

ALLEN JAMES LANE

THE CHOIR INVISIBLE

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The Choir Invisible

I

*"O may I join the choir invisible
Of those immortal dead who live again
In minds made better by their presence. . .
. . . feed pure love,
Beget the smiles that have no cruelty,
Be the sweet presence of a good diffused
And in diffusion evermore intense.
So shall I join the choir invisible
Whose music is the gladness of the world."*

GEORGE ELIOT

THE middle of a fragrant afternoon of May in the green wilderness of Kentucky: the year 1795.

High overhead ridges of many-peaked cloud—the gleaming, wandering Alps of the blue ether; outstretched far below, the warming bosom of the earth, throbbing with the hope of maternity. Two spirits abroad in the air, encountering each other and passing into one: the spirit of scentless spring left by melting snows and the spirit of scented summer born with the earliest buds. The road through the forest one of those wagon-tracks that were being opened from the clearings of the settlers, and that wound along beneath trees of which those now seen in Kentucky are the unworthy survivors—oaks and walnuts, maples and elms, centuries old, gnarled, massive, drooping, majestic, through whose arches the sun hurled down only some solitary spear of gold, and over whose gray-mossed roots some cold brook crept in silence; with here and there billowy open spaces of wild rye, buffalo grass, and clover on which the light fell in sheets of radiance; with other spots so dim that for ages no shoot had sprung from the deep black mould; blown to and fro across this wagon-road, odours of ivy, pennyroyal and mint, mingled with the fragrance of the wild grape; flitting to and fro across it, as low as the violet-beds, as high as the sycamores, unnumbered kinds of birds, some of which like the paroquet are long since vanished.

Down it now there came in a drowsy amble an old white bob-tail horse, his polished coat shining like silver when he crossed an expanse of sunlight, fading into spectral paleness when he passed under the rayless trees; his foretop floating like a snowy plume in the light wind, his unshod feet, half-covered by the fetlocks, stepping noiselessly over the loamy earth; the rims of his nostrils expanding like flexible ebony; and in his eyes that look of peace which is never seen but in those of petted animals.

He had on an old bridle with knots of blue violets hanging, down at his ears; over his broad back was spread a blanket of buffalo-skin; on this rested a worn black side-saddle, and sitting in the saddle was a girl, whom every young man of the town not far away knew to be Amy Falconer, and whom many an old pioneer dreamed of when he fell asleep beside his rifle and his hunting-knife in his lonely cabin of the wilderness. She was perhaps the first beautiful girl of aristocratic birth ever seen in Kentucky, and the first of the famous train of those who for a hundred years since have wrecked or saved the lives of the men.

Her pink calico dress, newly starched and ironed, had looked so pretty to her when she had started from home, that she had not been able to bear the thought of wearing over it this lovely

afternoon her faded, mud-stained riding-skirt; and it was so short that it showed, resting against the saddle-skirt, her little feet loosely fitted into new bronze morocco shoes. On her hands she had drawn white half-hand mittens of home-knit; and on her head she wore an enormous white scoop-bonnet, lined with pink and tied under her chin in a huge muslin bow. Her face, hidden away under the pink-and-white shadow, showed such hints of pearl and rose that it seemed carved from the inner surface of a sea-shell. Her eyes were gray, almond shaped, rather wide apart, with an expression changeful and playful, but withal rather shrewd and hard; her light brown hair, as fine as unspun silk, was parted over her brow and drawn simply back behind her ears; and the lips of her little mouth curved against each other, fresh, velvet-like, smiling.

On she rode down the avenue of the primeval woods; and Nature seemed arranged to salute her as some imperial presence; with the waving of a hundred green boughs above on each side; with a hundred floating odours; with the swift play of nimble forms up and down the boles of trees; and all the sweet confusion of innumerable melodies.

Then one of those trifles happened that contain the history of our lives, as a drop of dew draws into itself the majesty and solemnity of the heavens.

>From the pommel of the side-saddle there dangled a heavy roll of home-spun linen, which she was taking to town to her aunt's merchant as barter for queen's-ware pitchers; and behind this roll of linen, fastened to a ring under the seat of the saddle, was swung a bundle tied up in a large blue-and-white checked cotton neckkerchief. Whenever she fidgeted in the saddle, or whenever the horse stumbled as he often did because he was clumsy and because the road was obstructed by stumps and roots, the string by which this bundle was tied slipped a little through the loosening knot and the bundle hung a little lower down. Just where the wagon-trail passed out into the broader public road leading from Lexington to Frankfort and the travelling began to be really good, the horse caught one of his forefeet against the loop of a root, was thrown violently forward, and the bundle slipped noiselessly from the saddle to the earth.

She did not see it. She indignantly gathered the reins more tightly in her hand, pushed back her bonnet, which now hung down over her eyes like the bill of a pelican, and applied her little switch of wild cherry to the horse's flank with such vehemence that a fly which was about to alight on that spot went to the other side. The old horse himself—he bore the peaceable name of William Penn—merely gave one of the comforting switches of his bob-tail with which he brushed away the thought of any small annoyance, and stopped a moment to nibble at the wayside cane mixed with purple blossoming peavine.

Out of the lengthening shadows of the woods the girl and the horse passed on toward the little town; and far behind them in the public road lay the lost bundle.

II

IN the open square on Cheapside in Lexington there is now a bronze statue of John Breckinridge. Not far from where it stands the pioneers a hundred years ago had built the first log school-house of the town.

Poor old school-house, long since become scattered ashes! Poor little backwoods academicians, driven in about sunrise, driven out toward dusk! Poor little tired backs with nothing to lean against! Poor little bare feet that could never reach the floor! Poor little droop-headed figures, so sleepy in the long summer days, so afraid to fall asleep! Long, long since, little children of the past, your backs have become straight enough, measured on the same cool bed; sooner or later your feet, wherever wandering, have found their resting-places in the soft earth; and all your drooping heads have gone to sleep on the same dreamless pillow and there are sleeping. And the young schoolmaster, who seemed exempt from frailty while he guarded like a sentinel that lone outpost of the alphabet—he too has long since joined the choir invisible of the immortal dead. But there is something left of him though more than a century has passed away: something that has wandered far down the course of time to us like the faint summer fragrance of a young tree long since fallen dead in its wintered forest—like a dim radiance yet travelling onward into space from an orb turned black and cold—like an old melody, surviving on and on in the air without any instrument, without any strings.

John Gray, the school-master. At four o'clock that afternoon and therefore earlier than usual, he was standing on the hickory block which formed the doorstep of the school-house, having just closed the door behind him for the day. Down at his side, between the thumb and forefinger of one hand, hung his big black hat, which was decorated with a tricoloured cockade, to show that he was a member of the Democratic Society of Lexington, modelled after the Democratic Society of Philadelphia and the Jacobin clubs of France. In the open palm of the other lay his big silver English lever watch with a glass case and broad black silk fob.

A young fellow of powerful build, lean, muscular; wearing simply but with gentlemanly care a suit of black, which was relieved around his wrists and neck by linen, snow-white and of the finest quality. In contrast with his dress, a complexion fresh, pure, brilliant—the complexion of health and innocence; in contrast with this complexion from above a mass of coarse dark-red hair, cut short and loosely curling. Much physical beauty in the head, the shape being noble, the pose full of dignity and of strength; almost no beauty in the face itself except in the gray eyes which were sincere, modest, grave. Yet a face not without moral loftiness and intellectual power; rugged as a rock, but as a rock is made less rugged by a little vine creeping over it, so his was softened by a fine network of nerves that wrought out upon it a look of kindness; betraying the first nature of passion, but disciplined to the higher nature of control; youthful, but wearing those unmistakable marks of maturity which mean a fierce early struggle against the rougher forces of the world. On the whole, with the calm, self respecting air of one who, having thus far won in the battle of life, has a fiercer longing for larger conflict, and whose entire character rests on the noiseless conviction that he is a man and a gentleman.

Deeper insight would have been needed to discover how true and earnest a soul he was; how high a value he set on what the future had in store for him and on what his life would be worth to himself and to others; and how, liking rather to help himself than to be helped, he liked less to be trifled with and least of all to be seriously thwarted.

He was thinking, as his eyes rested on the watch, that if this were one of his ordinary days he would pursue his ordinary duties; he would go up street to the office of Marshall and for the next hour read as many pages of law as possible; then get his supper at his favourite tavern—the Sign of the Spinning, Wheel—near the two locust trees; then walk out into the country for an hour or more; then back to his room and more law until midnight by the light of his tallow dip.

But this was not an ordinary day—being one that he had long waited for and was destined never to forget. At dusk the evening before, the post-rider, so tired that he had scarce strength of wind to blow his horn, had ridden into town bringing the mail from Philadelphia; and in this mail there was great news for him. It had kept him awake nearly all of the night before; it had been uppermost in his mind the entire day in school. At the thought of it now he thrust his watch into his pocket, pulled his hat resolutely over his brow, and started toward Main Street, meaning to turn thence toward Cross Street, now known as Broadway. On the outskirts of the town in that direction lay the wilderness, undulating away for hundreds of miles like a vast green robe with scarce a rift of human making.

He failed to urge his way through the throng as speedily as he may have expected, being withheld at moments by passing acquaintances, and at others pausing of his own choice to watch some spectacle of the street.

The feeling lay fresh upon him this afternoon that not many years back the spot over which the town was spread had been but a hidden glade in the heart of the beautiful, awful wilderness, with a bountiful spring bubbling up out of the turf, and a stream winding away through the green, valley-bottom to the bright, shady Elkhorn: a glade that for ages had been thronged by stately-headed elk and heavy-headed bison, and therefore sought also by unreckoned generations of soft-footed, hard eyed red hunters. Then had come the beginning of the end when one summer day, toward sunset, a few tired, rugged backwoodsmen of the Anglo-Saxon race, wandering fearless and far into the wilderness from the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge and the Alleghanies, had made their camp by the margin of the spring; and always afterwards, whether by day or by night, they had dreamed of this as the land they must conquer for their homes. Now they had conquered it already; and now this was the town that had been built there, with its wide streets under big trees of the primeval woods; with a long stretch of turf on one side of the stream for a town common; with inns and taverns in the style of those of country England or of Virginia in the reign of George the Third; with shops displaying the costliest merchandise of Philadelphia; with rude dwellings of logs now giving way to others of frame and of brick; and, stretching away from the town toward the encompassing wilderness, orderly gardens and orchards now pink with the blossom of the peach, and fields of young maize and wheat and flax and hemp.

As the mighty stream of migration of the Anglo-Saxon race had burst through the jagged channels of the Alleghanies and rushed onward to the unknown, illimitable West, it was this little town that had received one of the main streams, whence it flowed more gently dispersed over the rich lands of the newly created State, or passed on to the Ohio and the southern fringes of the Lakes. It was this that received also a vast return current of the fearful, the disappointed, the weak, as they recoiled from the awful frontier of backwood life and resought the peaceful Atlantic seaboard—one of the defeated Anglo-Saxon armies of civilization.

These two far-clashing tides of the aroused, migrating race—the one flowing westward, the other ebbing eastward—John Gray found himself noting with deep interest as he moved through the town that afternoon a hundred years ago; and not less keenly the unlike groups and characters thrown dramatically together upon this crowded stage of border history.

At one point his attention was arrested by the tearful voices of women and the weeping of little children: a company of travellers with pack-horses—one of the caravans across the desert of the Western woods—was moving off to return by the Wilderness Road to the old abandoned homes in Virginia and North Carolina. Farther on, his passage was blocked by a joyous crowd that had gathered about another caravan newly arrived—not one traveller having perished on the way. Seated on the roots of an oak were a group of young backwoodsmen—swarthy, lean, tall, wild and reckless of bearing—their long rifles propped against the tree or held fondly across the knees; the gray smoke of their pipes mingling with the gray of their jauntily worn raccoon-skin caps; the rifts of yellow sunlight blending with the yellow of their huntingshirts and tunics; their knives and powder-horns fastened in the belts that girt in their gaunt waists: the heroic youthful sinew of the old border folk. One among

them, larger and handsomer than the others, had pleased his fancy by donning more nearly the Indian dress. His breech-clout was of dappled fawn-skin; his long thigh boots of thin deer-hide were open at the hips, leaving exposed the clear whiteness of his flesh; below the knees they were ornamented by a scarlet fringe tipped with the hoofs of fawns and the spurs of the wild turkey; and in his cap he wore the intertwined wings of the hawk and the scarlet tanager.

Under another tree in front of a tavern bearing the sign of the Virginia arms, a group of students of William and Mary, the new aristocrats of the West, were singing, gambling, drinking; while at intervals one of them, who had lying open before him a copy of Tom Paine's "Age of Reason," pounded on the table and apostrophied the liberties of Man. Once Gray paused beside a tall pole that had been planted at a street corner and surmounted with a liberty cap. Two young men, each wearing the tricolour cockade as he did, were standing, there engaged in secret conversation. As he joined them, three other young men—Federalists—sauntered past, wearing black cockades, with an eagle button on the left side. The six men saluted coolly.

Many another group and solitary figure he saw to remind him of the turbulent history of the time and place. A parson, who had been the calmest of Indian fighters, had lost all self-control as he contended out in the road with another parson for the use of Dr. Watts' hymns instead of the Psalms of David. Near by, listening to them, and with a wondering eye on all he saw in the street, stood a French priest of Bordeaux, an exile from the fury of the avenging jacobins. There were brown flatboatmen, in weather-beaten felt hats, just returned by the long overland trip from New Orleans and discussing with tobacco merchants the open navigation of the Mississippi; and as they talked, up to them hurried the inventor Edward West, who said with excitement that if they would but step across the common to the town branch, he would demonstrate by his own model that some day navigation would be by steam: whereat they all laughed kindly at him for a dreamer, and went to laugh at the action of his mimic boat, moving hither and thither over the dammed water of the stream. Sitting on a stump apart from every one, his dog at his feet, his rifle across his lap, an aged backwoodsman surveyed in sorrow the civilization that had already destroyed his hunting and that was about sending him farther west to the depths of Missouri—along with the buffalo. His glance fell with disgust upon two old gentlemen in knee-breeches who met and offered each other their snuff-boxes, with a deep bow. He looked much more kindly at a crave, proud Chickasaw hunter, who strode by with inward grief and shame, wounded by the robbery of his people. Puritans from New England; cavaliers from Virginia; Scotch-Irish from Pennsylvania; mild-eyed trappers and bargemen from the French hamlets of Kaskaskia and Cahokia; wood-choppers; scouts; surveyors; swaggering adventurers; land-lawyers; colonial burgesses,—all these mingled and jostled, plotted and bartered, in the shops, in the streets, under the trees.

And everywhere soldiers and officers of the Revolution—come West with their families to search for homes, or to take possession of the grants made them by the Government. In the course of a short walk John Gray passed men who had been wounded in the battle of Point Pleasant; men who had waded behind Clark through the freezing marshes of the Illinois to the storming of Vincennes; men who had charged through flame and smoke up the side of King's Mountain against Ferguson's Carolina loyalists; men who with chilled ardour had let themselves be led into the massacre of the Wabash by blundering St. Clair; men who with wild thrilling pulses had rushed to victory behind mad Antony Wayne.

And the women! Some—the terrible lioness-mothers of the Western jungles who had been used like men to fight with rifle, knife, and axe—now sat silent in the doorways of their rough cabins, wrinkled, scarred, fierce, silent, scornful of all advancing luxury and refinement. Flitting gaily past them, on their way to the dry goods stores—supplied by trains of pack-horses from over the Alleghanies, or by pack-horse and boat down the Ohio—hurried the wives of the officers, daintily choosing satins and ribands for a coming ball. All this and more he noted as he passed lingeringly on.

The deep vibrations of history swept through him, arousing him as the marshalling storm cloud, the rush of winds, and sunlight flickering into gloom kindle the sense of the high, the mighty, the sublime.

As he was crossing the common, a number of young fellows stripped and girt for racing—for speed greater than an Indian's saved many a life in those days, and running was part of the regular training of the young—bounded up to him like deer, giving a challenge: he too was very swift. But he named another day, impatient of the many interruptions that had already delayed him, and with long, rapid strides he had soon passed beyond the last fields and ranges of the town. Then he slackened his pace. Before him, a living wall, rose the edge of the wilderness. Noting the position of the sun and searching for a point of least resistance, he plunged in.

Soon he had to make his way through a thicket of cane some twelve feet high; then through a jungle of wild rye, buffalo grass and briars; beyond which he struck a narrow deertrace and followed that in its westward winding through thinner undergrowth under the dark trees.

He was unarmed. He did not even wear a knife. But the thought rose in his mind of how rapidly the forest also was changing its character. The Indians were gone. Two years had passed since they had for the last time flecked the tender green with tender blood. And the deadly wild creatures—the native people of earth and tree—they likewise had fled from the slaughter and starvation of their kind. A little while back and a maddened buffalo or a wounded elk might have trodden him down and gored him to death in that thicket and no one have ever learned his fate—as happened to many a solitary hunter. He could not feel sure that hiding in the leaves of the branches against which his hat sometimes brushed there did not lie the panther, the hungrier for the fawns that had been driven from the near coverts. A swift lowering of its head, a tense noiseless spring, its fangs buried in his neck,—with no knife the contest would not have gone well with him. But of deadly big game he saw no sign that day. Once from a distant brake he was surprised to hear the gobble of the wild turkey; and more surprised still—and delighted—when the trail led to a twilight gloom and coolness, and at the green margin of a little spring he saw a stag drinking. It turned its terrified eyes upon him for an instant and then bounded away like a gray shadow.

When he had gone about two miles, keeping his face steadily toward the sun, he came upon evidences of a clearing: burnt and fallen timber; a field of sprouting maize; another of young wheat; a peach orchard flushing all the green around with its clouds of pink; beyond this a garden of vegetables; and yet farther on, a log house.

He was hurrying on toward the house; but as he passed the garden he saw standing in one corner, with a rake in her hand, a beautifully formed woman in homespun, and near by a negro lad dropping garden-seed. His eyes lighted up with pleasure; and changing his course at once, he approached and leaned on the picket fence.

"How do you do, Mrs. Falconer?"

She turned with a cry, dropping her rake and pushing her sun-bonnet back from her eyes.

"How unkind to frighten me!" she said, laughing as she recognized him; and then she came over to the fence and gave him her hand—beautiful, but hardened by work. A faint colour had spread over her face.

"I didn't mean to frighten you," he replied, smiling at her fondly. "But I had rapped on the fence twice. I suppose you took me for a flicker. Or you were too busy with your gardening to hear me. Or, may be you were too deep in your own thoughts."

"How do you happen to be out of school so early?" she asked, avoiding the subject.

"I was through with the lessons."

"You must have hurried."

"I did."

"And is that the way you treat people's children?"

"That's the way I treated them to-day."

"And then you came straight out here?"

"As straight and fast as my legs could carry me—with a good many interruptions."

She searched his face eagerly for a moment. Then her eyes fell and she turned back to the seed-planting. He stood leaning over the fence with his hat in his hand, glancing impatiently at the house.

"How can you respect yourself, to stand there idling and see me hard at work?" she said at length, without looking, at him.

"But you do the work so well—better than I could! Besides, you are obeying a Divine law. I have no right to keep you from doing the will of God. I observe you as one of the daughters of Eve—under the curse of toil."

"There's no Divine command that I should plant beans. But it is my command that Amy shall. And this is Amy's work. Aren't you willing to work for her?" she asked, slowly raising her eyes to his face.

"I am willing to work for her, but I am not willing to do her work!" he replied. "If the queen sits quietly in the parlour, eating bread and honey"—and he nodded, protesting, toward the house.

"The queen's not in the parlour, eating bread and honey. She has gone to town to stay with Kitty Poythress till after the ball."

She noted how his expression instantly changed, and how, unconscious of his own action, he shifted his face back to the direction of the town.

"Her uncle was to take her in to-morrow," she went on, still watching him, "but no! she and Kitty must see each other to-night; and her uncle must be sure to bring her party finery in the gig to-morrow. I'm sorry you had your walk for nothing; but you'll stay to supper?"

"Thank you; I must go back presently."

"Didn't you expect to stay when you came?"

He flushed and laughed in confusion.

"If you'll stay, I'll make you a johnny-cake on a new ash shingle with my own hands."

"Thank you, I really must go back. But if there's a johnny-cake already made, I could easily take it along."

"My johnny-cakes do not bear transportation."

"I wouldn't transport it far, you know."

"Do stay! Major Falconer will be so disappointed. He said at dinner there were so many things he wanted to talk to you about. He has been looking for you to come out. And, then, we have had no news for weeks. The major has been too busy to go to town; and I!—I am as dry as one of the gourds of Confucius."

His thoughts settled contentedly upon her once more and his face cleared.

"I can't stay to supper, but I'll keep the Indians away till the major comes," he said. "What were you thinking of when I surprised you?"

"What was I thinking of?" She stopped working while she repeated his words and folded her hands about the handle of the rake as if to rest awhile. A band of her soft, shining hair, loosened by its own weight when she had bent over to thin some seed carelessly scattered in the furrow, now fell across her forehead. She pushed her bonnet back and stood gathering it a little absently into its place with the tips of her fingers. Meanwhile he could see that her eyes rested upon the edge of the wilderness. It seemed to him that she must be thinking of that; and he noted with pain, as often before, the contrast between her and her surroundings. From every direction the forest appeared to be rushing in upon that perilous little reef of a clearing—that unsheltered island of human life, newly displaying itself amid the ancient, blood-flecked, horror-haunted sea of woods. And shipwrecked on this island, tossed to it by one of the long tidal waves of history, there to remain in exile from the manners, the refinement, the ease, the society to which she had always been accustomed, this remarkable gentlewoman.

III

HE had learned a great deal about her past, and held it mirrored in his memory. The general picture of it rose before his eyes now, as he leaned on the fence this pleasant afternoon in May and watched her restoring to its place, with delicate strokes of her finger-tips, the lock of her soft, shining hair. How could any one so fine have thriven amid conditions so exhausting? Those hard toiling fingers, now grasping the heavy hoe, once used to tinkle over the spinet; the small, sensitive feet, now covered with coarse shoe-packs tied with leather thongs, once shone in rainbow hues of satin slippers and silken hose. A sunbonnet for the tiara of osprey plumes; a dress spun and woven by her own hand out of her own flax, instead of the stiff brocade; log hut for manor-house; one negro boy instead of troops of servants: to have possessed all that, to have been brought down to all this, and not to have been ruined by it, never to have lost distinction or been coarsened by coarseness never to have parted with grace of manner or grace of spirit, or been bent or broken or overclouded in character and ideals,—it was all this that made her in his eyes a great woman, a great lady.

He held her in such reverence that, as he caught the serious look in her eyes at his impulsive question, he was sorry he had asked it: the last thing he could ever have thought of doing would have been to intrude upon the privacy of her reflections. "What was I thinking of?"

There was a short silence and then she turned to him eagerly, brightly, with an entire change of voice and expression— "But the news from town—you haven't told me the news." "Oh, there is any amount of news!" he cried, glad of a chance to retreat from his intrusion. And he began lightly, recklessly: "A bookbinder has opened a shop on Cross Street—a capital hand at the business, by the name of Leischman—and he will bind books at the regular market prices in exchange for linen rags, maple sugar, and goose-quills. I advise you to keep an eye on your geese, if the major once takes a notion to have his old Shakespeare and his other volumes, that had their bindings knocked off in crossing the Alleghanies, elegantly rebound. You can tell him also that after a squirrel-hunt in Bourbon County the farmers counted scalps, and they numbered five thousand five hundred and eighty-nine; so that he is not the only one who has trouble with his corn. And then you can tell him that on the common the other day Nelson Tapp and Willis Tandy had a fearful fight over a land-suit. Now it was Tandy and Tapp; now it was Tapp and Tandy; but they went off at last and drowned themselves and the memory of the suit in a bowl of sagamity." "And there is no news for me, I suppose?"

"Oh yes! I am happy to inform you that at McIlvain's you can now buy the finest Dutch and English letter-paper, gilt, embossed, or marbled."

"That is not very important; I have no correspondents." "Well, a saddlery has been opened by two fellows from London, England, and you can now buy Amy a new side-saddle. She needs one." "Nor is that! The major buys the saddles for the family." "Well, then, as I came out on Alain Street, I passed some ladies who accused me of being on my way here, and who impressed it upon me that I must tell you of the last displays of women-wear: painted and velvet ribbons, I think they said, and crepe scarfs, and chintzes and nankeens and moreens and sarcenets, and—oh yes!—some muslinette jackets tamboured with gold and silver. They said we were becoming civilized—that the town would soon be as good as Williamsburg, or Annapolis, or Philadelphia for such things. You see I am like my children: I remember what I don't understand."

"I understand what I must not remember! Don't tell me of those things," she added. "They remind me of the past; they make me think of Virginia. I wear homespun now, and am a Kentuckian." "Well, then, the Indians fired on the Ohio packet-boat near Three Islands and killed—"

"Oh!" she said, with pain and terror, "don't tell me of that, either! It reminds me of the present." "Well, in Holland two thousand cats have been put into the corn-stores, to check the ravages of rats and mice," he said, laughing.

"What is the news from France? Do be serious!" "In New York some Frenchmen, seeing their flag insulted by Englishmen who took it down from the liberty-cap, went upstairs to the room of an English officer named Codd, seized his regimental coat and tore it to pieces."

"I'm glad of it! It was a very proper action!"

"But, madam, the man Codd was perfectly innocent!"

"No matter! His coat was guilty. They didn't tear him to pieces; they tore his coat. Are there any new books at the stores?"

"A great many! I have spent part of the last three days in looking over them. You can have new copies of your old favourites, Joseph Andrews, or Roderick Random, or Humphrey Clinker. You can have Goldsmith and Young, and Chesterfield and Addison. There is Don Quixote and Hudibras, Gulliver and Hume, Paley and Butler, Hervey and Watts, Lavater and Trenck, Seneca and Gregory, Nepos and even Aspasia Vindicated—to say nothing of Abelard and Heloise and Thomas a Kempis. All the Voltaires have been sold, however, and the Tom Paines went off at a rattling gait. By the way, while on the subject of books, tell the major that we have raised five hundred dollars toward buying books for the Transylvania Library, and that as soon as my school is out I am to go East as a purchasing committee. What particularly interests me is that I am going to Mount Vernon, to ask a subscription from President Washington. Think of that! Think of my presenting myself there with my tricoloured cockade—a Kentucky Jacobin!" "The President may be so occupied with the plots of you Kentucky jacobins," she said, "that he will not feel much like supplying you with more literature." Then she added, looking at him anxiously, "And so you are going away?"

"I'm going, and I'm glad I'm going. I have never set eyes on a great man. It makes my heart beat to think of it. I feel as a young Gaul might who was going to Rome to ask Caesar for gold with which to overthrow him. Seriously, it would be a dreadful thing for the country if a treaty should be ratified with England. There is not a democratic society from Boston to Charleston that will not feel enraged with the President. You may be sure that every patriot in Kentucky will be outraged, and that the Governor will denounce it to the House."

"There is news from France, then—serious news?" "Much, much! The National Convention has agreed to carry into full effect the treaty of commerce between the two Republics, and the French and American flags have been united and suspended in the hall. The Dutch have declared the sovereignty of the French, and French and Dutch patriots have taken St. Martin's. The English have declared war against the Dutch and granted letters of marque and reprisals. There has been a complete change in the Spanish Ministry. There has been a treaty made between France and the Grand Duke of Tuscany. The French fleet is in the West Indies and has taken possession of Guadeloupe. All French emigrants in Switzerland have been ordered to remove ten leagues from the borders of France. A hundred and fifty thousand Austrians are hurrying down toward the Rhine, to be reinforced by fifty thousand more."

He had run over these items with the rapidity of one who has his eye on the map of the world, noting, the slightest change in the situation of affairs that could affect Kentucky; and she listened eagerly like one no less interested.

"But the treaty! The treaty! The open navigation of the Mississippi!" she cried impatiently. "The last news is that the treaty will certainly be concluded and the open navigation of the Mississippi assured to us forever. The major will load his flatboats, drift down to New Orleans, sell those Spanish fops his tobacco for its weight in gems, buy a mustang to ride home on, and if not robbed and murdered by the land-pirates on the way, come back to you like an enormous bumblebee from a clover-field, his thighs literally packed with gold."

"I am so glad, so glad, so glad!"

He drew from his pockets a roll.

"Here are papers for two months back. And now I've something else to tell you. That is one of the things I came for"

As he said this, his manner, hitherto full of humour and vivacity, turned grave, and his voice, sinking to a lower tone, became charged with sweetness. It was the voice in which one refined and sincere soul confides to another refined and sincere soul the secret of some new happiness that has come to it.

But noticing the negro lad, who had paused in his work several paces off and stood watching them, he said to her:

"May I have a drink?" She turned to the negro: "Go to the spring-house and bring some water." The lad moved away, smiling to himself and shaking his head.

"He has broken all my pitchers," she added. "To-day I had to send my last roll of linen to town by Amy to buy more queen's-ware. The moss will grow on the bucket before he gets back." When the boy was out of hearing, she turned again to him:

"What is it? Tell me quickly."

"I have had news from Philadelphia. The case is at last decided in favour of the heirs, and I come at once into possession of my share. It may be eight or ten thousand dollars." His voice trembled a little despite himself.

She took his hands in hers with a warm, close pressure, and tears of joy sprang to her eyes. The whole of his bare, bleak life was known to her; its half-starved beginning; its early merciless buffeting; the upheaval of vast circumstance in the revolutionary history of the times by which he had again and again been thrown back upon his own undefended strength; and stealthily following him from place to place, always closing around him, always seeking to strangle him, or to poison him in some vital spot, that most silent, subtle serpent of life—Poverty. Knowing this, and knowing also the man he had become, she would in secret sometimes liken him to one of those rare unions of delicacy and hardihood which in the world of wild flowers Nature refuses to bring forth except from the cranny of a cold rock. Its home is the battle-field of black roaring tempests; the red lightnings play among its roots; all night seamless snow-drifts are woven around its heart; no bee ever rises to it from the valley below where the green spring is kneeling; no morning bird ever soars past it with observant song; but in due time, with unswerving obedience to a law of beauty unfolding from within, it sets forth its perfect leaves and strains its steadfast face toward the sun.

These paltry thousands! She realized that they would lift from him the burden of debts that he had assumed, and give him, without further waiting, the liberty of his powers and the opportunities of the world. "God bless you!" She said with trembling lips. "It makes me happier than it does you. No one else in the whole world is as glad as I am." Silence fell upon them. Both were thinking, but in very different ways—of the changes that would now take place in his life.

"Do you know," he said at length, looking into her face with the quietest smile, that if this lawsuit had gone against me it would have been the first great defeat of my life? Sorely as I have struggled, I have yet to encounter that common myth of weak men, an insurmountable barrier. The imperfection of our lives—what is it but the imperfection of our planning and doing? Shattered ideals—what hand shatters them but one's own? I declare to you at this moment, standing here in the clear light of my own past, that I firmly believe I shall be what I will, that I shall have what I want, and that I shall now go on rearing the structure of my life, to the last detail, just as I have long planned it." She did not answer, but stood looking at him with a new pity in her eyes. After all, was he so young, so untaught by the world? Had a little prosperity already puffed him up? "There will be this difference, of course," he added. "Hitherto I have had to build slowly; henceforth there will be no delay, now that I am free to lay hold upon the material. But, my dear friend, I cannot bear to think of my life as a structure to be successfully reared without settling at once how it is to be lighted from within. And, therefore, I have come to speak to you about—the lamp." As he said this a solemn beauty flashed out upon his face. As though the outer curtain of his nature had been drawn up, she now gazed into the depths and confidences.

Her head dropped quickly on her bosom; and she drew slightly back, as though to escape pain or danger. "You must know how long I have loved Amy," he continued in a tone of calmness. "I have not spoken sooner, because the circumstances of my life made it necessary for me to wait; and now I wish to ask her to become my wife, and I am here to beg your consent first."

For some time she did not answer. The slip of an elm grew beside the picket fence, and she stood passing her fingers over the topmost leaves, with her head lowered so that he could not see her face. At length she said in a voice he could hardly hear:

"I have feared for a long time that this would come; but I have never been able to get ready for it, and I am not ready now."

Neither spoke for some time longer; only his expression changed, and he looked over at her with a compassionate, amused gravity, as though he meant to be very patient with her opposition. On her part, she was thinking—Is it possible that the first use he will make of his new liberty is to forge the chain of a new slavery? Is this some weak spot now to be fully revealed in his character? Is this the drain in the bottom of the lake that will in the end bring its high, clear level down to mud and stagnant shallows and a swarm of stinging insects? At last she spoke, but with difficulty: "I have known for a year that you were interested in Amy. You could not have been here so much without our seeing that. But let me ask you one question: Have you ever thought that I wished you to marry her?" "I have always beheld in you an unmasked enemy," he replied, smiling.

"Then I can go on," she said. "But I feel as though never in my life have I done a thing that is as near being familiar and unwomanly. Nevertheless, for your sake—for hers—for ours—it is my plain, hard duty to ask you whether you are sure—even if you should have her consent—that my niece is the woman you ought to marry." And she lifted to him her clear, calm eyes, prematurely old in the experience of life.

"I am sure," he answered with the readiness of one who has foreseen the question.

The negro boy approached with a bucket of cold crystal water, and he drank a big gourd full of it gratefully.

"You can go and kindle the fire in the kitchen," she said to the negro. "It is nearly time to be getting supper. I will be in by and by."

"You have been with her so much!" she continued to Gray after another interval of embarrassment. "And you know, or you ought to know, her disposition, her tastes, her ways and views of life. Is she the companion you need now? will always need?"

"I have been much with her," he replied, taking up her words with humorous gravity. "But I have never studied her as I have studied law. I have never cross-examined her for a witness, or prosecuted her as an attorney, or pronounced sentence on her as a judge. I am her advocate—and I am ready to defend her now—even to you!" "John!—" "I love her—that is all there is of it!"

"Suppose you wait a little longer."

"I have waited too long already from necessity." It was on his lips to add: "I have gone too far with her; it is too late to retreat;" but he checked himself.

"If I should feel, then, that I must withhold my consent?"

He grew serious, and after the silence of a few moments, he said with great respect: "I should be sorry; but—" and then he forbore.

"If Major Falconer should withhold his?" He shook his head, and set his lips, turning his face away through courtesy. "It would make no difference! Nothing would make any difference!" and then another silence followed. "I suppose all this would be considered the proof that you loved her," she began at length, despairingly, "but even love is not enough to begin with; much less is it enough to live by."

"You don't appreciate her! You don't do her justice!" he cried rudely. "But perhaps no woman can ever understand why a man loves any other woman!" "I am not thinking of why you love my niece," she replied, with a curl of pride in her nostril and a flash of anger in her eyes. "I am thinking

of why you will cease to love her, and why you will both be unhappy if you marry her. It is not my duty to analyze your affections; it is my duty to take care of her welfare." "My dear friend," he cried, his face aglow with impatient enthusiasm — "my dear friend" and he suddenly lifted her hand to his lips, "I have but one anxiety in the whole matter: will you cease to be my friend if I act in opposition to your wishes?" "Should I cease to be your friend because you had made a mistake? It is not to me you are unkind," she answered, quickly withdrawing her hand. Spots of the palest rose appeared on her cheeks, and she bent over and picked up the rake, and began to work.

"I must be going," he said awkwardly; "it is getting late."

"Yes," she said; "it is getting late."

Still he lingered, swinging his hat in his hand, ill at ease, with his face set hard away.

"Is that all you have to say to me?" he asked at length, wheeling and looking her steadily and fondly in the eyes.

"That is all," she replied, controlling the quiver in her voice; but then letting herself go a little, she added with slow distinctness: "You might remember this: some women in marrying demand all and give all: with good men they are the happy; with base men they are the brokenhearted. Some demand everything and give little: with weak men they are tyrants; with strong men they are the divorced. Some demand little and give all: with congenial souls they are already in heaven; with uncongenial they are soon in their graves. Some give little and demand little: they are the heartless, and they bring neither the joy of life nor the peace of death." "And which of these is Amy?" he said, after a minute of reflection. "And which of the men am I?" "Don't ask her to marry you until you find out both," she answered.

She watched him as he strode away from her across the clearing, with a look in her eyes that she knew nothing of—watched him, motionless, until his tall, black figure passed from sight behind the green sunlit wall of the wilderness. What undisciplined, unawakened strength there was in him! how far such a stride as that would carry him on in life! It was like the tread of one of his own forefathers in Cromwell's unconquer-able, hymn-singing armies. She loved to think of him as holding his descent from a line so pious and so grim: it served to account to her for the quality of stern, spiritual soldiership that still seemed to be the mastering trait of his nature. How long would it remain so, was the question that she had often asked of herself. A fighter in the world he would always be—she felt sure of that; nor was it necessary to look into his past to obtain this assurance; one had but to look into his eyes. Moreover, she had little doubt that with a temper so steadily bent on conflict, he would never suffer defeat where his own utmost strength was all that was needed to conquer. But as he grew older, and the world in part conquered him as it conquers so many of us, would he go into his later battles as he had entered his earlier ones—to the measure of a sacred chant? Beneath the sweat and wounds of all his victories would he carry the white lustre of conscience, burning untarnished in him to the end?

It was this religious purity of his nature and his life, resting upon him as a mantle visible to all eyes but invisible to him, that had, as she believed, attracted her to him so powerfully. On that uncouth border of Western civilization, to which they had both been cast, he was a little lonely in his way, she in hers; and this fact had drawn them somewhat together. He was a scholar, she a reader; that too had formed a bond. He had been much at their home as lover of her niece, and this intimacy had given her a good chance to take his wearing measure as a man. But over and above all other things, it was the effect of the unfallen in him, of the highest keeping itself above assault, of his first youth never yet brushed away as a bloom, that constituted to her his distinction among the men that she had known. It served to place him in contrast with the colonial Virginia society of her remembrance—a society in which even the minds of the clergy were not like a lawn scentless with the dew on it, but like a lawn parched by the afternoon sun and full of hot odours. It kept him aloof from the loose ways of the young backwoodsmen and aristocrats of the town, with whom otherwise he closely mingled. It gave her the right, she thought, to indulge a friendship for him such as she had never felt

for any other man; and in this friendship it made it easier for her to overlook a great deal that was rude in him, headstrong, overbearing.

When, this afternoon, he had asked her what she was thinking of when he surprised her with his visit, she had not replied: she could not have avowed even to herself that she was thinking of such things as these: that having, for some years, drawn out a hard, dull life in that settlement of pathfinders, trappers, woodchoppers, hunters, Indian fighters, surveyors; having afterwards, with little interest, watched them, one by one, as the earliest types of civilization followed,—the merchant, the lawyer, the priest, the preacher of the Gospel, the soldiers and officers of the Revolution,—at last, through all the wilderness, as it now fondly seemed to her, she saw shining the white light of his long absent figure, bringing a new melody to the woods, a new meaning to her life, and putting an end to all her desire ever to return to the old society beyond the mountains.

His figure passed out of sight, and she turned and walked sorrowfully to the cabin, from the low rugged chimney of which a pale blue smoke now rose into the twilight air. She chid herself that she had confronted the declaration of his purpose to marry her niece with so little spirit, such faulty tact. She had long known that he would ask this; she had long gotten ready what she would say; but in the struggle between their wills, she had been unaccountably embarrassed, she had blundered, and he had left rather strengthened than weakened in his determination.

But she must prevent the marriage; her mind was more resolute than ever as to that. Slowly she reached the doorstep of the cabin, a roughly hewn log, and turning, stood there with her bonnet in her hand, her white figure outlined before the doorway, slender and still. The sun had set. Night was rushing on over the awful land. The wolf-dog, in his kennel behind the house, rose, shook himself at his chain, and uttered a long howl that reached away to the dark woods—the darker for the vast pulsing yellow light that waved behind them in the west like a gorgeous soft aerial fan. As the echoes died out from the peach orchard came the song of a robin, calling for love and rest. Then from another direction across the clearing another sound reached her: the careless whistle of the major, returning from his day's work in the field. When she heard that, her face took on the expression that a woman sometimes comes to wear when she has accepted what life has brought her although it has brought her nothing for which she cares; and her lips opened with an unconscious sigh of weariness—the weariness that has been gathering weariness for years and that runs on in weariness through the future.

Later, she was kneeling before the red logs of the fireplace with one hand shielding her delicate face from the blistering heat; in the other holding the shingle on which richly made and carefully shaped was the bread of Indian maize that he liked. She did not rise until she had placed it where it would be perfectly browned; otherwise he would have been disappointed and the evening would have been spoiled.

IV

JOHN GRAY did not return to town by his straight course through the forest, but followed the winding wagon-road at a slow, meditative gait. He was always thoughtful after he had been with Mrs. Falconer; he was unusually thoughtful now; and the gathering hush of night, the holy expectancy of stars, a flock of white clouds lying at rest low on the green sky like sheep in some far uplifted meadow, the freshness of the woods soon to be hung with dew,—all these melted into his mood as notes from many instruments blend in the ear. But he was soon aroused in an unexpected way. When he reached the place where the wagon-road passed out into the broader public road leading from Lexington to Frankfort, he came near stumbling over a large, loose bundle, tied in a blue and white neckerchief. Plainly it had been lost and plainly it was his duty to discover if possible to whom it belonged. He carried it to one side of the road and began to examine its contents: a wide, white lace tucker, two fine cambric handkerchiefs, two pairs of India cotton hose, two pairs of silk hose, two thin muslin handkerchiefs, a pair of long kid gloves,—straw colour,—a pair of white kid shoes, a pale-blue silk coat, a thin, white striped muslin dress. The articles were not marked. Whose could they be? Not Amy's: Mrs. Falconer had expressly said that the major was to bring her finery to town in the gig the next day. They might have been dropped by some girl or by some family servant, riding into town; he knew several young ladies, to any one of whom they might belong. He would inquire in the morning; and meantime, he would leave the bundle at the office of the printer, where lost articles were commonly kept until they could be advertised in the paper, and called for by their owners. He replaced the things, and carefully retied the ends of the kerchief. It was dark when he reached town, and he went straight to his room and locked the bundle in his closet. Then he hurried to his tavern, where his supper had to be especially cooked for him, it being past the early hour of the pioneer evening meal. While he sat out under the tree at the door, waiting and impatiently thinking that he would go to see Amy as soon as he could despatch it, the tavern-keeper came out to say that some members of the Democratic Society had been looking for him. Later on, these returned. A meeting of the Society had been called for that night, to consider news brought by the postrider the day previous and to prepare advices for the Philadelphia Society against the postrider's return: as secretary, he was wanted at the proceedings. He begged hard to be excused, but he was the scholar, the scribe; no one would take his place. When the meeting ended, the hour was past for seeing Amy. He went to his room and read law with flickering concentration of mind till near midnight. Then he snuffed out his candle, undressed, and stretched himself along the edge of his bed.

It was hard and coarse. The room itself was the single one that formed the ruder sort of pioneer cabin. The floor was the earth itself, covered here and there with the skins of wild animals; the walls but logs, poorly plastered. From a row of pegs driven into one of these hung his clothes—not many. The antlers of a stag over the doorway held his rifle, his hunting-belt, and his hat. A swinging shelf displayed a few books, being eagerly added to as he could bitterly afford it—with a copy of Paley, lent by the Reverend James Moore, the dreamy, saintlike, flute-playing Episcopal parson of the town. In the middle of the room a round table of his own vigorous carpentry stood on a panther skin; and on this lay some copy books in which he had just set new copies for his children; a handful of goosequills to be fashioned into pens for them; the proceedings of the Democratic Society, freshly added to this evening; copies of the Kentucky Gazette containing essays by the political leaders of the day on the separation of Kentucky from the Union and the opening of the Mississippi to its growing commerce—among them some of his own, stately and academic, signed "Cato the Younger." Lying open on the table lay his Bible; after law, he always read a little in that; and to-night he had reread one of his favourite chapters of St. Paul: that wherein the great, calm, victorious soldier of the spirit surveys the history of his trials, imprisonments, beatings. In one corner was set a three-cornered cupboard

containing his underwear, his new cossack boots, and a few precious things that had been his mother's: her teacup and saucer, her prayer-book. It was in this closet that he had put the lost bundle.

He had hardly stretched himself along the edge of his bed before he began to think of this. Every complete man embraces some of the qualities of a woman, for Nature does not mean that sex shall be more than a partial separation of one common humanity; otherwise we should be too much divided to be companionable. And it is these womanly qualities that not only endow a man with his insight into the other sex, but that enable him to bestow a certain feminine supervision upon his own affairs when no actual female has them in charge. If he marries, this inner helpmeet behaves in unlike ways toward the newly reigning usurper; sometimes giving up peaceably, at others remaining her life-long critic—reluctant but irremovable. If many a wife did but realize that she is perpetually observed not only by the eyes of a pardoning husband but by the eyes of another woman hidden away in the depths of his being, she would do many things differently and not do some things at all.

The invisible slip of a woman in Gray now began to question him regarding the bundle. Would not those delicate, beautiful things be ruined, thus put away in his closet? He got up, took the bundle out, laid it on his table, untied the kerchief, lifted carefully off the white muslin dress and the blue silk coat, and started with them toward two empty pegs on the wall. He never closed the door of his cabin if the night was fine. It stood open now and a light wind blew the soft fabrics against his body and limbs, so that they seemed to fold themselves about him, to cling to him. He disengaged them reluctantly—apologetically.

Then he lay down again. But now the dress on the wall fascinated him. The moonlight bathed it, the wind swayed it. This was the first time that a woman's garments had ever hung in his room. He welcomed the mere accident of their presence as though it possessed a forerunning intelligence, as though it were the annunciation of his approaching change of life. And so laughing to himself, and under the spell of a growing fancy, he got up again and took the little white shoes and set them on the table in the moonlight—on the open Bible and the speech of St. Paul—and then went back, and lay looking at them and dreaming—looking at them and dreaming.

His thoughts passed meantime like a shining flock of white doves to Amy, hovering about her. They stole onward to the time when she would be his wife; when lying thus, he would wake in the night and see her dress on the wall and feel her head on his bosom; when her little shoes might stand on his open Bible, if they chose, and the satin instep of her bare foot be folded in the hard hollow of his.

He uttered a deep, voiceless, impassioned outcry that she might not die young nor he die young; that the struggles and hardships of life, now seeming to be ended, might never begirt him or her so closely again; that they might grow peacefully old together. To-morrow then, he would see her; no, not tomorrow; it was long past midnight now. He got down on his bare knees beside the bed with his face buried in his hands and said his prayers.

And then lying outstretched with his head resting on his folded hands, the moonlight streaming through the window and lighting up his dark-red curls and falling on his face and neck and chest, the cool south wind blowing down his warm limbs, his eyes opening and closing in religious purity on the dress, and his mind opening and closing on the visions of his future, he fell asleep.

V

WHEN he awoke late, he stretched his big arms drowsily out before his face with a gesture like that of a swimmer parting the water: he was in truth making his way out of a fathomless, moonlit sea of dreams to the shores of reality. Broad daylight startled him with its sheer blinding revelation of the material world, as the foot of a swimmer, long used to the yielding pavements of the ocean, touches with surprise the first rock and sand.

He sprang up, bathed, dressed, and stepped out into the crystalline freshness of the morning. He was glowing with his exercise, at peace with himself and with all men, and so strong in the exuberance of his manhood that he felt he could have leaped over into the east, shouldered the sun, and run gaily, impatiently, with it up the sky. How could he wait to see Amy until it went up its long slow way and then down again to its setting? A powerful young lion may some time have appeared thus at daybreak on the edge of a jungle and measured the stretches of sand to be crossed before he could reach an oasis where memory told him was the lurking-place of love.

It was still early. The first smoke curled upward from the chimneys of the town; the melodious tinkle of bells reached his ear as the cows passed from the milking to the outlying ranges deep in their wild verdure. Even as he stood surveying the scene, along the path which ran close to his cabin came a bare-headed, nutbrown pioneer girl, whose close-fitting dress of white homespun revealed the rounded outlines of her figure. She had gathered up the skirt which was short, to keep it from the tops of the wet weeds. Her bare, beautiful feet were pink with the cold dew. Forgotten, her slow fat cows had passed on far ahead; for at her side, wooing her with drooping lashes while the earth was still flushed with the morn, strolled a young Indian fighter, swarthy, lean tall, wild. His long thigh boots of thin deer-hide, open at the hips, were ornamented with a scarlet fringe and rattled musically with the hoofs of fawns and the spurs of the wild turkey; his gray racoonskin cap was adorned with the wings of the hawk and the scarlet tanager.

The magnificent young, warrior lifted his cap to the school-master with a quiet laugh; and the girl smiled at him and shook a warning finger to remind him he was not to betray them. He smiled back with a deprecating gesture to signify that he could be trusted. He would have liked it better if he could have said more plainly that he too had the same occupation now; and as he gazed after them, lingering along the path side by side, the long-stifled cravings of his heart rose to his unworldly, passionate eyes: he all but wished that Amy also milked the cows at early morning and drove them out to pasture.

When he went to his breakfast at the tavern, one of the young Williamsburg aristocrats was already there, pretending to eat; and hovering about the table, brisk to appease his demands, the daughter of the taverner: she as ruddy as a hollyhock and gaily flaunting her head from side to side with the pleasure of denying him everything but his food, yet meaning to kiss him when twilight came—once, and then to run.

Truly, it seemed that this day was to be given up to much pairing: as he thought it rightly should be and that without delay. When he took his seat in the school-room and looked out upon the children, they had never seemed so small, so pitiful. It struck him that Nature is cruel not to fit us for love and marriage as soon as we are born—cruel to make us wait twenty or thirty years before she lets us really begin to live. He looked with eyes more full of pity than usual at blear-eyed, delicate little Jennie, as to whom he could never tell whether it was the multiplication-table that made her deathly sick, or sickness that kept her from multiplying. His eye lit upon a wee, chubby-cheeked urchin on the end of a high, hard bench, and he fell to counting how many ages must pass before that unsuspecting grub would grow his palpitating wings of flame. He felt like making them a little speech and telling them how happy he was, and how happy they would all be when they got old enough to deserve it.

And as for the lessons that day, what difference could it make whether ideas sprouted or did not sprout in those useless brains? He answered all the hard questions himself; and, indeed, so sunny and exhilarating was the weather of his discipline that little Jennie, seeing how the rays fell and the wind lay, gave up the multiplication-table altogether and fell to drawing tomahawks.

A remarkable mixture of human life there was in Gray's school. There were the native little Kentuckians, born in the wilderness—the first wild, hardy generation of the new people; and there were little folks from Virginia, from Tennessee, from North Carolina, and from Pennsylvania and other sources, huddled together, some uncouth, some gentle-born, and all starting out to be formed into the men and women of Kentucky. They had their strange, sad, heroic games and pastimes under his guidance. Two little girls would be driving the cows home about dusk; three little boys would play Indian and capture them and carry them off; the husbands of the little girls would form a party to the rescue; the prisoners would drop pieces of their dresses along the way; and then at a certain point of the woods—it being the dead of night now and the little girls being bound to a tree, and the Indians having fallen asleep beside their smouldering campfires—the rescuers would rush in and there would be whoops and shrieks and the taking of scalps and a happy return. Or some settlers would be shut up in their fort. The only water to be had was from a spring outside the walls, and around this the enemy skulked in the corn and grass. But their husbands and sweethearts must not perish of thirst. So, with a prayer, a tear, a final embrace, the little women marched out through the gates to the spring in the very teeth of death and brought back water in their wooden dinner-buckets. Or, when the boys would become men with contests of running and pitching quoits and wrestling, the girls would play wives and have a quilting, in a house of green alder-bushes, or be capped and wrinkled grandmothers sitting beside imaginary spinning-wheels and smoking imaginary pipes.

Sometimes it was not Indian warfare but civil strife. One morning as many as three Daniel Boones appeared on the playground at the same moment; and at once there was a dreadful fight to ascertain which was the genuine Daniel. This being decided, the spurious Daniels submitted to be: the one, Simon Kenton; the other, General George Rogers Clark.

And there was another game of history—more practical in its bearings—which he had not taught them, but which they had taught him; they had played it with him that very morning. When he had stepped across the open to the school, he found that the older boys, having formed themselves into a garrison for the defence of the smaller boys and girls, had barricaded the door and barred and manned the wooden windows: the schoolhouse had suddenly become a frontier station; they were the pioneers; he was the invading Indians—let him attack them if he dared! He did dare and that at once; for he knew that otherwise there would be no school that day or as long as the white race on the inside remained unconquered. So had ensued a rough-and-tumble scrimmage for fifteen minutes, during which the babies within wailed aloud with real terror of the battle, and he received some real knocks and whacks and punches through the loop-holes of the stockade: the end being arrived at when the schoolhouse door, by a terrible wrench from the outside, was torn entirely off its wooden hinges; and the victory being attributed—as an Indian victory always was in those days—to the overwhelming numbers of the enemy.

With such an opening of the day, the academic influence over childhood may soon be restored to forcible supremacy but will awaken little zest. Gray was glad therefore on all accounts that this happened to be the day on which he had promised to tell them of the battle of the Blue Licks. Thirteen years before and forty miles away that most dreadful of all massacres had taken place; and in the town were many mothers who still wept for their sons, many widows who still dreamed of their young husbands, fallen that beautiful, fatal August day beneath the oaks and the cedars, or floating down the red-dyed river. All the morning he could see the expectation of this story in their faces: a pair of distant, clearest eyes would be furtively lifted to his, then quickly dropped; or another pair more steadily directed at him through the backwoods loop-hole of two stockade fingers.

At noon, then, having dismissed the smaller ones for their big recess, he was standing amid the eager upturned faces of the others—bareheaded under the brilliant sky of May. He had chosen the bank of the Town Fork, where it crossed the common, as a place in which he should be freest from interruption and best able to make his description of the battle-field well understood. This stream flows unseen beneath the streets of the city now with scarce rent enough to wash out its grimy channel; but then it flashed broad and clear through the long valley of scattered cabins and orchards and cornfields and patches of cane.

It was a hazardous experiment with the rough jewels of those little minds. They were still rather like diamonds rolling about on the bottom of barbarian rivers than steadily set and mounted for the uses of civilization.

He fixed his eyes upon a lad in his fifteenth year, the commandant of the fort of the morning, who now stood at the water edge, watching him with breathless attention. A brave, sunny face;—a big shaggy head holding a mind in it as clear as a sphere of rock-crystal; already heated with vast ambition—a leader in the school, afterwards to be a leader in the nation—Richard Johnson.

"Listen!" he cried; and when he spoke in, that tone he reduced everything turbulent to peace. "I have brought you here to tell you of the battle of the Blue Licks not because it was the last time, as you know, that an Indian army ever invaded Kentucky; not because a hundred years from now or a thousand years from now other school-boys and other teachers will be talking of it still; not because the Kentuckians will some day assemble on the field and set up a monument to their forefathers, your fathers and brothers; but because there is a lesson in it for you to learn now while you are children. A few years more and some of you boys will be old enough to fight for Kentucky or for your country. Some of you will be common soldiers who will have to obey the orders of your generals; some of you may be generals with soldiers under you at the mercy of your commands. It may be worth your own lives, it may save the lives of your soldiers, to heed this lesson now and to remember it then. And all of you—whether you go into battles of that sort or not—will have others; for the world has many kinds of fighting to be done in it and each of you will have to do his share. And whatever that share may be, you will need the same character, the same virtues, to encounter it victorious; for all battles are won in the same way, all conquerors are alike. This lesson, then, will help each of you to win, none of you to lose.

"Do you know what it was that brought about the awful massacre of the Blue Licks? It was the folly of one officer.

"Let the creek here be the Licking River. The Kentuckians, some on foot and some on horse, but all tired and disordered and hurrying along, had just reached the bank. Over on the other side—some distance back—the Indians were hiding in the woods and waiting. No one knew exactly where they were; every one knew they counted from seven hundred to a thousand. The Kentuckians were a hundred and eighty-two. There was Boone with the famous Boonsborough men, the very name of whom was a terror; there was Trigg with men just as good from Harrodsburg; there was Todd, as good as either, with the men from Lexington. More than a fourth of the whole were commissioned officers, and more fearless men never faced an enemy. There was but one among them whose courage had ever been doubted, and do you know what that man did? "After the Kentuckians had crossed the river to attack, been overpowered, forced back to the river again, and were being shot down or cut down in the water like helpless cattle, that man—his name was Benjamin Netherland—did this: He was finely mounted. He had quickly recrossed the river and had before him the open buffalo trace leading back home. About twenty other men had crossed as quickly as he and were urging their horses toward this road. But Netherland, having reached the opposite bank, wheeled his horse's head toward the front of the battle, shouted and rallied the others, and sitting there in full view and easy reach of the Indian army across the narrow river, poured his volley into the foremost of the pursuers, who were cutting down the Kentuckians in the river. He covered their retreat. He saved their lives.

"There was another soldier among them named Aaron Reynolds. He had had a quarrel some days before with Colonel Patterson and there was bad blood between them. During the retreat, he was galloping toward the ford. The Indians were close behind. But as he ran, he came upon Colonel Patterson, who had been wounded and, now exhausted, had fallen behind his comrades. Reynolds sprang from his horse, helped the officer to mount, saw him escape, and took his poor chance on foot. For this he fell into the hands of the Indians.

"That is the kind of men of whom that little army of a hundred and eighty-two was made up—the oak forest of Kentucky. "And yet, when they had reached the river in this pursuit and some twenty of the officers had come out before the ranks to hold a council of war and the wisest and the oldest were urging caution or delay, one of them—McGary—suddenly waved his hat in the air, spurred his horse into the river, and shouted:

"Let all who are not cowards follow me!"

"They all followed; and then followed also the shame of defeat, the awful massacre, the sorrow that lasts among us still, and the loss to Kentucky of many a gallant young life that had helped to shape her destiny in the nation.

"Some day perhaps some historian will write it down that the Kentuckians followed McGary because no man among them could endure such a taunt. Do not believe him. No man among them even thought of the taunt: it had no meaning. They followed him because they were too loyal to desert him and those who went with him in his folly. Your fathers always stood together and fought together as one man, or Kentucky would never have been conquered; and in no battle of all the many that they ever fought did they ever leave a comrade to perish because he had made a mistake or was in the wrong.

"This, then, is your lesson from the battle of Blue Licks: Never go into a battle merely to show that you are not a coward: that of itself shows what a coward you are.

"Do not misunderstand me! whether you be men or women, you will never do anything in the world without courage. It is the greatest quality of the mind—next to honor. It is your king. But the king must always have a good cause. Many a good king has perished in a bad one; and this noblest virtue of courage has perhaps ruined more of us than any other that we possess. You know what character the old kings used always to have at their courts. I have told you a great deal about him. It was the Fool. Do you know what personage it is that Courage, the King, is so apt to have in the Court of the Mind? It is the Fool also. Lay these words away; you will understand them better when you are older and you will need to understand them very well. Then also you will know what I mean when I say to you this morning that the battle of the Blue Licks was the work of the Fool, jesting with the King."

He had gone to the field himself one Saturday not long before, walking thoughtfully over it. He had had with him two of the Lexington militia who, in the battle, had been near poor Todd, their colonel, while fighting like a lion to the last and bleeding from many wounds. The recollection of it all was very clear now, very poignant: the bright winding river, there broadening at its ford; the wild and lonely aspect of the country round about. On the farther bank the long lofty ridge of rock, trodden and licked bare of vegetation for ages by the countless passing buffalo; blackened by rain and sun; only the more desolate for a few dwarfish cedars and other timber scant and dreary to the eye. Encircling this hill in somewhat the shape of a horseshoe, a deep ravine heavily wooded and rank with grass and underbrush. The Kentuckians, disorderly foot and horse, rushing in foolhardiness to the top of this uncovered expanse of rock; the Indians, twice, thrice, their number, engirdling its base, ringing them round with hidden death. The whole tragedy repossessed his imagination and his emotions. His face had grown pale, his voice took the measure and cadence of an old-time minstrel's chant, his nervous fingers should have been able to reach out and strike the chords of a harp. With uplifted finger he was going on to impress them with another lesson: that in the battles which would be sure to await them, they must be warned by this error of their fathers never to be over-hasty or over-confident, never to go forward without knowing the nature of the ground they were to tread, or

throw themselves into a struggle without measuring the force of the enemy. He was doing this when a child came skipping joyously across the common, and pushing her way up to him through the circle of his listeners, handed him a note. He read it, and in an instant the great battle, hills, river, horse, rider, shrieks, groans, all vanished from his mind as silently as a puff of white smoke from a distant cannon.

For a while he stood with his eyes fixed upon the paper, so absorbed as not to note the surprise that had fallen upon the children. At length merely saying, "I shall have to tell you the rest some other day," he walked rapidly across the common in the direction from which the little messenger had come.

A few minutes later he stood at the door of Father Poythress, the Methodist minister, asking for Amy. But she and Kitty had ridden away and would not return till night. Leaving word that he would come to see her in the evening, he turned away.

The children were scattered: there could be no more of the battle that day. But it was half an hour yet before his duties would recommence at the school. As he walked slowly along debating with himself how he should employ the time, a thought struck him; he hastened to the office of one of many agents for the locating and selling of Kentucky lands, and spent the interval in determining the titles to several tracts near town—an intricate matter in those times. But he found one farm, the part of an older military grant of the French and Indian wars, to which the title was unmistakably direct.

As soon as his school was out, he went to look at this property again, now that he was thinking of buying it. He knew it very well already, his walks having often brought him into its deep majestic woods; and he penetrated at once to an open knoll sloping toward the west and threw himself down on the deep green turf with the freedom of ownership.

VI

YES, this property would suit him; it would suit Amy. It was near town; it was not far from Major Falconer's. He could build his house on the hill-top where he was lying. At the foot of it, out of its limestone caverns, swelled a bountiful spring. As he listened he could hear the water of the branch that ran winding away from it toward the Elkhorn. That would be a pleasant sound when he sat with her in their doorway of summer evenings. On that southern slope he would plant his peach orchard, and he would have a vineyard. On this side Amy could have her garden, have her flowers. Sloping down from the front of the house to the branch would be their lawn, after he had cleared away everything but a few of the noblest old trees: under one of them, covered with a vine that fell in long green cascades from its summit to the ground, he would arrange a wild-grape swing for her, to make good the loss of the one she now had at Major Falconer's.

Thus, out of one detail after another, he constructed the whole vision of the future, with the swiftness of desire, the unerring thoughtfulness of love; and, having transformed the wilderness into his home, he feasted on his banquet of ideas, his rich red wine of hopes and plans.

One of the subtlest, most saddening effects of the entire absence of possessions is the inevitable shrinkage of nature that must be undergone by those who have nothing to own. When a man, by some misfortune, has suddenly suffered the loss of his hands, much of the bewilderment and consternation that quickly follow have their origin in the thought that he never again shall be able to grasp. To his astonishment, he finds that no small part of his range of mental activity and sense of power was involved in that exercise alone. He has not lost merely his hands; much of his inner being has been stricken into disuse.

But the hand itself is only the rudest type of the universal necessity that pervades us to take hold. The body is furnished with two; the mind, the heart, the spirit—who shall number the invisible, the countless hands of these? All growth, all strength, all uplift, all power to rise in the world and to remain arisen, comes from the myriad hold we have taken upon higher surrounding realities.

Some time, wandering in a thinned wood, you may have happened upon an old vine, the seed of which had long ago been dropped and had sprouted in an open spot where there was no timber. Every May, in response to Nature's joyful bidding that it yet shall rise, the vine has loosed the thousand tendrils of its hope, those long, green, delicate fingers searching the empty air. Every December you may see these turned stiff and brown, and wound about themselves like spirals or knotted like the claw of a frozen bird. Year after year the vine has grown only at the head, remaining empty-handed; and the head itself, not being lifted always higher by anything the hands have seized, has but moved hither and thither, back and forth, like the head of a wounded snake in a path. Thus every summer you may see the vine, fallen back and coiled upon itself, and piled up before you like a low green mound, its own tomb; in winter a black heap, its own ruins. So, it often is with the poorest, who live on at the head, remaining empty-handed; fallen in and coiled back upon themselves, their own inescapable tombs, their own unavertible ruins. The prospect of having what to him was wealth had instantly bestowed upon John Gray the liberation of his strength. It had untied the hands of his idle powers; and the first thing he had reached fiercely out to grasp was Amy—his share in the possession of women; the second thing was land—his share in the possession of the earth. With these at the start, the one unshakable under his foot, the other inseparable from his side, he had no doubt that he should rise in the world and lay hold by steady degrees upon all that he should care to have. Naturally now these two blent far on and inseparably in the thoughts of one whose temperament doomed him always to be planning and striving for the future.

The last rays of the sun touched the summit of the knoll where he was lying. Its setting was with great majesty and repose, depth after depth of cloud opening inward as toward the presence of the infinite peace. The boughs of the trees overhead were in blossom; there were blue and white wild-

flowers at his feet. As he looked about him, he said to himself in his solemn way that the long hard winter of his youth had ended; the springtime of his manhood was turning green like the woods.

With this night came his betrothal. For years he had looked forward to that as the highest white mountain peak of his life. As he drew near it now, his thoughts made a pathway for his feet, covering it as with a fresh fall of snow. Complete tenderness overcame him as he beheld Amy in this new sacred relation; a look of religious reverence for her filled his eyes. He asked himself what he had ever done to deserve all this. Perhaps it is the instinctive trait of most of us to seek an explanation for any great happiness as we are always prone to discuss the causes of our adversity. Accordingly, and in accord with our differing points of view of the universe, we declare of our joy that it is the gift of God to us despite our shortcomings and our transgressions; or that it is our blind share of things tossed out impersonally to us by the blind operation of the chances of life; or that it is the clearest strictest logic of our own being and doing—the natural vintage of our own grapes.

Of all these, the one that most deeply touches the heart is the faith, that a God above who alone knows and judges aright, still loves and has sent a blessing. To such a believer the heavens seem to have opened above his head, the Divine to have descended and returned; and left alone in the possession of his joy, he lifts his softened eyes to the Light, the Life, the Love, that has always guided him, always filled him, never forgotten him.

This stark audacity of faith was the schoolmaster's. It belonged to him through the Covenanter blood of his English forefathers and through his Scotch mother; but it had surrounded him also in the burning spiritual heroism of the time, when men wandered through the Western wilderness, girt as with camel's hair and fed as on locusts, but carrying from cabin to cabin, from post to post, through darkness and snow and storm the lonely banner of the Christ and preaching the gospel of everlasting peace to those who had never known any peace on earth. So that all his thoughts were linked with the eternal; he had threaded the labyrinth of life, evermore awestruck with its immensities and its mysteries; in his ear, he could plainly hear immortality sounding like a muffled bell across a sea, now near, now farther away, according as he was in danger or in safety. Therefore, his sudden prosperity—Amy—marriage—happiness—all these meant to him that Providence was blessing him.

In the depth of the wood it had grown dark. With all his thoughts of her sounding like the low notes of a cathedral organ, he rose and walked slowly back to town. He did not care for his supper; he did not wish to speak with any other person; the rude, coarse banter of the taverns and the streets would in some way throw a stain on her. Luckily he reached his room unaccosted; and then with care but without vanity having dressed himself in his best, he took his way to the house of Father Poythress.

VII

HE was kept waiting for some time. More than once he heard in the next room the sounds of smothered laughter and two voices, pitched in a confidential tone: the one with persistent appeal, the other with persistent refusal. At last there reached him the laughter of a merry agreement, and Amy entered the room, holding Kitty Poythress by the hand.

She had been looking all day for her lost bundle. Now she was tired; worried over the loss of her things which had been bought by her aunt at great cost and self-sacrifice; and disappointed that she should not be able to go to the ball on Thursday evening. It was to be the most brilliant assemblage of the aristocratic families of the town that had ever been known in the wilderness and the first endeavour to transplant beyond the mountains the old social elegance of Williamsburg, Annapolis, and Richmond. Not to be seen in the dress that Mrs. Falconer, dreaming of her own past, had deftly made—not to have her beauty reign absolute in that scene of lights and dance and music—it was the long, slow crucifixion of all the impulses of her gaiety and youth.

She did not wish to see any one to-night, least of all John Gray with whom she had had an engagement to go. No doubt he had come to ask why she had broken it in the note which she had sent him that morning. She had not given him any reason in the note; she did not intend to give him the reason now. He would merely look at her in his grave, reproachful, exasperating way and ask what was the difference: could she not wear some other dress? or what great difference did it make whether she went at all? He was always ready to take this manner of patient forbearance toward her, as though she were one of his school children. To-night she was in no mood to have her troubles treated as trifles or herself soothed like an infant that was crying to be rocked.

She walked slowly into the room, dragging Kitty behind her. She let him press the tips of her unbending fingers, pouted, smiled faintly, dropped upon a divan by Kitty's side, strengthened her hold on Kitty's hand, and fixed her eyes on Kitty's hair. "Aren't you tired?" she said, giving it an absorbed caressing stroke, with a low laugh. "I am." "I am going to look again to-morrow, Kitty," she continued, brightening up with a decisive air, "and the next day and the next." She kept her face turned aside from John and did not include him in the conversation. Women who imagine themselves far finer ladies than this child was treat a man in this way—rarely—very rarely—say, once in the same man's lifetime.

"We are both so tired," she drowsily remarked at length, turning to John after some further parley which he did not understand and tapping her mouth prettily with the palm of her hand to fight away a yawn. "You know we've been riding all day. And William Penn is at death's door with hunger. Poor William Penn! I'm afraid he'll suffer to-night at the tavern stable. They never take care of him and feed him as I do at home. He is so unhappy when he is hungry; and when he is unhappy, I am. And he has to be rubbed down so beautifully, or he doesn't shine." The tallow candles, which had been lighted when he came, needed snuffing by this time. The light was so dim that she could not see his face—blanched with bewilderment and pain and anger. What she did see as she looked across the room at him was his large black figure in an absent-minded awkward posture and his big head held very straight and high as though it were momentarily getting higher. He had remained simply silent. His silence irritated her; and she knew she was treating him badly and that irritated her with him all the more. She sent one of her light arrows at him barbed with further mischief.

"I wish, as you go back, you would stop at the stable and see whether they have mistreated him in any way. He takes things so hard when they don't go to suit him," and she turned to Kitty and laughed significantly.

Then she heard him clear his throat, and in a voice shaking with passion, he said:

"Give your orders to a servant." A moment of awkward silence followed. She did not recognize that voice as his or such rude, unreasonable words. "I suppose you want to know why I broke my

engagement with you," she said, turning toward him aggrievedly and as though the subject could no longer be waived. "But I don't think you ought to ask for the reason. You ought to accept it without knowing it." "I do accept it. I had never meant to ask."

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