VARIOUS

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Содержание

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APRIL DAYS

"Can trouble dwell with April days?"

In Memoriam.

In our methodical New England life, we still recognize some magic in summer. Most persons reluctantly resign themselves to being decently happy in June, at least. They accept June. They compliment its weather. They complained of the earlier months as cold, and so spent them in the city; and they will complain of the later months as hot, and so refrigerate themselves on some barren sea-coast. God offers us yearly a necklace of twelve pearls; most men choose the fairest, label it June, and cast the rest away. It is time to chant a hymn of more liberal gratitude.

There are no days in the whole round year more delicious than those which often come to us in the latter half of April. On these days one goes forth in the morning, and an Italian warmth broods over all the hills, taking visible shape in a glistening mist of silvered azure, with which mingles the smoke from many bonfires. The sun trembles in his own soft rays, till one understands the old English tradition, that he dances on Easter-Day. Swimming in a sea of glory, the tops of the hills look nearer than their bases, and their glistening watercourses seem close to the eye, as is their liberated murmur to the ear. All across this broad interval the teams are ploughing. The grass in the meadow seems all to have grown green since yesterday. The blackbirds jangle in the oak, the robin is perched upon the elm, the song-sparrow on the hazel, and the bluebird on the apple-tree. There rises a hawk and sails slowly, the stateliest of airy things, a floating dream of long and languid summer-hours. But as yet, though there is warmth enough for a sense of luxury, there is coolness enough for exertion. No tropics can offer such a burst of joy; indeed, no zone much warmer than our Northern States can offer a genuine spring. There can be none where there is no winter, and the monotone of the seasons is broken only by wearisome rains. Vegetation and birds being distributed over the year, there is no burst of verdure nor of song. But with us, as the buds are swelling, the birds are arriving; they are building their nests almost simultaneously; and in all the Southern year there is no such rapture of beauty and of melody as here marks every morning from the last of April onward.

But days even earlier than these in April have a charm,—even days that seem raw and rainy, when the sky is dull and a bequest of March-wind lingers, chasing the squirrel from the tree and the children from the meadows. There is a fascination in walking through these bare early woods,—there is such a pause of preparation, winter's work is so cleanly and thoroughly done. Everything is taken down and put away; throughout the leafy arcades the branches show no remnant of last year, save a few twisted leaves of oak and beech, a few empty seed-vessels of the tardy witch-hazel, and a few gnawed nutshells dropped coquettishly by the squirrels into the crevices of the bark. All else is bare, but prophetic: buds everywhere, the whole splendor of the coming summer concentrated in those hard little knobs on every bough; and clinging here and there among them, a brown, papery chrysalis, from which shall yet wave the superb wings of the Luna moth. An occasional shower patters on the dry leaves, but it does not silence the robin on the outskirts of the wood: indeed, he sings louder than ever, though the song-sparrow and the bluebird are silent.

Then comes the sweetness of the nights in latter April. There is as yet no evening-primrose to open suddenly, no cistus to drop its petals; but the May-flower knows the hour, and becomes more fragrant in the darkness, so that one can then often find it in the woods without aid from the eye. The pleasant night-sounds are begun; the hylas are uttering their shrill *peep* from the meadows, mingled soon with hoarser toads, who take to the water at this season to deposit their spawn. The tree-toads soon join them; but one listens in vain for bullfrogs, or katydids, or grasshoppers, or whippoorwills, or crickets: we must wait for them until the delicious June.

The earliest familiar token of the coming season is the expansion of the stiff catkins of the alder into soft, drooping tresses. These are so sensitive, that, if you pluck them at almost any time during the winter, a day's bright sunshine will make them open in a glass of water, and thus they eagerly yield to every moment of April warmth. The blossom of the birch is more delicate, that of the willow more showy, but the alders come first. They cluster and dance everywhere upon the bare boughs above the watercourses; the blackness of the buds is softened into rich brown and yellow; and as this graceful creature thus comes waving into the spring, it is pleasant to remember that the Norse Eddas fabled the first woman to have been named Embla, because she was created from an alder-bough.

The first wild-flower of the spring is like land after sea. The two which, throughout the Northern Atlantic States, divide this interest are the *Epigaea repens* (May-flower, ground-laurel, or trailing-arbutus) and the *Hepatica triloba* (liverleaf, liverwort, or blue anemone). Of these two, the latter is perhaps more immediately exciting on first discovery; because it does not, like the epigaea, exhibit its buds all winter, but opens its blue eyes almost as soon as it emerges from the ground. Without the rich and delicious odor of its compeer, it has an inexpressibly fresh and earthy scent, that seems to bring all the promise of the blessed season with it; indeed, that clod of fresh turf with the inhalation of which Lord Bacon delighted to begin the day must undoubtedly have been full of the roots of our little hepatica. Its healthy sweetness belongs to the opening year, like Chaucer's poetry; and one thinks that anything more potent and voluptuous would be less enchanting,—until one turns to the May-flower. Then comes a richer fascination for the senses. To pick the May-flower is like following in the footsteps of some spendthrift army which has scattered the contents of its treasure-chest among beds of scented moss. The fingers sink in the soft, moist verdure, and make at each instant some superb discovery unawares; again and again, straying carelessly, they clutch some new treasure; and, indeed, all is linked together in bright necklaces by secret threads beneath the surface, and where you grasp at one, you hold many. The hands go wandering over the moss as over the keys of a piano, and bring forth fragrance for melody. The lovely creatures twine and nestle and lay their glowing faces to the very earth beneath withered leaves, and what seemed mere barrenness becomes fresh and fragrant beauty. So great is the charm of the pursuit, that the epigaea is really the one wild-flower for which our country-people have a hearty passion. Every village child knows its best haunts, and watches for it eagerly in the spring; boys wreathe their hats with it, girls twine it in their hair, and the cottage-windows are filled with its beauty.

In collecting these early flowers, one finds or fancies singular natural affinities. I flatter myself with being able always to find hepatica, if there is any within reach, for I was brought up with it ("Cockatoo he know me berry well"); but other persons, who were brought up with May-flower, and remember searching for it with their almost baby-fingers, can find that better. The most remarkable instance of these natural affinities was in the case of L.T. and his double anemones. L. had always a gift for wild-flowers, and used often to bring to Cambridge the largest white anemones that ever were seen, from a certain special hill in Watertown; they were not only magnificent in size and whiteness, but had that exquisite blue on the outside of the petals, as if the sky had bent down in ecstasy at last over its darlings, and left visible kisses there. But even this success was not enough, and one day he came with something yet choicer. It was a rue-leaved anemone (*A. thalictraides*); and, if you will believe it, each one of the three white flowers was *double,* not merely with that multiplicity of petals in the disk which is common with this species, but technically and horticulturally double, like the

double-flowering almond or cherry,—the most exquisitely delicate little petals, seeming like lace-work. He had three specimens,—gave one to the Autocrat of Botany, who said it was almost or quite unexampled, and another to me. As the man in the fable says of the chameleon,—"I have it yet, and can produce it."

Now comes the marvel. The next winter L. went to New York for a year, and wrote to me, as spring drew near, with solemn charge to visit his favorite haunt and find another specimen. Armed with this letter of introduction, I sought the spot, and tramped through and through its leafy corridors. Beautiful wood-anemones I found, to be sure, trembling on their fragile stems, deserving all their pretty names,—Wind-flower, Easter-flower, Pasque-flower, and homeopathic Pulsatilla; rue-leaved anemones I found also, rising taller and straighter and firmer in stem, with the whorl of leaves a little higher up on the stalk than one fancies it ought to be, as if there were a supposed danger that the flowers would lose their balance, and as if the leaves must be all ready to catch them. These I found, but the special wonder was not there for me. Then I wrote to L. that he must evidently come himself and search; or that, perhaps, as Sir Thomas Browne avers that "smoke doth follow the fairest," so his little treasures had followed him towards New York. Judge of my surprise, when, on opening his next letter, out dropped, from those folds of metropolitan paper, a veritable double anemone. He had just been out to Hoboken, or some such place, to spend an afternoon, and, of course, his pets were there to meet him; and from that day to this, I have never heard of the thing happening to any one else.

May-Day is never allowed to pass in this community without profuse lamentations over the tardiness of our spring as compared with that of England and the poets. Yet it is very common to exaggerate this difference. Even so good an observer as Wilson Flagg is betrayed into saying that the epigaea and hepatica "seldom make their appearance until after the middle of April" in Massachusetts, and that "it is not unusual for the whole month of April to pass away without producing more than two or three species of wild-flowers." But I have formerly found the hepatica in bloom at Mount Auburn, for three successive years, on the twenty-seventh of March; and last spring it was actually found, farther inland, where the season is later, on the seventeenth. The May-flower is usually as early, though the more gradual expansion of the buds renders it less easy to give dates. And there are nearly twenty species which I have noted, for five or six years together, as found before May-Day, and which may therefore be properly assigned to April. The list includes bloodroot, cowslip, houstonia, saxifrage, dandelion, chickweed, cinquefoil, strawberry, mouse-ear, bellwort, dog's-tooth violet, five species of violet proper, and two of anemone. These are all common flowers, and easily observed; and the catalogue might be increased by rare ones, as the white corydalis, the smaller yellow violet, (*V. rotundifolia*,) and the claytonia or spring-beauty.

But in England the crocus and the snowdrop—neither being probably an indigenous flower, since neither is mentioned by Chaucer—usually open before the first of March; indeed, the snowdrop was formerly known by the yet more fanciful name of "Fair Maid of February." Chaucer's daisy comes equally early; and March brings daffodils, narcissi, violets, daisies, jonquils, hyacinths, and marsh-marigolds. This is altogether in advance of our season, so far as the flowers give evidence, —though we have plucked snowdrops in February. But, on the other hand, it would appear, that, though a larger number of birds winter in England than in Massachusetts, yet the return of those which migrate is actually earlier among us. From journals kept during sixty years in England, and an abstract of which is printed in Hone's "Every-Day Book," it appears that only two birds of passage revisit England before the fifteenth of April, and only thirteen more before the first of May; while with us the song-sparrow and the bluebird appear about the first of March, and quite a number more by the middle of April. This is a peculiarity of the English spring which I have never seen explained or even mentioned.

After the epigaea and the hepatica have opened, there is a slight pause among the wild-flowers, —these two forming a distinct prologue for their annual drama, as the brilliant witch-hazel in October brings up its separate epilogue. The truth is, Nature attitudinizes a little, liking to make a neat finish

with everything, and then to begin again with *éclat*. Flowers seem spontaneous things enough, but there is evidently a secret marshalling among them, that all may be brought out with due effect. As the country-people say that so long as any snow is left on the ground more snow may be expected, it must all vanish simultaneously at last,—so every seeker of spring-flowers has observed how accurately they seem to move in platoons, with little straggling. Each species seems to burst upon us with a united impulse; you may search for them day after day in vain, but the day when you find one specimen the spell is broken and you find twenty. By the end of April all the margins of the great poem of the woods are illuminated with these exquisite vignettes.

Most of the early flowers either come before the full unfolding of their leaves or else have inconspicuous ones. Yet Nature always provides for her bouquets the due proportion of green. The verdant and graceful sprays of the wild raspberry are unfolded very early, long before its time of flowering. Over the meadows spread the regular Chinese-pagodas of the equisetum, (horsetail or scouring-rush,) and the rich coarse vegetation of the veratrum, or American hellebore. In moist copses the ferns and osmundas begin to uncurl in April, opening their soft coils of spongy verdure, coated with woolly down, from which the humming-bird steals the lining of her nest.

The early blossoms represent the aboriginal epoch of our history: the blood-root and the May-flower are older than the white man, older perchance than the red man; they alone are the true Native Americans. Of the later wild plants, many of the most common are foreign importations. In our sycophancy we attach grandeur to the name *exotic*: we call aristocratic garden-flowers by that epithet; yet they are no more exotic than the humbler companions they brought with them, which have become naturalized. The dandelion, the buttercup, duckweed, celandine, mullein, burdock, yarrow, whiteweed, nightshade, and most of the thistles,—these are importations. Miles Standish never crushed these with his heavy heel as he strode forth to give battle to the savages; they never kissed the daintier foot of Priscilla, the Puritan maiden. It is noticeable that these are all of rather coarser texture than our indigenous flowers; the children instinctively recognize this, and are apt to omit them, when gathering the more delicate native blossoms of the woods.

There is something touching in the gradual retirement before civilization of these delicate aborigines. They do not wait for the actual brute contact of red bricks and curbstones, but they feel the danger miles away. The Indians called the low plantain "the white man's footstep"; and these shy creatures gradually disappear, the moment the red man gets beyond their hearing. Bigelow's delightful "Florula Bostoniensis" is becoming a series of epitaphs. Too well we know it,—we who in happy Cambridge childhood often gathered, almost within a stone's throw of Professor Agassiz's new Museum, the arethusa and the gentian, the cardinal-flower and the gaudy rhexia,—we who remember the last secret hiding-place of the rhodora in West Cambridge, of the yellow violet and the *Viola debilis* in Watertown, of the *Convallaria trifolia* near Fresh Pond, of the *Hottonia* beyond Wellington's Hill, of the *Cornus florida* in West Roxbury, of the *Clintonia* and the dwarf ginseng in Brookline, —we who have found in its one chosen nook the sacred *Andromeda polyfolia* of Linnaeus. Now vanished almost or wholly from city-suburbs, these fragile creatures still linger in more rural parts of Massachusetts; but they are doomed everywhere, unconsciously, yet irresistibly; while others still more shy, as the *Linnoea*, the yellow *Cypripedium*, the early pink *Azalea*, and the delicate white *Corydalis* or "Dutchman's breeches," are being chased into the very recesses of the Green and the White Mountains. The relics of the Indian tribes are supported by the legislature at Martha's Vineyard, while these precursors of the Indian are dying unfriended away.

And with these receding plants go also the special insects which haunt them. Who that knew that pure enthusiast, Dr. Harris, but remembers the accustomed lamentations of the entomologist over the departure of these winged companions of his lifetime? Not the benevolent Mr. John Beeson more tenderly mourns the decay of the Indians than he the exodus of these more delicate native tribes. In a letter which I happened to receive from him a short time previous to his death, he thus renewed the lament:—"I mourn for the loss of many of the beautiful plants and insects that were once found

in this vicinity. *Clethra, Rhodora, Sanguinaria, Viola debilis, Viola acuta, Dracoena borealis, Rhexia, Cypripedium, Corallorhiza verna, Orchis spectabilis*, with others of less note, have been rooted out by the so-called hand of improvement. *Cicindela rugifrons, Helluo proeusta, Sphoeroderus stenostomus, Blethisa quadricollis, (Americana mî,) Carabus, Horia*, (which for several years occurred in profusion on the sands beyond Mount Auburn,) with others, have entirely disappeared from their former haunts, driven away, or exterminated perhaps, by the changes effected therein. There may still remain in your vicinity some sequestered spots, congenial to these and other rarities, which may reward the botanist and the entomologist who will search them carefully. Perhaps you may find there the pretty coccinella-shaped, silver-margined *Omophron*, or the still rarer *Panagoeus fasciatus*, of which I once took two specimens on Wellington's Hill, but have not seen it since." Is not this indeed handling one's specimens "gently as if you loved them," as Isaak Walton bids the angler do with his worm?

There is this merit, at least, among the coarser crew of imported flowers, that they bring their own proper names with them, and we know precisely whom we have to deal with. In speaking of our own native flowers, we must either be careless and inaccurate, or else resort sometimes to the Latin, in spite of the indignation of friends. There is something yet to be said on this point. In England, where the old household and monkish names adhere, they are sufficient for popular and poetic purposes, and the familiar use of scientific names seems an affectation. But here, where many native flowers have no popular names at all, and others are called confessedly by wrong ones,—where it really costs less trouble to use Latin names than English, the affectation seems the other way. Think of the long list of wild-flowers where the Latin name is spontaneously used by all who speak of the flower: as, Arethusa, Aster, Cistus, ("after the fall of the cistus-flower,") Clematis, Clethra, Geranium, Iris, Lobdia, Bhodora, Spirtea, Tiarella, Trientalis, and so on. Even those formed from proper names (the worst possible system of nomenclature) become tolerable at last, and we forget the man in the more attractive flower. Are those who pick the Houstonia to be supposed thereby to indorse the Texan President? Or are the deluded damsels who chew Cassia-buds to be regarded as swallowing the late Secretary of State? The names have long since been made over to the flowers, and every questionable aroma has vanished. When the godfather happens to be a botanist, there is a peculiar fitness in the association; the Linaea, at least, would not smell so sweet by any other name.

In other cases the English name is a mere modification of the Latin one, and our ideal associations have really a scientific basis: as with Violet, Lily, Laurel, Gentian, Vervain. Indeed, our enthusiasm for vernacular names is like that for Indian names, one-sided: we enumerate only the graceful ones, and ignore the rest. It would be a pity to Latinize Touch-me-not, or Yarrow, or Gold-Thread, or Self-Heal, or Columbine, or Blue-Eyed-Grass,—though, to be sure, this last has an annoying way of shutting up its azure orbs the moment you gather it, and you reach home with a bare, stiff blade, which deserves no better name than *Sisyrinchium anceps.* But in what respect is Cucumber-Root preferable to Medeola, or Solomon's-Seal to Convallaria, or Rock-Tripe to Umbilicaria, or Lousewort to Pedicularis? In other cases the merit is divided: Anemone may dispute the prize of melody with Windflower, Campanula with Harebell, Neottia with Ladies'-Tresses, Uvularia with Bellwort and Strawbell, Potentilla with Cinquefoil, and Sanguinaria with Bloodroot. Hepatica may be bad, but Liverleaf is worse. The pretty name of May-flower is not so popular, after all, as that of Trailing-Arbutus, where the graceful and appropriate adjective redeems the substantive, which happens to be Latin and incorrect at the same time. It does seem a waste of time to say *Chrysanthemum leucanthemum* instead of Whiteweed; though, if the long scientific name were an incantation to banish the intruder, our farmers would gladly consent to adopt it.

But the great advantage of a reasonable use of the botanical name is, that it does not deceive us. Our primrose is not the English primrose, any more than it was our robin who tucked up the babes in the wood; our cowslip is not the English cowslip, it is the English marsh-marigold,—Tennyson's "wild marsh-marigold shines like fire in swamps and hollows gray." The pretty name of Azalea means something definite; but its rural name of Honeysuckle confounds under that name flowers without

even an external resemblance,—Azalea, Diervilla, Lonioera, Aquilegia,—just as every bird which sings loud in deep woods is popularly denominated a thrush. The really rustic names of both plants and animals are very few with us,—the different species are many; and as we come to know them better and love them more, we absolutely require some way to distinguish them from their half-sisters and second-cousins. It is hopeless to try to create new popular epithets, or even to revive those which are thoroughly obsolete. Miss Cooper may strive in vain, with benevolent intent, to christen her favorite spring-blossoms "May-Wings" and "Gay-Wings," and "Fringe-Cup" and "Squirrel-Cup," and "Cool-Wort" and "Bead-Ruby"; there is no conceivable reason why these should not be the familiar appellations, except the irresistible fact that they are not. It is impossible to create a popular name: one might as well attempt to invent a legend or compose a ballad. *Nascitur, non fit.*

As the spring comes on, and the densening outlines of the elm give daily a new design for a Grecian urn,—its hue, first brown with blossoms, then emerald with leaves,—we appreciate the vanishing beauty of the bare boughs. In our favored temperate zone, the trees denude themselves each year, like the goddesses before Paris, that we may see which unadorned loveliness is the fairest. Only the unconquerable delicacy of the beech still keeps its soft vestments about it: far into spring, when worn to thin rags and tatters, they cling there still; and when they fall, the new appear as by magic. It must be owned, however, that the beech has good reasons for this prudishness, and possesses little beauty of figure; while the elms, maples, chestnuts, walnuts, and even oaks, have not exhausted all their store of charms for us, until we have seen them disrobed. Only yonder magnificent pine-tree,—that pitch-pine, nobler when seen in perfection than white-pine, or Norwegian, or Norfolk Islander,—that pitch-pine, herself a grove, *una nemus*, holds her unchanging beauty throughout the year, like her half-brother, the ocean, whose voice she shares; and only marks the flowing of her annual tide of life by the new verdure that yearly submerges all trace of last year's ebb.

How many lessons of faith and beauty we should lose, if there were no winter in our year! Sometimes, in following up a watercourse among our hills, in the early spring, one comes to a weird and desolate place, where one huge wild grapevine has wreathed its ragged arms around a whole thicket and brought it to the ground,—swarming to the tops of hemlocks, clenching a dozen young maples at once and tugging them downward, stretching its wizard black length across the underbrush, into the earth and out again, wrenching up great stones in its blind, aimless struggle. What a piece of chaos is this! Yet come here again, two months hence, and you shall find all this desolation clothed with beauty and with fragrance, one vast bower of soft green leaves and graceful tendrils, while summer-birds chirp and flutter amid these sunny arches all the livelong day. "Out of the strong cometh forth sweetness."

To the end of April, and often later, one still finds remains of snowbanks in sheltered woods, especially those consisting of evergreen trees; and this snow, like that upon high mountains, has become hardened by the repeated thawing and freezing of the surface, till it is more impenetrable than ice. But the snow that actually falls during April is usually only what Vermonters call "sugar-snow,"—falling in the night and just whitening the surface for an hour or two, and taking its name, not so much from its looks as from the fact that it denotes the proper weather for "sugaring," namely, cold nights and warm days. Our saccharine associations, however, remain so obstinately tropical, that it seems almost impossible for the imagination to locate sugar in New England trees; though it is known that not the maple only, but the birch and the walnut even, afford it in appreciable quantities.

Along our maritime rivers the people associate April, not with "sugaring," but with "shadding." The pretty *Amelanchier Canadensis* of Gray—the *Aronia* of Whittler's song—is called Shad-bush or Shad-blow in Essex County, from its connection with this season; and there is a bird known as the Shad-spirit, which I take to be identical with the flicker or golden-winged woodpecker, whose note is still held to indicate the first day when the fish ascend the river. Upon such slender wings flits our New England romance!

In April the creative process described by Thales is repeated, and the world is renewed by water. The submerged creatures first feel the touch of spring, and many an equivocal career, beginning in the ponds and brooks, learns later to ignore this obscure beginning, and hops or flutters in the dusty daylight. Early in March, before the first male canker-moth appears on the elm-tree, the whirlwig beetles have begun to play round the broken edges of the ice, and the caddis-worms to crawl beneath it; and soon come the water-skater *(Gerris)* and the water-boatman *(Notonecta)*. Turtles and newts are in busy motion when the spring-birds are only just arriving. Those gelatinous masses in yonder wayside-pond are the spawn of water-newts or tritons: in the clear transparent jelly are imbedded, at regular intervals, little blackish dots; these elongate rapidly, and show symptoms of head and tail curled up in a spherical cell; the jelly is gradually absorbed for their nourishment, until on some fine morning each elongated dot gives one vigorous wriggle, and claims thenceforward all the privileges attendant on this dissolution of the union. The final privilege is often that of being suddenly snapped up by a turtle or a snake: for Nature brings forth her creatures liberally, especially the aquatic ones, sacrifices nine-tenths of them as food for their larger cousins, and reserves only a handful to propagate their race, on the same profuse scale, next season.

It is surprising, in the midst of our Museums and Scientific Schools, how little we yet know of the common things before our eyes. Our *savans* still confess their inability to discriminate with certainty the egg or tadpole of a frog from that of a toad; and it is strange that these hopping creatures, which seem so unlike, should coincide so nearly in their juvenile career, while the tritons and salamanders, which border so closely on each other in their maturer state as sometimes to be hardly distinguishable, yet choose different methods and different elements for laying their eggs. The eggs of our salamanders or land-lizards are deposited beneath the moss on some damp rock, without any gelatinous envelope; they are but few in number, and the anxious mamma may sometimes be found coiled in a circle around them, like the symbolic serpent of eternity.

The small number of birds yet present in early April gives a better opportunity for careful study, —more especially if one goes armed with that best of fowling-pieces, a small spy-glass: the best, —since how valueless for purposes of observation is the bleeding, gasping, dying body, compared with the fresh and living creature, as it tilts, trembles, and warbles on the bough before you! Observe that robin in the oak-tree's top: as he sits and sings, every one of the dozen different notes which he flings down to you is accompanied by a separate flirt and flutter of his whole body, and, as Thoreau says of the squirrel, "each movement seems to imply a spectator," and to imply, further, that the spectator is looking through a spy-glass. Study that song-sparrow: why is it that he always goes so ragged in spring, and the bluebird so neat? is it that the song-sparrow is a wild artist, absorbed in the composition of his lay, and oblivious of ordinary proprieties, while the smooth bluebird and his ash-colored mate cultivate their delicate warble only as a domestic accomplishment, and are always nicely dressed before sitting down to the piano? Then how exciting is the gradual arrival of the birds in their summer-plumage! to watch it is as good as sitting at the window on Easter Sunday to observe the new bonnets. Yonder, in that clump of alders by the brook, is the delicious jargoning of the first flock of yellow-birds; there are the little gentlemen in black and yellow, and the little ladies in olive-brown; "sweet, sweet, sweet" is the only word they say, and often they will so lower their ceaseless warble, that, though almost within reach, the little minstrels seem far away. There is the very earliest cat-bird, mimicking the bobolink before the bobolink has come: what is the history of his song, then? is it a reminiscence of last year? or has the little coquette been practising it all winter, in some gay Southern society, where cat-birds and bobolinks grow intimate, just as Southern fashionables from different States may meet and sing duets at Saratoga? There sounds the sweet, low, long-continued trill of the little hair-bird, or chipping-sparrow, a suggestion of insect sounds in sultry summer, and produced, like them, by a slight fluttering of the wings against the sides: by-and-by we shall sometimes hear that same delicate rhythm burst the silence of the June midnights, and then, ceasing, make stillness more still. Now watch that woodpecker, roving in ceaseless search, travelling over fifty trees in an

hour, running from top to bottom of some small sycamore, pecking at every crevice, pausing to dot a dozen inexplicable holes in a row upon an apple-tree, but never once intermitting the low, querulous murmur of housekeeping anxiety: now she stops to hammer with all her little life at some tough piece of bark, strikes harder and harder blows, throws herself back at last, flapping her wings furiously as she brings down her whole strength again upon it; finally it yields, and grub after grub goes down her throat, till she whets her beak after the meal as a wild beast licks its claws, and off on her pressing business once more.

It is no wonder that there is so little substantial enjoyment of Nature in the community, when we feed children on grammars and dictionaries only, and take no pains to train them to see that which is before their eyes. The mass of the community have "summered and wintered" the universe pretty regularly, one would think, for a good many years; and yet nine persons out of ten in the town or city, and two out of three even in the country, seriously suppose, for instance, that the buds upon trees are formed in the spring; they have had them before their eyes all winter, and never seen them. As large a proportion suppose, in good faith, that a plant grows at the base of the stem, instead of at the top: that is, if they see a young sapling in which there is a crotch at five feet from the ground, they expect to see it ten feet from the ground by-and-by,—confounding the growth of a tree with that of a man or animal. But perhaps the best of us could hardly bear the severe test unconsciously laid down by a small child of my acquaintance. The boy's father, a college-bred man, had early chosen the better part, and employed his fine faculties in rearing laurels in his own beautiful nursery-gardens, instead of in the more arid soil of court-rooms or state-houses. Of course the young human scion knew the flowers by name before he knew his letters, and used their symbols more readily; and after he got the command of both, he was one day asked by his younger brother what the word *idiot* meant,—for somebody in the parlor had been saying that somebody else was an idiot. "Don't you know?" quoth Ben, in his sweet voice: "an idiot is a person who doesn't know an arbor-vitae from a pine,—he doesn't know anything." When Ben grows up to maturity, bearing such terrible tests in his unshrinking hands, who of us will be safe?

The softer aspects of Nature, especially, require time and culture before man can enjoy them. To rude races her processes bring only terror, which is very slowly outgrown. Humboldt has best exhibited the scantiness of finer natural perceptions in Greek and Roman literature, in spite of the grand oceanic anthology of Homer, and the delicate water-coloring of the Greek Anthology and of Horace. The Oriental and the Norse sacred books are full of fresh and beautiful allusions; but the Greek saw in Nature only a framework for Art, and the Roman only a camping-ground for men. Even Virgil describes the grotto of Aeneas merely as a "black grove" with "horrid shade,"—"*Horrenti atrum nemus imminet umbrâ*." Wordsworth points out, that, even in English literature, the "Windsor Forest" of Anne, Countess of Winchelsea, was the first poem which represented Nature as a thing to be consciously enjoyed; and as she was almost the first English poetess, we might be tempted to think that we owe this appreciation, like some other good things, to the participation of woman in literature. But, on the other hand, it must be remembered that the voluminous Duchess of Newcastle, in her "Ode on Melancholy," describes among the symbols of hopeless gloom "the still moonshine night" and "a mill where rushing waters run about,"—the sweetest natural images. So woman has not so much to claim, after all. In our own country, the early explorers seemed to find only horror in its woods and waterfalls. Josselyn, in 1672, could only describe the summer splendor of the White Mountain region as "dauntingly terrible, being full of rocky hills, as thick as mole-hills in a meadow, and full of infinite thick woods." Father Hennepin spoke of Niagara, in the narrative still quoted in the guide-books, as a "frightful cataract"; though perhaps his original French phrase was softer. And even John Adams could find no better name than "horrid chasm" for the gulf at Egg Rock, where he first saw the sea-anemone.

But we are lingering too long, perhaps, with this sweet April of smiles and tears. It needs only to add that all her traditions are beautiful. Ovid says well, that she was not named from *aperire*, to open,

as some have thought, but from *Aphrodite*, goddess of beauty. April holds Easter-time, St. George's Day, and the Eve of St. Mark's. She has not, like her sister May in Germany, been transformed to a verb and made a synonyme for joy,—"*Deine Seele maiet den trüben Herbst*"—but April was believed in early ages to have been the birth-time of the world. According to Venerable Bede, the point was first accurately determined at a council held at Jerusalem about A.D. 200, when, after much profound discussion, it was finally decided that the world's birthday occurred on Sunday, April eighth,—that is, at the vernal equinox and the full moon. But April is certainly the birth-time of the year, at least, if not of the planet. Its festivals are older than Christianity, older than the memory of man. No sad associations cling to it, as to the month of June, in which month, says William of Malmesbury, kings are wont to go to war,—"*Quando solent reges ad arma procedere*,"—but it holds the Holy Week, and it is the Holy Month. And in April Shakspeare was born, and in April he died.

THE PROFESSOR'S STORY

CHAPTER XXIX

THE WHITE ASH

When Helen returned to Elsie's bedside, it was with a new and still deeper feeling of sympathy, such as the story told by Old Sophy might well awaken. She understood, as never before, the singular fascination and as singular repulsion which she had long felt in Elsie's presence. It had not been without a great effort that she had forced herself to become the almost constant attendant of the sick girl; and now she was learning, but not for the first time, the blessed truth which so many good women have found out for themselves, that the hardest duty bravely performed soon becomes a habit, and tends in due time to transform itself into a pleasure.

The old Doctor was beginning to look graver, in spite of himself. The fever, if such it was, went gently forward, wasting the young girl's powers of resistance from day to day; yet she showed no disposition to take nourishment, and seemed literally to be living on air. It was remarkable that with all this her look was almost natural, and her features were hardly sharpened so as to suggest that her life was burning away. He did not like this, nor various other unobtrusive signs of danger which his practised eye detected. A very small matter might turn the balance which held life and death poised against each other. He surrounded her with precautions, that Nature might have every opportunity of cunningly shifting the weights from the scale of death to the scale of life, as she will often do, if not rudely disturbed or interfered with.

Little tokens of good-will and kind remembrance were constantly coming to her from the girls in the school and the good people in the village. Some of the mansion-house people obtained rare flowers which they sent her, and her table was covered with fruits—which tempted her in vain. Several of the school-girls wished to make her a basket of their own handiwork, and, filling it with autumnal flowers, to send it as a joint offering. Mr. Bernard found out their project accidentally, and, wishing to have his share in it, brought home from one of his long walks some boughs full of variously tinted leaves, such as were still clinging to the stricken trees. With these he brought also some of the already fallen leaflets of the white ash, remarkable for their rich olive-purple color, forming a beautiful contrast with some of the lighter-hued leaves. It so happened that this particular tree, the white ash, did not grow upon The Mountain, and the leaflets were more welcome for their comparative rarity. So the girls made their basket, and the floor of it they covered with the rich olive-purple leaflets. Such late flowers as they could lay their hands upon served to fill it, and with many kindly messages they sent it to Miss Elsie Venner at the Dudley mansion-house.

Elsie was sitting up in her bed when it came, languid, but tranquil, and Helen was by her, as usual, holding her hand, which was strangely cold, Helen thought, for one who—was said to have some kind of fever. The school-girls' basket was brought in with its messages of love and hopes for speedy recovery. Old Sophy was delighted to see that it pleased Elsie, and laid it on the bed before her. Elsie began looking at the flowers and taking them from the basket, that she might see the leaves. All at once she appeared to be agitated; she looked at the basket,—then around, as if there were some fearful presence about her which she was searching for with her eager glances. She took out the flowers, one by one, her breathing growing hurried, her eyes staring, her hands trembling,—till, as she came near the bottom of the basket, she flung out all the rest with a hasty movement, looked upon the olive-purple leaflets as if paralyzed for a moment, shrunk up, as it were, into herself in a

curdling terror, dashed the basket from her, and fell back senseless, with a faint cry which chilled the blood of the startled listeners at her bedside.

"Take it away!—take it away!—quick!" said Old Sophy, as she hastened to her mistress's pillow. "It's the leaves of the tree that was always death to her,—take it away! She can't live wi' it in the room!"

The poor old woman began chafing Elsie's hands, and Helen to try to rouse her with hartshorn, while a third frightened attendant gathered up the flowers and the basket and carried them out of the apartment. She came to herself after a time, but exhausted and then wandering. In her delirium, she talked constantly as if she were in a cave, with such exactness of circumstance that Helen could not doubt at all that she had some such retreat among the rocks of The Mountain, probably fitted up in her own fantastic way, where she sometimes hid herself from all human eyes, and of the entrance to which she alone possessed the secret.

All this passed away, and left her, of course, weaker than before. But this was not the only influence the unexplained paroxysm had left behind it. From this time forward there was a change in her whole expression and her manner. The shadows ceased flitting over her features, and the old woman, who watched her from day to day and from hour to hour as a mother watches her child, saw the likeness she bore to her mother coming forth more and more, as the cold glitter died out of the diamond eyes, and the scowl disappeared from the dark brows and low forehead.

With all the kindness and indulgence her father had bestowed upon her, Elsie had never felt that he loved her. The reader knows well enough what fatal recollections and associations had frozen up the springs of natural affection in his breast. There was nothing in the world he would not do for Elsie. He had sacrificed his whole life to her. His very seeming carelessness about restraining her was all calculated; he knew that restraint would produce nothing but utter alienation. Just so far as she allowed him, he shared her studies, her few pleasures, her thoughts; but she was essentially solitary and uncommunicative. No person, as was said long ago, could judge him,—because his task was not merely difficult, but simply impracticable to human powers. A nature like Elsie's had necessarily to be studied by itself, and to be followed in its laws where it could not be led.

Every day, at different hours, during the whole of his daughter's illness, Dudley Venner had sat by her, doing all he could to soothe and please her: always the same thin film of some emotional non-conductor between them; always that kind of habitual regard and family-interest, mingled with the deepest pity on one side and a sort of respect on the other, which never warmed into outward evidences of affection.

It was after this occasion, when she had been so profoundly agitated by a seemingly insignificant cause, that her father and Old Sophy were sitting, one at one side of her bed and one at the other. She had fallen into a light slumber. As they were looking at her, the same thought came into both their minds at the same moment. Old Sophy spoke for both, as she said, in a low voice,—

"It's her mother's look,—it's her mother's own face right over again,—she never look' so before,—the Lord's hand is on her! His will be done!"

When Elsie woke and lifted her languid eyes upon her father's face, she saw in it a tenderness, a depth of affection, such as she remembered at rare moments of her childhood, when she had won him to her by some unusual gleam of sunshine in her fitful temper.

"Elsie, dear," he said, "we were thinking how much your expression was sometimes like that of your sweet mother. If you could but have seen her, so as to remember her!"

The tender look and tone, the yearning of the daughter's heart for the mother she had never seen, save only with the unfixed, undistinguishing eyes of earliest infancy, perhaps the under-thought that she might soon rejoin her in another state of being,—all came upon her with a sudden overflow of feeling which broke through all the barriers between her heart and her eyes, and Elsie wept. It seemed to her father as if the malign influence,—evil spirit it might almost be called,—which had pervaded her being, had at last been driven forth or exorcised, and that these tears were at once the

sign and the pledge of her redeemed nature. But now she was to be soothed, and not excited. After her tears she slept again, and the look her face wore was peaceful as never before.

Old Sophy met the Doctor at the door and told him all the circumstances connected with the extraordinary attack from which Elsie had suffered. It was the purple leaves, she said. She remembered that Dick once brought home a branch of a tree with some of the same leaves on it, and Elsie screamed and almost fainted then. She, Sophy, had asked her, after she had got quiet, what it was in the leaves that made her feel so bad. Elsie couldn't tell her,—didn't like to speak about it,—shuddered whenever Sophy mentioned it.

This did not sound so strangely to the old Doctor as it does to some who listen to this narrative. He had known some curious examples of antipathies, and remembered reading of others still more singular. He had known those who could not bear the presence of a cat, and recollected the story, often told, of a person's hiding one in a chest when one of these sensitive individuals came into the room, so as not to disturb him; but he presently began to sweat and turn pale, and cried out that there must be a cat hid somewhere. He knew people who were poisoned by strawberries, by honey, by different meats,—many who could not endure cheese,—some who could not bear the smell of roses. If he had known all the stories in the old books, he would have found that some have swooned and become as dead men at the smell of a rose,—that a stout soldier has been known to turn and run at the sight or smell of rue,—that cassia and even olive-oil have produced deadly faintings in certain individuals,—in short, that almost everything has seemed to be a poison to somebody.

"Bring me that basket, Sophy," said the old Doctor, "if you can find it."

Sophy brought it to him,—for he had not yet entered Elsie's apartment.

"These purple leaves are from the white ash," he said. "You don't know the notion that people commonly have about that tree, Sophy?"

"I know they say the Ugly Things never go where the white ash grows," Sophy answered. "Oh, Doctor dear, what I'm thinkin' of a'n't true, is it?"

The Doctor smiled sadly, but did not answer. He went directly to Elsie's room. Nobody would have known by his manner that he saw any special change in his patient. He spoke with her as usual, made some slight alteration in his prescriptions, and left the room with a kind, cheerful look. He met her father on the stairs.

"Is it as I thought?" said Dudley Venner.

"There is everything to fear," the Doctor said, "and not much, I am afraid, to hope. Does not her face recall to you one that you remember, as never before?"

"Yes," her father answered,—"oh, yes! What is the meaning of this change which has come over her features, and her voice, her temper, her whole being? Tell me, oh, tell me, what is it? Can it be that the curse is passing away, and my daughter is to be restored to me,—such as her mother would have had her,—such as her mother was?"

"Walk out with me into the garden," the Doctor said, "and I will tell you all I know and all I think about this great mystery of Elsie's life."

They walked out together, and the Doctor began:—

"She has lived a twofold being, as it were,—the consequence of the blight which fell upon her in the dim period before consciousness. You can see what she might have been but for this. You know that for these eighteen years her whole existence has taken its character from that influence which we need not name. But you will remember that few of the lower forms of life last as human beings do; and thus it might have been hoped and trusted with some show of reason, as I have always suspected you hoped and trusted, perhaps more confidently than myself, that the lower nature which had become ingrafted on the higher would die out and leave the real woman's life she inherited to outlive this accidental principle which had so poisoned her childhood and youth. I believe it is so dying out; but I am afraid,—yes, I must say it, I fear it has involved the centres of life in its own decay. There is hardly

any pulse at Elsie's wrist; no stimulants seem to rouse her; and it looks as if life were slowly retreating inwards, so that by-and-by she will sleep as those who lie down in the cold and never wake."

Strange as it may seem, her father heard all this not without deep sorrow, and such marks of it as his thoughtful and tranquil nature, long schooled by suffering, claimed or permitted, but with a resignation itself the measure of his past trials. Dear as his daughter might become to him, all he dared to ask of Heaven was that she might be restored to that truer self which lay beneath her false and adventitious being. If he could once see that the icy lustre in her eyes had become a soft, calm light,—that her soul was at peace with all about her and with Him above,—this crumb from the children's table was enough for him, as it was for the Syro-Phoenician woman who asked that the dark spirit might go out from her daughter.

There was little change the next day, until all at once she said in a clear voice that she should like to see her master at the school, Mr. Langdon. He came accordingly, and took the place of Helen at her bedside. It seemed as if Elsie had forgotten the last scene with him. Might it be that pride had come in, and she had sent for him only to show how superior she had grown to the weakness which had betrayed her into that extraordinary request, so contrary to the instincts and usages of her sex? Or was it that the singular change which had come over her had involved her passionate fancy for him and swept it away with her other habits of thought and feeling? Or perhaps, rather, that she felt that all earthly interests were becoming of little account to her, and wished to place herself right with one to whom she had displayed a wayward movement of her unbalanced imagination? She welcomed Mr. Bernard as quietly as she had received Helen Darley. He colored at the recollection of that last scene, when he came into her presence; but she smiled with perfect tranquillity. She did not speak to him of any apprehension; but he saw that she looked upon herself as doomed. So friendly, yet so calm did she seem through all their interview, that Mr. Bernard could only look back upon her manifestation of feeling towards him on their walk from the school as a vagary of a mind laboring under some unnatural excitement, and wholly at variance with the true character of Elsie Venner, as he saw her before him in her subdued, yet singular beauty. He looked with almost scientific closeness of observation into the diamond eyes; but that peculiar light which he knew so well was not there. She was the same in one sense as on that first day when he had seen her coiling and uncoiling her golden chain, yet how different in every aspect which revealed her state of mind and emotion! Something of tenderness there was, perhaps, in her tone towards him; she would not have sent for him, had she not felt more than an ordinary interest in him. But through the whole of his visit she never lost her gracious self-possession. The Dudley race might well be proud of the last of its daughters, as she lay dying, but unconquered by the feeling of the present or the fear of the future.

As for Mr. Bernard, he found it very hard to look upon her and listen to her unmoved. There was nothing that reminded him of the stormy-browed, almost savage girl he remembered in her fierce loveliness,—nothing of all her singularities of air and of costume. Nothing? Yes, one thing. Weak and suffering as she was, she had never parted with one particular ornament, such as a sick person would naturally, as it might be supposed, get rid of at once. The golden cord which she wore round her neck at the great party was still there. A bracelet was lying by her pillow; she had unclasped it from her wrist.

Before Mr. Bernard left her, she said,—"I shall never see you again. Some time or other, perhaps, you will mention my name to one whom you love. Give her this from your scholar and friend Elsie."

He took the bracelet, raised her hand to his lips, then turned his face away; in that moment he was the weaker of the two.

"Good-bye," she said; "thank you for coming."

His voice died away in his throat, as he tried to answer her. She followed him with her eyes as he passed from her sight through the door, and when it closed after him sobbed tremulously once or twice,—but stilled herself, and met Helen, as she entered, with a composed countenance.

"I have had a very pleasant visit from Mr. Langdon," Elsie said. "Sit by me, Helen, awhile without speaking; I should like to sleep, if I can,—and to dream."

CHAPTER XXX

THE GOLDEN CORD IS LOOSED

The Reverend Chauncy Fairweather, hearing that his parishioner's daughter, Elsie, was very ill, could do nothing less than come to the mansion-house and tender such consolations as he was master of. It was rather remarkable that the old Doctor did not exactly approve of his visit. He thought that company of every sort might be injurious in her weak state. He was of opinion that Mr. Fairweather, though greatly interested in religious matters, was not the most sympathetic person that could be found; in fact, the old Doctor thought he was too much taken up with his own interests for eternity to give himself quite so heartily to the need of other people as some persons got up on a rather more generous scale (our good neighbor Dr. Honeywood, for instance) could do. However, all these things had better be arranged to suit her wants; if she would like to talk with a clergyman, she had a great deal better see one as often as she liked, and run the risk of the excitement, than have a hidden wish for such a visit and perhaps find herself too weak to see him by-and-by.

The old Doctor knew by sad experience that dreadful mistake against which all medical practitioners should be warned. His experience may well be a guide for others. Do not overlook the desire for spiritual advice and consolation which patients sometimes feel, and, with the frightful *mauvaise honte* peculiar to Protestantism, alone among all human beliefs, are ashamed to tell. As a part of medical treatment, it is the physician's business to detect the hidden longing for the food of the soul, as much as for any form of bodily nourishment. Especially in the higher walks of society, where this unutterably miserable false shame of Protestantism acts in proportion to the general acuteness of the cultivated sensibilities, let no unwillingness to suggest the sick person's real need suffer him to languish between his want and his morbid sensitiveness. What an infinite advantage the Mussulmans and the Catholics have over many of our more exclusively spiritual sects in the way they keep their religion always by them and never blush for it! And besides this spiritual longing, we should never forget that

"On some fond breast the parting soul relies,"

and the minister of religion, in addition to the sympathetic nature which we have a right to demand in him, has trained himself to the art of entering into the feelings of others.

The reader must pardon this digression, which introduces the visit of the Reverend Chauncy Fairweather to Elsie Venner. It was mentioned to her that he would like to call and see how she was, and she consented,—not with much apparent interest, for she had reasons of her own for not feeling any very deep conviction of his sympathy for persons in sorrow. But he came, and worked the conversation round to religion, and confused her with his hybrid notions, half made up of what he had been believing and teaching all his life, and half of the new doctrines which he had veneered upon the surface of his old belief. He got so far as to make a prayer with her,—a cool, well-guarded prayer, which compromised his faith as little as possible, and which, if devotion were a game played against Providence, might have been considered a cautious and sagacious move.

When he had gone, Elsie called Old Sophy to her.

"Sophy," she said, "don't let them send that cold-hearted man to me any more. If your old minister comes to see you, I should like to hear him talk. He looks as if he cared for everybody, and would care for me. And, Sophy, if I should die one of these days, I should like to have that old minister come and say whatever is to be said over me. It would comfort Dudley more, I know, than to have that hard man here, when you're in trouble: for some of you will be sorry when I'm gone, —won't you, Sophy?"

The poor old black woman could not stand this question. The cold minister had frozen Elsie until she felt as if nobody cared for her or would regret her,—and her question had betrayed this momentary feeling.

"Don' talk so! don' talk so, darlin'!" she cried, passionately. "When you go, Ol' Sophy'll go; 'n' where you go, Ol' Sophy'll go: 'n' we'll both go t' th' place where th' Lord takes care of all his children, whether their faces are white or black. Oh, darlin', darlin'! if th' Lord should let me die fus', you shall fin' all ready for you when you come after me. On'y don' go 'n' leave poor Ol' Sophy all 'lone in th' world!"

Helen came in at this moment and quieted the old woman with a look. Such scenes were just what were most dangerous, in the state in which Elsie was lying: but that is one of the ways in which an affectionate friend sometimes unconsciously wears out the life which a hired nurse, thinking of nothing but her regular duties and her wages, would have spared from all emotional fatigue.

The change which had come over Elsie's disposition was itself the cause of new excitements. How was it possible that her father could keep away from her, now that she was coming back to the nature and the very look of her mother, the bride of his youth? How was it possible to refuse her, when she said to Old Sophy that she should like to have her minister come in and sit by her, even though his presence might perhaps prove a new source of excitement?

But the Reverend Doctor did come and sit by her, and spoke such soothing words to her, words of such peace and consolation, that from that hour she was tranquil as never before. All true hearts are alike in the hour of need; the Catholic has a reserved fund of faith for his fellow-creature's trying moment, and the Calvinist reread those springs of human brotherhood and chanty in his soul which are only covered over by the iron tables inscribed with the harder dogmas of his creed. It was enough that the Reverend Doctor knew all Elsie's history. He could not judge her by any formula, like those which have been moulded by past ages out of their ignorance. He did not talk with her as if she were an outside sinner, worse than himself. He found a bruised and languishing soul, and bound up its wounds. A blessed office,—one which is confined to no sect or creed, but which good men in all times, under various names and with varying ministries, to suit the need of each age, of each race, of each individual soul, have come forward to discharge for their suffering fellow-creatures.

After this there was little change in Elsie, except that her heart beat more feebly every day,—so that the old Doctor himself, with all his experience, could see nothing to account for the gradual failing of the powers of life, and yet could find no remedy which seemed to arrest its progress in the smallest degree.

"Be very careful," he said, "that she is not allowed to make any muscular exertion. Any such effort, when a person is so enfeebled, may stop the heart in a moment; and if it stops, it will never move again."

Helen enforced this rule with the greatest care. Elsie was hardly allowed to move her hand or to speak above a whisper. It seemed to be mainly the question now, whether this trembling flame of life would be blown out by some light breath of air, or whether it could be so nursed and sheltered by the hollow of these watchful hands that it would have a chance to kindle to its natural brightness.

–Her father came in to sit with her in the evening. He had never talked so freely with her as during the hour he had passed at her bedside, telling her little circumstances of her mother's life, living over with her all that was pleasant in the past, and trying to encourage her with some cheerful gleams of hope for the future. A faint smile played over her face, but she did not answer his encouraging suggestions. The hour came for him to leave her with those who watched by her.

"Good-night, my dear child," he said, and, stooping down, kissed her cheek.

Elsie rose by a sudden effort, threw her arms round his neck, kissed him, and said, "Good-night, my dear father!"

The suddenness of her movement had taken him by surprise, or he would have checked so dangerous an effort. It was too late now. Her arms slid away from him like lifeless weights,—her head fell back upon her pillow,—a long sigh breathed through her lips.

"She is faint," said Helen, doubtfully; "bring me the hartshorn, Sophy."

The old woman had started from her place, and was now leaning over her, looking in her face, and listening for the sound of her breathing.

"She's dead! Elsie's dead! My darlin' 's dead!" she cried aloud, filling the room with her utterance of anguish.

Dudley Venner drew her away and silenced her with a voice of authority, while Helen and an assistant plied their restoratives. It was all in vain.

The solemn tidings passed from the chamber of death through the family. The daughter, the hope of that old and honored house, was dead in the freshness of her youth, and the home of its solitary representative was hereafter doubly desolate.

A messenger rode hastily out of the avenue. A little after this the people of the village and the outlying farm-houses were startled by the sound of a bell.

One,—two,—three,—four,—

They stopped in every house, as far as the wavering vibrations reached, and listened—

–five,—six,—seven,—

It was not the little child which had been lying so long at the point of death; that could not be more than three or four years old—

–eight,—nine,—ten,—and so on to fifteen,—sixteen,—seventeen,—eighteen–

The pulsations seemed to keep on,—but it was the brain, and not the bell, that was throbbing now.

"Elsie's dead!" was the exclamation at a hundred firesides.

"Eighteen year old," said old Widow Peake, rising from her chair. "Eighteen year ago I laid two gold eagles on her mother's eyes,—he wouldn't have anything but gold touch her eyelids,—and now Elsie's to be straightened,—the Lord have mercy on her poor sinful soul!"

Dudley Venner prayed that night that he might be forgiven, if he had failed in any act of duty or kindness to this unfortunate child of his, now freed from all the woes born with her and so long poisoning her soul. He thanked God for the brief interval of peace which had been granted her, for the sweet communion they had enjoyed in these last days, and for the hope of meeting her with that other lost friend in a better world.

Helen mingled a few broken thanks and petitions with her tears: thanks that she had been permitted to share the last days and hours of this poor sister in sorrow; petitions that the grief of bereavement might be lightened to the lonely parent and the faithful old servant.

Old Sophy said almost nothing, but sat day and night by her dead darling. But sometimes her anguish would find an outlet in strange sounds, something between a cry and a musical note,—such as none had ever heard her utter before. These were old remembrances surging up from her childish days,—coming through her mother from the cannibal chief, her grandfather,—death-wails, such as they sing in the mountains of Western Africa, when they see the fires on distant hill-sides and know that their own wives and children are undergoing the fate of captives.

The time came when Elsie was to be laid by her mother in the small square marked by the white stone.

It was not unwillingly that the Reverend Chauncy Fairweather had relinquished the duty of conducting the service to the Reverend Doctor Honeywood, in accordance with Elsie's request. He could not, by any reasoning, reconcile his present way of thinking with a hope for the future of his unfortunate parishioner. Any good old Roman Catholic priest, born and bred to his faith and his business, would have found a loop-hole into some kind of heaven for her, by virtue of his doctrine of "invincible ignorance," or other special proviso; but a recent convert cannot enter into the working

conditions of his new creed. Beliefs must be lived in for a good while, before they accommodate themselves to the soul's wants, and wear loose enough to be comfortable.

The Reverend Doctor had no such scruples. Like thousands of those who are classed nominally with the despairing believers, he had never prayed over a departed brother or sister without feeling and expressing a guarded hope that there was mercy in store for the poor sinner, whom parents, wives, children, brothers and sisters could not bear to give up to utter ruin without a word,—and would not, as he knew full well, in virtue of that human love and sympathy which nothing can ever extinguish. And in this poor Elsie's history he could read nothing which the tears of the recording angel might not wash away. As the good physician of the place knew the diseases that assailed the bodies of men and women, so he had learned the mysteries of the sickness of the soul.

So many wished to look upon Elsie's face once more, that her father would not deny them; nay, he was pleased that those who remembered her living should see her in the still beauty of death. Helen and those with her arrayed her for this farewell-view. All was ready for the sad or curious eyes which were to look upon her. There was no painful change to be concealed by any artifice. Even her round neck was left uncovered, that she might be more like one who slept. Only the golden cord was left in its place: some searching eye might detect a trace of that birth-mark which it was whispered she had always worn a necklace to conceal.

At the last moment, when all the preparations were completed, Old Sophy stooped over her, and, with trembling hand, loosed the golden cord. She looked intently, for some little space: there was no shade nor blemish where the ring of gold had encircled her throat. She took it gently away and laid it in the casket which held her ornaments.

"The Lord be praised!" the old woman cried, aloud. "He has taken away the mark that was on her; she's fit to meet his holy angels now!"

So Elsie lay for hours in the great room, in a kind of state, with flowers all about her,—her black hair braided, as in life,—her brows smooth, as if they had never known the scowl of passion, —and on her lips the faint smile with which she had uttered her last "Good-night." The young girls from the school looked at her, one after another, and passed on, sobbing, carrying in their hearts the picture that would be with them all their days. The great people of the place were all there with their silent sympathy. The lesser kind of gentry, and many of the plainer folk of the village, half-pleased to find themselves passing beneath the stately portico of the ancient mansion-house, crowded in, until the ample rooms were overflowing. All the friends whose acquaintance we have made were there, and many from remoter villages and towns.

There was a deep silence at last. The hour had come for the parting words to be spoken over the dead. The good old minister's voice rose out of the stillness, subdued and tremulous at first, but growing firmer and clearer as he went on, until it reached the ears of the visitors who were in the far, desolate chambers, looking at the pictured hangings and the old dusty portraits. He did not tell her story in his prayer. He only spoke of our dear departed sister as one of many whom Providence in its wisdom has seen fit to bring under bondage from their cradles. It was not for us to judge them by any standard of our own. He who made the heart alone knew the infirmities it inherited or acquired. For all that our dear sister had presented that was interesting and attractive in her character we were to be grateful; for whatever was dark or inexplicable we must trust that the deep shadow which rested on the twilight dawn of her being might render a reason before the bar of Omniscience; for the grace which had lightened her last days we should pour out our hearts in thankful acknowledgment. From the life and the death of this our dear sister we should learn a lesson of patience with our fellow-creatures in their inborn peculiarities, of charity in judging what seem to us wilful faults of character, of hope and trust, that, by sickness or affliction, or such inevitable discipline as life must always bring with it, if by no gentler means, the soul which had been left by Nature to wander into the path of error and of suffering might be reclaimed and restored to its true aim, and so led on by divine grace

to its eternal welfare. He closed his prayer by commending each member of the afflicted family to the divine blessing.

Then all at once rose the clear sound of the girls' voices, in the sweet, sad melody of a funeral hymn,—one of those which Elsie had marked, as if prophetically, among her own favorites.

And so they laid her in the earth, and showered down flowers upon her, and filled her grave, and covered it with green sods. By the side of it was another oblong ridge, with a white stone standing at its head. Mr. Bernard looked upon it, as he came close to the place where Elsie was laid, and read the inscription,—

CATALINA
WIFE TO DUDLEY VENNER
DIED
OCTOBER 13TH 1840
AGED XX YEARS.

A gentle rain fell on the turf after it was laid. This was the beginning of a long and dreary autumnal storm, a deferred "equinoctial," as many considered it. The mountain-streams were all swollen and turbulent, and the steep declivities were furrowed in every direction by new channels. It made the house seem doubly desolate to hear the wind howling and the rain beating upon the roofs. The poor relation who was staying at the house would insist on Helen's remaining a few days: Old Sophy was in such a condition, that it kept her in continual anxiety and there were many cares which Helen could take off from her.

The old black woman's life was buried in her darling's grave. She did nothing but moan and lament for her. At night she was restless, and would get up and wander to Elsie's apartment and look for her and call her by name. At other times she would lie awake and listen to the wind and the rain, —sometimes with such a wild look upon her face, and with such sudden starts and exclamations, that it seemed, as if she heard spirit-voices and were answering the whispers of unseen visitants. With all this were mingled hints of her old superstition,—forebodings of something fearful about to happen, —perhaps the great final catastrophe of all things, according to the prediction current in the kitchens of Rockland.

"Hark!" Old Sophy would say,—"don' you hear th' crackin' 'n' th' snappin' up in 'Th' Mountain, 'n' th' rollin' o' th' big stones? The' 's somethin' stirrin' among th' rocks; I hear th' soun' of it in th' night, when th' wind has stopped blowin'. Oh, stay by me a little while, Miss Darlin'! stay by me! for it's th' Las' Day, may be, that's close on us, 'n' I feel as if I couldn' meet th' Lord all alone!"

It was curious,—but Helen did certainly recognize sounds, during the lull of the storm, which were not of falling rain or running streams, —short snapping sounds, as of tense cords breaking,— long uneven sounds, as of masses rolling down steep declivities. But the morning came as usual; and as the others said nothing of these singular noises, Helen did not think it necessary to speak of them. All day long she and the humble relative of Elsie's mother, who had appeared, as poor relations are wont to in the great crises of life, were busy in arranging the disordered house, and looking over the various objects which Elsie's singular tastes had brought together, to dispose of them as her father might direct. They all met together at the usual hour for tea. One of the servants came in, looking very blank, and said to the poor relation,—

"The well is gone dry; we have nothing but rain-water."

Dudley Venner's countenance changed; he sprang to his feet and went to assure himself of the fact, and, if he could, of the reason of it. For a well to dry up during such a rain-storm was extraordinary,—it was ominous.

He came back, looking very anxious.

"Did any of you notice any remarkable sounds last night," he said,– "or this morning? Hark! do you hear anything now?"

They listened in perfect silence for a few moments. Then there came a short cracking sound, and two or three snaps, as of parting cords.

Dudley Venner called all his household together.

"We are in danger here, as I think, to-night," he said,—"not very great danger, perhaps, but it is a risk I do not wish you to run. These heavy rains have loosed some of the rocks above, and they may come down and endanger the house. Harness the horses, Elbridge, and take all the family away. Miss Darley will go to the Institute; the others will pass the night at the Mountain House. I shall stay here, myself: it is not at all likely that anything will come of these warnings; but if there should, I choose to be here and take my chance."

It needs little, generally, to frighten servants, and they were all ready enough to go. The poor relation was one of the timid sort, and was terribly uneasy to be got out of the house. This left no alternative, of course, for Helen, but to go also. They all urged upon Dudley Venner to go with them: if there was danger, why should he remain to risk it, when he sent away the others?

Old Sophy said nothing until the time came for her to go with the second of Elbridge's carriage-loads.

"Come, Sophy," said Dudley Venner, "get your things and go. They will take good care of you at the Mountain House; and when we have made sure that there is no real danger, you shall come back at once."

"No, Massa!" Sophy answered. "I've seen Elsie into th' ground, 'n' I a'n't goin' away to come back 'n' fin' Massa Venner buried under th' rocks. My darlin' 's gone; 'n' now, if Massa goes, 'n' th' ol' place goes, it's time for Ol' Sophy to go, too. No, Massa Venner, we'll both stay in th' ol' mansion 'n' wait for th' Lord!"

Nothing could change the old woman's determination; and her master, who only feared, but did not really expect the long-deferred catastrophe, was obliged to consent to her staying. The sudden drying of the well at such a time was the most alarming sign; for he remembered that the same thing had been observed just before great mountain-slides. This long rain, too, was just the kind of cause which was likely to loosen the strata of rock piled up in the ledges; if the dreaded event should ever come to pass, it would be at such a time.

He paced his chamber uneasily until long past midnight. If the morning came without accident, he meant to have a careful examination made of all the rents and fissures above, of their direction and extent, and especially whether, in case of a mountain-slide, the huge masses would be like to reach so far to the east and so low down the declivity as the mansion.

At two o'clock in the morning he was dozing in his chair. Old Sophy had lain down on her bed, and was muttering in troubled dreams.

All at once a loud crash seemed to rend the very heavens above them: a crack as of the thunder that follows close upon the bolt,—a rending and crushing as of a forest snapped through all its stems, torn, twisted, splintered, dragged with all its ragged boughs into one chaotic ruin. The ground trembled under them as in an earthquake; the old mansion shuddered so that all its windows chattered in their casements; the great chimney shook off its heavy cap-stones, which came down on the roof with resounding concussions; and the echoes of The Mountain roared and bellowed in long reduplication, as if its whole foundations were rent, and this were the terrible voice of its dissolution.

Dudley Venner rose from his chair, folded his arms, and awaited his fate. There was no knowing where to look for safety; and he remembered too well the story of the family that was lost by rushing out of the house, and so hurrying into the very jaws of death.

He had stood thus but for a moment, when he heard the voice of Old Sophy in a wild cry of terror:—

"It's the Las' Day! It's the Las' Day! The Lord is comin' to take us all!"

"Sophy!" he called; but she did not hear him or heed him, and rushed out of the house.

The worst danger was over. If they were to be destroyed, it would necessarily be in a few seconds from the first thrill of the terrible convulsion. He waited in awful suspense, but calm. Not more than one or two minutes could have passed before the frightful tumult and all its sounding echoes had ceased. He called Old Sophy; but she did not answer. He went to the western window and looked forth into the darkness. He could not distinguish the outlines of the landscape, but the white stone was clearly visible, and by its side the new-made mound. Nay, what was that which obscured its outline, in shape like a human figure? He flung open the window and sprang through. It was all that there was left of poor Old Sophy, stretched out, lifeless, upon her darling's grave.

He had scarcely composed her limbs and drawn the sheet over her, when the neighbors began to arrive from all directions. Each was expecting to hear of houses overwhelmed and families destroyed; but each came with the story that his own household was safe. It was not until the morning dawned that the true nature and extent of the sudden movement was ascertained. A great seam had opened above the long cliff, and the terrible Rattlesnake Ledge, with all its envenomed reptiles, its dark fissures and black caverns, was buried forever beneath a mighty incumbent mass of ruin.

CHAPTER XXXI

MR. SILAS PECKHAM RENDERS HIS ACCOUNT

The morning rose clear and bright. The long storm was over, and the calm autumnal sunshine was now to return, with all its infinite repose and sweetness. With the earliest dawn exploring parties were out in every direction along the southern slope of The Mountain, tracing the ravages of the great slide and the track it had followed. It proved to be not so much a slide as the breaking off and falling of a vast line of cliff, including the dreaded Ledge. It had folded over like the leaves of a half-opened book when they close, crushing the trees below, piling its ruins in a glacis at the foot of what had been the overhanging wall of the cliff, and filling up that deep cavity above the mansion-house which bore the ill-omened name of Dead Man's Hollow. This it was which had saved the Dudley mansion. The falling masses, or huge fragments breaking off from them, would have swept the house and all around it to destruction but for this deep shelving dell, into which the stream of ruin was happily directed. It was, indeed, one of Nature's conservative revolutions; for the fallen masses made a kind of shelf, which interposed a level break between the inclined planes above and below it, so that the nightmare-fancies of the dwellers in the Dudley mansion, and in many other residences under the shadow of The Mountain, need not keep them lying awake hereafter to listen for the snapping of roots and the splitting of the rocks above them.

Twenty-four hours after the falling of the cliff, it seemed as if it had happened ages ago. The new fact had fitted itself in with all the old predictions, forebodings, fears, and acquired the solidarity belonging to all events which have slipped out of the fingers of Time and dissolved in the antecedent eternity.

Old Sophy was lying dead in the Dudley mansion. If there were tears shed for her, they could not be bitter ones; for she had lived out her full measure of days, and gone—who could help fondly believing it?—to rejoin her beloved mistress. They made a place for her at the foot of the two mounds. It was thus she would have chosen to sleep, and not to have wronged her humble devotion in life by asking to lie at the side of those whom she had served so long and faithfully. There were very few present at the simple ceremony. Helen Darley was one of these few. The old black woman had been her companion in all the kind offices of which she had been the ministering angel to Elsie.

After it was all over, Helen was leaving with the rest, when Dudley Venner begged her to stay a little, and he would send her back: it was a long walk; besides, he wished to say some things to her, which he had not had the opportunity of speaking. Of course Helen could not refuse him; there must be many thoughts coming into his mind which he would wish to share with her who had known his daughter so long and been with her in her last days.

She returned into the great parlor with the wrought cornices and the medallion-portraits on the ceiling.

"I am now alone in the world," Dudley Venner said.

Helen must have known that before he spoke. But the tone in which he said it had so much meaning, that she could not find a word to answer him with. They sat in silence, which the old tall clock counted out in long seconds; but it was a silence which meant more than any words they had ever spoken.

"Alone in the world! Helen, the freshness of my life is gone, and there is little left of the few graces which in my younger days might have fitted me to win the love of women. Listen to me,—kindly, if you can; forgive me, at least. Half my life has been passed in constant fear and anguish, without any near friend to share my trials. My task is done now; my fears have ceased to prey upon me; the sharpness of early sorrows has yielded something of its edge to time. You have bound me

to you by gratitude in the tender care you have taken of my poor child. More than this. I must tell you all now, out of the depth of this trouble through which I am passing. I have loved you from the moment we first met; and if my life has anything left worth accepting, it is yours. Will you take the offered gift?"

Helen looked in his face, surprised, bewildered.

"This is not for me,—not for me," she said. "I am but a poor faded flower, not worth the gathering of such a one as you. No, no,—I have been bred to humble toil all my days, and I could not be to you what you ought to ask. I am accustomed to a kind of loneliness and self-dependence. I have seen nothing, almost, of the world, such as you were born to move in. Leave me to my obscure place and duties; I shall at least have peace;—and you—you will surely find in due time some one better fitted by Nature and training to make you happy."

"No, Miss Darley!" Dudley Venner said, almost sternly. "You must not speak to a man who has lived through my experiences of looking about for a new choice after his heart has once chosen. Say that you can never love me; say that I have lived too long to share your young life; say that sorrow has left nothing in me for Love to find his pleasure in; but do not mock me with the hope of a new affection for some unknown object. The first look of yours brought me to your side. The first tone of your voice sunk into my heart. From this moment my life must wither out or bloom anew. My home is desolate. Come under my roof and make it bright once more,—share my life with me,—or I shall give the halls of the old mansion to the bats and the owls, and wander forth alone without a hope or a friend!"

To find herself with a man's future at the disposal of a single word of hers!—a man like this, too, with a fascination for her against which she had tried to shut her heart, feeling that he lived in another sphere than hers, working as she was for her bread, a poor operative in the factory of a hard master and jealous overseer, the salaried drudge of Mr. Silas Peckham! Why, she had thought he was grateful to her as a friend of his daughter; she had even pleased herself with the feeling that he liked her, in her humble place, as a woman of some cultivation and many sympathetic! points of relation with himself; but that he *loved* her,—that this deep, fine nature, in a man so far removed from her in outward circumstance, should have found its counterpart in one whom life had treated so coldly as herself,—that Dudley Venner should stake his happiness on a breath of hers,—poor Helen Darley's,—it was all a surprise, a confusion, a kind of fear not wholly fearful. Ah, me! women know what it is,—that mist over the eyes, that trembling in the limbs, that faltering of the voice, that sweet, shame-faced, unspoken confession of weakness which does not wish to be strong, that sudden overflow in the soul where thoughts loose their hold on each other and swim single and helpless in the flood of emotion,—women know what it is!

No doubt she was a little frightened and a good deal bewildered, and that her sympathies were warmly excited for a friend to whom she had been brought so near, and whose loneliness she saw and pitied. She lost that calm self-possession she had hoped to maintain.

"If I thought that I could make you happy,—if I should speak from my heart, and not my reason,—I am but a weak woman,—yet if I can be to you—What can I say?"

What more could this poor, dear Helen say?

* * * * *

"Elbridge, harness the horses and take Miss Darley back to the school."

What conversation had taken place since Helen's rhetorical failure is not recorded in the minutes from which this narrative is constructed. But when the man who had been summoned had gone to get the carriage ready, Helen resumed something she had been speaking of.

"Not for the world! Everything must go on just as it has gone on, for the present. There are proprieties to be consulted. I cannot be hard with you, that out of your very affliction has sprung this—this—well—you must name it for me,—but the world will never listen to explanations. I am to be Helen Darley, lady assistant in Mr. Silas Peckham's school, as long as I see fit to hold my office.

And I mean to attend to my scholars just as before; so that I shall have very little time for visiting or seeing company. I believe, though, you are one of the Trustees and a Member of the Examining Committee; so that, if you should happen to visit the school, I shall try to be civil to you."

Every lady sees, of course, that Helen was quite right; but perhaps here and there one will think that Dudley Venner was all wrong,—that he was too hasty,—that he should have been too full of his recent grief for such a confession as he has just made, and the passion from which it sprung. Perhaps they do not understand the sudden recoil of a strong nature long compressed. Perhaps they have not studied the mystery of *allotropism* in the emotions of the human heart. Go to the nearest chemist and ask him to show you some of the dark-red phosphorus which will not burn, without fierce heating, but at 500°, Fahrenheit, changes back again to the inflammable substance we know so well. Grief seems more like ashes than like fire; but as grief has been love once, so it may become love again. This is emotional allotropism.

Helen rode back to the Institute and inquired for Mr. Peckham. She had not seen him during the brief interval between her departure from the mansion-house and her return to Old Sophy's funeral. There were various questions about the school she wished to ask.

"Oh, how's your haälth, Miss Darley?" Silas began. "We've missed you consid'able. Glad to see you back at the post of dooty. Hope the Squire treated you hahnsomely,—liberal pecooniary compensation,—hey? A'n't much of a loser, I guess, by acceptin' his propositions?"

Helen blushed at this last question, as if Silas had meant something by it beyond asking what money she had received; but his own double-meaning expression and her blush were too nice points for him to have taken cognizance of. He was engaged in a mental calculation as to the amount of the deduction he should make under the head of "damage to the institootion,"—this depending somewhat on that of the "pecooniary compensation" she might have received for her services as the friend of Elsie Venner.

So Helen slid back at once into her routine, the same faithful, patient creature she had always been. But what was this new light which seemed to have kindled in her eyes? What was this look of peace, which nothing could disturb, which smiled serenely through all the little meannesses with which the daily life of the educational factory surrounded her,—which not only made her seem resigned, but overflowed all her features with a thoughtful, subdued happiness? Mr. Bernard did not know,—perhaps he did not guess. The inmates of the Dudley mansion were not scandalized by any mysterious visits of a veiled or unveiled lady. The vibrating tongues of the "female youth" of the Institute were not set in motion by the standing of an equipage at the gate, waiting for their lady teacher. The servants at the mansion did not convey numerous letters with superscriptions in a bold, manly hand, sealed with the arms of a well-known house, and directed to Miss Helen Darley; nor, on the other hand, did Hiram, the man from the lean streak in New Hampshire, carry sweet-smelling, rose-hued, many-layered, criss-crossed, fine-stitch-lettered packages of note-paper directed to Dudley Venner, Esq., and all too scanty to hold that incredible expansion of the famous three words which a woman was born to say,—that perpetual miracle which astonishes all the go-betweens who wear their shoes out in carrying a woman's infinite variations on the theme, "I love you."

But the reader must remember that there are walks in country-towns where people are liable to meet by accident, and that the hollow of an old tree has served the purpose of a post-office sometimes; so that he has her choice (to divide the pronouns impartially) of various hypotheses to account for the new glory of happiness which seemed to have irradiated our poor Helen's features, as if her dreary life were awakening in the dawn of a blessed future.

With all the alleviations which have been hinted at, Mr. Dudley Venner thought that the days and the weeks had never moved so slowly as through the last period of the autumn that was passing. Elsie had been a perpetual source of anxiety to him, but still she had been a companion. He could not mourn for her; for he felt that she was safer with her mother, in that world where there are no more sorrows and dangers, than she could have been with him. But as he sat at his window and looked at

the three mounds, the loneliness of the great house made it seem more like the sepulchre than these narrow dwellings where his beloved and her daughter lay close to each other, side by side,—Catalina, the bride of his youth, and Elsie, the child whom he had nurtured, with poor Old Sophy, who had followed them like a black shadow, at their feet, under the same soft turf, sprinkled with the brown autumnal leaves. It was not good for him to be thus alone. How should he ever live through the long months of November and December?

The months of November and December did, in some way or other, get rid of themselves at last, bringing with them the usual events of village-life and a few unusual ones. Some of the geologists had been up to look at the great slide, of which they gave those prolix accounts which everybody remembers who read the scientific journals of the time. The engineers reported that there was little probability of any further convulsion along the line of rocks which overhung the more thickly settled part of the town. The naturalists drew up a paper on the "Probable Extinction of the *Crotalus Durissus* in the Township of Rockland." The engagement of the Widow Rowens to a Little Millionville merchant was announced,—"Sudding 'n' onexpected," Widow Leech said,—"waälthy, or she wouldn't ha' looked at him,—fifty year old, if he is a day, *'n' ha'n't got a white hair in his head."* The Reverend Chauncy Fairweather had publicly announced that he was going to join the Roman Catholic communion,—not so much to the surprise or consternation of the religious world as he had supposed. Several old ladies forthwith proclaimed their intention of following him; but, as one or two of them were deaf, and another had been threatened with an attack of that mild, but obstinate complaint, *dementia senilis*, many thought it was not so much the force of his arguments as a kind of tendency to jump as the bellwether jumps, well known in flocks not included in the Christian fold. His bereaved congregation immediately began pulling candidates on and off, like new boots, on trial. Some pinched in tender places; some were too loose; some were too square-toed; some were too coarse, and didn't please; some were too thin, and wouldn't last;—in short, they couldn't possibly find a fit. At last people began to drop in to hear old Doctor Honeywood. They were quite surprised to find what a human old gentleman he was, and went back and told the others, that, instead of being a case of confluent sectarianism, as they supposed, the good old minister had been so well vaccinated with charitable virus that he was now a true, open-souled Christian of the mildest type. The end of all which was, that the liberal people went over to the old minister almost in a body, just at the time that Deacon Shearer and the "Vinegar-Bible" party split off, and that not long afterwards they sold their own meeting-house to the malecontents, so that Deacon Soper used often to remind Colonel Sprowle of his wish that "our little man and him [the Reverend Doctor] would swop pulpits," and tell him it had "pooty nigh come trew."—But this is anticipating the course of events, which were much longer in coming about; for we have but just got through that terribly long month, as Mr. Dudley Venner found it, of December.

On the first of January, Mr. Silas Peckham was in the habit of settling his quarterly accounts, and making such new arrangements as his convenience or interest dictated. New-Year was a holiday at the Institute. No doubt this accounted for Helen's being dressed so charmingly,—always, to be sure, in her own simple way, but yet with such a true lady's air that she looked fit to be the mistress of any mansion in the land.

She was in the parlor alone, a little before noon, when Mr. Peckham came in.

"I'm ready to settle my account with you now, Miss Darley," said Silas.

"As you please, Mr. Peckham," Helen answered, very graciously.

"Before payin' you your selary," the Principal continued, "I wish to come to an understandin' as to the futur'. I consider that I've been payin' high, very high, for the work you do. Women's wages can't be expected to do more than feed and clothe 'em, as a gineral thing, with a little savin', in case of sickness, and to bury 'em, if they break daown, as all of 'em are liable to do at any time. If I a'n't misinformed, you not only support yourself out of my establishment, but likewise relatives of yours, who I don't know that I'm called upon to feed and clothe. There is a young woman, not burdened

with destitoot relatives, has signified that she would be glad to take your dooties for less pecooniary compensation, by a consid'able amaount, than you now receive. I shall be willin', however, to retain your services at sech redooced rate as we shall fix upon,—provided sech redooced rate be as low or lower than the same services can be obtained elsewhere."

"As you please, Mr. Peckham," Helen answered, with a smile so sweet that the Principal (who of course had trumped up this opposition-teacher for the occasion) said to himself she would stand being cut down a quarter, perhaps a half, of her salary.

"Here is your accaount, Miss Darley, and the balance doo you," said Silas Peckham, handing her a paper and a small roll of infectious-flavored bills wrapping six poisonous coppers of the old coinage.

She took the paper and began looking at it. She could not quite make up her mind to touch the feverish bills with the cankering copper in them, and left them airing themselves on the table.

The document she held ran as follows:

Silas Peckham, Esq., Principal of the Apollinean Institute,
In Account with Helen Darley, Assist. Teacher.
Dr.
To Salary for quarter ending Jan. 1st,
@ $75 per quarter $75.00

_____
$75.00
Cr.
By Deduction for absence, 1 week 8
days $10.00
" Board, lodging, etc., for 10 days,
@ 75 cts. per day 7.50
" Damage to Institution by absence
of teacher from duties, say . . . 25.00
" Stationery furnished 43
" Postage-stamp 01
" Balance due Helen Darley . . $32.06

_____
$75.00
ROCKLAND, Jan. 1st, 1859.

Now Helen had her own private reasons for wishing to receive the small sum which was due her at this time without any unfair deduction,—reasons which we need not inquire into too particularly, as we may be very sure that they were right and womanly. So, when she looked over this account of Mr. Silas Peckham's, and saw that he had contrived to pare down her salary to something less than half its stipulated amount, the look which her countenance wore was as near to that of righteous indignation as her gentle features and soft blue eyes would admit of its being.

"Why, Mr. Peckham," she said, "do you mean this? If I am of so much value to you that you must take off twenty-five dollars for ten days' absence, how is it that my salary is to be cut down to less than seventy-five dollars a quarter, if I remain here?"

"I gave you fair notice," said Silas. "I have a minute of it I took down immed'ately after the intervoo."

He lugged out his large pocket-book with the strap going all round it, and took from it a slip of paper which confirmed his statement.

"Besides," he added, slyly, "I presoom you have received a liberal pecooniary compensation from Squire Venner for nussin' his daughter."

Helen was looking over the bill while he was speaking.

"Board and lodging for ten days, Mr. Peckham,—*whose* board and lodging, pray?"

The door opened before Silas Peckham could answer, and Mr. Bernard walked into the parlor. Helen was holding the bill in her hand, looking as any woman ought to look who has been at once wronged and insulted.

"The last turn of the thumbscrew!" said Mr. Bernard to himself. "What is it, Helen? You look troubled."

She handed him the account.

He looked at the footing of it. Then he looked at the items. Then he looked at Silas Peckham.

At this moment Silas was sublime. He was so transcendency unconscious of the emotions going on in Mr. Bernard's mind at the moment, that he had only a single thought.

"The accaount's correc'ly cast, I presoom;—if the' 's any mistake of figgers or addin' 'em up, it'll be made all right. Everything's accordin' to agreement. The minute written immed'ately after the intervoo is here in my possession."

Mr. Bernard looked at Helen. Just what would have happened to Silas Peckham, as he stood then and there, but for the interposition of a merciful Providence, nobody knows or ever will know; for at that moment steps were heard upon the stairs, and Hiram threw open the parlor-door for Mr. Dudley Venner to enter.

He saluted them all gracefully with the good-wishes of the season, and each of them returned his compliment,—Helen blushing fearfully, of course, but not particularly noticed in her embarrassment by more than one.

Silas Peckham reckoned with perfect confidence on his Trustees, who had always said what he told them to, and done what he wanted. It was a good chance now to show off his power, and, by letting his instructors know the unstable tenure of their offices, make it easier to settle his accounts and arrange his salaries. There was nothing very strange in Mr. Venner's calling; he was one of the Trustees, and this was New Year's Day. But he had called just at the lucky moment for Mr. Peckham's object.

"I have thought some of makin' changes in the department of instruction," he began. "Several accomplished teachers have applied to me, who would be glad of sitooations. I understand that there never have been so many fust-rate teachers, male and female, out of employment as doorin' the present season. If I can make sahtisfahctory arrangements with my present corpse of teachers, I shall be glad to do so; otherwise I shell, with the permission of the Trustees, make sech noo arrangements as circumstahnces compel."

"You may make arrangements for a new assistant in my department, Mr. Peckham," said Mr. Bernard, "at once,—this day,—this hour. I am not safe to be trusted with your person five minutes out of this lady's presence,—of whom I beg pardon for this strong language. Mr. Venner, I must beg you, as one of the Trustees of this Institution, to look at the manner in which its Principal has attempted to swindle this faithful teacher, whose toils and sacrifices and self-devotion to the school have made it all that it is, in spite of this miserable trader's incompetence. Will you look at the paper I hold?"

Dudley Venner took the account and read it through, without changing a feature. Then he turned to Silas Peckham.

"You may make arrangements for a new assistant in the branches this lady has taught. Miss Helen Darley is to be my wife. I had hoped to announce this news in a less abrupt and ungraceful manner. But I came to tell you with my own lips what you would have learned before evening from my friends in the village."

Mr. Bernard went to Helen, who stood silent, with downcast eyes, and took her hand warmly, hoping she might find all the happiness she deserved. Then he turned to Dudley Venner, and said,—

"She is a queen, but has never found it out. The world has nothing nobler than this dear woman, whom you have discovered in the disguise of a teacher. God bless her and you!"

Dudley Venner returned his friendly grasp, without answering a word in articulate speech.

Silas remained dumb and aghast for a brief space. Coming to himself a little, he thought there might have been some mistake about the items,—would like to have Miss Darley's bill returned,—would make it all right,—had no idee that Squire Venner had a special int'rest in Miss Darley,—was sorry he had given offence,—if he might take that bill and look it over—

"No, Mr. Peckham," said Mr. Dudley Venner; "there will be a full meeting of the Board next week, and the bill, and such evidence with reference to the management of the Institution and the treatment of its instructors as Mr. Langdon sees fit to bring forward, will be laid before them."

Miss Helen Darley became that very day the guest of Miss Arabella Thornton, the Judge's daughter. Mr. Bernard made his appearance a week or two later at the Lectures, where the Professor first introduced him to the reader.

He stayed after the class had left the room.

"Ah, Mr. Langdon! how do you do? Very glad to see you back again. How have you been since our correspondence on Fascination and other curious scientific questions?"

It was the Professor who spoke,—whom the reader will recognize as myself, the teller of this story.

"I have been well," Mr. Bernard answered, with a serious look which invited a further question.

"I hope you have had none of those painful or dangerous experiences you seemed to be thinking of when you wrote; at any rate, you have escaped having your obituary written."

"I have seen some things worth remembering. Shall I call on you this evening and tell you about them?"

"I shall be most happy to see you."

* * * * *

This was the way in which I, the Professor, became acquainted with some of the leading events of this story. They interested me sufficiently to lead me to avail myself of all those other extraordinary methods of obtaining information well known to writers of narrative.

Mr. Langdon seemed to me to have gained in seriousness and strength of character by his late experiences. He threw his whole energies into his studies with an effect which distanced all his previous efforts. Remembering my former hint, he employed his spare hours in writing for the annual prizes, both of which he took by a unanimous vote of the judges. Those who heard him read his Thesis at the Medical Commencement will not soon forget the impression made by his fine personal appearance and manners, nor the universal interest excited in the audience, as he read, with his beautiful enunciation, that striking paper entitled "Unresolved Nebulas in Vital Science." It was a general remark of the Faculty,—and old Doctor Kittredge, who had come down on purpose to hear Mr. Langdon, heartily agreed to it,—that there had never been a diploma filled up, since the institution which conferred upon him the degree of *Doctor Medicinae* was founded, which carried with it more of promise to the profession than that which bore the name of

Bernardus Caryl Langdon

CHAPTER XXXII

CONCLUSION

Mr. Bernard Langdon had no sooner taken his degree, than, in accordance with the advice of one of his teachers whom he frequently consulted, he took an office in the heart of the city where he had studied. He had thought of beginning in a suburb or some remoter district of the city proper.

"No," said his teacher,—to wit, myself,—"don't do any such thing. You are made for the best kind of practice; don't hamper yourself with an outside constituency, such as belongs to a practitioner of the second class. When a fellow like you chooses his beat, he must look ahead a little. Take care of all the poor that apply to you, but leave the half-pay classes to a different style of doctor,—the people who spend one half their time in taking care of their patients, and the other half in squeezing out their money. Go for the swell-fronts and south-exposure houses; the folks inside are just as good as other people, and the pleasantest, on the whole, to take care of. They must have somebody, and they like a gentleman best. Don't throw yourself away. You have a good presence and pleasing manners. You wear white linen by inherited instinct. You can pronounce the word *view*. You have all the elements of success; go and take it. Be polite and generous, but don't undervalue yourself. You will be useful, at any rate; you may just as well be happy, while you are about it. The highest social class furnishes incomparably the best patients, taking them by and large. Besides, when they won't get well and bore you to death, you can send 'em off to travel. Mind me now, and take the tops of your sparrowgrass. Somebody must have 'em,—why shouldn't you? If you don't take your chance, you'll get the butt-ends as a matter of course."

Mr. Bernard talked like a young man full of noble sentiments. He wanted to be useful to his fellow-beings. Their social differences were nothing to him. He would never court the rich,—he would go where he was called. He would rather save the life of a poor mother of a family than that of half a dozen old gouty millionnaires whose heirs had been yawning and stretching these ten years to get rid of them.

"Generous emotions!" I exclaimed. "Cherish 'em; cling to 'em till you are fifty,—till you are seventy,—till you are ninety! But do as I tell you,—strike for the best circle of practice, and you'll be sure to get it!"

Mr. Langdon did as I told him,—took a genteel office, furnished it neatly, dressed with a certain elegance, soon made a pleasant circle of acquaintances, and began to work his way into the right kind of business. I missed him, however, for some days, not long after he had opened his office. On his return, he told me he had been up at Rockland, by special invitation, to attend the wedding of Mr. Dudley Venner and Miss Helen Darley. He gave me a full account of the ceremony, which I regret that I cannot relate in full. "Helen looked like an angel,"—that, I am sure, was one of his expressions. As for her dress, I should like to give the details, but am afraid of committing blunders, as men always do, when they undertake to describe such matters. White dress, anyhow,—that I am sure of,—with orange-flowers, and the most wonderful lace veil that was ever seen or heard of. The Reverend Doctor Honeywood performed the ceremony, of course. The good people seemed to have forgotten they ever had had any other minister,—except Deacon Shearer and his set of malecontents, who were doing a dull business in the meeting-house lately occupied by the Reverend Mr. Fairweather.

"Who was at the wedding?"

"Everybody, pretty much. They wanted to keep it quiet, but it was of no use. Married at church. Front pews, old Doctor Kittredge and all the mansion-house people and distinguished strangers,—Colonel Sprowle and family, including Matilda's young gentleman, a graduate of one of the fresh-water colleges,—Mrs. Pickins (late Widow Rowens) and husband,—Deacon Soper and numerous

parishioners. A little nearer the door, Abel, the Doctor's man, and Elbridge, who drove them to church in, the family-coach. Father Fairweather, as they all call him now, came in late, with Father McShane."

"And Silas Peckham?"

"Oh, Silas had left The School and Rockland. Cut up altogether too badly in the examination instituted by the Trustees. Had moved over to Tamarack, and thought of renting a large house and 'farming' the town-poor."

* * * * *

Some time after this, as I was walking with a young friend along by the swell-fronts and south-exposures, whom should I see but Mr. Bernard Langdon, looking remarkably happy, and keeping step by the side of a very handsome and singularly well-dressed young lady? He bowed and lifted his hat as we passed.

"Who is that pretty girl my young doctor has got there?" I said to my companion.

"Who is that?" he answered. "You don't know? Why, that is neither more nor less than Miss Letitia Forester, daughter of—of—why, the great banking-firm, you know, Bilyuns Brothers & Forester. Got acquainted with her in the country, they say. There's a story that they're engaged, or like to be, if the firm consents."

"Oh!" I said.

I did not like the look of it in the least. Too young,—too young. Has not taken any position yet. No right to ask for the hand of Bilyuns Brothers & Co.'s daughter. Besides, it will spoil him for practice, if he marries a rich girl before he has formed habits of work.

I looked in at his office the next day. A box of white kids was lying open on the table. A three-cornered note, directed in a very delicate lady's-hand, was distinguishable among a heap of papers. I was just going to call him to account for his proceedings, when he pushed the three-cornered note aside and took up a letter with a great corporation-seal upon it. He had received the offer of a professor's chair in an ancient and distinguished institution.

"Pretty well for three-and-twenty, my boy," I said. "I suppose you'll think you must be married one of these days, if you accept this office."

Mr. Langdon blushed.—There had been stories about him, he knew. His name had been mentioned in connection with that of a very charming young lady. The current reports were not true. He had met this young lady, and been much pleased with her, in the country, at the house of her grandfather, the Reverend Doctor Honeywood,—you remember Miss Letitia Forester, whom I have mentioned repeatedly? On coming to town, he found his country-acquaintance in a social position which seemed to discourage his continued intimacy. He had discovered, however, that he was a not unwelcome visitor, and had kept up friendly relations with her. But there was no truth in the current reports,—none at all.

Some months had passed, after this visit, when I happened one evening to stroll into a box in one of the principal theatres of the city. A small party sat on the seats before me: a middle-aged gentleman and his lady, in front, and directly behind them my young doctor and the same very handsome young lady I had seen him walking with on the side-walk before the swell-fronts and south-exposures. As Professor Langdon seemed to be very much taken up with his companion, and both of them looked as if they were enjoying themselves, I determined not to make my presence known to my young friend, and to withdraw quietly after feasting my eyes with the sight of them for a few minutes.

"It looks as if something might come of it," I said to myself.

At that moment the young lady lifted her arm accidentally, in such a way that the light fell upon the clasp of a chain which encircled her wrist. My eyes filled with tears as I read upon the clasp, in sharp-cut Italic letters, *E.V.* They were tears at once of sad remembrance and of joyous anticipation; for the ornament on which I looked was the double pledge of a dead sorrow and a living affection. It was the golden bracelet,—the parting-gift of Elsie Venner.

* * * * *

BUBBLES

I

I stood on the brink in childhood,
And watched the bubbles go
From the rock-fretted sunny ripple
To the smoother lymph below;

And over the white creek-bottom,
Under them every one,
Went golden stars in the water,
All luminous with the sun.

But the bubbles brake on the surface,
And under, the stars of gold
Brake, and the hurrying water
Flowed onward, swift and cold.

II

I stood on the brink in manhood,
And it came to my weary heart,—
In my breast so dull and heavy,
After the years of smart,—

That every hollowest bubble
Which over my life had passed
Still into its deeper current
Some sky-sweet gleam had cast;

That, however I mocked it gayly,
And guessed at its hollowness,
Still shone, with each bursting bubble,
One star in my soul the less.

CITIES AND PARKS:

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE NEW YORK CENTRAL PARK

The first murderer was the first city-builder; and a good deal of murdering has been carried on in the interest of city-building ever since Cain's day. Narrow and crooked streets, want of proper sewerage and ventilation, the absence of forethought in providing open spaces for the recreation of the people, the allowance of intramural burials, and of fetid nuisances, such as slaughter-houses and manufactories of offensive stuffs, have converted cities into pestilential inclosures, and kept Jefferson's saying—"Great cities are great sores"—true in its most literal and mortifying sense.

There is some excuse for the crowded and irregular character of Old-World cities. They grew, and were not builded. Accumulations of people, who lighted like bees upon a chance branch, they found themselves hived in obdurate brick and mortar before they knew it; and then, to meet the necessities of their cribbed, cabined, and confined condition, they must tear down sacred landmarks, sacrifice invaluable possessions, and trample on prescriptive rights, to provide breathing-room for their gasping population. Besides, air, water, light, and cleanliness are modern innovations. The nose seems to have acquired its sensitiveness within a hundred years,—the lungs their objection to foul air, and the palate its disgust at ditch-water like the Thames, within a more recent period. Honestly dirty, and robustly indifferent to what mortally offends our squeamish senses, our happy ancestors fattened on carbonic acid gas, and took the exhalations of graveyards and gutters with a placidity of stomach that excites our physiological admiration. If they died, it was not for want of air. The pestilence carried, them off,—and that was a providential enemy, whose home-bred origin nobody suspected.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.