VARIOUS

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THE EXPERIENCE OF SAMUEL ABSALOM, FILIBUSTER

In the winter of 1856, the outlook of the present writer, known somewhere as Samuel Absalom, became exceedingly troubled, and indeed scarcely respectable. As gold-digger in California, Fortune had looked upon him unkindly, and he was grown to be one of the indifferent, ragged children of the earth. Those who came behind him might read as they ran, stamped on canvas once white, "Stockton Mills. Self-Rising Flour!"—the well-known label in California, at that day, of greatest embarrassment.

One morning, after sleeping out the night in the streets of Oroville, he got up, and read these words, or some like them, in the village newspaper:—"The heavy frost which fell last night brings with it at least one source of congratulation for our citizens. Soon the crowd of vagrant street-sleepers, which infests our town, will be forced to go forth and work for warmer quarters. It has throughout this summer been the ever-present nuisance and eyesore of our otherwise beautiful and romantic moonlit nights." "Listen to this scoundrel!" said he; "how he can insult an unfortunate man! Makes his own living braying, lying, and flinging dirt, and spits upon us sad devils who fail to do it in an honest manner! Ah, the times are changing in California! Once, no one knew but this battered hat I sit under might partially cover the head of a nobleman or man of honor; but men begin to show their quality by the outside, as they do elsewhere in the world, and are judged and spoken to accordingly. I will shake California dust from my feet, and be gone!"

In this mood, I thought of General Walker, down there in Nicaragua, striving to regenerate the God-forsaken Spanish Americans. "I will go down and assist General Walker," said I. So next morning found me on my way to San Francisco, with a roll of blankets on my shoulder and some small pieces of money in my pocket. Arrived in the city, I sought out General Walker's agent, one Crittenden by name, a respectable, honest-looking man, and obtained from him the promise of two hundred and fifty acres of Nicaraguan land and twenty-five dollars per month for service in the army of General Walker, and also a steerage-ticket of free passage to the port of San Juan del Norte by one of the steamers of the Nicaragua Transit Line. Of my voyage down I do not intend to speak; several unpublished sensations might have been picked up in that steerage crowd of bog Irish, low Dutch, New Yorkers, and California savages of every tribe, returning home in red flannel shirts and boots of cowhide large; but my business is not with them, and I say only that after a brief and prosperous voyage we anchored early one morning in the harbor of San Juan del Sur, at that time part of the dominions of General Walker.

Whilst the great crowd of home-bound passengers, with infinite din and shouting, are bustling down the gangways toward the shore, our little party of twenty or thirty Central American regenerators assemble on the ship's bow, and answer to our names as read out by a small, mild-featured man, whom at a glance I should have thought no filibuster. It seems he was our captain *pro tem.*, and bore recommendations from the agent at San Francisco to a commission in the Nicaraguan service. He had made the voyage on the cabin side of the ship, and I saw him now for the first time. His looks

betokened no fire-eating soul; but your brave man has not necessarily a truculent countenance; and I was, indeed, thankful for the prospect of fighting under an honest man and no cut-throat outwardly.

We followed this our chief down the vessel's side to the shore, catching a glimpse of Fate as we passed over the old hulk in our course. It was one of Walker's soldiers in the last stage of fever. His skin was as yellow and glazed as parchment, and seemed drawn over a mere fleshless skeleton. Poor man! he lay there watching the noisy passengers descend from the ship. "His eyes are with his heart, and that is far away," carried back by the bustling scene to another shore,—the goal of that passing crowd,—never more to gladden *his* dim eye. The unrelenting grasp of death was on him; and even now, perhaps, the waves are rolling his bleaching bones to and fro on that distant beach. I say that this dismal omen damped the spirit of us all. But nothing in this world can long dishearten the brave; we soon grow lighter, and, marching along in the crowd, blackguard effectively the witty or witless dogs that crack jokes at us and forebode hard fate ahead of us.

When we came into the town of San Juan, we found there a general and colonel of the filibuster army, and reported ourselves forthwith as a party of recruits just arrived and at their service. The general was altogether absorbed hobnobbing with the old friends whom he had discovered in the passenger crowd, and would not listen to us; but the colonel pointed out an empty building, and told us to drop our luggage there, and amuse ourselves until we heard further from him. This town of San Juan del Sur is entirely the creation of the Nicaragua Transit Company, and is the Pacific terminus of the Isthmus portage-road. It consisted of half a dozen board hotels, and a litter of native grass-thatched huts, and lay at the foot of a high, woody spur, which curves out into the sea and forms the southern rim of a beautiful little harbor, completed by another less elevated point jutting out on the north. The country inland is entirely shut out by a dense forest, into which the Transit road plunges and is immediately lost. Whilst I was walking about this sequestered place, now all alive with the California passengers, a party of Walker's cavalry came riding in from the interior, and at once drew all eyes upon them. They were mounted on horses or mules of every color, shape, and size,—themselves yellow-faced, ragged, and dirty; nevertheless, their deadly garniture, rifles, revolvers, and bowie-knives, and their fierce and shaggy looks, kept them from being laughed at. They dismounted and tied their beasts in front of one of the hotels, and then dispersed about the town in search of whatever was refreshing.

From these men we learned that General Walker's prospects were never so fair as now. His enemies, they said, worn out and ready to despair, had drawn off to Granada, where they now lay irresolute and quarrelling amongst themselves. General Walker held the Transit route from ocean to ocean, and a single filibuster might walk all through the country without danger. This news was not satisfactory to all of us. A small, bright-eyed youth, from the California theatre, who had been noted on the voyage down for his loud talking, declared that for his part he had come to Nicaragua to fight, and, now that there was no more fighting to be done, he would pass through and take ship for the United States. The filibusters smiled at each other grimly, and told him, if that was the difficulty, he had better not go, for Walker intended driving the enemy out of Granada shortly, and he would there find all that he wanted. And well it was that they satisfied him to stay; for on that day this youth went without his dinner because he had no cent in his pocket to buy it, and ship-captains refuse to assist all such as lie under that unhappy cloud. Oh, thou light-bodied son of Thespis! Where art thou now? I saw thee last, with heavy musket on thy shoulder, marching wearily to the assault of San Jorge. Did the vultures tear thee there? Or art thou still somewhere amongst men, blowing the great deeds wrought by thy feathery arm that day? I hope thou wast not left on that dismal shore!

Late in the afternoon, when the Californians had departed for Virgin Bay, where they were to embark on Lake Nicaragua, our party of recruits took the road for the same place, on our way to Rivas, the head-quarters of the filibuster army. A short distance from the Pacific, we began the ascent of the Cordillera chain, not very formidable here, but broken into spurs and irregular ridges, with deep umbrageous hollows, and little streams of clear water winding noisily among them. Coming

down from this rugged high ground, we entered a wide plain, stretching away to Lake Nicaragua, out of whose waters we saw the blue cones of Ometepec and Madeira lifting their heads up above all, and capped with clouds. Before we had crossed the twelve miles between ocean and lake, and entered Virgin Bay, it was dark, and the Californians were already hurrying aboard a little steamer, which puffed and whistled at the wharf. In half an hour afterwards they were steaming across the lake for the entrance or head of the Rio San Juan.

It was here that we ate our first meal at the expense of General Walker, or, rather, at the expense of an innkeeper of Virgin Bay; for he, our entertainer, looked upon us as little better than sorners, declaring he had already fed filibusters to the value of six thousand dollars, without other return than General Walker's promise to pay, which he professed to esteem but slightly or not at all. These hotel-keepers of Virgin Bay and San Juan, who came in the wake of the Transit Company, and made their money by the California passengers, seemed to be a good deal worried by General Walker. Their business was no longer profitable, and their families lived in a state of continual alarm between the combatants; yet they were not allowed the alternative of flight; for it was General Walker's policy, wise or unwise, when he had got a man into Nicaragua who was useful to him, to keep him there; and the last Transit Company, being entirely in his interest, carried no emigrant out of the Isthmus unfurnished with a passport from President Walker himself.

That night we slept in an empty building, and were aroused next morning at daybreak, and ordered to continue our march to Rivas, which was said to lie nine miles to the north of us. We set forward, grumbling sorely for lack of breakfast, and stiff from our twelve-miles' march of the evening before. Our path led us sometimes under the deep shades of a tangled forest, sometimes along the open lake-beach, on which the waves rolled with almost the swell of an ocean surf. A few miles short of Rivas we emerged from the ragged forest, and entered a beautiful, cultivated country, through which we passed along green lanes fringed with broad-leaved plantains, bending oranges, tufted palms, and all tropical fruit-trees,—a very Nicaraguan paradise to the sore-footed wayfarer. At last this enchanting approach brought us to the outskirts of Rivas, and we entered a narrow, mud-walled street, and never halted until we came out upon the central and only *plaza* of the miserable town. Our incumbered march, without breakfast, after a long, inactive sea-voyage, had wearied us sadly; and we threw our luggage upon, the ground, lay down upon it, and ruminated on a scene of little comfort to the faint-hearted, if there were any such in our little crowd of world-battered and battering strong men, topers, and vagabonds.

The square we had entered was perhaps one hundred yards or more in width, much overgrown with grass, and surrounded by buildings of mean and gloomy aspect. Six narrow and sordid streets debouched into it,—two coming with parallel courses from the west, two from the east, and one entering at each eastern angle from the north and south. It was at the opening of the last of these that we rested, and received our first impressions of the wretched *plaza*,—since hung for us with a thousand dirty reminiscences.

It displayed none of those architectural embellishments and attempts at magnificence which usually centre about the *plazas* of the Spanish-American capitals,—not even a carved door-facing or trifling ornament of any description. The entire side on our right, between the two eastern streets, was occupied by the cracked and roofless walls of an ancient church or convent, which had long been a neglected ruin. The fallen stones and mortar had raised a sloping embankment high up its venerable sides; and the small trees, here and there shooting above the luxuriant grass and running vines which, covered this climbing pile of rubbish, waved their branches over the top of the mouldering walls. The interior of the crumbling structure was a wilderness of rank grass and weeds, the elysium of reptiles, iguanas, centipedes, and ten thousand poisonous insects. On our left, opposite the falling church, was another ruin; but its vulgar features owned none of the green and mossy dignity of age, which gave a melancholy beauty to the former. It was a glaring pile of naked dust and rubbish, and its shot crumbled walls and riddled doors told the tale of its destruction. The entire front on that side

of the *plaza* was in ruins, with the exception of one stout building on the corner diagonally opposed to us. The northern side was inclosed by a long, low building, with its elevated doors partly hidden by the far-projecting, red-tiled roof; and in front of it six or eight grim pieces of cannon, mounted upon wheels, gaped their black mouths toward us. Our own side of the square was occupied by a building exactly like the one opposite. The low-reaching roof was supported by wooden posts, and the long porch or corridor between the posts and the wall was paved with large earthen tiles. The doors, elevated several feet above this pavement to baffle the heat of a tropical sun, were darkened by the overhanging roof; and this, together with the effect of the small wooden-grated windows and the absence of furniture, gave the rooms a gloomy and comfortless aspect. All these buildings, with the exception of the ruined convent, which was of stone, were built of *adobes*, or large sun-dried blocks of mud; and their walls, doors, and staring red roofs were everywhere bruised or perforated with shot.

Such was the *plaza* and middle spot of Rivas, a town of some two or three thousand inhabitants, where General Walker stood at bay many weary days against the combined Costa Ricans, Guatemalans, and Chamorristas, and was netted at last. But these observations of the squalid *plaza* were of another date. At present our eyes and thoughts fasten upon the crowd of melancholy, fever-eaten filibusters, who walk with heavy pace up and down the corridors, and along the paths which cross the grass-grown plaza. There was a morbid, yellowish glaze, almost universal, on their faces, and an unnatural listlessness and utter lack of animation in all their movements and conversation, which contrasted painfully with the boisterous hilarity and rugged healthiness of our late Californian fellow-travellers. Their appearance was most forlorn and despicable in a military view,—no soldier's uniform or spirit amongst them, only the poor man's uniform of rags and dirt, and the spirit of careless, disease-worn, doomed men. Nevertheless, all bore about them some emblem of their trade; some, for the most part with difficulty, carried muskets or rifles; some, the better-dressed and healthier looking, wore swords,—a weapon, as I afterwards found, distinctive of commissioned officers; some had with them only their pistols or cartridge-boxes, which, belted around the middle, served a double purpose in keeping up their ragged breeches. Then almost all of them, as they moved about or lay in the shade of the corridors, sucked or gnawed some fruit of the country,—the only thing which they seemed to do with energy or due sensation.

Whilst I sat looking about at these miserable people, I was accosted by an individual whom I had known in California. He professed to be glad to see me; told me Nicaragua was the finest of countries; "but," said he, with some latent humor of too ghastly a hue, "I'm sorry you didn't come down with us three months ago, as you thought of doing; we've all been promoted. The officers and two-thirds of the men have died, and nearly all the rest of us are promoted. I myself am captain. You made a great mistake, you see."

"My friend," said I, "you needn't try to frighten me. I've lived in a tropical climate before, and it is the healthiest part of the world for men of my temperament."

"Then you'll be promoted," said he. "A healthy man is sure of his reward in this service. Do you see that fellow crossing the plaza with the old shoes in his hand?"

"Yes," said I,—"poor man!"

"He has got them off of some dead man's feet out at the hospital. They die out there night and day. All these men you see here will die in six months."

After running through this humorous vein, he told me what adventures he had seen since joining the filibuster army; which, however, I have no intention to recount;—honor enough, if I may relate veridically, and with passable phrase, my own tamer befallings.

Long after we had grown sufficiently hungry, one came from General Walker, and led us to a house in the outer parts of the town, where, he informed us, we had been allotted to quarter for the present. The same person further instructed us to send to the commissary, and we should obtain wherewith to satisfy our hunger. We did so gladly; and having drawn a supply of beef, tortillas, and plantains, were comparatively content for the rest of the day.

After several days of idle loitering about the camp, our party was separated and ranked in divers old companies of the army. Myself and some few others obtained seats amongst the horsemen, and had reason to think ourselves happy; for the mounted part of the service was so much more esteemed, that lieutenants of the foot companies had been known to drop their rank voluntarily and take grade as private soldiers in the saddle.

But first it was necessary to achieve our horses before we could mount; and to that end we were permitted, and indeed commanded, by General Walker, President of Nicaragua, to search the surrounding *haciendas* and stables, until we were satisfactorily provided. Accordingly we set out one morning on this errand, furnished, all of us, with rifles and store of ammunition, against the possibility of collision with such countryfolk as might desire over-ardently to keep their horses by them. It will not be profitable to follow our search over that magnificent country, diversified with groves of cocoa and plantain trees, patches of sugar-cane and maize, with here and there a picturesque grange embowered amidst orange and palm trees. Suffice it to say, that all the animals in the vicinity of Rivas, fit for warlike purposes, had been removed, and toward evening we found ourselves out amongst the hills to the west, beyond the circle of cultivation, and as yet with no horses in tow. From the summit of a high, grass-crowned hill we swept all the surrounding country;—toward the east spread a vast sea of verdure, rolled into gentle hollows and ridges, broken by the red roofs of Rivas, San Jorge, and Obraja; and beyond all, the lake stretching into misty remoteness, with its islands, and the ever-notable volcanoes, Madeira and Ometepec, rising abruptly out of it. It was a glorious scene, worthy of reverie. But we must scan it as Milton's Devil—to compare us with one far above us—did the hardly fairer garden of Paradise,—with thoughts of prey in our hearts. Nor were we disappointed, any more than that other greater one; for on top of an open ridge, a short distance west of us, we saw a solitary horse, tethered, and feeding composedly, as if he had nothing to fear out here amongst the hills. Part of us keep our eyes upon him, lest his tricky owner should get the alarm and remove him; whilst others plunge into the coppice which fills the intervening hollow, and soon reappear on the ridge beyond.

Whilst we stood about the horse, communing doubtfully, not knowing where to find another, an old man approached us, and, with rueful look and gesture, besought us not to deprive him of the sole support of his life.

"Beyond that hill," said he, "the Padre has many better horses. *El Padre está un rico hombre. Yo estoy muy pobre, Señores.*"

Set it down to the credit of filibusters, that we gladly surrendered this old man his horse, and betook ourselves to the rear of the hill which he pointed out to us; and there, after some search, we found, in close covert of tangled and almost impenetrable bushes, a small *corral* of mules and horses, which the Padre had begrudged the service of General Walker. For my own share in the spoils of this Trojan adventure, I chose a well-legged mule, young, lively, and well enough looking generally; and thenceforward I was entitled to call myself "Mounted Ranger," according to General Walker's rather high-sounding classification.

Let no one reflect upon the writer because he assisted in robbing this churchman of his horses. For him there was no choice; and if he is chargeable with moral depravity, it must be elsewhere, —forsooth, in joining with one who made war unprovided with a military chest sufficient to cover expenses. However, this is no matter, one way or the other. The private character of the relator, Samuel Absalom, is not before the reader; nor is it to be expected that he will care to turn his eye upon it for a moment.

The ranger company in which we had been ranked was stationed below, on the Transit road; but as it would return to head-quarters as soon as the California immigrants, now due, had crossed over to the Pacific, we were ordered to await it there. We spent the interim foraging for our animals or loitering about the camp. It may be that some short exposition of filibuster spirit and circumstances, as we saw them at this leisure time, will have interest for one or two. A few weeks before our arrival, the prospect of the Americans in Nicaragua was black enough, and, indeed, despaired of by most.

General Henningsen, with the greater part of the force, was cooped up and half starved in Granada, by three or four thousand Costa Ricans and Chamorristas; General Walker, with the remainder, lay lower down on the Isthmus, watched by a second division of the enemy, and too weak to give him any assistance. General Henningsen's men, reduced to a mere handful by starvation and the bullets of the enemy, could hold out but a day or two longer; and then the entire force of the allies would unite and beat up General Walker, and end the squalid game. The Central Americans were certain of their prey. But just at this juncture several hundred healthy Americans landed on the Transit road, and, placing them on one of the lake steamers, together with his old force, General Walker took them up to Granada, sent them ashore in bungos under a heavy fire, told them to do or die, and then paddled out into the lake with the steamer. It was a good stroke. The men, without other hope, fought their way over three successive barricades to General Henningsen, brought him out, setting fire to the city, reembarked on the steamer, and finally landed again at the fort of San Jorge, two miles east of Rivas. After that, General Walker gathered all his force at Rivas, and the enemy drew off to Granada, with some thirty or forty miles between.

When we reached Nicaragua, in the latter part of December, 1856, the entire force of the filibusters was still in Rivas, with the exception of a small party stationed on the Rio San Juan, beyond the lake, and communicating with the Isthmus force only by means of two small steamers, "La Vírgen" and "San Cárlos," which plied across the lake between the head of the river and Virgin Bay, on the California passenger-line. The allies had remained inactive at Granada, and were said to be broken into factions, and daily deserting and returning home in large bodies. The isthmus of Rivas was free ground to the filibusters, and a score of rangers might forage with little danger from the Costa Rican line almost to Granada. Their force outside of the hospital, as we saw it at head-quarters, numbered probably from eight hundred to one thousand men,—one-third mere skeletons, scarcely able to go through drill on the *plaza*,—fit only to bury,—and the great majority of the remainder turning yellow, shaken daily by chills and fever, and soon to be as worthless as the others. They were all foreigners,—Americans, Germans, Irish, French, and English,—with the exception of one small company of natives, captained by a half-breed Mexican. It was said, however, that many of the poorer natives were willing to fight against the Chamorristas,—the aristocratic Nicaraguan faction originally opposed to Patricio Rivas and the Liberals, now in arms against General Walker,—but that they made miserable soldiers outside of a barricade, and General Walker had no arms to throw away upon them. For sustenance, the filibusters had the fruits around Rivas, and a small ration of tortillas and beef, furnished them daily by Walker's commissary. The beef, as we heard, was supplied by Señor Pineda, General Walker's most powerful and faithful friend amongst the natives; and the tortillas were bought from the native women in the neighborhood of Rivas. It was the quality of the food—assisted largely by exposure, irregular fasts, and *aguardiente*—which made Nicaragua so fatal to the filibusters. The isthmus between the lake and the Pacific, swept nine months of the year by cool eastern breezes, is not unhealthy. But the ration of beef and tortillas (simple maize cakes without salt) was too scanty and intermittent; and in the absence of proper food, the men were driven to fill their stomachs with the unwholesome fruits which everywhere surrounded their quarters, and but few were able to stand it many months.

As to the spirit which seemed to animate these men, it was certainly most discouraging. They had lost all thought—supposing them to have ever had such thought—of regenerating Central America; and most of them wished no better thing than to fill their bellies, or to escape from Nicaragua. Many of them were sunk into a physical and mental lethargy, thinking of nothing and caring for nothing, and were gone, not a few, even into lunacy. Some cursed General Walker for enticing them there under false pretences. There were men with families who professed to have come there to settle and cultivate the soil, having been persuaded that the war was ended and the country prepared for peaceful immigration. Some had paid their own passage, purposing merely to reconnoïtre, and remain or not, as it pleased them; but when they landed in Nicaragua, General

Walker placed muskets in their unwilling hands, and there he had kept them, fighting, not for himself or his promises, but for life. It disgusted others that the service was not only almost certain death and thankless, but was altogether unprofitable. It was General Walker's practice, and had been always, to discharge his soldiers' wages with scrip of no cash value whatever, or so little that many neglected to draw it when due them. And this was concealed at their enlistment. Indeed, the hatred towards General Walker and the service seemed almost universal amongst the privates, and they would have revolted and thrown away their arms at any moment, had there been hope of escape in that. But they were held together by common danger in a treacherous or hostile country, separated by broad oceans and impassable forests from a land of safe refuge. There was, besides, distrust of each other; and fear, though no love, of General Walker. He was said to have the iron will and reckless courage of the true man of destiny. At one time, so they told us, a large body of fresh, able-bodied men, just arrived in Nicaragua, refused to join the filibusters on account of some disappointment about the amount of promised wages. General Walker led out his crowd of yellow men, whom the newcomers might have knocked down with the wind of their fists, and so overawed them by this display of resolution that they forthwith swallowed their complaints and joined his ranks with as good a grace as they might. I myself, in these first days, saw a little incident which impressed me that the man was no trifler. I was in his quarters one day, when an officer came in and made a report to him about some matter of his duty.

"Captain," said General Walker, looking serenely over the man's head, "if this is the way you are going to do business, Nicaragua has no further need for you. We want nothing of this sort done here, Sir."

The fierce, big-whiskered officer said nothing, but looked cowed; and, indeed, not without excuse; for though there was a nasal whine in the tone of the little General, and no great fire in his unmeaning eye, there was yet a quiet self-reliance about him extremely imposing, and which, as I thought, reached back of any temporary sufflation as tyrant of Rivas, and was based upon perennial character. Nor is it contrary, so far as I know, to the laws of psychology, for a man to be endued with all the self-reliance of Bonaparte, with, at the same time, an unusually short gift of the great man's marvellous insight, military or other.

Such an all-pervading demoralized spirit amongst the men as this I have slightly marked was sure to be contagious; and I am persuaded that there were few of us who came down there with enthusiasm or admiration for General Walker, but lost most of it during our first days' mixture in Rivas.

At the end of some six or eight days, our company came up from the Transit road, without the California passengers having as yet made their appearance. General Walker was expecting by this steamer, so long due on the Atlantic side, a large body of recruits with cannon, bombs, and other military stores, whose arrival would put him in condition to attack the enemy at Granada. He began to grow uneasy; and at length sent an armed row-boat across the lake to the head of the Rio San Juan to get intelligence. The little party which held that river were thought to be in no danger behind the walls of San Carlos and Castillo, and still further protected by the impenetrable forests which stretched backward from either bank; but now it began to be whispered that General Walker had committed a fatal blunder in not using the surest means to keep his only communication with the Atlantic open.

In the mean while our company of rangers was ordered back to the Transit road, to remain until the passengers crossed. We rode down by a trail that lay nearer the Pacific than the one by which we had first approached Rivas.

We found the same desolate, vine-netted forest; but on this route it was broken at several points by grassy savannas, dotted thinly with calabash-trees, and browsed by a few wild mules and cattle. In one of these openings, several miles from the Transit road, we passed a red-tiled building, the only one of any sort on the trail beyond the ring-fenced cultivation of Rivas. It was known as the Jocote Ranch-house, and became afterwards the scene of a bloody defeat for the filibusters.

Our ride terminated at a large open shed, standing on the Transit road, two miles east of San Juan, which had been erected by the Transit Company, and was used by them as shelter for their carriages. Here, together with a second company of mounted rangers, we were to quarter until the arrival of the California passengers; and then it was to be our duty to guard those feeble travellers through the dominions of President Walker to the Pacific. Our own company numbered some thirty heads,—men and officers,—and being but lately come to Nicaragua, were yet tolerably healthy and lively,—although shaken at times by chills and melancholy, and nearly all turning perceptibly yellow. At all times of the day, when not in the presence of food or drink, some of them were bewailing the hour they came to Nicaragua, and sighing sadly to escape; and had Samuel Absalom come there from any light motive of vanity, he had surely repented with them: as it was, he had seen a worse day; the life, too, was not without charms for some men, and his heart stayed within him through all. The other company was even smaller than ours, older soldiers, and in much worse health,—many of them having a chill daily, others wasted with perpetual diarrhoea.

Our routine of duty at this camp was, to ride each day into the forest and hunt our ration of beef, to water our horses, and to stand an hour's guard occasionally at night; the remainder of consciousness we spent broiling and eating cow's flesh, sucking sugar-cane, and waging horrid warfare against a host of ravenous ticks and crawling creatures of basest name.

One day, after we had so passed it off for a week or more, a report reached us from Virgin Bay, that one of the Transit steamers had been seen to pass up the lake toward Granada, without stopping to land the passengers. A little after came an order from the colonel of the rangers directing our party to ride with all haste to Virgin Bay, and garrison it against the enemy. We mounted immediately and rode over the Transit as fast as such beasts as we had could carry us. On the way we met some of the American residents of Virgin Bay, with carpet-bags in their hands, hurrying across to find comfort near the emigrant steamer, which still awaited her passengers in the harbor of San Juan. They were a good deal frightened, and said an attack was expected on Virgin Bay at any hour.

When we came into the town, it was dark, and, having no time to lose in getting out the pickets, our horses were left tied under saddle in the street, and we took station, four at a post, out on the several approaches to the town. It seemed that nothing was known with certainty of the enemy; but it was doubted by no one, since the steamer had passed in sight of her wharf without making or answering signals, that the enemy were in possession of her; and it seemed probable that they would land somewhere that night, and attack before General Walker had time to prepare for them. Our force to oppose them, should they attempt to land at Virgin Bay, the only convenient place with a pier on the whole lake, was scarcely thirty in all,—a detachment from both companies having been sent a few days before to Rivas; and of this force, the privates, to a man nearly, were wanted to furnish out the picket-guards,—leaving a reserve body in the citadel of some half-dozen officers armed mostly with revolvers.

All that night we listened anxiously to the ceaseless din of the lake breaking upon the shore; but it brought no enemy, and at morning we were released from guard and sent out to forage. At our shed-camp of the previous week the animals were turned out to feed in an inclosure, and we were spared the troublesome duty of foraging. But at Virgin Bay we were forced to go at it again under disadvantages; for the town had no surrounding circle of cultivation like that of Rivas,—having been but recently redeemed from the forest by the Transit Company,—and our only resource was a few distant *ranchos* scattered up and down the lake shore. Beside this, we had the daily duty, as before, of searching the open savannas in the forest for beef,—the commissary department furnishing us no part of a ration but bread,—and other irregular expeditions, which kept us in the saddle the greater part of the day.

Almost a week had passed in this manner, with no appearance or news of the enemy, and we had grown heartily tired of riding and watching to no purpose, when one day the steamer hove in sight towards the north; and steaming down she went to land, almost directly opposite Virgin Bay,

against the island of Ometepec. Day after day she lay there immovable, with her white side gleaming dimly across the water, and far out of the reach of us wistful filibusters;—for although there was a small brig of General Walker's floating beside the pier which ran out into the lake, yet it was out of repair; and, in any state, the wind blew too strongly and constantly from the northeast for a sail vessel to make the island, which lay almost in its teeth. Nevertheless, carpenters were set at work on it, and row-boats, borrowed of the vessels in San Juan harbor, were hauled over the Transit road; and it was said that the old brig was to be filled with soldiers and worked across to the island by aid of the row-boats. The thing seemed far from impossible. The space between the island and Virgin Bay was not above ten or twelve miles, and for part of the distance, under lee of the great volcano, the wind was lull. Could the brig be worked round the wind and brought into this calm water, the towing thenceforward was easy; and all this done in the space of one night, the surprise and recapture of the steamer were certain. In the mean while a detachment of foot marched down daily from Rivas, and, without giving us any relief, marched as regularly back again. Our hard-worked garrison, almost worn down by watching and riding, and, at sight of these men, hoping always to be relieved, snarled bitterly at such apparently useless expenditure of leg-muscle,—an article, truly, of which those lean, saffron-colored trampers had but too scanty supply for ordinary need.

One night, after the detachment of foot had gone, and there was no force but the rangers in the town, a large light, supposed to be under the boilers of the steamer, was seen on the water approaching from the north, and it was thought that the enemy were coming at last to attack us. However, when the light came almost opposite, it made toward the island and soon after disappeared. Next morning, looking across to the island, we saw a dark-colored steamer lying beside the white one; and we knew that the enemy were in possession of both the Transit steamers, and held the lake wholly at command. It was the same day, I think, that one of the boats was seen to be getting up steam, and shortly afterward she paddled out from the island, and came directly toward Virgin Bay. Things were quickly put in posture for a fight. The neutral residents, who had returned from San Juan, again set out over the Transit road. The squad of infantry which had just come in from Rivas was placed at the extreme end of the wooden pier that ran some one hundred and fifty yards into the lake. They were armed with rifled muskets and Minié ball, and hoped to kill at eight hundred or a thousand yards. The rangers, with arms of shorter range, waited on the shore. As the steamer approached, she was seen to be covered with a crowd of dark-skinned soldiers. She came steadily up within quarter of a mile of the shore, and then, suddenly turning broadside to, opened with a single cannon. The ball struck the water some little distance from the end of the pier,—after an interval implying awkward handling, another roar,—and then one or two nervous soldiers on the pier, not liking to await the ball in that place, break for the shore; but they are promptly knocked down by the others, and make no further progress. The steamer continues her fire out there leisurely, and the officer on the pier, being satisfied at last that she will come no closer, gives her a volley of musketry. In a moment the decks are cleared with a scamper, and no man is anywhere visible; whilst, at the same time, the steamer hastily puts about, and never stops until she reaches the island.

This ill-supported bravado was as much as we saw of the enemy at Virgin Bay; for next day we were recalled to headquarters, and gladly left that post to the care of the infantry. When we came to Rivas, we found many rumors about the enemy, but it was certain only that a bungo with natives from the island had been captured, as it came to shore, by a party of rangers, and it was these prisoners' report that the enemy were gathering provisions on the island, and awaiting reinforcements, on whose arrival they would land and attack us upon the isthmus.

I may as well state here the explanation, as we afterwards learned it, of this most unexpected reappearance of the enemy,—which came upon General Walker like a thunderclap, whilst he dreamed they had left him for good and all. It seems that the Vanderbilt Company, whom Walker had made enemies by ousting them from the Transit route, sent an agent (one Spencer) to the disheartened Costa Ricans, who showed them that they might easily strangle the filibuster force by seizing the ill-

guarded Rio San Juan. Led by Spencer, they secretly cut a road through the forest on the Costa Rican side, found the forts scarcely watched by a few spiritless sick men, and overwhelmed and scattered them without difficulty. At the same time they surprised and seized all the Transit steamers on the river and lake, so that thenceforward communication with the Atlantic was closed to General Walker, and a large body of New Orleans recruits under Lockridge, who had just arrived at the mouth of the river, found themselves headed off, and began a long and skilless fight to recover the steamers and make the junction with the isthmus force. So, after all, Walker owes his defeat, not to the natives of Central America, but to his own countrymen; and, had it not been for the malice or revenge of Vanderbilt, he might have reigned in Nicaragua at this day,—unless he had blundered himself out of it unassisted, as many who lived with him thought he could hardly fail to do, were time but granted him.—After capture of the lake steamers, the Costa Ricans, impressing their American crews into service, took them up to Granada to embark the old force of Costa Ricans and Chamorristas still remaining there. They were on this errand when the steamer San Carlos was first seen to pass Virgin Bay. But what other reinforcement they expected, whilst they lay so long against the island after their return from Granada, I do not know,—unless it was the Guatemalans, who we knew soon afterward had joined them in large force.

The next day after we had returned to Rivas, our company, now united again, had orders to ride to San Juan, on the Pacific, and convoy back some cart-loads of lead. As we were bringing our charge on the return, we were overtaken in the forest by an order to hasten to Virgin Bay, to the assistance of the infantry about to be attacked by the enemy. Leaving three or four of the company to follow the carts, we started immediately at hard gallop for Virgin Bay. When we arrived there, we found that the enemy, after a trifling cannonade of the town from one of the steamers, had put back to the island again, leaving no greater damage than a shot-hole in one of the row-boats,—which still lay at Virgin Bay awaiting the bungling delay (better worthy of greasers than earnest filibusters) about the brig. This demonstration against Virgin Bay was probably a ruse to divide the filibuster force; for, next day, as I recollect it, the Alcalde of Obraja, a native partisan of General Walker, hurried into Rivas with the news that fifteen hundred of the enemy had landed from the lake, ten or twelve miles above.

The Alcalde brought with him to Rivas his family and valuables, and proved himself one of the few natives of the better class who, during my sojourn, took active part with the Americans. It was said, that, when Patricio Rivas was President, and Walker General-in-chief of his army, many men of wealth and station amongst the Liberals—as Rivas's democratic party, opposed to the Chamorristas or aristocratic party, were called—encouraged and thought well of their American assistants. But after the Chamorristas were worsted,—mainly by strength of Walker's Californians,—and General Walker had broken with Rivas, and set up for President of Nicaragua himself, almost all the natives of any name or property had deserted him. However, many of them remained on their *haciendas*, and took no part in the struggle on either side. Those in the vicinity of Rivas feigned sympathy with us, but were probably inimical at heart. Indeed, intelligence of some act of disaffection was continually coming to General Walker; and thereupon he would oust the offender, confiscate his estate to the government, and, perhaps, grant it to some one of his officers, or pawn it to foreign sympathizers for military stores. The neighborhood of Rivas was dotted with ranch-houses, distenanted by these means,—rank grass growing in the court-yards, the cactus-hedges gapped, and the crops swept away by the foragers. Perhaps, had these men been let alone, jealousy toward foreigners would not, of itself, have made them enemies; but General Walker was obliged to provide arms and provisions for his soldiers, and, having no other resource, he must come down heavily on the Nicaraguans, so far as he could reach them. That this was a ground of great disgust and odium toward us, throughout the country, our company of rangers, which did some foraging and mule-gathering, had good reason to know. I remember, on one occasion, a small party of us, armed only with revolvers, were retreating out of a large *hacienda*, heavily incumbered with horse-provender, when we saw the landlord and his peons, with *machetes* in their hands, coming to meet us. As we trotted up toward them, the angry man

stood at the roadside, lariat in hand, frowning, and in the attitude to arrest our foremost horseman;—but the filibuster drew his revolver, concealed hitherto by his burden, and cocked it,—and the poor man, seeing that he was unequal, was fain to vent his wrath in boiling words. This man, who doubtless became an enemy, might have been soothed, had General Walker taken the pains to furnish foraging-papers to the rangers. He professed himself a true friend of Walker's, holding all he possessed at his service; but it was out of his power, he said, to contain himself, whilst a troop of *Americanos* were leaping his fences and ravaging his fields, without token of authority, or word of apology on any part. However, after all, General Walker may have acted for the wisest in this matter. The writer of this narrative was an unenlightened private in the filibuster army, and, of course, though open-eyed to some extent, saw all things of policy through a glass dimly. It may be that General Walker, who had opportunities for thorough acquaintance with Spanish-American character, held it weakness to place any trust or value upon their friendship, and therefore took no care to conciliate it. This has a look of wisdom, and would explain many apparently stupid and gratuitous negligences. But what shall I think when he seemed as little solicitous, and certainly was at no greater pains, to attach his own men? Instead of treating us like fellow-soldiers and adventurers in danger, upon whom he was wholly dependent, until his power was established, he bore himself like an Eastern tyrant,—reserved and haughty,—scarcely saluting when he met us,—mixing not at all, but keeping himself dose in his quarters,—some said through fear, lest some of his own men should shoot him, of which indeed there was great danger to such a man. But his treatment of the wounded was his worst policy. There was, it is true, a hospital at Rivas; but he never, or rarely, visited it; and it was so badly kept, that every good captain who had friends in the ranks chose the great inconvenience of nursing his wounded at his own quarters, rather than send them into that wretched hole whence few ever came out. It is true, the wounded seldom got well in that climate, and Walker's best general said that the government liked to have the enemy kill the men, rather than wound them; yet, had they been wiser, they would have taken care of them merely for the sake of the spirit of the rest.—But I have wandered from my narrative.

Toward the evening of the same day that the faithful *alcalde* brought his report, I walked down to the *plaza*, to see what stir the news had created among the skeleton foot-soldiers. There was no stir at all, outwardly. They sat in their doors and talked listlessly, without laughter or excitement, as they were always wont before. A hearty laugh or a loud voice in conversation always sounded unnaturally in the streets of Rivas; and, indeed, few amongst the foot found spirit for such things,—unless new recruits, or under the stimulus of *aguardiente*. As often as I have left the quarters of the more healthy and animated rangers in the outskirts, and walked down into the populous part of the camp, I have been reminded of one of those enchanted cities of the "Arabian Nights," where the silent inhabitants, though grouped about, seemingly engaged in their ordinary occupations, are in reality soulless, and no better than dead men or frozen fish.

I took my seat in the porch of the guard-house,—that stout building which I have mentioned as the only one surviving the ruin on the west side of the *plaza*,—and watched the foot go through their evening drill. Classed as musketeers, riflemen, and artillery-men, they were trained to a part of the United States army-practice, each morning and evening, on the *plaza*. The rangers were taught no drill of any kind; and when I observed how some of the despicable officers pricked those feeble creatures with their swords to make them look sharp and step lively, I was glad enough to go without instruction in the military science. The men, on the present occasion, were clothed in black felt hats, blue cotton trousers, brogans, and blue flannel shirts, with the letter of their company and the number of the regiment sewed upon the breast in characters of white cloth. They had received this uniform, I think, by the steamer on which I came down, and it was become somewhat greasy and louse-seamed by this time; nevertheless, their appearance was much more soldierlike and respectable than when I first saw them. After the exercise was ended, the men gathered around a small brass band, of half a dozen Germans, which began to play in front of General Walker's quarters. The little General himself sat in his door, and looked out with impassible countenance upon the crowd in the street. It was an

excellent conglomerate to study, for any one who could have the head and feeling there. What General Walker made of it, not even his staff-officers, who sat beside him, could tell,—if it were true, as was said, that he had no confidant, even amongst them.

Toward dusk, as I was returning to quarters, I saw a detachment of some one hundred riflemen marching out on the Obraja road, to the slow tap of a kettle-drum, and dragging a small piece of artillery with them. This, with the exception of some rangers, who had been sent forward to scout, was the sole force yet dispatched to meet the enemy,—who were now said to be advanced to Obraja, a hamlet nine miles northwest of Rivas.

[To be continued.]

THE MINISTER'S WOOING.[1]

CHAPTER XXXV
OLD LOVE AND NEW DUTY

The sun was just setting, and the whole air and sea seemed flooded with rosy rays. Even the crags and rocks of the sea-shore took purple and lilac hues, and savins and junipers, had a painter been required to represent them, would have been found not without a suffusion of the same tints. And through the tremulous rosy sea of the upper air, the silver full-moon looked out like some calm superior presence which waits only for the flush of a temporary excitement to die away, to make its tranquillizing influence felt.

Mary, as she walked homeward with this dreamy light around her, moved with a slower step than when borne along by the vigorous arm and determined motion of her young friend.

It is said that a musical sound uttered with decision by one instrument always makes the corresponding chord of another vibrate; and Mary felt, as she left her positive, but warm-hearted friend, a plaintive vibration of something in her own self, in which she was conscious her calm friendship for her future husband had no part. She fell into one of those reveries which she thought she had forever forbidden to herself, and there rose before her mind the picture of a marriage-ceremony, —but the eyes of the bridegroom were dark, and his curls were clustering in raven ringlets, and her hand throbbed in his as it had never throbbed in any other.

It was just as she was coming out of a little grove of cedars, where the high land overlooks the sea, and the dream which came to her overcame her with a vague and yearning sense of pain. Suddenly she heard footsteps behind her, and some one said, "Mary!" It was spoken in a choked voice, as one speaks in the crisis of a great emotion; and she turned and saw those very eyes, that very hair, yes, and the cold little hand throbbed with that very throb in that strong, living, manly hand; and, whether in the body or out of the body God knoweth, she felt herself borne in those arms, and words that spoke themselves in her inner heart, words profaned by being repeated, were on her ear.

"Oh! is this a dream? is this a dream? James! are we in heaven? Oh, I have lived through such an agony! I have been so worn out! Oh, I thought you never would come!" And then the eyes closed, and heaven and earth faded away together in a trance of blissful rest.

But it was no dream; for an hour later you might have seen a manly form sitting in that selfsame place, bearing in his arms a pale figure which he cherished as tenderly as a mother her babe. And they were talking together,—talking in low tones; and in all this wide universe neither of them knew or felt anything but the great joy of being thus side by side.

They spoke of love mightier than death, which many waters cannot quench. They spoke of yearnings, each for the other,—of longing prayers,—of hopes deferred,—and then of this great joy, —for *one* had hardly yet returned to the visible world.

Scarce wakened from deadly faintness, she had not come back fully to the realm of life,—only to that of love,—to love which death cannot quench. And therefore it was, that, without knowing that she spoke, she had said all, and compressed the history of those three years into one hour.

But at last, thoughtful of her health, provident of her weakness, he rose up and passed his arm around her to convey her home. And as he did so, he spoke one word that broke the whole charm.

"You will allow me, Mary, the right of a future husband, to watch over your life and health."

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[1] Concluded

Then came back the visible world,—recollection, consciousness, and the great battle of duty,—and Mary drew away a little, and said,—

"Oh, James, you are too late! that can never be!"

He drew back from her.

"Mary, are you married?"

"Before God, I am," she said, "My word is pledged. I cannot retract it. I have suffered a good man to place his whole faith upon it,—a man who loves me with his whole soul."

"But, Mary, you do not love *him*. *That* is impossible!" said James, holding her off from him, and looking at her with an agonized eagerness. "After what you have just said, it is not possible."

"Oh, James! I am sure I don't know what I have said,—it was all so sudden, and I didn't know what I was saying,—but things that I must never say again. The day is fixed for next week. It is all the same as if you had found me his wife."

"Not quite," said James, his voice cutting the air with a decided manly ring. "I have some words to say to that yet."

"Oh, James, will you be selfish? will you tempt me to do a mean, dishonorable thing? to be false to my word deliberately given?"

"But," said James, eagerly, "you know, Mary, you *never* would have given it, if you had known that I was living."

"That is true, James; but I *did* give it. I have suffered him to build all his hopes of life upon it. I *beg* you not to tempt me,—help me to do right!"

"But, Mary, did you not get my letter?"

"Your letter?"

"Yes,—that long letter that I wrote you."

"I never got any letter, James."

"Strange!" he said. "No wonder it seems sudden to you!"

"Have you seen your mother?" said Mary, who was conscious this moment only of a dizzy instinct to turn the conversation from where she felt too weak to bear it.

"No; do you suppose I should see anybody before you?"

"Oh, then, you must go to her!" said Mary. "Oh, James, you don't know how she has suffered!"

They were drawing near to the cottage-gate.

"Do, pray!" said Mary. "Go, hurry to your mother! Don't be too sudden, either, for she's very weak; she is almost worn out with sorrow. Go, my dear brother! *Dear* you always will be to me."

James helped her into the house, and they parted. All the house was yet still. The open kitchen-door let in a sober square of moonlight on the floor. The very stir of the leaves on the trees could be heard. Mary went into her little room, and threw herself upon the bed, weak, weary, yet happy,—for deep and high above all other feelings was the great relief that he was living still. After a little while she heard the rattling of the wagon, and then the quick patter of Miss Prissy's feet, and her mother's considerate tones, and the Doctor's grave voice,—and quite unexpectedly to herself, she was shocked to find herself turning with an inward shudder from the idea of meeting him. "How very wicked!" she thought,—"how ungrateful!"—and she prayed that God would give her strength to check the first rising of such feelings.

Then there was her mother, so ignorant and innocent, busy putting away baskets of things that she had bought in provision for the wedding-ceremony.

Mary almost felt as if she had a guilty secret. But when she reflected upon the last two hours, she felt no wish to take them back again. Two little hours of joy and rest they had been,—so pure, so perfect! she thought God must have given them to her as a keepsake to remind her of His love, and to strengthen her in the way of duty.

Some will, perhaps, think it an unnatural thing that Mary should have regarded her pledge to the Doctor as of so absolute and binding force; but they must remember the rigidity of her education.

Self-denial and self-sacrifice had been the daily bread of her life. Every prayer, hymn, and sermon, from her childhood, had warned her to distrust her inclinations and regard her feelings as traitors. In particular had she been brought up to regard the sacredness of a promise with a superstitious tenacity; and in this case the promise involved so deeply the happiness of a friend whom she had loved and revered all her life, that she never thought of any way of escape from it. She had been taught that there was no feeling so strong but that it might be immediately repressed at the call of duty; and if the thought arose to her of this great love to another, she immediately answered it by saying, "How would it have been, if I had been married? As I could have overcome then, so I can now."

Mrs. Scudder came into her room with a candle in her hand, and Mary, accustomed to read the expression of her mother's countenance, saw at a glance a visible discomposure there. She held the light so that it shone upon Mary's face.

"Are you asleep?" she said.

"No, mother."

"Are you unwell?"

"No, mother,—only a little tired."

Mrs. Scudder set down the candle, and shut the door, and, after a moment's hesitation, said,—

"My daughter, I have some news to tell you, which I want you to prepare your mind for. Keep yourself quite quiet"

"Oh, mother!" said Mary, stretching out her hands towards her, "I know it. James has come home."

"How did you hear?" said her mother, with astonishment.

"I have seen him, mother."

Mrs. Scudder's countenance fell.

"Where?"

"I went to walk home with Cerinthy Twitchel, and, as I was coming back, he came up behind me, just at Savin Rock."

Mrs. Scudder sat down on the bed and took her daughter's hand.

"I trust, my dear child," she said. She stopped.

"I think I know what you are going to say, mother. It is a great joy, and a great relief; but of course I shall be true to my engagement with the Doctor."

Mrs. Scudder's face brightened.

"That is my own daughter! I might have known that you would do so. You would not, certainly, so cruelly disappoint a noble man who has set his whole faith upon you."

"No, mother, I shall not disappoint him. I told James that I should be true to my word."

"He will probably see the justice of it," said Mrs. Scudder, in that easy tone with which elderly people are apt to dispose of the feelings of young persons. "Perhaps it may be something of a trial, at first."

Mary looked at her mother with incredulous blue eyes. The idea that feelings which made her hold her breath when she thought of them could be so summarily disposed of! She turned her face wearily to the wall, with a deep sigh, and said,—

"After all, mother, it is mercy enough and comfort enough to think that he is living. Poor Cousin Ellen, too,—what a relief to her! It is like life from the dead. Oh, I shall be happy enough; no fear of that!"

"And you know," said Mrs. Scudder, "that there has never existed any engagement of any kind between you and James. He had no right to found any expectations on anything you ever told him."

"That is true also, mother," said Mary, "I had never thought of such a thing as marriage, in relation to James."

"Of course," pursued Mrs. Scudder, "he will always be to you as a near friend."

Mary assented.

"There is but a week now, before your wedding," continued Mrs. Scudder; "and I think Cousin James, if he is reasonable, will see the propriety of your mind being kept as quiet as possible. I heard the news this afternoon in town," pursued Mrs. Scudder, "from Captain Staunton, and, by a curious coincidence, I received from him this letter from James, which came from New York by post. The brig that brought it must have been delayed out of the harbor."

"Oh, please, mother, give it to me!" said Mary, rising up with animation; "he mentioned having sent me one."

"Perhaps you had better wait till morning," said Mrs. Scudder; "you are tired and excited."

"Oh, mother, I think I shall be more composed when I know all that is in it," said Mary, still stretching out her hand.

"Well, my daughter, you are the best judge," said Mrs. Scudder; and she set down the candle on the table, and left Mary alone.

It was a very thick letter of many pages, dated in Canton, and ran as follows:—

CHAPTER XXXVI
JACOB'S VOW

"My Dearest Mary:—

"I have lived through many wonderful scenes since I saw you last. My life has been so adventurous, that I scarcely know myself when I think of it. But it is not of *that* I am going now to write. I have written all that to mother, and she will show it to you. But since I parted from you, there has been another history going on within me; and that is what I wish to make you understand, if I can.

"It seems to me that I have been a changed man from that afternoon when I came to your window, where we parted. I have never forgot how you looked then, nor what you said. Nothing in my life ever had such an effect upon me. I thought that I loved you before; but I went away feeling that love was something so deep and high and sacred, that I was not worthy to name it to you. I cannot think of the man in the world who is worthy of what you said you felt for me.

"From *that* hour there was a new purpose in my soul,—a purpose which has led me upward ever since. I thought to myself in this way: 'There is some secret source from whence this inner life springs,'—and I knew that it was connected with the Bible which you gave me; and so I thought I would read it carefully and deliberately, to see what I could make of it.

"I began with the beginning. It impressed me with a sense of something quaint and strange,—something rather fragmentary; and yet there were spots all along that went right to the heart of a man who had to deal with life and things as I did. Now I must say that the Doctor's preaching, as I told you, never impressed me much in any way. I could not make out any connection between it and the men I had to manage and the things I had to do in my daily life. But there were things in the Bible that struck me otherwise. There was *one* passage in particular, and that was where Jacob started off from all his friends to go and seek his fortune in a strange country, and laid down to sleep all alone in the field, with only a stone for his pillow. It seemed to me exactly the image of what every young man is like, when he leaves his home and goes out to shift for himself in this hard world. I tell you, Mary, that one man alone on the great ocean of life feels himself a very weak thing. We are held up by each other more than we know till we go off by ourselves into this great experiment. Well, there he was as lonesome as *I* upon the deck of my ship. And so lying with the stone under his head, he saw a ladder in his sleep between him and heaven, and angels going up and down. That was a sight which came to the very point of his necessities. He saw that there was a way between him and God, and that there were those above who did care for him, and who could come to him to help him.

"Well, so the next morning he got up, and set up the stone to mark the place; and it says Jacob vowed a vow, saying, 'If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, *then* shall the Lord be my God.' Now *there* was something that looked to me like a tangible foundation to begin upon.

"If I understand Dr. H., I believe he would have called that all selfishness. At first sight it does look a little so; but then I thought of it in this way: 'Here he was all alone. God was entirely invisible to him; and how could he feel certain that He really existed, unless he could come into some kind of connection with Him? the point that he wanted to be sure of, more than merely to know that there was a God who made the world;—he wanted to know whether He cared anything about men, and would do anything to help them. And so, in fact, it was saying, "If there is a God who interests Himself at all in me, and will be my Friend and Protector, I will obey Him, so far as I can find out His will."'

"I thought to myself, 'This is the great experiment, and I will try it.' I made in my heart exactly the same resolution, and just quietly resolved to assume for a while as a fact that there *was* such a God, and, whenever I came to a place where I could not help myself, just to ask His help honestly in so many words, and see what would come of it.

"Well, as I went on reading through the Old Testament, I was more and more convinced that all the men of those times had tried this experiment, and found that it would bear them; and in fact, I did begin to find, in my own experience, a great many things happening so remarkably that I could not but think that *Somebody* did attend even to my prayers,—I began to feel a trembling faith that *Somebody* was guiding me, and that the events of my life were not happening by accident, but working themselves out by His will.

"Well, as I went on in this way, there were other and higher thoughts kept rising in my mind. I wanted to be better than I was. I had a sense of a life much nobler and purer than anything I had ever lived, that I wanted to come up to. But in the world of men, as I found it, such feelings are always laughed down as romantic, and impracticable, and impossible. But about this time I began to read the New Testament, and then the idea came to me, that the same Power that helped me in the lower sphere of life would help me carry out those higher aspirations. Perhaps the Gospels would not have interested me so much, if I had begun with them first; but my Old Testament life seemed to have schooled me, and brought me to a place where I wanted something higher; and I began to notice that my prayers now were more that I might be noble, and patient, and self-denying, and constant in my duty, than for any other kind of help. And then I understood what met me in the very first of Matthew: 'Thou shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.'

"I began now to live a new life,—a life in which I felt myself coming into sympathy with you; for, Mary, when I began to read the Gospels, I took knowledge of you, that you had been with Jesus.

"The crisis of my life was that dreadful night of the shipwreck. It was as dreadful as the Day of Judgment. No words of mine can describe to you what I felt when I knew that our rudder was gone, and saw those hopeless rocks before us. What I felt for our poor men! But, in the midst of it all, the words came into my mind, 'And Jesus was in the hinder part of the ship asleep on a pillow,' and at once I felt He was there; and when the ship struck I was only conscious of an intense going out of my soul to Him, like Peter's when he threw himself from the ship to meet Him in the waters.

"I will not recapitulate what I have already written,—the wonderful manner in which I was saved, and in which friends and help and prosperity and worldly success came to me again, after life had seemed all lost; but now I am ready to return to my country, and I feel as Jacob did when he said, 'With my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands.'

"I do not need any arguments now to convince me that the Bible is from above. There is a great deal in it that I cannot understand, a great deal that seems to me inexplicable; but all I can say is, that I have tried its directions, and find that in my case they do work,—that it is a book that I can live by; and that is enough for me.

"And now, Mary, I am coming home again, quite another man from what I went out,—with a whole new world of thought and feeling in my heart, and a new purpose, by which, please God, I mean to shape my life. All this, under God, I owe to you; and if you will let me devote my whole life to you, it will be a small return for what you have done for me.

"You know I left you wholly free. Others must have seen your loveliness and felt your worth; and you may have learnt to love some better man than me. But I know not what hope tells me that this will not be; and I shall find true what the Bible says of love, that 'many waters cannot quench it, nor floods drown.' In any case, I shall be always, from my very heart, yours, and yours only.

"JAMES MARVYN."

Mary rose, after reading this letter, rapt into a divine state of exaltation,—the pure joy, in contemplating an infinite good to another, in which the question of self was utterly forgotten.

He was, then, what she had always hoped and prayed he would be, and she pressed the thought triumphantly to her heart. He was that true and victorious man, that Christian able to subdue life, and to show, in a perfect and healthy manly nature, a reflection of the image of the superhuman excellence. Her prayers that night were aspirations and praises, and she felt how possible it might be so to appropriate the good and the joy and the nobleness of others as to have in them an eternal and

satisfying treasure. And with this came the dearer thought, that she, in her weakness and solitude, had been permitted to put her hand to the beginning of a work so noble. The consciousness of good done to an immortal spirit is wealth that neither life nor death can take away.

And so, having prayed, she lay down to that sleep which God giveth to his beloved.

CHAPTER XXXVII
THE QUESTION OF DUTY

It is a hard condition, of our existence here, that every exaltation must have its depression. God will not let us have heaven here below, but only such glimpses and faint showings as parents sometimes give to children, when they show them beforehand the jewelry and pictures and stores of rare and curious treasures which they hold for the possession of their riper years. So it very often happens that the man who has gone to bed an angel, feeling as if all sin were forever vanquished, and he himself immutably grounded in love, may wake the next morning with a sick-headache, and, if he be not careful, may scold about his breakfast like a miserable sinner.

We will not say that our dear little Mary rose in this condition next morning,—for, although she had the headache, she had one of those natures in which, somehow or other, the combative element seems to be left out, so that no one ever knew her to speak a fretful word. But still, as we have observed, she had the headache and the depression,—and there came the slow, creeping sense of waking up, through all her heart and soul, of a thousand, thousand things that could be said only to one person, and that person one that it would be temptation and danger to say them to.

She came out of her room to her morning work with a face resolved and calm, but expressive of languor, with slight signs of some inward struggle.

Madame de Frontignac, who had already heard the intelligence, threw two or three of her bright glances upon her at breakfast, and at once divined how the matter stood. She was of a nature so delicately sensitive to the most refined shades of honor, that she apprehended at once that there must be a conflict,—though, judging by her own impulsive nature, she made no doubt that all would at once go down before the mighty force of reawakened love.

After breakfast she would insist upon following Mary about through all her avocations. She possessed herself of a towel, and would wipe the cups and saucers, while Mary washed. She clinked the glasses, and rattled the cups and spoons, and stepped about as briskly as if she had two or three breezes to carry her train, and chattered half English and half French, for the sake of bringing into Mary's cheek the shy, slow dimples that she liked to watch. But still Mrs. Scudder was around, with an air as provident and forbidding as that of a sitting hen who watches her nest; nor was it till after all things had been cleared away in the house, and Mary had gone up into her little attic to spin, that the long-sought opportunity came of diving to the bottom of this mystery.

"*Enfin, Marie, nous voici!* Are you not going to tell me anything, when I have turned my heart out to you like a bag? *Chère enfant!* how happy you must be!" she said, embracing her.

"Yes, I am very happy," said Mary, with calm gravity.

"*Very happy!*" said Madame de Frontignac, mimicking her manner. "Is that the way you American girls show it, when you are very happy? Come, come, *ma belle*! tell little Virginie something. Thou hast seen this hero, this wandering Ulysses. He has come back at last; the tapestry will not be quite as long as Penelope's? Speak to me of him. Has he beautiful black eyes, and hair that curls like a grape-vine? Tell me, *ma belle*!"

"I only saw him a little while," said Mary, "and I felt a great deal more than I saw. He could not have been any clearer to me than he always has been in my mind."

"But I think," said Madame de Frontignac, seating Mary, as was her wont, and sitting down at her feet, "I think you are a little *triste* about this. Very likely you pity the good priest. It is sad for him; but a good priest has the Church for his bride, you know."

"You do not think," said Mary, speaking seriously, "that I shall break my promise given before God to this good man?"

"*Mon Dieu, mon enfant!* you do not mean to marry the priest, after all? *Quelle idée!*"

"But I *promised* him," said Mary.

Madame de Frontignac threw up her hands, with an expression of vexation.

"What a pity, my little one, you are not in the True Church! Any good priest could dispense you from that."

"I do not believe," said Mary, "in any earthly power that can dispense us from solemn obligations which we have assumed before God, and on which we have suffered others to build the most precious hopes. If James had won the affections of some girl, thinking as I do, I should not think it right for him to leave her and come to me. The Bible says, that the just man is 'he that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.'"

"*C'est le sublime de devoir!*" said Madame de Frontignac, who, with the airy frailty of her race, never lost her appreciation of the fine points of anything that went on under her eyes. But, nevertheless, she was inwardly resolved, that, picturesque as this "sublime of duty" was, it must not be allowed to pass beyond the limits of a fine art, and so she recommenced.

"*Mais c'est absurde*. This beautiful young man, with his black eyes, and his curls,—a real hero,—a Theseus, Mary,—just come home from killing a Minotaur,—and loves you with his whole heart,—and this dreadful promise! Why, haven't you any sort of people in your Church that can unbind you from promises? I should think the good priest himself would do it!"

"Perhaps he would," said Mary, "if I should ask him; but that would be equivalent to a breach of it. Of course, no man would marry a woman that asked to be dispensed."

"You are an angel of delicacy, my child; *c'est admirable!* but, after all, Mary, this is not well. Listen now to me. You are a very sweet saint, and very strong in goodness. I think you must have a very strong angel that takes care of you. But think, *chère enfant,*—think what it is to marry one man while you love another!"

"But I love the Doctor," said Mary, evasively.

"*Love!*" said Madame de Frontignac. "Oh, Marie! you may love him well, but you and I both know that there is something deeper than that. What will you *do* with this young man? Must he move away from this place, and not be with his poor mother any more? Or can you see him, and hear him, and be with him, after your marriage, and not feel that you love him more than your husband?"

"I should hope that God would help me to feel right," said Mary.

"I am very much afraid He will not, *ma chère.* I asked Him a great many times to help *me,* when I found how wrong it all was; but He did not. You remember what you told me the other day,—that, if I would do right, I must not *see* that man any more. You will have to ask him to go away from this place; you can never see him; for this love will never die till you die;—that you may be sure of. Is it wise? is it right, dear little one? *Must* he leave his home forever for you? or must you struggle always, and grow whiter and whiter, and fall away into heaven, like the moon this morning, and nobody know what is the matter? People will say you have the liver-complaint, or the consumption, or something. Nobody ever knows what we women die of."

Poor Mary's conscience was fairly posed. This appeal struck upon her sense of right as having its grounds. She felt inexpressibly confused and distressed.

"Oh, I wish somebody would tell me exactly what is right!" she said.

"Well, *I* will," said Madame de Frontignac. "Go down to the dear priest, and tell him the whole truth. My dear child, do you think, if he should ever find it out after your marriage, he would think you used him right?"

"And yet *mother* does not think so; mother does not wish me to tell him."

"*Pauvrette, toujours les mères!* Yes, it is always the mothers that stand in the way of the lovers. Why cannot she marry the priest herself?" she said between her teeth, and then looked up, startled and guilty, to see if Mary had heard her.

"I *cannot,*" said Mary,—"I cannot go against my conscience, and my mother, and my best friend."

At this moment, the conference was cut short by Mrs. Scudder's provident footsteps on the garret-stairs. A vague suspicion of something French had haunted her during her dairy-work, and she resolved to come and put a stop to the interview, by telling Mary that Miss Prissy wanted her to come and be measured for the skirt of her dress.

Mrs. Scudder, by the use of that sixth sense peculiar to mothers, had divined that there had been some agitating conference, and, had she been questioned about it, her guesses as to what it might have been would probably have given no bad *résumé* of the real state of the case. She was inwardly resolved that there should be no more such for the present, and kept Mary employed about various matters relating to the dresses, so scrupulously that there was no opportunity for anything more of the sort that day.

In the evening James Marvyn came down, and was welcomed with the greatest demonstrations of joy by all but Mary, who sat distant and embarrassed, after the first salutations had passed.

The Doctor was innocently paternal; but we fear that on the part of the young man there was small reciprocation of the sentiments he expressed.

Miss Prissy, indeed, had had her heart somewhat touched, as good little women's hearts are apt to be by a true love-story, and had hinted something of her feelings to Mrs. Scudder, in a manner which brought such a severe rejoinder as quite humbled and abashed her, so that she coweringly took refuge under her former declaration, that, "to be sure, there couldn't be any man in the world better *worthy* of Mary than the Doctor," while still at her heart she was possessed with that troublesome preference for unworthy people which stands in the way of so many excellent things. But she went on vigorously sewing upon the wedding-dress, and pursing up her small mouth into the most perfect and guarded expression of non-committal; though she said afterwards, "it went to her heart to see how that poor young man did look, sitting there just as noble and as handsome as a picture. She didn't see, for *her* part, how anybody's heart *could* stand it; though, to be sure, as Miss Scudder said, the poor Doctor ought to be thought about, dear blessed man! What a pity it was things *would* turn out so! Not that it was a pity that Jim came home,—that was a great providence,—but a pity they hadn't known about it sooner. Well, for her part, she didn't pretend to say; the path of duty did have a great many hard places in it."

As for James, during his interview at the cottage, he waited and tried in vain for one moment's private conversation. Mrs. Scudder was immovable in her motherly kindness, sitting there, smiling and chatting with him, but never stirring from her place by Mary.

Madame de Frontignac was out of all patience, and determined, in her small way, to do something to discompose the fixed state of things. So, retreating to her room, she contrived, in very desperation, to upset and break a water-pitcher, shrieking violently in French and English at the deluge which came upon the sanded floor and the little piece of carpet by the bedside.

What housekeeper's instincts are proof against the crash of breaking china?

Mrs. Scudder fled from her seat, followed by Miss Prissy.

"Ah! then and there was hurrying to and fro," while Mary sat quiet as a statue, bending over her sewing, and James, knowing that it must be now or never, was, like a flash, in the empty chair by her side, with his black moustache very near to the bent brown head.

"Mary," he said, "you *must* let me see you once more. All is not said, is it? Just hear me,—hear me once alone!"

"Oh, James, I am too weak!—I dare not!—I am afraid of myself!"

"You think," he said, "that you *must* take this course, because it is right. But *is* it right? Is it right to marry one man, when you love another better? I don't put this to your inclination, Mary,—I know it would be of no use,—I put it to your conscience."

"Oh, I was never so perplexed before!" said Mary. "I don't know what I *do* think. I must have time to reflect. And you,—oh, James!—you *must* let me do right! There will never be any happiness for me, if I do wrong,—nor for you, either."

All this while the sounds of running and hurrying in Madame de Frontignac's room had been unintermitted; and Miss Prissy, not without some glimmerings of perception, was holding tight on to Mrs. Scudder's gown, detailing to her a most capital receipt for mending broken china, the history of which she traced regularly through all the families in which she had ever worked, varying the details with small items of family history, and little incidents as to the births, marriages, and deaths of different people for whom it had been employed, with all the particulars of how, where, and when, so that James's time for conversation was by this means indefinitely extended.

"Now," he said to Mary, "let me propose one thing. Let *me* go to the

Doctor, and tell him the truth."

"James, it does not seem to me that I can. A friend who has been so considerate, so kind, so self-sacrificing and disinterested, and whom I have allowed to go on with this implicit faith in me so long. Should you, James, think of *yourself* only?"

"I do nor, I trust, think of myself only," said James; "I hope that I am calm enough, and have a heart to think for others. But, I ask you, is it doing right to *him* to let him marry you in ignorance of the state of your feelings? Is it a kindness to a good and noble man to give yourself to him only seemingly, when the best and noblest part of your affections is gone wholly beyond your control? I am quite sure of *that*, Mary. I know you do love him very well,—that you would make a most true, affectionate, constant wife to him; but what I know you feel for me is something wholly out of your power to give to him,—is it not, now?"

"I think it is," said Mary, looking gravely and deeply thoughtful "But then, James, I ask myself, 'What if this had happened a week hence?' My feelings would have been just the same, because they are feelings over which I have no more control than over my existence. I can only control the expression of them. But in *that* case you would not have asked me to break my marriage-vow; and why now shall I break a solemn vow deliberately made before God? If what I can give him will content him, and he never knows that which would give him pain, what wrong is done him?"

"I should think the deepest possible wrong done me," said James, "if, when I thought I had married a wife with a whole heart, I found that the greater part of it had been before that given to another. If you tell him, or if I tell him, or your mother,—who is the proper person, and he chooses to hold you to your promise, then, Mary, I have no more to say. I shall sail in a few weeks again, and carry your image forever in my heart;—nobody can take that away; that dear shadow will be the only wife I shall ever know."

At this moment Miss Prissy came rattling along towards the door, talking—we suspect designedly—on quite a high key. Mary hastily said,—

"Wait, James,—let me think,—tomorrow is the Sabbath-day. Monday I will send you word, or see you."

And when Miss Prissy returned into the best room, James was sitting at one window and Mary at another,—he making remarks, in a style of most admirable commonplace, on a copy of Milton's "Paradise Lost," which he had picked up in the confusion of the moment, and which, at the time Mrs. Katy Scudder entered, he was declaring to be a most excellent book,—a really, truly, valuable work.

Mrs. Scudder looked keenly from one to the other, and saw that Mary's cheek was glowing like the deepest heart of a pink shell, while, in all other respects, she was as cold and calm. On the whole, she felt satisfied that no mischief had been done.

We hope our readers will do Mrs. Scudder justice. It is true that she yet wore on her third finger the marriage-ring of a sailor lover, and his memory was yet fresh in her heart; but even mothers who have married for love themselves somehow so blend a daughter's existence with their own as to conceive that she must marry their love, and not her own. Besides this, Mrs. Scudder was an Old Testament woman, brought up with that scrupulous exactitude of fidelity in relation to promises which would naturally come from familiarity with a book in which covenant-keeping is represented as one of the highest attributes of Deity, and covenant-breaking as one of the vilest sins of humanity. To

break the word that had gone forth out of one's mouth was to lose self-respect, and all claim to the respect of others, and to sin against eternal rectitude.

As we have said before, it is almost impossible to make our light-minded times comprehend the earnestness with which those people lived. It was, in the beginning, no vulgar nor mercenary ambition that made her seek the Doctor as a husband for her daughter. He was poor, and she had had offers from richer men. He was often unpopular; but he of all the world was the man she most revered, the man she believed in with the most implicit faith, the man who embodied her highest ideas of the good; and therefore it was that she was willing to resign her child to him.

As to James, she had felt truly sympathetic with his mother, and with Mary, in the dreadful hour when they supposed him lost; and had it not been for the great perplexity occasioned by his return, she would have received him, as a relative, with open arms. But now she felt it her duty to be on the defensive,—an attitude not the most favorable for cherishing pleasing associations in regard to another. She had read the letter giving an account of his spiritual experience with very sincere pleasure, as a good woman should, but not without an internal perception how very much it endangered her favorite plans. When Mary, however, had calmly reiterated her determination, she felt sure of her; for had she ever known her to say a thing she did not do?

The uneasiness she felt at present, was not the doubt of her daughter's steadiness, but the fear that she might have been unsuitably harassed or annoyed.

CHAPTER XXXVIII
THE TRANSFIGURED

The next morning rose calm and fair. It was the Sabbath-day,—the last Sabbath in Mary's maiden life, if her promises and plans were fulfilled.

Mary dressed herself in white,—her hands trembling with unusual agitation, her sensitive nature divided between two opposing consciences and two opposing affections. Her devoted filial love toward the Doctor made her feel the keenest sensitiveness at the thought of giving him pain. At the same time, the questions which James had proposed to her had raised serious doubts in her mind whether it was altogether right to suffer him blindly to enter into this union. So, after she was all prepared, she bolted the door of her chamber, and, opening her Bible, read, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him"; and then, kneeling down by the bedside, she asked that God would give her some immediate light in her present perplexity. So praying, her mind grew calm and steady, and she rose up at the sound of the bell which marked that it was time to set forward for church.

Everybody noticed, as she came into church that morning, how beautiful Mary Scudder looked. It was no longer the beauty of the carved statue, the pale alabaster shrine, the sainted virgin, but a warm, bright, living light, that spoke of some summer breath breathing within her soul.

When she took her place in the singers' seat, she knew, without turning her head, that he was in his old place, not far from her side; and those whose eyes followed her to the gallery marvelled at her face there,—

> "her pure and eloquent blood
> Spoke in her cheeks, and so distinctly wrought
> That you might almost say her body thought";

for a thousand delicate nerves were becoming vital once more,—the holy mystery of womanhood had wrought within her.

When they rose to sing, the tune must needs be one which they had often sung together, out of the same book, at the singing-school,—one of those wild, pleading tunes, dear to the heart of New England,—born, if we may credit the report, in the rocky hollows of its mountains, and whose notes have a kind of grand and mournful triumph in their warbling wail, and in which different parts of the harmony, set contrary to all the canons of musical Pharisaism, had still a singular and romantic effect, which a true musical genius would not have failed to recognize. The four parts, tenor, treble, bass, and counter, as they were then called, rose and swelled and wildly mingled, with the fitful strangeness of Aeolian harp, or of winds in mountain-hollows, or the vague moanings of the sea on lone, forsaken shores. And Mary, while her voice rose over the waves of the treble, and trembled with a pathetic richness, felt, to her inmost heart, the deep accord of that other voice which rose to meet hers, so wildly melancholy, as if the soul in that manly breast had come to meet her soul in the disembodied, shadowy verity of eternity. The grand old tune, called by our fathers "China," never, with its dirge-like melody, drew two souls more out of themselves, and entwined them more nearly with each other.

The last verse of the hymn spoke of the resurrection of the saints with Christ:

> "Then let the last dread trumpet sound
> And bid the dead arise;
> Awake, ye nations under ground!
> Ye saints, ascend the skies!"

And as Mary sang, she felt sublimely upborne with the idea that life is but a moment and love is immortal, and seemed, in a shadowy trance, to feel herself and him past this mortal fane, far over on the shores of that other life, ascending with Christ, all-glorified, all tears wiped away, and with full permission to love and to be loved forever. And as she sang, the Doctor looked upward, and marvelled at the light in her eyes and the rich bloom on her cheek,—for where she stood, a sunbeam, streaming aslant through the dusty panes of the window, touched her head with a kind of glory,—and the thought he then received outbreathed itself in the yet more fervent adoration of his prayer.

CHAPTER XXXIX
THE ICE BROKEN

Our fathers believed in special answers to prayer. They were not stumbled by the objection about the inflexibility of the laws of Nature; because they had the idea, that, when the Creator of the world promised to answer human prayers, He probably understood the laws of Nature as well as they did. At any rate, the laws of Nature were His affair, and not theirs. They were men, very apt, as the Duke of Wellington said, to "look to their marching-orders,"—which, being found to read, "Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God," they did it. "They looked unto Him and were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed." One reads, in the Memoirs of Dr. Hopkins, of Newport Gardner, one of his African catechumens, a negro of singular genius and ability, who, being desirous of his freedom, that he might be a missionary to Africa, and having long worked without being able to raise the amount required, was counselled by Dr. Hopkins that it might be a shorter way to seek his freedom from the Lord, by a day of solemn fasting and prayer. The historical fact is, that, on the evening of a day so consecrated, his master returned from church, called Newport to him, and presented him with his freedom. Is it not possible that He who made the world may have established laws for prayer as invariable as those for the sowing of seed and raising of grain? Is it not as legitimate a subject of inquiry, when petitions are not answered, which of these laws has been neglected?

But be that as it may, certain it is, that Candace, who on this morning in church sat where she could see Mary and James in the singers' seat, had certain thoughts planted in her mind which bore fruit afterwards in a solemn and select consultation held with Miss Prissy at the end of the horse-shed by the meeting-house, during the intermission between the morning and afternoon services.

Candace sat on a fragment of granite boulder which lay there, her black face relieved against a clump of yellow mulleins, then in majestic altitude. On her lap was spread a checked pocket-handkerchief, containing rich slices of cheese, and a store of her favorite brown doughnuts.

"Now, Miss Prissy," she said, "dar's *reason* in all tings, an' a good deal *more* in some tings dan dar is in oders. Dar's a good deal more reason in two young, handsome folks comin' togeder dan dar is in"–

Candace finished the sentence by an emphatic flourish of her doughnut.

"Now, as long as eberybody thought Jim Marvyn was dead, dar wa'n't nothin' else in de world *to* be done *but* marry de Doctor. But, good lan! I hearn him a-talkin' to Miss Marvyn las' night; it kinder' mos' broke my heart. Why, dem two poor creeturs, dey's jest as onhappy's dey can be! An' she's got too much feelin' for de Doctor to say a word; an' *I* say *he oughter be told on't!* dat's what *I* say," said Candace, giving a decisive bite to her doughnut.

"I say so, too," said Miss Prissy. "Why, I never had such bad feelings in my life as I did yesterday, when that young man came down to our house. He was just as pale as a cloth. I tried to say a word to Miss Scudder, but she snapped me up so! She's an awful decided woman when her mind's made up. I was telling Cerinthy Ann Twitchel,—she came round me this noon,—that it didn't exactly seem to me right that things should go on as they are going. And says I, 'Cerinthy Ann, I don't know anything what to do.' And says she, 'If I was you, I know what *I'd* do,—I'd tell the Doctor,' says she. 'Nobody ever takes offence at anything *you* do, Miss Prissy.' To be sure," added Miss Prissy, "I have talked to people about a good many things that it's rather strange I should; 'cause I a'n't one, somehow, that can let things go that seem to want doing. I always told folks that I should spoil a novel before it got half-way through the first volume, by blurting out some of those things that they let go trailing on so, till everybody gets so mixed up they don't know what they're doing."

"Well, now, honey," said Candace, authoritatively, "ef you's got any notions o' dat kind, I tink it mus' come from de good Lord, an' I 'dvise you to be 'tendin' to't, right away. You jes' go 'long an'

tell de Doctor yourself all you know, an' den le's see what'll come on't. I tell you, I b'liebe it'll be one o' de bes' day's works you eber did in your life!"

"Well," said Miss Prissy, "I guess tonight, before I go to bed, I'll make a dive at him. When a thing's once out, it's out, and can't be got in again, even if people don't like it; and that's a mercy, anyhow. It really makes me feel 'most wicked to think of it, for he is the most blessedest man!"

"Dat's what he *is*" said Candace. "But de blessedest man in de world oughter know de truth; dat's what *I* tink!"

"Yes,—true enough!" said Miss Prissy. "I'll tell him, anyway."

Miss Prissy was as good as her word; for that evening, when the Doctor had retired to his study, she took her life in her hand, and, walking swiftly as a cat, tapped rather timidly at the study-door, which the Doctor opening said, benignantly,—

"Ah, Miss Prissy!"

"If you please, Sir," said Miss Prissy, "I'd like a little conversation."

The Doctor was well enough used to such requests from the female members of his church, which, generally, were the prelude to some disclosures of internal difficulties or spiritual experiences. He therefore graciously motioned her to a chair.

"I thought I must come in," she began, busily twirling a bit of her Sunday gown. "I thought—that is—I felt it my duty—I thought— perhaps—I ought to tell you—that perhaps you ought to know."

The Doctor looked civilly concerned. He did not know but Miss Prissy's wits were taking leave of her. He replied, however, with his usual honest stateliness,—

"I trust, dear Madam, that you will feel perfect freedom to open to me any exercises of mind that you may have."

"It isn't about myself," said Miss Prissy. "If you please, it's about you and Mary!"

The Doctor now looked awake in right earnest, and very much astonished besides; and he looked eagerly at Miss Prissy, to have her go on.

"I don't know how you would view such a matter," said Miss Prissy; "but the fact is, that James Marvyn and Mary always did love each other, ever since they were children."

Still the Doctor was unawakened to the real meaning of the words, and he answered, simply,—

"I should be far from wishing to interfere with so very natural and universal a sentiment, which, I make no doubt, is all quite as it should be."

"No,—but," said Miss Prissy, "you don't understand what I mean. I mean that James Marvyn wanted to marry Mary, and that she was—well—she wasn't engaged to him, but"–

"Madam!" said the Doctor, in a voice that frightened Miss Prissy out of her chair, while a blaze like sheet-lightning shot from his eyes, and his face flushed crimson.

"Mercy on us! Doctor, I hope you'll excuse me; but there the fact is,—I've said it out,—the fact is, they wa'n't engaged; but that Mary loved him ever since he was a boy, as she never will and never can love any man again in this world, is what I'm just as sure of as that I'm standing here; and I've felt you ought to know it: 'cause I'm quite sure, that, if he'd been alive, she'd never given the promise she has,—the promise that she means to keep, if her heart breaks, and his too. They wouldn't anybody tell you, and I thought I must tell you; 'cause I thought you'd know what was right to do about it."

During all this latter speech the Doctor was standing with his back to Miss Prissy, and his face to the window, just as he did some time before, when Mrs. Scudder came to tell him of Mary's consent. He made a gesture backward, without speaking, that she should leave the apartment; and Miss Prissy left, with a guilty kind of feeling, as if she had been striking a knife into her pastor, and, rushing distractedly across the entry into Mary's little bedroom, she bolted the door, threw herself on the bed, and began to cry.

"Well, I've done it!" she said to herself. "He's a very strong, hearty man," she soliloquized, "so I hope it won't put him in a consumption;—men do go into a consumption about such things sometimes. I remember Abner Seaforth did; but then he was always narrow-chested, and had the

liver-complaint, or something. I don't know what Miss Scudder will say;—but I've done it. Poor man! such a good man, too! I declare, I feel just like Herod taking off John the Baptist's head. Well, well! it's done, and can't be helped."

Just at this moment Miss Prissy heard a gentle tap at the door, and started, as if it had been a ghost,—not being able to rid herself of the impression, that, somehow, she had committed a great crime, for which retribution was knocking at the door.

It was Mary, who said, in her sweetest and most natural tones, "Miss Prissy, the Doctor would like to see you."

Mary was much astonished at the frightened, discomposed manner with which Miss Prissy received this announcement, and said,—

"I'm afraid I've waked you up out of sleep, I don't think there's the least hurry."

Miss Prissy didn't, either; but she reflected afterwards that she might as well get through with it at once; and therefore, smoothing her tumbled cap-border, she went to the Doctor's study. This time he was quite composed, and received her with a mournful gravity, and requested her to be seated.

"I beg, Madam," he said, "you will excuse the abruptness of my manner in our late interview. I was so little prepared for the communication you had to make, that I was, perhaps, unsuitably discomposed. Will you allow me to ask whether you were requested by any of the parties to communicate to me what you did?"

"No, Sir," said Miss Prissy.

"Have any of the parties ever communicated with you on the subject at all?" said the Doctor.

"No, Sir," said Miss Prissy.

"That is all," said the Doctor. "I will not detain you. I am very much obliged to you, Madam."

He rose, and opened the door for her to pass out, and Miss Prissy, overawed by the stately gravity of his manner, went out in silence.

CHAPTER XL
THE SACRIFICE

When Miss Prissy left the room, the Doctor sat down by the table and covered his face with his hands. He had a large, passionate, determined nature; and he had just come to one of those cruel crises in life in which it is apt to seem to us that the whole force of our being, all that we can hope, wish, feel, enjoy, has been suffered to gather itself into one great wave, only to break upon some cold rock of inevitable fate, and go back, moaning, into emptiness.

In such hours men and women have cursed God and life, and thrown violently down and trampled under their feet what yet was left of life's blessings, in the fierce bitterness of despair. "This, or nothing!" the soul shrieks, in her frenzy. At just such points as these, men have plunged into intemperance and wild excess,—they have gone to be shot down in battle,—they have broken life, and thrown it away, like an empty goblet, and gone, like wailing ghosts, out into the dread unknown.

The possibility of all this lay in that heart which had just received that stunning blow. Exercised and disciplined as he had been, by years of sacrifice, by constant, unsleeping self-vigilance, there was rising there, in that great heart, an ocean-tempest of passion, and for a while his cries unto God seemed as empty and as vague as the screams of birds tossed and buffeted in the clouds of mighty tempests.

The will that he thought wholly subdued seemed to rise under him as a rebellious giant. A few hours before, he thought himself established in an invincible submission to God's will that nothing could shake. Now he looked into himself as into a seething vortex of rebellion, and against all the passionate cries of his lower nature could, in the language of an old saint, cling to God only by the naked force of his will. That will rested unmelted amid the boiling sea of passion, waiting its hour of renewed sway. He walked the room for hours, and then sat down to his Bible, and roused once or twice to find his head leaning on its pages, and his mind far gone in thoughts from which he woke with a bitter throb. Then he determined to set himself to some definite work, and, taking his Concordance, began busily tracing out and numbering all the proof-texts for one of the chapters of his theological system! till, at last, he worked himself down to such calmness that he could pray; and then he schooled and reasoned with himself, in a style not unlike, in its spirit, to that in which a great modern author has addressed suffering humanity:—

"What is it that thou art fretting and self-tormenting about? Is it because thou art not happy? Who told thee that thou wast to be happy? Is there any ordinance of the universe that thou shouldst be happy? Art thou nothing but a vulture screaming for prey? Canst thou not do without happiness? Yea, thou canst do without happiness, and, instead thereof, find blessedness."

The Doctor came, lastly, to the conclusion, that blessedness, which was all the portion his Master had on earth, might do for him also; and therefore he kissed and blessed that silver dove of happiness, which he saw was weary of sailing in his clumsy old ark, and let it go out of his hand without a tear.

He slept little that night; but when he came to breakfast, all noticed an unusual gentleness and benignity of manner, and Mary, she knew not why, saw tears rising in his eyes when he looked at her.

After breakfast he requested Mrs. Scudder to step with him into his study, and Miss Prissy shook in her little shoes as she saw the matron entering. The door was shut for a long time, and two voices could be heard in earnest conversation.

Meanwhile James Marvyn entered the cottage, prompt to remind Mary of her promise that she would talk with him again this morning.

They had talked with each other but a few moments, by the sweetbrier-shaded window in the best room, when Mrs. Scudder appeared at the door of the apartment, with traces of tears upon her cheeks.

"Good morning, James," she said. "The Doctor wishes to see you and Mary a moment, together."

Both looked sufficiently astonished, knowing, from Mrs. Scudder's looks, that something was impending. They followed her, scarcely feeling the ground they trod on.

The Doctor was sitting at his table, with his favorite large-print Bible open before him. He rose to receive them, with a manner at once gentle and grave.

There was a pause of some minutes, during which he sat with his head leaning upon his hand.

"You all know," he said, turning toward Mary, who sat very near him, "the near and dear relation in which I have been expected to stand towards this friend. I should not have been worthy of that relation, if I had not felt in my heart the true love of a husband, as set forth in the New Testament, —who should love his wife even as Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it; and in case any peril or danger threatened this dear soul, and I could not give myself for her, I had never been worthy the honor she has done me. For, I take it, whenever there is a cross or burden to be borne by one or the other, that the man, who is made in the image of God as to strength and endurance, should take it upon himself, and not lay it upon her that is weaker; for he is therefore strong, not that he may tyrannize over the weak, but bear their burdens for them, even as Christ for his Church.

"I have just discovered," he added, looking kindly upon Mary, "that there is a great cross and burden which must come, either on this dear child or on myself, through no fault of either of us, but through God's good providence; and therefore let me bear it.

"Mary, my dear child," he said, "I will be to thee as a father, but I will not force thy heart."

At this moment, Mary, by a sudden, impulsive movement, threw her arms around his neck and kissed him, and lay sobbing on his shoulder.

"No! no!" she said,—"I will marry you, as I said!"

"Not, if I will not," he replied, with a benign smile. "Come here, young man," he said, with some authority, to James. "I give thee this maiden to wife." And he lifted her from his shoulder, and placed her gently in the arms of the young man, who, overawed and overcome, pressed her silently to his heart.

"There, children, it is over," he said. "God bless you!"

"Take her away," he added; "she will be more composed soon."

Before James left, he grasped the Doctor's hand in his, and said,—

"Sir, this tells on my heart more than any sermon you ever preached. I shall never forget it. God bless you, Sir!"

The Doctor saw them slowly quit the apartment, and, following them, closed the door; and thus ended THE MINISTER'S WOOING.

CHAPTER XLI
THE WEDDING

Of the events which followed this scene we are happy to give our readers more minute and graphic details than we ourselves could furnish, by transcribing for their edification an autograph letter of Miss Prissy's, still preserved in a black oaken cabinet of our great-grandmother's; and with which we take no further liberties than the correction of a somewhat peculiar orthography. It is written to that sister "Lizabeth," in Boston, of whom she made such frequent mention, and whom, it appears, it was her custom to keep well-informed in all the gossip of her immediate sphere.

"My DEAR SISTER:—

"You wonder, I s'pose, why I haven't written you; but the fact is, I've been run just off my feet, and worked till the flesh aches so it seems as if it would drop off my bones, with this wedding of Mary Scudder's. And, after all, you'll be astonished to hear that she ha'n't married the Doctor, but that Jim Marvyn that I told you about. You see, he came home a week before the wedding was to be, and Mary, she was so conscientious she thought 'twa'n't right to break off with the Doctor, and so she was for going right on with it; and Mrs. Scudder, she was for going on more yet; and the poor young man, he couldn't get a word in edgeways, and there wouldn't anybody tell the Doctor a word about it, and there 'twas drifting along, and both on 'em feeling dreadful, and so I thought to myself, 'I'll just take my life in my hand, like Queen Esther, and go in and tell the Doctor all about it.' And so I did. I'm scared to death always when I think of it. But that dear blessed man, he took it like a saint. He just gave her up as serene and calm as a psalm-book, and called Jim in and told him to take her.

"Jim was fairly overcrowed,—it really made him feel small,—and he says he'll agree that there is more in the Doctor's religion than most men's: which shows how important it is for professing Christians to bear testimony in their works,—as I was telling Cerinthy Ann Twitchel: and she said there wa'n't anything made her want to be a Christian so much, if that was what religion would do for people.

"Well, you see, when this came out, it wanted just three days of the wedding, which was to be Thursday, and that wedding-dress I told you about, that had lilies-of-the-valley on a white ground, was pretty much made, except puffing the gauze round the neck, which I do with white satin piping-cord, and it looks beautiful too; and so Mrs. Scudder and I, we were thinking 'twould do just as well, when in come Jim Marvyn, bringing the sweetest thing you ever saw, that he had got in China, and I think I never did see anything lovelier. It was a white silk, as thick as a board, and so stiff that it would stand alone, and overshot with little fine dots of silver, so that it shone, when you moved it, just like frostwork; and when I saw it, I just clapped my hands, and jumped up from the floor, and says I, 'If I have to sit up all night, that dress shall be made, and made well, too.' For, you know, I thought I could get Miss Olladine Hocum to run the breadths and do such parts, so that I could devote myself to the fine work. And that French woman I told you about, she said she'd help, and she's a master hand for touching things up. There seems to be work provided for all kinds of people, and French people seem to have a gift in all sorts of dressy things, and 'tisn't a bad gift either.

"Well, as I was saying, we agreed that this was to be cut open with a train, and a petticoat of just the palest, sweetest, loveliest blue that ever you saw, and gauze puffings down the edgings each side, fastened in, every once in a while, with lilies-of-the-valley; and 'twas cut square in the neck, with puffings and flowers to match, and then tight sleeves, with full ruffles of that old Mechlin lace that you remember Mrs. Katy Scudder showed you once in that great camphor-wood trunk.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.