James Fenimore Cooper

The Lake Gun and other Stories

original

Джеймс Фенимор Купер

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«РИПОЛ Классик»

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The Lake Gun is a satirical short story by James Fenimore Cooper first published in 1850. The title of the story comes from a mysterious loud exploding sound coming from Seneca Lake, called “The Lake Gun” by European American settlers to the area, and known today as the Seneca Guns. These sounds remain unexplained to this day, with no clear or agreed-upon cause.

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Содержание

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The Lake Gun

The Seneca is remarkable for its "Wandering Jew," and the "Lake Gun." The first is a tree so balanced that when its roots are clear of the bottom it floats with its broken and pointed trunk a few feet above the surface of the water, driving before the winds, or following in the course of the currents. At times, the "Wandering Jew" is seen off Jefferson, near the head of this beautiful sheet; and next it will appear anchored, as it might be, in the shallow water near the outlet.

For more than half a century has this remnant of the forest floated about, from point to point, its bald head whitening with time, until its features have become familiar to all the older inhabitants of that region of country. The great depth of the Seneca prevents it from freezing; and summer and winter, springtime and autumn, is this wanderer to be observed; occasionally battling with the ice that makes a short distance from the shore, now pursuing its quiet way before a mild southern air in June, or, again, anchored, by its roots touching the bottom, as it passes a point, or comes in contact with the flats. It has been known to remain a year or two at a time in view of the village of Geneva, until, accustomed to its sight, the people began to think that it was never to move from its berth any more; but a fresh northerly breeze changes all this; the "Jew" swings to the gale, and, like a ship unmooring, drags clear of the bottom, and goes off to the southward, with its head just high enough above water to be visible. It would seem really that his wanderings are not to cease as long as wood will float.

No white man can give the history of this "Jew." He was found laving his sides in the pure waters of the Seneca by the earliest settlers, and it may have been ages since his wanderings commenced. When they are to cease is a secret in the womb of time.

The "Lake Gun" is a mystery. It is a sound resembling the explosion of a heavy piece of artillery, that can be accounted for by none of the known laws of nature. The report is deep, hollow, distant, and imposing. The lake seems to be speaking to the surrounding hills, which send back the echoes of its voice in accurate reply. No satisfactory theory has ever been broached to explain these noises. Conjectures have been hazarded about chasms, and the escape of compressed air by the sudden admission of water; but all this is talking at random, and has probably no foundation in truth. The most that can be said is, that such sounds are heard, though at long intervals, and that no one as yet has succeeded in ascertaining their cause.

It is not many lustrums since curiosity induced an idler, a traveler, and one possessed of much attainment derived from journeys in distant lands, first to inquire closely into all the traditions connected with these two peculiarities of the Seneca, and, having thus obtained all he could, to lead him to make the tour of the entire lake, in the hope of learning more by actual personal observation. He went up and down in the steamboat; was much gratified with his trip, but could see or hear nothing to help him in his investigation. The "Gun" had not been heard in a long time, and no one could tell him what had become of the "Wandering Jew." In vain did his eyes roam over the broad expanse of water; they could discover nothing to reward their search. There was an old man in the boat, of the name of Peter, who had passed his life on the Seneca, and to him was our traveler referred, as the person most likely to gratify his curiosity. Fuller (for so we shall call the stranger for the sake of convenience) was not slow to profit by this hint, and was soon in amicable relations with the tough, old, freshwater mariner. A half-eagle opportunely bestowed opened all the stores of Peter's lore; and he professed himself ready to undertake a cruise, even, for the especial purpose of hunting up the "Jew."

"I haven't seen that ere crittur now" – Peter always spoke of the tree as if it had animal life – "these three years. We think he doesn't like the steamboats. The very last time I seed the old chap he was a-goin' up afore a smart norwester, and we was a-comin' down with the wind in our teeth, when I made out the 'Jew,' about a mile, or, at most, a mile and a half ahead of us, and right in our track. I remember that I said to myself, says I, 'Old fellow, we'll get a sight of your countenance this time.' I suppose you know, sir, that the 'Jew' has a face just like a human?"

"I did not know that; but what became of the tree?"

"Tree," answered Peter, shaking his head, "why, can't we cut a tree down in the woods, saw it and carve it as we will, and make it last a hundred years? What become of the tree, sir; – why, as soon as the 'Jew' saw we was a-comin' so straight upon him, what does the old chap do but shift his helm, and make for the west shore. You never seed a steamer leave sich a wake, or make sich time. If he went half a knot, he went twenty!"

This little episode rather shook Fuller's faith in Peter's accuracy; but it did not prevent his making an arrangement by which he and the old man were to take a cruise in quest of the tree, after having fruitlessly endeavored to discover in what part of the lake it was just then to be seen.

"Some folks pretend he's gone down," said Peter, in continuation of a discourse on the subject, as he flattened in the sheets of a very comfortable and rather spacious sailboat, on quitting the wharf of Geneva, "and will never come up ag'in. But they may just as well tell me that the sky is coming down, and that we may set about picking up the larks. That 'Jew' will no more sink than a well-corked bottle will sink."

This was the opinion of Peter. Fuller cared but little for it, though he still fancied he might make his companion useful in hunting up the object of his search. These two strangely-assorted companions cruised up and down the Seneca for a week, vainly endeavoring to find the "Wandering Jew." Various were the accounts they gleaned from the different boatmen. One had heard he was to be met with off this point; another, in that bay: all believed he might be found, though no one had seen him lately – some said, in many years.

"He'll turn up," said Peter, positively, "or the Seneca would go down bows foremost. We shall light on the old chap when we least expect it."

It must be confessed that Peter had many sufficient reasons for entertaining these encouraging hopes. He was capitally fed, had very little more to do than to ease off, or flatten in a sheet, the boat being too large to be rowed; and cigars, and liquors of various sorts were pretty much at his command, for the obvious reason that they were under his care. In delivering his sentiments, however, Peter was reasonably honest, for he had the most implicit faith, not only in the existence of this "Jew," but in the beneficent influence of his visits. His presence was universally deemed a sign of good luck.

Fuller passed most of the nights in a comfortable bed, leaving Peter in the boat; sometimes asking for lodgings in a farm-house, and, at others, obtaining them in an inn. Wherever he might be, he inquired about the "Wandering Jew" and the "Lake Gun," bent on solving these two difficult problems, if possible, and always with the same success. Most persons had seen the former, but not lately; while about one in ten had heard the latter. It occurred to our traveler that more of the last were to be found nearer to the northern than to the southern end of the lake.

The cruise continued a fortnight in this desultory manner, with the same want of success. One morning, as Fuller was returning to the boat, after passing the night in a farm-house, he was struck by the statue-like appearance of a figure which stood on the extreme point of a low, rocky promontory, that was considerably aside from any dwelling or building. The place was just at the commencement of the hill country, and where the shores of the Seneca cease to offer those smiling pictures of successful husbandry that so much abound farther north. A somber, or it might be better to say a sober, aspect gave dignity to the landscape, which, if not actually grand, had, at least, most of the elements that characterize the noble in nature.

But Fuller, at the moment, was less struck with the scenery, charming as that certainly was, than with the statue-like and immovable form on the little promontory. A single tree shaded the spot where the stranger stood, but it cast its shadows toward the west, at that early hour, leaving the erect and chiseled form in clear sun-light. Stimulated by curiosity, and hoping to learn something that might aid him in his search from one as curious as himself, Fuller turned aside, and, instead of descending to the spot where Peter had the boat ready for his reception, he crossed a pleasant meadow, in the direction of the tree.

Several times did our traveler stop to gaze on that immovable form. A feeling of superstition came over him when he saw that not the smallest motion, nor relief of limb or attitude, was made for the ten minutes that his eye had rested on the singular and strange object. At he drew nearer, however, the outlines became more and more distinct, and he fancied that the form was actually naked. Then the truth became apparent: it was a native of the forest, in his summer garb, who had thrown aside his blanket, and stood in his leggings, naked. Phidias could not have cut in stone a more faultless form; for active, healthful youth had given to it the free and noble air of manly but modest independence.

"Sago," said Fuller, drawing near to the young Indian, who did not betray surprise or emotion of any sort, as the stranger's foot-fall came unexpectedly on his ear, using the salutation of convention, as it is so generally practiced between the two races. The Indian threw forward an arm with dignity, but maintained his erect and otherwise immovable attitude.

"Oneida?" demanded Fuller, while he doubted if any young warrior of that half-subdued tribe could retain so completely the air and mien of the great forests and distant prairies.

"Seneca," was the simple answer. The word was uttered in a tone so low and melancholy that it sounded like saddened music. Nothing that Fuller had ever before heard conveyed so much meaning so simply, and in so few syllables. It illuminated the long vista of the past, and cast a gloomy shadow into that of the future, alluding to a people driven from their haunts, never to find another resting-place on earth. That this young warrior so meant to express himself – not in an abject attempt to extort sympathy, but in the noble simplicity of a heart depressed by the fall of his race – Fuller could not doubt; and every generous feeling of his soul was enlisted in behalf of this young Indian.

"Seneca," he repeated slowly, dropping his voice to something like the soft, deep tones of the other; "then you are in your own country, here?"

"My country," answered the red man, coldly, "no; my FATHER'S country, yes."

His English was good, denoting more than a common education, though it had a slightly foreign or peculiar accent. The intonations of his voice were decidedly those of the Indian.

"You have come to visit the land of your fathers?"

A slight wave of the hand was the reply. All this time the young Seneca kept his eye fastened in one direction, apparently regarding some object in the lake. Fuller could see nothing to attract this nearly riveted gaze, though curiosity induced him to make the effort.

"You admire this sheet of water, by the earnest manner in which you look upon it?" observed Fuller.

"See!" exclaimed the Indian, motioning toward a point near a mile distant. "He moves! may be he will come here."

"Moves! I see nothing but land, water, and sky. What moves?"

"The Swimming Seneca. For a thousand winters he is to swim in the waters of this lake. Such is the tradition of my people. Five hundred winters are gone by since he was thrown into the lake; five hundred more must come before he will sink. The curse of the Manitou is on him. Fire will not burn him; water will not swallow him up; the fish will not go near him; even the accursed axe of the settler can not cut him into chips! There he floats, and must float, until his time is finished!"

"You must mean the 'Wandering. Jew?'"

"So the pale-faces call him; but he was never a Jew. 'Tis a chief of the Senecas, thrown into the lake by the Great Spirit, for his bad conduct. Whenever he tries to get upon the land, the Spirit speaks to him from the caves below, and he obeys."

"THAT must mean the 'Lake Gun?'"

"So the pale-faces call it. It is not strange that the names of the red man and of the pale-faces should differ."

"The races are not the same, and each has its own traditions. I wish to hear what the Senecas say about this floating tree; but first have the goodness to point it out to me."

The young Indian did as Fuller requested. Aided by the keener vision of the red man, our traveler at length got a glimpse of a distant speck on the water, which his companion assured him was the object of their mutual search. He himself had been looking for the "Jew" a week, but had asked no assistance from others, relying on the keenness of his sight and the accuracy of his traditions. That very morning he had first discovered the speck on the water, which he now pointed out to his companion.

"You think, then, that yonder object is the 'Wandering Jew?'" asked Fuller.

"It is the Swimming Seneca. Five hundred winters has he been obliged to keep in the chilled waters of the lake; in five hundred more the Manitou will let him rest on its bottom."

"What was the offense that has drawn down upon this chief so severe a punishment?"

"Listen to our traditions, and you shall know. When the Great Spirit created man, He gave him laws to obey, and duties to perform – "

"Excuse me, Seneca, but your language is so good that I hardly know what to make of you."

An almost imperceptible smile played about the compressed lip of the young Indian, who, at first, seemed disposed to evade an explanation; but, on reflection, he changed his purpose, and communicated to Fuller the outlines of a very simple, and, by no means, unusual history. He was a chief of the highest race in his tribe, and had been selected to receive the education of a pale-face at one of the colleges of that people. He had received a degree, and, yielding to the irrepressible longings of what might almost be termed his nature, he no sooner left the college in which he had been educated, than he resumed the blanket and leggings, under the influence of early recollections, and a mistaken appreciation of the comparative advantages between the civilized condition, and those of a life passed in the forest and on the prairies. In this respect our young Seneca resembles the white American, who, after a run of six months in Europe, returns home with the patriotic declaration in his mouth, that his native land is preferable to all other lands. Fuller soon understood the case, when both reverted to their common object in coming thither. The young Seneca thereupon resumed his explanation.

"These laws of the Great Spirit," continued the Seneca, "were not difficult to obey so long as the warrior was of a humble mind, and believed himself inferior to the Manitou, who had fashioned him with His hands, and placed him between the Seneca and the Cayuga, to hunt the deer and trap the beaver. But See-wise was one of those who practiced arts that you pale-faces condemn, while you submit to them. He was a demagogue among the red men, and set up the tribe in opposition to the Manitou."

"How," exclaimed Fuller, "did the dwellers in the forest suffer by such practices?"

"Men are every where the same, let the color, or the tribe, or the country be what it may. It was a law of our people, one which tradition tells us came direct from the Great Spirit, that the fish should be taken only in certain seasons, and for so many moons. Some thought this law was for the health of the people; others, that it was to enable the fish to multiply for the future. All believed it wise, because it came from the Manitou, and had descended to the tribe through so many generations: all but See-wise. He said that an Indian ought to fish when and where he pleased; that a warrior was not a woman; that the spear and the hook had been given to him to be used, like the bow and arrow, and that none but cowardly Indians would scruple to take the fish when they wished. Such opinions pleased the common Indians, who love to believe themselves greater than they are. See-wise grew bolder by success, until he dared to say in council, that the red men made the world themselves, and for themselves, and that they could do with it what they pleased. He saw no use in any night; it was inconvenient; an Indian could sleep in the light as well as in the darkness; there was to be eternal day; then the hunt could go on until the deer was killed, or the bear treed. The young Indians liked such talk. They loved to be told they were the equals of the Great Spirit. They declared that See-wise should be their principal chief. See-wise opened his ears wide to this talk, and the young men listened to his words as they listened to the song of the mocking-bird. They liked each other, because

they praised each other. It is sweet to be told that we are better and wiser than all around us. It is sweet to the red man; the pale-faces may have more sober minds"

The Seneca paused an instant, and Fuller fancied that a smile of irony again struggled about his compressed lip. As the traveler made no remark, however, the youthful warrior resumed his tale.

"I hear a great deal of what demagogues are doing among your people, and of the evil they produce. They begin by flattering, and end by ruling. He carries a strong hand, who makes all near him help to uphold it. In the crowd few perceive its weight until it crushes them.

"Thus was it with See-wise. Half the young men listened to him, and followed in his trail. The aged chiefs took counsel together. They saw that all the ancient traditions were despised, and that new conduct was likely to come in with new opinions. They were too old to change. What was done has never been said, but See-wise disappeared. It was whispered that he had gone down among the fish he loved to take out of season. There is one tradition, that he speared an enormous salmon, and the fish, in its struggles, drew him out of his canoe, and that his hands could not let go of the handle of his spear. Let this be as it may, no one ever saw See-wise any more, in the form in which he had been known to his people. At length the trunk of a tree was seen floating about the Seneca, and one of the oldest of the chiefs, pointing to it, pronounced the name of 'See-wise.' He would fish out of season, and his spirit is condemned, they say, to float among the salmon, and trout, and eels, for a thousand winters. It was not long after this that the lake began to speak, in a voice loud as the thunder from the clouds. The Seneca traditions say this is the Manitou calling to See-wise, when he goes down after the fish, out of season."

"And do you, an educated man, believe in this tale?" asked Fuller.

"I can not say. The things learned in childhood remain the longest on the memory. They make the deepest marks. I have seen the evil that a demagogue can do among the pale-faces; why should I not believe the same among my own people?"

"This is well enough, as respects the curse on the demagogue; but lakes do not usually"

Fuller had got thus far, when the Seneca, as if in mockery, emitted the sound that has obtained the name of the "Lake Gun" among those who have lived on its banks in these later times. Perhaps it was, in part, the influence of the Seneca's legend, united to the opinions and statements of the inhabitants of that region, which conspired to make our traveler start, in awe and surprise; for, certainly, the deep-mouthed cannon never gave forth a more impressive and sudden concussion on the ear.

"It does, indeed, sound very like a gun!" said Fuller, after a long pause had enabled him to speak.

"It is the voice of the Great Spirit, forbidding See-wise to fish," answered the Seneca. "For a time the demagogue has all the talking to himself, but, sooner or later, the voice of truth is heard, which is the voice of the Manitou. But I must go nearer to the tree – ha! what has become of it?"

Fuller looked, and, sure enough, the speck on the water had vanished. This might have been by an unobserved movement in a current; or it might have been owing to a sudden variation in the light; certain it was, no tree could now be seen. Fuller then proposed to use his boat, in endeavoring to get nearer to the "Jew." The Seneca gave a very cheerful assent, and, throwing his light summer blanket, with an air of manly grace, over a shoulder, he followed to the water-side.

"Most red men," resumed the young warrior, as he took his place in the boat, "would see something marvelous in this appearance and disappearance of the swimming Seneca, and would hesitate about going any nearer to him; but this is not my feeling – error is strengthened by neglecting to look into truth. I hope yet to go near See-wise."

Fuller hardly knew what to think of his companion's credulity. At times he appeared to defer to the marvelous and the traditions of his tribe; then, again, the lights of education would seem to gleam upon the darkness of his superstition, and leave him a man of inductive reason. As for himself, he was probably not altogether as much of the last as his pride of race would have led him to hope.

Peter had seen nothing, but he had heard the "Gun."

"'T was a mere flash in the pan to what I have heard, when the lake is in 'arnest," said the old fellow, with the love of exaggeration so common with the vulgar. "Still, it was a gun."

"A signal that the 'Wandering Jew' is near by; so, haul aft the sheets, and let us depart."

In a quarter of an hour the boat was lying with her foresheet hauled over, and her helm down, within a hundred yards of the object of the long search of the whole party. It was deep water, and a slight ripple under what might be termed the cutwater of the tree indicated a movement. Perhaps a lower current forced forward the roots, which, in their turn, urged the trunk ahead. As often happens in such cases, the accidental formation of the original fracture, aided by the action of the weather, had given to the end of the trunk a certain resemblance to a human countenance. Peter was the first to point out the peculiarity, which he looked upon uneasily. Fuller soon observed it, and said the aspect was, in sooth, that of a demagogue. The forehead retreated, the face was hatchet-shaped, while the entire expression was selfish, yet undecided. As for the Seneca, he gazed on these signs with wonder, mingled with awe.

"We see here the wicked See-wise. The Great Spirit – call him Manitou, or call him God – does not forget what is wrong, or what is right. The wicked may flourish for a while, but there is a law that is certain to bring him within the power of punishment. Evil spirits go up and down among us, but there is a limit they can not pass. But Indians like this Swimming Seneca do much harm. They mislead the ignorant, arouse evil passions, and raise themselves into authority by their dupes. The man who tells the people their faults is a truer friend than he who harps only on their good qualities. Be that only a tree, or be it a man bound in this form, for a thousand winters, by the hand of the Great Spirit, it tells the same story. See-wise did once live. His career comes to us in traditions, and we believe all that our fathers told us. Accursed be the man who deceives, and who opens his mouth only to lie! Accursed, too, is the land that neglects the counsels of the fathers to follow those of the sons!"

"There is a remarkable resemblance between this little incident in the history of the Senecas and events that are passing among our pale-faced race of the present age. Men who, in their hearts, really care no more for mankind than See-wise cared for the fish, lift their voices in shouts of a spurious humanity, in order to raise themselves to power, on the shoulders of an excited populace. Bloodshed, domestic violence, impracticable efforts to attain an impossible perfection, and all the evils of a civil conflict are forgotten or blindly attempted, in order to raise themselves in the arms of those they call the people."

"I know your present condition," answered the young Seneca, openly smiling. "The Manitou may have ordered it for your good. Trust to HIM. There are days in which the sun is not seen – when a lurid darkness brings a second night over the earth. It matters not. The great luminary is always there. There may be clouds before his face, but the winds will blow them away. The man or the people that trust in God will find a lake for every See-wise."

Tales for Fifteen: Or, Imagination and Heart

Introduction

On 1 February 1823 Charles Wiley published in New York *The Pioneers*, a new book by the author of *The Spy*; by noon he had sold 3,500 copies – a record-making sale by the bookselling standards of the time. On 26 June, almost five months later, Wiley quietly offered, as we know from a notice in The Patriot, a New York newspaper, "*Tales for Fifteen, or Imagination and Heart*, an original work in one volume, by Jane Morgan, price 75c." The actual author was the author of *The Spy*; and the two stories, "Imagination" and "Heart," were obviously imitations of Mrs. Amelia Opie's popular moral tales, published, as the paper cover noted, when *The Spy* was in its fourth edition, *The Pioneers* in its third, and *The Pilot* in press. The sale was so small that only four copies are known to be extant. Why, one may ask, did James Cooper, who was in 1823 a writer of national and international reputation, publish this volume of imitative stories for adolescent girls, even though his identity was carefully concealed?

According to Cooper's own account, *Tales for Fifteen* was written and given to Charles Wiley as a gesture of friendship to help the publisher out of financial difficulties. This explanation was echoed by the novelist's daughter Susan in a letter reprinted from the Cooperstown *Freeman's Journal* in *The Critic* on 12 October 1889. It is true that Wiley was having financial troubles in 1823, and Cooper undoubtedly gave him the proceeds from *Tales for Fifteen*; but to suppose, as full acceptance of this explanation requires, that Cooper reverted, even momentarily, to the repudiated literary models of his first book *Precaution* after the phenomenal success of *The Spy* would be to infer in him an almost total want of critical judgment and common sense. The real explanation, which Cooper might have been embarrassed to furnish and which the chronology of publication has obscured, lies in a hitherto unsuspected phase of the curious story of Cooper's entrance to authorship.

Cooper wrote Andrew Thompson Goodrich, his first publisher, on 31 May 1820, that *Precaution* had been preceded by an experimental effort to write a short moral tale. Mrs. Opie's *Simple Tales* (1807) and *Tales of Real Life* (1813) would have been among the obvious models. Finding the tale "swell to a rather unwieldy size," Cooper explained, "I destroy'd the manuscript and changed it to a novel." *Precaution*, which was completed on 12 June 1820, was probably written within a month; and before the novel had begun its tortuous way through the press, Cooper commenced the writing of *The Spy*. By 28 June he had completed "about sixty pages," presumably manuscript pages; and as the writing proceeded and his enthusiasm for the new work mounted, his expectations for the success of *Precaution* diminished. He wrote Goodrich on 12 July: "The 'Spy' goes on slowly and will not be finish'd until late in the fall – I take more pains with it – as it is to be an American novel professedly." In fact, The Spy was completed only a short time before its publication in New York on 22 December 1821.

During the eighteen months between the inception and publication of *The Spy* Cooper saw *Precaution* through the press, joined the New York literary circle which frequented Charles Wiley's bookshop, transferred his publishing business to Wiley, wrote three or four long book reviews for his friend Charles K. Gardner's *Literary and Scientific Repository*, finished *The Spy*, and commenced *The Pioneers*. While the period was, thus, not devoid of literary activity, it was, as the 1831 Preface to *The Spy* confessed, a period of acute uncertainty. Having discovered his literary talent, Cooper had yet to discover how to use it profitably, had indeed to be reassured of its true direction. He could not afford to write at all unless he could make his new profession pay handsomely. *Precaution* had been a deliberate attempt to produce a bestseller, and it succeeded only moderately. As the Preface to the first edition of *The Spy* indicates, Cooper experienced severe self-doubts and self-questionings

about this experiment. For an extended period, most probably during the first six months of 1821, he abandoned work on *The Spy*, which had been noticed as in press in the January issue of the *Repository*, fearing that the book could not succeed. It was almost certainly during this time that he conceived and partly executed another literary project of which *Tales for Fifteen* is the abortive remains.

As Cooper's hopes for *The Spy* faded, his confidence in the viability of the type of imitative writing he had attempted in *Precaution*appears to have revived. *Precaution* was reviewed in a most laudatory manner in the *Repository* for January 1821, and the comment accompanying the notice of publication in the *Repository* was: "We only regret that the scene of this novel was not laid in America." Whether Cooper persuaded himself or allowed himself to be persuaded by Wiley, Gardner, and other friends, he seems to have decided that his mistake in *Precaution* was not so much the choice of models as the choice of setting. Why not employ an American setting and continue his imitation of the British women? During 1820 Wiley, Goodrich, and William B. Gilley had jointly published a collection of Mrs. Opie's stories called *Tales of the Heart*; apparently they found it profitable. Accordingly, Cooper planned a series of stories which Wiley noticed as in press in the *Repository* for May 1822 and which he described as "*American Tales*, by a Lady, viz. Imagination – Heart – Matter – Manner – Matter and Manner. 2 vols. 18 mo. Wiley and Halsted, New York." A briefer announcement had appeared earlier, in the October 1821 issue of the *Repository*, although *The Spy*, which was certainly in press, was not noticed. In his letter of 7 January 1822 congratulating Cooper on the great success of *The Spy*, Wiley observed: "You speak of being engaged about 'the Pioneer.' – Have you forgotten 'the American Tales,' which were commenced by a certain lady a long time ago?"

What happened, evidently, was that Cooper's interest in *The Spy* had revived with such force that he had gone on to complete that book and to begin *The Pioneers*. Wiley's problem was then to persuade his reluctant author to complete a work in which he had lost interest but which was in press. Wiley was not successful. The three final tales, "Manner," "Matter," and "Manner and Matter," were never written. Eventually the publisher prevailed on Cooper to bring "Heart," the second of the stories, to a hurried conclusion. The author, probably happy to settle the matter, then wrote a coy Preface alluding mysteriously to "unforeseen circumstances" which had prevented the completion of the series, and gave the two stories to Wiley on the condition that their authorship be concealed. Thus *The American Tales* became *Tales for Fifteen*. A more eloquent criticism by the author could hardly be wished.

When Cooper permitted "Imagination" and "Heart" to be reprinted in 1841, he was again conferring a favor on a publisher. Towards the close of 1840 George Roberts, publisher and proprietor of the *Boston Notion*, subtitled without exaggeration "The Mammoth Sheet of the World," sent Cooper a circular letter in the hand of a clerk to request a short contribution suitable for his new publication, *Roberts' Semi-Monthly Magazine*. Normally, Cooper refused all such requests: but he was under the erroneous impression that Roberts had forwarded to him some Danish translations of his works which Longfellow had sent to America for him a few years before. Remembering these early stories, he replied to Roberts on 2 January 1841: "Some fifteen or twenty years since my publisher became embarrassed, and I wrote two short tales to aid him. He printed them, under the title of *Tales for Fifteen*, by Jane Morgan. One of these stories, rather a feeble one I fear, was called Heart – the other Imagination. This tale was written one rainy day, half asleep and half awake, but I retain rather a favorable impression of it. If you can find a copy of the book, you might think Imagination worth reprinting, and I suppose there can *now* be no objection to it. It would have the freshness of novelty, and would be American enough, Heaven knows. It would fill three or four of your columns."

Cooper owned no copy of *Tales for Fifteen*; but the resourceful publisher found a copy in New York, and "Imagination" filled almost the whole of the front page (approximately 60 by 34-1/2 inches) of the *Boston Notion* on 30 January 1841. It was reprinted in what was apparently a second edition of *Roberts' Semi-Monthly Magazine* for 1 and 15 February 1841 and in London in William Hazlitt's *Romanticist and Novelist's Library*. A subsequent request brought permission for the reprinting of

"Heart," which appeared in the *Boston Notion* for 13 and 20 March 1841 and in *Roberts' Semi-Monthly Magazine* for 1 and 15 April 1841. Roberts expressed his gratitude by defending Cooper in his paper from the charge of aristocratic bias which some New York journalists had brought against *Home As Found*. Doubtless the publisher would have been pleased to find other American writers sufficiently democratic to provide free copy.

Tales for Fifteen owes most of its interest today to its crucial position in the Cooper canon. The literary value of "Imagination" and "Heart," as their author realized, is slight. They were essentially experiments in which he sought to deploy indigenous materials within the conventions of British domestic fiction. "Imagination," with its sprightly observation of American middle-class vulgarities, betrays a satiric awareness that Cooper did later develop; but "Heart" is a forced sentimental indulgence of a sort he never permitted by preference in later works, though he sometimes tolerated it as a concession to feminine readers. For Cooper the chief significance of these stories was that they demonstrated forcibly, if demonstration was necessary, that neither the characteristic materials nor the characteristic forms employed by the British women were congenial to his imagination. His failure was altogether fortunate; for had *The American Tales* been completed and published instead of *The Spy*, Cooper's career and the course of much of American literature might have been different.

First editions of *Tales for Fifteen* are the rarest of all Cooper "firsts." The four copies presently known are in the Cooper Collection of the Yale University Library, the American Antiquarian Society, the J. K. Lilly Collection of Indiana University, and the New York Society Library.

James Franklin Beard
Clark University

Southern District of New-York.

Be it remembered, That on the thirteenth day of June, in the forty-seventh year of the Independence of the United States of America, Charles Wiley, of the said District, hath deposited in this office the title of a Book, the right whereof he claims as proprietor, in the words and figures following, to wit:

"Tales for Fifteen; or Imagination and Heart. By Jane Morgan."

In conformity to the Act of Congress of the United States entitled, "An Act for the encouragement of Learning, by securing the copies of Maps, Charts, and Books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned." And also to an Act, entitled "an Act, supplementary to an Act, entitled an Act for the encouragement of Learning, by securing the copies of Maps, Charts, and Books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned, and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving, and etching historical and other prints."

JAMES DILL,
Clerk of the Southern District of New-York

Preface

When the author of these little tales commenced them, it was her intention to form a short series of such stories as, it was hoped, might not be entirely without moral advantage; but unforeseen circumstances have prevented their completion, and, unwilling to delay the publication any longer, she commits them to the world in their present unfinished state, without any flattering anticipations of their reception. They are intended for the perusal of young women, at that tender age when the feelings of their nature begin to act on them most insidiously, and when their minds are least prepared by reason and experience to contend with their passions.

“Heart” was intended for a much longer tale, and is unavoidably incomplete; but it is unnecessary to point out defects that even the juvenile reader will soon detect. The author only hopes that if they do no good, her tales will, at least, do no harm.

Imagination

Chapter I

I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again:
Mine ear is much enamoured of thy note,
So is mine eye enthralled to thy shape;
And thy fair virtue's force perforce doth move me,
On the first view, to say, to swear, I love thee.

Midsummer Night's Dream.

"Do – do write to me often, my dear Anna!" said the weeping Julia Warren, on parting, for the first time since their acquaintance, with the young lady whom she had honoured with the highest place in her affections. "Think how dreadfully solitary and miserable I shall be here, without a single companion, or a soul to converse with, now you are to be removed two hundred miles into the wilderness."

"Oh! trust me, my love, I shall not forget you now or ever," replied her friend, embracing the other slightly, and, perhaps, rather hastily for so tender an adieu; at the same time glancing her eye on the figure of a youth, who stood in silent contemplation of the scene. "And doubt not but I shall soon tire you with my correspondence, especially as I more than suspect it will be subjected to the criticisms of Mr. Charles Weston." As she concluded, the young lady curtisied to the youth in a manner that contradicted, by its flattery, the forced irony of her remark.

"Never, my dear girl!" exclaimed Miss Warren with extreme fervour. "The confidence of our friendship is sacred with me, and nothing, no, nothing, could ever tempt me to violate such a trust. Charles is very kind and very indulgent to all my whims, but he never could obtain such an influence over me as to become the depositary of my secrets. Nothing but a friend, like yourself, can do that, my dear Anna."

"Never! Miss Warren," said the youth with a lip that betrayed by its tremulous motion the interest he took in her speech – "never includes a long period of time. But," he added with a smile of good-humoured pleasantry, "if admitted to such a distinction, I should not feel myself competent to the task of commenting on so much innocence and purity, as I know I should find in your correspondence."

"Yes," said Anna, with a little of the energy of her friend's manner, "you may with truth say so, Mr. Weston. The imagination of my Julia is as pure as – as" but turning her eyes from the countenance of Julia to that of the youth, rather suddenly, the animated pleasure she saw delineated in his expressive, though plain features, drove the remainder of the speech from her recollection.

"As her heart!" cried Charles Weston with emphasis.

"As her heart, Sir," repeated the young lady coldly.

The last adieus were hastily exchanged, and Anna Miller was handed into her father's gig by Charles Weston in profound silence. Miss Emmerson, the maiden aunt of Julia, withdrew from the door, where she had been conversing with Mr. Miller, and the travellers departed. Julia followed the vehicle with her eyes until it was hid by the trees and shrubbery that covered the lawn, and then withdrew to her room to give vent to a sorrow that had sensibly touched her affectionate heart, and in no trifling degree haunted her lively imagination.

As Miss Emmerson by no means held the good qualities of the guest, who had just left them, in so high an estimation as did her niece, she proceeded quietly and with great composure in the

exercise of her daily duties; not in the least suspecting the real distress that, from a variety of causes, this sudden separation had caused to her ward.

The only sister of this good lady had died in giving birth to a female infant, and the fever of 1805 had, within a very few years of the death of the mother, deprived the youthful orphan of her remaining parent. Her father was a merchant, just commencing the foundations of what would, in time, have been a large estate; and as both Miss Emmerson and her sister were possessed of genteel independencies, and the aunt had long declared her intention of remaining single, the fortune of Julia, if not brilliant, was thought rather large than otherwise. Miss Emmerson had been educated immediately after the war of the revolution, and at a time when the intellect of the women of this country by no means received that attention it is thought necessary to bestow on the minds of the future mothers of our families at the present hour; and when, indeed, the country itself required too much of the care of her rulers and patriots to admit of the consideration of lesser objects. With the best of hearts and affections devoted to the welfare of her niece, Miss Emmerson had early discovered her own incompetency to the labour of fitting Julia for the world in which she was to live, and shrunk with timid modesty from the arduous task of preparing herself, by application and study, for this sacred duty. The fashions of the day were rapidly running into the attainment of accomplishments among the young of her own sex, and the piano forte was already sending forth its sonorous harmony from one end of the Union to the other, while the glittering usefulness of the tambour-frame was discarded for the pallet and brush. The walls of our mansions were beginning to groan with the sickly green of imaginary fields, that caricatured the beauties of nature; and skies of sunny brightness, that mocked the golden hues of even an American sun. The experience of Miss Emmerson went no further than the simple evolutions of the country dance, or the deliberate and dignified procession of the minuet. No wonder, therefore, that her faculties were bewildered by the complex movements of the cotillion: and, in short, as the good lady daily contemplated the improvements of the female youth around her, she became each hour more convinced of her own inability to control, or in any manner to superintend, the education of her orphan niece. Julia was, consequently, entrusted to the government of a select boarding-school; and, as even the morals of the day were, in some degree, tinctured with the existing fashions, her mind as well as her manners were absolutely submitted to the discretion of an hireling. Notwithstanding this willing concession of power on the part of Miss Emmerson, there was no deficiency in ability to judge between right and wrong in her character; but the homely nature of her good sense, unassisted by any confidence in her own powers, was unable to compete with the dazzling display of accomplishments which met her in every house where she visited; and if she sometimes thought that she could not always discover much of the useful amid this excess of the agreeable, she rather attributed the deficiency to her own ignorance than to any error in the new system of instruction. From the age of six to that of sixteen, Julia had no other communications with Miss Emmerson than those endearments which neither could suppress, and a constant and assiduous attention on the part of the aunt to the health and attire of her niece.

Miss Emmerson had a brother residing in the city of New-York, who was a man of eminence at the bar, and who, having been educated fifty years ago, was, from that circumstance, just so much superior to his successors of his own sex by twenty years, as his sisters were the losers from the same cause. The family of Mr. Emmerson was large, and, besides several sons, he had two daughters, one of whom remained still unmarried in the house of her father. Katherine Emmerson was but eighteen months the senior of Julia Warren; but her father had adopted a different course from that which was ordinarily pursued with girls of her expectations. He had married a woman of sense, and now reaped the richest blessing of such a connexion in her ability to superintend the education of her daughter. A mother's care was employed to correct errors that a mother's tenderness could only discover; and in the place of general systems, and comprehensive theories, was substituted the close and rigorous watchfulness which adapted the remedy to the disease; which studied the disposition; and which knew the failings or merits of the pupil, and could best tell when to reward, and how to

punish. The consequences were easily to be seen in the manners and character of their daughter. Her accomplishments, even where a master had been employed in their attainment, were naturally displayed, and suited to her powers. Her manners, instead of the artificial movements of prescribed rules, exhibited the chaste and delicate modesty of refinement, mingled with good principles – such as were not worn in order to be in character as a woman and a lady, but were deeply seated, and formed part, not only of her habits, but, if we may use the expression, of her nature also. Miss Emmerson had good sense enough to perceive the value of such an acquaintance for her ward; but, unfortunately for her wish to establish an intimacy between her nieces, Julia had already formed a friendship at school, and did not conceive her heart was large enough to admit two at the same time to its sanctuary. How much Julia was mistaken the sequel of our tale will show.

So long as Anna Miller was the inmate of the school, Julia was satisfied to remain also, but the father of Anna having determined to remove to an estate in the interior of the country, his daughter was taken from school; and while the arrangements were making for the reception of the family on the banks of the Gennessee, Anna was permitted to taste, for a short time, the pleasures of the world, at the residence of Miss Emmerson on the banks of the Hudson.

Charles Weston was a distant relative of the good aunt, and was, like Julia, an orphan, who was moderately endowed with the goods of fortune. He was a student in the office of her uncle, and being a great favourite with Miss Emmerson, spent many of his leisure hours, during the heats of the summer, in the retirement of her country residence.

Whatever might be the composure of the maiden aunt, while Julia was weeping in her chamber over the long separation that was now to exist between herself and her friend, young Weston by no means displayed the same philosophic indifference. He paced the hall of the building with rapid steps, cast many a longing glance at the door of his cousin's room, and then seated himself with an apparent intention to read the volume he held in his hands; nor did he in any degree recover his composure until Julia re-appeared on the landing of the stairs, moving slowly towards their bottom, when, taking one long look at her lovely face, which was glowing with youthful beauty, and if possible more charming from the traces of tears in her eyes, he coolly pursued his studies. Julia had recovered her composure, and Charles Weston felt satisfied. Miss Emmerson and her niece took their seats quietly with their work at an open window of the parlour, and order appeared to be restored in some measure to the mansion. After pursuing their several occupations for some minutes with a silence that had lately been a stranger to them, the aunt observed.

"You appear to have something new in hand, my love. Surely you must abound with trimmings, and yet you are working another already?"

"It is for Anna Miller," said Julia with a flush of feeling.

"I was in hopes you would perform your promise to your cousin Katherine, now Miss Miller is gone, and make your portion of the garments for the Orphan Asylum," returned Miss Emmerson gravely.

"Oh! cousin Katherine must wait. I promised this trimming to Anna to remember me by, and I would not disappoint the dear girl for the world."

"It is not your cousin Katherine, but the Orphans, who will have to wait; and surely a promise to a relation is as sacred as one to an acquaintance."

"Acquaintance, aunt!" echoed the niece with displeasure. "Do not, I entreat you, call Anna an acquaintance merely. She is my friend – my very best friend, and I love her as such."

"Thank you, my dear," said the aunt dryly.

"Oh! I mean nothing disrespectful to yourself, dear aunt," continued Julia. "You know how much I owe to you, and ought to know that I love you as a mother."

"And would you prefer Miss Miller to a mother, then?"

"Surely not in respect, in gratitude, in obedience; but still I may love her, you know. Indeed, the feelings are so very different, that they do not at all interfere with each other – in my heart at least."

"No!" said Miss Emmerson, with a little curiosity – "I wish you would try and explain this difference to me, that I may comprehend the distinctions that you are fond of making."

"Why, nothing is easier, dear aunt!" said Julia with animation. "You I love because you are kind to me, attentive to my wants, considerate for my good; affectionate, and – and – from habit – and you are my aunt, and take care of me."

"Admirable reasons!" exclaimed Charles Weston, who had laid aside his book to listen to this conversation.

"They are forcible ones I must admit," said Miss Emmerson, smiling affectionately on her niece; "but now for the other kind of love."

"Why, Anna is my friend, you know," cried Julia, with eyes sparkling with enthusiasm. "I love her, because she has feelings congenial with my own; she has so much wit, is so amusing, so frank, so like a girl of talents – so like – like every thing I admire myself."

"It is a pity that one so highly gifted cannot furnish herself with frocks," said the aunt, with a little more than her ordinary dryness of manner, "and suffer you to work for those who want them more."

"You forget it is in order to remember me," said Julia, in a manner that spoke her own ideas of the value of the gift.

"One would think such a friendship would not require any thing to remind one of its existence," returned the aunt.

"Why! it is not that she will forget me without it, but that she may have something by her to remind her of me" said Julia rapidly, but pausing as the contradiction struck even herself.

"I understand you perfectly, my child," interrupted the aunt, "merely as an unnecessary security, you mean."

"To make assurance doubly sure," cried Charles Weston with a laugh.

"Oh! you laugh, Mr. Weston," said Julia with a little anger; "but I have often said, you were incapable of friendship."

"Try me!" exclaimed the youth fervently. "Do not condemn me without a trial."

"How can I?" said Julia, laughing in her turn. "You are not a girl."

"Can girls then only feel friendship?" inquired Charles, taking the seat which Miss Emmerson had relinquished.

"I sometimes think so," said Julia, with her own good-humoured smile. "You are too gross – too envious – in short, you never see such friendships between men as exist between women."

"Between girls, I will readily admit," returned the youth. "But let us examine this question after the manner of the courts

"Nay, if you talk law I shall quit you," interrupted the young lady gaily.

"Certainly one so learned in the subject need not dread a cross-examination," cried the youth, in her own manner.

"Well, proceed," cried the lady. "I have driven aunt Margaret from the field, and you will fare no better, I can assure you."

"Men, you say, are too gross to feel a pure friendship; in the first place, please to explain yourself on this point."

"Why I mean, that your friendships are generally interested; that it requires services and good offices to support it."

"While that of women depends on"

"Feeling alone."

"But what excites this feeling?" asked Charles with a smile.

"What? why sympathy – and a knowledge of each other's good qualities."

"Then you think Miss Miller has more good qualities than Katherine Emmerson," said Weston.

"When did I ever say so?" cried Julia in surprise.

"I infer it from your loving her better, merely," returned the young man with a little of Miss Emmerson's dryness.

"It would be difficult to compare them," said Julia after a moment's pause. "Katherine is in the world, and has had an opportunity of showing her merit; that Anna has never enjoyed. Katherine is certainly a most excellent girl, and I like her very much; but there is no reason to think that Anna will not prove as fine a young woman as Katherine, when put to the trial."

"Pray," said the young lawyer with great gravity, "how many of these bosom, these confidential friends can a young woman have at the same time?"

"One, only one – any more than she could have two lovers," cried Julia quickly.

"Why then did you find it necessary to take that one from a set, that was untried in the practice of well-doing, when so excellent a subject as your cousin Katherine offered?"

"But Anna I know, I feel, is every thing that is good and sincere, and our sympathies drew us together. Katherine I loved naturally."

"How naturally?"

"Is it not natural to love your relatives?" said Julia in surprise.

"No," was the brief answer.

"Surely, Charles Weston, you think me a simpleton. Does not every parent love its child by natural instinct?"

"No: no more than you love any of your amusements from instinct. If the parent was present with a child that he did not know to be his own, would instinct, think you, discover their vicinity?"

"Certainly not, if they had never met before; but then, as soon as he knew it to be his, he would love it from nature."

"It is a complicated question, and one that involves a thousand connected feelings," said Charles. "But all love, at least all love of the heart, springs from the causes you mentioned to your aunt – good offices, a dependence on each other, and habit."

"Yes, and nature too," said the young lady rather positively; "and I contend, that natural love, and love from sympathy, are two distinct things."

"Very different, I allow," said Charles; "only I very much doubt the durability of that affection which has no better foundation than fancy."

"You use such queer terms, Charles, that you do not treat the subject fairly. Calling innate evidence of worth by the name of fancy, is not candid."

"Now, indeed, your own terms puzzle me," said Charles, smiling. "What is innate evidence of worth?"

"Why, a conviction that another possesses all that you esteem yourself, and is discovered by congenial feelings and natural sympathies."

"Upon my word, Julia, you are quite a casuist on this subject. Does love, then, between the sexes depend on this congenial sympathy and innate evidence?"

"Now you talk on a subject that I do not understand," said Julia, blushing; and, catching up the highly prized work, she ran to her own room, leaving the young man in a state of mingled admiration and pity.

Chapter II

An anxious fortnight was passed by Julia Warren, after this conversation, without bringing any tidings from her friend. She watched, with feverish restlessness, each steam-boat that passed the door on its busy way towards the metropolis, and met the servant each day at the gate of the lawn on his return from the city; but it was only to receive added disappointments. At length Charles Weston good-naturedly offered his own services, laughingly declaring, that his luck was never known to fail. Julia herself had written several long epistles to Anna, and it was now the proper time that some

of these should be answered, independently of the thousand promises from her friend of writing regularly from every post-office that she might pass on her route to the Gennessee. But the happy moment had arrived when disappointments were to cease. As usual, Julia was waiting with eager impatience at the gate, her lovely form occasionally gliding from the shrubbery to catch a glimpse of the passengers on the highway, when Charles appeared riding at a full gallop towards the house; his whole manner announced success, and Julia sprang into the middle of the road to take the letter which he extended towards her.

"I knew I should be successful, and it gives me almost as much pleasure as yourself that I have been so," said the youth, dismounting from his horse and opening the gate that his companion might pass.

"Thank you – thank you, dear Charles," said Julia kindly. "I never can forget how good you are to me – how much you love to oblige not only me, but every one around you. Excuse me now. I have this dear letter to read: another time, I will thank you as I ought."

So saying, Julia ran into the summer-house, and fastening its door, gave herself up to the pleasure of reading a first letter. Notes and short epistles from her aunt, with divers letters from Anna written slyly in the school-room and slipped into her lap, she was already well acquainted with; but of real, genuine letters, stamped by the post-office, rumpled by the mail-bags, consecrated by the steam-boat, this was certainly the first. This, indeed, was a real letter: rivers rolled, and vast tracts of country lay, between herself and its writer, and that writer was a friend selected on the testimony of innate evidence. It was necessary for Julia to pause and breathe before she could open her letter; and by the time this was done, her busy fancy had clothed both epistle and writer with so much excellence, that she was prepared to peruse the contents with a respect bordering on enthusiasm: every word must be true – every idea purity itself. That our readers may know how accurately sixteen and a brilliant fancy had qualified her to judge, we shall give them the letter entire.

> My dearest love,
>
> "Oh, Julia! here I am, and such a place! – no town, no churches, no Broadway, nothing that can make life desirable; and, I may add, no friend – nobody to see and talk with, but papa and mamma, and a house full of brothers and sisters. You can't think how I miss you, every minute more and more; but I am not without hopes of persuading pa to let me spend the winter with your aunt in town. I declare it makes me sick every time I think of her sweet house in Park-place. If ever I marry, and be sure I will, it shall be a man who lives in the city, and next door to my Julia. Oh! how charming that would be. Each of us to have one of those delightful new houses, with the new-fashioned basement stories; we would run in and out at all hours of the day, and it would be so convenient to lend and borrow each other's things. I do think there is no pleasure under heaven equal to that of wearing things that belong to your friend. Don't you remember how fond I was of wearing your clothes at school, though you were not so fond of changing as myself; but that was no wonder, for pa's stinginess kept me so shabbily dressed, that I was ashamed to let you be seen in them. Oh, Julia! I shall never forget those happy hours; nor you neither. Apropos – I hope you have not forgot the frock you promised to work for me, to remember you by. I long for it dreadfully, and hope you will send it before the river shuts. I suppose you and Charles Weston do nothing but ride round among those beautiful villas on the island, and take comfort. I do envy you your happiness, I can tell you; for I think any beau better than none, though Mr. Weston is not to my taste. I am going to write you six sheets of paper, for there is nothing that I so delight in as communing with a friend at a distance, especially situated as I am without a soul to say a word to, unless it be my own sisters. Adieu, my ever, ever beloved Julia – be to me as I am to you, a friend indeed, one tried and not found wanting. In haste, your

"ANNA."
Gennessee, June 15, 1816.

"P. S. Don't forget to jog aunt Emmerson's memory about asking me to Park-place.

"P. S. June 25th. Not having yet sent my letter, although I am sure you must be dying with anxiety to hear how we get on, I must add, that we have a companion here that would delight you – a Mr. Edward Stanley. What a delightful name! and he is as delightful as his name: his eye, his nose, his whole countenance, are perfect. In short, Julia, he is just such a man as we used to draw in our conversation at school. He is rich, and brave, and sensible, and I do nothing but talk to him of you. He says, he longs to see you; knows you must be handsome; is sure you are sensible; and feels that you are good. Oh! he is worth a dozen Charles Westons. But you may give my compliments to Mr. Weston, though I don't suppose he ever thinks it worth his while to remember such a chick as me. I should like to hear what he says about me, and I will tell you all Edward Stanley says of you. Once more, adieu. Your letters got here safe and in due season. I let Edward take a peep at them."

The first time Julia read this letter she was certainly disappointed. It contained no descriptions of the lovely scenery of the west. The moon had risen and the sun had set on the lakes of the interior, and Anna had said not one word of either. But the third and fourth time of reading began to afford more pleasure, and at the thirteenth perusal she pronounced it charming. There was evidently much to be understood; vacuums that the fancy could easily fill; and, before Julia had left the summer-house, the letter was extended, in her imagination, to the promised six sheets. She walked slowly through the shrubbery towards the house, musing on the contents of her letter, or rather what it might be supposed to contain, and unconsciously repeating to herself in a low tone –

"Young, handsome, rich, and sensible – just as we used to paint in our conversation. Oh, how delightful!"

"Delightful indeed, to possess all those fine qualities; and who is the happy individual that is so blessed?" asked Charles Weston, who had been lingering in the walks with an umbrella to shield her on her return from an approaching shower.

"Oh!" said Julia, starting, "I did not know you were near me. I have been reading Anna's sweet letter," pressing the paper to her bosom as she spoke.

"Doubtless you must be done by this time, Julia, and," pointing to the clouds, "you had better hasten to the house. I knew you would be terrified at the lightning all alone by yourself in that summer-house, so I came to protect you."

"You are very good, Charles, but does it lighten?" said Julia in terror, and hastening her retreat to the dwelling.

"Your letter must have interested you deeply not to have noticed the thunder – you, who are so timid and fearful of the flashes."

"Foolishly fearful, you would say, if you were not afraid of hurting my feelings, I know," said Julia.

"It is a natural dread, and therefore not to be laughed at," answered Charles mildly.

"Then there is natural fear, but no natural love, Mr. Charles; now you are finely caught," cried Julia exultingly.

"Well, be it so. With me fear is very natural, and I can almost persuade myself love also."

"I hope you are not a coward, Charles Weston. A cowardly man is very despicable. I could never love a cowardly man," said Julia, laughing.

"I don't know whether I am what you call a coward," said Charles gravely; "but when in danger I am always afraid."

The words were hardly uttered before a flash of lightning, followed instantly by a tremendously heavy clap of thunder, nearly stupified them both. The suddenness of the shock had, for a moment, paralyzed the energy of the youth, while Julia was nearly insensible. Soon recovering himself, however, Charles drew her after him into the house, in time to escape a torrent of rain. The storm was soon over, and their natural fear and surprise were a source of mirth for Julia. Women are seldom ashamed of their fears, for their fright is thought to be feminine and attractive; but men are less easy under the imputation of terror, as it is thought to indicate an absence of manly qualities.

"Oh! you will never make a hero, Charles," cried Julia, laughing heartily. "It is well you chose the law instead of the army as a profession."

"I don't know," said the youth, a little nettled, "I think I could muster courage to face a bullet."

"But remember, that you shut your eyes, and bent nearly double at the flash – now you owned all this yourself."

"At least he was candid, and acknowledged his infirmities," said Miss Emmerson, who had been listening.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.