ABBOTT JACOB

MARY ERSKINE

Jacob Abbott

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Содержание

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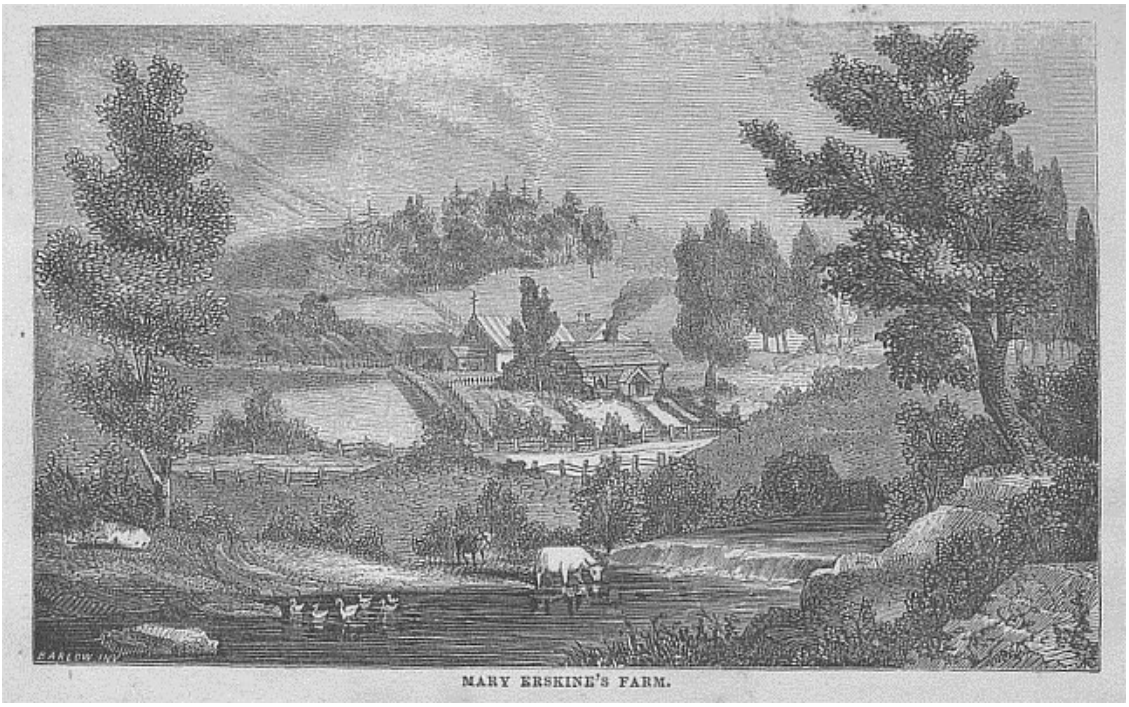


MARY ERSKINE'S FARM.

PREFACE

The development of the moral sentiments in the human heart, in early life,—and every thing in fact which relates to the formation of character,—is determined in a far greater degree by sympathy, and by the influence of example, than by formal precepts and didactic instruction. If a boy hears his father speaking kindly to a robin in the spring,—welcoming its coming and offering it food, —there arises at once in his own mind, a feeling of kindness toward the bird, and toward all the animal creation, which is produced by a sort of sympathetic action, a power somewhat similar to what in physical philosophy is called *induction*. On the other hand, if the father, instead of feeding the bird, goes eagerly for a gun, in order that he may shoot it, the boy will sympathize in that desire, and growing up under such an influence, there will be gradually formed within him, through the mysterious tendency of the youthful heart to vibrate in unison with hearts that are near, a disposition to kill and destroy all helpless beings that come within his power. There is no need of any formal instruction in either case. Of a thousand children brought up under the former of the above-described influences, nearly every one, when he sees a bird, will wish to go and get crumbs to feed it, while in the latter case, nearly every one will just as certainly look for a stone. Thus the growing up in the right atmosphere, rather than the receiving of the right instruction, is the condition which it is most important to secure, in plans for forming the characters of children.

It is in accordance with this philosophy that these stories, though written mainly with a view to their moral influence on the hearts and dispositions of the readers, contain very little formal exhortation and instruction. They present quiet and peaceful pictures of happy domestic life, portraying generally such conduct, and expressing such sentiments and feelings, as it is desirable to exhibit and express in the presence of children.

The books, however, will be found, perhaps, after all, to be useful mainly in entertaining and amusing the youthful readers who may peruse them, as the writing of them has been the amusement and recreation of the author in the intervals of more serious pursuits.

CHAPTER I.
JEMMY

Malleville and her cousin Phonny generally played together at Franconia a great part of the day, and at night they slept in two separate recesses which opened out of the same room. These recesses were deep and large, and they were divided from the room by curtains, so that they formed as it were separate chambers: and yet the children could speak to each other from them in the morning before they got up, since the curtains did not intercept the sound of their voices. They might have talked in the same manner at night, after they had gone to bed, but this was against Mrs. Henry's rules.

One morning Malleville, after lying awake a few minutes, listening to the birds that were singing in the yard, and wishing that the window was open so that she could hear them more distinctly, heard Phonny's voice calling to her.

"Malleville," said he, "are you awake?"

"Yes," said Malleville, "are you?"

"Yes," said Phonny, "I'm awake—but what a cold morning it is!"

It was indeed a cold morning, or at least a very *cool* one. This was somewhat remarkable, as it was in the month of June. But the country about Franconia was cold in winter, and cool in summer. Phonny and Malleville rose and dressed themselves, and then went down stairs. They hoped to find a fire in the sitting-room, but there was none.

"How sorry I am," said Phonny. "But hark, I hear a roaring."

"Yes," said Malleville; "it is the oven; they are going to bake."

The back of the oven was so near to the partition wall which formed one side of the sitting-room, that the sound of the fire could be heard through it. The mouth of the oven however opened into another small room connected with the kitchen, which was called the baking-room. The children went out into the baking-room, to warm themselves by the oven fire.

"I am very glad that it is a cool day," said Phonny, "for perhaps mother will let us go to Mary Erskine's. Should not you like to go?"

"Yes," said Malleville, "very much. Where is it?"

The readers who have perused the preceding volumes of this series will have observed that Mary Bell, who lived with her mother in the pleasant little farm-house at a short distance from the village, was always called by her full name, Mary Bell, and not ever, or scarcely ever, merely Mary. People had acquired the habit of speaking of her in this way, in order to distinguish her from another Mary who lived with Mrs. Bell for several years. This other Mary was Mary Erskine. Mary Erskine did not live now at Mrs. Bell's, but at another house which was situated nearly two miles from Mrs. Henry's, and the way to it was by a very wild and unfrequented road. The children were frequently accustomed to go and make Mary Erskine a visit; but it was so long a walk that Mrs. Henry never allowed them to go unless on a very cool day.

At breakfast that morning Phonny asked his mother if that would not be a good day for them to go and see Mary Erskine. Mrs. Henry said that it would be an excellent day, and that she should be very glad to have them go, for there were some things there to be brought home. Besides Beechnut was going to mill, and he could carry them as far as Kater's corner.

Kater's corner was a place where a sort of cart path, branching off from the main road, led through the woods to the house where Mary Erskine lived. It took its name from a farmer, whose name was Kater, and whose house was at the corner where the roads diverged. The main road itself was very rough and wild, and the cart path which led from the corner was almost impassable in summer, even for a wagon, though it was a very romantic and beautiful road for travelers on horseback or on foot. In the winter the road was excellent: for the snow buried all the roughness of the way two

or three feet deep, and the teams which went back and forth into the woods, made a smooth and beautiful track for every thing on runners, upon the top of it.

Malleville and Phonny were very much pleased with the prospect of riding a part of the way to Mary Erskine's, with Beechnut, in the wagon. They made themselves ready immediately after breakfast, and then went and sat down upon the step of the door, waiting for Beechnut to appear. Beechnut was in the barn, harnessing the horse into the wagon.

Malleville sat down quietly upon the step while waiting for Beechnut. Phonny began to amuse himself by climbing up the railing of the bannisters, at the side of the stairs. He was trying to poise himself upon the top of the railing and then to work himself up the ascent by pulling and pushing with his hands and feet against the bannisters themselves below.

"I wish you would not do that," said Malleville. "I think it is very foolish, for you may fall and hurt yourself."

"No," said Phonny. "It is not foolish. It is very useful for me to learn to climb." So saying he went on scrambling up the railing of the bannisters as before.

Just then Beechnut came along through the yard, towards the house. He was coming for the whip.

"Beechnut," said Malleville, "I wish that you would speak to Phonny."

"*Is* it foolish for me to learn to climb?" asked Phonny. In order to see Beechnut while he asked this question, Phonny had to twist his head round in a very unusual position, and look out under his arm. It was obvious that in doing this he was in imminent danger of falling, so unstable was the equilibrium in which he was poised upon the rail.

"Is not he foolish?" asked Malleville.

Beechnut looked at him a moment, and then said, as he resumed his walk through the entry,

"Not very;—that is for a boy. I have known boys sometimes to do foolisher things than that."

"What did they do?" asked Phonny.

"Why once," said Beechnut, "I knew a boy who put his nose into the crack of the door, and then took hold of the latch and pulled the door to, and pinched his nose to death. That was a *little* more foolish, though not much."

So saying Beechnut passed through the door and disappeared.

Phonny was seized with so violent a convulsion of laughter at the idea of such absurd folly as Beechnut had described, that he tumbled off the bannisters, but fortunately he fell *in*, towards the stairs, and was very little hurt. He came down the stairs to Malleville, and as Beechnut returned in a few minutes with the whip, they all went out towards the barn together.

Beechnut had already put the bags of grain into the wagon behind, and now he assisted Phonny and Malleville to get in. He gave them the whole of the seat, in order that they might have plenty of room, and also that they might be high up, where they could see. He had a small bench which was made to fit in, in front, and which he was accustomed to use for himself, as a sort of driver's seat, whenever the wagon was full. He placed this bench in its place in front, and taking his seat upon it, he drove away.

When the party had thus fairly set out, and Phonny and Malleville had in some measure finished uttering the multitude of exclamations of delight with which they usually commenced a ride, they began to wish that Beechnut would tell them a story. Now Beechnut was a boy of boundless fertility of imagination, and he was almost always ready to tell a story. His stories were usually invented on the spot, and were often extremely wild and extravagant, both in the incidents involved in them, and in the personages whom he introduced as actors. The extravagance of these tales was however usually no objection to them in Phonny's and Malleville's estimation. In fact Beechnut observed that the more extravagant his stories were, the better pleased his auditors generally appeared to be in listening to them. He therefore did not spare invention, or restrict himself by any rules either of truth or probability in his narratives. Nor did he usually require any time for preparation, but commenced

at once with whatever came into his head, pronouncing the first sentence of his story, very often without any idea of what he was to say next.

On this occasion Beechnut began as follows:

"Once there was a girl about three years old, and she had a large black cat. The cat was of a jet black color, and her fur was very soft and glossy. It was as soft as silk.

"This cat was very mischievous and very sly. She was *very* sly: very indeed. In fact she used to go about the house so very slyly, getting into all sorts of mischief which the people could never find out till afterwards, that they gave her the name of Sligo. Some people said that the reason why she had that name was because she came from a place called Sligo, in Ireland. But that was not the reason. It was veritably and truly because she was so sly."

Beechnut pronounced this decision in respect to the etymological import of the pussy's name in the most grave and serious manner, and Malleville and Phonny listened with profound attention.

"What was the girl's name?" asked Malleville.

"The girl's?" repeated Beechnut. "Oh, her name was—Arabella."

"Well, go on," said Malleville.

"One day," continued Beechnut, "Sligo was walking about the house, trying to find something to do. She came into the parlor. There was nobody there. She looked about a little, and presently she saw a work-basket upon the corner of a table, where Arabella's mother had been at work. Sligo began to look at the basket, thinking that it would make a good nest for her to sleep in, if she could only get it under the clock. The clock stood in a corner of the room.

"Sligo accordingly jumped up into a chair, and from the chair to the table, and then pushing the basket along nearer and nearer to the edge of the table, she at last made it fall over, and all the sewing and knitting work, and the balls, and needles, and spools, fell out upon the floor. Sligo then jumped down and pushed the basket along toward the clock. She finally got it under the clock, crept into it, curled herself round into the form of a semicircle inside, so as just to fill the basket, and went to sleep.

"Presently Arabella came in, and seeing the spools and balls upon the floor, began to play with them. In a few minutes more, Arabella's mother came in, and when she saw Arabella playing with these things upon the floor, she supposed that Arabella herself was the rogue that had thrown the basket off the table. Arabella could not talk much. When her mother accused her of doing this mischief, she could only say "No;" "no;" but her mother did not believe her. So she made her go and stand up in the corner of the room, for punishment, while Sligo peeped out from under the clock to see."

"But you said that Sligo was asleep," said Phonny.

"Yes, she went to sleep," replied Beechnut, "but she waked up when Arabella's mother came into the room."

Beechnut here paused a moment to consider what he should say next, when suddenly he began to point forward to a little distance before them in the road, where a boy was to be seen at the side of the road, sitting upon a stone.

"I verily believe it is Jemmy," said he.

As the wagon approached the place where Jemmy was sitting, they found that he was bending down over his foot, and moaning with, pain. Beechnut asked him what was the matter. He said that he had sprained his foot dreadfully. Beechnut stopped the horse, and giving the reins to Phonny, he got out to see. Phonny immediately gave them to Malleville, and followed.

"Are you much hurt?" asked Beechnut.

"Oh, yes," said Jemmy, moaning and groaning; "oh dear me!"

Beechnut then went back to the horse, and taking him by the bridle, he led him a little way out of the road, toward a small tree, where he thought he would stand, and then taking Malleville out, so that she might not be in any danger if the horse should chance to start, he went back to Jemmy.

"You see," said Jemmy, "I was going to mill, and I was riding along here, and the horse pranced about and threw me off and sprained my foot. Oh dear me! what shall I do?"

"Where is the horse?" asked Beechnut.

"There he is," said Jemmy, "somewhere out there. He has gone along the road. And the bags have fallen off too. Oh dear me!"

Phonny ran out into the road, and looked forward. He could see the horse standing by the side of the road at some distance, quietly eating the grass. A little this side of the place where the horse stood, the bags were lying upon the ground, not very far from each other.

The story which Jemmy told was not strictly true. He was one of the boys of the village, and was of a wild and reckless character. This was, however, partly his father's fault, who never gave him any kind and friendly instruction, and always treated him with a great degree of sternness and severity.

A circus company had visited Franconia a few weeks before the time of this accident, and Jemmy had peeped through the cracks of the fence that formed their enclosure, and had seen the performers ride around the ring, standing upon the backs of the horses. He was immediately inspired with the ambition to imitate this feat, and the next time that he mounted his father's horse, he made the attempt to perform it. His father, when he found it out, was very angry with him, and sternly forbade him ever to do such a thing again. He declared positively that if he did, he would whip him to death, as he said. Jemmy was silent, but he secretly resolved that he would ride standing again, the very first opportunity.

Accordingly, when his father put the two bags of grain upon the horse, and ordered Jemmy to go to mill with them, Jemmy thought that the opportunity had come. He had observed that the circus riders, instead of a saddle, used upon the backs of their horses a sort of flat pad, which afforded a much more convenient footing than any saddle; and as to standing on the naked back of a horse, it was manifestly impossible for any body but a rope-dancer. When, however, Jemmy saw his father placing the bags of grain upon the horse, he perceived at once that a good broad and level surface was produced by them, which was much more extended and level, even than the pads of the circus-riders. He instantly resolved, that the moment that he got completely away from the village, he would mount upon the bags and ride standing—and ride so, too, just as long as he pleased.

Accordingly, as soon as he had passed the house where Phonny lived, which was the last house in that direction for some distance, he looked round in order to be sure that his father was not by any accident behind him, and then climbing up first upon his knees, and afterward upon his feet, he drew up the reins cautiously, and then chirruped to the horse to go on. The horse began to move slowly along. Jemmy was surprised and delighted to find how firm his footing was on the broad surface of the bags. Growing more and more bold and confident as he became accustomed to his situation, he began presently to dance about, or rather to perform certain awkward antics, which he considered dancing, looking round continually, with a mingled expression of guilt, pleasure, and fear, in his countenance, in order to be sure that his father was not coming. Finally, he undertook to make his horse trot a little. The horse, however, by this time, began to grow somewhat impatient at the unusual sensations which he experienced—the weight of the rider being concentrated upon one single point, directly on his back, and resting very unsteadily and interruptedly there,—and the bridle-reins passing up almost perpendicularly into the air, instead of declining backwards, as they ought to do in any proper position of the horseman. He began to trot forward faster and faster. Jemmy soon found that it would be prudent to restrain him, but in his upright position, he had no control over the horse by pulling the reins. He only pulled the horse's head upwards, and made him more uneasy and impatient than before. He then attempted to get down into a sitting posture again, but in doing so, he fell off upon the hard road and sprained his ankle. The horse trotted rapidly on, until the bags fell off, first one and then the other. Finding himself thus wholly at liberty, he stopped and began to eat the grass at the road-side, wholly unconcerned at the mischief that had been done.

Jemmy's distress was owing much more to his alarm and his sense of guilt, than to the actual pain of the injury which he had suffered. He was, however, entirely disabled by the sprain.

"It is rather a hard case," said Beechnut, "no doubt, but never mind it, Jemmy. A man may break his leg, and yet live to dance many a hornpipe afterwards. You'll get over all this and laugh about it one day. Come, I'll carry you home in my wagon."

"But I am afraid to go home," said Jemmy.

"What are you afraid of?" asked Beechnut.

"Of my father," said Jemmy.

"Oh no," said Beechnut. "The horse is not hurt, and as for the grist I'll carry it to mill with mine. So there is no harm done. Come, let me put you into the wagon."

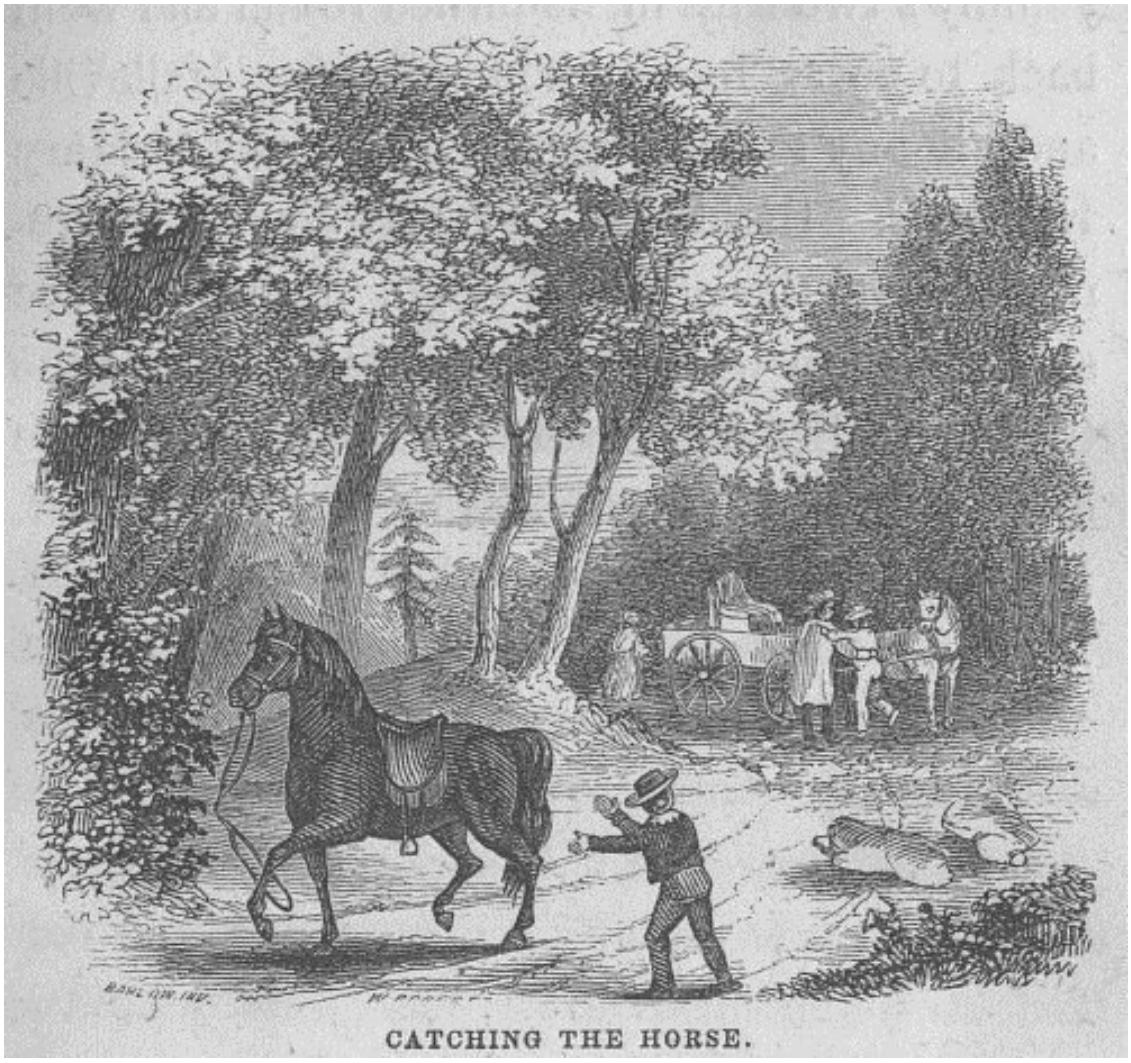
"Yes," said Phonny, "and I will go and catch the horse."

While Beechnut was putting Jemmy into the wagon, Phonny ran along the road toward the horse. The horse, hearing footsteps, and supposing from the sound that somebody might be coming to catch him, was at first disposed to set off and gallop away; but looking round and seeing that it was nobody but Phonny he went on eating as before. When Phonny got pretty near to the horse, he began to walk up slowly towards him, putting out his hand as if to take hold of the bridle and saying, "Whoa —Dobbin,—whoa." The horse raised his head a little from the grass, shook it very expressively at Phonny, walked on a few steps, and then began to feed upon the grass as before. He seemed to know precisely how much resistance was necessary to avoid the recapture with which he was threatened.

"Whoa Jack! whoa!" said Phonny, advancing again. The horse, however, moved on, shaking his head as before. He seemed to be no more disposed to recognize the name of Jack than Dobbin.

"Jemmy," said Phonny, turning back and calling out aloud, "Jemmy! what's his name?"

Jemmy did not answer. He was fully occupied in getting into the wagon.



CATCHING THE HORSE.

Beechnut called Phonny back and asked him to hold his horse, while he went to catch Jemmy's. He did it by opening one of the bags and taking out a little grain, and by means of it enticing the stray horse near enough to enable him to take hold of the bridle. He then fastened him behind the wagon, and putting Jemmy's two bags in, he turned round and went back to carry Jemmy home, leaving Malleville and Phonny to walk the rest of the way to Mary Erskine's. Besides their ride, they lost the remainder of the story of Sligo, if that can be said to be lost which never existed. For at the time when Beechnut paused in his narration, he had told the story as far as he had invented it. He had not thought of another word.

CHAPTER II.
THE BRIDE

Mary Erskine was an orphan. Her mother died when she was about twelve years old. Her father had died long before, and after her father's death her mother was very poor, and lived in so secluded and solitary a place, that Mary had no opportunity then to go to school. She began to work too as soon as she was able to do any thing, and it was necessary from that day forward for her to work all the time; and this would have prevented her from going to school, if there had been one near. Thus when her mother died, although she was an intelligent and very sensible girl, she could neither read nor write a word. She told Mrs. Bell the day that she went to live with her, that she did not even know any of the letters, except the round one and the crooked one. The round one she said she *always* knew, and as for S she learned that, because it stood for Erskine. This shows how little she knew about spelling.

Mrs. Bell wanted Mary Erskine to help her in taking care of her own daughter Mary, who was then an infant. As both the girls were named Mary, the people of the family and the neighbors gradually fell into the habit of calling each of them by her full name, in order to distinguish them from each other. Thus the baby was never called Mary, but always Mary Bell, and the little nursery maid was always known as Mary Erskine.

Mary Erskine became a great favorite at Mrs. Bell's. She was of a very light-hearted and joyous disposition, always contented and happy, singing like a nightingale at her work all the day long, when she was alone, and cheering and enlivening all around her by her buoyant spirits when she was in company. When Mary Bell became old enough to run about and play, Mary Erskine became her playmate and companion, as well as her protector. There was no distinction of rank to separate them. If Mary Bell had been as old as Mary Erskine and had had a younger sister, her duties in the household would have been exactly the same as Mary Erskine's were. In fact, Mary Erskine's position was altogether that of an older sister, and strangers visiting, the family would have supposed that the two girls were really sisters, had they not both been named Mary.

Mary Erskine was about twelve years older than Mary Bell, so that when Mary Bell began to go to school, which was when she was about five years old, Mary Erskine was about seventeen. Mrs. Bell had proposed, when Mary Erskine first came to her house, that she would go to school and learn to read and write; but Mary had been very much disinclined to do so. In connection with the amiableness and gentleness of her character and her natural good sense, she had a great deal of pride and independence of spirit; and she was very unwilling to go to school—being, as she was, almost in her teens—and begin there to learn her letters with the little children. Mrs. Bell ought to have required her to go, notwithstanding her reluctance, or else to have made some other proper arrangement for teaching her to read and write. Mrs. Bell was aware of this in fact, and frequently resolved that she would do so. But she postponed the performance of her resolution from month to month and year to year, and finally it was not performed at all. Mary Erskine was so very useful at home, that a convenient time for sparing her never came. And then besides she was so kind, and so tractable, and so intent upon complying with all Mrs. Bell's wishes, in every respect, that Mrs. Bell was extremely averse to require any thing of her, which would mortify her, or give her pain.

When Mary Erskine was about eighteen years old, she was walking home one evening from the village, where she had been to do some shopping for Mrs. Bell, and as she came to a solitary part of the road after having left the last house which belonged to the village, she saw a young man coming out of the woods at a little distance before her. She recognized him, immediately, as a young man whom she called Albert, who had often been employed by Mrs. Bell, at work about the farm and garden. Albert was a very sedate and industrious young man, of frank and open and manly countenance, and of an erect and athletic form. Mary Erskine liked Albert very well, and yet the first impulse was,

when she saw him coming, to cross over to the other side of the road, and thus pass him at a little distance. She did in fact take one or two steps in that direction, but thinking almost immediately that it would be foolish to do so, she returned to the same side of the road and walked on. Albert walked slowly along towards Mary Erskine, until at length they met.

"Good evening, Mary Erskine," said Albert.

"Good evening, Albert," said Mary Erskine.

Albert turned and began to walk along slowly, by Mary Erskine's side.

"I have been waiting here for you more than two hours," said Albert.

"Have you?" said Mary Erskine. Her heart began to beat, and she was afraid to say any thing more, for fear that her voice would tremble,

"Yes," said Albert. "I saw you go to the village, and I wanted to speak to you when you came back."

Mary Erskine walked along, but did not speak.

"And I have been waiting and watching two months for you to go to the village," continued Albert.

"I have not been much to the village, lately," said Mary.

Here there was a pause of a few minutes, when Albert said again,

"Have you any objection to my walking along with you here a little way, Mary?"

"No," said Mary, "not at all."

"Mary," said Albert, after another short pause, "I have got a hundred dollars and my axe,—and this right arm. I am thinking of buying a lot of land, about a mile beyond Kater's corner. If I will do it, and build a small house of one room there, will you come and be my wife? It will have to be a *log* house at first."

Mary Erskine related subsequently to Mary Bell what took place at this interview, thus far, but she would never tell the rest.

It was evident, however, that Mary Erskine was inclined to accept this proposal, from a conversation which took place between her and Mrs. Bell the next evening. It was after tea. The sun had gone down, and the evening was beautiful. Mrs. Bell was sitting in a low rocking-chair, on a little covered platform, near the door, which they called the stoop. There were two seats, one on each side of the stoop, and there was a vine climbing over it. Mrs. Bell was knitting. Mary Bell, who was then about six years old, was playing about the yard, watching the butterflies, and gathering flowers.

"You may stay here and play a little while," said Mary Erskine to Mary Bell. "I am going to talk with your mother a little; but I shall be back again pretty soon."

Mary Erskine accordingly went to the stoop where Mrs. Bell was sitting, and took a seat upon the bench at the side of Mrs. Bell, though rather behind than before her. There was a railing along behind the seat, at the edge of the stoop and a large white rose-bush, covered with roses, upon the other side.

Mrs. Bell perceived from Mary Erskine's air and manner that she had something to say to her, so after remarking that it was a very pleasant evening, she went on knitting, waiting for Mary Erskine to begin.

"Mrs. Bell," said Mary.

"Well," said Mrs. Bell.

The trouble was that Mary Erskine did not know exactly *how* to begin.

She paused a moment longer and then making a great effort she said, "Albert wants me to go and live with him."

"Does he?" said Mrs. Bell. "And where does he want you to go and live?"

"He is thinking of buying a farm," said Mary Erskine.

"Where?" said Mrs. Bell.

"I believe the land is about a mile from Kater's corner."

Mrs. Bell was silent for a few minutes. She was pondering the thought now for the first time fairly before her mind, that the little helpless orphan child that she had taken under her care so many years ago, had really grown to be a woman, and must soon, if not then, begin to form her own independent plans of life. She looked at little Mary Bell too, playing upon the grass, and wondered what she would do when Mary Erskine was gone.

After a short pause spent in reflections like these, Mrs. Bell resumed the conversation by saying,

"Well, Mary,—and what do you think of the plan?"

"Why—I don't know," said Mary Erskine, timidly and doubtfully.

"You are very young," said Mrs. Bell.

"Yes," said Mary Erskine, "I always was very young. I was very young when my father died; and afterwards, when my mother died, I was very young to be left all alone, and to go out to work and earn my living. And now I am very young, I know. But then I am eighteen."

"Are you eighteen?" asked Mrs. Bell.

"Yes," said Mary Erskine, "I was eighteen the day before yesterday."

"It is a lonesome place,—out beyond Kater's Corner," said Mrs. Bell, after another pause.

"Yes," said Mary Erskine, "but I am not afraid of lonesomeness. I never cared about seeing a great many people."

"And you will have to work very hard," continued Mrs. Bell.

"I know that," replied Mary; "but then I am not afraid of work any more than I am of lonesomeness. I began to work when I was five years old, and I have worked ever since,—and I like it."

"Then, besides," said Mrs. Bell, "I don't know what I shall do with *my* Mary when you have gone away. You have had the care of her ever since she was born."

Mary Erskine did not reply to this. She turned her head away farther and farther from Mrs. Bell, looking over the railing of the stoop toward the white roses. In a minute or two she got up suddenly from her seat, and still keeping her face averted from Mrs. Bell, she went in by the stoop door into the house, and disappeared. In about ten minutes she came round the corner of the house, at the place where Mary Bell was playing, and with a radiant and happy face, and tones as joyous as ever, she told her little charge that they would have one game of hide and go seek, in the asparagus, and that then it would be time for her to go to bed.

Two days after this, Albert closed the bargain for his land, and began his work upon it. The farm, or rather the lot, for the farm was yet to be made, consisted of a hundred and sixty acres of land, all in forest. A great deal of the land was mountainous and rocky, fit only for woodland and pasturage. There were, however, a great many fertile vales and dells, and at one place along the bank of a stream, there was a broad tract which Albert thought would make, when the trees were felled and it was brought into grass, a "beautiful piece of intervale."

Albert commenced his operations by felling several acres of trees, on a part of his lot which was nearest the corner. A road, which had been laid out through the woods, led across his land near this place. The trees and bushes had been cut away so as to open a space wide enough for a sled road in winter. In summer there was nothing but a wild path, winding among rocks, stumps, trunks of fallen trees, and other forest obstructions. A person on foot could get along very well, and even a horse with a rider upon his back, but there was no chance for any thing on wheels. Albert said that it would not be possible to get even a wheelbarrow in.

Albert, however, took great pleasure in going back and forth over this road, morning and evening, with his axe upon his shoulder, and a pack upon his back containing his dinner, while felling his trees. When they were all down, he left them for some weeks drying in the sun, and then set them on fire. He chose for the burning, the afternoon of a hot and sultry day, when a fresh breeze was blowing from the west, which he knew would fan the flames and increase the conflagration. It was important to do this, as the amount of subsequent labor which he would have to perform, would depend upon how completely the trees were consumed. His fire succeeded beyond his most sanguine

expectations, and the next day he brought Mary Erskine in to see what a "splendid burn" he had had, and to choose a spot for the log house which he was going to build for her.

Mary Erskine was extremely pleased with the appearance of Albert's clearing. The area which had been opened ascended a little from the road, and presented a gently undulating surface, which Mary Erskine thought would make very beautiful fields. It was now, however, one vast expanse of blackened and smoking ruins.

Albert conducted Mary Erskine and Mary Bell—for Mary Bell had come in with them to see the fire,—to a little eminence from which they could survey the whole scene.

"Look," said he, "is not that beautiful? Did you ever see a better burn?"

"I don't know much about burns," said Mary Erskine, "but I can see that it will be a beautiful place for a farm. Why we can see the pond," she added, pointing toward the south.

This was true. The falling of the trees had opened up a fine view of the pond, which was distant about a mile from the clearing. There was a broad stream which flowed swiftly over a gravelly bed along the lower part of the ground, and a wild brook which came tumbling down from the mountains, and then, after running across the road, fell into the larger stream, not far from the corner of the farm. The brook and the stream formed two sides of the clearing. Beyond them, and along the other two sides of the clearing, the tall trees of those parts of the forest which had not been disturbed, rose like a wall and hemmed the opening closely in.

Albert and Mary Erskine walked along the road through the whole length of the clearing, looking out for the best place to build their house.

"Perhaps it will be lonesome here this winter, Mary," said Albert. "I don't know but that you would rather wait till next spring."

Mary Erskine hesitated about her reply. She did, in fact, wish to come to her new home that fall, and she thought it was proper that she should express the cordial interest which she felt in Albert's plans;—but, then, on the other hand, she did not like to say any thing which might seem to indicate a wish on her part to hasten the time of their marriage. So she said doubtfully,—"I don't know;—I don't think that it would be lonesome."

"What do you mean, Albert," said Mary Bell, "about Mary Erskine's coming to live here? She can't come and live here, among all these black stumps and logs."

Albert and Mary Erskine were too intent upon their own thoughts and plans to pay any attention to Mary Bell's questions. So they walked along without answering her.

"What could we have to *do* this fall and winter?" asked Mary Erskine. She wished to ascertain whether she could do any good by coming at once, or whether it would be better, for Albert's plans, to wait until the spring.

"Oh there will be plenty to do," said Albert. "I shall have to work a great deal, while the ground continues open, in clearing up the land, and getting it ready for sowing in the spring; and it will be a great deal better for me to live here, in order to save my traveling back and forth, so far, every night and morning. Then this winter I shall have my tools to make,—and to finish the inside of the house, and make the furniture; and if you have any leisure time you can spin. But after all it will not be very comfortable for you, and perhaps you would rather wait until spring."

"No," said Mary Erskine. "I would rather come this fall."

"Well," rejoined Albert, speaking in a tone of great satisfaction. "Then I will get the house up next week, and we will be married very soon after."

There were very few young men whose prospects in commencing life were so fair and favorable as those of Albert. In the first place, he was not obliged to incur any debt on account of his land, as most young farmers necessarily do. His land was one dollar an acre. He had one hundred dollars of his own, and enough besides to buy a winter stock of provisions for his house. He had expected to have gone in debt for the sixty dollars, the whole price of the land being one hundred and sixty; but to his great surprise and pleasure Mary Erskine told him, as they were coming home from seeing the

land after the burn, that she had seventy-five dollars of her own, besides interest; and that she should like to have sixty dollars of that sum go toward paying for the land. The fifteen dollars that would be left, she said, would be enough to buy the furniture.

"I don't think that will be quite enough," said Albert.

"Yes," said Mary Erskine. "We shall not want a great deal. We shall want a table and two chairs, and some things to cook with."

"And a bed," said Albert.

"Yes," said Mary Erskine, "but I can make that myself. The cloth will not cost much, and you can get some straw for me. Next summer we can keep some geese, and so have a feather bed some day."

"We shall want some knives and forks, and plates," said Albert.

"Yes," said Mary Erskine, "but they will not cost much. I think fifteen dollars will get us all we need. Besides there is more than fifteen dollars, for there is the interest."

The money had been put out at interest in the village.

"Well," said Albert, "and I can make the rest of the furniture that we shall need, this winter. I shall have a shop near the house. I have got the tools already."

Thus all was arranged. Albert built his house on the spot which Mary Erskine thought would be the most pleasant for it, the week after her visit to the land. Three young men from the neighborhood assisted him, as is usual in such cases, on the understanding that Albert was to help each of them as many days about their work as they worked for him. This plan is often adopted by farmers in doing work which absolutely requires several men at a time, as for example, the raising of heavy logs one upon another to form the walls of a house. In order to obtain logs for the building Albert and his helpers cut down fresh trees from the forest, as the blackened and half-burned trunks, which lay about his clearing, were of course unsuitable for such a work. They selected the tallest and straightest trees, and after felling them and cutting them to the proper length, they hauled them to the spot by means of oxen. The ground served for a floor, and the fire-place was made of stones. The roof was formed of sheets of hemlock bark, laid, like slates upon rafters made of the stems of slender trees. Albert promised Mary Erskine that, as soon as the snow came, in the winter, to make a road, so that he could get through the woods with a load of boards upon a sled, he would make her a floor.

From this time forward, although Mary Erskine was more diligent and faithful than ever in performing all her duties at Mrs. Bell's, her imagination was incessantly occupied with pictures and images of the new scenes into which she was about to be ushered as the mistress of her own independent household and home. She made out lists, mentally, for she could not write, of the articles which it would be best to purchase. She formed and matured in her own mind all her house-keeping plans. She pictured to herself the scene which the interior of her dwelling would present in cold and stormy winter evenings, while she was knitting at one side of the fire, and Albert was busy at some ingenious workmanship, on the other; or thought of the beautiful prospect which she should enjoy in the spring and summer following; when fields of waving grain, rich with promises of plenty and of wealth, would extend in every direction around her dwelling. She cherished, in a word, the brightest anticipations of happiness.

THE LOG HOUSE.

The house at length was finished. The necessary furniture which Albert contrived in some way to get moved to it, was put in; and early in August Mary Erskine was married. She was married in the morning, and a party of the villagers escorted her on horseback to her new home.

CHAPTER III.
MARY ERSKINE'S VISITORS

Mary Erskine's anticipations of happiness in being the mistress of her own independent home were very high, but they were more than realized.

The place which had been chosen for the house was not only a suitable one in respect to convenience, but it was a very pleasant one. It was near the brook which, as has already been said, came cascading down from among the forests and mountains, and passing along near one side of Albert's clearing, flowed across the road, and finally emptied into the great stream. The house was placed near the brook, in order that Albert might have a watering-place at hand for his horses and cattle when he should have stocked his farm. In felling the forest Albert left a fringe of trees along the banks of the brook, that it might be cool and shady there when the cattle went down to drink. There was a spring of pure cold water boiling up from beneath some rocks not far from the brook, on the side toward the clearing. The water from this spring flowed down along a little mossy dell, until it reached the brook. The bed over which this little rivulet flowed was stony, and yet no stones were to be seen. They all had the appearance of rounded tufts of soft green moss, so completely were they all covered and hidden by the beautiful verdure.

Albert was very much pleased when he discovered this spring, and traced its little mossy rivulet down to the brook. He thought that Mary Erskine would like it. So he avoided cutting down any of the trees from the dell, or from around the spring, and in cutting down those which grew near it, he took care to make them fall away from the dell, so that in burning they should not injure the trees which he wished to save. Thus that part of the wood which shaded and sheltered the spring and the dell, escaped the fire.

The house was placed in such a position that this spring was directly behind it, and Albert made a smooth and pretty path leading down to it; or rather he made the path smooth, and nature made it pretty. For no sooner had he completed his work upon it than nature began to adorn it by a profusion of the richest and greenest grass and flowers, which she caused to spring up on either side. It was so in fact in all Albert's operations upon his farm. Almost every thing that he did was for some purpose of convenience and utility, and he himself undertook nothing more than was necessary to secure the useful end. But his kind and playful co-operator, nature, would always take up the work where he left it, and begin at once to beautify it with her rich and luxuriant verdure. For example, as soon as the fires went out over the clearing, she began, with her sun and rain, to blanch the blackened stumps, and to gnaw at their foundations with her tooth of decay. If Albert made a road or a path she rounded its angles, softened away all the roughness that his plow or hoe had left in it, and fringed it with grass and flowers. The solitary and slender trees which had been left standing here and there around the clearing, having escaped the fire, she took under her special care—throwing out new and thrifty branches from them, in every direction, and thus giving them massive and luxuriant forms, to beautify the landscape, and to form shady retreats for the flocks and herds which might in subsequent years graze upon the ground. Thus while Albert devoted himself to the substantial and useful improvements which were required upon his farm, with a view simply to profit, nature took the work of ornamenting it under her own special and particular charge.

The sphere of Mary Erskine's duties and pleasures was within doors. Her conveniences for house-keeping were somewhat limited at first, but Albert, who kept himself busy at work on his land all day, spent the evenings in his shanty shop, making various household implements and articles of furniture for her. Mary sat with him, usually, at such times, knitting by the side of the great, blazing fire, made partly for the sake of the light that it afforded, and partly for the warmth, which was required to temper the coolness of the autumnal evenings. Mary took a very special interest in the

progress of Albert's work, every thing which he made being for her. Each new acquisition, as one article after another was completed and delivered into her possession, gave her fresh pleasure: and she deposited it in its proper place in her house with a feeling of great satisfaction and pride.

"Mary Erskine," said Albert one evening—for though she was married, and her name thus really changed, Albert himself, as well as every body else, went on calling her Mary Erskine just as before—"it is rather hard to make you wait so long for these conveniences, especially as there is no necessity for it. We need not have paid for our land this three years. I might have taken the money and built a handsome house, and furnished it for you at once."

"And so have been in debt for the land," said Mary.

"Yes," said Albert. "I could have paid off that debt by the profits of the farming. I can lay up a hundred dollars a year, certainly."

"No," said Mary Erskine. "I like this plan the best. We will pay as we go along. It will be a great deal better to have the three hundred dollars for something else than to pay old debts with. We will build a better house than this if we want one, one of these years, when we get the money. But I like this house very much as it is. Perhaps, however, it is only because it is my own."

It was not altogether the idea that it was her own that made Mary Erskine like her house. The interior of it was very pleasant indeed, especially after Albert had completed the furnishing of it, and had laid the floor. It contained but one room, it is true, but that was a very spacious one. There were, in fact, two apartments enclosed by the walls and the roof, though only one of them could strictly be called a room. The other was rather a shed, or stoop, and it was entered from the front by a wide opening, like a great shed door. The entrance to the house proper was by a door opening from this stoop, so as to be sheltered from the storms in winter. There was a very large fire place made of stones in the middle of one side of the room, with a large flat stone for a hearth in front of it. This hearth stone was very smooth, and Mary Erskine kept it always very bright and clean. On one side of the fire was what they called a settle, which was a long wooden seat with a very high back. It was placed on the side of the fire toward the door, so that it answered the purpose of a screen to keep off any cold currents of air, which might come in on blustering winter nights, around the door. On the other side of the fire was a small and very elegant mahogany work table. This was a present to Mary Erskine from Mrs. Bell on the day of her marriage. There were drawers in this table containing sundry conveniences. The upper drawer was made to answer the purpose of a desk, and it had an inkstand in a small division in one corner. Mrs. Bell had thought of taking this inkstand out, and putting in some spools, or something else which Mary Erskine would be able to use. But Mary herself would not allow her to make such a change. She said it was true that she could not write, but that was no reason why she should not have an inkstand. So she filled the inkstand with ink, and furnished the desk completely in other respects, by putting in six sheets of paper, a pen, and several wafers. The truth was, she thought it possible that an occasion might arise some time or other, at which Albert might wish to write a letter; and if such a case should occur, it would give her great pleasure to have him write his letter at her desk.

Beyond the work table, on one of the sides of the room, was a cupboard, and next to the cupboard a large window. This was the only window in the house, and it had a sash which would rise and fall. Mary Erskine had made white curtains for this window, which could be parted in the middle, and hung up upon nails driven into the logs which formed the wall of the house, one on each side. Of what use these curtains could be except to make the room look more snug and pleasant within, it would be difficult to say; for there was only one vast expanse of forests and mountains on that side of the house, so that there was nobody to look in.

On the back side of the room, in one corner, was the bed. It was supported upon a bedstead which Albert had made. The bedstead had high posts, and was covered, like the window, with curtains. In the other corner was the place for the loom, with the spinning-wheel between the loom and the bed. When Mary Erskine was using the spinning-wheel, she brought it out into the center of the room.

The loom was not yet finished. Albert was building it, working upon it from time to time as he had opportunity. The frame of it was up, and some of the machinery was made.

Mary Erskine kept most of her clothes in a trunk; but Albert was making her a bureau.

Instead of finding it lonesome at her new home, as Mrs. Bell had predicted, Mary Erskine had plenty of company. The girls from the village, whom she used to know, were very fond of coming out to see her. Many of them were much younger than she was, and they loved to ramble about in the woods around Mary Erskine's house, and to play along the bank of the brook. Mary used to show them too, every time they came, the new articles which Albert had made for her, and to explain to them the gradual progress of the improvements. Mary Bell herself was very fond of going to see Mary Erskine,—though she was of course at that time too young to go alone. Sometimes however Mrs. Bell would send her out in the morning and let her remain all day, playing, very happily, around the door and down by the spring. She used to play all day among the logs and stumps, and upon the sandy beach by the side of the brook, and yet when she went home at night she always looked as nice, and her clothes were as neat and as clean as when she went in the morning. Mrs. Bell wondered at this, and on observing that it continued to be so, repeatedly, after several visits, she asked Mary Bell how it happened that Mary Erskine kept her so nice.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.