

The Harvest of Years eBook

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THE HARVEST OF YEARS

CHAPTER I.

"Emily did it."

Among my earliest recollections these three words have a place, coming to my ears as the presages of a reprimand. I had made a frantic effort to lift my baby-brother from his cradle, and had succeeded only in upsetting baby, pillows and all, waking my mother from her little nap, while brother Hal stood by and shouted, "Emily did it." I was only five years of age at that eventful period, and was as indignant at the scolding I received when trying to do a magnanimous act, take care of baby and let poor, tired mother sleep, as I have been many times since, when, unluckily, I had upset somebody's dish, and "Emily did it" has rung its hateful sound in my ears. To say I was unlucky was not enough; I was untimely, unwarranted and unwanted, I often felt, in early years in everything I attempted, and the naturally quick temper I possessed was only aggravated and tortured into more harassing activity, rendering me on the whole, perhaps, not very amiable. Interesting I could not be, since whatever I attempted I seemed fated to say or do something to hurt somebody's feelings, and, mortified at my failures, I would draw myself closer to myself, shrinking from others, and saying again and again, "Emily, why *must* you do it?"

Introducing myself thus clouded to your sympathy, I cannot expect my reader would be interested in a rehearsal of all my early trials.

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You can imagine how it must have been as I marched along from childhood through girlhood into womanhood, while I still clung to my strange ways and peculiar sayings; upsetting of inkstands at school, mud tracking over the carpet in the “best room” at home, unconscious betrayal of mischief plans, *etc.*, *etc.*, made up the full catalogue of my days and their experiences, and although I did have a few warm friends, I could not be as other girls were, generally happy and beloved.

Mother was the only real friend I had; it seemed to me, as I grew older, she learned to know that I was too often blamed, where at heart I was wholly blameless, and when sometimes she stroked my hair, and said, “My dear child, how unlucky you are,” I felt that I could do anything for her, and she never, to my remembrance, said “Emily did it.”

From my father I often heard it. Hal rarely, if ever, said anything else, and if I did sometimes darn his stockings a little too thick, it was not such a heinous crime. He was handsome, and I was as proud of his face as I was ashamed of my own; I know now that my features were not so bad, but my spirit never shone through them, while Hal carried every thought right in his face. My face also might have looked attractive if I had only been understood, but I blame no one for that, when I was covered even as a “leopard with spots,” indicating everything but the blessed thoughts I sometimes had and the better part of my nature. The interval of years between my fifth and sixteenth birthdays was too full of recurring mishaps of every kind to leave within my memory distinct traces of the little joys that sometimes crept in upon me. I number them all when I recall the face of my more than blessed mother and the mild eyes of Mary Snow, who was kinder and nearer to me than the others of my school-mates.

Hal grew daily more of a torment, and being five years my senior, “bossed” me about to his satisfaction, except at such times as I grew too vexed with him to restrain my anger, and turning upon him would pour volleys of wrath upon his head. On these occasions he seemed really afraid of me, and, for a time after, I would experience a little peace. Learning from experience that keeping my thoughts to myself was the best means of quiet, I grew, after leaving school, less inclined to associate with anyone except sweet Mary Snow. One blessed consciousness grew daily on me, and that was that I came nearer my mother’s heart, and as I was never lazy, I shared many of her joys and trials and learned to keep my rebellious nature almost wholly in check. Father was a good man, but unfortunate in business affairs, and the first time he undertook to carry out an enterprise of his own, he pulled everything over on to his head—just as I did the baby. This was of course a misfortune of which his wife had her share, but she never complained. The lines about her eyes grew darker, and she ceased to sing at her work as before, and I knew, for she

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told me, that in the years that followed, I grew so close to her, I became a great help to her and really shared her burdens. My little brother, Ben, varied Hal's "Emily did it," and with him "Emily will do it" was a perfect maxim. Kites I made without number, and gave my spare time to running through the meadows with him to help him fly them and to the making of his little wheelbarrows, and I loved him dearly. I seemed now to be less unlucky, and at home, at least, contented, but society had no charms for me and I had none for society; consequently we could happily agree to let each other alone, but, without repining, I had still sometimes, oh! such longings—for something, I knew not what.

CHAPTER II.

From girlhood to womanhood.

The old adage of a poor beginning makes a good ending, may have been true in my case; certain it is that my sorest mishaps, or those I had least strength to bear, came between my fifth and sixteenth birthdays. After this came the happy period in which I was helpmeet to my mother, and the gaining of an almost complete victory over my temper, even when teased by Hal, who at that time was developing rapidly into manhood and was growing very handsome.

I was not changed outwardly, unless my smile was more bright and frequent, as became my feelings, and my eyes, I know, shot fewer dark glances at those around me when mishaps, although less frequent, came sometimes to me. My good angel was with me oftener then, I thought, and as I often told mother, it seemed to me I had daily a two-fold growth, meaning that there was the growing consciousness of a nature pulsating as a life within my heart that seemed like a strong full tide constantly bearing me up. I scarcely understood it then, but now I know I had, as every one has, a dual nature, one side of which had never been allowed to appear above its earthly covering.

My daily trials, coming always from luckless mistakes of my own, were equal in their effect to the killing of my blossoms, for if any dared to show their heads an untimely word or deed would bring a reproach—if only in the three words, "Emily did it"—and this reproach was like the stamping of feet on violet buds, breaking, crushing and robbing them of their sweet promise. The life then must go back into the roots and a long time elapse ere they could again burst forth; so all my better nature, with its higher thoughts longing to develop, was forced down and back, and now, in the enjoyment of more favorable environment, I was beginning to realize the fruitful life which daily grew upon me, and with it came strength of mind and purpose and an imagery of thought that filled my soul to a delicious fullness.

What a power those conditions were to me! I drank joy in everything. My mother's step was as music, and her teachings even in household affairs a blessing to my spirit. I remember how one day in September I was dishing soup for dinner, the thought—suppose that she dies—came rushing over me like a cold wave, and I screamed aloud; dropping my soup-dish and all, and frightening poor mother almost out of her senses.

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"Have you scalded yourself, dear?" she cried, running toward me, and I was nearly faint as I replied:

"Only a thought. I am so sorry about the soup, but it was a terrible thought," and then I told her.

No word of chiding came from her lips. I thought I saw tears in her eyes as she said: "I should not like to leave you, dear. We are very happy here together," and I know my eyes were moist as I thought, "Emily did it," but her mother understands her.

How necessary all those days of feeling, full and deep, combined with the details of practical life were to me, and although I shall never date pleasant memories back to my earlier years, still if I had been too carefully handled and nursed I never could have enjoyed those days so much.

Nearly twenty-four months of uninterrupted work and enjoyment passed over me—and here is a thought from that first experience in soul growth; I cannot ever believe that people will enjoy themselves lazily in heaven more than here; I have another, only a vague idea of how it will be, but I cannot think of being idle there—when a little change appeared, only to usher in what proved to be a greater one, and the days of the June month in which the first came I shall never forget. It was when Hal came to me, hemming and thinking under my favorite tree in the old orchard, while beside me lay my scrap-book in which I from time to time jotted thoughts as they came to me. Hal sat down beside me and said at once:

"I'm going to try it, Emily." I dropped hemming and thinking together, and said:

"Try what?"

"Try my luck."

I was only bewildered by his answer, and he continued:

"Emily, I'm determined to carry out the desires of my life, and now I am intent on a Western city as the place best calculated to inspire me with the courage and strength I need to carry out my aims and purposes, and I thought I'd tell you now that I feel decided, and you will tell mother for me; will you?"

Never before in my life had I felt Hal so near to me. His manner toward me had changed, of course, as he grew into manhood, and "Emily, will you sew on this button?" or "Emily, are my stockings ready?" were given in place of "Emily did it," but now, as he looked full in my face, and even passed his arm about me with true brotherly affection, he seemed so near, that the hot tears chased each other down my cheeks, and I sat speechless with the feelings that overcame me. I thought of the handsome face—

always handsome in whatever mood—opposite me at the table, of the manly form and dignified carriage I had watched with pride, and when I could speak, I said,

“Hal I cannot let you go.” Hal was brave, but I knew he felt what I said, for his looks spoke volumes as he said,

“Shall you miss me so much?”

“Oh! Hal,” I cried, “we love you, mother and I, I never knew how much till now.” His head dropped a moment, and then he suddenly said,

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"You are the best sister a fellow ever had," and swallowing something that rose in his throat, marched off through the fields directly away from the house. I gathered up my work and scrap book, went in and prepared the supper, showing outwardly no emotion, but with my heart throbbing as if it would tell the secret on which I pondered, while I wondered how I should tell my mother.

Hal came in late to supper. I rushed from the table when I heard his footsteps, and sought my room until I heard him coming up to his room, when I went down stairs and busied myself with my work as usual.

I washed the milk pans three or four times over that night, and was about carrying them into the "best room," when mother said,

"Why, Emily, we keep our milk pans in the buttery."

"Oh!" I said, turning suddenly and letting my pans fall and scatter. And when I picked them up and collected my senses, I thought, "I cannot tell mother to-night after all, Hal will stay with us." When things were at last in their places, I sauntered out through the lane in the beautiful moonlight, and coming back met Hal who took my hand in his and whispered,

"Tell mother to-morrow, please, I want to go away next month and some things are necessary to be done."

"Have you told father yet?"

"No, but he will not care."

"Father *will* care," I replied, "but you know since his misfortune, and his conclusion that he cannot do anything but carry on the farm, he seems to have lost his sprightly step and his cheery ways of old."

"Well, Emily," said Hal, "I am no help to him on the farm, and could not be if I tried, and the work I am doing now is anything but satisfying to me."

Then the thought occurred to me, I had no idea of what the boy desired to accomplish, and the question what would you do Hal? was answered in this wise—

"Wait till I've been away six months."

"To build mud houses and fill them with mud people, was your favorite amusement when you were a boy, I remember," I said, and he gave me such a queer look that I started with the impression that came with it, but said no more, and we walked along and went into the house together.

The next day after dinner, when we were cleared up and alone in quiet, I told mother. She was of course covered with surprise, but her words came in wisdom and she said:

“I can imagine what Halbert desires to do, and although the way looks anything but clear, still I know I can trust him anywhere. He is a blessed son and brother, Emily, and I doubt not I am selfish to feel saddened by the thought of his leaving home (and a tear drop fell as she spoke). I only fear he may be sick. His lungs are not very strong.”

“What will father say?” I asked.

“Father’s heart will miss him but he will not seek to stay an endeavor of his earnest, ambitious boy.”

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So my trial was not so hard as I had expected, and father was just as wise as mother, and I alone rebellious concerning his departure. I cried night and day whenever I could get a moment to cry in, and I could not help it. How perverse I felt, although doing all I could to forward his departure, which was daily coming nearer, and when the 4th of July came and with it the gala day which the entire country about us enjoyed, I could not and did not go to the pic-nic, or the speech ground, and I succeeded in making all at home nearly as unhappy as myself.

CHAPTER III.

Changes.

Some people believe in predestination (or “fore-ordering,” as Aunt Ruth used to call it), and some do not. I never knew what I believed about events and their happening, but it was certainly true I learned to know that my efforts to hurry or retard anything were in one sense entirely futile—that is, when I did not work in unison with my surroundings, and made haste only when impelled. If I could have felt thus concerning Hal’s departure, I should have been of more service to him, and saved myself from hearing “Oh, Emily, don’t,” falling as an entreaty from his lips, at sight of my swelled eyes and woeful countenance. I think he was heartily glad of the innovation made in our family circle, which, of itself, was as wonderful to me as the story of Aladdin’s Lamp to the mind of a child. It happened so strangely too. Before I tell you of this event I must explain that our family circle consisted of father, mother, Halbert, Ben and myself. It was half past six in the evening of July 8, 18—, and we had just finished supper, when a loud knock was heard at the back door, and opening it we received a letter from the hands of a neighbor, who came over from the post-office and kindly brought our mail with him. We received a good many letters for farming people, and I had kept up a perfect fire of correspondence with Mary Snow ever since she went to the home of her uncle, who lived some twenty miles distant, but this appeared to be a double letter, and mother broke the seal, while we all listened to her as she read it. It is not necessary to quote the whole of it, but the gist of the matter was this: A distant cousin of father’s who had never seen any of us, nor any member of the family to which her mother and my father belonged, had settled in the city of —, about thirty miles from our little village. Her husband dying shortly afterward, she was left a widow with one child, a son. In some unaccountable way she had heard of father, and she now wrote telling us that she proposed to come to see us the very next day, only two days before Hal was to leave us. She went on to say that she hoped her visit would not be an intrusion, but she wanted to see us, and if we could only accommodate her during the summer she would be so glad to stay, and would be willing to remunerate us doubly. Mother said simply, “Well, she must come.” Father looked at her and said nothing, while I flew at the supper dishes attacking them so ferociously that I should have broken them all, I guess, had not mother said gently,

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"Let me wash them, Emily, your hands tremble so." Then I tried to exorcise the demon within, and I said:

"How can we have a stranger here, putting on airs, and Hal going away, and our home probably too homely for her. I know she never washed her hands in a blue wash-bowl in the world, much less in a pewter basin such as we use. She'll want everything we haven't got, and I shall tip everything over, and be as awkward as—oh, dear! Mother, how I do wish I could be ground over and put in good shape before to-morrow night." I never saw my mother laugh so heartily in my life; she laughed till I was fairly frightened and thought she had a hysteric fit, and when she could speak, said:

"Emily, don't borrow trouble, it may make Hal's departure easier for us. It must be right for her to come, else it would not have happened. You are growing so like a careful woman, I doubt not you will be the very one to please her."

Those words were a sort of strengthening cordial, and before I went to sleep I had firmly determined to receive my cousin as I would one of my neighbors, and not allow my spirit to chafe itself against the wall of conditions, whatever they might be.

So when the stage came over the hill, and round the turn in the road leading to our house, I stood quietly with mother in the doorway waiting to give the strange guest welcome in our midst. I was the first to take her hand, for the blundering stage-driver nearly let her fall to the ground, her foot missing the step as she clambered over the side of the old stage. She gave me such a warm smile of recognition, and a moment after turned to us all and said, "My name is Clara Estelle Desmonde, call me Clara,"—and with hearty hand-shaking passed into the house as one of us. Her hat and traveling mantle laid aside, she was soon seated at the table with us, and chatting merrily, praising every dish before her, and since her appetite did justice to her words, we did not feel her praise as flattery. I had made some of my snow cake, and it was the best, I think, I ever made. Mother had cream biscuit, blackberry jelly, some cold fowl, and, to tempt the appetite of our city visitor, a few of the old speckled hen's finest and freshest eggs, dropped on toast. She did not slight any of our cooking, and my cake was particularly praised. When mother told her I made it, the little lady looked at me so brightly as she said, "You must keep plenty of it on hand as long as I stay, I am especially fond of cake and pie," and although I well knew her dainty fingers had never been immersed in pie-crust, still she had made herself acquainted with the *modus operandi* of various culinary productions and talked as easily with us about them as if she were a real cook. She seemed from the first to take a great liking to Hal, and, seated in our family circle, this first night of our acquaintance, expressed great regret at his early departure, and remarked several times

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during the evening, that it would have been so nice if Halbert and her son Louis Robert could have been companions here in “Cosy Nook,” as she called our house. It seemed anything but a nook to me, situated as it was on high ground, while about us on either side, lay the seventy-five acres which was my father’s inheritance, when he attained his majority; but, to her, this living aside from the dusty streets and exciting novelties of the city, was, I suppose, like being deposited in a little quiet nook. When we said “good night,” all of us were of one mind regarding our new-found friend. I was perfectly at ease that first evening, and felt no inclination to make an unlucky speech until the next day, which was Sunday, came, and with it the question, “Are you going to church?” It was always our custom to go to the village church each Sabbath, and I enjoyed the sermons of Mr. Davis, then our minister, very much. He was a man of broad soul and genial spirit, and very generally liked. His sermons were never a re-hash but were quickened and brightened by new ideas originally expressed. Now, however, when this little lady asked, “Are you going to church?” I did not think at all of a good sermon, but of the shabbiness of my best bonnet, and I bit my tongue to check the speech which rose to my lips—“We generally go, but I’d rather not go with you”—while mother answered,

“Yes, Mrs. Desmonde” (“Clara, if you please,” the lady interposed), “we always go; would you like to go with us?”

“Oh, yes, thank you, it is a delightful day.”

I kept thinking about those shabby ribbons and wondering if I could not cover them up with my brown veil, and after breakfast was over, I actually did re-make an old lemon-colored bow to adorn myself with. I felt shabby enough, however, when we were all ready to start and my poor cotton gloves came in contact with the delicate kids of our guest, when she grasped my hand to say, “You cannot know, Emily dear, how happy I am.”

Somehow she made me forget all about how I looked, but the sermon that day was all lost. My eyes divided their light between herself and Halbert, and my heart kept thumping heavily, “Hal goes away to-morrow.” I think Hal knew my thoughts, for he sat next to me in our pew, and once when tears were in my eyes, tears which came with thoughts of his departure, he took my hand in his and held it firmly, as if to say, “I shall come back, Emily, don’t feel badly.” I looked him the grateful recognition my heart felt, and I crowded back the tears that were ready to fall, and when we drove home, our little lady chatting all the way, I was happier than before I went.

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Monday morning came and with it Hal's departure. We were up betimes. I think Hal slept little, and I heard the old clock strike nearly every hour, and was down stairs before either mother or father were up. He was to take the stage at half-past eight, and ride to the nearest station, and our breakfast was ready at half-past six. It was a sad breakfast, and though mother tried hard to keep up a conversation on different topics, it was useless. Tears would fill our eyes, and brother Ben, though at that time only about thirteen, was forced to leave his breakfast untasted, and, rising hastily, to take himself out of Hal's sight; but the stage came rumbling down the road, and almost ere we knew it, our good-byes were said, and Hal was waving his handkerchief from his high seat beside the driver, from whence he could see the old home for a long distance.

Everything, so far as his plans were concerned, worked favorably, and a chance inquiry, resulted in a good offer as book-keeping clerk in a wholesale warehouse in Chicago. Chicago was in her youth then. Many changes have passed over the city of the West since those days, but her mercantile houses were never in a more flourishing condition than during Hal's stay there. Father had informed himself regarding the man with whom he was to be connected, and was well satisfied of his integrity, ability, etc.

When Hal was fairly gone I went to my room and cried disconsolately, and groaned aloud, and did everything but faint, and I might have accomplished that feat if Clara (for she insisted on that appellation) had not come in upon me, resolved to bring about different conditions. She succeeded at last, and the afternoon found us quietly sitting together in our middle room apparently enjoying ourselves, though I did not forget Hal was gone, and a cloud of woe overspread my mental horizon.

CHAPTER IV.

Our new friend.

We could not object to the stay of our cousin, and she planned to remain indefinitely. I always smiled at the relationship, and I don't know exactly how near it was, but this I believe was it—father's mother and Mrs. Desmonde's grandmother were cousins; that brought me, you see, into very near kinship. She laughed at it herself, but, nevertheless, I was "her dear cousin Emily" always. "Little Lady" was my name for her, but she forced me call her "Clara." Her mother, it seemed, had married a gentleman of rank and fortune of French descent, and although she told me she was the picture of her mother, the graceful ways of which she was possessed, her natural urbanity and politeness, together with her fascinating word-emphasis accompanied with so many gestures, were all decidedly French, "Little lady" just expressed it. She was, when she came to our home, only thirty-seven years of age, and looked not more than twenty. Her complexion was that of a perfect blonde; her hair

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was light and wavy, clear to the parting; she had a luxuriant mass of it, and coiled it about her shapely head, fastening it with a beautifully carved shell comb. Her eyes were very dark for blue, large and expressive; she had teeth like pearls, and a mouth, whose tender outlines were a study for a painter. She seemed to me a living, breathing picture, and I almost coveted the grace which was so natural to her, and hated the contrast presented by our two faces. She called my complexion pure olive, and toyed with “my night-black hair” (her own expression), sometimes winding it about her fingers as if to coax it to curl, and then again braiding it wide with many strands, and doing it up in a fashion unusual with me. She was a little below the medium size, I, a little above, and though only turned nineteen, I know I looked much older than she. We were fast friends, and I could do her bidding ever and always, for her word was a friendly law, and I am sure no family ever had so charming a boarder. She bought gingham, and made dresses exactly alike for herself and me, made some long house-aprons, as she called them, and would never consent to sit down by herself but helped about the house daily until all the work was done, then changed her dress when I changed mine, and kept herself close, to us, body and soul—for she seemed in one sense our ward, in another our help, making her doubly dear, and I many times blessed the providence that brought her to us just as we were losing Hal. She was sensitive, but never morbidly so, apparently anxious to have every one about her happy, and I never saw the airs that I expected her to assume, for she was ever smiling and happy in her manner.

As the days passed over us, we took long walks in the woods together, and she unfolded to me leaf by leaf of her life history.

The deep love she had borne her husband remained unchanged—and nightly, with perfect devotion, she looked upon and pressed to her lips his miniature, which was fastened to a massive chain hanging on her neck; never in sight, but hidden from other eyes, as if too sacred for their gaze. Her husband was of French parentage, but had, when at the early age of sixteen she married him, been alone in this country. He was twenty years older than herself, and her parents passing away soon after her marriage, he had been husband, mother and father. Her son, Louis Robert, eighteen years of age, was named for him, and both she and her son had fortunes in their own right. It seemed that Mr. Desmonde had an illness lasting for months, and knowing it must prove fatal, had arranged every thing perfectly for his departure. It was his wish that Louis Robert should, if agreeable to his mind, pursue a course of study, to prepare him for professional work of some kind.

In a letter written on his death-bed he impressed upon his son the necessity of dealing honestly with his fellow-men, and exhorted him to endeavor to be always ready, as opportunities presented themselves for small charities and kindnesses; these, as his father thought, are often more praiseworthy than donations to public objects, and the giving of alms to be seen of men, as many wealthy people do.

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In accordance with these last wishes, Louis was placed under the care of a worthy man, who was principal of a seminary a little distance from the city where their home was. Clara desired him to come to us about the twentieth of August and stay two weeks, and also urged me to go to her home with her and meet him, then returning together.

I hardly wanted to do so, but her sweet urgency persuaded me, and I consented, reflecting mournfully over those shabby ribbons and that lemon-colored bow. If there is anything like help in the world that I receive most gratefully, it is the prompt recognition of a need, and unobtrusive aid for it. A short time before the day appointed for us to go to the city, our Clara came down stairs dressed in a beautiful dark shade of blue Foulard silk, with a lace ruff about her throat, fastened with a lemon-colored bow.

The blood rushed with a full tide to my face when my eyes fell upon her as she entered. Simple, I presume, to those accustomed to elegant costume would her attire have seemed, but to me, as yet uninitiated in the mysteries of society, dress, *etc.*, she was the perfection of loveliness, and the impression made upon me was an indelible one; I never saw anything half so lovely and perfect as she at that moment appeared to me.

It was an unusual thing too for her to be dressed so nicely for an afternoon at home. She had, I knew, many beautiful dresses, and had told me sometimes of the elaborate toilets of the city, but had heretofore donned as an afternoon dress the gray mohair she wore when she came, and a light blue scarf over her shoulders was the only color she wore about her. The weather was warm but the heat was never oppressive to her—her blood, she said, had never felt as it were really warm since the night her husband died. On this particular afternoon, we were talking principally of Hal, and my eyes unconsciously riveted their gaze on the folds of her dress hanging so gracefully about her, and trailing softly on the carpet if moved.

I wondered too a little at it, for I noticed it to be quite long in front as well as behind. The afternoon was far spent, and it was nearly time for Ben and father to come in to supper. Before she made any allusion to her extra toilette, extra for our little home, and nodding at me as I raised my eyes from the soft blue folds to meet the light of the blue eyes above them, she said:

“How does my dress please Mademoiselle Emily?”

“Oh!” I replied, “I never saw so beautiful a dress.” She smiled one of her bright quick smiles as if some fancy struck her, and said, laying her hand over the bow at her heart,

“And this too?”

“Both are beautiful in my eyes,” I said, “and so suited to you Clara.”

After supper we were going to take a walk, and Clara went to her room, doffed the blue Foulard and came down in the grey mohair. We had a beautiful walk out from under the shade of the o'erarching chestnut trees before our door, along the grassy highway leading to the upper meadow, over the smooth newly-cut field on to the edge of the birch woods beyond. There we rested quiet, coming back when the moon rose over the hills and the stars hung out like lanterns on our track.

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We talked. Clara had her seasons of soul-talk as she called it, and that night she read me a full page of her inner self the purport of which I shall never forget. The more she revealed to me of herself the more I loved her, and her words suggested thoughts that filled my soul—thoughts which, in depths within myself I had never dreamed of, found and swept a string that ere long broke its sweet harmonies on my spirit. I seemed, all at once, to develop in spiritual stature and to have become complex to myself.

When we said “good night” to the folks below and went up stairs together, Clara caught my hand and said,

“Come, mademoiselle, come to my room, please,” and of course I went, making a mock courtesy as if I were a queen, and she my maid. She unpinned my linen collar and unhooked my dress, while I sat wonder struck, saying nothing until I felt the fleecy blue silk being thrown over my shoulders, when I essayed to articulate something. But when my head emerged from the dress, she playfully covered my mouth with her hand, and proceeded to fasten the dress which seemed just to fit; then came the delicate lace and the lemon bow. Taking my hand she led me to the glass, surveyed me from head to foot, clapped her hands like a glad child, and cried,

“A perfect fit, but I was afraid.”

“Why, Clara,” I said, “how, what?”

“Never, never mind, you like it, I did it myself, and I wore it first only to see how it struck you. ‘Tis yours, my dear, go and put it away.”

I did not say thank you even, for she would not let me. I just kissed her and went to my room, to my little room with its high-post bedstead, three wooden chairs and shabby hair-cloth trunk, and dressed in that beautiful blue dress with that new silk bow. I could not help taking the old one out of the drawer to contrast it with the new, and although it did look soiled and shabby, I thought I was almost wicked to have felt so troubled at my little adornments, and then resolved to keep that little old faded lemon ribbon as long as I should live, and I have it now.

Carefully I unpinned that new bow, laying it, with the first real lace collars I had ever owned, in a mahogany box, as tenderly as though they were pearls, and hung the blue Foulard in my closet between my best much-worn alpaca and my afternoon gingham.

That night I dreamed that when father went to feed the chickens in the barn yard, a beautiful bird with silky wings of blue fluttered down among them to be fed. How impressible my artless brain! As great an event was this to me, as the inauguration of our highest potentate to the people.

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Next morning I opened the closet door before dressing, and looked at the new dress. The more I thought about it the more I wondered when or where I should ever wear it, and not until a traveling suit, the fac-simile of Clara's, was dropped upon me did I realize how the blue Foulard was fitted to my shoulders. In her own sweet way she told me, that though we were to remain only a few days at her home in the city, yet her friends would surely call, and I must take the Foulard to wear in the afternoons. Dear little soul, how tender she was of everybody's feelings, and with what true womanly tact she turned, as far as possible, every one into a pleasant path! Quick to notice needs, she always applied her gifts with the greatest grace and tact, and without making any one feel under obligation to her.

The morning of August thirteenth dawned upon us not altogether smiling, since the sky looked as if inclined to weep. We started, however, on our intended journey, and more than once the old stage-driver looked around to catch a glimpse of my darling friend, who was quite a wonderment to the country folk. Inaccurate rumors of Clara and her fortune had been talked about among them—yet none knew just how it all was, except our family, and we would betray no secrets that she wished kept. I hardly recognized myself when at last we arrived at our journey's end, and I was in Clara's home. Never before had I seen myself reflected in a long pier-glass, and never on earth did I seem so homely; my hands were too large and awkward, and I sat so uncomfortably on the luxurious chairs.

Clara noticed my discomfort and kept me changing from one position to another, until I was so vexed with myself I insisted on sitting in a corner and persuaded Clara that my head ached. The compassionate soul believed it and was bathing my temples, when a light step aroused us both, and a moment later she was in the arms of her beloved son, whom she proudly introduced to me.

I was surprised at his appearance—I thought him a boy, and so he was in years, but if Clara had not told me his age, I should have guessed him to be twenty-five. He had large dark eyes, a glorious head, perfect in its shape, an intellectual forehead, and the most finely chiselled mouth, most expressive of all his feelings; his lips parted in such loving admiration of his mother and closed so lovingly upon her own. After a profound bow to myself and a hearty grasp of the hand, he drew her to the crimson cushions of a tete-a-tete standing near, and passing his arm around her held her closely to him, as if afraid he would lose her. I envied her, and any heart might well envy the passionate devotion of a son like Louis Robert Desmonde.

I wanted to leave them to themselves, but as I could not do this, I covered my head, which really ached now, with my hands, and tried hard not to listen to their audible conversation, but from that time I appreciated what was meant by the manly love of this son, differing so widely from anything I had ever before known. Like his mother, he had great tact, and suited himself exactly to conditions and persons.

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I moved as in a dream. Everything that wealth could lavish on a home was here. I occupied Clara's own room with her, and it seemed at night as if I lay in a fairy chamber; there were silken draperies of delicate blue, a soft velvety carpet whose ground was the same beautiful blue, covered with vines like veins traced through it, and massive furniture with antique carving, and everything in such exquisite taste, even to the decorated toilette set on the bureau. Everything I thought was in perfect correspondence except the face on my lace-fringed pillow. I seemed so sadly out of place. I wondered if Clara was really contented with her humbly-furnished room at our house. Callers came as she had predicted, and it was all in vain my trying to keep out of the sight of those "*city people*." Insisting on my presence, and knowing well I should escape to our room if left by myself, Louis was authorized to guard me, and I had no chance of escape; I felt myself an intruder upon his time, every moment until during the last evenings of my stay, when in the lighted parlors quite a happy company gathered. I then had an opportunity of seeing a little of his thought, running as an undercurrent to his nature. Clara had been singing with such sweetness of expression and pathetic emphasis, that my eyes were filled with tears of emotion. Miss Lear, a young lady friend, followed her, and sang with such a shrill voice, such unprecedented flying about among the octaves, that it shocked me through every nerve, and I trembled visibly and uttered an involuntary exclamation of impatience. Louis caught my hand, and the moment she ended, whispered:

"Are you frightened?"

"Oh!" I said, "she is your guest, but where is her soul?"

"In heaven awaiting her, I suspect," he replied, "but, Miss Emily, she is a fair type of a society woman. I have just been thinking that to-morrow at sunset I hope to be among the birds and beneath the sky of your native town; one can breathe there; I am glad to go."

"I don't want you to go," I said, impetuously (poor Emily did it).

He turned his full dark eyes upon me, and I felt the tide that flooded cheek and brow with crimson.

"Explain to me, Miss Emily," he said, "you love to keep my mother there."

"I did not mean to say it, Louis, but it is true."

"Why true?"

"I am so sorry—"

My dilemma was a queer one; I had to explain, and the tears that gathered when his mother sang, came back as I described our plain home.



"I love my home, it is good enough for me, I could not exchange it even with you, but you will think us rude, uncultivated people, I fear; you will find no attraction there; everything is as homely there as I am myself!"

And I never can forget how his bright, dark eyes grew humid with sympathy, to be covered with the sunlight of his smile at the earnest honesty of my remarks, especially the last one.

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“Ah! Miss Emily, you know not your friend; I am more anxious than ever to go, and care not if you are sorry.”

“I am glad now of my unexpected speech,” I replied, “and feel as if I had really been to the confessional; your mother is so sensitive, I could not tell her, and I have kept this thought constantly before me, ‘He will not stay if he goes, and I am sure he cannot eat rye bread and butter.’”

“You will see, Miss Emily, how I shall eat it, but we are to be interrupted; here comes the soulless girl that shocked you so; mother is with her; excuse me for a moment,” and he made his way to a corner of the parlors, seating himself alone as if in reverie.

“Mademoiselle Emily, my friend, Miss Lear, desires an introduction to you; be seated, Miss Lear,” and Clara took the chair on the other side; the disappointment of Miss Lear, in not finding Louis, was visible, even to my unpractised eye, and her tender enquiries of his mother regarding his health *etc.*, were amusing.

I saw her furtive glances at my plain toilette, and knew she thought me a lowly wild flower on life’s great meadow, a dandelion, unnecessary to be included in a fashionable nosegay, and while these thoughts were passing through my mind, Clara left us to ourselves, and, feeling in duty bound to say something to me, she began:

“Mrs. Desmonde tells me your house is in the country; how sublime the country is! You see sunrises and sunsets, do you not?”

“I hope I do,” I replied. “There is great pleasure in watching nature.”

“Oh! the country is so sublime, don’t you think so?”

“Well that depends on your ideas of the sublime; I do not imagine milking cows and butter-making would correspond with the general ideas of sublimity.”

“Oh!” and she tossed her befrizzled head in lofty disdain, “that is perfectly horrid, I cannot see how human beings endure such things; oh! dear, what a poor hand I should be at living under such circumstances.”

“You would perhaps enjoy the general housework more, leaving the problem of the dairy to another.”

“Housework?—I—ah! I see you are unlearned—beg your pardon—in society ways. Do my hands betray symptoms of housework?” and she laughed ironically.

At this moment Louis came to take the seat his mother had left, and heard of course my reply to Miss Lear’s last remark.

“Yes, I know I am verdant in the extreme, and must plead guilty also to the charge of milking, churning and housework; I take, however, some pride in trying to do all these things well, and I believe the most fastidious can partake of the creamy butter rolls, we make at home.”

“Bravo,” exclaimed Louis, “pray tell me what elicited Miss Emily’s speech?”

“We were talking of the country,” I replied, growing bold; “Miss Lear thinks the country is sublime, but the butter-making, *etc.*, horrid.”

“Well,” said Miss Lear, “it may be my ideas are rather crude, but really I cannot imagine I could ever make butter! Do you think I could, Mr. Desmonde?” leaning forward to catch Louis’ eye, and plying her flashy fan with renewed energy and great care to show the ring of emeralds and diamonds that glistened on her right fore-finger.

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"I cannot say, Miss Lear, I am going up to find out the ways and expect to be Miss Emily's assistant. I imagine it takes brain to do farm work."

Miss Lear waited to rally a little and said only, "Complimentary in the extreme! Pray tell me the hour, I think my carriage must be here;" then the fashion-plate shook hands with us both and departed.

I felt almost ashamed, and repeated verbatim to Louis our conversation; he laughed, and, patting my shoulder, said:

"You spoke quite rightly, she was impertinent, pardon her ignorant vanity."

Then I stood with Louis and Clara in the centre of the parlors and received the adieux of their friends. Louis carried his mother in his arms up stairs and soon dreams carried me home to green fields and butter-making.

CHAPTER V.

Louis Robert.

Gloriously beautiful was the morning of August twenty-first. We were up early, for the old stage would not wait for us, and we had much to do just at the last moment. I say we, for I tried to do all that was possible to assist Clara in packing the two large trunks we were to take. One thing puzzled me. I had heard Clara say so many times to Louis, who went over the house with her during the early part of each day, "Now leave everything in shape to be taken at any moment." And this last morning all the chairs were covered, and Louis worked with old Jim, time-honored help, to accomplish it all. I had a secret fear that they were planning to go away to seek another home somewhere, and it troubled me. I wondered the more because Clara said nothing to me, and she was naturally so ingenuous and apt to tell me her little plans freely. It seemed to take less time than it takes to write it ere we were landed at the door of my home, and found father and mother waiting to welcome us. There was a look of surprise on the faces of my parents as Louis descended from the stage and turned so gallantly to his little mother, as he often called her. He was not the boy they expected to see, but a man to all appearance, tall and handsome, and the embodiment of a politeness which is founded, as I believe, on a true respect for the opinions and conditions of others. I felt gladly proud of our supper table that night, and I knew Louis looked in vain for rye bread. He did ample justice to our creamy butter, however, and after supper remarked to me that Miss Lear might like a few pounds of such.

Days passed happily along, and the two weeks allotted for Louis' stay came nearly to a close. I dreaded to have the last day appear. Like his mother, he had dropped into his own appropriate niche, and came into our family only as another ray of the sunshine

that brightened our home. I had Halbert in my mind much of the time, and talked of him to Louis until he said he felt well acquainted with him, and looked forward to meeting him as one looks to some happiness in store.

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Louis was original in his expressions and different from all others of his age. One evening when we were talking of Hal, as we sat on the old doorstone in the moonlight, he said:

"I have something to do for your brother, Miss Emily, I cannot tell you how, but we shall see, we shall never lose sight of each other, we are always to be friends, Miss Emily."

And the light of his dark eyes grew deep and it seemed as if I looked into fathomless depths as he turned them full upon me for a moment.

"Only a few hours between this long breath I am taking and the school to which I go (mother has written the professor, asking if I can stay longer—we shall have an answer to-morrow). It is doing me good, my mind goes over the country round us here, and I am gathering long breaths that give my mind and body strength. Ah! Miss Emily," he said, as he rose and walked to and fro, "I shall sometime breathe and act as I want to. I pray every day that my little mother may live to see me doing what I desire to do, and, also, for strength. I need great strength, Miss Emily. You will help to keep little mother alive, I know you will."

And he came back, took both my hands in his own; I felt almost afraid—I cannot tell you how powerfully expressive his look, voice and gestures were, and he continued:

"I like you—like you more than you know; you are true, you can be depended on; you call my little mother your fairy cousin, and I call you her royal friend. Do me a favor," he continued, "unbind your massive hair and let it trail over your shoulders." And before I realised it my hair swept the doorstone where I sat. "There," as he brushed it back from my face, "look up and you are a picture; wear your long hair floating—why not?"

"Oh, Louis," I said, "how could I ever work with such a heavy mass about me. If, as you say, I look like a picture, I certainly ought not to, for I am only a country dandelion even as a picture," and I laughed. He looked at me almost fiercely, as he said:

"Miss Emily, never say it again; you are full of poetry; you have glorious thoughts; you dream while at work; some day you will know yourself;" and then there came the far-away look in his eyes. Clara came to sit with us, and the evening wore itself into night's deep shading, and the early hour for rest came to us all. The professor was amiable and willing to accord two weeks more of freedom to Louis, who seemed to enjoy more every day; and when he entered upon his fourth week, said:

"He wished that week might hold a hundred days."

It seemed to me that since Clara came to us she had been the constant cause of surprise either in one way or another. In herself, as an individual, she was to me a

problem of no little consequence and not easily solved, and she was continually bringing forth something unexpected.

The last of the third week of Louis' stay was made memorable by one of her demonstrations. It was Wednesday evening, the last of our ironing was finished, and mother and I were folding the clothes as we took them down from the old-fashioned horse, when we heard her sweet voice claiming us for special consultation.

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"Mrs. Minot," she called, and we left our clothes and went into the square room, as we called it. Father and Louis were there, and when we were seated she began:

"Now, my dear friends, I propose to ask a favor of you. I love you three people, and you have made me so happy here I do desire to call this spot home for always. It seems to me I cannot feel so happy in another place, and now you know I have many belongings in my old home in the city. I know a lady who has met with misfortune, an old friend of my husband's family, who is worthy, and forced at present by circumstances to earn her living. Now may I ask you, my dear friends, to let me bring my furniture here. Will you give me more room, that I may establish myself just quite enough to make it pleasant, and then I can let my friend have my house (upon condition of her retaining my old help, which I shall not permit to be a trouble to her financially), and through your favor I may help another. I should have asked it long ago, but I waited for my boy to come and taste the air of your home here, and since he loves you as well as I do, may we stay?"

And she held her little white hands toward us, and opened her blue eyes wide.

Of course we all gladly consented.

Then she clapped her hands, and turning to Louis, said:

"Louis Robert, thank them."

And he bowed and said in his own expressive way:

"We will try to appreciate your kindness."

I knew then what the covered chairs meant, but I secretly wondered "How on airth," as Aunt Hildy used to say, all those moveables were to be got into our house. This thought was running through my head when Clara spoke, crossing the room as she did so, and taking my father's hand—and he was such a reserved man that no one else would ever have dreamed of doing so.

"Mr. Minot, I have not finished yet. Would you grant me one thing more? May I have a little bit of your ground on the west side of your house, say a piece not more than eighteen by twenty-five feet, with which to do just as I please?"

Father looked thunderstruck, as he answered:

"What can you do with it, Clara?"

"Oh, never mind; may I?"

"Yes, yes," he said in a dreamy way.

And mother looked up, to be met by the eyes which sought her own, while the sweet lips queried:

“Will you say so too if you like my plans?”

“I’ll try to do what is best for us all”—and that meant volumes, for my mother was thoroughly good, and as strong in what she deemed to be right as mortal could be, and she never wavered a moment, where right was considered. Unfaltering and true, her word was a law, and Clara at her quiet answer felt the victory won. Now for the sequel, thought I, and then Louis asked me to take a stroll in the moonlight, and although a little curious at the revelation awaiting us, I could not deny him and went for my hat and shawl.

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What a lovely night it was, and how the stars stealing one by one into the sky seemed like breathing entities looking down upon us. It seemed that night as if they heard what Louis said, and you would not wonder had you seen the youthful fervor of this dark-eyed youth; this strange combination of man and boy. When with him I felt awed into silence, and though his thoughts always brought response from my soul, yet did I hesitate for expression, language failing me utterly. How many beautiful thoughts he uttered this night, and how strangely I answered him! He was young and had not learned the lesson of waiting, if effort of his own could hasten the development of any loved scheme. I cannot, will not try to tell you all that he said, but he spoke so positively, and commanded as it were an answer from my very soul. He told me of his love for painting, of his great desire to do something worthy of the best, as he expressed it.

“And my first picture is to be yourself,” he said; “you shall speak on canvas. You think yourself so plain; oh! you are not plain, Miss Emily; I love you, and you are my wild flower, are you not? Speak to me, call me your Louis! Love me, as I do you. Ah! if you did not love me I could not stay here till to-morrow—you think me young and presumptuous—you say I do not know myself and I will change—I will not change—I am not young—I want great love, such as comes to me through your eyes, to help me—and you love me—you are my precious wild flower—I shall live for you and my little mother.”

No word had escaped my lips, and now he paused, and looking at me, said:

“Tell me if you do not love me!—tell me, Emily.”

Why did I—how could I answer him as I did—so cold; my voice fell upon my own ear as I said slowly:

“I don’t know, Louis—you are so strange.”

What an answer! He quivered and the tears came to his eyes; he dashed them aside and said:

“How long shall I wait for you? say it now and help me; your spirit loves me; I can hear it speak to me.”

I thought for the moment he was crazed. He divined my thought and said:

“No, not crazy, but I want your help.”

“Oh, Louis!” I cried, “I don’t know, I am so ignorant—why was I born so? don’t treat me unkindly, you are dear to me, dear, but I can’t talk.”

“Never, never say so again.”

He seemed taller as he paused in his walk, and released the firm hold he had kept of my arm, said slowly:

“God waits for man, and angels wait, and I will wait, and you will tell me sometime—say no word to my little mother”—and he kissed my forehead, a tear-drop falling on me from his eyes, and we walked silently and slowly home.

I sought my room, and crying bitterly, said to myself, “Emily Minot must you always do the very thing you desire not to do?”

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When my eye met Louis' at the table next morning, I felt as if I had committed an unpardonable sin. My whole being had trembled with the deep respect and admiration I had felt for him since the moment we met, and I certainly had given him cause to understand me to be incapable of responding to his innermost thought. I felt he would treat me differently, but a second look convinced me that such was not the fact. His noble nature could not illtreat any one, and I only saw a look of positive endurance, "I am waiting," photographed on his features, and made manifest in all his manner toward me, and a determined effort to put me at ease resulted at last in forcing me to appear as before, while all the time a sharp pain gnawed at my heart, and, unlike most girls, I was not easy until I told my mother of it all.

She stroked my dark hair and said:

"You and he have only seen nineteen short years. Wisdom is the ripened fruit of years; you cannot judge of your future from to-day."

That comforted me, and I felt better in my mind. I planned something to say to Louis, but every opportunity was lost, and the last week of his stay had already begun. The plans of his little mother had been confided to me, and work had commenced.

There was to be an addition of four large rooms on the west side of our house, and they were planned in accordance with Clara's ideas. She did not call them her's, and started with the understanding that the improvements were just a little present for her dear cousins. Best of all, we were to have a bow window in one of the rooms, and this was something so new, so different, it seemed a greater thing to me than the architecture of the ancient cathedrals. A bow window, and the panes of glass double, yes, treble the size of the old ones!

I heard father say to mother that this new part would make the old one look very shabby; but Louis had told me his mother intended to do all father would allow her to, and encourage him a little, *etc.* And we were to have a new fence. You cannot imagine how fairy-like this all seemed to me, and I could hardly believe what I saw. It seemed as if we were in a wonderland country, and I had moved as in a dream up to the last hour of my walk with Louis. Then I seemed to awake, as if shaken by a rough hand, and since then I had been striving to appear what I was not, all the time thinking that Louis misunderstood me, and here we were in the last week of his stay and no word as yet in explanation. I had thought it over until it became a truth to me that after all he had not meant that he loved me other than as a sister, and it also seemed to me that was just what I needed. What remained was to have it settled between us, and to do that I must clothe my thoughts with words, else how could he know how I felt. It seemed, too, that it was sheer boldness on my part to dream for a moment that Louis spoke of life's crowning love. He meant to be as a brother to me, and again I sighed, as I stood at the ironing table, "Ah, Emily Minot, you are a born mistake, that's just what you are!" and as I sighed I spoke these words, and, turning, found myself face to face with Louis, who

had just come from the village. He never could wait for the stage to come, and had been over as usual for letters.

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"The only mistake is that you don't know yourself," he said.

And the tears that had welled up to my eyes fell so fast, and I was so choked, that I turned from work, thinking to escape into mother's bedroom and hide myself; but my eye caught sight of a letter in his hand unopened, and love for Hal rose above all my foolish tears, and so I stood quietly waiting the denouement.

"Come into the other room with me, Emily; I have something to tell you."

He sat down on the little chintz-covered lounge, and I beside him.

"Emily, you are a strong woman, your heart will beat fast, but you will neither scream nor faint when I tell you; your brother is ill. There was a letter in the office and also a telegram at the depot. What will be done, who can go to him?"

I did not scream or faint as he had said, but I clasped my hands tightly and shut my eyes as if some terrible sight was before me, while my poor heart grieved and brain reeled, as I thought, "Oh! he will die, poor Hal! alone among strangers, and how would our patient mother bear it, and what should we do!"

My face was white, I know, for grief always blanched my face and brought those terribly silent tears, that fall like solemn rain drops—each a tongue. You must remember that I was a smothered fire in those days.

Louis put his strong arm around me, and stroked my forehead as if I were a child and he my mother.

"He will not die, little flower, thy brother will live; you must go to him, and I will go with you. You must not go alone to a great city."

"Oh Louis!" I said, "he had only just begun to love me when he went away, and now if he dies, what shall I do without him? Prayers have but little weight, they ought to have saved him, I have prayed so long, so hard, Louis, for his safety. But I must tell mother." And when she heard me, and I said I must go to him, she sat down as if in despair; but a moment after looked almost cheerful as she said:

"You must start to-night, my dear, and I must get all the little medicines I can think of ready for you to take, and as soon as he is able he must come home. If it is a fever, I fear for his lungs."

Clara waited until our talk was over, and then came and said Louis must go with me; put into my hands a well filled purse, and said:

"Bring the brother back, dear cousin; don't wait for him to get well; bring him back on a bed if necessary; he will never get well among strangers."

When father came he was pained beyond expression, and his first thought was for means to do all that must be done.

“Clara has provided that, father,” and he was too thankful to reply.

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Everything was ready; Louis and I said “good-bye” to all, and drove rapidly away, for in order to reach the station below ours, where we could take a night train West, we must ride thirty miles. The train was due at eight-forty-five, and it was four o’clock when we started; a neighboring farmer (Mr. Graves), who had a span of fleet horses took us, and we dashed over the ground rapidly, having full five minutes to breathe in at the depot ere we took the train. No luxurious palace cars in those days, you know, just the cushioned seats, but that was enough for me; I thought I could have sat on a hard wooden seat, or on anything if I only could reach that suffering boy. Louis tried to arrange our baggage so that I could sleep.

“Sleep will not come to my eyelids to-night, Louis, I shall not sleep until I see Halbert, and know how he is and is to be.”

“Now, Miss Emily,” he said as he took my hand in his, “I say you must sleep. Watching will do him no good until we get there, and more than this, it may do him much harm, for if you get so tired, you will be ill yourself when you arrive and then he will have no sister. For Hal’s sake, Miss Emily, you shall go to sleep; lean on my shoulder, and I believe I can help your nerves to become quiet.”

I knew he was right, and yielded myself to the strong control he possessed over me, and I slept I know not how long. When I awoke Louis said we were getting along at good speed.

“Day will break soon, and then comes a change of cars, and in a little while we shall see the great city.”

I was for a few moments at a loss to realize everything; when I did I said:

“Selfish girl to sleep so long, and you have sat here watching me, and now you are so tired.”

“Not so tired,—so glad for your rest—I can sleep to-morrow, and when we get to Chicago you shall watch him days and I will watch nights; we shall go to him armed with strength, which is more than medicine; I told you long ago I had something to do for Hal, you see it is coming.”

The whole journey was pleasant, and sometimes it seemed wicked when Hal was so sick for me to feel so rested and peaceful, but here I was controlled, and it was blessed to be. I might never have come back to my mother had it not been for the power of Louis’ strong thought and will.

The journey accomplished, it was not long ere we saw the dear face of my blessed brother. I will not detail all the small horrors that met me in the house where we found him. It might have seemed worse to me than it really was, but oh! how I needed all the



peace that had settled upon me, to take in the surroundings of that fourth story room. Soul and sense revolted at the sickening odors of the little pen, where, on a wretched cot, my brother lay. I thought of our home, and drew rapid contrasts between our comfortable beds, and the straw pallet before me; our white clean floors, home-made rugs, and,—but

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never mind. Then I said in my heart, "God help me to be more thankful," and with brimming eyes I caught both Hal's hands in my own, and looked in his flushed face, trying vainly to catch a look of recognition. He did not know me. Louis had kindly stepped aside to give me all the room, but he watched me closely, and caught me as I staggered backward feeling all the strength go suddenly from my limbs, while from my lips came the words which burned into my soul, "He will die." I had never in my life fainted, and did not now. Louis drew a little flask of brandy from his pocket and forced a few drops into my mouth. My will came back to me, and in a few moments I could think a little. "A doctor, Louis, oh! where is there one—what shall we do?" Even as I spoke, Hal's employer entered and with him Dr. Selden. The merchant did not come as near to me as did the old doctor with his good-natured, genial face, and quiet but elastic step. I forgot everything but the sufferer, and turned to him with upraised hands and streaming eyes, saying:

"Oh! tell me quickly what to do, don't let him die, he has a good home and friends, we love him dearly, help me to get him there," adding, in answer to his look of inquiry, "I am his sister, and this gentleman," turning to Louis, "is our friend Mr. Desmonde."

The doctor laid his hand on my head and said:

"I have not seen the patient before; an examination will doubtless help me to answer your question, and to give you the help you ask. Rest yourself, Miss, you will soon need a physician's aid yourself," and he drew a chair close to the foot of the bed for me. Then he felt Hal's pulse, stroked his head a little, and sat quietly down at the foot of the bed just opposite me, and laid one hand over Hal's heart, leaning forward a little, and looking as if half mystified. The few minutes we sat there seemed to me an hour, waiting, as it seemed, for decision between life and death. Suddenly Halbert sprang up and shouted:

"Here! here! this way, almost finished—hold my heart—hold it still; I'll make Emily's eyes snap when I get home, ha, ha!" and then a sort of gurgling sound filled his throat, and he placed both hands over his chest, and sank back, while for an instant all the blood left his face. I put my hand into Louis', and groaned, trying hard to control myself, for I knew we were close to the shadows, and perhaps, "Oh, yes," I comfortingly thought, "perhaps we need not pass through them all."

Doctor Selden moved to the head of his bed, and held both hands on Hal's temples; for a few moments it seemed as if no one breathed, then Hal drew a long breath as if he were inhaling something, and whispered:

"That feels good; my head is tired, tired, tired."

This gave me courage. It seemed then as if he were feeling the power of an uplifting hand, and soon—

“Emily, Emily!” passed his lips. “Tell her to come to me, she will help me, tell her to come.” Then for a few moments all was still, and he slept. Dr. Selden looked at me with hope in his eyes, and tears of gratitude gathered to run like a river of rain drops over my cheeks. He slept twenty minutes, and as he stirred the doctor motioned me to come where he could see me. His eyes opened and met mine.

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"Emily!" he said, and putting both arms around my neck, drew my head down to his pillow, and whispered:

"Don't cry—I'll go home with you—all right, the end will be all right." Fearing for his strength, I said softly:

"Don't talk, you're too weak, Hal; lie still for a little while and shut your eyes." I raised my head and put my hand on his forehead, and soon he was asleep. Then in a low, kind tone the doctor told us the crisis was past, and now we must wait for the changes, which were one by one to fall on him. Hal's employer urged me to go to his house, and let Louis remain with Halbert, and at last it was arranged that at night I should sleep there, and Louis stay with Hal. Several hours would elapse, however, before night, and during this time Dr. Selden, Louis and I would stay with Hal.

I had time during his long sleep to think of something to be done for him, and realized, as I recovered from the first shock his situation gave to my nerves, the importance of a different room, better ventilation, *etc.*, and when Dr. Selden motioned to Louis to take his seat near Hal's head, where he could lay his hand upon him when he woke, I whispered to him my thoughts. His answer, though somewhat comforting, bade me wait until he could decide what was best. He took my hand in his and called me "little girl,"—just think of it, I was five feet six inches high, my face looked every day of forty that minute,—told me I was too tired to plan, and he would attend to it all, adding, at the close of his dear good talk:

"His artist soul has nearly used up his physical strength. I feel there has been great pressure on the nerves. If so there must be, according to the course of nature, rapid changes up to a certain point, and then there will be a thorough change slowly wrought out. Do not doubt my skill, 'little girl,' he will come out all right; you and I have a sure hold on his heart-strings."

I could hardly wait to ask the question, "What do you mean by his artist soul? what is he doing? and the doctor's eyes were looking in wonder at me, and his lips parting with a word, when Hal's voice startled us with:

"Emily, who is this?" and we turned to see him looking at Louis, whose hand was on his head.

I answered, "The dear friend Hal who brought me here."

"What a beautiful hand he has. Oh! how it rests my tired, tired brain," he said. "Water, Emily, sister, a little water."

Dr. Selden gave him a glass, saying, "Drink all you like."

"I am faint," said Hal.

“Take this, my good fellow,” and the doctor held a glass of cordial to his lips.

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He was perfectly lucid now, and his voice natural. Dr. Selden, anticipating questions from him, answered them all; told him I had come to stay until he could go back to the old home with me, and of Mr. Hanson's kind tender of hospitality to both Louis and myself, and settled every vexing question for the patient, who looked a world of thanks, and with "God be praised" on his lips passed again into unconsciousness, with Louis' hand still passing over his head. I thought then if Louis should ask me to jump into the crater of Vesuvius for him I could do it out of sheer thankfulness; and I marvelled at him, the child of wealth and ease, only a boy in years, here in this miserable room a strong comforting man, seeming as perfectly at home as if always here. Then the thought of the artist came back to me and I leaned forward to ask Dr. Selden what it all meant.

"Why, little girl, your brother is a sculptor born. He has sat up nights working hard to accomplish his work, and has succeeded too well in his art, for unconsciously he has worn his nervous power threadbare. You will see one of his little pieces in Mr. Hanson's library when you go down there. He has a friend here who—Ah!" said the doctor, turning at that very moment toward the slowly-opening door and grasping the hand of a tall stately man with dreamy eyes, who seemed to be looking the question, "May I come in."

"Yes, yes; come in, professor," whispered the doctor, and he introduced me to Hal's teacher and friend, Wilmur Benton. Then offered him the only remaining chair.

The professor seated himself quietly, and raising his dreamy brown eyes said, "Will he live?"

The doctor smiled and bowed a positive "yes" as he said:

"The crisis is past, care and patience now."

At this moment Hal awoke, and this time more naturally than before. He was quiet, looked upon us all with the clear light of reason in his eyes, and would have talked if it had been allowed. He wanted us all close to him, and smiled as he held tightly Louis' hand in one of his, and with the other grasped that of Professor Benton, to lay both together in a silent introduction. I think Hal felt that Louis had saved his life, and he clung to his hand as a drowning man would to a life preserver. One sweet full hour passed over us, and the doctor made preparation to leave him, whispering to me:

"The young man you brought to your brother is giving him wonderful strength, and he must leave him only long enough to rest a little. The crisis is past and the victory won."

And here began and ended a wonderful lesson in life.

CHAPTER VI.

A question and A problem.

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The details of our stay in Chicago as a whole would be uninteresting, and I would not weary the reader with them. Hal improved so rapidly that on the fourth day after our arrival, he was carried in comparative comfort to Mr. Hanson's residence, and placed for a few days in a pleasant chamber to gather strength for our journey home. One little incident I must tell you, connected with my introduction to Mr. Hanson's family. We were seated at the supper table, talking of Hal, his sickness and the cause of it, when Daisy, a five-year-old daughter, spoke quickly, "Mamma, mamma, she looks just like the 'tree lady,' only she don't have her sewing."

I did not realize it as the child spoke, but when Mrs. Hanson chided the little one, saying, "Daisy must learn not to tell all her little thoughts," it all came so clearly, and I trembled visibly; yes, I guess it was rather more than visible, since an unfortunate tilt in my chair, an involuntary effort of trying to poise brain and body at once, upset cup and saucer and plate, and before I knew it Mrs. Hanson had deluged me with bay rum. They said I nearly fainted, but I realized nothing save the ludicrous figure I presented, and I thought despairingly "Emily did it." After supper I went to the library, and there it was—this piece of work which Hal had done, representing me sitting under that old apple tree, hemming and thinking. It was so perfectly done, even to the plain ring on my middle finger, a wide old-fashioned ring which had been my grandmother Minot's, and bore the initials "E.M." I could not speak when I saw it, and if I could I should not have dared to for fear of some unfortunate expression. I wished in my heart it had been any one else but me.

"If my face had been like Hal's," I thought, and I stood as one covered with a mantle and bound by its heavy folds, until the gentle voice of Mrs. Hanson roused me, saying:

"Take a seat, Miss Minot, you are very tired." Yes, I was tired, though I did not know it, and taking the chair she proffered, I covered my face with both my hands and drew long breaths, as if to deliver myself from the thoughts which overwhelmed me. Mrs. Hanson's womanly nature divined my feelings, and she left me to myself, but after a while Daisy drew an Ottoman near, and seating herself on it put her little hands in mine and whispered:

"I think you're awful pretty. Don't you?"

I drew her into my lap and kissed her, and my dreams that night were hope and peace. Louis was with me there, and although constantly attentive to Hal, he gave no signs of weariness, and Hal would look into his eyes, as he sat beside him, with a look of perfect devotion. I thought so many times, as he lay back among his pillows looking at Louis, he was mentally casting his features, and how nice it would be when his deft hands moulded the clay with face and form like that of our beautiful Louis Desmonde. What a joy to Clara's heart, and my own would beat

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like a bird in its cage, thrilled with rapture at the prospect of deliverance! Had he not saved the life of my darling brother, and in my heart down deep, so deep I could bring no light of words upon the thought, I felt that I loved them both. The tenth day (since our removal to Mr. Hanson's) arrived, and then came our departure. I cried every minute, and only because I was glad. Mr. and Mrs. Hanson and Louis thought it due to over-exertion, and when I tried to explain I made an unintelligible murmur, and only succeeded in bringing out one thought—my gratitude to them and the hope that I might one day repay it. Oh, how kind they were! Everything to make the transit easy for Hal was cared for, even to the beautiful blanket Mrs. Hanson gave him, which was doubly precious since her grandmother spun the wool and colored and wove it with her own hands. It was a happy party which left Chicago on that memorable morning, and our journey was delightful. Father was waiting for us at the old home station, and instead of the old stage we rode home in an easy carry-all behind our own horses. Mother and Clara met us with outstretched hands, and the latter, as she stood in the doorway, looked a perfect picture.

Hal was very tired, and for days after our return was threatened with a relapse, which was averted only by the unvarying care and strength of Louis. When this risk was over and he was fairly started on the road of recovery, came the departure of our friend and his return to his studies. Oh, how we dreaded it! Hal said afterward the thought of his going sent a chill to his head. The evening before his departure we walked over the hill through the pleasant path his mother and myself always chose when we walked and talked together. I said:

"Go with us, Clara," as we sauntered along the yard path toward the gate, but Louis looked at her and she turned gaily from us with the words:

"I will look after the invalid."

It seemed to me I was made of stone that evening, and we walked long before the silence was broken. At last Louis stopped, and taking both my hands looked into my heart (it seemed so to me) and said:

"I leave to-morrow."

My eyes grew moist, but only a sigh escaped my lips. I did not even say I was sorry.

Then we sat down on the mossy trunk of our favorite tree, and he said:

"Are you sorry, Emily? Will you miss me, and will you write to me, and will your dark eyes read the words I send to you?"

Dumb, more dumb than before, I sighed and bowed my head, and again he spoke, this time with that strange, terribly earnest look in his eyes I had seen before.

“Oh, Emily! my dear Emily! I am only a boy in years, but I love you with the strength of a man. I have saved the life of your brother because I loved his sister; and,” he added in a low tone, “I love him too, but not as I do the dark eyes of his sister. Oh! Emily, do you love me? Can you and will you love me, and me only?”

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And he drew me to him almost fiercely, while I quivered in every nerve, and answered:

“Louis, do you know me well? Can you not understand my heart? How can I help loving you?”

He loosened his grasp about me, and as his arm fell from my waist, tears fell at his feet. Oh, what a nature was his! Then turning again to me—“Will you wear this?” and a ring of turquoise and pearls was slipped on my finger, while in his hand he held a richly-carved shell comb.

“This is for your midnight hair Emily, wear it always,” and he placed it among the coils of my hair.

Silence followed for a little time, and then Louis with his soulful eyes fixed on something afar off, spoke with great fervor of the life he longed for.

“Emily, you do not know me yet,” he said.

“I know you better than you know yourself, but I am to you a puzzle, and oh, if I could skip the years that lie between to-day and the day when you and I shall really understand each other! Perfect in peace that day I know will come, but there are clouds between. My father willed that I should have this education I am getting. I need it, I suppose, but I have greater needs, and cannot tell you about them till I am free.”

“Two years—twenty-four months,” and his eyes fell, as he added despairingly, “What a long time to wait.” Then turning to me, “But you will love me, you have said so?”

I looked my thoughts, and he answered them.

“Do not ever think so of me, I am only too sane, I have found my life before the time.”

“Oh! Louis,” I cried, and then he answered with the words,

“My little mother knows it—she knows I love you. She knows my inmost soul, and answers me with her pure eyes. But ah! her eyes have not the light of yours; I want you to myself, to help me, and I will love you all my life.”

I was amazed, and wondered why it was—this strange boy had been much in society, and why should I, an unsophisticated, homely girl, bring such a shower of feeling on myself.

“Could it be real and would it last?”

He comprehended my thought again and replied:

“You are not homely; I see your soul in your eyes; you are younger than I am; I have never seen your equal, and I know years will tell you I am only true to my heart, and we will work together—ah! we will work for something good, we will not be all for ourselves, *ma belle*,” and on my forehead he left a kiss that burned with the great thoughts of his heart.

I could only feel that I was in the presence of a wonderful power, and at that moment he seemed a divinity. The moon came over the hill, and with his arm in mine we turned our steps homeward, and Clara met us half-way, and putting her hand fondly in Louis’ said:

“My boy is out under the moon. I feared he was lost.”

“My little mother!” and he gathered her under his wing, as it seemed, and we were soon at the gate of home. Louis and his mother passed in at the side door. As they did so, I fell back a step or two, turned my steps toward the old apple tree, and there, sitting against its old trunk, I talked aloud and cried and said:

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"Have I done wrong, or is it right?"

Oh! what strange thoughts came over me as I sat growing more and more convinced that Louis' talk to me was a boyish rhapsody, and yet I knew then, as I had before known, that my own heart was touched by his presence. If he had been older, I should have felt that heaven had opened; as it was, I longed to be full of hope and to dream of days to be, and still I feared and I said aloud, "I am afraid, oh, I am afraid!" and at that moment Louis stood before me, and in quiet tones spoke as one having authority:

"Emily, you will get cold, you should not sit here."

And as I rose the moonbeams fell on my tear-stained face, and he said as if I were the merest child:

"Why do you fear I shall ever be different toward you; but you need not feel bound even though you have said you will love me."

"Louis," I cried, "you are cruel; you trouble me; I can't tell how I feel at all," and then realizing his last sentence I took off the ring, but ere I could speak he put it back, saying:

"No, no, Emily. I will wait one year, and then if you are afraid I will go away; but keep the ring, for that is yours, and yours alone."

I went up to my little room without bidding any one "good-night," and thought those old three words right over, "Emily did it." I had covered myself up because I dared not be known, and if, after all, it was right, how good it would be to be loved by one capable of such wondrous love as he possessed.

I dreamed all night that I was alone and ill, and in the morning I dreaded to meet Louis, but he gave no sign of any troubled thought, and when the stage came was ready with his bright "good-bye." He folded his little mother to his heart and held her there for a few seconds. When he came to me his hand's grasp was firm and strong. His kiss and whisper came together, "I will write." A moment later and he had gone. Clara went to her own room, to cry a little softly as she afterward said, and so the time wore on till the evening found us again all around the table, and old grey Timothy, our cat, had the boldness to sit in Louis' chair, which made Clara laugh through her tears. Joy and sorrow go hand in hand, and while we felt his loss so keenly, his letters were a great pleasure.

Hal had his share as well as Clara and I, and mother used to read every one of Hal's. It seemed strange to me to have anything to keep from mother, and had she opened the door I would have told her all, but she never asked me about Louis' letters, and until I

overheard a conversation between my father and her I was held in silence; then the ice was broken, for father said:

“I do not know what to do. It is possible that this bright young fellow will play the part that so many do, and our innocent Emily be made the sufferer. When he comes again we will try and manage to have her away. She is a good girl and capable beside. Her life must not be blighted, but we must also be careful not to hurt Clara’s feelings. Clara is a good little woman, and how we should miss her if she left us!”

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"Well," said my mother, "I do not feel alarmed about our Emily, but, of course, it is better to take too much precaution than not enough," and their conversation ended.

When an opportunity presented I talked with mother, told her what I had heard, and all that Louis had said to me, almost word for word, and the result was her confidence. When our talk closed, she said in her own impressive way:

"I will trust you, my daughter, and only one thing more I have to say: Let me urge upon you the importance of testing your own deepest, best feelings in regard to this and every other important step—yes, and unimportant ones as well. There is a monitor within that will prove an unerring guide to us at all times. If we do not permit ourselves to be hurried and driven into other than our own life channels we shall gather from the current an impetus, which comes from the full tide of our innate thought. Such thought develops an inner sense of truth and fitness, which is a shield ever covering us, under any and all circumstances. It holds us firmly poised, no matter which way the wind may be, or from what quarter it strikes us."

This thought I could not then appreciate fully, but I did what I could toward it, and it was, in after years, even then, an anchor. My mother's eyes were beautiful; they looked like wells, and when thoughts like these rose to mingle with their light, they seemed twice as large and full and deep as on ordinary occasions. I never wanted to disobey her, and in those days we read through together the chapters in life's book that opened every sunrise with something new. Our souls were blent as one in a delightful unity, that savored more of Paradise than earth, and now with Hal's returning strength, there was a triple pulsation of mingled thought. Oh, Halbert, my blessed brother, no wonder my eyes are brimming with tears of love at these dear recollections! Louis had sent him a large box of material for doing his work, and Clara had insisted on his having one of her new rooms for a studio, and everything was as perfect as tasteful appointments could make it, even to the dressing-gown she had made for him.

She made this last with her own hands, of dark blue cashmere, corded with a thread of gold. He had to wear it, too, for she said nothing could be too nice to use.

"Why, my dear Halbert," she added, "the grass is much nicer and you walk on that."

The rich rosy flush came slowly enough into his pale cheeks, but it found them at last, and I do believe when we saw the work grow so fast under his hands, we were insane with joy. To think our farmer boy who followed the cows so meekly every night had grown to be a man and a sculptor, throwing such soul into his work as to model almost breathing figures! His first work was a duplicate of the piece at Mr. Hanson's, and was made at Louis' especial request. His next work was a study in itself. It was an original subject worthy of Hal's greatest

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efforts, a representation of our good old friend Hildah Patten, known to all our village as “Aunt Hildy.” We called her our dependence, for she was an ever-present help in time of need; handy at everything and wasteful of nothing. Her old green camlet cloak (which was cut from her grandfather’s, I guess) with the ample hood that covered her face and shoulders, was a welcome sight to me, whenever at our call for aid she came across lots. She lived alone and in her secluded woodland home led a quiet and happy life; she was never idle, but always doing for others. Few really understood her, but she was not only a marvel of truth but possessed original thought, in days when so little time was given in our country to anything save the struggle for a living. It is only a few years since Aunt Hildy was laid away from our sight. I often think of her now, and I have in my possession the statuette Hal made, which shows camlet cloak, herb-bags and all. I desire you to know her somewhat, since her visits were frequent and our plans were all known to her.

CHAPTER VII.

Wilmur Benton.

The fall is a busy time in a farmer’s household—with the gathering of grain, clearing up of fields, and making all due preparations for the coming winter; and it is beautiful also. This year, however, the many colored leaves had sought the ground unnoticed by me; for my days had been absorbed in thought and, instead of looking at things about me, if I had a spare moment I wandered in the realms of feeling.

November had come to us with Louis’ departure, and the weeks between his coming and going seemed, as I looked back, like a few hours only, crowded together as a day before me with the strange events, and stranger thoughts, whose existence from that time onward has forced me to own their supremacy and power. Hal’s artist friend, Professor Benton, was coming to see him—and I wished it were May instead of November, for it seemed to me the outer attractions of our country home were much greater than the inner, and I could not see how he was to be entertained. Clara’s side (as we called the four rooms she had added) would be the only attraction, and since Hal was domiciled there, that would be the right place. Many paintings adorned the walls, and to me there was such a contrast between our middle room and its belongings, and the sunny chamber occupied by Hal, that whenever I looked on the massively-framed pictures there, they seemed out of place. Clara was fond of having them in sight, and labored hard to have her loves ours. Every other evening we were forced to occupy that side of the house and I wonder, as I look back, that my father could have been so obedient to her wishes. She would sit on an ottoman between him and my mother and often with her head resting against the arm of his chair, talking with us of our farm, the plans for winter, and the fences to be built with the coming spring; and she was never

satisfied unless allowed to be really one of us. The building she had done was accredited to my father, for she would not have it otherwise, and when his spirit of independence prompted him to refuse her board-money afterward, she looked at him with tears in her eyes and said:

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"Why must I be repelled, Mr. Minot? Please let me stay here always. I have no comfort if I have no one to be happy with, and you must take this from me."

She was no trouble, and such a small eater that she must have paid us four times over for all she had. Father thought at first her impulsive gifts would be of short duration, but months had revealed her to us, and we realized that she was a marvel of goodness. Not only interesting herself in us but in others. Weekly visits were made by her to the poor in our parish, and blessings fell on her head in prayers rising from the lips of her grateful friends. The semi-monthly sewing circle she caused to be appointed at our house (her side), and with her own hands made all the edibles necessary on every occasion. She shrank from making calls upon those who were not in need of her services, and never went willingly to any public gathering. I never knew why, but she was morbidly sensitive on this point. Once she was over-persuaded, and went to an old-fashioned quilting party with mother, and she came home in a fainting condition, and we worked over her until after midnight.

"I am so cold here," she said, placing her hand on her heart—"I will not go out any more, Mrs. Minot; it hurts me."

We never afterward urged her, nor explained her suffering to the friends who inquired. She exacted a promise to that effect.

What a strange being our lovely Clara was! She grew to our hearts as ivy to the oak, and the tendrils of her nature entwined us, creeping a little nearer daily, until the doors of our hearts were covered with their growing beauty. I should be writing all about her, and not bring myself into my story at all, but the promise I made you must be fulfilled. At some other time I may write out for you the life and work of this beautiful friend. My own experience seems to me only a background against which her picture ought to rest. I have been rambling, for you remember I began to tell you about the coming of Hal's artist friend from Chicago. I believe it was the fifteenth of November when he came, and his presence was not a burden as I feared, for he found and filled a place held in reserve for him, and all united with me in saying: "What a splendid man he is!"

Brother Ben, who was now at an interesting age, called him "a man to study," and he seemed to be fascinated by him. His eyes followed every motion, and his ear was keenly alive to every expression of thought. I sometimes thought Hal wished Ben did not like him as well, for he was constantly availing himself of his society. Some work fortunately had to be done, else Hal would have been very much troubled to gain an audience. Clara did not like the artist quite as well as I did, though she said with the rest, "What a splendid man!" and betrayed by no word or act any disregard for his feelings, still I intuitively felt a something she did not say; and when I told her he had made an arrangement to

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stay all winter, she clasped her white hands together tightly, and between two breaths a sigh came fluttering from her lips, while tears gathered in the blue of her eyes, as the white lids fell to cover what she would not have me notice. Although a pain and wonder filled my heart for a moment, I knew if Clara wished me to divine her feelings she would explain herself, and her silence left me to my own conjectures. I said to myself "Some thought of the past has come over her," for I could not see how the stay of Wilmur Benton could affect her happiness. He treated her with great deference and seemed to realize with us that she had a rare organization. His stay was a matter of great interest with Hal, as Hal was to gain from him the instruction he needed, and they expected to get much enjoyment from working together. Louis would be with us through the holidays, and Mr. Benton would, I knew, enjoy that, for he insisted that it was the magic of his hand that had saved Hal's life, and he looked on him as a real blessing. The two artist souls blended as one, and drank daily deep draughts from the fountain of an inspiring genius, and as I watched the work grow under their hands, and the plastic and senseless clay become a fair statue, lacking nothing save breath and motion to reveal an entity, I questioned if the power was really theirs, or if their hands had touched a secret spring and were guided outside of themselves. It really never seemed like exertion, and to sense this wondrous art was to me the asking of questions deeper than any among us could answer.

Hal's statue of dear Aunt Hildy was copied, and improved also by Mr. Benton, who considered it a masterpiece, and the respect we bore our friend was not lessened, even though there were those among us who might speculate as to the motive that prompted it.

We never called her funny, but original, and good as gold. Our family numbered now seven people, and with the farm work in addition to the daily preparation of meals, the clearing up and upsetting again of things, there were many steps to take, and Aunt Hildy was installed as our help in need.

These were the days of help—not servants—when honest toil was well appreciated by sensible people, and no hurried or half-done work fell from their hands, but the steady doing resulted in answering the daily demands.

"It's a bunch of work to do; it is, indeed, Mrs. Minot," said Aunt Hildy.

"But we'll master it."

"I ain't never going to be driven by work, nor aristocracy neither. It's a creepin' in on us, though, like the snake in the garden, just to make folks think they can get more comfort out of fixin's than they can out of the good old truths. I can't be fed on chaff; no, I can't."

And her sleeves would go up to her elbows, and she would march through work like a mower through a field.

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Her coming gave me a chance to do some sewing, and with Clara's help about cutting (and she sewed with me), the needed spring and summer apparel and house linen were fashioned and made ready for use. The days passed pleasantly to us all, and though I had watched Clara closely, she betrayed neither by word nor sign anything that savored of dislike toward Professor Benton; and still, sometimes, I felt that unexplainable something that once in a while tried as it were to shape itself before me, and as often vanished in mist. We had long evenings, and many new topics were introduced and discussed. I had access to Clara's large and well selected library, and I improved every opportunity to inform myself on doubtful subjects. Sometimes I despaired of knowing anything new, and again my brain would seem clearer, and would take in the new thoughts with keen perception. When, however, we came to talk upon these same subjects, I sat nearly dumb; I could summon no thoughts nor words to frame them. Even this stupidity had its advantage, for Mr. Benton (Hal called him Will) was a good talker, and had, as all talkers have, a great respect for a good listener, and he often said to me:

"You have a heart to appreciate rare truths, Miss Minot."

Clara was gifted in conversation, but did not always express her sentiments with great freedom.

If we touched on things nearest her heart, and I believe the doing of good each to the other was her highest thought, she was at home, and her blue eyes would glow with light, as in her own sweet way she talked long and earnestly. I shall never forget the first time Mr. Benton noticed this point in her organization. The newsmonger of our town had been to see us, had spent the afternoon and taken tea, and while it was amusement for me to hear her gossip incessantly about this thing and that, this person and the other, Clara was greatly annoyed by it. It caused a righteous indignation to rise within her, and when after the visit we were seated by the antique centre table in her sitting-room, the conversation turned upon the peculiarities of this scandal-loving Jane North.

Clara expressed herself freely on the subject of small talk, as she termed scandal. Her eyes dilated, her small hands were folded tightly, and when she closed it was with this last feeling sentence:

"I can only say, 'Father, forgive them, they know not what they do,' who scatter the theme of contention where roses should appear, and in tearing down the habitation of their neighbors lose also their own; for they who have respect for themselves will have respect for their neighbors. May we yet live to understand the meaning of the words, 'Love ye one another.' When this shall be, oh, my more than friends, when this shall be, we shall know each other, even as we are known! No secret blight shall cover any life, no worm of regret gnaw at the tree of our unfolding lives! We shall all be as a unit, and our Father who seeth

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us in secret shall then reward us openly! Yea, more, for are not we ourselves capable of holding communion with this part of God within us? We know our souls are with us to-day, and it is only because the roots of thought are covered, and the feet of envy, hatred and malice are pressing, the hard soil against them, that the tendrils of our loving natures are never asked to climb, and the eternal ivy of our great love reaches not the windows of expressed thought, else our hands would be made strong to do daily that which is found to do with all our might."

Her last beautiful utterance finished, she closed her eyes as if covered with the mantle of her holy thoughts, and we all sat in a breathless silence. Aunt Hildy who sat in the corner (by preference) stirred not a muscle from the beginning to the close of her talk, and Mr. Benton looked first in wonder then in admiration, and when our silence was broken by a fervent "Amen" from Aunt Hildy, he added:

"'Even so let it be.' Those thoughts are beautiful."

Clara looked at him with an almost reproachful glance, the import of which I could not understand.

I was not sensitive like Clara; perhaps intuitive would express it better. She seemed to understand every one's nature on the first meeting, and I had marvelled many times at her accuracy in reading character.

She told me that her heart went out to Aunt Hildy at their first meeting, and I felt convinced now there was something about this new friend that no one save herself could detect, and whether it had shape with her or not was a question.

Three weeks of Mr. Benton's stay had passed when this incident occurred, and from that hour there was a marked change in his manner toward her. I could see, ignorant as I was of the phases of life, how he was attracted to her. This glimpse of her wondrous nature had opened his eyes, and perhaps touched his heart. His age must be about hers, I thought, and how strange if it should be that he loved her. But here I run into a mist where nothing was plain. Days will tell the story, I thought, and we were sure of days and changes while life lasted. It became plain to me after a little that Clara felt the change in his manner toward her, and in every quiet move of hers I detected the disposition on her part to repel any advances. She gave him no opportunity to be with her alone, and if by chance this happened, her sweet voice would call "Emily, come in this way, we are lonely without you," and her eyes would turn on me when I entered with a sort of wistful glance. It always reminded me of a child looking confidently into the eyes of its mother, expecting the help it was sure to find. I hardly enjoyed this, for I knew Mr. Benton thought me old enough to discern a little, and he must have believed

us to be in league together, whereas no word had passed between us on the subject until just before Christmas, when Louis was expected.

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Clara and I were sitting busily sewing and talking of the coming of “her dear boy,” when she let her sewing fall and sat as in thought a few moments before she spoke.

“Emily (and she spoke slowly and with earnestness. I felt frightened for her cheek grew white as the words fell from her lips), when Louis comes keep close to me all the time, will you? Oh! I know you will, and since I ask such a favor, it is only right I should tell you all about it. I know, for I feel it in here (and she laid her hand on her head), that Professor Benton desires to talk to me. He must not be allowed to, Emily, for if he does it will hurt me so much. I will tell you why, and I know you will tell it to no one.”

I looked an assent and she continued:

“He thinks that he might like me so well that he would wish me near him for ever. But he does not know that I cannot let him say this to me. It would be hard to make him understand me; he never could. And then if he should know me very well, it would be all wrong. I love my Louis Robert, and he is waiting on the hills for me. Yes, my dear Emily, he waits for me there. Did he not say so when he died, and will he not come for me some day when I shall be a little more weary, and this beating heart grows colder? He says he will and I am always with him in my thoughts. It almost hurts me to live at all. Can you see, Emily, can you know how it is because I need you all so much that I must stay with you? Professor Benton has a good heart, but it feels cold to me. His art obscures from him all else; he can love no one as he loves a picture. Now you will promise me, no not with words—I would only feel your arm around me, and with my hand in yours feel you are my trusted one—my soul friend and my great help.”

Silence was ill suited to my feelings at that moment. I gathered her gentle form to me, and held her tight while those ever ready tears of sympathy filled my eyes full, and I spoke honestly when I said:

“I don’t care a fig for Mr. Benton, and if he troubles you I will send him back to Chicago, and I wish he had never come at all.”

“Oh! oh! do not say it; I shall fear to have you know my heart, it makes you rebellious. It is well that he came, as your brother needs him, and you do wrong to say such words. Wait, Emily, keep quiet, you are like a wind when your thoughts are stirred, and time, my love, will help you to make your hand strong, and your heart also. It is on a full tide and with a steady wind that vessels find the sea, while changeable blasts will shipwreck them, and then cast their wrecks upon the shore. And so it is with mortals; we have to keep saying, wait! while we pray to be guided aright.”

“I am always running off the track, Clara, I know; teach me to know myself and let me help you; you are so different; I shall never be like you,” I said.

“And you do not wish to be, I hope,” was her reply.

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"I would like more of your quiet spirit, but that belongs to you, and if I wait and work hard to do it, I shall always be upsetting what I wish to do, and plaguing others instead of helping—" Mother came in and our talk was at an end.

CHAPTER VIII.

Fears and hopes.

Many thoughts filled my mind after what Clara had said, and I thought much of her beautiful faith as to her husband and his waiting for her; of her trust in his coming, and of the reality with which came into her existence this wonderful future that waits for us all if (and sometimes this little conjunction assumed wonderful proportions) immortality really be ours. My heart told me we were to live, and in my higher thoughts I could sometimes see the light that flooded those old hills near our home, reaching far on to where all those of our household were waiting. I never at these times could think of our beloved friends, my blessed grandmother, of whom we did not even possess a daguerreotype, as an angelic and unearthly something with wings, but rather as a real being, whose face I should recognize, whose hands should touch my own, while her lips would move, and in her dear old way she would say "Come in, Emily," just as she used to when I went as a child to her door, and looked in at her, as she lay on her bed, partly paralyzed. Her hair was white with the cares of seventy-four winters, and her eyes filled then with such a pleasant light. She had lived with us, this dear Grandma Northrop, for years. Hal had always been her special charge; she called him her boy, and up to the last month of her life mended his stockings first; she would go to the door and watch him go for the cows, and when he came back over the west meadows, would say with admiration:

"That boy is worth a dozen such as Ben Davis; he'll do something great before he dies."

My mother spoke often of her, and also recalled her saying, "I hope angels can see men," meaning that she could not bear the thought of leaving Hal.

I was only five years old when she left us, still her memory was sacred to me, and through the summer days I covered her grave with everlasting flowers and daisies. I remembered her as genial, though somewhat peculiar in her ways; she had a warm appreciation of wit, and was ever ready with answers. Mother remembered and told me so many of her happy sayings that it kept her memory fresh among us all, and if angels could both see and hear men, she must have felt grateful that we remembered her with such pleasure. I treasured the hoop ear-rings which she wore, and which bore her initials, "E.L.N." Her name was Elizabeth, but she was called by all "Betsey." To Hal she had left two silver spoons and her snuff-box. He had it among his little treasures, and kept the same bean in it that was there when she died. I wished a thousand times and more that my name might be Elizabeth, but

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Emily was given me by a sister of father's who desired me to be her namesake, and if I had been more like her in my young years I should never have been likened to a "fierce wind," as Clara so truly termed me. This Aunt Emily had gone to her heavenly home, as had many of my mother's family. She was one of eleven children, and at this date only one brother, Peter, and a sister, Phebe, were living. Mother had a beautiful sister, Sallie, who died young, and whom I loved to hear about. She painted her picture in words for me, and I could see her dark blue eyes, her brown hair that looked like satin, and her pink cheeks, almost as if I had really seen and known her. And when this heaven, that sometimes seemed so like far off mist, grew nearer, I imagined the meeting of them all, and enjoyed the pleasant picture which lay before my mind's eye like a waiting promise of whose fulfillment I felt sure. Clara and Aunt Hildy had long conversations on these subjects, and Aunt Hildy said to me when speaking of these talks:

"Oh! I love her white soul, Emily; she allus brings heaven right down to airth, and even when she don't talk I feel so kind of blessed when I sit near her. Few such folks are let to live, and somehow I'm almost convinced she can't stay long," and the corner of her blue-checked apron would touch her humid eyes, as she turned again to her work.

Work was a matter of principle with her, and to neglect one duty unnecessarily, no light offense. She was as true to her highest conviction of right as the needle to the pole, and held the truth close to her heart—so close that all her outer life was in correspondence with her interior perceptions. Truly her light was not under a bushel.

I hoped her fear of Clara's death would not soon be realized, for it did not seem as if we could bear to lose her presence. Never in any way could she intrude herself, for her nature moved her in perpetual lines, whose shadow never fell on the path of another. I felt sorry that she should be troubled, and I fear my dark eyes now and then shot telling glances at Mr. Benton.

The more she tried, even in her graceful way, to repel his advances, the more determined he was to gain access to her heart. In this I could detect the selfish part of his nature, and while I could not blame him for loving her, I knew that my love for her was so great that I would not knowingly give her any pain, and it seemed to me his love must be less than it should be, for he could not fail to know it troubled her and should have desisted. In a few days after our conversation Louis came.

Clara had, since she realized Mr. Benton's feelings toward her, been very careful in the selection of her wearing apparel, choosing for her daily use the plainest dresses. But on the day of Louis' arrival she said to me, as we went up stairs after dinner was cleared away:

“Emily, will you put on the dress that becomes you so well?” It was a garnet merino she alluded to, a gift from herself.

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"We should make a pleasant picture for Louis when he comes; the dear boy loves to see his little mother in blue, and our royal Emily in becoming colors."

"Of course I will," I said, and as I fastened the lace collar, whose pattern was roses and leaves, with the pin she gave me, and looked in my little glass, I thought what a poor resemblance to royalty I bore, and laughed at the appellation.

Supper was ready, but we waited for the stage, and when it came we were all at the door. Hal met Louis first and then came Mr. Benton; Clara kept drawing me back with her, and he was obliged to greet mother and father and Aunt Hildy also, ere we were visible.

"Little mother! blessed little mother!" and he held her close, kissing her with passionate fondness, then turning to me he took both my hands and whispered softly:

"Last but not least," and we followed the rest to the supper table.

Mr. Benton was more than polite during the meal, and afterward delighted Louis with showing him an unfinished portrait of Clara, which he had commenced painting on canvas.

This information was conveyed to me at the first favorable opportunity, and when Louis enjoined secrecy upon me, he expressed great pleasure with Mr. Benton, and said:

"Oh! Miss Emily. Little mother is so beautiful; she is always a picture. When the artist adds to the charming portrait the dress and the little pearls she wore to receive me, it will be so real I shall want to ask it to speak to me, and when she leaves me I can look at it, and in my heart hear her say 'Louis my dear boy.' You love her very much, do you not, Emily?"

"Oh, Louis!" I cried, "do not talk so, everybody says she is too good and beautiful to live, and it is a thought too bitter, I cannot bear it."

He turned the conversation into another channel, and talked so strongly about his great desire to master this art of painting, while I wondered to myself how it had happened that these hearts were gathered to our own and had become members of our household, coming, as they did, like rare exotics, to live and blossom among us plain hollyhocks and dandelions. Hal I could liken to a rare flower, but then he was only one among our number, and in all our family and friends there were none possessing the gifts of these two souls which had come to us so strangely.

Aunt Hildy said, "The ways of life are past all comprehending." I thought so too. Christmas came on Sunday in this year of our Lord eighteen-hundred-and-forty-two, and for this I rejoiced and was glad. When it came on a week-day, it seemed like Sunday, and although now and then we had some really interesting sermons, there was

not enough to fill two sabbaths coming so near together, and it gave me a restless sort of feeling, especially so, when I knew how quiet and solemn my father used to be all day, and also his great desire that we should imitate him.

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I had been a member of our old church three years, and while I desired to live a Christian life, I could never feel that a long face, and solemnly pronounced words made any difference in my real life. Father did not believe any more in long faces than I did, still, I think from fear of neglecting any part of his duty, he maintained a serious demeanor from the break of our Sabbath days to their close. He had an unusually beautiful way of asking a blessing that always gave me a happy feeling. He merely said in a pleasant way, and with open eyes: "We should be very thankful for this meal; may we have wisdom to prepare no unsavory dishes, and strength to earn for ourselves, and others if necessary, the bread we daily need." This gave us a thought (that never grew old with me) of the needs of our neighbor, and also seemed so rational, and fitted our needs so perfectly. Aunt Hildy called it a common-sense blessing. I remember well how she spoke of it, in contrast with Deacon Grover's long-drawn-out table prayers, saying with emphasis; "The man, if he is a deacon, has a right to grow better, and we know he asks God to bless things cattle couldn't eat."

Christmas, we all went to church, and although it was more than a mile, aunt Hildy refused to ride.

"Let me walk as long as I can, time enough to ride by and by, and I'm only fifty-eight years old, Mr. Minot," she said.

It was useless to urge her, and she came into church a few minutes later than we did, and sat in her own pew next ours. This church was an old-time affair, having been built by the early settlers. It had, as all those old churches had, square pews, a stove in its central portion with huge arms of pipe that stretched embracingly in all ways; and its pulpit was so high that I prevailed on father to sit back from the centre as far as we could and be comfortably warm, for it was breaking ones' neck to look at the minister, and the sermon was half lost if you could not see the play of his features. Our worship was of the Presbyterian order, and our present pastor a worthy man. This was all the church that belonged to us really. In the village which nestled in the valley two and a half miles south-west of us, like a child in the lap of its mother, there were three churches, Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian, and many who attended our old church would have liked better to go to one of those, and at times did so, but it was quite a ride in winter, and for this reason our church was better filled at this season than in the summer days.

A new branch of belief had latterly developed itself somewhat in our neighborhood, and this embraced the thought of universal salvation. There had been meetings held at the houses of some of our friends, and once or twice mother and myself had attended.

The sermon on this Christmas day did me no good, for our minister chose for his subject false doctrines, and the pointed allusions and personalities savored greatly of a spirit that was not calculated to remind us of the humble Nazarene and his lowly spirit.

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Tearing the roof down over our heads would not give one an idea of a comfortable home; and surely charity's mantle should at least cover the sins of ignorance, and that certainly was the hardest verdict we could render against those of our number who had become interested in these ideas, for that they were good and true people appeared from their doctrines. The only difference was this: That the love of God was so great for his children that not one of them would be lost or cast into the terrible fires, which, according to our old belief, burned for the guilty through endless time. And now as I reflect I can surely see it was more through fear of being thus cast off, and not because I could put my hand on anything so terribly wicked in myself or my acts, that I early desired and had communication with the church. Somehow I felt more secure to know I was approved of by men, and my name enrolled on the church list. As I grew older this was a troublesome thought that now and then, asked for a hearing. As we came out of church, Deacon Grover with his small black eyes peering into aunt Hildy's face, said to her:

"Smart sermon; good talk, Miss Patten, how did you enjoy it?"

"Well as I could," and I nearly laughed in his face, although I knew he did not realize what she meant. She never liked fiery sermons, as she called them, and believed that the only way to heap coals of fire on the head of the unrighteous, was by living so rightly as to make them ashamed of their ways and do better. Mr. Benton and Louis walked with Ben and aunt Hildy, and our ride home was a nearly silent one. I knew my father had not been any more edified than myself, but it was not his way to talk of it, and not until the next evening was the subject mentioned. The fire of reproof was begun by your humble servant, and I said many things which were unnecessary, and expressed my determination to investigate the new doctrine. If father had been with us I should have spoken less freely, and as it was I shocked my mother and almost myself, so severely did I denounce the minister. Louis sat in silence, also his mother, but aunt Hildy spoke as follows, after waiting a few moments to see if any one else had pent up wrath to give vent to:

"Well, as the youngest has spoke, I suppose I may express my feelin's, and I must say I never heerd a worse sermon. I have been a steady meetin-goer for forty years, and have tried to hold a peaceful spirit that would be jest such as the Master would recommend if he was among us; but I believe we all allow we are sinners more or less, and after all do daily the things we should not do. Still if anybody wanted my help, I should hate to have 'em chase me with a broomstick, for I couldn't do a thing for 'em if they did; and if we think anybody is going into a ditch of a wrong idee, we'd better not scare 'em to death hollerin at 'em, it would be apt to send 'em in head first, while if we could kinder creep along behind, and speak a few words kindly, they would turn round, and we could tell 'em of their danger." Her similes were original, and we involuntarily smiled an approval of her sentiment, when Mr. Benton said:

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"Do you not think the fear of hell helps to hold people in the right path sometimes, Mrs. Patten?" Aunt Hildy looked at him with a wondrous light in her eyes, as she answered:

"No, *sir*, I don't; my Bible says perfect love casteth out fear. The woman that's afraid of her husband can't love him if she dies for it, and the boy who hates his father through fear, can't muster up respect enough to love him if he tries." And her knitting needles clicked again as if to say, "that's the truth."

A few moments and then Clara spoke (Aunt Hildy stopped knitting the moment she began, as if expecting a treat). "We are taught," she said, "that our Father loves us; that he rejoices with great joy in the return of a prodigal to his fold. The truth that he loves us better than we can ever love each other here, that none of us shall ask for bread and receive a stone, neither fish and receive a serpent, was spoken to us from the ages past. Christ came into the world as the bearer of all essential truths. His enemies, the Jews, knew he told the truth and hastened to crucify him, saying in plain words—'If he live, all men will believe on him, crucify him, crucify him,' and it was done, but he left behind him the great token of his love, and he hath said, 'Whosoever believeth on me, even though he were dead yet shall he live,' etc. If we can understand him, he means us all, every child of our Father, and are we not all his? The law of Moses was buried when the law of Christ was given, which is the law of our omnipotent Father. I am ready," and down her cheeks tears coursed their way; "I do so want to know more of this beautiful faith, for it has ever been my own; I say to you to-night and I have already said it to my heavenly Father, I will yield my life, if I can help the poor, tired hearts, the needy souls of men, to embrace this glorious truth, 'Love ye one another.'" Tears filled the eyes of all save those of Wilmur Benton, who sat as if covered with astonishment, and I could see that he was puzzled; and if he spoke his thought might have said, "What manner of woman is this, and how can I touch the strings of her heart."

Clara's eyes grew large and full of light as she continued:

"I care not for the name, for what manner of difference can that make—we are to be known and know each other by and by; we can and should have our heaven below; we can and should have love for one and all; and while my loyal friend Emily speaks harshly of the minister, who, fearing a new path before some of his people, feels it his duty to not only call, but drive them back into the square pen of the old ideas; yet we must not condemn him, neither measure his heart exactly by the words of his text or sermon. The circumference of the tree is more than three times its diameter, and yet we know the width of the board we use is found in the diameter. Words are a circumference which encircle the breadth of a diameter,

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and we may feel and know that this man, standing as he does within the bounds of a belief whose main foundation embraces the two thoughts, heaven and misery, cannot, if he believes this to be true, do less than urge it upon us all. But if we stop and think, we can say, perhaps the heart of this religious tree he represents may not be sound, and when the axe of advancing ideas trims its branches and buries its blade within its trunk, we shall, as I believe, have proof of this; and then, perhaps his eyes will turn with ours to the outstretched arms of a noble oak, whose leaves are green, whose heart is sound, and at whose base we all may gather, against whose sides we all may rest. It has waited long, and grown in our father's forest until at last its giant dimensions have been apparent. The leaves of its upper branches caught the eye of a ranger on truth's high mountain, and the underbrush must now be cut away to make a path for our feet. Let the winds annihilate the dogmas of a creed, let our hearts open to all good thoughts, and let this one also be as the anchor of our souls, this glorious thought of our Father's love, this binding together of his children. Patience and work both are needed: will not my dear boy help me? I know he will, and our Emily; God give to me the help I need from these two young hearts," and she held out her hands to us.

I said "Oh, Clara!" and sank on the floor beside her, put my head in her lap, and let the tears fall as they would, unmindful of all else save my dear, beautiful friend. Louis sat on the other side of her with his arm around her waist, and her head lay on his shoulder. The curtain of the evening slowly fell, and in slumbers I drew her thoughts close to my heart, Aunt Hildy's "God help us" floating like music through my dreams.

CHAPTER IX.

The new faith.

"Emily will help me!" Oh, how those words haunted me! I would help her; yes, if I could, but when should I ever stop making blunders, when should I lose the impetuous nature that drove me too often on the beach of thought, with shipwrecked sentences that fell far short of my thought, and expressed nothing of my real self. Why was it, as I grew older, I came to realize, that if I had been born a little later, it would have been easier? I was standing on tip-toe trying in vain to touch that which lay beyond my reach; of course I must be constantly falling, and the security of growth I could not then wait for. I must keep reaching and falling, covering myself with disappointments, while in the hearts if not on the lips of those about me must rest the same old words, "Emily did it."

Clara says I can do something, and having grown to feel that her words were almost prophecy, I felt sure there was something ahead, and repeated again and again, "Emily will do it." Mr. Benton was looking beyond his depth, and still did not hesitate to try and swim across the difficult waters that lay between himself and Clara, and before Louis

left us, something occurred which I must tell about. I had been called over the hill on an errand, was obliged to go alone, and was then detained somewhat, and when I came back, Louis met me, and taking my arm, said:

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“Walk slowly, I have something I must say.”

I thought of Clara at once, and it was a true impression, for he said:

“My little mother is in trouble; I have heard what I would never know if I could avoid it—Professor Benton has been telling her that he loves her. He has forced this upon her, I know, for these are his words to which I unwillingly listened: ‘Why, Mrs. Desmonde, do you shun me, why turn you eyes whenever they meet my own, why call Miss Minot to your side when an opportunity presents for us to be alone together? I cannot be baffled in my love for you; no woman has ever before touched the secret spring of my heart, no voice has ever reached my soul—yours is music to me; and, Mrs. Desmonde, I need great love and sympathy; I am not all I want to be; my lot in life has been in some respects very hard to bear; I never knew my mother’s love, and when old enough to desire the companionship man needs, I had an experience which killed the flower of my affection—I thought its roots were as dead as its leaves, until I met you. Oh! Mrs. Desmonde, do you not, can you not return this feeling? My life is in your hands.’ It was hard for my little mother, and I stood riveted to the spot, Emily, expecting to be obliged to enter and catch her fainting form, for I knew in my heart each word was a thorn, but here is her reply:”

“Professor Benton, I had hoped to be spared this pain, I have avoided you, because I could do no other way. I am so sorry! I can never, never love you as you desire! I have a husband—my Louis Robert waits for me in heaven, and he is my constant guide here. He will always be near me while I tarry, and I have no love to give you in return for yours. I can be your good friend always, I can help you as one mortal helps another. I can call you a brother, and I can be your sister; but do not dream falsely. I shall not learn to love you; my heart is full, and it is through no fault of mine that you have raised false hopes in your bosom, but I am very sorry—more sorry than I can tell you.”

“Is that all, and is it final?” I heard him say.

“It is all that I can ever say,” she said.

“I drew back from the door, and, passing through your middle room, came into my own, in time to see Professor Benton step into Halbert’s studio. I entered then the room where little mother sat, and held her in my arm awhile, saying no word to her of what I had heard. She was not exhausted, and after a little time I left her to come and meet you. Tell me, Emily, if you know about it—has she said anything to you?”

Of course I told him all, and then added her, “‘Say no word to Louis,’ but under these circumstances she could not blame me, could she, Louis?”

“No, no, Emily,” he replied, “but what can we do?”

“I do not know,” I said, and he added:

“Do you like Professor Benton?”

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"I cannot see anything in him to like very much, Louis," I replied; "when I met him in Hal's sick-room, he seemed really beautiful. His eyes looked so large and dreamy, and he had such sympathy for Hal, and I like him now, for that, but otherwise he jars me so I say all sorts of uncomfortable things, and his talk always irritates me. No, I could not imagine your mother loving him, for she is so much better than I am, and I could never love him in the world."

Louis' hold on my arm tightened, and he said:

"Ah! Miss Emily, you are beginning to know yourself, you are learning to understand others, and I am glad," and to his eyes came again that earnest look, "for I long to be known by you; I have brought you a Christmas present, and the New Year is at hand before I give it to you—wear this in the dark, until your heart says you love me, then let the light fall on it."

He put a box in my hand, and when I opened it in my own room I found a small and finely linked chain of gold, and attached to it a locket holding Louis' picture. One side was inlaid with blue enamel in a spray of flowers, and on the other the name "Emily." My heart told me that I did love Louis, and then there came so many changeable thoughts, that I felt myself held back, and could not express myself to Louis.

This evening was spent in our middle room, and Mr. Benton, being obliged to write letters, was not with us. Of this I was glad, for it gave relief to the three who were cognizant of what had passed. The subject of universal salvation was again brought before us, and this time my mother expressed herself greatly in favor of giving the new thoughts a hearing, and to my utter astonishment and pleasure, my father proposed going sometime to hear the Reverend Hosea Ballou, who was then preaching over his society in Boston, and came sometimes to preach for the few in a town lying to the north and east of us. There were no houses of worship dedicated to the Universalists nearer than the one I speak of, and though it was a ride of ten miles, that was nothing for a span of good horses.

"When can we go?" rose to my lips quickly.

"Are you also desirous of hearing him, Emily?"

"Oh, father!" I said, "I want something beside the fire of torment to think of. You know the Bible says, 'He that is guilty in one point, is guilty of the whole.' If that is true, father, I am not safe; but if these new thoughts are truths, I am; and can you blame me if I want to know about it. I am afraid I knew very little of what I needed when I was united to our church."

"It is not singular, Emily," my father said, "and I desire only to help you, if you really want to know. We need not fear to investigate, for if the doctrines are erroneous, they are too

far below our own standard of truth to harm even the soles of our feet, and if they are true, it must be they lie beyond us, and we shall feel obliged to reach for them, and be glad of the opportunity. Halbert, have you nothing to say? are you to go with us? the three-seated wagon will hold us all."

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"Yes," added mother, "and we will take our dinner and go to cousin Belinda Sprague's to eat it."

Halbert looked a little puzzled and then replied:

"I guess the rest of you may go the first time, and I will stay at home with Will (Mr. Benton), for I know he would as soon stay at home as go."

Then said Ben, "Let me go, father, I'm young and I need starting right; don't you think so?"

We all laughed at this, and my father looked with fondness at his boy, as he answered:

"Ben, it shall be, and a week from next Sabbath, the day, if nothing happens."

I believe it was a relief to my father, this hope that there might be something more beautiful beyond than he had dared to dream; and Clara was absorbed with the prospect of his getting hold of the truth, which, though unnamed by her, had always been, it seemed, her firm belief. She said nothing to me of what had occurred, and the days wore on until the morning came when Louis said "good-bye," and left us for school.

Directly after his departure, Aunt Phebe (mother's sister) wrote us she was coming to visit us for a few days. Of this I was glad, and I rehearsed to Clara her virtues, told her of her early years, the sorrows which she had borne, the working early and late to maintain the little family of four children (for at the age of twenty-eight she was left widowed and alone in a strange city). Her native town was not far distant from the one in which we lived, and when she came I expected a treat, for together these two sisters unshrouded the past, took off the veil of years that covered their faces, and walked back, hand in hand, to their childhood—its years, its loves, its friends, its home—and it was never an old tale to me.

I loved to hear of grandfather Lewis, who went as minister's waiter in the War of Seventy-six, going with old Minister Roxford, whose name has been, and is still to be handed down through generations as a good old man of Connecticut. Grandfather was only sixteen years at that time, and though he saw no hard service, but was dressed up in ruffled shirt, *etc.*, received through life a pension of ninety-six dollars per year, having enlisted for a period of six months, whereas some of his friends, who saw hard service, and came out of the contest maimed for life, received nothing.

Grandfather was of French extraction, and he boasted largely of this, but I could not feel very proud of the fact that he traded with the British, carrying to them hams, dried beef, poultry, and anything in shape of edibles, receiving in return beautiful silk stockings, bandanna handkerchiefs, and the tea that the old ladies were so glad to get. Several times he was nearly captured, and once thrust into a stone wall, in the town of Stratford,



a quantity of silk stockings, with which his pockets were filled. He was so closely pursued at that time, that he lay down close to a large log and covered himself with dead leaves, and one of his pursuers, a moment after, stood on that very log and peered into the distance, saying, "I wonder which track the scamp took."

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I must not tell you more about this grandfather, whose history filled me full of wonder, but must hasten on to meet Aunt Phebe, who came according to appointment, and found a warm reception. She had a fine face, was tall and well-formed, her hair was a light-brown, and her eyes a bright, pure blue; she had a pleasant mouth and evenly set teeth, and she was a sweet singer. She is yet living, and sings to-day a "Rose tree in full blooming" with as sweet a cadence as when I was a child.

Clara was drawn toward her, and brought some of her best thoughts to the surface; read to her some of her own little poems, and wrote one for her, speaking tenderly of the past and hopefully of the future. Aunt Phebe had a nature to appreciate the beautiful, and ought herself to have been given the privilege of a later day, that she might have expressed her own good and true thoughts. She was a member of the Baptist church, and while we had no fear of condemnation from her lips, we knew she had not as yet tested this new thought that was now agitating our minds. She said she would like to go with us to hear "Father Ballou," as he was called by the Universalist people, and Clara, said:

"Well, Mrs. —, the day is coming when all shall see and rejoice at the knowledge they have long desired; this will be the real fruit that has been promised by the hope of the soul for years; and it is not new, it is an old, old truth, and for this reason there will be less preparation needed to accept it. The soil is ready, and the hand of the age will drop the seed in the furrows which the years have made."

"This talk is as good as a sermon," said Aunt Phebe, "I would like to hear you every week. Learning the work of wisdom is not an easy task, and all these thoughts come as helping hands to us; we are never too old to learn."

Aunt Phebe was free from all vanity; she dressed simply, and was truly economical. Her hands were never idle; she had always something to do; and during the few days she spent with us she insisted on helping. A huge basket of mending yielded to her deft hands, and patches and darns were made without number. These were among our great necessities, for, as in every other household, garments were constantly wearing out, and stitches breaking that must be again made good, and nothing could be appreciated more than her services in this direction. Mother felt, however, that she was doing wrong to let her work at all.

"Phebe," I heard her say one afternoon, as they sat in our middle room together, "you have stitches enough to take at home, and I feel condemned to see you so busy here. You should have every moment to rest in; I wish you could stay longer, for I believe when these carpet rags are cut you will find nothing more to do, and then we could rest and talk together. How I wish Sally and Polly and Thirza could be with us, and our brothers too! Have you heard from Peter lately?"

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"I heard only a few days before I left; one of the girls came down, and she said Peter was well, but oh, how they miss their own mother! Peter's first wife was the best mother I ever knew; those little girls looked as neat as pins, with their blue and iron-rust dresses, and she taught them to do so much—not half do it, but to finish what they began. I think of her with reverence, for her ways were in accordance with her ideas of duty, and she was no ordinary woman. It seems too bad she could not have lived."

And Aunt Phebe sighed, and then added:

"You ask what makes me work? Work has been my salvation. In the needs of others I have forgotten my own terrible experiences, and although the first time I washed a bedquilt I said 'I can never do that thing again,' I have since then washed many; and done also the thousand kinds of work that only a woman can do. Force of circumstances has made me self-reliant, and so long as I can work I am not lonely, and if there comes a day when the labor of my hands is less needed, I shall be only too glad to take the time for reading I so much desire."

"Oh, Phebe!" said my mother, "I often think of you as you were when young; slender and lithe as a willow, with a cheek where the rose's strength did not often gather; and then I think of all you have done since, and looking at you to-day, you seem to me a perfect marvel; for you have lived, and borne hard work and sorrow, and your face is fresh, your fingers taper as of old, and on your cheek is the tinge of pink that becomes you so well. You are only five years younger than I, and you look every day of twenty; you may outlive me—yes, I'm sure you will."

There was silence for a few moments, and then Aunt Phebe said:

"Speaking of work makes me think to tell you about an old colored man who came to my door last winter. He was so cold he could hardly talk, but seeing some coal before the door wanted to put it in for me. I asked him in, and he grew warmer after a little. I made a cup of hot composition tea for him, and while he was putting in the coal hunted up an old coat that one of our neighbors had given me for carpet rags, and when the poor old man told me his story I felt like proclaiming it to the city. Never mind that now. He lived through the winter and did not freeze, and last summer found considerable work, but I have thought for some time how valuable his help would be to William, my father, and I wonder if he could find a place to live in here among you. His name is Matthias Jones, and he is faithful though slow, but the constant dropping, you know, wears a stone. I like the old man, and you would, for he is honest and ambitious. He might have owned a farm himself if the evil of slavery had not crushed under its foot the seeds of growth that lay within him. Mr. Dutton has helped to get him work."

"Phebe," said mother, interrupting her, "are you going to marry that Mr. Dutton?"

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"I can't say," said Aunt Phebe, and their conversation closed, for father came in and supper-time drew near.

CHAPTER X.

Matthias Jones.

Father was consulted regarding the coming of Matthias Jones, and he thought it would be a good plan, for our farming people had often cause to hire help, and it had always been scarce, since it was only in the busiest time there were such needs.

Aunt Phebe and myself were delegated to go over to the house of Jacob Lattice and Plint Smith, who were the only colored people among us, and who lived about a mile to the west of our house. We thought there might be a chance for a home among them, and so it proved.

Jacob Lattice's wife had no room; "hardly enough for themselves," Mrs. Lattice said depreciatingly, "much less any place for strange folks"; but Mrs. Smith, known to us all as Aunt Peg, gave us a little hope. She had a peculiar way of addressing people, and sometimes her talk seemed more like the grunting of words strangely mixed. When she saw Aunt Phebe with me, her face radiated in smiles (and as her mouth was large, these smiles were broad grins) and, jerking her small wool-covered head while she hastily smoothed out her long apron, she said:

"Come in, Miss Minot."

"This is my aunt,—you have seen her before," I replied.

"Yes, seen her to meetin' with ye; come in, mam," and she dropped a low curtsy and set forward two chairs, whose sand-scoured seats were white and spotless, for Aunt Peg was a marvel of neatness.

I told our errand, and with one of her queer looks, she said:

"Is he clean?"

Aunt Phebe replied, "Why, I think the old man does the best he can, a lone man can't do as well as a woman, you know."

"Well, there's that ground room of mine he kin have if Plint is willin', and if he ain't, for that matter; for Plint himself arn't good for nothin' but fiddlin', and you see if I want bread I get it. I s'pose wimmen ought to be a leetle worth mindin', 'specially if they get their own bread," and a look of satisfaction crept over her face as if pleased with this thought.

“Well,” said Aunt Phebe, “I would like to see the room, and also know the price of it; of course, you must have some pay for it, and then, if Matthias should be ill, or prove troublesome to you in any way, it will not be so hard for you.”

“Oh, the pay, bless the Master, mam, I never get pay for anything hardly, not even the work I did up to Deacon Grover’s for years! I jist wish I had that money in a chist in the cellar. He kep’ it for me, he said, an’ so he did, an’ he keeps it yet, and—oh! but the room, come right along, this way, mam,” and we followed her steps.

She led us out of the little door, which in the summer was covered with those dear old cypress vines my mother used to have, and though the lattice was made by her own hands of rude strips, when it was well covered with the cypress intergrown with the other vines, there was great beauty round that little door.

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When Clara saw it, and I told her of its construction, and remarked on Aunt Peg's love for flowers, she said:

"Ah, Emily, it is typical of our nature! We do seem so rudely made in the winter of our ignorance, and through the lattice of our untutored thoughts the cold winds of different opinions blow and we are troubled. But when the summer of our better nature dawns, and the upturned soil catches seed, even though dropped by a careless hand, the vines of love will cover all our coldness, and the scarlet and white blossom of our beautiful thoughts appear among the leaves. Aunt Peg's earthly hand made the lattice, and the love of her undying soul planted the cypress seeds."

I thought of it this cold winter's day, and told Aunt Phebe, as we passed out of the door, how many flowers she had in summer and how pretty the vines were. Aunt Peg heard me, and smiled graciously. Then we went around to a side door, which opened into the ground room, as she called it.

Her house was on a bank, or at least its main part, and while a valley lay on one side, the ground rose upon the other. The door-sill of this room was, therefore, even with both the ground and the floor, and on either side of it were two windows, both door and windows facing the south. The sides and back of the room had no windows, the back partition being that which divided it from Aunt Peg's little cellar; and the east and west sides were hedged in by the bank which came sloping down from both front and back doors.

"This is a very comfortable little room," said Aunt Phebe. "Now, what will be the rent?"

"Well, if you are bent on payin', I don't want to say less than ten dollars a year."

"I would call it twelve, and that will be one dollar a month, Mrs. Smith."

"Thank you, mam, it'll be a great help; I have the sideache sometimes, and can't do nothing for a day or so, not even get the wool rolls off my wheel, and that is jist play when I'm smart: he may come neat or not neat, Plint or no Plint," and the bargain was finished, and Matthias Jones was to appear on, or near, the first of March.

My rehearsal of our visit at the dinner-table provoked great mirth, and Mr. Benton smiled on me more kindly than ever before, but I could not but think, whenever I looked at him, that he must die pretty soon, because Clara could not love him, and he had told her his life was dependent on her love.

The days of Aunt Phebe's visit drew too quickly to their close, and the time to go came on a bright sun-shiny morning. Father carried her to the railway station; we filled a large trunk with the farm products, so welcome to those who live in cities. Aunt Hildy put in a

bundle the contents of which she did not even want me to guess. She was a firm friend to Aunt Phebe, and shook her hand when she left, as if loath to let it go, and said:

“Come again as soon as you can, and if I am in my own little nest, come and stay with me, and we’ll have some more good sensible talk that helps our wings to grow; we are only covered with pin-feathers so far.”

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Aunt Phebe appreciated this good old soul, and said, earnestly, “God bless you, Mrs. Patten,” as my father started the horses.

Aunt Hildy watched them until they were out of sight, saying as she came in, “That woman will have an easier time before she dies. My Bible says, ‘He that is faithful over a few things shall be made ruler over many.’ She will have a home of her own, jest as true as preachin’ is preachin’, Mrs. Minot.”

“She ought to,” said mother. “May the day be hastened!” and again that never-to-be-neglected work claimed our attention.

Since Louis’ departure Clara had had several “pale” days, as she called them. After Aunt Phebe left us, she seemed to grow weak. I felt worried, and could not refrain from asking her what troubled her. She turned her beautiful eyes full on me, and putting both her hands in mine, said:

“I know that Louis heard it, and that he told you, and your secret sympathy has been a strength to me. It will pass over, Emily, but Professor Benton is not satisfied. He will not be content that I may not answer his demand for love. Yes, Emily, his words were soft, but a blade was beneath them and I could feel that it would have cut my heart-strings. I thank our Father that I do not love him; I should be so starved. Emily, I can love your brother,—no, no, not with that best love,” she said quickly, noting, I suppose, the look of wonder in my eyes, “but I can have that love for him that is founded on great respect and faith in his pure heart. It is only their art draws them together; they are not alike, and they will not come too near. The days will sunder them, and it will be better that they should. But, Emily, I must, I fear, call Louis back to give me strength. He is a great help to me. On his heart as on his arm I can rest myself, and I need him so much. I cannot tell you now, but you will know some time when you are no longer as strong as now, how the spirit feels the darts that are shot from the mind of another, and bury their poisoned points in the quivering life.”

She looked so weak as she spoke, her face was so transparently white, that I trembled with fear.

That night we slept together—she alone slept, however, for my eyes were open, their lids refusing to close until after midnight, and it was long after that hour before I fully lost consciousness. I felt wretched the next day in both body and mind, and my spirit was roused within me.

“I will avert it,” I said to myself—thinking first to ask mother how, and afterward saying aloud “No, I’ll do it myself, Emily will do it,” and the harder I thought the faster I worked.



I never washed the dishes so quickly; milkpans were despatched speedily to the buttery shelves, and at last Aunt Hildy, who was kneading bread, stopped, and looking at me, said:

“What on airth are you going to do? you work as if you was a gettin’ reddy to go to a weddin’, or somethin’—Is there doins on hand among the folks?”

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"No, mam," I replied, "but I have been so full of thoughts I could not help hurrying."

"I hope you're on the right track, Emily; sometimes ideas that stir one up so aint jest the kind we ought to have."

"I'm on the track of truth, Aunt Hildy, and that is the right track."

"Well, it ought to be, but sometimes truth has to wait for sin to get by before it can move an inch. I've seen it so many a time," and a sort of sigh fluttered to her lips, but the look of resolution that followed it closely gave it no time to linger, and the lines about her mouth grew firm as she resumed her bread-kneading.

Clara was better during this day, and while she took her after-dinner nap, I came quickly down into Hal's studio, and seated myself in his chair with a book.

Hal was in town all day on business, and I expected Mr. Benton to be there, and he appeared, saying:

"You look very comfortable, Miss Minot; am I an intruder?"

"No, sir, you are the person I wish of all others to talk to." Where was my guardian angel then?

"In need of advice, are you?"

"No, sir, not at all; I have some to give, however," and his eyes opened widely, as he seated himself almost directly opposite me on a lounge, taking a very artistic position, with his head resting on his hand, and his arm supported by that of the lounge.

"Proceed, Miss Minot, for I assure you I am much in need of comfort, and if you had been ready before, I might have been thankful to receive it."

I had begun more abruptly than I meant, and already felt I was stepping on dangerous ground. I thought for an instant I would turn it aside in a joke, then Clara's pale face rose before, and I said impetuously:

"I came to speak for another, though without her authority or knowledge. I desire to ask you not to trouble Clara, by persisting in your suit."

He started to his feet as if a hand had struck him, walked a few steps, and then turned toward me with a blanched face, and eyes that seemed to be leaping from their sockets; he was struggling between anger and policy. The latter prevailed, as he said:

"You are much interested in me; you fear that I shall have a friend. Is that it?"

“I suggested nothing of that kind; I fear my lovely Clara may die.” He smiled derisively.

“Am I then such a monster that I am feared? Really, Miss Minot, your picture of me is rather different from anything I have before known.”

“I ought to have known you would not understand me. It would have been equal folly for me to try to explain Clara’s nature to you, for you do not and cannot appreciate it.”

“We are getting into deep water,” he interrupted, but I continued:

“I have never called you a monster and have treated you as well as I knew how to. You were my brother’s friend, I have not doubted your esteem for Clara, for how can any see her without loving and respecting her; that is not the point. Your feelings, she has told you, she cannot reciprocate; why can you not respect her feelings, even at the sacrifice of your own? If you would do this, Mr. Benton, you would be stronger.”

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"Miss Minot, you are braver than I imagined. Let me disarm your fear; I have no intention of intruding myself where I am not desired. How you came in possession of these interesting facts is a mystery (insinuating, I felt, that I had been eavesdropping). Nevertheless I admit them all, and I admire you greatly. You are, however, as impulsive as a changeful sea, and you made little preparation for this conversation. Allow me to suggest that in affairs of the heart you should be a little less stormy. I am your friend, and I say this in kindness."

"I thank you, sir; you have lived longer than I have, and I know by the expression in your eye to-day that you can, if you choose, govern all the love in your nature at the will of your intellect; I cannot, and I never want to; I like to be impulsive, I like to be true, I hate policy." As I spoke, my eyes were, I know, like dark fires.

He looked like a man of marble as he said, "Your fears are ungrounded; you might have spared yourself this trouble," and turning, left me.

"There, 'Emily did it,' and didn't do it all," I said to myself. "Now he will be more determined than ever, Clara will die, Louis will hate me, and I shall be bereft doubly. Oh! dear, dear! Emily mistakes—my name should be." Then the tears came and I sat with my face buried in my hands, and cried like a child. A hand touched me, an arm crept round me, "Hal," I said, starting.

"No," said Wilmur Benton in his sweeter tone, "It is I."

"Oh!" I screamed almost, making an attempt to rise, but his arm held me firmly as he said:

"Forgive me, Miss Minot, if I have caused you pain—I spoke harshly, I fear."

"You are forgiven," I said, "let me go."

"You are my friend still?" he asked.

"Yes, yes," I said quickly, "do let me go," and I fled to my own room, and endeavored to wash away the stains of tears, to make my appearance down stairs, for it was already late and mother would be looking for me.

I felt unlike myself and feared all would discern my uneasiness. Mr. Benton had, I knew, a mistaken idea, and his polite attentions were torture to me; he evidently thought my tears needed his commiseration, whereas, I was only sorry I had not delivered a forcible speech in Clara's behalf, and caused him (as I had intended) to realize the necessity of a change in his conduct toward her. I expected him to be vexed with me and was willing he should be, if it would relieve Clara. Now, however, he seemed to feel I was entitled to his sympathy. There was one thought, however, that gave relief; while he was

occupying himself with me, Clara would not be annoyed. Mother said she had a basket to send to Aunt Peg, and I volunteered to take it. Mr. Benton smilingly said:

“Let me accompany you, Miss Minot, it will be quite dark ere you return.”

“I am not afraid, thank you, and it will be moonlight,” then thinking of Clara I added, “still I might encounter an assassin on the road.”

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This did not help the matter any, and only furthered the mistaken thought of Mr. Benton; nevertheless for the sake of that dear friend, for whom I knew I could have borne anything, I had, after all, a secret delight, in being misunderstood. I was a willing martyr to a just cause, and we started together.

"Take my arm, Miss Minot."

"Thank you, walking is second nature to me, and very easy," I replied.

After walking a little further he said, "I am very glad of this opportunity to talk with you, Miss Minot; I fear, from what I gathered in our talk of this afternoon, your idea of me is one which I would fain alter—it is not pleasant to feel that one is misjudged—"

"I know that," I interrupted.

—"And especially when the charge is a serious one. I cannot understand why I was so feared; rude enough I must have seemed, and your first words gave me a shock; I hardly know now how to explain it, and what I desire is light. Pray tell me by what act of mine, you came to such an unwarrantable conclusion."

"It was no act of yours at all. Common sense, I suppose, told me you would not be foiled if you could help it. All men are selfish."

"Are not women?"

"No, sir," I replied, "they are foolish."

"Excuse the question, but has Mrs. Desmonde complained to you?"

"No, sir," I said quickly—that was a little story and then again it was not, I reasoned.

"So I must conclude that you feared for the safety of your friend, reading, as you thought you did, the terrible selfishness of my heart."

"I guess that is about right," I said.

"You admit this as a fact?"

"Yes; before a judge, if you desire," I said.

"That being the case, let me here say from my heart I am not as much in love with Mrs. Desmonde as I might be, and one reason is that I find her more and more enveloped in the strange fancies peculiar, I judge, to herself alone."

“What am I to understand from this? Strange fancies, indeed! If truth and love are strange fancies, she is indeed enveloped. My darling Clara! She is a light leading to the eternal city. I knew you could not understand her.”

“Well, Miss Minot, let me explain. I know she is graceful, and beautiful, and truly good, but none can know positively there is an eternal city, and I must say I do not feel interested in the dreamy talk, which is, after all, only talk.”

“Goodness!” I exclaimed, “are you an infidel?”

“I cannot vouch for anything beyond this life.”

“If I felt I could not, I’d commit suicide to-morrow.”

He laughed heartily at this, and, as we were at Aunt Peggy’s door, could not answer until we turned toward home, when he said:

“Instead of taking my life, I desire to keep it as long as I can, and get all the enjoyment possible on this side the grave. I hope I have made myself understood, and disarmed every fear of your friendly heart.”

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"The days will tell," I replied, and our walk at last was ended.

It had been thoroughly uncomfortable to me, although he had seemed to be enjoying every step. I went to my room that night, and in my dreams tried to find the garden of Eden somewhere in our town, while a snake, with eyes like Wilmur Benton's, seemed to be crawling close behind me, and with the daybreak, I said:

"That dream means something."

Aunt Peg told me she should go to work and clean up the ground-room, and if father had any old "chunks of wood he could spare, Plint could come over and get 'em, and when that new nigger came, there'd be a prospect awaitin'."

I carried the message, and father thought it would be a good plan to have Matthias Jones appear, as he had more wood cut in the forest than he could haul with Ben's help, and doubtless this poor man would be glad of the job. Mother said the room could be made ready, she thought, inasmuch as there was an extra high-post bedstead in our attic chamber. Aunt Hilda added, "I've got a good feather mattress to put on it, and a straw-bed is easily fixed."

So I wrote a letter to Aunt Phebe, and Plint came over for the chunks of wood, riding back on a load of things we had gathered. When the ground-room was ready for occupancy, it was not a cheerless place. A nicely-made bed in its north-west corner, a deal table at the east side of the room, two rush-bottomed chairs, and a straight-backed rocker, two breadths of carpet lying through its centre, the wide-mouthed fireplace, with well-filled wood-box at its right hand,—all savored of comfort. To cap the climax, Clara put up to the windows some half curtains of unbleached cotton, bound with bright French red. It really looked nice, and Aunt Peg said: "I do hope, mam, he's clean."

The days sped on quickly, and Clara felt better. Mr. Benton had evidently dropped all thought of her, and his uniformly kind treatment of us, began, after a little, to make me feel ashamed of the suspicions which had crossed my mind. Letters from Louis came as usual, and I wish I could give them now—such beautifully-expressed thoughts, such tender touches did he give to his word pictures, that I read and re-read them. Treasures they were, and I have them all yet; not one but is too sacred to lose. My heart grew strong in its love for him, and his thoughts were all as hands reaching for my own.

CHAPTER XI.

The teaching of Hosea Ballou.

February first brought Matthias Jones. Father met him at the village, and our curiosity which was aroused regarding this new comer, was thoroughly gratified at his appearance. A better specimen of a southern negro was never seen. He was above



the medium size, broad-shouldered; his hair thick and wooly, sprinkled with grey, and covering a large, flat surface on the top of his head. His nose was of extra size, mouth in proportion, and his eyes, which were not dull, expressed considerable feeling, and you would know when you looked at them he was honest. His gait was slow, slouchy as I called it, and, as he walked leisurely along the path, Ben whispered, "My soul, what feet!" Sure enough, they seemed to stretch back too far, and they were immense.

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He took supper with us, and then father and Ben both went over to his future home with him, and introduced him to Aunt Peg and Plint. He was to work for father, and would be over in the “mornin’,” he said.

“I wonder if he was a slave, Emily?” said Ben.

“I think so,” said I. “We will question him to-morrow if we get a chance,” and we did, for the day was stormy, and father did not go to the woods, but kept Matthias at work in the barn cleaning up, *etc.* About four o’clock his work was finished, and we invited him to come in and sit awhile.

“Now, Ben,” I said, and we seated ourselves for a conference.

“Mr. Jones,” said I, “you came from the South, did you?”

“Pears like I did, Miss, an’ it’s a mighty cool country yere; I’m nigh froze in de winter, I is sartin.”

“Were you a slave?”

“Yes’m,” and the old man gave a long sigh.

“Would you mind telling us about it? Ben and I never saw a person before from the South.”

“Never did? There’s a heap on ’em, wud ’jes like ter see ye. Long time awaitin’, but de promise ov de Massa mus’ be true,” and again a thoughtful look came over his dusky face. “I don’t mind tellin’ ye a little if I ken. I was a slave in Carlina, an’ I had a good massa, Miss; a fus-rate man, but he done tuk sick an’ died, an’ then—wh-e-ew,” and he gave a long, low whistle, “thar cum sich a time thar; de ole woman she done no nuthin’ ’bout de biznis, an’ de big son he sell all de niggers an’ get *all* de money, an’ dars whar my trubbel begin. De nex’ massa had de debbil fur his father, sure; nothin’ go rite; made me go an’ marry, fus thing, an’ to a gal I didn’t like, nohow. Little niggers come along, an’ I done bes’ I cud by ’em, but what cud I do? Nothin’ at all; an’ fus thing I knew—he’d done gone an’ sold ebery one ob dat family, and den he mus’ hab me marry agin. Dis secon’ marriage was better’n that; fur I did like de gal mighty well. ’Pears like we’s gwine to take sum comfort, and when we’d had de meetins to our cabin, oh! how we did jes pray fur dat freedom we hear’m tell ’bout—pray mos’ too loud, for dat old Mas’r Sumner tink we’s alltogeder too happy, an’ den, he up and sold dat pretty gal ob ourn, what was jes risin’ uv her fourth year, Miss, an’ as pretty as could be. Dis broke my wife’s heart, an’ den he sold one more to a trader; and not long fur de wife an’ two last’ chilun was gone. Den I jes swore rite up, Miss—rite into dat Masr’s face an’ eyes—I’m neber gwine to hab no more chilun,’ an’ he says to me, ‘Matt, you got to do jes as I say,’ an’ I swear agin, an’ he cuss and swear, an’ then, I got sich a floggin’—Miss, but I didn’t

keer, an' I would never done as dat man sed, an' I 'spected to die, but a New Orleans trader cum dat way, an' I was sold, and Mas'r Sumner said, de las' thing, 'You'll get killed now, Matt.' 'All right, Mas'r,' I sed, 'de Lord is a waitin' an' He's a good fren, too,' an' off I went. Dar we

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wur in a pen in New Orleans, waitin' fur we didn't know what, an' on come a fever an' dat trader know he's got to die. Den, to make peace wid de Lord at the las't jump he done giv us all freedom, an' money to git us into dat great city ov New York; an' mine lasted me clean up to Misse Hungerford's door (Aunt Phebe), an' las' night, when I see dat nice room over thar an' that good fire, oh! my," and the old man buried his face in his hands and wept like a child, then looking up, he said, "Ef I cud only ahad my chilun in thar; 'pears de Lord Himself might ahelped me a minnit sooner—but dey is gone, all done gone, an' 'taint no use."

"You may meet them again, Mr. Jones; I hope we shall know each other there in that better country, and if we do you'll surely know and find them."

"Oh! Miss, that's the bery thing, it takes a load right off yere, when I think about it," and he laid his hand on his heart, "but I'd better be shufflin' off home, an' I'll tell you a heap more sometime," and as he went through the yard, I heard him singing "dat New Je-ru-sa-lem," prolonging the last word, as if it was too musical to lose.

I told it all to Clara, and she said:

"Oh! Emily, is he not one of God's children, and is it not true that all have that within which points to better things? How could the soul of this poor negro stay within his body if it were not for this hope that covers his troubles, and, like a lantern-light, throws a gleam into the path which lies before? I hope he will live now in comfort and die in peace. He must have been sent to you. Next time let me listen to his story." And she did, for the next evening we walked together over to his home, and spent two hours pleasantly enough.

Clara could not rest until sure of just how he could get along there, and finally made an arrangement with Aunt Peg to give him his meals when he should be there. The voice of the old man—he looked more than sixty years, but said his age was fifty, I think he did not know—quivered with emotion, as he said:

"Thank yer, mam, thank yer kindly, I'll tote a load forty miles for ye any day, and I kin tote pretty 'harbaneous' loads too."

"Never mind that, Mr. Jones, I like to see you comfortable."

"Strange talk, mam," he said; "these yere ole ears been more used to, 'git up thar, yer lazy nigger, this yere cottin mus be got into de market."

He proved a valuable acquisition to my father, and before this month of February, whose beginning brought him to us, had passed, father said to mother:

“I hardly see how I could get on without Matthias. He is so trusty, and he is smart too. If the poor fellow had been given half a chance, he would have made a good business man, for he has good ideas as to bringing things around in season.”

“Truth is stranger than fiction,” said mother. “Two classes of society have been perfectly represented in those who have been brought to us during this last year.”

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"How strangely things work, and there seem to be ways under them all that will work out in spite of us," said father.

The Sabbath on which we had expected to go to hear the Reverend Hosea Ballou preach proved cold and rainy, and a month would elapse ere he came again. We were impatient waiters, but the time came at last, on the Sabbath after the arrival of Matthias, and he was to come over and attend to the early milking, while Hal and Mr. Benton would have supper ready for us on our return.

That day was to me like a never-to-be-forgotten sunrise. Although gleams of light had before this crossed my vision, never had so radiant a morning of perception opened the door of my soul. New yet old, unknown yet longed for, those words fell like golden sun-rays into the room of my understanding; they bathed me with light, and baptized me with tenderness, while I stood at the fount of living inspiration. That grand old man, then about seventy-two years of age, talked to the assembled congregation from this text: "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God; an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (Second Corinthians, fifth chapter and first verse). It was all as natural as a part of himself could be, and he was a power. Pure and dispassionate, the plea he made rested on the ground of revealed truth. He told us of what the history of the past furnished, and carried us clear on into the life beyond. "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life; as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive."

It seemed to me then, and still seems, that he spoke with a power that was divine. The tide of earnest thought and feeling that carried him with his subject out on the depth, carried also his hearers, and we were shown the way to the port of eternal life. Oh, how he strengthened me! His touching invocation reached, as it seemed, the very doors of heaven and swung them wide open, and when the people joined in singing the good old hymn, written by Sebastian Streeter, whose first verse runs as follows:

What glorious tidings do I hear
From my Redeemer's tongue!
I can no longer silence bear,
I'll burst into a song.

I cried almost aloud for great joy. My father and mother were moved, and when they saw my tears united their own. To our great surprise, after the service we learned that the professor was the guest of our cousin, Belinda Sprag, and at her house after dinner I had an opportunity to say to him:

"Mr. Ballou, call me your child, for you have to-day baptized me. I am a Universalist, I know, for I love your doctrine."

“Bless you, my daughter,” was his reply. “God finds His own through time. May your young heart be made strong, and your life blossom with roses that have no thorns.”

That was great honor to me; the touch of that hand on my head; those words addressed to me. We all went home, having had a feast of good things, and our blessed Clara, who had been the means of leading us to the light, sat all the way as in a dream, only saying:

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"I have long known it was true."

Ben added his testimony to the rest.

"When I die," said he, "I want that man to preach my funeral sermon, if he will, and if he can't, I don't want any at all."

Dear boy, he had a loving heart; he was born later than either Hal or me, and had an earlier spiritual development. Is it not always so?

I could not enjoy my new thoughts in silence as Clara did, and gave vent to my theme in the strongest terms. Hal did not ridicule me at all: he was too sensible for this, but he smiled at my strong expressions, and said:

"You will preach yourself if you keep on, and I believe you would make converts. Your eyes are as large again as they were this morning."

"Then it must improve my looks, Hal," I said. "If so, I am glad, for in that respect I have always stood in the background. My brother is an artist, and must, of course, have the handsome face."

He laughed again, and added:

"He will never be ashamed of his sister, I think, and never say 'Emily did it,' even if she turns preacher."

Mr. Benton enquired—with his eyes—the meaning of those words.

I answered:

"Oh! Hal was forever shouting that in my earlier years at my many mistakes, until I almost hated the sound of my own name, for I was always doing the very things I tried not to, and I fear I have not finished all yet. And I thought, for a little, of the wrong light in which Mr. Benton held my strange talk with him.

I was each day more troubled regarding this, and especially so, since I had no one to talk with about it. Clara I must not tell, and I had resolved for her sake to be misunderstood indefinitely, for if I had failed in one point, I had gained in another. The burden was lifted from her, and she had told me the cloud was broken and she felt better, and added the strange words, "It may yet come near me; it seems as if a fringe of the cloud must yet touch me: but I am relieved for the present."

I feared to worry my mother, who, during all these days, was very busy and full of care. Aunt Hildy would hardly understand me, and as I was waiting for something to move as it were, to make room for me to step, I must still wait, and thought what a pity it was I

had not waited in the beginning, and then when I did move make all things plain. But then it lay before me, around and within me, this strange compound of good thought and impulsive will, and I must reach and fall until, ah! I could not tell when I should graduate in this school.

I had now power to restrain myself in many ways, and that had been given in the days before described, when I passed from girlhood to womanhood, but to sit satisfied and wait, I could not yet do. It seemed as if the wings of my thought must grow, and wanted to help me fly, and I was like a bird longing to get into the freedom that waited, and like the bird too, did not realize that my attempts would be in vain, and I could never get out of the cage until a hand opened its door. Therefore, full often I battled unwisely, but I certainly came to know those times, and never made a mistake that I did not realize just a moment too late. How foolish it was!

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I prayed for strength, and after the baptism of Mr. Ballou's preaching, I thought, "This will help to make me stronger; now I shall make fewer mistakes."

This was a comfort and a light before me, but my heart sank a little, thinking I might have penance to do for those already committed,—coming events cast their shadows before.

So full of this thought my heart grew, that I asked Aunt Hildy one day if she ever felt trouble before it came, and if that feeling had ever helped her to avoid any part of what was to come.

"Well," said she,—she was coring and paring apples for pies,—taking up the towel and wiping one apple three or four times over in an absent way, "Well, Emily, I've had a host of troubles in my day. They began early, perhaps they'll end late, but there is one thing, the things we expect are agoin' to kill us, most allus turn out like the shadder of a gate post. You know the shadder sometimes will be clean across the road, but when you find the post itself 'taint more'n five feet high. Then again the things we don't expect 'll come some morning like a great harricane, and kill the marigolds of the heart in just a minit."

I was sorry for her sake I had asked the question, for I knew there was something she thought of that pained her dear old heart, and I kissed her wrinkled cheek and said:

"I hope you will always be with us, and trouble have no part in the matter."

"There, there, child, don't talk so; never mind kissin' my old face neither, I've allus said it only made it worse to think of it, and I've shut up my heart tight and done the best I could as it comes along. When I get in that new body I shall have over there," and her tearful eyes were looking upward then, "perhaps I can hope to have some love that'll touch that empty spot."

I turned to my work and left Aunt Hildy with the shadows of the past clinging about her, her feelings being too sacred for the gaze even of a friend. Every heart knoweth its bitterness, I thought, and secretly wondered if every heart had to bleed a little here, holding some sorrow close to itself. If so, our duty in life would ever be a struggle, whereas it seemed to me the world was so beautiful, and if every life could reflect this beauty, all would be easy, and the pleasure of well-doing be always at hand.

Aunt Peg said 'twas easy enough to preach, but hard work to practise. I began to realize it a little, and the teacher who gave me the most practical illustrations was myself.

I wrote a long letter to Louis, telling him of our going to hear Mr. Ballou preach, and of Matthias' coming among us, and I felt like making him my confessor, and wanted to tell him all about the frantic endeavor I had made for Clara's sake; but my letter was long

enough when I felt this impulse, and I thought I could talk it all over with him when he came, and concluded to wait. And here is another lesson, for me to stop and reflect on. As time proved, that impulse was right, and I should have followed its guidance, while the sober second thought which I obeyed and of which I felt proud, led me to just the opposite of what I ought to have done. How was I to find myself out? If I yielded to impulse I was so often wrong, and in that instance I should certainly have been impulsive. Again comes in the text, “the ways of life are past comprehending.”

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Mr. Benton improved every opportunity to talk with me, and while I did not like the man at first, I became gradually interested in what he said; and when, in confidence, he informed me that Hal was in love with Mary Snow, I had a secret joy at receiving his confidence. He was eighteen years older than myself, and after my mind was settled regarding the wrong estimate in which I had held him, I treated his opinions with more deference than over before, and came to regard him as a good friend to us all.

I intimated to Clara one day that he was a much better man than I had thought, and she gave me no reply, but looked on me with a light of wonder in her eyes.

“He does not trouble you now, Clara, does he?”

“Not as before, Emily.”

“Well, does he at all?”

“I cannot say I feel quite at ease, Emily dear,” she replied.

And I said: “It is your beautifully sensitive nature, darling; you cannot recover the balance once lost, and the tender nerves that have been shaken are like strings that after a touch continue to vibrate.”

“Perhaps so, Emily, but I shall be so glad when the day comes when no mask of smiles can cover the workings of the heart, so glad; when we can really know each other.”

“Those are Louis’ sentiments.”

“Oh yes, my dear boy! he has a heart that beats as mine, Emily, and after many days it shall come to pass that the desires of his heart shall be gratified.”

Something in her tone and manner made me feel strangely; a chill crept over me, and for a second I felt numb.

It passed away, however, and through the gate of duty I found work, and left these thoughts.

When March came to us, father insisted that mother should go to Aunt Phebe’s, if we could get along without her—she had a little hacking cough every spring, and he knew she needed the change. It was decided that she should go and stay a month, if she could keep away from home so long. Aunt Hildy said: “Why, Mis’ Minot, go right along. Don’t you take one stitch of work with you neither. Go, and let your lungs get full of different air, and see what that’ll do for you. Take along some everlasting flowers I’ve got, and make a tea and drink it while you’re there, and let the tea and the air do their work together.”



So, although it was a trial to mother to leave home, she went, and we were to be alone. There were a good many of us, but it seemed to me, the first week, that her place would not be filled by twenty others, and while I enjoyed the thought of her being free from care, I walked out in the cold March wind alone every night after supper, and let the tears fall. If I had been indoors Clara would surely have found me. It was on one of these walks that Mr. Benton overtook me, and passed his arm within mine, saying:

“What does this mean, Emily,” he dropped “Miss Minot” soon after the first talk, “this is the fifth time I have seen you go out at this hour alone; what is the matter? Are you in trouble?”

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"And if I am," I said, "what have you to do with it?" at the same time trying to release his arm from mine.

"I have the right of a dear friend, I hope," he said, and the tears that would keep falling forced a confession from me and provoked his laughter, which grated on my ears at first, but he begged pardon for its seeming rudeness, and said he was thinking only of my going over the hills to cry, when I could have a whole house to fill with tears.

We walked farther than I intended, and Matthias passed us on his way over to his "ground room."

I said, "Good evening, Mr. Jones," and he saluted me with uncovered head, saying:

"De Lord keep you, miss, till mornin'."

Realizing how far we had walked, I turned hack so suddenly that Mr. Benton came near being pushed into the stone wall on the old road corners. On our return he spoke of Matthias.

"I don't like that fellow anyway, Emily."

"Don't like him! why not, pray?"

He gave a sort of derisive ejaculation, and added:

"You are a little simpleton, Emily, so good and true, you take all for gold."

"Well," I replied, "Matthias is good, I know; but why do you dislike him?"

"Oh! he belongs to a miserable, low-lived, thievish race, and he knows enough to be a dangerous fellow to have round. If I were you I'd not encourage his hanging round; he'll do something to pay you for your kindness yet."

CHAPTER XII.

A remedy for wrong-talking.

I could not believe what Mr. Benton said of Matthias, and did not refrain from speaking of it to Clara, whose opinions were golden to me, and her reply was perfectly in accordance with my own feelings. Each took her own route to the conclusion, but her interpretation came as an intuitive perception, while mine was more like something which fell into my mind with a power whenever his eyes met my own.

“Emily,” said Clara, “I have taken his dark hand in mine. I have come close to his white heart, when from his lips have fallen the words telling his history, and I would trust him everywhere. If any trouble comes to you, Emily, trust Matthias; he is as true as truth itself, and his soul is pure—purer, perhaps, than the souls of many who have had great advantages, and whose forms have been molded in a more beautiful shape. Our Father judges from within; let our judgment be like his.”

This was good for me to hear. I felt glad that I could sometimes come so near to Clara’s thoughts. I was greatly wrought upon by Matthias’ tales of the South; and yet he venerated the people of that country, and said:

“The Northerners are too cold-blooded: they didn’t invite folks to have a bite without first feelin’ in their pockets to see if they could find money there.”

I knew nothing from experience of Southern hospitality, but believed all he told me, and I thought it the greater pity that such a lovely land should be so marred with this terrible trade in lives, and I said to Clara, when we were discussing this subject:

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"Is it not too bad, and does it seem possible that this great evil will be suffered to endure forever?"

"No," said Clara, "neither possible nor probable. I may not live to hear with these earthly ears the glad news, but you, Emily, will live to see the bond go free, and the serpent of slavery lie at the feet of America, who will place her heel on its crushed and bleeding head. This will be, must be, and the years will not number so very many between now and then."

"Why do you think so, Clara?"

"Oh! I do not think it; I know it to be true; I have long known it; it stands by the side of the beautiful truth we have heard from the lips of that venerated preacher, Emily, and I cannot see why we may not all be in some measure the recipients of these truths, for they lie all around us on every hand. Did you ever read, Emily, of the man called Dr. De Benneville?"

"Never," said I; "tell me, please, his history."

"It was printed about 1783. I think I have it."

"Well, tell me, Clara, a little; I cannot wait for that now."

She smiled and said:

"Dear child, how glad I am that you have so good a heart, and some day these impulses will drive your boat on the shore of peace that lies waiting for us on the bay of truth. But you are anxious and I will tell you. Dr. George De Benneville was the son of a Huguenot, who fled to England from persecution, and was employed at court by King William. His mother was a Granville, and died soon after his birth in 1703. He was placed on board a ship of war—being destined for the navy—at the early age of twelve years, and received on the coast of Barbary singular religious impressions, induced, it is said, by his beholding the kindness of the Moors to a wounded companion. He had great doubts regarding salvation, but after suffering for months with doubts, the light was made clear to him, and he held to his heart the faith in a universal restitution. His great sense of duty led him to preach, and he commenced in the Market-house of Calais in his seventeenth year. He was fined and imprisoned, but did not desist. He sought and found co-laborers, and persisted two years in preaching in the woods and mountains of France. At Dieppe he was seized, and with a friend, Mr. Durant, condemned. Durant was hanged, and while the preparations for beheading De Benneville were in progress, a reprieve from Louis IX arrived, and after a long imprisonment in Paris, he was liberated through the intercession of the Queen."

"Good," I said, "she had a heart."

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“He then spent eighteen years in Germany preaching and devoting himself to scientific studies, and at the age of thirty-eight he emigrated to this country. He claimed no denominational name, but preached this glorious truth. I can come nearer to him than any other whose history I have known, for was he not called of God, and did he not fulfil his mission gloriously? He was ill on board the ship which brought him to America, and when it arrived in Philadelphia, a man by the name of Christopher Sower came on board, saying he was looking for a man who was ill, and whom he wished to take to his house. This man Sower was also divinely led, for he received a commandment in a dream to go seven miles from his home in Germantown to a certain wharf in Philadelphia, and inquire on board a ship just arrived for a man who was ill, to take him home and to specially care for him. He hitched his horse to his carriage, and followed the instructions of his dream.”

“Were these facts the doors that led you out into light?” I asked.

“I never read these facts, Emily, until after my vision was made clear, and I saw the future that lives and waits for all.”

“Girls,” called Aunt Hildy, “ef you’ve got through with the meetin’, I want to ask about these biscuit; I’m afraid they’re going to be poor; come look at ’em, Emily.”

“The biscuit are all right, Aunt Hildy. Did you hear what the preacher said.”

“No, not really, heard all I could without neglectin’ of my work.”

“She has been telling me a story of a good man. We will ask her to preach again.”

“Perhaps,” said Aunt Hildy, “more’n just you and I will hear her. I can’t see how all these ideas are comin’ out, and ’pears to me, it looks as ef we’d got to meet, and have a battle somewhere before long. The troubles are simmerin’ over the fire of different minds, and I shall never sell my birthright over a mess of pottage; that’s jest what I shan’t do. It has stuck to me where everything else has failed, and I’m never agoin’ to let go of it.”

I knew to what she alluded, for our good minister had stirred the waters with his sermons, and they were, of course, induced by his fearing the progress of liberal thought in our midst. We had ourselves received a sermon evidently directed at us, which described the act of going to hear Mr. Ballou as a wrong step. Even if we had not been clear-sighted enough to have taken the sermon to ourselves, we should have been reminded of it by the looks of some of the congregation, who sought out our pew with strong reproof in their eyes; among those whose eyes met mine in this manner, I remember most distinctly Jane North and Deacon Grover. I smiled involuntarily, and with a glance of horror at my wickedness, they turned their faces toward the preacher.

Clara was not with us that Sabbath, for which I was glad. I wondered what would be done, and the week after mother left us, Jane North came over, and I expected to hear some talk concerning it.



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She brought her knitting in a little gingham bag on her arm, and there was no way to get rid of her or of her coming talk, which, I confess, I dreaded.

"Oh, dear!" I said to Clara, "that wretched meddler is coming. What shall we do with her?"

"I will try and help you, Emily. Perhaps she has a good heart after all, and meddles only because her conditions in life have fitted her for nothing better."

"It isn't so, Clara; she tells stories about everybody; I would not believe her under oath."

"Charity," she said softly, and through the door came Jane.

"Good afternoon, Emily."

"Take a seat," I said, bowing.

"Good afternoon, Mis' Densin," to Clara.

"Mrs. *De-mond*," I said, pronouncing the name rather forcibly.

"Oh! *De-mond* is it?" with accent on the first syllable

"That is more like it," said Clara. "How do you do to-day? let me take your things."

"Don't feel very scrumptious, and ain't sick neither, kinder so so. How are all here? I heard Mis' Minot was gone. Ain't you lonesome?"

"We do miss her sadly," said Clara.

"Gone to a weddin', ain't she?" I laughed aloud.

"Only for a change," said Clara.

"Why, Mis' Grover"—

Clara waited for no news, but said quickly:

"You were very kind, thinking we were lonely, to come over and see. Come into the other side of the house," and she led the way to her sitting-room.

"Oh! ain't this be-yoo-ti-ful! What a wonderful change from the old side of this house! I declare, I should think Mr. Minot would be thankful enough for this addition to his house."

"Oh! I am the one to be thankful," said Clara, "he was so kind as to build it for me."

“Oh! he built it, hey; with his own money, did he?”

“Certainly, he never would use any other person’s. Cousin Minot in a very nice man.”

“Is he your cousin?” said Jane in astonishment.

“Why, of course he is. Did you not know of it?”

“Never heard of it before.”

“What are you knitting?” said Clara.

“Stockings,” was the monosyllabled reply.

“Did you ever knit silk?”

“Shouldn’t think I did. I ain’t grand enough to afford that.”

“You could, though, I know,” said Clara.

“Why, I dunno,—praps so.” Jane North was foiled, and she succumbed as gracefully as she could, although awkwardly enough; but Clara went on:

“I have some beautiful silk thread, I have had it for years. My grandfather’s people, over in France, were silk weavers. It is through my mother that I am related to Mr. Minot; my father’s people were French,” she said, noticing an incredulous look in the eyes of Jane. “I have a lot of silk in thread and floss: I’ll get the box and show it to you,” and she did.

My own curiosity led me into the room—I had stood back of the door all this time—and the silk was beautiful; rich dark shades and fancy colors mingled, and a quantity of it too. Although kept so long, it was strong, having been of such fine material.

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"Sakes alive! I should be scar't to death to own all that," said Jane.

"Well," said Clara, "if you will show me how to knit some for myself, I will be willing to scare you a little. I would like to give you enough to make a pair or two of stockings for yourself. Chose your own colors," and she emptied the contents of the box on the lounge at her side.

"You don't mean it, Mis' De-mond."

"Certainly I do, take any shade you prefer, and if Emily has needles, we will go right to work on our cutting."

The right string was touched, the cutting started, and when Jane North left us, she whispered to me:

"I like that woman, and I don't care whether she is a Baptist, or what she is, she's a lady."

Those stockings averted much, for her head was full of wonder talk.

I reminded Clara of the indignation she felt at her expressions, when she first saw her, and told her I did not suppose she ever would desire to look at her again.

"Why, Emily," she said, "I never feel like annihilating people whose ideas are all wrong. They are but representatives at the most, and I would rather desire to help these eaters of husks to find the true bread that shall bring to them comfort and peace. I should wish to fill their hearts so full that the rays of this inner light shall radiate around them, touching with the magic of good deeds all the suffering our world contains. This would leave no empty rooms in the house of our understanding; all would be filled with tenants of good-will and loving faith, bearing charity and love each toward the other; and uncultivated fields would be found no more. I thought if I could touch Miss North in the right spot, I might fill her mind, for a few brief hours at least, with something beside her gossip. If this could be done every day in the week, she would lose sight of it altogether, and like a tree engrafted with better fruit, on these new thought-branches beautiful wisdom apples might grow and ripen. If she comes again I will find something as new to her, I hope, as I have found to-day."

"What a wonderful compound you are, Clara," I said, "and what perfect symmetry nature has given to you, while I am your antipodes."

"What's that you are calling yourself?" said Aunt Hildy.

"Oh, something just different from all that is good and true enough to belong to Clara!"

“Pears to me you’re gettin’ some dretful big word now-a-days; when you want me to understand you, talk plain English.”

Hal, who had entered that moment, laughed heartily. “So I say, Aunt Hildy. Our Emily is going to be a blue-stockings, I fear. Housework will suffer before long, for housework and book cannot go together.”

“No more than ploughs and plaster,” I added.

“Not a bit more, sister mine,” and he passed his arm around my waist,—he often did this now-a-days,—and whispered, “give me a chance to say something to you.”

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I nodded an assent, and he passed on through the room, whistling to himself "Bonny Doon." I embraced the first opportunity to follow him, and found him alone in his studio. He seated himself beside me, took one hand in his and passed an arm around me. I wished he could have been my lover then, in fact, I often wished it, for he was as good as he was handsome, both noble hearted and noble looking. He was to me the embodiment of all that was good and all that went to make the best man in the world.

"Emily," he began, "you have been a blessed sister to me; I have loved you always, even though I plagued you so much, and you have been faithful to me. I entrusted to you the first great secret of my life, when I sought you under the apple tree."

"Why could you not have told me more?" I said.

"For the sole reason it would have been hard for you to have kept it from mother, and I wanted to surprise you all at home. Your hand, Emily, was the one that held the cup of life to my lips; and Louis," he added in a tender tone, "with his sympathy and the power of his heart and hand, led me slowly back to strength. Louis is a grand boy. Now, Emily," and he drew me still closer, "I have something else to tell you."

"Don't go away, Hal."

"I desire to stay, but, Emily, I love Mary Snow. I want to tell you of it. I cannot speak positively as to what may happen, but I love her very dearly. Could you be glad to receive her as a sister?"

Selfish thoughts arose at the thought of losing Hal, but I banished them at once, and my heart spoke truly when I said:

"Mary Snow is good enough for you, Hal. I have always liked her so much, but how stupid I am, never to have dreamed of this."

"No?" said he, as if surprised. "Never dreamed of it? Do you think it strange that I should tell you, Emily? I have seen the time when it would seem very silly to me, but I have learned to realize how great is the tie that binds us, and I hope through all the years you and I will never be apart. I ask of you, too, one promise. Do not tell even Clara, and if ever you have such a secret, tell me frankly, for we should love each other, and our joys should be mutual."

I said not a word, but I thought of Louis, and I longed to show him the chain and locket, which I constantly wore, but I could not, and I have wished since that I might have been wiser. At this moment Mr. Benton entered, and our position did not escape him.

"Truly, Hal," he said, "you make a capital picture. Courting, eh?"

"Call it that if you please; we are very near in spirit, thanks to the Father."

The thought of work came over me, and I left them to help about getting supper. To be in Hal's confidence and to feel the trust he reposed in me had made me very happy. Precious indeed did this seem to me, and if all brothers and sisters were as near, how much of evil would be averted. Young men might find at home the love and society they need, and less temptation and fewer penalties to pay would be the good result.

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Mother's absence was nearly at an end, and father had gone on Saturday to Aunt Phebe's to spend the Sabbath, and was to bring mother back on Monday.

Sabbath evening Hal went over to Deacon Snow's, Clara was in her room writing to Louis, Ben reading in the kitchen, and I was left with Mr. Benton in Hal's room. This night was never to be forgotten, for although from time to time I had been forced to notice the great change in his manner toward me, I was unprepared for what occurred, and unconscious that he had so misunderstood and perverted my motives in that fated talk. I cannot tell you all he said, nor how he said it, but I was thoroughly confused and startled by his protestations, and could only say:

"Mr. Benton, I do not desire to hear this; I cannot understand it; you have been mistaken," *etc.*

To all of which he replied as if deeply pained, and I believed in his sorrow and despised myself. I could not and did not tell him of Louis, for when I thought of it, it seemed too sacred, and he had no right to this knowledge. I was overwhelmed with strange and unpleasant feelings; there was no satisfaction in the thought of having heard these declarations; it was an experience I would fain have avoided. His talk to Clara, too, came to my aid, and rallying a little, I said:

"It is not long since you felt you could not live without the love of Clara's heart; how strangely all your feelings must have changed. This perplexes me, Mr. Benton."

He raised his head from his hands—he had been sitting some moments in a despairing attitude, evidently struggling with great emotion—and answered:

"It is natural that this should perplex you, and I am prepared for it. Years of lonely waiting and yearning for the love of a true heart, have, perhaps, made me seize too readily on any promise of hope and sympathy. I was certainly fascinated with Mrs. Desmonde, and told her of my feelings, prematurely as it proved, for the more I knew of her, the more convinced I grew of her unfitness, I might almost say for earth, although she still is beautiful to me. But you, Emily, are a woman of strength and will, of a strength that will grow, for your years do not yet number twenty-one; these years have already given you maturity and power, and I respect and admire you, and I believe I could worship you if you would let me."

This was stranger talk than I could endure, and I broke out passionately:

"You need not ever try; I do not want you to, for I shall never love you, and you are also old enough to be my father." I cannot tell why I should have made this great mistake for which I immediately reproached myself.

The lines in Mr. Benton's face grew a little sharper, and the gleam of his eye for a second was like a fierce light, and he answered gravely:

"My years do number more, but in my heart I stand beside you. I would have waited longer to tell you, but I am going away." I looked wonderingly. "A friend is ill. I go to him; then to Chicago to see some of our statuettes, and then if your parents will board me here, shall return for the summer, unless," and his eyes dropped hopelessly, his voice trembled, "unless," raising his eyes to mine appealingly, "I shall be too unwelcome a friend to remain."

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Dear Hal and his art rose before me, and pity and love caused me to say:

“Oh, come back, Mr. Benton! Hal needs you.”

“We will consider then that we are friends, Emily?”

“Certainly,” I said, glad enough to pass out of this door. Would it had been wider!

Advancing to me he took my hand, and said:

“My friend always, if I may never hope for more. I leave to-morrow morning, let us say good-bye here.”

This was a strange scene for a plain country girl like Emily Minot. Don’t blame me if I was bewildered, and if I failed for a moment to think of the snake I had dreamed about: neither wonder that in this last act in Mr. Benton’s drama, he seemed to have gained some power over me. He knew, for I was no adept at concealing, that he had won some vantage ground, and that I blamed myself and pitied him.

Morning came, and he left us, and Aunt Hildy said: “Gone with his great eyes that allus remind me that still water runs deep. Can’t see how Halbert and that man can be so thick together.”

Matthias, who was there early, ready to go to work, said to himself as the stage rolled away: “De Lord bless me, if dat man don’t mos’ allus set me on de thinkin’ groun. Pears like he’s got two sides to hisself, um, um.”

I heard this absent talk of Matthias’, and also Aunt Hildy’s words, and I marvelled, saying in my heart, “Emily Minot, what will be done next?”

CHAPTER XIII.

PERPLEXITIES.

We were all glad to see mother, and she had enjoyed her visit, which had improved her much.

“Hope you haint done any work?” said Aunt Hildy.

Mother said nothing, but when her trunk was unpacked she brought forth, in triumph, a specimen of her handiwork.

“Aunt Hildy,” I called, “come and give her a scolding.”

She came, and with Clara and myself, was soon busy in trying to find out how the mat—for this was the name of the article—was made.

“How on airth did you do it, and what with?”

“Why don’t you find out?” said mother.

“For only one reason, *I can’t*,” said Aunt Hildy.

“It is made of pieces of old flannel and carpet that Phebe got hold of somehow. We cut them bias and sewed them on through the middle, the foundation being a canvas bag, leaving the edges turned up.”

“Well, I declare,” said Aunt Hildy; “but you had no right to work.”

My mind was sorely troubled, and when, in about a week after Mr. Benton’s departure, I received a long letter from him, I felt worse than before. I blamed myself greatly, and still these wrong steps I had taken were all only sins of omission. It was for Clara’s sake; for Hal’s sake; and last, but not least, I could not say to Mr. Benton, as I would have wished to, that my love was in Louis’ keeping, for you remember I had met Louis’ advances with fear, and he had said, “I will wait one year.” How could I then say positively what I did not know? Louis was growing older, and my fears might prove all real, and I should only subject myself to mortification, and at the same time, as I really believed, cause Mr. Benton sorrow.

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"Poor Emily Minot," I said, "you must condole with yourself unless you tell Halbert," and I resolved to do this at the first opportunity.

Clara was delighted at Mr. Benton's absence. She went singing about our house all the time, and the roses actually tried to find her cheeks. Our days seemed to grow more filled and the hearts and hands were well occupied.

Hal was busy with his work and hopes, and I had been over with him to see Mary, and had looked with them at the picture of their coming days. I enjoyed it greatly. They were not going to be in haste, and Mary's father was to talk with our people concerning the best mode of beginning life. I think some people end it just where they hoped to begin. Mary had a step-mother, who was thrifty, and that was all; her heart had never warmed to infant caresses, and she would never know the love that can be felt only for one's own. It was sad for her, and I can see now how she suffered for this well-spring of joy which had never been found. To Mary she was kind, but she could not give her the love she needed. Mary was timid. Hal always called her his "fawn." It was a good name. He made a beautiful statuette of her little self and christened it Love's Fawn, and while he never really meant it should go into strange hands, it crossed the Atlantic before he did, and received high commendation—beautiful Mary Snow.

Instead of my visit helping to open my secret to Hal, it seemed to close the door upon it, and only a sigh came to my lips when I essayed to speak of it. Once he asked me tenderly as we walked home:

"It cannot be our happiness that hurts you, Emily?"

"No—no," I said, "it gives me great joy to see you so happy."

I told mother when he wished, and a talk ensued between her and father, then a conference of families, and a conclusion that the marriage which was to occur with the waning of September, should be followed, as the two desired, by their going to housekeeping.

Father had a plot of thirty acres in trust for Hal, and he proposed to exchange some territory with him, that his house might be nearer ours. Hal was named for Grandfather Minot, and was a year old when he died. In a codicil to the will, grandfather had bequeathed to Hal these thirty acres, which was more than half woodland. Hal was glad to make an exchange with father, and get a few acres near home, while he would still have nice woodland left. Acres of land then did not seem to be worth so much to us, and it was a poor farmer in our section, who had not forty or more acres, for our town was not all level plains, and every land-owner must perforce have more or less of hill and stubble. These new ideas of building and "fresh housekeeping" as Aunt Hildy said, gave much to think about, and while Clara and I were talking together with great

earnestness one afternoon in April, we were surprised by a letter of appeal from Louis. We, I say, for Clara read to me every letter he sent her, and this began as follows:

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"Little mother, bend thy tender ear, and listen to thy 'dear boy' who desires a great favor; think of it one week, and then write to him thou hast granted it."

The entire letter ran in this strain, and the whole matter was this: he felt he could not stay in school his appointed time. He had done in previous months more than twice the amount of work done by any one student, and when the vacation came with the coming in of July, he would stay with the professor through the month, and thus work up to a certain point in his studies, then he wanted a year of freedom, and at its close, he would go back and finish any and every branch Clara desired him to.

"Emily," said Clara, "he will be twenty-one next January, but he will be my boy still, and he will not say nay, if I ask him to return again. I have expected this. If Louis Robert had not left so strong a message—" and she folded her hands, and with her head bent, she sat in deep thought and motionless for more than half an hour. Then rousing suddenly, said:

"It will be well for him, I shall send the word to-morrow."

My heart beat gladly for in these days, I longed for Louis. Thoughts of Mr. Benton vanished at the sight of Louis' picture, and his letter I did not answer. He wrote again. The third time inclosed one in an envelope addressed to Hal, who looked squarely at me when he handed it to me, and afterward said:

"Emily, do you love Will?"

I shook my head, and came so near telling him, but I did not, and again committed the sin of omission.

While all these earthly plans were being formed about us, the stirring of thought with the people on religious matters grew greater. Regularly now several of our people went ten miles to the church where we heard Mr. Ballou. A donation party for our minister was to be given the last day of April, and the air was rife with conjectures. Jane North made her appearance, and her first salutation was:

"Good afternoon, Mis' Minot. Going to donation next Monday night?"

"I think so," was mother's quiet reply.

"Well, I'm glad: s'pose there's a few went last year that wouldn't carry anything to him now?"

Aunt Hildy stepped briskly in and out of the room, busy at work, and taking apparently no notice of the talk, when Clara came again to the front with:

“Oh! come this way, Miss North, I have something to say, these good people will excuse us.”

“Oh! yes,” said mother, and they went. I could not follow them for I was busy. Two hours after, I entered Clara’s sitting-room, and Jane sat as if she had received an important message from some high potentate, which she was afraid of telling. She sat knitting away on her silk stockings, and talked as stiffly, saying the merest things. Clara left the room a few moments, and then she said:

“Ain’t she jist a angel; she’s give me the beautifulest real lace collar for myself, and three solid linen shirts for our minister; said per’aps she should’nt go over; and two or three pieces of money for his wife, and a real beautiful linen table-cloth; you don’t care if I take ’em, do you?”

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"Oh, no!" I said, "Mrs. Desmonde is the most blessed of all women."

"*So she is*, but here she comes," and again Jane sat covered with new dignity. It was rather a heavy covering, but I thought of Clara's philosophy and said to myself, "Another batch of scandal pushed aside." This way of Clara's to help people educate themselves to rise above the conditions which were to them as clinging chains, was to me beautiful. If all could understand it, it would not be long before our lives would unfold so differently. "*Emily will help me.*" These words came full often before me, and now if I could only see my way through the difficulties which entangled me, then my hands would, perhaps, led by her, touch some strings which might vibrate sweetly. Then, and not till then, could I be satisfied, and unconscious of any presence, I sang aloud:

"How long, oh, Lord! how long?"

"Dat's de berry song I used to sing down thar, an' I dunno as I could 'spected any sooner," said Matthias, who came in unexpectedly.

"Oh, Matthias!" I said, "do you know I believe your people will all go free?"

And his large, honest eyes opened widely, as he said:

"Way down in yer, I feel sometimes like I see freedom comin' right down on de wings of a savin' angel, and den I sings down in dat yer grown' room, Miss; I sings dat ole cabin-meetin' song, 'Jes' lemme get on my long white robe, and ride in dat golden chariot in de mornin' right straight to New Je-ru-sa-lem.' 'Pears like I get great notions, Miss Emily."

"The Lord will hear you as well as me, Matthias, and some day slavery will die. What a good time there will be then above there," said I, pointing upward.

"Yes," said he, "good for de righteous, but dat old Mas'r Sumner, he'll jes' be down thar 'mong dem red-hot coals."

"Oh, Matthias!" I said, "there are no red-hot coals."

"Sure, Miss, I dunno but dat 'pears like I can't hab hevin' wid dat man thar."

"He will be changed and good."

"Can't think so. Dat man needs dat fire; preachin' could'nt do him no good, noway."

"We will agree to let each other think as they feel, but our Father must love all his children."

“Ef dat’s so,” said he thoughtfully, “I hope he’ll hab more’n one room for us, rather be mos’ anywhar dan in sight ob dat man,” and he trudged off with his literal Heaven and Hades before him.

Poor ignorant heart! let him hold to these thoughts; he cannot dream of a love so liberal as that which delights my heart to think of; he cannot know that we, being God’s children, must inherit some of his eternal goodness, and that little leaven within will be the salvation of us all through time that knows no end. Poor Matthias! his eyes will be opened over there; and tears filled my own at the glorious prospect waiting. He was living in his ground room truly.

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The donation came off happily. Our minister had been many years with us, and was a good man, to the extent of his light, and worthy of all we could bestow on him. He owned a small farm, and had also practised a little in medicine, and had always tried to do his duty. I suppose his fiery sermons were preached honestly, and that his duty, as Clara said, led him to hang out a signal lantern. To me it was a glow-worm light, that only warned me in a different direction, and although my fierce treatment of that Christmas sermon was past, down deep in my heart strong truths had been planted. I felt I must have a talk with both my pastor and my father before I could again partake of the communion.

Clara did not go with us to the donation. We went after supper, meeting at the house about six P.M., and stayed until nine. Many good and sensible gifts were brought them, and Clara's was not least among them. Jane North proudly displayed the four five dollar gold pieces, and descanted long on "such fine linen," and that beautiful lady who sent it.

Several said to us: "Why, we didn't know as you would come"—to which I said:

"Oh, yes! of course we proposed to come;" and for once I was wise enough not to ask why. I told Clara, she certainly had planted good seed, for not one word of scandal escaped the lips of Jane that evening, only praise of the beautiful Mis' Desmonde.

It was only a few days after the donation, that Mr. Davis, our minister, came over to spend the evening, and we had a long talk, one that ended better than I anticipated. When he came he inquired particularly for Clara, who insisted on our going into her sitting-room, and all but Hal followed her thither, his steps, after supper, turning as usual toward the house of his "fawn."

Mr. Davis alluded to his donation visit, and he desired especially to thank Clara for her most welcome offers to his wife and himself, adding, "And the greatest wonder to me is that the shirts fit me so well."

"You know my dear boy is a man in size," said Clara, "I thought they would be right, and he has now left four more that are new and like the ones I sent you, but please do not thank me so much, Miss North did me full justice in that line."

"She was a willing delegate, then?" said Mr. Davis.

"Oh, very!" said Clara, "and she is a lonely soul in the world."

"So she is, more lonely than she need be if our people could understand her," he replied; "but I confess my own ignorance there, for I never seemed to know just what to say to her."

"Clara does," said I, but Clara looked, "Emily don't," and I said no more.

At last the conversation turned on religious matters, and to my surprise, Mr. Davis came to explain himself instead of asking explanations, as I had expected.

“I have understood,” said he, “that you, Mr. Minot, think my sermon alluding to false doctrines, and also the one in which I spoke of preachers of heresy, were particularly directed to you, and that I believed you had done very wrong in leaving for one Sabbath your own church to hear a minister that preaches new and strange things.”

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"I never have intimated as much, Mr. Davis. I did suppose you intended some of the remarks in your last sermon should apply directly to myself and family; but of the first one, I had only one idea. As I have before said to you, the thought of a burning hell always makes me shudder. I never could conceive of such torture at the hand of a wise and loving God. If there is punishment awaiting the unrighteous, it is not of literal fire. I am well persuaded of this, for if it were a literal fire, a body would soon be consumed; hence, the punishment could not be endless as supposed; while upon a spiritual body, it could have no effect. The fire in the stove burns my finger, but touches not my soul."

"You know the tenets of our belief embrace both eternal comfort and eternal misery," said Mr. Davis; "it is what we are taught."

"I know," said my father. "I have considered my church obligations seriously, and am prepared to say, if it is inconsistent for me, in the eyes of my preacher or of his people, that I, holding these thoughts, should remain in fellowship with them as before, I can only say I have grown strong enough now to stand alone, and I should think I ought to stand aside. I cannot see why we may not agree on all else."

"I believe we do; I respect your opinions, Mr. Minot; we cannot afford to lose you either. May I ask with what denomination you would propose to unite?"

"None at all," said my father, "unless the road comes clearer before me. I love our old meeting-house, Mr. Davis; my good old father played the violin there for years, and when a youth, I stood with him and played the bass viol, while my brother, now gone, added the clear tones of the clarionet, and the voice of my sweet sister Lucy could be heard above all else, in the grand old hymns 'Silver Street' and 'Mear.'" At these recollections my father's voice choked with emotion, and strange for him, tears fell so fast he could say no more.

"Brother Minot," said Mr. Davis, rising to his feet and taking his hand, his eyes looking upward, "let the God who seeth in secret hold us still as brothers; keep your pew in the old church. This one difference of opinion can have no weight against either of us. This is all the church meeting we need or will have, and if I ever judge you falsely, may I be thus judged."

Aunt Hildy said: "Amen, Brother Davis, your good sense will lead you out of the ditch, that's certain."

Clara's eyes were looking as if fixed on a far-off star. She was lost in gazing, the thin white lids covered her beautiful eyes for a moment or two, then she turned her pure face toward Mr. Davis, and said:

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"It is good for us all to be wise, and it is not easy to obey the scriptural injunction, 'Be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves.' Ever growing, the human mind must reach with the tendrils of its thought beyond the confines of to-day. The intuition of our souls, this Godlike attribute which we inherit directly from our Father, is ever seeking to be our guide. None can be so utterly depraved that they have not sympathy either in one way or another with its utterances. Prison bars and dungeon cells may hold souls whose central thoughts are pure as noon-day; and sometimes hard-visaged men, at the name of home and mother, are baptized in tears. The small errors of youth lead along the way to greater crimes, and I sometimes ask myself if it is not true that living with wants that are not understood, causes men to seek the very things their souls do not desire, and they are thus led into deep waters. If Mr. Minot's soul reaches for a God of compassion and mercy, is it not because that soul whispers its need of this great love; and if it asks for this, will it not be found; for can it be possible with this spark of God within us, the living soul can desire that which is not naturally designed for it?"

"Why, my dear friends," she continued, "this is the great lesson we need to make us, on this earth, all that we might and should be. It is not true that the thought of eternal love will warrant us in making mistakes here; on the contrary, it will help us to see all the beauty of our world, and to link our lives as one in the chain which binds the present to the enduring year of life to come. Duty would be absolute pleasure, and all they who see now no light beyond the grave, would by this unerring hand be led to the mountain top of truth's divine and eternal habitation. In your soul, Mr. Davis, you ask and long for this. Doctrinal points confuse you when you think upon them, and you have lain aside these thoughts and said, 'the mysteries of godliness may not be understood;' but my dear sir, if this be true, why are we told to be perfect even as our 'Father in Heaven is perfect;' for would not that state be godly, and could there be mysteries or fear connected with it?"

"*Never, never,*" said Aunt Hildy.

Then, with her hands stretched appealingly toward him, Clara said:

"Oh, sir, do not thrust this knowledge from the door of your heart! Let it enter there. It will warm your thoughts with the glow of its unabating love, and you will be the instrument in God's hand of doing great good to his children."

She dropped her hands, the tender lids covered again those wondrous eyes, and we sat as if spell-bound, wrapt in holy thought.

"Let us pray," said Mr. Davis, and we knelt together.

Never had I heard him pray like this, and I shall ever remember the last sentences he uttered; "Father, if what thy handmaid says be true, give me, oh, I pray thee, of this

bread to eat, that my whole duty may be performed, and when thou shall call him hither, may thy servant depart in peace.”

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Mr. Davis shook hands with us all just as the clock tolled nine, and to Clara he said:

“Sister, angels have anointed thee; do thy work.”

This was a visit such as might never occur again. Truly and strangely our life was a panorama all these days. I dreamed all night of Clara and her thoughts, and through her eyes that were bent on me in that realm of dreams, I read chapters of the life to come.

CHAPTER XIV.

LOUIS RETURNS.

It would be now only a few days to Mr. Benton's return, and I dreaded it, never thinking of him without a shudder passing over me; Aunt Hildy would have called it “nervous creepin’.” I felt that this was wrong, and especially so since I knew I was thus hindered in the well-doing for which I so longed.

“Happiness comes from the inner room,” said Aunt Hildy; “silver and gold and acres of land couldn't make a blind man see.”

Her comparisons were apt, and her ideas pebbles of wisdom, clear and white, gathered from experience and polished by suffering. Both she and Clara were books which I read daily. How differently they were written! and then how different from both was the wisdom of a mother whose light seemed daily to grow more beautiful. It seemed when I thought of it as if no one had ever such good teachers. And now if I could only break these knots which had been tangled through Mr. Benton's misunderstanding of me, there seemed no reasonable excuse for not progressing. Church affairs had been happily regulated, so far as Mr. Davis and our few nearer friends were concerned, and the sermon on good deeds which he preached the Sabbath after his visit to us was more than worthy of him.

Clara said, “He talked of things he really knew; facts are more beautiful than fancies.”

“And stand by longer,” added Aunt Hildy.

Louis was to come on the first of July, his mother not deeming it advisable for him to study through that month; but Mr. Benton preceded him and came the first day of June. It was a royal day, and he entered the door while the purplish tinge of sunset covered the hills and lay athwart the doorway.

“Home again,” was his first salutation.

“Very welcome,” said Hal and father; mother met him cordially, and I came after them with Clara at my side, and only said:

“How do you do, Mr. Benton?”

He grasped my hand and held it for an instant in a vice-like grasp. I darted a look of reproof at him, and the abused look he wore at our last talk came back and settled on his features.

It seemed to me the more I tried to keep out of his way the more fate would compel me to go near him. Hal was very busy, and it seemed as if Clara had never spent so much time in her own room as now, when I needed her so much. Mother was not well, and every afternoon took a long nap, so I was left down stairs, and no matter which side of the house I was in he was sure to find me. The third day after his arrival he renewed his pleading, trying first to compliment me, saying:

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"What a royal woman you are, and how queenly you look with your massive braids of midnight hair fastened with such an exquisite comb!" (Louis' gift).

"Midnight hair," I said. "I've seen many a midnight when I could read in its moonlight; black as a crow would be nearer the truth," and I laughed.

The next sentence was addressed to my teeth. He liked to see me laugh and show my teeth; they looked like pearls.

"I wish they were," I said, "I'd sell them and buy a nice little house for poor Matthias to live in."

"Ugh!" he said, and looked perfectly disgusted; but he was not, for he said more foolish things, and at last launched out into his sober sentiment. Oh, dear, if I could have escaped all this!

"Have you not missed me? You have not said it."

"I have not missed you at all," I said, "and I do wish you would believe it."

"You have no welcome, then, no particular words of welcome?"

"Mr. Benton, you know I am a country girl."

"Yes, but you remind me of a city belle in one way. You gather hearts and throw them away as recklessly as they do, throwing smiles and using your regal beauty as a fatal charm. I must feel, Miss Minot, that it would have saved me pain had we never met."

This touched a tender spot. "Mr. Benton," I cried, "cease your foolish talk, you know that I never tried to captivate you, that I take no pleasure in an experience like this. You say that I am untrue to myself, false to my highest perception of right and justice. If you claim for me what you have said, you do not believe it, Wilmur Benton; you know in your soul you speak falsely."

"Why, Emily," he said, "you are imputing to me what you are unwilling to bear yourself; do you realize it?"

"I think I do," I replied, "and further proof is not needed to convince me."

"Really, this is a strange state of affairs, but (in a conciliatory tone), perhaps I spoke too impulsively, I cannot bear your anger; forgive me, Emily."

"Well," I answered merely.

"Can you forget it all?" he said.



"I will see," I replied, and just then I saw Halbert coming over the hill, and I was relieved from further annoyance. I cannot say just how this affected me. I felt in one sense free, but still a sense of heaviness oppressed me and all was not clear. My mental horizon was clouded, and I could see no signs of the clouds drifting entirely away, but on one point I was determined. I would give no signs of even pity for Mr. Benton, even should I feel it as through days I looked over my words and thoughts. He should not have even this to hold in his hand as a weapon against me. I would say nothing to Hal, for Louis would come, and in the fall, the year of his waiting would be at an end. He would tell me again of his great love, and I would yield to him that which was his. Oh, Louis, my confidence in your blessed heart grows daily stronger!

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While these thoughts were running through my mind, Matthias' voice was heard, a moment more and he was saying:

"Guess he's done gone sure dis time; he drink an fiddle, an fiddle an' drink; and nex' ting I knowed he's done dar at the feet of dem stars all in a heap by hisself."

"Who's that?" I cried.

"Plint, Miss. He's done gone, sure, an' I came roun' to get some help 'bout totin' him up stars. Can't do nothin', an' Mis' Smith she's jes gone scart into somebody else. She don't 'pear to know nuthin', an' when I say help me, she jest stan' an' holler like mad."

"I'll go over," said Aunt Hildy, wiping her hands, and turning for sun bonnet and cape.

"I'll go," said Hal.

"Me, too," cried Ben, and off they started.

Poor Plint was gone, surely enough; dead, "a victim to strong drink and fiddlin'," Aunt Hildy said. His funeral was from the church, for we all respected Aunt Peg and pitied Plint, and Mr. Davis only spoke of God's great mercy and his tenderness to all his flock; never putting a word of endless torment in it.

Poor Aunt Peg had great misgivings concerning Plint, and groaned audibly throughout the entire service. Matthias was a great comfort to her through her trouble, and she told Clara and me when we called on her, that he was not as clean as she wished, but he was a mighty comfort to her, and the greatest blessing Aunt could have sent. Plint's fiddle hung against the wall in her little room with whitened floor and straight-back chairs, and I could not keep back the tears when I noticed that she had a bunch of wild violets tied to the old bow. She noticed it and burst into tears herself, crying:

"That there fiddle was no use no way, but seems now I kinder reckon on 't." She was true to these intuitions of the soul, these thoughts that cover tenderly even the remembrance of a wasted life, and we could not but think that if Plint had not loved cider so well, he might perhaps have developed rare musical talent.

I had been true to myself as far as Mr. Benton was concerned, and since our last stormy interview, treated him with respectful indifference. He had two or three times attempted to bring about a better state of affairs, but I could not and did not give him any encouragement. I felt wronged and also justified in the establishment of myself where I should be safe from greater trouble at his hands.

The first day of July, the day for Louis' coming, dawned auspiciously, and I was as happy as a bird. It seemed to me my trouble was nearly over, and Louis, when he came in at our door that night, looked admiringly at me, and after supper he said:

“Emily, you are growing beautiful, do you know it?”

“I hope so,” I said honestly, “you know how homely I have always been.”

“No, no, I do not, you have been to me my royal Emily ever since I first met you.”

“I must have compared strangely with your city friends and their bewildering costumes.”

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"It was more strange than you know; you made the picture and they were the background," he said, and I thought, perhaps, he was going to cut short the year of waiting and say more. Instead, he looked off over the hills, and held my hand tighter. We were in Hal's room, and Mr. Benton entered, saying with great joy in his tones:

"Louis, I have made a success, take a little walk with me and I will tell you about it."

Louis looked at me a moment, as if to tell me it is the picture, and with a tender light in his eyes, went out under the sky, which was beautiful with the last tinge of sunset clinging to it, as if loath to leave its wondrous blue to the rising moon and stars.

As they passed out, I thought I saw Matthias coming, but must have been mistaken, as he did not appear. An hour passed and Louis and Mr. Benton returned, the latter looking wonderfully satisfied and happy, Louis thoughtful, and I should have thought him sad had I not known of Clara's picture.

The days passed happily, but through them all I was not as happy as I had expected. Louis must be sick, I thought; he was so quiet, and almost sad. Perhaps he had met with less, and I longed to ask him but could not. I was annoyed also by Mr. Benton, who would not fail to embrace every opportunity that offered, to talk with me alone, holding me in some way, for moments at a time. If I was dusting in Hal's studio, and this was a part of my daily duties, he was sure to be there, and several times Louis came in when we were talking together, I busy at work and Mr. Benton standing near.

Clear through the months that led us up to the door of October, these almost daily annoyances troubled me. It was not love-making, for since the day of my righteous indignation he had not ventured to approach me on that ground; but any thought which came over him, sometimes regarding his pictures and sometimes a saying of Aunt Hildy's,—anything which could be found to talk upon, it seemed to me, he made a pretext to detain me, and since he did this in a gentlemanly manner, how could I avoid it! It was a perfect bore to me, and yet I thought it too foolish a trouble to complain of. That was not the summer full of joy to which I had been looking, but it was full of work and care, and over all the mist of uncertainty.

Hal's house had been built; it was a charming little nest, just enough room for themselves and with one spare chamber for company.

"Don't git too many rooms nor too big ones," said Aunt Hildy. "If six chairs are enough, twenty-five are a bother. One loaf of bread at a time is all we want to eat. I tell you, Halbert, you can't enjoy more'n you use; don't get grand idees that'll put your wife into bondage. There are all kinds of slavery in this world," and between every few words a milk-pan went on the buttery shelf. She always worked and preached together.

Hal had a nice room for his work; then they had a sitting-room, kitchen and bedroom down stairs, and two chambers. It was a cottage worth owning, and Clara, as usual, did something to help.

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"Allus putting her foot down where it makes a mark," said Aunt Hildy.

She furnished Hal's room entirely, and gave Mary so many nice and necessary things that they were filled with thanksgiving. The marriage ceremony was performed at Deacon Snow's, and I cried every moment. I sat between Louis and Clara, notwithstanding Mr. Benton urged a seat upon me next himself; and on our return home he appeared to think I needed his special care, but I held close to Clara, and Louis, whose arm was his little mother's support, walked between us. He was sadly thoughtful, saying little.

The wedded pair left our town next morning for a brief visit with Mary's friends, and returned in a few days to their little house, which was all ready for occupancy. Aunt Hildy and mother had put a "baking of victuals," according to Aunt Hildy, into the closet, and the evening of their return their own supper table was ready, with mother, Clara, Louis and me in waiting. Louis remarked on Mr. Benton's coming over, and I forgot myself and said, in the old way:

"Can't we have one meal in peace?"

Mother said:

"Why, Emily, you are losing your mind; what would Hal think if Mr. Benton were left alone?"

Father and Ben came over, but not till after supper, and Aunt Hildy persisted in staying at home and doing her duty.

"Let him come, and stay, too," I added, still feeling vexed; and how strangely Louis looked as Mr. Benton came in. "Fairy land," he said.

Mother made some reply, but I sat mute as my thought could make me.

The stage came. Our first supper was pleasant both as a reality and as a type of their future. Hal and Mary were truly married, and through the ensuing years their lives ran on together merged as one. When we stopped to think over the years since his boyhood, to remember the comparatively few advantages he had enjoyed, the ill luck of my father in his early years, and his tired, discouraged way which followed,—it was hard to realize the facts as they were. Grandma Northrop often prophesied of Hal, saying to mother:

"That boy's star will rise. I know his good luck will more than balance his father's misfortune, and in your old age you will see him handsomely settled in life."

It seemed as if the impulse of his youth had all tended to bring him where the light could shine on his art, and from the time he entered Mr. Hanson's employ his good fortune

was before him. There is another thought runs by the side of this, and that is one induced by the knowledge of the great power of gold. Mr. Hanson was a man of wealth and good business relations. Liking Hal for himself, and interested in his art, it was easy for him to open many doors for the entrance of his work. Mr. Benton was a help to Hal in his art, and his reward was immediate almost, for Hal had told me Will's pieces had never been appreciated as now. It was astonishing, too, how many people had money to buy these expensive treasures,—but the sea was smooth.

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"Every shingle on the house paid for," said Aunt Hildy; "aint that the beginning that ought to end well?"

And now the road of the future lay, as a fair meadowland, whose flowers and grasses should be gathered through the years. Truly life is strangely mixed.

The look of perplexing anxiety had vanished from my father's face, for with Hal's prospects his own had grown bright, and you cannot know how Clara lifted him along, as it were; paying well and promptly and saving in so many ways, was a wondrous help to a farmer's family. There was also the prospect of a new street being opened through the centre of the town, and if my father wished he could sell building lots on one side of it, for it would run along the edge of his land.

"Trouble don't never come single-handed, neither does prosperity, Mr. Minot," said Aunt Hildy.

"Love's Fawn" was a famous little housekeeper, everything was in good order, and I certainly found a well-spring of joy in the society of these two. If Mary needed any extra help, Hal said, "Emily will do it." This was a very welcome change from the old saying.

Ben was a daily visitor, and spoke of sister Mary with great pride. He was a good boy and willing. Hal felt anxious to help him, if he desired it, by giving him more schooling, but he was a farmer born, and his greatest ambition was to own a farm and have a saw mill. He went to the village school, and had as good an education as that could give, for he was not dull. I was glad for his sake he liked farming; it seemed to me a true farmer ought to be happy. Golden and crimson leaves were fluttering down from the forest trees, for October had come upon us and nearly gone, and while all prospects for living were full of cheer, I felt a great wonder creeping over me, and with it, fear. Louis had said no word to me as yet, and could it be he had forgotten the year was at an end? Surely not. Could his mind have changed? Oh, how this fear troubled me! He was as kind as ever, but he said much less to me, and seemed like one pre-occupied. One chance remark of Clara's brought the color to my cheeks, as we sit together.

"Louis, my dear boy, what is it? A shadow crossed your face just then."

He looked surprised, and only half answered:

"The shadow of yourself. I was thinking about you."

Mr. Benton did not talk of leaving us; he had some unfinished pieces, and my father had said:

"Remain as long as you please, if my wife is willing."

After Hal left, I felt his studio marred by Mr. Benton's presence, for he had become a perfect torture to me, and I began to believe he delighted in it, secretly. Then again, I had the room to attend to, and I must in consequence be annoyed. Of this I was tired, and when day after day passed and brought no word from Louis, save in common with the rest, I said, hopelessly:

"Let it go. I will try to love no one but father and mother and Clara and Hal, and oh, dear! when shall I ever be ready to say, 'Now Clara, let me help you'?"

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She said to me through these days I was not happy. "Wild flower, what troubles thee?" one day, and again, "Emily, my royal Emily, art thou sighing for wings?"

November came and passed, and the gates of the new year were opening, still all the way lay dark before me. Night after night my tear-stained pillow told my sorrow mutely, and day after day I sighed. Mother was not well, and I felt that everything was wrong. I was worrying myself sick, I knew, and could not help it.

It was a cold, bitter day, and in my heart lay bitter thoughts when Matthias came over to tell us, that "Peg was right sick, 'pears like she's done took sick all in a minit, onions and onions, mustard and mustard, an nothin' don't do no good. Here's a piece of paper I foun' in de road, 'pears like you mus' want it," and he handed it to me.

I put it in my pocket and went to ask Aunt Hildy what to do for Aunt Peg. She proposed to go over, and Ben went with her.

While they were gone I read the paper, which proved to be a letter, evidently written to Mr. Benton, and the signature was plainly, "your heart-broken Mary," I could only pick out half sentences, but read enough to show me the treachery and sorrow, aye, more, a life cursed with shame, and at the hands of Wilmer Benton.

"Thank God," I cried aloud—I was in the sitting-room alone—and then tears fell hot and fast, and I sobbed and cried as if I had found a wide white path that led from the night of my discontent, out into the morning of the day called peace. I could not stay there and cry, I must pass Clara's door to go to my room, and throwing a shawl over my shoulders I rushed out, and fairly flew over the frozen ground to that dear old apple tree. What a strange place to go to, standing under those bare limbs, or rather walking to and fro, but I could not help it! This same old tree had heard my cries and seen my tears for years. I covered my face with both hands, and wept aloud. I could not have been there long, when I felt a presence, and Louis was beside me.

Putting an arm around me, he said tenderly, "Come in, Emily."

"Oh, Louis!" I cried, "I cannot, they will see my face, what shall I do? how came you here?" and I still kept crying and sobbing as if my heart would break.

"Why Emily, my royal Emily, come into little mother's room,—she has lain down,—and tell me why you weep."

I yielded gratefully, not gracefully, and we were seated alone, all alone, and he was saying to me:

"Emily, tell me what it is, you have troubled me so long, your eyes have grown so sad. Oh! Emily, my darling, may I not know your secret sorrow? I can wait longer, my year

has flown, and three months more, and still my heart is waiting; tell me your sorrow, and then let me say to you what I have waited in patience to repeat.”

It was not a dream, my heart beat like a bird, and I could tell him, only too gladly. “Emily will do it.”

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CHAPTER XV.

EMILY FINDS PEACE.

As soon as I could control my voice I said, "I cannot tell you why I cry so bitterly. I felt so strangely when I read this terrible letter, which Matthias had picked up in the road and given to me. Instead of sorrow covering me, as would seem natural, sorrow for another, not myself, I said, 'thank God,' for it seemed as if I had looked at something that would lead me from darkness to light. I have been so miserable, Louis; Mr. Benton has tormented me so long, that I have been filled with despair, and I begin to believe I shall never be worth anything again; oh! I am grieving so, and yet feel such a strange joy;" and I shook as if with ague.

Louis looked as if wonder-struck, and holding both my hands in one of his, drew my head to his shoulder, and with his arm still round me, put his hand on my forehead.

"Your head is like fire, Emily; the first thing is for you to get quiet; a terrible mistake has been made, and we may give thanks for the help that has strangely come."

I knew it would appear but did not know how. I still grieved and sighed and was trying hard to control myself.

"Emily," said Louis, in a tone of gentle authority, "do not try to hold on to yourself so; just place more confidence in my strength and I will help your nerves to help themselves, for you see these nerves you are trying to force into quiet, are only disturbed by your will. Let the rein fall loosely, it will soon be gathered up, for when you are quiet you will be strong, and the harder you pull the more troubled you will be. You must lean on me, Emily, from this day on as far as our earthly lives shall go—you are mine. It is blessed to claim you."

I tried to do as he said, and after a little, the strength he gave crept over me like a tide that bore me up at last; my grieving nerves were still, but my face was pale, as he said again:

"Now, Emily, let me hear from your own lips, 'I love you, Louis,'" and his dark eyes turned to meet my own, which were filled with tears that were not bitter—holy tears that welled from the fountain of my tired and grateful heart.

"I do love you, Louis—and Louis," I cried, forgetting again, impetuously, "I thought you had forgotten. I have suffered so long and you did not know it, and I dared not tell."

"Emily should have done it, but never mind, you say you love me, and shall it be as I desire? will you be my wife, Emily?"

I bowed my head and he continued:

“Thank you, Emily, and I do hope that listening angels hear and know it all. Their love shall sanction ours, and we will do all we can for each other, and also for those who unlike us see not the love, the comfort, and the faith they need. Now you shall be my Emily,—you are christened; this is your royal title,—my Emily through all the years.”

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Oh, how glad I felt! From the depths of my spirit rose so strong and full the tide of feeling that told me one love was perfect, and it cast out fear.

I said: "Louis, let us wait. Do not look at the dreadful letter now, it will mar this pleasant picture which rests me so, and I have been tired too long. I hope I may never again have to say to myself, 'Emily did it,' or its companion sentence, 'Poor Emily did not do it.' Let me breathe a little first, for I shall be again wrought up."

"Perhaps not," said Louis.

"Oh! I must be, it cannot be avoided, there is a dark passage through which we must pass, but if we go together it will not be so hard."

"As you say, my Emily," and at that moment Clara entered.

"Come in, little mother," said Louis, "come in and seal my title for your royal cousin with a motherly kiss, for she has promised to be my wife—my Emily through time."

And she glided toward us, kissed my forehead tenderly, and then taking a hand of each in one of hers, she turned her eyes upward and said:

"Father, bless my children; they were made for each other. May their lives and love continue, ever as thine, through endless time. Let our hearts be united and thy will be ours," and she knelt on the floor at our feet, her head resting in my lap, and her hand in Louis', whose face was radiant with the thoughts which sought expression in his features. I marvelled, as I looked on his beauty, that plain Emily Minot could have become so dear to him.

The thought of father's fear, too, came over me, and while we were thus in thoughtful silence, the old corner clock gave warning of the supper hour being near, and I said:

"The supper I must see to, Louis."

He smiled and said:

"My Emily can get supper, I know, for she makes both bread and butter, and is loyal to her calling ever, as to her lover."

Mr. Benton looked sharply at me during the meal, and it seemed to me as if my eyes betrayed the thought which, filled my heart. Aunt Hildy had returned from her errand of mercy, and she said it was "nervous rheumatiz."

"Poor creature, she's broke down with her hard work."

“Perhaps she’ll marry that old fellow, Mat Jones,” said Mr. Benton. “He’d make a good husband if she isn’t too particular,” and he laughed as if he thought his remark suggestive of great cunning. No one gave it even a smile. He did not like Matthias, and often spoke slurringly of him. This was strange, for I could see no harm coming to him from this harmless soul who was good and true and faithful as the sun. He was to us the very help we needed, and father could entrust the care of his work to him whenever he desired to rest a day, or it was necessary for him to be absent from home. This was no small consideration, and well appreciated by those who knew what the care and work of life on a farm meant. Mr. Benton’s remark called forth from Louis after a time one concerning the great evil of slavery.

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“And if we suffer from any error this race commit, we must remember it is our own people who have brought it to us,” said he. “Africa never would have come to us.”

Mr. Benton, apparently nettled, said:

“I imagine you would not enjoy a drove of these people in your care. I had a little taste of the South during two years of my life, and my word for it, Louis, they are not attractive creatures to be tormented with. They are a perfect set of stubborn stupidities, and driving is the only thing to suit them, depend on it.”

Louis looked more than he said, only recalling that the blame for this could not rest on the slave alone. “I do not imagine I could enjoy slave-owning. I feel the majority of slave-owners lower themselves until they stand beneath the level of the brutes.”

Father said, “It is all wrong.”

Aunt Hildy added, “All kind of bondage is ungodly, and the days will bring some folks to knowledge.”

“Out of the depth into the light,” said Clara, and our meal was over.

The days flew by on wings, each wing a promise, and it was a week after we plighted our vows ere I felt ready to read that letter and hear what Louis had to say. Then something came to prevent, and another week had passed when Louis said:

“My Emily, I must have a talk with your father and mother. I cannot feel quite satisfied, and it is only right they should be consulted, for you are their own good girl. I would wait for their hearts to say, ‘take her,’ if I waited years, but then, my Emily, it is neither giving nor taking, for every change that is right does not ask us ever to give ourselves or our loved ones away. I dislike that term.”

“You may wait, Louis; I will tell mother, and she can tell father.”

“No, no, Emily! It is I who ask for your hand, and is it not my privilege as well as duty?”

“What a strange man you are growing to be, Louis! Hal couldn’t bear the thought of telling mother or father his heart affairs, and I was the medium of communication between them.”

“He feels differently about it,” said Louis, “and yet he has the tenderest heart I ever knew within the breast of a man.”

“He is a good brother, Louis. I could not ask a better.”

“Nor find one if you did.”

At that moment Matthias came in. Taking off his hat and saluting us in his accustomed way, he said:

“Pears like I’ll have to ask some of yere to go out in de woods a piece—thar’s a queer looking gal out thar, an’ she’s mighty nigh froze to death; she is, sartin.”

“Where is she, Matthias?”

“Clean over thar; quite a piece, miss.”

“Near any house?” I said.

“Wall, miss, she mout be two or three good steps from that thar brick-colored house.”

“Oh, clear over there? Well,” I said, “I’ll go over if Lou Desmonde will go with me.”

“I will go, only never call me that again. Matthias calls me Mas’r Louis, and he says I remind him of a mighty nice fellow down in South Carliny,” said Louis.

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"Yis, sah, you does," said Matthias.

Telling mother and Aunt Hildy what we were going out to find, we started.

It was a very cold day, and through our warm clothing the winds of March pierced the marrow of our bones. We found the woman, who proved to be, as Matthias had said, nearly frozen. Louis took her right in his arms to the nearest shelter, Mr. Goodwin's, the brick-colored house, and his good, motherly wife had her put into the large west-room, where the spare bed was made so temptingly clean, and with such an airy feather mattress, that, light as she was, the poor girl sank into it almost out of sight. Matthias brought wood and made a fire on the hearth, and Mrs. Goodwin, Louis and I worked hard for an hour chafing her purple limbs, her swelled feet and hands, and at last she turned her head uneasily, and murmured:

"The baby's dead—she is dead and I am going to her."

Then a few words of home and some pictures.

"Myself! myself!" she'd cry, "my picture; yes, my hair is beautiful; my golden curls, he said; and my baby's hair; let me put it here."

And she passed into a sleep from which it would seem she could never waken. We sent Matthias back to tell mother, and say that we should both stay all night if necessary. This girl could not be more than twenty, we thought. Her fingers were small and tapering, and on her right hand she wore a ring set with several diamond stones. Her dress was of silk, and her shawl fine but thin. Her head covering had doubtless fallen off and then been carried by the wind, for we saw nothing of it. She was a beautiful picture as she lay there, for the blood had started and her cheeks were flushed with fever, her lips parted, showing a set of teeth, small, white and regular. Who could she be? Where did she come from? It was about an hour after she fell asleep that she stirred, wakened, and this time opened her eyes in which a conscious light was gathering.

"Where am I? What is it?"

Mrs. Goodwin stepped near her, Louis retreated from the room, and I kept my seat by the hearth.

"Dead, dead, I was dying but I am not dead; do tell me," she said, putting both her hands out to Mrs. Goodwin.

"You are sick, my child. We found you in the road and took you in. You had lost your way."

"Oh! oh!" she murmured, "can I stay all night?"

“Oh, yes, stay a week or two, and get rested!”

“May I go to sleep again? Who knows me here?” and again she fell asleep. By this time Aunt Hildy appeared on the scene, and commanded me to go home and stay there.

“Tain’t no place for you; I’ve brought my herbs to stay and doctor her. You go home and help your mother.” I obeyed, of course, and when I left, kissed the white forehead of the poor girl, and sealed it with a tear that fell.

She murmured: “Yes, all for love,—home, pictures, mother,—all left for love, and the baby’s dead. I’m going there.”

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I went out into the crisp air with Louis' arm for support, and a thousand strange thoughts whirling in my brain. "Great, indeed, must have been the sorrow which could have driven so tender a plant from home."

"Yes," said Louis, "God pity the man whose ruthless hand has killed the blossoms of her loving heart. She looks like little mother, Emily."

"So she does, Louis." And we talked earnestly, forgetting everything but this strange, sweet face. Supper was ready, and the rest were at the table.

"What have you been up to?" said Ben, "you look like two tombstones." I related briefly the history, and concluded by saying:

"She looks as frail as a flower." To which Mr. Benton added:

"Doubtless her frailty, Miss Minot, is the cause of her present suffering."

"Poor lamb," said Clara, "how thankful we should feel that Matthias found her."

"Yes," said Louis, "and if he only could have thought to have carried her into Mr. Goodwin's, and then come over after us, she would not have so hard a struggle for life."

"Do you think she can live?" said Mr. Benton.

"Oh, yes!" said Louis, "the blood has started, and with Aunt Hildy by her bedside she will be, by to-morrow, very comfortable. I think she had not been there long when we found her."

"Perhaps she will not thank you for bringing her back to life, however."

"Perhaps not," said Louis, "still it seems a sacred duty, and in my opinion, not finished with her mere return to life. She looks very beautiful—looks like little mother," turning in admiration to Clara, whose eyes reflected the love she held in her heart for him.

Father and mother were silent, but after supper mother said they would ride over and see if anything was necessary to be done that they could attend to. My mother was too silent and too pale through these days. I looked at the prospect of less work for her with pleasure, and after Mr. Benton left there certainly would be less. Louis would have Hal's room, and Clara then would see to their apartments almost entirely. This would be a relief, and now that my mind was at ease, I knew I could be of more service, while Aunt Hildy would still remain, for she said she would make "Mis' Minot's burden as easy as she could, while the Lord gave her strength to do it."

After father and mother were gone, Louis sat with me in our sitting-room, while Clara absented herself on the plea of something very particular to attend to. I mistrusted what

it might be, and looked at her smilingly. “My Emily guesses it,” she said, “something for the little lamb. Emily will help me too, have I not said it?” and she passed like a sweet breath from the room.

“Now Louis,” I said, as we sat together on the old sofa,—our old-fashioned people called it “soffy,”—“let us look at that letter.”

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He produced it from the pocket where it had lain in waiting, and we read. Many lines were illegible entirely, but together we deciphered much of it. "The baby is dead—she was beautiful, and if (here were two words we could not make out), it would have been so nice (then two lines blurred and indistinct, and another broken sentence). Where can your letters —— I am sure you write. If —— then I shall go to find ——. My father will give us ——" and from all these grief-laden sentences, we gathered a story that struck us both as being almost made to coincide with that of the poor lamb.

"Louis," I said, "if this is the very Mary, what shall we do?"

"We will do right and let problems be solved as best they can. First let us understand about ourselves, then we can better act for others. How did Mr. Benton annoy you?"

Then I told him.

"And you did not even think you loved him?"

"Louis," I cried, "how could you think so, when my heart has been yours always? How could you think of me in that light?" And those old tears came into my eyes.

"I could not convince myself that such was the case, but Wilmur Benton gave me so to understand—said you were a coy damsel but a glorious girl, and would make a splendid wife—'just such as I need,' he said, 'congratulate me.'"

"When, Louis, did he say this?"

"The night of our walk; and it was this instead of the picture he talked of."

"You were cruel not to tell me," I said.

"I waited for my year to finish as I had said I would, and then, Emily, I waited longer for fear you did not know your heart. Matthias said to me one day, 'Masr' Louis, dat man neber can gain de day ober thar; Miss Emily done gone clar off de books, an he's such a bother—um—um.' This set me to thinking; I asked him how he came to think so. 'Dunno, can't help it, 'pears like dat gal's eyes tell me 'nuf.' All this was good to hear, and I had watched you very closely for days, thinking every morning, 'I will tell her before night;' and several times went into Hal's room purposely, but Mr. Benton was always before me. It was because you felt all this that the letter made you feel truly an opening path—your tearful talk by the old apple tree was the 'sesame' that opened the way to the light."

"I do not like to feel that man is such a character as all these things indicate," I said, adding dreamily, "but I never came very near to him. He is a splendid artist, and still the canvas does not speak of his soul."



“How utterly void of feeling for those in bondage he seems to be! What a cold crust covers him! Emily.”

“It hurts me to think you could for a moment believe I preferred him to you.”

“You must not for a moment believe that in my soul I did, for it is not true; but I knew your artless, loving heart, and I knew also Mr. Benton had the power to polish sentences of flattery that might for a little dazzle you, as it were.”

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"And they did sometimes, Louis," I said, for I wanted the whole truth to be made plain, while I felt his glittering eyes fastened on me, "but not long. When I was alone, I saw your face and longed to hear again the words you had said to me. We are both young, Louis, and I feared you did not love me as you thought. I had no right to defend myself against Mr. Benton's attacks by using your name with my own. And when the year was past, then I still felt no right, and further," I added slowly, "to me my love was a sacred picture I could not ask him to look at."

"My Emily forever," said Louis, folding me closely to him. "Your fears were groundless as to the changing of my love for you, but, as you say, the picture was not for his eyes. Your suffering causes me sorrow, but let us hope it has not been in vain."

"It is all right, Louis, now, and I have said to myself, let 'Emily will do it' be the words hereafter, for 'Emily did it' has passed, and with this lesson, too, I hope, the second sin of omission, which in my heart I characterize as 'Emily did not do it.' And now your little mother's words lie just before me, reaching a long way through the years, 'Emily will do it.'"

"Amen," said a sweet voice, which was Clara's. "Emily has begun, and when she goes to see the little lamb here are some things to take."

"Do you want to see her, little mother?"

"Not now, Louis; I cannot now look upon her sorrow. By-and-by," and over her face came a shining mist, and through sweet sympathy's pure tears her eyes looked earnestly, but she did not tell us of what she was thinking.

CHAPTER XVI.

MARY HARRIS.

I think we must all have dreamed of the lovely face over among the pillows in Mr. Goodwin's west room, for we were hardly seated at the breakfast table ere Ben said:

"Wonder how that pretty girl is this morning?"

"She was better when we left last night," said mother, "I thought she appeared as if ready for a comfortable night; but shall hear soon if she is better, Aunt Hildy will be home, and if not, Matthias will be over."

"Wish I could see her—will she go right away?"

"That I do not know," said mother, "we have yet to learn her history. Mrs. Goodwin wanted Matthias to come over to-day, for after you left, Emily, she called for 'Peter,



colored Peter,' looking as if expecting to find him. Matthias came into the room and brought some wood, while she was awake, and when she saw him, she said, 'Oh, Peter! stay till I get rested—I want to tell you.' He dropped his wood heavily, it gave him such a start. He says no one ever called him that except some young people down in Carolina, and it seems he named himself Peter, to their great amusement, telling them that he 'cakilated to treat his old Mas'r just as Peter treated de good Jesus.'"

"Why, can it be possible he knows her?" I said.

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"He thinks not," said mother, "but this calling him Peter is singular enough."

"It seems very strange, and hardly possible she can have come so far," said father. Louis' eyes as well as my own had been covertly scanning Mr. Benton, and he was ill at ease. At the name of Peter his face grew pale and his hand trembled; no one else noticing it, he rallied, but made no remark whatever. Afterward Louis said to him:

"What a strange experience this is of the girl we found!—truths are queer things; I feel a real anxiety to find out about her. Do not you feel interested?" His eyes fell as he answered:

"Can't say that I do. You have more enthusiasm than myself. Having known more years, I am taught to let people look out for themselves very much. But that old Matthias I don't like. It may be all a put up job—something to bring credit or money to himself—you can't trust that darky."

"Why," said Louis, "I would trust him, and so far as this young lady is concerned, a different person from Matthias is at the root of the matter. I have a desire to know the truth and help the girl."

"She may be your fate, Louis."

"No," he replied, "Mr. Benton, that is not possible, my 'fate,' as you call it, is my Emily."

"Miss Minot?" said Benton, "great heavens! Has that girl played me false?"

"I think not," said Louis calmly, "and since the subject is broached, perhaps it will be best for me to tell you that Emily is to be my wife, her parents being willing."

"You *are* a *gentleman*, truly! I gave you my confidence and expected"—

"Do not say more," said Louis, raising his hand deprecatingly against the coming falsehood, "do not help me to despise you. I am too sorry that I am forced to know what you said to me was untrue, and also to realize what my Emily has suffered and kept in her own heart."

"Louis Desmonde," said Mr. Benton, "do you realize what you are saying?"

"Only too well, sir; do not force me to say more. I admire your art. I am willing to help you to be a man."

"*Indeed!*" replied Mr. Benton. "Philanthropic *boy!* who talks to a man of years and judgment!"

It was a bitter pill for him, and I believe it was the knowledge of Louis' money, and of his own great need of it, that forced him to retreat in silence, while Louis sought and told me of their interview.

"How could you help telling him of the letter, Louis?"

"I did not have to try to help it, for I want to be sure of all I say to him, and as far as I spoke I had perfect authority. He may at some time need my help, though he spurned the aid of his 'philanthropic boy.'"

"*Boy*," said I, "you are old enough to be his father in goodness, but here comes Aunt Hildy. The poor lamb must be better, else she would not come back so soon," and I opened the door for her entrance.

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"I know what you're after," she said, "she's better; the poor thing will get well. Oh dear! land! I wonder, when'll the same old story end."

"Has she told it to you, Aunt Hildy?"

"Partly to me and partly to Mis' Goodwin." (Aunt Hildy never said Mrs. — married or single, it was always Miss.) "She'll tell you all about it, I guess, for she wants to see you. She remembers your dark eyes, and Matthias she calls Peter—yes, she does, now she's come clean to her senses, and when she gets a little more strength, she says she must see him, and the dark eyes too; so you'll have to go over. Mis' Goodwin said mebbe you'd better wait till to-morrer, and so says Brother Davis. He come over and brought a few of his powders—he wanted to do something. I told him we could fetch her out straight—Mis' Goodwin and me—and I think he'd better tend to himself—says he's got a dreadful pain under his shoulder blades; acts as if he's goin' to be sick."

"Could the young lady eat anything, Mrs. Patten?" said Louis.

"Mercy! yes, I've made gruel twice for her and she's all right, only she'll be lame and sore-like for a good while, but I must go to work, I've been gone long enough. Where's your mother?" And the dear old soul hastened to her duties.

Our supper table was enlivened by the news that Aunt Hildy brought, all being interested with the exception of Mr. Benton, who was well covered with dignity. Part of that evening, Louis and I spent with Hal and Mary. I longed to tell them all about the letter and Mr. Benton's deceit, but as we entered, Louis whispered, "Let us be discreet," and I answered, "Emily will do it." He was so much wiser that our years told a story when they said "only a month's difference in their ages." Hal and Mary were much interested in the poor lamb, and like ourselves hoped to learn her history, and help her as she must need. Our visits here were always pleasant, and when we said "good night," a sincere "God bless you" rose from our hearts. We entered our sitting-room, to find Clara sitting between mother and father, and the three evidently enjoying a home talk. After we were seated, and a lull in the conversation came, Louis startled me by saying:

"Mr. and Mrs. Minot, I want to ask of you a favor—greater than the one granted my little mother; perhaps so great that you will fail to grant it; but it is worth the asking, worth the waiting for through years. May I call Emily my wife?"

My father looked strangely, and did not reply for a moment, while mother's face was covered with that pleasant smile, which from earliest years I had considered, "yes." Louis' eyes were bent on my father, who, when he answered, said:

"You are both young, Louis."

“Yes, sir, I know it, and I do not ask to make her my wife now. But I love her, Mr. Minot, and it is not right we should hold a position not sanctioned by you. I shall feel better if you are willing to consider us, as we feel, pledged to each other.”

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"I cannot say *no*, but I have thought—Mr. Benton has asked me the same question, and I hardly know what to say—I said to him, 'If Emily is willing, I will not oppose your suit.'"

"Oh!" I cried, "father, he has told such stories!"

Louis said: "We can explain that satisfactorily, Mr. Minot, but if there are other objections in your mind, let us know what they are."

My father was not a man who expressed himself freely, and Louis was so unlike other young men that he was embarrassed evidently, and there was, as it seemed to me, a long silence ere he said:

"I have no objections, Louis. I believe you mean what you say, and also have enough of your mother in you to treat our girl well. I cannot see why your plans may not be carried out so far as I am concerned."

He looked at mother, who smiled a consent, and Louis stepped toward them both, shook their hands heartily, and said:

"I thank you."

His way of manifesting feeling was purely French, and belonged to him—it was not ours, but we came to like it, and as my father often said, when Clara came she unlocked many a door that had been shut for years. Too many of our best ideas were kept under covering, I knew, and the hand of expressive thought was one which loosened the soil about their roots, giving impetus to their growth and sweetness to their blossoms. We knew more of each other daily, and is not this true through life? Do not fathers and mothers live and die without knowing their children truly, and all of them looking through the years for that which they sorely need, and find it not? Their confidence in each other lacking, lives have been blasted, hopes scattered almost ere they were born, and generations suffered in consequence. It was the blessed breaking of day to me, the freedom to tell my mother what I thought; and after Clara, became one of us, I could get much nearer to my father. The full tide of her feeling swept daily over the harbor bar of our lives, and we enjoyed together its great power. Her heart was beneficent, and her hand sealed it with the alms she gave freely. She was always unobtrusive, and anxious in every way to avoid notoriety.

Deacon Grover who had heard and known with others of her numerous charities, offered advice in that direction, and said to Aunt Hildy,

"If that rich lady would just walk up and give a few hundreds to the church fund it would help mightily."

Aunt Hildy had replied:

“Yes, yes, Deacon Grover, it would be nice for lazy folks to let the minister do all the saving, and somebody else all the paying. I believe faith without works is jest exactly like heavy bread, and will not be accepted at the table of the Lord.”

“He never said another word to me,” said she; “that man knows he has a right to be better.”

This was a conceded fact, and it always seemed to me he ought not to be carrying his deaconship in one hand, and his miserably small deeds in the other. Hypocrites were in existence among all people, and while thoroughly despised by them, still held their places, and do yet, as far as my knowledge and experience go.

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Early the morning of the next day, Matthias came over to tell us about that “poor gal,” as he called her.

“She wants to see you, Miss Emily, and they say she wants to talk to me too. Mis’ Goodwin said ‘pears like you’d better come over thar ‘bout three o’clock to-day, if you can.’ She’s right peart, an’ by ‘nuther mornin’, ‘spect she’ll call loud for me.”

“Do you think you know her, Matthias?”

“Can’t say I do, Miss, but seems queer enough, she ‘sists on callin’ of me ‘Peter’—um—gimme sich a feelin’ when she spoke dat word,” and Matthias looked as if his heart was turning back to his old home, and its never-to-be-forgotten scenes.

Mother sent a basket of delicacies over by him, and Aunt Hildy said:

“Tell Miss Goodwin I’m goin’ to bake some of my sweet cookies and send over, and we can make some bread for her; ‘twill help along—don’t forget it Matthias.”

“No, marm, I’ll ‘member sure,” and off he started. As he passed along the path I thought of a word I wanted to say, and ran out of the door in time to see the shadow of a form which I knew must be waiting in the “angle” as we called it. It was where the east L ended, about ten feet from the main front. In the summer I had a bed of blue violets here, and named it “Violet Angle.’ I stopped, for I heard a voice, and saw Matthias turn to this spot instead of passing on to the gate as usual. The first salutation I did not hear, but Matthias’ reply was “yaas sah.” The voice was Mr. Benton’s, and I stood riveted to the spot.

“Who is that girl, Matt?” he said.

“Dunno, sah.”

“Don’t know? Yes, you do know; you can’t play your odds on me. I’m not ready to swallow all I hear. I want you to tell me who that girl is, and how she came here.”

“I dunno, sah, sartin.”

“Matt, I don’t believe a word you say; first tell me the truth.”

“Massar Benton, you’re a queer man. Dis niggah shan’t tell you no lies, but de Lord’s truf, I dunno noffin ‘bout.”

“You don’t know me either, do you?” and he laughed ironically.

“Never thought I did,” said Matthias; “‘pears like long ways back I see some face like yours, but I dunno. Good many faces looks alike roun’ yere.”



"Yes, yes," says Benton, "you've said enough, you black rascal; and you *mark my words*, if you've raised the devil, as I think you have, I'll cowhide you. I'll give you something to remember me by, you old fool; and you a'nt a fool either; you're as cunning as Satan is wicked."

"De Lord forgive you," said Matthias, "you're done gone clar from your senses. I dunno who dat gal is, an I dunno who you is, an' what more kin I say?"

"I know who you are, and I know you were the slave of Sumner down in South Carolina."

"Yaas," said Matthias, "dat's so; but how does you know 'bout me? Did you come down thar? 'Haps dat's de reason you're face kinder makes me look back, an it mos' allus does; 'pears like you mout explain."

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"Yes, s'pose I *mout*," said Benton, "and I reckon you will before we get through."

"Wal," said Matthias, "if you wait till you gits evidence fo' you gives dat hidin' you talks 'bout, I've got plenty ob time to go over to de groun' room," and he walked off at his old gait, slow but sure, while I, turning, ran into the house and told mother what I had heard.

She raised her hands in a sort of holy horror, but only said:

"What does it mean?"

"It means," said Aunt Hildy, "that man's a rascal; I told you, Mis' Minot, he was when I first set eyes on him, and I've kept good track of Emily, for when he see he couldn't get the 'rich widder,' that's what he calls our good little creetur Clara, then he tacked round and set sail for Emily, and he's been a torment to her, and I know it. Thank the Lord, he's shown his cloven foot; I wish Mr. Minot had heard it. *He* laughs at me, thinks I'm a fool, but I've seen through him if I do wear an old cloak. It's mine, and so is my wit, what little I've got."

Aunt Hildy stepped up lively and worked every moment, keeping time to her thoughts and giving great expression by her peculiar accenting of words. Clara heard us, and came in "to the rescue," she said, "for it sounded as if somebody was getting a scolding."

I repeated my story, and although she rarely used French expressions, this time she clasped her little hands together, sank into a chair, and said:

"Oh! Emelie, j'ai su depuis longtemps, qu'il nous ferait un grand tort. Le pauvre agneau! Le pauvre agneau!"

"What will father do?" I said to mother.

"I cannot think of anything to do except to help the poor girl; his own punishment is sure, Emily; we are not his masters. 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord,'" she quoted calmly.

"Yes," said Aunt Hildy, "that's the spirit to have, but I believe if I had really heard it as Emily did, I'd have risked it to throw a pan of dish water on him."

I could not help laughing—we were having a real drama in the kitchen. Great tears had gathered in Clara's eyes, and I said to her:

"Now this will upset you. I'm sorry you heard it."

"No, no," she said, "but the poor lamb, I can hardly wait for the time when I may see her."

“Can you ever speak to Mr. Benton again?” I said to mother.

“I should hope so, Emily. I feel great pity for him; he might be a better man. We are taught toleration not of principles, but certainly of men, and I think if our Heavenly Father will forgive him, we can afford to, and then it would be very unwise to let him know we are cognizant of this.”

My mother reminded me so many times of the light that burns steadily in a light-house on a ledge. The waves, washing the solid rock, and wearing even the stone at its base, have no power to disturb the lamp, which, well trimmed, burns silently on, throwing its beams far out to sea, and fanning hope in the heart of the sailor, who finds at last the shore and blesses the beacon light.

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I admired her calm and steadfast trust in the truth, that bore her along in her daily doing right toward all with whom she mingled, but I well knew she would be righteously indignant toward Mr. Benton, and also that the whole truth, with the letter and the story of “the lamb,” would soon be forthcoming. I could hardly wait for the recital which I expected to hear in the afternoon, and entered Mrs. Goodwin’s door at three o’clock precisely.

She was glad to see me, and said cheerily:

“Take off your things, Emily, and I’ll show you right in, for Miss Harris is waiting anxiously.”

I thought she looked beautiful the night we found her, but to-day she was a marvellous picture, sitting among the white pillows. Her cheeks were touched here and there with pink, as if rose leaves had left their tender stain—her eyes beautifully bright, and such depths of blue, with arched brows above them, and long brown lashes for a shield. Her hair rippled over her shoulders in brown curls, and around her was thrown the light India shawl she had about her on that sad night. She smiled with pleasure as I entered, and beckoned me to her bedside, while Mrs. Goodwin said:

“Take the old splint rocker, Emily. I am going to let you stay two long hours.”

How gratefully the poor lamb’s eyes turned upon the good woman!

“This young lady’s name is Harris.”

“Yes,” said Miss Harris “Mary Abigail Harris, after my mother.”

I kissed her forehead, and then took the seat proffered, sitting so near her that I could lean on the side of the bed as I listened to the story.

Mrs. Goodwin left us alone, and the recital began:

“I remembered your eyes, Miss Minot, and I wanted to tell you all about it—how I came to be here, needing the help you so kindly gave. Oh, I shudder,” she said, “as I think how it might have been that never again my mother could have seen me!”

Her face grew pale, but no tears came, and I could see a resolute look that gave signs of strong will, and for this I felt inwardly thankful.

“I came from my home,” said she, “in search of my husband. Three years ago I was married in my father’s house to Wilmur Bentley, who came South from his Northern home on an artist’s tour, selling many pictures and painting more. He lived in our vicinity for some months with a friend, a wealthy planter by the name of Sumner.” I started involuntarily. “There were two of these gentlemen—brothers—and they owned

large plantations with many colored people. Mr. Bentley had every appearance of a gentleman of honor, and none of us ever doubted his worth. My father gave him a pleasant welcome and a home, and for three brief months we were happy. Suddenly a cloud fell upon him; he appeared troubled, and said 'Mary, I must go North—I have left some tangled business snarls there, which I must see to.' He left, promising an early return. The letters I received from him were frequent, and

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beautifully tender in their expressions of love for me. I was happy; but the days wore into weeks, and his return still delayed. I began to feel anxious and fearful, when I received a letter from Chicago, saying he had been obliged to go to that city on business, and would be unavoidably detained. He would like me to come to him, if it were not for fear of my being too delicate to bear the journey. My parents would have been quite unwilling also, for the promise of the days lay before me, and with this new hope that it would not be so very long ere he would come, I was again contentedly happy. The letters grew less frequent, and the days grew long, and when September came my little girl came too, and how I longed for her father to come.

“My parents telegraphed him of the event, saying also, ‘Come, if possible—Mary is in a fever of anxiety,’ but he did not come; the telegram was not replied to, and although dangerously ill, I lived. Now the letters came no more, and I, still believing in his goodness, felt sure that he was either sick or dead. My little Mabel lived one year. Oh, how sweet she was! and one month after her death I received a letter asking why I was so silent, telling me of great trouble and overwhelming me with sorrow. I answered kindly, but my father was convinced by this that he was a ‘villain,’ to use his own expression. The fact of his not writing for so long, and then writing a letter almost of accusation against me, made me feel fearful, and as I looked back on my suffering, determined, if it were possible to some day know the truth. My answer to the letter I speak of was received, and he again wrote, and this time told me a pitiful tale of the loss by fire of all his artist possessions, and his closing sentence was ‘we may never meet again, for in the grave I hope to find refuge from want. If you desire to answer this, write ‘without delay. It is hard to bear poverty and want.’

“I felt almost wild, and gave father the letter, hoping to receive a generous donation from him, but my father said, ‘Molly, darling, (that is my name at home), the villain lies! no, no, pet, not a cent.’ I cried myself ill, and sent him my wedding ring, a diamond, his gift, since which I have heard nothing.

“I told my father after it was gone, and if he had not loved me so much, I should have felt the power of angry words. He was angry, but he thought of all I had suffered, and he took me right up in his arms, and cried over me. ‘Mollie, darling, it is too bad; you have a woman’s heart. I would to God the man had never been born.

“I had a dear friend to whom I had confided all my sorrow—a Virginia lady, married and living in Boston. Her husband, Mr. Chadwick, is a merchant there, and every year she spends three or four months with her Southern friends. One brother lives in Charleston, my home. We have been attached to each other for years, and my father and mother love her dearly. Three weeks ago she

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arrived at her home in Boston, having been South four months, and at her earnest solicitation I came also. She knew my heart and how determined I was to find Mr. Bentley, and felt willing to aid me in any way possible. We went about the city, and I devoted myself especially to looking at paintings and statuary. I found at last by chance a picture with the name, not of 'Bentley,' but of 'Benton' on it. I traced it to Chicago, and proved it to be his, and there from his own friends gathered the facts which led me on his track."

"Oh!" I cried.

"Wait," said she, "More, Miss Minot; he has a wife, or at least there is a poor woman with two boys living in poverty in the suburbs of Boston, to whom he was married ten years ago. I have been to see her, but did not disclose my secret. Mrs. Chadwick has known of this for a long time, but dared not tell me until I got strong, and was in the North with her. I gave that woman money to help her buy bread, and Mrs. Chadwick will see to her now. She is a lovely character. Benton's home is near this place where she lives, and he goes there once in a great while. Now about my clothes—when I started for this place I was well clad, and the first of my journey quiet and calm, but I think my excitement grew intense, and I must have lost myself utterly. I know it was a week ago when I left Boston, and now as I look back, I remember looking at my baby's picture and everything growing dim in the cars. This India shawl was thrown about my neck, but it seems when you found me I had no other covering. I found the purse where I had sewed it in my dress, but my cloak and bonnet and furs, all are gone.

"I can remember how the name of this place kept ringing in my ears, and I must have asked for it and found it, even though I cannot remember one word. After the baby's picture your eyes came before me, and then old Peter."

Looking at the clock, she said:

"It is only half an hour since you came in, and will you ask Peter to come in and see me? I'm sure I hear him talking in the other room."

I stepped to the door, and there was Matthias.

I said to Mrs. Goodwin:

"Miss Harris wishes to see Peter, she says."

She looked at Matthias, and then said:

"Well, come in, and we'll find out what she means, if we can."

He walked solemnly along to her bedside, and stood as if amazed.

“Peter,” said she, “you know me; I am Mary Harris, and you lived with Mr. Charles Sumner—do say you know me. You said you would deny your master, and you did it,” and she held her hands to him.

He reached forth his own and took the jewelled fingers tenderly in his dark palm as if half afraid; then the tears came, forcing their way, and with an effort he said:

“Oh! oh! honey chile—can’t be pos’ble—what’s done happin to ye, and whar was ye gwine?”

“Never mind, Peter, but do you remember the man who painted beautiful pictures, and stopped awhile with your master’s brother?”

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"Sartin, I does."

"William Bentley he said was his name, but it was Benton; he told us a story."

"De great Lord, Molly chile, you's foun' him, sure—de debbil's got a hold on dat man, an'—"

But I looked a warning, and he waited.

"You remember him then, Peter; he had a light moustache, a pleasing mouth—a very nice young man we thought him to be."

"Yas, yas, dar's whar de mistake come in, wit dat 'ar mustaff," said Matthias dreamily.

"What mistake?" she said.

"Oh! de good Lord bress you, honey, what does you want of dis man?"

"I want to tell him something, and I heard he was here, and now will you find him for me?"

"I will, Miss Molly, 'ef I dies dead for it—de Lord help us."

"Do you think you can?"

"I knows dat ar to be a fack."

"Oh, Peter! I am glad; where is he?"

Poor Matthias looked at me, and I said, "Now, Miss Harris, you must not talk anymore, and I will help Matthias, for I think I know where this man is."

She shut her eyes and sank back among her pillows, looking tired and pale—the knowledge that this destroyer of her hopes was so near was, though looked for and expected, more than she could really bear.

Mrs. Goodwin left the room, motioning to Matthias to follow, and I sat quietly thinking of what to do, when she opened her eyes and said to me:

"I have written to Mrs. Chadwick, and also to mother, and she will send mother's letter from Boston. I cannot write to her of this; it would worry her so; and now, as I can see Wilmur and say to him what I desire, I shall leave you."

"It will kill you to see him."

“You are mistaken. I know I look frail, but I can endure much, and I do not love him any more though he was my Mabel’s father. I want him to go to his poor wife and do right if he can. She loves him and is deluded into believing the strangest things. Robberies and fires and anything he thinks of are an excuse for not sending her money.”

“Oh! he needs hanging,” I said.

“No, no, Miss Minot; if he is unfit for our society he certainly would find nobody to love him there; I am not seeking revenge, though his punishment is sure enough. In two days more I shall be strong enough to see him. Oh, I do hope Peter will find him!”

She needed rest, and I said:

“Now it is best for me to go, and when I come again I would like to bring a beautiful friend.”

“Oh, yes,” she said, “and do come to-morrow!”

She bade me a reluctant “Good bye,” and I told Matthias, I wanted him to walk home with me.

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My walk homeward with Matthias gave me the needed opportunity to talk with him, where naught save the air wandering off to the hills could hear us. I told him of the conversation which I had overheard, and also that I proposed to take the burden on my own shoulders of revealing to Miss Harris the fact of Mr. Benton being with us. "For," I said, "Matthias, it will hardly be safe for you to bear all this. He believes, I think, that you have helped Miss Harris to find him, and has been looking out for trouble since you came to us, for he warned both Louis and myself, and told us not to trust you. He did not, of course, say he knew you; that would not have done at all. But I will do all she asks, then your poor old shoulders will be relieved a little."

"Jes as you say, Miss Emly, pears like its queer nuf an' all happin too, an' ef he had worn just dat mustaff, without de whiskers, I'd know him yere straight off. I said long nuf, he set me on de tinkin groun—um—um—here come Mas'r Louis lookin' arter his gal, I reckon, mighty wise he is; I'd tote a long ways ef 'twas to help him."

Louis went to the village early and had returned to hear from Clara's lips my morning discovery, and came to meet me, anxious to learn the story of the poor lamb, which I rehearsed, having time to tell it all during the rest of the walk, and ending with "it is strange enough to make a book," just as we entered our gate.

Louis said the cloud must break ere long; and when Matthias left I followed along the path behind him, feeling that Mr. Benton might again assail him, and I was not mistaken.

"Look here," came from the angle, and "yas, sah," from Matthias as he turned to answer.

"What did you come home with Miss Minot for?" said Benton.

"Kase she axed me too, sah."

"Whom has she been to see?"

"Dat poor gal."

"Who is that girl, do you know?"

"Yas, sah," said the honest old man.

"You know more to-day than you did yesterday."

"Yas, sah."

"Why don't you tell me who she is."

"You didn't ax me, you said did I know?"

“I don’t want any of your nigger talk. I want her name, and by the great ——”

“Look yer, Mas’r Benton, if you’s gwine to dip in an’ swar, I’ll tote long by myself.”

“Well, tell me who she is.”

“She tole me she was dat little Molly Harris dat lived down in Charleston, an——”

“How in thunder did she get here?”

“Dunno, sah.”

“You do know, and I tell you you’ll make money to tell me all about it.”

“Dunno nothin’ moah. I said dat same word, how you git yere, and she say never min ’bout dat.”

“What else did she say, what does she want?”

“Wall, de res ob what she tell me, ’pears like she didn’t ’spect me tell. I’ll go over thar, an’ tell her you wants to know, an——”

“The devil you will, you impudent rascal—all I want to know is if she wants to find me.”

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"De good Lord, dat's de berry secret I don't want to tell."

"Ah! ha! my fine fellow, caught at last."

"Well," said he, "ef de Lord was right yere in dis vilit angil he'd say Matt dunno nothin' 'bout how de poor lamb got roun' to dis town."

"I don't know how to believe this, but now look here, Matt, if you'll go over there and tell her I've gone to Chicago, I'll do something nice for you. I'll get you a suit of nicer clothes than you ever had, and a shiny hat—hey, what do you say?"

"Mas'r Benton," said Matthias slowly, "I'm never gwine to tell a lie an' set myself in de place whar Satan hisself can ketch a holt an me. No, sah, 'pears like I'm ready to do what's right, but dat ain't right nohow, an' 'pears, too, its mighty funny you's so scart of dat poor little milk-faced gal. Trus' in de Lord, Mas'r Benton, an' go right on over thar—she can't hurt you nohow."

"Don't talk your nonsense to me; you're on her side, she's bought you, but I'll be even with you; I'll slap your face now to make a good beginning."

"No, sah," said Matthias, "I'm done bein' a slave jes now, an' ef you want to make me hit you I shall jes do it; fur you no bizness in de law specially tryin' to put it on a poor ole nigger who can't go by ye 'thout your grabbin' at him jes ready to kill, an' all kase you's done suthin' you's shamed of an' tinks he knows it. I'm gwine over to the groun' room."

I feared Mr. Benton would strike him, and I ran to the gate, and stood there while Matthias passed out and along the road. Mr. Benton disappeared suddenly.

Supper-time was at hand, and there had been no time to tell mother what I had heard of Miss Harris' history. At the table Ben, as usual, had inquiries to make, and I said, "Oh! she is better, Ben; you shall see her, for she will stay a long time."

"Where did she come from, Emily?"

From Charleston, South Carolina.

"Well, ain't that funny?" said he; "that's the very place Matthias came from, and perhaps she does know him after all."

"Oh! yes, she does," I replied, and raising my eyes to meet Mr. Benton's gaze, I shot the truth at him with a dark glance; his own eyes fell, and he looked as if overwhelmed with confusing thoughts; and the consciousness of being foiled roused the demon within him. This, however, was not the time or place to unbottle his wrath, and it must swell silently within.



My father began to feel the shadows thickening round him, and he kindly forbore to say a word regarding the matter, as did also mother. Aunt Hildy moved a little uneasily in her chair, and I knew she could have said something as cutting as a knife, but did not. As for me, I could and did talk on other things, and congratulated myself on another victory. I afterward told mother all Miss Harris said, and she remarked quietly:

"I am very thankful she is his wife."

"Well, but she isn't," I said.

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"Yes, I know, Emily, the previous marriage would be held as the only lawful tie, but it is much better than it might have been. She has a good home and parents, and is young. Years will restore her. I cannot see, however, why she should have taken the pains to find him here."

"For the reason that she desires to plead with him for the wife and boys that are in need, and is a strong noble woman too,—why, she will have the strength of a lion when she gets well, and there is a resolute determination on her part to place before Mr. Benton a plain picture of his duty."

"Hem!" said Aunt Hildy, "she can get her picture all ready and put on the prettiest paint in the market,—that man will be gone in less than twenty-four hours. Can't I see which way his sails are set?" Our back door-sill never was swept cleaner than where this sentence fell.

"That may be," said mother; "I hope he will, for it seems to me we have too great a duty to perform if he stays. I feel ill able to undertake the task."

Aunt Hildy turned to hang up her broom, saying as she did so:

"I'd like to have your sister Phebe give him a lecture—she'd tear him all to pieces jest as easy as shellin' an ear of corn. I like to hear her talk; she ain't afraid of all the lies that can be invented. What a good hit she give Deacon Grover that night when he come in with his ideas of nothin' spillin' over. She talked good common sense, and hew as the subject, for it was all about a hypocrite. He didn't stay to see if he could get a mug of cider to save his own, but set mighty uneasy and was off for home before eight o'clock. That done me good."

That evening was spent by me in conversation with Louis. Next morning at the breakfast table the subject of the poor lamb was not broached, and directly after, when the stage came along, Mr. Benton took it to go to the village on business.

"There," said Aunt Hildy, "he never'll step on to this door-sill again—but I wouldn't throw a horseshoe after him if I knew it would be good luck. He don't deserve any."

"Why, he hasn't taken as much as a carpet-bag," said my father, "of course, he will be back again."

"No, sir, Mr. Minot; that feller is up to snuff—he ain't going to stop now for any duty pictures," and she turned to her work as if satisfied with having made a true prophecy.

I spoke to Clara about going over to see Miss Harris, and she felt inclined to go that morning.

"Louis, too, may go," she said. "Come, dear boy."

We were very welcome, and found Miss Harris seated in the old rush-chair before the fire-place. Her dress was a most becoming wrapper of blue (she found it in Clara's bundle) her hair falling as on the previous day in natural curls, and the same India shawl thrown over her sloping shoulders. She was exactly Clara's size, and when the two came together, Clara said, "We are sisters surely."

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But afterward, as they sat side by side, I could see such a difference. Alike in form and complexion, also having regular features, yet the light in our Clara's eyes was incomparably purer, savored less of earth. Miss Harris' face was sweet, truthful, the lines of her mouth alone defining her powerful will and courage. She was very beautiful, but earthly, while over my own Clara's face there fell the unmistakable light of something beyond. Oh! my saving angel, how my heart beat as I sat there drawing the comparison, giving to Miss Harris a place in the sitting-room of my womanly feeling, and yielding to my beloved Clara the entire room where lay the purest thoughts which had been boon to my spirit, coming to life at the touch of her tender hand! She was a beacon light in the wilderness of thought.

"Tell me, Miss Minot," said Miss Harris, "tell me all you know, for I feel you do know much."

I explained Mr. Benton's coming to stay with us, and when I said he took the stage this morning for town, and will be back, I suppose—

"Never," she interrupted, "he has heard I am here."

"Yes," I said, and repeated his conversation with Matthias.

"I am then foiled, but he will not elude the truth that goes with him. He may have gone to his waiting wife. Mrs. Chadwick will write me, for she will not lose sight of her."

No tears came to her eyes, but the determined look deepened as it were into strength, and she said:

"It is too bad. I did hope to be able to make him do his duty. Now I must hasten to become strong, and go back to Boston. I will find him yet—I'm sure I will."

She talked freely of her Southern home, and expressed comfort at the hope of one day seeing us there.

"I need a little help to get there myself," she said; "I have no cloak—can you get one for me, Miss Minot? I am fortunate enough to be able to pay for it, my purse being with me."

Louis looked admiringly at the girl-woman (for such she seemed to be), and when our call ended said to her:

"When you are strong enough to leave, may you receive great help to do what seems to be your whole duty; and if little mother or myself can aid you, please command us."

“Thank you,” she said, “you remind me much of my dark-eyed Southern friends.” We took our departure. It was only one week after that the old stage carried her from our sight; but we did not forget her, nor the sad experience which had developed in her so great a strength.

Mr. Benton did not return, as Aunt Hildy predicted, and the stage brought a note for Hal, in which he said he was unavoidably detained, having found important letters at the village. He would write him a long letter, and the letter came after ten days’ waiting, bearing the postmark of —— (he was with his wife). He wrote that he was with a friend, and some unexpected business relations would keep him there for a time. He desired his belongings sent

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to him, if it would not trouble Hal too much. He feared that it would be a long time ere he would be again situated amongst such pleasant surroundings, "and they are, as you well know, so much needed by an artist," he said. I do wonder what the man thought. Hal and Mary had not known Miss Harris' story, but Louis had read the letter to Hal, and his perfidy was apparent to all. No word had been said, however, and I presume he (not learning about the letters) thought Hal still a good friend, which was in fact the case. Hal said:

"I would not lose sight of him for the world. Emily, his hand was one of those which led me across the bridge of sighs when my art was coming to life, and I shall help him. He may yet need more than we know."

"We can afford to pity him, but what about his wife, Hal?"

"His wife I intend to see. Let us hope he will yet prove of some assistance to her."

"Good brother! blessed brother! I have felt so angry with him, Hal, but I will try to be good. Of course Mary will be with you."

"She thinks he needs a little punishment, but I tell her to be patient, and to let the days tell us their story."

"Amen," said the voice of our Clara, who was always in the right place, "and may we not hope for all the suffering ones. There are bruised hearts all around us. Let the precious nutriment of our love and care fall on them as the dew, calling forth tender blossoms, whose perfume may mingle with their lives. Wisdom and strength, my Emily, will help us to these things, and the prayer of England's church be not so sadly true."

It was a relief to us all, and we could take long breaths now that Mr. Benton had gone, and mysteries solved had opened before us a vista of quiet days, into which our feet would gladly turn. We had to talk him over thoroughly, and I was glad to be able to say at last:

"Peace to his memory; let him rest."

The letter we expected from the sweet girl-woman came, and we heard each week of her and her unrewarded search going on. At last, when out from the snows blue violets sprang, there came a letter, saying,

"It is done. I found him looking at a lovely picture, one of his own. It was a fancy sketch, but the face, eyes and hair, those of Mrs. Desmonde, I know. He had clothed her in exquisitely lovely apparel, and she was looking out over a waste of waters, but I cannot describe it justly. If her son were here, he would secure it at any price. I



touched his shoulder; he turned, and with the strangest look in his eyes. He sought even then to avoid me, thinking probably I might prove a tempest in a teapot, and make a terrible scene. I said quietly, 'I am only desirous of two hours' conversation with you;' introduced Mrs. Chadwick to him as to a friend, and invited him to call; gave him my card and turned away, naming an hour the ensuing day; for I knew he would come. My manner disarming him,

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I really believe he felt relieved to know I was not on his track with weapons of law. He came, and I received him almost cordially. The parlor had been left for us, and my friend, at my request, sat outside the door where she could hear all that passed. Of course, I cannot tell you what I said, but my revelations were startlingly true, and he could not gainsay them, neither did he try to. He seemed rather astonished that I no longer desired his companionship and the great love which every true woman needs. I answered with spirit, and just as I felt, that while his love might be boundless, it could no longer be anything for me. I knew his soul was capable of maintaining the appearance of purity of thought long enough to delineate its outline on canvas, and while I admired his talent in verse, I had tasted the bitter dregs of his falseness, and was now thoroughly undeceived as to his character. Never again could I be misled by the semblance of a love which had no reality beneath its honeyed words. I told him also that our angel Mabel had been orphaned by his cruelty. And oh! how strong I felt when I said, 'Go to your own wife, whose burden I would not increase by revealing my own terrible secret. Live for her and those two boys. Redeem yourself in the eyes of your God as well as before those whom you have so foully wronged. If you will do this, I will say the peace of well-doing be with you.' He really felt the power of my words, and honored me for them, I know, and when he left my presence, he said:

"If life should hold for me henceforth some different purposes, would you be my friend? and if in the great hereafter we shall meet, will Mabel be with me there? I wish I could have seen her. Forgive me, Mary; you are heaping coals of fire on my head. I thought you sought my utter destruction.'

"My father would have appealed to you only through the law,' I said, 'but that would have been wrong, and would leave you no chance to grow better. Go, and do right, and there is yet time for redemption.'

"But you—what of you?' he asked.

"I rise from beneath the weight of sorrow that covered me so early in life, to find there is yet much worth living for. I shall live and be happy.' They were not false tears, the drops that fell on my hand at parting; and I said, after he had gone:

"Thank God who giveth me the victory.' My friend expected me to faint or moan, or make some sign of distress. No, I felt a great joy within, and I believe he will do better. I inclose to you some verses he sent me at the time he wrote me the terrible letter of want and despair. They had their effect, as I told you. Monday I leave for the South; I shall write you immediately after my return. God bless you all.

Mary."

We read the letter together, Clara, Louis and I—and here is the poetry, which speaks for itself of the talent this man possessed, and tells us, as Clara said, how fruitful the soil would have proved if it had been properly tilled.

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I was a poet nerved and strung
Up to the singing pitch you know,
And this since melody first was young
Has evermore been the pitch of woe:
She was a wistful, winsome thing,
Guileless as Eve before her fall,
And as I drew her 'neath my wing—
Wilmur and Mary, that was all.

Oh! how I loved her as she crept
Near and nearer my heart of fire!
Oh! how she loved me as I swept
The master strings of her spirit's lyre!
Oh! with what brooding tenderness
Our low words died in her father's hall,
In the meeting clasp, and parting press—
Wilmur and Mary, that was all!

I was a blinded fool, and worse,
She was whiter than driven snow,
And so one morning the universe
Lost forever its sapphire glow;
Across the land, and across the sea,
I felt a horrible shadow crawl,
A spasm of hell shot over me,
Wilmur and darkness, that was all!

Leagues on leagues of solitude lie,
Dun and dreary between us now,
And in my heart is a terrible cry,
With clamps of iron across my brow.
Never again the olden light—
Ever the sickly, dreadful pall;
I am alone here in the night,
Wilmur and misery, that is all!

For the solemn haze that soon will shine,
For the beckoning hand I soon shall see,
For the fitful glare of the mortal sign
That bringeth surcease of agony,
For the dreary glaze of the dying brain,
For the mystic voice that soon will call,
For the end of all this passion and pain,
Wilmur is waiting—that is all.

The letter and poem finished, we talked long of our new friend, and the strange experiences brought into our quiet lives, and Clara said:

“Oh! how long must all the good in the world of thought wait for the hand of love to open the avenues of work for willing doers! Cannot strong men weep; and must not angels sorrow to realize the darkness and the errors where light should dawn, and in a morning of new life men and women stand as brothers and sisters in the grand work of helping each other to do all that lies on either hand! Fields whiten for the harvest, but the reapers are not many. These experiences come to us as teachers, and oh, Louis and Emily, let your hearts search to find these sorrowing ones! May your hands never be withheld from the needed alms, and may you work in quiet love and patience through the years! The mists will shroud the valley, and ere long, my dear ones, I shall leave you, for I cannot stay too long away from all that awaits me there. If I had more strength I could stay longer—but strength is what we need to hold the wings of our soul closely down, and when the physical chain grows weak, all that is waiting comes nearer. Spiritual strength grows greater, and the waiting soul plumes its wings for flight. It does not seem so far, and Louis, Emily, when my visible presence goes from you, your prayers will come to me. I shall hear, perhaps I shall answer you also, for I shall be your guardian angel. Then—is it not beautiful to think of the long, long years, and no death for evermore?”

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She closed her eyes, and looked serenely happy, but I was weeping bitterly, and Louis' eyes swam in tears, as he said:

"Little mother, wait still longer, we cannot let you go."

"Oh! Louis, my dear boy, it is not now, it may be just a few years yet, but it is sure to come—and I love to talk with you of this change. It is natural for us to pass into the next room. If I go I must say all the things I need to first."

Aunt Hildy and mother entered, and we talked again of our new friend Mary. When God touched me that night with his magic wand, I dreamed of fairies, and saw wondrous changes at their hands, earth and heaven strangely mingling.

CHAPTER XVII.

PRECIOUS THOUGHTS.

I like to drift with the days, and scan them one by one, but as I recall all that I have written, I say to myself: "Emily must take some long step now, else the tale of her life will never be told, even though the changes came day by day, falling drop by drop into the lap of the waiting years."

Mother was feeling better, and when the rose-covered days of June came over us our hearts were singing. Clara seemed well (for her) and I forebore to grieve over her prophecy of leaving us, though for a few days after she had said those words, an icy feeling crept over me as I thought on what they foreboded. I could not see how we could bear to lose her presence; life without her would be an empty vial, not only for us, but for all. We loved her devotedly. In this beautiful June I felt younger than ever before, and believed that the constant saying to myself, "I will do right," was brightening all the world for me.

I was twenty-one years old the previous March, and it seemed to me I looked much younger than when two years ago we saw for the first time the face of our Clara Desmonde. March was a sort of wild month to find one's birthday in, and I never think of it without recalling the saying of one who had seen hard work and sorrow as well. It was a lady I met once at Aunt Phebe's, who came to bring a book for her to read, and in the course of conversation she said:

"Mrs. Hungerford, I was born in March, and have come to the delightful conclusion that all who dare to be born in this month must fight the beasts at Ephesus."

This year I had certainly fought Mr. Benton, and perhaps I should find another experience in the next March month that came.



Ben was seventeen years old in January, and this was a great year for him; he had sought and obtained father's consent to manage a farm for himself. Hal could not, of course, till the land he owned, and Ben had made arrangements to do it. He wanted the entire care, and Hal told him to go right ahead the same as if he owned it all and see what he could do. This was quite a step, and, as it proved, a successful one. He was at home in his old room at night, but ate at Hal's table, and Mary said he was so good they could never keep house without him. I rejoiced that he could fill a position for which he was fitted, albeit father and Hal were both disappointed that he could not have book knowledge enough to place him in some position in public life.

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"That was mere ambition," mother said, and Aunt Phebe remarked concerning him, that he should be let alone, and to help him to be an honest man was the wisest course possible.

"So I think," said Aunt Hildy; "common sense has got power to last a good while, and high ideas sometimes kill everything."

Louis was enjoying the summer "hugely," as he expressed it, and Clara was very willing to aid him in everything he undertook, and he was not an idle dreamer, for though he did dream beautifully, and talked often of the fairy land, as he called the home of his pure, good thoughts, he was a worker in all ways. If a sudden shower threatened the meadow, he was there with the men, doing all he could to aid them, and not slow to learn the use of rake and pitchfork. If Aunt Peg needed attention he was soon over to see her, and when he went to the village, he was the errand boy for any and all. He became well known among us, and the dear old home among the hills gave him a hearty welcome. Even Deacon Grover came to the conclusion that the city chap didn't put on airs, and told me he should think I'd almost want to catch him, laughing heartily at his own words. I always disliked this; it is a mark of a small brain to tell a story or say something witty, and crown your own talk by laughing at yourself—that would spoil the best joke in the world for me.

One August afternoon I called Clara to the window to watch Louis and Matthias coming along slowly together in a close and evidently interesting conversation. They came in together, and the face of our dusky friend was covered with the light of a new thought.

"Why, how happy you look!" I said.

"He feels happy," answered Louis; "they are going to have a wedding over at Aunt Peg's, and I am first man."

"Yes," said Matthias, "'pears like I kin get married now. Miss Smith, she feels lonesome, and I bother her 'bout my vittles, an' we kin set by one fire jes' as well."

"I shall write Aunt Phebe to-morrow, and ask her," I said, laughing.

"Um—um," said he, "reckon she's 'gaged to make me two white shirts 'reddy."

"Why, when did she know it?"

"Oh! she dunno nothing definite, but she said long ago she'd make 'em for me when I git married, an' I done come over to see ef you'd sen' a word about it to her."

"I will most certainly, but how long before you will be married?"

"'Bout tree weeks, I guess; haint set on no day. Let Miss Smith do that."

“And you’ll have a wedding?”

“No, Miss Em’ly. For de lan’ sake, you don’t ’spect we’s gwine into dat yere meetin’ ’ouse for de folks to call it a nigger show, duz ye? We’s too ole to be gwine roun’ to be laf at.”

“I didn’t mean to plague you, Matthias; please excuse me,” for he looked the least bit provoked. “I’ll make some cake, though, and you’ll want witnesses, so Louis and I can come, anyway.”

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“Spect you two need to get used to dat yere ceremony more’n de rest of de folks yere; yas, you kin come.”

Oh! how Louis laughed at this, saying:

“There, Emily, Matthias knows too much; look out for breakers when you talk to him.”

The old man laughed heartily also, and left us to talk over the coming event.

“Two shipwrecked lives trying to keep close to the shore of content for the rest of the journey, that’s what they are,” said Louis, “and we will help them, and do God’s service by ministering to their small needs, for ‘Inasmuch as ye do it unto the least of these, ye do it unto me.’”

He had so many Scriptural quotations at his tongue’s end nowadays, I often told him he would be a minister, I knew. Many of his days were spent in the society of Mr. Davis, and they read the Bible through together. Louis said the New Testament had great charms for him, and Mr. Davis said to Clara and myself when we called upon him, that the Scriptures had never been so blessed to his heart as now.

“Your son,” turning to Clara, “is not my student; he has the most lucid perception, and transfers his thoughts to my heart with wonderful strength, and yet he stirs the soil of years with tender hand, and never forgets I am growing old. Some day he will have a pulpit of his own.”

“Do you think so?” I said.

“Oh, it must be! He is like his mother; chosen for the good work. I delight in his society, and hope never to miss it while I stay. I am not strong, and some day I fear I shall not be able to preach when the Sabbath dawns. If I do fail at any time, I shall secure his help.” Clara only said:

“My dear boy shall do that which he can do well, for there will be no stumbling blocks laid in his path; if he starts right, and I believe he has, the way will be made plain, and as day unto day shall utter speech, so night unto night shall show its knowledge.”

“He seems benevolent,” said Mr. Davis, “and he will devote much of his time, and substance as well, to the uplifting of the degraded, and the exalting of mankind through daily practice.”

“So be it,” said Clara; “I shall be glad if he can uplift the lantern light of truth, that it may shine over all the dark and devious ways of ignorance, and when my feet shall walk beside his father’s on the hills, may our souls call to him, and his heart receive from us the strength which our love can give—angels to minister to his wants. Oh! this is beautiful to think upon.”



The eyes of our good minister filled with tears, and I thought how wisely and well Clara sows the seed. I felt ashamed to think how unmindful of this tolerance of ideas I had been when his fiery sermon aroused my spirit, and I have often since felt that we all possess too much intolerance each toward the other. Mr. Davis was original in thought, and had always regilded as it were the old texts in his sermon, until they could not fail to interest us; and when, yielding to pressure of conviction regarding eternal punishment, he warned his flock, Clara judged him rightly, and I was wrong; for while the idea was horrible to me, I had not wisdom or judgment to express myself, whereas Clara had opened wide the door of love to his heart, and he received and acknowledged the baptism of pure and elevating thought.

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His absolute fire died away into the description of conscience torment, and through his later years the mellow ripeness of new thought took in large part the place of the old. Mr. Davis was very anxious concerning his health, and we did not wonder, for his cheeks grew pale and thin. He seemed much older than he really was, and in two years of time had gained ten in the defining face lines. These were, it seemed, ineffaceable, and as the months wore on grew deeper still.

Matthias' marriage came off in September, and our whole household were invited. Aunt Hildy said she'd send them something, "but no weddins for me," and she shook her head when I asked whether she was going.

Mother was busy and did not feel like sparing the time, so at last, Clara, Louis and I went over, and Mrs. Davis came with her husband, who performed the ceremony in a pleasant way. I think no couple ever had just such wedding presents. A blanket and some home-spun towels from Aunt Hildy; a large silk bandana handkerchief, a chintz dress pattern, and a little bead purse with some bits of gold from Clara (how much I never knew), and from Louis a load of shingles, and the services of a carpenter to re-shingle the little house, with some sensible gifts from Hal and our people. Aunt Peg was beside herself with joy which she could not express to suit her, and at last she said, "won't try to tell you nothin'—can't do it."

Mr. and Mrs. Davis stayed only a few minutes after the ceremony, but we three had a long chat with our good friends, and when we left them at the door, tears of gratitude fell from Aunt Peg's eyes. I looked back, after we had started toward home, to see them sitting on the door stone side by side, and their dark faces resting in the shadow of the Cyprus vine was a pleasant picture.

"Their cup runneth over," said Louis; "I am glad and 'we shall rejoice with those that rejoice, and mourn, with those that mourn.'"

"Another Bible quotation, Louis?"

"Yes," said he, "and why may we not have these truths, like blessed realities, walk side by side with us through life. Every day might let the sunshine into the room of our thought, through the bars of understanding that stand as defining lines between them.

"Mr. Davis says you are to be a preacher. I believe you are already," said I.

"Would my Emily object? I think not, for has not little mother said, 'Emily will do it, Emily will help you?'"

I did not answer with words, but my eyes spoke volumes, and he read them truly.

Letters came to us monthly from our Southern Mary, and Clara often said she had hope of seeing her again. Mrs. Chadwick had kept track of Mrs. Benton, and that strange



compound of villainy and taste—her husband—had really been touched by Mary’s plea and was living with his family. I could hardly believe it, and when Hal stepped in one evening with “love’s fawn” at his side, and a letter from that veritable Benton, we had a grand surprise. I will not try to tell you of this well written epistle, but this interesting item I will relate; here are his words: “You will doubtless be surprised when I say I am married and keeping house. I found my wife here; she has two nice boys. If you come to this part of the globe, as I hope you will, call on us. You will be welcome.”

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"My soul!" said Aunt Hildy, "if the other world did have a fiery pit for liars, that man would have the best seat, and nearest the fire."

Mother smiled and said, "He does not know, of course, that we have heard of this wife, for how should he?"

"Why, certainly not," said Hal, "and I shall never tell him. Let him do right if he can, and we perhaps can hardly blame him if he does want to hold on to the few who have proven their friendship, for I think his friends do not number many. He needs them all."

"Judgment is mine saith the Lord," said Aunt Hildy.

"Well, that may be true, but I cannot feel that we are His direct agents for cursing the man."

"Neither are we," said Louis, "and if we obey the commandment, 'Love ye one another,' where can the curse come? No, no, Mrs. Patten, we must wait for the spirit of the man to grow good and true, and the weakness of the flesh by this will be overcome; he cannot forget all the wrong, and probably might recall the words, 'The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.'"

"Well," said Aunt Hildy, "I 'spose that's the Gospel good and true, but I do get riled at his cuttings up. I've seen 'em before, yes I've seen 'em before."

And she sat as if feeling her way back through the mist of years. I wondered what she had suffered, but she kept her own secrets close to her heart and held steadfastly to the truth doing much good. Her busy fingers through the long winter evenings kept adding to the store of stockings she was knitting for somebody who needed—and the needy would surely come in her path.

Aunt Peg and Matthias were quietly happy, and they came out of church every Sabbath and walked with a pleasant dignity homeward. Matthias had memorized the old hymns and he could pick many of them out, having learned to designate them by their first word or line, and this he called reading.

"Pears like I kin read a few himes, Miss Emily," he said. This is the way with us through life. It seems to me we get the first word or line and then go blindly on making mistakes and grievously sinning in our ignorance, unknowing of the great beauty that awaits us in the perfect rendering of life's beautiful psalm.

Clara said we were like children running through a meadow, trampling the daisies and clovers under our feet, and with breathless impatience hurrying on through the long day to the fall of night, and when the sunset of our earthly life came on, pausing then at the corner of the meadow, we gathered the few tired blossoms at our feet and passed out into the unknown.

“Oh, my Emily!” she said, “if our steps could be even and slow we should pick our comfort-daisies and our love-clovers on either side, while our feet still kept the one small path of our greatest duty; and this to me is the straight and narrow path spoken of.”

Her types of thought were so purely beautiful, and yet she drew them from the plainest facts. She was growing nearer heaven daily, or perhaps we were seeing her soul more clearly through the days. I thought and comforted myself that we should not lose her.

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Louis and I talked sometimes of the coming time when we should receive the sacred seal of marriage, and when the year for which he asked had expired and the fall term opened in the seminary, he said:

"Little mother tells me she cannot let me go back, she is too tired to live without me. I knew it before she told me; her strength is very little without mine, and," he added, "even if we do all we can, that little mother must leave us before many years. You know, Emily, how I have wanted all my life to be an artist. Perhaps I shall, sometime, but now before me I can see a need that will bring me into different work, and it may be also (his eyes were far away) I can, after all, do better service by painting living faces."

"What do you mean, Louis?"

"I mean, Emily, that when the tired hearts we find, feel comfort creeping over them, the work shines through the eyes and glows within the smiles that beam upon us. Did we not paint a pleasant picture at the wedding, and are not these works of art appreciated through endless time? Will they not repay us with something better than the gold which we may lose, the earthly things that perish? And again, I have seriously thought that it is not right for me to take the work that others who need might have. Side by side with our great love must walk these truths. I cannot see yet how our future plans are to be arranged, or where our home will be. What does your good heart say, Emily?"

"Oh! I cannot tell you, Louis. I sometimes imagine a little cosy home like Hal's, and then it dissolves beyond my reach and I say 'Time will tell it all.' Your mother taught me that one of the greatest lessons in life is to learn to wait, and move with the tide if we can instead of against it. These hills are very dear to me."

"May they never be less!" said Louis, gathering me to himself; while I reverently thought, "How glorious a manhood is his! how great the love he gives me!"

Time passed rapidly. Ben's first season as a real farmer had passed, and storehouse and barn were filled. His hands grew strong and his blows were telling. A handsome woodpile was one of the things he was truly proud of, and everything was done in good season and with perfect system. Hal said that he and Mary were living with Ben. Father was surprised at his success, and when, in the winter, he walked in with a dozen brooms of his own make, Aunt Hildy said:

"Industry and economy were two virtues that the Lord would see well rewarded. You'll be a rich man and a generous one too. Wish your Aunt Phebe'd come up to see us."

"She's coming," said Ben. "I've written to her to come to our house and stay a week. I want her to come and see my broom-corn room. I'll bet she'll be interested in it, and I'm going to give her six brooms to take home with her. But did you know Deacon Grover's very sick?"

“Why, no, indeed!” said I.

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"Well, he is, and Mrs. Grover wants Louis to come over. He'd better go back with me. They expect he'll die; he is troubled to breathe."

I called Louis and he went over. He came back to supper and told us he was going to stay with him all night.

"Mr. Davis says he cannot save his life, and they are to have Dr. Brown from the village. The man is terribly frightened; he knows he must go. He says he's afraid he has been too mean to get into heaven, and he moans piteously. His poor wife is nearly distracted."

"Shall I go with you, Louis?" I said.

"You might go over but I hardly think I need you all night there. He has been ill more than a week. I should not be surprised if he left us before morning."

"Small loss to us," said Aunt Hildy, "but if the poor critter knows he's been mean, perhaps he'll see his way through better. I'll go over if it wont torment him."

"You are just the one," said Louis.

"Well, I hope I sha'nt set him to thinking about—never mind what I say. Let me get my herb bag and start along."

We found the poor man no better, and wise Dr. Brown shook his head ominously. He was a regular grave-yard doctor, and I thought it a pity to set up the deacon's tombstone while yet he breathed. His poor wife was taking on terribly (as Aunt Hildy expressed it). When Deacon Grover saw Louis he tried to speak. Louis went near and took his hand, and he whispered:

"Peace, you bring me peace."

"It is all right over there," said Louis; "do not fear."

"All right," said the sufferer, and then, looking at his wife, he said, "Be her friend." A smile passed over his face, his eyes closed, and Deacon Grover was dead.

Mr. Goodman and Matthias came over to help Louis lay him out, and his funeral took place from the church the following Sunday. Louis was a great help to Mrs. Grover and she needed all the aid he could give. Her spirits were broken in her early days, and she followed the deacon in a little less than a year, her brain failing rapidly, her body having been weak for years.

Many changes had occurred during this year of my life, and when the beads upon my rosary of years numbered twenty-two, it seemed hardly a day since I had counted

twenty-one. How little time from one birthday to another, and in childhood how long the time between!

I was growing older, and the days challenged each other in their swiftness, but they were all pleasant to me, even though the church-bell often tolled the passing of souls, and the quiet of our hills was broken by the ringing of improvement's hammer as it fell on the anvil of our possessions. Long lines of streets passed through the meadowlands, and where, in less level places, rocks and stones were in the path, the power of inventive genius was applied and the victory gained. Some of our people felt it keenly. To father it was an advantage, but to Aunt Hildy, the opposite.

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"Goin' to pass right through my nest, Mr. Minot, and I tell you it aint so easy to think of that spot of ground as a grave-yard. 'Twont be nothin' else to me, never. Oh, the years I bury there!"

Father ventured to suggest remuneration.

"No, no, nothin' can't pay; they don't know it, Mr. Minot, but it's a bitter pill." And a shadow overspread her resolute features. She determined on making our house her home "forever and a day arter" she said, and bore it as patiently as she could; but I saw great drops fall from her eyes as she looked over to that little home and watched its demolition. She said she had prayed for a strong wind to do the work, but this was not granted. My own heart leaped to my throat in sympathy, but knowing her so well I said nothing.

Louis was more than busy. I wondered when my birthday came if he would remember it. He did, and all the evening of that day we sat together and talked of our future.

"Emily, I am feeling glad to-night; my heart sings loud for joy. You cannot think how beautiful you have grown in my eyes; even though you filled my heart long days ago, that heart-room does expand with growth, and your queenly beauty still fills it to completeness. Let your hair fall over your shoulders; look out over the future days with your speaking eyes as if you were a picture, my Emily." And as he said this my shell-comb was in his hand and my long and heavy hair lay about me like a mantle. He liked to see it so, and I sat as if receiving a blessed benediction.

"Can you see nothing before you?" he asked.

"Mists, like drapery curtains, shade the days," I said: "What is it you would have me find?"

"Find the month of June's dear roses,
Find a trellis and a vine;
Ask your heart, my queenly darling,
If the sun will on us shine,
And my heart, love's waiting trellis,
Then receive its clinging vine.
Have I spoken well and truly?
Does your soul like mine decide?
And, with June's dear wealth of roses,
Shall I claim you for a bride?
Do the old hills answer, darling?
Unto me they seem to say:
'Two young hearts in truth have waited;
Emily may name the day.'"

As the words of his impromptu verse died away, the moon, looking through the rifted clouds, beamed an affirmation, and I said:

“Let June be the month, Louis; the day shall name itself.”

Clara called: “It is nine o’clock, my dear ones;” and we said “good night.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

EMILY’S MARRIAGE.

Louis’ birthday came on the 24th of June, and it seemed very appropriate to me that this should be the day of our wedding, and, as I said to him; the day named itself, and it also came on Sunday. I had no thought of being married in the old church, but Louis was positive that it would be best.

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"You know," he said, "that all these good people around us feel an interest very natural to those who are acquainted with everybody in their own little town. They will enjoy our marriage in the church where all can come and none be slighted, and the evening after they can be invited to call on us at home."

"Oh, Louis!" I said, "I would much rather go quietly over to Mr. Davis'."

"Yes, Emily," he replied, "to take one of our pleasant walks over the hill and step in there; but after all I can see how it will be wiser for us not to be selfish in this matter. Never mind how we feel: these friends of ours are of much account, and the many new thoughts that brighten their existence as well as our own must fall, I believe, on us as a people as well as individually. A private wedding will cause unkind remarks, and perhaps unpleasant feelings, and idle conjectures may grow to be stern realities. Let us avoid all this, and as we have heretofore been among them, let us still keep our vessel close to the shore of their understanding, though we may often drift out into the ocean unseen by them, and gather to ourselves the pearls of new and strengthening thought 'Let him who would be chief among you be your servant.' Do you understand me?"

"I do, Louis, and 'Emily will do it,' for she knows you are right; but I should never have thought of it; and now another important consideration."

"The bridal robe?" said Louis.

"Yes," I said, "just that; the thought of being elaborately dressed is distasteful to me as well as unsuited to our desires, for a wedding display would certainly arouse the spirit of envy if nothing more."

"Trust that to little mother, Emily; she desires to have that privilege, I know."

"Let it be so."

And here we fixed the arrangement for the birthday and wedding day to be one; but it came on a Sunday, and hence the necessity of a talk with Mr. Davis, which resulted in the arranging for a short afternoon sermon, and after it the ceremony. We were not to enter the church until the proper moment, and Ben said he could manage it, for when the minister began his last prayer he would climb the rickety ladder into the old square box of a belfry and hang out a yard of white cloth on a stick.

"And then," he added, "you can jump right into the wagon and be there in three minutes."

He was the most perfect boy to plan at a moment's notice, but Louis told him not to hazard his life on the belfry ladder for we could manage it all without.

“And besides,” he said, “you, Ben, must walk into church with us; we are not going unprotected. Hal and Mary, Ben and little mother, and Mr. Minot with his wife and Aunt Hildy. That is the programme as I have it.”

You should have seen those eyes of the young farmer dilate with surprise as he gave a long and significant whistle and turned toward home, doubtless thinking to surprise Hal and Mary with this new chapter in his experience.

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The 10th day of June brought us a letter from Aunt Phebe with news of her marriage.

“Weddins don’t never go alone more’n funerals,” said Aunt Hildy. “Here Miss Hungerford’s been married since February, and we’ve just heard tell of it. Hope she’s got a good, sensible man, but ‘taint likely; no two very sensible folks get very near each other, that is, for life. She’s a good woman. What does he do to git a livin’?”

“Teaches school,” I replied.

“Hem!” said she, “school teachers don’t generally know much else. Eddicated men aint great on homelife; they want a monstrous sight of waitin’ on.”

“Let us hope for the best in this case,” said I. “Here comes Matthias; he knows Mr. Dayton, I believe.”

“Yas, Miss Em’ly, I does,” said Matthias, who heard my last remark.

“Is he a nice man?”

“Um, um! reckon that jes’ hits dat man; why, de good Lord bress us ef dat man ha’nt done, like he was sent, fur de slaves, Miss Em’ly. He knows jes’ whar dat track is,—de down-low track, I means, whar de ‘scapin’ from de debbil comes good to dese yere people when dey gits free. Mas’r Sumner an’ a’heap mo’ on ‘em would jes’ like fur to kill dat Mas’r Dayton ef dey could cotch him. Preaches like mad his ablishun doctrine, as he call it, an’ down on rum, sure sartin. He works jes’ all de time fur de leas’ pay you never heard tell of. Is he comin’ up yere?”

“I hope so, some time; but he is Aunt Phebe’s husband now, and we want to know something about him.”

“I reckon dat ye needn’t be oneasy, honey, ‘bout dat, fur Miss Hungerford is ‘zackly de one fur to take ker ob dat man; he’s got his head ‘way up ‘mong de stars, an’ ‘way down in de figgerin’ mos’ all de time.”

“Do you mean that he is an astronomer, Matthias?”

“Dunno nothin’ ‘bout dat, but he looks into de stars straight through a shiny pipe, Miss Em’ly, dat he sticks up on tree leg; an’ when dem peart fellers in dat college where dey lives, gits into figgerin whar dey’s done stuck and can’t do it no how, dey comes right down to dat man, an’ he trabbles ‘em right out ob all dese yere diffikilties. Um, um! dat man knows a heap ob dem tings. Miss Hungerford’s all right. ‘Pears like dere’s good deal ob marryin’ roun’ de diggins.”

“You set the example,” I said, “and the rest must follow. Louis and I expect your hearty congratulations when our day comes to step out of the world.”



“You kin ‘pend on good arnest wishes for a heap o’ comfort, Miss Em’ly, but ‘stead o’ leavin’ the world you jes’ gits into it; dunno nothin’ ‘bout livin’ till ye hev to min’ eberything yourself. But I ‘spect you’ll walk along purty happy-like, fur Mas’r Louis he’s done got hevin right in his soul, an’ you, Miss Em’ly, ‘pears like you’s good enough fur him.”

And the old man stood before me like a picture, his eyes beaming with the thoughts which filled his soul, utterance to which he could not wholly give; and I thought they grew like a fire within him, and that some day, beyond the pale of human life, they would speak with force and power, and all the buds of beauty there burst into flowers of eternal loveliness. And I said to him, as he rose to go:

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"Your good wishes are worth much to me; I want you always for my faithful friend."

"Dat's jes' what I'se gwine to be," he replied, and as he passed along the path, I thought I saw the corner of his coat sleeve near his eye.

The 24th of June was a royal day. The blue sky flecked with fleecy clouds sailing over us like promises; the air sweet with the mingling breath of flowers (we had multitudes of them about us). The south wind came up to us as pleasant breaths that sought our own, and the robins and blue-birds sang in the trees all day the song, "It is well." My heart echoed their music, and I moved in a dream, and when I felt Clara's fingers wandering over my hair I could not realize that her noble Louis was waiting to claim me as his wife—plain Emily Minot. But the blue-birds' "It is well" covered all these thoughts.

"Just a white dress, Emily, and violets to fasten your hair," said Clara, "which I will coax to curl for this one day."

And so, from under her hands, I came in a simple toilette of white mull, with my much-loved violets fastened at my throat and nestling among my black hair. Not a jewel save the ring that Louis had given me in the days before, and the chain, which was just one shining thread about my throat. I must have looked happy, but more than this I could not see, even though I hazarded a long, full look in Clara's mirror.

But Louis, ah! he should have stood beside a princess, I thought. It was contrast, not comparison, when I stopped to realize the difference. It was not his garb that made him regal, for he was clad in a suit of simple black with a vest and necktie of spotless white.

"A violet or two in your coat lappel?" said Clara.

"No, no, little mother; my royal rose begirt with violets will stand beside me. Put them in your own brown hair."

And he smiled, as taking them from her hand he placed them in her hair.

"Just a veil over your head, little mother; no bonnets among the wedding party."

Aunt Hildy insisted at first that she could not "parade around that church and stand up there before the minister. I'd feel like a reg'lar idiot, Louis."

At last she changed her mind, but preferred to walk with Ben, and he, who always loved her well, did not object.

So our entrance by one of the side aisles (the body of the church was filled with pews) was in the following order: Father, mother and Clara, Louis and Emily, Hal and Mary, and Ben and Aunt Hildy. The latter would walk to the church anyway, and when our old carryall reached the door, I felt like screaming to see her sitting there on the steps

fanning herself with her turkey-feather fan and waiting for us to appear. We all entered with uncovered heads, and as our feet crossed the threshold the choir sang one verse of "Praise ye the Lord." Mr. Davis had descended from his pulpit and stood before it upon a little elevated platform arranged for special occasions.

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Mother, father and Clara passed him where he stood, leaving the place for Louis and myself before him, with Hal and Mary, Ben and Aunt Hildy at Louis' left. It was a short and beautifully-worded ceremony, and when my eyes, already moist, looked upward to the pulpit and noticed a drapery of rose and vine which encircled it, those same tears fell fast over my cheeks, and while Louis' "I will" fell as a clear and strong response upon the air, my own assent was given silently and with only a slight bowing of my head, my lips murmuring not a syllable. After pronouncing us man and wife, Mr. Davis, at Louis' request, gave an invitation to all our friends to call on us the following evening, and again the choir and the people sang sweetly and with great feeling, as, turning, we passed down the opposite aisle toward the door.

When about half way to the door I was conscious of seeing Aunt Peg and Matthias; a moment more, and she with her white apron, and he with his high hat full of roses, were walking before us and throwing them in our path.

When we reached the door they stepped to either side, and still throwing roses, Matthias said in a tone I shall never forget:

"May de days do for ye jes' what we's doin' now, scatter de roses right afore ye clear to de end ob de journey."

This touched our hearts, and when we got into the carryall all eyes were moist, and I of course was crying as if my best friend were dead. Aunt Hildy said:

"Lord-a-massy! wonder he hadn't hit us in the head; that's the queerest caper I ever did see."

We all laughed heartily, and Louis said:

"My Emily, you are a rainbow of promise; the sun shines through your tears."

We had made preparations to receive our friends Monday evening, and had huge loaves of cake awaiting with lemonade, and something warm for those who desired it. An ancient service of rare and unique design was brought out by Clara for the occasion. It belonged to her husband's family in France and came to him as an heirloom. The contrast between it and the mulberry set which mother gave me struck me as singular, but the flowers and figures of the mulberry ware did not fall into insignificance. They were to me the embodiment of beauty. Among my earliest disappointments was the giving of grandmother's china to Hal, and I cried for "just one saucer," and this was a fac-simile and met a hearty appreciation. I bedewed it with tears, and Aunt Hildy said it was dretful dangerous to give me anything, and she should'nt try it.

“You’ll want two or three handkerchiefs to cry on to-night, for the folks’ll bring over a lot o’ things to you.”

“I do not expect a single present, neither desire any if I have to make a speech,” I said.

“Keep close to me, Emily,” said Louis, “and I will make the speeches if it becomes a duty.”

I feared Clara would get tired out, but she said:

“Oh, no, they will come early, you know, and go away early also, and with you and Louis to hold me up I shall be borne on wings!”

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At six o'clock they began to appear. We had our supper at four, and were ready to receive them. Louis and I sat in Clara's sitting-room, and Aunt Hildy said:

"It's my business to 'tend to the comin' in. 'Better to be a door-keeper in the house of the Lord, than dwell in the tents of wickedness;' so that's settled." And with this she established herself in a chair before the open door. Mother was near to assist, and I smiled to hear Aunt Hildy repeat:

"Good arternoon; lay by your things," until I thought her lips must be parched with their constant use. I was not prepared for the demonstration of love and friendship coming from these people of our town; for, until Louis and Clara came to us, I had, as I told you in the beginning of my story, not longed for their society, and had found few for whom I really cared. It was only from learning my duty, when my eyes, with the years and the wisdom Clara brought, were opened, that I could see the advantage gained by considering with respect even those whom I had dominated as selfish. Miserly and mean Jane North had grown into a different woman, and Deacon Grover had left us, blessing the love and strength of this wisdom which brought peace to cover the last hour of struggle; and many hearts, in the quiet ministering of one angel, had been touched. Home friends were growing round us I knew, but I had no realization of things as they really were, and the events of this greeting gave me a substantial evidence which was to my soul a platform. On it I reared a temple of love, and in the windows of my temple every face and heart and gift were set, as pure crystal in the sash of delightful remembrance.

First came the Goodins, and their hands yielded to us thoroughly appreciated gifts: one dozen linen towels spun, woven and bleached by the hands of Mrs. Goodwin; her husband adding for Louis the solid silver knee and shoe buckles his grandfather wore when a revolutionary officer, the trusty sword that hung by his side, and his uniform coat with its huge brass buttons, with the trunk of red cedar where for years they have been kept.

"Thank you," we both said simultaneously, and they passed along for others to come near. Not one of all that country town forbore to come and bring also tokens of their kindly feeling. Among the early arrivals was Jane North. I heard Matthias say:

"Be ye goin' to tote it in there?" and, as Jane answered resolutely, "I certainly am," I looked toward the door to see what it was that was approaching. At my feet Matthias dropped his burden, and the donor said:

"There is a goose-feather bed and a pair of pillows, and I picked every feather of 'em off my geese; them two linen sheets and two pair of piller-cases done up with 'em I made myself. I want you to use that bed in your own room, Mis' De-Mond (I started to hear that name applied to myself), and for the sake of the good Lord who sent salvation to

me through your blessed mother-in-law, in prayer for yourself don't never forget me. I've said all the hateful things I ever mean to."

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She held her hands out to us both, and we mingled our tears of gratitude with those that filled her eyes.

“Thank you,” I said.

“God bless your true heart,” said Louis, “and may your last days be your happiest.”

“Amen,” said Jane, and she passed into the next room, Matthias putting the present in a corner where it would take less space. Mr. Davis followed her, and beside him stood a clock which father had helped him to bring in.

“This clock, my young friends, is the one which has stood in the corner of my study for years. I have taken an especial pride in its unvarying correctness, and the man in the moon is unfailing in his calculation, showing his face at the appropriate season. The clock’s tick is strong and well becomes the old veteran, and the coat of mahogany he wears is one that can never need a stitch. To you, above all others, I would yield this treasure; it is worth far more to me than any gift I might purchase, and I know that you,” turning to Louis, “rejoice in keeping bright the old-time landmarks linking forever the past and the present.”

This brought Louis to his feet, and Clara and myself rose too, for his arms encircled us.

“Mr. Davis,” he said, grasping his outstretched hand, “you have done me great honor; may I have the pleasure to retain through endless ages the confidence you place in me and my blessed wife, my Emily.”

“The years will brighten the lustre of your true heart,” said Mr. Davis; and here his wife handed me a patchwork quilt, while her husband said:

“May your lives and loves be welded by a double chain as long as my wife’s handiwork shall last.”

It seemed to me I could not bear all this, and when father came forward at this moment and handed me a deed of some of his best land, I should, I believe, have screamed had not Louis’ hand held me tightly. Gifts multiplied like flakes of falling snow, until we were surrounded by them. I can only mention a few more, and before me rise plainly now the faces of Aunt Peg and Matthias, as bowing low before me they laid at our feet their offerings.

“Only jest a little intment; that’s all they is when we looks at the rest; but we wanted to bring you sunthin’,” said Aunt Peg.

A beautiful mat bordered with her own choice of bright colors, a clothes-basket made by Matthias, and in the latter three pairs of beautifully-knitted wool stockings for Louis.



“Peg spun dis wool,” said Matthias, “an’ de stockins is good: dis basket,” he added despairingly, “I tried my bes’ to put some sky color on, but I reckon ef de bluin’ bottle had jes’ spill over it ’twould do more colorin’ and better too. May de Lord help ye to live an’ war it out, and then I’ll make another.”

“That was a good speech,” said Louis, and we shook hands with these two white-hearted friends, and they also passed on out of sight, leaving me still at the mercy of the coming.

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It seemed to me there could be nothing more to come, when a loud “baa, baa” started us, and Ben appeared, leading the whitest little lamb you ever saw. He had tied a blue ribbon about its neck, and it trotted along up to us as if pleased with the novelty of its situation.

“Your namesake and my gift,” said Ben. I was truly surprised, but thanked him heartily, and the friends about us laughed immoderately. This caused the lamb to look for some way out, and Ben went with it at a quick pace, shouting back, “I raised Emily myself, and she’s a beauty.” The next surprise was from Hal and Mary—two pieces from the hand of my artist brother, “Love’s Fawn,” and “Aunt Hildy.” Duplicates of these were at that time hastening across the water with Mr. Hanson, who was anxious to take a venture over for Hal. When they were placed before us, Louis and myself exclaimed admiringly:

“How beautiful!”

Aunt Hildy, who stood near, said, “There, Halbert Minot, you’ve done it now!” and passed, like a swift wind through the room. I feared she felt hurt, but was disarmed of this thought, for she returned in a moment, and over the statuette she threw her old Camlet cloak.

“That is my present to you two,” she said, standing beside it as if empowered with authority. “To God’s children I give this, and you shall share it with ’em. I make one provision,” she added. “Mis’ Hungerford-Dayton is to have the sleeves for carpet-rags; you can cut it up when she comes. It’s all I’ve got to give; but the Lord will make it blest.” We took this as a crowning joke; and still to me it seemed to embrace a solid something, and set me dreaming.

When the hour of ten arrived the last of our guests were leaving; and, as I stood at the door with Louis saying “Good-night,” the echo of the words went ringing over the hills; and when it fluttered back, seemed to my heart to say, “It will be morning soon.”

As we went into the sitting-room, Clara said: “Now that the guests have all examined my gifts, it will do for my dear ones to look also,” and she led the way into our old middle-room, and pointing to the antique service, said:

“These are yours; I have them for my boy. There are false bottoms to the three largest pieces, and within them you will find the gift your father left you, Louis, to be given to you when you should become a man. I did not tell the others of this,” she added. “Here, my Emily, is something you I know will prize,—the set of pearls my Louis Robert gave me on my wedding day. They are very valuable. Keep them; and if changes should ever bring want before you, you have a fortune here. See how beautiful they are.” And she held up a string of large, round pearls to which clung an ornament, in shape somewhat like an anchor, of the same precious gems, two of which were pear-

shaped and very large. The ear-rings and brooch were of the most exquisite pattern. I had never seen anything so beautiful, and had no word for expression, and Clara said:

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"Your eyes tell it all, my royal Emily; you are tired, and the night is here."

Then, kissing us both good-night, Louis gathered her in his arms and carried her over the stairs, saying, as he turned to come down:

"Pleasant dreams, my fairy mother; your hand is a magic wand."

CHAPTER XIX.

MARRIED LIFE.

I could hardly see where we had room for all the gifts that came to us, for Clara's part of the house was well filled, and Aunt Hildy's belongings took nearly all the upstairs room we could spare; but by moving and shifting, and using a little gumption, as Aunt Hildy expressed it, they were all disposed of properly.

The clock occupied a corner in Louis' room, which had been Hal's studio, and was now to belong, with one other on Clara's side, to us two. Mother had said before our marriage:

"I can never let Emily go unless it be absolutely necessary. The boys are both settled, and I desire Emily to remain here. It would be lonely for her father and myself should she leave us."

I had no wish to do so, and Louis and Clara were as one in this matter; so we were to live right on together, and the convenient situation of the rooms made it pleasant for all concerned.

"Don't want no men folks round under foot," Aunt Hildy said, and there was no need for it, for Louis' room, while accessible, was out of the way, and it seemed to me as if the plan had fallen from a hand that knew our wants better than we knew ourselves. What Louis' work would be, I could not say, neither could he. To use his own language, as we talked together of the coming days, "I am to be ready to do daily all that my hand finds to do; and the work for which I am fitted will, I trust, fall directly before me." He had a right to be called the "Town's Friend," I thought, for his active brain and tender heart were constantly bringing before him some errand of mercy, or act of charity, all of which were willingly and well performed.

It was not long after our marriage that he was called on to fill Mr. Davis' place in the pulpit. I trembled to think of it; but you should have seen Clara when, as we entered the church together, he passed the pew door to follow Mr. Davis to the pulpit; for the latter, though from weakness of the bronchial tubes unable to speak, was anxious to be by the side of his friend, as he verified his prediction. There was a glory covering Clara's face,

and her eyes turned full upon her boy with an unwavering light of steadfast faith in his power and goodness, as from his lips fell the text, "If a man die shall he live again?"

His opening prayer was impressively simple, and the text, it seemed to me, just like a door which, swinging on its hinges, brought full before his vision the picture of the life that is and the life that is to come. His illustrations were so naturally drawn, and so beautifully fitted to the needs of our earthly and spiritual existence, that I knew no words had ever thrown around the old church people so wondrous a garment of well-fitted thought.

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"If this is all," he said, "this living from day to day, oppressed with the needs of the flesh, we have nothing to be thankful for; but if, as I can both see and know, man lives again, we have all to give great praise, and also rejoice through our deeds, that we are the children of the eternal Father."

Not a word of utter darkness, not a terrifying picture of a wrathful and impatient God did he draw, but it was all tenderness and love that found its way to the hearts of all his hearers; and when, in his own blessed way, he pronounced the benediction, I felt that a full wave of kindness covered us all, and I said in my heart:

"Oh, Louis, Emily will help you; Emily will do it!"

Mr. Davis' eyes were bright with gratitude and great joy as he greeted us after the service, and he whispered to me:

"You are the wife of a minister."

This was only a beginning, and for months after, every other Sabbath Louis occupied the pulpit, and to the surprise of Mr. Davis, all those who had become interested in the dispensation of Mr. Ballou, and who had now for a long time been to the church where we had heard the sermon which came as dew to my hungry soul, began to come again to the old church. Louis' preaching drew them there, and they settled in their old place to hear, as they expressed it, "the best sermons that ever were preached." This was pleasant. Louis had said:

"I cannot subscribe to the articles of your creed, or of any other, but am willing and anxious to express to others the thoughts that are within me."

This made no difference, for they knew he spoke truly, and also that the armor of his righteousness was made of the good deeds which he performed daily. It helped Mr. Davis along, and after a time his health became better; but even then he insisted on Louis preaching often, which he gladly did.

On the Christmas of this year, 1846, there was service as usual at our church, and both Mr. Davis and Louis occupied the pulpit. A Christmas service was not usual save in the Episcopal church, but Mr. Davis asked this privilege. His father had been a strict Episcopalian, and he had learned in his early years to love that church. Our people were not loth to grant his request, and I think this Christmas will never be forgotten.

We took supper at Hal's with Aunt Phebe, who had come with her husband to pay us, what Mr. Dayton termed, "a young visit." He had perfect knowledge of the English language, and power to express himself not only with words, but with a most characteristic combination of them. He said his wife felt anxious that he should be on amicable terms with her consanguineous friends, but he expected we should attribute

less of goodness to him than to her, for “Phebe Ann” was a remarkable woman. “And this,” he added, “is why she appreciates me.”

Ben tried in vain to interest him more than a few moments at a time, even though he displayed his young stock and invited him into the broom-corn room.

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It was not till he espied a Daboll's Arithmetic in Hal's studio that he became interested in the belongings of that house, albeit Hal and Mary had shown him the statuary they so much prized. He looked at the statuettes and remarked to Hal:

"You do that better than I do, but what after all does it amount to? It never will save a man from sin; never break a fetter, or dash away a wine-cup. But what do you know about figures? Do you think you know very much?"

"Not as much as I wish," Ben answered, as Hal smiled at the plain question.

"I thought so," said Mr. Dayton; "and the very best thing you can do, young man, is to come down to my house, or perhaps I can come up here, and gather some really useful and necessary information about figures. It will make a man of you. I guess you're a pretty good boy, and you only need brightening up a little."

Hal replied: "I wish you would, Uncle Dayton; that is just what I should like."

"Well," said he, "it wouldn't do you any hurt to come with him."

"I should come, too," said Mary.

"Come right along," was the reply. At supper time he said he preferred a simple dish of bread and milk, which he seemed to enjoy greatly, and all the niceties Mary had prepared were set aside unnoticed.

"Do you know what day you were born on, Ben?" he said.

"I know the day of the month, sir, but not the day of the week."

"Tell me the day of the month and year and I will tell you the day of the week."

"September 6, 1828."

"Let's see," said the philosopher, turning his eyes to the ceiling; "that came on Saturday."

We all asked the solving of this problem, and the instantaneous result seemed wonderful. After supper, at our request, he told us his history, and when we realized that this man had gained for himself all his knowledge, we looked on him as one coming from wonderland. It was hardly credible that he should have power to solve the most difficult mathematical problems, calculate eclipses, as well as do all that could be required in civil or hydraulic engineering, and that he had accomplished this by his own will, which, pushing aside all obstacles, fought for the supremacy of his brain life. His father desired him to have no book knowledge, and he told us that when a young boy he would wait for sleep to close his father's eyes, and would then, by the light of pitch-

pine knots and birch-bark in the fireplace, pursue his studies. This was pursuing knowledge under difficulties which would have proved insurmountable to many. But not so to Mr. Dayton, for he steadily gained; and though to an utter disregard for his unquenchable thirst for knowledge was added the daily fight for bread, he rose triumphantly above these difficulties, and mastered the most intricate mathematical calculation with the ease which is born only of a superior development of brain. Matthias had told us truly, and when he left us for his home we felt that in him we found new strength for much that was good and true, and for abhorrence of evil.

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During this visit the Camlet cloak was brought out, and Aunt Phebe and I together ripped out the sleeves. She said they would make a splendid green stripe in a carpet, and in her quiet, careful way she sat removing their linings, when she started as if frightened, exclaiming:

“Why, Emily, what on earth does this mean?”

“What is it?” I said, and she held before me in her hand a long brown paper, and within its folds were two bills of equal denomination.

“I wonder if this one has anything in it?” I said, and even as I said it my fingers came upon a similarly folded paper, and two more bills were brought to light. They were a valuable gift, and Aunt Phebe’s gratitude gave vent in a forcible way, I knew, for Aunt Hildy told me afterward she thanked her “e’en a’most to death.” I could hardly wait to rip the body of the cloak, and my surprise was unbounded when I discovered its contents.

There were two sums of money left in trust with us, and in her dear, good way she had made us wondrously grateful to her for the faith she had reposed in us; a deed of some of her land, which the street had cut into, which she desired us to use for some one who was needy, unless we ourselves needed it; and in the last sentences of her message to us she said:

“If ever anybody belongin’ to me comes in your path, give ’em a lift. I can trust you to do it, and the Lord will spare your lives, I know. Don’t tell any livin’ soul, Emily.” This was a sacred message to both Louis and myself, and I should feel it sacrilege to write it all out here, even though I much desire to.

Dear Aunt Hildy! when we essayed to thank her, she said:

“There, there, don’t say a word; I’ve allus said I’d be my own executioner, (I did not correct her mistake), and I know that’s the way. You see, some day I’ll go out like a candle, for all my mother’s folks died that way, so I want to be ready. The other side of the house live longer, more pity for it too. They’ve handed down more trouble than you know, but I aint like one of ’em; it’s my mother I belong to.”

It seemed to me now that the years went like days and the first five after our marriage, that ended with the summer of 1851, were filled for the most part with pleasant cares. I was still my mother’s girl, and helped about the house as always before. Of course, some sorrows came to us in these years, for changes cannot be perfectly like clear glass. Hal and Mary had held to their hearts one beautiful Baby blossom, who only lived four months to cheer them, and then passed from their brooding tenderness on to the other side. We sorrowed for this, and “Love’s Fawn” had pale cheeks for a long time. Hal feared she would follow her child, and it might have been had not a somewhat necessary journey across the Atlantic brought great benefit to her.

The venture Mr. Hanson had made had proved so eminently successful, that when, this year, he again went to the Old World, it was deemed wise and right for them to accompany himself and family. I almost wanted to go, too, and when Hal sent back to us his beautifully written account of all he saw, I stood in spirit beside him, and anticipated many of his proposed visits. They both returned with improved health and added fortune.

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The mining fever of 1849 took a few of our townspeople from us. Aunt Phebe wrote us that her second son had gone to find gold, and Ben had a little idea of trying the life of a pioneer; but the sight of the waiting acres, which he hoped some day to call his, detained him, and he still kept on making a grand success of farming, for he was doing the work he desired and that which he was capable of carrying to a successful end.

Louis' work had lain in all directions; helping Mr. Davis still as his varying strength required, interesting himself in the improvements about us, *etc.* Gradually widening the sphere of his influence, slowly but surely feeling his way among human hearts, he could not fail to be recognized, and after a time to be sought for among such as needed help. No appeal was ever made in vain from this quarter.

Capitalists, who had reared in the village below us a huge stone mill designed for the manufacture of woolens, had made advances which he did not meet as desired, for their system of operating was disloyal, he said, to all true justice, encroaching, as it did, upon the liberties of a class largely represented in this, as well as in all other towns. Three gentlemen, who represented the main interests, called on Louis, and he expressed to them what seemed to him to be the truth regarding this, and said:

"The years to come will be replete with suffering, and vice, degradation, and misery are sure to follow in the steps you are taking. I do not say that you realize this, but if you will think of it as I have, you cannot fail to reach the same conclusion. You cause to be rung a morning bell at five o'clock, that rouses not only men from their slumbers, but the little growing children who need their unbroken morning dreams. These children must work all day in the close and stifling rooms of your mill. Their tender life must feel the daily dropping seed of disease, and with each recurring nightfall, overworked bodies fall into a heavy slumber, instead of slipping gradually over into the realm of peace. The mothers and fathers of these children suffer in this strife for daily bread. Fathers knowing not their children, and entire families living to feel only the impetus of a desire to satisfy the cravings of hunger, and to shield themselves from the cold of winter or the summer's heat. What does all this mean? If we look at the elder among your employees we shall find men, who, not being strong enough to work twelve hours a day, naturally, and almost of necessity, have resorted to the stimulant of tobacco, and the strength of spirituous liquors.

"I can personally vouch for the truth of all I say regarding it. The practice of fathers is already adopted or soon will be adopted by their children, and by this means the little substance they may gain through hard toil, for you well know their gain is small if your profit is what you desire, falls through the grated bars of drunkenness and waste, into the waiting pit of penury and pauperism. Bear with me, gentlemen, if I speak thus plainly, and believe me it is for your own comfort as well as for the cultivation of the untouched soil in the minds of your workmen, that I feel called upon to address you earnestly.

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"You do not ask, neither would you permit, your wives and children to work in the mill beside these people, and only the line of gold draws the distinction between you. There are sweet faces in your mill, there are tender hearts and there is intellect which might grow to be a power in our midst. But the sweet faces have weary eyes, the tender hearts beat without pity, and the strength which might exalt these men and us as their brothers, becomes the power of a consuming fire, which as time flies, and our population increases, will burn out all the true and loyal life that might have developed among us. When our village becomes a city, we, like other denizens of cities, must see prison houses rise before us, and to-day we are educating inmates for these walls. Remember also, that the laces our wives shall wear in those days of so-called prosperity, will be bought with human life. I will not stand amenable before God for crime like this.

"If you will drop your present schemes, if you will be content to share with these men and children a portion of your profits, to let them toil eight hours instead of twelve per day, and if on every Saturday you will give to them one full long day in God's dear sunlight, I will invest the amount of capital necessary to cover all which you as a body have invested, and I will stand beside you in your mill. I would to God, gentlemen, you were ready to accept this offer, for it comes from my heart, but I can anticipate your reply. You will say I am speaking ahead of my time, that the world is not ready for these theories, much less for the practice I desire. And in return I would ask, when will it ever be? Has any new and valuable dispensation sought us through time, when hands were not raised in holy horror, and the voice of the majority has not sounded against it. You are to-day enjoying, in the machinery you use, the benefit of thought which against much opposition fought its way to the front. And shall we rest on our oars, and say we cannot even try to do what we know to be right, because the world, the unthinking, unmindful world, sees no good in it? It would be easier for many acting as one man, to move the wheels, but if this cannot be, I must wait as other hearts have waited, but I will work in any and in all ways to break the yokes which encircle the necks of our people."

He paused and looking still earnestly at them, waited a reply. The eldest said in answer:

"Mr. Desmonde, while you have spoken that which we have never before heard, I think I may say for my friends as well as myself, that your sentiments do not fall on entirely barren soil. While you were talking, it seemed to me the way looked plain, and I felt to say, Amen. But I know we are not ready for such a movement as this. Perhaps we ought to be, and if your picture is a true one, I say from the bottom of my heart I will for myself try to be of some good. I am willing to be taught how."

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Louis crossed the room, and offering his hand, said with emotion:

“Thank God, the truth I uttered found soil. May the years water with the dews of their love, the one seed fallen on rich ground, and may we, sir, live to be a unit in our thought and action, and you too, gentlemen,” turning to the two who were silent.

A short and pleasant conversation followed, and they took their departure. As they left us, Clara said:

“Well done, Louis. Here is a work and Emily will help you do it.”

Louis had grown grandly beautiful through these years, and never had he seemed for one moment careless or unmindful of any simplest need. We walked together truly, keeping pace through the years whose crown we wore as yet lightly. He said I grew young all the time, and often, when thoughts of his work filled his mind, as he sat looking on into the future, finding one by one the paths which, like small threads running through a garment, led to the unfoldment of life, he would hold my hands in his, and when, like a picture, the way and means all made plain, he would say:

“My Emily, do you see it? Oh? you have helped me to find it, and still you see it not; then I must tell you,” and he would unfold to me the work not of a coming day only—but sometimes even that of months and years.

He kept the promise made to the mill-owners, and the hearts of the little operatives knew him as their friend. When the work he was doing for them commenced, Aunt Hildy had said:

“That’s it; put not your light under a bushel but where men can see it, Louis, for I tell you the candles you carry to folks’ hearts are run in the mould of the Lord’s love, and every gleam on ’em is worth seein’.”

Aunt Hildy’s step we knew was growing less firm, and now and then she rode to the village. Matthias got on bravely, and gloried in the deposit of some “buryin’ money,” as he called it, with Louis, who took it to the bank and brought him a bank-book.

“Who’d a thought on’t, Mas’r Louis, me, an old nigger slave, up heah in de Norf layin’ up money.”

Ben had a saw-mill now of his own, and was an honest and thrifty young man. Many new houses had been built in our midst, and with them came of course new people and their needs.

We had, up to this time, heard often from our Southern Mary, and her letters grew stronger, telling us how noble a womanhood had crowned her life, and the latter part of 1851 she wrote us of a true marriage with one who loved her dearly. Her gifts to Mrs.

Goodwin had been munificent, and well appreciated by this good woman. We hoped some time to see her in the North. She had never lost sight of Mr. Benton, and he still lived with his wife and boys. This delighted the heart of Mary, and I grew to think of him as one who perhaps had been refined through the fire of suffering, which I secretly hoped had done its work so well that he would not need, as Matthias thought Mas'r Sumner would, "dat eternal fire."

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CHAPTER XX.

LIFE PICTURES AND LIFE WORK.

The pictures Louis painted were not on canvas, but living, breathing entities, and my heart rejoiced as the years rolled over us that the brush he wielded with such consummate skill was touched also by my hand; that it had been able to verify Clara's "Emily will do it," and that now in the days that came I heard her say "Louis and Emily are doing great good." I think nothing is really pleasure as compared with the blessedness of benefitting others.

My experience in my earliest years had taught me to believe gold could buy all we desired, but after Clara came to us and one by one the burden of daily planning to do much with very little fell out of our lives, and the feeling came to us that we had before us a wider path, with more privileges than we had ever before known, I found the truth under it all, that the want of a dollar is not the greatest one in life, neither the work and struggle "to make both ends meet," as we said, the hardest to enforce.

It was good to know my parents were now free from petty anxieties, that no unsettled bills hung over my father's head like threatening clouds, and that my mother could, if she would, take more time; to herself. Indeed she was forced to be less busy with hard work, for Aunt Hildy worked with power and reigned supreme here, and I helped her in every way. It was the help that came in these ways, I firmly believed, that saved mother's life and kept her with us. This was a great comfort, but none of us could say our desires ended here.

No, as soon as the vexed question of how to live had settled itself, then within our minds rose the great need of enlarged understanding. Millions of dollars could not have rendered me happy when my mind was clouded, and now it seemed to me, while strength lasted, no work, however hard it might be, could deprive me of the happiness and love that filled my heart. I loved to read and think, and I loved to work also.

Sometimes when my hands were filled with work and I could not stop to write, beautiful couplets would come to me, and after a time stanzas which I thought enough of to copy. In this way I "wrote myself down," as Louis termed it, and occasionally he handed me a paper with my verses printed, saying always:

"Another piece of my Emily."

May, 1853, brought Southern Mary and her husband to us. We met them with our own carriage, and within her arms there nestled a dainty parcel called "our baby," of whose coming we had not been apprised. What a beautiful picture she was, this little lady, nine months old, the perfect image of her mother, with little flaxen rings that covered her

head like a crown. I heeded not the introduction to her father, but, reaching my hands to her, said:

“Let me have her, Mary, let me take her. I cannot wait a minute.”

Louis gently reminded me that Mr. Waterman was speaking to me, and I apologized hastily, as I gathered the blossom to my heart, where she sat just as quiet as a kitten all the way home. Clara was delighted with the “little bud,” as she called her.

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"Tell me her name," I said.

"Oh! guess it," said Mary.

"Your own?"

"No, no, you can never guess, for we called her Althea, after kind Mrs. Goodwin, who nursed me so tenderly, and Emily, for another lady we know"—and she looked at me with her bright eyes, while an arch smile played over her face. I only kissed the face of the beautiful child, and Louis said:

"My Emily's name is fit for the daughter of a king. God bless the little namesake," and Althea Emily gave utterance to a protracted "goo," which meant, of course, yes.

You should have heard her talk, though, when Matthias came over to see "Miss Molly."

"Come shufflin' over to see you," he said, "an' O my! but aint she jest as pooty. O"—and at this moment she realized his presence, both her little hands were stretched forth in welcome, and "ah goo! ah goo!" came a hundred times from her sweet mouth as she tried to spring out of her mother's lap.

"Take her, Matthias," I said.

"Wall, wall, she 'pears as ef she know me, Miss Emily—reckon she's got a mammy down thar."

"She has, indeed," said Mary, "and I know she will miss Mammy Lucy. She was my nurse, and she cried bitterly when we left, but I do not need her, Allie is just nothing to care for, and I like to be with her myself, for I am her mother, you know," she added proudly.

"I mus' know that ole Mammy Lucy, doesn't I, Miss Molly?"

"Certainly you do, Matthias, and she has sent a bandanna turban for your wife, and a pair of knitted gloves for you. She told me to say she didn't forget you, and was mighty glad for your freedom. Father long since gave her her's and she has quite a sum of money of her own."

All this time white baby fingers were pawing Matthias' face, as if in pity, and losing their little tips among his woolly hair.

When he rose to leave she cried bitterly, and turning back he said:

"Kin I tote her over to see Peg to-morrer?"

“Oh! yes,” said Mary “give her my love and tell her I am coming over.”

“Look out for breakers,” said Aunt Hildy, when she saw the child, “this house’ll be a bedlam now, but then we were all as leetle as that once, I spos’e,” and her duty evidently spoke at that moment, saying, “You must bear with it.” But she was not troubled.

Allie never troubled us, she was as sweet and sunny as a May morning all through, and even went to meeting and behaved herself admirably. She never said a word till the service ended, when she uttered one single “goo” as if well pleased. Aunt Hildy said at the supper-table she didn’t believe any such thing ever happened before in the annals of our country’s history,

“She’s the best baby I ever see. Wish she’d walk afore you leave.”

“She has never deigned to creep,” said Mary; “the first time I tried to have her, she looked at me and then at her dress as if to say, “That isn’t nice,” and could not be coaxed to crawl. She hitches along instead, and even that is objectionable. I imagine some nice morning she will get right up and walk.” At that moment Allie threw back her head of dainty yellow rings, and laughed heartily, as if she knew what we said.

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Mrs. Goodwin claimed the trio for one-half of the six weeks allotted to their stay, and she said afterward:

"They were three beautiful weeks with three beautiful folks."

Louis at this time was working hard with the brush of his active goodness, and had before him much canvas to work upon. The days were placing it in his view, and we both dreamed at night of the work which had come and was coming.

It was a sunny day in June when he said: "Will my Emily go with me to-day? The colors are waiting on the pallet of the brain, and our hands must use them to-day."

"Your Emily is ready," I replied, "and Gipsy (our horse) will take us, I guess."

We went first to Jane North's, and Louis said to her;

"Jane, are you ready now to help us as you have promised?"

"Yes, sir," she replied; "I am."

"Will you take two boys to care for; one eleven years of age, and the other twelve?"

"I'll do just what you say, or try to, and if my patience gives out I can tell you, I 'spose, but I'm bound to do my duty, for I scolded and fretted and tended to other folk's business fifteen years jist because my own plans was upset, and I couldn't bear to see anybody happy. Well, 'twas the power of sin that did it, and if some of the old Apostles fell short I can't think I'm alone, though that don't make it any better for me. When are they coming?"

"To-night, I think. Give them a good room and good food, and I will remunerate you as far as money goes. I would like you to take them; you are so neat and thrifty, and will treat them well. When they get settled we will see just what to do for them," said Louis, and we drove on to the village. Our next stopping-place was found in the narrowest street there, and where a few small and inconvenient dwellings had been erected by the mill owners for such of their help as could afford to pay only for these miserable homes. They looked as if they had fallen together there by mistake. And the plot of ground which held the six houses seemed to me to be only a good-sized house lot. We stopped at the third one and were admitted by a careworn woman, who looked about fifty years of age. She greeted us gladly, though when Louis introduced me, I knew she felt the meager surroundings and wished he had been alone, for her face flushed and her manner was nervous. I spoke kindly and took the chair she proffered, being very careful not to appear to notice the scantily furnished room.

"Well," said Louis, "Mrs. Moore, are you ready to let your boy go with me?"

“Oh, sir,” she said, “only too willing; but I have been afraid you would not come. It seemed so strange that you should make us such an offer—so strange that you can afford to do it, and be willing, too, for experience has taught us to expect nothing, especially from those who have money. But Willie’s clothes, sir, are sadly worn. I have patched them beyond holding together, almost; but I could get no new ones.”

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"Never mind that," said Louis. "We will go to the mill for him and his little friend, too, if he can go."

"Oh! yes, sir; he can, and I am so glad, for the father is a miserably discouraged man. He drinks to drown trouble, and it seems to me he will drown them all after a little. A pleasant man, too. His wife says poor health first caused him to use liquor."

We then called on the woman in question and obtained her tearful consent, for while the promise of a home for her boy was a bright gleam, she said:

"He is the oldest. Oh! I shall miss him when we are sick."

"He shall come to you any time," said Louis, "and you shall visit him."

And in a few moments we were at the mill. Entering the office, Louis was cordially greeted by one of the three gentlemen who had called on us. He evidently anticipated his errand, for he said:

"So, you are come for Willie Moore and Burton Brown?"

"Yes, sir," Louis replied. "Can I go to the room for them?"

"As you please, Mr. Desmonde, I can call them down. Their room is not a very desirable place for a lady to visit."

Louis looked at him as if to remind him of something, while I said:

"My place is beside my husband."

"Yes," added Louis, "we work together. Come, Emily," and he led the way to the fourth floor, where, under the flat roof in a long, low room, were the little wool pickers. I thought at first I could not breathe, the air was so close and sickening. And here were twenty boys, not one of them more than twelve or thirteen years old, working through long hours. The heat was stifling, and the fuzz from the wool made it worse. They wore no stockings or shoes, nothing but a shirt and overalls, and these were drenched as with rain.

As we entered Louis whispered, "See the pictures," and it was a bright, glad light that came suddenly into all their eyes at sight of their friend. He spoke to them all, introducing me as we passed through the long line that lay between the two rows of boys. When we came to Willie and Burton, Louis whispered to them:

"Get ready to go with me."

They went into the adjoining hall to put on the garments which they wore to and from the mill, and in less time than it takes me to write it, they stood ready for a start. As we passed again between the lines of boys Louis dropped into every palm a silver piece, saying, as he did so:

“Hold on, boys, work with good courage, and we will see you all in a different place one of these days.”

“Thank you, sir;” and “yes, sir, we will,” fell upon our ears as we passed out. Our two little proteges ran out in advance. And as I looked back a moment, standing on the threshold of the large door, I said:

“It is a beautiful picture, Louis. You are a master artist.”

After again stopping in the office for a few words of conversation with Mr. Damon, Louis was ready, the boys clambered into our carriage, and we were on our way to their homes, first stopping to purchase for each of them a suit of clothes, a large straw hat, and a black cap. The boys said nothing, but looked a world of wondering thanks.

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Louis made an arrangement for the boys to live with Jane, and to go to our town school when it began in the fall.

“This summer,” he said to their mothers, “they need all the out-door air and free life they can have to help their pale cheeks grow rosy, and to give to their weak muscles a little of the strength they require. I desire no papers to pass between us, for I am not taking your children from you, only helping you to give them the rest and change they need to save their lives. They are the weakest boys in the mill and this is why I chose them first. Every Saturday they shall come home to you, and stay over the Sabbath if you desire, and they shall also bring to you as much as they could earn in the mill. Will this be satisfactory?”

Both these mothers bowed their heads in silent appreciation of the real service he was rendering, and I knew his labor was not lost. I felt like adding my tribute to his, and said:

“Your boys will be well cared for, and you shall come often to see us. We expect you to enjoy a little with them.”

“Oh! mother, will you come over and bring the children?” said Willie.

“And you, too, mother,” echoed Burton.

Weary Mrs. Moore said:

“I would like to breathe again in the woods and on the mountains, but I have five little ones left here to care for,” and Mrs. Brown added:

“I could only come on Saturday, and the mill lets out an hour earlier, and your father needs me on that day more than any other.”

Her sad face and tearful eyes told my woman’s heart that this was the day he was tempted more than all others, and I afterward gathered as much from Burton.

“Well, we must turn toward home,” said Louis, and the boys kissed their mothers and their little brothers and sisters, and said “good-bye,” and each with his bundles turned to the carriage. Louis untied Gipsy, and I said to the mothers:

“Were they ever away over night?”

“No, never,” said both at once.

“I will arrange for them. You shall hear to-morrow how the first night passes with them.”

"I was just thinking of that," said Mrs. Brown; "God bless you for your thoughtfulness," and getting into the carriage, we all waved our good-byes, and turned toward home. We told Jane all we could to interest her, and particularly asked her to make everything pleasant for them, that they should not be homesick. Louis went to their room with them, and when we left them at Jones' gate, Willie Moore shouted after us:

"It's just heaven here, ain't it?"

He was an uncommonly bright little boy, and yet had no education whatever beyond spelling words of three letters. He was twelve years of age, and for three years he had worked in the mill. Clara and all at home were delighted with our work, and Aunt Hildy said:

"Ef Jane North does well by them boys, she oughter have a pension from the Gov'ment, and sence I know that'll never give her a cent, I'll do it myself. I've got an idee in my head."

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Then Southern Mary and her husband laughed, not in derision, for they admired Aunt Hildy, and Mr. Waterman said:

"If men had your backbone, Mrs. Patten, there would be a different state of things altogether."

"My husband is almost an Abolitionist," said Mary. "Some of our people dislike him greatly; but my father is a good man and he does not illtreat one of his people. He is one of the exceptional cases. But the system is, I know, accursed by God. I believe it to be a huge scale that fell from the serpent's back in the Garden, and I feel the day will dawn when the accursed presence of slavery will be no longer known."

"Good!" said Aunt Hildy, "and there's more kinds than one. Them little children is slaves—or was."

"When you get ready to make out your pension papers, Mrs. Patten," said Mary, "let me help jest a little; I would like to lay a corner-stone somewhere in this village for some one's benefit. You know this is the site of a drama in my life; I pray never to enact its like again."

"I'll give you a chance," said Aunt Hildy.

Louis went over to Jane's in the morning, and the boys returned with him to tell us what a good supper and breakfast they had had.

"And such a nice bed," added Burton. "When we looked out of the window this morning I wished mother could come."

"Poor little soul!" I said, "your mother shall come. We will move every obstacle from her path."

"If father could find work here it would be nice," and a little while after, he said in a low tone:

"There ain't any rum shops here, is there?"

He was a tender plant, touchingly sensitive, and when I told him we were to send word to his mother that he liked his home, his joy was a pleasure to witness.

"Miss North says we may have some flowers, and we'd better go back, Willie, and see about getting the spot ready—she had her seed box out last night, but I guess she'll give us plants too, to put in the ground."

He was very thoughtful, and would not stay too long for anything, he said. Aunt Hildy looked after them, and sighed with the thoughts that rose within, but said no word.

The three weeks of Mr. and Mrs. Waterman's stay were at an end.

"On the morrow," said Mary, "we go to Aunty Goodwin's. I want to go, and dread to leave. But is that Matthias coming over the hill? It is, and I have something to tell him. I have meant to do it before, but there was really no opportunity. Come out with me, and let's sit down under the elm tree while I tell him. Come, Allie," and she lifted the blue-eyed baby tenderly. Oh, how sweet she was! and I wondered how we could bear to lose her. She crowed with delight at Matthias' approach, and at Mary's suggestion he took a seat beside us.

"I have something to tell you now; open wide your ears, Uncle Peter."

"What's dat you say, Miss Molly; got some news from home?"

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"Yes, I have news for you from your own."

"Oh, Miss Molly, don't for de Lord's sake wait a minit!"

"Your wife, whom Mr. Sumner so cruelly sold for you, is very happy now, for she is free, Matthias."

"Done gone to hevin, does you mean? Tell it all," said the old man, who trembled visibly.

"She did not live two months, but she was in good hands. I accidentally met her mistress, who told me about her. She said she had kept her in the house to wait on her, for she liked her very much. But she seemed sad, and grew tired, and one morning she did not appear, and they found her in her little room, next that of Mrs. Sanders, quite dead and looking peaceful and happy. Her mistress felt badly, for she meant to do well by her. They thought some heart trouble caused her death."

"Oh, my! oh, my! dat heart ob hern was done broke when dat man sold our little gal. Oh, I knowed it ud neber heal up agin! but tank de Lord she's free up dar. Oh, Miss Emily! can't no murderers go in troo de gate? Dat Mas'r Sumner can't neber get dar any more, Miss Molly?"

"Yes, Matthias. Dry your tears, for I've something good to tell. Your oldest boy, John, has a good master, and is buying his freedom. They help him along. He drives a team, and is a splendid fellow. He will be free soon, and will come to see you, perhaps to live with you. This is all I know, but isn't it a great deal?"

Matthias stood on his feet, his eyes dilating as they turned full on Mary, his hands clenched, his form raised as erect as it was possible for him, and his breast heaving with great emotion, as from his lips came slowly these words:

"Do you mean it, Miss Molly? Is you foolin, or is you in dead earnest for sartin?"

"It is truth, every word I say."

"Oh, oh, oh!" and he sank on the seat beside us, covering his face with both hands, while tears fell at his feet, and as they touched the grass they shone in the sun like large round drops of dew. I thought they were as white and pure as though his skin was fair. And he wept not alone, for we wept with him.

Allie reached to bury her fingers in his mass of woolly, curling hair, and as he felt their tender tips, he raised his head and put out his hands to her, saying:

"Come, picaninny, come and help me be glad. Oh, Canaan, bright Canaan! Oh, de Lord has hearn my prayer an' what kin I say, what kin I do, an' how kin I wait fur to see



dat chile? He's jes like his mother, pooty, I know. Oh, picaninny, holler louder! le's tell it to the people that my John is a comin' fur to see me, dat he haint got no use fur a mas'r any more," and up and down he walked before us, while Allie made demonstrations of joy.

It was a strange picture. "Oh, Canaan!" still he sang, and "De New Jerusalem," until I really feared his joy would overcome him, and was glad to see Louis coming toward us. He took a seat beside me, and I was about to tell him the wonderful news, when Matthias, who noticed him, handed Allie to her mother, and falling on his knees before Louis, cried aloud:

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"Oh, Mas'r Louis, help me, for de good Lord's sake! will you help me, Mas'r Louis?"

"Oh, yes, my dear fellow!" and he laid his hand on him tenderly; "tell me just what you want me to do."

"Oh, my boy! Miss Molly tells me my own boy John have got his freedom mos out, an' he's comin' to find me. I can't wait, Mas'r Louis; 'pears like a day'll be a year. I mout die, he mout die too. I'll sen' him my buryin' money, an' ef tant enough, can't you sen' a little more? an' I'll work it out, I will, sure, an' no mistake; fur de sake of the right, Mas'r Louis, an' for to make my ole heart glad. Will you do it?"

"I certainly will, Matthias; but you are excited now."

"Bless ye. May de heavins open fur to swallow me in ef I don't clar up ebery cent you pays fur me. But you can't tell. Oh, ye don't know!" and again he walked, clapped his hands, and sang, "Oh, Canaan, bright Canaan!" till, pausing suddenly, he said, "Guess I better shuffle ober to tell Peg—'pears like I'm done gone clar out whar I can't know nothin';" and with "good arternoon" he left us, swinging his hat in his hand, and singing still "Oh, Canaan!" as he traveled over the hill toward home.

We were all glad for Matthias, and Clara said:

"Let us rejoice with them that rejoice; and Louis, my dear boy, write at once to the gentleman who owns John, and pay him whatever he says is due. We can do it, and we should, for the poor, tired heart of his father cannot afford to wait when a promise lies so near. Let us help him to lay hold upon it."

"Amen," said Aunt Hildy. "I'll help ten dollars' worth; taint much."

"But you shall keep it for John," said Clara; "he will need something after he gets here."

The next morning Matthias came to deliver his bank-book to Louis, saying:

"Get the buryin' money; get it and send it fur me, please."

Louis told him to keep his bank-book.

"You shall see your boy as soon as money can get him here."

"Oh, Mas'r Louis!" and he grasped both his hands; "de Lord help this ole nigger to pay you. I's willin' to work dese fingers clean to de bone."

Our two boys got on bravely. The first Saturday night we sent them home with loaded baskets, and each with a pail of new milk, which we knew would be a treat to the children, and in their little purses the amount promised by Louis. Matthias took them to

their homes, and Louis went for them on Monday morning, and when he returned he said:

“The pictures are growing, Emily. Bright eyes and rosy cheeks will come soon.”

Mr. and Mrs. Waterman were leaving us. We were kissing “our baby” good-bye. How we disliked to say the word! And when looking back at Matthias after we started, she cried, “Mah, mah!” I laughed and cried together. Louis and I parted with them reluctantly at the depot, and our last words were:

“Send John right along.”

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"We will," they answered, as the train rode away and baby Allie pressed her shining face against the window. It was only two weeks and two days from that day that Louis, Clara and I (she said after our marriage "Call me Clara, for we are sisters—never say 'mother Desmonde;' to say mother when you have such a blessed one of your own is robbery to her") drove to the depot to meet John. Matthias said to us,

"You go fur him, ef you please, fur I can never meet him in de crowd; I want to wait by de road an' see him cum along. Mighty feared I'll make a noony o' myself."

The train stopped, and Louis left us in the carriage and went to find him. My heart jumped as I thought he might not be there, but ere I had time to say it to Clara, he came in sight, walking proudly erect by the side of Louis, as handsome a colored man as could be seen. He was quite light, tall as Louis, and well proportioned, his mouth pleasantly shaped and not large, his nose suited to a Greek rather than to a negro, and over his forehead, which was broad and full, black hair fell in tight-curling rings,—resembling Matthias in nothing save perhaps his eyes. It did not seem possible this could be a man coming from the power of a master—how I dislike that term, a slave—this noble looking fellow; I shuddered involuntarily, and grasped his hand in welcome with a fervent "God bless you, John; I welcome you heartily." Clara stretched forth her little hand also, saying:

"John, you can never know how glad we are." He stood with his hat raised, and his large beautiful eyes turned toward us filled with feeling as he answered:

"Ladies, you can never realize the debt I have to pay you. It seems a dream that I am here, a free man with an old father waiting to see his son; oh, sir," and he turned to Louis, "my heart is full!"

"We do not doubt it, dear fellow, but get into the carriage and let Gipsy take us to the hills. She knows your father waits. Now go, Gipsy," and the willing creature seemed inspired, going at a quick pace as if she understood her mission.

I saw Matthias sitting on a log a little this side of our home, shading his eyes with his hand, and when John spied him, he laid his hand on his heart and said:

"Please let me get out and walk; excuse me, sir, but I cannot sit here."

We respected his feelings and held Gipsy back, that he might with his long strides reach his father before us, which he did. When Matthias saw him walking toward him, he rose to his feet and the two men approached each other with uncovered heads. At last, when about ten feet apart, Matthias stopped and cried:

"John, oh, John!"

“Father, father, I am here,” and with one bound he reached him, threw his arms about him, while Matthias’ head fell on his shoulder; and here, as we reached them, they stood speechless with the great joy that had come to them. Two souls delivered from bondage—two white souls bathed in pure sunlight of my native skies. I can never forget this scene. We spoke no word to them, but as we passed them John spoke, saying:

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"Sir, will you take my father's arm? He feels weak and I am not strong." I took the reins and Louis, springing to the ground, stepped between, and each taking his arm they walked together up to the door of our home where Aunt Hildy, mother, father, Ben, Hal and Mary, Mrs. Davis, Jane North and Aunt Peg, waited to receive them. When Matthias saw Peg he said:

"Come, Peg, come and kiss him; this is my John sure enuf." Supper waited and the table was spread for all. Mr. Davis gave thanks and spoke feelingly of the one among us who had been delivered from the yoke of bondage, saying:

"May we be able to prove ourselves worthy of his great love, and confidence, and be forever mindful of all those both in the North and South who wait, as he has waited, for deliverance." Matthias grew calm, and when they left us to walk home, Louis and I went with them. On the road over John said to Louis:

"Sir, I am greatly indebted to you, and I am anxious to go to work at once and pay my debt."

"You owe me nothing," said Louis; "I have no claim upon your money or time; I will help you in every way possible, and my reward will be found in the great joy and comfort you will bring to your father in his old age."

"This is too much," said John.

"Not enough," said Louis, and at Aunt Peg's vine-covered lattice 'neath which he stood, we said good-night and turned toward home, while in our hearts lay mirrored, another fadeless picture.

CHAPTER XXI.

JOHN JONES.

How the days of this year flew past us, we were borne along swiftly on their wings, and every week was filled to overflowing with pleasant care and work. John was called in the South after his master's name, but now he said, inasmuch as he had left him and the old home in Newbern, it would seem better to him to be called by his father's name, and so he took his place among us as John Jones. He went to work with a will, became a great friend to Ben and helped him wonderfully, for between the saw-mill, the farm with its stock-raising and broom trade, which really was getting to be a good business, Ben was more than busy.

John was a mechanic naturally; he was clever at most anything he put his mind on, "and never tried to get shet of work;" and his daily work proved his worth among us. Matthias worked and sang the long days through, and all was bright and beautiful before him. He

tried to think John's angel mother could look down from "hevin" on him, and it gave him pleasure to feel so.

When the fall came John said to Louis:

"I want to know something. I promised the boys and gals that when I got free I'd speak a few words for them, and I must learn something."

So he came regularly to Louis through the winter evenings, and in a little time he could send a readable letter to the friends down South. Newbern was a nice place, had nice people, he told us, and he had been well treated and permitted to learn to read, but the writing he could not find time to master; he was skilful in figures, and Louis was very proud of his rapid improvement.

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In our meetings he gradually came to feel at home, and at last surprised us one evening by a recital of his life, and an earnest appeal to Christians to forget not those who looked to the star in the North as to a light that promised them freedom and the comforts of a home. His large, expressive eyes grew luminous with feeling, and as he stood, rapt in his own thought, which carried him back to the old home, he seemed like a tower of strength in our midst, and when at the close of the meeting, as we walked behind them, he took his father's arm, I heard Matthias say:

"John, you's done made me proud as Loosfer."

And his handsome son bowed his head as he answered:

"Thank the God who made us all to be brothers that I have the power to tell these thoughts that rise within me. You feel just as I do, father, only you can't express it, because they did not let you grow. The heavy weight of slavery has held you close to the ground, and this is the foundation of the system. The ignorance of the chattel is the life that feeds the master's power. Like horses, if slaves knew this power, they could break their bondage, and no hand on earth could stop them."

Among the pleasant occurrences of this summer were the picnics of the mill children, who enjoyed two days in July and two days in August rambling in the woods and taking dinner in the old hemlock grove, where the trees had been so lavish of their gifts that a soft carpet of their fallen leaves covered the ground the long year through. The coolness of this beautiful shelter was most refreshing, and it seemed as if nature knew just how much room was needed to spread our lunch-cloth, for there was the nicest spot in the world right in the heart of the grove, and as we sat around our lowly table every third or fourth person had a splendid hemlock tree to lean against. This was a rare treat to the mill children, and oh, the faces of the pictures we painted in these days.

Willie and Burton both had their own friends with them, and when in conversation Louis spoke of the work of repairing the church and putting in new pews, Burton Brown said:

"My father can do such work."

"Can you, Mr. Brown?" said Louis.

"Yes, sir," he replied; "working in lumber is my trade; change and hard luck forced me into the mill."

I cannot tell you of all the events that occurred among us, but when the smoke from a new chimney rose in the very spot almost where Aunt Hildy's cottage stood, it was due to the fact that a new double house had been erected on a splendid lot, and Willie and Burton were living there with their parents.

Mrs. Moore had grown young looking, though the grey hairs that mingled with the brown still held their places. Mr. Brown did not meet temptations here, and as Aunt Hildy said:

“Headin’ him off in a Christian way was the thing that saved him; poor critter, his stomach gnawed, and he needed just them bitters I made for him, and Louis’ kind treatment and planning to help him be born agin, and its done good and strong, jest as I knew it would be.”

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Two more little mill boys were brought to Jane to take the places of Willie and Burton, and Louis kept walking forward, turning neither to the right nor left, bringing the comforts of living to the hearts that had known only the gathering of crumbs from the tables of the rich, and the few scattering pennies that chanced occasionally to fall from their selfish palms.

Clara's glad smile and happy words made a line of sunshine in our lives, and the three years following this one, which had brought so many pleasant changes, were as jewels in the coronet of active thought and work, which we were day by day weaving for ourselves and each other.

When Southern Mary left us, she gave to Aunt Hildy something to help make out Jane North's pension papers, and the first step Aunt Hildy took toward doing this was in the fall of 1853, when she painted Jane's house inside and out. Then in the next year she built a new fence for her, and insisted on helping Louis make some improvements needed to give more room, and from this time the old homestead where Jane's father and mother had lived and died, became the children's home, with Jane as its presiding genius, having help to do the work. From six to eight children were with her; three darling little girls whom Louis found in the streets of a city in the winter of 1855, were brought to the Home by him, and he considered them prizes.

To be independent in thought and action was Louis' wisdom. He had regard for the needs of children as well as of adults, for he remembered that the girls and boys are to be the men and women of the years to come, and to help them help themselves was his great endeavor.

"For this," he would say, "is just what our God does for us, Emily. He teaches the man who constantly observes all things around him, that the proper use of his bounty is what he most needs to know, and to live by the side of natural laws, moving parallel with them, is the only way to truthfully solve life's master problem. Yea, Emily, painting pictures is grand work; to see the ideal growing as a reality about us, to know we are the instruments in God's hands for doing great good; and are not the years verifying the truth of what I said to you, when a boy I told you I needed your help, and also that you did not know yourself? I knew the depth of your wondrous nature. My own Emily, you are a glorious woman," and as tenderly as in the olden days, with the great strength of his undying love, he gathered me in silence to his heart. How many nights I passed to the land of dreams thinking, "Oh, if my Louis should die!"

Father and mother were enjoying life, and when Aunt Phebe came to see us, bringing a wee bit of a blue-eyed daughter, she said, "If I should have to leave her, I should die with the knowledge that she would find a home among you here."

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"I don't see why we haint thought out sooner," said Aunt Hildy; "you see folks are ready, waitin', only they don't know whar to begin such work, and now there's Jane North, I'll be bound she'd a gone deeper and deeper into tattlin', ef the right one hadn't teched her in a tender spot, and now she's jest sot her heart into the work, and as true as you live, she's growin' handsome in doin' it. I'm ashamed of myself to think I have wasted so much time. Oh, ef I'd got my eyes open thirty years ago."

"Better late than never," said Aunt Phebe; "live and learn; it takes one life to teach us how to prize it, but the days to come will be full of fruit to our children, I hope."

"Wall ef we sow the wind we reap the whirlwind sure, Miss Dayton."

Aunt Phebe was very desirous that John should see Mr. Dayton, which he did, and an offer to study with him the higher mathematics was gladly accepted, and between these two men sprang a friendship which was enduring.

Uncle Dayton had helped many a one through the tangled maze of Euclid problems and their like, and when John walked along by his side in ease and pleasure, Mr. Dayton was delighted; and when he came to see us, he said:

"The fellow is a man, he's a man clear through.

"Why," said he, "I was just the one to carry him along all right. I was the first man to take a colored boy into a private school, and I did it under protest, losing some of the white boys, whose parents would not let them stay; not much of a loss either," he added, "though they behaved nearly as well as the colored boys I took. I belonged at the time to the Baptist Church; the colored woman, whose two sons I received into my school, was a member of the same church; three boys, whose parents were my brothers and sisters in the faith, were withdrawn, and the minister who had baptized us all, and declared us to be one in the name of the humble Nazarene, also withdrew his son from my school, being unwilling to have him recite in the class with these two boys, whose skin was almost as white as his own. The natural inference was, that he considered himself of more consequence than the Almighty, for he certainly had given us all to him, and I had verily thought the man meant to help God do part of his work, but this proved conclusively that the Lord had it all to do—at any rate that which was not nice enough for the parson—and it took a large piece of comfort out of my heart. I was honest in trying to do my duty, and it grieved me to think he was not. Another young colored boy whom I took, is a physician in our city to-day, and another who came to my house to be instructed has been graduated at the Normal School of our State with high honors, being chosen as the valedictorian of the class, and he is to-day principal of a Philadelphia school.

"I tell you this truth has always been before me, and I have run the risk of my life almost daily in practising upon it. My school was really injured for a time, and dwindled down to

a few scholars, but I kept right along, and the seed which was self-sowing, sprang up around me, and to-day I have more than I can do, and the people know I am right."

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The blue eyes of Mr. Dayton sparkled as he paused in his recital, running his fingers through his hair, and for a time evidently wandering in the labyrinthine walks of the soul's mathematics, whose beautifully defined laws might make all things straight, and it was only the sight of John's towering form in the doorway that roused him, and he said:

"I have brought to you Davies' Legendre. I thought he would receive more thanks in the years to come than now, for is it not always so? Are not those who move beyond the prescribed limits of the circle of to-day, unappreciated, and must we not often wait for the grave to cover their bodies, and their lives to be written, ere we realize what their hearts tried to do for us? It is a sad fact, and one which shapes itself in the mould of a selfish ignorance, which covers as a crust the tender growing beauty of our inner natures.

It was a cold day in December, 1856, when we were startled to see Jane coming over the hill in such a hurried way that we feared something was the matter with the children. These children were dear to me. Hal and Mary had a beautiful boy two and a half years old, but no bud had as yet nestled against my heart.

I met her at the gate and asked, "What's the matter with the children?"

"Go into the house, Emily De-mond, 'taint the children, it's me." She wanted us all to sit down together.

"Oh! dear, dear me, what can I do? I'm out of my head almost."

We gathered together in the middle room, and waited for her to tell us, but she sat rocking, as if her life depended on it, full five minutes before she could speak—it seemed an hour to me—finally she screamed out:

"He's come back!"

"Whom do you mean?" I cried, while mother and Aunt Hildy exchanged glances.

"He came last night; he's over to the Home, Miss Patten, d'ye hear?"

"Jane," said Aunt Hildy in a voice that sounded so far away it frightened me, "do you mean Daniel?"

"Yes, yes; he's come back, and he wants me to forgive him, and I must tell it, he wants me to marry him. I sat up all night talkin' and thinkin' what I can do."

"Jane," said Aunt Hildy, in that same strange voice, "has he got any news?"

"Both of 'em dead. Oh, Miss Patten, you'll die, I know you'll die!"

“No, I shan’t. I died when they went away.”

“What can I do, Miss Patten? Oh, some of you *do* speak! Mis’ *De-mond*, you tell; you are allus right.”

Clara crossed the room, and kneeling on the carpet before her, said:

“My dear soul, is it the one you told me of?”

“Yes, yes,” said Jane, “the very one; gall and worm-wood I drank, and all for him; he ran away and—”

“Yes,” added Aunt Hildy, “tell it all. Silas and our boy went with him, father and son, and Satan led ’em all.”

“Has he suffered much?” said Clara.

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"Oh, yes, marm, but he says he can't live without me! He hain't never been married; I'm fifty-four, and he's the same age."

"Jane," said Clara, "I guess it will be all right; let him stay with you."

"How it looks," interrupted Jane; "they'll all know him."

"Never mind. The Home is a sort of public institution now; let him stay, and in three weeks I'll tell you all about it."

"Get right up off this floor, you angel woman, and lemme set on the sofy with you," said Jane.

Louis and I left the room, and after an hour or so Jane went over the hill, and Aunt Hildy stepped as firmly as before she came. Poor Aunt Hildy, this was the sorrow she had borne. I was glad she knew they were dead, for uncertainty is harder to bear than certainty. I wondered how it came that I should never have known and dimly remembered something about some one's going away strangely, when I was a little girl. My mother had, like all Aunt Hildy's friends, kept her sorrow secret, and she told me it was a rare occurrence for Aunt Hildy to mention it even to her, whom she had always considered her best friend.

If Jane had not herself been interested, it would have leaked out probably, but these two women, differing so strangely from each other, had held their secrets close to their hearts, and for twenty-five long years had nightly prayed for the wanderers.

Aunt Hildy's husband was a strange man; their boy inherited his father's peculiarities, and when he went away with him was only sixteen years of age.

Daniel Turner was twenty-nine, and the opinion prevailed that he left home because he was unwilling to marry Jane, although they had been for several years engaged, and she had worked hard to get all things ready for housekeeping. He was not a bad-looking man, and evidently possessed considerable strength.

Clara managed it all nicely, and when the three weeks' probation ended, they were quietly married at Mr. Davis', and Mr. Turner went to work on the farm which Jane had for many years let out on shares. He worked well through the rest of the winter, and the early spring found him busy doing all that needed to be done.

He was interested in our scheme, and felt just pride in the belongings of the Home, which was really settling into a permanency. We sometimes had letters of interrogation and of encouragement as well, from those who, hearing of us, were interested.

Louis often said the day would come when many institutions of this kind would be established, for the object was a worthy one, and no great need can cry out and not finally be heard, even though the years may multiply ere the answer comes.

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“Changes on every hand,” said Mr. Davis, “and now that the pulpit has come down nearer to the people, and I can send my thoughts directly into their hearts, instead of over their heads, as I have been so often forced to do, we may hope that the chain of our love will weld us together as a unit in strength and feeling. I almost wish our town could be called New Light, for it seems to me the world looks new as it lies about us. The lantern of love, we know, is newly and well trimmed, and I feel its light can never die; it may give place to one which is larger, and whose rays can be felt further, but it can never die. I really begin to believe there is no such thing as death. I dislike the word, for it only signifies decay. I call it change, and that seems nearer right.”

“So it is, Mr. Davis,” said Clara, as he talked earnestly with us of his interest in the children and the people about us, “for, even as children are gradually changing into men and women, so shall our expanding lives forever climb to reach the stature of our angelhood, which must come to us when we let the perishable garments fall, and the mortal puts on its immortality. If we all could only see that our Father will help us to shape these garments even here; could we know that stitches daily taken in the garment that our soul desires are necessary that it may be ready for us when we enter there,—how great would be the blessing! This would relieve death of its clinging fears, and our exit from earth and entrance to the waiting city would be made as a pleasant journey.

“Louis, dear boy, feels all this, and if the cold hearts of speculative men could be warmed and softened into an unfolding life, he would not constantly do battle with the wrong; but truth is mightier than error. God’s love must at last be felt, and when the delay is over, how many hearts, now deaf to his entreaties, will say with one accord, ‘we are sorry, if we could live our days over, we would help you!’”

Louis did do battle, that is true; he paid due respect to people of all classes, but fearlessly and trustfully he dealt, both by word and practice, vigorous blows against all enslaving systems. He said to us sometimes, that when he went to the mill—as he constantly did, working until every one of the twenty boys to whom he promised liberty, found it—he came in contact with three different conditions; he classified them as mind, heart and soul. “When I talk to them,” he said, “or if I go there on my mission and speak no words, I hear their souls say ‘he is right and we are wrong;’ I hear the earthly hearts whisper hoarsely, ‘curse the plans of that fellow, he is in our way;’ and the worldly policy of the mind steps forth upon the balcony of the brain and says, ‘treat him well, it is the best policy to pursue, for he has money.’ Yes, my Emily, I thank God for the fortune my father left me, hidden in the silver service. It shall all be used. You and I will use it all. And was the bequest not typical, its very language being ‘a fortune in thy service, oh, my father!’”

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"I never thought of this; how wonderful you are, Louis," I said.

"And you, my Emily, my companion, may our work be the nucleus around which shall gather the work of ages yet to be, for it takes an age, you know, to do the work of a year—almost of a day."

Our lives ran on like a strong full tide, and all our ships were borne smoothly along for four full years. An addition had been made to Jane's house, and her husband proved loyal and true, so good and kind and earnest in his work that Aunt Hildy said:

"I have forgotten to remember his dark days, and I really don't believe he'd ever have cut up so ef Silas had let him alone."

Good Mrs. Davis had sought rest and found it, and a widowed niece came as house-keeper. John Jones was growing able to do the work he promised the girls and boys down South, and lectured in the towns around us, telling his own story with remarkable eloquence for one who had no early advantages. He was naturally an orator, and only needed a habit of speaking to make apparent his exceptional mental capacity. Aunt Hildy was not as strong when 1860 dawned upon us, and she said on New Year's evening, which with us was always devoted to a sort of recalling of the past:

"Don't believe I'll be here when sixty-one comes marchin' in."

Clara looked at her with a strange light in her eyes, and said:

"Dear Aunt Hildy, wait for me, please; I'd like to go just when you do."

It was the nineteenth day of April this year, when an answer to a prayer was heard, and a little wailing sound caused my heart to leap in gratitude and love. A little dark-eyed daughter came to us, and Louis and I were father and mother. She had full dark eyes like his, Clara's mouth, and a little round head that I knew would be covered with sunny curls, because this would make her the picture I had so longed to see.

"Darling baby-girl, why did you linger so long? We have waited till our hope had well-nigh vanished," and the dark eyes turned on me for an answer, which my heart read, "It is well."

Louis named her "Emily Minot Desmonde." It was his wish, and while, as I thought, it ill suited the little fairy, I only said:

"May she never be called 'Emily did it.'"

"May that be ever her name," said Louis, "for have you not yourself done that of which she will be always proud, and when we are gone will they who are left not say of you, 'Emily did it'?"

“Ah! my darling, you have lost and won your title, and it comes back shaped and gilded anew, for scores of childish lips have echoed it, and ‘Emily did it’ is written in the indelible ink of the great charity which has given them shelter.”

“Louis, too,” I said, and he answered:

“Had I not found my Emily, I could never have undertaken it. You cannot know how I gathered lessons from your happy home. In my earliest years I was dissatisfied with the life which money could buy. I did not know the comforts of work and pleasure mingled, and it was here, under these grand old hills, while communing with nature, I sought and found the presence of its Infinite Creator; and your smile, your presence, was a promise to me which has been verified to the letter.”

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When Clara held our wondrous blessing in the early days of its sweet life, she looked sometimes so pensively absent that I one day asked her if she did not wish Emily had come sooner.

“Ah! my Emily, mother; ’tis a wrong, wrong thought, still I cannot deny it;” and a mist covered her tender eyes. My heart stood still, for I knew she felt that her hand would not lead our little one in the first steps she should take, and the thought embittered my joy. I suppose everybody’s baby is the sweetest, and I must forbear and let every mother think how we cared for and tended the little one, and how our heartstrings all vibrated at the touch of her little hand, and if she was ill or worrisome, which she was earthly enough to be, we were all robbed of our comfort till her smiles came back.

Aunt Hildy was an especial favorite, and she would sit with her so contentedly, while that dear old face, illumined by the sun of love, told our hearts it was good for baby’s breath to moisten the cheek of age.

Little Halbert, as we called Hal’s boy, was as proud of his cousin as could be, and my old apple tree, which was still dear, dropped leaves and blossoms on the heads of the children, who loved to sit beneath its branches.

CHAPTER XXII.

CLARA LEAVES US.

The year 1861 had dawned upon us, and Aunt Hildy had not left us as she had expected to.

I said to her, “I believe you are better to-day than you were one year ago.” She folded her hands and looking at me, said:

“Appearances is often deceitful, Emily; I haint long to stay, neither has the saint among us. Her eyes have a strange look in them nowadays, and the veins in the lids show dreadful plain; we must be prepared for it.”

I could not talk about this, and how was I to prepare for it? I should never love her less, and could I ever bear to lose her, or realize how it would be without her? “Over there” was so far beyond me, I could only think and sigh and wait; but the symptoms of which Aunt Hildy spoke I noticed afterward, and it was true her eyelids seemed more transparent, and her eyes had a watery light.

I knew she was weak, and since the snow had fallen was chilled more easily than before, and had ventured out but little. I did not desire to pain Louis, but feeling uneasy, could not rest until I talked with him, and he said his heart had told him the little mother would leave us ere long. “If she lives till the fall, we will go down and see Southern



Mary, if we can." Little Emily clung very closely to Clara, and if I had not insisted on having the care of her, I believe she never would have asked for me. Mother said we should spoil her, and Ben declared she "would make music for us by and by." Ben was still interested in his work, and as busy as a bee the long days through.

"Thirty-three years old," I said to him, "are you never to be married?"

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"Guess not," he would reply laughingly, "I can't see how Hal could get on without me, and I, in my turn, need John. What a splendid fellow he is! They all like him around us here, and I believe I shall sell out the mill to him and buy another farm to take care of. He handles logs as easily as if they were matches. He is a perfect giant in strength."

"Yes, I know, Ben, but he never will live in a saw-mill. John is destined to be a public man; he will have calls and by and bye will stand in the high places and pour forth his eloquence. He may buy a saw-mill, but he will never keep himself in it, no matter how hard he tries."

"So my cake is all dough, you think, so be it, sister mine;" and baby Emily received a bear hug from Uncle Ben, who, a moment later, was walking thoughtfully over the hill.

The eighteenth of March was a cold day, extraordinarily so, tempestuous and stormy. Louis had been in Boston three days, and we thought the winds were gathering a harsh welcome for his return. His visits to Boston were getting to be quite frequent nowadays, for he had found some warm friends there, who had introduced themselves by letter, and now they were making united efforts to found a home for children,—foundlings who were to be kept and well cared for, until opportunities were presented to place them with kind people in good homes. He was getting on wonderfully, and I could hardly wait for the news he would bring to us.

He came at last, and with him an immense square package looking in shape very like a large mirror or a painting, and I wondered what it could be. Baby Emily had to be saluted cordially, and both her little arms were entwined around his neck.

"Now, now, little lady," said Louis, "go to thy royal mother, I have something to show thee," and taking off the wrappings of the mysterious package, he placed two life-size portraits before us, saying as he did so:

"Companion pieces, my life's saving angels—behold yourself, my Emily, see my fairy mother," and sure enough there we were. A glance at Clara caused me to exclaim:

"Wilmur Benton painted them."

"Yes, both," he replied. "Are they not beautiful?"

"Mine is not, I am sure, Louis; but your mother's,—oh, how lovely it is, and as natural as life! It must be the one to which Mary referred."

"It is, my Emily. I secured it long ago, and Mr. Benton has been a long time at work on yours. He is sadly afflicted, and does not look like the same man. His wife is dead, and I think he will not himself stay long. I have been to see him always when in Boston, and would have told you all before, had I not feared you might, by getting hold of one thread, find another; Hal knows all about it. But see, Emily, just see yourself as you are. I told

you your eyes should speak from the canvas, and is it not as well as if my own hand had held the brush?"

I looked the words I could not say, and wondered how it came that this likeness should have been painted without my being before the artist. It was years since Wilmur Benton left us, and the picture represented me at my present age, I thought, and I asked:

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"How did he get the expression, Louis?"

"Oh, Emily, he remembered every outline of your face, and with the greatest ease defined them! Then from time to time, I sat near and suggested here or there a change, until at last the work was perfected, which in all its beauty only tells the truth; you do not see yourself when your face lights up with glorious thought; the depth of your eyes was to me always a study, and this man, Emily, carries in his heart to-day the knowledge of your worth; he holds you and my little mother in fond remembrance. His soul is purified by suffering, and this last visit I made him has given him strength to tell me his whole life. When with a sigh he ended his story, he looked at me sorrowfully, and said:

"I suppose you will despise me now, but I feel that after all your kindness I must tell you, for it is right you should know. Halbert, I have never told—it is as well not to do so."

"Poor fellow," I said, "and we knew it all before."

"No, not all; his life has been a drama with wonderfully wild, sad scenes, and the great waves of his troubles and errors have, at times, driven him nearly crazy. His eldest son is an artist like himself, and finely organized. The other is in the West with an uncle of his mother's. Are you sorry I have done all this? Speak, my beloved."

My eyes told him that my heart was glad for the little comfort he could give this man whose perfidy had given me sorrow, and Clara said:

"To help one lost lamb to find the fold is the blessed work my boy should always do."

Aunt Hildy raised both hands at sight of our pictures, exclaiming:

"Beautiful! beautiful! Splendid! Louis could not have brought us all a greater surprise, or one that would have been more highly valued."

Little Emily patted and kissed the faces, and soon learned to designate them, "pit mam and mam Cla," for pretty mamma and mamma Clara.

A few weeks after this we were sitting together in earnest conversation; the small, dark cloud hung over us that threatened civil war, and while I could hardly believe it possible, Louis and Clara said it must come. Matthias came in of an errand, and sat down to hear us talk, and when father said, "Oh, no, we shall not have war; those Southerners are too lazy to fight," he raised both his hands and exclaimed:

"Excoose me fur conterdictin' ye, but, Mr. Minot, ye dunno 'bout dat; dey'll fight to de end ob time for dar stock. A good many on 'em owns morin' two hundred, an' its money; it's whar de living comes from. Ef you gib 'em a chance dey'll show you a big streak, an' fight dey will for sartin."

The words had hardly left his lips, when Clara said:

“Oh! take me quick, dear boy!”

We all sprang to her side. Ere Louis could put his arms around her, she fell from her chair like dead.

“Fainted! Water!” said Louis.

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"Camfire!" said Aunt Hildy, and I stood powerless to move or speak. I saw Louis lay her on the sofa, and thought she was dead; the room grew dark, and I forced myself to feel my way to the door, and leaning against it would have fallen had not father put his arm about me and led me through into the entry where I could get some air. When the sickening swimming feeling left me, and the mist fell from my eyes, I was strong enough to do something, and kneeling by the side of the motionless figure, felt her pulse, or rather tried vainly to find it, and put my cheek to her mouth, whence came no breath.

"Oh! Clara darling, little mother, speak to us, our hearts are breaking! Oh, Louis! get hot water and flannels, chafe her limbs, put a hot cloth over the stomach and chest; she is not dead," and putting my head down, I breathed full, long breaths into her nostrils.

"Taint no use," said Aunt Hildy, "but we must do it," and she worked with a will.

"That poor angel woman is done gone," said Matthias. "She couldn't stan' it. Oh, de Lord!" and he looked the picture of despair.

We were losing hope of resuscitation, and I sank on the floor beside Louis, who still knelt at the head of the lounge, when a faint sound came from her lips. We held our breath and listened, and now in a low, weak voice she said:

"I'll go back, Louis Robert, to say good-bye; I can stay a little longer; oh! they feel so badly—yes, I must go back," and then long, deep sighing breaths were taken. A little longer and her eyes opened—"Louis, Emily, baby, friends, I am here."

"Oh! little mother," said Louis, "where is the trouble?"

She tried to smile, as if to cover all our fears, and said with effort:

"I am weak; I could not hold together; get some of Aunt Hildy's bitters," and when the glass containing it was held to her lips, she drank eagerly.

"Take both hands, Louis; let the baby touch me."

"Oh, Clara, don't go!" I said, as I held little Emily near her.

"No, no, not now, but I want help to stay; keep the baby close.

"Matthias, don't go home," she said, and then, closing her eyes, lay so still and motionless I feared she would never move again.

A half hour had passed and she still looked so cold and white, when suddenly her eyes opened, and her voice was strong as she said:



"I am better now, I have come clear back,—help me to get up, dear boy," and Louis put his arms around her to raise her; as he did so I saw a strange look pass over her face, and her hands were laid on her limbs. She turned her beautiful eyes upon me, as if to say "don't be frightened," and said, "Please move my limbs, there is no feeling there—they are paralyzed, and I am so glad it is not my hands." I moved them gently, and thought when she was really herself she would be able to use them. She seemed now bright and cheerful as before.

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The evening wore on; Matthias went home, and at Clara's request Aunt Hildy occupied a room with her down stairs, Louis carrying her tenderly to her couch as if she were a child.

Sleep came toward us with laggard steps through the long night; Louis seemed to realize it all so plainly, and my heart was in my throat. I tried to hope, and when at last I fell asleep I wandered in dreams to a wondrous fountain, whose silvery spray fell before me as a gleaming promise, and I thought its murmuring music whispered, "she will live," and her Louis Robert, who stood near me, constantly sang the same sweet words. I believe my dream really comforted me, for when I woke it clung to me still, and "she will live" rang in my ears like a sweet bell chime.

We found her better and like herself, but the lower limbs were cold as marble, heavy also and without feeling, and we knew it was, as she had said, "paralysis."

"Now I am to be a burden, my Emily mother, and oh, if you had not called me back, I would have gone to the hills with Louis Robert! It was not fancy nor delirium, for I knew that my body was falling. I saw him when he came and whispered 'now, darling, now,' and when I lost your faces, he raised me in his arms, and I was going, oh! till somebody breathed upon me, and warm drops like rain touched my cheek, and I heard your hearts all say, 'we cannot have it.' This like a strong hand drew me back, and I thought I must come and say good-bye for a comfort to you all. So Louis Robert, with his great love waiting for me there, drew himself away and kindly said, 'I will wait,'—then a mist came between us, and I opened my eyes to see you all around me."

"Oh, Clara! how can we ever let you go?"

"Ah, my beloved ones! I only go a little before you, and if you knew how sweet it will be to be strong, you would say, because you love me, 'I may go.' I have many things to say—and I shall remain with you a time, and may, I fear, weary you. I am glad Louis is strong."

It was pitiful to see the patience with which she bore her suffering. There was no pain, she said, but it was a strange feeling not to be alive—and she would look at her limbs and say, "Poor flesh, you are not warm any more." We had one of her crimson-cushioned easy chairs arranged to suit her needs, and in this she could be rolled about. She sat at the table with us and I kept constantly near her, and tried to shield her from any extra excitement. When on the thirteenth day of April, news reached us of the blow which, the day before, had fallen on Sumter, we feared to let her know it. But her spirit quickened into the clearest perception possible, divined something, and obliged us to tell her.

She said: "I knew it would come, I have felt it for years, and when the cruel sacrifice is finished, liberty will arise, and over the ashes of the slain will say, 'Let the bond go free.'"

Ben's eyes looked as Hal's did, when he left us for Chicago, and he whispered to me:

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"I must go. Hal must stay here; Louis cannot go. John will see to every thing for me, and I am going."

Six days later he had enlisted, and oh! how filled these days were! When Matthias heard of it, he came over, and happening to meet me where he could talk freely, he said:

"Dis is jes' what I knowed was a comin', an' I have tole Ben fur to kill dat Mas'r Sumner, de fus' ting, for he's the one dat ort fur to be killed."

"Why, Matthias, you are in a great hurry to kill him, and you really believe he is to drop right into that terrible fire; why, I could not hurry a dog out of existence if I thought everlasting torment awaited him."

"Look a yere, Miss Em'ly, ef dat dog wuz mad, you'd kill him mighty quick, wouldn't ye?"

I did not know what to say, and he answered the question himself:

"Yas, de Lord knows, dat man needs tendin' to, an' I'se mighty anxious fur de good Lord to take him in han'. We'll live to see ebery black man free, Miss Em'ly,—we shall, shure,—an' dere'll be high times down in Charleston. Wonder what little Molly'll do?"

"I have been thinking about her," I said. "You know the last letter we received they were fearful of war, and thinking of coming to her husband's friends in Pennsylvania; but she feared her mother would die; she has been poorly for a long time."

"Reckin she'll die, then, fur de 'sitement'll kill her, ef nuffin else don't."

The days wore on and Clara still lingered with us. Ben was as yet unhurt, and first lieutenant of his company. He wrote us that battle was not what he had thought it; he was not shaky at all, and the smell of powder covered every fear; he had only one thought and that was to do his duty. A letter full of sorrow came from Mary. Her mother had passed from earth, and her father was going on to a little farm they owned a few miles from the city, and she, with her husband and Althea Emily was, trying to get into Pennsylvania. "I am in momentary fear," she wrote, "for my husband is watched so closely, his principles are so well known, I think we shall have great trouble in getting through, but we cannot stay here."

The dewy breath of May was rising about us; violet angle was alive with its blossoms, and the birds sang sweetly as if there were no sorrowing hearts in the land.

Clara had failed of late, and the evening of the fifteenth we were gathered together at her request in her sitting-room.



“Do not feel troubled,” she said, “for when I am out of sight, you will sorrow if you feel I have not told it all. Come, baby Emily, sweet bird sit close to mam Cla, while she tells the story.”

Louis and I sat on either side, Aunt Hildy with mother and father very near, so that we formed a semi-circle.

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"I am losing my strength, as you all know," said Clara "and the day is very near when I shall reach for the hand that will lead me to the hills. Now, Louis, my dear boy, here is the paper I have written, wherein I give to you all the things I believe you will prize. I believe I have remembered all who have been so kind and so dear to me, and I know you will comply with every wish, and I desire no form of the law to cover my words." Louis took the papers with a trembling hand, and she continued: "It is wise and right for me to tell you about the laying away of this frame of mine, for I know if I do not tell you about it many questions will arise, and we will have them all settled now before I go beyond your hearing. I shall hear you and see you all the time.

"First, buy for me a cedar coffin, since it will please you to remember that this wood lasts longer in the ground than any other. Do not have any unnecessary trimmings for it, and I would like to wear in this last resting-place the blue dress I prize the most. You will find in my large trunk the little pillow I have made for my head; just let me lie there a little on one side, and put a few of Emily's sweet violets in my hand that I may be pleasant to look upon. Leave no rings upon my fingers; these I wear, my Louis Robert gave me, and you must keep them for his grandchild," and as she said this, she unfastened the shining chain that she had worn hidden so many years, and putting it around our little Emily's neck, said: "Let her always wear the chain and the locket," and while the baby's eyes reflected the gleam of the gold that dazzled them, we were all weeping. "Do not feel so," said Clara; "it is beautiful to go; let me tell you the rest. All these people whom I have known will desire to look at my face, and for their sakes let me be carried into the old church which has become to me so dear. I have asked Mr. Davis to preach from the text, 'I am the resurrection and the life.'

"Be sure that the children from the Home all go, and I would like you with them to occupy the front pews. I have a fancy," and she smiled, "that if you sit there it will help me to come near to my deserted tenement. I know I shall be with you there, and I hope you will never call me dead. My house of clay is nearly dead now, and the more strength it loses the stronger my spirit feels. Mr. Minot said, long since, that I might own part of his lot in the churchyard, and I would like to be buried under the willow there. I like that corner best. Do not ever tell little Emily I am there; just say I'm gone away to rest and to be well and strong, and when she is older tell her the frame that held the picture is beneath the grasses, and that my freed soul loves her and watches her, for it will be true. If you feel, Louis, my dear boy, like bringing your father's remains to rest beside me, you can do so. It will not trouble either of us, for it matters little; we are to be together. This is all, except that, if

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it be practicable, I should like the burial to take place at the hour of sunset; this seems the most fitting time. While the grave is yet open, please let the children sing together, 'Sweet Rest;' I always like to hear them sing this. To-morrow evening I have something to say to the friends who really seem to belong to me,—Hal and Mary, Mr. Davis, Matthias, Aunt Peg and John, Jane and her husband. Please let them come at six o'clock."

She closed her eyes wearily, and looked so white and beautiful, her small hands folded, and the fleecy shawl about her falling from her shoulders, and it seemed as if the material of life, like this delicate garment, was also falling from her. Desolation spread its map before me. I could think of nothing but an empty room and heart, and with Louis' arms about me, I sobbed bitterly. Then I thought how selfish I was, and said: "Louis, take her in your arms; she is so tired, poor little mother." The blue eyes looked at me with such a tender light, and she said, "Yes, I am tired." Louis gathered her in his arms and seated himself in a rocker. Aunt Hildy went for some cordial. Mother and father sat quietly with bitter tears falling slowly, and with little Emily in my arms, I crossed the room to occupy a seat where my tears would not trouble her. It was sadly beautiful.

She drew strength from Louis, and was borne into her room feeling, she said, very comfortable. I wanted to stay with her through the night, but she said:

"No, the baby needs you; so does Louis; I know how he feels; my night will be peaceful and my rest sweet; Aunt Hildy will rest beside me."

"Yes, yes, I'll stay, and we shall both rest well," said Aunt Hildy.

In the morning she was weak, but we dressed her, and after eating a little she felt better, and in the afternoon seemed very comfortable and happy. We had our supper at a little after five o'clock, and at six o'clock, as she had wished, all were in her room.

"Louis, roll my chair into the centre of the room, and let me face the west, for I love to see day's glory die. Now come, good friends all, and sit near me, where I can see your faces. I want to tell you that I am going out of your sight, and I have left to each of you what seemed good and right to me. I hope, yes, I know you will remember that I love you all so much I would never be forgotten. You are grown so dear to me that I shall not forget to look upon you; and please remember that I am not dead, but shall be to you a living, active friend, who sees and knows your needs, and to whose heart may be entrusted some dear mission for your greatest good. Mr. and Mrs. Turner," and she held her hands to Jane and her husband, "be true and faithful to each other. Leave no work undone, love the children, and ask help from the hills, whence it shall ever come. You will, I am sure;" and her eyes turned inquiringly upon them.

“Oh, Mis’ *De-Mond*,” said Jane, “I will, oh, you blessed angel woman!”

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"I will, so help me God!" said Mr. Turner, and they took their seats, while Clara, with a motion that said please come, called:

"Matthias and Aunt Peg, and you too, John, don't think I can ever forget you. You will come to me, and you will know me there, and, John, you have a wonderful work to do; your words will bear sweet tidings to your race, and your reward shall be that of the well-doer."

"Oh, de good Lord! white lamb, how kin we ever let you go; you's done got hold on our heart-strings! Oh, de good Lord bless ye, ye snow-white darlin', an' ef it's de Mas'r's will, den we mus' lib all in the dark widout ye, but de light ob your eyes is hevin to dis ole heart!"

"Oh, that's true' nuf!" said Aunt Peg, "God'll take care on you, but what'll we do?" and their groans fell like the wailing winds upon the ears of us all; our hearts were touched to their inmost chords.

"Mr. Davis," said Clara, and her eyes dilated with a wondrous light while her voice grew unnaturally strong, "I am to see your wife. Shall I say you are looking forward to meeting her?"

"Just that, and it will not be long," and he bowed his head as he held in both his own her white hand.

"Halbert and Mary, come and let me bless you. My brother and sister, you are so dear to me. You, Halbert, have a wondrous touch; you stand before the shrine of art, and ere many years a people's verdict shall more than seal your heart's desire; a master artist you shall be, my friend."

"Oh, Clara, Clara!" said Hal—

"Yes," she continued, "Love's fawn has won the prize for you at home and abroad; I leave to you a friend,—Louis will attend to it all,—and among the little ones who come there will be some who have, like you, talent; help them as you shall see fit."

He could only bow his head, while Mary, sobbing as if her heart would break, said:

"Do not go; oh, do not leave us!"

Clara closed her eyes and sank back among her cushions almost breathless. We took her hands, Louis and I, and I feared she would never speak again. Tearful and motionless these beloved ones sat about her, and at last, when the crimson and gold swept like a full tide of glory the broad western expanse that lay before us, she raised herself, looked into all our faces, held her lips for a last kiss from us of the household, and said in tones as clear as silver bells:

“I am going now; he is coming. Aunt Hildy, you will come soon. Emily, love my Louis. Louis, kiss me again; fold close the falling garment. Baby, breathe on me once more—Louis Robert. Oh, this is beautiful!”

Her head dropped on Louis’ shoulder. Slowly the eyelids covered the beautiful eyes.

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She was dead. Clara, the purest of all, dead and how beautiful the transition! What a picture for the sunset to look upon, as with the full tide of sympathy flooding our hearts, we stood around her where she lay! John, in his strong dark beauty, with folded arms, and eyes like wells of sorrow; Matthias and Aunt Peg, with tears running over their dusky faces; good Mr. Davis, with his gray hairs bending over her as if to hear her tell the message to his loved one; Aunt Hildy standing like one who is only waiting for a little more to fill the cup, which is already near her lips; my father and mother with their tender sympathies expressed in every feature, with Jane and her husband near them like two statues; Hal and Mary beside Louis and me, wrapt like ourselves in the mantle of a strange and new experience. How long we stood thus, I know not; the last sun-rays were dying as Aunt Hildy said: "We must wait no longer; Jane and Aunt Peg, you'll help me, the rest of you need'nt stay;" and so we left our beautiful dead, still in the hands of her friends.

The day of her burial was a perfect one—calm in its beauty, the blue of its skies like the eyes of our darling. The little pillow made by her own hands was of blue, covered with a fine web of wrought lace, and with edging that had also been her handiwork. We dressed her as she desired,—in a plain dress of pale blue,—the violet blossoms she loved were in her hand, and it seemed to me as if I could never see her laid out of sight—she was so beautiful in this last sleep; she looked not more than thirty; there were no gray hairs among the brown, and no lines of care or sorrow marked her sweet, pure face.

All things were as she desired, and when the sun burned low on the hills, we laid her under the willow, while the children sang "Sweet Rest."

"Will there ever be another like her?" I said.

"Never," said Aunt Hildy.

"No, never," said the hearts of all.

My father missed her as much as if she had been his daughter, and I was glad of little Emily's presence; it was a star in our night. Louis was calm and strong, and spoke of her daily, and insisted on her plate at the table, saying:

"I cannot call her dead. Let us keep a place for her."

It was a tender recognition which we respected. He looked after her, it seemed to me, and almost saw her in her new home. The months wore on, and our cares were still increasing. News of battles lost and won came to us daily, and at last a letter telling of Lieutenant Minot having been wounded seriously. It was impossible for any one to reach him at present, and we must wait until he got to Washington, whither he would be sent as soon as he was able. Our fears were great, but at last a letter came from

Washington, stating he would start for home on the twenty-first of October, and he desired Hal to meet him in New York. Hal found that the wound was in the shoulder, and the ball was still in it. Unsuccessful probing had caused him great suffering, and we should hardly have known him.

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When the real state of the wound was known, Aunt Hildy said:

"I can get that ball out," and she went to work energetically. She cut cloth into strips and bound all about the place where the ball entered, and then she made a drawing "intment," as she called it, and applied it daily, and in about four weeks, to our great delight, the ball came out. Ben had the receipt for that wonderful "intment," and he calls it "Aunt Hildy's miracle."

When the cold days of the fall came upon us, Aunt Hildy felt them greatly, and the morning of December tenth we awoke to find her gone; she had gone to sleep to wake in a better home.

It seemed as if we could not have it so, but when I remembered all she had told me of her hopes and fears, when I knew she had found Clara and was glad, I said we were selfish; let our hearts say "Amen."

The town mourned Aunt Hildy, and again our church was filled to overflowing, and the sermon Mr. Davis preached was a just and beautiful tribute to our beloved friend, the true and faithful Hildah Patten.

The day after the burial, father said to us in a mournful tone:

"Now I have a duty to perform, and when she talked to me about it, she said, 'Do it right off, Mr. Minot; don't wait because you feel kinder bad to have me laid away. It's the best way to do what you've got to do, and get it over with.'"

"So to-night we'll read the papers, and then we will carry out her desires—good old soul; I do wish she could have stayed longer. I can hardly see how we're going to live without her."

The evening drew near, and Halbert, Mary and Ben, with little Hal, were seated in the "middle room," while my father, with a trembling hand, turned the key in a small drawer of the old secretary, and took out a roll of papers and a box. As he did so a thought struck him, and he turned suddenly, saying:

"Why are not all here? She told me to have Matthias and Peg and John come over. I believe a few more sad partings would make me lose my memory."

"I'll go over for them," said Ben; "it is early yet."

"Yes, there is plenty of time," said father. "The sun sets early; the shortest day in the year will soon be with us," and his eyes closed as if he were too tired to think, and he sat in silence until the sound of feet on the walk aroused him.

“Hope we hain’t come over to see more dyin’, Miss Em’ly. ’Pears like its gettin’ pooty lonesome round yere,” and as our friends seated themselves, the old clock tolled the hour of seven.

Little Emily was asleep in Louis’ lap, and her cousin Hal curled himself up in one corner of the old sofa, as if he, too, felt the presence of the god of sleep.

“Now we are ready,” said my father, “and here is the paper written by Aunt Hildy which she bade me read to you all, and whose instructions we must obey to the letter, remembering how wise and good our kind friend has ever been. It is written in the form of a letter,” and he read the following:

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"My dear friends, I am writin' this as ef I was dead and you still in the land of the livin', as we call it; I feel now as if when you read it I shall be in the land of the livin', and you among them who feed mostly on husks. I know by this stubbin pain in my side that I shall go to sleep, and jest step over into Clary's room before long, and all that ain't settled I am settlin' to-night, and to Mr. Minot's care I leave these papers and this box. You have been good and true friends to me, and I want to help you on a little in the doin' of good and perfect work. When Silas left me alone he took with him little money. I don't know what possessed him; but Satan, I guess, must have flung to the winds the little self-respect he had. He took one boy off with him to be a vagrant. Silas' father was a good man, and he left a good deal of property to this son of his, and we had got along, in a worldly sense, beautiful; so when, he went away he left considerable ready money and a lot of land, and I've held on to it all. Sometimes I've thought one of 'em might come back and want some of it; but now I know they are dead. From time to time I've sold the land, *etc.*, and you see I've added to what was left. I now propose to divide it between Emily and Louis, as one, Jane North Turner and her husband, and John Jones."

As this name fell from my father's lips, John's dark eyes spoke volumes and his broad chest heaved with emotion, but he sat perfectly erect, with his arms folded, and I thought what a grand picture he made.

Matthias groaned:

"Oh, de good Lord ob Israel, what ways?" Aunt Peg gave vent to one of her peculiar guttural sounds as father concluded the unfinished sentence with the names of Ben, Hal and his good little wife.

"Now, you can't do a great deal with this money, but it will go a little ways toward helpin' out. I believe there is just three thousand dollars, and that figgers only six hundred dollars apiece. Now, ef Ben's shoulder prevents him from workin', and he needs to have it, Halbert must give him half of what I leave to him, and I know he'll do it. Ben wants to get married, and I can see which way the wind blows in that quarter, and I think sense he's been half killed you'd all better help him. When that comes to pass, give to him all the furniture and beddin' that I leave, for his wife will be sensible enough to be glad of it. Halbert's likeness of me in marble is a great thing they say, and sells well, and he will please to put me up again in that same shape, and then sell the picter and use the money to help the poor. He'll do jest what I'd like to have him.

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"Emily and Louis will know jest what to do with their share; and now, John Jones, to you, —as a child of our father, as a brother to me,—I say, help yourself with what little I bestow in the very best way you can. Ef I didn't know you would look well after Peg and Matthias I should have left it to them and not to you. They won't stay here very much longer, any way—and its all peace ahead, blessed peace. You, perhaps, are wonderin' why Jane and her husband ain't here in this list. This is the reason: I wanted to tell you jest how I come to have this money, and I thought her husband would feel bad at the explanation. I should like to have you all go over there, and let Mr. Minot read to Mr. and Mrs. Turner and the children the paper I have left for them. Now I'm contented to go, and ef they do put a railroad track through my wood lot, it can't make me feel bad. The things of earth that I held so close through long years, will not seem to me any more as they have, too holy to be teched."

When father concluded the reading, we sat in such silence that the tick of the old clock, was to our ears the united beating of our hearts. Our thoughts were all centered on the wisdom and goodness of our unselfish friend who, through her life had been ever mindful of the needs of her fellow-men, and who, when standing before the gate of her eternal home, threw behind her her last treasure, thinking still of the poor hearts who needed its benefit.

We were to assemble at Jane's the next afternoon at five o'clock, and when we said "good night," John looked up at the stars and said:

"If the spirit of that good woman sees me, she reads what I cannot tell you."

The next afternoon found us in Jane's large square room, which faced the western sky, and no less than twenty children were seated there with us. This number seemed to be the complement of the Home,—as many as could comfortably be accommodated. It was a pleasant care to Jane, for her heart was in the work, and she looked younger now than before the work began. The wishes of the boys were consulted, and each one as nearly fitted to the place he occupied as possible. Jane said, when they first began to multiply, the care troubled her some; but she began to talk to herself, and to say: "There now, don't be foolish enough to notice every little caper of them boys," and then, she said: "I began to practise what I preached to myself. It worked first-rate, for I give over watchin' 'em, and we get along splendid."

There was a breathless silence when Louis said:

"We are here at the request of your friend, children, the blessed Aunt Hildy who has left a word for you. You know she loved you, and I imagine at this moment you are each wearing a pair of stockings which were knit for you by her. Now listen, please, while Mr. Minot reads to you her letter."

Then, in a slow and impressive manner, father read as follows:

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“My dear folks at the Home. I’m about to leave this world for a better, and on the borders of that blessed land I think of you. I think of your happy faces and of Mr. and Mrs. Turner, who love you so much, and I should like to have you know that I expect to meet you all over there. You boys will grow to be good men, and you girls, who are like sweet pinks to my mind, I want you to make blessed good women every one of you. Now I think the good folks who take care of you would be thankful to have a school-house of their own, and teachers who are interested in the work of helping you along; and to give a little help, I leave to Mr. and Mrs. Turner eight hundred dollars—two hundred is in the box in one dollar gold pieces—to build a school-house with. You know I own a piece of land next to yours, and here in this plot of two acres I want you to put up this school-house. Give Mr. Brown the work, and let him draw up the plan with Mr. Turner; I’ve figured it out, and I think there’s enough to build a good, substantial building such as you need; and the deed of the two acres I give to the children. Each one of their names is there, including those of the two that came first. Let each one, ef old enough, do as he or she pleases with the ground. Ef they want to raise marigolds, let ’em, and ef they want to raise garden sass, let ’em. I should think Burton Brown would like to step in as a teacher, and I believe he will, but the rest you can manage.

“Now this is all. When you get the school-house built you’ll want a walk around it, and ef you should have a border of flowers, you may put in some ‘live forever’ for me, for that means truth, and that is what I want you to find. If Fanny Mason feels like goin’ over to Mis’ Minot’s to live with her, I’d like to have her go, and if she does, she’ll find two chests and a trunk full of things I’ve left that she needs, but she must have her piece of ground here just the same. The deed I have made is recorded, and I would like to have Mr. Dayton survey the land, and make the division of it. Then you can each one of you hold your own as long as you live, Mr. and Mrs. Turner keepin’ it in trust till the law says you’re of age.”

The hearts of the children were touched at this token of love. Bright eyes reflected happy thoughts. Fanny Mason was the first to speak. She looked at my mother, while her eyes swam in tears.

“May I come, Mrs. Minot?—I would like to help somebody, and it must be right or she would not have written it.”

Mother held her hand to her, and I thought I never saw gratitude more plainly written than upon the face of Fanny. She was one of the three girls whom Louis found in the city streets, the eldest of the flock, and so good and amiable we had always loved her. When mother held her hand out to her in answer to her question, little Emily thought it time to speak, and putting out both her own, said:

“Tum, Panny, et, you outer.”

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"I will," said Fanny, as she gathered her in her arms.

"I'm goin' to have flowers," I heard one little fellow say.

"I'm goin' to raise corn," said another.

Mr. Davis was with us this evening, and after the children had given vent to their joy, he rose, saying:

"I have a word to say of our dear good friend, Mrs. Patten. About four weeks before she left us, I had a long talk with her. She told me of her pleasant anticipations and also that she expected to see me there ere long. Her last words on that memorable occasion were, as nearly as I can remember, these: 'I go from death to life, from bondage to freedom. All I have of earth I want to leave where it shall point toward heaven, or a higher condition of things. If you were to stay, Brother Davis, you should do some of this work, but you must get yourself ready, and you need no more to dispose of.' I feel that this is true, and I ask you, children, to feel that I shall hope to be remembered by you through time. The lesson of harmonious action has been taught upon these hills, and when the years to come shall brighten our pathway, tired hearts will still be waiting. The angel of deliverance will be present then, as now, and the munificence of those who have gone from us, as well as of those who are yet in the body, has made the strong foundation on which to stand; and in the blest future your hands will be helpful, while your hearts shall sing of those whose hearts and hands did great service for the advancement of love and truth. My heart is glad; I have learned much; I know that our Father holds so closely his beloved, that no one of his children shall call to him unheard."

We had a real meeting, as Jane expressed it, and I said to Louis:

"What a great fire a small matter kindleth!"

He replied: "We have claimed the promise and brought to our hearts the strength we need 'where two or three are gathered together.' You know I often think of this, and also of the incomparable comfort the entire world would have if the eyes that are blinded could see; if the hearts that beat slow and in fear were quickened into life. Ah! Emily, the years to come hold wondrous changes. The cruel hand of war would never have touched us had the first lesson in life's book been well read and understood."

"That is true," said my father, as we entered the gate at home, and looking up I saw two stars, and said:

"Clara and Aunt Hildy both say 'Amen!'"

CHAPTER XXIII.

AUNT HILDY'S LEGACY.

It was the spring of 1862, when "Aunt Hildy's Plot" was the scene of happy labor. Uncle Dayton made the survey of the land and a map of it. All the children knew the boundaries of their individual territories; and the youngest among them, five-year-old Sammy, strutted about with his hands in his pockets, whistling and thinking, now and then giving vent to his joy. When he saw Louis and me coming, for we all went over to see the ground broken for the schoolhouse, he came toward us hurriedly, saying with great earnestness:

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"I shall raise much as three dollars' worth of onions on my land. Do you s'pose I can sell em, Mr. Desmonde? I want to sell 'em and put the money in the bank, for when I get money enough I'm going to build a house, and get married, too, I guess."

Louis answered him kindly, as he did all the rest, and when we went home he said he held more secrets than any one man ought to.

The dedication of our schoolhouse was a grand affair. It came off on the seventeenth of June. Uncle Dayton and Aunt Phebe came, and we gathered the children from the town and village, clothed them in white with blue ribbons streaming from their hats, and had them marched in line into the building—the first two holding aloft a banner which Louis and I had made for them. Many came from the surrounding town, and three of our friends from Boston. There were speeches made by Mr. Davis, Uncle Dayton, Louis, John, and others, and singing by the children. It was a glorious time, and we felt that our beloved Aunt Hildy must now be looking down upon us with an approving smile; and when the marble statuette of her dear self was placed in a niche, made for its reception, it seemed to me I could hear Clara say, "It is beautifully appropriate."

The mode of operation was to be decided on, and when Louis spoke with feeling of the coming days, he said to the children:

"You are our children; we are your friends; and together we mean to be self-supporting, instead of going about among the people soliciting alms. We will be pensioners on each other's bounty, and when we are strong enough to aid others who need our assistance, we will send forth gladly comforts from our home. Some little boys who are to raise strawberries on their patch of ground, will be glad to carry a dish of berries to some poor invalid; and so with everything you do, remember the happiness of doing something for those around us, for the poor we have always with us. I have been thinking about a teacher. Mr. Brown, our little Burton from the mill, has engaged to teach school in an adjoining village, and for a time cannot come to you. He will be able to be your teacher after awhile, and I understand that is his wish. I never taught school myself, but I have been wondering if you would like me to try until he is ready. All those who would like me to come, say aye."

I rather think Louis heard that response. I started, for such a sharp, shrill sound rent the air that the window glass quivered as if about to break."

"Now all who do not wish me for a teacher, say no."

A calm like that of the Dead Sea ensued, to be broken after a second by little Sammy, who cried:

"Oh, pooh! There ain't nobody."

“Agreed,” said Louis; “then I am elected, am I?”

“Yes, sir!” shouted the children.

“Then we’ll hear you sing ‘Hail Columbia,’ and separate for the day. I hope the summer will be a happy one for you all!”

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It will be impossible to fully describe "Aunt Hildy's Plot," as it appeared in the days when everything was settled, and the children at work in earnest, each with an idea born of himself.

I thought I saw little that spoke to me of original sin and of the depravity which, according to an ancient creed, grew in the human heart as a part of each individual. There were strawberry beds and raspberry rooms, patches of lettuce and peppergrass, long rows of corn with trailing bean-vines in their rear, hedges of peas and string beans, and young trees set out in different places, like sentinels of love and care reaching toward the overarching sky.

Little Sammy had his onion patch as he desired. It was a happy sight, and one that touched the heart, to see each one progressing methodically day after day. They worked an hour before breakfast, and as long as they pleased after supper. They took great comfort in "changing works," as they called it; you would hear them say:

"Now, let's all go over to Joe's land this afternoon, and to John's to-morrow;" and in this way they sowed and reaped together.

The plot measured considerably more than two acres, and there was a space of about twenty square rods for each.

This, when properly cared for, made for them nice gardens to take care of. Louis succeeded, of course, in the school. The building had cost considerably more than six hundred dollars, for we knew it was wise to build it of brick rather than wood, and also to have room enough for an increase of pupils.

Louis said, when it was being built:

"I can see, Emily, the days to come; the harvest that shall arise; and for years, perhaps, the hands of the reapers will not number many. Some of the seed will fall on barren soil, and some of the grain that waits for the reaper will spoil; but in the end, yes, in the gathering up of all, the century shall dawn that lights the world with these dear thoughts that feed us to-day. Work and pleasure go hand in hand with the progressive thought that after a time shall blend the souls of men with those of angels, for 'the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.' I feel that I have escaped so much in coming here when I did. These hills have, with your presence, my beloved, made it the shrine of purity, and the vows here taken have absolved my soul. The little things that arise to annoy us may not be called trouble, and we shall live here till our hair is gray; till Emily Minot shall take in her own hands the reins that fall from the hands of her mother; for I feel that all the unfinished pictures which we shall leave will be completed, some at the hands of our daughter, and others by those whose hearts we shall learn to know.

Before we leave this lower state
To join the well-beloved who wait,
Our little mother helps us here,
Our guardian angel through each year.
She was as beautiful as fair;
How glorious an angel there!”

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And the face of my Louis, transfigured by his thought, shone with a light that seemed to come from afar. I loved so well to hear him preach, that when Mr. Davis' health became too precarious for him to occupy the pulpit longer, I was glad to hear Louis say he would accept the place tendered by Mr. Davis and by all the people of our town. I say all the people, although perhaps there were a few who, liking to be busy and failing to look for anything better, occupied themselves with the small talk which made sometimes great noise without really touching anybody; but we did not count this in life's cost, and were not affected by it.

Louis treated all with uniform kindness, and taught them the lessons they could not fail to appreciate, though, as he had said, some of the seed must fall on barren ground. It is not to be supposed that the mill-owners were glad to lose the work of the children, for it was worth much and cost little; but since they were not powerful enough to establish monarchical government, they were forced to submit, and they submitted gracefully, too, from the policy which, as Louis had said, whispered "He has money," and they might sometime desire favor at his hands.

It seemed to me sometimes that Louis' money would not last as long as his life; but when I said something of the kind, he answered:

"Yes, yes, Emily; we shall not be embarrassed financially, for we consult needs, and these you know are small compared to wants. A little ready money will go a long way; we shall not suffer from interest nor from high rates of taxation here; give yourself no uneasiness."

When the school was started we were surprised, as well as pleased, to receive calls from some of our good people, who desired to have their children go to the Home School as pupils. They felt moved to take this step from two considerations; one, the more thorough education which the children would receive; and the other, an interest felt in our work, and a desire to help the school to become one of the best.

They proposed paying a tuition fee, to which we all consented, reserving to ourselves the right of taking those who might desire to attend and not be able to pay; and through their really generous contributions in this way, when Burton Brown came to assume the duties of a schoolmaster, there was a fund sufficient to pay him well for his services.

We named this the Turner Fund, although Jane insisted it should be *Demond*.

John desired to donate his gift from Aunt Hildy to the Turner Fund, but Louis objected, saying:

"John, you have no right to do this; you need to get a house for yourself before you help others. It would not be right to take your money, and we cannot accept it."

Matthias says:

“Pears like I kin tote ober to de ‘Plot’ an’ tinker roun’ thar wid de chilun. John’s done boun’ I shan’t do no moah work, an’ I can’t stop still no how, for it ‘pears like I’m dead ‘fore de time.”

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He made himself wonderfully useful there, and the children loved him. John got along splendidly, and bought the saw-mill; for Ben, although better, could not do any work at the mill, and John was very glad to own it.

I am ashamed to say that now and then a small-souled individual would ventilate his miserable prejudices, and expressions like the following came to our ears:

“Wonder what’ll happen if the niggers all get free; got one for a saw-mill owner already;” all of which fell, to be sure, at John’s feet with an ignorant thud. Still, when we looked at him and realized his noble nature, it seemed too bad to think there could be one such word spoken.

How fortunate it is that our hearts do naturally retain the perfume of the roses, and forget the presence of the thorns! The wiser we grow the more natural we become; and on the rock of truth we can stand, feeling no jar, when the missiles of a grovelling mind are hurled against its base. When we get tired, however, and are forced by the pressure of material circumstances to wander down into the valley, while we stand even then in the shelter of our mountain, still we find our feet sometimes soiled by the gathered mud.

Here is where the weak-hearted of our earth fail, and, looking not to the mountains, become at last settled in the valley, and suffer even to the end, borne down by the fettering chains of a life which is, at best, only breathing. Their wings held close, they cannot rise beyond the clouds and fog into the clearer atmosphere of a higher condition.

My fortieth birthday is upon me. I am sitting in the room where, since the day of our wedding, all of my best thoughts have been written. Sharp winds blow around our dwelling, but our hearts heed not their harsh voices. Louis and I have been retrospecting to-day, reading together the journal of the past two years. We have kept it together, devoting two pages to each day, each of us writing one. It is not uninteresting; many changes have been dotted down; and still, to look in upon us, you could not see them. Here is the date of one, the death of good Mr. Davis, and an account of the sermon preached by Louis at his funeral, the witnessing of his last experience among us, and the blessed comfort it gave us, as with his death-cold lips he murmured, “My wife.” Clara and all, he saw their beckoning hands and angelic faces. He heard sweet music blending with our voices as we sang to him at his request.

“It is enough; let us rejoice together,” said Louis, “for he has gone to his own, and he shall have no more pain forever.”

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On another page we read of the children's harvest gathered, and also of their Christmas festivities, of the prosperous condition of the school, and the untiring diligence of the scholars; extracts from lectures given by John at the schoolhouse, and the date of his first lecture in the Quaker city, Philadelphia; sorrowful records of the battles fought and gained; a sad story of Willie Goodwin, who was taken prisoner by the Confederates, and came home, poor fellow, only to die; news from our Southern Mary in her Pennsylvania home, and an account of her visit to us, bringing with her Louise, a pet girl, once owned by her father. I saw John looking at her sharply, and with undisguised admiration, and I thought, perhaps, when Ben's wedding day had passed, John might have one. I could say truthfully, "I hope he will."

No matter how many or great the changes, the robins still build their nests in the elm tree, and the grass still grows to cover the earth of brown with its emerald mantle; for what care the daisies and the grapes, if the hand of the reaper bids them bow before his trusty blade? The life is at their roots, and their flowers and blades will come again. So with our hearts; they are as hopeful as in the earlier days, ere we had lost sight of some of our jewels, and it is true our love has deathless roots.

Louis grows more blessed all the while. The step of my mother is slow, and father bends to bear the burden of his years, while the voice of our Fanny, who will be my sister through all time, cheers them in their daily walk, as she holds in peace the place of little house-keeper. She loves her home, and we love her. Louis and I have just been looking at the pleasant picture in our middle room, where our Emily Minot, sitting between gray hairs, holds in her lap a year-old brother (Louis), while Fanny, sitting on the old sofa, sings the song of "Gentle Annie."

Matthias, Peg and John are coming over the hill; Jane and her husband will be here soon, for I am to have a birthday supper. Ben will be with us, but Hal and Mary, with little Hal, are across the sea. They sailed last June to find "Love's Fawn," or rather strength for Mary. Aunt Hildy, "done up in marble," went with them. They will come to us in June, the month of roses; I love it best of all.

"Hope dey will; but 'pears like you's jes' gone an' done it."

It is morning again. No clouds skirt the horizon; broad, beautiful daylight beams lovingly upon us. The wind, which yesterday blew such fierce breaths, journeyed southward during the night, and returned laden with good-tempered sweetness, whispering of warmer days. We had a pleasant birthday supper, and by request I read aloud a few of the foregoing chapters. Matthias rose in terror as he listened to the recital of our united lives, and interrupted me, saying:

"De good lansake, 'fore de Lord ob Canaan! but you ain't gwine to put *me* down in rale printed readin', is ye?"

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One would have supposed I had been reading his death warrant, or something equally portentous, as he stood before me with dilated eyes and upraised hands. I smiled at the picture and answered:

“Certainly.”

“Wall,” he said, in a despairing tone, “it’ll jes’ kill de sale ob dat book. All de res’ is good nuf, but dem tings l’s’e said don’t have no larnin’ to ’em, Miss Em’ly. ’Spect de folks’ll tink you’s done gone crazy puttin’ me down by de side ob de white lamb. It’s mighty quare an’ on-reasonablelike, ’tis sartin’.”

“Oh, Matthias,” I replied, “the people will like it!”

“Hope you’s in de right ob it, but what kin you call it when it’s all done printed out fur ye?”

“That is the question. Louis says ‘call it *The Harvest of Years*.’”

The look of quiet wonder which had succeeded the terrified expression his face at first revealed merged gradually into one of happy certainty, his large eyes filled with honest tears, and he said with much feeling:

“Mas’r Louis knows what’s right sure nuf. De good Lord had taken into de kingdom some ob de bes’ grain an’ lef de ole stubble still. ’Pears like ‘twas cuttin’ a big field fur to take Miss Catten an’ de white lamb too. Ah! Miss Em’ly, dis harves’ ob years is a gwine on troo all de seasons; hope dis ole nigger’ll be ready when de Lord comes roun’ fur him.”

The child of my thought is christened by the recognition which comes from the heart of one who is “faithful over the few things,” and therefore claims the promise which many with enlarged privileges fail to acknowledge. Can I regret the choice Louis made? My heart says “never,” and my narrative shall be called “The Harvest of Years.”

“Yes,” said Louis, “I think so too; but my name for the book is ‘Emily Did It.’”

Transcriber’s Notes:

Pg 164—moved closing quote from ‘shook as if with ague.’” to ‘feel such a strange joy;’”