs, of the fog and the Round Stone, and desecrated a sacred thing with every word.

Page 165

It would have been a comfort to him if she had even talked with an apostate's yearning bitterness for his betrayed religion, if she had spoken harshly of their old, sweet folly; but she was all kindness and eager, willing reminiscence. Just as she spoke his name, his faery name of "Piper Tim," in a tone that made it worse than "Uncle Tim," so she blighted one after another of the old memories as she held them up in her firm, assured hands, and laughed gently at their oddity.

After supper as Tim sat again in the kitchen watching her do the evening work, the tides of revulsion rose strong within him. "We were a queer lot, an' no mistake, Piper Tim," she said, scraping at a frying pan with a vigorous knife. "An' the childer are just like us. I've thried to tell them some of our old tales, but—I dun'no'—they've kind o' gone from me, now I've such a lot to do. I suppose you were up to the same always, with your nephews an' nieces out West. 'Twas fine for ye to have a family of your own that way, you that was always so lonely like."

Timothy's shuddering horror of protest rose into words at this, incoherent words and bursts of indignation that took his breath away in gasps. "Moir! *Moir!* What are ye sayin' to me? *Me* wid a family! Anyone who's iver had th' quiet to listen to th' blessed little people—*him* to fill up his ears wid th' clatter of mortal tongues. No? Since I lift here I've had no minute o' peace—oh, Moira, th' country there—th' great flat hidjious country of thim—an' th' people like it—flat an' fruitful. An' oh, Moira, aroon, it's my heart breakin' in me, that now I've worked and worked there and done my mortal task an' had my purgatory before my time, an' I've come back to live again—that ye've no single welcomin' word to bid me stay."

The loving Irish heart of the woman melted in a misunderstanding sympathy and remorse. "Why, poor Piper Tim, I didn't mean ye should go back to them or their country if ye like it better here. Ye're welcome every day of the year from now till judgment tramp. I only meant—why—seem' they were your own folks—and all, that ye'd sort o' taken to thim—the way most do, when it's their own blood."

She flowed on in a stream of fumbling, warm-hearted, mistaken apology that sickened the old man's soul. When he finally rose for his great adventure, he spoke timidly, with a wretched foreknowledge of what her answer would be.

"Och, Piper Tim, 'tis real sweet of ye to think of it and ask me, an' I'd like fine to go. Sure, I've not been on the Round Stone of an evening—why, not since you went away I do believe! But Ralph's goin' to the grange meetin' to-night, an' one of th' childer is restless with a cough, and I think I'll not go. My feet get sort of sore-like, too, after bein' on them all day."

V.

As he stepped out from the warm, brightly lighted room, the night seemed chill and black, but after a moment his eyes dilated and he saw the stars shining through the densely hanging maple leaves.

Page 166

Up by the Round Stone the valley opened out beneath him. Restlessly he looked up and down the road and across the valley with a questing glance which did not show him what he sought. The night for all its dark corners had nothing in it for him beyond what lay openly before him. He put out his hand instinctively for his pipes, remembered that he had left them at the house, and sprang to his feet to return for them. Perhaps Moira would come out with him now. Perhaps the child had gone to sleep. The brief stay in the ample twilight of the hillside had given him a faint, momentary courage to appeal again to her against the narrow brightness of her prison.

Moira sat by the kitchen table, sewing, her smooth round face blooming like a rose in the light from the open door of the stove. Her kindly eyes beamed sweetly on the old man. "Ah, Piper Tim, ye're wise. 'Tis a damp night out for ye'r rheumatis. The fog risin' too, likely?"

The old piper went to her chair and stood looking at her with a fixed gaze, "Moira!" he said vehemently, "Moira O'Donnell that was, the stars are bright over the Round Stone, an' th' moon is risin' behind th' Hill o' Delights, and the first white puffs of incense are risin' from th' whirl-hole of th' river. I've come back for my pipes, and I'm goin' out to play to th' little people—an' oh, shall old Piper Tim go without Moira?"

He spoke with a glowing fervor like the leaping up of a dying candle. From the inexorably kind woman who smiled so friendly on him his heart recoiled and puffed itself out into darkness. She surveyed him with the wise, tender pity of a mother for a foolish, much-loved child. "Sure, 'tis th' same Piper Tim ye are!" she said cheerfully, laying down her work, "but, Lord save ye, Timmy darlint, *Moira's grown up!* There's no need for my pretendin' to play any more, is there, when I've got proper childer o' my own to keep it up. *They* are my little people—an' I don't have to have a quiet place to fancy them up out o' nothin'. They're real! An' they're takin' my place all over again. There's one—the youngest girl—the one that looks so like me as ye noticed—she's just such a one as I was. To-day only (she's seven to-morrow), she minded me of some old tales I had told her about the cruachan whistle for the sidhe on the seventh birthday, an' she'd been tryin' to make one, but I'd clean forgot how the criss-cross lines go. It made me think back on that evening when I was seven—maybe you've forgot, but you was sittin' on the Round Stone in th'——"

Timothy's sore heart rebelled at this last rifling of the shrine, and he made for the door. Moira's sweet solicitude held him for an instant in check. "Oh, Tim, ye'd best stay in an' warm your knee by the good fire. I've a pile of mendin' to do, and you'll tell me all about your family in th' West and how you farmed there. It'll be real cozy-like."

Timothy uttered an outraged sound and snatching up his pipes fled out of the pleasant, low-ceilinged room, up the road, now white as chalk beneath the newly risen moon. At the Round Stone he sat down and, putting his pipes to his lips, he played resolutely through to the end "The Song of Angus to the Stars." As the last, high, confident note

died, he put his pipes down hastily, and dropped his face in his hands with a broken murmur of Gaelic lament.

Page 167

When he looked abroad again, the valley was like a great opal, where the moon shot its rays into the transparent fog far below him. The road was white and the shadows black and one was no more devoid of mystery than the other.

The sky for all its stars hung above the valley like an empty bowl above an empty vessel, and in his heart he felt no swelling possibilities to fill this void. To the haggard old eyes the face of the world was like a dead thing, which did not return his gaze even with hostility, but blankly—a smooth, thin mask which hid behind it nothing at all.

He was startled by the sudden appearance of a dog from out of the shadows, a shaggy collie who trotted briskly down the road, stopping to roll a friendly, inquiring eye on his bent figure. His eyes followed the animal until it vanished in the shadows on the other side. After the sound of its padding footsteps was still, the old man's heart died within him at the silence.

He tried vainly to exorcise this anguish by naming it What was it? Why did he droop dully now that he was where he had so longed to be? Everything was as it had been, the valley, the clean white fog, tossing its waves up to him as he had dreamed of it in the arid days of Nebraska; the mountains closing in on him with the line of drooping peace he had never lost from before his eyes during the long, dreary years of exile. Only he was changed. His eye fell on his mud-caked boots, and his face contracted. "Oh, my! Oh, my!" he said aloud, like an anxious old child. "She couldn't ha' liked my tracking bog durt on to her clane kitchen floor!"

But as he sat brooding, his hand dropped heavily to the Round Stone and encountered a small object which he held up to view. It was a willow whistle of curious construction, with white lines criss-cross on it; and beside it lay a jackknife with a broken blade. The old man looked at it, absently at first, then with a start, and finally with a rush of joyful and exultant exclamations.

And afterward, quite tranquilly, with a shining face of peace, he played softly on his pipes, "The Call of the Sidhe to the Children."

ADESTE FIDELES!

I.

The persuasive agent sought old Miss Abigail out among her flower-beds and held up to her a tiny chair with roses painted on the back. "I was told to see you about these. They're only four dollars a dozen, and the smallest school children love 'em." Miss Abigail straightened herself with difficulty. She had been weeding the gladiolus bed. "Four dollars," she mused, "I was going to put four dollars into rose-bushes this fall." She put out a strong, earth-stained old hand and took the chair. Her affection for her

native Greenford began to rise through her life-long thrift, a mental ferment not unusual with her. Finally, "All right," she said; "send 'em to the schoolhouse, and say they're in memory of all my grandfathers and grandmothers that learned their letters in that schoolhouse."

Page 168

She went back to her digging and the agent clicked the gate back of his retreat. Suddenly she stood up without remembering to ease her back. She heard the first shot from the enemy who was to advance so rapidly upon her thereafter. "Wait a minute," she called to the agent. As he paused, she made a swift calculation. "I don't believe I want a dozen," she said, much surprised. "I can't think of that many little ones." The agent took his notebook. "How many?" he asked.

The ponderous old woman stared at him absently, while she made a mental canvass of the town. She spoke with a gasp. "We don't need any!" she cried. "There ain't a child in school under eleven."

"Take some now and have them handy," urged the agent.

Miss Abigail's gaze again narrowed in silent calculation. When she spoke her exclamation was not for her listener. She had forgotten him. "Good Lord of Love!" she cried. "There ain't a single one comin' up to sit on those chairs if I should buy 'em!"

The agent was utterly blotted from her mind. She did not know when he left her garden. She only knew that there were no children in Greenford. There were no children in her town! "Why, what's comin' to Greenford!" she cried.

And yet, even as she cried out, she was aware that she had had a warning, definite, ominous, a few days before, from the lips of Molly Leonard. At that time she had put away her startled uneasiness with a masterful hand, burying it resolutely where she had laid away all the other emotions of her life, under the brown loam of her garden. But it all came back to her now.

Her thin, fluttering, little old friend had begun with tragic emphasis, "The roof to the library leaks!"

Miss Abigail had laughed as usual at Molly's habit of taking small events with bated breath. "What of it?" she asked. "That roof never was good, even back in the days when 'twas a private house and my great-uncle lived in it."

Miss Molly fluttered still more before the awfulness of her next announcement.

"Well, the talk is that the town won't vote a cent toward repairs."

"They'll have to! You can't get along without a library!"

"No, they won't. The talk is that the men won't vote to have the town give a bit of money for shingles. No, nor to pay somebody to take the place of Ellen Monroe as librarian. She's got work in the print mill at Johnsonville and is going to move down there to be near her mother's family."

“Oh, *talk!*” said Miss Abigail with the easy contempt she had for things outside her garden hedge. “Haven’t you heard men talk before?”

“But they say really they *won’t!* They say nobody ever goes into it any more when the summer folks go away in the autumn.”

Miss Abigail’s gesture indicated that the thing was unthinkable. “What’s the matter with young folks nowadays, anyhow? They always used to run there and chatter till you couldn’t hear yourself think.”

Page 169

Miss Molly lowered her voice like a person coming to the frightening climax of a ghost story. "Miss Abigail, they *ain't* any young folks here any more!"

"What do you call the Pitkin girls!" demanded the other.

"They were the very last ones and they and their mother have decided they'll move to Johnsonville this fall."

Miss Abigail cried out in energetic disapproval, "What in the Lord's world are the Pitkinses going to move away from Greenford for! They belong here!"

Miss Molly marshaled the reasons with a sad swiftness, "There aren't any music pupils left for the oldest one, the two next have got positions in the print mill and little Sarah is too old for the school here any more."

Miss Abigail shook her head impatiently as though to brush away a troublesome gnat. "How about the Leavitts? There ought to be enough young ones in that or family to—"

"They moved to Johnsonville last week, going to rent their house to city folks in the summer, the way all the rest here in the street do. They didn't want to go a bit. Eliza felt dreadful about it, but what can they do? Ezra hasn't had enough carpentering to do in the last six months to pay their grocery bill, and down in Johnsonville they can't get carpenters enough. Besides, all the children's friends are there, and they got so lonesome here winters."

Miss Abigail quailed a little, but rallying, she brought out, "What's the matter with the Bennetts? The whole kit and b'iling of them came in here the other day to pester me asking about how I grew my lilies."

"Why, Miss Abigail! You don't pay any more attention to village news! They've been working in the mills for two years now, and only come home for two weeks in the summer like everybody else."

The old woman stirred her weighty person wrathfully. "Like everybody else! Molly, you talk like a fool! As if there was nobody lived here all the year around!"

"But it's *so*! I don't know what's coming to Greenford!"

An imperative gesture from the older woman cut her short. "Don't chatter so, Molly! If it's true, that about the library, we've got to do something!"

The interview had ended in an agreement from her, after a struggle with the two passions of her life, to give up the tulip bulbs for which she had been saving so long, and spend the money for repairing the roof. Miss Molly, having no money to give, since she was already much poorer than she could possibly be and live, agreed, according to

Miss Abigail's peremptory suggestion, to give her time, and keep the library open at least during the afternoons.

"You can do it, Molly, as well as not, for you don't seem to have half the sewing you used to."

"There's nobody here any more to sew *for*—" began the seamstress despairingly, but Miss Abigail would not listen, bundling her out of the garden gate and sending her trotting home, cheered unreasonably by the old woman's jovial blustering, "No such kind of talk allowed in *my* garden!"

Page 170

But now, after the second warning, Miss Abigail felt the need of some cheer for herself as she toiled among the hollyhocks and larkspurs. She would not let herself think of the significance of the visit of the agent for the chairs, and she could not force herself to think of anything else. For several wretched weeks she hung in this limbo. Then, one morning as she stood gazing at her *Speciosums Rubrums* without seeing them, she received her summons to the front. She had a call from her neighbor, Mr. Edward Horton, whom the rest of the world knows as a sculptor, but whom Miss Abigail esteemed only because of his orthodox ideas on rose culture. He came in to ask some information about a blight on his Red Ramblers, although after Miss Abigail had finished her strong recommendation to use whale oil soap sprayed, and not hellebore, he still lingered, crushing a leaf of lemon verbena between his fingers and sniffing the resultant perfume with thoughtful appreciation. He was almost as enthusiastic a horticulturist as Miss Abigail, and stood high in her good graces as one of the few individuals of sense among the summer colony. She faced him therefore in a peaceable, friendly mood, glad of the diversion from her thoughts, and quite unprepared for the shock he was about to give her.

"I'm on my way to interview the trustees of the church," he remarked. "It is curious that all but one of them now really live in Johnsonville, although they still keep their nominal residence here."

"What do you want to see *them* for?" asked Miss Abigail, with a bluntness caused in part by her wincing at his casual statement of an unwelcome fact.

"Why, I've had what I flatter myself is an inspiration for everyone concerned. I've got a big commission for part of the decorations of the new State House in Montana, and I need a very large studio. It occurred to me the other day that instead of building I'd save time by buying the old church here and using that."

Miss Abigail leaned against the palings. "*Buy our church!*" she said, and every letter was a capital.

"I didn't know you were a member," said the sculptor, a little surprised. "You don't often go."

Miss Abigail shouted out, "Why, my grandfather was minister in that church!" Mr. Horton received this as a statement of fact. "Indeed? I didn't realize the building was so old. I wonder if the foundations are still in good shape." He went on, explanatorily, "I really don't know why I hadn't thought of the plan before. The number who attend church in that great barn of a place could easily be put into someone's parlor, and save the trustees the expense of heating. One of them whom I saw the other day seemed quite pleased with the notion—said they'd been at a loss to know what to do about conditions here." He glanced at his watch. "Well, I must be going or I shall miss the train to Johnsonville. Thank you very much for the hint about the blight."

Page 171

He went down the street, humming a cheerful little tune.

To Miss Abigail it was the bugle call of "Forward, charge!" She had been, for the last few weeks, a little paler than usual. Now her powerful old face flushed to an angry red. She dashed her trowel to the garden path and clenched her fists. "What's coming to Greenford!" she shouted. It was no longer a wail of despair. It was a battle-cry of defiance.

II

She had no time to organize a campaign, forced as she was to begin fighting at once. Reaching wildly for any weapon at hand, she rushed to the front, as grim-visaged a warrior as ever frightened a peaceable, shiftless non-combatant "Joel Barney!" she cried, storming up his front steps. "You're a trustee of the church, aren't you? Well, if you don't vote against selling the church, I'll foreclose the mortgage on your house so quick you can't wink. And you tell 'Lias Bennett that if he doesn't do the same, I'll pile manure all over that field of mine near his place, and stink out his summer renters so they'll never set foot here again."

She shifted tactics as she encountered different adversaries and tried no blackmail on stubborn Miles Benton, whom she took pains to see the next time he came back to Greenford for a visit. Him she hailed as the Native-Born. "How would you like to have brazen models and nasty statues made in the building where your own folks have always gone to church?"

But when the skirmish was over, she realized ruefully that the argument which had brought her her hard-won victory had been the one which, for a person of such very moderate means as hers, reflected the least hope for future battles. At the last, in desperation, she had guaranteed in the name of the Ladies' Aid Society that the church, except for the minister's salary, should thereafter be no expense to the trustees. She had invented that source of authority, remembering that Molly Leonard had said she belonged to the Ladies' Aid Society, "and I can make Molly do anything," she thought, trusting Providence for the management of the others.

As a matter of fact, when she came to investigate the matter, she found that Molly was now the sole remaining member. Her dismay was acute, Molly's finances being only too well known to her, but she rallied bravely. "They don't do much to a church that costs money," she thought, and, when Molly went away, she made out her budget unflinchingly. Wood for the furnace, kerosene for the lamps, wages to the janitor, repairs when needed—"Well, Abigail Warner," she told herself, "it means nothing new bought for the garden, and no new microscope—the roof to the library costing more than they said 'twould and all."

But the joy of triumphant battle was still swelling her doughty old heart, so that even these considerations did not damp her exultation over her artist neighbor the next time he came to see her. He listened to her boasting with his pleasant, philosophic smile, and, when she finished, delivered himself of a quiet little disquisition on the nature of things which was like ice-water in the face of the hot-blooded old fighter.

Page 172

“My dear Miss Abigail, your zeal does your heart credit, and your management of the trustees proves you an unsuspected diplomat; but as a friend, and, believe me, a disinterested friend, let me warn you that you are contending against irresistible forces. You can no more resuscitate your old Greenford than you can any other dead body. You have kept the church from my clutches, it is true, though for that matter I wouldn’t have offered to buy it if I hadn’t thought no one cared about it—but what do you mean to do with it now you have it? You cannot bring back the old Greenford families from their well-paid work in Johnsonville to sit in those rescued pews, or read in your deserted library, or send their children to your empty schoolhouse. You tell me they are loyal to their old home, and love to come back here for visits. Is that strange? Greenford is a charming village set in the midst of beautiful mountains, and Johnsonville is a raw factory town in a plain. But they cannot live on picturesque scenery or old associations. The laws of economics are like all other laws of nature, inevitable in their action and irresistible in—”

Miss Abigail gave the grampus snort which had been her great-grandfather’s war-cry. “Hoo! You’re like all other book folks! You give things such long names you scare yourselves! I haven’t got anything to do with economics, nor it with me. It’s a plain question as to whether the church my ancestors built and worshipped in is to be sold. There’s nothing so inevitable in *that*, let me tell you. Laws of nature—fiddlesticks! How about the law of gravity? Don’t I break that every time I get up gumption enough to raise my hand to my head!”

Mr. Horton looked at the belligerent old woman with the kindest smile of comprehension. “Ah, I know how hard it is for you. In another way I have been through the same bitter experience. My home, my real home, where my own people are, is out in a wind-swept little town on the Nebraska prairies. But I cannot live there because it is too far from my world of artists and art patrons. I tried it once, but the laws of supply and demand work for all alike. I gave it up. Here I am, you see. You can’t help such things. You’d better follow on to Johnsonville now and not embitter the last of your life with a hopeless struggle.”

Miss Abigail fairly shouted at him her repudiation of his ideas. “Not while there is a breath in me! My folks were all soldiers.”

“But even soldiers surrender to overpowering forces.”

“Hoo! Hoo! How do they know they’re overpowering till they’re overpowered! How do they dare surrender till they’re dead! How do they know that if they hold out just a little longer they won’t get reinforcements!”

Mr. Horton was a little impatient of his old friend’s unreason. “My dear Miss Abigail, you have brains. *Use* them! What possible reinforcements can you expect?”

Page 173

The old woman opposed to his arguments nothing but a passionately bare denial. “No! No! No! We’re different! It’s in your blood to give up because you can reason it all out that you’re beaten,” She stood up, shaking with her vehemence. “It’s in my blood to fight and fight and fight—”

“And then what?” asked the sculptor, as she hesitated.

“Go on fighting!” she cried.

III

She was seventy-one years old when she first flew this flag, and for the next four years she battled unceasingly under its bold motto against odds that rapidly grew more overwhelming as the process that had been imperceptibly draining Greenford of its population gained impetus with its own action. In the beginning people moved to Johnsonville because they could get work in the print mill, but after a time they went because the others had gone. Before long there was no cobbler in Greenford because there was so little cobbling to do. After that the butcher went away, then the carpenter, and finally the grocery-store was shut up and deserted by the man whose father and grandfather had kept store in the same building for sixty years. It was the old story. He had a large family of children who needed education and “a chance.”

The well-kept old village still preserved its outer shell of quaintness and had a constantly increasing charm for summering strangers who rejoiced with a shameless egoism in the death-like quiet of the moribund place, and pointed out to visiting friends from the city the tufts of grass beginning to grow in the main street as delightful proofs of the tranquillity of their summer retreat.

Miss Abigail overheard a conversation to this effect one day between some self-invited visitors to her wonderful garden. Her heart burned and her face blackened. “You might as well,” she told them, “laugh at the funny faces of a person who’s choking to death!”

The urbane city people turned amused and inquiring faces upon her. “How so?”

“Roads aren’t for grass to grow in!” she fulminated. “They’re for folks to use, for men and women and little children to go over to and from their homes.”

“Ah, economic conditions,” they began to murmur. “The inevitable laws of supply and —”

“Get out of my garden!” Miss Abigail raged at them. “Get out!”

They had scuttled before her, laughing at her quaint verocity, and she had sworn wrath fully never to let another city dweller inside her gate—a resolution which she was forced

to forego as time passed on and she became more and more hard pressed for ammunition.

Page 174

Up to this time she had lived in perfect satisfaction on seven hundred dollars a year, but now she began to feel straitened. She no longer dared afford even the tiniest expenditure for her garden. She spaded the beds herself, drew leaf mold from the woods in repeated trips with a child's express wagon, and cut the poles for her sweet-peas with her own hands. When Miss Molly Leonard declared herself on the verge of starvation from lack of sewing to do, and threatened to move to Johnsonville to be near her sister Annie, Miss Abigail gave up her "help" and paid Miss Molly for the time spent in the empty reading-room of the library. But the campaign soon called for more than economy, even the most rigid. When the minister had a call elsewhere, and the trustees of the church seized the opportunity to declare it impossible to appoint his successor, Miss Abigail sold her woodlot and arranged through the Home Missionary Board for someone to hold services at least once a fortnight. Later the "big meadow" so long coveted by a New York family as a building site was sacrificed to fill the empty war chest, and, temporarily in funds, she hired a boy to drive her about the country drumming up a congregation.

Christmas time was the hardest for her. The traditions of old Greenford were for much decorating of the church with ropes of hemlock, and a huge Christmas tree in the Town Hall with presents for the best of the Sunday-school scholars. Winding the ropes had been, of old, work for the young unmarried people, laughing and flirting cheerfully. By the promise of a hot supper, which she furnished herself, Miss Abigail succeeded in getting a few stragglers from the back hills, but the number grew steadily smaller year by year. She and Miss Molly always trimmed the Christmas tree themselves. Indeed, it soon became a struggle to pick out any child a regular enough attendant at Sunday-school to be eligible for a present. The time came when Miss Abigail found it difficult to secure any children at all for the annual Christmas party.

The school authorities began to murmur at keeping up the large old schoolhouse for a handful of pupils. Miss Abigail, at her wit's end, guaranteed the fuel for warming the house, and half the pay of a teacher. Examining, after this, her shrunk and meager resources, she discovered she had promised far beyond her means. She was then seventy-three years old, but an ageless valor sprang up in her to meet the new emergency. She focused her acumen to the burning point and saw that the only way out of her situation was to earn some money—an impossible thing at her age. Without an instant's pause, "How shall I do it?" she asked herself, and sat frowning into space for a long time.

Page 175

When she rose up, the next development in her campaign was planned. Not in vain had she listened scornfully to the silly talk of city folks about the picturesqueness of her old house and garden. It was all grist to her mill, she perceived, and during the next summer it was a grimly amused old miller who watched the antics of Abigail Warner, arrayed in a pseudo-oldfashioned gown of green-flowered muslin, with a quaintly ruffled cap confining her rebellious white hair, talking the most correct book-brand of down-east jargon, and selling flowers at twenty times their value to automobile and carriage folk. She did not mind sacrificing her personal dignity, but she did blush for her garden, reduced to the most obvious commonplaces of flowers that any child could grow. But by September she had saved the school-teacher's pay, and the Martins and the Allens, who had been wavering on account of their children, decided to stay another winter at least.

That was *something*, Miss Abigail thought, that Christmas, as she and Miss Molly tortured their rheumatic limbs to play games with the six children around the tree. She had held rigorously to the old tradition of having the Christmas tree party in the Town Hall, and she had heartened Miss Molly through the long lonely hours they had spent in trimming it; but as the tiny handful of forlorn celebrants gathered about the tall tree, glittering in all the tinsel finery which was left over from the days when the big hall had rung to the laughter of a hundred children and as many more young people, even Miss Abigail felt a catch in her throat as she quavered through "King *Willyum* was King *James's* son!"

When the games were over and the children sat about soberly, eating their ice-cream and cake, she looked over her shoulder into the big empty room and shivered. The children went away and she and Miss Molly put out the lights in silence. When they came out into the moonlight and looked up and down the deserted street, lined with darkened houses, the face of the younger woman was frankly tear-stained. "Oh, Miss Abigail," she said; "let's give it up!"

Miss Abigail waited an instant, perceptible instant before answering, but, when she did, her voice was full and harsh with its usual vigor. "Fiddlesticks! You must ha' been losing your sleep. Go tuck yourself up and get a good night's rest and you won't talk such kind of talk!"

But she herself sat up late into the night with a pencil and paper, figuring out sums that had impossible answers.

That March she had a slight stroke of paralysis, and was in an agony of apprehension lest she should not recover enough to plant the flowers for the summer's market. By May, flatly against the doctor's orders, she was dragging herself around the garden on crutches, and she stuck to her post, smiling and making prearranged rustic speeches all the summer. She earned enough to pay the school-teacher another winter and to buy the fuel for the schoolhouse, and again the Martins and the Allens stayed over; though

they announced with a callous indifference to Miss Abigail's ideas that they were going down to Johnsonville at Christmas to visit their relatives there, and have the children go to the tree the ex-Greenfordites always trimmed.

Page 176

When she heard this Miss Abigail set off to the Allen farm on the lower slope of Hemlock Mountain. "Wa'n't our tree good enough?" she demanded hotly.

"The *tree* was all right," they answered, "but the children were so mortal lonesome. Little Katie Ann came home crying."

Miss Abigail turned away without answering and hobbled off up the road toward the mountain. Things were black before her eyes and in her heart as she went blindly forward where the road led her. She still fought off any acknowledgment of the bitterness that filled her, but when the road, after dwindling to a wood trail and then to a path, finally stopped, she sat down with a great swelling breath. "Well, I guess this is the end," she said aloud, instantly thereafter making a pretense to herself that she meant the road. She looked about her with a brave show of interest in the bare November woods, unroofed and open to the sunlight, and was rewarded by a throb of real interest to observe that she was where she had not been for forty years, when she used to clamber over the spur of Hemlock Mountain to hunt for lady's-slippers in the marshy ground at the head of the gorge. A few steps more and she would be on her own property, a steep, rocky tract of brushland left her by her great-uncle. She had a throb as she realized that, besides her house and garden, this unsalable bit of the mountainside was her only remaining possession. She had indeed come to the end.

With the thought came her old dogged defiance to despair. She shut her hands on her crutches, pulled herself heavily up to her feet, and toiled forward through some brush. She would not allow herself to think if thoughts were like that. Soon she came out into a little clearing beside the Winthrop Branch, swirling and fumbling in its headlong descent. The remains of a stone wall and a blackened beam or two showed her that she had hit upon the ruins of the old sawmill her great-grandfather had owned. This forgotten and abandoned decay, a symbol of the future of the whole region, struck a last blow at the remnants of her courage. She sank down on the wall and set herself to a losing struggle with the blackness that was closing in about her. All her effort had been in vain. The fight was over. She had not a weapon left.

A last spark of valor flickered into flame within her. She stood up, lifting her head high, and summoning with a loudly beating heart every scattered energy. She was alive; her fight could not be over while she still breathed.

For an instant she stood, self-hypnotized by the intensity of her resolution. Then there burst upon her ear, as though she had not heard it before, the roar of the water rushing past her. It sounded like a loud voice calling to her. She shivered and turned a little giddy as though passing into a trance, and then, with one bound, the gigantic forces of subconscious self, wrought by her long struggle to a white heat of concentration on one aim, arose and mastered her. For a time—hours perhaps—she never knew how long, old Miss Abigail was a genius, with the brain of an engineer and the prophetic vision of a seer.

Page 177

IV

The next months were the hardest of her life. The long dreary battle against insurmountable obstacles she had been able to bear with a stoical front, but the sickening alternations of emotions which now filled her days wore upon her until she was fairly suffocated. About mail time each day she became of an unendurable irritability, so that poor Miss Molly was quite afraid to go near her. For the first time in her life there was no living thing growing in her house.

"Don't you mean to have any service this Christmas?" asked Miss Molly one day.

Miss Abigail shouted at her so fiercely that she retreated in a panic. "Why not? Why shouldn't we? What makes you think such a thing?"

"Why, I didn't know of anybody to go but just you and me, and I noticed that you hadn't any flowers started for decorations the way you always do."

Miss Abigail flamed and fulminated as though her timid little friend had offered her an insult. "I've been to service in that church every Christmas since I was born and I shall till I die. And as for my not growing any flowers, that's *my* business, ain't it!" Her voice cracked under the outraged emphasis she put on it.

Her companion fled away without a word, and Miss Abigail sank into a chair trembling. It came over her with a shock that her preoccupation had been so great that she had *forgotten* about her winter flowers.

The fortnight before Christmas was interminable to her. Every morning she broke a hobbling path through the snow to the post-office, where she waited with a haggard face for the postmaster's verdict of "nothing." The rest of the day she wandered desolately about her house, from one window to another, always staring, staring up at Hemlock Mountain.

She disposed of the problem of the Christmas service with the absent competence of a person engrossed in greater matters. Miss Molly had declared it impossible—there was no money for a minister, there was no congregation, there was no fuel for the furnace. Miss Abigail wrote so urgently to the Theological Seminary of the next State that they promised one of their seniors for the service; and she loaded a hand sled with wood from her own woodshed and, harnessing herself and Miss Molly to it, drew it with painful difficulty through the empty village street. There was not enough of this fuel to fill even once the great furnace in the cellar, so she decreed that the service should be in the vestibule where a stove stood. The last few days before Christmas she spent in sending out desperate appeals to remote families to come. But when the morning arrived, she and Miss Molly were the only ones there.

Page 178

The young theologian appeared a little before the appointed time, brought in the motor car of a wealthy friend of his own age. They were trying to make a record winter trip, and were impatient at the delay occasioned by the service. When they saw that two shabby old women constituted the congregation, they laughed as they stood warming their hands by the stove and waiting for the hour. They ignored the two women, chatting lightly of their own affairs. It seemed that they were on their way to a winter house party to which the young clergyman-to-be was invited on account of his fine voice—an operetta by amateurs being one of the gayeties to which they looked forward.

Miss Abigail and Miss Molly were silent in their rusty black, Miss Molly's soft eyes red with restrained tears, Miss Abigail's face like a flint.

"A pretty place, this village is," said the motorist to the minister. "I have visited the Ellerys here. Really charming in summer time—so utterly deserted and peaceful." He looked out of the window speculatively. "Rather odd we should be passing through it to-day. There's been a lot of talk about it in our family lately."

"How so?" asked the minister, beginning cautiously to unwind the wrapping from around his throat.

"Why, my brother-in-law—Peg's husband—don't you remember, the one who sang so fearfully flat in——" He was off on a reminiscence over which both men laughed loudly.

Finally, "But what did you start to tell me about him?" asked the minister.

"I forget, I'm sure. What was it? Oh, yes; he owns those print mills in Johnsonville—hideous place for Peg to live, that town!—and of late he's been awfully put out by the failure of his water-power. There's not much fall there at the best, and when the river's low—and it's low most all the time nowadays—he doesn't get power enough, so he says, to run a churn! He's been wondering what he could do about it, when doesn't he get a tip from some old Rube up here that, above this village, there's a whopping water-power—the Winthrop Branch. I know it—fished it lots of times. He didn't take any stock in it of course at first, but, just on the chance, he sent his engineer up here to look it over, and, by Jove, it's true. It'll furnish twice the power he's had in Johnsonville lately."

"Seems queer," said the minister a little skeptically, "that nobody's ever thought of it before."

"Well, I said that, but Pete says that his engineer tells him that there are lots of such unknown water-powers in the East. Nobody but farmers live near 'em, you see."

The minister was but mildly interested. "I thought the cost of transmitting power was so great it didn't pay for any water-force but Niagara."

Page 179

“He isn’t going to carry the power to Johnsonville. He’s going to bring his mill here. A lot of his operators come from around here and most of ’em have kept their old homes, so there won’t be any trouble about keeping his help. Besides, it seems the old hayseed who wrote him about it owned the land, and offered him land, water-power, right of way—anything!—free, just to ‘help the town’ by getting the mill up here. That bespeaks the materialistic Yankee, doesn’t it?—to want to spoil a quiet little Paradise like this village with a lot of greasy mill-hands.”

The minister looked at his watch. “I think I’ll begin the service now. There’s no use waiting for a congregation to turn up.” He felt in one pocket after the other with increasing irritation. “Pshaw! I’ve left my eyeglasses out in the car.” The two disappeared, leaving the vestibule echoing and empty.

For a moment the two women did not speak. Then Miss Molly cast herself upon her old friend’s bosom. “They’re coming back!” she cried. “Annie and her children!”

Miss Abigail stared over her head. “They are *all* coming back,” she said, “and—we are ready for them. The library’s ready—the school is ready—” she got up and opened the door into the great, cold, lofty church, “and—” They looked in silence at the empty pews.

“Next Christmas!” said Miss Molly. “Next Christmas—”

The young minister bustled in, announcing as he came, “We will open the service by singing hymn number forty-nine.”

He sat down before the little old organ and struck a resonant chord.

“Oh, come, all ye faithful!”

his full rich voice proclaimed, and then he stopped short, startled by a great cry from Miss Abigail. Looking over his shoulder, he saw that the tears were streaming down her face. He smiled to himself at the sentimentality of old women and turned again to the organ, relieved that his performance of a favorite hymn was not to be marred by cracked trebles. He sang with much taste and expression.

“Oh, come, all ye faithful!”

he chanted lustily,

“Joyful and triumphant!”