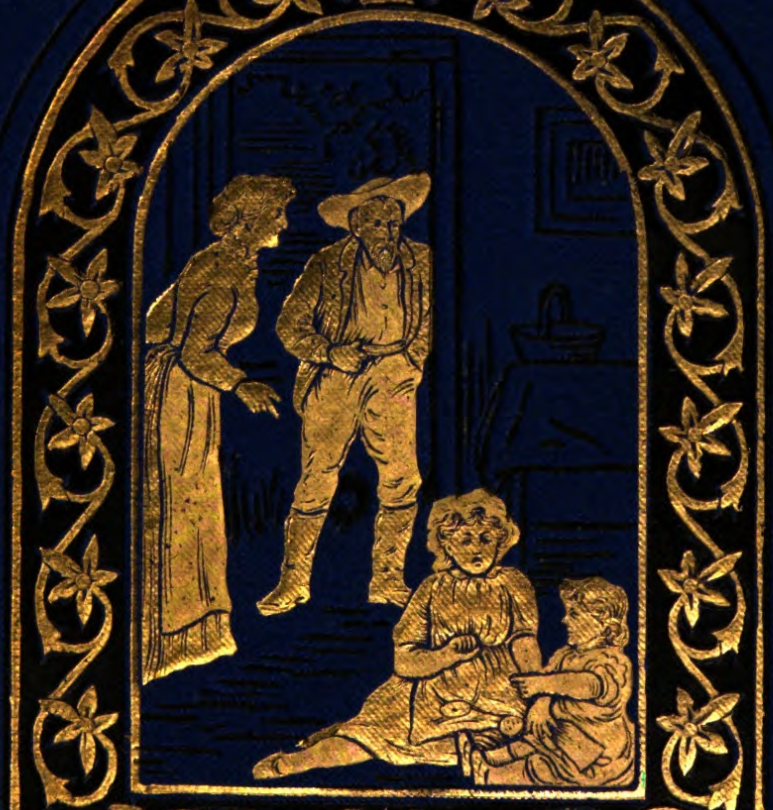

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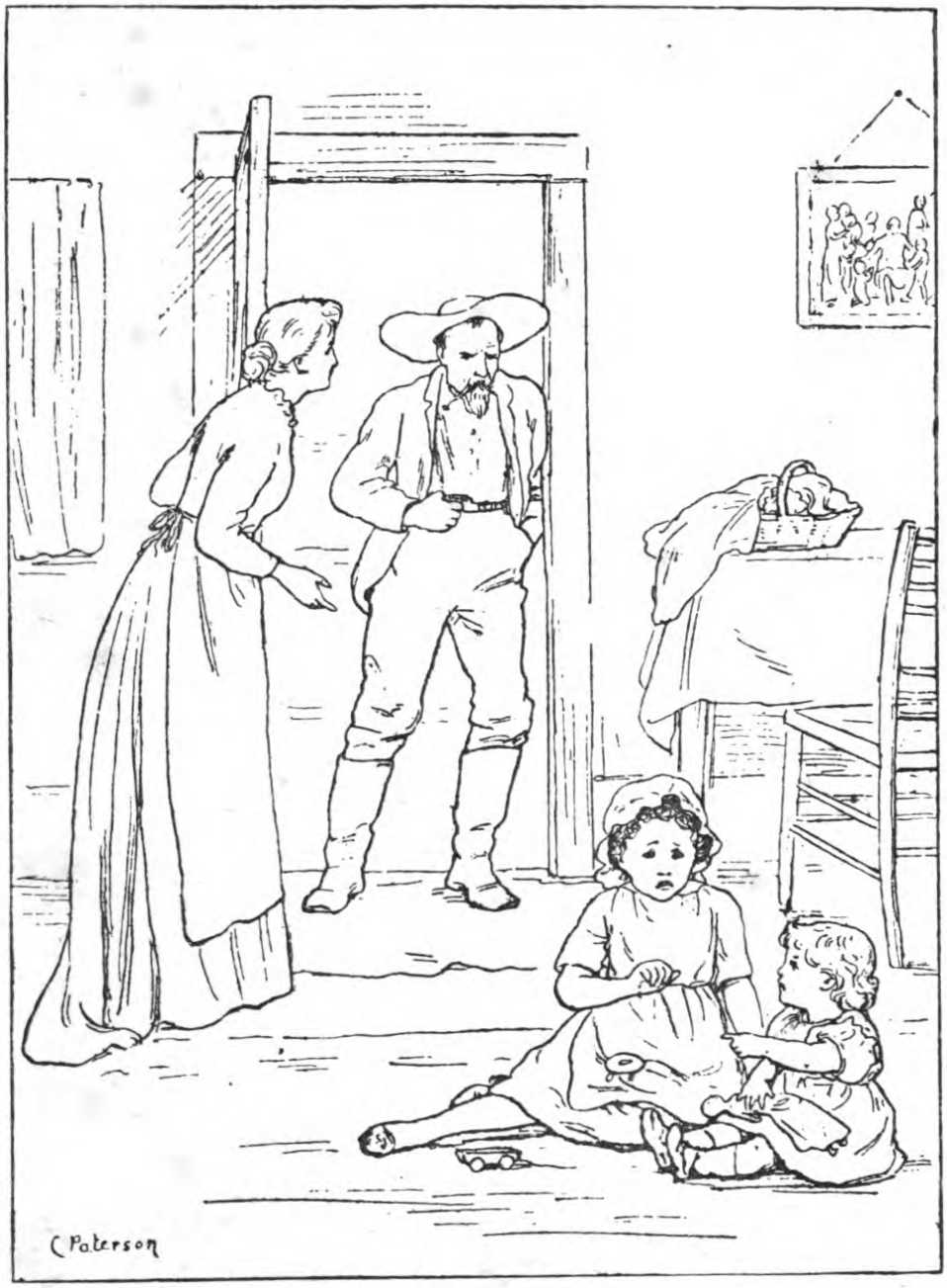

THE RUNAWAY SLAVE ENQUIRED FOR.

DAISY PLAINS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'THE WIDE, WIDE WORLD.'

'A time to keep silence, and a time to speak.'

—ECCLESIASTES.

LONDON:

JAMES NISBET & CO., 21 BERNERS STREET.

1885.

PREFACE.

WHEN I took up the MS. of this true book to read it, I found that a bit of the story had not been told. It was needful that I should supply what was lacking; in other respects the book is printed as it came to my hands.

ANNA B. WARNER.

MARTLAER'S ROCK,

Sept. 28, 1885.

NOTICE.

THE motto in all its bearings is specially recommended to the careful study of gossips, and of lovers, and, perhaps, of mothers also.

CONTENTS.

DAISY PLAINS.

—o—

CHAPTER I.

THE STEAMBOAT LANDING.

THE sun was shining down hot upon the broad Mississippi. The river, at the place I am thinking of, whatever might be true of it higher up or lower down, was not a pleasant object. Broad and muddy and seemingly sluggish, the farther shore low and very far off, the nearer just at this spot offering nothing comfortable to the eye. For where man comes, he spoils, speaking generally; and this was one of the lesser landing places which were scattered 'along shore.' Therefore the bank which rose up from the water's edge was despoiled of trees and of all vegetation save a little miserable burnt-up grass here and there; and instead had come a loose cluster of those bare and unpromising buildings which gather around such a point. A few dwellings, poor enough to suit the characters of the people who lived in them; a few storehouses for receiving and protecting goods or products; and a boat-house with its quay. It all looked brown and dusty and hopeless, this hot afternoon; and under the scorching sun nobody was moving about; it was a dead picture.

From a house the farthest up on the bank, a woman sat looking at it. Her position commanded the whole:

the mean, barren, and dusty settlement on the slope below her, and the broad, brown, abyss-like river. She had been watching a steamboat that had just touched at the pier; she could oversee everything: the landing of goods, the taking on of more freight, and then the paddle-wheels set in motion again and the boat going on her way. Clumsy enough we should think her now, no doubt, but at that time she was reckoned one of the splendid great Mississippi steamers—a thing to admire and be proud of. And the woman had admired; but she felt no exultation as she looked. Yet she watched the departing vessel, after all the other watchers had gone into their houses from the sun; she followed with a sort of forlorn fascination the line of white bubbles left upon the brown flood in the steamer's wake, and noted the revolution of her paddle-wheels as far as she could see them. *There* at least was motion and life and freedom; and the woman felt as if she herself were spell-bound in the midst of a moral and physical desert.

Anybody who could have seen her face, as she sat there at her window, would have been interested, the expression of it was so remarkable.

A handsome face it was not; yet why it was not handsome I cannot tell, for it was well-featured, intelligent, and showed refinement and character. Yet somehow nobody thought of calling it more than 'good-looking.' It was that in more senses than one. 'Good' nobody could have doubted that she was, who had observed her face at this time. But it was sorrowful. Tears stood in the large, fine, tender eyes, and one or two had even escaped and were taking a slow course down her cheeks; unregarded, as there was nobody to see. The set of the mouth was that of one who had to endure. At the same time the intent gaze of the eyes was lit up with a strange fire of something like joy. Whence could it come so accompanied?

This woman was at the minute very downhearted. She was an Eastern woman, daughter of a Massachusetts

farmer; she felt cast away on this barren Mississippi shore, in the midst of surroundings depressing in every respect to mind and body. The climate tried her, the loneliness weighed upon her, the moral atmosphere was appalling to her; and the utter barrenness of scene at the spot where her lot was cast, left her without the refreshment of hills and trees and flowers, cornfields and green pastures, among which she had lived nearly all her life. She had married a man superior to herself in social station and superior in acquirements—a young lawyer in Boston. But her husband's health had given way; it could not bear the rough sea winds and low temperatures of Boston Bay; and a brother of his, a commander and part owner of one of the big Mississippi steamboats, had proposed to him to try a change and accept a business position at one of the landings. This brother was a man of means, and might be of service in more ways than one. So in the forlorn chase after health they had come to this place. They had certainly left behind the obnoxious sea breezes, and the frosty cold which used to penetrate so disadvantageously the slight frame of her husband, the rough air and the long cold rain-storms; but what had they not left beside! The wife felt herself in banishment, spell-bound, desert and hopeless. She looked after the retreating steamer with a miserable feeling of her own inability to stir—with a tantalizing remembrance that there were other places in the world besides this dusty river bank to which she was confined. So the tears came.

But then came too the thought of some words she had been reading. 'Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God, through Christ.' That brought the fire to her eyes,—the sense of her elevation, and her riches, and her possessions, and her prospects. And 'Oh, what does it matter where I am?' she thought. 'Have I not all I can want? Is there anything for me to do, but to find out how best I may show my joy and live my praise?'

She was just full of this thought, when her eye, coming back from the disappearing steamboat, caught the sight of something moving nearer at hand. There had been no stir visible a few moments ago; only the hot sunshine on the hot river bank. Her window commanded the whole locality—landing, settlement, and the steep path leading up from it to the house. Up this path a figure was slowly coming,—a little figure; a small coloured girl. She was decently dressed, as to her frock; no covering to her head, and no covering to the feet, which plodded steadily along in the dust, yet with what seemed to the observer a lack of assurance or of certainty as to her destination. Perhaps that was fancy; however, something in the air of the child moved the watcher to go from her window to the door, which she opened and stood there waiting. And as the little dusty feet came near, to be sure they came straight to the open door, and paused, and the black eyes looked up with an expression of questioning. The doubt in them, and the wistfulness, went to the woman's heart; but she was a wise woman, and she waited for the other to open communication, if communication were desired.

'Please, 'm, don't you want a gal?'

'A girl!' repeated the lady. 'Who are you?'

'I'se a little gal.'

'Well, I see that. What is your name? and whose girl are you?'

'Ain't nobody's, 'clar, missus! Dar ain't no one dis yere chile b'longs to—hain't got nobody to look arter me —dat's sure.'

'I have never seen you before. You do not belong hereabouts, do you? Where do you come from?'

'Dunno, missus.'

'You do not know where you come from?'

'Dunno nuffin, missus.'

'How did you get here?'

The child gave an uneasy, doubtful look to one side, endlessly pitiful to the eyes that were watching her.

Was she afraid to answer? or did she lack the requisite knowledge? The lady thought the former.

'How did you get here, child? you must know how you came. I saw you climbing up the hill; where did you come from?'

'De boat, he bring me,' the little darkey said, lowering her breath.

'The boat! The steamboat, do you mean—the big boat that has just gone on?'

'Biggest boat ever I see.'

'Did *that* bring you?'

A pause, and a nod.

'Why didn't you go on with the boat?'

'Please, 'm, I didn't want to go no furder.'

'Why not?'

'Dey's gwine Souf!' said the little negress half under her breath, as if she were disclosing a secret.

'Well, yes, what then? Didn't you want to go South?'

'Reckon I'd let de boat go widout me.

'Why, child?'

'Dey is orful bad down dar!' said the child mysteriously. 'I warn't no mind to go no furder.'

'And you ran away?'

'Please, 'm, I stopped on shore, and let de boat go widout me. I ain't no runaway,'—shaking her head,—'nebber was. De runaways ain't no count. I'se stiddy, I is. *Don't* you want a gal, missus?'

This time the question was put pleadingly, urgently; and the little creature's eyes looked into those that were scrutinizing her, as if she had found something in them which at once gave her hope and stimulated desire.

'Come in,' said the lady; 'I must know more about you. Are you hungry?'

'Please, 'm.'

She took the child to her neat kitchen, and furnished her there with a bowl of good bread and milk and a capable piece of gingerbread. When the bread and milk

were disposed of, and the gingerbread was achieving the contentment of at least the bodily wants in question, the lady went on with her interrogatory. I may mention that during the consumption of the gingerbread the black eyes were rapidly taking note of everything around them; not so much observing in detail the various items of clean white floor, bright tin pans and vessels, and nice and plentifully stocked dresser, as taking in a general impression of comfort and order. Which impression no doubt had something to do with the part she played in the following dialogue. The lady on her side had been also taking notes, although they did not lead to equally certain conclusions. The features of the little stray were good; her busy eyes were intelligent as well as soft; her colour very dark. From her dress little could be guessed at respecting her former way of life or the condition of her owners; even wealthy people, as the lady knew, suffering their house servants to go in an attire which would drive a nice Northern housekeeper out of her senses.

'Now, child,' she began, 'I want you to tell me all about yourself. Where do you come from?'

''Clar, dunno, missus. Dat ar big boat, he done tuk me away.'

'Where were you before the boat took you away? what is the name of the place?'

'Nebber had no name,' said the little darkey, shaking her head to give emphasis to the negative. 'I comes from up dat a-way,'—pointing up the river.

'How long were you on the boat?'

'Dunno.'

'One night?—two nights?'

'Dunno nuffin 'bout de nights. I slep' on de carpet, an' I slep' on de floor o' de boat.'

'On deck?'

'Yes, missus, on de deck.'

'Whose girl are you?'

The black eyes came again to the questioner's face,

with that expression of uncertainty and wistfulness which to the nature of the woman was so endlessly pitiful. Her own eyes kept steady, but she had to forbid the moisture which she felt was ready to come into them.

'Ain't nobody's gal,' the child answered. 'Dar ain't nobody what has me, missus. I is nobody's gal anyhow. Please, missus, don't you want a gal?'

'What can you do?'

'Oh, missus, I kin do a heap.'

'Of mischief!'

'No, 'clar, missus! I don't nebber do no mischief; 'clar, missus, I don't. You ax Mis'—' But she stopped there.

'Ask Mrs. Who?'

'Dunno. 'Clar, missus, I'll be good.'

'What is your own name?'

'Lize—no, tain't Lize. Dey calls me Juney.'

'Janey, I suppose. Your name is Jane?'

She shook her head. 'Nebber was no Jane. Dat ain't dis chile. Nebber see no Jane on our place. I'se Juney I is—or Marigold.'

'Look here,' said her new friend, biting in a smile, 'you must tell me nothing but the truth. Tell me the truth always, and I'll see if I can help you; but I don't want to have anything to do with people who tell lies. I don't like such people. I always tell the truth myself; if you want me to be your friend, you must do so too. Now speak truth; how did you get away from the boat?'

'I jes' comed, missus.'

'Did nobody see you come?'

'Reckon dey didn't. Reckon dey'd ha' stop' me, right smart, ef dey seen me. Dey was all busy, like; and I didn't want to go no furder'—

But here, all of a sudden, the bold and confident demeanour changed; the little black face wrinkled up, and the child burst into a piteous fit of sobs and tears; in the course of which she repeated her assertion that she 'didn't—want—to go—no—furder!'

'Why not?' the lady asked again. To which black eyes replied, when she could speak, that 'dey was orful feared to go Souf—dey was bad folks down dar.'

There came an interruption here in the form of a different cry—the half sleepy announcement of a little child's waking somewhere. The lady went to an inner room and brought thence a fair little creature of perhaps two years old; the little delicate face flushed with sleep, golden curls disordered with rolling on her pillow, and eyes that had hardly got back their full brightness yet. The little black girl dried her tears to look at this new object. And with her heart yet even a little tenderer than before, with those tiny white arms encircling her neck and the fair small head on her shoulder, the mistress of the house resumed her interrogatory.

'I don't see how you managed to get away from the boat, Juno,—or Marigold, whatever your name is. Were there more beside you going South in the boat?'

'Dey was a heap on 'em, missus. Dey didn't none ob 'em want fur to go.'

'Was there a man in charge of the gang?'

'Dar was a man what had 'em.'

'How came you to escape him?'

'Dunno, missus; I was boun' to git off dat ar boat. An' I'se little; I s'pect dat's how it war. An' I didn't gib 'em no time, noder. I come off jest when I see dey was mos' ready to go; and den dey hadn't no mo' time to go arter me.'

'Why didn't you go up to some one of the other houses, nearer the landing? what made you come all the way up here?'

'I was feared. Missus, won't you keep me? Dat ar man, he'll come arter me, sure!'

Mrs. Thayer knew that, and considered what she should do. Indeed she had been considering it all along. It was not a pleasant prospect that she saw before her, nor an easy job which seemed to be offered her. But in her thankful heart, a little while ago, she had been asking

what work she could do to please the Master who had done so much for her; and if this castaway was the answer, she was not going to shirk the task on account of the difficulty. And besides, Mrs. Thayer was one of the few people in this world who really carry out the command to love their neighbour as themselves. Seeing herself in this little runaway's place, she determined to help her with might and main.

CHAPTER II.

THE STRAY.

MR. THAYER came home to an early supper. He was a tall, slim, spare man, whose face and frame showed traces of a student-like delicacy and feebleness. Both were disappearing under the influence of a warmer climate and more active way of life: but Mr. Thayer's spirits did not seem to have improved in any corresponding proportion. Men are proverbially unreasonable; and he did not rightly appreciate the health which he could not use in the pursuits he liked best. Mr. Thayer did not like business, and in spite of its genial sun did not fancy the South. He was too genuine a Boston man. He did not enjoy living with no servants and seeing his wife do the work of the house; although he recognised the fact that if they were ever to be at some future time in easy circumstances, they must be content to rough it for a while now. His brother, through whose influence they had been brought to Mississippi, might be able and willing to help on their fortunes; but he could not be asked to step in and support the family; and if he could, Mr. Thayer was not the man to ask it. All the same, it grated on him that he was obliged to do this sort of work for a living, and that his delicately-reared wife must do the cooking and the housework for herself and for him. Mr. Thayer's personal comfort did not suffer under this state of things. He knew that. The supper to which he sat down this evening was dainty. His wife was nice and bright in her fresh muslin gown, and welcomed him, as she did always, with a cheery smile and a calm brow.

For which she did not get the reward of a return in kind.

'What have you got there in the kitchen?' he asked, as he stirred his cup of coffee.

'Something astray, Cranston. It is a queer story.'

'What story is there about it?'

'Why, she's a runaway; left the boat that stopped at the landing this afternoon, and came up here. She was one of a gang going down the river, and had, as they all have, a horror of the far South. So she slipped away. She must have done it very cleverly; she must have waited for the very last minute, when there would be no time left to look for her, and then slipped on shore and hid herself. I cannot conceive how she managed it. When the boat was away, she came up here.'

'Why here?'

'I don't know, I am sure; trying to get as far from danger as she could, I suppose. And then she saw me at the door, and begged me to take her in.'

'Which of course you did. What are you going to do with her?'

'I will find out,' said his wife thoughtfully.

'You can't *keep* her, you know?'

'I do not know that, Cranston.'

'Well, I can tell you you can't. They'll come to look for her when the boat touches here again, and they will find her. You cannot help it; very likely some one has seen her already.'

'Nobody saw her whose suspicions were excited, or you know they would have made inquiries.'

'What do you expect to *do?*' asked Mr. Thayer impatiently.

'I'll pray my way,' said his wife, with a faint smile.

'Now, take my advice, and let this thing alone. You'll get into trouble, and, what's more, you'll get me into trouble.'

'This creature *is* in trouble, without any perhaps about And, Cranston, the word is,—and I cannot get it out

of my head,—"Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." That marks out a straight path.'

'Stuff!'

'It isn't stuff.'

'What do you think her owners would like you to do?'

'They have no right to like anything else but what I am going to do.'

'I tell you, you will get yourself into trouble. This is no joke, wife; and you are not in Massachusetts, remember.'

'I am just where I should be if I were there,—in the Lord's hand.'

Mr. Thayer looked up at his wife, and saw what he knew was the expression of a fixed purpose in her face, just then not so calm as usual. He never interfered with her when he saw that look; perhaps he was wise enough to know that at such times he was the weaker of the two; and he had besides an enormous respect for his wife,—more in fact than he knew,—as well as a profound regard for her. So he said no more at the minute, and only at the conclusion of the meal intimated his desire to see and speak with the stray himself. The little girl was called in, and came looking uneasy enough, though she put a brave face on it.

'Come here, girl; who are you?' Mr. Thayer asked.

'Please, massa, I'se—I'se Julia.'

'Look here,—that isn't your name. You are not Julia, you know. Who are you?'

'I'se anythin' massa please,' said the little girl submissively.

'What's your name?' demanded the man imperiously.

'Don't frighten her,' whispered his wife. 'That is not the best way. Tell Mr. Thayer your name,' she added encouragingly, putting her hand on the shoulder of the little girl,—'the name you told me a while ago, you know.'

'I disyemember, missus,' said the child, lifting the big black eyes to Mrs. Thayer's face, with a look half appeal-

ing, half innocent. Mrs. Thayer turned away to hide a smile, and her husband went on.

'Where did you come from, hey? you can tell that, I suppose.'

'Nebber know de place, sah.'

'No place, and no name! How did you get here?'

'Dat ar big boat, he fetch me.'

'From up the river?'

'I s'pect it mought ha' been dat a-way,' said the child, very non-committal.

'How came you to be on the boat?'

'Dunno, sah.'

'Look here. What do you think of runaways?'

'Tink dey's pison mean folks. We don't hab no such niggers up to our place; nebber did, no ways. We's 'spectable niggers, we is.'

At this deliverance, which was given with the most serious mien of conviction, Mr. Thayer's judicial sternness gave way. He laughed.

'Cordelia, you will have your hands full,' he said.

Which Mrs. Thayer quite well knew, although her difficulties seemed to her to loom up in quite another direction from that in which they appeared just now to her husband's mind. The necessity of concealment, and the precarious means to that end, were what occupied her. Yet to Mrs. Thayer, who was a woman of faith, the means seemed less precarious than they would to another. Faith overleaps troublesome second causes, and fastens on what is not doubtful nor subject to contingencies. Still, she must use means while trusting in something else. Her first step was to rummage out of her boxes a piece of flaring red calico, which her mother had given her when she was coming to the South, under the notion that it might be somehow found useful among the coloured people. 'And so it is! but in a way mother never thought of,' said Mrs. Thayer to herself as she drew it out. Of this bright stuff she cut out a gown and hood for the little stray thrown upon her charities, and spent a day or two in diligent labour

until she had made them up. She cut down and adapted other articles of clothing already made, till she had a comfortable suit prepared; and then Marigold's old things were taken off and burnt up, and the little girl was dressed in the new.

'You do not look like the same child, Goldy,' said Mrs. Thayer approvingly.

''Clar, missus, I feels like I war somebody else,' said Goldy, eyeing her fiery gown also with deep approbation.

'And now come here and let me cut your hair; that is the next thing.'

But Goldy stood still, and tears began to pour over her face.

'What's the matter? I shall not hurt you, child. Your hair is too long.'

'Oh, missus!—Please, missus!—Dat ar man'—

'What man?' for the child's sobs choked her.

'He war allus cuttin' and shavin' his niggers—shave 'em close, he did; 'cos he said he'd know 'em better. Don't cut it, missus!'

The shears fell. 'Is that it?' said Mrs. Thayer. 'No, we'll let it be as long as ever it will. And, Goldy, keep your hood on; and when people come by do not look at them; do not lift up your head; take no notice. You just keep beside my little girl, and be taking care of her and playing with her; pay no attention to anybody else. Do you understand?'

Goldy nodded, and her bright, sage eyes certainly seemed to respond to the counsel.

'There will nobody come to look after you just yet, but they will come; and you had better do as I tell you.'

'I'se gwine to, missus.'

'And one thing more you must do, Goldy.'

'I'se sure to do it, missus.'

'Well, we shall see. I am going to try to save you from what you fear; but though I will do what I can, I have no power. *I* cannot save you, and you cannot, and Mr. Thayer cannot. Only One can.'

'What's dat, missus?'

'God. He can save you. You must ask Him. So will I ask Him. I think, if we both ask Him, He will do it.'

'Whar's He at, missus?'

Now Mrs. Thayer, seeing that great ignorance was here, stopped all her work and gave Goldy her first lesson in religious truth. The child listened certainly; gave grave heed to all she heard; whether also an intelligent reception, Mrs. Thayer could not tell.

'Now, do you understand?' she asked finally. 'God can help us; He can save you; and without His help I cannot do anything. Will you ask Him?'

'I'se afeard.'

'Why?'

'Reckon He don't want no little darkey a-pesterin' Him.'

'He loves dark and white all alike; great and small. He is just as ready to hear you as to hear me. He is not like the proud and foolish men and women of this world; He is all goodness and love and tenderness; and He specially cares for the poor.'

'I'se mighty glad, missus.'

Whether she understood or no, Mrs. Thayer could not tell. She took occasion to repeat her lesson from time to time, as the days went on; and she herself at least prayed a great deal for the poor little stray, who could hardly pray for herself. Meanwhile Goldy promised to repay in some measure her kindness. She proved herself an intelligent and obedient little maid; paid attention and learned to do the things she was told to do; and especially made herself useful in playing with and waiting upon Mrs. Thayer's little two-year-old girl. A strong friendship was presently struck up between them; the child was contented and happy with her new nurse, and the little coloured girl, young as she was, showed that she could be trusted. She was exemplary in her care of the baby; unwearied in amusing her; and Mrs. Thayer's hands were so set free for many other things that else would have had to bide their time.

'She is a good child,' Mrs. Thayer remarked to her husband; 'and she is very handy about Helen. She really saves me a great deal of trouble already.'

'Humph! Your trouble is to come, I am afraid.'

'I will hope not.'

'They will not leave a likely chattel like that unlooked-after, you may be sure.'

'Don't call her a chattel!'

'Names cannot alter things,' said her husband, with a half laugh. 'That is what she *is*, as a matter of fact. As a matter of theory, she may be what you please.'

'It is not a fact; it is a fraud.'

'A fraud is a fact too, isn't it? And it is precisely the fact with which you will be charged, I am afraid. It's a folly, wife; and may have very disagreeable consequences. The people hereabouts do not understand a joke. It is one of their few defects. If we were in Massachusetts now!—but we are in a different place.'

'It is doing you good, Cranston?'

'Yes—my chest is better.'

'And you look better and eat better. Well, I will bear anything for that!'

'Fortunes are not much better, so far.'

'Fortune is a much smaller consideration.'

'That is your nonsense, Cordelia. Money is just everything in this world. It is health, and comfort, and ease. It is Massachusetts, if you will; it is what a man wants, in short. It is what we live for.'

'It is what we cannot carry away with us.'

'Who wants to?' said he impatiently. 'But this world is a pretty poor place without it.'

'I do not think so. I do not feel it so. We have not much money at present; and yet, if you were quite well, I could be perfectly happy, even here.'

'Doing your own work!' he said, with almost a sneer.

'Oh, work is no hindrance to happiness. And I have a very good little helper now.'

'If you can keep her. You must manage it. *I* can't tell any lies for you, I warn you of that.'

'I am not going to tell any lies,' said Mrs. Thayer coldly, 'either in person or by proxy.'

'Then your game is lost, I can tell you beforehand.'

'No game is worth winning that must be won by falsehood.'

'I don't know about that. The world is full of all sorts of lying. I don't know but it is fair to beat lies with lies. Why not?'

'You can beat them much better with truth; for then you can have the power of God to help you.'

'Don't He help the people that tell lies? How comes it that they get along as they do?'

'That was a puzzle to David once,' said Mrs. Thayer, smiling; 'but he found his way out of it.'

'I should have got along a great deal better, if I would have done as other people do.'

'Wait and see,' replied his wife contentedly.

But though she was firm enough in her principles, she certainly trembled a little when she thought of the trial before her. Not for herself, but for her poor little protegée. The little girl behaved very well, and was unmistakeably happy, and clung to Mrs. Thayer. It wins all a woman's heart to have some helpless thing depend on her. Mrs. Thayer felt ready to do something desperate, at times, when she saw the child's innocent face, and watched the careless glee with which she played with little Helen and amused her and watched over her. There was plenty of good in the girl; must she go to the nameless fate of a slave on a cotton plantation? Mrs. Thayer prayed a great deal in those days.

CHAPTER III.

THE INQUIRY.

IF Goldy seemed careless, she was nevertheless thoughtful. One day she came to her protectress and showed her a stick in her hand. It was a rough, straight stick, somewhat jagged on one edge.

'What is this, Goldy?'

The child drew her attention to some rude notches which gave the stick that jagged appearance.

'Well, Goldy, what does that mean?' Mrs. Thayer inquired kindly.

'Dat's so long, missus.'

'So long? Not very long. Not much more than a foot, I should think. What do you want to do with it?'

'Don't want to do nuffin wi't. Dey's how many, missus? You tell.'

'How many? How many what?'

'Dar!' and she put her finger successively to the rude notches, one after another. 'Dey is Saturdays, dey is, ebery one. Dat ar war de fus'; dat's when I come; den dar is one, two, t'ree'—

'Oh, those are Saturdays, are they? Yes, you came on a Saturday; and now this is the third. Yes, three weeks. What about it? Did you cut these notches in the stick?'

'I cuts 'em, fur to tell when de boat come. He come soon now.'

'The boat! yes, and the man. Yes, he will come soon now, if he comes at all. So you have been watching and

keeping count, Goldy? Very wise of you. And have you prayed, child, as I told you?'

'Pray, missus? I done ask de Lord will He help me, and make de wind blow hard, hard! and knock dat ar man off de boat, or sumfin.'

'Knock him off the boat! Why, you do not want him to be drowned?'

'I s'pects I don't care,' said Goldy thoughtfully.

'Was he cruel to you?'

'He mought leave me 'lone whar I be, and not come to take me off down Souf!'

'You shall not go South if I can help it; but, Goldy, you must not feel angry at that man. Maybe he did not know any better.'

'He's white man,' said the little girl wistfully.

Something in the words touched Mrs. Thayer's feelings, which were always easily touched, and she turned away to hide the water which suddenly filled her eyes. Alas, alas! that the race which should know better, the race of light, should so make itself guilty of deeds of darkness! Yes, that man would be here in a few days to claim his prey; and what more could she do to turn him off the scent? In her red dress and turban Goldy did not indeed look much like the forlorn little creature that had slipped away from the boat; but these slave-dealers of course acquired habits of more or less keen observation; Goldy was not safe from him. She studied the matter. At last she hit upon an additional precaution. She took a pair of shoes of her own, which fitted the child well enough, and were partly worn. From one of these she took off the heel, and made Goldy put them on; repeating anew her former directions, that she should pay no attention to the people who might see her, and as far as possible not even look at them. Goldy had already been drilled into a tolerable obedience to these injunctions, the meaning of which she well understood.

'That's the way you tell no lies!' remarked Mr. Thayer, when he observed the foregoing arrangement.

'I tell no lies,' answered his wife quietly.

'You draw nice distinctions; as most women can when it suits their purposes, I have noticed.'

'I tell nothing. It is nobody's business what state Goldy's shoes are in. Different people would draw different conclusions from them.'

'No doubt; but what you want is, that somebody should draw wrong conclusions.'

'Yes.'

'What is that but a falsehood? Something done, in this case not spoken, with intent to deceive.'

'Then where would you draw the line, Cranston? To hide the truth is certainly often necessary, and is not of course falsehood. That depends upon the way it is done. If I tell you something contrary to facts, I am false. But if I put on somebody else's shawl, in order that I may not be recognised in going somewhere, that is not false, is it?'

'Nice distinctions!' her husband repeated.

'They *are* nice distinctions; but are they not justified?'

'I can't say I see it.'

'It is not that the end justifies the means. I do not believe that doctrine. But I do not believe either, and *you* do not believe, that one is bound on all occasions to tell all one knows; nor that it is falsehood not to do it. Nor that it is falsehood to put on another person's cloak with intent to hide oneself; or to wear disguise for the purpose of getting out of prison, or of escaping an enemy; or to furnish one's house plainly for the sake of making thieves suppose there is nothing of value there; and five thousand other things of the like. But I would not give an untrue answer to a question, to save my life.'

'Nor to save somebody else's life?'

'I hope not to be tried that way! But I believe I would not, Cranston. I would not, unless my faith failed.'

'What has faith to do with it?'

'It has all to do with it. To tell a falsehood, supposes that I cannot trust God to take care of me without my doing what He has forbidden. It is sheer unbelief.'

'Nice distinctions!' said Mr. Thayer again. He was half in earnest and half teasing; and Mrs. Thayer was teased. For one of the aims of her life was to make her religion beautiful in the eyes of her husband. He looked at her, and smiled.

'Cranston, you do not think it is right to tell a lie?'

'Decidedly not.'

'You do not think it is wrong for a man to cut off his whiskers and dye his hair and change his dress, that he may get away out of an enemy's country?'

'I should be sorry to think it wrong.'

'Then what is become of your argument?'

'Shattered upon the rocks of nice distinctions,' said Mr. Thayer, rising and sauntering to the window. 'Hollo, Cordelia! come here.'

Mrs. Thayer came to his side, and saw what he was looking at. A man was coming up the hill—a stranger; not one of all the men who lived at and about the Landing. He came slowly, taking off his broad-brimmed hat and wiping the sweat from his brow, for it was a very hot afternoon. Looking a little farther, Mrs. Thayer saw that the steamboat was lying at the jetty. She turned slowly from the window and met her husband's eyes. Neither of them said a word. But the two faces spoke to each other and answered. *His* had in it the recognition of a hard task and a sharp trial before her. Hers said that she knew it; but along with the set, intent resolve of the brow there was also a most sweet and confident smile on the lips and in the eyes. Mr. Thayer admired and wondered, for *he* could not have met the trial so. He preferred not to meet it at all; he turned on his heel and went off, just as the stranger was coming up to the door.

Mrs. Thayer cast a hasty glance into the room. Nothing could be better. Goldy was down on the floor with

little Helen, playing with her and amusing her. 'Keep still, Goldy!' she whispered; and then the knock came at the door. Mrs. Thayer opened immediately.

A rather underset and short man stood there, whose looks repelled Mrs. Thayer on the instant. He was heavy-featured, with an ugly square jaw and those expressionless light blue eyes that look as if all the colour had been washed out of them. A face that showed strength, perhaps, as certainly his figure showed it, but was possessed of no other one good quality. Mrs. Thayer held the door in her hand, confronting him.

'How d'ye, mum?' said he shortly. 'I come to see if you could give me any news of a runaway nigger o' mine?'

He was chewing tobacco as he spoke, and spitting incessantly.

'What sort of one?' returned Mrs. Thayer. 'Will you come in and take a seat?'

He glanced past her at the neat carpeted room, where everything was in simplest nice order and purity, and some sense of incongruity seemed to press upon his mind.

'I'm all in a mess,' said he, looking down at his shoes, 'comin' up this blazin' hill. Dust is deep enough to bury a man. Makes one sort o' dry, and as powdery but not quite as clean as a miller. What about my runaway?'

'You have told me nothing yet,' said Mrs. Thayer. 'I do not know what you are looking for. This is not a likely place for a runaway, I should think.'

'They're just as likely to go to an unlikely place, the varmint! This is a gal, a little un. Keep any niggers yourself?'

'No,' said Mrs. Thayer. 'I have none but this child, who is nurse to my little girl. That is all.'

She stepped a little to one side, as if to leave the view of the room free, with the group on the floor. The man peered in intently.

'She was about that size,' he said. 'That's all you've got, eh?'

'I have only this one. Where did your girl go from?'

'From the boat, rat the little varmint! She must ha' run away from the boat last time she went down the river; that's three or four weeks ago.'

'But how is that possible?'

'Mum, there's everything on 'arth possible with these here critters. There ain't nothin' too stupid, and there ain't nothin' too sly, but what some of 'em 'll do it. This gal o' mine must be one o' the sly kind. They're all sly, confound 'em! but this one's real cunning, the varmint! She'll be worth a good penny more for this trick, if I can catch her.'

'What makes you think she came off the boat at this place?'

'Missed her just arter. Must ha' ben here, for we hadn't stopped for a long stretch above this; and then we missed her. Must ha' waited till the very last minute before we shoved off, and then slinked on shore and hid herself.'

'I should think you would make search among the houses at the Landing. Such a child would be likely to take the first shelter she came to, it seems to me. I should not have thought she would wander up this hill.'

'Where does the road go to?'

'Back into the country.'

'She's given me a roastin', comin' up this bank,' said the man, taking off his hat again to wipe his face; all this while the chewing and the spitting went on without intermission. 'She's given me a roaster; and I'll do my best to give it her back, when I catch her! If I don't, you never saw a dusty man. That girl there's lame, I see,' he went on. Mrs. Thayer knew he had been looking again and again at the children on the floor within the room.

'Limping a little does not hurt her for *my* work,' remarked Mrs. Thayer quietly.

'Well, *she* wasn't lame. A right likely gal she is, and she has proved herself. All the better for me; and all

the worse for her,—when I catch her. Good day to ye, mum.'

He turned away, and Mrs. Thayer looked after him for a minute or two before she shut the door. He went on, chewing and spitting, down the hill now. Had she got rid of him? She turned the key in the door, and with a long breath went back to the children. Goldy had risen to her feet. Mrs. Thayer took her own little girl into her arms, and looked with a yearning which she would not show at the motherless, helpless, endangered little outcast before her. She sat down and bestowed some caresses on little Helen, caresses which covered feeling as well as expressed it, and then looked at the little coloured girl.

'Is he done gone, missus?'

'Yes.'

'Won't he nebber come back?'

'I don't know. I hope not.'

'Den I'se you's gal?'

'Yes, I suppose so; for the present.'

'I ain't nebber gwine away. I'se you's gal sure! I ain't nebber gwine 'way, no mo',' said the little waif, shaking her head.

'Then you must be a good girl, you know.'

'I reckon dat's so, missus.'

'Look here,' said Mrs. Thayer, biting in a smile, 'why do you think you must be a good girl?'

'Reckon you's no use for poor niggers.'

'Perhaps. But there is another reason, Goldy. Who has saved you now from going down South?'

'Mis' T'ayer.'

'No; I have done what I could; but I could not have saved you, if God had not helped us. Don't you know, I told you to pray to Him to help us?'

Goldy nodded.

'And did you?'

'I done ax Him t'ree hundert times dat He help us! But dar warn't nobody, missus.'

'Oh yes, there was, and He saw you and heard you,

though you could not see Him. And now it is He that has saved you. You must be, not my girl, but the Lord's little girl, and be good because He loves it.'

'What make you t'ink He help, missus?'

'Because we asked Him, Goldy, you and I; and He has promised to hear such prayer, when people believe Him. When people ask Him and trust Him, He always helps them. You must thank Him that this man did not find you out.'

Mrs. Thayer looked earnestly on the little heathen before her, and the girl looked up intently in Mrs. Thayer's beautiful eyes.

'Den I'se His gal?' she asked.

'Yes. Because He is so good, and has saved you, you must be His girl as long as you live; and you must do everything to please Him. I am His servant too. We will serve Him together.'

'Missus ain't nobody's servant,' objected Goldy. 'Missus free woman. De white folks is allays free.'

'You shall be free too; but you must be the Lord's servant, as I am. And He does not like anything bad, Goldy.'

'Den reckon He don't like niggers, nohow.'

'Yes, He does. He loves black just as well as white. He loves you, Goldy, and wants you to be His good and happy little girl.'

The child looked up into the tender, motherly eyes, which were soft with pity and shimmering with tears and intent with earnestness; and something of the light in them found its way to her dark little heart. How much she understood was a question; but something of the magic of sympathy wrought upon her nevertheless; some glimmer of faith and love was caught and kept in that chamber of barrenness which her heart had until then been.

'I'se be good as good!' she asserted, with an energetic wag of her head. 'Sartain I will.'

'You must ask God to help you in that too.'

'What fur, missus?'

'Because you cannot do it any other way.'

'Kin't I be good?'

'Not really and truly, without God's help. You may try; but before you know what you are about you will find yourself wanting to do something you ought not to do—tempted to tell a lie, or to get angry, or to be lazy, or something else; and then, if God does not help you, you will do the naughty thing, and then maybe be sorry afterward. No, there is no way to be good but to ask Him and trust Him, just as you asked Him to save you from going down South.'

'An' I'se be you's gal?'

Mrs. Thayer nodded. A joyous illumination came into the dark little face, such as she had never seen in it before, and with a dance and a fling utterly indescribable and inimitable, the child went off. Coming back after a quarter of an hour, she knelt down by Mrs. Thayer's side, and intently pressed her lips to her benefactor's dress.

'Goldy! what is that for?' Mrs. Thayer inquired, half startled.

''Cos you's done save me.'

Mrs. Thayer's heart swelled in her throat so that for a minute she could not speak. Then she tried to explain again to Goldy who it was that had really saved her from the boat and the master of the gang, and what the same One had done to save her from far worse things.

CHAPTER IV.

SAFETY.

FOR a long time no more was heard of the gang leader and his inquiry for his lost chattel. The days flowed peacefully on in their usual course. It was a very dry and tasteless course to Mrs. Thayer, who missed in this home on the banks of the Mississippi nearly everything that had made life pleasant on the Massachusetts farm. Her husband's health was improved, and so one subject of anxiety taken from her mind; but the business he was following was not congenial to him, it did not prove for the present at least very lucrative, and his temper seemed to suffer a perpetual friction. That brought friction into Mrs. Thayer's life, if not into her temper; and I am afraid her temper at times was frayed. She had hard work enough to try it, without any help of that sort. Even in a small household, a woman who does all the work and does it in the style to which Mrs. Thayer had been brought up, has enough to do. The settlement at the Landing was so small and so poor that she could not obtain occasional hired service. Her husband's means were too limited to permit him to buy a valuable slave, and a worthless one Mrs. Thayer preferred to be without. Indeed she preferred to be without even a good one, on principle; though nothing but want of power kept Mr. Thayer from taking the boat to New Orleans and bringing thence a competent housekeeper. Mrs. Thayer swept and dusted and scrubbed, cooked and washed and baked; and between whiles took care of her little girl and began to teach Goldy to read.

'It is not allowed,' her husband said.

'By what law?'

'By the laws of the country, which we are bound to respect.'

'There is a law above those.'

'Says nothing about teaching darkies to read, that ever I heard,' her husband returned, with a sneer.

'Yes, it does, and tells me to do it.'

'Where?'

Mrs. Thayer opened a Bible and pointed to the words —'Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.'

'All very well, when you can; but you can't.'

'I can, and I will.'

'Keep it close, then, I advise you, or you'll get a swarm of hornets about your ears.'

Mrs. Thayer did not despise this advice, and charged her pupil to be discreet and not talk on the subject. Goldy was both discreet and intelligent, and made rapid advance in learning. The learning was various; for Mrs. Thayer's lesson book was the Bible; and as the child became able to spell out words, the contents of them called forth an endless stream of questions. By degrees Goldy learned many things; and, what pleased her instructress best of all, she began to have a notion of those higher truths which were of all most precious to Mrs. Thayer's heart. Their preciousness to her appeared of necessity in the way she spoke of them; and so here too Goldy learned by sympathy.

Meanwhile in the common things of everyday life Goldy became a great help to her. She was bright and trustworthy. She developed into an admirable nurse, and presently learned to do one thing after another of the daily work of the house. Growing fast and growing strong, she was able month by month for something new; she was quick to take instruction, and extremely capable of doing all she knew; and the girl's willingness equalled her ability. Mrs. Thayer began immediately to reap a

reward for her kindness. And when, in the following summer, she was laid by a few weeks on occasion of the birth of a little boy, Goldy proved herself invaluable both to Mrs. Thayer and to little Helen. Indeed, her motherly care and housewifely prudence were so marked that even Mr. Thayer was struck by them; and he, who had hitherto grumbled at Goldy, from this time gave her his unqualified approbation. Mrs. Thayer heard no more about his having 'so many mouths to feed.'

The number was increased no further for several years; and no particular change can be recorded in the circumstances of the family. Mr. Thayer made enough to keep the wolf from the door; little beyond that. Mrs. Thayer's life remained one of great exertion and entire monotony, so far as that can be true in any household where there are children growing up. She had no friends, no associates, no society. Among the dwellers at the Landing there was no one that could put in a claim to be considered in either light; they were very coarse, rude people, living to make gains in a rude way. It troubled the good woman that her husband, an educated and intellectual man, should be numbered in any sort with them and share in their rough way of life; but, as he discontentedly told her, it was better that he should live *so* in Mississippi than not live at all in Massachusetts; and Mrs. Thayer was dumb.

The children were lovely. Little Helen, always called May, because she came with the May blossoms one happy spring, grew and developed worthy of her nickname. Tender, grave, reserved, sweet; refined in every thread of her nature; full of affection and truth; quick and obedient; no mother could have more content in a child. The boy, three years younger, promised to be more like his father; he was a fine boy too. And Goldy, the remaining member of the home circle, with every year became more invaluable to her mistress. She was exceedingly clever, and as faithful and good. The girl grew and grew, and soon had left behind all danger of

recognition as the little runaway who had escaped from the steamboat that August afternoon. She was a handsome child; what they call down in those parts a 'bright girl; that is, her skin was not black, but of a clear, warm, almost transparent amber brown hue, very handsome; and the eyes, as often happens, were quick and wise and soft in their beautiful lustrous black. I need hardly say that Mrs. Thayer loved her; and the girl was wholly devoted in her turn to the family. They were as much to her, perhaps more, than if she had been born of their blood; for a kind of worship was mingled with her affection. She was above all devoted to her first little charge, Helen.

There is nothing more that need be told about a series of years that followed Goldy's coming to the Landing, until, five years after Edward's birth, a second little daughter was added to the family. She too was born in the spring; but it was not Massachusetts, and there was no arbutus growing in the woods near the Landing. Instead, Goldy brought in one day an immense armful of the Pixidanthera, just then in blossom; and Mrs. Thayer, rejoicing over the lovely bright flowers and star-like little round white buds, said her baby must be called Pixie. She was baptized by another name, but uselessly; she was called nothing but Pixie all her life.

I am running ahead of my story, for it was a long while before Pixie received baptism. At the Landing there was neither church nor minister; neither was one within reach by any road. It was another of Mrs. Thayer's deprivations, that she felt very oppressively. And now that she had three children, and that May was growing to be a big girl,—tall, that is, though slight,—Mrs. Thayer began to consider in her mind how she was to care for them, or how she could possibly bring them up in this strange place. She spoke to Mr. Thayer about it.

'They'll do!' was his summary though scarce comforting conclusion.

'*How* will they do, husband?'

'Like the flowers, my dear. Don't you see it before your eyes?'

'Yes, I do. But flowers have only to be sweet and look sweet.'

'That's the most of a woman's calling.'

'Oh, Cranston! you do not think so.'

'I give you my word I do. A woman that isn't sweet is of no earthly use to society.'

'But a woman that is *only* sweet? I cannot bear to think of Pixie and May growing up so. Sweet they are; but I want them to be everything that women ought to be. And Edward; what shall we do with Edward?'

'Just what we are doing; let him eat and run his shoes off. It's lucky I can find that boy in shoes. He'd break me if I was a little poorer. All in good time, wife! Don't you worry.'

Which admonition always shut Mrs. Thayer's mouth. But she thought only the more.

She was sitting musing one day, with her baby in her lap, when her thoughtful brow attracted the attention of her eldest girl. Helen drew near. The baby was lying asleep on her mother's knees, no longer requiring any care; and Mrs. Thayer's eyes were gazing out of the window, with two fine lines of perplexity drawn across her brow. She did not notice Helen.

'Mother,' said the little girl, 'what are you thinking about?'

'Home,' said Mrs. Thayer absently.

'Home? What home? Isn't this home?'

'For the present.'

'What is the matter with it?'

'Nothing. I was not thinking of this home, May.'

'What one, then, mother?'

'The one I knew when I was as old as you.'

'Where was that?'

'A great way from here. I think it is a hundred thousand miles away!'

'A hundred thousand miles, mother! Why, you said the world wasn't so big as that?'

'I meant, in everything but miles, May. It was not like this in any way.'

'What was it like?'

'May, I cannot tell you. I was thinking of the old apple orchard.'

'Was there an apple orchard?'

'And such heaps of apples! They used to fall from the trees and make great spots of red and yellow under them, covering up the grass; and I used to go and get great yellow apples, and spicy red ones, and sweet Seek-no-farthers, and beautiful fair pippins, and Sheep's-noses and Swars. And then in the spring, just the time when you were born, May, the trees were covered with their sweet blossoms.'

'Apple blossoms? Are they pretty, mother?'

'I think there is nothing like them. Nothing!'

'Prettier than anything?'

'Sweeter than anything. Oh, I do not mean, to *smell;* it is another sort of sweetness—like nothing else in the world.' Mrs. Thayer sighed.

'What else, mother? You never told me about that place. What else was there?'

'There was a garden, May, full of delicious flowers; flowers that you know nothing about. There was a whole host of them. Roses, red and white'—

'Oh, I know roses, mother.'

'Yes, but the others you do not know. There was larkspur, and phlox, and moss pink, and hypericum, and lily of the valley, and peonies, and syringa, and snowball, and laburnum. I shall get homesick if I talk of them,' Mrs. Thayer went on, smiling and getting rid of a tear at the same time. 'There were sweet-williams, and four-o'clocks, and columbine, and marigolds, and balm, and southernwood, and lilies, and pansies, and poppies, and centaurea, and mignonette, and pinks, and China asters.'

'Pretty?'

'Beautiful!'

'Why don't they grow here?'

'It is too hot and too dry. Nothing grows here at the Landing, and nobody cares for them.'

'Was that other home pleasanter than this?'

'Far pleasanter.'

'Then why did we come away?'

'I went away from it when I married your father. It was my home when I was a little girl.'

'Were you a little girl when you married him?'

'No,' said Mrs. Thayer, laughing. 'Little girls stay with their mothers.'

'Were you a little girl with your mother then?'

'Yes.'

'Where's she now, mother?'

'She is gone to a better home, May,' said Mrs. Thayer, stooping forward to kiss the child.

'Mamma, what are you crying about?'

'Nothing very reasonable, May. Only that I shall not see her again till I go where she is; and sometimes I feel as if the sight of her would do me so much good.'

'But, mother, you have got papa and me.'

'And Pixie and Ned. Yes, I have got a great deal, May. But sometimes I think I would like to take you all away, back to my dear old home and its apple blossoms; where it is cool and fresh and green, and the church bell sounds of a Sunday.'

Mrs. Thayer's wishes were about to be fulfilled, little as things looked like it at the time she spoke them. One event after another came, unlocking the several doors that seemed to stand barred between the wishes and their accomplishment. First was the death of her husband's brother, the master of a steamboat on the river. He had not done much to help along their fortunes during his life, but he made up for it by leaving them all he possessed at his death. It was a considerable property, and at once placed Mr. Thayer at ease. At once, therefore, the business at the Landing was given up, and preparations

made to go further down, to New Orleans. Mrs. Thayer looked at the prospect with patient dismay. Before, however, any real step could be taken, beyond preparations, everything was changed by the death of Mr. Thayer himself. Mrs. Thayer was left independent, both as to means and movements. And of course, as soon as she could think, she knew what she would do. She would go home to the old farm. The house was unoccupied. Mrs. Thayer took immediate measures to have it aired and cleaned, and at once set about getting ready to move her family. There were many business details, however, to be attended to, and a favourable season must be waited for, so the removal did not take place for several months.

Before she left the Landing, I forgot to mention, Mrs. Thayer had another brush with the man who had been the leader of the gang among whom Goldy once was making her way to New Orleans. It was just before Mr. Thayer died. He came one afternoon, much as he had come that first time, and interviewed Mrs. Thayer on her doorstep.

'I've seen you before,' he said, spitting out tobacco juice between the two halves of every sentence. Walker; you mayn't remember. Came to look arter a runaway gal—six or seven years ago. You couldn't tell me nothin' at that time; and I couldn't hear no news of her nowheres, and I let it go for a bad job. But to-day we was stoppin' here again, and I thought I'd post up this here confounded hill, and see ef you couldn't maybe tell me no more.'

'How should I tell you any more? I know no more now than I did then.'

'I thought maybe she mought ha' hid herself somewheres and come streakin' along arterwards. I give her up too easy. She was a likely little devil. They is all of 'em devils, only there's different kinds; and she was a kind to fetch money.'

The man had been drinking, Mrs. Thayer thought. She was silent, and waited.

'You had a gal about that time, somethin' like as big as mine. What's become of her?'

'She has grown to be almost a woman.'

'Got her yet, eh?'

'Certainly.'

'Wall, I must conclude that 'ere little warmint o' mine drownded herself out o' spite—jest to cheat me out o' so much money. There's plenty of 'em ain't any too good to do it. She jest vanished out of sight, and without anybody bein' able to see how nor where. I 'most think she's lyin' at the bottom of the river.'

He stood still in drunken pondering, but as Mrs. Thayer had the prudence to be still and volunteer nothing, he at length discontentedly took himself off. That was the last ever heard of Goldy's former owner and persecutor.

CHAPTER V.

APPLE BLOSSOMS.

IT was just when the apple blossoms were making the old orchard look young, that the family arrived at home. They had come by a method of progress far slower than could be attained now-a-days, and arrived in the middle of one afternoon, tired and dusty and glad. The old house was standing, with its simple furniture, unchanged since the days when its owner had been a child there; so, though packing-cases were still unopened in the barn, it was not difficult to put things in living order at once. Fires were speedily kindled; the kettle hung on the crane, which institution Goldy highly approved; the boxes and hampers they had brought with them allowed beds to be made and a table to be spread with no delay; and by the time the supper dishes were washed and put away, Mrs. Thayer felt at home and settled. At home especially. Through the back door of the kitchen, which stood open, came a cool, fresh, sweet breath of air, like nothing that blows over the lower Mississippi; the evening light fell on the old barn, and a stray apple tree which stood at the corner of the grey old building was in a glory of pink blossoms. Just outside the kitchen door was a little paved way and an open woodshed, under cover, with a stock of cut wood already there.

'Things is mighty convenient,' said Goldy, in a satisfied manner. 'I never see no such handy kitchen. And is them apples, Mis' T'ayer?'

'Apple trees. That one at the corner of the barn bears very fine early apples; large and yellow and juicy. It is

called Thayer's Seedling, for it grew up here, and is not found anywhere else in this neighbourhood.'

'And when 'll they be ripe?'

'Oh, not for a good while; not till the end of August. There is a great deal to be done before we eat apples from that tree, Goldy.'

'Reckon dat's so, missus. An' de fus' t'ing is to see what's become o' dem childern. Dey is too still for peace.'

'May is with them,' said Mrs. Thayer. But she threw down her towel and hurried 'ben' to the sitting-room; then, as nobody was there, she went on to the porch. There sat May with Pixie in her lap. The little girl was asleep; but May had one hand full with keeping Edward quiet.

She was holding him fast and exhorting him. At Mrs. Thayer's arrival there was a double burst of appeal.

'Ma, mayn't I go?'

'Mother, he wants to go and run all over, and I wanted him to wait till you came. I told him he must get on his other clothes first.'

It was a sweet picture. One little image of loveliness asleep in the arms of the other, and the eager, restless little boy detained by the motherly hand of his not very much older sister. Pixie a dewy little rosebud; May with a look of wisdom and care upon her face which might seem to say the rose was full blown; yet the dew of the bud was also there, and the innocence of the yet sheathed sweetness. Or rather, May was like her namesake the arbutus, in a delicate beauty that did not court notice and so was only the more exquisite when noticed. Mrs. Thayer took the sleeping baby in her own arms.

'Don't you want to run too, Helen?'

'Oh yes, mother? Isn't it too lovely?'

Mrs. Thayer went down from the porch and paced slowly through the overgrown paths of the little flower garden. Flowers were there still, even many of the old

friends, though sadly in want of the gardener's hand. The children went before and behind her, delighted and curious.

'Mother, this is a nice place!' May was saying.

'I think,' said Mrs. Thayer, 'it is the nicest place in the world.'

Opening a little gate, she strolled on into the orchard. The children's delight here was unbounded. They ran this way and that, to get new views of the universal wonder of the apple trees, ever coming back to their mother as a central point.

'Oh, mother, it is beautiful enough for heaven!' May exclaimed.

'I used to think just that when I was your age.'

'And were you here then?'

'Yes, under these same trees; and their blossoms were then just the same that they are now; but it is not like heaven to me now, May.'

'Why, mamma?'

'My darling, the people are gone that were here. That is one thing.'

'But you have got *us*, mamma; and you hadn't us then.'

'True; but I have learned one great lesson, May, my child; that apple blossoms pass away.'

'But, mamma, you knew that then, didn't you? *I* know they don't last. But then they come again, mother, every year; don't they?'

'They come and they go. Yes, they go and they come. And just so they put me in mind of the other things that go and do not come any more.'

'What things, mamma?' inquired Helen, pressing closer to her mother's side and looking up into her face wistfully. 'Do you mean—people?' Her voice fell a little.

'I mean everything, May, that is earthly.'

Mrs. Thayer caught the wistful, serious, doubtful look on the sweet face, and came out of her own thoughts

with the recollection that she was speaking to ten years old.

'It is true, May,' she said, with a change of tone; 'nothing in this world does last. The very best passes away; except only those precious things which never pass away, and which we can take with us when we go or keep when all beside is fading.'

'What are those things, mother?'

Mrs. Thayer sat down on a wheelbarrow which had been left standing in the field, and, while Edward went galloping about, drew May down beside her; for her arms were filled with the sleeping Pixie.

'I will tell you, May; now is a good time. Everything in the world changes or dies or fades; except one or two things. One is—the love of Christ.'

'Do you mean, *His* love, mamma, or our love of Him?'

'Both.'

Helen looked serious and expectant.

'That fails never, my child. It never fades, unless we are unfaithful. It just grows brighter and sweeter and more happy; and when everything else fails it fills up the place of everything else. Whoever loves the Lord Jesus, and is loved by Him, is rich and happy; and anybody that does not know and love Him, is miserably poor. But you cannot be poor if you belong to the Lord Jesus, May, my darling; for in that case all He is and has is yours.'

'But, mamma'—

'Well?' said her mother, seeing the sweet childish brow heavy with thought. 'What is it?'

'I was thinking, mother. You said, "when everything else fails"?'

'Yes.'

'It couldn't make up, if I hadn't you, mother.'

'Yes, it could.'

The child looked wondering and incredulous.

'Listen, May. The love of Christ can make up for the loss of *everything*. He loves His children, and if they

trust Him He will take care of them in all circumstances. Don't you know the Bible says, "None of them that trust in Him shall be desolate"?'

'Mamma, I love Him a little, but I do not love Him so well as that.'

The tender lips were trembling, and the sweet childish eyes were full of tears. Mrs. Thayer put her arm round the child and bent down to kiss her.

'There is nothing to cry about, May. Only to be glad.'

'Mamma, is there anything else,—you said *things*,—is there anything else that does not go away?'

'The prospect of heaven.'

'Oh, but that is not until we die.'

'The *prospect* is now. The hope and the expectation. And there nothing passes away any more. There we shall have the love of Christ and the love and presence of our dear ones too—if they are His. I don't know if there will be apple blossoms, but I think there will be flowers, May, because we are told that the new earth fitted for the Lord's people shall be so much better than this, that this will be no more thought of.'

May considered a little.

'That's all, mother?' she asked then.

'No, there is one thing more which does not fail, here upon earth; and that is, work for Christ.'

'What is that, mother?'

'Whatever He gives us to do.'

'But have *I* anything that I can do for Him?'

'To be sure. May, you can do everything for Him—everything. Your lessons and your play, dressing yourself and eating and drinking; you can do it all just as you think He would like best,—if you love Him, that is. Nothing but love can keep watch and do every little thing to please some one else, whether it is an earthly or a heavenly friend.'

'But didn't you mean any other work, when you said "for Him," mother?'

'Yes. You do every little common thing for Him, and He will show you other things; bits of service that you may do for His kingdom, or some help to His servants, or His poor.'

'Like when you took me, Mis' T'ayer?'

The words came from just behind them, and there stood Goldy. Mrs. Thayer smiled, as she allowed that the accepting of the charge so suddenly offered her had certainly been a bit of service she thought she was doing for her Master.

'But I warn't His servant nohow, nor His poor,' Goldy objected.

'Not His servant, perhaps, but His poor, I think, Goldy.'

'No, mum, I warn't. I warn't good noways, Mis' T'ayer.'

'You have always been good to me, child.'

'Ain't so orful bad, neider, as dat. Ef I hadn't been good to missus, dat ar Walker ought to ha' cotched me.'

'But, you see, God was good to you, Goldy.'

'What fur, Mis' T'ayer?'

'What for?'

'Yes 'm. I war jes' no count; a little nigger gal, what nobody hadn't no use for, 'cept dat ar man.'

'I think the Lord meant that you should be one of His dear children, Goldy. I know He loves you, and He wants you to love Him. Now we will go in. Pixie must go to bed.'

But as the little party reached the garden again they were met by a visitor. A rather extraordinary visitor she seemed to Helen and to Goldy, who both eyed her curiously. It was a very plainly-dressed woman, with no hat on her head, and with a long grey stocking in her hand, which she was knitting, pulling the worsted as she went on from a ball in her pocket. Her face was rather fat and full; a fact which was emphasized by the way her yellowish hair was drawn tight back from it, smoothly brushed and fastened up snugly behind. The eyes were

quick enough, though they could not match her fingers; the rest of her features were inexpressive. She never ceased knitting; walking or talking, it made no difference.

'Well, Cordelia Thayer!' she began; 'so you've got back again,—back to the old place. I thought I'd jes' run over to see you and see if you've grown old any. Don't you know who I be? I'm Betsy Sawyer. *I've* grown old, hain't I? Ain't much like the Betsy Sawyer you used to know. I think it's eatin' buckwheat in the winters makes me fat; that and buttermilk in the summers. I say to myself I won't drink none no more; but la! what's the use? May as well live while you live; and 'tain't livin', not to drink buttermilk. 'Tain't no harm to be fat, as I know; anyhow 'tain't no sin. My! you've kep' poor enough. You're as slim as ever you was.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Thayer. 'Such a climate as I have been living in is not favourable to flesh.'

'I want to know! Is these all your chillen?'

'These are all. Goldy, you may take Pixie and put her to bed. Won't you come in, Betsy?'

'La, no; I hain't no time. I jes' run over for a minute. What you goin' to do with the farm?'

'I'll work it myself, I think.'

'It's a sight o' trouble. That is, it's a sight o' trouble to look arter the men; that's what I look at. The men is mostly sot in their own opinions; and they calculate, 'cause you're a woman and can't mow yourself, you don't know how the grass had ought to come down. They're jes' a fractious lot. I du think, the sense o' the world is into the women's heads, but you can't get a man to say that. Who hev you got to do the work?'

'Barnet Rockaway, for head man.'

'He's glad o' the place, I guess. He's ben kind o' shiftless with his own place; there didn't seem to be no get-along in him; it was his wife, I guess. Have you taken 'em in?'

'Not at all. He lives in his own home.'

'It's sort o' handy to hev a man round, though. Don't you calculate to hev your milkin' done early? Can't be too early, I allays think.'

'Yes, I think so too,' Mrs. Thayer agreed.

'What'll you du, ef he ain't regular?'

'Regular?' repeated Mrs. Thayer.

'Yes. Supposin' he don't come in the mornin' till your cream ought to be settin'?'

'I shall ask him to be earlier, in that case.'

'Guess he'll let you ask. Got a cow?'

'Not yet. I am only just come, you know.'

'How many do you calculate to hev?'

'One good one ought to be enough.'

'Don't you want you to churn your own butter?'

'Certainly.'

'Well, I allays find that when chillen's round, they take an amazing sight o' milk. Maybe yourn don't, but ourn do. I don't know but we've one critter as would suit you. If you hev two, that is, she mought do for one. She ain't one o' them chancy critters they tell about, that fills a pail mornin' and evenin'; I allays think, ef they give so much milk it's bound to be poor. But she's a real comfortable home cow; not for a show, you know, at a fair; but one that'll stan' in your barn-yard and give satisfaction.'

'Has your brother more cows than he wants?'

'Well, I was thinkin' we could spare you one, ef you wanted it. How long's your husband been gone?'

The sudden turn almost took away Mrs. Thayer's breath. She answered as decorously as possible, but it made no difference.

'He had a brother, hadn't he?'

'Yes.'

'He's dead too?'

'Yes.'

'Before or arter?'

'Before.'

'It was a good thing for you, warn't it?'

'A good thing! What do you mean, Betsy?'

'Well, jes' that. He left a good pot o' money, didn't he? La, folks must die, you know; you needn't look as if I was sayin' somethin' strange. But when folks die and leave a pot o' money, I allays think it's a good thing for somebody. You was on good terms, warn't you?'

'My brother-in-law was very kind to us always.'

'An' he hadn't nobody else belonging to him?'

'I believe not.'

'Then that's what I said. Why, Cordelia Thayer, you ought to be one o' the richest women in town. That your help, that took the baby?'

'Yes.'

'Brought her from Mississippi along with you? Well, I must be goin'. I never hed nothin' fall into my lap like that. I'd like to know how it feels. I never had a thing in all my natural life but I hed to work for it.'

'Things are sweeter so,' remarked Mrs. Thayer.

'Think so? Well, "many men of many minds." Good-night to ye. Will you come over and look at that cow?'

'Mother, who is she?' whispered Helen as the visitor departed.

'She lives near here. I used to know her when I was a girl, May. She is sister to the man that owns the next farm.'

'Does she always keep knitting so?' said Helen, wondering. 'Mother, did you see how her fingers flew? And the needles went click, click, ever so fast, and I could almost *see* the stocking grow.'

'Betsy Sawyer is a smart woman,' said Mrs. Thayer, as they went into the house.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COW.

HER new home seemed very charming to Helen. The rooms up-stairs, in one of which she went to sleep, it is true, were whitewashed as to the walls, and the woodwork was of the plainest and painted blue, and the ceilings were low. What of all that? The house was sweet with cleanliness; the little windows opened upon the orchard at one side and looked over the garden upon the other. The floors were painted and smooth; the chairs were rush-bottomed; the tables and bedsteads were of the simplest description; but the bed linen was sweet, and the air that breathed in at the windows bore no burden of dust and was charged with no oppression of heat; cool, dewy, balmy, it filled the rooms with an inexpressible sweetness. The little white muslin curtain at this one window was borne inward by the faint breeze, and mother and daughter, as if by one impulse, went to it and stood looking out. There was a shimmer of moonlight on the apple trees; the pale blossoms looked unearthly bright and fair; and with the dewy air came in that untold fragrance, from the tree flowers, from ploughed ground, from springing grain. It was a wonderful night. Mother and daughter looked and breathed at first in silence.

'Mother,' said Helen then softly, 'what is heaven like?'

'It is better even than this, my darling.'

'What is it like, mother?'

'I cannot tell, May; but there comes no storm upon

the peace, and no blight upon the blossoms. There is no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun. The Lord is their everlasting light, and the days of their mourning are ended. Friends are together and do not part again. There shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain. And the best of all is, they will be with Christ. He has promised that.'

'Mother,' said Helen slowly, 'wouldn't you like to go there?'

'Very much, my darling.'

'I think I would.'

'But we must stay and do our Lord's work first, while He gives it to us to do,' said Mrs. Thayer, with a sort of stricture at her heart at these words. 'And that is what we want to do, isn't it?'

'Yes, mamma; but I don't know what the work is.'

'He will show us. If we are only willing and obedient, He will give us just the work He wants us to do for Him.'

'Won't He give it if we are not willing?'

'It is possible to refuse it, May; and then the Lord is not honoured by our service, and we lose the happiness of it.'

'Mother, what did God make the world so beautiful for?'

'I think for our pleasure, May; because He loves us. And then, all the beauty tells of Him, doesn't it?'

'How, mamma?'

'He contrived it—thought of it—made it. It all comes from Him.'

'Oh, mamma!' said Helen ecstatically; 'now the apple orchard says wonderful things to me!'

That evening was but the beginning of delights. Mornings and evenings and all times were thenceforth to Helen seasons of rejoicing. The place was a rich, fair village, set in a fine arable country; good farms and good cultivation were everywhere to be seen; the people living

there were comfortable in their circumstances, and all houses and barns and fences were nice-looking and in good repair. Nothing could be fancied more smiling and promising than the whole look of the land. There were no eyesores: no factories, no brick kilns, no drinking shops. Indeed, there was no close collection of houses. The village, which was called Daisy Plains,—why it would be hard to tell, for not a daisy showed its pretty but baieful face in the pastures or by the roadside; the farmers rooted them all up;—the village was hardly deserving the name, being scattered over a large extent of country, each house in the midst of its own belongings of field and meadow and pasture ground. Fine large trees grouped about all these homesteads, and were allowed to stand all over in great numbers, giving shade to cattle, and refreshment to the human eye. Altogether, Daisy Plains was a pleasant place. A little stream wound through it, not of force enough to tempt a mill-owner. The distance from Boston was not great, yet enough in those days before railroads to discourage any speculator. Daisy Plains was left to its simplicity and its contented thriving; had no great fortunes, and no poor among its population. Grain enough ripened to feed the inhabitants, and grass enough grew to maintain their cattle in a state of sleek prosperity. The butter made there was rosy, it was so sweet, and might have been dyed with marigolds, it was so yellow; but dyeing, unless it were the legitimate colouring of woollen stuffs, was unknown in that happy region; they would as soon have thought of falsifying their own names as their butter and cheese. Wood was cut in those days four feet long for the cording; cows were fed with grass and grain, not with ensilage; and no brewery was known nearer than Boston. The age of shams was not yet, in Daisy Plains at least. People did not lock their doors at night; for the age of foreign invasion had not come, and there was nothing to fear. There was no inquiry after French fashions, for the people thought their own quite good enough; and dress

was not at any rate the first object in life. They did not see many new books, but they did read old ones; and if the community could not be called polished, which in truth it could not, there was nevertheless no lack of intelligence and there was a fair degree of information. The farmers talked, when they came together, not only or chiefly of their crops and their cattle; the great questions of the day were fairly gone into; and the women—well, the women talked household and family affairs, as nearly all women except the very highly cultured, and even some of them will. It was not a very progressive society; but then, neither was it stagnant or stupid. If new books came among them rarely, on the other hand, as I said, they read the old ones; and if some new truths were slow to make their way, perhaps that was more than compensated by the absence of fashionable untruths. It will be seen that this was a solid little community, in which the condition of the people corresponded nearly to the condition of their farms; an even prosperity and comfortableness, which did not exclude individual and local differences, but pleasantly embraced them all.

A day or two after their arrival Mrs. Thayer took May and went over to inspect Miss Sawyer's cow. It was evening, the light coming clear and soft aslant through the trees and across the road. Here a meadow, there a field of grain, lay in the tender glow; the elms lifted up their stately heads into the light; the apple orchards were still in their glory, and here and there the white blossoms of a pear tree told of the further riches of nature, in presence and in preparation. The road was excellent and well kept, so that no discomfort of footing hindered the uninterrupted enjoyment of the eye. The quarter of a mile of way was filled every inch of it with pleasure; and Helen was in ecstasy.

Mr. Sawyer's farmhouse was, generally speaking, a repetition of their own; a little larger, and showing rather less paint about it; but clean, orderly, comfortable,

and well-to-do looking. Miss Sawyer came to the door before they could knock.

'I saw you comin',' she said. 'I guessed you wouldn't want to live along a great while without a cow. Come to look at her, ain't ye? Oh, come in; I'll take you out directly, when they go to milkin'. Come in, right along.'

Blue wainscoting, yellow painted floors, strips of rag carpeting, well shaken and clean, laid down over them; all looked much in the style of her own home to Helen, although perhaps an indefinable shade less delicate and refined. She felt the difference, however; but before they could turn out of the little entry way into one of the rooms, they were confronted by a figure which made Helen forget the house. It was a boy, several years older than herself; a very handsome, spirited-looking fellow, with dark, fine eyes, and a very upright bearing. The two children's eyes fastened on each other at once.

'Who is this?' said Mrs. Thayer, pausing.

'Oh, that is my sister's boy—Trim Satterly. You know Sally's a widow? She lost her husband five years ago; and so then she came home, and she and me we keep up the place, she and me and Asa. She brought her boy with her, of course; and what *he* does I don't know—but grow and eat, and eat and grow.'

'That is the way my boy does,' said Mrs. Thayer, smiling kindly at the young fellow in a way that calmed him down; for Miss Betsy's speech had evidently the effect of rousing his ire. 'I fancy it is the way with all boys who are growing up as they ought to do. Trim, this is my little daughter Helen. We have come to be your neighbours.'

The bold black eyes softened, and a pleasant smile came upon the features; and as Mrs. Thayer at last followed Miss Betsy, the boy put out a hand to detain May.

'I'll show you my rabbits,' he said, 'if you like.'

'Rabbits?' said Helen, doubtful.

'Yes. One is almost white, and two are spotted.'

'Where are they?'

'Out here—just a little way—t'other side of the barnyard. Come!'

May was uncertain about going, but she had a natural aversion to seem uncivil, and the offer was friendly; she followed her entertainer. They passed through the entry, out at the back door, which let them into a vegetable garden, and from there into the farmyard at one side of the garden. The yard was large, well kept, flanked with barns and sheds and granaries and what not. Quite across it Trim went, to a granary raised up two or three feet above the ground on brick piles; and there, beneath it, well sheltered from sun and rain, was the rabbit hutch. Helen looked at the pretty creatures with great interest.

'I never saw rabbits before,' she said shyly.

'Never saw rabbits! Where have you lived all your life? Why, they're as plenty as blackberries on Pine Hill, and they come down here and visit us just a little bit too often.'

'Why? Do they do any harm?'

'Uncle Sam thinks so. Just ask him!'

'But *what* harm do they do? They are so pretty!'

'Well, they just eat what they like; and that is what you do yourself, isn't it?'

'What do they like?' said Helen, who saw a doubt here.

'I don't care what they like; mine are going to have it, anyhow; and as much as they want.'

'Do they like being shut up in a box?'

'If they weren't shut up, they'd be killed. They don't know that, but I do, and so I have to put them in prison for their good, you see. Now I'll show you something they like.'

He fetched some delicate, fresh cabbage leaves and supplied them to his imprisoned favourites. May looked on with great interest to see their motions and ways;

gave them herself timidly a cabbage leaf or two; and was greatly fascinated. Yet more by her companion than by the rabbits. His handsome face, his strength, and his decided, spirited way, all took her fancy; and on Trim's part the fascination was still more undoubted. He was entirely taken captive by the little soft brown head, and the delicate, sweet face and manner, as well as by the refinement, which had no place in Mr. Trim's immediate surroundings.

'Look here,' said he suddenly; 'I'll give you one if you like.'

'Oh, thank you!' said Helen, flushing with pleasure. 'But I haven't any cabbages to give it.'

'I'll bring you some. Oh, there are plenty of things they eat.'

'Have you got a garden?' asked Helen, looking up at him.

'*We've* got a garden. 'Tain't mine particularly.'

'Then it's your uncle's?'

'My uncle's, and my mother's, and everybody's. What about it?'

'They mightn't like you to cut the cabbages to feed my rabbit, if I had one.'

Trim laughed a little, this was such an original way of looking at things.

'Suppose they didn't like it,' said he. 'They needn't know, in the first place, anything about the matter; and if they did, who cares? I have a right to my share of the garden; and I'll bring you all the truck you want.'

'Stop,' said Helen, putting her hand on his as he was about to open the hutch and take out one of its long-eared inhabitants,—'oh, stop, please! It's very kind of you; but I mustn't take it.'

'Why mustn't you? Yes, you must, if you want it. *Do* you want it? Only say the word, and I'll fix things so you shall have it. Do you want it? You shall have whichever you like best.'

'I think not,' said Helen a little wistfully. 'I don't think it would be right.'

'Right! What isn't right?' inquired Trim scornfully. 'The rabbit's mine, and I give it to you; and I'll get you stuff enough to feed it. It sha'n't starve, I tell you, if you're afraid of that.'

'I think it wouldn't be right, Helen repeated modestly.

'*Why* wouldn't it be right?' Tim demanded imperiously.

'Because the cabbages are not yours,' the little girl said frankly, though with so soft a look and manner that her companion could not take offence. He flushed high, however.

'Folks ain't so careful about doing right as all that comes to,' he remarked by way of protest.

'Oh yes, they are; some of them are,' said Helen.

'I tell you they ain't. Not anybody I know. Why, that's nothing. A few cabbage leaves!'

'But they are not yours; and your uncle would not like it; and my mother would not like *that;* and so there would be a great deal of wrong about it, don't you see?'

Trim studied this delicate little moraliser as a very new specimen of the human race. She was so dainty, so gentle, with such a wonderful look of loving purity, and now this standing up for what was 'right.'

'Is it wrong to do a thing, just because cranky folks don't like it?' he demanded. 'At that rate, a fellow 'd be pretty sharp tied up.'

'Don't you remember the rule?' said Helen.

'What rule? I hate rules! They're just things to plague a fellow.'

'Oh, but not God's rules.'

Trim stared.

'Our folks ain't specially pious,' said he; 'if that's what you mean.'

'No,' said Helen simply; 'I do not mean *specially* pious, but just minding what the Bible says, you know.'

'How should I know?' said Trim, with a half laugh. 'I don't know anything about it, I tell you. Nobody ever learned me my catechism.'

'Oh, but this is not out of the catechism; this is only the Bible. Don't you know that?'

'Which part of it?' said Trim, not willing to confess all his ignorance to one whom it might shock.

'I mean—you know, of course you know; I guess you are just making believe. I mean those words,—"Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Yes, it says, "*all* things whatsoever ye would."'

Trim studied her and the words.

'Is that in the Bible?' he asked.

'Why, yes; you know it is.'

'Then all I have to say is, it might just as well be anywhere else, or nowhere. Nobody minds it.'

'Oh yes, Trim, some do.'

'Who?'

'Mamma. And I try to do it.'

'You two are the only people then in Daisy Plains. If that's what you mean by pious, there ain't much o' your sort o' pious in the world. I should like to see it! I never did yet, and that's more. Come!' said he, shutting up the hutch, and looking over his shoulder; 'they've done looking at the cattle, and they'll be yelling for you, next thing.'

But instead of leading the way, Trim crouched down again beside his little companion and spoke under his breath, with a mischievous, laughing look upon his handsome face.

'Look here! Is your mother goin' to trade with my Aunt Betsy for one o' them cows?'

'I don't know,' said Helen, wondering; 'we came to see the cow.'

'Yes. Well, I know something about it, you see. Now you say I ought to do what I'd like to have done to me, don't you?'

'The Bible says so.'

'Well, that's what I mean. Now, there's two sides to it; which way shall I do?'

'Two sides?' repeated Helen.

'Yes! There's my aunt, and there's your mother. Now if I do what one of 'em 'd like, I shall do what t'other one wouldn't like; don't you see?'

'No,' said Helen, very much mystified. 'How should you?'

'I'll tell you. I know what cow Aunt Betsy wants to get your mother to buy; I heard her talkin' about it. 'Tain't the best cow in the yard, not by a long shot. Now if she was a kicker, I guess your mother 'd like to know, wouldn't she?—and you go bail my Aunt Betsy wouldn't thank me for tellin' her.'

Helen gazed with the utmost astonishment and perplexity into the bright, handsome face, which was not evil at all in its expression, though just now mischievous and challenging.

'What do you say?' Trim went on, enjoying the situation. 'Which of 'em shall I do for, hey?'

'But *does* she kick?' asked Helen, so innocently that Trim burst into a fit of delighted laughter.

'If I do what my Aunt Betsy 'd like, I shan't tell you.'

'*But*,' said Helen, 'that wouldn't be right.'

'Which wouldn't be right?'

'It wouldn't be right to let mother buy her, if she kicks.'

'That's your side of it.'

'It would be doing as you'd be done by, to tell mother.'

'Yes,' repeated Trim, 'that's your side of it. But in that case, you see, Aunt Betsy wouldn't sell her cow; and *she* wouldn't think it was doing as I'd be done by, to peach about it.'

'Wouldn't it?' said Helen.

'Wouldn't what?'

'Wouldn't it be doing as you would be done by?

Would *you* sell a kicking cow to anybody without telling of it?'

'Wouldn't I be a fool if I told?'

'No.'

'Why not?'

'Oh, Trim, say! *would* you do such a thing?'

'Everybody does it. I don't know what I'd do. I think it's kind o' mean; but then, how could folks do business if they gave their things away?'

The summons expected some time since now actually came; but as Helen turned to obey it, she paused.

'Oh, Trim, tell me; *does* that cow kick?'

And Trim nodded to the confiding little face and answered,—

'Like seventy.'

CHAPTER VII.

THE SERVICE.

THE sun was just set and the evening was dewy and delicious as the mother and daughter set out on their way home. Helen was profoundly serious for some time. At last she put a question.

'Mother, did you get the cow?'

'*A* cow, but not *the* cow. Not the one Miss Sawyer at first proposed. I did not like her looks.'

'Have you got a good one, mamma?'

'I hope so. We shall see.'

'Mother,' Helen began, after a slight pause, 'did you see that boy that took me to see the rabbits?'

'I saw him. What of him?'

'Did you like him?'

'May, I cannot tell on such short experience. You had more chance. Did *you* like him?'

'He was very good to me, mamma; but he seemed to me a queer boy.'

'How queer?'

'He seemed to think nobody is good.'

'That is unfortunate for him.'

'But, mamma, has he good people round him?'

'My dear,' said her mother, 'all his family are good; at least they ought to be. They are members of the church, and have been ever since I can remember.'

'Miss Betsy too, mother?'

'Yes; and her brother, this boy's uncle, is deacon in the church.'

'I am very sorry for him, mamma.'

'Why, May? I am afraid *he* is not good himself, if he holds such opinions.'

'But, mamma, I don't see how he can help his opinions.'

Somewhat startled at this utterance, Mrs. Thayer asked for an explanation and got it. *She* became serious then.

'My child,' she said, 'it shows you how careful Christians ought to be how they walk.'

'Mamma, can *Christians* do such things?'

'You see for yourself, May, how contrary they are to the commands of the Bible. But last night, do you remember, you thought my lamp was out, when it was only very low down?'

A pause.

'Mamma,' said May, 'do you think I am a Christian?'

'What do you think yourself, May?'

'Mamma, I wish you would question me, and see what you say.'

'What is your notion of a Christian?'

May thought over this.

'Mamma, isn't it some one that belongs to the Lord Jesus?'

'In a certain sense everybody belongs to Him. He is the King of kings; and all things were created by Him and for Him. In one way, all belong to Him.'

'But not their hearts, mother.'

'Does yours, May?'

'Yes, mother, I think so.'

'What is your reason for thinking so?'

May pondered again.

'It is very difficult to tell some things,' she said, very truly; 'but, mother, don't you think one knows if one loves any one?'

'Sometimes.'

'Not always, mother?'

'It is not always easy to know whom one loves best; and, you know, the Lord Jesus will be loved best by those that in your sense belong to Him.'

'How can one tell, mamma?'

'The best way I know is the way He has Himself told us. Whose will do you do? In great matters or in little matters; when God's will says one thing, and your wishes say another, which do you follow?'

Helen did not immediately reply, but the answer was clear when it came.

'Mamma, I think, when I know it, I love to do His will.'

'Those are the people He says love Him, Helen.'

'Mamma, can one *always* know His will?'

'I think one can, my child, if one is willing to know it. I do not think it is even very difficult. When you are puzzled about any question of duty, take these words for your key,—"Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." That will generally set things straight.'

'Mamma,' said Helen, holding her mother back as they were approaching their own gate, and speaking a little anxiously,—'mamma, do you think I am too little to join the church?'

Mrs. Thayer started, half with delight.

'It is not usual,' she said, hesitating. 'People would say you are too young to know what you were doing.'

'But Jesus knows I belong to Him, mother.'

'Why do you wish it, Helen?'

'Mother, I would like to begin to serve Him. Isn't that one way?'

'Certainly it is, and His appointed way too. Only, my child, it must not be done lightly. After you have publicly taken the Lord's service upon you, you are a mark for people's eyes; they will watch and judge you; and, what is much worse, they will judge of the truth by you, and even judge of your Master by you. Of course that is, people who do not know Him themselves. They will be drawn to Christ by the beauty of your walk and conversation; or they will conclude religion is a sham, or find excuses for their own neglect of duty in your unfaithfulness.'

'Yes, mamma, like Trim this evening. I believe that was what made me think of it just now. I think he is doing what you say.'

Mrs. Thayer put further questions, and stood still in the road to hear what Helen had to tell her; and it made her heart swell to perceive, as she did, that her little daughter, in genuine care and sympathy for one going astray, had been prompted to come forward with her small witness-bearing before the world. And yet not small, thought Mrs. Thayer as she went in; and the praise of babes and sucklings is not slighted nor scorned by Him who looks at truth in the inward parts. She stopped again in the garden.

'I will talk with the minister,' she said. 'But, May, if you enter upon the service of the Lord Jesus, you must remember that you are not your own. You must live to do His service and accept His will, whatever it may cost; and there must be no half-way work. It is a continual service, hour by hour and minute by minute. It means, not living to one's self, and being separate from the world; it means loving Him best.'

'I do love Him best, mamma,' said the child gently.

Mrs. Thayer had enough to think of that evening, which made her heart a chapel of song and thanksgiving; but she was to have yet more before she went to bed. Helen was in her little cot and fast asleep, with the lovely peace of childhood on her face, and yet with a peace beyond that, the mother thought, as she stood looking. Pixie's brow, hard by, had that same blissful unconsciousness and absence of care; but on Helen's there lay also a flush of sweetness and happiness more positive and even more pure. Her eyes filled as she turned away, and there stood Goldy before her.

'Mis' T'ayer, if she's gwine, I'se gwine too.'

'What, Goldy? what do you mean?'

'She's gwine to de New Jerusalem, ain't she? I heerd you's talkin' in de garding. *Ain't* she gwine for de New Jerusalem?'

'I hope she is,' Mrs. Thayer answered soberly.

'Den I'se gwine too. May ain't gwine nowhar 'dout me. So dar!'

'But, Goldy,' Mrs. Thayer began, 'this is a serious business. It cannot be done with words.'

'What missus mean?'

'I don't know if you understand what you are talking about.'

'What am Mis' T'ayer talkin' 'bout?'

'I am talking of what you said just now; about going to the New Jerusalem. That means, to be a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ; for you cannot go there in any other way.'

'Dat ar way am good 'nuff for me, missus.'

'But do you know what it means? If May goes, as you say, it will be as a loving servant of the Lord, doing His will.'

'De way she am gwine, dat ar am de same way I'm gwine,' Goldy persisted.

'But do you know what it is?'

'Don' know nuffin. Missus please take hold and find out.'

Mrs. Thayer to her surprise saw a working in the lines of the dark face faintly lighted by the tallow candle in her hand, which showed her that it was earnest thought with the girl and something not to be trifled with. She put down her candle, and sat down in a chair and looked at Goldy.

'You know what the Bible says, Goldy,' she began somewhat vaguely.

''Bout what, missus?'

'About this. Why do you want to be a Christian?'

'Reckon it's 'cos *she's* a-gwine,'—indicating May by a slight motion of the head.

'But that is not reason enough.'

'What fur no, missus?'

'It is Christ you must follow, not May, or anybody else.'

'But, missus remember, dar was Andrew brought Peter; an' dat oder,—he brought de oder man, him what war under de fig tree,—missus knows. I can't seem to jus' 'member all dem names.'

'That is true,' said Mrs. Thayer, surprised. 'That is true. One does bring another. But, Goldy, when they come, whoever brought them, they become the servants of Christ; now do you know what that is?'

'Please, missus find out.'

'It means, to trust Him for everything, to love Him dearly, and to do everything He says.'

'Dat's in de Bible.'

'Yes, that is what I mean; to do everything the Bible bids us. Now are you willing?'

'Ain't I allays done what missus told me?'

'Always! But that is to please *me*, Goldy; this other obedience is to please Jesus.'

The girl nodded. 'Dat's jes' what I'se gwine to do,' she said. 'An' I'll read dat ar ole Bible all over, to find out; dat's what I'll do.'

'Why do you wish to please Him?'

The answer did not come as the questioner expected. Goldy was silent, her features worked, a shine of moisture came into her soft black eye, even by the poor light of the candle Mrs. Thayer could see; and finally she dropped upon her knees by her mistress's side and hid her face in her lap, and Mrs. Thayer knew it was to screen the burst of quiet tears that followed. Both were still for a minute or two, Mrs. Thayer laying her hand tenderly on the shoulder of the girl, who had come to be almost like a child of her own.

'Let us go on, Goldy,' she said presently. 'It is necessary that I should ask, and that you should tell me. Why do you wish to please the Lord Jesus?'

Goldy raised her head, drew back, and remained on the floor sitting on her heels.

'Don' know, missus; reckon 'cause He so good.'

'Good to you, do you mean?'

'He am powerful good to me, missus—sure He am; but 'pears like I seen Him all glory, and yet a-lookin' down at me; and den I say, I'se de Lord's, sure 'nuff; hain't His blood a-dripped down fur me? and I t'inks, now my blood, it's all His'n, and I'm all His'n, and I'se do what He tell me, and I'se do nuffin else; and ain't dat ar bein' His servant, missus?'

'I think so indeed. Then what has Helen to do with it?'

'I heerd her a-speakin' in de garding, and den I t'ought it war time fur me to speak. I warn't gwine to let her get ahead o' me, nohow.'

'My child, I am very glad!'

'Yes, missus—I'se glad too.'

'But, Goldy, if you set your hand to this work, if you enter upon this service, it must be for ever and at all costs. Suppose there came a time when to follow Christ would bring you into great trouble?'

'Trouble?' the girl repeated.

'Yes. That has often happened and will often happen again. It is easy just now to follow Christ; suppose a time came when it was very hard?'

'How 'd dat be, missus?'

'It comes in a great many ways. Suppose by working on Sunday a man can make a great deal of money; and maybe he is poor, and has a family. Suppose by telling a lie a person can escape a great deal of shame and pain. Suppose a girl loves a man who is not a Christian.'

'What den?'

'Then she must either disobey the Lord's command, or perhaps break her heart. It is the *pinch* that shows whose servant you are; and when the pinch comes, then the world looks to see what sort of a Christian you are, and whether religion is anything after all.'

'I s'pect some o' dem pinches is pretty hard.'

'Very hard. But it is better not to begin to be a Christian if one is not willing to go through with it.'

'How's de pinch comin' to me, missus?'

'My child, I cannot tell. But it is likely to come.'

'It'll nebber come to May?' Goldy said, with a startled accent.

'It probably will,' the mother said, with a sigh. 'In little things it really comes every day; when one is tempted to be impatient, to be untrue, to be careless, to be selfish. But there come greater trials than those; and the promise, Goldy,—you may read it in your Bible,—is "to him that overcometh."'

The girl stood thinking, sober and intent. Mrs. Thayer watched her.

'Nebber t'ought I hab no *great* t'ing to do fur de Lord,' she said at last; but she said it as if the prospect were of an unlooked-for honour.

'Then you are in earnest, Goldy, and mean it?'

'I'se in earnest all I kin be, Mis' T'ayer.'

'Then I will speak to the minister about you both.'

CHAPTER VIII.

PROS AND CONS.

SHE had an opportunity soon, for the very next day the minister and his wife came to call. *The* minister, for there was as yet but one at Daisy Plains, and only one white church reared its white spire above the trees and the houses that dotted the ground.

Mr. Franks did not seem an attractive person in Helen's eyes. He was a man of much sense and plenty of education; he could write learned sermons and carry on discussions that concerned the depths of things. But learning and controversy in the best of cases have no softening effect upon the character; and Mr. Franks looked as if he wanted some influence of that kind. Keen his eye was, and cold; his manner stately, his speech dry. His wife, on the other hand, seemed to have all the gentleness her husband lacked. Perhaps her sweet face took some of its meekness from the enforced habit of her home life.

'I understand you are a denizen here,' Mr. Franks was saying. 'You were here before, in the time of my predecessor?'

'I have not lived in Daisy Plains for fourteen years,' Mrs. Thayer answered.

'You have spent the interval at the South, I think? I should suppose you would hardly find there educational institutions suited to the needs of your young flock?'

'My flock was not old enough to miss them,' Mrs. Thayer said, smiling.

'Ah, true! And were you where the institutions of

religion were what you could wish, for yourself and for them? No age is too tender to miss them.'

'I am very glad to be at home on that account,' said Mrs. Thayer. 'I had no such advantages where I was. And I wish to consult you, Mr. Franks, upon a matter in this connection. My little daughter has expressed to me her desire to unite herself with the church.'

'Indeed! Very gratifying, certainly; highly gratifying. May I ask how old the—a — your little daughter is? I understood you just now to intimate that your children were young.'

'Helen is young. She is a little over ten.'

'Humph! A very tender age to assume weighty responsibilities.'

'Yes, she is young. But when the responsibilities are once clearly seen and felt, they can no longer be "assumed," I think; they are already present and pressing. And when even a young child clearly sees and feels them and accepts them, is it not better she should have all the help that Christian vows and Christian fellowship and the Lord's institutions can give her?'

'Humph!' said Mr. Franks, caressing his chin dubiously, —'certainly! yes, as you say. But it is necessary first to be certain whether she *does* so see and feel and accept A child of that age is hardly capable, I am afraid, of understanding the deep things of the kingdom. I should teach her the Shorter Catechism, and wait, I think, until I could be assured she knew what it meant, before I encouraged her to venture into the—ahem!—the very serious responsibilities of church membership.'

'The responsibilities are on her already; the question is now, whether she shall have the help and comfort of covenant vows.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Franks, again stroking his chin all ways, —'yes; that is one way of looking at it. Another, you will allow me to suggest,—pardon me, it is part of my duty to take the other view,—another is, that we must look at the public example and guard the public safety. To admit

children of ten years old into membership, generally, would, I fear, bring the profession into reproach with the world. They would say we cannot mean much by it; and they would point, as they are sure to do, at inconsistencies.'

'Provided they could see them.'

'Undoubtedly. Of course I meant that. It is very natural that you should think this unlikely in the special case; and it may be unlikely; still, in the majority of cases I do not see how it could fail. Ten years old! why, a girl is playing with her—a—with her doll-babies at that age.'

'Doll-babies do not hurt her,' put in gentle Mrs. Franks, who up to this moment had not spoken a word in the discussion. And she might as well not have spoken this, for her husband paid no regard to it, even by so much as a look. Mrs. Thayer pondered a minute.

'When will be the next occasion for receiving members upon profession?' she asked.

'H'm! let me see. This is May. Our next sacramental occasion will occur on the third Sabbath in July.'

'I have a responsibility in the matter too,' Mrs. Thayer went on; 'and I confess it makes me unwilling to put any hindrance in May's way. Would you approve of my bringing her, when the proper time comes, to be examined by the church?'

'The deacons and I will meet to receive applications on the Friday afternoon preceding. We always do meet then for that purpose, though I am sorry to say we rarely have applications. It can do no harm, I should say, to let your little girl come before us.'

They rose to take leave, and the meek woman, who had hardly spoken, squeezed Mrs. Thayer's hand in leave-taking as if she would express thus a whole heartful of sympathy and gladness and kindness. Mrs. Thayer knew from that time she had one certain friend in the village.

She said nothing of this conversation to Helen. But from this time till the middle of July she spent a great portion of her leisure in reading with the two girls and

talking with them. And by degrees Mrs. Thayer's own mind was quite set at rest on the subject of all the doubts Mr. Franks had expressed.

Meanwhile other things fell into train. Mr. Rockaway proved himself efficient and capable; ploughing and sowing went on vigorously; fences and barns were put in repair; a vegetable garden was arranged; a quiet old horse and waggon were procured for the use of the family. The cow did all that was expected of her; and Goldy did more, for she learned speedily to be a good dairy-woman by dint of following directions faithfully.

'Dat ar's what de Book say,' she responded when Mrs. Thayer praised her. 'Ain't it put down dar,—"do it heartily, as unto de Lord"? Dat ar means de milk and de butter, don't it?—de pans and de tubs? I'se gwine to do it dat a way, missus; dat ar's obedience, ain't it?'

'Yes, Goldy.'

'Den dar's somefin else what my head's t'inkin' 'bout. De Book do say fur not to tell no lies, don't it?'

'Certainly.'

'Well, I knowed it. An' I'se been tellin' one big one, all dis time. You see, missus, when I fus' come I war a poor little pickaninny an' didn't know nuffin; an' I war so feared dat ar man 'd get hold o' me an' take me down Souf; an' I didn't know nuffin, I hadn't no sense; an' I t'inks de truf'll kill me an' de lies will save me 'live.'

'So you told me lies?' said Mrs. Thayer, who could not help smiling.

'A heap, missus!'

'I knew it, Goldy.'

'But dar! dat's what I ain't nohow. I'se no Goldy, nor Marigold, nor nuffin. Dat ar ain't my name. Dar war a Marigold, whar I was raised, but 'twarn't me. I'se no Marigold.'

'What is your name, then?'

'You see, missus,' the girl went on earnestly, 'I didn't know nuffin, and I was so feared. An' dey all does it.

Dey's all feared for somefin or nudder, and dey all tell lies. Dey all *has* to tell lies.'

'Do not say that, Goldy. No one *has* to do wrong.'

'But dey 'd punish 'em awful, if dey didn't.

'That makes no difference. There comes one of the pinches I told you of. One who loves Christ will bear anything rather than displease Him. That is just where you see who does really love Him.'

The girl's fine expressive face showed a great tenderness, and the soft black eyes were all suffused.

'I didn't lub Him, missus; an' dey all,—dey's mos' like chillen; dey doesn't know nuffin; dey doesn't t'ink no mo' harm to tell lies den to eat corn-cake. But I'se a new creetur.'

Mrs. Thayer almost started at the expression, yet believed it, as she looked up at the girl.

'An' I'se tell no mo' lies, if dey kills me. I ain't Goldy no mo'!'

'What, then? What is your true name?'

'Dey call me Mercy, whar I was raised.'

'Mercy! That is a good name.'

'An' I'se not do not'ing, no mo', to displease de Lord; not when I knows it. Missus, do He mind very much, if I do somefin and *don't* know?'

'Mercy, you know a good deal of the Bible now, and if you ask the Lord He will teach you further. All He asks of you is, that you should live up to all the light you have got, and be every day getting more, and trust Him.'

The girl smiled, a very pleasant clear smile of intelligence and sweetness, and the conversation ended. It was renewed, however, almost every day; and together the three, mother and daughter and handmaiden, searched the Scriptures and talked and prayed about these things.

It was a summer of sunshine. It seemed to Mrs. Thayer's fancy, that as the grain ripened without and the fruits grew and matured, so within the house and in the hearts sprang blessed growths to strength and perfection. The younger children were too young still to give any

care; and the atmosphere of the place was peace and sweetness. Others seemed to feel it too, who came into the atmosphere but for a moment as it were.

'It's a grand thing not to have many to look after!' sighed Miss Betsy Sawyer.

'You have not many, have you?' Mrs. Thayer returned, smiling

'I tell you what, one boy's as bad as a dozen. You have a boy too, yes, I know; but he's little. Wait till he gets a few years older, and you'll know. He *eats* as much as two men, to begin with.'

'That is no harm,' said Mrs. Thayer, still smiling, 'when there is bread enough in the house.'

'Bread! 'Tain't bread that'll content him. Bread, indeed! Just ask him to eat a piece, ef it ain't that thick with butter that you don' know which there's the most of! The appetite of boys for butter is something mysterious to me. I wish they could be put out to grass, like the colts, and grow up so; for they air enough to drive a woman out o' her wits, ef she hes any left, arter nursing him through everything. Does he come over to your house often?'

'Not very often.'

'I wouldn't let him get in the way of it, ef I was you. There's no one at home can hender, ef he takes the notion.'

'Do you know, Betsy, I like the boy. He seems to me a fine spirited fellow, with good abilities and good impulses. He only wants to be led right.'

'Led right!' echoed Miss Sawyer. 'Who's to do the leading, I should like to know? And what'll you lead a boy like that with? He'll go arter a plate o' butter or a pot o' preserves, I shouldn't wonder; but likely that ain't what you mean. Lead Trim Satterly? I'd like to see you, and he'd like to see you; I guess he'd be most astonished of anybody.'

'Is his mother going to send him to college?'

'Send him! She could as soon send a ball out of a

gun. No, but I guess he'll go; because he has taken it into his head. You see, Trim will be rich.'

'Will he?'

'Yes; his father's family; goodness knows 'tain't our'n. He'll hev altogether more money than is good for him, and my master knows it too; and so he's like a horse full of oats. He rides over everybody. I jes' wish you'd "lead him"!'

'Betsy, there is only one thing to lead people with,—for their good,—and that is love.'

'Love!' echoed the other. 'Where are you goin' to git it? I'd like to hear you tell.'

'You read your Bible?'

'I read it by spells—on Sundays.'

'Not other days, do you mean?'

'La sakes, Cordelia Thayer! How do you s'pose a body's to hev time for everything? What with the mouths to cook for, and the backs to mend and make for; and the dairy work, and the keepin' the house clean; and the picklin' and the preservin' and the dryin' and the puttin' down,—not to speak of all the goin' out and the comin' in,—there ain't much time for readin' in our house, I kin tell you! There's eight or nine folks sit down at our table three times a day; and in hayin' and harvestin' there's two lunches to be sent into the field besides. I often wish folks had been made so they could live without eatin'; but as it is there'd be somethin' wuss'n a storm ef the victuals warn't ready. But you've got to fly round to hev 'em. An' when you git a chance, ef ever you do, to sit down and fold your hands in your lap, ef you're like me, you don't want to lift 'em agin, for no book that ever was printed.'

'There is no rest that I know,' said Mrs. Thayer, 'equal to the rest that one can find in the Bible, and over it.'

'Mebbe,' said Miss Betsy shortly; she was knitting all the time. 'Readin's hard work to me. I'd rather pull the dasher any day.'

'One must take care, though,' said Mrs. Thayer gently. 'Those things you speak of are the "cares of this life," which are in danger of choking the word till it becomes unfruitful. We must not let them do that.'

'Well, I guess I'll be goin',' said the visitor, rising. 'I hevn't done all my chores yet, and I s'pose I hadn't no business to run over and see you; but I hed somethin' to ask. Oh, I know now what 'twas! The deacon says he's heard,—I guess 'twas the dominie told him; but I guess 'twarn't, for the dominie, he don't tell nothin' of what he knows. I've an idee he tells some things he don't know. But *some* one has told the deacon as how you're a-goin' to send that little gal o' your'n to jine the church next sacrament day.'

'I am not going to *send* her. Helen wishes to be allowed to become a member of the church.'

'Why, how old is she, for pity's sake?'

'Between ten and eleven.'

'An' is she goin'?'

'She will go to present herself to be examined.'

'Well, ef they are wise, in my opinion— But la! 'tain't no business o' mine. Folks has their own way o' lookin' at things. Like the cow?'

'I am well pleased with her, in every way.'

'There's one pint we're agreed upon,' said Miss Betsy. 'She was pretty nigh the best we hed. I sort o' grudge her to you. Well, good-night.'

CHAPTER IX.

THE SESSION.

BY degrees several of the Daisy Plains inhabitants came to make friends or to renew acquaintanceship with Mrs. Thayer. Deacon Brown and Deacon Folger, with their wives, came; some of the farmers' families living several miles away, yet put in a claim to be neighbours; why not? they went to the same church, and they or their fathers had known Mrs. Thayer's fathers for many a day. There were even one or two visits made and requested that included a tea-drinking, but not many; the neighbourhood was not social in that way. Distances were often too great, and the trouble of entertaining was too much, for people who had already their hands full and their time all occupied. An afternoon drive and a call were all very well, and even refreshing; but to those who had nobody but themselves to wash up the cups and plates after a meal, or to make the cake before it, such hospitality partook too much of the character of hard labour to be often gone into. With these exceptional breaks, life ran a very smooth course at Mrs. Thayer's for some weeks; till July was half over, and the day came when the minister and the deacon smet to receive applications for church membership. They always met; but additions to the list of names belonging to the church were rare, except as the children of the various families grew up to man's or woman's estate, and one after another quietly fell into the ranks which death was as slowly and quietly thinning. The church did not grow. The gains hardly made up the losses. The whole religious community had got into a

dull dry groove of formal compliance with recognised duties, from which the sap and the life and the fruit-bearing vigour were gone. So gone, that for the most part nobody missed them. 'All things continued as they were,' if not from the beginning of the creation, yet from a time of the forgotten past. Did not the old church bell ring out its summons every Sunday with the same voice, sounding over the plains and penetrating to every farmhouse within miles, across the level country and through the still air? And did not the same waggons with the same occupants a little while thereafter come jogging along the roads and hitch up, one after another, in the great shed which stretched along beside the church? If now and then the son held the reins where the father had driven, and the daughter sat where the mother had once been sitting, that really made no change. There was always somebody to take the singing in the choir; teachers were not lacking for the Sunday school; the services of the church were passably attended. What more was to be desired, or could be looked for? Was not Daisy Plains a model place? That all this had no life in it occurred to only a very few in the community.

It was a warm, lovely, perfect summer day, when Mercy and May set out to walk to the minister's. Mrs. Thayer had meant to go, but found she must stay at home with the little ones, and trust May to Mercy's care. The way to the minister's house was rather long; a good mile; however, as I said, the weather was perfect, the footing was good, and the walk was felt to be no hardship at all. It was the full, glorious ripeness of midsummer. The genial heat was brooding over the cornfields, curing the hay, bringing the fruit to its maturity, working in its millions of leaf laboratories to ripen the sap; there was a sense of the bountifulness and graciousness of nature everywhere; everywhere the tokens of the beneficent work which was going on for man's comfort and advantage; and all with that richness and power and fulness, which even an unthinking mind can hardly help recognising in

part, and which fills a thoughtful one with delight and wonder. The sun was hot, but the great trees which shadowed the way prevented any feeling of oppression, and the air stirred gently in the tops of them and kissed the faces of the walkers. It was a pleasure to be out and feel it. The way was all strips of sunlight and shade, joyous to see. But the faces of the two girls who passed along there under sunshine and shadow were sober, although one of them was placid as the sunlight.

'May, ain't you frighted?' asked the elder girl, after they had gone in silence a piece of their way.

'Afraid? No; I am not afraid.'

''Spects you's no 'casion. I be, though.'

'What are you afraid of, Goldy?'

'I ain't no Goldy. I'se Mercy. Reckon you's Christiana, dat's what it is, and I'se gwine 'long wi' you. Dat ar Mercy were afeard, don't you mind? and I is too.'

'What for, Mercy?'

'Dunno. Reckon de white folks won't have nuffin to say to me. Dey'll t'ink, What you doin' here, gal? you's no business to be here.'

'They cannot think so, Mercy, for you have just as much business as anybody.'

'I'se gwine, anyhow,' said Mercy; 'but I *is* awful feared o' dem deacon. What ar de deacon, anyhow, May?'

'I do not know, exactly; they are officers in the church, I believe.'

'Officers? dat's de folks what catches people.'

'No, these don't catch anybody; they take care of the poor, I believe.'

'We isn't poor.'

'No, but they do other things. I believe they have to see whether people are fit to belong to the church.'

'Dey won't t'ink I be.'

'Yes, they will, Mercy; because, you know, Jesus has let you in, and they can't shut you out.'

'Den what use is dey, anyhow?'

'I suppose they must find out whether Jesus *has* let people in, before *they* can let them in.'

'Ef dey lets Christiana in, dey has to let Mercy in too; for I'se gwine whar she goes, dat's sure. I'se get in somehow.'

The place of their destination was the minister's house; the meeting was held there, which saved trouble, and in cold weather saved the expense of warming up some unused place. Mrs. Franks saw the two girls coming into her garden, and met them at the door with the kindest of welcomes.

'How do you do, dear? and how is your mother? Come in right here, and see me a bit. How do you do, Mercy? Mrs. Thayer could not leave home, and you are come to take care of Helen?'

'I'se gwine whar Christiana goes,' said the girl, somewhat to Mrs. Franks' mystification. She looked to May doubtfully. May's explanation was not very clear.

'Mercy is coming too,' she said.

'Yes, to take care of you? Sit down, Mercy. Are you tired, dear? Won't you have a piece of cake after your walk?'

The tempting cake was refused, however, Mercy remarking that 'De minister say four o'clock;' and the timepiece on the mantelshelf showed the hour come.

'You may take a piece, though,' said the kind woman. 'Helen will not need you when she goes in to see the minister. You will have plenty of time.'

'I'se gwine to see de minister too,' said Mercy, throwing back her head. ''Tain't half so good as cake; but I'se gwine, for all dat.'

Mrs. Franks looked from one to the other.

'You don't mean—why, my dear, is it possible? Are you *both* presenting yourselves for admission? I am very glad! and Mr. Franks will be very glad. Two at once! Dear me, how delightful!'

And the good woman's eyes fairly ran over, and her face flushed with excitement.

'My dear,' she said to her husband, who just then opened the door, 'they are both coming! Just think! two of them! Oh, Gilbert, it makes me think how blessed it would be if everybody was coming!' The tears absolutely dripped down.

'If everybody was coming, there would have to be some excision, I fancy,' remarked her husband judicially. 'How do you do, Helen? Who is this?'

'I'se Mercy, massa,' said Mercy, dropping a curtsey. 'I'se gwine along wid Christiana.'

'*What?*' said the minister. 'What do you mean?'

'She is coming with me, sir,' said May.

'Coming where?'

'Don't keer whar,' said Mercy, to whom the minister's eye had turned as he spoke; 'whar possible she goes I'se boun' to go too. Dis yere time it's to de New Jerusalem we's gwine; we's set out, sure.'

'Do you know what you are talking about?' said the minister severely. 'This is not a subject for lightness.'

'Makes folks feel sort o' light, dough,' said Mercy, whose face was both bright and demure. 'Didn't de King David dance fo' de ark?'

The minister glared at her, but deigned no further rejoinder. He opened the door at which he had come in, and signed to Helen to pass by him into the next room; checked Mercy, however, who was following.

'You may wait here,' he said. And Mercy fell back. Helen hesitated; but if the minister preferred to examine them separately she could make no objection to that, and she went on.

The room which now received her was the minister's study. Books were around the walls, on plain open shelves, which should have made the place pleasant; yet it seemed to Helen that she had got out of the sunshine. A great oak before one window and a grape vine draping the other made the room altogether too shady, and threw an ominous green light upon everything within. This effect was enhanced by a great table covered with a dark

green cloth which stood in the middle of the floor. Round the table sat several men, and Helen's innocent eyes went from one to another to see who and what they were who sat there as her judges. Only a glance the shy eyes gave; that was enough.

There was Deacon Sawyer; she knew him, and Trim's words flashed through her mind as she looked. A grey-haired man, with busy eyes and a flaccid, feeble mouth; he might be strong for his worldly business, but he did not look it, nor for any other. Then there was Deacon M'Jimpsey; a hard face, truculent-looking; a sort of face to say no, and take pleasure in it, and fight to maintain it. Indeed, he looked as if his life had been spent in saying no. Deacon Folger sat next to him; very hard-favoured, also, but rather self-important than aggressive. A face, however, with no sympathy in it. At the head of the board sat the minister; better shaven and better dressed than his three above-mentioned brethren, yet quite as uncompromising. His close-cropped black hair, well defined, black, clean-cut eyebrows, square jaw, and thin, straight lips, seemed to make his face all hard lines. There was a fifth figure at the table, unknown to Helen; he sat with his back to her as she entered, but then presently twisted himself round so as to look at her; and she saw a benignant, gentle, grave, and lofty countenance. This was Deacon Post; and with the sight of him Helen at once knew that she had one friend in court.

They all looked at her in silence for the first minutes. That did not seem unnatural to Helen, and in her simple absence of self-consciousness it did not embarrass or confuse her. She herself kept her eyes upon Mr. Franks, who seemed, she thought, to be the judge in the court.

'This is the candidate for admission, brethren,' said the minister in a business tone.

'A young one,' remarked Deacon Sawyer.

'Yes. However, what we have to do is to try the case on its merits, since Mrs. Thayer has preferred so to have it. That will be an easy matter.'

'Ahem! My dear, do you know what you are here for?' inquired Deacon Folger from the foot of the table.

'Yes, sir,' Helen answered quietly. But she thought it a very strange question. How could she have taken all that walk, and presented herself for the present ordeal, without knowing what she was about?

'Perhaps it would be well you should begin by telling us,' suggested Deacon Sawyer.

'What I came here for?'

'Yes, my dear.'

'If you can,' added Deacon M'Jimpsey.

'It is because I want to be a member of the church, sir.'

'Ah! And what is a member of the church?' Mr. M'Jimpsey went on inquisitorially.

'I believe—they have their names in the book, and they go to the communion.'

'Do you want to go to the communion?'

'If you please, sir.'

'I don't please,' said Mr. M'Jimpsey; 'I don't believe, myself, in havin' church members that ain't indoctrinated —*indoctrinated*—in the principles of religion; and strong meat ain't for babes, we hev it on good authority.'

'We've got to see whether she ain't indoctrinated,' said Deacon Sawyer. 'Mebbe she is. Her mother's a clever woman.'

'There's mor'n head knowledge wantin',' said Deacon M'Jimpsey. 'Not only the doctrines o' grace in the head; there should be a work of grace in the heart.'

'She may have that too,' suggested Deacon Post.

'Well, well!' said Mr. M'Jimpsey; 'there's new ways comin' up, I hear, and new opinions. I stick by the old. "No man, hevin' drunk old wine, straightway desireth new."'

'We are getting away from the point in hand, brethren,' remarked the minister. 'We have something to do here. It is proper to subject the applicant to an examination on both points. Perhaps Deacon Mr. M'Jimpsey will begin?'

In consequence of which demand upon him, Deacon M'Jimpsey cleared his throat, and Helen directed her meek eyes upon this one of her examiners. They were rather slow about their work, she thought. Then Mr. M'Jimpsey eyed her fixedly, and inquired,—

'What is justification?'

'I do not know, sir,' said Helen.

The minister and the deacon exchanged glances which seemed to express satisfaction.

'My dear,' said Deacon Post gently, 'do you think you are a sinner?'

'Yes, sir; I know I am.'

'Do you think your sins are forgiven?'

'Yes, sir, I know they are.'

'How *can* you know, child?' Mr. M'Jimpsey burst forth.

'Yes, that is goin' a leetle too fur,' said Deacon Sawyer. 'I'd like to be able to say so much myself with the same assurance.'

'But you would not say it, I hope, if you could,' the other went on. 'Humility befits one who is yet in the kingdom of grace; assurance will do for the kingdom of glory.'

'Wait a bit; let us hear,' said Deacon Post. 'It is written, "A little child shall lead them." My dear, why do you conclude that your sins are forgiven?'

'Because, sir, Jesus promised.'

'Ah! What did He promise?'

'"He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life."'

'But what has become of your sins, then? How could this be?'

The little girl's smile was very sweet, looking into the face which she knew had sympathy with her.

'God said He would put them away as far as the east is from the west.'

'But how could He? He is just and holy, and we have broken His commandment; and "the wages of sin is death," you know.'

'"The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin," He said, sir.'

'That is justification, brethren, ain't it?' asked the good man, turning to his fellow-deacons round the table. 'Won't that do?'

'But there is another question. I should like to know how the applicant is so sure in her own person that she is a partaker of the grace which we all hope for, but none of us dare predicate with such certainty of himself,' Mr. Franks objected. 'How does she know with such assurance that her sins are forgiven?'

'Can you answer, my dear?' said Deacon Post. 'How can you be so sure? Mr. Frank wants to know.'

Helen looked at him a moment.

'Sir,' she answered, 'Jesus said, "Come unto Me, and I will give you *rest*." I could not *rest* if I did not know my sins were forgiven.'

'True, true, true,' said the good deacon; 'but there is a point yet, my child. There is such a thing as a false rest—a mistaken security. How do you know that yours is the true? Hey, my child? Can you tell?'

'No, sir,' said Helen; 'I don't know. But I do not think I am mistaken, because Jesus said, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me."'

'Hey? and you keep them, do you?'

'Yes, sir.'

'That is too much!' broke in Mr. Franks. 'Who of us can say so much as that? We all *wish* to keep them, but none of us do perfectly. A large assertion, made so lightly, shows in my opinion a failure to apprehend.'

'I judge so,' assented Mr. M'Jimpsey. 'Do you know what you are saying, child, when you make that statement?—when you say you keep the Lord's commandments? You say you do what nobody does.'

Helen looked at them both, a little puzzled. Deacon Post opened his mouth and shut it again; then opened it to speak.

'What makes you think you keep His commandments, my child?'

'Because I love them, sir.'

The answer came with equal readiness and simplicity. The old deacon's eyes watered.

'The Lord be thanked!' he said, stroking his hand over his grey head. 'So do I, my child; so do I love them! And what we love, we do, all of us. I acknowledge my young sister here for a fellow disciple of the Lord. Brethren, what say you? I guess she has found the blessed way, and is walking in it.'

'The decision appears to put all the rest of us in the wrong,' said Mr. Franks, with what seemed to Helen a sort of bristling up of his black hair. 'If *that* is the definition, I am afraid our disciples are few.'

'It is a definition not invented by me, brother,' said Mr. Post, again stroking his head. 'I don't see how you can get over it. The definition was given by the Master Himself, and He ought to know. "He that hath My commandments *and keepeth them*"'—

'Of course that is the standard; but we none of us come up to it perfectly. We all of us try.'

''Tain't in the Bible,' said the old deacon, 'that we are to *try*. I dursn't put a word there that ain't there. In the Bible, folks air disciples, or they ain't; there's no tryin'.'

'But you remember, "there is none that doeth good, no, not one,"' put in Deacon Sawyer, smiling. 'You are talkin' of keepin' the commandments. Now I want to keep 'em, and I *try*, but I confess there's often times when I fail. I don't do *everythin'* I had ought to. I I guess there's no man that does, or kin.'

'That's so,' put in Deacon M'Jimpsey.

'That's true doctrine,' added Mr. Franks.

Deacon Post sighed and hesitated.

'Brethren,' said he slowly, 'let us take keer lest we maybe make a mistake here, and fall below our privileges. That is true doctrine accordin' to the flesh; but we live

in the times of the Spirit. And it was said before our Redeemer was born, "He shall be called Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins."'

'From their sins, in their consequences,' said Mr. M'Jimpsey eagerly.

'It is not so put down, brother,' said Deacon Post, repeating the gesture of stroking his head, as if he would smooth away some differences there. But the minister interfered.

'This is not the time or place for discussing doctrines,' said he. 'The question in hand is, whether we shall admit the applicant to the privileges she asks for.'

Silence. The deacons looked at the table and at each other.

'Is there any cause why we should not?' then again Deacon Post put himself in the breach.

'The question rather stands, Is there sufficient cause why we should?' the minister rejoined.

'I for my part would not dare say no,' the good deacon answered.

Silence again.

'You are very young, you know, Helen,' Mr. Franks remarked to her. But Helen did not see what she could do with the suggestion, which was undeniable, and she made no attempt to answer.

'The younger the better!' said Deacon Post; 'always supposing she is old enough to know what she is about I'd be glad to know all the children in town were coming to Christ.'

'With all my heart; but—into the church?' said the minister.

'You couldn't keep 'em out, dominie,' said the good deacon, with a soft laugh. 'When the Lord has let 'em in, it's too late for us to bar the doors. We kin do it; but it's venturesome work, and maybe the Great Shepherd wouldn't take it well of us, to leave His lambs out in the cold.'

That speech settled the matter. I suppose the decision

was really not doubtful before, but after that utterance of Deacon Post's no one made even any more suggestions. The minister took down Helen's full name and age, and then told her she might go. There was an air as if business was done.

'Shall I send Mercy in?' asked Helen, as she turned to leave the room.

'What Mercy?' returned the minister.

'Our Mercy. She came with me.'

'Mercy? Oh—ah! Does *she* want to be admitted?'

'If you please, sir.'

'Who is that? Another applicant?' asked Mr. Folger.

'It seems so. I was not aware of it before. It is a coloured girl, whom Mrs. Thayer brought with her from the South.'

It somehow struck Helen that to the minister's apprehension a coloured skin might be as great a hindrance to the entrance of light as young years in another case.

'Shall she come in?' she asked again doubtfully.

'Yes—oh yes, certainly! Send her in. We will see what this amounts to.' And in another minute Mercy was before them.

She curtseyed to the assembly, and then her eyes, like Helen's, took a survey of the individuals who composed it. Not like the child's fair, simple face, the dark countenance did not reveal the thoughts behind it. Grave and impenetrable, the soft, beautiful black eyes went from one to another as she waited.

'Good afternoon!' said Mr. Franks affably. 'I understand you wish to be admitted to the church. Is that so?'

'Arternoon, sir,' said Mercy, dropping another curtsey. 'I sartainly does.'

'What for?' said Deacon Folger abruptly. 'What is your reason for wishing to take such a step?'

'Dar is a heap o' reasons, sir,' said Mercy.

'Ah! Let us hear. What are they?' said the minister.

'Dar is de Lord's orders. Dar is'—

'Stop, stop, my girl. One thing at a time. He has not ordered *you* to do this, has He?'

'Mos' sartainly, sir.'

'How do you make that out?'

'Didn't He say, "Dis do in remembrance o' Me"?'

'That was to His disciples.'

'I is a disciple.'

Mercy's lips parted as she spoke these words, and a line of white teeth became visible. It was a sort of smile of triumph.

'Are you sure?'

'Mis' T'ayer, she say de gen'lemen 'xamine me and find out.'

'Well, we will try to do that,' said the minister. 'And first, you may give us your other reasons for wishing to join the church.'

'If de gen'lemen pleases, Miss Helen she's gwine to de New Jerusalem; and whar she's gwine I'se boun' to go too. I is dat!'

'Ah, I thought so!' said Mr. Franks. 'Sympathy and imitation, rather than conviction. But, Mercy, the fact that one is going is no reason why another should go.'

'Ain't it, sir?'

'No, certainly not. How should it be?'

'But, sir, it is in de Book, how Andrew he fetch Peter, and Philip he fetch t'oder man,—I disremember his name,—and Mercy, she went after Christiana'—

'Yes, yes,' said Mr. Franks, while a smile ran round the table; 'one may give an invitation to another, but the invitation is not accepted for the messenger's sake.'

'I is accepted it, anyhow.

'That's the main point,' said Deacon Post, slewing himself round a little, and crossing his left leg over the other, which had previously been uppermost.

'We want to make sure of the fact,' said the minister.

'Especially among the emotional and excitable natures, it is necessary to guard against a mistake which would be most unhappy.'

'What do you understand by "sin," my girl?' Deacon M'Jimpsey took the word.

'It's our doin' what de Lord have forbid.'

'Very well. And now, tell me what is the meaning of the atonement?'

'Please, sir, I doesn't know no sich big words.'

'Then how can you understand what the things are? The things are bigger than the words.'

'You're a leetle too hard on her, Brother M'Jimpsey,' said Deacon Post, stroking his head again. 'At least I think you air. The heart kin understand, maybe, more than the head kin intellectually reason about. Let us put it another way. My girl, do you expect you'll go to heaven by and by?'

'I'se set out to go dar, sir.'

'Good. Well, how do you expect to get in? Ain't you a sinner?'

'I knows dat, sir.'

'Well, how do you expect to get in? There are no sinners there.'

'Dey is redeemed sinners, sir.'

'Ah! what is that? what are redeemed sinners?'

'Dey was sinners down here, and some of 'em bad 'nuff. Den de good Lord He come to save dat which war lost, an' He spill His blood for 'em; and de blood it wash 'em clean. Dey sinners no mo', but dey's nebber forget dey *was* sinners, and dey does love de Lord dat bought 'em. Dis yere one do, anyhow, and 'spects to give Him glory for ever mo'.'

There was silence, and the good deacons looked at one another. I think they had no doubt any longer, but there was a little inclination to hear Mercy talk more.

'Don't you think you need to be changed before you go to heaven?' asked Mr. Folger.

'Where nothing that defileth shall by any means enter,' added Deacon Post.

'I *is* changed, sir,' Mercy answered.

Mr. Franks checked an impatient rejoinder on the part of one of his brethren, and asked simply, 'How?'

'Does de minister mean, how I war changed? It war de Lord's doin', for sure. Mis' T'ayer she done all she could, but she couldn't do dat.'

'No; I mean, what sort of change do you find in yourself?'

'I'se won'erful happy, sir.'

'Are you? Well, that is good; but people are happy for various reasons. What makes you so?'

'Dey was all kind to me befo',' said Mercy thoughtfully,—'and dey took keer o' me, and didn't let me want for not'ing, dey didn't; but I war not happy, for all dat. I'se got all dat now, but it ain't sich t'ings as *kin* make nobody real happy. Den I find de Lord Jesus, and now I'se got all I want.'

'Why?'

'Dunno, sir,' said Mercy, looking a little surprised. 'Reckon I kin't help it. I'se got all I want.'

'A clear case,' said Deacon Post, stroking his head comfortably.

'I suppose there is no need to ask anything more, brethren?' said the minister. 'What is your name, your full name? I know it is Mercy; what more?'

'Dar ain't no mo' to it.'

'No name but Mercy?'

'No, sir.'

'But you must have another name. What was your mother called?'

Mercy hesitated. She felt it a sort of disgrace that she had never known her mother, and she did not want to reveal it to the company in which she found herself.

'She hadn't no mo' names den me,' she answered diplomatically.

'But you must have a name!' said Mr. Franks.

'Who's to know what "Mercy" it is? It won't do to put it down just so.'

'If you please, sir, de Lord He knows,' said Mercy. 'Dar won't be no mistake.'

The minister thought he would consult Mrs. Thayer, and the applicant was dismissed.

CHAPTER X.

GROWING UP.

THE evening was tender and sweet as the two girls began their walk home. If it had been fair when they came, it was fairer now that they were returning. Air a little cooler, lights more delicate, colours softened in sky and earth; everywhere that delicious speech of nature which says 'peace,' telling of labour done and rest beginning. The girls walked silently for a space.

'I is certainly glad dat is over!' said Mercy at last.

'So am I,' said May; 'but it wasn't as bad as I expected. I didn't mind much.'

'Dey was mighty onsartain what to do wid me,' said Mercy. 'Dey did ax me de curiousest questions. I is certainly glad dey is t'rough. And now, nobody won't ax us no mo' t'ings till we gets to de gates o' de city.'

'Will any one ask us questions there?' said Helen.

'Dunno,' said Mercy. 'If dat ar ole gen'leman, de one wi' de under lip stan'in' out so,—if *he* was dar, he'd be axin' us sumfin befo' he'd let us go in, he would sure. An' now you's Christiana, and I is Mercy, and we's sure 'nuff gwine to de Celestial City. Will de folks dar be all on em' white, Christiana?'

'White?'

'Yes. Will dar be any coloured folks? I mean, will dey be coloured folks *den?*'

'I don't know. No, I think not. I think they will be all alike, Mercy.'

'An' does you t'ink, we'll have sich hard times as de

real Christiana and Mercy dey had, fo' dey could get to de New Jerusalem?'

'Oh, I don't know, Mercy. I never thought about that. I daresay we shall. But I am not afraid, are you? You know, they had Mr. Greatheart to help them.'

'Whar's our Mr. Greatheart?'

'I don't know. I suppose Jesus will be that Himself. Why, Mercy, are you afraid?'

'I is kind o' feared for Christiana.'

'But you needn't. You know you needn't, Mercy. There's the Good Shepherd, and He has promised to take care. I am not afraid.'

Mercy walked along and did not then pursue the question. But at home she renewed it.

'Mis' T'ayer, does de pilgrims allays have sich awful hard times to get to de New Jerusalem?'

'Such hard times?' Mrs. Thayer repeated.

'Sich as de pilgrims dey had in dat ar book,—Christiana and Christian and Hopeful, and all de rest.'

'Oh! Well, Mercy, this world is not exactly a peaceful place for pilgrims to travel through; and there are some enemies.'

'Which be dey?'

'There is the great enemy, Satan; and he often stirs up people to put temptations in the way of the Lord's pilgrims, or to make their way hard.'

'Why de good Lord let him?'

'I suppose, for various reasons. Sometimes to let them learn how good and how loving their great Keeper is. How should they know it, if they never needed His help?'

'Dat's so!' said Mercy thoughtfully.

'Sometimes troubles are allowed to come to show the unbelieving world what religion is and what it can do.'

'Like dat ar Job?'

'Yes; that was a grand case. Sometimes they come, Mercy, because the Lord's children are living too carelessly and too far from Him; and they must be driven to

their hiding-place—the only one where they can be safe or happy.'

'Mis' T'ayer, I'se mighty feared de troubles won't stay away, if dere's so many reasons why dey should come.'

Mrs. Thayer sighed.

'The Lord knows!' she said. 'He will let no harm come to His children.'

'Is you sure o' dat?'

'Quite sure. He has promised. What are you thinking about?'

'I was jus' t'inkin'—Christiana don't need to have no troubles come; anyhow, looks like as if she didn't need to have none.'

'She can hardly go through life without them, Mercy. But we must leave all that.'

It was quite true, that to human eyes this one little pilgrim seemed too true and pure to be a candidate for anything but love and happiness. Love and happiness were the element in which she lived, and seemed to be the atmosphere she mentally breathed. Anything sweeter, purer, gentler, cannot be seen in this lower world. She was not precisely a gay child; her nature was not like a mountain brook, dancing and sparkling and laughing in its way to the sea, but rather resembled a Scotch lake with the sun upon it; still, and deep, and light all through to the bottom. Her manner of feeling and showing affection corresponded with this; intense, and very quiet. Not undemonstrative, but unobtrusive and self-contained. There was no fault to be found in May. If childish errors had sometimes showed themselves in earlier years, they failed from this time. A sweet, steady, happy, loving observance of every duty characterized her young life, along with the fullest enjoyment of each day and hour. A happier child could not be, nor one more delightsome to those about her.

So ran on the years, for some time after Mrs. Thayer's return to Daisy Plains, marked by nothing more than the changes of seasons and the soft growing up of the children.

There was a plain village school in the place, to which Helen and in course of time also Edward and Pixie were sent; at home Mrs. Thayer endeavoured to supplement this somewhat elementary beginning. Yet though elementary it was sound and good; and what was added at home brought Helen to be in essential things a very well educated girl. Mrs. Thayer could not bring herself, for the sake of music and languages, to send her human rose-tree where it would be less carefully watered and kept; the question was never raised, and the idea never entered Helen's happy heart. Edward, three years younger, was a good boy, but delicate. Pixie was an incarnation of sweetness and brightness, like, and yet not at all like, her sister; merry, flashing, dancing, singing; while May was a universal blissful repose, with rare fragrance lurking in the air.

The children lived much alone, having little intercourse with other children. None lived very near, and few in all the place were precisely congenial; for these children had an inborn and cultivated refinement which put them somewhat apart from their fellows. Trim Satterly was an occasional visitor for a few years; then he went off to school and college, as his aunt had prophesied.

'Well, he's gone,' said Miss Betsy, on the occasion of her next visit to Mrs. Thayer; 'an' I did think, when he was gone there'd be some peace in the house; but I declare, Trim Satterly away makes more fuss than he did when he was to home. Sarah Ann can't talk o' nothing but Trim, nor think o' nothing; I used to comfort myself that the boy couldn't be in more'n one place at once, and except at meal times it was commonly a place where I warn't; but now he's all over. Ef I'm in the dairy, Sarah Ann'll come there with something about Trim; and ef I'm settin' down,—it's precious little time I git for settin' down, but ef I du git it,—then she entertains me with somethin' about Trim; and it's this for Trim and the other for Trim. You hain't no children but your own, Cordelia, and you don't know what the plague of

other people's is. An' now next thing he'll be comin' home for holidays, and bringin' the land knows who with him. I know! That's the way they do. When he was home he was one boy; now he is gone he will be half a dozen.'

'Take it quietly,' said Mrs. Thayer, smiling.

'I don't take nothin' quietly. Wait till you hev to send your Edward.'

'That will not be for some time.'

'Why, how old is he?'

'Eleven.'

'Well, how long will it be before he's sixteen? Just while you're turnin' round. Five years is nothing. How old is May?'

'Fourteen.'

'H'm! *She*'ll be sixteen in no time. I wonder which is wuss, to *hev* a family, or not to hev 'em? Ef you hevn't your own, you hev other folks's. You're a rich woman, Cordelia, ain't you?'

'We have enough to be comfortable.'

'An' that means a good deal in these days. Folks ain't content with what was good enough in their mother's time. There's Trim now, it's as much as ever ef he'll set down to a table that hain't a white tablecloth on it.'

'Don't you like a white tablecloth?'

'I'd like a crimson satin one maybe, but it wouldn't stand the use it 'd get in our house; no more does a white damask. What's the use o' tryin' to do what you can't do? Get a half dozen o' our farm hands round a table, and they won't leave it white till the coffee's poured out. An' forks; Mrs. Franks hez silver forks, they do say!'

'Well, why not?' said Mrs. Thayer, smiling.

'Why, *you* don't go in for things like that?' said Miss Betsy. 'There's no use in it, and there's an awful lot o' money. An' the trouble and care of it! I think the old steel ones are trouble enough.'

'Betsy, I am afraid you let yourself be worried by the cares of life.'

'I ain't worried,' said Miss Sawyer; 'but there is days when seems to me I can't say my soul's my own; and to-day's one of 'em. I just ran over to you to catch a breath.'

'Try the Bible plan, and be careful for nothing.'

'That's ridiculous, Cordelia Thayer.'

'What is? The Bible says it, you know, and it is the Lord's command; and a sweet command too. "Be careful for nothing."'

''Tain't possible, though. Oh, well, there's some folks, I do suppose, as is called to be saints; but I ain't one of 'em, and never set up to be.'

'The Lord's people are all "called to be saints," Betsy.'

'Well, I'd like to know how they're to manage it, some of 'em. Maybe you can, but you haven't a brother-in-law, and a sister that is a widow, and a boy at college that ain't your boy, but that you've got to work for all the same. An' you haven't got thirteen cows to take care of; and you haven't six farm hands to feed, nor eleven calves to bring up, nor ninety-eight young turkeys to raise for the market; and you don't make no cheese nother. I suppose *you* can be a saint and go to Sewing Society; but I've got other fish to fry.'

'Betsy, just such busy folks as you want the comfort and the stay of the Lord's promise.'

'You talk as if I was a good deal o' a heathen, seems to me.'

'Not a heathen, but an unbelieving believer,' said Mrs. Thayer, smiling.

'You think I am unbelievin', do you? 'Cos I can't do three things to once. That's sort o' charitable!'

'The Bible says, "Continue in prayer;" and I can tell you it is a wonderful way of smoothing out rough things, and making heavy things light, and clearing the prospect when things are perplexed. Just begin the morning with half an hour'—

'Begin the mornin'!' cried Miss Sawyer. 'An' half

an hour just out o' the cream o' the day, and when fifty things want attending to, all at the same minute!'

'Your own soul is one of the fifty things.'

'No, 'tain't; not at that time o' day. There's the milk, and the churnin', and the house, and the breakfast. My! wouldn't things stand on end accordin' to your plan!'

'But according to *your* plan there is no peace in life. I do not wonder things worry you. You want to do with your mind as you do with water when it is roiled; —let it be quiet and get clear.'

'I don't,—ef I'm in too big a hurry; I take it as it comes. Quiet and get clear! Jes' you wait till Ned is going to college and gettin' into scrapes, and bringin' home lots of other boys that you don't want to see, and half a dozen of 'em begin to come after Helen; *then* see whether you can keep your mind from roiling! I tell you! It's easy talking. La, I can talk; but when it comes to the tug, then you'll know. I think it's a pity folks warn't made full-grown and educated; and ef things had been arranged so that they could live without eatin', there 'd ha' been a better look-out for me; but as it is, I've got my hands full, and I expect you'll hev your'n. Good-night to you.'

'Good-night. But, Betsy, the Bible way is the easiest.'

'For folks that hev no house nor children.'

Miss Betsy went, and Mrs. Thayer sighed. Yes, she knew that her life might not always be so free from care as it was at the moment. Yet she smiled too immediately after; thinking of the words,—

'Though a sinner do evil a hundred years, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know it shall be well with them that fear God.'

In the present, her life was as peaceful and sunshiny as possible; in the future,—she would leave that. Her children were good and pleasant; growing in grace and beauty with every day. Mercy was a model handmaid. Her farm crops were garnered regularly, her cattle throve, her flowers blossomed, her fruits were rich and plenteous. The days passed over her head, seemingly doing no other

work but that of the sun upon the fields; ripening, enriching, increasing to added strength and beauty; noiselessly too, and imperceptibly, like the sun in his course; so that Mrs. Thayer almost started sometimes at suddenly perceiving what was done, which she had not noticed in the doing. Pixie was old enough to go to school; that she was prepared for. But next thing, she saw that Helen was a woman; even unawares the sweet bud had opened out, and was already in its exquisite early perfection. To her mother the perfection was absolute; I think not to everybody else. Or rather, perhaps, not to anybody except those who looked closely. Those are never the majority; and Helen was not a dashing beauty, one of those who catch the eye of a stranger and make an instant demand for admiration. Helen might be overlooked in a crowd; often was overlooked. But if any one looked closely, what they saw was a flower of the most modest loveliness; features and colour of faultless delicacy, the promise of a warm and sensitive nature, with the steady strength of true womanliness; unselfish, tender, patient, hopeful, and infinitely sweet. If such an observer once learned to know Helen Thayer's face, he would never overlook it again; he would turn to it invariably as to a treasury of love and wisdom, and watch to see the tokens of both which would break forth in a smile or a glance or a word. She was not much of a laugher, and not much of a talker; so the rarer was the smile when it came, and so was the word more precious. Happy she was, with the blessed absence of self-consciousness that belongs to a new-opened flower. And in the simplicity of life at Daisy Plains, it was possible for this blessed simplicity to last, and live on from year to year.

The next thing was that Edward must go to college. He had been early prepared, first at the good village school, and then by the kind offices of Mr. Franks, who was a scholar; and the next stage of our story begins with his coming home from Cambridge for the summer vacation, the second year of his college life.

CHAPTER XI.

EDWARD'S FRIEND.

EDWARD'S coming was a grand event, for he was a Junior now, and the interest of the neighbourhood was aroused.

'When do you expect him?' Mrs. Franks had asked. 'To-night? Then you are very busy, and I'll go.'

'No, all is done,' said Mrs. Thayer. 'May is just putting some flowers in the rooms; nothing else is left. Ned is bringing a friend home with him.'

'Indeed. Who is that?'

'A college friend; a Mr. Somers. He is older than Edward—has been longer at Cambridge—I believe he graduates next year. He has been very kind to Ned; so he begged to be allowed to bring him here and let us know him.'

'Ah! Now your troubles are beginning. Who is the young man?'

'My troubles?' said Mrs. Thayer, ignoring the question.

'Yes, my dear friend; don't you see it? What is this Mr. Somers?'

'I do not know particularly. I believe his father is one of the rich shipping merchants of Boston. Ned says this friend of his is very clever and very kind; has helped him and befriended him in various ways; and I could not refuse to let Ned bring him down here.'

'No. We cannot refuse our fate,' said the other woman rather solemnly.

'Two college boys coming home for vacation does not

look much like "fate,"' said Mrs. Thayer, with a smile, which was, however, a little constrained.

'Helen's fate, perhaps.'

'Helen does not think of such a thing!'

'No. Did you, or did I, when ours came?'

'But what do you mean?' said Mrs. Thayer. 'This is the simplest matter. Edward brings one friend to-day, another time it would be another friend; just to enjoy the country and each other's society; like boys.'

Mrs. Franks looked at her with a significant and somewhat sorrowful smile.

'You know better,' she said. 'You know the chance is that May's society will be the most enjoyed.'

'May is a child!' repeated Mrs. Thayer vehemently.

'How old is she?' demanded the other.

Mrs. Thayer was silent. May was almost twenty. She told it to herself; she recognised the unwelcome fact; she struggled with it, as it were.

'She is a child still, nevertheless,' she said again. 'In all her thoughts she is a child, as much as Pixie. She has no notions such as you ascribe to her; not the least.'

'I believe it. But the sleeping beauty will wake up, you know, when the right touch comes; you cannot keep her a child always.'

Mrs. Franks took her departure, and presently after May came in.

'Everything is ready now, mother. I put flowers in both the rooms, and they look so pretty! and they are sweet with the smell of mignonette and roses.'

'I do not believe Ned will be any wiser.'

'Why, mother, he must. And his friend will, I hope, at any rate. The flowers give a nice welcome, and seem to say we are glad to see him.'

They would tell a false tale, Mrs. Thayer thought, for her! She looked at her 'child' May, and tried to look with a stranger's eyes. What did she see? A slim but well-rounded figure; a grave, sweet, unconscious maidenhood; brown eyes so soft and pure that they seemed the

very windows for a woman's soul to look out of; and innocent lips as yet showing no lines but those of a happy childhood and girlhood's experience. As yet, the woman's soul was hardly awake. Mrs. Thayer's heart so swelled with the thoughts that came pouring in upon her that she could not bear it; she hastily rose and went off to her room, where she sought her only unfailing help for trouble in prayer, this time wordless and passionate.

It was evening, a little before sunset, when the collegians arrived. They had left their buggy at the farmyard gate, and walked the few steps from that to the little picket that opened from the flowery plot of ground before the house. The sun's rays came slant and fair upon the old house, touched up the gay colours of the flowers, glorified the apple orchard at the side, lay soft and bright on the turf. It was a wonderfully pleasant scene to the eyes of the stranger, the only one who had leisure for all these details. He was slightly surprised at the style of the place altogether; he had expected to see a house and grounds of more pretension. Here was a plain old farmhouse, in good preservation, no doubt; but with small windows and low doorways, and sharp sloping roof, and a little bit of a flower garden in front; no lawn, no noble trees, no 'grounds' at all. These must be just farm people who dwelt here. Intelligent, and to a certain degree cultivated, no doubt, for his friend Edward could have belonged to no other; but— And here Mr. Somers started, and suddenly forgot to carry on his lucubrations. Helen had come out of the door and was hastening along between the roses to greet her brother. Yet not hurrying, not running, not doing anything in the least undignified or ungraceful. What a creature! What soft rosy colour, and what pearly fair skin, and what masses of rich auburn hair! but more than that, what a fair, pure face of truth and sweetness! Young Somers stood on one side and lifted his hat, and waited for his turn to come to speak to this apparition, rather envying his friend Edward, for the first time in his life.

At last the brown eyes came to him, and Somers bent low involuntarily, paying a homage, which was on the instant sincere and profound.

'This is my friend Seneca, May; he has got the name by his superlative wisdom, you understand. You have heard about him. And you have heard about May, Somers.'

They touched hands, but both in silence.

'How's mother?' But then Edward rushed past them to clasp another figure appearing in the doorway, and left the two to walk up to the house together.

'It is worth while going away, for the sake of coming home,' Somers remarked as he saw the meeting of the two ahead of them; and Helen glancing at him was sure that his eyes were glistening, and fancied that his lips, although accomplishing a smile, were very grave.

'Do you think so?' she said.

'I used to think so.'

'I believe I do not think so.'

'You have been tried?'

'No, really I have not. I have never been away from mother. But I think'—

May's communications were interrupted. Her brother turned to present his friend; and this time she was sure Mr. Somers was very grave. Then came a storm of welcome from Pixie, who overwhelmed her brother with caresses. She was a bright, lovely child, resembling Helen in a general way, though much more lively and sparkling.

'Look here, Pixie, you are overflowing. There is somebody else in the world besides me. Speak to Mr. Somers, and then let us go off and get rid of some of our dust. Mother, the roads are in a state, for want of rain. We have come in a sort of dry fog, so thick we could hardly see the country.'

'Take Mr. Somers to the corner room, Edward, at the end of the gallery; and make haste, for supper will be ready.'

'It is against Seneca's principles to make haste, mamma; but I'll try to worry him into it.'

The young men disappeared; and the others held a short council together, before setting the supper on the table.

'Ned looks well,' said the mother.

'Stronger than last year,' Helen returned.

'T'other one is nice-looking,' said Pixie. 'I like him. I guess he's jolly.'

'Pixie, do not use Edward's slang words,' admonished Helen. 'Mother, I don't believe Mr. Somers has any mother; he looked so sober when he saw Edward kissing you. Anything but "jolly," Pixie.'

'Well, let us have supper,' said Mrs. Thayer, with a sort of pull at her heart which she told herself was altogether unreasonable.

Meanwhile Somers got rid of his dust and refreshed himself with cold water, changing rapidly his impressions of the place and of Edward's people.

Certainly everything in his room was as plain as possible; but everything also was as neat as it could be. The smell of the roses came in at the little windows, through the openings of the green blinds, which latter were an uncommon luxury then in the country. The toilet furniture was common enough, but, on the other hand, the naperies were fine and white and fragrant. A mat on the floor was pleasantly cool; the bed linen and dimity were spotless. A little table stood with writing furniture. Altogether Mr. Somers felt that he was in a house which, at least so far as refinement was concerned, would be congenial to him; and then the beauty of the womanhood belonging to it! Such lovely girls, and so fair and dignified and kind a head of the family. He was not sorry he had come down with his friend.

The supper-time was royally pleasant. He sat by Mrs. Thayer, and he looked across the table to May and Pixie; the girls talked most with their brother, and Mrs. Thayer with him; that was all as it should be; and though hardly gay himself he enjoyed the gaiety of the others

and helped it. But Mrs. Thayer watched with a kind of jealous pang to see his eyes go over the table so often to May. What did she know about him, that she had let this young man come down into her fold? And now he was there, and she could not help it, were it for weal or for woe.

Mr. Somers' appearance, as far as that went, spoke in his favour. He had regular and rather handsome features, and a grave face, the expression of which betokened both sense and character. It showed also reserve, with which his manner corresponded; for, though free enough to talk, he volunteered nothing concerning himself. Refinement and honesty seemed to be at home, however, under his grave grey eyes, and self-command was in the lines of a finely-chiselled mouth. His figure had nothing remarkable; of average height, and good, not striking, proportions.

Mrs. Thayer was detained a little by household affairs after supper was finished, and the young people came together in the porch and strolled down among the flower-beds. It was a delicious evening, the air full of scents, and starlight and a lingering glow in the sky making the twilight long and fair.

'Seneca, this is better than philosophy!' Edward exclaimed, as he went on with Pixie.

'You think so now,' answered his friend.

'Do you not think so, Mr. Somers?' inquired May, to whose lot he fell.

'Perhaps we had better define first what we mean by philosophy,' he answered.

May laughed a little. 'That is what Ned says; he says you are always making definitions.'

'A very useful habit, isn't it?'

'Perhaps,—but is it amusing?'

'Very!'

'I should not have thought so.'

'Try it. What do you mean by philosophy?'

'The question is what *you* mean by it. I am not

professing to be fond of definitions. I leave the answer to you.'

'But it occurs to me, that if you are not fond of definitions, you would not care for the answer.'

'Yes, I would. It is making or finding definitions that I am not fond of. I think definitions are the most difficult things.'

'Is it *therefore* you do not like them? Do you dislike difficult things?'

'Not always. It depends,' May said thoughtfully.

'Please define now. What sort of difficult things can you take pleasure in?'

'Not in anything, for the difficulty's sake.'

'Ah! that is a distinction. I believe I do like some things for the difficulty's sake.'

'Do not men generally?'

'Well, as to "generally," I will not say. What do you judge from? Not from Edward.'

'No, not from Edward; he likes things to be easy. But I have got the impression—men like difficulty and danger, do they not? like to overcome it, I suppose. They take pleasure in climbing mountains, where nobody ever climbed before; in driving wild horses, and all that sort of thing. Don't they? I thought they did.'

'Where did you get the impression? Is that the character of the men here on Daisy Plains?'

'No,' said Helen, smiling. 'I suppose I have got it by reading.'

'Can you get books down here?'

'Why not? Mother writes to Boston for everything she wants. We have a good many, and she is always getting more.'

'That is your house. It is not Daisy Plains.'

'Yes, it is Daisy Plains too. We are great readers. Everybody reads, and reads a great deal. Mother lends books all over.'

'I am curious to know what sort of books are most in favour.'

'With us, or with them?'

'With both.'

'I think in the village, history and novels, or stories of some sort, are most popular; but Macaulay's Essays and Cook's voyages and some other books of travel have been read and liked too.'

'And at home?'

'Oh, at home, we like everything.'

'That tells me only half of what I want to know.'

'What do you want to know, Mr. Somers?'

'Your tastes.'

'Really, they are very universal. I think we enjoy the *Penny Magazine* as much as anything.'

'The *Penny Magazine?*'

'Yes; don't you know it? It is English; it is just delightful; it tells one so much that one wants to know; and such variety. It is a new magazine; perhaps you have not met with it. Then there is the "Library of Entertaining Knowledge;" we enjoy that *very* much too. Both are new, and very good.'

'Novels, then, are not in favour at home?'

'Mother does not favour them.'

'You have read *none?*'

'Almost none. We have read the *Vicar of Wakefield*, over and over. And lately I have read *Waverley*, and *The Antiquary*.'

'How do you like *Waverley?*'

'I was very much interested, of course'—

'But did not like the book?'

'Yes, I did like the book; but then I was sorry for the people.'

'Fergus M'Ivor, of course!'

'I did not mean, for him only,' said May a little shyly, beginning to think that she was talking too freely.

'Pray tell me for whom else you were sorry?—unless you mean his sister and his poor clansmen.'

'No,' said May; 'I was sorry for Waverley too. And the people in general. They did not seem to me happy.'

'What was the matter with Waverley? He married Rose Bradwardine, you know, and had plenty of money, and all that.'

'All that does not make people happy. And I do not think anybody can be called happy that is so weak.'

'You are severe.'

'Am I?'

'If you judge people by such a plumb-line.'

'I do not mean to judge them.'

'You think to be weak is to be unhappy?'

'Nobody need be weak, and everybody might be happy.'

This speech called forth a burst of merry laughter from Somers, which, however, was not mocking, and in its merriment had nothing to chill May's confidence, which she was giving so fast.

'Pray give me your receipt,' he said. 'If you could take out a patent for it you might make an unheard-of fortune. All men might be strong, and all men might be happy! Good news!'

'Yes,' said May gravely, looking at him; 'is it not true? It *is* good news—but I cannot take out a patent for it, even if I had been the discoverer; for people will not believe it. My good news is only what we call the gospel. It has been in the world a good while, and yet only a very few people are strong and happy; they will not believe it.'

Somers looked curiously at the girl while she spoke, and afterwards he studied her. She was unlike any girl he had ever seen. Thoroughly modest, and quiet in look and manner, sweet and delicate, yet he could see that she had the strength of which she spoke; and that she had the happiness also no one could doubt. He had not in his life ever seen so stedfastly happy a face; one so settled in its peace, and so strong in its gladness. There was, be it understood, nothing of what we call radiance about Helen Thayer; her eyes were not brilliant, her face play was not sparkling. But her brown orbs were

like wells of pure strength; and her mouth showed heart-happiness in every movement of its curves. Somers found himself singularly drawn and interested, and growing in reverent admiration, as well as excited curiosity. He went to bed at night with his thoughts in a buzz of interest and delight, and congratulating himself that he had come down to Daisy Plains with his friend Edward.

'Edward,' said May, just before they separated, 'has Mr. Somers a mother?'

'No; she died a year and a half ago.'

'Why, May?' asked Mrs. Thayer.

'I thought he had lost his mother, mamma.'

Mrs. Thayer wished Helen would not think anything about it.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FLOUR MILL.

'WE are out of wheat flour,' Mrs. Thayer remarked at breakfast next morning. 'Ned, don't you want to drive to mill?'

'First-rate, mother; show Seneca the country. Will you go, Somers?'

'Oh, and I'll go!' cried Pixie. 'May I, mother?'

'Suppose we all go?' suggested Somers. 'Why should we not all go? How far is it?'

'It's a drive of six miles to the mill, and the waggon goes with a load,' said Helen.

'Needn't take more of a load than we like,' said Ned. 'I'll leave out a bushel of wheat for every girl that will go. I'll go again next week, if necessary. And the waggon will hold half-a-dozen, and the greys are good to get it along. Come, we'll all go.'

Mrs. Thayer, nevertheless, could not; she had household affairs that must be attended to. So had May, the girl declared. However, finally it was arranged, upon earnest representations made by both young men, that May and Pixie should be sharers in the pleasure of the expedition, and thus double it, they declared, to the others. So about ten o'clock, the great farm waggon, laden with bags of wheat, and drawn by two noble grey draught horses, came up to the door; seats were arranged upon the bags, and the two girls handed in and carefully bestowed. In their fresh print dresses and white sunbonnets, they looked as bright and pure as any lily

of the valley, or strawberry under its leaf. The two young men mounted to the driving board, and off they went.

Mrs. Thayer stood at her door, looking after the vehicle which carried her earthly treasure. There was an odd constriction at her heart. Why in the world should it be there? What could be more simple, or more commonplace, than that her boy should go to college and bring home a college friend? Everybody else's boys did the like, and everybody else's daughters ran the same risk, if risk there were. How should there not be risk? It is true, Edward, and through him his mother, did know a good deal about this friend of his. Mr. Somers the elder was one of Boston's wealthy shipping merchants, living in all prosperity and honour. The young man himself had an irreproachable college record. He was clever, he was successful, he was studious; he had been kind to Edward, befriended him and helped him, when young Thayer was a stranger in Cambridge; he was a Christian, Edward assured his mother, and a first-rate fellow; he was certainly well-looking and agreeable, and gentlemanly. And yet Mrs. Thayer was conscious, as she looked after the departing waggon, that she wished he had been neither agreeable nor well-looking. She could almost have wished that her May were not such a vision of loveliness. Nay, that she could not; but a shadowy and yet well enough defined fear clouded all the mother's sunshine at the moment, and brought a strained, thoughtful expression upon her usually placid and happy face. She was startled by a slight movement, and found Mercy just behind her, also looking after the disappearing waggon.

'Whar's Christiana gwine to now, Mis' T'ayer?'

'Gone to mill.'

'Nebber went to mill afo'; don't see no sense in dat. Am dat ar gen'leman gwine to stay here?'

'Yes, for a while. Why? don't you like him?'

'H'm! Likes him too well, I reckon.'

Mercy went off, having delivered this oracular judgment; but it had disposed of the small remainder of Mrs. Thayer's composure. The household affairs for which she had stayed at home were neglected; she went to her room to repair her mental quiet in the only way she had ever found effectual; and it was not till after an interval at which Mercy wondered, that the business of baking and preserving was taken up again.

Meanwhile the greys pulled the waggon along at a pretty fair rate, considering how it was loaded. And Mr. Somers, sitting in front with his friend, yet seemed to see nothing but a white sunbonnet that was behind him, with the face it shaded. I do not mean that he was perpetually wheeling round and riding backwards, but rather that through whatever else he saw, that face and sunbonnet seemed to look out upon him. The drive was delightful. The day was not too hot, and the breeze which met the travellers' faces was full of life and spicy refreshment. They drove at first for some miles through a rich level country, the country of Daisy Plains; after that they began to get among hilly and rocky ground, and the grey horses, which had trotted in a praiseworthy manner as long as they had smooth going, now fell to slow walking up the inclines. It was really a glorious day for anybody, but to Somers there seemed to be a kind of aureole of a white sunbonnet round everything; and he went as in a dream. If he turned round, there were those two faces; and if he sat still and looked straight before him, he saw them more plainly still than he dared with his natural eye. The girls were chaffing with Edward in gay and light-hearted fashion from time to time; Somers sat very still.

'What *is* Seneca thinking about?' asked Edward at length.

'This wind! It is delicious. I should think it had come straight from the North Pole, and met nothing disagreeable all the way.'

'Why from the North Pole?' Helen asked.

'The very region of purity. Did you ever taste any air with more strength in it?'

'I am glad you like it. We often have this air at Daisy Plains.'

'The people that live at Daisy Plains ought to be strong people.'

'They are,' said Edward. 'I don't know if it is the air; but they *are* a strong set. Strong sense, and strong character, and strong nerves. Hardheaded, perhaps; but you can depend on them.'

'For what?'

'Well, for knowing their own minds and doing their own work.'

'Capital. But that is New England all over.'

'Do you prove yourself a Daisy Plains boy?' inquired his sister.

'I am not,' said Edward. 'I was born down South; and the best timber grows on the north side of the tree, don't you know?'

'That won't do, Edward,' laughed Pixie. 'Mahogany grows in the West Indies, and that is hardest of all.'

'Well, I didn't grow in the West Indies,' said Edward; 'and do I look like mahogany?'

They got among the hills and the rocks at last; not high hills, but long rocky ridges where cultivation had never been attempted, covered in places with a more or less thick growth of oaks and maples and savins. Now they crossed from time to time a brawling brook, and sometimes followed its course for a while. Following its course for a longer stretch than usual, they came finally to the mill; a rude enough building, perched on a rock, in a wild solitude. Beyond it was the weir and the mill pond, and thick woods closed it all in; for the hill rose again just beyond the little level space which made the mill pond possible. It was very wild and still. The pour of water from the weir, the whirr of a bird's wings flying past, the cry of a crow overhead, were all the sounds to be heard.

The waggon was unloaded, of both its vegetable and animal freight. The miller was at home and at leisure to take charge at once of the sacks of wheat; but the grinding would take some time and must be waited for. So the party went a little up the stream, till they found a large smooth surface of rock, lying warm in the sunshine, and overlooking the pond and the mill. Here they sat or lay down, the young men preferring the latter position, and Helen produced from a basket some bread and cheese.

'It is all you can have,' she said, 'till we get home. Then we will have a tea-dinner, right early; and in the meantime you must be content with this.'

'I know what tea-dinner means, at home,' said Edward. 'Courage, Seneca! I can venture to promise you this will not be the *worst* day's fare you ever knew.'

'Safely,' returned Somers. 'This bread and cheese is certainly the best bread and cheese that ever was eaten! Is the water drinkable?'

'Try. It's as clear as diamonds—and about as hard.'

'What do you know about diamonds?' jested Helen.

'Know how to spell the word, and *could* give the definition, only that is Seneca's business.'

'What does *he* know about diamonds?' said Helen.

'He means definitions—not diamonds,' that gentleman put in an amendment.

However, both of them started up, each armed with a dipper, and went up the stream to seek the clearest and coolest pool from which to get a draught. The girls sat still and laughed at them in very gaiety of heart. It had turned out that drinking vessels had been forgotten; neither cups nor glasses were on hand; each of the party having taken for granted that somebody else had put them in. Nothing could be had but the two dippers. And now, when the young men came back, each with his dipper full, and spilling bright drops as he came, there was an amicable dispute as to the division of the store; finally arranged by the brother and sisters drinking out of one dipper, while the other was resigned to their

guest; an arrangement whereby Somers declared he felt lonely.

'But isn't the water as bright as diamonds, though?' said Pixie admiringly.

'And as hard,' added her brother.

'It is the sweetest water I ever drank,' Somers affirmed; 'and there never was such good bread and cheese before.'

'All very well while it lasts,' said Edward; 'but what shall we do when it is done? The miller yonder will take a while, I can tell you, before he will have our wheat in a condition to make bread of it.'

'Can't be too long,' said Somers. 'This is perfect Arcadian felicity. One doesn't get this sort of thing every day. The air up here is pure nectar. If they had the like on Olympus, the gods must occasionally have got intoxicated.'

It will be seen that they were a very gay party, and taking the good of their circumstances in a very thorough manner. Somers, perhaps, *was* a little intoxicated, although his manner was sedate enough. Helen also found the sunshine uncommonly bright, and had a keen sense of the beauty of nature; the sky seemed to her of a wonderful blue, the brook prattled with a delightful quiet familiarity, the very rock on which they were all sitting afforded her matter of pleasure and wonder in its various lichens, which spread over it a draping of hues most harmonious and rarely mingled. She had never so noticed the lichens on the rocks before. The bread and cheese tasted good to her too, and she was glad their guest liked it. They all liked it, and in fact demolished it utterly.

Then Pixie got Edward to go with her to look for a piece of hickory to make a whistle of; and the two others were left together on the rock.

'This water is truly as bright as diamonds,' said Somers, slowly pouring the last drops out of his dipper.

'Are diamonds as bright as the water?' Helen asked.

'As bright as anything. Did you never see any?'

'I never saw one.'

'I will bring one down to show you, the next time I come.'

Then he meant to come again? Helen was glad of it; glad he liked the place well enough.

'Are there many diamonds in the world?' she went on to ask.

'Many diamonds! Well, they are not as plenty as flint stones; but indeed there are, take them all together, a very great many in the world.'

'I wonder what they were made for?' said Helen innocently;—'they and all the rest of the precious stones. There must be a *great* many, take the whole of them.'

'Made to wear, I suppose; to adorn that part of creation that needs least adornment.'

'But *that* cannot be,' said Helen.

'Why not?'

'Because the Bible forbids it.'

'Where?' said Somers, looking up in astonishment.

'Don't you remember? Christian women are told to adorn themselves differently; "*not* with gold, or pearls, or costly array."'

Somers glanced up again, and thought with himself a white sunbonnet would do as well as anything; but he said nevertheless,—

'So you take that literally?'

'How could you take it?' inquired Helen, who felt the surprise now in her turn.

'Well, I don't know. I never thought about it. But all the women I ever heard of wore diamonds; those that could, I mean.'

Helen did not know what reply to make to that statement.

'Why shouldn't they?'

'Only because the Bible says so,' Helen answered, in some difficulty.

'Do you do everything the Bible says?'

'Yes!—everything it bids me.'

'*Do* you?' cried Somers, rolling over on the rock, so that he could lie on his breast and look at her. 'Do you really? I never heard any one say so much before.

'But I thought all Christians did. At least, all true Christians.'

'They all wear diamonds,—if they can get them,' said Somers, looking at her.

'But they cost a good deal, don't they?'

'That is part of their value.'

Helen added nothing, and he wondered what she was thinking of.

'They are supposed to be great beautifiers,' he went on; 'and, I must say, justly.'

'I suppose that is the temptation.'

'Temptation to what?' said Somers, laughing. 'You cannot imagine how surprised I am to hear you speak so; nor how counter your words run to the universal feeling and practice of the world.'

'Do they?' said Helen. 'Perhaps that is because I do not belong to the world.'

'Oh, but one must belong to the world, while one is in it.'

'Mr. Somers, Christians must not. The Bible says they must not.'

'Then we must come to defining terms,' said Somers, lying as aforesaid on the rock, and looking exceedingly well entertained. 'What is "the world"?'

Helen pondered. 'I do not know how to define it,' she said.

'So, you see, you can come to no practical conclusion. If you do not know what "the world" is, to say you do not belong to it, or that I ought not to belong to it, conveys no meaning whatever.'

'Yes,' said Helen, 'I see that. So it must be possible to define it, though I cannot. And it must be easy to define it.'

'But what did you mean?' asked Somers, willing to carry on the discussion at any rate.

'I suppose I meant, that I do not belong to *your* world.'

'Making me the representative of evil, for the nonce!'

'Oh no, I did not mean that.'

'Of that class of evil-doers, then, who wear diamonds?'

'No,' said Helen, laughing. 'You are getting my thoughts in confusion. I could not mean that, but I cannot tell exactly what I did mean.'

'What's the harm in diamonds?'

'I never went beyond the Bible command,—"*Not* with gold, or pearls, or costly array."'

'Do you indeed follow all the Bible commands?' asked Somers, after a moment's pause.

'Why, yes!'

'I do not think anybody else does.'

'How can they be Christians and not do it?'

'Well, I suppose they manage by means of definitions. It all depends on what the words mean, you know. But costly array! Heavens and earth!'

'Why?'

'You do not belong to the world, and you do not know,' said the young man pleasantly. 'You say you never saw diamonds. They are pretty things.'

'There is something very strange about it all,' said Helen; 'for precious stones are mentioned in the Bible as if they were held in a great deal of honour. You know the twelve stones in the high priest's breastplate; and the precious stones in the foundations of the City.'

'The City?' repeated Somers. 'Oh yes, I remember. But I fancy it is not quite certain what stones are intended by some of the Greek names. I must study the matter up. Why should precious stones be in the foundations of the City?'

'I never thought. It must signify beauty, and imperishableness, and glory, and purity, and value.'

Somers smiled.

'Then they must be good things to have about one now; must they not?'

'Is Greek a difficult language, Mr. Somers?'

'I should say not, to anybody with a will.'

'I have a great will to learn it; I thought I would make Edward teach me the letters this summer.'

'What for, may I ask?'

'Oh, to read the New Testament in the original.'

'You bring everything back to the Bible,' said the young man, half amused, half admiring.

'Yes, of course,' said Helen simply.

'May I ask, without being impertinent,—why of course?'

'Because it is the word of Christ.'

There lay a little shadow of astonishment in Helen's brown eyes as she answered the question; and there sounded in her tones and glanced in her look such an unmistakeable comment of love and loyalty, that her interlocutor was for a moment silenced. Yes, probably she was *not* of his world. Something in her look or tone pricked him, with what point of pain he did not stop then to analyze. She was turning her head to look after Edward and Pixie, whose voices sounded from a little distance. Somers did not want her to go after them; he went on hastily.

'Perhaps, as I have been longer studying it, there would be no presumption in assuming that I know the Greek alphabet as well as Edward. Let me teach you the letters.'

He drew himself up to a less lazy position before her on the rock, and, taking out his penknife, made use of it to scratch away the lichen from the grey surface so as to show a rather large Alpha in dark lines. He informed her what letter it was, bade her observe its conformation and resemblance to the English A; and then went on to draw Beta in like manner. Helen presently became excessively engaged; she was eager in the study of the letters; her brown eyes shone with zeal and glowed with pleasure. Her instructor might study them at his leisure, for their owner thought of nothing but her work. Or, if she did, if along with the cognisance of Greek letters came a consciousness of the manners and

qualities of her teacher, it was accompanied with no self-consciousness whatever. There was just a little shy grace about her which was most innocent and bewitching. Somers was a good deal bewitched. She showed quick intelligence and aptness to learn; indeed, intelligence sparkled out in her words and looks more than he had reckoned belonged to her. And he was clever; precise in giving information, gentle and original in his manner of imparting it, entirely gentlemanly in the whole.

It *was* a delightful play. Edward and Pixie came back and found an absorbed pair, from whom or with whom no fun was to be had. They were driven back upon their own resources. The Greek alphabet grew upon the rock, in a way calculated to puzzle future explorers in that region. Still the two heads bent together over the characters, and the two faces looked into each other, pleased and eager. Edward and Pixie went off again disgusted; and the play went on till Helen had mastered the whole list from Alpha to Omega. Then she looked up and smiled. The smile was so bright that it dazzled the young man, and so innocent that it awed him.

'Thank you!' she said. 'That is a beginning.'

'More than that,' said Somers. 'Alpha was a beginning,—and you have got to Omega.'

'Not to the end, though. "Alpha and Omega"—how much that means!'

'What does it mean?' asked Somers. 'I know—of course I know how the words are used; but did you never observe that in the words of the Bible, if you look at all deep into the meaning you think you see, another opens upon you out of an unknown depth? It is like looking down into a smooth, clear lake; at first you see the water; then you see the bottom far below, with perhaps its wonderful things or its beautiful things.'

'It would be both, looking down into the Bible words,' said Helen; 'wonderful and beautiful things.'

'What do you find in the "Alpha and Omega"?'

He never in all his life forgot the look she flashed at

him. It was so surprised, and so effulgent from the hidden fire and feeling. To him there seemed reproach in it; but Helen did not mean that.

'Mr. Somers,' she said questioningly, 'I thought—Edward said—that you were a Christian?'

'I am,—I hope and believe.'

'Then you must know'—

'I am beginning to think there are different sorts of Christians,' he said, with a smile which covered, and did not entirely cover, some pain. 'Please tell me what those words mean to you.'

'"Alpha and Omega"?' said Helen slowly, while her eyes changed and grew dark with introversion. '"The beginning and the end; the First and the Last." That is, all, and everything.'

The eyes were raised and looked at Somers with the last words.

'How? For that is not *literal.*'

'It is pretty literal,' said Helen slowly again. 'Yes, I mean it literally. I love my mother, and my brother and sister; and I take quantities of pleasure in a world of things; but they are all—in comparison—nothing. And even in my enjoyment of *them*, Christ is the beginning and the end—the First and the Last. My *life* is in Him.'

'Then if you had lived in the old Roman times, you would have given them all up, and faced the lions in the arena?'

'I hope I should,' Helen answered gravely. 'But mother says'— She hesitated.

'What, please, does Mrs. Thayer say?'

'She says the times are not so really different after all. Oh yes, they are *different;* there are no real lions to face; but she means that the same sort of faith and obedience are needed now as then, and that the enemies to be met are quite as dangerous if not so frightful; more dangerous because less frightful.'

'What enemies?'

'You had better ask mother; she can tell you better. Only I have heard her say that. And so, that if Christ is *not* Alpha and Omega, people cannot meet their enemies.'

'I must ask her,' said the young man. 'You have given me something to think of. Hollo, Edward, is it time to go? Come here and look at these two wasps, travelling up and down on the rock; I have been watching them for this last quarter of an hour. What do you suppose they can be about?'

They all watched the wasps for a little, then they got up and went about looking for flowers; making desultory and aimless examination of whatever came in their way; here a bird's nest, there a woodpecker, a pretty bit of lichen, a rich bed of moss. Every object had a charm unusual to it. The rock and the wood were a sort of enchanted ground; the air was not common air; the human nature was in part at least rare human nature. Somers thought he had never seen so interesting a specimen of young womanhood; and the girls thought their visitor was an uncommonly agreeable person. And when they set out upon their return home with their bags of flour, two of them at least were in a great fulness of content. Edward avowed that he wanted his dinner, and Pixie rejoiced in the prospect of lamb pot-pie; but Somers and May did not think of wanting anything.

CHAPTER XIII.

PLEASURING.

THE dinner and the evening were gay. Edward reported that Somers had behaved himself like a naturalist, having been excited about the goings-on of two wasps, and curious about the flora of Daisy Plains; and Pixie said that he had been trying to scrape all the lichen off the rock where they had been sitting; at which it is true Somers and Helen laughed a good deal. But they did not explain, and Mrs. Thayer thought it all sounded safe enough, and she chid herself for her anxieties. When she went up to her room at night, however, she found May standing thoughtfully by the window.

'What are you doing, my dear?'

'Nothing, mother,' said Helen, starting a little. 'I was just thinking'—

'Of what?'

'Oh, of the day, and what we did and said. We had a lovely time, mamma.'

'How do you like Edward's friend?'

'Very much, mother. I think he is uncommonly pleasant. Don't you think so?'

'Yes, I am inclined to like him, so far.'

'Mother, I wish you would talk to him when you get a chance. I think he would like it. About religion, I mean. I think he does not understand some things.'

'He is a believer?' said Mrs. Thayer, startled.

'Oh yes! But I think he is hardly a strong believer—in some things. I think you might do him good.'

'What have you been talking about?' Mrs. Thayer asked, with smothered anxiety.

'Oh, different things. Diamonds,—and what religion really is to a Christian.'

'What does he think it is?'

'I don't know;—something less than it is to us.'

'You had better not talk with him on these subjects, May.'

'But, mother, then how is he ever to know better, unless some one talks to him?'

'I cannot risk your faith to strengthen his.'

'There is no danger of *that*, mother! there is no question of risking anything. He seems to me quite honest, only he does not know.'

'If he begins to suggest doubts,—as to the truths of the Bible, I mean,—let me be told at once. I will have nothing of that sort in the house.'

'He is nothing in the least like that, mother,' said Helen earnestly; 'not in the least.'

'Have you had a pleasant day?'

'Oh, mother, it was a delicious day! Every minute of it was pleasant, from the very first setting out till we got home again; everything we did was pleasant. I think Mr. Somers had as good a time as we did, too.'

'Well, go to bed now, my child. You know there is churning to do in the morning.'

There was no lagging about the morning work. It was still early when Helen stepped out into the garden to get some roses for the breakfast table, and there she found Somers. There was a heavy mist yet hanging in the air, through which the sun was sending his shuttles with golden threads, weaving a web of soft and rich texture, under which the trees and flowers glowed yet shrank away, as if half concealed. The air was still, fresh, and fragrant.

'Good morning!' cried Somers. 'Is this the sort of thing you have ordinarily at Daisy Plains? How delicious everything is to-day!'

'Yes,' said Helen; 'you should have seen it two hours ago; there was not a bit of this fogginess then.'

'Two hours ago! That was at five o'clock. Did you look at the morning so early as that?'

'Yes, I always do. And the morning has a chance to look at me. I get up at five o'clock, unless I get up before.'

'*Before* five o'clock! That is virtue unheard of. Isn't it virtue unneeded?'

May laughed a little. 'Don't you know,' she said, 'that in a farmhouse there are some things which must be done before the sun gets hot?'

'Might an uninitiated person without indiscretion ask, what things?'

'Butter, for instance.'

'Butter,' said Somers thoughtfully. 'It never had occurred to me that in order that I might have the luxury of eating butter, somebody must get up at five o'clock.'

'That is only giving somebody another luxury,' said Helen. 'There is no time in all the twenty-four hours like that time between four o'clock and six.'

'*Four* o'clock! Pray tell me what makes the peculiarity, or the excellency, of that particular time?'

'I do not know,' said Helen, stopping short with her roses in her hand—stopping to think. 'I never analyzed it.'

'Won't you do it now, for my benefit?'

'If you would get up to-morrow, you might do it for yourself.'

Helen thrust her hand into a great bush of yellow-white roses, sweet as June, the stems of which, however, were tough and thorny, and defied her. Somers got out his knife and came to her help.

'To-morrow it may rain,' he said, 'and I am curious in every department of knowledge. Besides, analysis is a useful exercise of the mental powers; won't you try it in my behalf, on the beauty of the first hours of the day?'

Helen received the bunch of white roses, which completed her task, and again stood still with a look of thought.

'It is a very difficult exercise,' she remarked, referring to analysis.

'I have often found it so. But I am persuaded you are equal to that difficulty—as to any other which presents itself in the line of duty.'

'I am afraid you are laughing at me,' said Helen. 'But I do not know what it is about four and five o'clock. I think,'—she said, with her eyes growing deep and large,—'I think it is like the glory of creation before sin came into the world. There is the promise—and the purity—and the silence of expectation; you know that the promise will not be fulfilled, and that the silence will not break into joy; but I think that is what it is like.'

'But,' said Somers, both interested and amused, 'I should say the promise *is* fulfilled, every day anew. Look at the glory awakening this minute.'

'It is different,' said Helen. 'It has lost that look. It is glorious, but it is earthly now.'

'What was it then?'

'If I said, *un*earthly, I should come as near to it as I can.'

'May, come in to breakfast!' shouted Pixie's voice from the house. They went in; Helen a little afraid that she had been led on to talk too much, Somers musing on the new view he had gained, not into nature at large, but into one human heart in particular.

After breakfast the young people all came together in the porch.

'What are we going to do to-day?' Edward asked.

'I move we go for flour again,' said Somers.

'There isn't anything to do,' said Pixie, rather lugubriously. 'We never *do* do anything here.'

'There would be 'dew's enough to make a rain,' said Edward, 'if Miss Betsy had spoken them.'

'Edward, that is trying *very* hard to be witty,' said Helen; 'and people that try very hard generally do not succeed—at that game.'

'Who is Miss Betsy?' Somers inquired.

'She is— Hollo! do you see who is coming to the gate? She is the aunt of that gentleman.'

'Trim Satterly!' said Helen. 'I did not know he was at home. We have not seen him in a great while.'

It was Trim Satterly, grown to be a man, and come into possession of his money and his independence. Otherwise not much changed, to appearance. He was rather a handsome fellow; tall, with a good figure, bright black eyes, a confident manner, and very well dressed. He knew all the party, but greeted Somers with an expression the reverse of gratified. Which negative condition of mind seemed to be general and mutual in the party. Nobody appeared to be gratified.

'Where do you come from, Trim?' Edward asked; 'and what on earth are you roving after at this time in the morning? You used not to be such an early bird, if I remember.'

'I remembered you were, and I was afraid I shouldn't catch you if I didn't come soon after breakfast. You know it's the early bird, and so forth.'

'Thanks, I'm sure,' said Edward. 'So you are come here in that capacity. My dear fellow worms, I beg you to take notice,—this bird of smooth plumage has come here to snap up somebody.'

'You are talking awful nonsense, Edward,' said Somers, while they all laughed, as light-hearted young folk will at any nonsense that is presented to them. 'I suppose that comes of the reaction from college work. You had better take care in future not to bend your bow so taut, my dear fellow; the recoil is fearful.'

'Where are you living now, Trim?' Helen asked.

Trim had been travelling, since he left college; had been to the West and to Texas, and gave an account of

his doings and of some of the things he had seen, which lasted some time.

'Look here, Trim, what are you going to be?' said Edward at length.

'What do you mean?'

'I mean, what are you going to *do?* you know. You can't intend to do nothing all your life, I take it.'

'What ought I to do?'

'I don't know. What are you fit for?'

'Does that determine the question?'

'I should think so! You can't cut with a hammer or pound with a penknife, can you?'

'In other words,' said Somers, 'the round peg is thrown away in a square hole.'

Trim ignored the last speaker.

'Suppose your tool has weight and sharpness too?'

'Then I should say it was an uncommonly valuable tool; and my question becomes still more pertinent. What are you going to do with it?'

'Why should I do anything with it?—anything in particular?'

'I don't know,' said Edward. 'If I found an axe lying about anywhere that wouldn't cut, I should say the metal might as well be in the mine.'

'Suppose there are axes enough without that one,—to do all the work?'

'Then that axe has no business to be; that's what I said.'

'Trim,' said Mrs. Thayer, who had joined the company in the porch for a few minutes, 'you are supposing an impossible case. You know that, don't you?'

'Mrs. Thayer, upon my honour I do not know what work there is in the world for me to do. I do not believe there is any.'

Mrs. Thayer shook her head. 'Then you had better have been born a poor man, with your bread to get.'

'Why, Mrs. Thayer?'

'That would give you something to do, to keep you out of mischief.'

'But I am not in mischief,' Trim asserted laughingly. 'Indeed I am not, Mrs. Thayer. I have been travelling to make myself acquainted with my own country. And now I came over here to see what you were all going to set about to-day—that I might help.'

'Pixie says we never do anything here,' said Edward; 'and it is largely true. That is, we do so much every day, you understand. It is the wheel that turns so fast you can't see it.'

'You did something yesterday, though.'

'How do you know?'

'Oh, Edward,' cried Pixie, 'Mrs. Bell saw us, and Mr. Seldon saw us; and of course everybody knows by this time what we were doing. I suppose Mr. Seldon told Mr. Sawyer.'

'No; your man Rockaway came over to our house about something, and he told where you had gone. Now where are you going next? Let us do something, while the weather is good.'

'All the varieties here,' said Edward, 'are hay-cutting, apple-gathering, and going to mill. It is too soon for the first-mentioned amusements, and the last we did yesterday.'

There ensued a lively discussion of plans possible and impossible. Mrs. Thayer sat by and listened, with an odd sinking at her heart. There was no harm in the propositions made; young folks may and ought to enter into all such innocent pleasures when time and tide serve; she had not a word to say in objection; but somehow she had congratulated herself yesterday that there would be no more expeditions. She was afraid of them. At home, in the house, or even in the garden, under her own eye and in her own almost immediate presence, she felt as if she could keep in some measure a guiding hand on what was done and a protecting arm around her treasure. Perhaps she was mistaken; but at any rate on these

expeditions everything was out of her reach, even if she went with them. Yet she made no objection; she even chid herself for her folly; but she listened to the discussions with a secret hope that they would turn out to be vain.

'You cannot sit still here and do *nothing*,' Trim urged.

'That is not our way,' said Helen playfully. 'I thought you knew us better. We never propose to sit still and do nothing.'

'Not you, I know,' said Trim; 'but you are not the only one. I just wish I had you out on a Western prairie, though!'

'What should we do there?'

'Open your eyes, I tell you! Why, *you* would pick flowers, and Ned would shoot chickens.'

There was some merry laughter here. 'Really,' said Helen, 'we could do both those things without travelling so many hundred miles for it.'

'Not prairie flowers, though, nor prairie chickens. I tell you, you stayers at home don't know what the world is like. Let us do something. Suppose we go to the seashore somewhere?'

'The sea!' echoed Helen.

'Too cold,' suggested Somers. 'Too early for the sea shore yet.'

'Just for a visit,' said Trim. 'Well, then, what if we go to Bell Mountain?'

'Bell Mountain! It is twenty miles off,' said Edward.

'That's the fun.'

'What? to travel twenty miles?'

'Don't you like travelling?'

'Oh, I do,' cried Helen. 'But how should we go?'

'Horses enough, aren't there? and waggons enough. I can scare up all that.'

'We do not want anything better than our brownies. But our waggon wouldn't take everybody.'

'Some of us might go on horseback. Can you ride, Helen?'

'Never was on a horse's back.'

'That's too bad. Mrs. Thayer, Helen ought to ride. That's too bad, that she don't.'

'She has had no opportunity hitherto. I should be very glad to have her learn.'

'Don't take much learning,' said Trim. 'Put yourself in the saddle, and go! It's like swimming; you find out how.'

'By finding yourself on your back on the ground,' suggested Somers. 'That *is* one way of learning; but I hardly think it is the easiest.'

'Mrs. Thayer, may she ride if I find her a horse?'

'Hardly to-day, I think, Trim.'

'Oh, to-day! To-day we are going to Bell Mountain, aren't we?'

'Can't go twenty miles and get back to dinner.'

'Don't mean it either; we'll take our dinner along; that's what I propose.'

'A picnic!' cried Pixie. 'Oh, a picnic! Oh, mother, do say we may go! Oh, do, mother!'

Mrs. Thayer looked at the faces around her.

'If you knew how pleasant it was yesterday, mother, you would say yes,' Helen gave her voice.

'If you go, I must go along to take care of you,' she said.

Whereupon Pixie fell to capering.

'And there must be a little time for preparation,' Mrs. Thayer went on slowly. 'Dinner for six hungry people means something, though you young men naturally think it means nothing but a good appetite and a table set. I must have time to get things ready.'

'That's capital,' said Edward. 'Sounds comforting, and full of promise.'

'What is at Bell Mountain?' Somers asked now.

'Oh, a view—a grand view! you can see ever so far, if the day is good; I don't know how many States at once. I suppose Trim has got so into the habit of wide views that one State at a time don't content him. He wants to

go where he can be assured that the earth is a large place. I wonder how people feel who have been all over the world?'

'I'll tell you some day,' said Trim. 'Then to-morrow, Mrs. Thayer?'

'If the weather is good. I will try to be ready for to-morrow.'

'I ought to bring part of the dinner, if it is a picnic. What shall I bring, Mrs. Thayer?'

'Anything you like, Trim; a piece of your Aunt Betsy's nice cream cheese would do.'

'All right. Only if I ask her, maybe she will offer herself instead of the cheese, or along with it?'

Trim spoke with a doubtful face, but Mrs. Thayer gave him a cheerful assurance of welcome to Miss Betsy in that case, and he departed.

'I shan't ask her,' he said as he went.

'Now, mother,' said Edward, 'you *have* gone and done it! Who wants Miss Betsy Sawyer on a picnic?'

'That sounds very much like a reason for asking her, Ned. . A person that nobody wants rarely gets a chance at pleasure.'

'But, mother! there is reason in all things. Is it necessary to spoil our pleasure in order to build a pleasure for Miss Betsy on the ruins?'

'Not necessary at all, Ned; nothing of the kind will happen.'

'I don't know,' muttered the young man; 'she is such a talker!'

'She is not a fool, Ned.'

'Not a bit of it! she is too sharp. Well, here goes! It'll be a jolly thing, anyhow. We shall want more waggons than one, though, if Miss Betsy is to join the party. And then, suppose Mrs. Satterly takes it into her head to want pleasure?'

'Let her have it, my boy.'

'Mother, that is a very extraordinary way of arranging things! I didn't come home for my vacation that I might

have the delight of seeing Mrs. Satterly; and I think you owe some hospitality to Seneca too.'

'And not to my neighbours?' said Mrs. Thayer, smiling. 'I am sure Mr. Somers will forgive me.'

She was half conscious to herself that it would not be unwelcome if enough of her neighbours came to drown all private and particular attentions in a flood of commonplace.

CHAPTER XIV.

PLACES.

THE remainder of that day was very much taken up with making preparations. For, as Mrs. Thayer remarked, a dinner for six or eight people means something. In this case it meant several busy hours for her and her daughter.

'Mrs. Satterly and Miss Betsy may both come,' she said.

'We have not near bread enough, mother. I had better make up a quantity of tea biscuits.'

'And I will boil a piece of beef and a ham; so the heavy viands will be supplied.'

'But you will have something besides meat and bread, won't you, mother?' said Pixie. 'That wouldn't be much of a picnic.'

'I'll make up a batch of Rhode Island gingerbread, Pixie; and Miss Betsy will send, or bring, some of her nice cream cheese.'

'If she only wouldn't bring herself!' said the little girl regretfully. 'We don't want her.'

'You should always want the people that nobody else wants, my child.'

'Why, mother?'

'Because it is an opportunity of giving so much pleasure, and doing so much good.'

'But one don't want to be always doing good!' said Pixie.

'Don't you?'

'I mean, one don't want to be always giving somebody else pleasure. Sometimes one wants it one's self. Isn't it right to have pleasure one's self, mother?'

'At other people's expense?'

'Why not, if it is right for them to have it at our expense?'

'The question is, what *you* will do—not what they will do. And I find, that to give other people pleasure is a capital way of getting it myself. Try it, Pixie; and remember who it was that "pleased not Himself."'

The little girl was silenced, and the preparations for the next day went on at such a rate that her desponding mood gave way. Helen, she saw, did not share it; and Helen was the glass in which Pixie dressed, if not herself, at least her opinions. From under Helen's deft and skilful hands came one thing after another, in beautiful readiness and with delightful smooth rapidity. Butter in dainty little pats, each one wrapped up separately in a green vine leaf and put in the dairy to keep cool; turnovers with raspberry jam in them, light and flaky, and in numbers; tea biscuit, a great corn basket full. Then baskets were packed with cups and plates and napkins, and salt and sugar, and pepper and mustard, and knives and forks; indeed, it moved Pixie's wonder to see how many insignificant and usually unthought-of things were needed for the plainest meal.

Word was brought in the evening that both ladies would come. Edward scowled and Mrs. Thayer smiled. And betimes the next morning Trim drove up in the Sawyer waggon, with his mother and his aunt behind him, and behind them a significantly large hamper. The Thayer family were mustering, and the Thayer waggon stood already loaded with all but its live freight. Trim jumped down and ran into the house.

'Brought 'em all, everybody and everything,' he said. 'Now, who's going with me? We've got one seat to spare, and you've got one too many for your waggon; so that'll fit. It's a glorious day! Now we should be off.'

Mrs. Thayer went out to see her friends in the other waggon. Two figures in smart calicoes and deep sun

bonnets, from out of which the faces looked curiously at all that was going on.

'Spect you'll hev your hands full, Cordelia, with so many folks,' said Miss Betsy. 'Who else is goin'?'

'Nobody but ourselves. I am glad to see you, Mrs. Satterly.'

'Wall,' said the lady addressed, a faded-out copy of Miss Betsy, 'you see I don't git so much chance to see Trim now-a-days, but what I'm glad to foller him up over the mountains, if I can't do it no other way. La, the young folks doesn't make much count o' the old folks, seems to me, in these times.'

'The young birds must go off to learn to shift for themselves, Mrs. Satterly.'

'Wall, I guess likely. That's so, no doubt; but I kind o' think it's hard on the old folks, too.'

'Are you comfortable there for a long drive?'

'La, yes; I've got one folded eight times under me; for I said, says I, "Twenty miles, Trim! then I must look out that my bones don't come through before I git there." I guess we'll do.'

'If you had something under your feet,' said Mrs. Thayer; and she rested not till she had a bench for one and a cushion for the other brought and placed in the waggon.

'Now, then,' said Trim, 'who's going with *me?* Mrs. Thayer, I want you or May. Do, please!'

Mrs. Thayer gave the matter a quick consideration.

'I think I will stay by my boy too, Trim,' she decided. 'You may have Helen.'

Why she made this decision she hardly knew; probably with some vague thought of breaking up one line of influence with another. But she did not know any influence at all at work; she only feared. Nobody, if we except Trim, was particularly pleased with this disposal of the party; however, there was no gainsaying it; and the pleasure expedition began, as so often happens, with a little alloy to the pleasure even at the very beginning.

Nevertheless, on the whole, pleasure was in the ascendant. The day was one of June's perfect days; gathering up in one all that summer can do of choicest and best. Fresh and cool, and also warm; fragrant and inspiriting; neither enervating nor oppressive; to breathe was a gratification, and to use one's eyes a constant delight. All the Daisy Plains valley was one spread of luxuriant growth; crops and orchards and gardens and rich pasture lands succeeding each other. The fields were stocked with fine cattle, grazing comfortably, and rejoicing in the genial summer sun; the gardens were sweet with the breath of roses; the grain stood thick and even, giving great promise of a good yield. The picture of rural thrift and beauty was perfect; for in all the valley there was not a neglected house to be seen, nor a tumble-down fence, nor a barn out of repair, nor a gate hanging by one hinge. The grass was almost ready for the scythe, and in other fields ploughs were turning up the rich loose soil.

All this, however, was so familiar to nearly every one of the party that they never thought of it. But every one drew in the inspiriting air, and felt his spirits rise as they drove forward. Even Helen, who at first had been a little taken aback at learning that she must take the twenty miles to Bell Mountain in the company belonging to the second waggon, reflected that twenty miles would not last for ever, and breathed the wonderful air with growing content; as did almost everybody else. She was perfectly quiet, however, till Mrs. Satterly's voice was heard just at her shoulder.

'Do you know, you're grown as pretty as a picture, May?'

Helen started and looked round. Mrs. Satterly nodded, which gesture received added emphasis from the deep sunbonnet.

'There ain't as handsome a girl as you on the Plains—except only yourself.'

'Handsome is that handsome does, Mrs. Satterly,' said Helen, colouring a little and laughing.

'By all I hear tell, you're handsomer that way than the other. La, Helen Thayer, I expect there ain't your match between here and Boston. I should think your ma 'd be dreadfully sot up; I guess she is, too, if the truth was told.'

'Let her alone, mother,' said Trim; laughing, however, at Helen's rosy cheeks. 'Don't you see, she don't like flattery?'

'I ain't no flatterer,' said the good woman. 'I was speakin' nothin' but what's most certain truth. An' ef there's anythin' that does make a woman's heart kind o' sot up, it's to have children that's likely and handsome.'

'That's the reason *you're* so set up, hey, mother? Won't you go on and say something for me now?'

'Wall, I think there's two of ye!' said Mrs. Satterly, with very evident motherly pride and unction, which was mixed with a certain astonished admiration of her boy also.

'Don't you wish they was only one?' suggested Miss Betsy. But Trim did not want Helen to hear such a suggestion, and began to talk as hard as he could.

'I'm afraid you'll be tired with this rumbling old box, before we get there,' he said. 'If the old folks hadn't taken a notion to go, I'd have brought my buggy, and taken you in style. I've a horse that it would do your heart good to see.'

'Oh, the waggon goes very well,' said Helen; 'and it is a great deal pleasanter for you to have them along.'

'Is it?' said Trim. 'Well, I don't know. I think it's rather hard on old ladies, to go twenty miles to a picnic. I'm not quite certain they wouldn't have had things quieter at home. Look here, I want to know what is that fellow doing here, at Daisy Plains?'

'What fellow?'

'That fellow—Somers, is his name? I know who he is; his father's one of the merchant swells of Boston; they think the world and all of themselves. What's he down here for?'

'Why, he's Edward's friend, Trim. He has been very kind to Ned at college, and Edward is very fond of him.'

'Yes, that's all very well; but Ned don't want his good offices down here, does he? and Somers has lots of other places to go to, without coming to the Plains.'

'Why shouldn't he come to the Plains?'

'I should say the Plains don't want him. What kind of a chap is he, hey?'

'You can see for yourself. He is a gentleman.'

'Oh, a gentleman!' said Trim, with an accent which was incomprehensible to Helen's simplicity. 'What do you mean by a gentleman?'

'What do I mean by it? I never was asked to define a "gentleman" before,' said Helen, laughing. 'You should ask Mr. Somers; he is great on definitions.'

'Is he?'

'So Edward says.'

'I don't care for any definition except yours. Everybody makes his own, according to what he likes and dislikes.'

'But truth is somewhere,' said Helen.

'At the bottom of the well! That is where the ancients put her. I guess they were about right.'

'But that is not right, Trim. Truth *can* be got at; or else what should we do?'

'How'll you get her, from the bottom of the well?'

'She is not there.'

'Yes, she is, begging your pardon. Where is she, do you think? or where can you find her?'

'Why, Trim, you know;—in the Bible.'

Trim bent forward, to reach with the end of his whip a fly which was pasturing on the withers of his near horse; the fly was not easy to dislodge.

'That's all very well,' he said, recovering his former position; 'but, don't you know, the Bible is the deepest well of all?'

'It is easy to get at the truth in it, though.'

'What is truth?'

'Trim, it was a heathen good-for-nothing who asked that question, in that way.'

'What way?'

'The way you asked it just now;—as if believing that truth is a myth, and not to be had anywhere. You know better.'

'Then, May, I tell you I don't. Everybody flies to the Bible to support what he believes; and the things people believe are all sorts, and can't by possibility all be true. What's a fellow to think?'

'Go to the Bible for yourself.'

'But I might mistake too, as well as another.'

'Trim, you know there is a provision against that. The Lord has promised to give wisdom to those that seek it of Him in the right way.'

'How comes it more don't get it, then?'

'I suppose, because they do not seek it in the right way.'

'What is the right way? You see, you would say one thing and somebody else would say another.'

'The question is, what does God say?'

'Where? Now, May, the Bible is a big book; and it says one thing in one place and another thing in another.'

'No, Trim, it does not. You say so because you have not studied it. I *have;* and I tell you it is all one thing, from the beginning to the end; it is all one.'

'The Old and the New Testaments?'

'Yes. All one in their teaching and meaning.'

'Well, everybody but you says that the two are very different; and *I* believe that the New has superseded the Old, and that we have only that to mind now.'

Helen was silent, studying this proposition; and Trim presently began to speak of something else. The day was so lovely and the motion so pleasant that she could not but enjoy herself; nevertheless she cast some longing looks towards the other waggon, and felt rather cast away amid her present companions. Yet, to be sure, somebody must occupy her place, and why not she as

well as any other? She chid herself for selfishness. Why not she as well as anybody else? May scolded herself, and resigned herself to make the best of it; which in general was a sweet way she had; a kind of oil upon the waters, which was apt to diffuse itself from her own spirit to her surroundings, and made May's company very desirable.

Mrs. Thayer the while had her own thoughts, with which also some self-chiding was involved. Why had she thrust Helen into that place, which certainly she had not desired to fill? Was Trim more eligible than Somers? And, if less dangerous, did it follow that he could avert the other danger? And what could she hope to effect by such small measures? and where was her trust in Providence that she was undertaking to play Providence herself? Why should she have condemned poor May to Mrs. Satterly and Miss Sawyer, instead of the society she would have liked better? It was not a matter in itself of much moment; twenty miles are soon passed over with good horses; and a little check is no harm to young people's ardour of pleasure; but Mrs. Thayer perceived and considered with some trouble of mind the motives which had been influencing her; and she resolved that she would do so no more. Within all proper limits she would let things take their course, and not try to lay her ignorant hands upon the guiding reins of human destiny.

CHAPTER XV.

BELL MOUNTAIN.

IT was verging towards noon when they reached the foot of Bell Mountain. Further than this their teams could not take them. It is true, the hill they had to mount was not very high; seven or eight hundred feet was all; but short as the ascent was it must be made on foot; there was no carriage road; and the growth of timber on the hill was too insignificant to tempt wood-cutters, who else no doubt would have left a sort of rude way, by which horses might climb. They must go on foot; and of this nearly everybody was glad. The change of position—and other changes—were so welcome. So the horses were hitched, and provided with their luncheon; baskets were hauled out from the waggons and taken charge of by the young men; small burdens of cream, teapot, cups, and spoons, etc., were assumed by the ladies; and a merry company set out to go up the narrow path which wound its way to the top. There was a low growth of stunted oaks and savins, which gave a grateful shade; the faint midday breeze blew fitfully but refreshingly; and, as Trim exhorted them, the party 'took it easy.'

'Mercy!' exclaimed Mrs. Satterly, half way up. 'I haven't been here this twenty year!—and when I was a girl this hill warn't more'n half as high, seems to me.'

'Take it easy, mother,' said Trim. 'Helen, I'll take that tea-kettle.'

'No, thank you, Trim; you look out for your own. If you give that basket such a swing, I'm afraid you'll break something.'

'Those swings carry it part way up hill, don't you see?'

'No,' said Helen, laughing, 'I don't see—nor you either. Do you suppose we can get wood to kindle a fire?'

'I'll worry down a cedar with my pocket-knife, but you shall have a fire, if you want one.'

'Not I,' said Helen; 'but your mother and Miss Betsy would like a good cup of tea, I know.'

The ascent was rather long, though not toilsome; steep enough, however, to try the endurance of the two older women,—I should say, of Mrs. Satterly, for her sister had the toughness of well-seasoned timber. At the top all were glad to sit down and rest. Some distance below the actual summit there was a sort of shoulder of the hill which gave a tolerably level clear open space. A large part of this open space was occupied by a flat rock surface, grey with the invariable lichen, otherwise quite bare. Behind it the woody slope of the hill rose for still a few hundred yards; before it lay spread out a very wide fair view, the same, as far as it went, as the view from the true summit. Here was the lunching place for parties, and here baskets and pails and shawls were gladly deposited; and here the three older ladies resolved to abide while the younger people went on to get the view from the very top.

'This is high enough in the world for me,' said Mrs. Satterly, resting herself on the warm rock. 'La, I ain't as young as I was. I'm 'most beat. I guess young folks had ought to do the picnics. But I'm glad I come, for all!'

'Hope they won't stand too long flirtin' up there on the top,' said Miss Betsy; 'for I'm as hungry as if I'd done a day's work, and I hain't really done nothin' yet. Ef I had the wood I'd make the fire, but choppin' trees is the one thing I *can't* do.'

'Don't talk of flirting,' said Mrs. Thayer.

'Why not? That's what they'll do. Do you suppose boys and girls can be together and not do it? And don't you know our Trim is mighty sweet on your May?'

'May does not think of such things,' said Mrs. Thayer, inclined to wish at the moment that picnics had never been heard of.

'She's got to, though,' said Miss Betsy coolly. 'An' *you've* got to. It's what people were made for, I expect; though I won't say but what now and then I think the single ones has the best of it. I don't think all that about "single blessedness" is only talk, mind you. But the most of folks is inclined to try the other.'

'Why did you never try it?' said Mrs. Thayer, partly by way of diversion from her own thoughts.

'Well, I never see nothin' to tempt me. I never see a man yet, that I thought was worth shucks.'

'Betsy, you don't mean it!' remonstrated her sister mildly.

'I ain't sayin' nothin' against your man, Sarah Ann; you had your ch'ice, and you've got Trim to remind you of it. Most folks has their ch'ice; and I generally think it's the wrong ch'ice they make. Any way, it seems to me I see a sight o' repentin'. Now I've never repented o' mine, and don't expect to. I suppose May has got her ch'ice to make now.'

'She does not think of it,' said Mrs. Thayer hastily. 'Don't say a syllable to put such a thing in her head, Betsy.'

'I?' said Miss Betsy, laughing. 'Well, I declare! Three young men round her, and you want *me* not to put it in her head. What do you expect, Cordelia? The world ain't a-goin' to stand still for you; and marryin' and givin' in marriage has been the way of it ever since it had folks enough in it to *be* married. Who'll Helen choose, though? that's what I want to know.'

'She is young yet. She need not choose anybody.'

'Ah!' said Miss Betsy; 'that bein' young is jest the thing. Their heads is as easy turned as a top, and then they go spinning along. You know, you never can tell which way a top'll spin,—they go every sort of way; but it's when they seem to go no way that they're spinnin'

the hardest of all; and it don't prove nothin' that Helen looks as quiet as a pan o' cream.'

'My boy ain't a bad-lookin' feller,' said Mrs. Satterly.

''Tother one ain't,' said Miss Betsy.

'My boy'll have lots o' money too, Cordelia.'

'Maybe so will the other,' said Miss Betsy. 'Ain't his father one o' the great folks in Boston? Sends ships to Chiny, don't he? and plenty of 'em.'

'I don't know—I believe so,' said poor Mrs. Thayer. 'That has nothing to do with the matter. Helen will have money enough.'

'I never heerd that havin' enough kep' people from wantin' more, did you? It works t'other way, I guess. An' when a man once gits the taste for spendin', there ain't no "hevin' enough" for him. Some poor folks was the richest folks ever I see.'

Meanwhile the younger portion of the company, having rushed to the look-out place on the top of the hill, were standing there enjoying the view. Or so they said; but Helen was enjoying her being out of Trim's waggon; Somers was more occupied with the living than with the inanimate surroundings about him; and Edward and Pixie were more ardent for luncheon than for anything else; while Trim felt as if he had lost a possession, and stood beside Helen on the rock without at all seeing the prospect before his bodily eyes.

Why did *he* stand there? Helen queried; he had no particular right to that place. But the neglected prospect was in truth very fair, giving a wide, unbroken panorama; and the clear atmosphere allowed every detail to take its full value and receive full recognition. The broad country at the beholder's feet was not too remote to let its beauties be seen; farm-fields, houses, roads, copses, hilly ridges, and meadowy levels, were spread out like a map, with soft variations of colour and rich suggestions of fertility. And far away was a thin blue distance, with here and there hills rising into the pale sky. Helen had

up to that time never looked upon such an extended view, and her delight was genuine.

'You like it?' said Trim, who had eyes only for her.

'Oh, it is wonderful!' sighed Helen, with a breath burdened with admiration.

'Is it? I wonder what you'd say to a prairie, and to the big Mississippi?'

'Oh, I've seen the Mississippi.'

'Well, the Rockies, then. I wonder what you would say to them!'

'I suppose I should say nothing. Words are no good at such a time.'

'But what do you see *here?*' said Trim, looking around him disparagingly.

'Miss Thayer has just said that she cannot tell you,' said Somers. 'I suppose, what anybody sees anywhere depends on his eyes.'

'And where his eyes happen to be,' suggested the other.

'I do not know—I am inclined to think it is more in the organ of vision, or in what lies behind it. A microscope, for instance, gives you a very different view of the world from that which you can enjoy without it.'

'Why does one enjoy such a sight as this so much?' Helen asked.

'Something new,' said Edward. 'That's what women are always after. I don't think it matters so much what the novelty is.'

'But one can see so far!' said Pixie.

'That is the novelty here,' said Edward.

'It is more than that,' remarked Somers. 'Something that your grosser senses do not perceive. Hill-tops and high places, in all countries and in all ages, have been felt to be places of moral elevation as well, and fitted for lofty thoughts and exercises.'

'I feel that,' said Helen.

'When don't you feel it?' said her brother. 'I wish you'd come down to commonplace on the present occasion.

I'm furiously hungry! and do you know what o'clock it is?'

They all laughed at Edward, but as his appetite was confessedly shared by others of the company, they began their descent to the lunching ground; reluctantly on Helen's part.

'I think what we have up there is better than what we shall have down here,' she confessed.

'Perhaps we will get another run up to the top before we go,' Somers suggested, in an aside which was heard only by her.

The pleasures of the lower level, however, were undoubted. It was fun to see the young men gather wood and make a gipsy fire; then the spreading and ordering their feast on the rock was amusing, and had the asserted charm of novelty in abundance. It might truly be called a feast, when Mrs. Thayer's and Mrs. Satterly's stores were combined. Helen's tea biscuit and butter, Miss Betsy's cheese, wonderful cakes,—for people at Daisy Plains were skilled bakers,—ham and chicken, and dried apple pie, and I know not what all, with flagons of milk and warmed-up coffee, and tea freshly made. The air up there on the hill was fresh and enlivening, and quickened their appetites; the lovely view before their eyes furnished—to some of the party—perpetual entertainment; though, indeed, in the mood which prevailed, nobody could fail to be entertained; and the universal impression was that a picnic twenty miles from home is well worth going the twenty miles.

After the appetites had been satisfied and the dishes packed up in the baskets again, the younger people proposed to ramble about the ground a little. Miss Betsy resumed her knitting, which had been only laid aside for dinner.

'Well,' she said, 'now it's over! That's the way with everything. That's why I don't care about what folks call pleasure. I'd rather be at my work.'

'But that comes to an end too,' said Mrs. Thayer, smiling.

'No, it don't,' said Miss Betsy. '*My* work don't. I never see the end o' that. When I get to the toe o' one stocking, I begin another. An' then, I don't care if it *does* come to an end. That's the difference.'

'I think the use, and pleasure too, of real pleasures, does not pass away—does not end,' said Mrs. Thayer. 'It remains with one. My life is full of pleasures; and they keep me fresh for work.'

'Don't say!' ejaculated Mrs. Satterly. 'Cordelia Thayer! do you say your life is full of pleasures—and you as old as you be?'

'Why not?' Mrs. Thayer asked, laughing.

'I've allays heard say, youth was the time for pleasures, an' I allays thought it too; an' I don't find it no different. La, what's one like me to do with pleasures? Those boys are havin' a good time now, I'll be bound,'—as a gay laugh reached her ear,—'but you and me, we're left sittin' here, to wait till it's time to go home.'

'Our children's pleasures are ours, though.'

'Ef that's what you think, it's what I don't. What good hev I of Trim, 'cept now and then when he's at home for a spell? And take it now, when he *is* to home, he ain't thinkin' o' me. His head's all in that girl of yourn. Next thing you know, *her* head will be all in him,—or in somebody else; I hope to goodness it will be in him, or else I'm sure I don't know what Trim'll do with himself,—and then where'll you be? and your pleasures? I don't understand your talk, Cordelia, I must say.'

'I suppose it depends upon where you look for pleasure,' said Mrs. Thayer rather soberly. Poor woman, the image presented to her by her neighbour's words was not just enlivening.

'I s'pose you look where your pleasure *is*, don't you? I don't see how you'd look anywheres else.'

'That is the very thing, Mrs. Satterly. There is a source of pleasure that never runs dry, nor turns bitter.'

'Well, cf it ain't your children, what is it? I never see no man that was that much to a woman, 'thout it was afore she married him.'

'I mean neither husband nor children.'

'I s'pose I know what you mean. La, Cordelia Thayer, I never could see no sense in what ministers say on that p'int. Maybe you do, but I don't. What's nearer to you than your husband and children? and when what's nearest to you is gone, or turns to worryin' and disapp'intin' you instead o' givin' you what you want of 'em, what's left, I'd like to know? It's easy talkin', for folks that don't know what they're talkin' about.'

'It's not ministers—it is the Bible,' said Mrs. Thayer feebly; for she too felt how different talking is from doing.

'The Bible wouldn't go agin human natur',' said Mrs. Satterly, with confidence. 'What's in the Bible?'

'Don't you remember this?—"My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me, the Fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."'

Mrs. Thayer's voice faltered a little, and her bright eyes filled. Mrs. Satterly was for a moment silenced; and in the silence she noticed that the voices of the young people had died away in the distance. The hillside was left empty and still. Where could they have gone?

They had wandered about in the wood and among the rocks for a little while, and Edward had set off in full chase after a butterfly. He was making a collection, and a beautiful new specimen presented itself; Edward forgot everything else and went in pursuit, followed by Pixie and Trim, who entered into the fun of the thing so far at least as the chase went. Somers was near Helen.

'Now is our time,' said he softly. 'Come!'

And with one accord they slipped off among the bushes and low-growing trees in a direction opposite to that the chase had taken, and made toward the summit. They

were in half a minute quite out of sight and hearing, and safe from being followed; yet they went on swiftly, pushing their way through bushes and winding in and out among trees and rocks, till they gained the regular path. For years and years thereafter, the smell of cedars in a warm afternoon would bring back that walk to Helen's remembrance; the pleasure, the elation, the sort of triumphant gratification with which she found herself alone with Somers, escaped from the rest of the party and separate from the rest of the world, making her way to the hill-top view again. Were cedars ever so sweet, or a warm June afternoon ever so pretty, on any former occasion of her life? Helen would have said not.

They scarcely spoke to each other, only hurried on, till they arrived at the top. There Helen sat down out of breath, and Somers stood still beside her. They had the view before them again, and fairer than ever, for the hour was further removed from the meridian and the shadows marked the picture better. Yet the view was not so entirely absorbing as it had been the first time. It was more enjoyed, perhaps, with half a heart, while the other half was filled with a delicious consciousness, unconfessed, unbetrayed, the more delicate in its sweetness; like some of those ethereally fragrant scents which must be taken in passing and will not bear dwelling upon too closely. They were both silent at first.

'I am glad to have got here again,' said Helen.

'It is a nice view,' said Somers, 'but it isn't much.'

'Not much? Oh, how can you say so? To me it is so very much!'

'I spoke, comparing it in my mind with some other views I have seen.'

'I have nothing to compare it with,—nothing better; and so for the present I am the best off. Perhaps this is all to me that those grander views have been to you.'

'I'd like to see what you would say to those, however.'

'Were they views from high points?'

'All of them.'

'Do you know, just this feeling of being lifted up so in the world has a strange effect upon me? I cannot tell what it is; and yet it is strong.'

'But not strange,' said Somers, letting himself down upon the rock beside her.

'Oh, mustn't we go?' said Helen. 'They will be looking for us.'

'We can stay five minutes more,' said Somers, taking out his watch. 'We are safe for that amount of time. What you feel is part of the universal language of Nature, which is simpler and truer than people know. You are, as you say, "lifted up;" the world is beneath you; you have escaped from the narrow to the wide view, in which trifles are seen to be trifles, and perplexities cease to be perplexities; you see the relations and connections of things as you could not before, simply because you are lifted above them and looking down upon them from a higher sphere. All that is physical; but the spiritual nature within you translates it into its own terms and knows that it is as true for the mind as for the body.'

'Oh, that is it!' cried Helen. 'I believe that is it. I feel that it is true. But how is it that standing on high ground physically gives my mind such a feeling?'

'Philosophers would say, association of ideas. But I think it is rather that there is a divine alphabet of spiritual things in the physical creation; and the spirit that is finely constituted, and not preoccupied, feels it and reads it.'

'But I did not read it, until you spelt it out for me.'

'You read it unconsciously. People can read sometimes when they cannot spell.'

'I suppose,' said Helen thoughtfully, 'one can improve in reading this language, as in reading any other?'

'No doubt.'

'It is a very beautiful idea to me, this of spiritual truth being written, so to speak, in the physical creation. But it is a very harmonious idea. I mean, it harmonizes well with all we know of the Lord's doing. There is a

curious harmony running through all the creation; and that it should extend also to the world of spirit, and connect the two, is perfectly reasonable.'

'Perfectly,' said Somers. 'I believe the connection you speak of is manifold, and much closer and more intimate than most people think.'

'But I never thought much of it before!'

'There must be a beginning to most things,' said Somers.

Helen thought the beginning was very pleasant. The five minutes were slipping away, more precious than if they had been ten; she tasted every breath, and felt every second of the swift passing time. She did not know what made it so fair; there was a sort of consecration upon everything. Sunlight and shadow had never been seen with such a blessedness in them; air had never blown so suggestive and so stimulating; society had never been so utterly to her mind. Yet Helen did not feel this in detail, as my words put it; nothing of the kind; only she thought that nature was fairer and richer than she knew, and life more full of purpose and possibility, and human sympathy more sweet. And her companion? Well, Somers was not so new to the world as she, and had stood on hill-tops before; though truly never with anybody who had made the hill-top quite so pleasant. Something of the enchantment that was upon her had seized him too; he was pleasantly conscious of it,—conscious that these stolen minutes had a peculiar charm, which the presence of any third party would have broken up; but Somers was not speculating, and much more busy with watching his companion than himself. The last two minutes on the hill were spent in perfect silence by both of them. Then Somers offered his hand to help Helen up.

'Minutes are out,' he said.

'It's a pity!' said Helen. 'How I have enjoyed them! It was worth coming for.'

'It was worth coming for, if we had had only two instead of ten.'

'Ten!' cried Helen. 'You said five.'

'It's only five multiplied by two.'

Multiplied by something more than figures, Helen felt; and I know not if it were some secret consciousness which made her begin to talk, as they ran down the hill.

'Mr. Somers, what would you say to a person who doubted and disparaged the authority of the Old Testament?'

'I doubt if I should say anything to him.'

'Why not?'

'The good book says, 'Answer not a fool according to his folly.'

'But it says too, "Answer him."'

'Well, yes, sometimes.'

'Sometimes you must, mustn't you?'

'Perhaps you must.'

'Then, what would you say?'

'That would depend on the person, and on the form which his opposition took.'

'Mr. Satterly says all *his* Bible is in the New Testament.'

'That's a more daring proposition than he knows.'

'Why?'

'He couldn't prove it.'

'But he thinks so. He says the Old Testament is superseded.'

'Shows how much he knows!'

'But what would you *say* to him?' Helen asked, as they went running down the hill, dodging boulders, and pushing through branches of trees and underbrush.

'If I did him the honour to say anything to him—Take care, Miss Thayer! look out for that cat-brier. Wait a bit.'

'Well?' said Helen, as the obstruction was got out of the way, and nearing the open ground she went more slowly by the side of her companion, instead of before him;—'*if* you said anything to him, what?'

'I don't know; but it would be a very good thing to

show him that he is under a mistake, and that if his religion were not in the Old Testament he would scarcely find it in the New.'

'How do you mean?'

'He wouldn't understand the New Testament if it were not for the Old.'

'He does not read the Old.'

'I presume he does not; neither has he ever been in a silver mine; but he drinks his tea with a silver spoon every morning of his life, nevertheless.'

'I see what you mean,' said Helen, standing still a moment with a face of great interest; 'but do you think that is altogether true? Isn't there a great deal of the New Testament that anybody would understand, even if he had nothing else?'

'Let us look into it,' said Somers. 'Suppose we take some time and study that question out? What do you say?'

'Oh, delightful!' said Helen, with an unmistakeable accent. And then they went forward and joined the rest of the party, who were all together by this time. She could let this beautiful day go now, with a contented heart; something even better was looming up beyond.

Miss Betsy was just rolling up her knitting and sticking her needles in. Mrs. Satterly eyed the two young people as they drew near with an expression of doubtful curiosity, unsatisfied, and a trifle uneasy. Mrs. Thayer did not dare look; she made herself busy with the baskets, arranging them to go down the hill. The young men stood ready to take them up and bear them away as soon as she had done.

'Well,' said Miss Betsy, 'now we've got twenty miles to ride home. Is this what you call pleasure? I declare I'd rather do a day's washin'. *Then*, at the end, you have a basket o' clean clothes; and what you've got now is two or three baskets of dishes to wash. I allays think pleasure is awful short-sighted.'

'Young folks must have pleasure, though, Betsy,'

remarked her sister. 'What do *you* say about it, Helen?'

'It has been pleasure to me, Mrs. Satterly. I would not mind washing the dishes.'

'Not ef you hed three beaux waitin' on you. La, that does make gay times! I don't know why youth and age should make such a difference!'

'The difference ought to be the other way,' said Somers, 'and the old ladies ought to have the waiting on.'

'Think so?' responded Miss Betsy. 'I'd like to see you try it. Only not on me. I never did want no waitin' on, whether by old or young. The cleverest thing a woman can do is to learn to stan' alone. Mind that, Helen, my dear.'

But they all took their way harmoniously down to the waggons, and the old ladies did this time receive all the attention they needed, Helen keeping rather close to her mother. And then the drive home was undeniably pleasant. Through the gathering evening, with its sunset lights and colours; through the soft dusk, perfumed with flowers and new hay, for here and there a field had been already mowed; under the light of the stars, sparkling down upon the party, calm and cold, it is true, but also bright and clear; it was a pretty drive. Not much talking was done, for the elders were tired, Pixie grew sleepy, and the young people perhaps had talked themselves out, or perhaps they had things to think of. Trim was inclined to be gloomy, for he had Mrs. Thayer in Helen's place, and the other waggon was a troublesome subject of speculation with him. Mrs. Thayer tried not to think. And Helen did not indeed speculate about anything, but she gave herself to a succession of pleasant images which floated dream-wise through her mind. With nothing of the confusion of a dream, nor its inconsistency; only the somewhat arbitrary and easy sequences, the same soft vagueness of outline and connection, the same inactivity of the reasoning faculty. The world had suddenly grown so large to Helen, the things in it had grown so fair.

Why, she did not ask; as I said, she was not speculating. Starlight was tenderer than ever before; hay was sweeter; the country was a delightful country to drive twenty miles in, and driving itself was a most desirable pleasure, putting one in so agreeable a mood to enjoy, and giving one so much quiet opportunity. And then, the day behind her, with its sights and its talks and its new impressions; there was enough to do for much more than twenty miles in going them over again.

As for Mr. Somers, I remarked that he had had more experience in the world; nevertheless of him it may be said, that during that drive he never for a moment forgot that Helen was sitting behind him; and that to him too the starlight seemed to possess a singular gentle beneficence that night. He thought so still after he had got home.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE ORCHARD.

MRS. THAYER began to wonder how long Mr. Somers would make his visit. He had not, indeed, been many days at Daisy Plains, and she had no decent pretext to find fault. The young man made himself very pleasant in the house in many ways; she could not but allow that. Besides being an intelligent and cheery companion, a good and ready talker, a man of excellent manners, he was the most useful person in the world. He always had his head on his shoulders, Edward remarked; but, besides that, he never had his hands in his pockets. He was always busy at something, and, if possible, at something that was to be a convenience or comfort to somebody else. He made and put up a swing for Pixie which was a model of nice workmanship. He arranged a shelf for Mercy in the dairy which was 'jes' what she wanted.' 'Whar you s'pose, Mis' T'ayer, he done got dat ar shelf? What's *he* know about de milk pans? It's fus' rate, dat is; only I worries myself to know *how he knowed?*' It was so with other things. Mr. Somers' wits seemed to have a universal adaptability. If a handle of a knife got loose, he put it on again. If the hay-rake had lost a few teeth, he made new ones and put them in. If Helen's desk had had a fall and got broken to pieces, Mr. Somers proved himself able to fill the place of the distant cabinetmaker, and restored the desk after a day or two as good as new. He carved most remarkable figures for Pixie out of deal; he put up some truly elegant rustic pins in the hall to hang hats and coats

on; he made a work-table for Mrs. Thayer which was the admiration of the village for many a day, and a great convenience to its owner; he cut spoons and forks for culinary purposes for Helen, and also a book-rest. It was a perpetual amusement to see 'what Somers was doing now;' and they would gather round him and sit watching him, exchanging little bits of quiet talk and growing into a very familiar and everyday intimacy all the while. Mrs. Thayer saw it, and could not help it. She could not see, however, that the intimacy was taking any dangerous turn; but what could she know? She liked Mr. Somers, she liked him very much! she only wished to be sure that a similar liking would not be prematurely developed in somebody else. But she could not be sure, nor do anything about it. There was Trim, too. But Trim was easier managed. There was no mistaking Trim.

'Mrs. Thayer, Helen ought to learn to ride.'

'Yes, I wish she could; but you know she has no opportunity.'

'I've got a first-rate little pony,—just the thing for her,—a Canadian; small and tidy-looking, but strong and a good goer; easy, too; good temper, and sound, and all that. Just the thing for Helen. Mrs. Thayer,'—lowering his voice and with a wistful look at her,—'may I bring him down for Helen?'

'Where is he?'

'In a stable in Boston.'

'What is his price?'

'Oh, I don't want to sell him, you know.'

'Then how could Helen have any use of him? I should not like to take the responsibility of a valuable horse.'

'Now, Mrs. Thayer! don't you be so awfully particular. I got him for Helen; really I did, you know; I thought of her while I was making my bargain. I really don't want him; he's too small for my riding, you know, but just the thing for a lady; and gentle and

sweet-tempered and easy and everything. Mayn't Helen have him?'

'I have no objection—provided you will let me pay his price. I should like May to ride, and Pixie.'

'Mrs. Thayer, mayn't I give him to her?'

'Trim, you know you may not.'

'Why?'

'You know that too.'

'I don't indeed! Indeed, Mrs. Thayer, I can't see why I shouldn't do that. I don't want the pony, and she does, and—and there is just no reason in the world why she shouldn't have him, and why I shouldn't give him to her. Why not?'

'Trim, a lady cannot receive presents from any gentleman, unless he is a very near relation.'

'I'm as good—I'm a very old friend, you know.'

'Well, if you were both sixty,' said Mrs. Thayer, laughing, 'it might do; but you are not quite so old a friend as that.'

Trim had to compound and sell the pony, which Mrs. Thayer willingly bought. Trim could be managed and kept in his place. But what place did Mr. Somers occupy? The mother watched, but was able to make out nothing with certainty. Helen was very bright, and plainly enjoying the time; but who did not enjoy it, and when was May not bright? The household of course was livelier than common; there was more stir and more talking; but Mrs. Thayer could not see that there was any private and particular communication between those two whose relations to each other she doubted of; not more than between any other two. So it struck her one evening when she saw Somers and Helen sauntering off through the garden alone.

'Where are they going?' she said to Edward.

'Nowhere, I guess,' was his answer. 'Hollo, Seneca! which way?'

'To the orchard.'

'What are you going to do there?'

'Come along and see. We are going to study something.'

'Study! You had better say, eat apples.'

'Apples aren't ripe, thank you.'

'Oh, aren't they, though! Just you go up to the old Buchanan tree in the north-west corner and see what you'll find.'

'What is the Buchanan tree?' Somers asked his companion in a lower tone.

'I believe it came from a seedling in some Mr. Buchanan's orchard in my grandfather's time; they are very early apples, and very good. All Daisy Plains knows the Buchanan apples.'

'Then don't they get stolen?'

'Stolen? Never! There is no stealing on the Plains.'

'Happy Plains!' said Somers. 'Why, it is a second Arcadia.'

'What was Arcadia?'

'A place where people were supposed to live in primitive innocence. Ha! this old orchard is a nice place, on such an evening as this.'

He was quite right. The old turf, softly swelling around the roots of the old trees, the soft shadows which stretched over it, one tree shadow meeting another, till all the orchard was largely covered by them, and the light, which came bright, to be sure, fell only here and there in irregular caresses upon the greensward; then the touches which the sunlight gave to the trees, here brightening the top and there glancing from the stem; all this and more made the old orchard this evening a scene of rare harmonies and thoughtful peace. The stir and the worry of life had no place there; even the memory of it came softened if it came at all; the rows of ancient trees with their burden of green fruit disposed the visitor yet more to look back than to look forward; there was in them even more of reminder than of promise. Exceedingly sweet it was, but grave; there was no provocation to light-minded laughter or gay trifling. And

the young people hardly spoke at all while they were slowly going up the field to find the famous tree at the north-west corner.

When reached, the ripe fruit did make a diversion to their mood; it was tender and rich and delicious. They provided themselves with several samples of it, to sweeten their study with them, and then sought out a convenient place, where the shadow lay upon the turf under an old tree, and the swelling roots had pushed up the soil to form an easy seat.

There they took their position, and, after despatching a couple of apples, each opened a little New Testament he or she had brought along.

'Now,' said Somers, 'we will suppose that we have neither of us ever seen an Old Testament Bible. We are earnest seekers after truth; I am coming to you for counsel and help in my search; but you are not to give it to me out of anything you may have got from the Old Testament; you understand? You have never seen an Old Testament Bible.'

'But it ought to be I coming to *you* for counsel.'

'No, this is the proper arrangement on every account. You see, you do know a great deal more of the Bible than I do; but I know enough to ask questions.'

'I am sure that cannot be the state of the case,' said Helen; 'but I suppose it does not much matter. I think this is like a most delightful play, and very curious.'

'Well, we will see,' said Somers. 'I do not know what we shall make of it. But I agree with you as to the delightfulness of the play. What can be more pleasant than this orchard at this time? It is peace embodied. One would think the world had no disagreeable stirs in it, to look at these apple trees. Nothing has ever disturbed *them*.'

'Does that mean, that nothing ought to disturb *us*?'

'I do not mean it. That would be asking too much of human nature.'

'Is it more than the Bible asks?' said Helen timidly.

'What, never to be disturbed? I should think so!'

'But—to take no care for anything, to be rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, in everything giving thanks;—where would disturbance come in?'

'Where all that stopped, I suppose. Mortals cannot be out of reach of pain.'

'But *disturbance?* Disturbance and pain are two things, are they not?'

'Can you be in pain without being disturbed?' said Somers, looking at her.

'I—think so.'

'You really look as if you could,' said Somers, still regarding the face which had such a singular repose in its sweetness, a repose which looked as if it were indestructible. 'All the same, I do not believe it is a human experience. Come, let us go to something that we can prove. I hope you will never be tried. Now let us begin our Bible study. This beautiful light will not last for ever. Now then,—

'"The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham,"—

'Who was this Jesus Christ, and what is the meaning of the names?'

'He was a wonderful person, who lived in Palestine eighteen hundred years ago; and this book tells of His life. *Jesus* means "Saviour," and *Christ* means "Anointed."'

'What does "Anointed" mean?'

'Speaking in ignorance of the Old Testament, I must say I don't know. Anointing was practised among Eastern nations,—is practised still; it was, and is, used as a festive social observance; but why Jesus was called the "Anointed" I cannot say.'

'Who was David?'

'An ancestor—but that is all I can know. Except that he seems to have written some psalms in which he prophesied of this "Anointed One;" and in the sixth verse he is spoken of as a king. Probably the king of

this people of the Jews, for they were called the children of Abraham. Abraham was a further back ancestor, and seems by the way he is mentioned in other parts of this book to have been a very good man. Stop, there is more about him in the seventh chapter of Acts.'

Helen turned to that chapter and read a few verses. 'The history of the people of the Jews is outlined here, down to Solomon. We learn here something about Jacob, and Isaac, and others.'

'So far so good. But of what interest or importance to us is all that? Why should we have this long genealogical list?'

'I do not know.'

'Well, we will let that pass. But now here comes a question. In the twenty-first verse—"He shall be called Jesus,"—that is, you say, Saviour,—"for He shall save His people from their sins." Who are His people?'

'Those who obey Him, as we learn further on.'

'Good. Then what are *sins?*'

'What are they?' said Helen, looking up.

'Yes. What do you mean by sins?'

'Everything that is wrong.'

'What is "wrong"? how do you know that anything is wrong?'

'It is wrong,—well, this book tells us that it is wrong to disobey this Lord Jesus in anything.'

'Then there were no sins before He came into the world?'

'Yes, there must have been. I see!—I do not know how to tell you what sin is.'

'I think you cannot tell me. Can you explain why it is sin to disobey this Saviour?'

'It is the same as disobeying God.'

'Who is God?'

Helen looked up again, startled, intelligent.

'Without the Old Testament, I do not see how I can possibly tell.'

'We know without the New Testament that there are

a great many gods worshipped in the world; which of them is this God, and where is His rule established?'

'This book says He will rule in the end over all peoples and nations.'

'What reason have we to think the book in that speaks true? Is there any reason?'

Helen pondered.

'There is the character of Christ. One so absolutely pure and holy could not say anything but the truth.'

'As He believed it.'

'But He spoke as one having authority. He said what He knew. He claimed to be Divine Himself.'

'Then why did He appear in human form?'

'He took part of our nature. It was not a mere form.'

'Why did He do that?'

'That He might die for us.'

'What possible good could His death be to us?'

Helen pondered again. 'If I am not to borrow from the Old Testament, I am afraid I should find it very difficult to explain,' she confessed. 'It is, or was, the means by which He could save His people from their sins; but *how*, without going to the Old Testament, I really do not see that I can tell.'

'Well, let us go on with our chapter. Here in the twenty-second verse—what prophet wrote or spoke the prophecy quoted?'

'Of course, without the Old Testament I know nothing about it.'

'And likewise in the next chapter?—where the sayings of prophets are referred to, verses 5, 15, 17, and 23.'

'Of course,' said Helen.

'Then in verse 3 of the third chapter, what is the allusion?'

'As dark as possible. Prophecy and the fulfilment of prophecy, I see, would nearly cease to exist for us.'

'What could the Jews understand by the "kingdom of heaven," as John preached it?'

'Nothing at all, without their old Testament Scriptures, that I see.'

'What would they make of his exhortation to "repent"? What is repentance?'

'Impossible to say, in this case, unless we first know what the sin is from which they were to repent. It is very interesting, all this, Mr. Somers!'

Helen looked up, with a face all alive with intelligence and eagerness.

'Let us leave Matthew and take another departure. See the first chapter of John, twenty-ninth verse; and tell me, please, what you understand by "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world"?'

'I see,' said Helen. 'We get all our knowledge of it from the Old Testament. Not quite, though. We do know that all over the world men have brought animal sacrifices to atone for their sins.'

'And supposed them sufficient?'

'Yes—except in the case of the Jews, who knew they were not. But without the Old Testament we should not know so much as that. Why, Mr. Somers, without the Old Testament we should not know how to understand Christ's coming, nor His work when He came, nor the need of the one or the other!'

'You see that. Then you begin to see why so long a time of the world's existence had to pass away before He could come; how much preparation, in many ways, had to be made first; that when He came He might be recognised, and His work understood, and His word received.'

'I see it! But I never understood it before. I have wondered sometimes why so long a succession of ages, so dark and miserable as they were too, had to pass away before the Deliverer came? I see now.'

'All through this Gospel of John, you cannot get along at all without the knowledge of the Old Testament; that

is, if you read thoughtfully. The reference to the Scriptures is constant and deep in its application. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness." Suppose you do not know Moses, nor the wilderness, nor the occasion referred to? Try to understand the fifth of Romans, or the seventh, or the fifteenth of Corinthians, without the Old Testament. Or all the rest, in fact.'

'I see it, said Helen. 'I should know better how to answer Mr. Satterly next time. But I am astonished to find how little I have known, all this time!'

Somers smiled, well pleased. So sweet, so intelligent, and so ingenuous a countenance, he had never looked upon before. It was a pleasure to look; and very little danger that Helen would know he did so. Meanwhile the sun had gone down; the lights had left the tree-tops and the turf; soft shadows had crept on, and twilight melting everything into grey. The two had ended their discussion; they could no longer see to read much; yet still they kept their places on the greensward under the apple tree. It was too pleasant to go in. The hour once ended would never come back again, and it was very sweet in the passing. Other hours might come, no doubt, but they were still future; this was in the fragrant and peaceful present. Neither was in haste to move, though both knew they must move soon. The lingering minutes were the sweeter.

'We have not pursued our Greek,' said Somers suddenly.

'No,' said Helen, with a bright smile; '*we* have not, but *I* have. I have studied the alphabet over and over, and I know it now.'

'Have you a Greek grammar?'

'Yes, Edward's.'

'If you'll let me see it to-morrow, I'll give you a lesson.'

'Oh, thank you! I could really ask Edward, but I do not think he is fond of playing tutor.'

'He'll learn better in time,' said Somers. 'He is young. You must always make allowances.'

'This has been a very pleasant time,' said Helen as they rose.

'I shall never forget it. Anything more perfect than this old orchard this evening I never saw, air and light and everything!'

'And we couldn't have had anything much better to talk of,' Helen added.

CHAPTER XVII.

SUITORS.

AFTER this there were Greek lessons. Mrs. Thayer saw the pair every day, in the house or in the porch, putting their heads together over a Greek grammar, and once with a Greek Testament and lexicon. Very interested both seemed to be; but she was unable to discern anything that looked like incipient love-making under this show of learning. There was no secrecy about it; there was no consciousness. Helen was unaffectedly intent and happy, and Somers helpful and amused. Mrs. Thayer could not make out anything more.

'Could not Edward help you?' she ventured to ask one day. 'You must not impose on Mr. Somers' good nature.'

'I am sure I do not, mother,' Helen answered eagerly. 'I made sure of that. Mr. Somers likes to teach me. And he knows a great deal more about it, mother, than Ned does. He is giving me excellent help. I can soon get on by myself.'

Mrs. Thayer was inclined to hail it as a welcome diversion, when Trim brought his pony down. It was a new and absorbing matter of interest, at any rate. The whole family assembled to admire the new acquisition, even Mercy in the doorway looking on with all her eyes. It was a pretty little creature; light sorrel, with mane and tail almost white; fat and round, and kind-looking.

'He is exactly like a circus horse,' cried Edward. 'You are sure he isn't painted, Trim?'

'He isn't painted,' said Somers. Somers was examin-

ing the pony critically; feeling his legs, lifting up his feet to see his hoofs, pinching his hide, and opening his mouth.

'He's all right,' he concluded as he stepped back.

'But how is Helen going to ride him?' asked Pixie. 'She hasn't a saddle.'

'Yes, she has,' said Trim. 'I knew you had not a saddle, Mrs. Thayer, so I brought one from Boston. Here, Jem, fetch that saddle out of the waggon. Now, May, we'll go into the orchard and try how he goes.'

Helen was in a great state of delight, mingled with an odd, vague wish that it were another rather than Trim who had brought the pony. Somers examined him, but took no further part in the matter; stood by, looking amused, and left all the initiative to Mr. Satterly. Trim was in high feather. He put the saddle and bridle on the pony himself, mounted, and went careering round the orchard, and then brought him up before Helen.

'Now, May!' said he, throwing himself off.

'That's a swell saddle,' remarked Edward.

'I would rather have a good one,' Mrs. Thayer remarked quietly. 'How much was the price, Trim?'

'When I tell you, Mrs. Thayer, you shall pay it.'

'Certainly!' she said, smiling; 'and that will be before you go. I always prefer to get a good article. It is cheaper in the end.'

Trim affected not to hear; he was helping Helen to mount, and showing her how to hold the bridle. And then the play went on for half the morning; Helen riding about in the orchard, walking first, and then trotting, taking as kindly to it, Trim remarked, as if she had been brought up among horses. After her, Pixie must mount; and after Pixie was tired, Helen mounted again. The orchard resounded with merry cries of gay young voices; the sunlight and shadows played over varying groups with soft alternation. The old place was the scene of pretty doings that day, innocent, careless, happy. Mrs. Thayer looked on, with sometimes pleasure

and sometimes a painful constriction in her heart. Beneath all this fair and sweet play, what sort of earnest might be preparing? Two pair of eyes at least were already following her darling with more than strangers' interest, or so she thought. In numbers there was safety; but suppose these two counterbalanced and checkmated each other, what other confusions of choice might be coming? And how powerless she was! She stood and watched the young people a while, and then with a sigh went back to the house, where indeed household duties claimed her.

'I s'pose now,' said Mercy, 'Christiana'll be so set up, she won't put her little feet to de groun' no mo'!'

'I guess she will, Mercy,' Mrs. Thayer replied, stripping up her sleeves and tying on a great apron.

'Well, Mis' T'ayer, she's done gone and forgot her biscuits, an' dey is jes' jumpin' out o' de bowl, dey's so riz up.'

'I'll make 'em out, Mercy. I'll do that the first thing.'

'Well, but, Mis' T'ayer,—s'pect could do dat self!—but what's she doin' den? Is dem two young men come a courtin' her? Bof of 'em?'

'I guess not, Mercy. I hope not.'

'Why does you hope not?'

'Why, if both wanted her, one would have to be disappointed, you know,' said Mrs. Thayer, speaking more lightly than she felt.

'Is one of 'em gwine to hab her, den?'

'Not that I know, Mercy,' said Mrs. Thayer, with a sigh which this time she forgot to repress.

'What for you make such a big sigh, Mis' T'ayer? like you'd bus' you's heart.'

'That was foolish, Mercy. I was wishing I could take care that I cannot take, that's all.'

'Den dar's no use tryin',' said Mercy sententiously.

'No use at all.'

''Spect dat makes folks more tireder den dey has any need to be.'

'It certainly does.'

'Doesn't you want Christiana to be married, Mis' T'ayer?'

'I suppose so, Mercy,—to the right person.'

'How's you gwine to know de right pusson?'

'I cannot know, child; I have no means of knowing.'

'Christiana, will *she* know?'

'I do not know how she should,' said Mrs. Thayer slowly. 'We cannot see into people's hearts.'

'Den, what you gwine to do 'bout it?'

'I can do nothing, it seems,—but wait and pray.'

'Doesn't you t'ink you'd best do dat, and leave de sighin' alone? Christiana's got sense. *I* t'ink she'll know when de right pusson comes. An' I'll jes' make out dem biscuits; reckon I kin, good 'nuff for dese yer courtiers!'

Mrs. Thayer tried to follow the advice given her. Nevertheless, she was glad to see the end of the vacation come and to bid good-bye to Ned's college friends. Somers took his departure some time before the vacation was over, but Mr. Satterly stayed to the end. He was forced to let Mrs. Thayer pay him for the saddle and bridle, sorely against his will.

'Mrs. Thayer, won't you accept them from me?' he asked, in a half-injured tone.

'They are not for my use, Trim,' she answered, smiling.

'Mayn't I give such a little thing to May?'

'No,' she said kindly.

'Why not? There's no reason why not!'

'Yes, there is, and you know it. The customs of society forbid that a young lady should receive presents from a young man who is not her brother.'

'But I am as good as her brother. I have known her these years and years. Mrs. Thayer, I never knew you were ceremonious before.'

'Ceremony is not a bad thing sometimes.'

'To keep people at a distance that want to be near!' said Trim hotly.

'Yes, if you please,' said Mrs. Thayer, with a gentle voice,—'until they have a right to be near, Trim.'

'Give me the right, Mrs. Thayer! Say I may! You know me, and you know I love her.'

The young man's fine eyes were fiery and soft at once; he waited upon Mrs. Thayer's answer as if it were a sentence of life and death; eager, impatient, longing. Indeed, the tokens were too plain of a passionate and impetuous nature, unaccustomed to self-control or to denial. Mrs. Thayer was a little sorry for him, but not moved with fear.

'I have been afraid of it, Trim.'

'*Afraid.* Why afraid?'

'Because it is a sorrowful thing to have affection of that sort spring up where it is on one side only.'

'One side! Doesn't she like me?'

'I am sure she likes you very much,—as she should. But *love* is another thing, and that is the thing you are talking of.'

'What makes you think she could not love me, Mrs. Thayer?'

'I said nothing of "could not." I spoke only of the present. Helen, I hope, loves nobody at present.'

'Why, you *hope*, Mrs. Thayer? She is old enough.'

'And also young enough.'

'Then she isn't taken up with anybody else?'

'I have never asked her, Trim. As I said just now, I hope not.'

'Then at least I may try to make her love me, if I can?'

'Meanwhile, you see, I must pay you for the saddle. How much did you say it was, Trim?'

So at last they were all got rid of, Edward and his cronies; though Trim Satterly had really been always more a friend of Helen's; and the little household settled down to its wonted quiet ways for the long winter. And, though she watched carefully, Mrs. Thayer could not see that the subsidence of the social wave had left any

troublesome deposit behind it. Helen was exactly her usual self, neither more grave nor more gay than was her wont; the same sweet, helpful, gracious, happy creature, whose presence was a blessing universally, whose words fell as sweet as roses, whose hands were ready and skilful and deft for every work they had to do, and whose eyes shone like quiet stars out of a clear sky. There was nothing but comfort and peace where May was. Mrs. Thayer could not see that any qualification of all this had set in since the visit of Somers.

There was assiduous study of the Greek Testament. But no conclusions could be drawn from that. May now and then brought her books to her mother's side, to tell her of some beauty or some illumination of the sense which she had found in the original; it seemed to be a very simple and unmixed pleasure that she was taking. There was no dreaming with folded hands; no slackening of interest in everyday work; no change whatever, if it were not an increase of sweetness. Mrs. Thayer gradually threw off her cares, and drew breath from a relieved heart.

The subject was looked at also by other eyes, and from a different point of view.

'Well, Trim,' said his aunt, on the eve of Trim's departure to new scenes,—'well, Trim, how is it between you and Helen Thayer? Are you on, or are you off?'

'Speak sense!' said Trim. 'I am nothing; neither on nor off.'

'Why ain't you? I'd be one or the t'other, if I was you, seems to me. I wouldn't shilly-shally.'

'I *don't* shilly-shally!' said the young man passionately; 'but Helen Thayer isn't like common girls. If you think she is, you're mistaken. She don't care a pin about having a beau, and being made love to, and all that. She don't know what it means. She's as good as a sister to me; but I can't make her look at me in any other light.'

'I guess she's more'n a match for you, Trim; that's the view I'm inclined to take at present.'

'You may take any view you like,' said the young man hotly. 'You don't understand Helen Thayer, Aunt Betsy, and never would if you lived till doomsday. She's as pure as an angel, and has no more wickedness in her.'

'I'm afraid you've forgot your catechism, Trim, if you ever learned it. Well, I know what an angel means, when a young man's wits is keepin' company with his heart and his heart's off on a wild-goose chase; but nobody else sees angels; and when you come to find out, *they're* gen'ally mistaken. What does she say to you?'

'She says just what she ought to say.'

'Well, will she have you?'

'I haven't asked her.'

'I *would* have asked her, ef I was you,' said Trim's mother disapprovingly.

'No, you wouldn't; not unless you'd been a ninny,' said Trim. 'I tell you, the thing isn't in her head yet.'

'If you warn't a ninny, you'd ha' put it in her head,' remarked Miss Betsy. 'What's the good o' hevin' a tongue, I'd like to know? An' I tell you, she's too deep for you, Trim. Don't you believe it! A girl twenty years old, and not know what a beau means! *She* ain't so soft.'

'She ain't twenty, is she?' asked Mrs. Satterly.

'Very nigh. She was ten years old when her mother come back; and that's ten years ago—let me see—yes, it's ten years ago last April or May. May it was, for the apple blows was out. She's twenty if she's a day.'

'She's younger than other girls at seventeen, though,' put in Trim.

'Did you speak to Mrs. Thayer?'

'Yes.'

'What did she say?'

'She didn't say much,' Trim answered slowly; 'only that May wasn't fond of anybody yet.'

'She didn't put you off?'

'No; she wouldn't let me speak now, though.'

'She won't get a better match than my boy,' said Mrs. Satterly comfortably. 'She knows you've got plenty o' money, Trim; and there ain't a handsomer feller than you between here and Boston. I guess you hain't no cause to be afeard. You jes' hold on and hev patience. Money and looks! I guess you hain't no cause to be faint-hearted.'

'Money ain't anything, mother,' said Trim. 'Helen don't care twopence about money.'

'Helen's mother does, you may depend,' said Miss Betsy.

'Helen's mother don't!'

'*She* ain't an angel,' said Miss Betsy confidently; 'and short o' bein' an angel *or* a fool, she'd hev to care. Don't she know you're a good catch? but why she don't catch you, when she's got you, so to speak, that's somethin' I don't see into. There's *some* reason; there allays is reasons for everythin', I find. What was that Somers doin' here?'

'Amusing himself.'

'He's rich, too, ain't he?'

'No, but his father is.'

'That'll do as well. How does Helen like *him?*'

'I don't know; I never asked her.'

'If I'd hed your opportunities, I'd ha' hed no need to ask her. Couldn't you see?'

'I could see what there was to see,' broke out Trim violently, 'but I tell you there was nothing—nothing, whatever! Just all having a good time, that's all; and not one more than another.'

'Guess *she* hed,' remarked Mrs. Satterly. 'Girls jes' like that,—to hev a string o' young men danglin' after 'em. La, I guess I know! I've hed a few round me in my time; and I didn't let on to one of 'em that I liked one of 'em more'n the rest. So I hed 'em all,' added Mrs. Satterly, chuckling.

'Girls is kind o' heartless creturs,' Miss Betsy made her commentary on this statement. 'It's a sort o' cat and mouse play with 'em. I'd look sharp, if I was you, Trim. Helen's a girl, if she is an angel. She can't help it, I guess.'

Trim was so utterly incensed and outraged at these various suggestions that he deigned no more words on the subject, but flounced out of the room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHETHER, OR NO?

THE winter passed and the spring came; and then the time came when the apple trees were in blossom again. Except the external face of nature, nothing had changed in Daisy Plains. It was not a changeable place. Families and individuals went on their accustomed way, from one month to another and from one year to another. You always knew where to find everybody, so long as he was in life at all. And thus it happened that at Daisy Plains growing old was a very slow process. As there were no forced growths, so there were no sudden decays. Sweet, slow maturing, and then a long standing still in maturity, seemed to be the way of things. Mrs. Thayer looked younger than when she had come, ten years before. Helen, at twenty, was as fresh as at sixteen. Pixie was certainly growing taller, however, this spring.

'Mother,' said the girl one day, 'who's Edward going to bring with him this vacation?'

'Bring with him?' echoed Mrs. Thayer, as if the thought had never occurred to her. But it had.

'Yes. Last year, you know, he brought Mr. Somers. I wonder if he will bring him again this year.'

'Ned has said nothing about it.'

'I hope it will be somebody else this time.'

'Why, Pixie,' said her sister, 'that is very ungrateful of you, it seems to me. Mr. Somers was a good friend to you last summer.'

'How?'

'He helped you in loads of things.'

'He helped *you*,' said Pixie, lolling with her arms on the table and looking at her sister's busy hands; for Helen and her mother were making dresses for summer wear. 'He helped *you* enough; Greek, and botany, and dairy-work'—

'Dairy-work?' Mrs. Thayer interrupted.

'To be sure. Don't you know those butter prints he cut for Helen? and the wooden spoons and the ladle? May uses them all the time.'

'He helped you too,' said Helen.

'Oh, he said he'd bring some diamonds the next time he came. Do you suppose he will?'

'Diamonds?' said Mrs. Thayer again, in a kind of incredulous consternation.

'Yes, ma'am; he said he would.'

'What for?'

'Oh, to show us—May and me—what they are like. What *are* they like, mother?'

'Surely you know, Pixie. They are brilliant stones.'

'I don't see how stones can be brilliant, I am sure; but I hope he won't forget.'

'I do not know at all that he is coming,' Mrs. Thayer said.

'Ned spoke of it in one of his letters, mother.'

'Did he?'

'In a letter to me.'

Mrs. Thayer looked, but Helen's eyes were on her work, and there was no change of colour on her fair cheeks.

'Ned would speak of it to me, before bringing him or anybody,' she said.

'I suppose he will,' May added. 'I think he does mean to bring him—if you will let him; and I suppose you have no objection, mamma?'

'How came you to be talking about diamonds?' Mrs. Thayer asked hastily.

'I hardly know. It was that day we went to the mill;

we got talking about the ways of the world and the Bible commands about dressing; and then he said he would bring some diamonds the next time he came, to show us what they were like. I believe we were talking of the foundations of the New Jerusalem, too.'

'Don't you like Mr. Somers, mother?' said Pixie.

'Yes, my child. I like what I have seen of him.'

'I thought you didn't seem so very glad at the notion of Ned's bringing him here again.'

'I would just as lief have Ned alone,' Mrs. Thayer confessed; 'but that is nothing against his friend.'

There was an end, however, of her composure of spirit.

She had quieted herself with time, and having her daughters all to herself; now the old trouble was to be renewed. Should she let Somers come? How could she hinder it? Ought she to hinder it? Would Helen care? She could answer none of the questions that started up. It seemed to her jealous fear that Helen *did* care; yet she could prove nothing. Neither could she do anything in the circumstances. She could only drift and let things drift, conscious that there was a Guidance which could order them, while hers could not. And she blamed herself much that having this assurance she could not be easy. It must be confessed her friends and neighbours did nothing to help her.

'And so Mr. Somers is coming again?' said Mrs. Franks.

'Yes.'

'He graduates this year?'

'So Edward says.'

'And Edward next year?'

'Yes.'

'How is he?'

'Not strong at all. Mr. Somers, he says, has been very good to him; as kind as if he had been a brother.'

'Perhaps that is what Mr. Somers wishes to be?'

'Perhaps. But I do not know it. Oh, it is hard

sometimes to know what to do! I could not refuse to let him come?' said Mrs. Thayer appealingly.

'Why should you? The young man is eligible in every way, is he not?'

'Eligible! But I do not know that he thinks of such a thing.'

'Everybody else thinks of it,' said Mrs. Franks, smiling. 'Indeed, how could it be otherwise, with such a girl as your May? She is a darling!'

'That proves nothing,' said Mrs. Thayer hastily. 'The young man may have another attachment, for aught I know.'

'Singular that he should spend all his time here, then,' returned her friend.

'I know nothing about it,' Mrs. Thayer went on anxiously. 'I have no reason to think there is anything more than mere friendly liking between the two. I have never seen any more.'

'Dangerous!' said Mrs. Franks, again smiling.

'Yes; but what can I do? I sometimes am ready to wish I lived in a desert, where I could gather my young ones under my wings, and keep them there.'

'You could not keep them there,' said the other. 'And the desert would have its own dangers. May is under better keeping than yours, after all.'

The mother's eyes filled with tears.

'I know it,' she said. 'I believe I am rebellious, as well as unbelieving. Do you know, it is harder to trust for one's children than for one's self?'

'I have never been tried,' said Mrs. Franks soberly.

And so that passed, though it left a vibrating nerve in Mrs. Thayer's mind which thrilled every time Mr. Somers' name was mentioned. A thrill of a different sort seemed to be felt by everybody else; the pleasant stir of preparation and anticipation filled all the house, and gave a gentle touch to all that was done.

'That will be for Mr. Somers, won't it, mother?' Pixie would say, adverting to some new arrangement; and

even Helen once or twice brought up his name, saying, *apropos* to something, 'You know, mamma, Mr. Somers likes it.' Quite innocently and simply, Mrs. Thayer saw, but that proved nothing. Anything might disturb the innocent unconsciousness; and in matter of fact something did disturb it, and before Mr. Somers could get there.

It was the afternoon of the day when he and Edward were expected; a fair June day, like last year. Mrs. Thayer and her girls were sitting in the porch, idle, half because there was nothing special to do any more, and half because of an excitement of spirits that would not let them work, when a sunbonnet was seen coming along by the fence, and presently at the little gate a figure appeared with a long grey stocking depending from the knitting needles in its hands.

'Mother,' said Helen, low, 'do you see who is coming?'

'Mother,' cried Pixie, with hurried breath, '*don't* ask her to stay to tea!'

'Hush!' whispered her mother. 'Good evening, Miss Betsy.'

''Tain't evenin' yet, is it?' was the answer. 'I've done the heft o' my day's work, but I hain't done the hull of it, neither. I got sort o' tired o' things at home, an' I thought I'd come over and see how you was gittin' along. It kind o' rests me to look at something else.'

But what Miss Betsy had said on leaving home was to the following effect: 'I'm goin' over there to see how the land lays; an' if there's anything to be found out, you may depend I'll find it.'

So she took a seat in the porch and looked around her, while her needles clicked incessantly. They always were clicking, if Miss Betsy had not a broom or a duster or a butter ladle, or something else, in her hand.

'Well, your posies do smell sweet, I declare!' was her first remark. 'Who on earth takes keer of 'em?'

'We all do. Helen perhaps most of all.'

'But such loads of 'em! I've no objection to a rose-

bush here and there, and a root of balm, and lady-slippers; two or three things; that don't do no hurt and don't call for no keer neither; they'll take keer o' themselves; and the weeds won't get a chance, if there's plenty o' grass. But you've all the flowers in creation, seems to me. How do you get time for 'em? and what becomes o' the weeds in your garden? I don't see none.'

'We don't like weeds, Betsy, anywhere.'

'Like 'em! Well, I don't know as anybody likes 'em; I s'pose they come in with the curse; but I hain't no time, for my part, to fight weeds. Indoors is all I can look after. I wonder now and then *why* folks hes such a sight o' things to do. Seems to me I could get along with a little more time, if I hed it. But you're all doin' nothin', I see. Is it a company afternoon? 'Cause I hain't got my best gown on.'

'No company,' Mrs. Thayer said. 'At least, we are only expecting Edward and his friend from college.'

'Comin' this evenin'?'

'We hope so.'

'What friend has he got with him this time?'

'The same friend. They seem to be inseparable. Edward has been not very well this term, and Mr. Somers has taken the best care of him.'

'I s'pose he likes it,' said Miss Betsy.

'I have no reason to doubt that. Grudging kindness is not worth much,' said Mrs. Thayer. 'It is hardly kindness.'

'Well, I don't know about grudgin'; but do *you* believe there's much kindness in the world that hain't a purpose to it?'

'A purpose to help and comfort somebody?'

'No, a purpose to help and comfort one's self.'

'I hope there is. Why, Miss Betsy, you are kinder than that yourself.'

'I don't know if I be,' said Miss Betsy judicially. 'I guess, come to find out, if I could see it, there's mostly a reason for my doin' things. But I'll warrant you Mr.

Thingembob—what's his name?—knows what he is about.'

'Do you mean Mr. Somers?' said Pixie. 'Because he *always* knows what he is about.'

'That's what I said. Folks gen'ally do.'

'But what can you mean, Miss Betsy? Of course he knows what he is about. And he is very fond of Edward, besides.'

'I guess he's fond of all of you, ain't he?'

'I don't know,' said Pixie. 'We are very fond of him. He is just the nicest, pleasantest, best person that ever was. Really, he's a great deal nicer than Edward; only Ned is our brother.'

'Oh, Pixie!' cried Helen; 'how you talk! Are you not ashamed of yourself?'

'And what does Helen say to him?' inquired Miss Betsy, with a keen look over her knitting. 'You don't like him so well?'

'I should never think of putting him in Edward's place,' said Helen, amused.

'An' I guess he wouldn't want it,' remarked Miss Betsy. 'Don't you think he'd like another place better? Come, Helen, when is it to be?'

'When is what to be?' cried Pixie. 'What are you talking about?'

'Never mind,' said Miss Betsy; 'it ain't your affairs I'm talking about. But I'd hev things settled, Helen, if I was you. Don't let 'em go danglin'. Or be they all settled, sure enough?'

'I don't know what you mean, Miss Betsy,' Helen answered, without well knowing what she said, for certainly she was at no loss now for her visitor's meaning. 'There is nothing settled, and nothing to be settled. You are talking quite in the air.'

'Don't you let *him* talk in the air,' said Miss Betsy, noting with satisfaction the deep troubled flush which had come up in Helen's cheeks and risen to her fair brow. No, nothing was settled, she could see. 'Young folks

will, Helen. It's a good thing to pin 'em down, and not let 'em dangle too much, as I said. Things as lays loose is allays doubtful; if they don't get in a tangle they get caught somewheres else, and when you want to put your hand on 'em they ain't there. I'd bring him up to the sticking p'int, if I was you, and hev things all nice and comfortably settled. Where's the child goin'?'

For Helen, unable to bear one word more of Miss Betsy's advice, had rushed past her and disappeared into the house, rushing past her mother, too, whom she had met on the way, hastening from everybody to some hiding-place. Mrs. Thayer had been called in by Mercy to see to some important culinary matter, or she would have known how to put a short stop to Miss Betsy's animadversions. She caught a glimpse of May's troubled face, and in the porch found Miss Betsy rolling up her knitting.

'Mother,' cried Pixie, 'what's Miss Betsy been talking about? I don't understand.'

'Ah, well, Helen understands,' said that good woman. 'I warn't talkin' to you, Pixie. Good evenin', Cordelia. I s'pose your folks 'll be here directly, and you won't want me by. I'll come over agin, some time when you're alone.'

'What did she mean, mother?' said Pixie, as Miss Betsy moved off and got outside the gate. 'She's been talkin' a lot of stuff about Mr. Somers, and things being settled, and dangling, and I don't know what all. And I think May didn't like it, for she ran off. What did she mean?'

Mrs. Thayer sat down like one struck dumb. Yet she found words to remark that Miss Betsy's meaning was hardly worth searching for; and then she queried with herself, why must that woman come there just to make mischief? How much mischief? Was Helen's happy unconsciousness gone? and what then? Mrs. Thayer had often felt a secret wish that the two farmhouses did not lie within quite such a convenient distance from each

other; she had never felt it so strongly as now. But she could do nothing, least of all go after Helen. That blessed veil of ignorance could never be dropped again, behind which a girl is so safe and so happy. Must she substitute for it—a mask?

And then the young men came, stormily received by Pixie, to whom, Mrs. Thayer noticed, Mr. Somers as well as her brother gave a brotherly kiss. She tried to be as bright as every one else, for the faces of the three were shining. But where was Helen?

Just as she was asked for she came, down the steps of the porch, and to the group in the garden, and *not* as she came last year; they all felt that. Soft and quiet, blushing a little, rather grave; with an older air, no longer like seventeen. Gracious, and delicate, and sweet; no fault at all could be found with her look and manner; but it drove Somers back from a jovial glad greeting to one of profound reverence and respect. Her manner changed his, Mrs. Thayer felt; and she half fancied that there was a reflection of his again in an increased soberness with which Helen took her brother's arm and led him into the house; while Somers followed, answering Pixie's eager questions in a somewhat abstracted way. Mrs. Thayer brought up the procession. Perhaps it is no harm, she thought, if he *has* got a check; perhaps it will lead to good; but—oh, my darling, my darling!—how I wish I could shield you!—if you do need shielding.

As the supper-time went on, she thought more and more that she had not been mistaken. Pixie's gay chatter and Edward's somewhat boisterous joy covered up whatever the others might show, or not show; nevertheless, Mrs. Thayer's eyes, sharpened by anxiety, thought they could discern that Somers' manner was damped, and Helen's shadowed. They talked, and they laughed, both of them; as far as mere sound went, they contributed, no doubt, their share to the cheerful hum and buzz of social gladness; but to Mrs. Thayer's feeling the freedom and

spontaneousness was missing. She drew a deep sigh once or twice, which she did not allow to be heard.

'And how is Ned getting on, Mr. Somers?'

'Capitally, Mrs. Thayer; if he would only take a little more care of himself.'

'Oh, that's bosh!' cried Edward gaily. 'That's only Seneca, mamma; don't mind him. We ought to have called him Esculapius. He's for ever wanting to dose me or coddle me, or something.'

'Ungrateful of you, to slander your best friend! I am not an Esculapius, but I have a little common sense.'

'Precious little, in that connection,' said Edward.

And he looked well now, certainly, in the flush of summer and flush of pleasure; though when his face was quite in repose his mother could see that the lines of it were not quite satisfactory.

'And you are done with college now, Mr. Somers?'

'Unless I go back to it some day as a professor! Who knows?'

'Have you decided on your profession?'

'It is the most difficult thing to decide in the world; depends on so many things, you see.'

'I should think, in your case, mainly on one thing;—what you would like best.'

'I don't know what I like best. I do not like anything much, I believe.'

'Then something must be the matter,' said Mrs. Thayer, smiling.

'I suppose something must be the matter,' the young man responded, with an answering smile, which was very pleasant, frank, and sweet. 'Whether the matter is with *me*, or with the rest of the world, I do not quite know.'

'Of course the matter is with you,' cried Edward. 'He is like Halifax, the Halifax of James the Second's time, you know; he *will* look all round things, and when you offer the ripe side of a peach he will inform you that a worm has been at the other side.'

'What if it be true?'

'I say you had better shut your eyes and not see it. What's the use? There's a worm in most peaches.'

'Oh, Edward!' cried his sister. 'What dreadful doctrine!'

'True, though. And I say, eat the ripe half, and shy the other away.'

Seneca laughed. 'Good advice!' said he,—'if moral and social and political peaches were so conveniently divisible.'

'I did not know but you were thinking of the ministry,' remarked Mrs. Thayer.

'I never did think of it, for myself. I am not good enough, Mrs. Thayer.'

'That is an objection which may be got rid of,' she said pleasantly.

'Yes, but it *isn't* got rid of,' said Somers. 'I believe I am of too restless a disposition. I should not like to sit down anywhere and be still for the rest of my life. There is an impulse to movement and change, which perhaps, as it is innate with me, ought to be taken account of.'

'Most certainly it ought. All men are not cut out for the same thing; and the same work may be done in various ways. How do you like the law?'

'Think of being eternally in an atmosphere of quarrelling!'

'Say rather, of making peace.'

'You have to make peace in the law by such hard fighting. No, thank you. Not even a judge's wig could tempt me.'

'Judges don't wear wigs!' said Pixie.

'How do you know?'

'Because I have seen one.'

'What?—a wig, or a judge?'

'Oh, don't, Seneca! you know what I mean. I have seen Judge Thompson, who lives in Boston. He is a friend of mother's; he didn't wear a wig.'

'I shall, when I am a judge,' said Somers.

'What do you think of medicine?'

'A most dreadful employment! I would rather be for ever mixed up in men's quarrels than always hearing their groans.'

'Unless, again, you could manage to still them.'

'Ah! But there, too, Mrs. Thayer—I said I was not good enough for a divine; I am still less good enough for a physician.'

'They are not a saintly race, by all accounts,' said Edward, 'that ever I heard.'

'They ought to be.'

'Medicine, law, and divinity,' said Mrs. Thayer. 'I do not see what is left to you.'

'Always philosophy!' said Seneca lightly.

'But if you can find nothing you like to do, have you considered what is probably to be the end of it?' Helen inquired gravely.

'That I shall end by doing nothing? I have looked at that possibility also, Miss Thayer.'

'Do you like it?'

'Well, the shadow of it has rather an ugly face,' said Somers. 'Do you know what has happened to your friend Mr. Satterly? He has gone in for law.'

'Has he? That is the best thing I have heard of Trim,' said Helen heartily.

'He won't stick to it,' said Edward. 'He has too much money. Trim will never stick to anything long but his pleasure.'

Mr. Satterly did not appear to be an interesting subject, and the conversation changed.

CHAPTER XIX.

TRAINING THE PONY.

NOTHING occurred that evening of a more satisfactory nature. The talk was general; or if it split up into dialogues, it was always Pixie and Mr. Somers, and Edward and Helen, or else Mr. Somers and Mrs. Thayer, while the two sisters engaged their brother. The next day was spent by the two young men for the most part abroad. But after supper, when Helen had been missing some time from the family group, she came out into the porch where they were all sitting, enjoying the evening and the sunset. Mrs. Thayer was in eager talk with her son on one side, while Mr. Somers and Pixie occupied the other seat. He sprang up instantly to give Helen his place.

'But where will you sit?' said she, hesitating.

'Here,' said he; 'the best place in the world;' and he took a position on the floor just at her feet, or rather on the uppermost step of the small flight that led down to the garden.

'I am afraid that is not comfortable,' said Helen, while she took the vacated place, however.

'Comfortable is not the word,' said Somers dryly. 'I agree with you. It is much too good for me, to be here at all, after my long stay last summer.'

'It did not seem long,' said Helen.

'I am glad it did not! though there are too many good reasons for that to leave me any room for self-gratulation. How has the winter been?'

'Oh, pleasant. It always is.'

'Short or long?'

'I do not know—neither long nor short; it *is* a good while, you know, from the beginning of our winter to the end of it.'

'Don't you grow tired of it?'

'Oh no. How should I? There is nothing to be tired of.'

'Behold an Arcadia!' cried Somers. 'Nothing to be tired of! What would not the rest of earth's inhabitants give to know your secret! Why, don't you know that everybody else gets tired of everything?'

'Do you?'

'Well,' said Somers quizzically, passing his hand over his forehead, 'I haven't got to that stage yet, you see. I suppose it is coming. At least all the wise ones say it must come.'

'To be tired of everything?' said Helen.

Somers laughed. What a sweet bit of Arcadia she was, to be sure! He did not gaze, but he glanced up at her very frequently. The evening sun played its bright rays round the fairest and sweetest head, he thought, they would see in all their course round the world. Innocent lips; sage eyes, yet so unknowing of all the perversities and vanities and restlessness of the world; lines of pure contour, in cheeks and chin and brow, that had nothing but love and truth in them; and something more, something beside, difficult to characterize, and quite impossible to find except apart from the world's perversities and vanities; something which in the true old use of the word is meant by *gravity;* a high, pure calm, which comes of looking at earth in the light of heaven. Somers' thoughts wandered a little, but he wanted to keep Helen talking, and so he went on.

'Yes, to be sure, they say that such is the end of all earthly desires. Don't you know how Solomon tried it? and, as he said, who could do in that time more than he?'

'But Solomon had not the one thing that would have kept him from disappointment.'

'Pray, what was that?'

'The knowledge of God.'

'No? I thought he was stated to have been such a wise man.'

'In other things he was.'

'How do you know it was only in other things?'

'His life proves it. If he had had that wisdom, he would never have built altars to heathen deities right in the face of the temple he had built for the Lord.'

'You surprise me,' said Somers, turning round a little on the step where he sat, so that he could look up undisturbed into Helen's face. 'I always thought Solomon was a wise man every way. Why, what did his great prayer ask for?'

'Earthly wisdom.'

'*Earthly* wisdom!' cried Somers.

'Certainly. You look at it again. He asked for wisdom to judge his people.'

'Surely that was a good prayer, wasn't it?'

'Yes, and granted,' said Helen, smiling; 'but he did not ask for the still better thing he might have had. And so nothing satisfied him.'

'And you think, if he had possessed that other thing, he would not have found the world so disappointing?'

Helen's smile was enchanting. She had forgotten about herself in the interest of the discussion; she leaned forward a little towards Somers, who sat looking up at her; she was intent and earnest, and yet half amused.

'He would not have been disappointed if he had expected nothing,' she said, with that delightful smile.

'If he had expected nothing! no.'

'And if his expectations had been fixed on God, he would not have looked to the world to satisfy him.'

'Fräulein May,' said Somers seriously, 'if your words mean anything, they mean a tremendous deal, and more than I am in any condition to argue about. Do you

mean to say that one can have so much of heaven in this world as to dispense with earth?'

'I do not mean to say that,' said Helen, drawing back; 'I mean rather that one can have so much of heaven—of God, rather—that the things of earth are good, and not disappointing.'

'What things?' asked Somers hastily.

'All right things. Flowers and sunsets, and books and friends and knowledge; and all that is beautiful, and all that is good for mind or body.'

'And that is the way you live?' cried Somers.

Helen laughed and blushed, but answered a little reservedly,

'Yes, I think so.'

'And you are never disappointed?'

She hesitated a little, coloured more, then spoke with, as it seemed, yet more guardedness.

'How can I be disappointed, so long as I am content with what God gives me, and wish for nothing He does not give me?'

'Have you never wishes that you are not certain of His fulfilling?'

Helen waited yet longer with her answer this time, and a shadow passed over her brow.

'If I have, I am foolish; and in any case I am willing that He should decide for me.'

Somers meditated a moment in silence. Was she thinking of Mr. Satterly, or of himself? She had quite drawn back now to her first position; there could be nothing more done with Solomon.

'How's the pony?' he began again.

'Oh, Mr. Somers,' cried Pixie, 'he's well, but he's *too* well. He is grown fat and saucy. Helen lets him have just his own way, and he does what he likes.'

'And the next question is, what are his worship's likings?'

'Oh, he goes just his own way. If he wants to walk, he walks, and then the waggon has to drive slowly to

accommodate him. If he likes the dusty part of the road, he will go there and dust us all, and Helen cannot get him to go on the grass; and if he is in a fractious mood he will run.'

'He doesn't run far,' Helen put in.

'But this will never do, you know,' said Somers. 'Run? I fancy he wants correcting.'

'Oh, he won't stand that,' said Helen.

'What does he do to show his displeasure?'

'Kicks,—and shakes his head,—and stands still.'

Somers laughed. 'We must take him in hand. Evidently he wants educating. And you must educate him, Fräulein Helen.'

'I? I don't know how.'

'I will show you.'

There ensued upon this a series of exercises with the pony, which turned out greatly to the delight of Helen and her sister, and presumably to that of Somers himself. Daily the three were to be seen in the orchard, busy by the hour together; Helen receiving instruction which she forthwith imparted to pony, who improved visibly under the training. So did Helen, and Pixie looked on and watched every step with intense edification. Mrs. Thayer often stood in the porch and from there looked on at the doings of the group; glad at her children's evident pleasure, yet anxious, as in these days she had learned to be anxious; a new lesson for her; she had never been careful before, all the days of her life. Now she rose up and went to bed with a burden at her heart.

It was not that she had any objections to Somers, for she liked all she knew of him; and he was certainly a delightful inmate and companion in the house. But she could not decide what all this intercourse was coming to, or likely to come to. It was intimate, cordial, free, as of persons that much enjoyed one another; but Mrs. Thayer could have wished that it had been more free or less; it was uncertain, and therefore dangerous. The two young people were very much together, but that in the

circumstances was of course; and she could not discern anything unequivocally special in Somers' manner to Helen, nor determine from the girl's manner towards him whether she cared more for him than the pleasant summer companion of a day. Indeed, Helen held back more and was more undemonstrative than she had been the summer before.

One day, soon after the horse exercises began, Miss Betsy came over and found Mrs. Thayer standing in the porch, so intent upon the doings of the group in the orchard, that she never regarded her visitor's step on the gravel walk.

'How d'ye do?' said the latter, who as usual had her stocking in hand, and was knitting even as she came along. 'I get tired o' things at home, and I told Sarah Ann I'd come over and see how you was gettin' along. I s'pose you've got your hands full, like we have?'

'Pretty full,' Mrs. Thayer responded pleasantly. 'Shall we go in? the sun is rather bright yet.'

'What's goin' on yonder?' said Miss Betsy, without regarding this hint. 'Who's that in the orchard?'

'The girls, and Mr. Somers, and Edward.'

'Ain't ridin' there, be they?'

'No; Helen is taking lessons.'

'In what? Du tell! I'd like to go and see. Lessons of Mr. What's-his-name! Does he know so much?'

While she spoke, Miss Betsy descended the steps from the porch and made straight for the gate, and Mrs. Thayer had no choice but to accompany her, explaining as she went along the character of the lessons. I doubt, however, if Miss Betsy heard the explanation, her eyes were too busy to allow her mind to receive anything through her ears. She went into the orchard, and paused a few rods from the group around the pony, where she stood still, for the moment all eyes.

'What air they doin', will you tell me?'

'If I understand, which I'm not sure about, Helen is teaching the pony to come up to her.'

'Come up to her! Why, she's got her whip and she's whoppin' him!'

'That will make him come up, though; she does not strike hard. See!—see how he walks up to her. It is really very curious.'

'My sakes alive!' said Miss Betsy slowly; 'it's the curiousest thing ever I see! And for pity's sake, what does she want him to come up to her for? He can't do that when she's on his back. What's the good of it?'

'I don't know,' said Mrs. Thayer; 'but Mr. Somers says it is essential. And really the pony is behaving better than ever I saw him. Mr. Somers has ridden him a little and put him in order. The pony was getting rather obstreperous; and Helen did not know how to manage him.'

'An' you call that managin' him, now? tappin', and steppin', and coaxin', and strokin'; and now a bit o' sugar! I guess somebody else is gettin' *his* bit o' sugar out o' all that, ain't he?'

Mrs. Thayer made no answer.

'How comes this Mr. What-d'ye-call-him to know so much about horses? Maybe he's been in a circus and learned.'

'He knows a good many sorts of things,' Mrs. Thayer answered carelessly.

'An' now, I s'pose he's trainin' 'em both at once, ain't he? an' you stand by, Cordelia, so I s'pose it's all right; but it's a queer way to court a girl, I do declare. I never see the like. But I'll tell our Trim his pony's run off with his sweetheart, poor fellow!'

'You will tell him nothing of the kind, Betsy. There is no thought of courting here, that I know of. You would be doing Helen great harm. Don't put such a thing in her head.'

'I guess I won't,' said Miss Betsy drily. 'Do you think, Cordelia, that sort o' thing waits to be put in a girl's head? It grows there, as natural as cherries in

June. She knows all about it, and she knows which one of 'em she likes best too; but don't *you* know?'

'Not I; and I hope she does not.'

It is doubtful if Miss Betsy heard; she was looking at the party of young people who were approaching her; a pretty sight, surely. Helen led her pony by the bridle; her hat was off, for coolness, and her sweet flushed face was half smiling with pleasure and her eyes still lighted up with the excitement of what she had been doing. It was no gratification to see Miss Betsy; nevertheless, pleasure had the upper hand; and Helen was a lovely picture. Her hair a little fluffy and disordered, her lips just parted in triumph at the successful lesson; her eyes hiding, and yet not altogether hiding, a certain sweet mystery; so she came slowly towards her mother and Miss Betsy. The two young men behind her were good specimens of young manhood; open air and warmth had given Edward's face a look of more flourishing health than sometimes belonged to it; and Somers, who also had his hat off, was a handsome, lithe, powerful fellow, with a head and face very expressive of intelligence and spirit. He was talking to Pixie, who held his hand familiarly, and would herself have attracted the notice of any impartial beholder, the child was growing up into such sparkling beauty. There was nothing in all this which should have put Miss Betsy's mental nature out of tune; the scene was full of harmonies, and properly would have brought a smile upon her face; but no smile came. Miss Betsy was not a bad woman at all, and certainly wished no ill to her friend's family; but unluckily she thought she saw in the scene before her something unfavourable to the interests of her nephew Trim. Now neither did Miss Betsy love Trim Satterly with any tenderness; she never had loved him; but what will you have? He was her nephew, he was her sister's son; and Helen Thayer was the best match in all the country side, both for beauty and money, not to speak of character, which at this moment Miss Betsy did not take into consideration.

This young man, no doubt, was after Mrs. Thayer's money; why should he have it? Report said he had enough of his own. So had Trim enough of his own; but Trim was a Daisy Plains man, and an old friend, and a neighbour's son, and had every right to be preferred. Miss Betsy eyed the approaching group with no good will.

'Well, Helen,' said she (knitting all the time, she had no need to look at her fingers), 'what air you doin', I should like to know? I've ben watchin' you, and I can't make head or tail of your motions.'

'It was the head that was in training to-day,' put in Somers.

'Whose head? You are sure it warn't the heart?'

'I do not know,' said Somers, with a speculative look of inquiry, 'whether such a thing as a heart is belonging to pony. Perhaps; I am half inclined to think, in that case, his heart *was* touched. I noticed a sort of contrite expression in his eyes once or twice.'

Helen was vexed, but could not help laughing. The increase of colour, however, which accompanied her laugh incensed Miss Betsy.

'Who is settin' about to train the pony's head, or heart either?'

'Oh, Helen,' cried Pixie. 'And Mr. Somers is showing her how.'

'Trainin' both at once? Well, Helen, if I was you, I guess I'd make him wait a little before he did that.'

'Make whom wait?' said Pixie. 'Oh, Helen is getting along beautifully; the pony walks straight up to her when she wants him, and is getting his mouth beautifully limber, Mr. Somers says.'

'What's the good o' that?' Miss Betsy asked ungraciously.

'To make him obedient,' said Somers.

'He obeyed Trim well enough,' said Miss Betsy. 'I can't see what's the sense o' pattin', and tappin', and playin' nonsense with a horse, and workin' his mouth up

and down, and standin' lookin' at him, like that. But I s'pose one sort o' play'll do as well as another. Only, Helen, my dear, don't you let no trainer get hold o' *you*, till you've made up your mind who you'd like to foller round all the rest o' your life; that's my advice to you.'

Helen's face grew very grave; it was flushed before; she turned away without speaking and went towards the gate. But as they all went the same way, she did not escape hearing the conversation that followed.

'Is that Miss Sawyer's notion of the holy estate of matrimony?' Somers asked, with mock gravity.

'Well, I warn't speakin' to you,' Miss Betsy answered. 'It ain't my idee o' the man's part in it, by no means.'

'But in Daisy Plains, I am to understand, that is what is expected of the lady?'

'Ain't it what's expected everywhere?' returned Miss Betsy grimly. 'It's what women *do*, all over the world pretty much, I expect; and what you do to-day'll be expected of you to-morrer. Ain't that so? An' what's a woman to do, by the law o' the land and by the law o' the Bible, but to foller her husband round, no matter which way he's fool enough to go?'

'Or wise enough,' suggested Somers.

'There's more fools than wise folks in the world. The woman often hez all the sense o' the two in her head; but that don't help nothin'. If the man could see it, he wouldn't be such a fool no longer. An' so she hez to foller roun', as I said, and pick up all his dropped stitches, if she can.'

'But that is a deplorable view of things!' said Somers.

'I suppose,' remarked Edward, 'that is what has deprived some man of the advantage of having Miss Betsy to "follow round" after him! I never thought you would shirk your duty, Miss Betsy, for fear of consequences.'

'That man don't live!' said Miss Betsy somewhat savagely.

'Died for want of your care?'

'Now you shut up, Ned Thayer! I ain't a-goin' to take none o' your nonsense. Wait till you get a wife; I'll be boun' she'll hev to run round after you. I never see a man yet that *I* thought was worth it; and I've seen some—as good fellers as you, too. I think it's just ridiculous, the way girls is glad to get married and their mothers is glad to hev 'em; when it's just the beginnin' o' slavin' after somebody that ain't no better than they be, in no ways, only just that he's a man!'

'But, on the other hand, Miss Betsy, you must remember it is something to have somebody to take care of you,' Edward went on wickedly.

'To take care of me!' the lady echoed.

'Not of *you;* I know you have nobody to take care of you; but your married sisters, I mean.'

'I never had no sister but one, and she's a caution. Take care of you! Of all helpless creturs that live, a man is the helplessest. If it warn't for women round you, from the time you're born till the time you die, I wonder what 'd become of you! The best of you wants one special, who hain't got nothin' else to do but to look after you; and a nice time she hez! I know! If you can git the bridle on once, then she soon learns she hez to walk up. But it ain't no good my talkin'; I s'pose the world will go its own way as long's the world stands. Some folks wears the bridle and some folks hez the whip; I never was fool enough to put my head in, though.'

Miss Betsy seemed cool enough, but perhaps the subject or the handling of it had chafed her, for she would not go into the house. She departed on her homeward way, knitting as she went. The two young men made merry over her as soon as she was out of hearing; but Mrs. Thayer a little anxiously went to seek Helen, who had vanished long ago. Helen was in her room, putting herself in order, and tying on her white dairy apron.

'What now?' asked Mrs. Thayer.

'Pot cheese to make up, mother. And then,—would you like to have some biscuit for supper?'

'Mercy can make them.'

'Oh, I would rather than not.'

'Yours are a little the best. Dear, have you enjoyed your pony work?'

'Oh, very much, mother!' Helen's cheeks grew more rosy. 'If only that woman would let one alone!'

'You must not mind her. She means no harm.'

'She does harm, though,' said Helen; and ran down, staying no further question.

CHAPTER XX.

A BREAK-UP.

MRS. THAYER, as days went on after that, was a little afraid that Miss Betsy *had* done harm. Whether it were her suggestive talk or the appearance of Trim upon the scene, she could not tell; but Helen seemed to be less free in her manner, and kept herself much more frequently in the background. She often kept herself quite out of sight, finding something to do in dairy or kitchen which formerly her mother was sure would not have been suffered to interfere with Helen's part in the social pleasure of the family. She had always some reason to give, and Mrs. Thayer did not dare handle the matter seriously. Moreover, and this was worse, when Helen was with the others she maintained a certain reserve, not natural nor usual with her; and if she favoured either of the young men, by her manner seemed oftenest to distinguish Trim Satterly rather than his rival. Mrs. Thayer was concerned about this symptom, for she did not believe that Helen really preferred Trim; nay, she knew that the show of favour was quite as likely as not a token that the reality was given in another quarter. At the same time, others would not so understand it; and she could say nothing and do nothing. Helen was shy, she could see, with both the young men, but far more shy of Somers. She held back; she went out of his way; she was constrained in her words and looks; and if Miss Betsy or Trim's mother were present, she went off altogether, if that was possible, and quitted the company. After a while Mrs. Thayer saw, or fancied,

that this course of action had a reflex effect on Mr. Somers. *He* began to draw back; was less free and unconstrained in his manner; sought out Helen less, and, if he did not observe her less, did it, as it were, carelessly or surreptitiously. The family life was not growing more genial or comfortable under these cross influences; only Edward and Pixie, who knew nothing of them, kept things in a certain train of liveliness. Mrs. Thayer saw Somers once or twice sitting with a book and not turning his leaves over; saw him sitting without a book, in grave meditation. At other times he would rouse up to more life and gaiety than usual, but now he did not attempt to draw Helen into it. For some reason or other, they had drawn off, outwardly, from each other; yet there was nothing that could be laid hold of, to speak of it. Mr. Satterly appeared to be in a state of blissful content; was very often at the house, and happy when there; and Mrs. Thayer looked on anxiously at her young people, doubtful what would come of it all.

Meantime the summer had advanced to July, when Mr. Somers was summoned home suddenly by a letter from his father. He went off to Boston, telling Mrs. Thayer he would be back in a few days to finish his visit.

They all missed him. Even Mrs. Thayer had become so used to his bright face, and his cheery, helpful ways, and his pleasant conversation, that she confessed the house was different without him. Pixie lamented openly. Helen alone said never a word. Her mother could have wished she would speak, like the others. Instead, there appeared to the tender eyes which watched over her a sort of lassitude, not natural to Helen. Her energies seemed to droop; and, what was very rare to her, indeed unheard of before, there came to light now and then a degree of irritability. There was no longer any constraint in her manner, but it did not gain in liveliness; she was very silent. Trim Satterly lost at a stroke all his apparent advantages, and was distinguished no longer; indeed, Helen put him at a distance with a coolness which was

probably as unconscious as it was cruel. No eyes but Mrs. Thayer's were keen enough or wise enough to read all this; it was not so marked as to draw general notice; but the mother read it well, and wearied herself in secret over what she had no power to touch. Only one thing she was sure of; Mr. Somers had paid his last visit at Daisy Plains, unless he should show good reason to the contrary. Of his feeling she was profoundly uncertain. That he liked Helen, and that he had enjoyed and sought her society, there was no doubt; and Mrs. Thayer did not for a moment suspect him of untruth or of careless trifling with her daughter's happiness. In some respects that would have been easier to deal with. Mr. Somers had done nothing for which he could be blamed, although the mother wanted to blame him; he had merely shown himself pleasant and made himself desirable to everybody. She could not form any judgment respecting his deeper feelings, nor be sure that she had seen anything in her house but a congenial society and an enjoyable friendship. Men ought to be more on their guard! she said bitterly; but, after all, what were they to guard against? You could not ask of a man that he should make himself disagreeable or show himself unsocial. She began to dread with strained anticipation the time of Mr. Somers' return.

He had been gone nearly two weeks, and Edward and Pixie were reckoning the hours to his possible coming. Helen had been very silent and grave all day; towards evening she went out into the back garden to gather raspberries. Mrs. Thayer's garden held a fine variety, large and yellow, called I think at that time Antwerps. Presently Mercy came out and joined her.

'Reckon we's gwine to have company dis yere evenin', ain't we?' she began, pulling the rich fruit swiftly into her dish.

'I don't know, I'm sure,' Helen answered indifferently.

'Who's gwine to eat all dese yere, den?'

'Oh, they must be picked,' said Helen. 'They would drop off.'

'What harm in dat, if nobody wants 'em?'

'They will be wanted, Mercy; everybody likes them.'

'Mr. Somers particular, don't he?'

'He likes them, I believe.'

'When's he gwine to come back?'

'I don't know.'

'S'pose you don't keer, neider?'

'Why should I care?'

'Dunno,' said Mercy. 'Dar ain't no tellin' 'bout sich t'ings. I t'ought maybe you did. 'Pears like *I* keers; and I ain't nobody. Ain't he a right smart pleasant man, dough?'

'Certainly. He is all that.'

'An' ain't he good?'

'I do not doubt it.'

'An' don't he t'ink you's de top o' all creation?'

'I? Not at all,' said Helen loftily. 'He has seen more of the world than you have, Mercy, and he knows better. Don't talk nonsense.'

'Well, I is talkin' nonsense, o' course,' said Mercy; 'but I likes him a heap better'n dat ar Satterly man, or forty sich.'

'Why, of course!' said Helen. 'Who don't?'

'I t'ought Christiana war mighty kind to dat ar Mr. Satterly,' said Mercy, lowering her voice to a soft tone of confession.

'I? No. Nonsense! Never, Mercy!'

'Dar is ozer folks t'ought so,' said the girl in the same tone.

'Who? what folks?'

'Mr. Satterly,' said Mercy in a whisper. 'Didn't he look as smilin' as a hull nosegay o' buttercups, dough? An' I see nobody else smilin'.'

'That will do, Mercy,' said Helen hurriedly; 'we have got plenty for tea, and the rest will keep best on the bushes. That is all nonsense that you've been talking—just nonsense.'

She took the berries and went in, her faithful friend

following her with a very thoughtful and doubtful look. In the sitting-room the table stood ready set for tea, and Helen now added her raspberries to the store of preparation already on the table. Her mother was there and watched her, fondly admiring, as the girl went about the table, pouring her golden fruit into glass saucers and placing them beside the several plates. Quiet and delicate in her movements and ministrations, nice in her handling, entirely attentive to her business, Mrs. Thayer yet read the thoughtful, tender, sensitive nature which was even then, and at all times, more busy with higher things. There was grave dignity on the brow; there was a sweet firmness in the lines of the lovely curved lips; the eyes, lustrous and deep, were shadowed by the lids that drooped a little over them, as if weighted with thought or feeling. Mrs. Thayer's own eyes were fascinated and held. Helen did not notice her; she went on dispensing her golden store round the table, evidently thinking of more than the raspberries; until her mother saw a sudden check come upon her movements, a moment's pause of attention, together with a quiver of the eyelids and a light rising of colour in the cheek. It was but momentary, and Helen had begun again her interrupted activity before Mrs. Thayer heard a sound outside. It was a step coming into the porch; then she heard Somers' voice speaking to Pixie, and the girl bounded into the room announcing his arrival. She was followed immediately by Somers, and Mrs. Thayer was struck by the perfectly calm and ordinary manner of Helen in receiving him. Not a change of tone, no shyness, no colour; simple, unexcited, quiet, and kind politeness. If Mrs. Thayer had not seen that previous start and pause!—

But she must welcome him herself, with her heart full of other thoughts; so the ordinary current of human social life sweeps over and hides all the abysses of its channel. Somers himself was hardly so composed, she thought.

'Oh, we have missed you so, Seneca!' Pixie was saying. 'We cannot get along without you.'

'How did you manage last winter?'

'Oh, well, we knew that summer was coming, you see.'

'I am afraid you will have to learn to do without me again.'

'No, we won't; not for a great while. We are going to keep you.'

'Yes; for how long, do you think?'

'I don't know. Oh, a *great* while. You see, we can*not* get on without you, Seneca.'

'You will have Mr. Satterly.'

'Trim? Pooh, *he's* no good! Considering that he is a tolerably well-looking young man, he is the least use of anybody I ever saw. Edward is pretty bad, but Trim is worse. He can't do anything but look at Helen.'

'Hush, Pixie!' said her mother.

'So your estimate of people goes upon the scale of their usefulness?' said Somers, with some effort, Mrs. Thayer thought. Helen had left the room several minutes before.

'I like people to be good for something.'

'If you please, what am I good for? It is sometimes useful to know the opinion our fellow-creatures have of us.'

Pixie looked up at him from under her long eyelashes, and it struck both the persons present how very handsome the girl was growing. She was not at a handsome age; nevertheless the promise was there of sparkling beauty. The face was as pure as her sister's.

'I am not your fellow-creature,' she answered demurely.

'The worse for me!' said Seneca.

'Why? But, Seneca, you *are* going to stay now, aren't you? and we can go everywhere,—to the mill, and to Bell Mountain, and to the sea; we can go on horseback now, some of us; and that will be great fun.'

'I hope it will, but I am very sorry I shall not share it. I am going back to Boston to-morrow, Pixie.'

'Oh!—to-morrow! You are not!'

'I am sorry, I must.'

'But you'll come right back again?'

'Not this summer.'

'Why not? Where are you going?'

'To China.'

Pixie almost screamed. 'Oh, Seneca! What for *are* you going to China? Don't!'

'I am going,' he said, smiling, yet gravely. 'My father wants me to go. I have consented to go. I must go.'

'What for?'

'Pixie, you are passing polite bounds,' said her mother.

'No,' said the young man; 'she has a perfect right to ask, and it is quite proper that I should give an account of myself to friends who have harboured me so long and so kindly. My father wants me to go, Pixie, as supercargo of a ship.'

'What is that?'

'I go to take charge of his property in the vessel, and to look after his affairs in China.'

'Then you are going to be a—what is it?—a shipowner, a merchant like your father, instead of a lawyer or anything else?'

'I do not know. I am going to make this one voyage.'

'And very proper too,' said Mrs. Thayer, speaking with some difficulty. 'It is probably the best thing you could do. There is always a great deal to be said for the Eastern custom of sons walking in the footsteps of their fathers.'

'There are the steps ready made for them,' said Somers. 'I don't know if it be an advantage.'

Here Pixie bounded into the kitchen.

'May!—just think! Seneca isn't come to stay; he's going right off again—to-morrow;—he's going to China!'

'Pixie, I cannot attend to you until these eggs are done; go away, child.'

'Go away! Do you hear what I tell you, May? Do

you hear? Seneca is going to China. What are you talking about eggs?'

'The eggs must be done, however, for we want them for supper. Just stand out of my light, Pixie.'

Pixie ran off again, as fast as she had come; and a few minutes afterwards the eggs made their appearance on the board, Helen almost immediately following them. She looked as usual; Mrs. Thayer's anxious glance made out so much; and she behaved as usual; with the exception, perhaps, that she did not talk. Helen was never loquacious; to-night she volunteered no words at all. Also she seemed to look at nobody; for none of the eyes which sought her could see anything but downcast or averted looks. Mrs. Thayer, on her part, threw herself into the breach, and talked much more than was her wont. She had a vague notion of shielding Helen, without being sure that Helen needed shielding; and she kept the conversation going, with help from Pixie, who at no time was chary of words.

'What sort of a place is China, Seneca?'

'A large place.'

'I could tell so much from the maps. What else do you know about it?'

'Not much, Pixie. The men are yellow, and wear long hair, and drink tea.'

'I know all that.'

'Then it seems you know as much as I do.'

'But what are you going to do there? I shouldn't think it would be pleasant to live among yellow men.'

'There are a few white ones to keep me in countenance.'

'Seneca, how comes it that there are men of so many colours in the world? Why aren't they all white?'

'I suppose for the same reason that they are not all yellow.'

'What reason is that?'

'You credit me with being more of a philosopher than I am. Some people have supposed they must have had

different parents and not be all descended from Adam and Eve.'

'But the Bible says they are.'

'True. So that supposition falls away.'

'What was it, then? How come people to be red and yellow and black and white?'

'Pixie, you are importunate,' remarked her mother. 'Do not be troublesome.'

'Seneca is a philosopher, mamma; and I am asking a proper question for a philosopher. Knowledge cannot be troublesome to him.'

'But ignorance may.'

'If it wasn't for ignorance, what would a philosopher have to do?' said Pixie acutely.

Somers laughed, and answered her; but Mrs. Thayer could not help thinking that he too was somewhat preoccupied and sober.

'Noah had three sons, Pixie; Shem, Ham, and Japheth. They were all very different from one another, to begin with.'

How do you know?'

'Because their descendants are to this day.'

'Different from one another?'

'Very distinctly and markedly.'

'How?'

'That would take us rather too far. They *are* different, and in distinct and important ways. Then their children were scattered abroad from the Tower of Babel; and climate, food, and habits of life, for thousands of years, have wrought the surface changes of which you speak. The original differences of which I spoke are mental, not bodily.'

'Oh!' said Pixie. 'Because I was thinking—Helen and I look very much alike.'

'You are not alike, though.'

'Why aren't we?'

'I don't know,' said Somers, with a short laugh. 'The fact admits of no doubt.'

'Mamma,' said Pixie, appealing, 'are May and I not like each other?'

'In face you are a good deal like each other.'

'In what else are we not? *I* don't know. I think we are just alike.'

'Which shows *you* are not a philosopher,' said Somers; and the conversation changed. It was kept up brightly by Mrs. Thayer, who thought she was doing the best thing she could for her daughter. But as they left the table Helen said to herself rather bitterly, 'What could keep mother running on at that rate to-night? She did not give him a chance to speak—anything I wanted to hear.'

And the rest of the evening passed in a manner equally unsatisfactory. Desultory talk, in which no one could take any pleasure, the minds of all being full of the sense that pleasure in that connection for the present was disposed of; then the good-nights, which were painful, being the last.

And then there came the breakfast in the morning, specially good and plentiful, though that was not needed; with dishes that Seneca particularly liked. 'We have got waffles for you,' said Pixie sorrowfully; 'but there is no fun in eating them.' She managed to do her share, however. Helen, her mother noticed, ate none; nor of any other dish that was on the table. It had been the same way last night at supper, although by no one observed except by her mother; the girl was for the present living on something else beside food. But she was entirely composed, quiet and pleasant as ever. That she was not talkative would hardly be laid against Helen; there was nothing mournful or cast down in her appearance or manner; nothing more than a friend's regret at a friend's departure.

'How long do you expect to stay in China, Mr. Somers?' Mrs. Thayer asked, half for herself, half for another. But Mr. Somers replied that it depended on what he, as yet, hardly knew.

'You know a little, though,' said Pixie. 'How long *must* it be, and how long *may* it be?'

'You are aware it takes half a year to get there, and another half year to come back. It can hardly be less than two or three years, at the smallest, Pixie.'

'Two or three years! Oh, that is for ever! And how long *may* it be?'

'Not longer than for ever,' said the young man, with a grave smile. 'Don't forget me.'

Pixie was very much dismayed and disturbed; and the feeling was so general that there was no temptation, and no endeavour, to linger over the leave-takings when once breakfast was over. Mrs. Thayer gave kind words and wishes. But Helen, she noticed, gave nothing; she said not even a word; and Somers said no word to her. Only a warm hand-clasp passed between them; else not even a look, for the girl's eyes were not raised, and only she knew that the clasp had lingered long enough to make it significant. Why did it linger? what did it mean? did it mean anything? But then, *why* had it lingered so long, with such clinging pressure? It seemed to Helen that her consciousness at first was all swallowed up in that one sensation of her hand in Somers' hand; and she stood like one dazed, when he had left her, hearing vaguely the voices outside, whither she did not follow, and then the grating of the wheels as the buggy moved off. Then Helen moved, and Mrs. Thayer when she came in did not find her.

CHAPTER XXI.

A FIGHT.

INSTEAD of Helen, there was Mercy standing looking out after the departing vehicle.

'Whar's he gone, Mis' T'ayer?'

'A great way off—to China.'

'Cheeny? dat's todder end o' creation, ain't it?'

'Very far off,' said Mrs. Thayer, with a sigh.

'Ain't he nebber comin' back no mo'?'

'I do not know, Mercy.'

The girl looked wondering, excited, indignant. Her eyes flashed fire at her mistress.

'What's he done been here all dis time fo', den?'

'Hush! He is a friend, and we are very sorry to miss him, Mercy.'

But both women stood still, silent and solemn, for some seconds thereafter; Mrs. Thayer feeling more shaken by her handmaiden's sympathy than she could account for, and not immediately finding self-control; and Mercy meditating. Pixie in the porch was giving way to tears. Mercy spoke again slowly and thoughtfully:

'Mis' T'ayer, is dat ar true, what I've heerd and read in de Book,—how all t'ings is good to de Lord's people,—is dat all true, for sure?'

'Everything good to them?—it does not always look so, Mercy,' Mrs. Thayer answered dreamily.

'But is dat ar *true*, sure 'nuff? De Book do say dat, don't it?' Mercy pursued anxiously.

'It does say so; and whatever it says is certainly true, Mercy—no doubt of it, however things may look to us

poor creatures.' But with that Mrs. Thayer had very nearly broken down. She commanded herself and stood grave and still, all she could attain at the moment. Mercy said no more, and Mrs. Thayer went out of hearing of Pixie's sobs, which she could not bear.

It was a heavy day to the mother. She tried to make out what sort of a day it was to her child; but she could not. She was foiled. Helen was busy, persistently busy; finding household matters to attend to one after another; but her manner was as usual, and her looks, for aught Mrs. Thayer could see. The sunny, sweet, pure face was like itself, a little sober perhaps; and it is true that when Pixie came into the kitchen with her outspoken laments, her sister stopped her; yet not directly but indirectly, finding for the instant something for Pixie to do which gave her thoughts a diversion and checked her tongue. A great deal of work was done that day, of pickling and preserving; jars and jars were filled, fastened up, labelled and put away. The steady precision and method with which Helen went to work accomplished large results and with singular neatness and speed. At night she confessed herself tired, and went early to bed. They were all tired; even Edward was a little disconsolate at missing his chum, and so was no help to the rest of the party. He did not say that Somers, as he shook hands with him for the last time, had remarked, 'I don't know but I have been a great fool.' Edward was not of that opinion; he thought Somers' decision to go as supercargo to China was the only wise thing his friend could do, and regarded the remark as an evidence of weak vacillation, probably forgotten in five minutes more. He wished he were going as supercargo to China himself.

But Edward brightened, and Pixie, after a day or two; while to Mrs. Thayer it seemed that the restless activity of Helen was not diminished. She seemed cheerful, however, and as usual in every other respect. Mrs. Thayer could find no opportunity of speaking. At last, two or three days after Somers' departure, going up to bed some-

what later than was her wont, something impelled her to look into the girl's room; she gently pushed the door open, and saw Helen's figure outlined against the window where she was standing. The window was open, and Helen stood with her forehead leaning against the sash. Mrs. Thayer went in softly and stood beside her. Then the girl started slightly and held up her head, folding her arms. It was a dewy, glistening summer night; everything without was as it were breathing life and fulness; a hum of insects in the air, a scent of flowers and fruits; a genial warmth brooding over the earth; one could almost feel the palpitations of nature's heart. Soft, kindly, odorous, the laden air hardly stirred. Helen did not speak, and Mrs. Thayer stood still. Pixie's regular breathing showed her fast asleep. Mrs. Thayer was afraid to move, yet she must.

'What are you doing, my child?' she whispered.

Helen did not speak; she hesitated, and then, turning, gave herself to the arms that enfolded her, and laid her head on her mother's bosom. What word next to say, Mrs. Thayer did not know; she spoke none, and Helen spoke none. She did not weep either; there were no tears; the moveless hush said more than tears could have done. The ache in Mrs. Thayer's heart grew correspondingly heavy, but what could she say? And the two women stood so, without stirring, and with never a word, for a good half hour. Then Mrs. Thayer knew some move must be made.

'May—my child,' she whispered.

Helen lifted her head from its hiding-place. In the starry gloom they could not well see each other's faces.

'What are you going to do?'

Helen paused, and then said under her breath,—

'Wait.'

'Wait for what?' said Mrs. Thayer promptly. But Helen made no answer.

'Wait for what, my child?' she repeated, with an unconscious sorrowful accent.

'Nothing, mother,' said Helen, freeing herself out of her mother's arms. 'There is nothing to wait for. I do not know what I meant.'

'But what was your thought? You may tell *me*.'

'It is no use, mother. It was no very good meaning,—if I had any.'

'What did you mean?' Mrs. Thayer insisted.

'Some things are better not spoken,' said Helen. 'I mean, wait — till—till the morning!' With which word she laid her head down again on her mother's shoulder.

'Wait *here* till the morning?' inquired Mrs. Thayer in doubt.

'Oh no!'

'What then, darling?'

'Not the morning that comes every twenty-four hours. Never mind, mamma; don't you mind,' said the girl, pressing affectionate kisses upon her mother's lips. Her own lips were cold. 'Never mind. It will come!'

'What?' demanded Mrs. Thayer.

'Morning,' Helen's lips breathed.

'My child,' said Mrs. Thayer, rousing herself in a kind of desperation, 'what you must do now is to go to bed and sleep, and not stand at the window any more. Will you? And to morrow we will talk. This is not the time nor the place.'

Helen quietly withdrew from her mother, as if to obey, after another kiss.

'And in the meantime, my child, there is one Friend who never fails nor forgets.'

'Yes,' Helen whispered again.

'Cannot you trust?'

'I do.'

'What?—and whom?' Mrs. Thayer asked immediately, in sudden fear lest her words had been mistaken.

'I trust everybody, mamma,' said Helen, sitting down on the edge of her little bed and beginning to undress.

'There has been no wrong—except in me. There is that comfort.'

Mrs. Thayer was mute, standing in the middle of the floor before her daughter, unable to move, unable to frame words, and very uncertain what sort of words to try for. She was filled with intense longing to say something or do something that might act favourably on this high-strung state of Helen's; but miserably conscious of the difficulty. She stood still, with a terrible pain at her heart, looking at the girl, who went on quietly with her undressing; taking off and folding or hanging up one piece of her garments after another in the usual regular fashion. Then suddenly Helen paused and spoke softly:

'Are you very much ashamed of me, mother?'

'Ashamed? May, what do you mean? My darling, there is nothing to be ashamed of—not on your part, certainly.'

'There is not on any other,' she said, looking up eagerly. 'Nothing!'

'May, I am willing to think so. It is my fault.'

'No, mother; it is nobody's fault. Now do not think about it any more. Go to bed and sleep, and leave me.'

She rose and came up to her mother and kissed her, as if to dismiss her with a good-night; but Mrs. Thayer could not go. She put her arms round her child, with an infinite tenderness, and strained her to her heart. Perhaps May could not bear it. She gently disengaged herself and went on with her work of undressing again, her mother standing dumbly and looking at her, in that heart-breaking impotence of affection which cannot even say comfortable words.

'Go to bed, mother,' Helen whispered.

'I do not know how to leave you.'

'Yes, but you must, you know.'

'Shall I bring my pillow and a blanket and stay here with you?'

'Oh no, mother. I am best alone. Never mind. Don't lie awake thinking of me.'

'Pray,' the mother said as she turned.

'I do nothing else. At least, when I do anything,' Helen answered. 'It seems to me much of the time that I am a blank.'

Mrs. Thayer withdrew, to fight out by herself the sorrowfullest night her life had known up to that time. Weary thoughts of pain chased each other through her head all night. Self-reproach,—and yet what could she have done, other than she had done? Without a knowledge of people's hearts, how could she tell what turn or what course things would take, or how they would be affected by any action on her part? She could not shut her children up and keep them as in a cloister; she could not guard the effects of intercourse with the world. She could not have refused Edward's request that he might bring his friend for a visit, nor was it possible that she should shield Helen when he came. And yet, she felt as if she ought to have done something, or *not* done something, somehow to hinder what had come about. And now, how deep was the mischief? Was it a girl's fancy, or a woman's heart, that had been laid hold of? Was this something to last all Helen's life? She must know how it was.

Helen was so entirely like herself at breakfast that Mrs. Thayer's heart sank. It is the deadly wound that does not bleed outwardly, and it is the hard-struck stag that hides himself in the depth of the thicket. She followed May, and hung about her, pitifully, all day; but May was active as usual, neglecting nothing, forgetting no duty, and doing nothing with a slack hand. Mrs. Thayer thought she kept busy purposely and avoided occasions of being alone with her. In the middle of the afternoon, however, Mrs. Thayer sent Mercy out on an errand with Pixie, and secured the opportunity she wanted. May was sewing in the sitting-room; she brought her own work and took a place near her.

There was silence then between the two for some time; but Mrs. Thayer knew her minutes were slipping away.

'May,' she said softly.

'Yes, mother.'

'We ought to speak once together frankly, and after that let the subject alone.'

'What is there to say?' Helen asked faintly.

'I want to know the truth.'

'I am afraid you do know it, mother.'

'What *is* the truth?'

Helen hesitated.

'I have been so foolish that I am ashamed of myself!' she said, her innocent face filling with suffusing colour, and for a minute or two she put up her hands to her face. 'And yet—I couldn't help it, mother!'

'When did it begin?' Mrs. Thayer asked hoarsely.

'I don't know — I almost think—it began almost as soon as he came here,' the girl said, low.

'Did you know it then?'

'I didn't know *what* it was, mother. I knew the pleasure — the change — the different look everything seemed to have; everything seemed new—all the world.'

Again Mrs. Thayer was silent with dismay.

'Helen,' she said, making an effort, 'did he—did Mr. Somers—ever say or do anything to make you think that he cared for you?'

Helen shrank visibly before she answered.

'I thought so, mother—I was so foolish. But it was only my folly. There was never any change in him. It was only that I was so foolish.'

'Do not blame yourself, my child—my innocent child. It was a mistake easy to fall into, and there is no shame connected with it. Do not give yourself any unnecessary torment. It was very natural—to a person with no more worldly wisdom than you have. I ought to have guarded you better.'

'Oh, you could not, mother,' said Helen faintly; and then there was a long pause. Mrs. Thayer's words died in her throat. Helen sat dry-eyed and grave, the flush which had suffused all her face at the beginning of the

conversation, and then burnt in her cheeks, gradually fading away, but the strained look not leaving her brow. At last Mrs. Thayer gathered herself together.

'May, my child,' she said, 'there is one thing—you mustn't think.'

Helen looked up suddenly with something like a flash of appeal against this impossible order.

'No, you must not think,' Mrs. Thayer repeated. 'The past is past; do not go back to it. Leave it and let it alone. Do not think of Mr. Somers *at all*.'

'Mother!—how can I help it?'

And Mrs. Thayer knew that she was tearing away the last comfort, or what seemed like the last comfort, that was left to her child; but she repeated her words steadily.

'That is your first duty, May. To think can do you no good and must do you harm. Leave all that as something you have done with. Take what God gives you in the present, and go forward to what He may have for you in the future; but do not spend your strength in looking back, or indulging recollections with which now you have nothing to do.'

'Is it wrong?'

'Yes.'

'Why, mother?'

'It unfits you, or it would unfit you, for doing your duty. May, my child, my darling, do you know what that is now? what your duty is?'

'Aren't you telling me, mamma?'

'I am going to tell you. May, nothing comes to a child of God without His will.'

'I know. Mother, why does such a thing as this come? It seems as if—as if my life was all dead!'

'*That* is not the Lord's will for any of His children, and can only be by their fault. Why does such a thing come? I do not know, May. But the dear Lord does know; and I know one thing, His meaning is that it should lead to more blessing and sweetness and flourish-

ing of the plants in His garden that have to go through such a storm; "He purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit."'

Helen hid her face.

'And now, my darling, what you have to do is just to accept the Lord's will.'

'Accept it?' said Helen, without looking up.

'You are His child, you are His servant. Shall not the Lord say *how* His servants shall serve Him? You must serve Him now by agreeing to His will.'

'I think—I do, mother.'

'Heartily? You must say, Amen!—so let it be!—to all that has happened. Be willing that it should be. And so you must not look back and indulge yourself with fancies and remembrances. Remember one thing: the Lord's plan for you is sure to be the very best.'

'Yes!'

'It is not likely we shall ever see anything of Mr. Somers again, and it is not desirable. He has gone into his father's money-making, and will very likely stay in China for years. Nothing could be more mistaken or misplaced than to let your thoughts be occupied with him.'

'Mother—it is very hard to stop thinking.'

'But it is duty. And my May will do her duty.'

'*Is* it duty?' she asked, looking up through a shimmer of tears.

'*Not* to stop thinking would be almost a beginning of rebellion. May, it is *looking at* what the Lord has withheld or forbidden.'

'So it is!' said the girl, bowing her gentle head again, perhaps to hide the tears which dropped fast for a minute or two. For she knew, and her mother knew, how hard this duty was. Mrs. Thayer sat sadly by; her tears were burned up. Her child's feet had got out of the flowery fields into the dusty highway, all at once as it were, and there was no going back. For it is in the dusty highway, for the most part, that the race must be run; and, to be

sure, the runner must learn his paces; but her heart ached for the untried feet, to which the road is at first so hard.

'Well, my darling, it is no worse than this,' she said after a little, with a lighter tone. 'The Lord will have you to follow Him closer and with a more difficult service just now than you would have chosen; but *if* you follow and keep close, May, the end will be a dearer love and a more blessed union with Himself. And that will be, not loss, but gain, darling.'

May got up and came into her mother's arms, putting her arms round her neck and resting her head on her bosom, kneeling on the floor beside her. And so they remained, for a space of time that neither of them measured. They spoke no more; Helen was not weeping; and if a big hot tear now and then filled Mrs. Thayer's eyes and ran over, her child did not know it. They were absolutely still for a long while, and only when the click of the gate latch sounded, and voices and steps were audible outside, Helen softly withdrew her arms and rose, and, with a kiss on her mother's cheek, left the room.

CHAPTER XXII.

PEACE.

FOR many months after this day the river of life showed as smooth a surface flow as if its waters covered no sharp rocks and hid no unsounded depths. The whole routine of years past went on for years more, unbroken, unaltered. The same changes of season; the same alternation of winter and summer clothing; the same butter-making and cheese-making, preserving of summer fruits and preparing of winter mincemeat and sausages; the same going to church in all seasons and in all weathers, and the same sermons to listen to, for Mr. Franks did not change any more than the rest of the world; the same sparse intercourse with the same neighbours. Daisy Plains in those days enjoyed an uninterrupted evenness of existence, which was comfortable or otherwise according to the mental condition of individuals. To one person at Daisy Plains—probably she was not the only one—the sameness of all things was very trying.

'Mother,' she said one day when her mother and she were sewing together, and alone, 'I wish I could find something to do.'

'Something to *do*, my dear?' said Mrs. Thayer in surprise. 'What can you mean? You are not idle a minute in the day.'

'These are little things,' said Helen. 'I wish I could find something of more importance to do,—something that would require more effort, and take me out of myself.'

'But what could you do, my child?'

'I do not know. It seems as if there must be something—some way in which I could work to more advantage, and be of more use in the world. Isn't there always demand corresponding to supply?'

'What you have to do, my child, is to furnish supply for the demand.'

'What demand, mother? I do not seem to be doing anything.'

Mrs. Thayer was silent a bit.

'There is great demand for patience, May, and for quiet trust that the Lord, in polishing His precious stones, will not take more time or use rougher means than necessary.'

Helen covered her face.

'Be still, and wait, and trust. Above all, trust. No harm shall come to you, darling, but good. The "peaceable fruits of righteousness" are sweet when they come.'

May made no answer.

'I know how it is,' her mother went on. 'I know all about it. I know how much easier it would be to go away, and be in a different place and with different surroundings. But that is evidently not the Lord's plan for you, or some way would have opened. You cannot run away from the battlefield, my darling; you must fight the fight out.'

'Mother, does *everybody* have a fight?'

'Most people do. And some conquer, and some succumb. You will conquer.'

There was no more said upon the subject, either at that or at any other time. And the mother's prophecy, which had half the force of an adjuration, came to be true. It was not till after a time had passed, indeed, and two faithful hearts and anxious pairs of eyes had to wait and watch for it; but it came. And May's face regained all its calm, and more than all its happiness, and a beauty it had never known before.

I speak advisedly. For there was something about the

girl now that struck almost with wonder those who saw her, and that was quite beyond their power to explain; with the exception, of course, of the two who were in the secret. To others Helen's loveliness was a thing attracting and enchaining in some inexplicable way or by some unsearchable power. Yet her face had been distinguished for calmness and sweetness in its earlier days, but it was not like this. That was the calm which had not been disturbed; this was the serenity which had been shaken, and had found its footing on a rock where it could never be shaken any more. And that first sweetness of innocence and love was replaced now by a higher and a purer; the sweetness of a spirit that has chosen the will of God for its own. There is nothing that I know of that gives such supreme loveliness to a face as this; I do not know that it can be had at less price. Where one sees it, one sees something of the clearness of heaven shining down between the clouds of an earthly sky; clouds there may be, but mists and darkness no more for ever.

Perhaps Mrs. Franks half got at the key; if she did, she never told of it. The Daisy Plains people in general decided that Helen Thayer was a saint.

'I wonder why she don't get married!' was uttered by more than one of her companions in age.

'Ain't no one good enough for her, I expect,' was the answer of one mother.

'La, she ain't thinkin' o' no sich nonsense,' was the conclusion of a second. 'She'll stay at hum and take care o' her mother; so *I* calkilate.'

'I guess she'll finish by takin' Trim Satterly, ma,' the daughter answered. 'He's handsome and rich, and he's always goin' in and out there.'

Mr. Satterly's aunt and mother were exercised on the same subject.

'What are you waitin' for, Trim?' asked his aunt. 'I should think she'd be put out with you if you shilly-shally much longer.'

'There ain't no shilly-shally about him!' opined his mother.

'Well, she's old enough, and *he's* old enough, if they're ever goin' to be. If you let your thread trail, somethin' 'll be sure to catch it.'

'It's easy talking!' said Trim in some dudgeon.

'Don't seem so,' returned his aunt, the click of whose needles gave emphasis to her words. 'What have you got to do *but* to speak? There's nothin' in your way, as I see; but there *will* be, if you stand with your hat in your hand too long. Helen ain't as young as she was, now.'

'She's prettier than ever,' said Mrs. Satterly, 'ef she ain't as young.'

'You don't know what you are talking about!' said Trim wrathfully. 'I tell you she hasn't *wanted* to be spoken to. I couldn't get the ghost of a chance any time when I've been in her company for months past. I don't want to ask her when I'm certain she'll say no.'

'You don't expect she'll tell you when she's goin' to say yes, do you?' inquired his aunt.

'Girls does that mostly, Betty,' observed Mrs. Satterly.

'No girl does it that has got a grain o' gumption. Men never set no value on what comes to 'em easy, whether it's one thing or another. They want their pride taken down a bit before they're fit to live with, and that's a fact; and it'll do Trim no harm to hev his took down; but I guess it's been done, ain't it, sufficiently?'

Trim could stand no more, and went off. Possibly, however, the talk had given a needed fillip to his courage, or to his pride; for towards evening he found his way over to Mrs. Thayer's farm, with the determination that if he saw a chance he would seize it. Fortune favoured him so far.

It was a calm, mild September evening, soft and hazy; the sun was descending towards the west behind a dense golden-coloured veil. The light coming through this medium lay with a peculiar rich warm glow on all the

earth; and touched by it, adorned by it, Trim saw a figure sitting under an apple tree in the orchard, all lighted up with that glow; and straight towards that figure went Mr. Satterly. It was a favourite place with Helen, where she loved to sit and study her Bible; whether there was an association lingering in her mind which connected the Bible and the green turfy bank under one particular apple tree, I will not say, but there Helen always sat, and, as I said, it was a very favourite place with her in the summer and autumn days. There she was now, with two or three books around her, so busy that she did not hear Trim's footsteps, which to be sure made almost no noise upon the short soft grass. When his figure came within her line of vision she looked up.

'You have no idea what a pretty picture you make,' said Trim,—'the tree and the bank, and you and the books. What are you doing?'

'Studying. It's a very good study place.'

'What on earth are you studying?'

'The Bible.'

'I thought you knew that all by heart.'

'Did you? Well,' said Helen, gathering up her books, 'now you are come, I suppose I shall do no more study. I may as well go in.'

'Don't!' said Trim, throwing himself down on the ground before her in time to prevent her rising,—'don't, May! for I want to speak to you.'

'What is it, Trim?'

The voice was a great deal too composed; Trim felt a premonitory chill, but he remembered his aunt's words, and went on.

'Don't you get tired of Daisy Plains now and then?'

'I know you do,' said Helen, smiling. 'Where are you going now, Trim?'

'I was thinking,' said Trim slowly, 'of Egypt. Either that or Rome. What do you think?'

'Oh, Egypt, I should think. What a thing it would be to see Egypt!—the Nile, and the Pyramids, and the

ruins of the old great places! Rome would be good too, but I should choose Egypt.'

'Will you go with me, Helen?'

'I?' She lifted up her eyes and looked at him as if a little surprised; not in shyness or embarrassment; gravely, with a little bit of startle in the gravity.

'Yes, May, you and no one else. I'll go anywhere you like, or we'll go everywhere, one place after another. It would all be good with you, and I wouldn't give a red cent for any of 'em without you. I've been waiting to tell you this—I don't know how long; years, I think; and I seemed never to get a chance. What do you say?'

'Oh, Trim, I am very sorry!'

'Sorry for what?'

'Sorry you ever thought of such a thing. I am a fixture in Daisy Plains. I do not think I shall ever go away, unless mother goes away.'

'Don't you like travelling?'

'I have never travelled, you know. I do not think I shall ever travel. I shall stay with my mother.'

'Then I will stay too, if you will let me. I would like any place where you are. If you are a fixture, I will be a fixture—if you will let me belong to you only, May. I will stay in Daisy Plains too.'

'That would be impossible,' said Helen, smiling. 'You would never be contented to be quiet.'

'With you, Helen! yes, I should. Anywhere with you. And I don't care for anything in the whole world, if it is not with you.'

He spoke eagerly, ardently, watching her lips and her eyes. For the lips were at rest, with a slight, rather sorrowful smile upon them, and the eyes were at rest too, clear and grave. Trim's hopes died in his breast, seeing those eyes and that smile.

'You will forget it, Trim,' she said gently. 'I am happy to believe you will forget all this. If I did not believe so, I should be very sorry. For things cannot be as you wish.'

'Why not?' he asked hastily.

'I cannot give you any better reason than that it is not my wish.'

Trim Satterly was never much accustomed to see his wishes contradicted, and with his grief now mingled something like anger. His cheeks flushed and his dark eyes snapped.

'But why isn't it?' he persisted. 'There is nobody else; and we have known each other all our lives, almost. You aren't the sort of girl to live at home for ever, and you won't do it neither. You'll end by marrying somebody, and it may as well be me, Helen.'

'I don't think so, Trim.'

'But there *is* nobody else?' he asked almost fiercely. Helen looked up at him.

'There is nobody else. Who should there be? But that is not the thing, Trim. I do not want to be married. I would rather stay with my mother.'

'But that can't last always!' he said in great vexation. 'That is nonsense!'

'It seems to me to be sense. I daresay Pixie will be married some day, and I shall stay with mamma.'

'She doesn't want you half as much as I do!'

'Ah, but I want her,' said Helen, smiling. She was so calm, so unmoved, and so sweet, all at once, Trim saw he must give up the fight, at least for the present. He tore up tufts of grass by the handfuls and threw them away, in a manner quite indicative of his state of mind.

'There's something else I wanted to speak about,' he said at last, with an effort. 'If it is no good talking about you, I want to talk about Edward.'

'What about Edward?' she said, with a change of tone.

'You know he isn't well. I mean he is not strong,—not as strong as he should be.'

Helen paused.

'He has not been strong since he left college,' she said softly.

'It would do him good to go away.'

'Where?'

'Anywhere—anywhere that is warm, I mean. What do you think of my taking him off to Egypt?'

'Oh, Trim!—I believe that would be a very good thing. Thank you for the thought.'

'You will trust me to take care of him, then?'

'Yes, indeed! trust you perfectly. Oh, Trim, that is very kind of you!'

'Then, if I bring him home safe, perhaps you will trust me with something else?'

Helen passed this speech over; she was hastening to the house, whither Trim followed her in a bitter-sweet state of mind. They found Mrs. Thayer in the porch.

'Mother,' said Helen, 'Trim wants me to go with him to Egypt; and, as I have refused, he proposes to take Edward. To Egypt! Isn't that delightful? It would do him so much good.'

The scheme was discussed, decided upon, and as soon as possible thereafter acted upon; for Helen's utter disengagedness and calmness took away from her suitor any vestige of hope that her mind might be changed as to her own going. Comments were few.

'So you would not take Trim's offer?' remarked Mrs. Thayer one day.

'Mamma, did you think I would?'

'No. But I have known for years that he would come for you.'

Helen was silent.

'So you're goin' to have the brother instead of the sister, Trim?' said Miss Betsy. 'How comes that?'

'Because everything in this world is turned the wrong way!' said the young man hotly.

'That's news,' said his aunt. 'What's turned *her?*'

'Nothing has turned her! She is one of the people that don't change; she is just the same now that she was when she was ten years old. She's a very good friend, and that's all. I wish I knew what *would* turn her.'

'A little more experience, I guess, and gettin' a little older. Girls like that thinks all the world's at their feet, and that it'll always stay there, and they're only to stoop down and pick up what they like. Then by and by they come to find their arms don't reach as fur as they used to could, and the world's slippin' away from under 'em. And don't they grow meek and sensible then!'

'You are talking most abominable stuff!' said Trim; 'and you don't in the least know what sort of a person you are speaking of. I'll not bear it.'

So he and Edward set off for Egypt. Edward's condition of health had been the only cloud lately upon the minds of Mrs. Thayer's little family; all else was peaceful sunshine. And now, when Trim carried him off to the land of hope, sunshine fell upon them again, almost untroubled. Surely, if all was not right with him, Egypt would make it right; and they could be quiet.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CHINESE VALUABLES.

THE crossing of the threads of human life is surely one of the mysterious and untraceable things. Two of the threads with which this story has to do got entangled somehow at the other side of the world.

It was about the time when Edward and Trim set off for the Old World, or a little later, for it was winter time. Winter and beautiful weather, with a genial sun shining on all the glories of Canton. The scene to which we must transport ourselves is a large airy room of a finely-built brick house in that place. Matting on the floor, quaint and beautiful furniture of Eastern pattern and workmanship, jars of jade stone filled with flowers, ornamental articles of brass-work, and vases of India china, Japan screens, and some very beautiful stuffed and mounted birds, may be seen around the room; yet it has rather a cool, empty look, for nothing is crowded; and large windows open out upon a luxuriant and tropical wealth of foliage. The banyan tree is there, and the elegant bamboo; the banana and the palm; with flowers of glorious hue and brilliancy. Everything is open, and the air that comes in is delicious, while the broad roof of the verandah keeps the light within the room tempered to a pleasant degree of mildness. A table in the middle of the floor, however, is unquestionably European, and the young man sitting there at work is as unmistakeably of Western extraction. No yellow, pig-tailed native of the country, or dark or tawny foreign resident; his fair skin and brown locks tell of his race, and a certain fine

intellectuality of feature and mien indicate that he may have come from the furthest west of the white skins, even from America itself. It is in fact our friend Mr. Somers, a trifle older and more sunburnt, with also a trifle more of business preoccupation in his face than when he was taking his vacation at Daisy Plains. He does not look quite so gay-spirited as he did then, either. Life has got hold of him, and business.

I said at work, but he is not at work at this moment, though the table shows papers enough to occupy somebody. He has just broken off from his writing to welcome a visitor. This is a somewhat older man; a handsome man; with the full measure of intelligence, but without the business look that characterizes the younger. Hair and eyes dark, expression keen and calm, in person rather strongly built and powerful, manner quiet and movements slow; but there is nothing slow about the mind of this man. Mr. Somers had given him a warm welcome.

'And what in the world has brought you to this corner of it, Professor?' he asked.

'Health, partly. I was a little overworked.'

'And are quite restored?'

'Quite. As good as new again.'

'But why Canton for refreshment, when Italy and Switzerland—yes, say all Europe—lay so much nearer to you, and could be reached in so much less time?'

'Time is nothing when you have struck off work; and I had seen Italy and Switzerland. I thought I might increase my stock of knowledge more by going further.'

'How long have you been in Canton?'

'A week or two. I did not know where to find you till to-day. What are *you* doing here?'

Somers sighed. 'Business!' he said. 'That is what everybody is about in Canton. To make money is the one object and purpose of existence.'

'How much money?' inquired the Professor, with a glint of his dark eye.

'I wish I could tell you! or that you could tell me. It would be one point gained. As it is, there is no standard and no limit; the only thing is, to *make money;* and that, you observe, may go on for ever.'

'The question, whether or no you may have enough already, does not come into consideration?'

'Not all all; why should it? There is no such word as "enough" in that connection. Nobody has enough. "Somers and Somers" have more than they know well what to do with; but that just enables us with advantage to go on making more, don't you see?'

'Does this sort of thing satisfy you?'

'Satisfy!' repeated Somers. 'Professor L'Estrange, did you ever hear of anybody that was satisfied?'

'I should not have thought it was a line of life that would suit your particular turn of mind.'

'It does not. I might just as well be a spoke in a wheel. I *am* a spoke in a wheel, eternally going round. An intelligent spoke, and an intelligent wheel; but that's what I am.'

'Hardly meets intelligent aspirations,' said the Professor, eyeing his younger friend seriously. Somers passed his hand over his head, as if the confusion were outside of it.

'Well,' said he, rousing himself, 'I am here, and I cannot immediately get out of it. What better can I do?'

'Work for God.'

Somers was still and thoughtful for some minutes; going, the Professor could see, into some very engrossing meditations.

'How long shall you be here?' he asked thoughtfully.

'A day or two. I have done all I can do, and have only a few purchases to make.'

'Of what sort? Let me be helpful to you.'

'Nothing of any importance. I am gathering up bits of all sorts of things, at random, for use at home. Now

that I am here, you know. One does not come shopping in Canton and Singapore every day.'

'No. Well, if you will let me I *can* help you. Let us have what the Indians call *tiffin*, and then we will start out.'

The Professor did not object, and the meal was served. It was served daintily, with flowers and fruits of the torrid zone in great abundance; and with delicious tea in eggshell cups. A fresh air blew in, shaking the leaves of the banyan tree, and waving the delicate bamboo; and the Professor enjoyed the hour; but his host was preoccupied and grave. Suddenly he broke out,—

'Which way do you go home, Professor L'Estrange?'

'By San Francisco.'

'If your boxes are not too full, could you take a small package—a book—for me to a friend near Boston?'

'And see that he gets it, as soon as I get there myself. Certainly.'

'I would like to be sure that it was delivered; for it ought to have gone before,' Somers remarked.

The rest of the day was spent among the wonderful Canton streets—among Eastern curiosities and Eastern work; the Professor picking up a thing here and another there, all sorts of things that struck his fancy, for their beauty, or rarity, or local significance, or usefulness. Jade, brass, silk, china ware, embroidery, painting, and what not. At the end of the day Somers persuaded him to return and be his guest for the night. The evening passed delightfully, and the two sat talking, looking at the moonlight on the feathery bamboos, and going back to Boston and college reminiscences, until a late hour. But when Professor L'Estrange had at length withdrawn to his room, Somers' face took another expression, and became grave, intent, absorbed. *He* did not go to bed. Instead of that he moved to his writing-table, turned up his lamp, chose a sheet of note-paper that suited him, and, with that heavy abstraction upon his brow, began to

write. The letter may be as well given here. After he had once fairly begun, his pen moved freely, and the cloudy abstraction of his face in part cleared away as he went on.

'CANTON, *Jan.* 18.

'MY DEAR MISS THAYER,—Or I might put it less stiffly, and say, My dear Miss Helen. For I do not think of you as "Miss Thayer;" and I may as well acknowledge it at once. Also I may as well at once make another acknowledgment,—that I think of you very often. I wish I could know that you sometimes think of me.

'I will go back to the time when I saw you last; when I bade you good-bye at the door of that pleasant house, which was during so many weeks the pleasantest of all homes to me. I did not want to go, but it seemed the best thing to do; my father wished it; and I had no reason to suppose that any one would miss me. If I could have thought *that*—but I had no ground for thinking it. I supposed it was a matter of indifference to you and to everybody else. So I went.

'But I presently found that it was not a matter of indifference to myself. I had vaguely known it, or guessed as much before; and as soon as I had parted from you I was certain of it. I told your brother, I remember, at the stage office, that I did not know but I was a fool to go; a remark which of course he could not understand, but the full realization of which came to me very soon. I went on, it is true, as men do when they think they have gone too far to turn back; I went on, finished my preparations, and received my business instructions, and set sail. Through those days—they were but two or three—of hurried preoccupation, I did not stop to think. I had gone too far to stop, I foolishly fancied. Until I was on board ship and we had sailed, and I knew my next abiding place would be

at the other side of the world. Then I *knew* I had been a fool. I had leisure to think, and the necessity of thinking was forced upon me; and then I knew, and knew it better with every mile we sailed away, that I had left my heart behind me. I had left it in your keeping. If you had only *known* it was in your keeping, and had been willing to accept the charge, I could have borne the waiting and the absence, and the distance of hope; for anything left in your care would be safe enough, I knew well. Truth is not more true than you. But I had told you never a word; I had asked nothing of you; how were you to keep that which you did not know you had to keep? And I knew now that I loved you, and loved you dearly, and loved you only in all the world; and I might have told you so, and did not; and I was going far off, and away from you; where, though I might write, it would take months for a letter to get to you. And what might happen in the meanwhile!

'I had a poor time of it, all my passage out, with these thoughts. Sometimes I said to myself that when I reached Canton I would turn straight round and go back again; for I knew by that time that without you nothing else in the world that I might succeed in obtaining would be of the least value to me. I think just the same now, Helen; and yet I am still here, and it is two years since I saw you.

'I can hardly make you understand how it has been. As soon as I landed, I found a swarm of business affairs to attend to; matters in which my father's interest and the interests of his house were concerned. He had trusted me, and sent me to attend to them; I could not be false to the trust reposed in me. And soon I seemed to be, as it were, entangled in the meshes of a net of business. One day prepared work for the next; every ship that came in gave me new reason for staying some months more. At first I would not write, because I meant to go myself, which would be so much better; and still when I found I could not go, I put off writing in the

hope of a better time; latterly, in a sort of despair of the better time ever coming. I have never ceased to think of you; never have learned to love you less; but I have been a poor impotent fly struggling in the tenacious web of business—which is as pitiless a spider as any of them all. You can see every day the musty dried forms of what once could buzz like other flies, and eat sugar, now shrivelled and lifeless in the web of that magnified spider of "business;" they are no good for anything else any more, and cannot get out of that web.

'Well, I have not come to that pass yet. I could buzz yet, as merrily as ever, if I were once more at Daisy Plains, and could sun myself in your presence. Here there is no lack of sunshine of another sort, but of moral sunshine there is nothing. Nothing; the few Europeans and Americans who are in the country are here only to make money; flies caught in that web above mentioned, and not even struggling. If there is a missionary here and there, as I believe there is, they do not come in my way, and in the universal darkness are like glow-worms seeking to light up a coal mine. There is but one mercantile house here, that I know of, that tries to do anything for the enlightening of the natives; and that house is not ours. I do not know what to do; and perhaps I want enlightening myself. I rather think that must be the case. And so I come back to my point and my question.

'Helen, I think my life depends upon you. I know by my too late consciousness that it is you that I want. I want nothing else, that I know of, in the wide world. I have money enough; I do not care about fame; I can have, and do have, a position that satisfies me. But I think I have nothing if I have not you. Why did I not tell you before? Ah, why did I not? Is it too late? I do not think it is too late. I send this by a sure hand, and you will not fail to get it in good time. Send me in answer one line, to say I may come back for you—and I

will come as fast as winds and sails can take me. And I will not return hither unless you like; nor engage further in business, unless you like; in short, you may dispose of me; for one cannot be more devoted to another and another's pleasure than I am to you and yours. But write me soon! for I shall count months and days until I can get an answer, and then, till it comes, I shall count ships as they arrive, every one.

'If I should be so unhappy as *not* to hear from you, I shall stay here; for in that case the furthest from you would be the best; and you will see me no more. But send me word to come for you.

'I think I have loved you from the first week I saw you; only I did not know it. And afterwards you were so cool, so calm, so indifferent seemingly, that I was staggered, and doubted if I had any chance. I thought sometimes that you preferred somebody else—which I considered a great mistake on your part; but I am inclined to think now that the mistake was of my own making. In pity let me hear from you soon, and put an end to all these confusions in my head. My *heart* is quite clear. Ah, do you remember the day when we sat on the rocks behind the mill, and I taught you the letters of the Greek alphabet? You bound me in your chains that day, and I have never got free, nor desired it. So fasten the bond for ever, dear Helen.

'Your servant, whether or no, and in bonds which cannot be unloosed,

'B. Somers.'

This epistle being finished, Mr. Somers took a small book from his table, and laid the letter within the cover, doing up both together then neatly, and addressing the package to Helen; ending with a careful sealing of the wrapping paper and of the enveloping twine. This package was delivered to Mr. L'Estrange, who promised anew to take good care of it and to see that it got

promptly to its destination, as soon as he himself should be in Boston again.

Returning to his lodging place, the Professor presently found that he had not boxes enough in which to bestow his various purchases and gatherings. He must needs get a new one. In this new one he packed and repacked all his curiosities and goods that were not for personal use; and Mr. Somers' book he laid at the bottom, without looking at the address or knowing any more about it, for the present, than that it was to go to Boston. As this box was to go straight through to Boston, and never to be opened again till it got there, at the bottom was as good a place for Mr. Somers' parcel as any other.

Professor L'Estrange sailed for San Francisco. Arriving there, almost the first person he met in the street was his father. Mr. L'Estrange the elder had come to California to look after and secure the property and effects left by a brother of his, who had been for some years in San Francisco, it was understood, making much money; and there had recently died. The property was left in a very confused state, and Mr. L'Estrange wanted urgently the help of his son to aid in recovering it. The business proved troublesome, and important enough to warrant the trouble. Professor L'Estrange, instead of pursuing his way promptly to the isthmus and so home, was delayed and detained week after week, till weeks ran into months. In the midst of it his father fell ill, was ill for some time; had to be nursed, and then shipped off for home, while the Professor stayed in San Francisco to finish up the business.

So the winter had gone and the spring had advanced far enough to be settled and mild, before he could set his face homewards. At that point an offer was made him which had great charms. A party were going across the continent, to finish making certain researches and surveys in the service of the Government; the gentlemen of the party knew Mr. L'Estrange, and proposed to him to go

with them. His business was done; what could come more welcome than such an offer? The Professor made his arrangements, stored his boxes of unusable precious things,—unusable at least at present,—and set off for that delight of a naturalist, a journey over an unexplored country.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DIATOMS.

THE journey lasted a good while. The party with whom the Professor had joined forces had a large amount of work to do, of a kind which takes time; and Mr. L'Estrange was not in a hurry. He had work to do also, which left no day long enough for his demands upon it. Soils were to be examined, geological formations ascertained, botanical researches and gatherings without end undertaken, the rocks questioned, and heavy little bags of minerals accumulated. Meteorological observations were to be made, and insect and animal life studied. And by the way the Professor and his companions managed to have a remarkably good time. There was many an opportunity for a hunt, and much booty accruing from the same; not only for scientific uses, but for the comfort and behoof of the physical man. There were campings out under the stars, in the dry air of high elevations; there was tent life, jolly with hunter's fare; and there was delightful society, for people who come together with a common object are then most pleasant and most helpful to each other. Slowly the party made their way across the country, over the Rocky Mountains, and over the wide districts still wild between them and the Father of Waters; until Chicago and civilisation received them. And then the summer was well nigh spent. So nearly, that there was just time for the Professor to make his dispositions and re-enter his old place in the college, which he had vacated to go on his travels. It had been filled in the interim, and he had

been uncertain whither his steps would lead; it opened just in time to welcome him in again.

And with that and the commencement of term, things fell back quietly and perfectly into their old train. Not knowing where he was going to be, or how soon he would be established anywhere, Mr. L'Estrange had left order in San Francisco to keep his box of curiosities till he sent for it. He gave it no more thought. His head was busy with other things, and he had no one at home for whose sake he might have desired to unpack it. In one sense the Professor had no home, for he had no family. He had a dwelling indeed, and an old housekeeper who in some sort took care of him; and in Boston he had an old mother, widowed now, whom he frequently visited; but he lived alone with his books and his beloved scientific researches. Old Mrs. L'Estrange preferred to remain in Boston; it suited her, she said; and so they were perhaps all best suited, for the Professor lived free and undisturbed and could devote himself to his beloved pursuits.

He was very much liked as a professor. Clear, keen, and quick, the students found his intelligence always a match for them, and his kindness always indulgent; his patience unvarying, when it was not wantonly tried. His language was lucid, his experiments masterly, his love of knowledge so true that it gave him pleasure to impart it. In college Professor L'Estrange was a favourite. He was a favourite in society too, when people could get hold of him; but that was not frequently. He liked no frivolous company and could not be tempted into it. The company of his peers he knew how to get when he wanted it. But his liking was rather for his solitary life, and the society of his books and instruments; that sort of thing is apt to grow upon a man, and it had grown upon him; and under the influence of this habit Professor L'Estrange was a less useful man, practically, than he might have been. He was a true and earnest Christian; but habit is habit; and under the power of this habitual seclusion many a thing did not occur to him as possible

or good to be done, which a man of business would have grasped unfailingly.

So the days passed on, till now Somers had been four years abroad. Edward and Mr. Satterly were still roaming about in warm parts of the Old World; Edward, it was said, slowly gaining. Mrs. Thayer had taken a house in Boston for the winter; partly to be near Pixie, whom she had put in a first-class school to finish the education that school can give, and partly that she might bring Helen, if she could, out of a certain sweet, quiet, reserved way, in which she seemed inaccessible to the world at large. She was not unhappy; that was plain; but she was too content to do without everybody in the world beside her own little family. She did not care to go into company; and if she went, she was glad to come home. She had no special desire to spend the winter in Boston; and when the first one was over, rejoiced greatly to be back in Daisy Plains again.

It was now the second winter of their stay in Boston.

It happened one evening that Professor L'Estrange found himself at a little party in the city. He was not often so found; and those who knew him made much of the occasion, and were eager to get the chance of a talk with him. One of these chances was laid hold of by an old acquaintance, a lady whose family and position gave her the right to know everybody, although her cast of mind and habit of life did not fit her to be precisely one of Mr. L'Estrange's boon companions. Still, she was a good woman, and, as I said, of the highest respectability. She sailed in skilfully into the momentary gap left by the departure of somebody else from the Professor's side, and tackled him at once.

'I have been wanting to get hold of you all the evening, Professor. Here, sit down; I want to speak to you. Do you know, you are quite the lion of the party. Why don't you let us see you oftener?'

'Lions are not sociable creatures, Mrs. Vernon.'

'Oh, but you are! Professor, I want you to do a kind-

ness for somebody. I have a friend—and a very delightful friend; she is the widow of a man who had a great fortune and lost it; and now she has been for years heroically maintaining herself and doing good to society by receiving into her house a number of young ladies. It is the best institution in Boston,'—

'Of what kind?'

'Kind? why, I was telling you. She receives these girls into her family, and gives them every possible advantage. Girls cannot have a better education, in every respect, than they acquire at Mrs. Maundeville's; and she is careful to let them enjoy every advantage that it is possible to procure for them. Now she wants something of you.'

'Of me!'—

'Yes, or else I do. Mrs. Maundeville would never ask what I told her I would ask for her, if I could see you; and happily here you are, and I have got my opportunity. Professor, wouldn't you show a few things in your microscope to a class of her girls? They have been studying something—I forget what—optics, I believe; or else it was natural history; I forget, I am sure, and it does not matter; but she was wishing that she could show them a first-rate microscope; it would be *such* an advantage; so she said. And then I told her I knew you, and knew you had all sorts of glasses and things, and preparations, and I was quite sure you would be glad, as a benevolent philosopher, to let her girls have the benefit of them. Was I right?'

'In thinking me a benevolent philosopher? I do not know.'

'Oh, but you will do this for her—for me?'

'She is in Boston, and my microscope is not.'

'Oh, but they would come out to you. Mrs. Maundeville would bring her young ladies to wait upon you, any day you will appoint. I know she would make everything else give way.'

The Professor was cornered, and saw no way out but

to give his assent. Indeed, he was kindly enough not to dislike the task, although rather doubtful of a class of young ladies. However, he agreed to the proposal, and fixed the day, and Mrs. Vernon went her way triumphant.

But things are so complex in this world that even in the simplest step one can take we never know what we are doing. So it fell out on this occasion, that Mrs. Vernon's kind offer to her friend and Professor L'Estrange's complaisance had results that neither telescope nor microscope could see to the end of.

In all unsuspiciousness, when the day came, Professor L'Estrange got his room and his glasses in readiness. It cost him a little trouble. He was not the least in the world of a disorderly man; rather specially exact in all his own doings and all his requisitions from those who learned of him. Nothing at loose ends; nothing half understood or known in bits; indeed, his nickname at the university was 'Thorough.' At the same time his study, when nobody came to it but himself, was apt to show a rare kind of irregularity, at least in the arrangement of its stores and its books; and so to-day the Professor went about putting things up and making room for the movements of a corps of young ladies. He was not altogether in a good humour over his task, and was rather disposed to find fault with Mrs. Vernon's officious kindness which had brought it upon him. So little he knew. But books were put up, out of the way; writings cleared off into drawers; a table moved into a proper position in front of the north window, and the microscope put in order, and various objects chosen from the Professor's stock. He was still moving about his instrument and making sure that all was arranged just as he wanted to have it, when his servant announced 'A parcel of ladies, sir.'

'Show them up, and show them in,' was the somewhat grim answer, the Professor setting his teeth, as it were, to go on with what he had undertaken. He finished the preparation he was making, and did not even look

round, blind man! till it was done; although a certain soft patter of feet and rustle of garments did let him know that his visitors had come and were entering the room. When he was ready he turned round and confronted them.

Well, it was a pretty sight, that the Professor confessed to himself on the instant; such a group of young things, with bright faces, fresh cheeks, and sparkling eyes, and smiles of expectancy. All youth has a beauty of its own, pleasant to look upon; and here there was not only youth, but intelligence and refinement and all the setting off which a judicious use of means can give even to youth and beauty. The Professor's eyes were not dazzled, for he was not that sort of man; he had got beyond being dazzled, besides; but they sparkled with answering pleasure at the unwonted sight, and went with rapid survey from face to face; till suddenly his thoughts were arrested and turned into a new channel, and the whole bouquet of human blossoms before him faded from his vision. By what reason? Simply the sight of another face and figure, which as it was a little in the background he did not at first see. When he did see it, the Professor forgot everything else. He succumbed, for the first time in his life, to the power of a woman; and he knew it, and stood there like a man who had met his fate. Nobody else knew it. He stood in outward dignified calm, waiting for Mrs. Maundeville, or somebody, to step forward and present him to his guests or his guests to him; but indeed he did not think of Mrs. Maundeville. His thoughts were filled with one object; but, as I hinted, he was not a young man, and, being gifted by nature and habit with considerable *àplomb*, he stood his ground creditably, though knowing to the centre of his soul that he was a conquered and a captured man.

What he saw was only another young woman, but so unlike the rest that he never, then or at any time, classed her with them. Indeed, he never classed her with anybody; she stood alone. She was dressed more quietly

than the others, in what the Professor would have designated as 'mouse colours;' at least a mouse's coat has not less to mark it, and the hues were soft and indeterminate. All the more shone the face of this figure, like a flower relieved by its surrounding of plain green leaves. Yet it was not the colour beauty, nor even the beauty of form, that struck him; it was the wonderful, lovely light of the spirit within. The like of it he had never seen anywhere; and it is difficult to characterize. A soft gravity, a grave light, an apart and sweet purity, which looked as if its owner were more conversant with heaven than earth; a shadowless calm, which invested its wearer with a singular dignity, while of all conventional and assumed manner there was not a trace. Self-consciousness seemed to be utterly wanting.

The Professor gathered these and other items of observation together in a few minutes. Meanwhile the person they concerned stepped forward a little, made a gracious little reverence, more to the Professor, he could see, than to the man; and then went on to introduce the several members of the pretty group which had crowded in after her and for the first moment spread out before her. She named them one after another, each young lady in her turn giving the Professor a low reverence; and the Professor received and answered the salutations properly, without giving a thought to them.

They were all introduced; then he stepped up to their fore-woman.

'Mademoiselle, you have not introduced yourself,' he said.

'Myself? Oh, I am just Helen Thayer. Mrs. Maundeville found herself too ill to come out to-day; and as you had been so kind, sir, as to appoint this morning, she was unwilling to let the young ladies lose the pleasure she had promised them. Miss Badger, her assistant, has been called away; and Mrs. Maundeville asked me to take charge of the girls for her. I had gone there, as it happened, to see my sister.'

'Your sister?'—Professor L'Estrange's eye swept the group standing by.

'I mentioned her name among the rest; my sister Pixie.'

'Pixie?' said the Professor, coming back to Helen's face; he could not see any other face. 'Not Pixidanthera?'

And then he was favoured with such a smile as he had never seen the like in all his life. It was amused, frank, merry, and withal so sweet as only the innocent lips of childhood generally show.

'Yes,' she said, 'I believe it is really that. We were living at the South, and Pixidanthera was all about in the woods. At the North we had had the Arbutus, the May; and they gave my sister the Southern flower.'

'And are you the Northern May?'

Again Helen laughed, and this time blushed a little. 'At home they call me so,' she said.

The Professor turned away with a certain violence over himself, and surveyed the group of expectant damsels. He did not look for Pixie; their faces were all one, as far as he was concerned.

'Young ladies,' said he, 'what have you come here to see?'

Nobody was ready with an answer.

'If you know what you want to see, you will be twice as likely to see it.'

'We want to see anything you will be so good as to show us,' said one of the young ladies politely. But the Professor slightly shook his head.

'We do not know what we ought to wish to see, sir,' added another more gravely.

The Professor shrugged his shoulders. 'Well,' said he, 'I will show you some things. At the end you shall all of you tell me, if you please, what you have seen. Now you may approach your eyes to this glass, but—please to notice—*nothing else.*'

He signed to the nearest of the girls to take the place

where he had been standing, before the microscope; and one after the other they relieved each other. He managed it so that Helen's turn came last. Some looked in silence; some uttered emphatic exclamations of surprise and admiration. One fair girl faced around upon him.

'What are they, Professor?' she asked.

'Mademoiselle, what do you think they are?'

'They look like elegant shells—but I can see nothing on the slip of glass under there.'

He took it out, and, holding it up to the light, allowed her to see that a little fine dust was thus noticeable.

'*That?*' said the girl. 'What are they?'

The Professor usually was quite equal to the management of any sort of class; to-day he was meek to an extraordinary degree. To the young lady's question he replied that the objects referred to were the silicious cases of what are called 'Diatoms.'

'None of us know what "diatoms" are,' the young lady rejoined.

'I suppose not. They are a very low form of vegetable life.'

'*Vegetable!* A vegetable with a shell?'

'A shell of silex; not of lime. You know what silex is?'

'Yes but in vegetables?'—

'Other vegetables take up silex. The cuticle of grasses is sometimes full of it. Did you never cut your finger with a blade of grass?'

'Where are these—"diatoms"—found?' asked another young lady as she applied her eye to the microscope.

'Nearly everywhere, where there is water.'

A look of incredulous astonishment met him.

'Nearly everywhere,' he repeated. 'There are many places in the world where the silicious envelopes of diatoms have accumulated by successive deposits to large beds, at the bottom of the sea or of fresh-water lakes. In the Antarctic Ocean they colour the ice brown where

the water washes over it. There is a layer of mud, formed by these deposits, near Victoria Land, that is four hundred miles long'—

'Oh! four hundred miles long!' burst in irrepressible exclamations from one and another of the group.

—'And one hundred and twenty miles broad,' the Professor finished his sentence. 'And there is hardly a ditch or a bit of stagnant water, or a brook or a cistern, where they are not; and often in very great numbers.'

'But how *do* you get them? You cannot see them.'

'And how *can* you manage them after you have got them? How can you manage things you cannot see?'

As I remarked, the Professor was in a very meek state of mind. He bore all this and a good deal more with patient equanimity; told the girls some things, and smilingly informed them that if they would come and look on he would show them some others; and finally, the last of the party having looked her fill, called up Helen to the instrument.

'Do not hurry yourself; they have all seen it,' he said in an aside, and then turned to his questioners again; but not before he had seen a delicious colour start on Helen's soft cheek, and caught one hurried look of delight and wonder which she gave him.

'Professor L'Estrange,' said the bright, handsome girl who had begun the catechizing, 'is it allowable to ask as many questions as we like?'

'I am here to answer them, mademoiselle.—Is the focus right for your eyes?' This last was for Helen; and he had not taken the trouble to ask the same of any of her companions.

'Professor L'Estrange,' the fore-mentioned young lady went on, 'I am consumed with the desire to know why there should be so many diatoms in the world?'

'Do you suppose there is any reason?'

She hesitated.

'Why, of course there must be!' said another.

'I suppose there must be,' assented the first.

'Do you think the fact that *you* cannot see any reason, proves anything?'

Again hesitation. 'Why, Professor, if there was a reason, why shouldn't I see it?'

Mr. L'Estrange smiled a little. 'For much the same cause that would hinder a two-year-old baby from understanding my microscope.'

The girl bridled a little. 'Am I like a baby?' she asked.

'My comparison fails to give the infinite distance between the thoughts of man and the thoughts of God, mademoiselle. The Lord says of them that they are higher, "as the heavens are higher than the earth."'

'But we can understand *some* things?'

'A few. And so I can tell you a part of the uses of diatoms. They are food for creatures that live in water.'

'*Food?*'

'And their silicious coats go to make up certain mineral deposits; as chalk, for instance, and what we call rottenstone.'

He was interrupted by cries of astonishment.

'But chalk is nothing but white powder, if you rub it,' said one.

'And rottenstone is black or grey powder,' said another. The Professor bowed slightly to this scientific announcement.

'But how do you know they are used as food or anything, Professor?' another young lady asked.

'They are found frequently in the stomachs of crustacea and other aquatic animals. Another use they subserve, mademoiselle, is to assist in purifying the ocean waters from carbonic acid. And then, when the life of the diatom has done its work, its silicious envelope, as I hinted, sinks to the bottom and helps to form great beds of earthy deposit.'

'Well, I give up!' said one of the girls. 'These wonders are beyond anything in the Arabian Nights.'

'Professor L'Estrange,' said another, 'I should think you would be a very happy man?'

'Why, mademoiselle, if I may ask?'

'You know such delightful things.'

The Professor left this conjecture where it was, and now replaced the diatoms under the microscope by another object. He showed the party some beautiful seeds and pollen dust; then some exquisite preparations of woody tissue and of animal skin; then some feet and tongues of insects. Finally he said he would show them what he was certain Mrs. Maundeville would particularly like them to see, the circulation of blood in a frog's foot.

'But how can you, Professor?'

'Very easily, mademoiselle. I will have it ready for inspection in a few minutes.'

'But please don't kill him in here!'

'If I did, I could show you no circulation of his blood,' said the Professor dryly.

'Oh, will you hurt him?'

'I will not hurt him at all. I will just submit a portion of the thin membrane of the foot to your inspection. Now, if you please, mademoiselle'—

He always managed to let Helen's turn come the last, so that while he was meeting questions she had an uninterrupted time to look. The questions came thick now, however, and at once.

'Professor, I don't see any blood.'

'What do you see?'

'I see—very curious!—a quantity of little round things hurrying along, and going different ways,'—

'Those are the blood corpuscles.'

'They are not red.'

'I beg your pardon. They are red, but you see a very thin layer of them.'

'Why should that make them not red?'

'You can ask of your instructor to explain that to you.'

'And is that blood?' exclaimed another. 'Has all

blood those little things in it? And what is the use of them?'

These and other points were discussed, at more or less length, until all had looked through the glass, and Helen too had satisfied herself. The frog's foot was the last thing displayed, and the little company gathered themselves together, as it were, to return to ordinary life and home.

'Now, ladies,' said the Professor, 'I come for my promised gage. You were to tell me, if you please to remember, what you have seen. Not of course the several objects I have had the honour to show you; but what you have seen through them, or by means of them.'

It was not quite easy to get at the information demanded; nor, to tell the truth, did the Professor much care, or know what the answers were. He kept the little company busy, and meanwhile covertly studied the one of them who said nothing. He had been doing that all along; watching the soft glow of excitement which rose in her cheeks, catching sometimes a look of rapt delight in the eyes, or of intent and far-reaching thought. He secretly watched her now, while she was again studying the circulation of blood in the frog's foot, and answered with half attention only the remarks of the girls. These did not amount to much, it must be confessed; 'wonders' and 'beauties' they all professed to have seen, and one of them complimented the Professor's kindness; but he had asked them the question only that he might reasonably and without suspicion ask it of another, and he paid little attention to what they said. He amused them until Helen took her eye from the glass.

'What have you seen to-day, Miss Thayer?' said he, coming up to her. 'It is your turn.'

Helen for the moment was lifted out of her usual quietness, and answered more frankly than at another time she might have done to an entire stranger.

'I have seen the glory of God!'

Something perhaps in the smile of the lip and the

sparkle in the eye she was looking at recalled her to herself; she added more soberly,—

'I do not mean, of course, the glory that Moses asked to see; but the invisible glory, the glory of character; "the invisible things of Him, which are clearly seen, being revealed by the things that are made." I never had such a vision before; I did not know that it could be had, or anything like it.'

'What was the glory Moses asked to see?' asked the Professor, as gravely as if he were intent upon philosophy.

'That was visible glory, evidently.'

'How "evidently"?'

'Because it was something which he could not see and live. Because what he did see of it had a transforming physical effect upon himself.'

The Professor looked impenetrable. 'And what have you discovered more particularly?' he went on. 'You see, you are the only one. Nobody else has had the view you have had.'

'I wonder—why that is true?' said Helen soberly.

'They have not eyes.'

Here there was a little bustle and outcry. The girls had become somewhat accustomed to the Professor, and emboldened from their first awe and shyness, and permitted themselves now to make audible complaints that he should judge them to be without visual organs. He shook them off, as it were, giving them no attention, and waited for Helen's words; which were not swift to come.

'I am older,'—she said, as if answering her own wonder.

The Professor thought to himself that she was the youngest of the party; he did not say so. 'Let them have the benefit of your age,' he said dryly. Helen was not very willing to speak, but then he was waiting for her, and all the girls now in listening expectation. She had better speak and be done with it.

'Somebody else might put it much better,' she began.

'But I seemed to see, as never before, the infinite, far-reaching, beautiful wisdom with which the works of creation are ordered and arranged—the adaptation of parts—the perfection of skill.'

'It doesn't look as if the creation had made itself, you think.'

'But oh, Professor L'Estrange,' cried one of the young ladies, 'that brings me back to a question I wanted to ask and it slipped by me. Those invisible little atoms of dust—those diatoms—do tell me why they should have been made so beautiful? What use, when nobody can see them?'

'You can see no use?'

'Why, not in the least, when nobody can see them.'

'You have just seen some of them.'

'Through your microscope. But think of that mud bank four hundred miles long, made up of such delicate, exquisite things! It makes my head swim.'

'I thought of that too,' another young lady confessed.

'Perhaps Miss Thayer can solve the puzzle. Or is it a puzzle to her as well?'

'No,' said Helen; 'that was another of the glories I saw.'

'What glory?' asked one of the girls. 'I see the beauty, but where is the glory?'

'Oh,' said Helen, 'the glory that will bear no imperfection.'

'I wasn't talking of imperfection,' returned the other. 'It wouldn't have been imperfection, would it, if a mud bank had been just a mud bank and nothing more?'

'It would not have been perfection,' said Helen.

'That is it,' said the Professor. 'Go as far as you will, in looking at God's works;—get more and more power of lenses to see further;—and you find nothing but more perfection; you never come to rough or unfinished work.'

'So we know He does not like it,' said Helen.

The other girl—she was a gay beauty—rather pouted.

'When a thing can't be seen,' she said. 'I don't see the use.'

'Everything is seen, sooner or later,' said the Professor.

'Everything!'—

'Even down to people's idle thoughts.'

'Oh but, Professor, that would be dreadful! I have a great many idle thoughts. Pray how should one's thoughts be seen?'

'By the words that reveal them. And "there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed."'

'So you see,' said Helen, coming to the girl's help, who she saw was very near being angry,—'you see what a lesson we have in the diatoms of the inner perfection that the Lord likes.'

'But nobody's thoughts would bear looking into with a microscope. I don't care who it is.'

'What is the answer, Miss Thayer?' asked the Professor.

'It is true,' said Helen. 'But it shall not always be true. For it is written, "The King's daughter is all glorious within." And that other word, "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee."'

The Professor nodded, and smiled a little, and then bowed to his young visitors, allowing them to depart. He even went to the door with them, and stood at the door looking after the gay small procession till they had turned a corner and the last one was out of sight. The last one was Helen Thayer.

CHAPTER XXV.

A CONSULTATION.

IT was a day or two after this that Professor L'Estrange went into Boston and paid his mother a visit. The old lady lived in a little bit of a house, which she owned, in a small inconspicuous court. It was a very small tenement; however, as soon as one entered it he found himself surrounded by all the tokens of good housekeeping and comfort. The neatness on every hand was extreme; the plain articles of household furnishing were well husbanded and in order; the air of the house was fresh. A door at the end of a very short entrance hall admitted the Professor to a pleasant small room, where his mother was sitting in her rocking-chair. A clean little fire burned in the grate; the sunlight streamed in through a back window; the green drugget and green table-cover were spotless and lintless; and Mrs. L'Estrange, with a basket of work beside her, was delighting herself with a newspaper. As her son entered she took off her spectacles and looked at him.

She was a little woman, with a round face full of wrinkles, but clear and healthy in colour; her eye was bright, and the expression of her face shrewd and practical. She did not rise, and he did not kiss her. These two had a great and deep regard for each other, but with the unfortunate New England habit of not showing tenderness in any but involuntary ways. Each, however, examined carefully the other's face, to see its tokens of mental and other condition.

'Good morning, mother. Is all well?'

'When I don't look at the newspaper I think so,' was the answer. 'What's brought you into town, Joseph?'

'I wanted to see you, mother, and have a talk.'

'What about? You haven't got into any fuss at the college?'

'I never get into a fuss,' said the Professor, smiling gravely. 'Did you ever know me do such a thing?'

'Has that ridiculous old housekeeper of yours been cuttin' up any capers?'

'No.'

'I don't believe you'd know if she did. What did she give you for breakfast this morning?'

'I forget.'

'You don't care enough about it, Joseph. You can't have things right in the house if you don't care. Folks want to be kept up to the mark, the best of 'em. I know your eatin' costs you twice what it had ought to, and ain't fit to eat when all's done. You have a kind o' hungry look this minute. Well, I'll give you a dinner, anyhow, that'll stay your stomach till tea-time. I've got as nice a chicken to roast as you want to see, and parsnips, and I made an Indian puddin' yesterday, of the old kind that you like, and there's more'n half of it left. It takes knowin' how to cook for one.'

'Then you cannot find cause for surprise if my old Abigail sometimes makes a mistake.'

'I thought her name was somethin' else,—Lucindy?'

'So it is, I believe.'

'Then why do you call her Abigail? Ain't losin' your memory, air you? I didn't say I was surprised, did I? I'm never surprised except when folks does the right thing.'

The old lady folded up her newspaper and laid it by, put on her spectacles and took up her work.

'I should think your handmaiden might have time enough to do that for you,' her son remarked.

'Well, Joseph,' returned his mother, 'I suppose you know a great deal, but housekeepin' ain't one o' the

things. I sometimes think some folks jes' know too much to know a little; and whether the little ain't of more importance than the much, on that point I'm not clear. What's brought you into town to-day?' she asked suddenly, letting her work fall in her lap, and looking over her spectacles at her son. ''Tain't to see me, that's one thing I can make out.'

The Professor laughed a little. 'You have good eyes, mother,' he said.

'Well, I don't know,' said the old lady; 'but I sometimes conceit I can look through you.'

'Not difficult, when there is nothing to see.'

'And now that ain't the case, hey? I can see so much. Well, go on, Joseph; I've nothin' to do but to listen. Wait till I see if the girl has put that chicken down.'

She rose and bustled away with all the vigour of a woman of thirty; came back after a few minutes, with the same alert step, sat down, and looked expectantly at her son. The Professor was not ready, and took the poker in hand to stir up the fire.

'Jes' let that be, Joseph,' said his mother quietly; 'what should you go to tormenting the fire for? it can't burn no better than what it's doing. What's wrong with you?'

The Professor laughed again, put down the useless poker, and spoke without looking at the old lady.

'Mother, you know everybody; do you know a Mrs. Maundeville?'

'The one that keeps a girls' school in Vernon Street?'

'She has young ladies with her;—I do not know in what street.'

'Well?' said his mother, all attention. 'I guess I know her, but I never had much to do with her. She's been flyin' about the world too much; one o' those folks that won't stand still to let you look at 'em. What do *you* know about her?'

'Not much, beyond the fact I have mentioned. She

has a Miss Thayer with her. I wish you would find out for me who *she* is and where she comes from.'

And, as he said this, the Professor's eyes came round to his mother, and the two looked at each other steadily.

'Joseph, what do you want to know that for?'

'I want to get acquainted with her mother, if she has one,' the Professor said frankly.

'I thought you was safe!' said Mrs. L'Estrange, after a moment's pause; and she said it as if the opinion had been found defective.

'Safe from what?'

'From bein' made a fool of.'

'I hope you were right.'

'What do you want to know this girl's mother for?'

'I like the daughter so well.'

'Hm!' said the old lady. 'So you're no wiser than the rest of folks, Joseph, with all your learnin'! Learnin' don't help folks much, for all I see. What's taken you in this girl?'

'I could not tell you,' her son answered, after a moment's hesitation.

'No, nor no one else, I'll warrant,' said the old lady, rubbing her forehead worriedly. 'I thought you was safe; and now here you'll go and jes' make shipwreck of everything!'

'Why, mother,' said the Professor, laughing, 'you take far too solemn a view of things. What am I likely to shipwreck, do you think? And do you think it is good for man to be alone?'

'Yes, I do, Joseph; when the man is you, and when you have lived till now by yourself and got fond o' your own ways. Do you know what a wife 'll do for you? O' course you don't.'

As he did not answer, she went on.

'She'll jes' turn things upside down for you. She'll want to go out when you want to stay in; she'll be chattering when you wish she'd hold her tongue; she'll bring folks round her that you'd jes' as lieved keep away;

and she'll make a rumpus in your study, where you want nobody to come in but yourself. You can't keep *her* out, and she'll do jes' what she likes. With some men she couldn't, but with you she will. I know you; you can keep your college boys in order, but your wife you won't. You've got a soft spot in your heart for women-folks, when it comes to takin' care of 'em.'

The Professor heard, but as his mother spoke his fancy brought before him the sweet face of Helen Thayer, and his mother's words of threatening had no power to terrify him. To fear *her* hand in his study, or her voice in his ear, was simply out of the question. His mother, watching the effect of her words, saw a slight smile, which told her how completely they had shattered. She wasted no more at the time. She got up and went to see about her dinner, and then she overlooked the laying of the cloth, and soon there was served up to the Professor the nicest possible little meal, with no extravagance or profusion, but with comfort in every detail. Mrs. L'Estrange, in spite of her son's disturbing communications, enjoyed her dinner; she noticed that he by no means did justice to it. Both of them were thinking.

'Joseph,' she said, when they were eating some well-kept apples after the dinner was taken away,—'Joseph, that girl is too young for you.'

'No,' he said easily. 'I want some years of forty yet.'

'And she?—how much does she want of everything? And how many lives ought a man to live before he begins again with seventeen?'

'Seventeen!'

'Yes. You're twice that and more.'

The Professor gave a short laugh. 'You are too experienced, mother, not to know that in matters of this kind all these considerations signify nothing. Besides, Miss Thayer is more than the age you mention.'

'Not a day. They are all young things; I know, for I've seen 'em. I think you're bewitched. 'Tain't like you, Joseph.'

The Professor looked at her gravely. 'It is not that one,' he said.

'Which one? I was speakin' of 'em all.'

'I was speaking of none of them. The one I mean is not with Mrs. Maundeville.'

'What's Mrs. Maundeville got to do with her, then? You are getting my head all confused, Joseph.'

'Mother,' said the Professor good-humouredly, 'you know your head is never confused. I am not speaking of a Miss Thayer at Mrs. Maundeville's, but of a sister, who is at home or elsewhere; and I want to know where.'

Mrs. L'Estrange finished her apple in what seemed discontented silence.

'You know, Joseph,' she remarked as she left the table, 'when a man is married he's done for himself; he's got to take things as he finds 'em after that.'

'How more than before?' the Professor asked, with a twinkle of his eye.

'Before that, if he don't like 'em he can change 'em. And you like things as you've got 'em now.'

'I have a desire to change them, nevertheless,' said he, smiling.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A VISIT.

MRS. L'ESTRANGE was a woman of business, and however little she liked her trust, did not fail to execute it. And so it befell, that one fair day in the latter part of spring, her son was driving a little light buggy along the road that led from Boston to Daisy Plains. A pretty country road, running for the most part through a fine farming country, now smiling with the plentiful promise of crops and harvests, to be gathered in by and by. Ploughed fields, young grain, fruit trees in blossom, meadows lush with the fresh growth of grass; cattle feeding at ease, looking happy and comfortable; neat farmhouses, clean barnyards, stacks of cut wood in the house sheds; fences trim, and gates well hung, met the traveller's eye continually in shifting and changing combinations; but everywhere was the picture of thrift, ease, and plenty. Few people were to be seen on the road; therefore it struck the Professor's eye as a new feature when he observed a little before him, as he came round a turn, the figure of a lady on horseback; and some instinct of curiosity, or of recognition, made him whip up his horse. The rider was just then going leisurely, so that he had a chance to get near her. She sat well and easily; the animal she rode was a light sorrel pony, with cream-coloured mane and tail; and horse and rider seemed to be taking things pleasantly, the pony going gently, the rider looking about her, as if she, as the Professor had been doing, were enjoying the landscape. Something made Mr. L'Estrange sure that

the light, erect, supple figure, which conformed so easily to the pony's movements, was one he had seen before, and seen but once; and he encouraged his horse by a motion of the reins to come up alongside; but perhaps pony disapproved of steps behind him, for he forthwith set off in a light canter, which was swift enough to distance the buggy. The Professor jogged on, disappointed, watching the figure on horseback, which went straight as an arrow and steady as a swaying pine tree, right on into the lessening distance. Then fortune favoured him, for the lady brought her horse about and came at the same swift pace, now approaching him. On she came, till she was almost abreast of the buggy; then suddenly saw who was in it, and reined up, wheeling her pony again, and bringing him close alongside. Her eyes were bright and her cheeks had a colour; that might have been the exercise; but her lips had a smile that certainly was due to the stranger himself.

'Professor L'Estrange!' she said, with an accent half of greeting and half of surprise; certainly pleased surprise.

The Professor bowed and lifted his hat.

'It is well met,' he said; 'for I am a stranger in this place. Is there anything here that corresponds to an inn in other places?'

'Oh yes,' said Helen, 'certainly; but—they have sickness in the house; it would not be pleasant for you. If you will come in and see mother, Professor L'Estrange, I think she can tell you what to do. Our house is about half a mile further on. May I take you there?'

'I desire no better,' said the Professor. 'You are very kind.' So they trotted on together.

'You leave town early,' Mr. L'Estrange remarked; for Helen kept her pony by his side.

'Oh, always! It is so much pleasanter here at home.'

'Because it is home? or for more general reasons?'

'Oh, we made that home, too, while we were in Boston; but I like this home best.'

'For what special reason?'

'Country is better than town; don't you think so?'

'It is prettier,' said the Professor, letting his eye rove for a moment over the green, blossoming, fragrant landscape,—'it is prettier; but there are things in the city that you cannot have here.'

'Microscopes,' said Helen, smiling; 'and the advantages of learning. Yes, we are simple people down here at Daisy Plains.'

'This is a very good place for a microscope,' said the Professor. 'But society'—

'I am not very fond of what is called society,' Helen returned.

'Shall I be thought impertinent if I ask why not?'

'No,' said Helen, laughing; 'if you will not judge my reasons conceited or presumptuous. Professor L'Estrange, in my experience it doesn't amount to much.'

'In my experience, on the contrary, it amounts to a great deal.'

'Ah, *you*,' said Helen. 'I daresay. I do not doubt it. *You* would have, I suppose, a kind of society that would delight me.'

'I should like to know what you suppose my kind of society is?' said the Professor, with a humorous smile.

'I suppose it to be a kind where there is real refreshment, and stimulus, and gain of knowledge to be had. That *ought* to be the result of people's coming together to see each other and talk.'

'It ought, certainly. And, may I ask, what is the actual result in your experience?'

'If I spoke honestly, I should say, weariness and loss of time. But I am speaking very frankly to you.'

'That is not the character I have heard given to Boston society,' said the Professor, with the same amused smile.

'Oh, I have no doubt it is not all so. I have happened upon the wrong side of it.'

'Perhaps you prefer diatoms to humanity?'

'To some humanity. Oh, I should not say so; and it ought not to be true. All humanity has its points of interest;—at least, one interesting side; it must be my fault that I cannot always get at it. It is my fault, of course. But it is true.'

'That one interesting side—what is it?'

Helen looked at him in a little grave surprise. 'When one remembers that they are not mortal, but immortal.'

'That *is* a point frequently forgotten,' said the Professor.

'But if you remember it, and other people forget it, that makes society a sorrowful, shadowy thing,' Helen went on. 'It makes one weary to see them forgetting their immortality; and yet it is not always possible—for me—to remind them of it.'

'It is not always possible.'

'Yet it seems as if it might be. And so I cannot enjoy the things they use to help them to forget what they are.'

'No,' said the Professor thoughtfully.

'It is not a sensible conclusion, I suppose, to dislike society; but it comes to that. And then Daisy Plains seems to me delightfully peaceful. Look at those apple blossoms.'

She pointed with her riding-whip to a large orchard just then in its wealth and beauty of bloom. It was, indeed, her mother's own, though they had a little circuit of road still to travel before getting to the house door. The professor looked at the apple trees steadily for a moment.

'Allow me to ask,' said he,—'is the society at Daisy Plains more pleasantly constituted than that of which you have been speaking?'

'Daisy Plains? Oh, we have none.'

'No society?'

'No; not what you would call so. Oh, neighbours

come and see each other sometimes; but there is little even of such visiting; and they very seldom invite each other to any entertainment.'

'When they do?'—

'When they do come together—well, yes; I do not know that the people are any better; but I think they are more thoughtful than the people in the city.'

'Do not forget their immortality?'

'I do not know,' said Helen. 'It is a more natural life, a more sober life; and so, perhaps, a more conscious life, than people have amid more bustle and distractions. But here we are,' she said, jumping off her pony; 'this is home. Will you come in, Mr. L'Estrange?'

He tied his horse and followed her in, noticing as he went up the path the hyacinths and tulips and snowdrops, jonquils and narcissus, which were blooming on every side and in beautiful order. He noticed, too, when he came into the porch the exquisitely neat condition of everything there. But Helen did not leave him much time to look about him and smell the apple blossoms; she opened the door and led him into the presence of her mother.

These two took to each other at once. He saw a fine, handsome, grave, sweet woman, all whose look and manner told of character and experience. She saw the tokens of acute intelligence, thought, kindliness, and dignity, under a fine exterior, and a certain very pleasant, frank, and straightforward manner.

'Mother,' said Helen, 'Professor L'Estrange has come to Daisy Plains on business, but he does not know the place nor anybody here; and you know he could not be comfortable at the Caroways just now; so I brought him to you.'

'Not to give you any trouble,' said the Professor, as Helen disappeared, going to get off her riding dress;—'but Miss Thayer was so good as to take pity on me; and I thought perhaps you could tell me where I could get my horse put up.'

'We have plenty of room,' said Mrs. Thayer, 'both in the house and out of the house; and shall be glad for our own sakes that the inn is in no condition to receive visitors. Mercy,'—opening a door and raising her voice a little,—'Mercy, send James to take the gentleman's horse and put it up; and open the windows in the red room.'

'But this is kindness to which I have no claim,' said the Professor; accepting it, however, as frankly as it was given, and sitting down with a feeling of profound comfort in the pleasant room. It had all the pleasantness of what is simple, genuine, and natural; full of promise, but making no pretension. It was an ordinary room of a commonplace farmhouse; rather old, for the great beams which supported the floor above were not covered in, and stood out in rich brown tints against the white ceiling. The carpet was inexpensive, but of soft, inconspicuous pattern; the chairs and tables likewise had no particular elegance of fashion or material; the woodwork of the room was painted brown, and the hearth was laid in red brick. Yet the Professor sat down in front of the fireplace and felt himself uncommonly pleased with his situation and surroundings. The life that was lived in this place was real, whatever else might be said about it. There were no shams anywhere. The room had a harmonized pleasant air from soft-toned chintz curtains and coverings of some easy-chairs and a sofa; the spring light came in cheerily at three rather small windows, met by a warmer light, which streamed forth from a quietly burning fire of good logs in the fireplace. And books lay piled on the tables, and baskets of work were here and there, and a davenport and a portfolio told of writing work. In it all and from it all breathed indescribably a breath of peace; which yet one felt was a peace connected with stirring activity, and enriched with the refinements of many tastes. But especially there was here no conventional life. The Professor felt himself greatly stirred to contentment, and sat looking into the fire like a man who had got where he would be.

'This is most delightful!' he said suddenly to Mrs. Thayer, who had left him for a moment.

'You are tired with your drive?' she asked, not knowing quite how to interpret his pleasure.

'Tired! no, not with that; but tired of the confusions of the world. You seem to be here in a bay, past which the great stream runs, keeping you fresh but leaving you quiet.'

Mrs. Thayer smiled, a little surprised, while she was attracted by his manner.

'Yes,' she said; 'it is partly so. It is more or less true—at present. But you know, I think, from what Helen has told me, that there is only one real place of quiet,—where those that know it rest "under the shadow of His wings."'

'What did Miss Helen tell you about me?' he asked, looking up.

It is inexplicable by what power of perception or intuition Mrs. Thayer got from these words, or from an inscrutable something in the accent of the speaker, a quick thought of the feeling that possessed him. It came, sharp as a flash of light; but was immediately dismissed from her mind, as altogether impossible and absurd.

'She told me all about her pleasant visit to your microscope, and the talk that went on about it. Living as we do, we tell each other everything.'

'That is much more than Miss Helen did to me. She said as little as possible.'

'She is not a great talker,' said Mrs. Thayer, wondering.

'People that are great talkers seldom have much to say. I could see that was not the case with your daughter. The others, who had as nearly as possible nothing to say, were very free with their words.'

'Both my daughters were there, were they not?'

'I believe so,' said the Professor, half laughing; 'but really my attention was concentrated on the one. Of the

others, I saw only a general flutter of butterflies' wings, —a shimmer of colour and stir of life;'—

He paused, and if he had more in his mind did not utter it. Still wondering, Mrs. Thayer invited her guest to go up to his room, and get rid of any stray dust before supper; for part of his way had been over a dusty road.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SKIRMISHING.

THE 'red room' was as pleasant to the Professor's feeling as the sitting-room down-stairs had been. It took its name evidently from red wainscoting and hangings; those the guest did not much regard; but he noticed the refined purity of the appointments; he tasted the sweetness of the fresh, clean air; and when his eyes turned to the window they were met by the glory of the apple blossoms in the orchard close by. The fragrance and the splendour of them seemed to come in and fill the room. The Professor felt it quite harmonious that Helen should have grown up to be what she was in such surroundings, and went down-stairs with even increased satisfaction.

And then he was more delighted than ever. He was taken into another room to supper, where the floor was painted brown and uncovered, and the same brown wainscoting clothed the walls. Here there was a softly burning, genial fire of English coal, which the coolness of the air made very pleasant, although the apple trees were in full blossom. Indeed, one small window was open, and here too the glory of the apple orchard was in full view. Some of the sweet blossoms were in a glass on the table; and the table itself was the cosiest-looking that was possible. It was small and round; not too small to hold a wealth of good things, but allowing the three seated at it to be very near each other. The Professor took as a mere matter of course what would have struck another stranger; that china and glass and tea service,

though simple enough, gave unequivocal proof of refined habits. Professor L'Estrange took his place, feeling himself in a social paradise.

'Miss Pixie is still in Boston?' he asked, addressing himself to Helen.

'Yes. She will be there two or three—three or four—weeks yet.

'You are exact.'

'Should not one be exact?'

'I see it is the habit of your mind.'

'Mamma has always made it the habit of our tongues.'

'With Pixie,'—Mrs. Thayer said, correcting this statement. 'It is not my doing that it is the habit of your tongue, May. I think the Professor is right.'

'It is the habit of some minds to be true,' said he. 'They are born so. It would cost them much more to be false than to be true. They are what you may call the incorruptible gold of humanity. There isn't much of it lying loose about.'

'But there is surely no incorruptible gold of humanity!' said Helen.

'Not much of it,' said the Professor. 'Don't you think the Lord has a few bits of gold for Himself, scattered here and there?'

Helen was too much confounded to answer. Mrs. Thayer was obliged to recur to her banished thought, though she did her best to banish it again. It was too preposterous. Yet she saw that the Professor, while doing justice to the nice things on her table like a man with an appetite, nevertheless was not attending to what he was eating. He was looking out at the apple blossoms, and thinking—what was he thinking of? But then he began to talk.

'You have the prettiest dining-room, Mrs. Thayer, that ever I saw,' he said.

'*This?*' said Helen, laughing, and not displeased. 'Why, there is nothing handsome in it.'

'More than you know,' the Professor answered dryly.

'But look at those trees just outside of it! I hold to the North. I have sat at table in the midst of all the luxuriant vegetation of the tropics; with palms waving, and bananas rich with their clusters, and the slim, graceful bamboo, with a hundred other things; and creepers and flowers making a blaze everywhere, and birds brilliant as winged blossoms;—but I like this better.'

'With only the apple blossoms!'—cried Helen.

'There is nothing in all the world better than apple blossoms,' said the Professor.

'Yet that tropic magnificence must be pleasant to see,' remarked Mrs. Thayer.

'To see, and come away. There is a character difference. All that tropic magnificence speaks of passion and changeableness; nature runs riot with a sort of violence of profusion; there is quick growth and swift decay. In the cooler and slower North you have the strength and calm of that which is abiding.'

'Where have you seen the tropics?' Mrs. Thayer asked.

In answer to which the Professor launched out upon a sea of recollections and experiences, and talked so as to enchant his two listeners. He was not an indiscriminate talker; was often silent in company, and when he spoke was more apt to put what he had to say into a few words, and have done with it; but there were occasions and there were people who drew him out; and this was one of the times. He talked delightfully, finding his audience quite to his mind; and these women, who were so cultivated and so quick of intelligence, had yet led lives so simple and uneventful that they were like white paper in their receptivity. However, that is a very bad image for the sort of ground the Professor's talk found to work upon. He had seen a great deal of the world; he had been a scientific as well as a curious observer; he had even lived abroad in his youth, when he spent some years in Germany at one of the universities; and Helen was greatly interested with his accounts of German student life and the peculiar doings of the German student *corps*.

'And you were really one of them, Professor L'Estrange?'

'Certainly,' said he. 'I wore the ribbon.'

'But you said,—before any one could wear it he must fight three duels?'

'Yes, well?'

'You fought?'

'Oh, certainly,' said the Professor, laughing. 'I fought them, of course; three before, and I don't know how many after. It is an old saying, Miss Thayer, that boys will be boys; I sometimes am of the mind that they are like nothing else in creation. It seems to be a transition state, almost as little resembling childhood and manhood as the larva state of an insect is unlike its former and latter stages. Only that is the very worst possible comparison; for the period to which I have likened the larva is one of concentrated vitality and activity, instead of torpor.'

'But in what you have been telling us,' said Mrs. Thayer, 'there is more than concentrated vitality; it sounds to me like brutality. Does it not tend to brutality, all this "burschenthum" life of which you have been telling?'

'A little, perhaps,' said the Professor. 'I am afraid something like that is often a condition of the stage of life we have been considering. There is such an exuberance of vital consciousness that one's own "ego" swallows up all others—for the time. However, in what concerns the "burschenthum," I am inclined, I confess, to prefer its extravagances to our custom of hazing—or to the English fagging system—as less brutalizing and more noble.'

'And the drinking?' said Mrs. Thayer.

'I have given up all drinking long ago,' he said, with a very genial smile. '*My* German student life is left a great way behind.'

The talk ran on, making the supper-time a long one; and then it continued in the other room with untiring

and unflagging variety and interest. The ladies, as they parted for the night, agreed that it was a happy thing for them that the inn was ineligible just then for visitors. Another of the family took a somewhat different view.

'What man is dat ar?' asked Mercy next morning, when Mrs. Thayer came into the kitchen to see about breakfast.

'He is a professor in the college—or the university—near Boston.'

'What's he come here for?'

'I do not know—some business of his own. I did not ask him what his business was.'

'Reckon he'll tell you some day, of his own accord. Reckon he will. Is he a good man, Mis' T'ayer?'

'A very good man; and a very clever man. He knows a vast deal, of all sorts of things. Then you may make some waffles, Mercy.'

'Hm!' said Mercy, with an indescribable expression. 'Yes, I'll make 'em, Mis' T'ayer; but 'tain't no sort o' use. He don' know what he's eatin', dat man don't. And he don' know what he sees before his eyes, no mo'. His eyes don' see nothin' but Christiana.'

Mrs. Thayer started a little; she made no answer.

'Dat's what he don't,' Mercy went on. 'Do she like him, Mis' T'ayer?'

'Hush, Mercy! I am sure I don't know. Do not breathe a word of such a thing!'

Mrs. Thayer went back to the parlour in some disturbance of mind. And she tried to observe more carefully at breakfast the manner of her guest; but could find no corroboration of her handmaid's surmise. Fresh and bright and free the talk flowed on again as it had done the evening before; Mrs. Thayer could see no signs of an engrossed or preoccupied mind.

'I have been thinking all night—or dreaming,' Helen said,—'of your stories of German students. Do not the authorities try to prevent some of those doings?'

'They try very hard.'

And accomplish nothing?'

'Not much. The students are more than a match for the faculty, everywhere, so far as I know, if they set themselves about it.'

'But that ought not to be.'

The Professor smiled. 'Don't you know,' said he, 'that in this world wrong is stronger than right?'

'Oh no!' cried Helen.

'I said *in this world*—not absolutely. Right is stronger than wrong just now, as things are. Surely you know that the devil is the prince of this world? And the current of folly flows with more force than the stream of wisdom.'

'But oh, *that* ought not to be, either,' said Helen.

'You know it is true, though? See the pains people will take for everything under heaven, *except* the truth. See the exertions, the self-denials, the heartiness of purpose and steadiness of aim, with which the followers of false religions pursue what they think their duty or their safety. See their pilgrimages, fastings, contributions, observances, wars, for the maintenance of false faith. See the follower of Mahomet dropping everything, business or pleasure, three times a day, to pray; he will break off a bargain, or stop in a journey, or cut short the most important conversation, when the time comes. Prayer first, then business. How many Christians in name, do you think, follow that rule?'

The ladies were silent, looking at the speaker.

'And men will do anything and bear anything in their pursuit of honour, or gain, or pleasure, or knowledge. Ask them to do the tithe of so much for Christ! Daisy Plains must be a very exceptional place, if things are different here.'

'They are not different,' said Helen in a low voice.

'The victory of the right will come one day; in the meantime all we can do is to fight on against odds. Against visible odds. We are too apt to forget that the

mountain was full of horses of fire and chariots of fire round about Elisha.'

'If one knew how to fight!' said Helen thoughtfully. 'How to make best fight, I mean.'

'Yes, it is a question,' said the Professor. 'I sometimes think I have got as much on my hands as I can manage.'

'You! Oh yes; it is easy for a man, I should think, to find his place and his work. It is not so easy for a woman.'

'Why not?'

'There seems so little she can do.'

'"*Au jour la journée,*"' said the Professor, smiling. 'Take what comes and do it well; that I am sure is your rule; and it is the rule for every servant of a wise and good Master. The Master knows what He wants each servant to do; doesn't He?'

'Yes, but the servant does not always know. Different things may hinder his knowing.'

'Not in the long run, if he is quite willing to know. Now, are you not going to show me your beautiful apple orchard before I go?'

They rose from the table, and, while Helen went for her hat, Mrs. Thayer asked her guest if she could give him any help in the business that had brought him to Daisy Plains, as he was a stranger in the place.

'Thank you—you are very good! Should I be trespassing too much on your kindness, if I asked you to drive a short distance with me to show me my way?'

Mrs. Thayer could do no other than give her assent, although it struck her that the request was somewhat peculiar; and then Helen came in.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HAND TO HAND.

IT occurred to the younger lady in like manner to marvel a little that the Professor could not look at the orchard without help; however, the thought was very soon banished. She found, indeed, that *she* was the person who needed assistance to see what was there. She was able, to be sure, to tell her visitor the names of the trees, and to describe their habit, and the quality of the fruit that each one bore; and these things he desired to know; but then insensibly he led her on to other and various pieces of knowledge concerning the apple trees, which he had and she had not; and in the charm of this discussion Helen presently forgot every impertinent thought of how she had come by it. He explained to her eager ears how plants grow; he described in detail the various functions of the different parts; the movement of sap in the woody tissue, and its preparation in the green laboratories of the leaves; the uses and structure of the flowers. Helen listened with charmed ears, as they went strolling on from one tree to another; the day was one of our rare spring days, soft, tender, and still; and it was a pleasure only to be out in it and to feel the air and see the light. But I do not know whether they saw the light much, they were so busy looking at apple blossoms.

'I am inclined to go back to a question some one put about the diatoms that day,' said Helen at last, 'and ask what may sound like a similar question. Is there any special reason, that we know, *beside* the beauty, why

flowers should have their various lovely colours, and not be all green, or all like one another?'

'I am afraid science has not got so far as to answer,' said the Professor. 'One very partial use is subserved by the distinguishing hues of some flowers, in that the insects which visit them to get honey from them may know them from a distance.'

'Do they that?' said Helen.

'I think there is no doubt but they do, in many instances. It is almost proved in the case of some of the orchids, upon which careful observations have been made, in quantity.'

'It would be unlike all the rest of the Lord's works,' said Helen, 'if the flowers did not serve more purposes than one.'

'Do you know any other?'

'Besides the pleasure? Yes, — I think they have characters, moral and spiritual, from which we can learn lessons.'

'Explain to me that,' said the Professor, stopping and facing round upon his companion.

'I am not good at explaining,' Helen said, with a smile. 'I can only feel.'

'But if you know *what* you feel, you can tell it.'

'Does it follow? I seem to perceive many things in the flowers;—but one thing, they seem to me to bid every one do his very best, his very prettiest, in the place where he is. And *not* to think that every one must do it on the same pattern,—which we are so tempted to forget.'

'Going back to your thought of the work one has to do in the world.'

'Yes,'—said Helen. 'A large part of that work is to *be* the best and utmost that one can. And that the flowers seem to say. The use,' she added, smiling, 'may not be always apparent.'

'What can you do at Daisy Plains?'

'Not much, I am afraid. There seems to be very little here that one can do. There are no poor people; and

society generally has got into ruts, and does not want to get out of them.'

'I can conceive that. But we are told that some flowers are "born to waste their sweetness on the desert air," you know; so the parallel holds.'

'I do not believe that,' said Helen. 'I do not believe that in God's works, or arrangements, anything is wasted. It cannot be. Where He puts a flower, or a person, there He wants the one and the other to be; and the use He will know how to secure.'

'I believe that heartily,' said the Professor, 'so far as our own action does not come in. It is possible for a man, or a woman, to refuse the place to which the providence of God assigns him; and so miss himself and cause others to miss an untold amount of good, which otherwise would accrue.'

'Oh yes!' said Helen.

'I am going to bring that home,' said the Professor. 'I want to transplant this particular flower from its isolation in Daisy Plains to the midst of a very different world, that wants it.'

Helen could not conceive what he meant. He meant something; of that his serious, speaking countenance assured her; but he was holding a sprig of apple blossoms in his hand as he spoke, and no idea came to her but a vague and impossible one, that he wanted to move that particular tree into his garden at Cambridge. She looked puzzled. He saw it, and went on.

'It was for that I came down here. That is really my business. From the time I first saw you I knew one thing,—that, however it might be in your case, *my* life would never come up to its full rounded possibilities—of either use or happiness—unless I had you by my side.'

There was no mistaking him now. Helen started and flushed a little, as she looked up at him; but unbounded astonishment for the moment mastered every other feeling.

'I am a bold man, to speak so plainly without giving

you any preparation,' he went on, with half a smile; 'but I do not think I am good at strategy. I should not understand how to make the gradual approaches of a regular siege,—and I believe I have not the patience to wait for it. And I do not believe it is necessary. In some cases, straight out is the best. Do not suppose for a moment,' he said, with another smile, 'that I expect you to make up your mind as suddenly as I made up mine. Mine was made up, I think, five minutes after I saw you. It has never changed since,—and never will change, I believe. My haste is only to declare myself, that then at your full leisure you may think over the matter'—

He paused. Involuntarily they had put themselves in motion again, and were slowly, and now aimlessly, pacing along under the apple trees. Helen's tongue was tied with astonishment; she was not able to bring out a word; she walked on mechanically, with her thoughts in a whirl of confusion.

'I really do not know how to plead my cause,' the Professor went on, after a short silence. 'I have nothing to offer but the bare facts,—that from the time I saw you I yielded myself your unconditional captive; and since then have had but one dominant wish,—to be allowed to give you all I have. Whether it is worth your accepting you can hardly at present know; my request therefore is, that I may be allowed to put you in the way of finding that out, by coming to see you sometimes.'

'Oh, stop, Mr. L'Estrange!' Helen cried at last, catching her breath. 'Do not talk so! I am very sorry!—I did not know—I had no thought.'

'I know you had not,' he said gently. 'It was only I whose fate was decided that hour over the microscope. There was no earthly reason why you should think of me. But now you will think, for I ask it. If I am not worthy of you, that is not saying much in my opinion; for I do not believe anybody lives that is worthy.'

'Oh no!' said Helen. 'Worthy! there is no question

of worthiness. But I cannot—I cannot let anybody say such things to me.'

'Why not?' he asked quietly.

'Because I do not mean ever to go away from home. You are very good, Mr. L'Estrange,—you do me honour quite beyond what I deserve; but—I mean to stay with my mother.'

'Would it not do as well if she stayed with you?'

'Oh no! She will stay here—and I mean to stay with her always. I daresay Pixie will marry and go away; but I mean to stay with mother.'

'And yet you will not,' he said.

Helen looked up at him. He was taking her words quite quietly, she saw; not dismayed by them, nor disheartened, to judge by his looks.

'Why should I not?' she asked involuntarily.

'You are made for a wider field of action and influence; and you will find that out. Daisy Plains is no sphere for you. The flower must stand where it can exercise its power of attraction, or the flies will get no honey from it,' he added, with a smile.

'Oh, I do not want to attract flies!—or anything else,' said Helen.

'Nevertheless, it is what the flower is set to do. And, pardon me, you *do* want to attract people that you may draw them the way that leads to Christ.'

'Yes,' said Helen, hanging her head a little, — 'if I could. That, of course. But, Mr. L'Estrange, *that* is true; and it may be that you could offer me a far better field of action than I have here, or can have; but that is really nothing to the question. What you want me to do is not to be done for such reasons; nor for any reason but one.'

'No,' said he gravely; 'nor would I have you. Not unless you can love me; and that, perhaps, you cannot yet tell.'

'Yes,' said Helen, 'I can. I know. I shall never love anybody, in that way. I am going to give my life to mamma.'

'May I ask,' said he,—'I *may* ask, for so much it is right I should know,—is there anybody else who stands in the way of your loving me?'

Helen lifted her eyes and gave him an unhesitating negative.

'That is enough,' said he, grasping her hand and giving it a warm pressure. 'You will love me yet,—not that I am worthy, but I love you; and I will wait.'

Helen was dumb, and absolutely let the assertion stand without challenge. She was very sure in her own mind that Mr. L'Estrange deceived himself, and that no such things would take place as he seemed to foresee; certainly he was only deceiving himself; nevertheless, the strength of his quiet confidence was imposing, and she disliked to combat it. The words had not been spoken aggressively; they demanded no answer; and she left them unanswered.

They returned to the house after that. Mrs. Thayer, watching them as they came, saw that Helen looked flushed and disturbed, while no trace of either was discernible in the Professor. He quietly claimed her promise to drive a little way with him; and, much doubting in her own mind, Mrs. Thayer went. Helen betook herself to the kitchen, where she had something to do.

'What sort'n a man is dat ar?' asked Mercy, looking also suspiciously at Helen's flushed face.

'Oh, he is a very fine man, Mercy!'

'Fine how?'

'Many ways. He is very clever; he knows a great many things'—

'Well, dat all don't make a fine man—what I calls fine. Dar is folks knows a heap, and dey's no count arter all. Knowin' ain't much; what I cares about is doin'.'

'He is a good man too, Mercy.'

'Is he, sure?'

'I think so.'

'Christiana, how does you know?'

'Mercy, I know his character; and I know how he talks.'

'I don't set no store by talkin'. Talkin's as easy as eatin'. Don't tell nothin'.'

'I think you are wrong. *Some* talk tells nothing; but there are other things that I think can only come from the truth.'

'Is he a great man, dat Perfessor?'

'Great? It is only people who do great things, I suppose, that can be reckoned great men. I do not know whether Mr. L'Estrange has ever had an opportunity of doing great things. But, you know, the Bible says, "He that ruleth his spirit is greater than he that taketh a city." So I do not know, Mercy.'

'Does you like him, Christiana?'

'Like him? Certainly.'

'Not too much?'

'What do you mean, Mercy? No, I do not like him too much.'

'I jes' wanted to know,' said Mercy. But she did not like the flush on her young mistress's cheek. I hardly know why. Perhaps it was more than anything else because of jealousy for Helen, thinking nobody in the world good enough for her.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AN ARMISTICE.

MRS. THAYER came into the house alone, meeting Helen in the sitting-room.

'What have you done with Professor L'Estrange?' asked the latter.

'What have *you* done with him?'

'Nothing!—nothing in the world, mother,' said Helen, half laughing, but flushing too again. 'Why do you ask?'

'Where have you ever seen him? how much have you ever been with him?'

'Just that one day when we went to see the microscope. Never any other time, until yesterday.'

'I do not understand it!' said Mrs. Thayer. 'May, it is love at first sight.'

'I—I am sorry for it, mamma,' said Helen humbly.

'Come up-stairs; I want to speak to you, May.'

'But where is the Professor?' said Helen, as she obediently followed her mother.

'Driving in to Boston—he has duties there, he says, or at Cambridge, which is the same thing. He would not come in. But he says he is going to visit us again, May?'

'Yes.—I am sorry, mamma,' repeated Helen in the same way.

'Why do you say "yes"?'

'Because—I understood that he would, mamma; he said much the same thing, or what amounted to the same thing, to me.'

'Then why do you say you are sorry?' asked Mrs. Thayer, sitting down and surveying her daughter.

'Because I *am* sorry, mother. It is no use for him to come. I wish he would not.'

'Did you tell him so?'

Helen considered, and said finally, 'No.'

'Why didn't you—if you meant it?'

'That question did not come up. He did not ask me if he might. It was a conclusion he made on his own responsibility.' Helen could not help half laughing again, even while she looked vexed.

'Mother, I said no to everything else.'

'You ought to have negatived that too, if you meant it. May, *why* do you mean it?'

Mrs. Thayer's manner changed, and her tone became rather wistful as she looked at her daughter.

'Mother—I cannot help it.'

'What cannot you help?'

'Feeling so. I do not want to go away from home, ever. I daresay Pixie will marry somebody,—she is so pretty,—and, mother, I mean always to stay with you.'

The girl had thrown herself on the floor at her mother's feet, and was fondly embracing her knees, looking up at her with a most loving, winsome expression, half caressing and half pleading for her choice.

'What is the reason, May?' Mrs. Thayer asked in a low voice.

'No reason, mother, except that I like it better.'

'May, I must ask you now,—Is there any lingering feeling for another person at the bottom of all this?'

Helen shook her head. 'No, mother; not the least, she said steadily.

'You are sure?'

'Why, yes, mother, I am sure. Of course I am sure! Mother, I am not ashamed of that old feeling, for I was inexperienced and young'—(Helen was so old now!)—'and I drifted into it innocently, without knowing what I was doing. But I should be very much ashamed of myself now, if I were to go on thinking of a person who does not, and never did, think of me. That was all

a foolish mistake; not wrong then, but it would be wrong now.'

'I think you are right in principle. My child, are you certain of your facts? I mean the fact of your feeling. Sure the old—fancy—has died out?'

'It was not a fancy,' said Helen, low. 'Not that, mother. But it is entirely gone,' she went on, lifting her eyes to her mother's face. 'I am quite free, and quite happy,—as happy as if it had never been.'

'Then, May,' said Mrs. Thayer, taking her daughter's hands in her own,—'then, May, I think you ought to let Professor L'Estrange come.'

'Why, mother?'

'I would like to see you married to him.'

'Oh, why, mother?'

'I think, May, he would make you happy.'

'He could not *make* me happy, for I am happy already.'

'You would be happier.'

'I don't think so, mother,' said Helen, smiling again; her face had been very serious.

'My child, it is happier for a woman, generally, to marry, if she can marry a good man. It is a richer, wider life, generally; more noble and more blessed than to live alone, and so more happy. You are specially made for it.'

'But whatever qualities make me specially fitted for it, make me also fitted to live unmarried.'

'Sophistry. It is very well now,—but what if Pixie were married, and I not here?'

'Oh, mother!'—said Helen, sinking her head upon her mother's knee, but she did not finish her sentence, if she had been going to speak one.

'We must look at things as they are, my child.'

'Mother, I am perfectly contented just as I am.'

'Now'—

'Must we look ahead to possibilities, which are only possibilities?'

'Not *only*, for they are probabilities also.'

Helen was silent, and sighed.

'Mother, what do you wish me to do?'

'Nothing against your own heart and sense.'

'My own heart'—

'Stop,' said Mrs. Thayer. 'I would like you to be quite sure of your own heart, and of what it would say to you.'

'I am quite sure, mother'—

'Just now. But I would like your heart to have full opportunity of judging what it would choose.'

'And therefore—you want me to let this man come here?'

'If the case is not prejudged.'

'No, mother; in what you mean, it is not. But I do not think it will be of any use; and it would just give —somebody—trouble for nothing.'

'May, I am not sure of that. And I noticed that Professor L'Estrange was not at all cast down by your rejection of him.'

'Yes,' said Helen, smiling, with a little embarrassment and a little colour; 'I believe it is that very confidence of his that makes me afraid of him. He knows his own mind so very well!'

They were both silent. Mrs. Thayer had said all she cared to say, and waited now with a little anxiety, watching Helen's face. It was somewhat cloudy and meditative; but at last it cleared up, and with a smile she bent forward and put her arms round her mother and kissed her.

'But I don't promise anything, mother,' she said. 'He must understand that. It is at his own risk.'

Mrs. Thayer was satisfied. And so was Professor L'Estrange, when the result of this consultation was made known to him.

He began now to make short visits from time to time at Daisy Plains, in which visits he no longer inquired about the inn, but drove straight and unhesitatingly to Mrs. Thayer's hospitable house. He found always the

same reception that had greeted him the first time; with the exception that Helen was a little more careful not to give him opportunities of being alone with her. Mr. L'Estrange did not ask for them. He was content to make his way slowly, he was resolved it should be surely, into the good liking of mother and daughter. And he was really very pleasant about it. He never presumed upon their favour; he took nothing for granted which they wished left doubtful; he only made himself excessively agreeable, so that it was difficult not to be glad to see him come and sorry to see him go away. And all the family fell into this way of regarding him. His conversation in the little circle which he felt so entirely congenial to him was a delightful thing. He was full of knowledge; and to these people who were not so full, whose intelligence and taste and sympathy were so perfect and lively, he poured out his stores of learning, science, and experience. Not like a pedant, or even like a scholar; still less like a philosopher; except as unconsciously the proofs of his wisdom and knowledge would come out. They listened and learned, and were delighted; it was better than the Thousand and One Nights; and they talked too, and often discussed matters with him, which it was pleasant to discuss; but to which nobody in Daisy Plains could bring sufficient knowledge or power. There were soon three in the little family, for Pixie came home at the end of June.

Pixie had grown into a most lovely girl. She was very like her sister in general characteristics; with more liveliness of nature and piquancy of manner than Helen, and without the rare sobered sweetness which made Helen's face, her mother and Mr. L'Estrange thought, like the face of an angel. Nobody would think of an angel and Pixie together; she was a thorough woman, very sweet also, in human fashion, and not without her little fancies and waywardness, which rather kept the small family astir than ever brought a shadow across it.

'What is that man coming here for?' she asked her mother one day, when she had been home a few weeks.

'My dear, I suppose he likes to come,' said Mrs. Thayer vaguely. A falsehood was impossible to her, and evasion difficult.

'Well, I should think he did!' said Pixie, 'seeing he has been here—how many times?—in the last four weeks. I declare I have lost count. Mother, what *does* he come here for? Who is he after?

'Hush, hush! don't speak so.'

'Well, who is it?' said Pixie, lowering her voice. 'Because it is not for nothing. I can't make out. Does May like him?'

'Do not ask her, Pixie.'

'I shall not ask her! but I ask you, mamma. It is mysterious. He comes and goes, and he pays no particular attention to anybody that I can see; and May lifts up her grave eyes at him in the queerest way, when he isn't looking. I think he'd like to catch just that look; but she doesn't let him.'

'What does it say, or seem to say?'

Pixie laughed, in a way that covered a little annoyance. 'I don't know, mamma; it is too much honour for him!'

'Why do you say that? it is not reasonable.'

'Well, I don't want her to go away from us!'

'It is best,'—said Mrs. Thayer, sighing.

'Then he *is* after Helen! Well, it is the very oddest kind of courtship I ever heard of. I thought when people were much in love they behaved differently.'

'You have not much experience.'

'Mamma, Trim Satterly *was* in love,—and showed it.'

'People are different. I like Mr. L'Estrange's way best.'

'Why, mamma?'

'I think it means more, and will stand better.'

'I suppose May thinks so too, for she certainly likes

the Professor better than poor Trim. I am glad Trim is in Europe yet.'

It was true that Professor L'Estrange did not hurry matters. It was true that he was wise enough to avoid distressing Helen—or exasperating her—by any too marked urgency. He reaped his reward, for he gained ground in her regard daily, and he knew it. Yet he still bided his time patiently. He went and came; the summer weeks passed by, and the fall fruits were gathered in; he never found an opportunity of discussing things with Helen alone, and he waited till such an opportunity should naturally present itself. It came at last, as he knew it must come.

CHAPTER XXX.

ONE AFTERNOON.

ONE afternoon in October the Professor had been going over a part of her farm with Mrs. Thayer, giving her a little information about soils, and a little counsel about what was good for them. At the gate stood the Professor's buggy, ready to take him back to town; but at the gate also stood Pixie with her bonnet on, waiting for her mother to go with her to see a neighbour. The two ladies took leave of their guest and went on; the Professor stood still till they were out of sight, and then turned and went into the house.

Helen was in the sitting-room alone, thinking everybody was gone; feeling free and safe; she was arranging some work that was spread out on the table, and crooning to herself softly an old hymn tune. She started and looked up when she heard a step, and then a conscious colour came up into her face. She ceased her song and looked down again. Helen guessed what was coming, and she made herself very busy over her pieces.

'Where's mamma?' she asked.

'She and your sister are gone somewhere together to make a visit, I think. And I must go presently; but there is a word I have to say first.'

Helen did not look up. The Professor came and stood before her on the other side of the table, and was silent a minute.

'Miss Helen, do you know yet what to think of me?'

The peculiar form of the question almost made Helen smile; but she answered demurely enough,—

'Yes, I think so.'

'You have had time. And I am not so difficult to know. People that are true never are.'

'I think so,' said Helen.

'That was one reason why I knew you so quickly. But my question now takes a one-sided meaning. Miss Helen, to put it more plainly,—do you think you could be happy with me?'

She hesitated. 'I think any reasonable person might, Professor L'Estrange.'

'Are you a reasonable person?'

'I do not know,' said Helen in a low voice. 'Mother has been trying to make me so.'

'Do not misunderstand me,' said Mr. L'Estrange, coming a step nearer and speaking with grave emphasis. 'Mrs. Thayer is my good friend, and I thank her; but it is only your mind that I want to know now; your own mind, uninfluenced and unpersuaded even by myself. You have had time to find out. Tell me if you think I can make you happy?'

Helen hesitated longer this time, flushed a good deal, and ceased arranging her patches.

'I told you,' she said, 'I did not want to leave home, and I don't think I do, but if I did it would be with you rather than with anybody else.'

'That is half an answer,' said the Professor, with half a laugh. 'Cannot you come a little nearer to it? I might tell you that the happiness of my life is at stake, but I do not urge that, because it is your happiness that is in question, and I would not damage that for the sake of the other.'

'I believe it,' she said.

'So, what is my answer, Helen?'

She could not mistake the seriousness in his voice, nor fail to see what the question meant for him. Indeed she had never doubted it. Professions are not the surest proof of love; and without professions Helen Thayer had not failed to recognise the fact that she was loved. She

rose up now from her seat, and came round the table to Mr. L'Estrange and gave her hand to him, looking up at him with one of those looks in her sweet, grave eyes which Pixie had opined he would like to get. Simple, gracious, womanly, and yet with a manner like an innocent child, she came and stood before him, lifted her most sweet eyes, and said,—

'Mr. L'Estrange, I will try.'

'What will you try?'

'To be a good wife to you.'

Perhaps, in her simplicity, she had hardly expected the reception which was inevitable to those words. His fingers had closed round hers in a gentle, strong clasp, but at those last words, which gave him what he had been so long waiting for, he unclasped them and put both arms round Helen, giving her a kiss the profound satisfaction of which went to her woman's heart. She had known certainly that Mr. L'Estrange loved her, she had not known that he loved her so passionately or so fondly. Yet his manner was very quiet, and perhaps he felt Helen tremble, for he did not repeat the kiss, and instead put her into a chair.

'You make me very happy,' he said simply.

Helen could answer nothing. She was quite aware of that fact without his words. It may be odd to say it, but it is a solemn thing to know that you make another human being very happy just by what you are yourself. Helen was glad, and rather glad that the thing was decided which had been so long hovering before a decision, but she found nothing to say. She half wished Mr. L'Estrange would go away and leave her to recover herself, but that was not his thought, as soon appeared. He took a chair beside her, and seemed to forget all about going.

'And now, Helen, you must tell me how I can make *you* happy,' he said, taking one of her hands and kissing it. 'All that I have in this world, or can do, is yours, from this time and for ever. You may command over all.'

'That is the last thing I should wish,' said Helen, forcing a smile.

'What is the last thing you would wish?'

'To command anything.'

'No,' he said, 'that is not your nature. What *do* you wish? what wishes of yours can I fulfil?'

'I do not think I have any wishes.'

'You are a wonderful woman, then!'

'I never have had wishes,' Helen went on. 'I really have always had what I wanted—everything I had a right to wish for. I think,' she added, looking up at him with a smile, 'it is always so.'

'Always so!' repeated the Professor; 'it is *never* so, in my experience or observation. To want what they cannot have, and what generally they ought not to have, seems to me the common lot of mortals. Where have you lived?'

'Ah, but,' said Helen, 'it is not the lot the Lord has chosen for them. I did not speak clearly. I was thinking of the words, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and *all these things shall be added unto you.*" That must be true, for it is the promise.'

'There is a condition,' said the Professor. '"Seek ye *first* the kingdom." Who does that?'

'A few people.'

'*First*,' repeated the Professor thoughtfully. 'I wonder if I have ever done it?'

He was silent a moment, and so was Helen, not a little surprised at the seriousness her words had called up.

'Do you know,' he said, 'that means a great deal—a very great deal?'

'Yes,' said Helen, hesitating. 'But—it means after all only what Jesus said in another place,—"He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me."'

'Child, you are carrying the probe deeper and deeper!' cried the Professor.

Helen was dumb now, in very much doubt and amaze

over the effect of her own words. For Mr. L'Estrange had taken them up in good earnest.

'To *hold* first is one thing; I think I do that. I am sure nothing is so precious to me as Christ and His salvation. I am sure I would part with everything else —even with you—before I would lose Him. To hold first is one thing; but to *seek* first—that is practical, not theoretical, and means now and everywhere and in all ways. To seek His kingdom *first*, means to make all other things and interests subordinate and subservient.'

'Yes,' said Helen. 'It means that.'

'Do you, as a matter of fact?'

'I think so.' But if the words were moderate, the smile that accompanied them was frank and bright. Such a smile was unmistakeable.

'How long have you lived by this rule?'

'I think I have lived by it ever since I was ten or eleven years old.'

'How have you managed it?'

'Why,' said Helen, who could not help laughing at the question and at the look which came with it, a look which was curious, with an admixture of something like awe, 'I had no managing to do. It is as simple as breathing. What one loves best, one puts first always and naturally, without effort.'

'True,' said the Professor,—'true! it is undeniable. But how is it then, May? Christ and His interests are *not* put first by the Christians of our time.'

'By real Christians—they must be, must they not?'

'Where are the real Christians, then?' he asked hastily. 'There is money ready for everything else, but not for Christ's kingdom; there is strength and time and effort enough expended for every other object under heaven, but only a few unimportant people devote themselves to carrying *that* forward. Look at the houses and the furniture with which people surround themselves, and a school of heathen boys can hardly get books and Bibles

to go on with, or blankets to keep them warm at night, even lying three in a bed. Everybody can give entertainments, but our missionaries are not taken care of, and our superannuated ministers and their families are in absolute want. And so it goes on!'

'We do not know much about all that at Daisy Plains,' said Helen, hesitating. 'The living is simpler here; people do not spend much money on themselves or their houses, and there are no entertainments.'

'What do they do with their money?'

'Lay it up, I suppose.'

'Ah! that is not much better. But to seek "the kingdom" *first*—Helen, do you know, I think I have never done it?'

He looked very serious and very earnest, and she did not know what to answer. Then his face changed, and he said, with a smile,—

'You are going to bring better things in?'

'Where?' asked Helen.

'Into my house—and my life.'

'I do not know,' she said, smiling and colouring. 'I will carry my own in.'

'And that shall be mine,' he said. 'It shall be known, as far as anything is known about it, that we are the subjects of that kingdom and that all we do is in the service of it. When, Helen?'

'When what, Mr. L'Estrange?'

'Is that what you are going to call me?' he said, with a face of disgust. 'I have not a very euphonious name, but yet it is not a bad name. My mother calls me Joseph.'

'That is not a bad name at all,' Helen answered, laughing at his look and the tone of appeal in which he had spoken. 'Pray, Professor, are you a descendant of Roger L'Estrange?'

'Professor!' said he. 'Worse and worse! Yes, I am descended straight from that old Tory rascal. More's the pity.'

'He wrote beautiful English, though,' said Helen.

'What do you know of his English?'

'Sometimes I have seen a bit of him quoted, and the wording is beautiful.'

'Well,' said he, 'I wish my name was Roger, if you do not like Joseph. But when will you come, May? Do you not think I have been waiting upon your pleasure long enough?'

'You must talk to mamma about that,' said Helen, blushing.

But although a blush might rise now and then, and her sweet eyes were a little shy of him, there was nevertheless a most womanly, gracious, dignified charm about her manner. Mr. L'Estrange was wholly bewitched by it. His horse stood pawing the ground in front of the gate, the Professor forgot that he had a drive before him. The hours of the afternoon rolled away, the sun sank toward the western horizon, shadows stretched long over the road, even the shadows of the Professor's horse and buggy; the sunlight left the road and went up to the tree-tops, and the cooler lights and still cooler shadows of evening began to show that night was at hand. And still Mr. L'Estrange sat talking. Not on the one theme; he had left the question of the wedding day, and was going with Helen into other questions, some serious, some gay; discussing, debating, sometimes laying plans for future action, but generally talking in a most delightful way, until Pixie's clear voice and a sound of the gate latch started him up.

He met the two ladies just inside the gate.

'Will you congratulate me?' said he, holding out his hand.

Mrs. Thayer had wished for this, and yet the announcement struck her with something very like dismay. She could not offer any congratulations, except by a silent giving of her hand, which he grasped and then hurried away.

'Professor, are you going *now?*' cried Pixie. 'It will

be dark in two minutes.—He's off!' she went on. 'Mother, what has he been about all this afternoon? I thought he was in Boston by now.'

But Mrs. Thayer seemed to heed her as little as the Professor had done. They went on into the sitting-room, where Helen now was not, in her stead Mercy, who stood looking out from the open door with a face of uneasy speculation.

'Mis' T'ayer, is dat Perfessor done gone?'

'Yes, Mercy.'

'What's he been doin'? He's been here all de arternoon, and he never stopped talkin'. I don't see what folks finds so much to talk! I couldn't get no word to Miss Helen 'bout dem pears; reckon she don' know pears from peaches by dis time!'

Mrs. Thayer passed on and went up-stairs.

'What is it all, Miss Pixie, sure 'nuff?'

'I don't know, Mercy; I am afraid'—

'What's you frighted at?'

'I suppose I shouldn't say I am afraid,' said Pixie, standing still, however, with a face very much clouded. 'It's not my affair,—but I think the family is big enough as it is. I don't care about any additions to it.'

'What's de additions?' demanded Mercy.

'I expect we shall have to make up our minds to take in the Professor.'

'Is he comin' to live in dis house?'

'Oh no, Mercy!' said Pixie, breaking down a little; 'but he will take Helen away.'

She sat down and covered her face.

'He won't take her 'way from *me!*' said Mercy; '*dat's* sure. Whar she's gwine, I'm gwine. It's like dat Moabite woman what wouldn't leave dat other old lady—what's her name? Her people shall be my people, and whar she dies thar I'se be buried, and nowhars else. De Perfessor he is boun' to take me 'long if he takes Christiana! But what she take *him* for, anyhow, Miss Pixie?'

'Oh, Mercy, he is a very fine man, and everybody thinks a world of him. I suppose we ought to be glad.'

'Folks is glad o' queer t'ings den,' said Mercy. 'I don' know what's come to dem pears.'

And she hurried away to the kitchen. Pixie was left to mix the sweet and bitter cup she had got to drink.

CHAPTER XXXI.

FOR LIFE.

MRS. THAYER, proceeding up-stairs, also mixing for herself a cup of the same sort, found Helen standing at the window of her room looking out. The dusky shades of the evening seemed to surround her figure. Mrs. Thayer came softly up.

'What have you been doing, May?' she said, trying to utter her words in an easy tone.

'Mother! — How long you and Pixie have been!' Helen answered, half turning, and then resuming her position.

'We met Mr. L'Estrange at the gate. What have you been doing, Helen?'

'I believe I have made somebody happy, mamma.'

'How about yourself, my daughter?'

'Me? Oh, I am happy anyhow, you know.'

'But is that all you can say?' asked Mrs. Thayer, covering as well as she could a sudden great qualm of anxiety.

'It is a good deal to say, isn't it?'

'Certainly; but, my dear—How have you made some body happy?'

'Didn't you see the Professor?'

'Yes.'

'What did he say to you?'

'He asked me to congratulate him.'

'Well, you may,' said Helen. 'You congratulate people that have got their wish.'

'But I care most about *your* wishes, my child. Are they satisfied?'

'Mother,' said Helen, half laughing, 'I do not know that I have any. I am happy always. I would have been very content to stay always with you at home; but you thought that was not the best, and perhaps it would not be the best. I think the one thing I want is to do the most work that I can for Christ; and I suppose—in this way—I should have more opportunity, or a better opportunity'—

'Helen, a woman has no right to marry for the sake simply of increasing her usefulness. Do you think she has?'

'For what then, mamma?'

'For no reason in the world but one. If she loves a man so that he has in a sort become a part of her life. She should love him better than all the rest of the friends she has in the world.'

There was a silence of several minutes that followed this utterance, during which Mrs. Thayer certainly tasted only the bitter in the cup she was mixing, and failed to find any of the sweet drops.

'But,' said Helen at last, without turning from the window, 'such a feeling may be, without—I mean, the existence of such a feeling does not always signify that a woman is to marry; she may have it, and not marry; so I should think there may be cases when she might marry and not have it.'

'I doubt the cases; and I do not want you to try one of them.'

'Mother, I really think I like Mr. L'Estrange quite well enough to marry him. I do like him very much, and I have the profoundest respect for him. I cannot say I could describe my feeling in the terms you used just now; I thought I had such a feeling once;—do you think a woman is very likely to feel it twice?'

'No reason against it, that I know. One's capacity for loving does not die out.'

Not one's capacity for loving; only one's power of loving *so*.'

'May, my child, do not make a mistake!—Are you certain that the old feeling has quite died out?'

'Oh yes, mother. I consider that I have a sound heart to give Mr. L'Estrange,—else I would not give myself to him, even to make him happy; and he is very happy, mother,' said Helen, coming now from the window and throwing her arms round her mother's neck, whom she proceeded to cover with caresses. This sort of demonstration was not frequent between mother and daughter, but when it occurred nothing can be thought of more sweet than the witchery of Helen's lips and hands. Mrs. Thayer received it this time with a divided and very disturbed heart, torn with doubts and anxieties. Had she done well? had she done ill? what was to be the end of it all?

'Helen,'—she said, as it were striving against the witchery of those kisses,—'May—I am not satisfied.'

'I am,' said Helen quietly. 'And you ought to be. And another person is,—very!'

'His satisfaction does not come in question at all!' Mrs. Thayer said vehemently.

'Oh yes, it does,' said Helen lightly. 'I should not like to marry anybody who was not satisfied with me.'

'But the thing is your happiness, my child! This is not a matter to be jesting about. When a woman marries, she takes a step which she cannot take back. She ought to be very sure of her own mind.'

'Mr. L'Estrange is sure enough for us both,' said Helen, with a smile. 'I knew when this began how it would end. Do you know, mother, when anybody knows his own mind very well, what a long way he has gone towards bringing other people to think with him? It is curiously true.'

'But, May, has he made you love him as he loves you?' Mrs. Thayer repeated anxiously. 'What security is there for your being happy with him?'

'Mother, I like him very much. And I care most of all things in the world, I think, to do the Lord's work, as much and as well as possible. You think, and he says, that I can do more and better so,—than so.'

'*Provided*'— said Mrs. Thayer, with emphasis.

'Well, mother, have you the courage to go and tell Mr. L'Estrange that I take back what I have said? Because *I* haven't. I think you'll have to let things stand, and do as you always do, make the best of them.'

And, indeed, nothing else remained for Mrs. Thayer to do; but she was very uneasy. The supper that evening was taken in a sort of troubled social atmosphere, for Pixie was very cloudy, and only May herself was clear and bright as usual. Even Mercy as she came in and out from the kitchen wore a doubtful and questioning look. It was hard to talk, and harder to be silent. But May's sweetness was unaltered; and when Miss Betsy walked in, with her knitting as usual in her hands, Helen gave her a welcome and poured out for her a cup of tea, with a full measure of hospitality. Miss Betsy laid down her knitting and tasted her tea, then tasted it again.

'Is it right?'

'Couldn't be no righter. You always do contrive to have your tea hot and good somehow.'

'Don't *you*, Miss Betsy?' said Pixie.

'Wall,—sometimes it's hot; it can't help that, I suppose, if the kettle biles; but it don't never have the kind of taste yours has.'

'What kind of taste?'

'Ah! I don't know,' said Miss Betsy, taking persistent little sips of enjoyment all the while; 'a kind o' taste o' good spirits and comfort. It jest goes to the spot, and does one good.'

'We never put *spirits* in, Miss Betsy, good or bad.'

'Ah! Don't you?' said Miss Sawyer, with half a laugh. 'That's all you know about it, Pixie. If you, or somebody, didn't put it in, how did it get there? That's what I want to know.'

'Mysterious,' said Pixie; 'for we hadn't any to put in this evening. Unless May; she keeps a provoking stock on hand.'

'I guess she gets a stock from Boston, don't she? or Cambridge. Somebody brings it down in a buggy. I see it goin' and comin', and I always reckon it brings a stock o' spirits along.'

Something in this speech set Pixie a-laughing, but laughing brought tears, and she choked in a kind of hysterics, coughing and laughing together.

'Spirits don't seem to agree with you,' remarked Miss Betsy dryly. 'I'm comin' for another cup in a minute more, May,—spirits or no spirits. I'd like to know what kind they are, though. Tea is never so good anywheres else but here.'

'What's the matter with yours at home?' asked Helen.

'Well, I don't know,' said Miss Betsy, smacking her lips over the sips she was taking from her teaspoon; —'when Sarah makes it, it tastes o' the tea-kettle; and when I make it, it tastes like some sort o' medicine; and either way it puts *me* out o' spirits. By the way, it seems to me I see that buggy comin' along very often; is that absolutely necessary to the tea?'

'We are always glad to see the Professor,' said Mrs. Thayer gravely. 'Betsy, may I give you a little bit of this fish?'

'I guess you may,' said Miss Sawyer, with a critical eye,—'if it's good. Salmon, is it? and salt? I s'pose I shall want to drink the well dry—but never mind. What I want to know, May, is, whether you take all the spirits out o' that buggy and send it home without none? He warn't drivin' like a discontented man, I thought, this evenin'.'

'Why should he?' said Helen. And,

'How does a man drive when he is discontented?' cried Pixie.

'Well—his horse generally knows it, and then can I

commonly tell. Thinks I to myself when I see him go by this evenin', he hain't left *all* his spirits where he came from. Now, May, I'll have another cup. What do you let him be here so often for, eh?'

'Why not?' said Helen, who was specially addressed.

'Well, I s'pose you know what folks 'll say?'

'What then? We do not care much what folks say.'

'You had better care. May, you don't mean you are going to take up with that Professor? You don't tell me *that?*'

'I did not tell you that,' said Helen quietly, giving the refilled cup. 'Now, Miss Betsy, see if this is as good as the first one.'

'It all depends,' said Miss Sawyer. 'If you tell me you're goin' to let that Professor come and go with his buggy—I shall know what that means, and I shan't want another drop.'

'That is taking it too hard, Miss Betsy,' said Helen, smiling.

'Takin' it! Then you're goin' to take him? That Professor man with his buggy!'

'What's the matter with the Professor?' asked Pixie, bristling up.

'She might have had Trim Satterly, and rode in her carriage. She might ha' had my nephew Trim. I don't think much of him, but he's as handsome as a picture, and has lots o' money; and all he wanted was to lay it at May's feet. What's this other man got, I should like to know?'

'This matter is not to be spoken of, Betsy,' said Mrs. Thayer, who was vexed at the turn the talk had made, which yet she had been unable to prevent.

'Spoken of! Why ain't it to be spoken of? It'll be spoken of in Boston fast enough, and why shouldn't it be spoken of at Daisy Plains? No, no, Cordelia; things can't be done in a corner. No, thank you,—I won't take any more of anything, and the spirits is all out o' the tea; it hasn't a particle of taste; and I must be gettin'

home before that little bit of a moon's down. Don't ask me to the weddin', that's all. Good-night!'—

'Now she's got what she came for!' said Pixie wrathfully. 'I wish all gossips'—

'Hush, hush!' said Mrs. Thayer. 'We might have managed better, if we had had our wits about us, and not let her be quite so successful.'

'After all, what does it matter?' said Helen.

The mother thought, it might have mattered; but things certainly could not be altered now.

No, they could not. The news of Helen's engagement would be all over Daisy Plains in another day or two; and if not, would it not be all over Boston and Cambridge? The Professor was not bound to secrecy, nor likely to observe it. I do not know what Mrs. Thayer might have tried to do, or undo, if opportunity had been given her; as things were, there was nothing left her but to arrange the wedding day with the Professor and to make the wedding preparations. The marriage was fixed for the first day of the Christmas holidays, which then the Professor proposed to use in showing his bride so much of the world as lay between her home and Washington; there would be no time for more, as he must be back at his duties.

Helen was the only one at home whose sunny placidity suffered no change during this interval; the other three were excited, and concealed a certain amount of uneasiness under their bustle of business; however, if it appeared, that was natural enough.

'Are we gwine to live in Boston, Miss May? or whar den?' asked Mercy one day, looking up from a bowl of biscuit dough which she was handling.

'Not Boston, Mercy; at least not I. You will be in Boston, I suppose. I shall be probably in Cambridge.'

'Whar you go, thar I goes,' returned Mercy decidedly. 'What you thinkin' about, Miss Helen? Doesn't you know I belongs to you? Ain't gwine nowheres else but

whar you is, anyhow. Doesn't you remember Christiana allays did keep Mercy 'long wi' her?'

'Yes, Mercy,' said Helen, smiling gratefully; 'and I would wish it of all things; but what would my mother do without you?'

'She don't want me,' said Mercy shortly.

'Besides,—the Professor is keeping house already, and has been for a long time; he may have his household made up, and no room in it for you. I cannot tell how that may be.'

'I ain't gwine to have nuffin to do wi's household; I'se gwine to take keer o' you. O' course I is!'

'"I *am;*"—why won't you learn grammar, Mercy? But I should not like to take you to Mr. L'Estrange's house without his permission.'

'Den you'll have to get his permission; for I'se gwine 'long wi' you, Miss Helen. His folks takes keer o' him; I'se gwine to take keer o' nobody but you. Don't keer for nobody else, neider. Ain't de 'fessor comin' here to-night?'

'I expect so.'

'Den will you tell him 'bout it?'

'I don't know,' said Helen, laughing. 'I will see.'

But Mercy was not disposed to leave the matter to a peradventure. She watched her chance, and when she came in to lay the cloth for supper she got it. Professor L'Estrange came into the dining-room to tell her of some fruit he had brought, which needed to be unpacked. Mercy stood and listened, and then dropped a curtsey.

'I has somefin to say to de 'fessor,' she began, as he was about to turn away. He stood still, looking at her good-humouredly; he was a man of rather stately presence, and somewhat imposing to Mercy, who, however, stood her ground.

'Does de gen'leman 'fessor know who I be?'

'Yes, I know you are Mrs. Thayer's good girl, Mercy. What do you want of me?'

'Does de gen'leman know whar I come from?'

'No. Yes!—I know you came with Mrs. Thayer from the South.'

'De 'fessor don' know why I come?'

'No.'

'I war mos' a pickaninny, and dey was takin' me off down to de terrible Souf. Dar was a lot o' us on de big boat, gwine down de great river; and dar was a man what had us all, and he war a-takin' us down dar. I was de littlest of 'em, and dar was right smart of us, and dey was all drefful feared o' dat Souf country—'spect de 'fessor knows'—

'Not very well,' said Mr. L'Estrange. 'Why were you so much afraid of going there?'

'I was too little,' said Mercy,—'I didn't know nuffin; but I hears 'em all cryin' and lamentin', and skeered to death 'cos dey was gwine; and fo' we started dey had a prayer-meetin' all night—it was allowed; and dey prayed and dey sung, and dey cried, de folks dat was gwine, and de other folks what stayed behind,—dey all prayed and cried together, till I was mos' frighted out o' my life, and 'lowed de Souf must be somefin drefful; and den, I watch and say nuffin to nobody; and when de boat stopped at de Landin', and nobody was 'tendin' to what I did, I slipped off de boat and ran behind a house, and dar I stood till I see de big boat go puffin' down de river wi'out me on her; and den I waited, and when she out o' sight, I catch up my feet and ran.'

'Where did you run to?'

'I didn't care whar to—I only wanted to get clar o' de houses; and I ran up de hill, till I couldn't run no mo', and den I walked; and dar I see one house standin' all alone, and I doesn't know now why I warn't afeard to go to dat house—I reckon when I foun' de boat didn't come back to get me I grew peart like again; and I went straight up to de do', and dar was somebody standin', and I foun' 'twas one o' de good Lord's angels.'

'That was Miss Helen?'

'Miss Helen! No, sir; Miss Helen was a little tot

den—mos' a baby; she war another angel, sure; but jes' a little angel. No, sir; dat was Mis' T'ayer; an' she took me in, and she kept me, and she's kep' me till now.'

'Did the people never come to inquire for you?'

''Deed dey come! dat ar man come; he come twice; but Mis' T'ayer and me we fooled him.'

'You had better not tell this story, Mercy; harm might yet come of it,' said the Professor gravely.

'Yes, sir, I doesn't tell it. I never tells it; only now, when de 'fessor is as good as one o' de family'—said Mercy, with an indescribable air and look of ingratiation and coaxing.

'And why do you tell it to me now?'

'Please, sir, I'se took keer o' Miss Helen ever since dat time; we'se growed up together.'

'I owe you a debt of gratitude for that,' said the Professor, smiling. 'In what way can I be of use to you?'

'De 'fessor knows when Christiana set out for to go to de Celestial City, she took Mercy to go 'long wi' her.'

'In the *Pilgrim's Progress!* yes, I know. What then?'

'Please, sir, Mercy don't want to go 'way from Christiana,'—the girl said, with the same indescribable air; it was half sly and half graceful. 'I axed Miss Helen,—that is Christiana,—and she said she didn't know if de 'fessor would like it; and den I 'lowed I'd ask him myself.'

The Professor laughed heartily.

'There is no pleasure to be asked but hers in the house,' he said. 'By all means, if she will bring you, come. I have only one old housekeeper, and she will want some help.'

And so all parties were pleased, except, indeed, old Lucinda Ann, who had not been consulted.

The family determined to stay in the country till Christmas and have the wedding there. It suited the members of the little circle, which was to be broken up

so soon; it secured them all the uninterrupted quiet which was possible, and released them from various conventional necessities. The Professor cared nothing about it, *where* he was married; and the only person discontented was his mother. If he would do it, she said, he ought to do it respectably, and not disappoint all his friends. She was one of the disappointed, as things turned out; for when the time came a violent cold confined her to her house. So the wedding was almost strictly private; and very few beside her mother and sister saw the bride's sweet face, and the bridegroom's proud satisfaction. Neither of them was a demonstrative person; however, the very absence of demonstration made the reality of things more remarkable.

'I think I never saw a man happier, or a woman lovelier,' Mrs. Franks remarked to her husband.

'I hope she was happy, too?' said Mr. Franks.

'Oh, Helen is always happy. Naturally, she would not show it in the same way that he did.'

CHAPTER XXXII.

BEGINNINGS.

THE Professor had no reason to doubt his wife's happiness, it may be remarked. The fortnight of their absence was filled with a sunshine which suffered no cloud; and Helen's delight in all that he showed her was fresh and eager and bright, with the intelligence of a woman and the simpleness of a child. If the Professor was in love before, every day plunged him deeper in his heart content; and when at the end of the holidays they returned home, there seemed nothing to regret; it was only a change of pleasure.

It was truly that to Helen, who was a little curious and a little eager about her new home and her new life in it. The house she liked much. It was nothing remarkable in itself; rather an old house; very substantial and well built; entirely plain; not very large. But it had a pleasant aspect; and while in all its furnishing there was hardly one pretty thing, and only two or three handsome ones, the whole was so harmonious in its simplicity, comfort, and respectability, that the general impression, to her, was very agreeable. The lack of pretty and luxurious articles in the original plenishing, however, was largely made up by the gifts which had come in. Packages of all sorts and sizes had been received by the old housekeeper during her master's absence, and had been all stowed by her in a locked-up room; and here Helen found her hands full. The first thing to do was to unpack and bestow fittingly all these tokens of the favour in which her husband was held by a very

various set of people; for only a small few of them had any knowledge of herself. These were a homage to Mr. L'Estrange. Helen freed them of their wrappers and examined them with great amusement. The Professor stood and looked on, amused at her.

'Here are two clocks,' said Helen. 'This one is beautiful, isn't it? Where shall it stand?'

'Where you like to have it.'

'But what shall we do with the other one?'

'What shall *you* do,' said the Professor. 'I am glad it is not my business to dispose of all these things.'

'But it is my business to put them as you would like them, Mr. L'Estrange.'

'May, all they are good for is to please you.'

'I think they are good to show how much people care for you. Just look at this bronze standish—that is very handsome! and these lamps. I know what to do with the lamps; but the standish?—Oh, that will go on your study table!'

'Say rather, on your study table.'

'I have none.'

'Then I must get you one.'

'But I never had a study table in my life,' said Helen, smiling. 'I have done very well without it, and done a good deal of study too. It seems to me I have never wanted for anything; but that must be a mistake, for see these card-cases! three of them!'—she went on merrily, holding them up. 'Three card-cases! Whatever shall I do with them?'

'Put cards in them.'

'But I make very little use of cards.'

'What do you do when you go to see your friends, and find them not at home?'

'I go again.'

'Sounds very simple,' said the Professor, much amused; 'but in a large circle would involve a considerable expenditure of time.'

'A large circle of what?' said Helen, who had got into

a gay mood, not very common with her, and proportionately enchanting to her husband.

'Friends,' he answered.

'Oh, one never has a large circle of friends. I was not speaking of acquaintances.'

'Do you not visit your acquaintances?'

'If they are people I want to make friends of.'

'No others?'

'Not more than I can help,' said Helen, half laughing at his look. 'Unless,' she added, 'they are in need of me and I can be of use to them.'

'I am standing in a maze,' said the Professor, 'before a view of life and society so entirely original and unconventional.'

'It is not *original*, Professor.'

'Prove it.'

Then Helen began to laugh in good earnest; such arch and sweet merriment, so simple and at the same time so intelligent in its expression, that the Professor, laughing at her and laughing with her, was honestly curious also to know her meaning, which, philosopher as he was, he certainly did not fathom.

'Mr. L'Estrange,' said Helen, sobering herself, 'it is in the Bible.'

'The Bible!'

'Yes.'

'I know you find a great deal in the Bible and get a great deal out of it, more than other people; but I am at a loss where—and what'—

'Yes, I can prove it to you,' said Helen, nodding her head; 'but it will take a little time, and you have got to go to your lecture.'

'I shall do my work then to-day like a schoolboy who is looking forward to a promised treat if he is good and learns his lessons well.'

He had stayed till the last minute, and now went off, leaving Helen at work among her new riches. Softly unfolding and unpacking, examining and admiring and

amused, a little time had passed pleasantly enough, when Mercy came to the door. She came with a burden of business; however, at sight of the glittering treasures spread out on tables and chairs, all thought of business forsook her. She came in eagerly, stood in ecstasies of admiration, wanted to know what everything was and what it was made of, and was much more deeply interested than Helen herself.

'Is all dese t'ings your'n sure 'nuff?' she asked in awe.

'They are sent to show people's honour of Mr. L'Estrange. The senders do not know me much.'

'But is dey your'n? or does dey b'long to de 'fessor?'

'Some are mine, for he could make no use of them. What is wanting, Mercy?'

'Dunno, missus. Where is we come to now, does you t'ink?'

'Where have we come to? What do you mean, Mercy? I do not know what you mean.'

'I don't mean, whar is Miss May and her servant come to. I mean, whar is Christiana and Mercy now? I can't jes' make out. 'Taint de Interpreter's house, as I see; and it couldn't be de House Beautiful. Must be some place. Whar is we, sure 'nuff, Miss Helen?'

'Along the way, I suppose,' Helen said, smiling a little.

'Dat all? Well, dere is queer spots in de way, ain't dar?'

'Plenty, no doubt. What queer spot have you come to?'

'Dunno,'—said Mercy doubtfully.

'What is it? What is the matter?'

'We was in a green medder, wid runnin' streams and still waters, whar dar was no travellers but what was gwine de one way. I s'pects we'se got out o' de medder; and dar is somebody down-stairs ain't gwine our way, nohow.'

'Who is that?'

'Dunno. She calls herself Cindy Ann, and de 'fessor's housekeeper.'

'Oh! Well, that is what she has been.'

'She ain't now?'

'*I* am rather supposed to hold that place.'

'Well, you'll have to fix it,' said Mercy discontentedly. 'Reckon we'se got to one o' dem places whar dere had to be a fight. What's a dragon, Miss Helen?'

'A fabulous creature, Mercy.'

'But dere is dragons in de Bible. What does dey mean?'

'They generally mean mischievous powers or forms of evil. The great dragon means the greatest of all—the devil.'

'Dis yere's a little dragon.'

'What has she done to you?'

'She hain't done nuffin to *me*,' said Mercy disdainfully; 'but she's boun' she'll be mistis in dis house; and whar 'll Christiana be den?'

'What is the quarrel? You must not quarrel, Mercy.'

'Ain't doin' no quarrelling, Miss Helen. Dat ar woman, she's boun' she'd scald de fowls; and I told her you 'lowed to have 'em picked 'thout scaldin'; and she's gone and done it, over my head.'

'But you must remember, you are not mistress either.'

'Don't want to be neither,' said Mercy; 'dat's de differ. Does you want de potatoes and de turnips all b'iled in de pot wi' de chickens?'

'Boiled? I told her to roast them.'

'Reckon you did; but dey's a-b'ilin' as hard as de pot 'll let 'em. I tol' de woman dat too,—dat ar warn't no way to b'il t'ings—b'il de life out o' em! but she t'inks she knows. *I* can't do nuffin.'

Helen considered a moment, and then left her fine things and descended to the kitchen. The ruling power here was peculiar, as Mercy had intimated. A somewhat ungainly specimen of New England blood and breeding, which in its best estate is not characterized by softness and graciousness, like some strains that cannot boast its striking quality; and in this particular instance lacked

the quality also. It was no indemnification for this lacking, that her manner had a smooth complaisance with no body to it. She was a tall, bony woman, with hair as near straw-colour as hair can come, and eyes of that watery blue which seems to forbid the notion of warmth or depth anywhere; although, unhappily, it may go along with strength of will. She met her new mistress now with no show of surprise or disfavour.

'What can I do for you, mum?' she asked, as if Helen's appearing there must have some extraordinary occasion.

'I came to see how far you are carrying out my instructions, and to see my kitchen.'

'Haven't you viewed it yet? It's a very serviceable kitchen, mum, as much as most. There's rather too much winders for my approbation.'

'A kitchen cannot have too much light. Do you find this a good stove?'

'When the fire's right, mum, and the drafts regilated according, and the wind ain't too strong nowheres; it'll do, mostly.'

'What is cooking in this pot?'

'It's your dinner, mum.'

'My dinner? which part of it?'

'Both parts of it, mum, I may say.'

Helen lifted the lid, to cut short this somewhat slow way of getting information. There was no doubt of it; the chickens were reposing there in peace and ebullition, along with the vegetables Mercy had named.

'Did I not tell you I wished the fowls to be roasted?'

'Yes, mum, but the Professor, he likes 'em this way.'

'Did he give you any directions?'

'Yes, mum; he said, "Lucindy, you do everything as you know how to do it. I have perfect satisfaction in your judgment."'

Helen bit her lips to keep her gravity.

'But this time, Lucinda, it was my judgment which should decide.'

'Yes, mum,—of course, mum,—but I knowed, mum,

you'd be wantin' things the way the Professor likes 'em, and is accustomed to have 'em, and expects to have 'em; and o' course you couldn't know how that was; and if you did, mum, you'd say, "Lucindy,—or Mrs. Mapps,—you'll have the goodness to do 'em jes' as you knows they ought to be."'

'Is your name Mrs. Mapps?' Helen asked, again biting her lips into soberness.

'I've ben a married woman, mum, a year and a half; and when my husband left me, I was left to do for myself; and it was then I come to keep house in my present position. I've come down to that—to keepin' another man's house.'

'When your husband "left you"? he is dead?'

'No, mum, he ain't dead, I'm ashamed and sorry to say; he's rovin' round on the earth doin' all sorts o' mischief; only he has sense enough to keep out o' prison. I'm as good as a married woman still, mum; but you needn't to make no difference on that account. I don't mind bein' called by my own name; it's as good as his'n; the Professor, he allays called me so. I don't mind at all, mum.'

'Lucinda,' said Helen gravely, 'I do not like my vegetables cooked in the same pot with the meat.'

'The Professor likes to have 'em so, mum.'

'I do not.'

'Well, mum, but ain't it goin' to be the way the gentleman likes it?'

'I will judge of that. What you have to do, is to follow my orders. What is in this pail?'

'It's jes' bits and scraps, mum. They goes to a poor man's pig, mum, as is glad to get 'em.'

'But here is half a loaf of bread. And I see a beef bone with a good deal of meat on it. And quantities of fat,—mutton fat, isn't it?'

'Mutton fat it is; no lady 'd want to eat it, I'm sure.'

'But no good housekeeper would want to throw it

away. There must be nothing thrown away that is good for anything, understand. I throw away nothing.'

'I hope you don't call it throwin' away, to help the poor? And the Professor allays says, "Lucindy, help the poor all you can. Our leavin's 'll be their findin's," he says. And, mum, I put it to you, if I ain't like to know how things had ought to be in this house, me that has been here these ten year, more or less,—better'n a lady that has jes' come, with the best intentions? I know jes' how the Professor likes everything done and everything cooked, and I knows jes' how to please him; but of course—if the new lady says it's to be different, different it'll have to be.'

Helen gave up the matter for the present, and retreated up-stairs again; but pondering a little oddly the question, how much truth there might be in the housekeeper's assertions. What if her husband's ways and likings might be better known to this woman than to herself? What if her innovations might not seem to him improvements? Reason said there was no sense in the fear, but some of our nerves are not defensible by reason; and Helen went up-stairs with a new doubt stirring in her mind.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A REMONSTRANCE.

THE next few days were filled up with receiving visits. Professor L'Estrange, though so little of a society man, was yet widely popular; and not only among his college friends and associates. So the people that came to see his wife were many, and the cordiality which received her was great. Old Mrs. L'Estrange made herself on hand about these times, and took post in her son's drawing-room; partly to see who came, and rejoice her pride with numbers; partly to see how Helen behaved, and to quiet her jealous fear that everything might not be done properly. But nobody could less want a guardian and monitor than the Professor's wife; she was not nervous, nor anxious, nor excited at the honour done her; in her sweet, quiet, and soft dignity she won all hearts; and invitations showered upon her and the Professor, which Helen took as a matter of business, and the Professor with a shrug and sometimes a grimace. But the Professor's mother was happy and proud.

One afternoon, before these days had yet run their course, the Professor, coming home from his work, found his wife again in the room where her wedding presents were displayed. She was standing, her eyes bent on the ground, with a face of grave contemplation. As he came in she raised her head and turned to him.

'Mr. L'Estrange, look here.'

'I am looking,'—he said. But, indeed, he saw not what she saw; his eyes were occupied with her own sweet figure, and the simple, graceful, grave charm that

was about her. As he drew nearer, however, he obeyed her direction, and saw the object on which her eyes had been fixed. It was no other than a most magnificent Bengal tiger skin, with head and claws, spread out upon a rich ground of dark felt. The Professor looked, and his eyes came back to the gracious, innocent face of his wife, which had more attraction for him.

'I see,'—he said. 'Somebody has been in earnest this time.'

'Too much in earnest!'

'How so?'

'It is too handsome. Look here—by mistake, I suppose, the ticket has been left on; how much do you think this rug is worth?'

'I am sure I do not know; the more the better. It cannot be too good for the feet that it is intended to keep warm.'

'Less expensive things will keep one just as warm,' said Helen, laughing. 'I am perplexed about it.'

'I didn't know you were ever perplexed about anything. What is the puzzle in this case?'

'Mr. L'Estrange,'—there was something inimitably sweet about Helen's way sometimes of speaking this name; a tender, half timid intonation which wholly bewitched the ears that heard it,—'Mr. L'Estrange, it is too costly. People know you are not what is called a rich man.'

'Putting it mildly. But I am afraid they know you are what is called a rich woman.'

'Worse and worse. I cannot tell everybody that this is a present.'

'Why should you?'

'They will think we have bought it.'

'What then?'

Helen looked serious. The Professor studied her, amused, and well pleased, not in the least understanding what she would be at, but ready to expect some bit of quaint originality.

'It looks as if I cared for this sort of thing.'

'Don't you care for this sort of thing? I think it is superb,' said the Professor, stooping down and feeling the magnificent thick, short fur.

'I care for it,—oh yes, I care for the beauty of it; the thing is perfectly beautiful, beyond anything I ever saw, in its way. But look here,—it cost three hundred and sixty dollars. If I could spend three hundred and sixty dollars on a rug, while there is so much else to be done with money,—and I am *not* a rich woman, Mr. L'Estrange, for mother has the money,—people might well think I bear the name of Christian, without much of the character.'

'What has your Christian name to do with it?' said the Professor. By this time he had drawn Helen into his arms, and was standing with infinite contentment looking down into her face and reading its play of thought and feeling, somewhat as yet inscrutable to him.

'We are to provide things honest in the sight of all men.'

'I have no doubt the tiger is paid for.'

'Ah, but it is not that. Think of the things to be done with money. Think of the people to be helped, the mouths to be fed, the houseless to be covered, the darkness where the light has not yet come. What do I care for all that, if I, with my means, could take three hundred and fifty or sixty dollars, and lay it down on my floor to look at? How dwelleth the love of Christ in me?'

'My dear,' said the Professor seriously, 'I once pleased you, I remember, with showing you diatoms under a microscope;—it seems to me you are applying a microscope of tremendous power to the invisible things of daily life.'

'How do they look under it?' said Helen earnestly.

'Something like you.'

'Like me!'—

'Yes. That is, terribly grave, deliciously true and sweet.'

Helen laughed, but coloured high.

'Then you understand?' she said.

'Partly. Your face convinces me more than even your words. In fact, your face conquers me.'

'But do you need to be conquered? You see the thing as I see it, do you not?'

'How far would you go?'

'How far?'—

'In this putting off from yourself for the sake of putting on other people?'

'Just as far as the Bible goes?'

'How far is that? I have really read my Bible all my life, but I do not seem to know.'

'If you will let me fetch a Bible, I will show you'—

'No, I will not let you go away for anything. I have no doubt you know well enough, and can tell me without book.'

'Well,' said Helen, 'it is very simple. '"Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you"'—

'But how far?' insisted the Professor again.

'In the early Church, nobody said that anything he had was his own.'

'They did not keep that up long.'

'But it is according to the rule,' pleaded Helen. '"That ye love one another, *even as I have loved you.*" And Christ gave Himself.'

'Must we also?' said the Professor gravely.

'Don't you remember? He "laid down His life for us; *and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*" "He that saith he abideth in Him, ought himself also to walk even as He walked."'

'I said you didn't want book,' said the Professor humorously. 'But how far, Helen, practically? What is your working rule?'

'I do not know that I have thought it out. I suppose, really, the question is, who wants a thing most,—I or somebody else.'

'I see your moral diatoms would soon make whole continents of human action. But where have I been all this while? If you are right,—where are we all?'

To this Helen made no answer. Both stood still a minute, thinking, and then with a caress and very fondly the Professor said,—

'The question with me is, what *you* want.'

'I? oh, I want nothing,' said Helen. 'Except just to know what is right, and to do it.'

'Which according to your views involves, you must allow, a good deal!'

'Yes,—but so as, I hope, not to be displeasing to you?'

'*I* have not thought it out,' the Professor went on; 'and I do not know yet what all this would end in. But I will make a bargain with you, Helen. We will live, as I have been accustomed to live, on my income,—at least so far as you yourself do not wish to make changes; and what you have from your mother is yours, and you shall do what you like with it. How will that work?'

'Mr. L'Estrange!—that is very large-hearted of you!' exclaimed Helen, much struck and astonished as well as touched.

'No,'—said her husband, again with an accent of humour;—'my heart really is filled with one thing, and I have no room in it for more. Fortunes are trifles!'

When Helen repeated this conversation to her mother, Mrs. Thayer, however, shook her head.

'It is very nice of him! but he is a man in love. I would not count upon it, Helen, nor think of taking him at his word.'

'Mother, do you expect his love for me to *decrease?* Upon better acquaintance?' Helen said, half laughing, yet wholly serious.

'A man in love is not precisely what he is afterwards.'

'Why should there be any "afterwards"?'

'There should not, in your case. But I do not know your husband well enough yet to promise you that there will not be.'

'It seems to me it is part of my duty to prevent it.'

And Helen acted conscientiously upon this persuasion. She tried to arrange and order all her affairs in the way

she thought Mr. L'Estrange would best like; she even bore with his whilom housekeeper's bad cookery and worse manners, and would not annoy him by making any representations about either. Mercy fretted under the infliction; but no symptom of fretting ever clouded the sweet brow which the Professor loved so to look upon. To judge by *that*, the world was all clear sunshine. He saw it on the other side of the table at meal-times, he watched it in the evenings that they were allowed to spend at home; where Helen's figure in the particular easy-chair he liked to see her in made a picture of delight for him; as indeed it might for any professor. Always dressed with faultless taste and simplicity, always busy and always happy, Mr. L'Estrange often forgot his work and often his play, to look at her. His play was to read to Helen; his work was some bit of study, which frequently engaged him in the evening as well as at other times. The readings were exceedingly enjoyable to Helen, enriched and enlivened as they were by digressions of explanation or discussion. When Mr. L'Estrange was busy, she thought her own thoughts, sometimes studied also, at her side of the table, and was still happy.

Their evenings at home, however, were not too many, nor entirely uninterrupted. During the larger part of the day, except at meals, the Professor did not see his wife, and did not know what she had to busy herself with. He did not ask, and she did not say. In truth, they went into company so much that the opportunities of quiet work at home were welcomed eagerly by him, and he naturally supposed it was the same with her. And so things went on, till they had been entertained in turn by nearly all their acquaintances. The months of winter had passed, and some gentle spring days had made Helen begin to think of the Plains.

Then one day old Mrs. L'Estrange made her son a visit. Really a visit to her son; she did not want to see Helen, she said; indeed, Helen was not to be seen. She was out.

'Where is she gone?' asked the elder lady.

'I do not know. I did not know she was not in the house.'

'Do you know where she is most of the time?'

'She is always at home,' said the Professor, looking up a little surprised.

'When you see her. Do you know where she is the rest of the time.'

'No. Why should I?'

'Don't you think it is well for a man to know where his wife goes?'

'No,' said the Professor, with a sly twinkle of his eye. 'It is well for him, I think, to know what his wife *is*, —and then, let her go!'

'I told you, Joseph, you were too old to get married. You do not know how to take care of a wife, now you have got her.' The old lady seemed rather in a worry. The Professor smiled.

'I daresay it is true, mother,' he said. 'But then!'—

'You don't know where your wife is this minute. You do not know what she does with herself, all the time.'

'Is that supposed to be a man's duty? And ought I to give accounts to her of all my hours, idle and busy?'

'You to *her!* that would be ridiculous, Joseph.'

'I always heard that it is a poor rule which does not work both ways.'

'The man is the head.'

'The woman is the better half.'

'I can tell you what your wife *doesn't* do, if you want to know.'

The Professor looked a little impatient, fidgeted slightly with his pen, but made no remark.

'She does *not* do her duty, in one respect.'

'What is that? I cannot guess.'

'She has never returned the visits made her.'

'Well, that is serious,' said the Professor.

'It *is* serious, Joseph, light as you may make it. It *is*

serious. If we are to live in this world, we must not go against all people's notions; and it is a universal thing, that when people pay visits they expect them to be returned.'

'No doubt.'

'A first visit is a compliment; and if you take no notice of it, it is as good as throwing the compliment back in somebody's face.'

'That would be bad,' said the Professor. 'I will give Helen a lecture.'

'And then, Joseph, I can tell you what she *does*, that she had better not do. You don't want her to be talked about?'

'That is hopeless,' said the Professor. 'To escape being talked about was never the lot of but two men. Adam,—because there was no one at that period to do the talking, before his sons and daughters were grown; and Alexander Selkirk on his desert island, where the conditions were somewhat similar. I never expected it to be my lot.'

'Nonsense, Joseph! You know what I mean, when I say you do not want your wife talked about.'

'Go on!'—said the Professor resignedly. 'I seem to know it even better than you do.'

'But you ought to know what they say. And people are making very strange remarks, I can tell you. They say young Mrs. L'Estrange does not go to see her friends—does not make a proper return for the civilities shown her; but instead of that she goes roaming through all the old back streets and odd places of Cambridge and Boston, and is specially fond of jails and hospitals.'

'Jails and hospitals!' cried the Professor.

'Yes; how do you like that? She goes to the jail regularly, I believe. Of course she is talked about, and not in a way very flattering to her or to you. I've been seein' this thing goin' on all winter; and I made up my mind it was time you should have something to say about it.'

'I will try to say something,' said the Professor, with

again a twinkle of fun crossing his face; 'but I know beforehand I shall be worsted. I always am.'

'*What* are you?' asked his mother impatiently. 'Worsted? what do you mean? I hope you know better what is right than that girl does.'

'I wish I could hope it!' said the Professor resignedly. 'There, mother, you have done your duty.'

'No, I haven't,' said the old lady; 'for there is another thing. Aren't you and she going to make any return for all the invitations people have sent you?'

'Return?' said her son bewilderedly.

'Yes! You accepted the invitations; you have been going to dinners and suppers all the winter; when are you going to pay some of them back?'

'So!'—said the Professor. 'It is a loan to be repaid?'

'Not exactly *that*, but it is a civility to be answered. It is tit for tat. If it were not tit for tat, how could society exist at all? It could not get along, all on one side.'

'Like the bear in Daniel's vision. No. Well, that is something to be considered. Perhaps, if we had known, we would not have accepted all those invitations. But we supposed *that* was duty.'

'What are you talking about a bear?'

'Nothing. I do not want to be one. What must we do, mother, to give tit for tat to society? Make as many parties as we have been asked to?'

'Not at all! Joseph, you are no better than a child! You must give a dinner to the people who made dinner-parties for you; and'—

'Dinners are very stupid things unless you have the right sort of people. It would be a great hotch-potch, mother, if we gathered them all together, the people who have entertained us. At their own houses we have them separate.'

'Have them separate here, if you like.'

'Then instead of one dinner-party we must give a couple of dozen.'

'I don't care how you fix it, Joseph, but you must do

something. Then all the rest you can manage by one or two evening parties.'

'Hm!—In giving this desirable "tit for tat," mother, is it essential,—or to be attempted,—that society should get full change for its sovereign?'

'I don't know what you mean,' said the old lady discontentedly.

'Must one do everything after the fashion of one's rich neighbours? Or will plum-cake think slightly of bread and butter?'

'Bread and butter! who talks of bread and butter? It is no compliment to ask people to something not as good as they would get at home. Oh, Joseph, you are simple! you don't understand common things. What need have you to give people bread and butter? you can set as good a supper as anybody, and pay for it in as good money.'

'Can I? My income is no bigger than ever it was.'

'But you have married a rich wife.'

'*She* may be rich; but I am as poor as I used to be.'

'That is nonsense, Joseph.'

'Maybe; but I doubt. How can truth be nonsense?'

'But your wife's money is your money?'

'I do not want it. And whatever we do, in a social way, must be done, so far as I am concerned, on the basis of my professor-like circumstances.'

'Well! all I have to say is, people won't understand it, and won't like it, and will set it down to something very different from want of means. If you ask Mr. Topstone to your house and give him lemonade or tea, when he opened any number of bottles of champagne for you, he won't feel flattered. I shouldn't in his place. But I've said my say,' added the old lady, getting up, 'and I'll go. I tell you, Joseph, you and your wife are going the wrong way to work to make people like you; but it's your affair, no doubt. I wish you had married a wife who would teach you what is proper! but I've done what I could to help you. I think you're bewitched.'

With which utterance Mrs. L'Estrange departed.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

VISITS AND VISITS.

FOR a little while the Professor internally pish'd and pshaw'd, then—he forgot all about it. Forgot the whole conversation and the subject-matters of it utterly, and never remembered the thing again till he met his wife at tea. Not then immediately. The pleasure of seeing her was so great, that for a time he could only look and enjoy. Helen was a very careful dresser, and never in her life more than now. Which means, however, not precisely what some of my readers might think it means, and I must explain. There was never anything striking about her, never anything to catch the eye, never anything very expensive. But the colours chosen always suited her, and were always in soft harmony; her robes were arranged in graceful, flowing lines of drapery, which did not indeed hide a good figure, but neither did painfully reveal it. There was no rustle or crackle to her garments, nor any creaking in her shoes, nor any stiff formality of crinoline. Seeing her you did not think what she had on, out of her presence you could not remember it; what you were sensible of was a gentle, soft-moving, gracious, and graceful appearance, about which there was nothing wrong and nothing that could be wished different.

All this her husband felt daily, with daily new joy in it, but more than all this his eyes were filled with the fair face, in which all harmonies seemed to meet. Peace, and purity, and goodwill, and gracious intelligence, a sweet freshness of health and good condition, and a

conscience at rest; all these were to be read in her face and manner, and her husband was not weary of reading them, and went over the lovely category again and again. He forgot all about what she had been doing or not doing, and thought only of what she was. He sat in his arm-chair before the fire, and Helen moved about the table preparing the tea. And then his mother's talk flashed upon him, and he became conscious that he must bring up the subjects of it and have them discussed; how he could do it without betraying her communications was the question. He must not betray them if he could help it. Helen was good-nature itself, but he would not give her a disagreeable impression about his mother, and how was it to be avoided? But he did not trouble himself, her silence was so sweet he was not in a hurry to make her talk.

'You are very quiet, Mr. L'Estrange!' Helen said with a smile at length. 'I must break up your musings,—tea is ready. Will you come to the table? You seem to be studying all the while.'

'The appearance corresponds to the fact,' said the Professor, as he obeyed her summons.

'You ought not to be studying *here*.'

'On the contrary, it is just here that I take it up. Roast potatoes! Now that is a sensible supper dish. What would people say, Helen, if we invited them to take tea with us and gave them roasted potatoes?'

Helen looked at him and laughed. 'It depends on the people, I suppose. At Daisy Plains we thought it a very good supper. To be sure we sometimes added such a trifle as fricasseed chickens or roast pig, if we had a party; but that was for supper early in the afternoon; it was really a tea dinner. We never had it so for ourselves.'

'Why isn't what is good enough for one's self good enough for one's friends?'

Helen looked across the table, a little surprised at this adventurous suggestion.

'*I* think it is,' she answered, with a smile; 'but you know when the entertainment is for form's sake the form must have something to it.'

'Salt is not enough,' said the Professor. 'No, I dislike anything that is for form's sake!'

'Oh, so do I.'

The Professor recollected here that he was getting forward on the wrong road.

'But I suppose one must conform one's self, nevertheless, to what the customs of society have agreed upon,' he added.

Helen made no answer to this, and roasted potatoes had their rights for a few minutes.

'What do you do with yourself all day, Helen?' the Professor began again. 'I should think *you* would want some study to fill up your time.'

'I have it.'

'Have you! What, pray? I have heard nothing of it.'

'I am studying human nature, and the world, and I find the study very perplexing.'

'As how, Helen?'

'I am puzzled by the way people make it hard for their fellow-men to live. And then by the perverseness—or the ignorance—which makes it hard to help them.'

'I do not understand what has given occasion to your study of all these social questions,' said the Professor, thinking that he was coming up to the subject very easily and nicely.

'Trying to help!' said Helen, with the breath of a sigh.

'Whom are you helping, my dear?'

'I will tell you whom I am longing to help. Have you noticed in the papers that a large concern in Connecticut somewhere, large millowners,—Baffle & Force, I think,—have discharged a number of their hands because the market is going to be bad?'

'I had not noticed'—

'Well, their example is followed by others; and now a great establishment just out of Boston has dismissed three hundred men.'

'They must do it, I suppose.'

'Why?'

At this question the Professor looked up. He had been listening only languidly to the statement of mill embarrassments and reductions, thinking, indeed, of something quite distant from them; but now Helen's query, put with an accent which conveyed not so much an inquiry as a challenge, roused him up a little. Why must millowners reduce their force when the demand for their wares or the price of them falls away? What a question!

'Why?' he repeated. 'Because it would not pay to keep on all their hands when they can dispose of but half the work they would do.'

'It would not pay,' Helen repeated slowly. 'That is, they would not make much by it?'

'They might not make anything. They might lose. It might be a clear loss to them every day.'

'Would it ruin them?'

'Who are they, these of whom you are speaking?'

'Bagges & Packetts.'

'Not likely it would ruin *them*. They are strong enough to stand.'

'Suppose it would ruin them?' Helen went on. 'That is one family or two. *Not* to go on ruins four hundred families.'

The Professor looked across the table at his wife, but for the moment spoke not.

'It is one or two against four hundred!' Helen said again.

'My dear,' said the Professor, slowly sipping his tea without in the least knowing how it tasted, 'is not a man's first duty to his own family?'

'I think not—not always,' Helen answered, also slowly.

'I should like to hear to whom then?'

'First to himself. And then to God. And then to his neighbour. But his family are only his nearest neighbours.'

The Professor set down his teacup now, and intermitted the business of eating. What sort of a little woman was this he had married? And what kind of propositions were these? If you had come to the Professor with any sort of natural questions or problems of natural science, he would have been ready for you; it was odd how taken aback he was at these statements of gospel ethics.

'I don't know if I have put it right,' Helen went on thoughtfully,—'but that is how it seems to me. First to himself, to be the utmost and best he can be. Then to God, to give all this redeemed and renewed self to His service. And then to his neighbour, in the doing of that service. But a man's family cannot exhaust his duties to his neighbour, Mr. L'Estrange?'

'They come first, though.'

Helen was silent.

'I mean!'—said her husband,—'I do not intend to dispute what you have just said, but it seems to me a man cannot be called upon to damage his own family's interests to save another man's family from damage.'

'It isn't one against one, it is one against four hundred,' said Helen. 'And neither is it damage for damage, Mr. L'Estrange; to his wife and children it is simply living less handsomely, eating less expensively, and dressing less luxuriously, or putting down carriages and stopping of dinner-parties. To the four hundred it is starvation. It means neither bread to eat nor fire to be warmed by.'

'Not quite so bad as that.'

'I have seen it. I am seeing it every day. And when these men who discharge their workmen profess to be Christians, I do not know what to answer to the flings I hear against such Christianity!'

'My dear wife,' said Mr. L'Estrange, somewhat amused, and, if the truth be told, not a little puzzled, 'it seems to

me you are cherishing what would be called very advanced ideas. Are you not?'

Then Helen's fine eyes filled with tears.

'Yes,' she said, 'I suppose I am. They are so advanced that they are as high as the heaven is above the earth, for they are the Lord's thoughts. "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you."—Suppose *I* were starving, and you out of work?'

The Professor changed his position a little.

'Where do you see these people, Helen?'

'Some of them are in Boston. A few are here.'

'How come you to meet them?'

'I met one or two in the course of my going about, and then I looked up others.'

'For what purpose?'

'To give help, where I can,—and comfort, where I can.'

'How can *you* help them?'

'By giving them work,' said Helen simply, 'or by getting somebody else to give them work. I have provided for a few so.'

'What work can you give them—four hundred people—that would avail anything?'

'Not the four hundred,' said Helen, sighing. 'But you know what you said, Mr. L'Estrange, about—well, about mother's money. I have got places for boys, and given sewing and carpet-making to women, and I have set some men to work down at Daisy Plains.'

'What sort of work?'

'Ditching—road-making—stone-cutting—hewing timber—tending a mill'—

'What mill?'

'A saw-mill belonging to Mr. Sawyer, up in the hills. I hired it of him—it was doing next to nothing; that gives employment to several men.'

'And how long will your finances hold out against all this expenditure?'

Helen smiled. 'Some of the work is self-paying, the mill work, and the carpet-weaving. It will hold out, I hope'—

'How many families have you helped?'

'One way and another—twenty or thirty.'

His wife had got ahead of him. The Professor felt himself not prepared to entertain or to condemn her positions; he stopped talking, and for some time attended to his roast potato, which had had time to cool. His thoughts, however, meantime, were not undergoing a cooling process, they were rather getting heated and confused. What his mother had said was true, then? only it was not half the truth. And it was very likely his wife was getting herself talked about, very likely indeed! And *not* desirable. And good things, very good things, might be pushed too far; and women especially are always under the temptation of letting their feelings run away with them. Helen was strong in her affections; was she not becoming a little—enthusiastic? The Professor took a new departure.

'Among your duties to your neighbours, you are not, I hope, forgetting your friends who are *not* in distress?'

'No,'—said Helen, rather absently.

'Have you not some visits to pay?'

'Some'—

'Are any of them paid?'

'Oh yes! about half, I think.'

'It would be well to finish the other half, Helen.'

'I mean to do it as soon as possible. I must return these first calls, and after that I will make no more.'

'No more what? calls?'

'No more formal calls.'

'Why not?'

'I have not time.'

'But, my dear, who has more than you?'

'I mean, time to spare for such things,' Helen explained, smiling. 'I have time, but I have more than enough to do with it.'

'People will not understand that, I fear. It will be ill taken.'

'Yes, perhaps, but I must risk that. One cannot do both things, Mr. L'Estrange.'

'Both what things, Helen?'

'The Lord's work and the world's pleasure. The choice has to be made. But I will of course return all these first calls. Civility demands that.'

'How does civility consist with neglecting the calls which will follow?'

'It *must*,' said Helen, smiling again. 'I will be civil—oh, as civil as the May itself I am called after. Nobody shall mistake me for anything else. But I must be civil in my own way.'

'Does your "way" include giving entertainments?'

Helen looked up quickly, discerning something in her husband's tone that was not unqualified agreement with her statements. Yet he was smiling, for *her* smile had been so charming that he could not help it. In doubt and with some hesitation she answered,—

'What sort, Mr. L'Estrange?'

'The like of those that have been given to us.'

'To all those people?'

Helen's face expressed some anxiety, not to say dismay.

'Well, yes; civility demands that also, does it not?'

Helen did not immediately answer. She grew grave—how grave her husband could not see, as she turned her face slightly away from him; neither did he perceive the slight tremble which came upon her lip; but her silence struck him.

'Well, Helen, what is it?' he asked cheerfully.

'I was thinking, Mr. L'Estrange'—

'I see you are; and your thoughts generally are worth attending to. What now?'

'Is it your wish that we should give this round of entertainments?' she asked earnestly.

'Yes, I think so. It will be expected of us. I would not have you offend people unnecessarily, nor even repel them. It is you I care most about.'

Helen was silent again, and he could not see her face.

'Have you any objection?'

'I am afraid of being caught in the great wheel of the society machine!'—

'Well? Only go round with it, and it will do you no harm,' Mr. L'Estrange said, laughing. 'What are you afraid of, my darling?'

Helen suddenly faced him. 'What do those words mean, then?—"When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee."'

'We are *making* the recompense,' Mr. L'Estrange said, laughing. 'And you need not have any great entertainment; a simple affair will do very well. But I think so much is due to our friends.'

CHAPTER XXXV.

POPULARITY.

THE Professor and his wife gave their first party. 'If you call *that* a party,'—old Mrs. L'Estrange said. The truth was, it was a very agreeable occasion, extremely enjoyed by those who were privileged to share in it, and much talked about in consequence. Helen had chosen her people with great care and nice adaptation; every one fitted in well; she had given them, as regards eatables and drinkables, it must be allowed, a very simple entertainment; but her natural grace had so managed that the mental refection had been uncommonly good. Everybody had showed himself at his best; everybody's stores had been happily drawn upon; there had been not a moment of dullness or dragging; on the contrary, a rather brilliant play of wits and faculties all the evening through. But the Professor's mother was one person dissatisfied. This time she made her strictures in Helen's hearing as well as her son's.

'Well, is that the best you can do, Joseph?' she asked in high disdain. 'I couldn't believe my eyes. Tea and bread and butter! And to people who gave *you* everything there was in the market. Bread and butter and tea! To such people as the Babbages and the Crowninshields and the Russells and the Fortescues!'

'There was something else, wasn't there?' said the Professor. 'Cakes—and coffee'—

'And fruit'— added Helen.

'Never mind; what people will speak of will be the bread and butter.'

'It was good bread and butter,' said Helen, smiling.

'And capital tea,' said the Professor. 'It rather seemed to me that our friends enjoyed it. I thought the cups were lively.'

'I *know* they were,' said Helen. 'I did not know Boston people were so fond of tea.'

'I am of opinion our friends enjoyed themselves,' the Professor summed up the discussion.

'Maybe they enjoyed *themselves*,' said the old lady; 'but they didn't enjoy *you*, you may depend. I think you have both of you lost your wits. Tea and bread and butter to such a company! When you could just as well as not have given them as good as they gave you; and they know you could. What are they to think? They can't feel much complimented. And I—I don't know how to show my face, I am sure!'

'Why, mother?'

'It won't do, Joseph!' the old lady went on, emphatically shaking her head. 'People will not take it well of you. They know you can afford better things, and handsome things. Look at that magnificent tiger rug on the floor, and think of giving bread and butter to the friend who sent it you!'

The husband and wife exchanged glances.

'I daresay he eats bread and butter—when he cannot get anything else,' said Helen.

'But I am ashamed!' said the old lady. 'You have been treated so handsomely—and now to ask the people that have done it to a cup of tea!'

'Mother, they know that a professorship in a college is not a very lucrative business,' the Professor put in. 'I always was a rather poor man.'

'They know you have married a rich wife,' said Mrs. L'Estrange sharply. 'You can't draw *that* cloak round you.'

The Professor and Helen again looked at each other.

'People know exactly what to expect of you,' said the old lady, rising; 'and I shall see my son dishonoured in

the society among which he was brought up. I never thought to see that. People will forgive you a great deal, but meanness they will not forgive, and they oughtn't; it's worse than pison.'

She went away in her wrath and indignation, and the two who were left looked at each other. Then Helen looked out of the window.

'I am afraid mother has some reason,' the Professor said.

Helen did not move.

'It is true, the world is unreasoning, and judges without knowing all the data.'

'But, Mr. L'Estrange, our evening last week went off perfectly well. What is the purpose of inviting people, but that they may enjoy themselves? and if the end of the entertainment is met, what more is to be wished for?'

The Professor crossed his right leg over his left, instead of his left over his right, which had been his position.

'It seems that is not the only end of an entertainment,' he answered.

'What is the other?'

'It would appear to be, — to satisfy people's expectations.'

'To do that, how much should one sacrifice, Mr. L'Estrange?'

'It is not much sacrifice. It takes no more time, I suppose, to order one thing than to order another. The money is nothing. I should not wish you to suffer in the estimation of the world for so small a thing as the price of a supper.'

'It is not that, Mr. L'Estrange. It means the daily bread taken from the mouths of my poor people.'

'My dear, I think you must be exaggerating a little. A supper or two, or a dinner, cannot make much difference. But I should not like you to suffer, even for your poor people's sake, I confess.'

Helen opened her mouth, and closed it again. She spoke no more.

But her next entertainment was different. It was

according to all the rules, and perfectly contented old Mrs. L'Estrange, who looked on in proud satisfaction, seeing her son, as she thought, take his place among the best and hold his own with them. It was followed by others on the same pattern; and at the old lady's suggestion Helen even invited a second time some of the people who had been asked to the first tea-drinking, 'lest they might feel themselves a little put out, you know.' It could not be said that in a social point of view these latter companies, however, were so distinguished as the despised tea-party had been.

'I am sorry,' said one or more of the best members of Boston and Cambridge society,— 'I hoped Mrs. L'Estrange would go on in that very nice way she had begun, and dispense with form and splendour. That little tea-party of hers was the best thing we had all the season.'

That season came to an end; but the next autumn Helen still followed the rules prescribed to her. She and her husband were of course invited again everywhere;— and went. Helen did not know how it happened. Her husband was not very fond of mixed companies, yet he evidently liked to have her go, and so submitted to go with her. The truth was, the new Mrs. L'Estrange had become a great favourite. She was continually in request. It was good only to see her sweet beauty; her quiet happiness was something comforting to meet; her gentleness was winning; her conversation was stimulating. Helen came very near being voted a wit; yet she was not brilliant. The odd fact is, that simple truth frankly stated has often in it something of the surprise of repartee to those who never by any chance use it themselves. It is the last thing it would occur to them to speak; they are tickled with the audacity or the piquancy of this new flavour in conversation. For every reason, and with all diversities of people, the new Mrs. L'Estrange became a much-desired and much-prized sharer in all festivities and member of all companies; also, helper in all schemes to which she could be persuaded to put her hand.

'Well, May,' exclaimed Pixie one day, when Helen had come in for half an hour to their house in Boston,—'well, May, you have got into the whirl! Who would have thought it! Our May! I never expected it of you, that's a fact.'

Helen was silent, and looked suddenly downcast.

'I hear of you everywhere. Why, May, the world can't get along without you. It is Mrs. L'Estrange here and Mrs. L'Estrange there. I hear of you at all sorts of things, except the theatre. You don't go there, do you?'

'Pixie!' said Helen reproachfully. 'How can you speak of it! Mr. L'Estrange would not ask me, nor go there himself.'

'I don't quite know why he shouldn't,' said Pixie. 'I *don't*, that's the fact. Why is the theatre so much worse than other things? It is a long way more sensible, and all the world round more entertaining.'

'It leads to more harm, also. I go to these other places only to please Mr. L'Estrange. He seems to wish it. It is not my pleasure. What do you know about the theatre, Pixie? You were never there in your life.'

'No, but they had private theatricals at the Farquhars' one night. Don't you remember? I told you about it. They played "She Stoops to Conquer," and they did it magnificently well.'

'I did not know the Farquhar entertainment was to be anything of that kind,' said Mrs. Thayer, 'or I would have kept Pixie at home.'

'Why, mamma? I am glad you didn't know. It has opened my eyes to the inane stupidity of a great deal of what we call entertainment, and shown me something better.'

'That decides me on one thing,' said Helen. 'I will have no acting in *my* house; nor will I accept any invitation to see acting, be it never so private, anywhere else.'

'Why, May? That is ridiculous. Why?'

'Because I see how it has fascinated you.'

'What's the harm in being fascinated?'

'The danger of being drawn on.'

'Must one never be fascinated by anything?' cried Pixie, firing up. 'What dreadful precision that is!'

Helen looked at her sister with her gentle, beautiful, grave eyes, but otherwise spoke not. Mrs. Thayer took the word.

'The Bible bids us be sober, Pixie.'

'Sober!—What is that?'

'Just, not intoxicated with anything. Then you do not enjoy your round of dissipation, May? I am glad of it.'

'I do not enjoy it at all,' said Helen gravely. 'I go solely because Mr. L'Estrange wishes it.'

'Does he make you go where you don't want to go?' cried Pixie; if he does, I shall write him out of *my* books! You, of all people!'

'Why not I?' Helen answered, with a grave smile. 'I think he wishes it chiefly for my sake. He wants me to stand well with people.'

'And don't *you* want to stand well with people?' cried Pixie again. She was somewhat lively in her ways of talking. 'But look here, May, you are wearing your last winter's bonnet!'

'Don't tell Mr. L'Estrange that,' said Helen, with another smile, more merry than the last. 'He would forthwith make me get another.'

'And haven't you another?'

'No. Not a presentable one.'

'Then *why* haven't you another?'

'Can't afford it.'

'Now, May!—When mother will give you any money, for the asking!'

It happened that Pixie was called away at this minute to see a visitor, and Helen turned to her mother with a very earnest face.

'Am I wrong, mamma? Do you think I have made a mistake? I thought I ought to do what my husband wished in this thing. It was very much against my own wish. Mamma, he is one of the noblest of men, pure, unselfish, true, and generous; but he does not see some

things just as I see them, and as you see them. Few people do, I find; I am in hopes that by and by, some day, he will.'

'I think you are probably right, May.'

'He never asks me to do anything that I feel is in itself really *wrong;* never to go to the theatre, for instance, nor to take part in games of cards. He won't have a pack of cards in the house. But he likes people to like me,' said Helen thoughtfully; 'and so he wishes me to accept invitations, and to give them. And so, here I am.'

'I think you are right,' Mrs. Thayer said again. 'It costs you only a little time and pleasure for the present.'

'It costs me much more!' said Helen, her eyes filling fast. 'It is impossible to do both things, mother. I cannot pay visits to all the world, and also go to see all my poor people. I cannot. And I cannot give all my money to help them, and at the same time arrange such dinners and suppers at home as I am expected to do. The one thing crowds out the other, in a hundred ways. And so'—

She stopped and turned away.

'Can't I do something?' Mrs. Thayer said.

'No, mother, you are not strong enough. And if you could,—that would be your part, it wouldn't be my part, after all. Don't you find that one person cannot do another person's work in the world? He must do it himself, or it remains for ever undone.'

'I might look after some particular cases.'

'I manage to do that. But there are so many that I cannot reach! I try to console myself with the fact that duty is duty'—

'Have you ever talked to your husband on this whole subject?'

'Yes, as far as I could. He understands and loves working for Christ, mother; but—like most people—he does not see that it is the only thing to live for; he does not understand practically putting it everywhere *first.*

He thinks—like everybody else—that one's friends and rich neighbours should be the first entertained; and that afterwards the lame and the blind should take what is left for them.'

'Patience!' said Mrs. Thayer, smiling,—'and pray your way, May. "Do the next thing."'

'Yes, mother, I do—try. And, you understand, Mr. L'Estrange is thoroughly noble and true. He will do in a minute what is right, as soon as he sees it. In this thing he is principally concerned for me.'

'And your bonnet, Helen?'

'Hush, mother!' said Helen, laying her finger on her lips. 'Don't speak of that. I look respectable, don't I?'

'Certainly, respectable; but you know the fashion has changed a little since last winter. I should think your husband'—

'He knows nothing about fashions, happily. He *does* know whether I look well or not; but that is on general principles. Diatoms never change their fashions,' she went on, smiling; 'and he would be content that men and women should not. So would I. Good-bye, mother dear!'

'But stop,' said Mrs. Thayer, detaining her after the kiss Helen stooped to give;—'what is it really about the bonnet?'

'It has gone to put a bright little girl to a school where she can learn to be something.'

'I will give you the money to get another.'

'Then *that* will go,—oh yes, I'll take it, mother,—but it will go, I forewarn you, to get grapes and wine for a girl who is slowly dying of consumption. I have two such cases. I have supplied one of them, the other I simply cannot supply. I will give you her address.'

Which Helen did, and departed. Mrs. Thayer sat a long while meditating. Was all right? If it was not, she saw well enough that she could do nothing to make it so; but that consideration is not always precisely a quieting one.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AN OLD FRIEND.

THE Professor never found out that his wife was wearing her bonnet two winters. How should he, when she looked so lovely in it? and what more could one demand of a bonnet? Indeed, she looked lovely to him in everything she wore, and he never doubted but it was all right, every item. And, as I have said, Helen was a careful dresser; one who always made herself delicately pleasant to the eye, both of her husband and of all other people; though her efforts were directed to him principally. You never knew what Helen had on when you were in her presence; but you said afterwards,—every one said it,—'How delightfully she dresses!' The Professor said it too, in his heart of hearts, though he never knew what bonnet she wore. In that, as in all other things, he rested with full satisfaction in what she was and what she did; in a repose which was never disturbed by a question. Perhaps such perfection of repose is not good for a man; or, more strictly speaking, perhaps it is not good for the man's wife. Perhaps, for her, a little uncertainty might be better; so much uncertainty as might lead to some inquiry into *her* way of life and what she met with in it. The Professor rested in sublime security and questioned nothing. Helen made her visits and gave her entertainments; that was the only point on which there had ever been a difference of views between them; he had all he wanted. He was free to bury himself in study; to lose himself in investigations; he could carry on science and perfect the means of knowledge to his heart's content; in

that certainty of finding his wife, whenever he came out of his study, just where she ought to be and just what she ought to be. Why, she was a new stimulus to him, to go on and study more and dig deeper into the secrets of nature, that he might prove himself worthy of her.

So he did not find out that Helen was doing to please him what did not please her. He never guessed at the little economies by which she strove to fill up, in part, the gaps in her funds made by the demands of society. He never dreamed that she was enduring Lucinda Ann's perverseness and unskilfulness for fear of disturbing him in his habits and likings; putting up with bad cookery, thinking it was to his taste; putting up with worse manners, fancying that it might annoy the Professor if she sent the offender away. He never thought of a more serious thing, that his wife was very much alone. That is a circumstance which men are apt to lose sight of. *They* have plenty of change and stir and busy intercourse with the world; it is merely refreshing and soothing to get out of the great current once in a while and rest themselves in a quiet bight of the shore where there is not even an eddy. What can be more pleasant, for a while, than to sit there and hardly hear the waves lapping against the rocks outside? What it would be to sit there always, does not occur to them; unless perchance they reflect that it is a very happy lot *for a woman.* Sheltered, shut off, in unexciting monotony; just what for themselves they would not like. But it is nice for a woman.

And so perhaps it is. Yet if she cannot see with her own eyes, she at least likes to be told what is round the corner. Besides the fact that some women have an inner stir and impulse towards action, following perhaps upon the consciousness of latent power, which makes it hard for them to sit still, lie upon their oars, and never feel the rush and toss of the brisk current they see passing by their retirement. Helen was such a woman. And if anybody just here is inclined to remark that in the bustle

and stir of society she would have found life enough to content her, I answer, that to her it seemed stagnation.

But what she found or what she missed her husband did not know. She was a delightful companion when he talked to her and told her about his studies and investigations, or claimed her sympathy in his successes and discoveries; she found him a delightful companion at those times also he was aware; the long intervals between them he did not consider. And Helen in her gentleness and patience never tried to enlighten him. Still more, she never enlightened her mother. She never said, or implied, that her married life was not everything she had hoped it would be. Fair, and happy, and sweet, as she was in the eyes of everybody who saw her, no one could have guessed that she was suffering from disappointment in anything, or that her life did not suffice her, or that energies within her were craving action and longing to enter upon a field of action at present closed to her.

So days passed, and months. In course of time a child was born to her; and then indeed Helen's energies and her affections had full play. Also she was a little relieved, for some time, from the exactions of her social world and permitted to live more to herself. But with Helen one thing did not drive out another; and the cares of her nursery never made her forget the children of less happy mothers who had no care, and the mothers themselves who were unable to give it; rather her tender heart yearned over both of them the more, now that she knew better what it was to be a mother and to have a child.

With these explanations I may pass over a stretch of several years. Helen's life had after a time resumed very much its former course, and it was in danger of settling permanently into the half satisfactory, two-thirds commonplace, line of so many women's lives, only in Helen's case there was the underlying regret of consciously missing her mark; when there came a remedy. It was a sharp one, but it did the work.

Mercy was the only person, besides her mistress, who

had understanding of her mistress's feeling. Once she approached the subject, sideways, as it were.

'Miss Helen,' she said one day, *apropos* to nothing,—'Miss Helen, why didn't Christian and Christiana go 'long de way together?—in dat book dar.'

'Together?—Oh, you know, Mercy, Christian was ready to go before his wife was willing; so she had to make the journey alone.'

'Well, but 'tain't allays Christian dat's ahead, is it?'

'No, not always.'

'I t'ink, Christian 'd be mighty sorry arterwards dat he let Christiana go alone, when he might ha' gone wid her his own self,' said Mercy, as if in profound meditation. 'Do you t'ink she tried to make him go, all she could?'

'No doubt,' said Helen, smiling. 'But men, and women, are perverse, Mercy, and often miss their best way, as well as their best time.'

If Helen thought she had missed anything, Mercy could not tell. The current of life was unchanged for many a day.

Helen might have been married five years, when something new happened.

It was winter-time, and Mrs. Thayer and her little family were as usual inhabiting their house in Boston. It was a very simple house, although Mrs. Thayer's means were ample; but, according to the pleasant fashion of Boston in old times, people of much larger fortunes than even Mrs. Thayer's were content to live in streets and courts of no pretension, and to hide their wealth of plate and treasures of art in modest little brick houses that a pompous New Yorker of far less means would not look at. One sharp winter night a gentleman came to Mrs. Thayer's door and asked to see the ladies. Mrs. Thayer, the servant told him, was not well, but Miss Thayer was at home; and he was ushered up-stairs into the library, a large room at the back of the house, taking up the whole breadth of it; entering which, one had an immediate feeling of being well placed. It was warm with fire glow,

bright with lamplight, the walls sufficiently covered with books to warrant the name it went by, while there were tokens all over of other than student life, bits of work and bits of play. No splendour but much comfort was apparent, with evidence of busy and cultured life. The only person in the room was Pixie, sitting behind, or rather beyond, a large table; the lights on the table hindering her from seeing clearly the person coming in until he had found his way round the table and stood just before her. Pixie looked up in some astonishment, for she did not recognise this person whose face seemed to say that he knew her. She saw a grave, handsome man, a gentleman unmistakeably, a travelled man also she instantly thought, though why she thought it she could not have said. Something in dress and air which was not precisely like Boston growth was perhaps the reason. And there was a perplexing sort of familiarity in the features which yet were unknown to her. Still more perplexing was his look of moved, astonished recognition; and therewith agreed the first word he spoke.

'May! Is it possible you are so little changed?'

'It is not May,' said Pixie, rising doubtfully, and looking hard at the man who so addressed her,—'it is not May, it is Pixie.'

'Pixie!—Pixie was a little girl.'

'When?' said the girl, with a smile of merriment which assuredly was not May's; it was less sweet, more arch. 'I was a little girl once. Who are you?—Oh, I know, do I not? I know who you are!'

'I think you may.'

'It is Mr. Somers!'

'Yes, certainly;—but—are you Pixie?'

'Of course I am Pixie. Do I look like anybody else?'

'You look—you seemed to me to look—just as your sister did when I saw her last.'

'But that is ten years ago!' Pixie cried, with another smile. 'We do not stand still here in Boston while time

goes on. Is that the way you do in China? I understand everything goes the wrong way there; so perhaps people grow young instead of growing old.'

'I have not grown younger,' he said.

'N—o,' said Pixie, surveying him; 'and you have not grown old either; but you have changed. I recollect you perfectly. Yes, you have changed.'

'Ought one not to change in ten years?'

'That depends entirely on what one is at the beginning of them.'

'Has your sister changed?'

'May?' said Pixie thoughtfully. 'No. She was one of the people that ought not to change.'

'Is she at home?'

'At home? I suppose she is. Oh, but not here. This is not her home now. You know May is married?'

'Married!'—

He said no more for a moment, and instinctively put up his hand in a position to shield his face from the light. That might be merely to see Pixie better, for aught she knew; but really his eyes at the moment saw nothing.

'Oh yes,' Pixie went on; 'she is married; she has been married now these five years.'

'I beg your pardon,' he said somewhat hoarsely; 'but these changes one finds, after being away for a long time and coming home, are so bewildering. When I saw you, I forgot that years had passed—I thought I had your sister before me, just as she was when I went away.'

'I am not like her,' said Pixie decidedly.

'Are you not? To a stranger you seem very like.'

'But you are not a stranger.'

'It seems I am!' he answered, with a sigh that Pixie heard but could make nothing of. 'I suppose a man deserves to be a stranger, who forsakes his country in search of any advantage he prefers—even for the moment—to his country, and what it holds.'

There was a little accent of bitterness, it struck Pixie, in these words, as well as in the voice which spoke them.

'He can bear that, I daresay, if he has gained what he went for,' she remarked.

'I do not know,' he answered. 'I am beginning to think it is a more serious matter to expatriate one's self than I believed when I took the step. After all, what can pay a man for getting out of harmony with all his surroundings in the place where he expects to enjoy the earnings of his labour?'

'Mr. Somers must be very much changed, if he is out of harmony with his surroundings.'

'Do you remember me so well?' he asked quickly. 'You were a child.'

'I was a child, but a child often takes the effect of things which it could not reason about. I remember you as a person of universal harmonies. You were in accord with everything,—that had no harm in it. Discords never lived where you were.'

'Thank you,' he said, with a faint smile. 'If all my friends remembered me so, I should indeed have no cause to complain that I felt out of place. I used to know May—your sister—better than I knew you; tell me about her. She is married,—to whom?'

'Oh, to Professor L'Estrange, of Cambridge.'

'L'Estrange!' cried Somers, almost starting out of his chair. 'It is not possible! Not Joseph L'Estrange!'

'Why not? His name *is* Joseph, though. I wish it were anything else, for my part.'

'Why so?' Somers asked mechanically, and without attending to the answer. He was trying to get the mastery over a confusion of thoughts and feelings which he did not wish to have appear.

'Oh, it's a stupid name for such a bright man,' said Pixie. 'Did you ever know a Joseph that was much of anything, since the one that was Governor of Egypt? And then May never will call him by his name, and if it

was a decent name I suppose she would. It is so stiff to say "Professor" to one's brother-in-law; but I can't be more familiar than his wife chooses to be, you know.'

'And she is happy, I suppose?' said Somers, half asking, half assuming, carrying on the conversation with effort.

'Happy? Of course. May is always happy, don't you know? That is her way. To tell you the truth, I don't think married people are so much happier than unmarried, if you once get over the name of the thing. May is happy, and the Professor is happy; but I believe, if the truth was known, they were just as happy before they concluded to be happy together. The Professor polishes his microscopes, and May attends to her own business. We might just as well have had her all this time. We shouldn't have had the children—but really I'd rather have May herself, as we used to have her.'

'She is a mother, then?'

'Oh yes; didn't I tell you? Two of the loveliest cherubs of children you ever saw in your life. The eldest especially—the little girl—as *we* see her, she seems to wear an aureole already, but Helen says she is of the earth yet; and the boy is a beauty, magnificent!—might be a professor himself, for his gravity; but his eyes are wells of affection. They are just what one would expect May's children to be.'

'Then she must be happy,' said Somers gravely.

'Well, yes, she is; but, after all—she was happy before the children were born, and happy before she was married; and when you are happy, why, isn't that enough? I wish things could stand still a bit in this world.'

'That is what they will not do for you,' said Somers. 'You will be trying change for yourself, Miss Pixie, one of these days.'

'I do not think so,' said Pixie. 'Privately, I will confide to you, I have more worldly wisdom than May ever had; and I intend to take care of myself.'

A strange thought darted into Somers' head, and, having made entrance, it presently made a lodgment for itself, and did not leave him again.

He had waited in China, after writing his letter to Helen, till he should get an answer to it. He waited till his friend would have had plenty of time to get home, and then counted the months that must pass before a ship could bring him the answer. They passed, and no answer came. He reckoned then for hindrances, delays, sicknesses, that might possibly intervene; but the months went on their quiet way, like the stars, and brought him as little intelligence, of the sort he was looking for. And the months grew into years. There was no doubt left that Helen did not care to answer him; he had been right in his surmise that her liking for him was only superficial and transient; what he had to do now was to forget her. And this was easier done in China than at home. So he stayed in China.

If he could have guessed that all this while the letter he had sat up that night to write, and into the lines of which, it seemed to him, he had poured his heart, was lying, still safely folded in the book where he had placed it, securely hidden at the bottom of Professor L'Estrange's trunk! He could not guess it, nor that the trunk itself was yet lying in a storehouse in San Francisco. The Professor had forgotten all about the book, naturally enough; of the letter he had never known anything. The trunk itself he had practically forgotten; amid the new interests which filled his mind after his introduction to Helen, it had sunk away to a low place of insignificance in his memory. It was safe; some day he would get it home; he did not care when. He was busy with microscopical investigations; he was very full of his lectures and teachings, delighting to impart to all receptive minds the knowledge he loved; he was rejoicing in his new home life; the box in California had receded to a very vanishing point in the perspective of his thoughts. And Somers, knowing nothing of all this, gave up his hope

that Helen might have remembered him; made up his mind that for him, as far as his life was concerned, one place in the world was as good as another; and lived on in Canton, helping to increase the hoards of his father's wealth, which long ago had reached an extent that ought to have satisfied anybody.

He got tired of it at last. Ten years had passed nearly. His riches had mounted up out of sight of ordinary arithmetic; he began to think he had done enough addition and multiplication for the rest of his natural life. The old wound bled no more; he was grown an older man and hardened, he said to himself. He could bear to see all the old faces again, and he rather thought he would like to see them. He was a little tired of almond-shaped eyes and yellow skins; a little tired even of tropical flowers and fruits, and hot suns; he thought he would like a good Spitzenberg apple again, and that a field of ice and a pair of skates would be pleasant, if only for the sake of old times. Above all, he wanted to see the old faces; his father's carefully trimmed grey whiskers, the minister whom he used to think so tiresome in the pulpit, the old clerk who was at the head of the business—and Helen's bright brown head. Even her, he thought, he would like to see, just to renew old times.

And when he came into the library that evening, where he had been told he would find Miss Thayer—he knew of no Miss Thayer but one—his head had been full of Helen; and the first sight of Pixie's figure, with her face not yet turned towards him, had carried him away to his exclamation at what he supposed her persistent youth. The news of her marriage had struck him hard, harder than he could have thought it would. He fancied he had got over all that. But it stung him. And then there came this strange thought—congruously or incongruously?—into his head. He sat silent a few minutes; then gathered himself together and tried to talk again.

'You cannot think how pleasant it is to me to see you again!'

'While you thought I was Helen!'—said Pixie archly.

'I thought that for one moment. I see my mistake, which was easy enough, for I was expecting to see your sister; and in old times I hardly knew *you*.'

'Oh, I knew *you* very well,' said Pixie. 'I remember perfectly how I used to make you helpful to me in all my work and my play. Do you let everybody make use of you so still?'

'What is a man good for, if he cannot be made of use?'

'You change my words,' said Pixie. 'I said, *make use of you*. Now that may be one thing or another, you know.'

'True; I hope you will honour me by making use of me, as aforetime. By the way,—where is my friend Edward?'

'He is here; I mean, in Boston. He is not at home to-night. He came home from his wanderings with Mr. Satterly a good while ago. But he is going off again. He has got a taste for roving, I am afraid. Does everybody get it, who stays a sufficient number of years away from his native country?'

'I have not got it. I desire nothing so much as to settle down quietly at home and be a citizen of my own country.'

'How will Boston seem, after Canton?'

'Something like light after darkness.'

'I wonder, then, you stayed in the dark so long!'

'So do I.'

'You are honest,' said Pixie, laughing. 'Now do tell me about China. I know of course they make tea there; don't tell me about tea; and I know they paint extraordinary pictures on teacups; I have seen them. Tell me about the people, and the country.'

In accordance with which request, Mr. Somers drew

his chair a little nearer and went into a long discussion of Chinese ways and doings, which was highly entertaining to Pixie. Mr. Somers developed his old powers of pleasing. His talk was intelligent, acute, humorous; he illustrated it quite often by his pencil, and when he went away left a little heap of bits of paper on which he had drawn a variety of figures and scenes of still life, or beauties of the vegetable world. Pixie looked them over again, admiring and musing.

It was very odd that Mr. Somers should have turned up again at this time of day, and have stayed—this first visit—till this time of night!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

NEW TIMES.

SOMERS walked home through the moonlit streets slowly and thoughtfully. Indeed, the way home was too short for his meditations, as it lay in Tremont Street, and he had only come from Mrs. Thayer's house in Mount Vernon Street; so he took a turn round the Common. It was a beautiful winter night, for Boston; the air was keen but it was still, and the sharp shadows of the elm branches lay moveless on the snow. Somers walked on round the Common, no faster than to keep his blood warm, and did a great deal of speculating, almost enough, indeed, to keep him warm without walking. He was not admiring the moonlight and the elm tree shadows; he was not thinking of either Boston or Canton, nor comparing at all this pale, pure beauty with the glowing colour and rich luxuriance of the world he had left. His thoughts were full of Pixie, and he was half unconsciously comparing or contrasting her with what her sister used to be.

He had been wrong in declaring that they were like each other. No; they were very different. A family likeness, of course, subsisted, both bodily and mental; but it was made up, as the heraldic writers say, 'with a difference.' What the difference was, he was trying to think. There was a similar pure brightness of face, indicating the character. Pixie's was more bright than Helen's, that is, it was more sparkling; was it less sweet? It was sweet in a different way, he decided. Pixie's eyes were not like her sister's; they were more brilliant and

laughing. Helen's eyes were wells of light, very grave, endlessly sweet, with a great depth of strength in them. In that the sisters were not like each other. There was not the same evidence of a strong character in the younger. Mr. Somers was not clear—he thought he was not clear—that the difference was to Pixie's disadvantage. Need a woman be so strong? Pixie's complexion was pale and clear, with hair and brows darker than May's auburn; the whole effect more piquant and perhaps more striking; her eyes were flashing, her lips were curling every other minute with a new expression. May's soft quiet was rarely broken. Yet they were children of the same mother, with, doubtless, the same pure simpleness of nature and fineness of temper. Pixie was now just where Helen was when he left her; would not one do as well as the other?

Perhaps this is not sentimental. My apology must be, it is fact. I am telling a true story, so far as the main facts are concerned.

'Who do you think was here last night?' Pixie asked, as she was attending upon her mother's breakfast the next morning. Mrs. Thayer was ill with a cold, and kept her room.

'Somebody who stayed late, I know. Who was it?'

'Do you remember Mr. Somers?'

'Somers!' cried Mrs. Thayer, with a start. 'You mean Somers who went to China?'

'I never knew any other Somers, mamma. He has come home.'

'What brought him home?'

'Why, mamma! he wasn't an exile. He got tired of making believe he was, I suppose; and resolved to prove to himself that he had a home to go to. Any way, he came.'

'I wish he had stayed in China.'

'Why, mamma?' said Pixie to this incautious remark. 'Don't you like him?'

'I used to like him,' said Mrs. Thayer evasively.

'Well, you may begin again. He is just as likeable as he ever was. I think he is just the same; only he has grown handsomer; and he always was handsome. He is very nice! He has a travelled air, you know. I think he always had that too, more or less; but it's more now; and he is delightfully entertaining. He told me lots of queer things last night, and amusing things, and strange things. I believe Edward must be in the right of it, that home is the dullest place there is. I think I would like to go away and see things myself.'

'My dear Pixie, don't talk so; you do not mean it.'

'Word and honour I do, mamma. I declare I'll stipulate, when I marry, that I shall see something besides Boston. I think I'll strike for the Pyramids. Things *are* rather slow at the Hub.'

'They are slower at the Pyramids,' said Mrs. Thayer, smiling. 'Mummies have been waiting there for thousands of years.'

'Waiting for what?' said Pixie, opening her eyes.

'What has brought Mr. Somers home?'

'An instinct of human nature, I suppose, mamma; an instinct of civilised human nature, I mean. Savages, I daresay, do not know that they have a country. "Lives there a man with soul so dead?"—any other man?'

'Mr. Somers seems to have forgotten his native land for a good while.'

'He has been making money.'

'They did not need to make money; they had enough before, by all accounts.'

'I don't know what is "enough,"' said Pixie; 'and probably they didn't. Mamma, I should think it must be just glorious to have so much riches that you cannot see to the end of them!'

'The end of them is never far off, Pixie.'

'Oh, you know what I mean, mamma! One is continually hampered by having to think about the cost of a thing and whether one can afford it. Now the Somerses can afford *anything*. They could make the Arabian

Nights come true. I'd stay out of my native land a good while for that!'

'My child, do not talk foolishly.'

'It's truth, mamma; and it cannot be foolish to tell the truth.'

'Did Mr. Somers talk about old times?' Mrs. Thayer asked, after a pause.

'Not very much. No, not much at all. He just asked after everybody. I got him talking about China. He'll go into old times with you the next time he comes, I expect.'

'I do not want to see him,' said Mrs. Thayer. 'I am not well enough,' she added quickly.

'But you will be. Oh, I am going to have you downstairs again by to-morrow. Mamma'—

And then there was a long pause, which Pixie broke at last in a doubtful, tentative sort of way,—

'Mamma—in those old times—did Mr. Somers—ever—have a fancy for Helen?'

'What makes you ask?'

'I don't know. Did he?'

'He never said so. And it is to be presumed that he would have said so, if he had had such a fancy.'

Pixie was silent.

'Why? Did he speak of Helen?'

'He took me for her; which is ridiculous, you know, mamma, because I am not like her a bit. Of which fact I shall try to convince him.'

'Why? I cannot conceive why you should be unwilling to be thought like your sister.'

'Because it isn't the fact, mamma; and everything rests best on its own foundation, don't you know? If you could put the Venus of Milo at the top of one of the pyramids, she would be taken for a sphinx, by all but the privileged few who could get up to her level.'

Mrs. Thayer did not quite know what her daughter meant, but she inquired no further. The conversation left her uneasy. Vaguely uneasy; she did not know

what she feared, or rather, she would not confess it to herself. Helen was safe, of course! with her kind husband and her lovely children; and yet Mrs. Thayer wished that Mr. Somers could have married a Chinese millionaire and stayed in Canton. As the next best thing, she wished it were possible to have no intercourse with him; to keep him out of the house and avoid all contact with him; but this was as wild a wish as the other. And this she saw, when, the very first evening of her coming down-stairs, Mr. Somers called again.

She was obliged to confess to herself that he was very attractive. He had even improved in looks, with that travelled and cosmopolitan air which Pixie had observed, and which sets so well upon a man. His manners had more than their old charm of grave gentleness, as he accosted his old friend and received the welcome she could not but give him. Then he drew up a chair for a free, familiar chat.

Mrs. Thayer put a great many questions, somewhat eagerly; staving off half consciously she did not know what. He answered all fully, in detail, with the leisurely manner of one who found it pleasant to be questioned by her. Pixie sat by, taking no part, working her worsted work busily. Somers' eyes sometimes strayed over to her, but then came readily back to the face of Mrs. Thayer.

'You have not changed a bit,' he said. 'It is just like ten years ago.'

'There are some changes,'—she said, with her heart beating a little faster.

'In me,' he replied,—'and in others,'—looking at Pixie for a moment,—'but not in you. Your face looks at me just as it did that first evening I went down to Daisy Plains; when I certainly thought I had got into Arcadia.'

'What sort of a place was Arcadia?' asked Pixie. 'One is curious to know.'

'Mountainous,'—said Somers.

'Ah! uneven and variable. I understand.'

'You were the only variable portion of it,' said the other. 'I see you have not changed your character. How is it with your other daughter—Helen? I beg pardon!—Mrs. L'Estrange,' he went on, turning to Mrs. Thayer. 'I thought she was one to keep her sweet identity always.'

'She is much what she was,' Mrs. Thayer answered constrainedly.

'She *was* exactly what she was,' said Pixie, 'till she married a man of the world; that of course makes a difference. Helen, you know, was not of the world.'

'But Professor L'Estrange!' cried Somers,—'you do not call *him* a man of the world? I should never dream of applying that epithet to him. He has rebuked me for my worldliness before now.'

'That's easy,' said Pixie. 'Nothing easier; I could rebuke pretty nearly every one I know, on the same grounds. The difficult thing is, not to be worldly yourself.'

'My dear,' said Mrs. Thayer seriously, 'I do not think you ought to speak in that light way. You might be taken to mean what you say.'

'I give you my word, mamma, I do. You have got to define what you mean by worldly, that's all. I find there are a great many different ways of it. A man may be as worldly over foraminifera, as a woman over feathers.'

'What do you mean by worldly, then, Miss Thayer?' Somers asked.

'I mean, just making your world of it, whatever it is. With one man it is his diet; with another it is his diatomaceæ. I tell Mr. L'Estrange he is become an adjunct to a microscope.'

'But a man cannot be eminent as a scientist, or as anything else, without giving himself to it; making more or less his world of it, as you say.'

'Just what I remark,' said Pixie. 'I don't see how it is to be helped; but it is very stupid for a man's wife, nevertheless. I hope the fates will preserve me from marrying a philosopher.'

'And is your sister also devoted to diatomaceæ? She used to be very fond of nature, and of knowledge, as I remember her.'

'She is just as fond of them now,' Mrs. Thayer put in.

'Yes; but she is changed, mamma,' persisted Pixie. 'She has come down a good deal to be like other people. How can one live in the world and help it? and she has to live a good deal in the world. That's the Professor's doing, too, I suppose; he likes Helen to keep up with everybody and to keep *in* with everybody,—what a queer language ours is!—and she, like a good child, does whatever he likes. So they live pretty much like other people, which is what I never hoped to live to see May do. It affords some promise for me.'

'How, Miss Pixie? I do not follow your chain of reasoning.'

'I never chain my reason,' said Pixie. 'It runs at its will, or takes a jump now and then, where your poor dog in the leash cannot follow.'

'Show me at least where you are, then,' said Somers, laughing; 'for I profess I do not know.'

'It doesn't matter where I am,' said Pixie; 'for I want to be somewhere else. Do tell me how America seems to you after China?'

'Like a fixed point to one who has been floating.'

'Like the change?'

'There is creeping over me a delicious lull and sense of being at home and secure.'

'Then the question comes inevitably,—why did you float so long?'

Somers did not immediately answer. He watched with somewhat dreamy eyes Pixie's fingers as they flew in and out of her work, or made the crochet needle fly; they were pretty fingers, slim and delicate and white;

and the agile movement of them, and the grace of the positions into which they fell, quite engaged the young man's attention. Then Pixie looked up suddenly, and he caught a glance from two dark, bright, very wide-awake eyes. He smiled.

'Do you believe, Mrs. Thayer, in the theory that hands have a character?' he said.

'I should think they must,—if their owner has anything of the kind,' she answered.

Somers' eyes fell on her own, lying quietly folded in her lap, and rested there somewhat wistfully. What did he see in them? Perhaps it was fancy.

'*Your* hands are like Helen's,' he said.

The hands changed their position and took hold of each other in another fashion, while Pixie eagerly exclaimed,—

'It is true! but how do you know it? and what do you see in them? Tell, Mr. Somers!'

'They are not like yours,' he said.

'I know it! but you are a stranger; how do *you* know it? And what difference of character do you see?'

'I am tempted to make a jump from my position, as you did just now,' he answered, smiling. 'You must remember, I was not a stranger always.'

Pixie's eyes gave another swift, searching glance from her crochet work to his face; with a passing wonder in her mind how he had happened to get so near to the family without coming yet nearer, and a flitting doubt whether some mystery might be hidden behind this relation which she had been too young ten years ago to find out. A swift retrospect of that time went like lightning through her brain, and then she returned to the charge.

'I am not so much of a philosopher as Helen has become, and speculation is really not my line; but when the question concerns a person's hands, it may be said to be near. I want to know how you read hands, and what you see in ours, and in Helen's?'

'I do not know how I read hands,' said Somers slowly. 'Perhaps I do not read—only fancy.'

'*What* do you fancy?'

There was an urgent, pretty imperativeness about the girl, to which it was pleasanter to yield than to offer defiance. But Mr. Somers was not very free to speak his thoughts.

'You are not so quiet as your sister,' he said.

'I am quiet enough,' said Pixie.

'That would imply—a criticism. Do you see?'

'Well, all right,' said Pixie. 'Nobody is beyond criticism. And I mean it. Helen is too quiet.'

'How can a woman be too quiet.'

Pixie gave him another glance, impatient this time.

'If my words held a criticism, yours certainly contain a compliment! I shall maintain my position. A woman may have not self-assertion enough. The woman whom you compliment at my expense has not.'

'The assertion should be done for a woman, by some one else.'

'Suppose it isn't?'

'My dear,' said Mrs. Thayer, 'what sort of a discussion are you going into? It appears to me scarce seemly.'

'Forgive me, Mrs. Thayer!' said Somers. 'I deserve your rebuke.'

'It was not meant for you,' said Mrs. Thayer, with a sigh of suppressed uneasiness.

'Then go back to the hands,' said Pixie. 'We have not done with them, by any means. What do you read in mother's?'

Somers looked at Mrs. Thayer, with a smile that was half apology and half veneration, and held out his own hand to take one of hers. Doubtfully she gave it him, not knowing what he would be at; but the young man bent down his head and gave it a kiss, full of affectionate, grave homage. Then relinquishing it, he turned to Pixie, as if he had answered her question.

'I see!' said Pixie, not without a trifle of pique;

'but, Mr. Somers, if you think mamma is a woman who does not know how to assert herself, you are mistaken.'

'I think nothing in that connection that I ought not to think,' he answered; and then, easily turning the conversation, he went off into other themes, and the hour passed smoothly and fast.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

POVERTY.

IT left Mrs. Thayer, however, very thoughtful and anxious. This man had lost none of his old charm, and that is putting it tamely; he had gained in every way, looks, manner, and stores of conversation. He was a very attractive person, with a singular grace of grave gentleness, especially in his manner to women; and a mature man's knowledge of the world and acquaintance with life. His talk was delightful. But it filled Mrs. Thayer with uneasiness. She was thankful that Helen and her husband were just on the wing for a visit to Washington, where they were to spend the Christmas holidays. That would keep them away for two or three weeks; Mr. Somers in the meantime would have paid his duty visits, or the debt, perhaps, which he owed to memory, and would have turned to the new future unfolding before him. She tried to comfort herself with this thought.

But if Mr. Somers was paying duty visits, he somehow seemed to feel the duty very binding; or, if it were a debt to memory, the debt must be large. For he kept coming. Mrs. Thayer was still a convalescent person, and kept to her house; and Pixie stayed at home with her. Mr. Somers was pretty sure to find the two in the library together, when he came in the evening to see them, and frequently alone; Pixie at her ornamental work, and her mother trying to read the papers, or languidly moving her knitting-needles, for her strength had not yet come back. And it grew to be a very common thing

for Mr. Somers to join them, and almost take upon himself a certain care of them. He would draw the paper from Mrs. Thayer's hand and read to her himself all that was interesting in its columns; commenting and discussing as he went along, wiling Mrs. Thayer into talk and making the talk very animated and pleasant. Then he would throw down the paper and wind or hold Pixie's wools for her, getting into talk of another sort, while Mrs. Thayer lay back in her chair and watched them, or shut her eyes and listened to their talk, and — trembled, with fear she would not confess and could not put down. The more pleasant he was, the more she felt this, and the more she could not banish him. By degrees he fell into his old ways of helpfulness and quiet ministry. He mended Pixie's sewing-machine for her, which was rendered unusable by a refractory screw; he hewed out a knitting-needle to replace one of Mrs. Thayer's, which was broken; he picked a lock which had lost its key, and then took the lock off and got a key for it. He arranged a shade roller which would not work on account of a stiff spring; and while he sat talking with the two ladies he sometimes busied himself with carving out and polishing new crochet needles for Pixie, or paper-knives for Mrs. Thayer. He brought bits of sandal-wood or of red cedar for these manufactures, and managed to carry them on and yet leave no rubbish of chips and dust to be cleared away after him. Evening after evening he was more at home and more familiar, until Mr. Somers began to be as regular a part of the evening as the argand lamp, and almost as necessary.

Mrs. Thayer could not help it; but she had a great many thoughts which she kept to herself. It did not escape her notice that Pixie as time went on was showing herself a little different from her wont. She was quieter and softer. Pixie's temper, like her sister's, had always been perfectly sweet, yet her sweetness had a spice to it which was sometimes pungent. That largely disappeared now,

her mother noticed, unless upon occasions when there were others present besides Mr. Somers. Then Pixie became sparkling and lively, according to her old fashion; but when they were a company of three only, she was often silent, bowed her fair face over her work, and when she looked up did not always quite lift the eyelids that drooped over the eyes. She had never seen Pixie more lovely, her mother thought, and she shrewdly guessed that another person was of the same mind; but then, if that were indeed true, what would come of it all? When Helen should return, and they would, as they must, all come together? how would it be? She would lose herself in terror; and then start out of it to catch some low word of Somers and see one of those half-lifted glances of Pixie's that never met his face.

Mrs. Thayer suffered tortures at this time—tortures of vague apprehension. How Helen would take it, when the deferred meeting should come about,—how Somers would take it; and now mingled another question with the others, how Pixie would take it. Mrs. Thayer could do nothing; only try to shut her eyes and go forward, since she must go forward, to meet the future. The comfort of speaking to anybody about what was on her mind was denied her. She could not say a word to Pixie.

One evening, as usual, Somers was sitting with the two ladies. They were at work, and he was mending a bit of the inlaid border of the old-fashioned table on which Pixie's wools lay.

'Have you been out to-day?' he asked casually.

'Haven't I! Been all through Washington Street.'

'What could take you all through Washington Street?'

'The vain endeavour to find something.'

'Apparently you did not know where to look.'

'Yes, I did. Isn't everything in Washington Street?'

'Then, perhaps, you did not know what you wanted? If you suffer from neither of those kinds of ignorance, shopping need not be a long business.'

'Who told you I was shopping?'

'Pardon me! In Washington Street, looking for something,—what could that be but shopping?'

'It could be something much less pleasant, I can tell you; and that is trying to do shopping. You'd never guess what it was all about; nothing in the world but a bit of riband.'

'Hardly worth the trouble, was it?'

'Ah, *you* would say so,' cried Pixie. 'That is all you know about such things. The riband was to match a brown dress, and the match had need be perfect, you see, or the dress would be lost. You don't understand that, but you must take it on trust. Gentlemen do not understand a great many things. I went in and out of all the shops in the street. The cold was snapping; and so was my patience before I got through. It was one of those days, don't you know, when Boston is twice as big as usual.'

'I return to my first remark,' said Somers. 'It was hardly worth the trouble, was it?'

'That depends,' said Pixie. 'It depends on how much you think of a new dress.'

'*You* do not think much of that?'

'Why don't I?' cried Pixie. 'Why shouldn't I? Of course I think much of it! Mamma may say what she likes, but I think it is a frightfully inconvenient thing to be poor, and a delightfully luxurious thing *not* to be poor. Oh, I should think it must be delicious; not to care whether a dress is spoilt or no; if it is spoilt, give it away!—if you drop a sixpence, not to have to stoop and pick it up. It isn't really worth the trouble of stooping for, you know; but if you haven't another sixpence, you must. Think of spending your life stooping to pick up sixpences!'

'You do not mean, I suppose, to represent yourself as under that necessity?'

'Yes, I do. What have I been about all this morning? Oh, I know mamma has money, but she thinks it is good for my health to pick up sixpences; so she keeps *me* terribly short.'

'Do you put the matter quite correctly, my dear?' said Mrs. Thayer, while Somers looked up from his mending with a smile at the exceedingly bright, arch face—if a little wilful—which was so near him.

'Mamma has theories, you see,' Pixie went on, without looking at the eyes which were bent on her,—'mamma and Helen have theories. To put it briefly, they think it is—well, immoral, to be rich.'

'Pixie, speak sense if you speak at all,' said her mother.

'I will speak the truth, mamma, and that you always think is sense. They think, mamma and Helen, not that it is immoral to *have* money, for that one cannot very well help, in some cases, but only that it is an evil thing to act as if you had it.'

'Might as well not have it, then?' said Somers, still smiling at her.

'You laugh at me, but they do.'

'I may be permitted to take that statement with a grain of allowance?'

'No, I mean it, and they mean it. Helen would be ridiculous if she hadn't a husband.'

'And your mother?'—queried Mrs. Thayer.

'Mamma, I mean to be respectful.'

'How does this tendency show itself?' Somers asked, gravely now.

'Did you never make the observation?'

'Never, I assure you. In all your places of abode, in all your arrangements, domestic and social, so far as I have been privileged to know them, I have never noticed anything but the most delightful harmony and the most delicate adjustment to all the requirements of an active and refined and rich mental life.'

'That is provoking!' said Pixie.

'Why?'

'You will aid and fortify mother in all her—I must say—extravagant notions.'

'I do not know what they are,' said Somers, laying down

his tools and turning from the table to Mrs. Thayer. 'I am glad the conversation has come upon this topic. I know you do not think as everybody thinks, and I want to understand your way of looking at things,—these things.'

'Poverty and riches,' added Pixie. 'It is no use for Mr. Somers to try to look at poverty, because he cannot see it.'

'I have no "way,"' said Mrs. Thayer, smiling. 'I have no "views." If I am peculiar, it is simply in that I obey—or try to obey.'

'But obey what?'

'Now she'll drive you into a corner and fasten you in, Mr. Somers! You've got mother just where she wants to be.'

Mrs. Thayer seemed to be in no hurry to drive anybody. She was silent, till Mr. Somers repeated his question. 'Obey what?'

'The Bible.'

'But the Bible!—we all, we who are Christians, obey that, do we not?' he said gently.

'Do we?'

'I thought so.'

'We who are Christians certainly suppose that we do.'

'Is the supposition a mistake?'

'It is not for me to say. Try the habits of the Christian world at large by the rules laid down in the New Testament—and see for yourself.'

'But I thought I *had* seen, all my life,' said Somers. 'Bring forward some of the rules you refer to, Mrs. Thayer, please. I do not know just what you are thinking of.'

'If you make a convert of Mr. Somers, mamma, I'll never forgive you,' Pixie put in here. The young man turned and looked at her with a sort of surprised curiosity, a trifle flattered, perhaps.

'Why, Miss Pixie?' he asked.

'I have mamma and Helen against me already,' she said. 'That is two too many.'

'If they are in the wrong. How if they be in the right?'

'They are *not* in the right!' said Pixie. 'People are people; they are not angels; and they are not intended to be angels—not yet.'

'Mrs. Thayer, I wait upon you for the explanation of these mysterious words,' said Somers, turning again to his hostess. 'Miss Pixie, I will not be against you if I can help it.'

'Mr. Somers,' his hostess began, 'are you in earnest?'

'I give you my word on it,' he said seriously.

'Because these are not things to play with. Take for a first instance what we call the golden rule.'

'Do to others as we would wish them to do to us? Yes, but that is a rule of good breeding, without going so far as to make it a matter of religion. That is universally accepted by good people, is it not?'

'As a matter of good breeding. But we are talking of religion.'

'Well—as a matter of religion,' he said slowly,—'is it ignored?'

'Is it obeyed?'

He looked at her thoughtfully, doubtfully.

'Do we make it a matter of first concern to give everybody we know what in their place we should wish, and have a right to wish for, from our Christian neighbours?'

Somers was still silent, pondering and questioning.

'Does every sick person we know have the care and the dainties his condition needs? Does every poor man find work and fair pay? Is no woman killing herself over her needlework? Are the prisoners in the jail taught and sympathized with and helped to mend? Are those who sit in darkness all within reach of the light? Are missionaries' children all happy, and missionaries' wives not overworked, and the families of old ministers all comfortable? Does nobody that you know need a drive in the fresh air, or a few weeks at the seaside, or

the refreshment of a pleasant evening in kind society? Is every yoke broken yet? and are all the oppressed set free?—I might go on indefinitely.'

'No one will blame you for indefiniteness so far, mamma,' said Pixie. 'Mr. Somers is fairly "blinded with excess of light."'

'I am stupid,' said Somers. 'Is it supposed to be my duty to do all this for *everybody?*'

'One may ask, not unreasonably,' said Pixie, 'in that case will not *you* be one of the people needing relief? Mamma, think! what would be left to anybody, who set out to do all that?'

'Be sensible, Pixie, or rather be honest. No one is charged with a duty he cannot perform.'

'But my question?' said Somers. 'Do the words mean that I should do all this for every one I can reach? Because that means'—

'Yes,' said Mrs. Thayer; 'it means that. It means losing your life in this world. You know, however, both of you, the promise added to such. It means another disused command,—"Seek ye first the kingdom of God."'

'*First*'— said Somers, looking up. 'What does that imply?'

'That it be before all else and everything else,' said Mrs. Thayer. '*That* first; other things as they may.'

'Miss Pixie,' said Somers, 'we are going to have a terrible hard fight, if we are to answer all the things your mother brings up!'

'That's her way of putting it,' said Pixie. 'She and Helen. Nobody else, that I know, takes things so.'

'Isn't it better to take them as they are given?' said Mrs. Thayer.

'She and Helen'—Somers repeated. 'They two, then, live according to these rules, which the most of us neglect?'

'Helen has got a husband, and he acts as a regulator for *her*,' answered Pixie; 'but as for me, I assure you, I have to pick up sixpences, which I object very much to

doing. And here I have spent my morning running in and out of every mercer's shop in Washington Street, as I tell you, to save a dress; instead of dropping it into the next charity box and getting another.'

'Picking up sixpences!' Somers repeated. 'I comprehend that in the case of poor people; but you are not poor.'

'Am I not!' cried Pixie. 'What *is* "poor," to begin with? If you are pinched for want of money, is not that something like poverty?'

Somers laughed.

'Very well,' said Pixie. 'You laugh because you don't see the pinching. I do not choose you should. What has that got to do with it? I *am* pinched. I cannot do a quarter of the things I want to do; I must hold off; and that quarter, I tell you I have to pick up a sixpence, if I drop one anywhere, to get as much as that done.'

'That cannot be your mother's view of the matter,' said Somers, hardly grave yet.

'Yes, it is,' said Pixie. 'That is precisely mamma's view. That is just what she and Helen think; that *everybody* ought to be poor, practically; and mamma at least acts up to her principles. Helen would if she could.'

Somers turned his amused face to the other lady.

'There is a great deal of false assertion made,' Mrs. Thayer answered his look, 'which yet has so much truth in it that it is difficult to deny.'

'And this is such an assertion?' he asked wonderingly.

'Take my golden rule and apply it; mind the "whatsoever"; and then tell me, how will most of your money go?'

'But'—said Somers, and stopped.

'In the first time of the church, when the love of Christ was warm, and the spirit of Christ made them like their Master, do you remember that "no man said that aught he had was his own"?'

'I always thought'—Somers began, and stopped again.

'Was not that a bit of enthusiasm—even extravagance? It was not long kept up.'

'Why was it not?'

Somers was silent.

'It was in that early time of love and devotion that the church made her conquests, if you remember. Fifty years after Paul's fruitless endeavour to preach the word in Bithynia, Pliny wrote his famous letter to Trajan, asking what he should do with the Christians. The love that keeps the Lord's commands is the love that gains His victories.'

'Mother can be eloquent on this theme,' said Pixie.

'And you are not convinced, Pixie?' said Somers, turning to her.

'No!' said the girl, lifting her head with a sparkle in her eye and a half smile on her lips. 'No, I am not. I think times are different.'

She was wonderfully pretty, with that sparkle about her and just the suspicion of a little added colour in her cheeks; was it, her mother queried, because he had dropped the usual ceremony of address? She could not marvel that Somers' eye rested on her with evident fascination and—satisfaction? But Helen!—Mrs. Thayer said to herself, with a kind of pang.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A BRACELET.

ONE thing she resolved with herself she must do, and she did it. She wrote to Helen in Washington, and told her how the evenings were passing in Mount Vernon Street. It was difficult to write this letter, and excessively disagreeable; but Mrs. Thayer said to herself that Helen must not come home unwarned. That was the word that occurred to her; and she was startled by it. *Unwarned!* Unwarned of what? Mr. Somers had come home; was that something to *warn* Helen about? That could not be. Had not Helen declared explicitly that Mr. Somers was nothing to her, more than any other man? Helen was not a person to make statements rashly or presumptuously, she reminded herself. But Mrs. Thayer also remembered well that there had been a time, once, when he was more to her than all other men. Well she remembered those days of pain, when she had seen her child's cheek grow wan, and the lines of her lips become fixed in self-repression, because Mr. Somers had gone to China. Her brow had lost its brightness then. Did it ever come back? Mrs. Thayer had certainly thought so; but now she wearied herself in trying to compare Helen's face now, with Helen's face in those summer days when Mr. Somers was hovering about her, and at home among them all at Daisy Plains. She could not compare, for she could not be sure of the correctness of the image which memory brought up to her. But it seemed—she could not get rid of the impression that it seemed as if the sunshine were brighter then. She told herself that

Helen was older, maturer, a mother of children, a wife of years; she might be expected to be different from her first youthful self. But reason said again, that in the matter of bright-spiritedness, it was *not* to be expected of Helen. Oh, if Mr. Somers had but kept away in China! And now here he was, hovering about Pixie; and Pixie's face and manner were showing—to a mother's eye—that she knew it. Mrs. Thayer determined upon one thing; the play of ten years ago should not be played over again. She would watch closely; and if the gentleman's regard and attentions meant no more than a passing amusement, she would take her child and run away with her, to Siberia, if necessary, out of Mr. Somers' reach. Meantime she wrote to Helen and told her all that was going on, so far as she herself knew it.

Pixie came in just as she finished her letter.

'To Helen, mamma?' she exclaimed, seeing the address. 'What need? Why, Helen will be home in a day or two.'

'Not till the middle of next week.'

'Well, this is Thursday. Your letter will but just catch her. Mamma, what shall I wear at the Vances' on Monday?'

'Wear? You have things enough, haven't you?'

'Enough? No, ma'am; "enough" for me means a great deal; and I am puzzled. What *shall* I wear?'

Mrs. Thayer with some difficulty brought her mind down to the subject.

'Your blue silk?'

'Mamma, I wore that at the Beauforts'.'

'What then?'

'The same thing twice running! That won't do.'

'It would be sensible, in my opinion, if one dress served for the evening occasions of one winter.'

'Great and small, mamma?'

'Yes. Why should a girl be different on one occasion from what she is on another?'

'Mamma,' said Pixie, in desperation, 'you know it is the custom!—in this country.'

'I know it; but the other custom would be much more rational, I should say. What is the use of life?'

'Not much, mamma, if one can't be comfortable and *look* comfortable. Would you like me to dress just the same for a party of hundreds of people and for Mr. Somers here at home?' The name probably came out before she was aware, for Pixie bit her lip.

'You do not go to parties of hundreds of people.'

'Well, for a little affair of forty, we will say; would you make no difference between that and *two?* Would you make no difference, mamma?'

'I am old-fashioned, my dear,' Mrs. Thayer said, after a slight pause and with a half sigh;—'I am *very* old-fashioned; for I belong to a party which flourished more than eighteen hundred years ago, and was not fashionable even then!'

'Is there any *harm* in being fashionable?'

'No harm at all, so long as it does not interfere with your living the life of one who does not belong to this world.'

'Mamma, you do carry things to extremes! One must belong to this world,—a little. Even Helen does.'

Mrs. Thayer sighed again, not a half sigh this time.

'And I think you make religion unnecessarily severe and forbidding. I do indeed, mamma. You would scare people from becoming Christians.'

'I wish I could,' said Mrs. Thayer, 'unless they would be Christians indeed. It is Christians in name only, that are ruining the world. But, my child, it is not I that am making these conditions. You seem to forget that. Who was it that said to His disciples, "Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world"? But, Pixie, I want to speak to you about something else. You mentioned Mr. Somers' name just now. Do not give Mr. Somers any encouragement.'

Pixie's eyes opened wide now, if they had not before. She turned pale a little, at first; and then as she began to speak a most lovely rose tint spread gradually over her cheeks.

'Mamma!' she said. 'Don't you like Mr. Somers?'

'Very much.'

'Then— But what is it that I am not to encourage?'

'I might say his attentions to you.'

'Mamma, I hardly knew that he had paid me any very particular attentions.'

'No. If he had, the matter would be different. It is the general, *not* particular attentions that I want to guard you against.'

Pixie was silent now, the rose deepening.

'He is an old friend; he was an old friend of your brother; he used to be very much at home in the house; he knew you when you were a child. It is natural that he should feel at home with us now, and he likes to come here,'—

'Rather!' said Pixie, half under her breath.

'And I want to remind you, my child, that all that means nothing.'

'It means a good deal of liking,' said Pixie; 'whether it is of you, or me, or Helen, I will not decide; but how can I discourage it, mamma?'

'Be on your guard.'

'Against what?'

'Yourself, perhaps, most of all.'

'Mamma, I think you give me strange counsel. Do you know that all Boston is envying you and me Mr. Somers' friendship?'

'That is folly, Pixie.'

'It is foolish truth, then. Why, mamma, there is nobody—no young man—in town comparable to him; looks, and fortune, and character, and cleverness; he has everything.'

'I am willing he should,—except your heart, Pixie.'

'Why not that too, mamma,—if—he wants it?'

'Have you given it to him already?' said Mrs. Thayer, looking up at her daughter with eyes so startled and anxious that Pixie did not know what to make of them.

'Mamma'—she said; the rose was deep on her cheeks,

but the lips were audaciously smiling,—'I never found out yet whether I had such a thing belonging to me. You and Helen have so much heart, I don't know but you have absorbed my share. I think I am a kind of Undine.'

'At which period of her story?'

'Her story will never be mine,' said Pixie, coming near and caressing her mother. 'I will never receive a soul except at the hands of some one who will take better care of it than that horrid old German knight did of hers.'

'Very well,' said Mrs. Thayer; 'but remember, my dear, that in this, as in many other cases, "discretion is the better part of valour."'

She did not feel that she had learned anything; she was not sure that she had accomplished anything. Mr. Somers came in the evening, and matters went on precisely as they had been going; and Mrs. Thayer sat by and wondered what Helen would think of her letter. Life was rather heavy to her just now; and those two—Nay, they were finding it sweet. She could see it in Mr. Somers' quiet little attentions, and absorbed looks, and low, modulated tones; there are tricks of voice that no man, or woman, falls into unless from the prompting of a happy feeling. And Pixie's face and manner, to her mother at least, betrayed that she knew what all this meant; or rather, recognised and accepted it, whether consciously or unconsciously it did not matter. The eyelids drooped over the bright eyes, in soft withdrawal of their brightness; or if they flashed upon her companion, it was a momentary, almost shy, manifestation; but shyness never belonged to Pixie, and the dainty reserve must be laid to something else. And sometimes there was a soft colour like a rose leaf laid upon her cheek, which also was not common; Pixie's beauty was not pale, indeed, but her skin had that rich creamy hue which showed ordinarily no red but in the lips. Mrs. Thayer did not wonder that Mr. Somers was fascinated; but then, had she not seen him fascinated once before, when it meant nothing?

An evening or two after the talk just related, Mr. Somers was sitting with the two ladies in the library as usual; it had come to be usual now. It was a very stormy night, and they were alone. Somers was rather more silent than usual.

'This is a night for anybody to be out!' said Pixie, as a blast of wind swept past the house. 'Isn't it snowing?'

'Thick.'

'I wonder you are not afraid of the weather, such a night, Mr. Somers. I admire your bravery.'

'Why should I be afraid of the weather?'

'After ten years in China. Really I should think you might be quite spoiled for Boston east winds and a New England winter. It is inevitable that one looks upon you somewhat in the light of a hothouse plant.'

'If you had lived weeks with the atmosphere at ninety-eight degrees, you would know how refreshing a winter snow-storm can be. I was glad of the storm this evening, besides, for I hoped it would secure me the privilege of being your only visitor; and I wanted to show you something.'

'That is delightful,' said Pixie. 'What is it? something Chinese and extraordinary?'

'Neither Chinese nor extraordinary; yet I wanted to show it to you. Once, a great while ago, I remember your sister's curiosity was excited about jewels.—Do you remember a conversation we had on the subject of precious stones, and the mention of them in the Bible, Mrs. Thayer?'

'It seems to me I do, dimly,' she said.

'I recollect I promised to bring some diamonds to show to you both,' he went on, turning again to Pixie. 'I never fulfilled the promise—Daisy Plains was at an inconvenient distance from Boston for such a purpose'—

'I remember,' said Pixie. 'I recollect it perfectly well. I don't know whether I heard you promise or only heard May's report of the promise; I know we hoped to see the diamonds.'

'I do not know if this may be taken as a fulfilment of that promise and disappointed hope,' said Somers, slowly drawing a case from his pocket. 'It cannot come with so much grace; for you have seen diamonds enough before now.'

'No,' said Pixie, 'not so many. I have seen them at a distance certainly, but—Ah!—Oh, mamma! look at that!'

Somers had in a leisurely way opened the case, and brought to view a bracelet, lying alone on its bed of purple velvet. It was rather a rare specimen of jewellers' work, both for the beauty of the stones and the way they were set. The setting did not appear; no shimmer of gold anywhere interfered with the pure lustre of the diamonds; and nothing appeared but a band of light, composed of a string of the stones. They were of various sizes, one very large being in the middle, and from that the others grading off in diminishing splendour on either side. Mrs. Thayer herself came nearer to see, for the thing was marvellous in its simplicity of magnificence. Presently Mr. Somers took the jewels from their resting-place and laid them over Pixie's arm, then clasped them on. The girl sat in silent, breathless admiration, after her first exclamation, holding out her arm a little and looking at its unwonted decoration. The arm was fair and round and of faultless colour; the sleeve of her dress a little pushed back to let the diamonds show. They sparkled and flashed, a circle of pure splendour; it was curious how they made a queen of Pixie, and seemed to dignify the whole room, like a seal of light. Pixie gazed in silence. Mrs. Thayer looked admiringly, and then with a half sigh went back to her chair. Somers sat back in his seat and looked at the arm and the bracelet with a half smile.

'Mamma,' said Pixie, stretching out her hand a little more, in emphasis of her words, 'what is the harm in that?'

'It looks pure of all harm,' Mrs. Thayer said. 'Nothing can be purer, to the eye.'

'Pearls are, to my fancy,' said the owner of the diamonds. 'Or if not to the eye, at least to the mind. Pearls are nothing *but* pure; the diamond has a power about it which gives one the doubt of a hidden fire.'

'Don't talk metaphysics!' said Pixie. 'I never saw anything so perfect in all my life, of things that were not living things.'

'Of what are you thinking?' he asked in a low tone.

'Just then of Helen's boy's eyes.'

'You might say, of her own.'

'No, they are not diamonds, and do not remind one of diamonds, nor diamonds of them. 'It's the most beautiful thing I ever saw. Mamma, speak! is it not? Mamma, what is the harm of such a thing as that?'

'It was my mother's,' said Somers, as Mrs. Thayer did not answer. 'I have thought that the old setting could not be improved. Mrs. Thayer, I trust, sees no harm in it, and no harm in its being just where it is. With her leave, and your leave, it shall remain there; and become yours, and not cease to be mine.'

He spoke very quietly, and he looked at nobody but Pixie. She gave him one glance, the flash of which certainly rivalled the diamonds, and then seemed to see nothing but them, lowering the white curtains of her eyes till the rays from them mingled only with the diamond fire. The room was still; it seemed to Mrs. Thayer that a mist gathered before her eyes, and hid the picture she was looking at. There was a sort of grip at her heart; she could not speak. Somers waited, but I am afraid forgot her; a smile growing upon his lips; and at last he stretched out his hand and gently took the one above which the diamonds glittered. Pixie did not refuse it him, and for a few moments the silent compact remained with only this mute attestation; and the group was motionless enough to have sat for a *tableau vivant*. The spell was broken then by Somers stooping down and kissing the hand he held. Then he turned to Mrs. Thayer without relinquishing it.

'I have Pixie's leave,' he said. 'May I have yours?'

Mrs. Thayer tried to gather herself together; her tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of her mouth. What could she do? She would fain have done anything but give the leave asked for. Yet there the circlet of diamonds glittered above the clasped hands; the thing had passed out of her power. Had it ever been in her power?

'Mr. Somers,' she said, with difficulty, 'you are hasty, beyond the bounds of prudence. It is only a few days, I may say, since you have known Pixie.'

'But those few days have been enough,' he said.

'You hardly know her now.'

'You have only seen my diamonds a few minutes. Do you doubt them?'

'Pixie is not a diamond.'

'She is better. And not less unmistakeable.'

'How do you know?' said Mrs. Thayer, shaking her head. Pixie would have released her hand here, but he would not suffer it.

'I know *you*,' he said, with pleasant emphasis, still speaking to Mrs. Thayer. 'I know her mother. And I used to know her sister. I am not to be told now what manner of persons you are. I know happiness and honour are safer in her hands than in any others to which I could trust them. And it has come to this, Mrs. Thayer,—that my life is in your hands. I have been a wanderer, leading a rather dreary life all these years, alone; in fact, I have lived long enough alone to know exactly what I want. Solitude sharpens a man's mind, I think; it certainly betters his self-knowledge, if he has any; and in one thing I know I am wise. I have found my life's treasure, and I am not going to let it slip from me through any failure to recognise what it is worth to me.'

'Mr. Somers,' Mrs. Thayer said, after a slight pause, 'I am very conscious that you have every earthly advantage —of what are called advantages—to give Pixie; but you

know, too, that one thing goes before all others with me; that she live and be helped to live as it becomes a Christian to do.'

'I know that!' said Somers, with a little surprise; 'but I am a Christian also. I hope you do not doubt that?'

'No, I do not doubt it.'

'Then have you any fear for her Christian principles in my hands?'

'Not from you,' Mrs. Thayer said, with a sorrowful smile. 'I *am* afraid of your money.'

'My money!' exclaimed the young man. 'She shall spend it just as she pleases. What are you afraid of? But, dear Mrs. Thayer, this is a side matter, that can be adjusted to your pleasure, but we need not talk of it now. She shall spend my money as she pleases—if you will only give leave that she shall?'

'I cannot refuse it,' Mrs. Thayer said, not unkindly, though with a great inward feeling of helplessness. And then Somers rose, and, putting his other arm round Pixie, bent down and kissed her. It was gravely done and gracefully, setting the seal for all time upon the transaction just accomplished.

Pixie had been motionless and mute during all the foregoing conversation, as pretty as possible, with the unwonted flush on her cheeks and the unwonted brilliance on her wrist. Now she began to recover herself. She freed her hand, and, holding it up with its flashing splendours upon it,—

'Mamma is afraid of *that!*'—she said.

CHAPTER XL.

COUNSEL.

HELEN and her husband had come home, but an indisposition of one of the children kept her for another week or two shut up in Cambridge. Mrs. Thayer almost welcomed the respite, in spite of her anxiety. Meanwhile the night of the entertainment at the Vances', above mentioned, came in its appointed course. Mrs. Thayer was able to go, and Somers had joined himself to the party. He and Mrs. Thayer were sitting in comfortable talk; for he had his old way of making people comfortable wherever he was, and now especially Mrs. Thayer; when Pixie came down. She was all in white, but as plain as possible. That is, she wore neither satin nor silk, nor any other expensive stuff; she was quite without ornaments, and almost without laces, for the edging which trimmed her muslin draperies was too narrow to have any effect of luxury. And yet, Pixie was brilliant. Her soft muslin robes just daintily showed a pretty figure; and the attention, distracted by no ribands or furbelows, received the full impression of grace, youth, and piquant loveliness which was embodied in her. Nothing could be more simple; and yet as the eye rested on her it found absolutely no fault and no lack. So she was to her mother's eye; and so she was to another perhaps even more critical. They looked at her in a sort of charmed silence, which Pixie understood, for her eye sparkled and she laughed.

'Do you know what you remind me of?' said Somers. 'Raphael's "Third Hour of the Day." Only you want a

star over your forehead. With a cluster of brilliants there you might sit for the character.'

'I do not know the "Third Hour of the Day,"' said Pixie, with a flashing smile which rewarded him sufficiently. 'Raphael's, did you say?'

'Then you do not know Raphael's "Hours"?'

'No.'

'I will bring them for you to see. They are in the library at home. Or—what would be much better!—suppose you come there to see them? There are other things, and — Mrs. Thayer, will you come? You and Pixie; come and take supper with my father and me, and look at some of the engravings. Will you? I think you cannot refuse me that.'

'Mamma, it would be delightful,' said Pixie eagerly; and Mrs. Thayer could not refuse. So a day was fixed upon. And if Mr. Somers was enchanted with his wife elect that evening at Mrs. Vance's, it was only what every man of taste and feeling would have been. So pure and bright and delicate, in her perfect but most elegant simplicity, with an airy grace and sparkle about her which bore the very stamp of inward happiness, inimitable and unmistakeable, yet was maidenly and grave and dignified; at the world's end removed from everything that now-a-days would be called 'fast' or 'loud' or forward. The bridegroom elect looked, and smiled to himself. The mother looked, and felt all the beauty of what she saw, but was unable to smile..

Before the evening came that had been fixed for the supper party, another thing must be done to which Mrs. Thayer looked forward with a great dread. She must go out to Cambridge and see Helen. On one pretext and another she had deferred it; now she must go; and Pixie declared her intention of being her companion. It made matters all the worse, but Mrs. Thayer could not deny her, and set out with a great sinking of heart.

Helen, however, appeared precisely as usual. The children were better, and playing about her; and the fair,

sweet face, more fair to Mrs. Thayer's eyes than any other, even than Pixie's in its new brightness, was only perhaps a little pale with being up of nights. The children were quite well again, she said, with a happy smile, in which Mrs. Thayer could discern no unusual shadow; the Professor was busy with his classes. Still nobody spoke of Pixie's new relations; Mrs. Thayer could not, for all the world; Pixie did not, and gave no sign; Helen seemed unconscious of them; and her mother began to grow very nervous. Then, at a pause which gradually came upon the conversation and laid its spell upon them all, the elder sister turned her eyes upon the younger, with a grave, steady gaze, the expression of which Mrs. Thayer could not read. It might be inquiring, it might be sympathetic; it might be more; it was inscrutable. Pixie met it gravely at first, then smiling, and then her colour rose.

'Well?' she said, with some spirit.

'Yes. Is it well?' the elder sister asked gravely.

'Is *what* well?' Pixie retorted. 'You are sphinx-like in your looks if not in your words, and your words want some explanation.'

'It is hardly four weeks since I went to Washington'—Helen went on.

'Time is not always to be measured by days, though,' said Pixie. 'Four weeks may do the work of four months.'

'They are a small time to do the work of a lifetime, though.'

'That is like you, Helen! But they haven't. Part of the work was done a good many years ago.'

'Not of *this* work?' said Helen, with no change of face that her mother could see.

'Yes, it was. Really, all the foundation was laid; and the superstructure, every one knows, is not so important as the foundation.'

'Pixie! you talk wildly. You were a mere child at that time.'

'Yes, but my friend Mr. Somers is profoundly impressed with the fact that a family is *one*. He believes in blood, I suppose, or in education and example. He sees in me, I am persuaded, simply a fractional part of what he once learned to know and esteem so highly.'

The young lady was slightly defiant, feeling herself as it were upon her trial.

'My dear Pixie!' said her sister, 'I am not concerned about that side of the question. It is your happiness I am thinking of. Do you know what you are doing?'

'Tolerably well,' said Pixie. 'I can tell you better after to-morrow. We are going to take supper in Tremont Street and look at pictures; and no doubt we shall see other things besides pictures. But a house in Tremont Street speaks for itself.'

Helen turned in despair to her mother.

'Are you satisfied, mamma?'

'I'll tell you what,' Pixie here burst in,—'mamma would be better satisfied if there were no house in Tremont Street, and no diamonds, and no all that sort of thing. She has not the least objection to Mr. Somers; but she is dreadfully afraid of all his advantages. If he were only some poor lawyer or clergyman, or anything else that can hardly make a living, she would be quite contented. She saw me one evening with a diamond bracelet on my arm, and she has not got over the scare yet.'

'By your present way of talking, I should say she has reason,' said Helen gravely. 'But this is idle talk. If you could marry for diamonds, or a house in any street, you certainly would not be a fractional part of the family you spoke of. Pixie dear, do you know what you are doing?'

Pixie was silent. The two looked into each other's eyes a moment, and then her lips broke into a smile sweet as Cupid's bow, and her eyes took a sparkle that had lost all its mockery.

'There are more people in the world than Professor L'Estrange,' she said saucily.

Some swift change passed over Helen's face, swifter than any wind-driven cloud; to all but her mother's eyes invisible in its vanishing passage; yet Mrs. Thayer was sure it had been there. No cloud either, no shadow; and the next moment Helen's face was just as it had been. It was grave, but exceedingly sweet and tender; a little wistful over her sister; her wonderful eyes never more deserving the character of 'wells of light.' She answered with infinite gracious tenderness.

'I only want you to be sure you know what you are doing, Pixie. A thing that is to last for life, is not one to be done in a hurry. Don't make a mistake, that is all. It can never be undone, remember.'

'How should I make a mistake?' said Pixie, without catching anything of her sister's gravity. 'You know yourself, there is not a girl in all Boston that would not give all she has in the world to be in my shoes. And quite right, too! There is really nobody else left in Boston, now that—Seneca—has disposed of himself.'

'Pixie!' exclaimed her mother, for she was sure she saw that same flash of changing expression cross Helen's face again. It was gone as suddenly as it came, and she answered with the same tender steadiness as before.

'I grant all that; but if he were the only man in the world, it would still be a woful mistake to marry him, Pixie, unless you loved him with your whole heart. And for that you have had but four weeks. Mind, it should be with *all your heart*—all that you have to give to anything in this world.'

Pixie made a dash at little 'Delice, as she was called, and lifted her up to her lap, hiding her face in the caresses she gave the child.

''Del,' she said, 'I hope you and Roger will be supremely wise people! you ought, if you mind your mother. Do you know your mother is a wise woman, 'Del?'

The child looked at her with the exquisite gravity of good childhood.

'When you grow up, I hope you'll mind her.'

'I does' — said the little one, who was a delicious miniature of her mother.

'All right! then you'll go straight, and never make her anxious. Do you know she is troubled about me now?'

'Isn't you good, Aunt Pixie?' asked the child, trying with inquiring eyes to read the older page of human nature before her.

'What is being "good," 'Del?'

'When I love God, and mind mother.'

Pixie overwhelmed the sweet speaker with caresses; and then, putting her down with the remark, 'I am not as good as you are, 'Del,' she came over to her sister and threw herself into her arms, repeating her demonstrations.

'It's all right, Helen,' she said; 'but I can't talk about it. It's all right; if you'll only get mamma not to be afraid of diamonds and such things. You see, May, I'm *not* afraid of them. I'm not afraid of being poor either,' she said, with a proud lifting of her pretty head. 'If—somebody—had been as poor as a mouse, do you think I should have cared, if his liking met mine? But I will confess to you—I wouldn't have cared for that, but I do care for this. I like a house in Tremont Street, and carriages and horses, and—yes, I do—diamonds. And everything!' concluded Pixie with energy.

'What will you do with them?' Helen asked gravely.

'Enjoy them!'

'Is that all?'

'That is all that can be done with such things. Books I can study; but diamonds I can only delight in.'

'Look here, Pixie. I am not going to say one other word to you; but look at these words which are not mine.'

She drew Pixie down, half unwillingly, to look at the page of a book she had opened. The words Pixie read were these:

'Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.'

CHAPTER XLI.

WHAT IS WHAT.

TWO days after this came the day in the evening of which mother and daughter were to take supper at Mr. Somers'. It was very severe weather, piled-up snow filling the streets and a fierce wind blowing into every corner and round every corner of the city. In the course of the morning arrived a large pasteboard box for Pixie, which being opened revealed a superb sealskin cloak with trimmings of black fur. Pixie's cheeks took on a beautiful rose-colour of surprise and pleasure; she wrapped the cloak round her and stood confronting her mother with silent eyes of delight. At that moment there was no need of artificial brilliants. The look challenged Mrs. Thayer to say something; but it was difficult, for she had many thoughts besides those of pleasure; yet Pixie was a vision of beauty as she stood there framed in with the black fur.

'It is very handsome, my child,' said the mother.

'Literally and figuratively, mamma; isn't it?'

'And comfortable, isn't it?'

'Comfortable! That word does not express it. Mamma, one feels sheltered from all that's rough or cold in the world.'

'That is what I am afraid of, Pixie.'

'Of what, mamma? Of my being sheltered?'

'So sheltered, that you will forget there are others unsheltered. Or cease to realize what want of shelter means.'

'How could I, mamma?'

Mrs. Thayer did not answer immediately, looking at

the very bewitching image before her. Pixie in her fair brightness, with the sparkle of happiness better than diamonds about her head, wrapped in the fur, in enveloping folds of brown and black which set off her delicate skin and delicate features with their luxurious, soft, indeterminate masses; she was as pretty a thing to look at as one could find in all Boston. She stood, half smiling, half impatient, waiting for her mother to speak. And the words came wistfully.

'"Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Will you promise to make that your rule, Pixie?'

'The first man being—Seneca—mamma?'

'If you like. But, second, coming your servants; and third, your neighbours; and fourth, the poor around you; and fifth, the people you do not like; and sixth, the people you do not know, in foreign lands and at home.'

'Oh, mamma! You are cutting out work for a lifetime, I should say.'

'What else? Will you do it, Pixie?'

'Mamma, what would be left for my poor self, after all that was attended to?'

'It is he that loseth his life, for Christ's sake, that shall find it,' Mrs. Thayer answered a little sadly; 'and "he that findeth his life in this world shall lose it."' But she added no more, and Pixie went off with her fur around her.

The evening brought Mr. Somers and the carriage, to take the ladies the short drive to Tremont Street. It was harsh weather; the wind whistled round corners and beat mercilessly on whoever was abroad; the lamps shone on piled-up snow, bleak and drear in the narrow streets of the city, however cheery it might be on the open country. The Common, indeed, showed some fair sheets of white under the elm trees; but this night was too dark to get more than an eerie gleam upon bare elm branches swaying in the blast. It was a night to give emphasis

to a fur cloak; and Pixie, sitting warm and soft within the shut windows, as the runners glided smoothly along, looked out and felt only that she was better protected and more daintily placed than ever in her life before. Nevertheless, if it had lain in the possibilities of Pixie's nature to be nervous, she would have had the sensation now. She was about to face Mr. Somers' father, in his own house, and for the first time; an indisposition having prevented the old gentleman from waiting upon her. But Pixie was never nervous, and set her little foot on the threshold of her future home with a step as free and assured as if she had been entering her own. The feeling she had at work just made her more than ordinarily graceful.

The house was like no new-built, upstart New York piece of magnificence; it was not magnificent at all. It was roomy, convenient, and exceedingly plain; that fact struck one immediately on entering. They entered first a sort of square hall, from which an easy staircase went up. The balustrade of this staircase was not handsome; the lamp that hung from the ceiling was not ornamental; the walls were not artistic. But here the master of the house met them, and his figure and manner gave at once the certainty that the place, whatever it was, belonged to a gentleman of the old time. He was a tall, thin person, wrapped himself in the folds of a fur-lined coat of some sort; grave, somewhat formal and dignified. To him made Pixie a curtsey so low and sweeping that it amounted to a reverence; but then she had to submit to be smiled at and kissed; and Pixie lowered her eyes and coloured with a peach-blossom tint in her fair cheeks, and was prettier than ever, but as stately as the old gentleman himself.

'I do not believe there is another in all Boston!' said the latter, turning to his son. 'Take them up, take them up, Bentley. I will join you in the supper-room presently.'

So the ladies were conducted up the easy stairs to an

upper hall, where an elderly woman met them and waited upon them to their room. The feeling of its being a plain house began to disappear from Pixie. It *was* plain; simple woodwork, simple cornices, old carpets and old furniture. But now other details began to come into view. Here was a beautiful India screen, rich with colour and rare in material. Here the foot sank in a Persian rug. Here was a mirror in an old frame, so quaint and delicate in its fancies and curious in its art, that the whole must be priceless. There a silver lamp hung from the ceiling by silver chains, the workmanship of which was also beautiful and foreign-looking; and in a corner stood one or two huge china vases which Pixie knew were very valuable as well as stately. All this was seen in a minute, while the fur cloak was laid off; and the ladies found Mr. Somers waiting for them, who led them down half the flight of stairs and at the landing opened a door.

'Supper is not quite ready,' said he. 'We will wait for it here.'

They entered a room which Pixie at once decided in her own mind was the most beautiful room she had ever been in. It was of pleasant size; no more. On one hand was a fireplace, framed in with brown wood carving; the opposite side was set with several windows. Round all the room, wherever there was space for them, ran low bookcases of the same brown wood carving, but rather massive and simple than ornate. The bookcases were not more than four or five feet high; above them the walls were hung in dark red, except the further end of the room, which was entirely filled, above the bookcases, by a great picture. By day the windows must give light enough; at night the place was brilliant with the glow of a soft coal fire and the light of a lamp which hung from the ceiling, and shone upon the dark luxuriance of a flowery Persian carpet and furniture, the woodwork and coverings of which were all kept unobtrusively sober and deep-toned in colour. The lamp itself was the only

article that challenged the eye by its gay reflections; it was Oriental in fashion, and of some curious metal work, reminding one of répoussé brass. Words after all are slow to give a right mental impression of a scene, and the above description may quite fail to convey the sense of stateliness, elegance, and exquisite harmony which struck Pixie as she entered, though they may suffice to tell of the luxury of the place. Pixie, indeed, was so full of admiration that she must needs speak it out, Mr. Somers the elder not being near at the moment.

'Seneca,' she said, laying her hand on his arm, 'this is the very prettiest room I ever saw!'

'I am glad you like it,' said he. 'I always liked it.'

'What is that picture?'

'It is the portrait of a remote ancestor of mine, taking leave of his mother when he was going off to the wars with Marlborough.'

'How delightful! Now most of us in America count our fighting ancestors no further back than our great-grandfathers. However! well considered, perhaps it is as much honour to have borne arms under Washington as under Churchill!'

'Don't tell my father so!' said Somers, laughing.

They sat down to await the summons to supper, and Pixie was thoughtful. She let her mother and Somers do the talking, and sat graceful and grave between them, taking no further part. Perhaps the shadow of future changes and responsibilities came over the girl in her future home. But all trace of such thoughtfulness disappeared when they went down to supper; though new food for it was furnished.

The supper-room presented the same mingling of plain simplicity and sterling magnificence. The apartment and the service and the furniture were as plain as consisted with the utmost comfort; but the plate was massive, some of it old and beautiful, and some of the glass ware very precious. Here, however, Pixie confronted old Mr.

Somers again, and was again thoroughly his match. Grave and simple,—and stately. Mrs. Thayer watched her, amused; Somers watched her, astonished; also delighted, for this sort of thing he knew was the thing to charm his father. And the old gentleman was charmed. As much as politeness allowed he devoted himself to Pixie; tried to draw her out; tried to find what was her mental calibre and what her conversational powers. Pixie quietly refused to be drawn out; declined to make any exhibition of herself in any way; met the old gentleman's attentions and propositions with a deliciously calm and cool polish of manner, which was worthy of a fine lady of many seasons' standing. It was difficult for the other two to keep up any conversation at all, so much their interest was engaged in what was going on between Mr. Somers and Pixie.

'I hope,' the former was saying when he became observant of this fact,—'I hope, Miss Pixie, that you do not approve of Bentley's superstitions?'

'I never approve of superstitions,'—the young lady answered nonchalantly, as she peeled a well-preserved pear.

'I am glad to hear that! Of course, as he is my only son, I am anxious; and naturally much would depend upon you. But how would you define "superstition"?' he went on, with a keen look at her.

'That is too hard a question,' said Pixie. 'At school I always skipped definitions; and I hoped to go through life in the same way.'

'But then, how will you know where you are?'

'Chiefly, I suppose, by taking somebody else's bearings,' Pixie said, with the simplest air in the world.

'How will you know where *they* are?'

Is it necessary I should know?'

'Most decidedly!—unless you are willing to lose your way.'

'I do not lose my way,' Pixie said, with a charming, *fine* smile. 'To vary the figure—I always make for the

sunny side of a hill. Does it matter, so that I am in the sun, what hill it is?'

This was a little too evasive and somewhat too confusing for the old gentleman's purpose. He hesitated a little, and Pixie accepted a cup of coffee, sugared and creamed it, and then tasted, waiting observantly upon Mr. Somers' next words.

'I wanted to know,' he said, 'your opinion of the hill—to use your metaphor—on which Bentley suns himself.'

'What is it?'

'He calls it, I believe, Christianity.'

'So far as I have observed,' said Pixie, taking her coffee with great deliberation, 'there are several things meant under that name.'

'Ah, but they all go upon the basis of a supposed revelation.'

'I believe they do.'

'And that is an impossible idea, you know.'

'Is it?'

'Is it not? All educated nations, you know, claim to have had each their revelation; and each one knows what to think of all the other revelations except its own. Its belief in its own I call superstition; in other words, a religious belief which is ungrounded. Hindoo, Chinese, Persian, Scandinavian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Jewish, and now Christian. What is the difference?'

'You will not call *all* those hills *sunny?*' inquired Pixie.

'One about as much as another,' said Mr. Somers, with a shrug of his shoulders.

'But how many of these have you tried?'

The old gentleman laughed gently. 'You can see where the sun shines, without going to the spot, cannot you?' he said. 'This is called a Christian country; but I do not meet many contented-looking faces. Do you? You need not glance over at Bentley; of course *he* is contented just now; if he were not, he ought to be an

Egyptian; but the old Egyptians, to judge from the portraits left us, were a happier set than you can find in Boston to-day. What do you think?'

'I know very few really happy faces,' Pixie confessed.

'Well, where is your sunny hill of Christianity, then?'

'If there is not light there, it is nowhere else,' said Pixie.

'Ah, you think so because you live in Boston. If you had been born in Constantinople, now, you would believe that all light streamed from the Koran, and was found among the followers of the Prophet. It is all a matter of circumstance—education.'

'I do not know the Koran.'

'Precisely! And they do not know the Bible.'

'Do you think, then, there has been *no* revelation given to man?'

'None whatever; if you mean a revelation from another world.'

'Yet I should think the Creator of the world would not leave it without some answer to the questions that have always busied and troubled it. That seems to me unlikely, and unreasonable.'

'Where is the certainty that the world has had, or needed to have, any Creator—as you use the term?'

'Its existence speaks for that, does it not?'

'How so?'

'If it had no Creator,' said Pixie, taking the last drops of her coffee, and setting down her cup carefully, 'how came it to be as it is, or to exist at all?' She looked at the old gentleman with the most unconcerned air in the world, as if she were gathering information. And he, evidently, did not quite know how to take her. However, he went on in the same tone with his last remark.

'All that was settled long ago by a Roman poet and philosopher called Lucretius. He wrote *De Rerum Natura*.'

'Pray how did he settle it?'

'He attributed the earth's existence to a fortuitous concourse of atoms.'

'Ah! And the atoms?'—

'Those he found in space.'

'Did he! And what set them a-going?'

'I beg your pardon?'—

'You said "*concourse* of atoms;"—if concourse, there must have been movement. What moved them first?'

Mr. Somers looked at her a little slyly.

'I see,' he said, 'you have what all Eve's daughters have, the power of asking questions.'

'That is not a bad thing,' said Pixie, 'if you, sir, like the rest of the sons of Adam, have the power to answer them.'

'I cannot do that on the present occasion, fair lady. Bentley, I counsel you to keep off questions; you might get puzzled. However, there is no doubt but Lucretius hit the truth. It is the only reasonable way of accounting for the world's existence.'

'And for the niceties of its structure, and adaptation of parts?'

'Undoubtedly—undoubtedly. That has come in course of ages, by evolvement of one thing out of another. The world is pretty old.'

'And all these things are mere chance?'

'Chance and growth.'

'How comes it that chance does nothing of the kind now-a-days? Has it lost its power? Chance may destroy, —but it never organizes now. It creates nothing. It even changes nothing.'

'That was done once for all, some time ago. The atoms have found their places and affinities, and abide in them.'

'And what of that which we call immaterial?'

'True philosophy knows no such thing.'

'Do you mean to say,' said Pixie, with large eyes of innocent, grave wonder at her entertainer, seeing which Mrs. Thayer did not know whether to laugh or to cry,

and Bentley was consumed with secret laughter,—'do you mean to say that I, for instance, am only an atom or combination of atoms?—fortuitous too!—without having, as I supposed I had, the power of thought?'

'Not without the power of thought, certainly!' her entertainer responded gallantly, with a slight bow;—'but thought itself is only a secretion.'

'Ah! that explains it consistently,' said Pixie. 'Then perhaps the lower animals think?'

'There is no question but they do. They very often think fast and correctly. And men, you know, in cases of accident and disease, quite frequently lose the power of thinking justly, or at all.'

'In what, then, am I, for instance, any better than a parrot or a pussy-cat?'

'Higher organization—consequent nobler faculties,'—said Mr. Somers, smiling.

'But no nobler destiny?'

Mr. Somers shrugged his shoulders. 'If you mean destiny beyond the bounds of this life, we are all on one level; the animals and ourselves. When the organ by which we think is destroyed, of course there is no more thinking. How should there be?'

'How come we to be here and thinking at all?' Pixie asked in the most innocent manner.

Mr. Somers was silent.

'A chance concourse of atoms?'

'No doubt, originally—far back. Then came growth and development, and adaptation, and the modifying effects of circumstance, and finally we have the perfect creature.'

Mr. Somers gave application to his words by a slight, not ungraceful, movement of the head and expression of features.

'You have not accounted for *life*. Where did life come from, in the first place?'

'It is one of the inquiries science has not yet answered satisfactorily. No doubt the answer will come. But

I regret much I cannot give it to you to-day. It is *the* question.'

Pixie turned to the younger of her hosts, with an air that absolutely said nothing.

'Seneca,—will you take me somewhere and show me something to take the taste of these ideas out of my mouth? I am not used to consider myself *merely* a combination of atoms, and it depresses me!'

CHAPTER XLII.

PERSECUTION.

SENECA obeyed, laughingly. They went back to the library, whither the elder man did not accompany them. His son drew up easy-chairs for the ladies in front of the large table, and got out a portfolio of prints. Pixie kept up her non-committal manner, and desired to see Raphael's 'Third Hour of the Day,' first of all. When it was displayed, she studied it attentively.

'And that is what you think I look like?' she said, in a tone which did not give the impression of her feeling flattered.

'I did not say so.'

'You said, with a star on my forehead I might sit for the picture.'

'Yes, but I did not mean that you looked like her. It was something of the grace and the life and the sweetness of the Hour, that I seemed to see reproduced in you.'

'I do not understand her, I believe. What is she doing?'

'Swinging her censer. You see, it is that early hour of breaking day which is so full of the stir and fragrance of awakening life. The stars have not yet all paled before the advancing sun,—the morning breeze is stirring,—and from trees, and flowers, and the soil, and the turf, rises the incomparable sweetness which the dew and the air have drawn forth. In Guido's great picture, you know, Aurora goes before the sun's chariot scattering flowers, but the Third Hour of the Day swings her censer before the flowers can be seen.'

'Thank you! That is delicious. I can enjoy her now. Mamma, did you ever see so perfectly graceful a figure? And is not the painter's way of hinting his facts absolutely delightful? Honestly confessed, I am not very fond of Raphael, but this is certainly an exception.'

'You would not say that of Raphael if you could see his pictures in the original. Suppose we make a pilgrimage to study them? Hey?'

'What are you going to show us next?'

'Shall we take what comes? I really do not well know what is here.'

He drew forth a large engraving, which represented an old monk at his devotions. The place was an open air retirement, allowing one to suppose a cell in the rock hard by, though the cell did not show. But here the penitent lived, that was evident. On the wall of rock beside him hung his hamper, presumably containing food, and his water bottle; before him, on a great stone which served for a table, a huge folio was propped up, laid open at a place which the hermit was studying. Beyond the book rose a crucifix,—beside it lay a skull and hour-glass, and a rosary hung over the edge of the stone, at the foot of which grew the wild large leaves of some coarse weed. But the monk kneeled at his study, which he was evidently mingling with prayer, for his hands were clasped, and the raised face directed devoutly and intently to the open page. The foot that was pushed out from beneath his monk's frock was quite bare, the cowl had fallen back from his head, showing the white hair and the bald crown of an old man. There was something about the picture that was tender, striking, and at the same time sweet. They all considered it a little while in silence.

'What a contrast!' said Pixie, but not lightly. 'That Third Hour of the Day has the world in every fold of her garments and swing of her censer, and this old devotee has got as far from the world as he could. I believe Raphael could not have painted this man.'

'Which is best?' asked Mrs. Thayer.

'Mamma,' said Pixie, 'this is severe!'

'Yes,—and happy.'

'Where do you see that, mamma? Your eyes must be good! Bread and water, the bare rock, the hour-glass, and the skull!'

'You are leaving out the Bible, and the Saviour.'

'Only the image of Him, mamma.'

'To judge by the old monk's face, he is seeking if he has not already found Himself. He is never honestly sought in vain.'

'This is a very severe way of seeking Him, I must think.'

'A true seeker does not regard that, if it be necessary to the search.'

'But it is *not*, mamma!'

'Sometimes. And that is the true spirit of a real disciple, to regard nothing that stands in his way. Paul had suffered the loss of all things that he might win Christ. He could not otherwise.'

'No, for *him*, and at that day. But it is not so now, mamma. Why do you talk so?'

'Because things have not changed except in external circumstances, Pixie. A true servant of Christ now, is minded just like a true servant of Him then. And the Lord's words stand yet,—"He that findeth his life shall lose it."'

'Seneca, do cover that old monk with something else,' said Pixie. 'You are listening to mamma as if she were a real old-time prophet. Now she isn't. This is her way, —and Helen's.'

'You could not possibly mention two better arguments for the correctness of her teaching,' said Somers.

'Well, if you go off into the wilderness with a basket and an hour-glass, *I* will not go into a convent, I promise you. Where would you go, I wonder, starting from Boston? I suppose, in the rocks on the coast of Maine you might find a cavern or a cleft somewhere, but a

cavern might be too comfortable. The weather would suit, at this time of year.'

Somers laughed at her a little, and proceeded to do as she had requested, hide the old monk beneath another engraving. But the next that came in order was Albert Dürer's exquisite picture of the Crucifixion. They were all silent before it. Its wonderful sweetness and majesty seemed to touch and emphasize all that Mrs. Thayer had been saying. 'If any man will come after Me, let him take up his cross and follow Me.' Even Pixie was hushed, and gazed in unwilling admiration and silence. And it was without a word further spoken that Mr. Somers removed that picture and set another in its place. But after one hurried exclamation Pixie was silent before this also.

It represented the figure of a woman, lying in a very peculiar position on her side. On her side, with arms stretched down in front of her, but the head turned so that the face was downward on the marble floor. The hair swept round in front and underneath the face; the hands, not clasped, lay near each other; the feet, also near together, did not lie side by side, but the left foot (the figure lying on the right side) was raised a little so that only the toes touched the marble. Altogether it was a position that no living figure would fall into unless just at the moment of ceasing to live. Yet it was graceful exceedingly, calm and sweet in expression. The draperies were very fine, simple, and natural, and revealing the form within them.

'Seneca,' said Pixie, a little under her breath, after a few minutes of looking,—'what in the world is this?'

'St. Cecilia.'

'Who was she?'

'A noble Roman lady. She lived in the third century, in the reign of Alexander Severus. Don't you know her story? She was a wonderful musician, and—a Christian.'

'And a martyr!' added Mrs. Thayer.

'As you see. Her husband and his brother were first

converted by her means, and then put to death for refusing to sacrifice to idols. And then Cecilia followed them. She was beheaded in her own house, the Roman prefect fearing to venture a public execution, the reverence for her saintliness was so great and so general among the people. Perhaps that—I mean, the same reverence—was the reason why the Roman lictor could not do his work, but struck her three blows with his axe without being able to kill. Roman law forbade another stroke, and she was found living still by her friends after he was gone. She lived three days, preaching and declaring the truth with wonderful sweetness and power, tradition says, and then they buried her in the Catacombs.'

'Where is this statue? in the Catacombs?'

'Oh no. Her burial place was discovered in the ninth century, and the remains transferred to her church. Then in the sixteenth century her tomb was again opened, and the body of the saint found lying as you see her here. The best artist of the time, Stefano Maderno, testifies in an inscription that he has given in marble the very attitude in which the saint was found.'

'How came you to know all about it?' Pixie asked.

'I saw it on my way home. I brought this engraving with me.'

'Then I suppose you like it?'

'I like it, yes. Do not you?'

'Bentley, it is painful!' said Pixie; and her face showed that she thought so. There was even a suspicion of tears in her eyes, very unusual with Pixie; she was disturbed quite beyond her wont.

'It is not painful to me,' Somers replied slowly. 'Perhaps my sensibilities are blunter than yours. I have always liked the statue, as a work of art.'

'If it were art!' cried Pixie;—'but it is truth.'

'She is right,' said Mrs. Thayer. 'It is truth that was enacted over and over, in those days. This was one of those who counted not their lives dear to them, for

Christ's sake. This is the very spirit we were talking of.'

'Those days are not these days. Do give us something else, Seneca!'

He obeyed.

'The fates are against you, Pixie,' he said, as he placed another picture on the stand. 'I would spare you this, but it is too good to pass by. I think you must look at it.'

'What is it?—The Coliseum!' cried the girl.

It was a water-colour drawing this time, done with happy skill, and giving a very effective view of the great ruin. The view was taken from the inside, on the ground, and so presented the enormous pile of what had been a uniform slope of seats and galleries surrounding the arena to the uppermost tier. A ruin, to be sure, where plants of many kinds gave a soft green covering to the rough edges of walls and broken stone-work; but fancy needed to make but a little spring to see it as it once had been; to fill it with a sea of faces, and to half realize what it was for a solitary Christian or two, or a small band of them, to stand there under all those scornful eyes and hear the scornful shouts, and wait for the lions.

The three looked out at the picture in silence again. Somehow its peace and its loneliness rather served to suggest the old rush and roar and tumult of violence and scenes of cruelty which had once filled the great walls.

'I do not see,' Pixie began,—'I do *not* see how people lived in those times. Christians, I mean.'

'They were the only people who could truly be said to live at all,' Mrs. Thayer replied.

'It is not living, to be always in fear.'

'On the contrary, they were "alway rejoicing."'

'How could they, while this building stood and the Romans were the Romans?'

'It is one of the paradoxes which the world cannot understand. But do you remember, Pixie, the Lord said

to one of His churches,—"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer"?—and told His disciples, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you'? and Peter wrote, "If ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled"?'

'How could they help it?'

Mrs. Thayer paused, and then said—'Christ with them, and Christ in them.'

'It remains a spectacle to the world,' said Somers; 'and no wonder that the world cannot understand it.'

'*I* cannot understand it,' said Pixie.

'Naturally,'—said Mrs. Thayer.

'Why "naturally," mother, if it is so plain?'

'It is not plain to those who have not the key. But this much you can see, Pixie; that when Christ says, "Fear not," He has the power to make good His words; none of *His* words are vain. And, my child, do you not yet know, by observation and experience, that to be "alway rejoicing" is the lot of nobody else in the world, except only of Christians?'

'Mamma, it is not the lot of a good many of them.'

'If it is not, it is their own fault.'

'Now-a-days. But *then!*'—

'There are no sorrowful inscriptions in the Catacombs,' Somers remarked. 'They gathered up the bones of their martyrs, and laid to rest in the dark niches the remains of their hunted and persecuted friends, and wrote over them constantly, "In peace. In Christ." And the palm branch of victory is everywhere to be seen on those funereal inscriptions.'

'Victory!' said Pixie. 'Over what?'

'Over the world first. Then, the anticipated victory over death and the grave,' Mrs. Thayer said, and with a smile.

'I should think the world had overcome them, mother.'

'No, you wouldn't, Pixie. You know it was the other way. And just that is what we want now,—Christians

who have overcome the world. And for want of seeing that, the world has almost ceased to recognise the divine life of religion. It finds itself the most powerful.'

'I thought the world was favourable to religion,' Somers said here.

'To a sort which it despises. Do you really think, Bentley, that the Lord's words have worn out their truth?—"If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore *the world hateth you.*"'

'I thought the hatred had died out.'

'Just begin to follow Christ *fully*, and then you will see.'

Somers had opened his mouth to speak, but Pixie stopped him.

'Now don't!' she said. 'If you two go on any more in this way I shall dream of the Coliseum and fancy we are living under Diocletian. That's a beautiful painting, Bentley.'

'My mother was always very fond of it'—

'But it is sorrowful, sorrowful, sorrowful! What a set of pictures you have showed us to-night! I wish I could get St. Cecilia out of my head, but I know she'll haunt me. Oh, do let me see something different, if you have got anything different, and then we must go home.'

'Don't be in a hurry!' said Somers, smiling; and he hid the Coliseum with another picture. This time it *was* something different. A supper-party of gay people in the time and in the costume it might be of Louis the Sixteenth's reign; the ladies in high heads and feathers; the gentlemen with their hair powdered and dressed in queues. The place a very magnificent small room, with mirrors and carvings, and high-polished floor; the entertainment luxurious; champagne glasses at nearly every one's lips or in every one's hands; eyes and face-play showing that the play of words was going on with great liveliness; the gentlemen courting, the ladies courted.

A high revel, in short, of the most elegant and distinguished type, with every accessory of wealth and style. The portraiture was extremely well given; one could all but hear the murmur of voices, and the clink of glasses, and the low ripples of gay laughter.

Somers placed the picture in a good light, and waited in some amusement to see how Pixie would take it. She reviewed it for some time and gave no sign, beyond a somewhat disgusted face.

'That is a contrast,'—he remarked tentatively.

'Rather!' said Pixie.

'I could not have put it stronger, could I?'

'I don't think you could. Mamma, it is time we went home.'

'Why?' said Somers, laughing.

But though Pixie would give no reasons, she was not to be held longer. She persisted in wishing to go, and Mrs. Thayer was quite willing. During the drive home she sat leaning her head upon her mother's shoulder; the others talked, Pixie was quite silent. At home, she came into her mother's room, put off her furs, waited till Mrs. Thayer took a seat, and then came beside her and nestled in her arms. Her mother was at a loss to know what mood this portended, and sat silent. At last Pixie burst forth,—

'Mamma, life is queer!'

'What now, my child?'

'Mamma, I feel as if I could not get my breath!'

'Why?'

'Do you suppose, every time I go there, I am to hear that dreadful old man talk about thought being a secretion?'

'My dear, it is not good to speak of your husband's father in such terms.'

'No such person lives at present!' said Pixie, lifting her head with a toss; 'and I'll speak as I think. Mamma, such talk is the most awful drivel of nonsense! And yet, he isn't a fool.'

'Anything else but a fool.'

'How *can* a man with a head find his way into such stupidity?'

'To get out of the way of something else.'

'What shall I say to him, if he goes on with this kind of thing? or how am I going to stand it?'

'You behaved very well this evening. It is not much use to say anything. The best thing you and Mr. Somers can do—I mean Bentley—is to *shine*.'

'Then he ought to have married Helen,' said Pixie, rising. 'Good-night, mamma. I shall dream that Mr. Somers is a great goblin of a giant, smoking his pipe, and puffing away my soul instead of honest tobacco smoke.'

CHAPTER XLIII.

EXPRESSIONS.

THE first meeting between Somers and Mrs. L'Estrange, to which Mrs. Thayer had looked forward with so much anxiety, came about suddenly, and the simplest way in the world. Helen was visiting her mother and sister, the day after the supper-party which has been described; and while she was sitting with them Somers came in.

Helen met him with the most unruffled calm. She might have been seeing him every day for the last ten years,—or she might never have seen him in her life,—for the indifferent quiet of her manner. Somers, happily, was too preoccupied to take critical notice of her way of speaking to him; or perhaps too much struck with the rare, pure, sweet beauty he had not seen for so long. But there was no danger; he was heart and soul Pixie's now; and turned, after a moment's interchange of civilities with Helen, to give his lady-love the whole measure of homage that belonged to her. It struck Mrs. Thayer, however, that Helen's greeting was something *too* cool. If he had never been more than a mere friend, assuredly there would have been more pleasure shown in meeting him again and more cordiality put into his welcome. Indeed, Helen did not welcome him. She treated him kindly, as her sister's betrothed had a right to expect, but coolly as a person to herself indifferent. Pixie made something of the same observation.

'I thought you and Seneca used to be such good friends!' she cried, in half petulant disapprobation.

'I hope we always shall be good friends,' Helen answered, with a smile so charming that it stilled doubt; and Pixie turned to her lover.

'I hope so too,' she said, 'but it didn't look like it. What is your errand to-day, Seneca? You look as if you had one.'

'Your sister came to see the house last night,' Somers said, turning to Helen, without answering.

'I did nothing of the kind!' cried Pixie. 'I went to see the "Third Hour of the Day."'

'To see *what*, Pixie?' asked her sister.

'Really, she had the goodness to go to see my father,' Somers went on. 'He has been unable to go out, and he was very desirous to see Pixie.'

'What did he say of me?' inquired that lady. 'Don't imagine that Mr. Somers is the visionary creation I referred to, Helen. What did he say of me, Bentley?'

'Shall I tell you?' said Somers, smiling. 'He said seriously, "Bentley, we must have the house new furnished."'

'Is that supposed to be a compliment to me, or otherwise?'

'Evidently he thinks the house as it stands not good enough for you. He went on to remark that a creature so bright must have brighter surroundings. And I have come to-day, in pursuance of his instructions, to beg you will have the goodness to tell us what to do.'

Pixie's cheeks reddened a little, and her eyes were cast down with the loveliest grace of humility that knows its own value, and modesty that receives its due homage. But her words were otherwise.

'Tell you how to get new furniture?'

'Precisely. How should *we* know?'

'How should *I* know?'

'You know what you like.'

'My dear friend, I like different things in different places; and before I can possibly know the things I must know the places.'

'You saw the house last night.'

'Seeing isn't knowing. You must live in a house before you can tell what to do with it. It is like dressing one's self. There are styles—it is a great thing to hit the style; there is expression'—

'What should be the "expression" of furniture?'

'Take a lesson from heathendom,' said Mrs. Thayer. 'In old Babylon, every brick was stamped with the king's name, in token of his proprietorship.'

But Pixie pouted.

'One might as well not have new furniture, at that rate,' she said. Somers turned to the other two ladies.

'I am at a loss about the expression, still,' he said.

'Well,' said Mrs. Thayer, smiling and yet serious, 'it should not look like people's treasure—"the best they have"—for one thing. Expression in any case seems to me a compound of style and purpose.'

'Mother,' said Helen, 'Deacon Post used to pray that his furniture might be consecrated,—do you remember?'

'Well, if it hadn't been that, it wouldn't have been anything,' broke in Pixie. 'That was all the expression it had.'

'An expression of consecration!' said Somers. 'Now we are nearing our point. Pray, what like was this remarkable furniture of Deacon Post's?'

'I don't know,' said Pixie;—'queer old rubbishy stuff.'

'Not rubbishy,' said Helen. 'No one ever saw a bit of dust on it, or a torn cover, or a broken edge; it was just as nice as it could be, always.'

'Well, that's what I said,' answered Pixie; 'that's what I meant by matching styles. The furniture always looked just like the deacon.'

'But "consecrated" means set apart for sacred uses. I can understand it of the good deacon himself,—how of his old furniture?' said Somers.

'Not set apart in idleness,' Mrs. Thayer put in her word; 'neither the deacon nor his furniture. But only

kept for the Master's use; and so redeemed from anything common or vain, and sacred to His divine service.'

'Yes,' said Helen; 'the rocking-chairs looked as if they had rested so many tired people, and the tea-table made you think of the five loaves and the two fishes which the Lord had blessed.'

'A very graphic description, truly,' said Somers, smiling. 'But pray, does not all furniture have that same look of adaptation of means to an end?'

'No!' said Pixie; 'indeed it does not. Your big screen never kept the wind off anybody in its life; it just came from Canton to be looked at. And your great china jars are Ali Baba's pots of money.'

'You would like to replace them with smaller?'

'*I* wouldn't,' said Pixie. 'But mamma and Helen would.'

'Or do without them altogether,' said Somers, looking round the room. 'I see none here,—and I remember none at Daisy Plains. But I remember the harmonies everywhere; and I suppose if the jars had been there, they would have been so placed as to be in keeping.'

'No, they would not,' said Mrs. Thayer, smiling. 'They could not be so placed in my house, Mr. Somers.'

'Why not?'

'Because,' said Helen, 'their presence there at all would be an anomaly, and so—to borrow Pixie's phrase—out of style and out of expression. The rule of mother's house being, "Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus," so great an outlay that was manifestly for herself could not possibly be in keeping.'

'I see,' said Somers;—'correct as usual, and true to your traditions.'

'Not correct at all,' said Pixie; 'that is great nonsense, May. One isn't always responsible for what one has. They might be a gift.'

'Yes,' said Somers, turning to Helen again; 'that might be. Suppose I had sent you home a pair from China—how then, Mrs. L'Estrange?'

'You would not,' said Helen quickly; 'that would have been most anomalous of all.'

Now it is true they had been speaking of Mrs. Thayer and Mrs. Thayer's house; it is undoubted also that 'you' is a very uncertain pronoun in its application; yet there must have been something in the tone and manner of the question that made Helen's answer just what it was. She knew instantly that she had spoken too quick; that it was a mistake to appropriate words doubtless meant for her mother; it struck Somers also; but Pixie's lively tongue for the moment prevented further notice.

'No, of course you would not,' she said. 'Helen is right there, Bentley. Why should you have sent us jars in those days? But we might have had them from somebody else. Or our three times great and (therefore) respected grandmother might have left them to us, you know. Jars that came over in the *Mayflower*.'

Somers laughed at her.

'Talk of anomalies!' he said. 'But, Mrs. L'Estrange,—it occurs to me,—I *did* send you a book from China. Was that tossed aside as also, in its way, a small anomaly?'

For Mr. Somers was no better in some respects than other men; and had a mind to know, now that the subject was once started, why his letter had received no reply. A shimmer of light and shade passed over Helen's face, unseen by all but Mrs. Thayer; her words came with careless deliberation.

'A book? I never got it, Mr. Somers.'

'Never got it!' Somers turned completely round upon her now. 'Never got it?' he repeated. 'That shows the lurking faithlessness of faithful men!'

He sat looking at Helen's sweet face, bent low over some bit of work with which her hands were busy. That letter in which he had forwarded his heart for her acceptance had then never come to hand! What would she have said if it had? Should he tell the whole story as a good joke? But here Mr. Somers reflected that this was not precisely the stuff of which good jokes are made;

seeing that he had Pixie, and she Professor L'Estrange. He would like to tell it, just to expose the Professor and his carelessness. But what would Pixie say to such a narration of facts? Yet he would very much like to know!—For even as you will sometimes hear a girl confess that it is 'such fun' to find out whether the man 'means anything,' even so Mr. Somers, for all he belonged to Pixie, felt a sudden strong desire to know what this other most fair woman would have said to his suit. He looked at her hands, so well remembered;—did the small scissors with which she was outlining scallops go quite steadily in and out? Happily, just here, Pixie asserted her claim.

'A book?' she said; 'you sent Helen a book? What was it, Bentley? and whatever did you send it for?'

'It was—I forget what it was! The title has gone out of my head.'

'What was it about?'

'It contained,' answered Somers rather slowly, 'some account of discoveries made in China, in which I thought your sister might be interested.'

'Discoveries!' said Pixie. 'I didn't know they ever made discoveries in China. I thought everything went on there exactly as it has always done since the Flood!'

'Somewhat so,' Somers confessed, still watching Helen.

'And therefore anything new would be the more remarkable and worth having,' said Helen, beginning to fold up her work. 'Thank you, Mr. Somers, for the book that never came.'

'Who brought it?' said Pixie, eyeing them both.

'Why, no one, it seems,' answered Somers, turning now towards her. 'Some mail bag, or some messenger, must have been in fault. Well, lady fair,—about our furnishing?'

They were on a different plane these two, from the two others; a different light on their faces, and from a different outlook. The gleam and sparkle of a hundred minor things was on these; flashing, fading, changing;—

on the others a steady luminousness from that which cannot change. 'Blessed is the soul,' says an old Scotch writer, 'whose hope hath a window looking straight out unto that day.'

> 'The day for which all others
> From Paradise, were made.'

But Somers and Pixie had no such direct vision. Their mental windows opened on every other prospect. Was not life long? and is not life given for enjoyment? For what were diamonds, if not to wear? for what was wealth, if not to buy new furniture? Yet they did not launch forth indiscriminately. Pixie had taste, and Somers good sense as well; so they went on rather slowly, sorting colours and matching 'expression,' or choosing contrasts; and only a few changes and touches disturbed the belongings in the old Somers mansion, until Pixie herself arrived there as its young mistress.

CHAPTER XLIV.

MILESTONES.

PIXIE'S trousseau was made up under her mother's wise guidance; and Helen too busied herself over the preparations; wearing a strange sweet look that puzzled Mrs. Thayer, it was so grave and so self-contained. But if sense and moderation ruled over the work at home, no such wise hand-maidens brought in the gifts from without. And so more diamonds came into Mrs. Thayer's quiet house, with many splendours of other kinds; and as Pixie invariably tried on every ornament that presented itself, the home sitting-room flashed and sparkled in those days much more than was its wont.

At these exhibitions Mrs. Thayer for the most part looked on in silence, uncertain what words were wise. Helen was seldom there to see. Old Mrs. L'Estrange had been a little ailing for some weeks before the marriage, and Helen spent the mornings with her; driving into Boston with the children, and sending them to see her mother, while she herself went to Mrs. L'Estrange. And thus it happened one day that Mercy brought little Helen and Roger to the house in Mount Vernon Street, just when Pixie was in a full tide of display. Mercy led the children up to Mrs. Thayer, and then turned and stood studying the show, with unreadable things in her deep black eyes. Pixie was just then parading an exquisite set of amethysts, the gift of old Mr. Somers.

'Look, mother!' she cried; 'look, Mercy! Did you ever see anything so lovely?'

Mercy looked at the sparkling face with its sparkling adornments; then round at the fair, innocent, wondering eyes of the two young ones.

'Reckon I has,' she answered somewhat grimly. 'Reckon Mis' T'ayer, she *do*.'

'Oh, she can never see anything but those blessed children, when they are in sight,' said Pixie. 'Mother, I am going to put my amethysts on little May-morning, and then you will look at them.' But Mercy came between.

'No, you don't, Miss Pixie,' she said. 'Dey *is* bressed children; and dey's gwine to stay so.'

'Well, I shan't hurt them,' said Pixie.

'Mebbe'—Mercy answered doubtfully. 'Couldn't risk it, anyhow.'

'How silly you are!' said Pixie. 'You ought to like to see 'Del wear these, Mercy. Don't you know that these very stones—amethysts—are one of the foundations of the New Jerusalem?'

''Spect dey won't hurt nuffin up dar,' said the girl, keeping her guard.

'Then they can't hurt anything here.'

'Dunno,' said Mercy again, eyeing the jewelled comb in Pixie's soft hair; 'down here's differ; and de top ain't de foundations. 'Spect it mus' ha' been in de ole Jerusalem dat folks weared sich. King Solomon's t'ousand wives, mebbe. De folks in de New Jerusalem don't nebber wear nuffin but white. And de white shines!' —Mercy had a rapt way of saying things sometimes which was rather imposing. It silenced Pixie now for the moment.

And then, just then, the door bell rang, and the maid brought in another package; small, but costly. Pixie caught it up, and found words immediately.

'White?' she said, displaying her new treasures; 'then see my pearls! They are white enough, I hope.' Pixie had caught the sound of a sigh from her mother, and now turned from her, addressing Mercy. 'They are white enough, I hope?'

'Hope dey is, too,' said Mercy, with a glance; 'but dey ain't de gates ob entrance; dey's too small.—Come, childern,' she broke off suddenly, bearing down upon her little charge;—'we's boun' t' go right straight off. 'Pears like we's got on to de 'chanted groun', and I'se oneasy till I gets yer home.'

'But oh, wait, Mercy!' cried the little boy. 'Look at Aunt Pixie!'—For the bride elect was rapidly putting on one after another of the flashing trinkets, and stood there a vision of growing splendour. 'The kingdoms of this world and the glory of them'—Mrs. Thayer thought, with a pang. Was that the game the devil meant to play for her youngest born? She looked on, fascinated, and could not but look; for it was a wonderful picture. The gem-crowned young beauty; the two lovely, astonished children; and half facing toward them and away from Pixie, the tall, fine figure of the coloured girl.

'That's the Queen of Sheba!' said Roger, putting his hands behind him with an air of masculine discernment. But little Helen folded hers, drawing a deep sigh.

'No,' she said; 'it must be like one of the shining ones!'

'Dunno 'bout no "mus'," said Mercy. 'De good Book say, "Dey dat be wise shall shine;"—dunno ef dat ar be wise or no.'

'They're so bright!'

'Don't hol' a candle to yer ma's eyes,' said Mercy. 'Come! an' we'll see dem 'fore long.'

'Well, *mother*'d like to see Aunt Pixie's things, and she'd *stay*,' said Roger.

'Mebbe'—said Mercy. 'Yer ma's got discussion to stay mos' anywhar's. But I'se simple, I is, and dese yer broad ways is mighty confusin'. I hes t' keep to de narrer road, whar I kin see de milestones.'

She swept her young charge away and into the Professor's little carriage; and through the fair sunshine they jogged back to Cambridge again. And certainly, if the old milestones held wisdom locked in their moss-grown faces, Mercy did her best that day to draw it out.

But if she made discoveries she kept them to herself. Helen came home rather late, and the children poured out descriptions and questions and requests and regrets, in a sort of flood tide; to all which Helen listened rather silently. Mercy too was silent; waiting on the young ones' tea, and letting them talk with no comments of her own. But when bed-time came, and the tired little creatures shut their eyes upon earth and earth's concerns; then, as the soft eyelids fell and the busy tongues were still, Mercy finished the tucking up with the air of one who had somewhat on her mind.

'Christiana,' she began, 'does you 'member dat ar 'chanted groun' de pilgrims had to pass t'rough, whar a man war mighty apt to forget his wits?'

'In the *Pilgrim's Progress?* I remember—yes,' said Helen.

'Whar away war dat, sure 'nuff?'

'Where was it?' said Helen; 'why, just where it is now, Mercy; and that is wherever earthly things are so bright or so sweet that we are in danger of loving them best.'

Mercy straightened herself up, looking at her mistress.

'We's been dar,'—she said briefly.

'Been there, to-day?' said Helen, smiling round at her from the low seat near the window. 'I hope you came out all safe?'

'Dunno,' said Mercy. 'Glad t' see dem childern safe in bed—I is dat. And I'se done studied de milestones all de way back. Learned a heap too.'

'From the milestones?' said Helen. 'Didn't you know before how far it is from Boston to Cambridge?'

'Well, it's furder'n I t'ought,' said Mercy, coming across and putting herself on the floor at Helen's feet. 'Dey's cur'ous t'ings, de milestones! First dey says, So fur—so fur from Boston. Den dey turns right about 'n says, So near—so near to Cambridge. Why you reckon dey do dat, Christiana?'

'I am sure I do not know; I never thought about it,'

said Helen. 'Oh, I suppose it is because that is what people want to know; first how far they are from where they set out, and then how little way it is to home.'

'Dat's jes' it!' said Mercy, with a joyful flash of her dark eyes. 'Dat's dem very two tex'es.'

'What two texts?'

'Done forgot one on 'em,' said Mercy; 'can't jes' seem to cotch him. But de fus' one say, "having 'scaped." Dat's "so fur from," yer see; from de City ob Destruction whar we's set out. What's de oder, Miss May? you's boun' t' know. Somefin 'bout "nearer," it is.'

'Oh,'—said Helen, 'is this what you mean?—"Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed."'

Mercy's hands came softly together with glad emphasis.

'De very one!' she said. 'Fust we's all de time lookin' back, tryin' to see how fur we's come, t'inkin' how we's 'scaped. And den all in a minute it's turn about to how fur we's got t' go. So near—so near to de New Jerusalem.'

'So near?' Helen repeated. 'It does not look very near, Mercy, does it?'

'All 'pends on de milestones,' answered Mercy. 'An' dat's anoder t'ing. Christiana, what you t'ink 'bout Beulah Land?'

'The Land of Beulah!' said Helen.

'Yes,' said Mercy,—'dar whar de sun shine night and day; and de birds sing, and de weary pilgrims see mos' 'cross de ribber?'

There came a surge in Helen's heart that kept her silent.

'Well, I'se foun' out,' said Mercy. 'Reckon I has; from dem ole milestones. Christiana, don't you t'ink de Beulah Land lie jes' whar we stop sayin' "How fur?" and begins to say "How near?"'

But Mercy got no answer to her question then. An uneasy movement of one of the children threw off the covers; Mercy went to adjust that; and then, seeing that Helen had leaned her head back with her face toward the

window, she softly went down-stairs to attend to business; and Helen sat still and gazed out into the twilight. Now a belated bird flew past the window, now a soft insect hum stole up from the green turf; then Mercy went out to the well for a pail of water, and as she went she sang. Clearly the girl's thoughts were yet lingering in Beulah Land. How sweet the words came!—

> 'A few more days in sorrer,
> An de Lord will call us home;
> To walk de golden streets
> Ob de New Jerusalem.'

Helen drew a very long breath as she listened. But 'in sorrow'—what had such words to do with her? Nothing, Helen felt. And yet as these lately past days and weeks had slipped by, she had been dimly conscious of frequent little pricks, which if not well watched and rubbed away might have become pains. She knew, too, especially now, sitting here in the dusk, that it was generally Somers' hand that gave the pricks. Helen had striven bravely; but she could no more have helped her perceptions than she could have changed the facts. Just as Somers sat at Pixie's feet last night, he had in the old time sat at hers; just as he now bent forward to listen to the one, so had he done in years gone by to the other. And even as now he followed Pixie's every motion, knew when she spoke; guessed her thoughts, divined her wishes, demanded her reasons, guarded her steps;—yes, just so had he formerly done to Helen herself. She had tried to forget; she had thought she had forgotten;—but now it was impossible not to remember, with the whole thing acted over again before her eyes. Did he mean nothing more now than he had then? Or did he perhaps then—but at that possibility Helen would not look. She roused herself up and went down to care for Professor L'Estrange, who had come from a scientific dinner, was going to his scientific club, and wanted a cup of tea between.

CHAPTER XLV.

OCCUPY.

'I SAW then in my dream, that they went on till they came to a certain country, whose air naturally tended to make one drowsy.'—So spake the wonderful old dreamer of true things; and it seemed to Helen in these days as if that land and air lay all around her. Were they awake, these reasonable creatures, giving their whole lives up to such unreasonable things—dress, jewels, entertainments, money making and money spending? Were her own eyes well open, as she went round and round on the edge of the vortex? She did not enjoy it; she went round and round with a weary, hidden wish that she could go straight ahead; but still she went round and round. Would eternal things and eternal interests take care of themselves? Here and there, indeed, was some Noah building his ark, and much laughed at for his pains; but for the most part, 'they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they married, they were given in marriage,'—as people did before the Deluge, and have done ever since.

Among the married ones now was Pixie; finding immense satisfaction in her new pedestal, and great comfort in being no longer, as she said, obliged to 'pick up sixpences.' There was no handsomer bride than Pixie that winter in Boston. And she was a capable young woman, this; contriving to enchant the younger Somers, bewilder the elder, and delight the world generally. If the enchanted ground made *her* drowsy, it was certainly not to outward eyes. And Helen? was

she dwelling in Beulah Land? She thought not, herself. For there 'the sun shineth night and day;' there the eyes of the pilgrims are 'filled with celestial visions;' and in this round of things which she did not enjoy, was not sure she ought to do, and yet did not see how to stop doing, there was a good deal besides sunshine, and much that was wholly terrestrial. Helen's face had grown grave, amid all its placid sweetness; only when she took her message in hand, and went forth to minister in some of the dark corners of the city, then the old look came back; and Mrs. L'Estrange became again the May of former days. The Professor saw no difference, at any time; she was always perfect in his eyes; and indeed he had but small chance to study Helen's looks. These manifold social duties took such bites out of his time, that Mr. L'Estrange was fain to fill up the gaps with hours which really belonged to his wife and children; and was more and more enveloped in the mists of study, even when he was with them. Mrs. Thayer saw it all, yet dared not speak; and Mercy watched and prayed, and grumbled to herself, and now and then shot word arrows into the air in the hope they might hit somebody as they came down.

In due time Pixie and Mr. Somers went abroad,—and then they came home again. No children came to brighten the old rejuvenated house in Tremont Street; but the money flowed in, and the money flowed out; and young Mrs. Somers was an admired leader on every road where society cares to follow. She was charitable, too, heading all the lists which society likes to fill up. And Helen's children grew wholesomely under their mother's sweet training; and the Professor went deeper and deeper into science; and his wife visited all the poor people she could find time for, and gave away all the money she could save. She even tried to turn her manifold social duties into missionary successes; but that was hard work. For the fitness of things must be regarded, and opportunities do not always offer themselves for sale;

and many a hindering anomaly starts up instead. If I am at your ball, why should you not give it? If I meet you everywhere, it is plain that you also meet me! Is your time any more precious than mine? or has my mind a transmuting power which turns the frivolous into the consecrated? And whatever I believe,—or try to believe,—does the world generally think, or have reason to think, that I go the rounds of the world's requirements seeking 'first the kingdom of God'?

These, or such like thoughts, fought many a battle in Helen's mind, and flavoured many a draught of social pleasure. Yet her husband wished it; did the Lord *not?* Some new case of sin or sorrow gave a great jar to her content oftentimes; and sometimes also, so did Mercy.

'Miss May,' she said one afternoon, 'what dat ar "occupy" mean, for sure?'

Pixie had just got home from another trip abroad, and was carrying all before her as usual; but Helen had been pushed aside a little with a slight sprain in her foot; and now this Sunday she sat at home up-stairs, with her foot on a cushion and her Bible in her lap; half musing, half reading. And on the floor beneath the west window sat Mercy; with the warm level sunshine tangled in her crisp black hair, and giving a rich glow to her smooth dark skin. Mercy had kept well her identity; showing the characteristics of her race in mind as well as person. Eyes soft and yet full of fire; a manner innocent, and yet acute; a busy brain full of imagination and conceits; a heart deeply religious, where faith dwelt and love bore sway. She too had her Bible; and looked up from it now to put her question.

'Occupy?' said Helen, coming out of her own thoughts. 'Why, it means to have the use of a thing, or to be very busy with it all the time.'

'Means 'nuff, den,' said Mercy. 'De ten servants,' she went on, consulting her book, 'dey had ten poun's. And de noble-man—de Lord Jesus—him dat war goin' so

fur away—he say, "Occupy till I come." He didn't say, Spend 'em; and he didn't say, Keep 'em; but jes', Occupy. So den we's to use 'em an' be busy wi' 'em all de time. Dat's clar. Now I'se one o' de ten servants,—but whar's my poun', Christiana?'

'Why, it's all you have, Mercy,' said Helen; 'it is everything: time, strength, money, influence, sense; eyes and tongue, and hands and feet. They are none of them to lie idle, but all to be used for His service. They are to see for Him, and to hear for Him, to be spent for Him; to be busy for Him all the day long.'

'Ain't I never to be occupied wid nuffin else?'

'Never; if it hinders this.'

'Reckon dere'd be some unoccupied groun' lyin roun' somewhars,' said Mercy. 'How's I gwine to do two t'ings at a time?'

'"Seek first the kingdom," let the other things wait.'

''Spect dey'd wait a good while, if I'se so took up wi' dat ar poun',' said Mercy. 'But how's I allays gwine t' know which one *am* de kingdom?'

'Cannot you tell which you want to do to please yourself, and which for the love of the Lord Jesus?'

Mercy pondered.

'Reckon!'—she said, looking up with a gleam of her white teeth. 'Dough we does mostly t'ink jes' alike. Christiana, you s'pose dese yer ten was all darkies? dey's differ'nt from de oder two what had five poun's and two poun's.'

'Different? No,' said Helen; 'why should they be different? It is just another way of telling the same thing.'

'Dey's differ'nt,' Mercy repeated, comparing the two accounts. ''Spect *dey* was white folks. De Lord knowed dey was differ'nt. He say, Now here come Mis' T'ayer—her what had de five poun'—and she fetch Him two mo'. And He say, Well done! Den dere's Christiana—she had two poun's, and *she* fetch two mo'; and de Lord He say,

Well done! ag'in. And de Mr. 'fessor— Nebber mind him,' said Mercy, breaking off suddenly,—' don't know nuffin 'bout whar de 'fessor keep his money. But dese oder'—and the girl's tone grew wistful; ' dey's po' ig'rant folks; hadn't only got ten poun' 'mongst de hull on 'em. And de dear Lord, He know. So He couldn't say, Well done! to dem, yer see, dey's done so mighty little; and He couldn't bear disappoint 'em, neider; so He jes' say, kin' o' pitiful like, Well, you good servant. Yer see dey'd 'lowed t' do better'n dey'd done. And de Lord say, "You's been faithful wid de very little, now I'se try you ag'in wid mo'."'

'But, Mercy,' said Helen, smiling at the girl's conceit, though her eyes watered too, 'you forget. In that account the man with the one pound gained five times what the other man did who had five to begin with.'

'Dey's mighty differ'nt, for all,' Mercy persisted. 'De man wi' de five poun', he say, Behold!—he had sumfin to show, he had. I'se gained five mo', he says; and de Lord look, and He say, Well done. But de oders,'—and again the dark face was all astir with feeling,—'if dey *had* done gained a little, dey didn't know how it come; dey jes' put it all back on de Lord Hisself. Lord, dy poun's been and gained ten poun's. 'Spect you knows all about it,—*we* doesn't. And den de bressed noble-man (He war de King den) He jes' say, Well.'

Mercy laid down her book and turned towards the open window, beyond which the sun was slowly going down in a sea of splendour; her face rapt and glowing.

''Pears as if I'd like to hear Him say dat,' she remarked. 'Soun's wonderful quiet. All de little worries, and all de big peck o' troubles, dey's jes' done blowed away—clar gone—wi' de bref of de King's mouf when He say, "Well."'

If a sudden wish sprang up in Helen's heart that the time were come for that wonderful word to be spoken to her, it was not that she was conscious of any private 'peck of troubles.' Things had found their level again, after the temporary disturbance; and as in the old time, so now,

May thought herself — and really was—happy. Yet when through one set of circumstances or another happiness holds less and less firmly with the hand that rests on earth; so does earth itself change, and recede, and grow dim. Once cease investing in that bank, except in temporary fashion, and the bank ceases to pay interest. You keep your spending money there, and that is all.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE PROFESSOR'S BOX.

HELEN'S foot was still in a slightly disabled state, when the day came for which a grand excursion had been devised. It had long been the way that the two married daughters should spend much of the summer-time in the old house at Daisy Plains: Helen with her children almost a fixture there; and Pixie coming and going at will. For Pixie and Somers led a flitting-about life, much like two Daisy Plains butterflies. I think it was Pixie's fault. She wanted to see other places, and she had seen them. England, Italy, Switzerland, even Palestine and Egypt; and if going round the world had been the fashion in those days, doubtless Mr. and Mrs. Bentley Somers would have made the grand tour with the rest. Just now they had come home from a winter in Berlin; and were all ready to rusticate—as Pixie said—at dear old Daisy Plains. Pixie had gained the travelled air herself by this time; but was in other respects very much the Pixie of former days. High aims and noble accomplishment had not stamped her bright face with any new seal of dignity; the happiness of her married life had brought no richer growth of character. Somers and Pixie were devoted to each other; but it is only when two go hand in hand on the narrow upward path, with mutual stimulus, mutual help, that love is, or does, its rich utmost. They went hand in hand, indeed, but it was in the world's merry-go-round.

Helen the while had also kept her identity, wearing still the fair unshadowed face of old; what though the

looks were a little graver, the calm content somewhat less absolute, than then. For Helen had still no taste for the merry-go-round, and would rather have climbed any sort of a Hill Difficulty. There were poor people needing her money, there were sad people needing her time; was she not as much of an anomaly in the gay throng as the Ali Baba jars would have been at Daisy Plains? And still she went round and round, for Mr. L'Estrange liked it.

To Daisy Plains they were now all going for the summer. But as the children, grown larger, demanded more room, and as Pixie's spirit of enterprise was never quiet, she had planned and carried out certain enlarging improvements; put on a new wing for herself, in fact; and now the purpose was to go down in a body for the day, inspect the work done, and see what more might be needed in the way of mattings and wicker-work. Only Helen begged off, because of her lame foot.

'But your foot is better, May?' the Professor said anxiously.

'Much better.'

'Then you can as well go as not,' Mr. L'Estrange decided. 'Once in the carriage, you need not stir but to get out of it; and once out of it, you need not stir but to get in.'

'A lively prospect!' said Helen, laughing. 'That is not at all my idea of an excursion; I am not such a philosopher.'

'No, of course,' said Mr. L'Estrange; 'but you need change of air; and then your counsel is always invaluable.'

'My counsel will not be needed to-day,' said Helen; 'this is Pixie's affair, and she always knows what she wants.'

'It will not be half a day without you,' said the Professor. 'I think I will stay at home too.'

'Oh no, you will not,' said Helen. 'Half a day at Daisy Plains is very good, and quite worth going for.'

'I remember when I used to think so,' said the Professor, smiling. 'Even a quarter—or less—could wile me all the way from Cambridge. But then May was there. Now, the drawing will be all the other way.'

'Not when you are once off,' said Helen. 'Now please, Mr. L'Estrange, go and get ready;—the children's joy will make you forget all about my lame foot.'

The Professor made a scornful inarticulate sound of denial, but went off nevertheless to do as he was desired, coming back, however, the next moment to put his head in at the door.

'It just occurs to me,' he said,—'if you *will* stay,—my old box of odds and ends from across seas has suddenly turned up, been sent on from San Francisco. I had forgotten all about it—never should have thought of it again—but the storehouse burned down, and this was one of the few things saved. Finding my name on the box, they shipped it at once for Boston. How would you like to overhaul it to-day, and so keep yourself out of mischief?'

'*Very* much,' Helen said, smiling.

'I'll order it up-stairs at once, then,' said the Professor, highly pleased with his bright idea. 'I haven't the least recollection what is in it. Keep what you like, May, and give away what you like—and burn what you like. I give you full discretion.'

'But, Mr. L'Estrange,' Helen called after him, as he went off, 'don't have it brought up-stairs. Where is it now?'

'In the back porch.'

'That will do nicely; and all the mess and dust can be left there.'

So it was decided. The party drove away; and Helen, after a rather prolonged Bible study, went down to the porch. Why she lingered more than common over the Bible that morning none could tell, least of all Helen herself, but the fact remains. In *Evangeline* I think it is, the shrinking of the mimosa, which folds its delicate

leaves at the jar of approaching hoof-beats which are yet unheard and far away, is likened to those strange mental premonitions which every one has felt and for which no one can give a reason. So Helen, unconsciously, lingered over her Bible; delaying her play-task; dwelling, she could not tell why, most of all on those promises from which in ordinary one half holds back, as recognising the situations in which only they can come true.

'When thou passest through the waters,' she read, 'I will be with thee.'

'When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.'

Long Helen studied the words, long bent her head in supplication that the fulness of the promise might be her own; then slowly made her way down to the porch, summoning Mercy to help. And the shine and the shadow must both have lingered on her face, for Mercy gave a little checked cry of astonishment as she came in.

'Whar's you been, Christiana?' she asked.

'Only up-stairs.'

Mercy made another wordless sound.

'Looks like you'd been seein' how hot dey made de furnace for de t'ree Hebrew childern,' she said.

'I have been thinking of it a little,' Helen confessed, with a smile.

'Knowed it!'—said Mercy. 'Dat ar fire's done burned out long ago, chile.'

'But there are other fires as hot,' Helen answered dreamily. Mercy looked at her.

'Dey wasn't so bad off,' she said; 'de Hebrew childern. It war hot, for a fire; but dey had de form ob de Fourth One wid 'em, right in dar; and dey walked roun' an' see how dat ar ole furnace war made. S'pect it ain't a very bad place nowhar, when de Lord Jesus am along.'

'Oh yes, they had Him,' said Helen. 'They couldn't have lived a minute if He *hadn't* been there, Mercy.'

''Spect like's dey couldn't,' assented her handmaid, beginning to open the box. 'Nobody wouldn't nebber

ha' seen one ob 'em no mo'. But seein' He *war* dar it warn't a noways bad place.'

Helen leaned back in the chair and looked at her, but said nothing. Mercy busied herself with taking off the top stratum of packing paper.

'Dey's in glory, dese years,' she said, with a furtive glance at her mistress. 'But ain't it heaven to be wid de Lord? An' if He choose to bring a little bit ob heaven down into de midst ob de fire, what den, Christiana?'

A strange glow lit up Helen's sweet eyes; they opened wide at Mercy. She half raised herself, fell back again; and then, with a gesture of her hands which Mercy could not read, but which she never forgot, Helen answered slowly,—

'"Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."'

But Mercy could not say another word. She went on with the wrapping paper.

'S'pose de 'fessor ain't packed up no sarpints in dis yer box,' she began again, half to herself. 'Dey's boun' to be dead, anyhow. But I does 'spise a sarpint! An' I does t'ink dat ar Eve war de curiousest woman, t' sit an' chin wid de biggest one ob 'em all! What for she no heave a rock right on to his ugly ole head? Den we wouldn't none o' us nebber ha' had no mo' trouble. Now I'se done my part. Dar!'—

For, as Helen drew up her chair, and, taking the package that came first, unwrapped it, there appeared a beautiful little hand-screen of Eastern work, covered with golden-bronze tracery of leaves, and stems, and flowers, in and out which the folds of a great golden-bronze serpent were twined. Mercy surveyed it with great disapproval.

'Dat am de 'fessor,' she said. 'Dat ain't me.'

Helen laid it aside, and took out the next, a box of wonderfully carved chessmen.

'I shall give this to Miss Pixie,' she said. 'Set it off by itself, Mercy.'

'Best give her de oder t'ing too,' suggested Mercy; 'de sarpint. She 'mire 'em on her arms, so likely she ain't got much objection to 'em nowhars.'

'No, I shall let Mr. L'Estrange have that in his smoking room. And here is a box of ivory knitting-needles and shuttles and winders, that he must have got for his mother. Put this on the other table.'

Mercy did so, remarking that 'if he had, they'd been a heap o' use to her all dese years.'

Next came a small box with the strangest looking necklace, which at first puzzled even Helen herself. Then she exclaimed,—

'Oh, I know, Mercy! This is a necklace of tiger's claws and teeth.'

'Claws and teeth,' said Mercy; 'de tiger's! Dey's so desp'ate fond o' being eat up over dar, dat dey can't get 'long widout tigers in de house?'

'This must have been a large one,' said Helen, turning the necklace in her hands. 'I shall not give this away to anybody. It must go in the cabinet in the hall.'

Mercy laid the little box away by itself, but shook her head the while.

'Don't want no tiger jes' yet,' she said, 'fo' me. When de leopard eat straw like de ox, s'pect de tiger will too. Reckon he'll look real handsome 'mong de white clover den. I ain't got no use for him in de present state o' t'ings.'

'Well, here is something you can use in the present state of things,' said Helen, smiling at her, and presenting Mercy with an enormous fan, on which were painted various Eastern ladies, of that extraordinary fulness and flabbiness of face which seems to be in favour with Japanese artists. 'This you may keep, Mercy.'

Mercy took the fan, spread it out, gazed at it; finally threw back her head with a laugh.

'Reckon Miss Helen done give me dis, fear I war frettin' to be white folks,' she said. 'Be dey real folks, sure 'nuff, dese yere?'

'Real folks, and really dressed just so,' said Helen.

'And oh, Mercy, look!—here is one of the things they worship!'

She had taken out a large flat portfolio, full of engravings, pictures, and sketches, and from it now drew forth a coloured drawing of a colossal image of Buddha. Helen propped it up on a strip of the box lid, and leaned back in her chair and studied it with deeply interested eyes. Mercy too gazed, half-fascinated; getting down on her knees at Helen's side.

'Christiana—what am dat?' she said at last in a low voice, as if awe-struck.

'That is the picture of a great Japanese idol, sixty or seventy feet high.'

'What dey call him?'

'Buddha.'

'Budd—ha,'—Mercy repeated. 'Well, when he's done come anywhar, I'se clar out. Dat's so.'

'Oh, would you?' said Helen. 'I think it has a beautiful face, Mercy. I cannot see how any mere heathen could have imagined it. And I could fancy how the people who know no better, who never heard about Jesus, would come from far, far away to pour out their sorrows at the feet of this idol.'

'Is dat what dey does?'

'Oh yes; I have read about it. There is a constant line of people—men and women and children—winding up and down the hill where this great idol stands.'

'Must be funny sort o' sorrers dey could pour out at dem foots,' said Mercy.

'But they must tell their trouble somewhere, or their hearts would break; and they do not know about Jesus. And that is a wonderful face, Mercy.'

''Spect it is dat,' said Mercy, eyeing the idol askance;—'won'erful and fearful. Look at him's han's! Dey's jes' all turned up. What I'se got I'se keep.'

'I see!' said Helen. 'Or perhaps it is, What I have got I *must* keep. The face says, I would help; and the hands say, I cannot.'

'Him big 'nuff,' remarked Mercy. 'Ain't we jes' de happiest, blessedest, ongratefullest folks dat ever was, over here? We 'sciples ob de Lord?'

Helen looked round at her with wet eyes.

'I think we are, Mercy; just that.' She went on silently turning over the portfolio's treasures; then paused and set out another one.

'Oh, see this!' she said. 'I have heard about this too. How like to the other, and how unlike! Look, Mercy, this is the Burgomaster's family. The story is that his little child was very ill, and then was healed in answer to prayer. So the father had this picture painted in grateful remembrance.'

'Looks pretty peart, most on 'em, now,' said Mercy, studying the picture. 'Ain't no one sick, 'cept de little way-up chile; and dey ain't none o' 'em lookin' to see how *he* is, 'cept de ole man. Takes it easy, dey does.'

'Oh, but this is the sick child, down here,' said Helen. 'I mean, the one that was sick. And they are all looking at *him*, don't you see? he is so well. Look how he holds out his own little hand and admires it; turning it up as if to catch more blessings. And up there, Mercy; the child up there is meant for the Lord Jesus. See how He stretches out His hand, turning it down to pour out the blessings. And don't you see how sick He is? He has made the little child well by taking the ailment upon Himself. See how His head droops. I suppose the painter was thinking of that verse in the Bible: "Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses."'

Mercy's eyes filled.

'Dat ar am pitiful,' she said. 'An' dey don't one ob 'em give Him glory, 'cept de ole man. Dey jes' says, How much I'se got!—and holds out der han's fo' mo'. An' all de while de Lord's head am a-droopin' an' a-droopin', an' His han' a-pourin' out. An' He couldn't save Hisself, 'cos He had to look out fo' all de rest. Dat ar Buddha, he look out for's self. He's de wellest one dar. Cotch him bein' sick for nobody.'

'I shall keep this,' said Helen, laying the picture gently aside, and going on with her search. And the talk drifted, and went on too, over the very mixed contents of the box. At last they got so deep down that Helen was fain to sit back in her chair and let Mercy finish the taking out. Packages large and small came forth; the tables in the neighbouring rooms were covered; the chairs grew full.

'Dey's all out now,' Mercy repeated at last; ''cept dis one. Mighty keerful done up it is; tied an' tied, an' sealed an' sealed. Must be sumfin mighty apt to run away. Wonder de 'fessor didn't tie him fast to de box.'

She dived down and brought forth to view a small package, done up indeed with extraordinary care, and with a degree of neatness which had not characterized the other parcels. The smooth brown paper was folded with exact corners, the twines crossed at symmetrical angles; the seals were large and round and red. Helen took it into her hand with a vague curiosity that was half distrust; turned it over and read, 'For Miss Helen Thayer.'—Not Mr. L'Estrange's hand, she knew at once; knew also instantly whose hand it was. This, then, was the missing book; and the unfaithful messenger had been Mr. L'Estrange himself!

Helen's first impulse was to carry the package away and open it privately; but she put down that thought. What was Mr. Somers to her, that she could not look at his gift before all the world?

'It is a book, I think, Mercy,' she said, slowly untying the knots, but keeping the addressed side towards herself.

'Mighty queer der ain't no mo' books,' said Mercy. 'But folks is cur'ous. Now he's home, 'pears like de 'fessor can't get enough books; and over dar, one would do him.'

'Yes,' said Helen abstractedly, taking off the twine and looping it round her fingers. She began cracking the

seals. Mercy went on storing the packing rubbish in the box again.

What the name of that book was, Helen never knew. For as the seals gave way, and the smooth wrapping paper started up from its long confinement, and the little volume lay free in her hand, it opened of itself midway, and there lay a letter. Yellow from its long seclusion from light and air; sealed and addressed with even more careful exactness than the package itself had been; it lay there in the book confronting her. 'For Miss Helen Thayer;'—so ran the clear, bold handwriting; and it had come into the hands of Mrs. Professor L'Estrange!

CHAPTER XLVII.

CHINESE DISCOVERIES.

BUT at this point something warned Helen to carry on her researches in private. She gathered up wrapping paper, book, and string; and, first telling Mercy in careful detail what to do with the various contents of the box that were laid out in the next room, slowly made her way up-stairs. There, with the instinct of self-preservation, put herself in a great supporting and surrounding easy-chair; dropped paper and string in her lap again; and from the opening book took out her letter. It did not occur to Helen to question whether she ought to read it; as little did she stop to guess what she should find there. With the sort of swift inevitable action that carries a stream over the edge of a suddenly-reached declivity, so she went on and read from the first word to the last; the whole present world and state of existence forgotten, merged, swallowed up, in the past life so vividly brought back and laid open before her. She read it;—she read it again; a third time her eyes devoured every word; and it was only then, when the whole being more familiar she could dwell upon a part, that her gaze fastened upon special words, and could not get away.

'I knew now that I loved you,'—so ran one passage,—'and loved you dearly, and loved you only, in all the world.'

It had been true, then! and she had not been mistaken; had not in truth given her love unsought. And in that twofold gladness, contenting both the woman's heart and the woman's proud reserve, Helen sat

enwrapped. 'I think I have loved you from the first week I saw you.'—'Helen, I think my life depends upon you.'

Then slowly against that sunlit wave of the past, the dark tide of the present rolled in, and kept its place. 'In pity let me hear from you soon,' he wrote. 'Send me one line!' Send him one line! She, Helen L'Estrange, to him, Pixie's husband!

'Write me soon, for I shall count months and days until I can get your answer.'

Soon?—and he had waited years! And with that, an exceeding bitter cry escaped Helen's lips, and she broke into a passion of such weeping as in all her gentle life she had never known. Oh, how he must have suffered! Alone, so far away; and waiting, watching for the letter that never came. Until that torrent had somewhat run its course, Helen could think of nothing else. Then of a sudden she sat straight up, in a fire of indignation as foreign to her nature as the flood had been. Mr. L'Estrange had done it! The package had been entrusted to him, and he had kept it back!

But Helen's was too honest a mind to hold such an idea for long. Gentler thoughts came to her, and truer. The fire died out of her eyes, and the floods came back. No, that could not have been. In those days the Professor did not even know her name, nor for long afterwards; and so the address, if he read it—which was doubtful—had made no impression. As to the rest, it was just like him to forget the whole thing. It had all been a series of miserable mistakes. But oh, poor Seneca! 'I think the same now, Helen; and yet I am still here; and it is two years since I saw you.'—And now once again there swept over Helen's heart that tumultuous, unmanageable joy—'In bonds which cannot be unloosed.'—But they *were* unloosed.

They tell of warriors who rouse themselves with one last effort after the spear-thrust or the arrow-shot; conscious that they are stricken, yet endued for the

instant with unearthly power and unearthly calm. But Helen sat with these different thoughts surging and contesting, and got no hold of herself at all; sat back in her chair at last, for how long a time she never knew, all dull and stunned and wearied out. Until at last the sunbeams, slanting in from the west windows, brought a reminder. Evening was close at hand, when they would all be home again.

Helen's heart died within her. How was she to meet them? What was she to do? The past was past; irrecoverable, unreachable;—what should be done with the present? She knew well—had long known, known from the first—though never so well as now; that no new image had ever filled the place of the first one in her heart. She had dethroned it, hidden it, disowned it; but the shrine had stood empty. It seemed to Helen now as if the whole world were emptiness. She sat back in her easy-chair, the letter clasped in her hands, gazing vaguely out at the sunlight, with its mute urging. Life seemed to stand still; to have stopped, but for that. There was not a sound, nor a stir. Then all at once Mercy's steps sounded in the room below, as she threw open the windows, arranged the fire, and began to set the table for tea. And something of the day's talk must have dwelt in Mercy's mind; for when she began to sing, it was one of the weird old plantation songs, of which she still remembered a few.

'Oh, nobody knows de trouble I hab seen!
Nobody knows but Jesus.
Oh, nobody knows de trouble I hab seen!
Nobody knows but Jesus.
De wind blow east,
De wind blow west;
De waves dey billow
Across my breast.
Oh, nobody knows de trouble I hab seen!
Nobody knows but Jesus.'

It seemed to Helen for a little while as if she should die. 'Nobody knows but Jesus,'—again the sweet refrain

burst forth. But He did. Not like that giant image of Buddha, powerless even though sympathetic;—Jesus was 'mighty to save;' and He knew. Knew all the ins and outs; knew all the past and all the present. Knew, and remembered, and stood near. Like one adrift, Helen reached out her hands and laid hold of that fact; clinging for a while with little sense of anything but just that she was not swept away. And I think if Christians could tell—which they never can—what this mere consciousness is to them, the stoutest scepticism might give way before such evidence;—if indeed scepticism were waiting for evidence, which in truth it is not. What it is to know that the Lord Jesus knows; knows the things which must be hidden from all the world;—and what it is to have Him stand by, in hours when the dearest of earth are but intruders. Ay, and also to know that His tender knowledge searches out all the miserable pain, hears the mute cries, catches the unspoken prayer; and that in clearest view of all the hard and all the impossible things, He yet answers: 'Fear not, for I will help thee.' 'Nobody knows but Jesus;'—but oh, what a 'but' that is! bringing together all the need of earth, and all the power of heaven. No, we cannot tell it;—we can but fall back on the old words, and say: 'O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him.'

At first no word like 'blessed' came into Helen's heart; but slowly other words—in which the blessing was wrapped up — stole in following Mercy's song. 'When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then Thou knewest my path.' Even now, therefore, the Lord was looking on. 'For He knoweth the way that I take; when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.'—It was to be as gold, then. Like the three in Babylon, who came forth from the sevenfold heated furnace not miserably marred and shrunken, but with not even the smell of fire upon their garments. 'He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver.'

Helen slid down out of her chair and got upon her

knees; so taking at least the guise of pleading; and there—with words or without them, who shall say?—Helen L'Estrange fought out her battle. She had knelt down a bewildered, broken-hearted woman;—she rose up pale indeed, and shaken; but with the old high calm of eye and brow, with patient strength in every look and movement.

The first thing she did was to put together the coals and brands of the wood fire, which had almost burned itself away. Helen put on fresh wood, and sitting down before it watched the flames as they curled and crept among the sticks, until the whole was in a light blaze. Otherwise, the room was all dusky gloom; for the sun had sunk away, and the sunset glow had faded. For a little Helen watched the fire;—then, as it reddened and broke into fiercer heat, she slowly laid the book in her lap on the top of the bright coals. And as that presently sunk away into a mass of cinders, with a steady hand that did not stay nor falter, Helen laid the precious letter where just now the book had been; and saw it flame and fade, and pass away for ever. A burst of quiet tears followed, as the fire rose and fell; but the agony was over, and the victory was won.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A HEADACHE.

THE party from Daisy Plains came in late, and also famished. Happily Mercy had expected this last condition of things; and not only was the table set, but a bountiful supply of viands was all ready to set upon it. Candles were lighted, and tea made; the pleasurers—who were all to stay at Cambridge that night—came down from their several rooms refreshed and renovated; but still the sweet mistress of the mansion did not appear.

'Where is May?' said Mrs. Thayer, looking round the supper-room; the Professor, just in from the post-office with his hands full of letters, paused to hear. Mercy, placing the supper on the table, made answer,—

'Miss May done gone to bed wi' de headache.'—

'A headache!' cried Professor L'Estrange, hurriedly laying down his despatches. 'I'll step up and see her. Don't wait.' But Mercy got between him and the door.

'If de gen'leman 'fessor please,' she said, 'he won't do no sich a t'ing. Bes' leave Miss May along wid her own head.'

Mr. L'Estrange made one of his sounds of impatient denial, and tried to get round Mercy.

'But that is ridiculous,' cried Pixie. 'Helen never has headaches.'

'Done got him dis time, anyhow,' said the girl, looking appealingly past the Professor to Mrs. Thayer. And Mrs. Thayer, who had risen at Mercy's first words and

then sat down again, now left her chair once more and came forward.

'Mercy is right,' she said. 'Sleep is better than talk for a headache, Mr. L'Estrange.' The Professor turned towards her, standing irresolute.

'I needn't talk to her,' he said.

'Folks wi' de headache ain't so mighty fond o' bein' looked at,' put in Mercy. 'An' Miss Helen say if she sleep, she do well. If de 'fessor want de mornin' all bright, he please bes' let de evenin' be quiet.' Slowly the Professor walked round to his end of the table.

'It's incredible!' he said. 'No, Helen *never* has headaches.'

'Sympathetic with her foot-ache,' Pixie opined. 'What has she been doing all day, Mercy?'

'Miss Helen done clared out de 'fessor's big box. We's been in dat ar box mos' all day; bofe of us.'

'Oh, my old box of odds and ends,'—said Mr. L'Estrange, looking at the others. 'I told her to amuse herself with it. But I didn't mean she should get a headache;—only pass away the time. She didn't try to put all those things away, Mercy?'

'No, sir. I done dat. All 'cept what Miss Helen burned.'

'Oh, *why* did she burn anything till I came!' cried Pixie. 'Those are just sure to be the very things I should like.'

'Give May credit for a little sense and taste, Pixie,' said her mother.

'What did she burn, Mercy?'

'Dunno,'—Mercy answered. 'Mos'ly paper trash. Reckon it was. Miss May didn't 'sturb de sarpints nor de tigers.'

'Serpents and tigers and papers!' said the Professor, laughing. 'Well, that proves that I certainly have forgotten what was in the box.'

'What box was it?' Somers inquired now.

'An old packing-case that I left in San Francisco; full of I don't know what, picked up in my trip to the East. Did she find much to burn, Mercy?'

'Dunno, sir. Miss Helen she 'tended to dat in her own room, whar de fire war. De smell war 'nuff for me. Don't see how she could get 'long widout de headache, nohow.'

'Oh, Mercy, *what* did she burn?' cried Pixie.

'Der warn't nuffin to see when I come,' said Mercy. 'Der warn't nuffin dar 'cept de ashes and de smell; and jes' Miss May, white as de wall, wi' dat ar powerful smell a p'isinin' her. So I got de vinegar, and de open winder; and Miss May—she's done gone to bed.'

'Well, do leave her there in peace, and let us have tea,' said Pixie; and the meal went on, Mrs. Thayer also checking her first impulse to go after Helen, and sitting quietly down in her place. And there was no lack of conversation. Pixie discussed chairs, and proposed amendments; keeping the furniture ball in very lively motion; and the others listened and replied, and went on with their own thoughts the while. A vague uneasiness was in Mrs. Thayer's heart; a dim speculation in that of Somers; while the Professor tangled his thoughts more and more with every effort to work them clear.

'I cannot imagine'—so he met Pixie's question about a screen—'what May can have found to burn.'

'Naturally; as you have forgotten what was there,' Somers answered him.

'No, I have not the least idea,' Mr. L'Estrange confessed. 'Things were laid in helter-skelter, I suppose, as I picked them up. It might have been a roll of incense. She might have thought it mere waste sticks.'

'May has better eyes than that,' said Pixie decidedly. 'Oh, Mercy, give me one of those muffins! What did the room smell like when you went in?'

'Like incense?' suggested the Professor.

'Don't know nuffin 'bout no incense,' said Mercy;—'dat ar smell war mos' like wax.'

'Wax? Oh, then she finished off with burning old letters,' said Pixie, dismissing the subject. 'Not your things at all, Professor. And a more headachy piece of work does not exist.'

CHAPTER XLIX.

A CLEAR SKY.

THE old house at Cambridge was soundlessly quiet that night. If thoughts were wakeful they made no noise; if hearts were restless, the owners thereof kept still. And it was not long after the sun came forth from his eastern tabernacle, that the fair mistress of the mansion stepped softly down the stairs and into the breakfast-room. If ever Helen had been fair, and calm, and sweet, she was that morning. It was a face where the day had broken, from which the shadows had fled away. You know the temporary clearings up; the gleams of blue sky so soon to be again overcast; the momentary change of the wind which presently chops round to its old stormy quarter; the short lull, while yet new thunders are rising behind the hill;—this was not so. It was the cleared, washed, spiritualized blue, when the tempest is in truth ended and gone. Helen's brow was as clear, her smile as sweet, the lines of her face as much at rest, as in the days of her ignorant childhood. She looked like a child this morning; and Mercy gazed at her.

'De head's all right; see dat for self;' she made her private comment.'—De heart allays is. But whar's she been? 'Tain't de fire dis time. Reckon de Lord done pass by 'fore her, likes He did to Moses, and tell her all His won'erful names.'

And if the secret remarks of the rest of the family were different from this in word, in thought they were not so far apart. No one cared to question Helen much that morning; nobody said many words about what she

had burned or why she had burned; and even inquiries as to her head were few and simple, and easily disposed of. But on her part Helen was very ready with questions about the day before and the plans for to-morrow. Had they enjoyed themselves? was there much yet to be done? And how soon could the move be made?

'About when the apple blossoms come out,' Pixie said. 'You know you always did like apple blossoms, Helen.' And Helen answered, "Always," and went calmly on with her breakfast. And when breakfast was over she detailed to Mr. L'Estrange the various dispositions she had made of his knick-knacks; and herself saw them placed or packed, as the case might be. The hard-won fight, and all trace of it, had passed away.

And yet I say wrong—one trace remained; for never again did Helen's life come even near the drift into commonplace. From henceforth one thing was changed; —society had found its place, and Helen had found hers. No longer at the beck and call of every invitation; no longer in perpetual debate between her conscience and her husband; no longer even within reach of his mother's uneasy comments;—Helen took her ground once for all, and held it. And yet, as people do like to see other people true to their principles, so Helen still contrived—for the most part—to content everybody. She was so sweet about it all, so gentle, so gracious, that the world almost forgot to call her odd, and said instead 'unique;' really deciding that for young Mrs. L'Estrange, 'first the kingdom' meant only an added charm. But Pixie could make no more flings about what Helen 'used to be;' and in places of mere worldly pleasure and display Helen was seen no more. Yet she kept her friends, and pretty well kept up her acquaintances. With visits skilfully made, with dainty if inexpensive entertainments at home; with the truth of welcome and friendliness and human interest for all. Mrs. Thayer studied her, almost as one of the shining ones come down to earth;—Mercy watched, and was satisfied.

'We's done set out now, for all,' said the girl to herself. 'We's jes' boun' fo' de New Jerusalem, and nowhar's else. De milestones is all turned roun'; and we's nebber look back no mo', nor step aside no mo', till we's dar!'

Meantime they had all moved out to Daisy Plains. Professor L'Estrange had been suddenly sent across seas on some scientific business, and the rest were established in the old house. Pixie's part, indeed, was as new as money and will could make it; with a spacious flower garden and well-kept lawn surrounding the new wing; where now and then a gay garden party came together, or knots of lively friends gathered for afternoon tea. But Helen and Mrs. Thayer, the two children and Mercy, for the most part dwelt peacefully apart from such distractions in the old portion of the house; living very much the sweet old life. Apple blossoms bloomed and dropped, hyacinths came and went; and now, at this time of which I write, from porch and garden and pillar the roses shone. Pixie and Somers had gone away to the seaside for a bit; and on this particular afternoon Mrs. Thayer and the children had gone for a long drive to a certain strawberry meadow, and Helen had tried to insist that Mercy should go too. But it was very seldom indeed that the girl could be persuaded to go anywhere without her younger mistress.

Helen had been out among the roses in the summer-sweet afternoon; and now, as the shadows began to fall cool and long across the greensward, and the birds took on their supper-time hurry and twitter, she came back into the house with thoughts of the tea to be got ready there. Helen's hands were full of roses; and among them a cluster of the same yellow-white beauties that Somers had cut off for her on that morning so long ago. It had been a thorny bush to Helen for many a long day;—one rather shunned, even in later times, when she was gathering her flowers. But now they had regained their sweetness; to-night she had gathered them with

only joy at their exceeding loveliness. She could bear to think—she did think, as she arranged them—of that far away morning when the world had seemed all made over new. It was not that to-night; not in the old sense. But a better thing had come true; for the real and the heavenly and the eternal did so outshine and outnumber the fleeting little affairs of earth, that she looked down upon them all as from a safe, sweet distance.

'Good and acceptable and perfect,' so the apostle declares the will of God to be; and when that is also the speech of your heart, then for you the crooked things of earth are made straight, and the rough places plain. Far above all second causes—when no wrong-doing of our own is concerned—disturbed thoughts spring up and find their rest. Sabeans and Chaldeans, as well as lightning and tempest, had bereaved Job; and sickness and pain had smitten himself; the great adversary was in it all, sharpening, helping, procuring;—but to Job it was all from the hand of God. 'Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?' Job quite declined to take his medicine from any other hand.

And so Helen saw it all to-night. The old joy and sorrow, the old promise and blight. There had lain a shadow on her life, more than she herself had known; but it was gone now. The Lord had delivered her, and she was free. For in life as in death, the word is only: 'Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Helen put her roses in water on the supper-table, brightened up the wood fire in the old sitting-room,—for the early summer night was cool,—and began her preparations for tea. Then, when all was done, but the few last touches, she came back to a seat in the flickering firelight, took up her work, and sat—half idle and half busy—in the warm glow. Suddenly came the sound of wheels; the gate clicked, and Somers came in.

'Oh,—there is nothing the matter?' Helen said, hastening to meet him.

'Nothing whatever.'

'But I thought you were at Nahant?'

'We are—half of us,' said Somers, smiling. 'Pixie is there. But Pixie also left something here, which she wants; and as I had business in Boston, I agreed to come round this way to hunt it up.'

'You will stay here to-night?' Helen asked him.

'Only for tea. How pleasant that fire is! May, this end of the house will always be the best, and the best looking, after all.'

'I am afraid you are growing old-fashioned,' said Helen, smiling. 'This end of the house is more and more out of date every day, Mr. Somers.'

'All depends upon what your dates are,' said the gentleman, setting his chair within comfortable range of the fire heat. 'Mine begins with a wonderful pleasant June evening—let me see—how many years ago, Helen?'

'So many, that you have forgotten,' Helen answered.

'Not forgotten at all; I never forget.' He sat looking at the fire, then turned a little to watch Helen. The firelight flitted about the sweet, pure face, bent down a little over a small stocking she was setting up.

'You have taken to Miss Betsy's trade,' said Somers, watching the deft fingers. Helen was about to say that little feet made it needful; but, remembering that this was a sore point in the Somers household, she changed her words.

'I have learned,' she said, 'that Miss Betsy taught at least one very good lesson.'

'A lesson busy creatures like you never need to learn.'

Again silence fell; but Somers studied the picture before him with increasing fascination. At this particular time of day, Pixie, in full-dress splendour, was at the hotel table at the beach. He looked over Helen's dress now, critically. A soft grey silky stuff, fitting well, and falling in harmonious folds; delicate ruffles at neck and wrists; beautiful hair in beautiful order; the little foot that rested on the rug was less expensively clad than

Pixie's, but with just as much neatness, added to a look of use and service that gave attractions which the other had not. Curiously Somers' thoughts went back to Helen's description of Deacon Post's furniture, 'consecrated.' Yes, her own little shoe had just that sort of 'expression;'—clearly it went nowhere but upon sweet and worthy errands, nor was ever heedlessly idle. Over all the fair presence before him shone a light of sweetness, and strength, and noble life-doing. Somers' eyes went back to the fire, and he fell into a brown study. The fire crackled and flared, Helen's needles moved softly, without Miss Betsy's click. Outside, in the stillness, they could hear Mercy's rich voice; home now from an errand, and busy with the kettle,—

> 'O de New Jerusalem!
> De New Jerusalem!
> 'Pears like I'se homesick for de golden street!'

There was a motion—and yet Helen had not seemed to move; a breath, which yet was not a sigh. Somers turned to her suddenly.

'Helen, I asked you once if you had ever received the book I sent you from Canton?'

A moment's pause, and then Helen answered quietly,

'You asked me, Mr. Somers—and I told you I had not—with thanks.'

'Yes,' he said; 'I remember.' Again he sat watching how the firelight gleamed on her needles; watching the hands that plied them.

'Your hands are *not* in the least like Pixie's!' he said. 'Helen,—if I put the same question over again to-night, would you give me the same answer?'

The stitch Helen was taking off slipped from the needle, and she bent her head a little lower to pick it up; in that brief instant fleeing, like Nehemiah, to the heavenly Court for direction. But there are questions which to refuse is to acknowledge, and this was one;

—and not the Psalmist himself hated 'every false way,' more than Helen. So this pause was hardly longer than the last, before she said,—

'No, I could not.'

'You could not!' Somers cried, starting up;—'then you know? Oh, Helen, what would you have said?'

'Hush, hush!' Helen answered him, gravely now, and looking up from her work, which she dropped in her lap. 'That is no question to be either asked or answered.'

'I was such a fool!' Somers broke forth;—'I never really knew till I was away.'

'Oh, hush!' Helen repeated, a tone of distress in the voice this time. 'Mr. Somers, with all that we have nothing to do. All that happened on some other planet.'

'It happened right here, in Daisy Plains. When I came in to-night I could have called the years a dream. I could have asked you to go off into the orchard for another Bible study.'

'But I should not have gone,' said Helen, forcing her lips into a smile. 'So you see the years do count.'

'And to think of *his* doing it!' Somers went on, not heeding her. 'He!—whom I thought the soul of honour!'

Helen laid her work quite away, and looked up at him with steady eyes.

'He *is*. There is not an honourable man on earth, if Mr. L'Estrange be not one.'

'I used to think so.'

'And you seem to forget that he is my husband, Mr. Somers,' Helen went on.

'On the contrary, that is unfortunately just what I remember.'

'You are very unjust,' said Helen earnestly. 'Mr. L'Estrange did not even know my name in those days. And I doubt if he ever knew to whom the package was addressed.'

'I remember,' said Somers moodily, 'he did not honour

it with a glance when I gave it to him; and I daresay he tossed it into his box in the same way. But oh, Helen, how did this thing happen?'

'You are talking very wildly,' Helen answered him. 'You are talking as no man should talk. You are forgetting what you ought to remember, and remembering —what you ought to forget.'

If the voice fell a little, if the words just made themselves heard in the stillness, they were yet steady, and their tone was clear and sweet as Helen's own eyes. Somers looked at her, threw himself into the chair and bent his brows on the fire; got up and mended it; then sat down again, and listened to a cricket that was chirping its heart out in the corner.

'Words are easy,' he remarked; 'but'—

'We have nothing to do with words,' Helen interrupted him. 'We have to do only with silence. And facts.'

'If you had fed on silence, May, for as many years as I did, you would know that it means—starvation!'

Did she not know? Helen was very near breaking down; again, woman-like, with that swift, keen pang for what he had suffered.

'But there is no question now of starvation,' she reminded him gently; 'only of good work to do, and of opportunities seized; of life well lived and full of praise.'

'For you,' Somers answered. 'I do nothing. You might have stimulated me to it;—once I thought you would.'

'Stimulate her'—Helen said very low; but he went on thinking his own thoughts and thinking them aloud.

'Once I fancied a woman might be too strong in character,—I know better now! Helen, would you have listened to me?'

'What avails it asking?' Helen said in the same low tone. 'It is not a question to ask.'

'And that was my letter you burned! Helen, you might have kept it for what it held. My whole heart was in it.'

'No,' she answered him; 'it was not mine to keep. That letter was for Helen Thayer There is no Helen Thayer in the world. And the letter held nothing. What first it held had been taken out and given away; it was mere waste paper, Mr. Somers, both to you and to me.'

'True,' he said; 'you are right; you are always right. Waste paper, waste hopes, waste time.'

'Waste time to talk about it,' said Helen, with that same gentle steadiness; 'or to think about it, now. But I am sure there can be for us no real waste where there is not our own wrong-doing. Some way, somehow, the Lord will make it good.'

'Helen,' said Somers, looking at her, 'you are like the woman with the alabaster box. What would be waste to other people, with you is all fragrant service.'

There came a flush to Helen's eyes, a great throb at her heart; but with it also a wonderful sense of the sweetness of the will of God. Such a sense as is possible only—as I said—when we have got above second causes, and have taken all that has come, straight from the hand of our Father in heaven.

'The darkness hideth not from Thee, but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to Thee.' And so mistakes were visible, and forgetfulness was known; and yet no angel was sent down, to prevent or to remind. 'Shall not the Judge of the whole earth do right?'

> 'Shall I not trust my God,
> Who doth so well love me?'—

The silence lasted long this time; and the mended fire shone and flickered over two very thoughtful faces. Helen's, in the exquisite calm of her childlike trust; Somers', at first moody, then slowly clearing itself to a grave repose. He was the first to speak.

'I am glad I came to-night, May; I am glad we have had this talk;—for unsettled questions are restless things.

Now, they are done with, for ever;—burned to ashes with the paper that held them. And I, like you, will strive to render "fragrant service;" and to be a better man—and not a worse—for all that has come to us "by the will of God."'

He held out his hand, and for a moment the two hands met. Then Somers rose up.

'Sister Helen,' he said, 'I hear wheels. Will you order in the tea? for I must be in Boston to-night.'

So they went their way, these two, and never by look or word was the subject touched upon again. It was all burnt paper. Yet from that waste ground—if waste it were—came forth precious spoils of closer walking and nobler work. And if earth was held a little looser than it might have been, so did the hold tighten upon heavenly things. Perhaps Helen's sweet face had a look which it might not else have had; perhaps Somers was a graver man;—certainly both knew they had missed their ideal. But both knew also that the real which they had in hand was to be used and invested for the Lord's glory, and so was full of His presence and grace. Intercourse was constant between the two who should have been one; but never any shadow of constraint lay there; it was utterly free, righteous, wholesome, and stimulating. The past was all burnt paper; the present held noblest work to be done for God; the future was a blank sheet on which He should write His will, until earthly things should pass on into the heavenly. And what Mercy had said of her mistress, was in good measure true of Somers as well:

'We's look back no mo', and we's step aside no mo', till we's dar!'—

THE END.

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