



The
Ivy
Vine



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AN IVY VINE,

And How It Grew.

AN IVY VINE,

And How It Grew.

BY

ANNIE E. WILSON,

Author of "A Jewish Maiden," "Love's Leading," "Compendium of
United States History and Literature," and "Handy
Helps in English History."

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"Influence is the echo of our words and
actions in the hearts of others."—*Anon.*



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AN IVY VINE.

CHAPTER I.

WHO PLANTED IT?

Ask God to give thee skill
In comfort's art,
That thou may'st consecrated be,
And set apart
Unto a life of sympathy;
For heavy is the weight of ill
In every heart,
And comforters are needed much,
Of Christlike touch.

—*Anna E. Hamilton.*

JUST as soon as Sunday-school was out the four heads went together as by a single impulse. These four heads belonged, respectively, to two pairs of sisters, Berta and Effie Blair, and Estelle and Agnes Graham. Perhaps it was because they were in the same Sunday-school class that they were so often like-minded when there was any good deed to be done. Whatever the cause or explanation, they were chattering like so many magpies now, and, of course, all at the same time, girl fashion.

Somewhere in the lesson or the closing exercises had come the message to them, "Let us not live for ourselves, but strive, each one to do something to help others, or make them happier."

"I am sure we can find things to do every day, and all we've got to do is to do them," said Berta with a kind of queenly toss of her dainty head and a radiant light in her clear, sweet eyes.

Effie was looking earnestly off into the possibilities.

"I suppose there are plenty of things to do, but the question is will we be sure to see them and—to feel like doing them."

"Let's form a society and get Miss Edmonia Morrison to help us," proposed Estelle, with a shy, deprecating manner.

"That would be fine!" exclaimed Berta and Agnes, in a breath.

"Yes—I expect it would," spoke Effie, more deliberately; "then we could help each other to remember and watch for the opportunities."

They discussed the *pros* and *cons* with all the energy and animation of early girlhood, and went to their separate homes with minds fully made up to organize into a little band or society, provided they could persuade Miss Morrison to be its first President.

Miss Morrison was their teacher in Sunday-school, and a most estimable young lady. In fact, her girls firmly believed there wasn't anybody else quite her equal in beauty, wisdom and goodness. I am not sure but they were right. She had eyes like big purple pansies, the dark lashes giving them the look of having been discovered in a shady, dewy nook; her hair was only an ordinary brown, but the girls went wild over the "cute little kinks and curls" that would slip out and laugh and play around her brow and neck like merry, irrepressible little cupids, no matter how straight she brushed them back. Agnes did not make so much of the kinks and curls, because she had hair much of the same fashion. She thought her greatest charm, next, of course, to her eyes, was the way her color would come and go with every emotion, like a curtain of pink rose-petals drawn back and forth over lovely views. As for Miss Morrison's wisdom and goodness? She certainly had the wisdom of a loving heart, and the goodness of a pure, high-idealed young spirit.

There wasn't the slightest chill thrown over their project in having to unfold it to her. Even shy Estelle felt sure in advance of her sympathy, and talked almost as freely as the rest.

They had gone in a body to Miss Morrison's

home, and were happy to find her at leisure to listen to their plans.

As it was a warm September day, she took them out under the shade of the trees on the lawn, and, the girls all protesting they would rather sit on the grass, she let them have their way, and did not insist upon chairs, for, although the summer was ended and the outer leaves of the trees already showed the effect of the change in soft touches of gold and crimson, it was still dry and summer-like as long as the sun shone. She herself sat down in their midst with a caressing word or look or touch of the hand for each. She changed her position slightly before they began to unfold their plans, saying, with a sweet, earnest smile, "I always like to have my face to Double Mountain when I start out on a new path; it gives me strength and inspiration." Agnes smiled up at her in a comprehending way, with a glance of kindred affection at the square-topped block of blue so clearly outlined on the fair evening sky. "It tells me so many things," Miss Morrison went on, "The two mountains, neither so very much in themselves, merged into one, make such a grand, beautiful sight—there's for our united work, you see. And then"—her hands involuntarily folded over each other and her head bent

with a reverent motion—"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help!"

There was a thoughtful pause all round. Then she looked back to them brightly. "Now for our talk. What scheme is brewing in your busy young brains and hearts?"

So they told her all about it, each adding a touch of color from her own personality.

"Something of the same kind has been shaping itself in my own mind," she said, thoughtfully, and she could not have said anything which would have given them more sure encouragement.

They decided to meet once a week, choosing Saturday as the day in order that it might be kept up all the year round; and to make some money with which to give such help as might be needed among the very poor of the town. The next Saturday was to be the beginning, and they were to bring all the bits of silk and pretty woollen scraps and help each other decide what salable articles might be manufactured out of them. While sewing, they could discuss ways and means of disposing of their work.

"But what are we going to call ourselves?" questioned Miss Morrison, as the meeting seemed about to come to a satisfied finish.

A recollective "Oh!" passed around the circle, as if conscious of having forgotten a very important part of the proceedings.

"I thought of 'We Four,' " spoke up Berta, promptly, "and we might take for our badge a four-leaf clover," she added, enthusiastically.

They were all watching Miss Edmonia's face to see what she thought of it. "It certainly is appropriate," she smiled, "and beautifully significant, because you are such a dear, harmonious little quartette of workers; then four is a complete, four-square number—and yet—" she paused, with a smiling glance at Berta—"there is an old juvenile saw, 'We four and no more,' which, I fear, might, with some who heard, modify it in a way we would not wish—give it an exclusive sound; you know, we do not want to be selfish—"

"Yes," said Estelle, "there's Olive Baylor. We want to get her to join right away. She's in our class, and she always goes with us in everything."

"Exactly. I was thinking of her, and wondering if you were going to leave out my one other girlie."

"How would 'We Four and More' do?" suggested Agnes.

"I thought of 'Burden Bearers,' " said Effie, "for that is what we want to be."

“Yes, that is what we want to be,” Miss Edmonia spoke, musingly.

“But,” interposed Estelle, as if answering a not altogether satisfied expression on her teacher’s face—“but need we tell everybody what we intend to be—it would hardly seem like—‘not letting our left hand know what our right hand doeth.’”

Miss Morrison laid her hand on the girl’s with a gentle, encouraging pat, and waited for further suggestions.

“It’s your turn now, Miss Edmonia!” chimed in several voices.

Miss Morrison had brought pencil and paper out with her in case they should be needed. Four pairs of eyes followed her fingers as they tightened their grasp on the pencil and watched with wide-awake interest as she wrote “I-V,” then added a “y,” and meditatively outlined an ivy vine, leaf by leaf. “Ivy Band!” called out the eager young voices.

“Or simply, ‘Ivy Vine,’” she said. “How would that do? The numerical—symbolic of the inception in these four heads—would make a pretty design for a stick-pin, and you can always get a fresh ivy leaf to go with it.”

They all acquiesced as delightedly as if it had been their own suggestion, as, indeed, Miss Mor-

rison soon proved it to be. "Your clover leaf, Berta, suggested the still more significant ivy, with its beautiful evergreen ministry of adornment and protection from winter winds and summer sun."

The ingenuity of bright young brains discovered many other sweet similes in the combined symbol, and went home in a gale of girl-life ecstasy over their proposed work. Nor was it the novelty only. The sincere desire to be helpful to others will always warm the heart, temporarily if it be only a desire, permanently if the desire be carried out in kindly deeds.

Olive Baylor, who had happened to be absent from Sunday-school the Sunday the seed of the Ivy Vine was sown, was promptly informed of the project, and showed by her presence at the second meeting how heartily she was in sympathy with the idea. She had demurred a little at first over the winter mud and the difficulty she might have in getting to town, now that they were working on the road, and every little rain made the red clay soft and sticky; but "the boys," her brothers, had promised to take her in behind them on horseback, if everything else failed, and the girls said there was no use trying to have it without her. So she readily agreed to enter her best endeavors with the rest.

CHAPTER II.

FURTHER ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE IVY LEAVES.

Within this leaf, to every eye
So little worth, doth hidden lie
Most rare and subtle fragrancy.

—*S. Wilberforce.*

SEVERAL meetings of the Ivy Leaves were taken up with discussions as to what to make and how to dispose of what they should make. The only visible work which had been done was in the shape of pocket pin-cushions. *Shapes*, perhaps I should have said, for there were circles and crescents, hearts and diamonds, boots and shoes, and ivy leaves, of course—everything, in fact, which could be fairly represented with only length and breadth, and such measure of height or thickness as could be afforded by two thicknesses of pasteboard.

“I don’t see how we are going to find out the best way of selling things,” said Effie Blair, “except by trying first one way and then another. I am sure any man would buy one of these pin-cushions if we asked him. I think I shall take

my two and try." Which decision settled the question for the time, each agreeing to sell what she herself had made.

As to the price—"Why not let's get whatever we can," suggested Agnes.

"Yes, I intend to get a quarter for every one I make," declared Berta, with that witching toss of the head which would be very apt to get it if she asked for it.

"Then some might get more than others," demurred Estelle, conscious that she would most likely be the one to fall behind.

Miss Morrison had listened to these discussions with only sufficient joining in to assure her fullest attention, and always with her own sweet smile of interest. At this point her face was a little grave, and she spoke: "I think, dearies, we must be guided in our price chiefly by the rules of common honesty, and take care 'not to do evil that good may come.' The pin-cushions will hardly be worth more than ten cents to the purchasers, and we will sell all the more by being perfectly fair, don't you think?"

Miss Morrison had such a tactful way of adding "her little word," as she called it, that her suggestions always carried without a dissenting voice.

On the way home Estelle was a bit long-faced

and Agnes quiet. They had never tried to sell anything before in their lives, and they did not exactly know how to go about it. "Somehow, Berta and Effie always know how to do things!" sighed Estelle, despondingly. "I wish they had asked us to go with them when they sell their pin-cushions."

"What's to hinder our asking them to let us?" spoke up Agnes, quickly.

"Do you think they would?"

"Why, of course; why should they object?"

They concluded to follow the girls home and at once make their request. It did not take long to overtake Berta and Effie, but only to find them enviably jubilant over having already sold their stock in trade. They had met a party of college students whom they knew, just returned for the fall term, and sold all they had in hand at once.

"I haven't even one left to sell to father," Berta told them, in a half-tone of regret.

"You can make another one for father," said Effie. "Indeed, we will have to make and sell a great many more than two apiece if we expect to earn money enough to accomplish any good work."

Shy Estelle's countenance had drooped with disappointment when she found they were too

late to profit by the example of the older, more self-reliant girls. But the hint of selling to father came in with the timely encouragement needed. Their father bought one for himself and also one for their brother Julian, leaving them one apiece to sell. But Effie, without knowing it, had dropped another small seed of suggestion, on the strength of which they went to work to make more pin-cushions before going out of the house to sell. They had fixed upon Friday as the momentous day of their first attempt, and had come down all ready to go, each with three little beauties exactly alike as to shape, but of different color, carefully protected from dust or finger-marks in one of their father's business envelopes. They were simply wild to show them to Miss Edmonia before they passed out of their hands, but they knew there would be no opportunity to see her until Saturday, and they thought they would rather have the money to carry to the meeting.

As they came down the front stairway, chatting over their work with a quiet, bubbling pleasure, their mother called from the kitchen.

I am sorry to have to confess that Estelle made a wry face, and Agnes brought her lips together with a queer little snap that savored strongly of insurrection.

"I just knew mamma was going to want us for something," said Estelle, while Agnes followed with even more reluctant feet.

"And where do you two think you are going now?" questioned Mrs. Graham, a trifle severely. "You will have to stay at home and help me, whatever were your intentions, for Sarah has gone home to her sick child, and your father has invited two of the new students to tea. You two girls are old enough now to be of some assistance to me, and cannot expect to frolic all the time, especially while Janet is away, and I am trying to get along without a nurse to lessen expenses. I have had Clara in my arms ever since dinner, and have just gotten her to sleep."

"Mamma, we didn't know Sarah had gone," explained Agnes, defensively.

"And we were not going for frolic, but to sell our pin-cushions," added Estelle. "Of course we won't go if you don't want us to," in a tone resigned, but not altogether pleasant.

"Sell pin-cushions, is it! And that's the way you expect to earn your club money—peddling pin-cushions at a dime apiece!" Somehow, this whiff of sarcasm made the whole thing seem so contemptible and absurd it sapped every particle of Estelle's enthusiasm for the time. And, in answer to her mother's question, "How many

have you sold?" she admitted, reluctantly, "Only the two papa bought."

"We haven't tried to sell any others yet," said Agnes, petulantly. Mrs. Graham glanced up at her keenly, but said nothing, and Agnes turned and went upstairs to put her hat away. Estelle had already thrown hers on a chair, and, at her mother's bidding, commenced to measure out materials for a cake.

The truth is, Mrs. Graham had a great deal of pride, even that foolish pride which pays undue regard to "what people will think." She did not altogether relish the idea of her daughters "peddling pin-cushions," as she had called it, to the college students, though she did not like to express her prejudice openly, as the Blairs and Olive Baylor were doing the same. Still, though she did not express her feeling openly, her daughters instinctively felt her disapprobation, and their ardor was cooling under it irresistibly.

"What are you going to do with your money after you have made it?" presently asked Mrs. Graham, lifting the spoon from the frothing eggs to rest her arm a moment.

"We don't know, certainly—help the poor people, someday, I suppose," Estelle responded, dully; while Agnes—"It doesn't look as if *we*

would have much to spend," with sharp emphasis.

Mrs. Graham looked quickly from Agnes—sullen, almost defiant—to Estelle—discontented, downcast—and said, in a very displeased tone, and that peculiar expression in the snapping black eyes, and the lips curving upward to the right, which the members of her family most dreaded, "I am sorry I called you back from what was of so much greater importance than helping your mother—and—" sharpening as she went on, "let me tell you one thing. If your club (with emphatic scorn) is going to make you cross and impertinent whenever your plans happen to be interfered with, and cause you to forget that your first duty is to *me*, you had better get out of it as quickly as possible. Now, let us think no more of it at present; there is too much else to think of of more importance."

Mrs. Graham knew well how to enforce such an autocratic injunction, and they were soon conversing pleasantly on other topics, and the little puff of ill-humor had vanished like a summer cloud.

They were in the full swim of cakes and waffles and fried chicken when Julian came in.

Julian was Professor Graham's child by a former marriage, as Janet was of Mrs. Graham.

The boy's early motherlessness had been disastrous to him. And though such a little fellow at the time, his step-mother had never been able to gain any good influence over him. In consequence he was an awkward, overgrown lad, old enough to be a man, but distressingly boyish and trifling in most things, the torment of mother and sisters, and the despair of his father, though having some fine traits of character lying dormant.

"What are you doing?" he asked of nobody in particular.

His question received no immediate answer. They were all so busy, and so accustomed to his aimless questioning, they hardly heard it. But he kept repeating it with a vehement insistence until Estelle at length answered, rather irritably, "Can't you see we are cooking supper?"

"What are you doing it for?"

"For the best reason in the world—because there is nobody else to do it," said Agnes.

"Sarah has gone out," Estelle added, more graciously.

"Has she gone for good?"

"I hope not."

"Well, what are you cooking so much supper for?"

"Perhaps, because you are to be one of the eaters," snapped Estelle, losing patience again.

"Estelle, tell me," he said, unrebuffed, "is there going to be company for supper?"

"Julian, I should think you would know without asking!"

"Who is it?" smacking his lips with a relish of anticipated extras.

"Some of papa's visitors," again parried Agnes.

"Are we going to have fried chicken?" (That was his special weakness.)

"No, these are fried oysters, don't you see?" rejoined Estelle, lifting a chicken leg to turn it, and holding it toward him as he bent inquisitively over the stove.

"Get out of my way, Julian!" spoke his mother, who had been unobservingly busy over the biscuit. "What are you doing in here, anyway? Boys are always in the way when there is work to be done."

"Who is to be here?" questioned the boy, regardlessly.

"Some of the new students your father has invited. Didn't you hear me tell you to stand back?"

Julian always had the knack of getting under people's feet when they were busiest, of breaking

into the most concentrated thought, or of interrupting the most interesting conversation with his useless, self-centered torment of questions.

"How many are there, Estelle?" he went on, getting between Estelle and her mother, as they were preparing to empty the contents of two bowls into one.

"Julian, why do you make yourself so disagreeable!" exclaimed Mrs. Graham, provoked beyond tolerance. "Go upstairs at once and study your lessons!" But Julian did not go. Too many of his mother's commands were merely exclamations for him to feel them necessarily imperative. He went over to where Agnes was emptying some coddled apples into a dish, and unintentionally jostling her arm, the hot juice splashed up on her hand. Down came the saucepan with a crash, and Julian, jumping back out of the way, stumbled over a chair and sat plump down on Estelle's best hat. This exhausted the last grain of patience. "Julian!" exclaimed Mrs. Graham, in no very gentle tones, "I told you some time ago to go to your lessons. If you had obeyed me we would have been saved this trouble. You need not ask for apples at the table; you see for yourself there is hardly enough left to go round," dipping them into another dish as she spoke.

At the same instant Estelle picked up her hat with an exclamation of dismay, for her father's salary was not so large nor so carefully husbanded that it was not sometimes a problem where a single new hat for a season was to come from for his wife and three girls.

Julian was fairly driven out of sight now with reproaches for the mischief he had done, and he went sullenly upstairs. It did seem as if he were always "putting his foot in it," as he expressed it.

The supper was duly enjoyed, and Professor Graham was too proud of his wife and daughters not to betray the fact that they were entirely responsible for it. Julian did not appear when the bell rang.

"He must have gone to sleep over his lessons," Mrs. Graham laughed. But she did not send for him, for, to tell the truth, it was rather a relief to have the awkward, ugly duckling of the family out of the way when strangers were about, even though the visitors were only two new students. However, she would have been slow to confess the feeling, if she had been conscious of it. At any rate, everybody was at his best, and the evening passed off pleasantly.

CHAPTER III.

THE GROWING OF LEAVES AND VINE.

“What is too small for man to consider is often large enough for God to use.”

AS Mrs. Graham laid no further embargo upon them, Estelle and Agnes went out the next morning to sell their pin-cushions, and did not find it so formidable an undertaking as they had imagined. As they were first in the market with these convenient little commodities, the girls were all able to report not only every one sold that had been made, but orders for more.

“Can’t we begin to do something with the money right away?”

“Yes, I think so,” Miss Morrison smiled brightly at Estelle. “Have you something in mind that needs to be done?” She saw in a moment it had only been a fit of impatient energy on Estelle’s part, and, without waiting for her abashed negative, hastened to say, “Certainly we ought, each one, to be looking out for some one who needs our help. I wonder if Selina Lindsay—”

“Oh! by the way”—it was Effie who spoke this time—“I saw Selina on their little porch as I passed there just now, and she asked if I wouldn’t please hand her a knitting-needle which had dropped over the steps. She said she had broken her crutch, and could not get about so well with only one. It did not take long for the Ivy Vine, which had grown out of a desire to help others, to decide on devoting the first earnings to the mending of Selina’s crutch. Effie Blair and Estelle Graham were appointed a committee to attend to it, with instructions, if they found it could not be neatly and securely repaired, to contract for a new one, and if there was not money enough in the treasury, it should be soon forthcoming.

Effie, rather inclined to weigh and measure and discuss the *pros* and *cons*, was prompt and energetic when action had been determined upon, and now proposed they should go to the carpenter’s on the way home, and see what he could probably do before arousing Selina’s hopes. The carpenter said he had no doubt it could be satisfactorily mended for about thirty cents. And that if they would bring it to him he would attend to it at once and take it to Selina on his way home that evening. The only regret the girls felt, as they confessed to each other

when all had been done, was that their commission had been accomplished with so little trouble and at so little expense.

“Why, our fund, small as it is,” said Effie, “has hardly been touched.”

“Oh! I expect we can find plenty of others to help.”

“I don’t know about that. Father says there are very few really poor people in Bridgeton—fewer than any place he ever knew.”

The next Saturday morning five pairs of young eyes were watching anxiously the mist-enshrouded town and country. They knew full well the meaning of the clouds hovering low on the mountain sides, but hoped this was only mist, and would vanish when the sun mounted higher in his path. All day long their hopes went up and down with that snow-white line on the blue front of Double Mountain. One moment they were sure it was moving up a little, and that the clouds were breaking overhead; the next, it would most evidently be dropping down, and down their hopes would topple. Shortly before the time for the meeting of their circle it began to pour in such torrents as only a little mountain town could tell of.

Estelle and Agnes Graham went off to their room, and, after giving full vent to their vexa-

tion to each other, sought to forget it in a game of backgammon. Olive Baylor, matter-of-fact little housewife that she was, did not stop long at the window, but got out her basket of socks and did some darning, for she had her father and three brothers to mend for, and she knew it would not lessen her chances of getting there to get her accustomed tasks all done beforehand. Effie, after dilly-dallying all day, as she said, when the matter was finally decided, got out some Christmas work and "made the best of it." Berta still lingered at the window. Not that she was more rebellious than her sister, but there was a kind of fascination in watching the tremendous power of the wind and rain. The big locust tree in the yard was reeling and groaning, and flinging its slender limbs about as if imploring for mercy, until she really had a heart-ache for it. But the reckless blast only caught the helpless branches and wrenched them from their parent stem, and flung them over the housetop in cruel disdain and mad merriment, then whistled and howled as it went on its way in search of new prey. With each gust of wind the rain poured in torrents, under which not a rose bush could hold up its head. Even the sturdy lilac, with its multitude of leafless twigs keeping close together for protection, were bending and swaying under the heavy down-pour.

“Oh! mother, mother! just come and look!”
Berta suddenly cries.

Mrs. Blair, who had that moment entered the door of the room, quickened her stately steps, realizing that something unusual had called forth the cry, and Effie dropped her work and joined them at the window. Across the street, opposite them, two little girls were struggling helplessly with the storm. At the instant the wind seized the umbrella, turned it wrongside out, and whirled it up in the air, despite the frantic efforts of the child to hold on to it. At the same time the smaller girl was literally beaten down to the ground by the pitiless sheets of rain. A sympathetic “Oh!” burst from each of the lookers-on, but before the sound had left her lips Effie had her cloak and hood and was on her way to their succor. Mrs. Blair and Berta followed her to the door, and held it open for the return. How the wind did blow, and how the rain did pour, as if the very windows of heaven had again been opened! It was almost more than Effie could do to keep her feet in touch with the earth. She half expected every moment to see herself flying up into the air like the little girl’s umbrella. The children were by this time huddled together in a little heap flat on the pavement. It was all they could do, and, as Effie

found on coming nearer, the least one of the two was sobbing in terror, while the elder was comforting and shielding her to the best of her small ability. Effie had some difficulty in persuading them to venture even the little journey across the street. But when they saw the open door, with its warm, safe shelter within, they yielded to Effie's urgent "Come, let's go before another storm-gust catches us!" and suffered themselves to be gently hustled over and into the house, looking for all the world like two little picked birds. They were drenched to the skin.

While Mrs. Blair went to the packing trunks to find among the stored-away things something they could put on, Berta and Effie gave the little ones a bath and a good rubbing to ensure their not taking cold, entertaining them cheerily throughout the process. When at last they were wrapped in blankets toasting in front of a glowing fire, they gave the whole history of their adventure and of themselves. Their mother—a widow—had come to Bridgeton to take boarders, under the advice of friends. "We were not very rich," the oldest girl—Agatha—said. "And mother didn't know any other way she could get us educated," chimed in the less one, "and she just had to have some butter, so she sent us for it." Berta and Effie began to laugh

at the incongruous connection; but a blank look of distress came over the faces of the little strangers. What had become of the butter they had been sent for, and were carrying home so carefully?

Annie began to cry again, sobbing out, "I'm afraid mamma's boarders will all leave her!" And Agatha's lips immediately pursed up in sympathy. However, with a brave effort at self-control, Agatha said, soothingly, "I don't expect they will, when they know we could not help it. And, any way, maybe mamma only told us that in fun to make us hurry home before the storm."

"We were hurrying as hard as we could, too, only the man kept us waiting so long at the store."

Berta and Effie could not but be intensely amused at the children's exaggerated distress over the lost butter; yet they were sorry for them, too, and tried not to laugh in a way that would embarrass them.

When the children had thoroughly recovered from their fright and chill, Berta and Effie dressed them in some of their own outgrown garments, choosing the most fantastic combinations for their further amusement, while their own were being thoroughly dried by the kitchen fire,

so as to be ready to be put on as soon as the storm should abate.

“Mamma says,” little Annie chirped, looking at her own quaint figure in the mirror, “that outgrown clothing is the only thing we have plenty of at our house, because we catch up with each other so fast she cannot even pass them on down.”

They tried a short game of “neighbors come to see,” but found the little strangers were too restless to enjoy it much. Presently Agatha went to the window and looked out at the still fast-pouring rain, with a sober sigh. “I’m afraid if it keeps up this way much longer, mamma will be like Saul’s father,” she said, quaintly; “she will cease caring for the butter and be troubled about us.”

“O Agatha!” exclaimed Annie, starting up and joining her sister at the window, “what did become of the umbrella?”

Agatha’s lips quivered a little as she answered, “It blew clear over the fence—but—it broke all to pieces before it got away; if it hadn’t I would have tried to keep on holding it, though it did hurt my wrist so badly. Mamma told me to be sure to take good care of it, too, because it was the only one she had.”

After Agatha’s first remark Mrs. Blair had

gone quietly out of the room. Returning now, she drew Agatha and Annie to her, and said kindly, "You need not distress yourselves about your mother. I have sent word you were in safe quarters, and would come home as soon as the storm would permit."

"Oh! did you?" Agatha's expressive face brightened as with a burst of sunshine, and Annie crept into Mrs. Blair's motherly arms and whispered in her ear, "I think Bridgeton must be a very kind place."

By the time the rain was over their clothes were dry and nicely ironed, and it was only a frolic for Berta and Effie to take them home.

A warm friendship between the two families was the result of this little incident.

"Agatha is very anxious to join the Ivy Vine," Berta and Effie told the Grahams at the next meeting. "She is a good deal younger than the rest of us, but she is such a dear little thing; and then, if she joins, I expect Virgie will also—she is about our age."

"Who are they?" asked Estelle Graham.

"They are the new people, don't you know, who rented the old Lyle place this fall to take boarders—student boarders?"

"Oh! yes, I remember now," spoke up Agnes. "They were at church last Sunday—such a string of them—and all girls."

“Mamma says,” added Estelle, “it is a pretty good scheme to get her pretty daughters married off, and maybe herself likewise.”

Berta was looking a thunder-cloud of righteous indignation at this insinuation concerning her new friends, but said nothing.

Effie remarked, with quiet earnestness, “The girls are very pretty, and, for that matter, I believe Mrs. Wallace is the prettiest of any. But if you knew them I am sure you would never associate them with any unladylike scheme.”

“You certainly would not,” emphasized Berta, and Effie added, “Mother says they are such perfect gentlewomen.” Then the two sisters went on to tell of their acquaintance with them the day of the storm, and of the quaint sayings and doings of the children.

“Is it the Wallaces of whom you are speaking?” interjected Miss Morrison, joining them. “They are lovely people. Let us get the girls to join the Ivy Vine, by all means. Any one of them will be an acquisition, if like her mother.” Naturally, they were all eager to carry the invitation now, and, unable to settle upon a committee of two, they went in a body to secure as many of the Wallaces as they could induce to join them.

CHAPTER IV.

THE IVY VINE REACHING DOWN DEEPER.

“No man liveth to himself.”

AT the next meeting of the band, Virgie and Agatha Wallace were present as new members. Lucille, the older sister, was afraid she could not always be spared from home, but would like to come sometimes as a visitor, and to help all she could.

Virgie Wallace was not so pretty as Lucille or little Agatha, but had a fine face, sincere and strong, and her manners were unusually attractive.

“Our Ivy Vine is growing,” Miss Morrison said in tones of zestful congratulation, “and I am so glad of it. I would like to see it climb up, and up, and up — oh! I hardly know where.”

The first business of the meetings was always an animated discussion on the subject of pin-cushions. A dictionary would define the word as a cushion to hold pins. But no compiler, I am sure, would undertake to list the infinite va-

riety of shapes and colors into which this simple article had blossomed under the inventive genius and tireless zeal of these busy workers. Never since the first stone of Bridgeton was laid had the trade in pin-cushions been so flourishing.

Convince people of the utility of an article, or throw it into a form of temptation, and it will surely sell. In the Bridgeton market pin-cushions had become not only a fad which no young man could afford to be without, but an absolute essential to comfort and convenience, which even the sober fathers of the community wondered they had not discovered before. It was a surprise to the girls themselves to find how many people in town needed pin-cushions and did not have them; and how quickly a young man could wear out one from simply carrying it in his pocket. Moreover, as pin-cushions were thus far the sole source of revenue to the Ivy Vine, the subject was one of the greatest importance. And now, given a circle of girls, each with a dainty basket or box, filled with bits of silk, ribbon and soft woollen goods in as many shades and colors as would be represented in a bed of sweet-peas, and the necessity laid upon them to meet the demand for pin-cushions, and it need hardly be said the conversation did not flag, and the *pros* and *cons* of light shades and dark, of silk

and wool, of round and square, were respectively advocated with the zest of connoisseurs. But, as "variety is the spice of life," it had been decided at the last meeting, whenever there was no other matter of business on hand, to devote a portion of the time they were together to having, some one reading aloud while the rest listened and sewed.

"If no one else is prepared for this part of the entertainment this evening," their President interposed, when the first symptom of a pause occurred, "I have something I believe will interest you, as it did me." She held in her hand a letter, "from a very dear friend," she explained, "who went to China as a missionary a few years ago."

"I want to tell you," the letter read, "of a girl-wife, or rather widow, who has recently become a member of our family. Her own parents, needing money, according to the custom of the country, sold her to be the wife of a man much older than herself, whose mother needed help in her work. The girl, however, did not prove much of a comfort, for she was utterly averse to work, and, as the mother-in-law expressed it, the more she was beaten the more cross and obstinate and lazy she became. Nor did it prove of much avail to complain to her father and

mother; they were only too glad to get rid of her. The child herself—for she was not more than fifteen years old—had a sour, morose expression, nothing in or about her to attract, save through pity. But when I chanced to call at the house one day, and opportunely witnessed one of the ‘beatings,’ I could not wonder at the worst disposition she could show. After the death of her parents matters grew still worse, as there was then no appeal on either side. Finally the husband died also. Since then the old mother’s one thought has been to get rid of her. I had tried often to talk to the poor young thing, and, if possible, influence her for some good, but had never been able to extract more than a word from her, and that a very sullen and spiteful one. The last time I was there the mother offered to sell her to me at half the price she had given for her, that she might be able to buy a wife for her younger son who would be more helpful and obedient. Of course, I would not for a moment have thought of buying her to use as a slave as the woman expected me to do, but it did seem a providential opportunity to try the remedy of unvarying kindness upon her, especially as I noticed her face brighten to the faintest shadow of a smile when the proposition was made in her presence. Yet, when I

asked her if she would be willing to come and live with me, she replied, in a hopeless tone that went to my heart, yes, she was willing; she did not care. So I gave the money to the mother and brought the girl home with me, though with many misgivings, and with the express stipulation that if she ever wanted to return to her mother-in-law, the only relative she had in the world, she was to say so, and be permitted to do it. I had most difficulty in gaining this permission from the old mother, though I assured her I should expect no price for her return. She was evidently delighted to get rid of her, and had no relish for the prospect of having poor Ah-lin back on her hands. Well, the unhappy child has been with us now for three weeks, and has received nothing but the tenderest kindness from any member of our household; and though she has not as yet given back a single grateful, or even civil, word, and is no end of trial, as you may imagine, yet I am so deeply sorry for her I cannot regret what I have done, and trust to the grace of God to bring some good out of it for her. Dear friend, help me pray for her."

Some of the other eyes were glistening, diamond-like, as well as Miss Edmonia's, when she folded the letter and put it back into the envelope.

“Cannot we pray for her, too?” It was little Agatha Wallace who spoke, but her words were echoed in each heart of the little circle, and they forthwith entered into a sacred compact, silent save for the eloquent language of eye to eye and heart to heart.

As they were breaking up, Miss Edmonia said, holding two or three hands in hers, and including them all in her loving glance, “We will not forget little Ah-lin. I am sure it will do us good to have some person of special interest outside of ourselves and our own.”

The girls were rather sober under the weight of this new responsibility they had taken upon their young hearts. Even Olive Baylor, despite the ready jollity she always kept on hand for the sake of “the boys,” walked thoughtfully between Estelle and Agnes Graham.

“It’s real scary, isn’t it?” she presently said, with a shrug, “to believe we have actually something to do with the salvation of a soul, even if it is the soul of a little heathen.”

“I think it is lovely!” exclaimed Agnes, enthusiastically, yet touched with somewhat of the same awe.

“Only, I don’t see why we ought not to feel just as much concerned about the souls all around us,” said Estelle. “In fact, I am sure we

ought—but who?” She broke off abruptly with an embarrassed laugh. “Julian, for instance, I suppose!”

“Yes, Julian,” said Olive, seriously, “and my brothers Paul and Elmer.”

“If Julian would only make himself as agreeable at home as your brothers do,” stipulated Agnes, in a self-accusing tone, “we might bring ourselves to feel as much interest in his becoming a Christian as” (laughing) “in the heathen; but he is so cross and overbearing, and so silly sometimes, even mamma does not know what to do with him.”

“There is a lot of good in Julian, for all his crankiness,” said Olive, earnestly, and he will be all right some day.”

“Julian’s crossness may be partly our fault, for we certainly are cross to him sometimes,” confessed Estelle, candidly; “and boys cannot help being rough, can they, Olive?”

“My brothers are, I know; but, then, there are so many of them they take it out on each other, and so do not bother me. I think, after all, what is the matter with Julian is he is just one by himself.”

“It may be,” mused Estelle, in a tone of compunction.

“Yes,” echoed Agnes, “you are one to three,

and we are *five* girls to one boy. It must be dreadfully hard on Julian."

"And we haven't tried to be good to him, while your brothers are so lovely to you. Besides, mamma isn't even his very own mother, and she says it always was hard for her to love him," added Estelle, with increasing contrition.

When Estelle and Agnes Graham parted from Olive, at the corner of College street, they made her promise faithfully she would come next time, and every time until the roads became actually impassable. How little they knew what would happen before another Saturday afternoon! And, in blissful ignorance, they went their several ways—Olive, with her heart full of a great pity for the sisters, whose love wasn't blind enough to miss the little peccadillos which blurred the character of their only brother, even if he was but a half-brother, and Estelle and Agnes, talking half-defensively, half self-accusingly, of Julian, wholly admiringly and lovingly of Olive, with gentle, penitent inner resolves to be in future more like her in their treatment of their brother.

"Have you seen anything of Julian? He has not been home since dinner," was their mother's rather anxious greeting as they came in. "I told him, too, that I would want him to do some

errands for me this afternoon, as you would both be away." Then, turning her worry on them, for want of other outlet, "I do not see, for the life of me, why you all should have deliberately chosen for your meetings the time of all the week when I would most surely need you."

The girls, conscious it was Julian, more than themselves, with whom she was vexed, and with hearts softened toward the truant boy, made no answer for themselves, only, while they waited with hats on to know what errands they could still do for her in his place, Estelle said, deprecatingly, "I heard him talking to Paul Baylor about driving home with him and Olive; but I did not know you wanted him, and he must surely have forgotten."

"It is easy to forget—'accidentally on purpose,' to use his own slang—what one does not intend to remember," Mrs. Graham said, with a peculiarly bitter expression on her face.

The afternoon waned and darkness fell; still no news of Julian.

"Doesn't he often stay all night with the Baylor boys?" Mr. Graham suggested, comfortingly.

It was quite true he spent a great deal of time out there; true, also, that he frequently went without informing any one of his intentions. Mrs. Graham had reminded herself of these

facts over and again, but the recollection of Julian's face, as she last saw it, neutralized any comfort she might otherwise have found in it. He had tormented her to give him a dime to buy pencils with, and when she told him to wait for his father, as she did not have it to spare, he dogged her busy steps with his pouting complaints and arguments until she scarcely knew whether she had sweetened the Sunday cake with sugar or salt.

Had her tones been harsher than usual, she wondered, that he had looked so cowed and crest-fallen under them, so almost desperate, as he stalked out of the room at her bidding? She had a conscience about her husband's only boy, if it did so seldom disturb her, and if he had been differently constituted, she might have been the best of step-mothers to him, she often told herself. Her conscience was inexplicably alive to-day. Touched by something in the expression of his face, she had determined, after he had done her errands, in the afternoon to give him the dime any how, hoping this would undo any unpleasant impression of the morning. To that intent she had called after him as he left the dinner table, to be on hand without fail, but either he did not or pretended not to hear. He went out the front door with a bang, and that

was the last she had seen of him. It was seldom, indeed, she was troubled with unreasoning apprehensions, and such scenes were of too frequent occurrence to cause annoyance, and yet she could not rid herself of it. Estelle and Agnes were also watching for him with unwonted anxiety, eager, perhaps, for an opportunity to put their good resolutions into practice. But, at a rather late bedtime, they were forced to content themselves with the most likely solution, that he was simply spending the night at Dr. Baylor's.

CHAPTER V.

BROKEN TENDRILS.

WHILE the anxious thoughts of his home people were thus reaching out after Julian in the dark, he was sitting on a stool at Olive Baylor's feet, winding and unwinding a ball of bright worsted, glancing up from time to time, with a boy's unstinted, uncritical admiration to the girl's face above him. It was not a beautiful face by any means. Boys, while still boys, are less easily enthralled by simple beauty than later; the child's intuitive perception of genuine worth lingers.

Olive's was a face where a strong, brave, thoughtful, loving heart shone through. She lacked four years of being as old as Julian, according to the birth-register, yet few would have believed it. She was fully conscious, as well as he, that in maturity of judgment and personal acceptance of the responsibilities of life, she was the older of the two. Being the only sister, she had kept herself completely on a "we boys" platform with her brothers; might have verged upon the "tom-boy" if they had not been so gallantly protective. Consequently, she was admi-

rably fitted to advise, and scold if need be, another boy.

Julian was with her brothers so much she had virtually adopted him as "one of the boys." She knew he was often misunderstood to his disadvantage at home, and she had great sympathy for him.

"No, I don't believe they care anything for me," he was saying now. "Mamma thinks everything ought to be for the girls; has no use for a boy, except to wait on them and do all the disagreeable jobs that will tire their backs or spoil their hands."

"Hush, Julian! How can you talk so? You know you do not believe it. People have different ways of showing their love, but mothers always love their boys."

"Own mothers, you mean," he interrupted, significantly. Olive had forgotten, but she went on, unheeding. "And I think Estelle is lovely to you."

"Estelle is good to me sometimes, and then again she is just like the rest. If I could only have a sister like you—"

Olive laughed gayly. You may be one of my brothers. I couldn't have too many, if they were all like those I have now. But, then"—her smile grew grave—"I am sure it would be better

if you appreciated the sisters and mother God has given you."

"I would if they treated me right," he spoke up, implacably.

"Are you quite sure the fault is not sometimes your own?"

His eyes fell before her kindly scrutiny. "I'm as good to them as they are to me. I can't take everything from them," he persisted, pugnaciously.

Olive felt that arguing was a failure, and she knew from experience there was no good in allowing him to dwell morbidly on his imaginary troubles, or, as he supposed, his causes of complaint.

"Do you know what I would expect if I were your sister?" she said, smiling saucily.

His smile was a little rueful, as he could not but remember how like a little queen her brothers treated her in sharp contrast to his own home manners. "But, then," he consoled himself, "it would be easy if it were Olive," so he only said briefly, "What?"

"Well, when I came down in the morning, I would expect you to jump to your feet, no matter how engaged, and with a pleasant greeting say, 'Here, sister, take my seat by the fire, or near the window, as the season might be.'"

Julian flushed and fidgeted, remembering how often he did not even trouble himself to respond to a greeting when he received one.

“At the table,” Olive went on, gayly, “you would anticipate all my wants, and never dare to leave the house without asking if there were any errands you could do for me down-town.”

Again Julian remembered his short-comings, and the fight he made over the least little thing he was asked to do.

“If I were going out in the evening,” pursued the merry lass, relentlessly, “you would always be sure I was provided with an escort before making any plans for yourself. In short, you would have to be as manly and true-knightly and perfectly unselfish as are the dear brothers I already have, else I would soon turn you off again. Do you think that would be very unreasonable? Of course you do,” reading his dubious face; “but, then, you have not looked at it from the other side. Even though you had but one sister, you would still expect your clothes to be kept in good order; never a string nor a button missing, though a thousand stitches needed to be taken to fill out the measure of her own wardrobe. Whenever you came home you would expect to be met with a cheerful face and plenty of jolly chat about things that interested

you, however trying domestic affairs might have been during the day, whatever disappointments and vexations might have come into her own small life, and to have her lay down an exciting novel or a fascinating piece of fancy work at the most interesting juncture to patch or darn a rent you had carelessly gotten without an impatient word or sigh of regret." The picture was in some things truer than she knew. Julian winced under it, and could not even laugh; but her own winsome smile disarmed any suspicion that she was intentionally hurting him, as she added, playfully, "That's what my own brothers expect of me, and I don't dare to offer them less—such tyrants are you lords of creation! Do you still imagine you would like to be one of my brothers?"

She flirted her handkerchief into his sober face to provoke a smile as she got up in response to the bell, and said, "Come, let us go in to supper."

Olive was quite a dignified little house-mistress at the head of her own table. Her mother had been dead for several years, and she had tried to take her place in every way as far as such a slip of a girl could. After supper came games and lively chat, in which Dr. Baylor took an equal share with the young people. At ten

o'clock the circle broke, after the merriest kind of an evening. The Baylor boys, none of them smoked, but Julian had already acquired the enslaving habit. He promised, however, to be content with one cigar this time, and to follow them in a very short while.

He stood for a moment, when left alone, looking around on the tasteful belongings of the family sitting-room. There was plenty to tell of refinement, intelligence, cultivation, which he could appreciate only in a dim, vague way, but still more marked to him was a certain home-atmosphere, which he, whether from fault of his own or of others, had never gotten into in his own home. To Julian it all breathed of Olive. He and Olive had always been the jolliest of comrades. For some reason the thought of her this evening overwhelmed him with the consciousness of his own "meanness"—his roughness with his sisters—his disobedience to father and mother. With startling self-conviction came the remembrance of his mother's charge not to stay away that afternoon, as she particularly wanted him, and here it was bedtime, and he only just thinking of it. He tucked back the dainty muslin curtains, and propping his feet into the window, looked out on the moon-flooded lawn, and held a serious council with himself.

If he should change his conduct at home—be the fine gentleman Olive wanted him to be—he would doubtless have to run the gauntlet of surprise, ridicule, and long lack of faith in the permanence of the improvement from those of his own home, for, indeed, such conduct would be absurdly unnatural in him. It seemed utterly impossible to make up his mind to face the consequences of this change. Never in his life before had he looked at himself as others saw him. Presently he did something he had not done for many a year—he knelt down and asked God to help him to be a better boy, and, with a great longing for the mother-love of his babyhood, which he barely could remember, he hoped that if saints could pray in heaven, his mother would pray for him now.

The half-consumed cigar had dropped unnoticed from his hand. He got up from his knees, looked at his watch, and, finding how long his reverie had lasted, chunked the fire down low in the grate, and stood a moment more looking down into the glowing coals, then—turned out the lamp, and—“sniff! sniff!”—there was the smell of something burning. A coal must have rolled out on the carpet while he manipulated the fire, and he hurriedly began to hunt for it, contrite and distressed beyond measure at the

damage which might ensue. Down on his hands and knees he felt around and smelled around in every direction where a coal could have rolled, the smell of smoke growing stronger, but its source utterly eluding his anxious search.

A sudden light flashed into the darkness from behind him. He sprang to his feet, to see the whole of the pretty muslin curtain in a blaze from floor to ceiling. He quickly caught it in his arms and dragged it down, but the angry flames had already leaped across to another window. It was barely a moment before the room was enveloped in flame and smoke. He dared not open the door, lest it spread through the house. He tried to cry out, but his voice was smothered. He must give the alarm in some way. Breaking through a window, he jumped to the ground, and began to yell lustily. Soon lights and night-robed figures were moving about. Dr. Baylor and the boys came out, one by one—dazed, half-awake. “Where is Olive?” Somebody echoed his own thought. As the question passed from mouth to mouth around the group, Julian drew his coat up over his mouth and nose, and shutting his eyes tight, rushed into the midst of smoke and flame.

Nobody knew the house any better than he did, and nobody else knew so well the direction

of the fire. It had not reached Olive's room. Thank God for that! Involuntarily he paused to knock, but too well he knew there was no time to wait for her drowsy questionings if she should be still asleep. When she opened her eyes he was standing by her bed, hushing her screams of terror by saying simply, "Olive, the house is on fire. I have come to take you out!" and, without more ado, he wrapped her in a blanket and picked her up in his arms. At the door of her room she looked back at the portrait over the mantel and murmured, "O mamma! mamma!" Then, with her accustomed self-control, resolutely closed her lips and said no more.

The back stairway was burning underneath, but proved still equal to the double-weight. At the foot, however, great tongues of flame darted across the narrow passway, causing Olive to cling shudderingly to her bearer. For that one instant the heart of a man thrilled within him, that for once in his life he could be a comfort and help. Drawing the blanket closely over her head, he dashed through, and they soon breathed in safety the chill night air, in which the flames were holding such high carnival, and Julian gave up his burden to the father and brothers who had been trying to reach her by the other stairway. Then Olive, turning and taking in

for the first time the whole terrible conflagration, clung to her father, and, with a heart-piercing wail of waning consciousness, "Oh! my beautiful home! my beautiful home!" sank in a heap on the ground. She was immediately carried to the nearest house, the miller's cottage, and one convulsion followed another in such quick succession they hardly knew if she were ever conscious. She lay at death's door for weeks, and at the end of that time the physician, who had been summoned from the city, could only promise, "She may live, but if she does, will probably be an invalid for life."

And where was Julian!

CHAPTER VI.

THE VINE WOUNDED IN ITS LEAF.

“EFFIE, what is that?” Berta sprang up in bed, as the loud, rapid clanging of a harsh bell broke the stillness of the “wee sma’ hours.” Effie had awakened at the same instant, and was listening.

“Can it be anybody is dead?” said Berta.

“No, for that is not tolling, or it would be slow and solemn.”

“Perhaps they are tolling this way at first, to be sure of waking people up.”

“I don’t believe they ever toll the bell in the night. There would be no need to wake everybody up just to let them know somebody was dead. I am sure, if that were it, they would wait till morning.”

“Besides, I don’t think it can be a church-bell. None of the church bells have that awfully sharp sound.”

“It couldn’t be the court-house bell, either—” At that moment another bell, which they recognized as belonging to the court-house, added its clangor to the first, and the wild, distracting

noise was truly alarming. A moment more, and two shivering, white-clad figures stood in the hall calling softly, "Father, what does that bell-ringing mean?"

He opened the door at once, for he was nearly dressed, and their mother was at the window, from whence could be seen a red glare of light all over the northeastern horizon.

"It is fire; but we cannot tell where."

"Can it be the college?" asked Berta, in awe.

The town boasted a fire-engine, and about once a year the volunteer firemen were paraded through the streets, and carried through all the manœuvres of hook and ladder, hose and engine, of an imaginary fire; but never, within the memory of Berta and Effie, had there been a real fire.

"No," their father replied, looking at it anxiously, as he slipped on his coat, "I am sure it is not the college; it is farther off than that. It may be the bridge—or the mill—or—Dr. Baylor's house.

The girls clasped their hands in involuntary terror. The mention of the Baylors brought it almost closer home than if it had been the college. Their father went out quickly. He was going down the street to see if he could learn particulars, while the mother and girls huddled

together under shawls and blankets to await in anxious suspense his return. The long minutes of uncertainty brought at last, not their father, but a messenger, to say it was Dr. Baylor's house, and Dr. Blair had gone out to see what he could do. There was nothing left for the rest of them but to wait for the morning and further news.

Berta and Effie lay down beside their mother, not to sleep, but to watch the weird red light in the sky, as it would die down to a faint, roseate hue, as of the breaking day, then flare up again with an angry red glow, which made them shudder. As it finally disappeared entirely, they did fall asleep, to dream troubled dreams about poor Olive, the Doctor and the boys.

When morning came, and their father, they almost dreaded to question his troubled face. He did not wait, however, but told them at once the house had burned to the ground, the family had escaped with their lives, but Olive was desperately ill, and Julian Graham, who was there, could not be found. He had brought Olive out, and, they feared, had gone back into the building for some purpose, and been burned to death. No trace of him could thus far be discovered.

"How horrible!" exclaimed the girls, simultaneously, and Berta buried her face in her

hands. The whole town was one universal note of distress, for Dr. Baylor and his family were greatly beloved.

As soon as possible Mrs. Blair hurried over to the Grahams. Although Julian was not Mrs. Graham's own son, she thought, she has had him ever since he was a little fellow, and must feel this terrible disaster almost as if he were.

"They say Julian was very disagreeable at home; perhaps they will not grieve so much—except for the horror of the thing," said Berta, with a shrug and a shudder.

"Oh! yes they will," exclaimed Effie. "They will only remember the good he was and did, now—poor fellow! Isn't it terrible, to think of anybody being burned alive! What could he have gone back for, if all the people were out?"

"I don't know, unless Olive asked him to get something she wanted. He perfectly worshipped her, and if she had asked him to go right into the fire, I believe he would have done it for her."

"If that were so, would it not be dreadful to remember now, and feel that she was the cause of his death?" Effie murmured, thoughtfully. "Maybe it is a blessed thing she is unconscious until they find some other solution of his death. Oh! it is all so dreadful."

If dreadful to these dear girls and friends, who only felt it from the outside, what must it have been to those most deeply concerned!

Dr. Baylor and the boys had hardly had time to realize their loss as yet, every moment and thought being wholly taken up with Olive.

The miller moved out and gave them full possession of the little three-roomed cottage, as it was impossible to tell when the sick girl could be moved. Mrs. McBride, her mother's sister, stayed with her as much as possible, but Hugh, oldest of the three boys, could not be persuaded to leave her either to eat or to sleep. At night, when she was sufficiently quiet for her father to seek some rest, Hugh would lie down beside her and hold her hand, so he could know if she moved or breathed other than as she ought. For days he did not undress, except when it was necessary to change his clothing; not until the convulsions became less frequent and showed some signs of succumbing to the remedies used. Even then she lay in a stupor, not noticing anybody or anything.

There had been no further revealments concerning Julian. It was impossible longer to flatter themselves with vain hopes of his escape. If he had been able to get out of the building a second time alive, he would of necessity have

been too badly burned to creep to any great distance, and must have been discovered ere this. Moreover, the cremation had been complete, for not a symptom of a bone had been found.

Mrs. Graham candidly confessed, in that haughty, self-poised manner of hers, she could have borne the loss if it were not for the regret that her last words to him had been impatient ones. Janet was recalled from school for a week, which was a great comfort to her mother. She would fain have kept her at home altogether if the girl herself had been willing. For it was the continual squabbling between Janet and Julian which had made it advisable to send her off to a boarding-school at a rather early age. She was still the core of her mother's heart, and it was a sore trial to have her absent.

Judging from his quiet, undemonstrative exterior, one might have thought Professor Graham grieved but lightly over the loss of his son. His grave, studious face showed little change. If his tall form stooped a trifle more, few would have noticed. Yet he did feel it beyond what any one dreamed. A man craves for earth's life no higher joy or pride than to know his name will be worthily perpetuated in his son. This joy and pride his only son, Julian, had never given him. On the contrary, he had been

a growing mortification as the years went on. No teacher had ever been able to stir his ambition, or by any motive to induce him to study, and the constant complaints of his step-mother and sisters made him an unmitigated trial in the home. Nevertheless, the father, with exhaustless patience, had hoped for the time when the good seed would outgrow the weeds. He was not conscious himself how strong this hope had been. Now hope was dead—his interest in life crushed, as grain in the maw of the mill. Though his greater grief could find no words, he was none the less tenderly pitiful for that of his wife and daughters, which could, nor less responsive to the affectionate caresses of Estelle and Agnes, who gave more than was their wont, from an intangible feeling of his need.

As for Estelle and Agnes, they were half-bewildered by the sudden shock and horror, and, as with the step-mother, their grief was sharpened by remorse. With sad misgivings they remembered their lack of gentleness and patience in their daily intercourse. "I expect Olive was right," Agnes sighed, in the privacy of their own chamber, "all that was the matter with Julian was his being one by himself."

"I know it," echoed Estelle, with a fresh outburst of subdued weeping, "and we did not try

to help him, or sympathize with him in the least; but, just because there were most of us girls, and we had the strongest side, we took advantage of him."

They sat on the side of the bed and cried softly, Estelle presently murmuring, "No wonder God took him away from us; we did not deserve to have a brother."

This cloud of self-accusation was still hanging heavily over them when Miss Edmonia called.

Each one of her girls was peculiarly dear to her in a special way. And certainly she would have judged no two of them less needing severe chastisement than shy, unselfish Estelle or bright, winsome Agnes. It broke her heart to see such heavy shadow on their dear faces. At first she could only draw a head down on each shoulder and weep with them; but tender words of sympathy soon loosened their tongues and drew them out to tell her freely all that was oppressing their young hearts and consciences,—the vagueness of the certainty, if it might be so expressed. "How can we ever feel perfectly sure he is dead," they said, "when we could not see his lifeless form, nor follow it to the grave." The funeral services at the church had seemed empty and meaningless, and then Estelle mur-

mured, gulping down a big sob, "We were not as kind to him as we ought to have been!"

"Indeed, we were not," repeated Agnes, and both covered their faces and wept again.

The involuntary expression of this bitter root to their sorrow gave their teacher a new insight into it. Nothing aggravates the distress of losing a friend like remorse over some real or fancied failure in duty toward them.

"Ah!" she said, patting their hands, which lay in her lap, "if we could always keep before us the day when we shall look back and remember and regret every unkind word and ill-natured deed there surely would be fewer of them. But, unfortunately, we do not stop to think until the sudden blankness of death comes between us. Then it is too late. Still there is no profit in reproaching ourselves. It only adds to our sorrow. There is something else I am gladder to say than that it is no profit to remember. It is that I am quite sure God does not want us to remember, only to act differently in the future. He knows how weak we are in the grasp of passion or some unexpected temptation, and I do believe he is less hard on us—the dear Heavenly Father—than we are on ourselves, if only we are truly trying to do better, to grow more like him all the time.

CHAPTER VII.

TROUBLE IN THE ATMOSPHERE.

FOR several days little Agatha had felt there was trouble in the atmosphere from some cause, else Lucille's usually placid face would not be wearing those worry-wrinkles, and mother would not be smiling and talking so extra cheerily, as if she were trying to drive them away.

Agatha was not feeling all this in words, perhaps she did not know she was feeling it at all, only she kept watching the two faces and wondering. Mrs. Wallace thought it a pity to burden little girls with cares they could not help, and so thus far had only taken Lucille into her confidence. Sometimes she almost regretted that, although Lucille was a mature, clear-headed girl, and it is such a help to have somebody else's mind on whatever is worrying one's self. Virgie had of late begun to look on a little enviously at the private conferences between mother and daughter. She had suddenly shot up into a tall girl on a level with Lucille, feeling quite grown. She thought she might help as

well as her sister, who was only two years her senior. She, too, had noticed something wrong, and easily surmised what it was.

They had calculated on getting at least five or six student boarders, whereas they had only gotten three; one of these gave Latin and French lessons to herself and Lucille for his board, and another taught the English branches to all of them. This left only one to keep up the table, and it was not sufficient in town, where they had everything to buy.

“But if the worst comes,” Mrs. Wallace had said, with her gentle, sweet smile, which always stood for faith and hope to her children, “we can go back to the country, and be as well off as we were before.”

It so happened that little Agatha heard this remark, and while she herself had no special dread of going back to the country, she knew her mother and Lucille and Virgie thought it would be much better if they could remain in town. So she determined to ask Mr. Forsyth, who was her special friend, if there was no chance of more students coming who would need to get board.

He did not give her much encouragement, for it was too late in the session to justify expectations. Still he promised his little friend to be

on a sharp lookout, and to "snap up for her the first strange man that appeared on the campus."

The next morning came the startling news of the burning of Dr. Baylor's house, with its consequent afflictions. Little Agatha and Virgie forgot their curiosity, Lucille her worry, and Mrs. Wallace all her anxieties for her own little flock in her sympathy for the motherless girl, and the family which had lost its only boy in such a harrowing way. She was naturally shy and shrinking. She could not forget she was so recently a stranger in the community. Nevertheless her whole heart was going out to them, and she was not the woman to listen to foolish demurrings when a kindness was to be done. As soon as possible after breakfast she put on bonnet and wrap, and went to Professor Graham's.

The visit was somewhat a surprise to Mrs. Graham, as she had, through procrastination or indifference, neglected to call on the strangers. Howbeit, she could not but appreciate the kindness which would waive all ceremony in this manner. She also felt the gentle sympathy which led Mrs. Wallace to say, with evident effort, "My own two little boys died by accident within a very short time of each other." She paused a moment, then added, "I was very

rebellious at first, but often since I have seen young men who made me thankful my boys were safe with Jesus, and had not lived to become like them."

Mrs. Graham stiffened a little, perceiving the very natural mistake into which her visitor had fallen, and said explanatorily, "Julian was not my own child, you know; he was the child of Professor Graham's first wife. Still I have had him ever since he was a little fellow in kilts, and"—with a touch of self-convincing pride—"I do not believe he ever knew any difference. He was a very difficult child to manage, and gave me a great deal of trouble, even to the last, but I flatter myself his own mother could have done no better by him than I did, or been more patient with his faults. And yet, such is the perversity of human nature, at this very moment I am reproaching myself unmercifully because, under great provocation, I spoke harshly to him that last day. Of course, if it had been my own child I would not have thought of it again, but stepmothers are so apt to be criticised, you know, and I always tried to be so careful." She watched for a moment silently the quiet, uncomprehending face before her. "You at least have no self-reproach mingled with your grief."

The two looked at each other; the one with

her fresh grief, including its self-reproach, all toned to a measure of perfect decorum; the other with her ever-fresh sorrow quivering through face and form and mother-heart. Mrs. Wallace forgot the puzzle this other nature had been to her a moment before. "No self-reproach!" she murmured; then with downcast, reminiscent face, she pictured her two beautiful boys of two and four years as she had left them with a nurse, in whom she had most implicit confidence, to seek her own pleasure with her husband at an evening's sociable. They were both in perfect health, had hardly known a day's sickness in their lives; yet on her return, at a rather late hour, she found them stiff and cold in death. The reckless girl had given them an opiate to get them early to sleep and out of her way, and did not know she had done any more until the mother's quick eye and touch had detected it—but all too late.

Mrs. Wallace had come with a heart full of sympathy to do what she could to comfort under a more recent bereavement; both were beginning unexpectedly to realize that the older was by far the deeper grief of the two. Notwithstanding, this little glimpse into each other's hearts did them both good. Mrs. Graham, being naturally of a suspicious temperament, had few

intimates, and although they had been six or eight years connected with the college, she had never yet quite fallen into the free, natural life of the little town. Mrs. Wallace was as yet equally an outsider, but she had in this one act placed her perfect genuineness and kindness beyond a question, and Mrs. Graham did not fail to respond to it, with the best that was in her.

This visit being accomplished, Mrs. Wallace began to turn yearningly toward the Baylors and the motherless, sick girl. She was at a loss how to let her sympathy reach them, as she had no way of getting to the country, for she could not walk as the young people did, and had no means of driving. Mere formal notes of sympathy or inquiry seemed so empty. She gladly gave her consent when, within a week or ten days, one of the young men offered to drive Lucille out.

Lucille was growing like her mother. The early sharing of responsibility had given her a grave sweetness of face, which softened her sunniest smile to make it—like her mother's—always soothing and hopeful, never offensively bright under any circumstances.

When she and her companion reached the cottage, it so happened that Dr. Baylor was util-

izing a quiet interval to get a little rest, and Elmer, the youngest of the boys, as the only hospitality he had to offer, invited them right into the room where Olive lay sick, though he did it in some awkwardness and embarrassment, as if he knew it was not just the proper thing to do. However, Lucille had no hesitation in entering alone, but, with her usual thoughtfulness, advised her companion to remain outside with Elmer.

Olive still lay unconscious, and, as Lucille thought, without attendant. Taking a seat beside the bed she touched the delicate, white hand of the sick girl with her cool palm, stilling the tremor of it with a gentle, firm pressure. The sufferer instantly turned her head toward Lucille, and gave a little moan as of relief, though she did not open her eyes. In a moment Hugh sprang up out of some shadow of the darkened room, and approached the bed on the other side. Coming in out of the sunlight, Lucille had not seen him at all, and he did not notice her now until he had felt the pulse and brow of his sister, and watched her anxiously for several minutes. Lucille had withdrawn her own hand at his approach, and stepped back a little with an apologetic instinct of intrusion. But they both noticed that at the removal of the pressure

of her hand the tremor in the fingers of the patient not only became more perceptible, but extended up the arm, and began to twitch the face in such a distressing manner Lucille involuntarily caught the hand in her own again, with the same gentle firmness of touch, and stooping pressed the cool velvet of her cheek on Olive's brow. It seemed to soothe her into a sweet quiet, and again came the little moan of comfort. Hugh, with his hand on her pulse still, looked up quickly with a smile of infinite relief, and for the first time their eyes met.

"Miss Wallace, I believe; is it not? It is very good of you to be here." He spoke in a low, full voice.

"I am so glad to come, if I can be of any service," she murmured, her eyes wandering back anxiously to the patient's face.

"None of us have ever been seriously sick before since mother died, and we are missing her so dreadfully now."

A deep pity shone in Lucille's sweet eyes. "I will gladly stay all day, if Mr. Rutherford can come back for me"—and she made a move toward the door to ask him.

"There will be no need," said Hugh eagerly; "we will see that you get home if you can spare the time. Aunt Em has stayed with us as much

as she could, but she was so worn out with her double duties she was obliged to go home for rest to-day."

"Mamma says I am a born nurse," Lucille smiled in response to a congratulatory exclamation of Hugh's over some little slight-of-hand adjustment of the pillows, which evidently gave great comfort.

"Let me do the lifting, please!" Hugh quickly interposed; "I *can* do that," and, with the strength of a man and the tenderness of a woman, he eased the tired body into a more restful position under Lucille's suggestions.

Dr. Baylor was delighted to find she had missed the convulsion. From that time they became less frequent, and her father was able to grasp some hope of her recovery.

"Send for me whenever the help or comfort I can bring will pay for the trouble of getting me here," Lucille told Dr. Baylor at leaving; "mother or I can always come."

Realizing that the offer was made in all good faith, the "mother or I" was frequently called upon during the weeks of terrible illness which followed, and the touch of Lucille's cool palm or the tender mothering of Mrs. Wallace rarely failed to soothe the sick girl's nervous restlessness.

Meanwhile Mr. Forsythe had not forgotten his promise to Agatha.

One day when the trouble lines of personal anxiety had begun to reappear on the faces of mother and eldest daughter, Virgie and Agatha were confiding to each other their conviction, that taking boarders was not turning out very well for the family, and that it would be a relief all round if they could go back to the country, and be content to get their education the best way they could. An exclamation from little Annie, who was looking out the window, interrupted these rather gloomy communings. "I do believe!—" "I'm just sure!" exclaimed Agatha, promptly joining her, "that Mr. Forsythe is bringing us some more boarders!" and flew to the door to verify her hopes.

She was right about it. Mr. Forsythe had brought two young men who had been boarding with Dr. Baylor previous to the fire. One of the brothers was not in very robust health, and his mother coveted for him the early hours of a country home, and the oversight of a physician.

Since the fire the stronger brother had made every effort to find satisfactory accommodations elsewhere in the country without success, and the proverbially small stock of patience credited to young men being exhausted, he readily ac-

cepted the suggestion of Mr. Forsythe to try the next best thing, and put him under Mrs. Wallace's motherly wing. There was no palpable difference anyway, he had added, in the healthfulness of town and country in a mountainous district like this.

“‘It's an ill wind blows naebody good,’” quoted Virgie, voicing the all-round uplift from recent depression.

But Mrs. Wallace looked up quickly, with a deprecating, “O daughter!”

Her sweet, sensitive soul could not bear to think of profiting by such heavy sorrows to others. Yet she knew that in some way it was God's good hand to all, though they might not see it now.

CHAPTER VIII.

LOVING MINISTRY OF THE IVY LEAVES.

“Is thy cruse of comfort wasting? rise and share it with another.”—*Mrs. Charles.*

IT had been two weeks since the disaster which had thrilled the whole community with sorrow and sympathy. The first Saturday, in the unsubsidied excitement, the Ivy Vine and its meeting had been entirely forgotten. As the hour again approached at which they were accustomed to assemble, the question came up in each girl's heart, “Shall we go—will there be a meeting?” Though their object was a sober and thoroughly laudable one, the hour spent together was always one of such genuine enjoyment they wondered if it would be wanting in respect and consideration for those in sorrow for them to be “seeking their own pleasure!” Nevertheless, they were all there except Olive, even Estelle and Agnes Graham. If they had asked their mother about going, she would probably have demurred on account of appearances. But they thought it could do no harm to call and ask Miss Morrison what they ought to do. For

answer, she had taken them by the hand, and led them in with her.

Miss Edmonia's own heart was very tender, and while they were in this melted mood, she took occasion to speak words of sweet counsel, which she knew they would remember far better for receiving them into soft and genial soil. They talked a great deal about Olive.

"I was there yesterday," Miss Edmonia said, "and her father thinks there has been a turn for the better, and has some hope now of her life being spared, though he still fears long years of suffering and invalidism may be the alternative."

"And she was so bright and jolly, doesn't it seem hard!" said Berta regretfully.

"And how the boys will miss her!" said Effie.

"She used to say she had to be jolly because the boys would not have it otherwise," said Agnes, tears springing to her eyes and to Estelle's at the mutual remembrance of other words Olive had spoken in that same last conversation they had had with her on the way from the Ivy Vine meeting.

"The devotion of her brothers is beautiful," Miss Edmonia added softly. "And now, dear girls, as soon as she is well enough to see us, let us each one try in some little way, each week,

to give her pleasure, and, however long she may be confined to her bed or couch, never let her forget she is one of us."

For a few minutes the needles went in and out silently, while many a quiet tear was wiped hastily away, lest it soil the pretty fancy work which brought their income. It grieved Miss Morrison sorely to see her merry little circle so sad-faced, yet she knew God had sent the sorrow into their midst, and no doubt had some wise purpose in it.

"Do you remember poor Ah-lin, the unhappy young Chinese widow?" she presently asked. The girls looked up from their busy fingers with quick interest.

"I noticed, this morning, in the *Missionary Magazine*, an account of her death, and I thought you would like me to read it to you."

Little Agatha, at this announcement, clasped her hands in a startled way, as if not at all prepared for this disappointment to her faith and prayers, and while Miss Morrison read, the child sat gazing at her for a time, with the same uncomprehending expression.

The brief account simply said, "Ah-lin had lived a most unhappy life. With the usual concomitants of too early marriage, too much mother-in-law, etc., was combined a naturally

disagreeable temper. After she became a member of one of the missionary homes, and learned she had nothing to expect but kindness, whatever she might do or say, or be, she realized the difference between this and anything she had ever known before, and gradually came to understand that it was the religion of Christ which made the difference. Even before her sickness she tried, in her dumb way, to let them know the change taking place in her feelings. When laid on a bed of illness, her one thought was a longing to get well, that she might go back to her mother-in-law, and prove to her the power of this new religion by what it had wrought in her old, obstreperous charge. When she found this could not be, she gave up with the faith of a little child, and died blessing God that he had sent his Son from heaven to die for her, and sent these dear friends across the big ocean to tell her of it."

When Miss Morrison finished reading, little Agatha exclaimed, "There's one, isn't there?" and all turning to her, saw her face beaming in an ecstasy of reverent faith—joy, in the fact that one soul had been saved in answer to their prayers. They all felt it—the sweet, grave uplift of spirit which lingered on their hearts through the pause ensuing.

It was not strange they were not in a talkative humor this afternoon. It required an effort for Miss Morrison herself yet, "I must help my younger friends," she thought, "that they may not miss the good of it." A line occurred to her,

"The busy mind no moping knows,"

and one small matter suggested itself at once.

"Has Lena McBride ever been invited to join us?" she asked.

She caught a disapproving frown on some of the faces before her, but went on unheeding. "Lena gave me a hint the other day she would like to join if the dues were not too heavy—you know her mother's income is rather small—I told her I did not think our dues would need to scare her; then let the matter drop, because I felt the right of invitation was yours. It may be some of you have already—"

"She is such a rowdy!" Berta Blair demurred, candidly, in response to her leader's inquiring glance.

"Yes, I know, but she is thoroughly good-hearted, and the boisterousness is most likely due entirely to her mother's lack of opportunity to give her the attention and training which each of you have had."

She purposely left the subject there, well knowing her girls would not need a second

reminder to do the kind thing, and promptly changed the subject, that the implied rebuke might not have a chance to rankle.

“I met little Selina Lindsay a while ago, and she smiled at me as brightly as if she had a most grateful feeling toward every member of our band. I wonder if it is because she is so fond of knitting that she is always doing—”

“I think she is obliged to,” interrupted Estelle, shyly.

“Yes, you know, Estelle, she told us the day we were there how proud she was to be able to help a little on the family expenses!”

“Do you know what kind of knitting she does?” questioned Miss Morrison. “I am ashamed to say, although I have so often watched her with interest as I passed the door last summer, and admired her industry, I did not once think to notice what she was doing. Now that I am thinking we might get some work for her, I wish we knew just what she can do!”

“The day we went to see about her crutch,” said Estelle, “she was knitting some beautiful trimming out of thread.”

“If that be so, I am sure we could get orders for her, for that kind of trimming is not only pretty, but durable, and washes beautifully.”

When each of the girls had had something to say about what she could do, Miss Morrison added, "I am so glad you have started out on this line, for there is no helping more really helpful than to aid those who are trying to help themselves. Let us keep our eyes open, and see if there are not others whom we can help in the same way."

It was still a sober set, dispersing quietly to their homes, but it was the soberness of earnestness and renewed zeal. There is nothing so quickly relieves heart-depression from whatever cause as something to do for somebody else.

Selina Lindsay, to whom their thoughts all turned first, was a little girl of twelve years, who had been a cripple since her fourth year. She had been dreadfully burned by an exploding lamp placed near her little bed. The flesh on one limb had been almost consumed. Only after a long agony of suffering and the most patient and wise medical treatment, had it been brought to heal over, and then there were left some angry, painful sores on foot and ankle. These resisted every remedy, and Dr. Baylor finally admitted he could do nothing more. Thus the poor little thing had hobbled back into a life full of almost constant pain. The mother, never very robust, had a severe tax on her

strength, nursing a young baby and a heavy, helpless child at the same time, with another little girl of six to keep out of mischief, and all her own work to do. But when they found there was no hope of recovery, Mr. Lindsay bought a pair of little crutches for Selina, and on these she soon learned to get about quite independently, and even to relieve her mother of some little errands in course of time. Mr. Lindsay had always been perfectly devoted to the child, primarily because she had his mother's name. Before she got her crutches, he used often to carry her in his arms to his blacksmith's shop, where, in a chair brought there for her benefit, and placed at a safe distance from the sparks, she could be diverted for an hour or two watching the huge bellows, and the glowing iron and the regular motion of the heavy hammers. Although never entirely free from pain she always tried to keep smiling because, as she expressed it, "Papa is so sorry for me if I don't, and mamma has so many other troubles."

About four years after her accident her father listened to a traveller telling of a famous physician of Philadelphia and his wonderful cures. He said nothing of the impression made on him to any one until he had saved up money for the trip and ten dollars over to pay the doctor.

Then he got a new dress for Selina, and had his wife make it, and started off on the long journey with his little girl. .

Dr. Baylor could have given him valuable advice and assistance in the matter, but it was kept a profound secret from him lest he should feel hurt at their seeking another physician, or else persuade them it was no use to go. So, with what seemed to him such an ample amount of money in his pocket, and a note from his pastor mentioning him as a valued member of his church, he took passage in the stage-coach, which was to carry him and Selina to the nearest railroad station. Reaching Philadelphia, where he had never been before, he had all the *contre-temps* imaginable in finding the doctor, whose street address he did not know, and a boarding house adjustable to his means. He was gratified, however, in finding the great doctor interested in the case, and did not demur, even at his suggestion to leave the little girl at his infirmary for at least a month.

On his expressing a willingness to do so if there was any chance of her recovery, the doctor had handed him a folded paper, with a nod toward a spry-looking young lady sitting at a desk in the corner, and turned to another patient. Mr. Lindsay did not understand all this

formality, but supposing it was merely polite dismissal, laid his ten dollars, long ago put into an envelope and addressed, on the table before the young lady, and departed. He was whirling along on his homeward way before he bethought him to open and read the note handed him by the physician. It was a bill for one hundred and fifty dollars for board and medical attention. The hardworking blacksmith felt as if the mountains of his own native county had suddenly come down upon him to destroy him. But after a short, helpless struggle under the horror of debt, for he was a man who had never owed a dollar before in his life, he found one little hope popping its head up; if the man could only cure Selina, it would be hard, but he would find some way to pay for it.

At the end of six weeks he was telegraphed to come for her, and actually did bring her home apparently well. For several months no little lark in its own blue sky could sing more glad-some songs of praise than did Selina as she trotted around on two well feet.

But one hapless day she saw a red spot on the poor little foot.

She shut her eyes tight, and slipped her stocking on quickly and tried to forget. Never had she been so prompt to move at her mother's

bidding—she wanted to be going all the time. For several days she kept it to herself. When her mother at length noticed it, and called her husband to look, the child sobbed out her pent-up grief and disappointment in her father's arms, for there was no mistaking the old angry redness—the dreadful burning sensation that seemed to penetrate all her veins.

Mr. Lindsay wrote at once to the Philadelphia doctor, and got Dr. Baylor also to write, but he could only reply: he did not believe anything else could be done with hope of permanent cure, and strongly advised amputation as the only positive security against blood-poisoning. To this Mr. Lindsay could not bring himself to agree. Thus the little Selina had gone back to her crutches.

Mr. Lindsay had bravely begun to pay off his debt to the Philadelphia surgeon by littles, and had “made a hole in it,” as he jovially remarked to his little daughter not long before. But after this bitter disappointment he lost heart, took no longer interest in his work, nor, in fact, in anything save his little lame daughter.

Within a year he suddenly died, leaving only a modest home and a small life insurance. With this—their only living—Selina and her

mother tried hard to save a little each year on the debt, but with five to feed and clothe, two of them boys, how was it possible, and the child could only hoard her own small earnings from an occasional order from the pastor's wife, or such of it as could be spared.

The Ivy leaves only came gradually to know all this, but they never forgot her radiant face, when they gave her their several orders for trimming and promised her more.

CHAPTER IX.

REACHING OUT ITS TENDRILS TO DOUBLE MOUNTAIN.

“Slowly by God’s hand unfurled.”—*Anon.*

“IF you want to find people who truly need your help, you should go out to Double Mountain, and do a little missionating there.”

“Do you really mean it?” Effie Blair looked up with a half-startled deprecation on her earnest young face to the tall cousin who was springing this large proposition on her and her friends. She had never contemplated anything so grand as missionary work. Was he ridiculing their modest aims and accomplishments, or were they like children, who, in reckless play, exert their efforts to move a harmless handle, and stare with wonder as the sudden throbbing of great machinery pulses through their being and terrifies them with the consciousness of a force evoked beyond their control! She had heard her father use this illustration once, and it came back to her now with a disturbing personality.

For answer to her exclamation, Græme Gordon went on to tell her of a hunting tramp he and his college chum, Rutherford, had lately had

into some of its more unfrequented nooks. "In following the trail of a deer, we lost our way, and then a storm came up, and we were forced to seek shelter in the first house we came to. House! it was not to be mentioned within a week of the comfortable quarters some of our valley Dutch farmers provide for their stock. The hospitality of a pallet, shared with several rough mountaineers, on the floor of a low, ill-ventilated loft, was a mere matter of adventure to us boys; but the next morning we were glad to get out into the fresh air pretty early, and, while waiting for breakfast, amused ourselves with the half-dozen miniature mountaineers gazing at us from unkempt forelocks of dingy hair. We remembered it was Sunday morning, and asked the shavers if they were going to Sabbath-school. They dropped their lower jaw and grinned patronizingly, as if we were singing them a pretty song in a foreign language. It flashed over me there might be no Sunday-school within convenient reach. I drew the nearest one to me, and from all I could get out of him, they had never heard of church or Sunday-school. Those wretched little pagans have been pricking my conscience ever since, and if you all—I am sure I can find boys enough to do the work if you all—"

“You mean, if we will raise the money you will do the work,” said Effie, in her matter-of-fact way.

“Yes, exactly.”

“I do not know what the girls will say to it,” Effie mused, brightening slowly. “*I think it would be splendid.*”

Effie repeated to Berta what Græme had been saying to her, but it was after they had gone to bed, and they were too sleepy to discuss the subject, and, anyway, Berta’s comments were not very encouraging, so the whole matter lay in abeyance until Saturday.

But Effie Blair did not forget. The thought suggested by her cousin was stored away in a careful corner of her memory, and on Saturday afternoon, when Miss Morrison gave the customary opportunity for “suggestions,” it was unfolded to the girls in its crude simplicity, as nearly as she could in the words of her cousin, Mr. Gordon, without comment of her own, save in the emphasis of tone, the kindling of her eye, and in her closing words, “Don’t you think we might do something for them?”

She was hardly prepared for the enthusiasm with which it was taken up, and Miss Edmonia only tried to hold it in check to this extent, that they should, in a body, make an excursion to the

Mountain, and feel the way before definitely entering into any engagement or planning any specific work. The first bright spell of weather in May was decided upon as the time, and whatever conveyance or conveyances they could get to carry the party *in toto* as the mode, and the girls had plenty to do in the preliminary arrangements to keep them from growing impatient.

Excursions to Double Mountain were of quite common occurrence in Bridgeton. In fact, it was considered a part of the curriculum of every student in one or other of his four years; while those who were fond of hunting could find no better than among the ins and outs of Double Mountain. Besides this, there were frequent parties of strangers among summer tourists.

The weather did not disappoint them this time. It was as fine as if they had asked a special dispensation of Providence.

A large open wagon had been secured, which held their whole party, including, in addition to the regular members of the Ivy Vine, Lucille Wallace, who came as Miss Morrison's guest, and two of the young men whom Græme Gordon had drummed up as active partners in the missionary scheme. The other two were on horseback.

"Thirteen!" Lena exclaimed, counting them rather ruefully.

"A baker's dozen—good measure, you know," Miss Morrison spoke up promptly, smiling placidly down at their youngest member, little Agatha, who sat in her lap.

"I am so sorry Olive cannot be here with us," Estelle whispered, in a soft tone of regret, as Hugh helped her climb in, then blushed, fearing she had been unkind to remind him, as she met his great dark eyes, so full of tender yearning for the invalid sister at home.

Lena McBride could keep any party alive with her boisterous merriment and jokes. "We might get some ideas in millinery for our summer hats while we are out here," she giggled, gleefully. "Don't you think they wear pretty bonnets, Agnes?"

"Of course," said Agnes, a trifle sarcastically. "Suppose you do have yours made like them; no doubt you could start the fashion."

"They certainly have some advantages," observed Miss Morrison. "They are easy to make and splendid to keep off the sun. Have you seen any of the mountain women, Lucille? Though it is hardly time for them to begin to come with berries, unless you saw them last fall with nuts. They are generally lean and large-featured, with big, appealing eyes—"

“And calico dresses as lean as themselves—
Ha! ha! ha!” Lena was always chief laughter
at her own jokes.

“Yes, they use no starch in anything, and
their clinging skirts do not accord very well
with present styles. But the distinguishing
feature, as Lena hinted, is the bonnet. It is
made of some white material or calico, covering
an unbroken width of card-board, drawn down
around the face sun-bonnet fashion by the
crown, as utterly devoid of adornment as their
own simple lives.”

Miss Morrison’s smile was not all merri-
ment as her voice fell, and Græme Gordon
nodded over his shoulder a confirmatory “that’s
so.”

The objective point of all tourists is to reach
the highest peak of the more easterly spur in
time to see the sun rise. To do this one must rise
early, even if lodging a little up from the foot
of the mountain. With so large a party, they
could hardly hope to find lodgings in any one
house. Hence, had taken the precaution to bring
two tents along in case of need.

The shadow of the coming night falls early on
the mountain side; so early that our party
began to fear they had not given themselves
sufficient time to make necessary arrangements.

But presently, as they became conscious of the up-grade by the slowing of the steady, strong, willing horses, and the turning of the road, as it were, across the mountain's height, they spied a dim light in the near distance, and plucked up their courage.

Miss Morrison and Effie Blair, with Græme Gordon, were detailed a committee to interview the host and see what the prospect was for the night, leaving the remainder of the party to care for wagon and horses and to look out for a camping sight, if it should be called for.

Though the two-roomed cabin was rather small, the mountaineers were hospitably inclined, in their dull, undemonstrative way, and offered the use of the loft room. From where they stood they could see the tiny four-paned ventilator and the low-latched door at the top of the ladder. Græme's description of his night's experience came vividly back to Effie. She clutched Miss Edmonia's sleeve with a little invisible nudge, and said aloud, "As there are so many of us, I expect we had better be content with our tents, don't you think? It will not be cool enough to hurt, and then we can all be together."

A little barefoot girl sidled up from behind them and tried to hide under her mother's elbow.

The apparition reminded the committee of the prime object in coming to the mountain.

“You have no church on the mountain, have you, or near enough to attend?” Miss Morrison inquired; “or Sunday-school where the children can go?”

“Nō, there ain’t no church near’en Colliers-town, and I dunno ’es we’d go ef ther was. Mountain folks ain’t got much use for ’em, no way. As for the chillun, they ain’t got no shoes to wear, and if they had they’d want ’em to walk to town.”

“If there was a Sunday-school of your own close by, where the children could go barefoot if they wanted to, you would like that, would you not?”

“Dunno. ’Tain’t likely to come, and chil-lun’s mighty contrary.”

But the little girl was shining her eyes up into Effie’s in a way that made her feel they had really broken ground for their new enterprise.

When they returned to report, they found a place had already been selected for the camp, as far up as they could conveniently drive the wagon, which they had then drawn to one side, on a ledge of rock. The horses had been fed and tethered on a small patch of mountain-grass, and a fire made. The girls, under Lucille’s leader-

ship, were preparing to make some coffee and spread out the lunch, while the young men busied themselves with the tents.

The last rays of the setting sun peeped over the tips of the distant mountain tops, and smiled benignly upon this unusual merriment among the mountain glooms, and the moon showed her glad, white face from between white curtains, as if eager to participate in it.

The party were not particularly noisy or boisterous, only wherever there are live boys and girls together there will be plenty of fun and frolic, and, somehow, their laughter awoke strange echoes among the stern realities of mountain life. Why is it the mountaineer so rarely laughs?

The larger tent of the two had been arranged to include the wagon body, as safer sleeping quarters for as many as it would accommodate, and apportioned to the girls. Estelle, who always accepted the nubbings of everything as her right, was one of the three who occupied the "lower berth," as they merrily dubbed it. Lena McBride said she reckoned she had better sleep down there too, because she kicked so she might kick the foot-board out of the wagon, and Lucille insisted upon sharing the "out-station" with the younger girls. The other six packed themselves,

sardine fashion, into the straw of the wagon floor.

And now everything grew quiet and still about the camp; the murmur of low talk gradually sank into silent unconsciousness or gave place to Lena's unintelligible sleep-mutterings. Nobody dreamed that Estelle's heart was quaking within its sheltering ribs until sleep fled from her eyes. She was on the outside, next to the tent-wall, and, unfortunately, the edge of it, strained beyond its capacity, did not quite reach the ground. She could not help peering out into the darkness, with a fascination born of her cowardice. She lay watching the grewsome shadows sent by the moon to sport among the swaying trees and bushes, and began to suppose all manner of terrors and to wonder if there were robbers in the woods. She started uncontrollably at the dropping of a twig, and shuddered at the hooting of an owl. Presently she really did hear a noise; stealthy footsteps softly crunching the dry leaves of the steep mountain side above them, and coming, apparently, directly toward the tent. She turned herself carefully, so as not to disturb Miss Lucille, and raising the flap of the tent a little higher, saw truly a dark object creeping, this way and that between the trees, on all fours. In a moment there was another footstep and an-

other. Both of the last being beyond her line of vision, she could not tell whether they were of the same kind or not. "Was the being on all fours just a pretence, or was it a real animal? And were robbers after it, or after themselves?"

Estelle had been laughed at so much for her timidity, she feared the ridicule of her companions, and still heroically kept herself from screaming until she could be quite sure to scream was the best thing to do. "It might be only stray dogs, or sheep or goats, from some mountain home," she told herself. But, as the one in sight came nearer and nearer, there could be no mistake about it—it was a genuine, live black bear. The great lumbering thing came slowly on, moving sidewise to balance his huge body, his nose close to the ground, and giving forth low, satisfied growls, as if, being sure of a good supper, he did not mind taking his time to reach it. The other footsteps were closing in, though still not in sight. "Did bears go in packs like wolves?" poor Estelle wondered, a cold, shuddering horror wrapping her in its wet blanket. Then, in a dull stupor, she found herself calculating whether one bear could eat a whole person at once, and whether there would be enough bears to devour their whole party. For the first time she thought of the young men, with their

pistols. Surely, if they knew, they would do something for their protection, and she had determined to cry out for help, when suddenly the animal reared on two feet, and—a man stepped between him and the tent. At last her spell-bound voice was released; she could scream in earnest now. However, Hugh Baylor, for it was he, spoke at once reassuringly, “Do not be alarmed, Estelle; we’ll manage the old fellow!” Instantly one pistol was fired, then another, and the huge carcass fell dead, shot in head and heart, and sliding down the slope, landed almost at their feet. The students’ target-shooting had done them good service for once.

Of course, the report of the pistols aroused the soundest sleepers, and in explaining to the others how the danger was all over now, Estelle found her own nerves quieted, and, in the full assurance that neither bear nor robber could reach them without first facing the loaded pistols of their four protectors, she fell asleep so soundly she was the last to hear the turkey-call with which the boys notified them it was time to be up if they expected to reach the mountain top for the sunrise.

CHAPTER X.

BREAKING GROUND FOR PLANTING.

“The same desire which, planted on earth, will produce the flowers of a day, sown in heaven, will bear the fruits of eternity.”—*Joseph Roux.*

SUNRISE on Double Mountain was an old story to Miss Morrison; Berta and Effie had also seen it once before. Yet to a genuine lover of nature, and nature's God, there is in the glorious view something ever new, defying description by tongue or pen. Besides, to the rest of the party it was absolutely new. Little Agatha Wallace, standing in a tip-toe of expectation, her golden hair blown back from her fair, sweet face, and the blue eyes full of awe, was a picture to see, as the great, supreme ruler of the day slowly lifted his golden head from his pillow of clouds, and shed o'er the sleeping world the light of his countenance. Lucille and Virgie grew quietly reverent. Agnes, her poetic temperament stirred to its deepest depths of ecstasy, stood with head tilted to one side, drinking in as much as a soul could hold. Even Lena McBride forgot her rough merriment, forgot all

effort to attract attention to herself, and gazed with the rest at the grand, inspiring sight.

Into the solemn, reverent silence fell presently the soft chirping of a bird. His mate answered. Another, and another, and another, until the forests were alive with their morning greetings and the busy hum and whirr of the day's smaller lives.

With a long-drawn breath the souls of our party of young people came back from their trance of delight to the accustomed earth-born consciousness of self, and—wanted breakfast.

It was only a short, steep climb back, and the cold biscuit and ham, with Lucille's hot coffee, was a delicious feast for the fasters.

Breakfast over and the baskets repacked, they had the day before them for the Sunday-school canvassing. They decided to stroll around in parties of three or four, by the different roads and foot-paths, to see what they could find to do.

"I should like to go back to the house to which we went last night," said Effie, "and tell them exactly what we want to do, and ask for help and advice."

"Admirably thought of, I am sure," said Miss Morrison, warmly. "I believe you are right about it; the shortest, most direct way of coming to the point will be the best."

Estelle timidly expressed a desire to go with Effie, and was gratified by the eager way in which her offer was accepted.

It was thought best they should take Mr. Forsythe with them, while Hugh and Græme, as being more familiar with the mountains, should pilot other parties. Mr. Rutherford volunteered to be the first "to stay by the stuff," if some of the ladies would stay with him, and if some one or all the exploring parties would promise to be back in time to give him a chance.

"Lena and Agatha and I will keep you company," Miss Morrison promptly responded, "and we'll take our jaunt after lunch."

It was thus agreed to reassemble at the camping-grounds at noon for lunch, tell their mutual experiences while eating, and, as many as felt equal to it, make other short excursions, and be ready to start home in time to get over the roughest part of the road before dark.

There was a shade of disappointment on Agatha's lovely face, and Lena openly spoke her discontent. Miss Morrison, seeing this, laughingly reminded them, "A good general chooses his best soldiers for the reserve corps." And, seeing the cheery acquiescence of the older ones, soon shamed away the last vestige of dissatisfaction. Moreover, Miss Morrison took care not

for a moment to permit Lena and Agatha to feel they were less actively engaged than the others. They cleared away the debris from the morning meal, selected a new spot for the noon lunch, then concluded to look around for a spring less choked with leaves, or failing in that, to clean out the old one for a better supply of water. A shallow stream, but clear as crystal, ran across the road a short distance below them. Surely its source, if they could reach it, would be all they could wish.

“Do not go entirely out of sight, or, at least, of hearing,” Miss Edmonia called after them, for she was again allowing herself to be left behind, after arranging for signals if she should need them.

None of them thought it likely this little stream would lead them very far; it seemed too small. But the windings of that little brook were something wonderful. Pulling up slippery steeps by trees and bushes, down which the creeklet had flashed like a streak of silver; following it westward around an unexpected slope; climbing great masses of moss-covered rocks, over which it had leaped, a mimic Niagara, or through which it had trickled in laughing glee; losing it among a great patch of ferns, and finding it again as it slid down from its mother's

arms into a green-fringed basin of solid stone;— they never would have guessed they had gotten back to the same bunch of Anemones they had looked at so longingly at the top of the rock which formed the south wall of their encampment. They were utterly surprised when, in response to Mr. Rutherford's turkey-call, Miss Edmonia's cheery, "All's well!" came back from over the precipice at their elbows. They were looking around for some shorter path than the one they had followed by which she could join them, when they saw coming toward them a young nymph of the mountains. She was apparently a girl of some thirteen or fourteen years, slender and lithe, but strong of limb, her bare feet clinging to the mountain side as a bird's to its native twig. She carried a wooden pail in each hand, and was watching a squirrel, probably with intent of finding its haunts to trap it. Hence the party at the spring saw her before she noticed them. When she did she shied behind a tree, like the little wild thing she was, and took a long, deliberate look at them from behind her screen.

"Come here!" called Lena, impulsively. "We want to ask you something."

The girl started forward then, with her chin dropped, and her large, dark eyes looking ask-

ance from under a heavy crop of short, curly hair.

Unfortunately, Lena laughed, as she so often did, in simple good humor; but it startled the young mountain deer, and she looked back, as if about to shy behind another tree, or else vanish altogether. But little Agatha spoke, in her gentle, coaxing voice, "Do come. We want you to tell us about the spring, and how to get to it by the shortest way from out wagon." She went towards her as she spoke, her face as persuasive as her voice. They met half way, and walked back to the spring together.

"Do you live near here?" Agatha asked.

"Yes."

"How far?"

"Just round there," pointing toward the curve of the path.

"Do you always come here for water?" Mr. Rutherford asked.

"Yes."

"For washing purposes, too?"

"Maw washes her *clothes* down at the creek yonder," glancing up to be sure that was what they meant.

They coaxed her to sit down on the rocks beside them, and managed to draw from her many items of interest concerning her family

and the mountain folk in general, and in return they told her of the Sunday-school they were going to have. Her listless face lighted with pleasure as she came to understand it was something the children and young people might go to once a week and wear their clean, best clothes.

The only event that ever comes into the life of these mountain children is a trip to town. And that means, not months, but years often, of anticipation, and then the long, tiresome walk, tramping about town to sell their bucket of berries or nuts, often the curious gaze of strangers, occasionally the thoughtless smile or open laugh of ridicule from some boy or girl, who does not dream the mirth is causing pain.

Molly had an unusually quick mind, and entered into their plans with what you might call eagerness; told them of several families, neighbors of theirs, where there were children, and agreed to pilot them around.

Lena McBride had not failed to notice how her boisterous manner had startled the timid child of nature, and how much more readily Agatha or Mr. Rutherford, with their gentle, quiet ways, could draw the child out and get her to talk, as they wanted her to do, than she could with her giggling awkwardness, and, being fully as much in earnest as the rest, she made heroic

efforts to subdue all excrescences of uncalled-for mirth, and was rewarded by presently finding Molly turning to her with the same deference of interest as to the others.

As the girls were doing most of the talking, Mr. Rutherford took the opportunity to slip away unnoticed, find a short path for himself, and bring Miss Morrison to join the party at the spring. As they approached, returning, they were admiring the becoming softness of Lena's expression and manner, as she gave an occasional nod by way of emphasizing what Agatha was saying, at the same time she was gently swaying her body back and forth. She did not hear the shrill, chattering sound so close to her side, nor did Agatha. They did not see the small, gleaming eyes, fixed with venomous aim on the side of her fair face; but Molly knew from experience what the sound meant, and quickly discovered the wily head rising into the air from the centre of a shining coil, the slender, pointed tongue vibrating with almost invisible rapidity.

Before Lena and Agatha had time to question the startled terror in Molly's face, the alert mountain girl had seized them each by a hand, and, with a sudden movement, whisked them several yards from the spot. At the same instant Mr. Rutherford, who had also spied the rattler,

came down upon its neck with the full force of a large club, wielded by his muscular arm, and the dangerous reptile dropped its head helpless.

Mr. Rutherford explained to the astonished girls the philosophy of Molly's manœuvre, as she herself could not have done. A rattlesnake can only bite when coiled, and, in order to bite, can only dart his head a certain distance proportioned to his own length. If one can escape beyond that distance, the creature is not apt to pursue, unless he has been angered in some way; even then, he must stop and coil again before seriously dangerous.

Hence Molly had done exactly the right thing in getting the girls beyond his reach, for he was just ready to strike.

“How fortunate he was up on the rock, and did not poison the spring; but we must hasten back and guard the horses, as the mate will likely be about somewhere.” Molly was able to relieve their minds on this score by reporting that her father had killed one near here the day before. Still, they thought it best to return to camp, as it was nearing noon, and the scouting parties would soon be coming in. They took Molly with them to camp, that she might know where to find them after she should have carried home her buckets full of the clear, sparkling mountain

nectar, and gotten permission to spend part of the afternoon in piloting them to the places of which she had told them, in search of pupils for their Sunday-school.

As they all gathered for lunch, each party had an entertaining narrative to tell of experience and success, and were eager to start out on new excursions. But, on careful consideration, they found that all the plans which had been sufficiently matured had already been carried out, and no new ones presented themselves as practicable for the short half of an afternoon, except the one under Molly's guidance. So the remainder of the party rested and lolled, gathered ferns and flowers, chatting all the while, in groups or pairs, over the important events of the morning and the bright promise of their enterprise.

Nobody had thought of a room until the last party returned, radiant with success, and reported that Molly's father had offered the use of a large, new barn, which he had just finished building, the floor of which could easily be cleared for their use once a week, and some benches made for the accommodation of the children and teachers by the next Sunday.

CHAPTER XI.

UNCLE FELIX.

ON the night of their return from this pioneering trip to Double Mountain something wonderful happened in Professor Graham's household.

The girls had gone to bed early, so weary they slept through it all, and knew nothing until morning. Clara had been a little ailing, and kept her mother and father awake. Just as they were falling into their first sound sleep there came a knock at the front door.

Mr. Graham got up at once, and called from the window to know what was wanted, but no answer came. His wife, who was city-bred, and naturally suspicious of such late visitors, especially when they would not give any account of themselves, besought him not to go down, lest it should prove to be a trick of burglars.

Of course, man-like, Mr. Graham laughed at her fears, hooted the idea of burglars in a quiet, out-of-the-world place like Bridgeton. Hurrying into his robe and slippers, he went down and opened the door.

Mrs. Graham's foolish fears had not been allayed by her husband's indifference. She followed him to the head of the stairway, and once imagined the scuffle had indeed begun, consequent on an exclamation from Mr. Graham. But the excitement instantly subsided into a quiet-toned conversation, which, in some measure, did disarm her fears. Her curiosity, however, was proportionately aroused. What errand could bring any one to them at such an hour? She crept halfway down to the first landing, in her effort to make some new discovery, but could catch no word from the carefully lowered voices. At length the chill of the night air drove her to bed, and she dropped to sleep, she knew not for how long. She awoke at last, in still greater surprise, to distinguish the low tones coming upstairs, the mysterious visitor evidently being conducted to the guest chamber.

In a new quiver of excitement as to whether the guest chamber was in proper trim for its occupant, she listened alertly to her husband's movements, supplying his guest with water, towels, etc., and was ready with a volley of questions when he returned to her.

Yet something silenced her questions before uttered. She could not see the new, glad light in his eyes, but there was in his very movements

that which betrayed the joy-quickenèd pulse and a new, happy flow of the blood in his veins, and, without waiting to be questioned, he told her all she wanted to know.

It seems an older brother, Felix, whom he had not seen nor heard from for twenty-five years, had returned. She had been ignorant of his very existence. They talked the night through of the merry boy, with his never-to-be-forgotten pranks, the popular young man, the life of every gathering of young people, the universal favorite in the town where they lived. When little more than grown, he had fallen a victim to an unfortunate love affair. The girl had actually engaged herself to him, whether in mere flirtation, who could know; but Felix was in desperate earnest, as he was in everything he did, and was completely cut up when she told him she was going to marry another man. He vowed he would not believe it of her, even from her own mouth, until he saw the deed done, which he did. The night she was married he stood at the door and witnessed the ceremony. Immediately afterward he had sought his brother, and, with a white face, had told him good-bye.

In reply to his question as to where he was going, he merely said, "To the ends of the earth!" and slipped out of sight through the out-

side crowd. From that night nothing had been heard or known of him.

These intervening years, as it now appeared, had been spent in the employ of the British government in India.

By the time this hitherto unknown relative met the family in the breakfast-room next morning, they knew enough about him to give him an affectionate welcome. They were fully prepared to rejoice with their father in the return of this long lost brother, especially as this joy came to him in such opportune compensation for his great sorrow in Julian's death; but they were hardly prepared to find their new uncle, even within a few days, slipping into his own place among them, as if he had always been there. None were more surprised at this than Mrs. Graham. If he had come upon them in any other than the way he had she would have felt a certain extra reserve and restraint, born of the simple fact that he was her husband's kin. And if she had been given time to think, might have imagined their house already too full to admit of his remaining as more than a passing guest.

But he had come, an inevitable, in the middle of the night, and had staid without a question of anything else. However, he had not been there long before he succeeded in making him-

self so universally essential she only wondered how they had ever gotten along without him. "You know, Mr. Graham never has given me the help a wife generally gets in the little things of life," she remarked, in explanation of her ready dependence on her brother-in-law.

"Because papa is always so busy," Estelle was quick to interpose, extenuatingly.

"Yes, I know that very well," she said; "but, besides, men are differently constituted. Some of them do not know how, or if they know how to do, they do not know how to systematize their time. Is it not so, Brother Felix?"

"It is, indeed," he replied; "and Joe was ever slow to move—slow and sure, you know—dear old fellow!"

Uncle Felix always had time for everything. Baby Clara was never so happy as when seated on his knee listening to his wonderful songs and stories. He was a most willing escort for the older girls and their friends, though it took time for them to learn to call on him as freely as he wanted them to do, for the reason that they had been but little accustomed to expecting such attention. Their father had not waked up to the fact that they had gotten beyond their childhood, and Julian, alas! had considered it such a bore to *have* to go to places with them. Consequently,

they had generally preferred to stay at home, unless some outside opportunity offered. On the other hand, Uncle Felix found out for himself when he was needed, and saved them even the asking. Mr. Graham listened with the keenest personal interest to the most detailed and oft-repeated accounts of the fire and Julian's sad and mysterious fate. He felt the loss was almost equally his and his brother's, as Julian had been the only representative of the name, and he grieved with the bereft father, even as the brother had grieved with him in the bitter long ago.

He won the girls' hearts completely by his staunch encouragement of their Ivy-Vine work, especially that for the mountain folk, and succeeded in vanquishing the last prejudice of Mrs. Graham. Yet, useful as he was thus able to make himself in a variety of ways, he was not content to remain long an idle inmate of his brother's family. He opened a small book-store in the central part of the town, in order, as he said, not to be a loafer, and it soon became the loafing-place for everybody else. The students made it a place of rendezvous; all kinds of committee meetings, church and state, were held in his cheery "den," as he called the little room back of the store, which he had fitted up as a kind of office or sitting-room.

In his long absence and many adventures in foreign lands, and broken connection with his home church, he had not lost his religion, and promptly discovered a place for himself in the church of Bridgeton and its activities, though he came into it as a stranger. He gained a wonderful influence over the young men who habituated his corner, and, long before he was made an officer in the church, most of those who joined it had gone to him for counsel and encouragement in the first place. To the past, Mr. Graham never alluded, save in the most sacred confidences with his brother.

The two brothers were direct antipodes of each other. They always had been. As men, now, Professor Graham was grave and silent to a fault, except in his class-room. His broad, intellectual forehead, was reaching back toward his crown; that, and the premature stoop of his shoulders, caused him to look older than he was, while his eyes, still sufficiently clear and bright to redeem his age, were generally bent down in abstracted meditation. His brother Felix, older by two years, looked ten years his junior, despite the wreck of his early hopes. His rich chestnut-brown hair was heavily sprinkled with gray, but he still had a full supply of the mixture, and his figure, formerly less tall than his brother's, was

erect and slender, giving him full credit for the height he had. With a nature still vigorous, earnest, sympathetic and warm-hearted, fond of his jokes, too, and always ready to appreciate the jokes of others, he was good company for any age or sex at any time. In short, he was one of those men who are, in the nature of things, "in everything." No meeting for any purpose, business, charity or pleasure, was complete without him, and he was "Uncle Felix" to everybody, old and young. When there was a picnic or excursion on hand, no better or more agreeable chaperon could be found, and the young people never ceased to regret he had not gotten home in time to go with them to Double Mountain.

"I almost wish Professor Graham had been more like you," Mrs. Graham said one day. "It would have been so much better for the children."

"No, you must not wish that," he answered, gravely, "for if he had been any other than just what he is, I am afraid I could never have come back to him. And, as it is, the children have us both."

"Only, Julian never knew you," Estelle whispered at his ear.

He patted her cheek affectionately, but said not a word, only looked the deep regret he felt whenever the boy's name was mentioned.

CHAPTER XII.

UNCLE FELIX AS A "MISCHIEF-MONGER."

"Let the hopes of your own life moulder, if it must be ;
From heart and hands busy for others will grow fresh
hopes and more enduring." —*Anon.*

ONE Saturday afternoon, in the early part of the vacation, when Miss Morrison entered the room, where her girls were gathering, she perceived a very sensational hum of small-talk buzzing about among them. So much laughing and fun hardly betokens work, she thought, and wondered what had created the stir. Nor did she have long to wait.

"Oh! Miss Edmonia," cried Agnes, as soon as she caught sight of her, "do you know there is a real love affair going on in the church? Everybody is talking and laughing over it."

"Am I, then, the only one left out in the dark? and how is it a church affair?" smiled Miss Edmonia.

"If you have not noticed it," said Estelle, "it can only be because you are so far over on the other side of the church."

"Well, tell me quickly who are the happy

pair, and why is it so funny?" begged Miss Morrison.

"Do you remember the odd little woman who comes so regularly to church and prayer-meeting, no matter how cold or how hot it is, or whether it rains or snows, or hails cobblestones, and always smiles and bobs her head at everybody she passes coming out of church, whether she knows them or not?"

Yes, Miss Morrison recognized the portrait. "I have often felt the cheery influence of her happy good-natured face, and her faithful attendance at the meetings," adding softly, "I think I should like to be odd that way."

"Mamma knows her well," said Lena McBride, "she sometimes gets her to come and help her out when she has more work on hand than she can get through with. She says Jennie has lived for a long time with some cousins, and has no nearer kin in the world."

"Do they support her?" wondered Effie.

"They give her a home, and her food and clothes, but she has to do all the work. They have a lot of little children which keeps the mother busy, and Jennie Hoffman does the cooking and housework, and helps with the sewing. But Jennie says her cousin is "awful good to her; he gives her money for church regularly every week without her asking."

“That is thoughtful of him,” said Miss Morrison.

“Uncle Felix says she is so jolly and contented it does a body good just to look at her,” continued Estelle.

“And is she a part of this marvellous love affair?” queried Miss Morrison, as there came a pause.

“Part! I should say! She is the heroine—think of it! and she is a real old maid, too, at least forty, I am sure.” These exclamations came in chorus.

“And what about the other party?” asked Miss Morrison, who had kept her curiosity under admirable control during this slow process of satisfaction.

“Well, let me tell you!” exclaimed Agnes, seizing the floor.

“The first we knew of what was going on was last Sunday night. As we went into church, Uncle Felix touched father’s arm, pointing to where Jennie Hoffman sat in one of the short, room-for-two pews on our side of the church, with a big burly German beside her, and Uncle Felix chuckled, in church as it was, as if he thought it was the richest kind of a joke. ‘What mischief are you up to now?’ father asked. For answer, Uncle Felix whispered back compla-

cently, 'Don't they look well satisfied? I never did a better job in my life than when I suggested to him to go and ask Jennie if she would mind his sharing her seat.'" And we left him chuckling as if he enjoyed it as much as they, and as we passed them, we noticed they were chatting quite cosily while waiting for service to begin. When mother saw the big German escorting Jennie out of the lecture-room last Wednesday night, as if it were a settled matter, she told Uncle Felix he ought to know something of the man if he were going to make himself responsible for the match. He insists upon it he is all right—a fine old fellow; as regular at church and prayer-meeting as Jennie herself, and even at Sunday-school. In reality he knows just this much, that he is a laborer at the cooper factory. Oh! yes, and he used to be a soldier in the German army."

"Is he an old bachelor or a widower?" Berta wanted to know.

"He has never been married, as far as anybody knows," Agnes replied, "and that is the queer part of it, that both should live to be old without any thought of marrying, and then fall in love simply because they happen to be seated together in church."

As everybody had apparently told whatever

she knew to tell, the conversation gradually drifted to other subjects and matters of more serious import. The Mountain Sunday-school, of course, came first.

The four young men, according to agreement, had gone out the Sunday following their expedition, and, by an early hour of the afternoon, with the efficient help of Molly, had drummed up quite a goodly number of children and some adults, making a decidedly encouraging opening. Almost every week since, there had been more or less additions. At the close of the college term, Messrs. Rutherford and Forsythe were obliged to go home for the summer holidays, but Græme Gordon and Hugh Baylor were on hand, and promised to carry on the work as best they could, pending the return of their faithful comrades. Nobody dreamed how the work would grow on their hands during the warm weather.

The girls fully realized that this Sunday-school was a responsibility which would have to be met every month, and was on their shoulders. Various ways and means were proposed to increase their income.

“Why not ask the church people to help us?” suggested Virgie Wallace. “I am sure they would.”

“But we do not like to beg,” hastily interposed Agnes, thinking of her mother’s sometime comments, and dreading her disapproval. “Selling pin-cushions and things is rather too much like it for my fancy.”

“Any way, ought not we rather to depend on ourselves?” questioned Effie; “we have undertaken this work, and I am sure we can do it ourselves if we try.”

“Still, I think Virgie’s suggestion is worth considering; it does seem selfish to keep all this pleasure to ourselves. Only, let’s not call it *begging*, dear, and we will be less apt to feel as if it were,” said Miss Edmonia, smiling with sweet affection into Agnes’ eyes. “There is a great deal in the way a thing is done. If we start out with the conviction that these other good people are as ready to deny themselves for a worthy cause as we are, surely there is no begging when we ask, ‘Would you like to help us with our Mountain Sunday-school?’ ”

It ended in Effie and Virgie being appointed a committee of two to present the matter personally to as many as possible of the gentlemen of the congregation, that all who wished might make a small monthly contribution, to be called for by the girls. Uncle Felix was the first to put his name on the list, and he did it most

heartily. Others, also, appreciated the fact how large a matter it was for the girls to carry unaided, and enough was subscribed to place the Sunday-school on a solid base. This also left the young workers some margin for extraneous calls upon their interest. Thus the girls, while feeling the responsibility no less, were in no danger of being oppressed thereby.

“During the next two or three weeks the ‘church love affair’ developed rapidly. Jennie Hoffman, who was as artless as a child, gave herself away in the most absurd fashion whenever approached on the subject. One Wednesday night, Mrs. McBride came out close behind the lovers, and, her way home being in the same direction, she found herself following them for several squares. They were in animated discussion over something, but presently he stopped, slipped a little package into Jennie’s hand, then turned with slow reluctance and went in the opposite direction.

Mrs. McBride immediately joined Jennie, and opened upon her in good-natured raillery. “Why don’t you make your beau take you all the way home?” she asked.

Jennie tossed her head like a frisky cow, and tittered. “He wanted to,” she said, “but what would be the use? I live down here at the

Point, and he way out at the other end of town; I'm used to going home by myself, and he wouldn't have no time to stay to-night no way; so I told him I'd rather he'd come some other night, and stay longer." She dropped her head, shy as a girl, and grinned all over her homely face.

Then Mrs. McBride wanted to know what they had been discussing so animatedly before they parted.

With a fresh little outburst of enjoyment, Jennie informed her he had been begging to take her into the drug-store to get some soda water, but she told him he had better be saving his money; he might want it worse some day. "He said people always liked to treat their sweethearts once in a while," Jennie went on, "but I told him if I was his sweetheart, I knew I'd rather he'd save it."

When they approached a street lamp, Jennie began to fumble with the string of the package he had given her. She stopped under the lamp, with a shame-faced, apologetic laugh, and said, "I wonder what he's got in here anyhow! I reckon I'll have to see!"

"Why, yes," urged Mrs. McBride sympathetically, "open it by all means."

Jennie untied the string with nervous fingers,

and began unwrapping. It was the work of some minutes, for whatever it was had been as carefully protected as if it were extremely sensitive to external impressions of some kind. When the pavement was well strewn with brown and blue and pink and yellow wrapping paper, she finally came to a photograph—the broad, red, good face of Mr. Schmidt himself.

“Humph!” murmured Jennie, blushing and beaming with surprise and gratification, “he must have money to burn!”

Soon after this, it was generally known that they were actually engaged.

“I wonder where she will get wedding clothes, and how they expect to live?” queried practical Effie Blair.

“I believe Mr. Schmidt earns one dollar and twenty-five cents a day at his trade,” spoke up Estelle, “and Uncle Felix says, as for the wedding finery, there’s a job for us girls.”

“Let’s do girls,” proposed Effie, “we can get her a dress and bonnet to be married in, at least.”

The girls were surprised to find how greatly interested everybody was in the affair, and how ready to give a quarter for “wedding finery” when opportunity was given. They soon had five dollars in hand.

Then Mrs. Graham sent for Berta and Effie to ask how it would do to give Jennie a silver grey, almost new summer silk of hers, laid aside for mourning. They thought it would do finely, and Mrs. McBride offered to make any needed alterations. When some of the girls took it down to see about the fit Jennie seriously threatened to "giggle herself away to everlasting bliss," as Lena McBride expressed it, over the idea of possessing a silk dress.

Then Lucille and Virgie Wallace asked permission to supply the bonnet. The necessity of economy and an exacting good taste had taught them to make and trim for themselves, and so many were called for in the family there was generally material over for one more.

"But what are we to do with the five dollars which has been contributed?"

The question came to Effie's mind while they were talking to Jennie about the dress, and prompted her to ask, "Will you keep house or board after you marry?"

Jennie snickered. "Seems like you must be talking of somebody else 'stead o' me. They—" indicating her cousins with an odd little toss of the head—"they never thought I'd ever marry any more'n I did. Well, Mr. Schmidt says he's kinder tired boardin', so we went down

to look at some rooms over a grocery. They were cheap enough, but I told him I didn't like having to come and go through other folks' store, and we'd better go and look at some others we had heard of, which didn't cost but a little more. I was most sorry I had said anything," Jennie chattered on to the sympathetic girls, "because he began to look kinder sad like, and I thought maybe that was all he could afford, as we had to buy furniture and all, too. So I ses, 'Oh! I expect this will do all right, and we won't go to look at the others at all.' That made him chirp up a bit, and he says, 'No, we'll go and see the others anyhow.' The other rooms are lovely, so bright and cheery with a side door of our own, but I just told him we were not going to think about them at all *now*. Maybe they would wait until we got our furniture paid for. Then he looked at me so pitiful, and says he, 'Jennie, I'm afraid I can't take care of you as you deserve to be taken care of; I expect you had better give me up, and take the next chance.' Humph! says I, this is the first chance I ever did get; tain't likely I'm going to let you go. Well, he was tickled to death over that, and never said another word about giving me up." Jennie laughed in artless simplicity, hence the girls did not hesitate to join in.

A simultaneous flash of eagerness had passed between the girls at mention of the furniture, and Lena had burst out in the midst of Jennie's narrative with, "Girls, let's—" but at a premonitory look from Effie, she stopped. As soon as they got outside the door, they exclaimed together, "Suppose we try to get a set of furniture for them!" And with some addition to their five dollars, they did succeed in buying a neat oak set, including two rockers, a table and pretty shaded lamp. Never were two happier, more grateful people than Mr. Schmidt and his intended, fixing up the apartments of their choice with the handsome gift of the church people, and whatever else of the useful and needful they were able to purchase for themselves.

Before the eventful day arrived, Jennie had everything looking spic and span, floors as white as soap and sand and elbow-grease could make them, tins shining like silver, and even the stove and iron pots polished until you could see your face in them.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BRUISED IVY LEAF.

“Hope is like the sun, which, as we journey towards it, casts the shadow of our burden behind us.”—*Smiles.*

OLIVE BAYLOR had gradually recovered her health, until now she was able to sit in a wheel-chair the greater part of the day.

They were still living in the miller's cottage, but another double cabin had been thoroughly renovated and fitted for use, and the two connected by a covered passway. In Olive's room, which was the largest and best, her brothers had made many little improvements, adding to its comfort, convenience and cozyness. One Saturday afternoon, by preconcerted arrangement with “the boys,” Olive was carried over into the other part of the house, ostensibly for a change, and to see how nicely the male part of the household had fixed up their own quarters. In her absence, the Ivy Vine surreptitiously took possession of her room. They did it up in all manner of pretty toilet ornaments, table-covers and dainty draperies, all of their own manufacture,

with flowers on her lamp-stand and a growing ivy plant in the window by way of signature.

As soon as she was well enough, Olive had sent for the girls to come to see her. Hence she had been pretty well posted with regard to the mountain trip and the Sunday-school established there. Hugh being one of the active workers, she did not lose even the amusing or touching incidents which occurred in connection with it.

The girls had also faithfully reported the preliminary arrangements for Jennie Hoffman's marriage, and Estelle and Agnes were with her now, expressly to tell her of the last act of the drama, as far as it could be participated in by the outside world.

"O Olive, it was too funny for anything!" exclaimed Agnes.

"Well, do tell me all about it."

"You know, they were married Wednesday night at the close of the regular service."

"Did they go to prayer-meeting as usual?" Olive asked, her pale face alight with responsive attention.

"No, I do not think they were there all the time, or if so, they must have been very far back, or possibly in the pastor's study. Nearly everybody knew of the wedding or marriage, and the congregation was unusually large. After the

benediction there was a rather awkward pause. Dr. White came down out of the pulpit and took his stand on the platform in front, watching the door, the rest of us sat down—”

“And watched him,” interpolated Estelle.

“We soon heard voices at the door, especially Uncle Felix, prompting them in a very audible whisper, ‘Jennie, you take his arm,’ etc. Every face in the room broke into a broad smile and turned towards them. Mr. Schmidt was as dignified as a soldier should be, but it was all Jennie could do to keep her face straight. Of course, the ceremony went off all right.”

“Except that Jennie’s emphatic ‘I will’ provoked another grin,” commented Estelle.

“Well,” resumed Agnes, “after Dr. White had shaken hands with the bride and groom, we all went up to do the same. Mr. Schmidt still kept up his dignity, though his broad, good-natured face was intensely smiling, and at each offered congratulation he would exclaim with fervor, ‘Oh! I’ve got a pearl; I know it!’ As for Jennie, she would snicker right out in pleased surprise every time she heard herself called ‘Mrs. Schmidt.’”

“And do you know,” said Estelle, “it was so contagious that the rest of us couldn’t help laughing outright.”

“Wasn’t it absurd? and yet they were, underneath their smiling exterior, so dead in earnest.”

“And why should they not be dead in earnest,” said Olive, still laughing. “I have no doubt they are just as much in love as—either of you may be some of these days.”

“Do you really believe they are in love?” questioned Agnes, incredulously.

“Of course I do, ‘like to like,’ you know. It is very well, when it comes to falling in love, that all women do not fancy the same man.”

At that moment a shadow of pain crossed her ethereal face. Noting it, Estelle asked, with quick anxiety, “Are you suffering, Olive?”

“Yes, but I think it will pass off in a little while.”

“Sister, Rogue can—!” Elmer had bumped into the room in his boyish impulsiveness, stopping short, abashed at sight of visitors. However, he found his tongue again when he discovered who they were, and, turning to Agnes, who, like himself, loved all living creatures, said, “Ah! Miss Agnes, I have found something at last you cannot bewitch. I’ll bet you cannot make friends with Rogue in an hour, as you did with Rex! Rogue won’t let anybody touch him but me.”

“Why do you want him to be so cross and disagreeable?”

“Oh! I don’t know. I think it’s lots of fun to see everybody afraid of him when I know he will not do anything more than bark. Besides, I want him to guard my chickens, and I don’t care how sharp he gets.”

“But,” persisted Agnes, “I would much rather he should be intelligently sharp than simply cross.”

“Well, come on out, anyway, and see what you can do with him.”

As the door closed after them, Olive, as if eagerly embracing the opportunity, leaned towards Estelle and laid a tremulous hand on her arm. Her face, usually so placid, was strained and anxious.

“Estelle,” she said, in a low, tense tone, “tell me, do you believe Julian is dead?”

Estelle was so startled by the question she knew not how to answer, and Olive continued, calming herself by a marvelous effort of will for one so frail, “They will not let me talk about it, which only makes me sure they think he was burned to death in the house.” She shuddered, and her face twitched with agony. “If I believed that it would kill me,” she said, “for if he did go back into the house it was to get

mother's picture for me, and I could not stand it; I could not look you all in the face for a moment. But I do not, I cannot believe it," she went on, vehemently. "It may be foolish and unreasonable, but I have the most implicit faith and the surest hope we shall hear of him again—that he is alive." She was a little calmer now. "It is this hope which keeps me alive. Estelle, help me pray he may soon come back to us."

Estelle answered only with a responsive pressure of the hand she had clasped. She was one of the people who can speak and understand many things through the hand which the tongue refuses to utter. Moreover, she was thoroughly alarmed about Olive, who was leaning back in her invalid chair, utterly exhausted, her face a death-like pallor, and still repeating, with nervous iteration, "I must hope and believe!"

"Let's not talk any more about it now," Estelle begged. "You are so tired. Is there anything I can do for you? Yes, I too will hope and pray."

Olive did not reopen her eyes again, but the hand grasping Estelle's was twitching convulsively. Smoothing the hair back from the invalid's brow, Estelle was startled by its cold clam-

miness, and was about to go and call for some of the family when the door was opened by Hugh to usher in Lucille Wallace. The light-hearted words died unuttered as he instantly took note of his sister's threatening condition, and, for once in his life, forgetting to offer a visitor a chair, he hastened to Olive's side with the needed restoratives.

As he bent over his sister's chair, pushing it back to a level by a deft movement of his foot, he cast a questioning, reproachful glance at Estelle, and could not help seeing the painful flush which instantly mantled her face. She was fully conscious that Olive would not have broached this subject to any one else, therefore she was, though unwittingly, the cause, as Hugh surmised, of her friend's exhausted condition. She got up as if he had bidden it, and went out. Lucille, who had been left standing at the door, saw none of this, but came forward, now yielding to a beckoning look from Hugh, and took the chair Estelle had vacated beside Olive.

When assured that the convulsion had been successfully warded off, Hugh left Lucille in charge, and slipped off to join Estelle on the rustic seat under the wild grape vine beside the door. He was not surprised to find her looking tearfully hurt and dejected. He knew how

sensitive she was, and that it was he who had wounded her. He had sought her to make what amends he could, and also as a safeguard for the future. If he had rightly conjectured, they had been talking of Julian. He was careful this time in broaching the subject, and while Estelle readily and penitently admitted it to be true, he took all the blame upon himself for not having warned her to avoid the subject.

“Father says,” he added, “it is part of sister’s nervous condition to be morbid. She imagines she was in some way responsible for his death, though she knows, as we all do, that he got out of the fire safely when he so nobly risked his own life to save hers. How he could have been caught by the flames afterward is one of those distressing mysteries which, I suppose, can never, by any possibility, be solved. Estelle, this conversation is very trying to you—” She was sobbing convulsively, in spite of every effort to control herself. “But”—he laid his hand gently on hers, with the affectionate familiarity of an older brother—“ I know you love Olive, and would not for the world do her harm.” His own manly voice was tremulous with feeling. “Father said we must try, as far as possible, to keep her from thinking or being reminded of anything relating to the fire until she should

grow strong enough to remember and talk of it calmly."

And now, having said all that was necessary, Hugh kindly sought to beguile Estelle away from this distressing subject by talking of the Mountain Sunday-school, a common interest to both. Then he took her down the hill to the spring. She was not slow to take the hint, and laved the hot, red eyes and cheeks in the cool spring stream until they felt fresh again. They wandered on by his flower plots, and gathered a rich cluster of maiden-blush roses, which, he said, always reminded him of her, but the counterpart he had provoked was much too vivid to verify the likeness. By this time they could venture to hunt up Elmer, Agnes and Mr. Forsythe. All five came into the house together, the little fox-terrier leaping and jumping to Agnes' hand, as if his master were nowhere, in Elmer's freshman parlance.

Olive, though still pale and weak from her recent attack, was almost her own cheery self again, under Lucille's soothing ministry and companionship, but her eye followed Estelle yearningly. She knew, even better than her brother, how intensely sensitive the girl was, how morbidly inclined to reproach herself causelessly.

When eyes and hands met, however, in the good-byes, Estelle answered her unspoken question with a smile so satisfying and unclouded Olive could not but be content, and for a long time the subject, the mention of which had produced such disastrous effects, was not again broached between them, though both knew full well it was never forgotten in any thought or prayer for each other.

CHAPTER XIV.

A COLLEGE AFFAIR.

MRS. WALLACE'S parlor was the living-room—that is to say, the family gathering place. As she was accustomed to say, “My family is so large now, there is no other room that will hold us all with a small space over to stir around in.”

There was nothing fine or stilty about it, but there was always a chair, or two chairs, just where wanted, and facing in the most desirable direction, or if it did happen to be otherwise, one felt no hesitancy in moving it. Indeed every article in the room was on rollers, and subject to the pleasure of any occupant.

Then, in summer it was always cool and fresh and sweet, with cut flowers gathered from the abundant yard, and in winter it was warm and well lighted, with books and magazines lying about in tempting places. The family were accustomed to assemble here to enjoy the evening-fall, and the young men who boarded there got in the habit of dropping in early to enjoy it with them. It is not everywhere a young man

off at college can find a home like this in his boarding house, but Mrs. Wallace always thought of each one as "some other mother's little boys."

This new session had brought her all the boarders she could accommodate. The five who had been with her the winter before—Forsythe, Rutherford, Duncan, McCann, with Leonard and Stanley Sinclair—again occupied their old rooms. Besides these, five others, rooming elsewhere, took their meals with her. Of these we need only mention Russell Brent and Gasper Comes, who were room-mates and devoted friends.

One evening Brent entered the door with the pugilistic exclamation, "I'd have knocked him down if I had been in Stanley's place!"

"Humph!" interjected Comes at his shoulder, and a smile, more or less audible, passed around the group at the picture of Stanley Sinclair, slim, pale, high-toned, shaking his fist in the face of Professor J. Carr Carter, an athlete in size and strength, as well as in intellect.

Fortunately, on this particular evening, Len and Stanley Sinclair had gotten home in time to have their ruffled feathers smoothed down by gentle womanhood before Brent came in with his swagger of fighting talk, but it was not

always so. Professor Carter, who had been elected to fill the chair of Greek in the place of good old "Father Parks," who had died during vacation, had come to the college with a reputation already won, not only for brilliant attainments and talents, but for indomitable integrity in the grading of his classes.

This had been a chief attraction to the trustees who aspired to raise the standard of scholarship somewhat in the college. They had, moreover, in ill-advised zeal, forewarned the new professor that the students needed reining up from the over-leniency of the popular predecessor. This was peculiarly unfortunate, inasmuch as Professor Carter was naturally rather curt in manner. Several times he had struck fire in one and another of the students by an over-peremptory tone or a cutting silence. "It is only the intolerance of genius," Mother Wallace would say, if it happened to be "one of her boys." "Who knows but one of you may be there some day!" This was an oft-repeated anodyne, for it tickled their pride to remember the young professor was the foremost Greek scholar of his age in the United States, and among the first irrespective of age.

Stanley Sinclair and the professor touched only on one point, their love for Greek, and the

preëminence in his own specialty aroused Stanley's devoutest admiration. Alas! this glare of superiority—the having attained the pinnacle toward which his own ambition was straining—overwhelmed Stanley with such self-abnegation that he could never be himself in the class-room, or in the presence of the professor. At the same time, this painful *mauvais honte* and self-abasement rather excited the professor's contempt. He snubbed the boy so openly as often to excite the indignation of the whole class, and Len, to whom his younger brother was the impersonation of all the admirable qualities and talents he himself had missed, would grow more furious and retaliative by far than if the professor had threatened himself with some personal indignity. The two brothers were unusually popular among the students, and though Stanley could, by the earnest persuasion of his own knightly gentleness, prevent overt acts on the part of his brother, he could by no means hinder the continual flings of retaliation and championship from the others.

This state of things went on for several months, aggravated rather than otherwise by time. Stanley had never gotten any other than the highest marks in his life; now they frequently fell below par. He grew morbid, de-

spondent, supersensitive; Len, bitter, reckless, vindictive, while the young professor, from being cold, indifferent, supercilious, became severe, sarcastic, and at times absolutely rude.

It was all the Wallace family could do to keep down the obstreperous feelings of resentment and ill-will. Again and again, as the subject was broached at the table, or in twilight discussions, they would explain away or find some excuse for the professor's irritation or irritating manner, only to have their plausible apologies knocked to atoms by the professor's own rough hand or tongue in the next act of the drama.

"One might imagine," said Virgie, one day, "that he had some direful domestic skeleton in his closet haunting him with rasping tragedies."

"Yet, he has a lovely little wife, who is evidently devoted to him," said Lucille.

"Some one told me his little child is delicate," Mrs. Wallace remarked, extenuatingly.

The crisis came, as it had to come. It happened on this wise. Stanley, without a thought of disrespect, which would have been utterly foreign to his nature, became so enthusiastic over the lesson one day, he forgot his habitual self-abasement, and took issue with his preceptor over an opinion expressed.

Whereupon the professor answered him with brusque, sharp emphasis, "The young gentleman will please to remember he is *student*, not teacher in this class."

Sinclair bit his lip, with flashing eyes; his slow temper, buried under such a might of gentleness, was touched at last, and blazed.

"Does he think I am a child to be told to shut my mouth!" he muttered. And, still without any thought of intentional defiance, got up and left the room. The professor irately ordered him back, but the young fellow did not even hear him. Whereupon, as is often the case, he vented his spleen over the heads of the, on this occasion, unoffending ones who remained.

The class was dismissed in a buzz of excitement that rapidly spread throughout the college. "How great a matter a little fire kindleth!"

Russell Brent was in his element. "I have never been good so long before in my life," he had told Mrs. Wallace only the night before, adding, "I am fairly spoiling for some deviltry, if Len and Stanley Sinclair do not soon give me a chance, I will have to make a break on my own behalf."

Mrs. Wallace had laughed heartily, never dreaming of prophecy in his fun.

Brent was shoulder to shoulder with Len Sin-

clair now, and Comes, with his handsome, covert face was at his other elbow. When they came to supper, Brent was as gay as an Indian dancing his war dance.

"It's lots of fun to fight other people's battles," he said to Lucille.

"Why, have you been trying it?" she smiled, innocently.

"No, but I am going to do that same." He raised his voice to a grandiloquent pitch, and spoke sententiously, "From this time forth, I espouse the cause of Stanley Sinclair, and, believing it to be entirely just, will maintain it against all adversaries."

"Hear! Hear!" promptly responded his fellow-students around the table in hearty sympathy.

Lucille and Virgie and Mrs. Wallace looked at each other, and then searchingly from face to face around them in vague, elusive apprehension.

What talking followed was mostly between the young men. There was an evident avoidance of *tête-a-tête* with the Wallace family.

A hectic flush had mounted to Stanley's face as Brent spoke his name, and he bit his lip in resolute repression of any personal response by word or look. As they left the table he gripped

his brother's arm, drawing him away from the rest, and Agatha heard him pleading, "Len, if you have any regard for me or my future, keep out of it!"

Little Agatha, with her keen, instinctive perception of change in the mental or moral atmosphere, could not but be conscious of the unwonted excitement, and crept up beside her friend, Mr. Forsythe, begging to know what the students were going to do.

"Just have a little college-boy fun," he told her, but turned away from her questioning so abruptly she was highly disgusted, and said she knew the boys were up to some mischief, and had drawn Mr. Forsythe into it; then worried all evening, and could hardly go to sleep for wondering.

Uncle Felix, also, had had his suspicions. Half sentences caught from one and another of the young men as they talked in eager groups in his store; the unmistakable leadership of Comes, whose unspeaking face he mistrusted, and of Brent, whose fearless dare-deviltry bespoke him dangerous; the buying and discussing of certain materials, as if of common interest to them all—these and similar signal-lights led him to fear something in the wind which would breed trouble, and the drawing off from the

other boys of Stanley Sinclair, and his uneasy restlessness whenever he saw them grouping, clearly indicated that he had an unwilling part in whatever was going on. Mr. Graham had tried more than once to ingratiate himself into the thick of the discussions, as heretofore he had always been welcome to do. This time they laughingly gave him the cold shoulder. "I am afraid you are too good to be trusted," Brent had said, good-naturedly, as he turned on his heel and left him.

This was just before supper, and not a man of them came near his store again that evening, except one of the freshmen, to buy a little black paint.

The sun went down in red wrath. The chapel bell rang the hours as usual. Lights went out over the town, and later the college dormitories fell under the sombre spell of night. The last twinkling student's lamp was extinguished.

As the town clock on the tall spire of the oldest church tolled out its twelve silver chimes of midnight, muffled figures issued stealthily from the many doors of the dormitory. Not a click of the well-oiled latches marked their egress, and the hushed footsteps on the campus might have been those of ghosts.

A little way down the smooth slope of the

lawn, exactly in front of Professor Carter's house stood a large oak tree, with a great horizontal limb reaching out toward the college buildings. Under this the ghostly shadows were dimly gathering. There was no moon. Even the stars were hiding their bright faces behind a cloud from the deed that was about to be done. A *posse* of the imps had levied on somebody for a wagon, and the shadows parted, right and left, before the human team, leaving way for them to draw it up under the giant arm of the tree. The wagon was not empty. Two dark objects moved in unison in the midst. As it stopped in the centre of the deepest gloom, the hand of the rear occupant flashed the light of a dark lantern over the face and form of the other.

Suppressed murmurs of applause swept over the dusky assembly, as they recognized the classroom expression of the new professor. The artist had done his work wonderfully well.

"Swing her up!" came in the low, leading voice of Russell Brent.

A multitudinous chorus murmured its assent. No one heard the voice on the outskirts of the crowd that trembled with its pleading—"Don't do it! please don't do it!" or if Russell Brent heard, he purposely drowned it with his still more emphatic, "Swing her up!" and the shroud-

like cloak could not conceal the tall, sinewy form and long, graceful arms of the Spanish Creole, Comes, as he lifted the effigy from the wagon, and thus gave the signal for it to be slowly drawn up between heaven and earth beneath the outstretched arm of the noble tree, with the light of the dark lantern continuously on its face. There the merry-makers, who thought they had for once found their fun in the line of just requittal, left their night's work to await the revelations of the morning light, the crowd silently melting away as they had come.

None noted a pair of alert, detective eyes which had followed the whole thing from the beginning, passing in and out among the throng, and recognizing many of the faces, grown careless in their excitement. They disappeared with the rest. Only Stanley Sinclair was left with his brother Len. Stanley threw off his cloak, and, sitting down on a stone, gazed helplessly up at the absurd caricature dangling from the limb of the tree in the dim light of the newly-risen moon.

"I don't see that any great harm has been done," Len muttered, sullenly. "Not half what he deserves, and I don't see why I couldn't have a hand in it!"

“I am so glad you didn’t. Oh! Len, it will be the greatest comfort of my life that *you* had nothing to do with it.”

“Neither had you?” Len spoke quickly, with a suspicious interrogation.

“I wish my conscience were clear in the matter, but—I fear I did it all—with my one rash speech!” He put his face down in his hands in utter dejection.

For a moment there was a struggle with Len between his love for his brother and his hatred of those who caused that brother pain.

At length he said, with slow reluctance, “I can take it down, if you want me to?”

“Could you, Len?—and will you? You are the dearest brother man ever had!”

CHAPTER XV.

AFTERWARDS.

“If we had known those feet were weary,
Climbing up the hills of pain.” —*Anon.*

WHEN the chapel-bell gave an ominous twang at an unusual hour next morning the students easily surmised what it meant. Those who passed the old oak tree, Russell Brent among the number, took warning notice that the effigy had already been removed.

“I’ll bet that sneak, Stanley Sinclair—” he muttered, in sudden revulsion of wrath.

They were not surprised to find the President in a royal rage of indignation. His address spoke impressively of the honorable standing of the college from its foundation; of the high standard hitherto upheld by the students—as *gentlemen*—and now, in the seventieth year of the institution, when the faculty had been congratulating themselves on having an unusually fine set of young men, to have them blot their record with a disgraceful episode, such as that of last night, was mortifying in the extreme, besides being derogatory to themselves and to a State hitherto held preëminent for hospitality and courtesy—”

“Courtesy begets courtesy!” muttered Brent, and all the President’s eloquence was lost for the time on him and those who took his cue. Hence the students, safe under the shelter of numbers, defied the worst, and refused to confess or to betray the leaders. So the fiat went forth, “Ten demerits against every student until the guilty confess.” At the same time the class-rooms were closed until further orders.

Of course, by breakfast-time the whole affair, as far as it could be known, was blown by the winds to the uttermost bounds of the town, and the students were beset by eager curiosity to tell the rest. The bell-call at so early an hour roused everybody to questioning, and some prowling darkies, curiosity drawn, told of the goblin work they had caught a glimpse of on the college campus; from the faculty meeting, preceding the summoning of the students, leaked out a little more, and it was not hard, with what everybody knew of the condition of feeling existing toward the young professor, to guess the rest. But those of the students who had taken no part were as mum as the most active participants, accepting their share of opprobrium and demerits rather than betray their fellows.

Brent’s spirits were in nowise less high than they had been the day before. He even went so

far as to hold up to ridicule the speech of the President. "I wish you could have heard the old gentleman pleading, with tears in his eyes, that his dear students would not disgrace their *alma mater*, and bring his gray hairs down in sorrow to the grave, by withholding the name of the wicked fellow who, for reckless fun, had gone out in the dark alone and swung up the ghost of a beloved professor, in order to worship it, and then, for a little more fun, taken it down again. Oh! it was rich, rare and absurd—as if a fellow was going to tell on himself for a lump of sugar."

With Russell Brent's intonations and gestures it was impossible not to laugh, as he ran on, in a continuous stream of nonsense. But Lucille and Virgie laughed, with an anxious gravity treading on the heels of mirth, while little Agatha smiled because the rest seemed to think it funny, but candidly averred, "I do not think it is funny at all until I know what you all did."

The Wallace girls knew Professor Carter very slightly, and were in such full sympathy with the boys it did not seem a very dreadful thing that they had done, yet felt it must be, or the faculty would not be treating it as such a serious matter.

The whole time they were at the table little

Agatha, but little distracted by the grandiose rhetoric of Mr. Brent or the forced gayety of the others, watched the faces, one and another, with her penetrative gaze, and this was her conclusion, spoken with her seer-like eyes fixed on Brent, as they were leaving the house, "If I were the President of the college, I would not try to make them *all* tell who was the leader. I would just ask Mr. Brent up and down if he did not know."

Of course they all laughed uproariously at this piece of childish wisdom—all except Stanley Sinclair. Stanley cared little for the threatened demerits, as far as he was personally concerned. He had been well aware for some time that his low averages in Greek would lower his general standing far below what it had ever been before, hence this deficiency in deportment did not distress him much. Nor had he as yet begun seriously to disturb himself over the ban laid upon others, in a sense on his behalf. Yet the whole affair hurt him more and more, as the slow hours of the long day passed with the classrooms closed.

He felt as if a taint had fallen upon his knighthood. It was such a little thing to make a fuss about, such a cruel retort to throw contempt on a stranger for a few, perhaps uninten-

tionally, rough speeches. Stanley's conscience would listen to no extenuation from himself nor from Len. It was childish retaliation, and he was most to blame, for it was his careless, thoughtless words, which had appealed to the childishness, the dare-devil spirit of the students under cover of championship of a weaker friend.

When the stars came out that night, they saw a solitary figure pacing the campus with slow, troubled tread, beneath the memorable oak tree.

The young men were supposed to be in their rooms for the night, though it still lacked a few minutes of the last bell.

Stanley could not make up his mind to go to bed without having made the *amende honorable* to the Professor first, then to the students, and then to the faculty through the President. He must not give his courage time to cool. A few strides brought him to the house; a light step or two across the porch to the door. But, in passing the window of the study, a sight met his eye which caused a sudden revulsion of feeling, and almost drove him from his purpose. Professor Carter sat by his table alone, with his head bowed on his hand in the most abject dejection. No blind nor curtain shielded him from the gaze of a possible passer-by.

The man sank low in Stanley's estimation;

he could not help it. As hard, and bitter, and critical as he had often felt toward him, he had given him credit for manly independence. He had never dreamed he would take so to heart a piece of school-boy fun. The young lip, so unused to any other than gentle curves, curled with something of haughty contempt. But, then, the necessity of righting himself was entirely independent of anything the Professor might be, or do, or—seem.

The front door stood slightly ajar, yet Stanley's unaggressive knock was not heard, not even when repeated. There was nothing to do but to enter and knock softly at the study door.

"Come in!" came from within. The Professor had lifted his head, but not a gleam of pleasure, or relief, or gratification, flitted over the stern, bitter, broken face, not even surprise. Stanley's humbly-worded apologies and confessions died on his lips in wonderment. Surely the man must surmise what was bringing him there at that hour!

For several seconds they gazed at each other mutely.

At length the Professor got up and held out his hand, not a muscle of the stolid features moving, and pointed to a chair, with a low, mechanical murmur, "It is kind of you to come."

Instinctively Stanley felt there was something more than he knew. His pity stirred to see a strong man bowed like that, though he knew not for what—certainly it could not be, as he had imagined, mere mortified self-appreciation. He began to wonder if he had ever heard at all of the foolish affair of last night, and to feel mortified himself that he could have attached so much importance to it. Concern for his own tarnished shield went glimmering into obscurity before this great unknown shadow. All of his own grievances were forgotten as he said, with genuine manly sympathy, "Professor, I fear you are in some kind of trouble. Is there anything I can do to help you?"

With a quick start of surprise, Professor Carter looked down at his visitor, and for a moment his stern lip quivered uncontrollably. "You do not know?" he questioned, then turned dully and led the way into the adjoining room, treading softly, as if afraid of awakening a sleeping babe.

A small lounge-bed stood in the middle of the room, draped in snowy white.

The man knelt beside it, and, with tender, reverent touch, turned down the covering from a waxen cherub face of marvellous beauty—a little golden-haired girl. Oblivious for the time

to all else, he moaned, in bitter sorrow, "Oh! my baby! my baby!"

How Stanley's heart smote him. How puny the indignity they had offered to one lifted so high above them by the sacredness of grief. The insult had thus far evidently missed its mark, and it should for all time, if he had aught to do with it, was the young man's resolve.

Stanley knelt on the other side and gently dislodged a fly out of place on the perfectly chiseled nose.

"How long was she sick?" he questioned.

"How long!" the father echoed, drearily. "Her short life was one long day of suffering that I *could not* bear for her." As he spoke he turned the cover down, displaying two tiny hands, crossed over a pitifully deformed little body. And the strong man, whose arms had been her cradle night after night, walking the floor for hours to soothe her into a few moments rest, leaned his head on the little cot and sobbed like a child.

When he looked up at last, and saw tears of genuine feeling coursing down Stanley's cheeks, he was greatly moved. Their hands met in a warm, strong compact of friendship across the lovely little soulless casket of beloved clay, and the old feud was dead.

All through the quiet hours of the night they sat in the study and talked. It was a relief to the father to tell how beautiful and perfect the child had been at her birth; of the appearance and slow development of the terrible disease which had made her a hopeless, helpless sufferer; of her sweet and wonderful patience for the past year or two, and of the fiery ordeal of suffering in which her life had closed at last.

"I cannot but be thankful it is over, for her own sake," he said at last. "It was fearful even to witness such agony; her mother could scarcely stay in the room at all. What must it have been for a little, frail figure to have to endure it! Therein is the mystery of it. Why should it have to be? *She* had never sinned. And if it was for *my* sin, why could not I bear the penalty myself?"

"The same old stumbling-block of Job's friends," ventured Stanley, modestly, "and though God so manifestly disproved their reasoning, Christ had to meet the same fallacy among his disciples—'Master, who hath sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'"

"You think it was not punitive?"

"Most assuredly."

"Then what?—remedial?"

Both were silent for a moment. Then Professor Carter said, gently, "Thank you."

When Stanley rose at length to go, Professor Carter, holding his visitor's hand between his own two, said, "I fear we have sadly misunderstood each other, hitherto."

"I fear we have, and, not knowing this"—looking down on the little maid, and involuntarily murmuring, "She is not dead, but sleepeth"—"I came to acknowledge my part of it and ask forgiveness."

"It is already forgotten, and it shall not be so any longer, shall it?"

He looked down at the boyish figure before him with a pathetic yearning in his deep, sad eyes.

"Indeed, it shall not!" responded Stanley, warmly. "And I cannot tell you how much I shall enjoy the privilege of admiring you as much as I wish."

"Love—not admire!" the other said, with a touch of his old curtness, wincing before the self-pointed reproof.

"Yes," admitted Stanley, flushing under the correction, "love I should have said, truly, for there has been no stint in my admiration all the time."

Thus they smiled and parted. Thenceforth not prejudice only, but the natural restraints between professor and student, were annihilated. The two became as David and Jonathan.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SLIGHT BREEZE AMONG THE IVY LEAVES.

NOBODY except Len knew where Stanley had spent the night, but everybody knew that Professor Carter's little daughter and only child had died at six o'clock that afternoon. The most reckless of the students could only mention the events of the night before in hushed, regretful whispers. Even Russell Brent, slipping his hand into Stanley's arm as they passed out of the dining-room, said, "I called you some ugly names, old fellow, when I thought you had played 'king's evidence' to the President, and taken the image down before it had done a mite of good. But I take them all back. As things have turned out, I am glad somebody did take the thing down. It would have been pretty rough on the young porcupine, under the circumstances. Perhaps some of these days we will try it again when it will not look so mean."

"I am sure we will never want to do it again," said Stanley, warmly. "We will all like the Professor better, no doubt, if we will give ourselves time to know him."

Stanley was then on his way to see President Blair.

Without incriminating any one, he made a clean breast of the whole affair, acknowledging they had been too hasty in taking up a prejudice against a stranger, adding, "We are all so deeply mortified to find that at the very time we were having our ugly fun the Professor was suffering under the deepest affliction. I do not think you need apprehend any further trouble. And, don't you think, sir," the young man concluded, "it would be as well—the most kindly thing you know—not to mention the disgraceful affair to Professor Carter, for I am pretty sure he does not know of it as yet, until such time in the future as he can look upon it merely as the failure of a poor joke?"

Stanley was very much in earnest, and little dreamed the man to whom he was talking had witnessed the whole occurrence, and could, therefore, fully appreciate the noble self-abnegation which was willing to assume the opprobrium of what he had tried in vain to prevent.

As these events all came in between two Saturdays, there was quite a good deal to talk about when the girls next met, a buzz of "they says" and "I hears." Berta and Effie Blair and Estelle and Agnes Graham naturally took the

part of the faculty, and thought it was a dreadful shame for the students even to plan such an indignity on one of the professors. On the other hand, the Wallaces, being brought into such close, daily contact with a part of the students, just as naturally sympathized entirely with them. Miss Edmonia thought it very well for them to have an opportunity to air the *pros* and *cons*; but she was a wise little woman, and was watching the exact moment to switch them off from the subject before the discussion could grow uncomfortably warm. Berta had just said, with that haughty toss of her pretty head, "I think Russell Brent must be one of those Kentucky desperadoes the papers have so much to tell about!" And Virgie had answered, with a defensive kindling of her quiet eyes, "Mamma says she never saw a more gentle-hearted man, to be so big and strong in every way."

"That is just what father told Uncle Felix about Professor Carter," said Agnes.

"Well," interposed Miss Edmonia. "I have an idea we had better let the men fight their own battles now, and come to something that concerns ourselves more nearly. Do you know Thanksgiving is only two weeks off? and we want to work out our motto then of all the times of the year."

Any little bait of suggestion from Miss Morrison was sure to be caught up by somebody's little fish of thought, hence her task was an easy one, and after an hour's brisk interchange of ideas and opinions, the girls started homeward, full of plans to be worked out in kindly deeds, each in her own sweet way and sphere. They were to keep them all to themselves until afterwards, except in so far as they needed to ask for help, but the first meeting in December would be, as Miss Morrison expressed it, "an experience meeting."

However, thanksgiving kindnesses could not have full possession of the thoughts of these young people. I can by no means say they were "not like other girls." For some of them the day had other meanings also.

"Mother says," quoted Berta, on the way home, "the best way to keep thanksgiving is to help other people to be thankful. And that is the reason father always has his 'thanky-tea,' as the boys call it, for the fellows that are freshest from home." This was said explanatorily for the benefit of the Wallaces who had moved to town just after the last occasion of the kind.

For several years past President Blair had made a point of thus utilizing Thanksgiving

Day—calling for a simple five-o'clock tea, instead of the accustomed elaborate dinner. The comparatively small amount of labor required equalized the burden laid upon wife and servants, and, therefore, detracted nothing from the benevolence of it. It needs hardly be said that this custom planned by the elders in strictest accord with the true idea of thanksgiving was found by the young people of the family, as well as by the students, to combine therewith a most enjoyable evening beside the yearly anticipation. Is it not the prerogative of youth to find, under given conditions, the greatest amount of enjoyment? Berta and Effie, being the only daughters of President Blair, had of necessity had some share in the entertainment ever since they were quite small, but were only now beginning to appreciate it as "grown-ups," though still young.

Young ladies were not overabundant in Bridgeton, hence their services were called into requisition at a rather early age to assist at entertainments. Accordingly, this informal tea on the afternoon of Thanksgiving Day, without conscious intention, had become the special occasion for the first appearance of *debutantes*, as admitting the public attentions of the numerous students who were temporary residents of the town,

by virtue, no doubt, of its being particularly designed for the younger men of the college.

“Of course, invitations have been sent to Miss Lucille and Virgie Wallace,” Effie said to Estelle, “and mother wanted to have you and Agnes this year; both of you are quite as tall as I, if Agnes is younger. But your mother said she could not think of allowing Agnes to begin that sort of thing so early. She had no objection to your coming, if you wanted to. Will you come?”

“I don’t know—” hesitated Estelle. “I believe I would rather wait for Agnes. I don’t know how to talk to the boys, anyway,” and she gave a little laugh of self-derision.

“Father says,” quoted Effie, “that but for that affair the other night he would have considered the new men of this year an unusually fine set of fellows.”

“Several of them, you know, are Yale students,” Berta interluded, with a speck of pardonable uplift of proprietary pride in “our own college.”

“And the strange part of it is,” resumed Effie, “they are drawn by the reputation of that same professor whom now they are delighting to dishonor. He was a graduate of Yale, you know.”

“Of course these men have to be invited—at

least, father and mother think so," said Berta, with a differentiating shake of the head, "because it is their first year here, though they are not really freshmen. Mother said it would never do to draw the line on them at this time, though I must confess *I* think there is very good reason."

A moment later they came to the parting of the ways.

Berta and Effie Blair were unusually handy with their needles, could even make their own dresses under their mother's supervision. But, for this special occasion, Berta, as the eldest daughter of the house, had been promised the honor of a dress made by her mother's dress-maker. Over this, as was natural, the dainty damsel was considerably elated. But peculiar favors and privileges do not always render us peculiarly happy. The very day Berta went with her mother to take the dress to Mrs. Deaver, she came home angry and disappointed.

She threw her hat on the bed with a spiteful little toss, glancing expectantly toward her mother as she did it.

"Do not leave it there, dear; no more trouble to put it away now than later," was the gentle rebuke she knew was coming.

If the hat had had any thoughts of its own, it

must have wondered what had gotten into those usually gentle and careful fingers to make them so rough and reckless. As soon as she was out of sight of her mother, Berta began to mumble and grumble. "I do not see why she could not work for us as well as anybody else! Mother was the very first one to give her a trial, too, I have heard her say so, and run the risk of ruining a handsome dress. Now, the hateful old thing puts everybody ahead of us, and I just know I am not going to get my dress."

"What is the matter?" asked Effie, looking up from a lapful of dark blue merino.

Effie told her grievance with no stint of hard words, for Berta, generally amiable and kind, had been changed into another girl by this untoward disappointment, and was acting, as she herself said afterwards, like a naughty child.

"All the work she can do for a week yet—and two of her working girls sick?" echoed Effie. "Then how could you expect her to do it, Berta—at least, right away?" Effie's direct question stayed for a moment the torrent of rebellious complainings, but only for a moment.

"I do not see why other people could not be put off as well as we," grumbled Berta, with persistent crossness.

Effie made no effort to conceal her surprise

and contempt at this unwonted ebullition of temper, and said, witheringly, "I'm sure mother would not ask her to break promises she had made to others." Her eyes dropped back to her own work, and soon her needle was clicking industriously back and forth through the blue merino.

Presently Berta's silent, moody thoughts began to follow the gleaming of the needle's quick, regular movements; to get mixed up with the soft, blue folds; to wonder if her own dress, just like this, would not have been quite as pretty if made at home also. When the calming silence had lasted some minutes, Effie again dropped her work and looked up. "I tell you what, Berta, suppose you help me with my dress, so I can get it entirely done this week; then, when Mrs. Deaver is ready to begin on yours, you and I can go down there, if mother is willing, and help on it in place of those two girls who are sick. In that way we can manage to get it done. I am sure, right under Mrs. Deaver's eye and directions, we can do as well as they."

Berta did not take to the idea very eagerly. It seemed rather a toning down, or trimming off, of her honor to have to help make a dress which was to have been a genuine dressmaker's work. Nevertheless, she could not help falling into the

plans Effie was mapping out so enthusiastically, and which only needed their mother's sanction, Mrs. Deaver's consent, and her own ordinary reasonableness and good nature to be decided on.

Friday afternoon they finished Effie's dress, and it was so pretty and becoming Berta wondered if the dressmaker could do any better.

Alongside of this query came an unspoken regret for her childish behavior with regard to hers. She felt now, in the reaction, that she would really prefer to have it made at home, only she knew there was not time to get it done. We will leave the rest for Berta to tell at the December meeting.

Meanwhile the "Thanky-tea" came off quite pleasantly, though Mrs. Blair had felt no little apprehension lest Professor Carter's absence should tempt the students' tongues to wag unwarily concerning him. This, she knew, would provoke her husband, who had been very much wrought up over their escapade. He had insisted upon making a public example of the leaders; but she had begged for them, as they were both new men, and she knew any severity of discipline at that time would spoil her Thanksgiving tea, while the pleasant entertainment might really answer the purpose best, anyway.

“Remember, girls, your first duty is to see that everybody is having a good time,” was always her final and repeated injunction to her daughters. This time it received an extraordinary emphasis from her own anxiety.

The house was tastefully decorated with trailing cedar and the bright orange and red berries of the bitter-sweet vine. The girls all looked exceptionally pretty in their sweet, simple, girlish dresses.

Of course, the students were out in full force, all who had a right to an invitation.

Russell Brent, with a feeling of diffidence and self-depreciation entirely foreign to his nature, begged Lucille Wallace to “chaperone” him. And she, in fullest sympathy, accepted the challenge and prepared to defend him from every spiteful shaft of witticism, criticism or malicious neglect. She did not know her hosts well enough to know how little she had to fear on this score. However, she went with Mr. Brent through the necessary formalities of speaking to the host, etc. And then took her seat beside him in a shadowy corner, determined to devote the whole evening to him, rather than he should feel what she knew to be the attitude of the family toward him. “If they could know him right well, they would like him as well as we

do," she was meditating, when Berta, with a sudden qualm of her hospitality conscience, a sudden remembrance of her mother's charge, spied the couple, and, realizing how long they had been together, brought over a relief party.

"Miss Blair, *must* you turn me over immediately to somebody else?" Mr. Brent asked, with a daring he only would have been capable of. "I greatly desire to become better acquainted with *you*."

There was a captivating deference of manner, as he bent his head eagerly toward her, and his strong white teeth gleamed in a most winning smile.

Even in that one moment Berta understood better the Wallace's championship. Still, her smile was a little constrained, as she replied, "I fear I must, for see! there is one of the girls over there in the bay-window who has no one to talk to, and this is her first season, too."

"Suppose I rebel, what will be the consequence?"

"In that case, I could only leave you to take care of yourself, while I should seek some one else more gallantly willing to help me out."

The young Kentuckian surrendered at discretion, so promptly and so gracefully, Berta hardly

realized until afterwards that he had stipulated his own conditions.

The first time he saw her for a moment alone he seized a passing student to take his place with the *debutante*, and joined her.

Mr. Brent had resolved, before the evening was over, to set himself right with his severest judges, the President's family. Beyond that, he cared little for the demerits, as he was not trying for any honor or prize. At the end of his half-hour conversation with Berta, he was fully conscious that he had made a good beginning, at least, in that direction.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE IVY LEAVES GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF THEMSELVES.

“What have I done that’s worth the doing?”

—*Isaac Watts.*

IT was a clear, cold day, that first Saturday of December. Jack Frost, always a fidgety fellow when he gets among the mountains, had long ago hustled the trees out of their summer clothes, and persuaded Dame Nature to pack them carefully away, so that they could be brought out fresh as new in the spring. Having taken this much on himself, Jacky might as well have persuaded Father Winter to be in a hurry about sending on his ermine mantles, which were specially needful for the wheat fields.

It seemed as if old man Winter had forgotten the wheat fields, and was only intent on toughening the trees. Whatever his motive, the wheat fields had smiled their greenest in vain, and the trees had stretched out their bare arms in unavailing appeal up to this time. The trees no doubt did grow sturdier and stronger from rough romping with the wind, and the sun

always has a warm heart for everybody. He had been doing his best. His warm, bright, loving face was almost equal to snow coverlets and cloaks. With his help, and by dint of hugging the tiny, delicate spears of wheat closely in her arms, mother earth had managed to keep them from freezing.

On this particular day it promised to be a fight for life with anything tender or green, for the atmosphere bit as if it had veritable teeth. But what does a group of hearty young girls care for the cold!

"I think this is fine weather!" exclaimed Effie Blair, throwing back her sturdy young shoulders, and breathing long, deep breaths of frozen sunshine.

"So do I!" echoed Berta, though her cheeks and nose were fairly tingling under Jack Frost's busy paint brush.

"The young men said at dinner," remarked Lucille, "if the weather had been the least bit colder, or begun a day earlier, they would have had a fine day's skating to-day. Some of them went down to the river to try, but found it hardly safe, and came back disappointed."

"If it continues as cold as this until Monday, they will have all the skating they want," said Effie, "for you remember, Berta, there was not

a single day of really good skating all last winter, so I am sure the faculty will give holiday rather than have the students miss it. Father says he considers skating the finest sport in the world, and he wishes we girls would learn, too, only it never has seemed just the thing here; none of the girls ever did. Do you skate Lucille?"

Berta had turned to Lucille with a sudden flash of expectation—a dim remembrance of having heard her mention it.

"Yes," Lucille admitted, "we all skated a good deal on our own ponds at home in the country."

"Then you can teach us!" Berta and Effie both exclaimed, with enthusiasm; "it would be ever so much nicer than having to get the boys to teach us."

Here Estelle and Agnes and Lena joined them, and they had soon reached Miss Morrison's door. A little hush of waiting fell over them, once within the old-fashioned library of Major Morrison. They were not all talking at once, as they so often were, when Miss Edmonia came in. Perhaps because each had something special to tell. At any rate each face was brightly full of its own story. Her cordial greeting glanced from one to the other with

pleasant inquiries for mothers, small sisters and brothers, etc., and then, for some reason hardly clear to herself, decided to begin at that part of the circle represented by Lena McBride. Most likely because Lena was evidently so ready to respond to her slightest glance of invitation.

“Let me be first!” she begged in her eagerness, half rising to her feet, “because, whenever I have anything disagreeable to do, I always like to do it at once, and be done with it.”

There was a mild outburst of amusement over this apology for her eagerness, and Miss Morrison smiling her assent, Lena went on: “Mamma told me if I would do without butter for the two weeks before Thanksgiving, she would help me make a cake to carry to Selina Lindsay. So I did, and my own hen laid the eggs, and it was a splendid, great big cake, big enough for all the little Lindsays to have as much as they could eat. I wish you could have seen the kids crowding around to see what I had brought, and how they clapped their hands, and danced when they saw it was cake. I don’t reckon they have good things very often.”

“I thought of Selina, too,” said little Agatha Wallace. “I was sure, if she should happen to be out of work, nothing would make her gladder than to get some more orders. She always looks

so happy when we take her any. I got her three orders for a dozen yards each, and she certainly did smile as if it was the nicest thing I could have done for her. Virgie went with me, and I am sure she will say so too."

"Mother and I got up a little basket of Thanksgiving good things for Mrs. Lindsay," Virgie said; "among other things a jar of mincemeat, which I am glad now we did not, for lack of time, make into pies, because it will keep better in the jars, and be more enjoyed when Lena's cake is gone."

Lena was evidently brimming over with something else to tell, and making a violent effort to keep it to herself until all should have had a chance to tell their Thanksgiving experiences. But it so happened there was a break just here, and an opportune moment of silence was more than she could withstand, for she did love to be the first to tell a bit of news. "Do you all know," she exclaimed, in her own abrupt way, "that Selina is laying up money from her knitting? She must have a whole lot, too, for she told me yesterday she was going to help send her sister Nannie to boarding school, so she can learn to be a teacher."

Over this news they all marvelled, and exclaimed, and looked incredulous, some express-

ing pity for the little girl's simplicity. But Miss Morrison quickly interposed.

"I came by Mrs. Lindsay's this morning," she said, "and I expect I can throw some light on the dear child's hopes. Mrs. Lindsay told me that her sister, who is the wife of a well-to-do farmer in Pennsylvania, had written she would pay the board and tuition of her namesake, Nannie, at a good school in Philadelphia for two years, taking care of her during the intervening holidays if they could ensure her suitable clothing and pay for her books. I was careful not to raise any undue hopes, but I have no doubt it can be done, and I have no doubt that Selina, with her wise little head, is thinking of the new clothes that will have to be, for you know Nannie is a pretty girl, and has always managed in some way to dress with remarkable taste and neatness."

The discussion of the subject lengthened the interlude to some minutes and Miss Morrison was just answering somebody's "We might help some in getting the clothes," when the striking of the clock reminded them of the number of reports yet to be given in. Miss Edmonia gave a gentle little tap on her table, and said, twinklingly, "That is to silence myself that somebody else may have a chance to talk."

Lucille's time came next. "I happened to find out not long ago that Olive Baylor had a fondness for ferns kindred to my own, and made a small glass-covered fernery to sit on her table, in which the ferns and moss will keep green and fresh all winter."

"Oh! I know how much she will enjoy that," said Estelle, warmly. "I went out to see Olive also; I generally do on the holidays, since—since she cannot come to see us. I took her a little picture I had painted myself, framed with pampas grass one of the students had brought me from his home. She likes anything new and odd for her room, as she expresses it, 'things that give her something to think about.'"

Agnes had found her mission in the laundry woman's family of little children, and Effie Blair had saved quilt-pieces for her old mammy. "And we took them to her with a dinner hot from the table. She thinks nothing is so good as a plate helped at the table as for ourselves. She always asks, 'did you fix it on your own plate, honey; den I know it's good.'"

Berta's face had been slowly flushing, her eyes dropping, and her hands clasping and unclasping each other restlessly as the thread of the story unwound itself toward her. A little silence fell after Effie and all were looking ex-

pectantly at Berta. Presently she threw back her head bravely, and began. "I will have to tell a very ugly story about myself, to begin with," she said, and with resolute, unsparing candor she told what we already know of her impatience and ill-humor over the dress-maker's inability to make her dress just when she wanted her to do it. "It is very mortifying," she went on, "for any one as old as I am to own up to such a childish tantrum. I don't know why mamma did not send me off to my room for solitary meditation, and let my dress go a-glimmering.

"Anyhow, it made my thankful deed seem so very small I felt it was hardly honest to let you all see it in any other proportions. Mrs. Deaver was really glad to agree to Effie's proposition for us to go and help with the plain sewing in order to make it possible for her to get it done. Every moment of those three half days I repented of my selfish ill-humor, especially Tuesday, when the poor woman actually fainted with my dress in her hands, from exhaustion and nervous strain, and I found out that, busy as she was, she had been sitting up at night with one of her sick girls who had no mother.

"Of course, I could not bear to have her touch the old dress again, but she insisted she would be as much disappointed as I if it were

not finished, and all I could do in reparation was to go down every afternoon this week to help her with other work. Mother says she doesn't know a more lady-like woman, whatever her birthright may have been, and she certainly proves it when you see her among her sewing girls, so good and kind and considerate, she has made me feel meaner by contrast than I ever did before in my life."

Somehow Berta's bit of experience and the candor of its telling touched a good many responsive cords. Her own eyes had drooped again in sober humility. Agnes had a slight pucker of consciousness between her arching brows, while a look of surprise rested on Virgie's face. Estelle was looking down thoughtfully, and Lena shook her head with an incredulous movement, as if wondering if Berta were not making much ado about nothing. Into the quiet moment of self-communing, Miss Edmonia's voice fell like a silver bell, "I think," she said softly, "not Berta only, but all of us have cause to remember her experience." She then added her own little mite to the general fund, and continued, "Let us not only remember, but act. It is not what we have done that should remain with us, but what we have found out we may do. Even a pleasant word or a kind look in passing helps to lighten a burden sometimes."

“I wonder,” said Lena, if Nannie Lindsay would not like to take the place of one of these sick girls, and make a little money to help on her school clothes!” If mamma thinks I can sew well enough, I would be glad to, to make a little money to help her—and myself,” ending with her characteristic giggle.

That was voted a sensible suggestion, and the meeting closed in some soberness.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FEW SURPRISES.

“ Better to weave in the web of life
A bright and golden filling.”

THE holiday for skating did not come on the following Monday, as the girls had thought it might. On the contrary, the weather had moderated somewhat during Sunday, so that the ice on the river was deemed by no means safe for a holiday's burden of men and boys. But the gala day came at last, about two weeks later. The river was frozen as smooth and solid as if sent by some rapid transit from Iceland itself. The rumor had gone abroad that some of the young ladies were contemplating going on the ice, and, as this was a novelty, the students were out in full force, possibly anticipating a little fun at the expense of the fair beginners. It was true that our group of girls had made up their minds to share in this delightful sport, which hitherto they had enjoyed only as spectators. Græme Gordon gladly offered his cousins, Berta and Effie, whatever instruction they

needed, and Paul Baylor was to do the same for his cousin, Lena McBride. Both parties had come to invite the Grahams to join them, knowing they had neither brother nor convenient cousin.

“I wish Uncle Felix would go with us,” Estelle murmured, in a dissatisfied tone, when the girls had departed with a doubtful acceptance of their cordial invitation.

“Oh! I wonder if he wouldn’t!” exclaimed Agnes, brightening.

“Of course he will. Where is it you want to go, and when?”

It was Uncle Felix answering for himself, though they had not seen him approaching from the gate.

“You know how to skate, don’t you, Uncle?” they said, turning to him, coaxingly.

“I should say I do, if I know anything, or—used to—” a shadow crossing his good, kind face. He put his hand up over his eyes, but only for the time he could draw thumb and first finger slowly across them, to meet at the bridge of his nose, then, “Do you know how, or do you want me to teach you?”

“We want you to teach us. None of the girls have ever done it here.”

He still seemed a little distrait. “It has been

twenty-five years since I had on skates, but”—recovering himself with a shake—“even if I have forgotten, no doubt I will soon recatch the swing, once on the ice. Have pretty good skating here?”

“The boys all say it is fine.”

“And how comes it you are giving an old man a chance to renew his youth with two pretty girls? Will I have any fights on my hands?”

“No, indeed, uncle,” exclaimed Agnes. “If you do not have pity on us, we will have to be tagging on to the Blair girls or Lena McBride, who are going with their cousins. It will be ever so much nicer for us to have you.”

“All right, then, have your skates ready by—to-morrow morning, is it?—and I will be on hand.”

It was another glorious December day. The sun shone with all his might, but could only clear out the mists and infuse an invigorating tonic into the atmosphere. Beyond this his smiles met with but a cold reception, for this was not the day of his power. Where the river broadened out into the lowlands, as if for the express satisfaction of the skaters, some four or five hundred young men and boys from the college and preparatory school were moving about in geometrical lines and curves, filling the air with

the hum of voices, the echo of merry laughter, and the musical skirr-r-r of their steel-clad feet.

When the party including the seven girls appeared on the bank, scores of hats were lifted in recognition, and when Uncle Felix shook a string of skates in the air, there went up a rousing cheer from the whole crowd.

Immediately, all who could claim any acquaintance, turned their toes in that direction, and cavalierly pressed their services.

“As there is such an abundant supply, you had best accept two beaux apiece,” Uncle Felix laughingly advised, “for I rather suspect it will take that many to initiate you into the mystery of standing on a thread of steel.”

But Agnes and Estelle clung to him, pleading, in anxious whispers, that he would teach them himself, and not leave them to disgrace themselves with young men whom they barely knew. Of course Uncle Felix yielded, and the three slipped off together around the upper bend, and were forgotten for the space of an hour or two.

Berta and Effie Blair also declined to impose on good nature, but Lena McBride followed the advice of Uncle Felix, and accepted the first offer of support on her other side, for, as she said, she was as awkward on skates as every-

where else, and glad to get all the help she could. Moreover, she did not mind being laughed at.

Lucille and Virgie Wallace, though not daughters either of the President or the most popular professor, had formed closer friendships among the students than those who were, and did not lack the most assiduous attentions. Mr. Brent, of Kentucky, came promptly to Lucille's side, begging he might be permitted to do for her what she had so kindly done for him on the night of the "Thanky-tea." He put on her skates, fastening every buckle with special care; then, as he helped her up and on to the ice as carefully as if she had been a toddling child just learning the use of its own little feet, he said, "Now, I can assure you, you will not need but one cavalier, and sure that's myself, Uncle Felix to the contrary notwithstanding, if you will let me show you how we skate in Kentucky."

He grasped her left hand in a firm clasp, and was proceeding to slip his arm under her right arm in such manner as to afford very substantial support in case of lost balance. But Lucille drew back, laughing. With a graceful bow she held out her hand, and, touching his lightly, said, "I think this will be all I need." With that, she drew him on with a sweeping motion, and they went flashing down the river, his pa-

tronizing expression changing to one of unalloyed admiration as she glided by his side—the very poetry of motion.

“It was rather cruel to let me sell myself so cheaply. I didn’t dream you knew how, after what Uncle Felix said.”

“Well, do you object to being pleasantly surprised once in a while?”

As they swept around the broad curve of the river, Mr. Rutherford and Virgie following in their wake, a hearty shout of applause was wafted after them. Quick as thought, they changed hands, wheeled face about, made a bow to the cheering crowd, and were off again like the wind, amid redoubled shouts and cheering.

Later, when Lucille was resting on the bank, and several other acquaintances had come to claim the “next,” Brent spied Berta Blair trying her wings near the other shore. Mr. Gordon and Effie had skated off a short distance, teasingly pretending they were going to leave her. In the fear lest they might, she was seized with stage fright, forgot and lifted her foot, losing her motion and balance together, and began to totter and stretch out her hands beseechingly. Of course, her companions hastened back, laughingly, to her assistance, but Mr. Brent was before them, and his mere touch revived her cour-

age. She raised her blue eyes to his, filled with a coy surprise, but also with an infinite relief. This was enough for the Kentuckian. "We cannot allow you to be selfish, Mr. Gordon," he said, turning to him in his lordly way. "I'll take care of Miss Berta—by your leave?" aside to her.

With a tight grip of his strong, steady forefinger, and his other hand under her elbow, she faltered no more, but sped over the ice, with an airy delight, like a veritable winged creature.

"If you were not born on skates," he exclaimed, "you were certainly born for skating! Do you Virginia girls learn everything in the world as quickly and as perfectly as you do skating? One doesn't get a mite of fun or credit out of teaching you."

As he was so aggrieved over the lightness of his task, Berta was tempted to betray their secret and tell of the private lessons Lucille and Virgie Wallace had given the rest of them on a shallow pond, shut in between two hills, down back of their father's orchard.

Meanwhile Uncle Felix had done his part thoroughly. In some secluded nook, beyond the notice of a passer-by, he had drilled his two modest nieces until they not only knew how, but had gained the confidence of experience, and now, at last, he brought them out before the

public, no longer clinging timorously to his arm, but skating gracefully beside him. Ever so many of the young men, realizing that the girls were more approachable under the chaperonage of Uncle Felix than under that of the "Empress," as Mrs. Graham was known among the students, pressed forward to improve their opportunity. Stanley Sinclair was particularly attracted by Agnes' bright face, and he had hardly carried her off when Hugh Baylor came to claim Estelle. Uncle Felix, making dire complaints of the ingratitude of this world, especially the nieces of it, dashed into the melée of boys, as if he were one of them, and wherever he went there was sure to be a good time. The girls all voted skating much more interesting on the ice than from the bank, and promised to try it again whenever the river permitted.

That afternoon, when the ivy leaves gathered in weekly conclave, you might have thought skating had superseded pin-cushions in its measure of importance. For, although a listener, stepping in among them, might have found difficulty in untangling any single strand of conversation, yet each word caught by the ear would most likely bear some relation to the subject so freshly and enjoyably in their thoughts. With faces beaming and eyes shining, each was glad to tell

her own pleasant experience, even if she were not quite sure of a listener among the busy tongues around her.

As Miss Morrison appeared at the door, each paused and looked up in greeting, and, looking at her, the pause continued. Miss Morrison's tell-tale face was more interesting reading to her young friends than a novel.

This afternoon, as she returned their greeting and sat down in their midst, one was reminded of the changeful glories of a beautiful sunset; the ebb and tide of pink and crimson; sometimes like a delicate roseleaf dropped by a fairy on the soft, fair cheek; sometimes a flood of crimson trespassing on the white throat and brow. The deep blue eyes, "white lidded as with mists of morning," now looking out through a shimmer of brightness, as if discovering a deeper, sweeter, purer meaning in life than anybody else could know; then dropping behind the shadows of their own lashes, lest they prove too eloquent of the happy, hidden thoughts within.

She proceeded at once to the business of the hour, but evidently with mind preoccupied in unwonted way. She made several little absent-minded blunders, over which she laughed at herself unmercifully. All the while the pink

and crimson were chasing each other over her face, and the girls were watching it in curious wonder.

“Whenever Miss Edmonia’s color changes that way,” thought Agnes, “it is sure to mean something. I wonder what she is going to tell us that will be a surprise!”

Presently Miss Morrison, with a little catch of her breath, began, “There is one matter I suppose I ought to speak of—though I hardly know—I am afraid—you had better get some one to take my place—”

A hurtful silence of surprise was filling her pauses with small encouragement, and her hands were clasping themselves over a letter she had dropped in her lap with a tight grip. It was hard, but she went on determinedly, “I am sure you will have no difficulty in finding some one who will give you as much, or more, real help—”

At this point an impulsive outburst of protesting noes and whys interrupted her—forced her to lift her eyes, which had hitherto been in hiding, while the crimson rushed to its flood-tide in cheeks, brow, ears and throat, as she murmured reproachfully, “Oh! girls, I thought you would help me tell it—cannot you guess?—you might know nothing else could induce me to give you up—I’m going to be married—some of these days—”

In a moment the girls had dropped their fancy work and were crowding around her, some on their knees, some on the arms of her chair, the rest wherever they could get closest, and such a deluge of questions as never was heard poured in upon her. "Who is it?" "Where is he from?" "When is it to be?" "How long have you known him?" "What is he like?" etc., etc., all in such a jumbled heap she could do nothing but throw back her head and laugh merrily, with the prettiest flush still on her cheek, and her eyes shining and glinting and dodging, as it were, the encounter with anybody's else.

In the first pause, she said demurely, her eyes still playing hide-and-seek, "I cannot tell you any more just yet, for the reason that the whens and wheres and hows are still so uncertain; but you shall know in good time. Meanwhile, I must ask you to keep my secret for me. I have told you thus early, because I would so much like to see a new leader in my place, and the work going right on before I leave. I think you cannot make a mistake in your choice," and she glanced significantly at Lucille Wallace.

But the girls were too full of eager interest in the revelation itself to transact anything so business-like as choosing a successor. They begged she would not hurry them, but just keep her own place as long as she could.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PRUNING OF THE IVY VINE.

IF it was so intensely interesting to our girls to have a love affair in the church, imagine what it was to have one in their own small circle, and to have it all to themselves, too, for even if Miss Morrison had not bound them over to silence, they would have felt that her secret was a sacred trust until such time as she chose to reveal it to others. Nevertheless, this did not preclude much discussion of the subject within closed doors, as it were. They soon found, however, that Miss Morrison had told all she had to tell for the present. Tempt her as they would, she fought shy of the subject, and adroitly turned the tide of their thoughts in some other direction whenever they began to question her.

The truth was, she had revealed her secret while it was still new and strange to herself, for a special purpose of good to them, as she had told them. It still rested on its same basis of simple fact, and for further developments they must wait. But one Sunday night there was a strange young preacher in the pulpit.

After church, Lena McBride whispered to Estelle, in a great state of excitement, that Miss Edmonia had waited for him, and she had seen them go off together.

The whisper flew round among the girls long before Saturday.

"If it was he," said Berta, "I think Miss Edmonia might have told us. We would have looked at him and listened to him so differently if we had known."

"Perhaps," said Virgie, "she preferred to hear what we thought of him without prejudice."

"Well, what did you all think of him, any way?" asked Lena.

"I do not think he is quite good-looking enough for Miss Edmonia," observed Berta.

"It would take a fairy prince to be that!" exclaimed Agnes, devoutly.

"Still, I think he has a fine face," said Lucille; "something better than mere good looks."

"I think so, too," assented Effie; "and I imagine it is a face that will grow on you."

"I heard papa say," continued Agnes, "he thought it was an uncommonly good sermon for a young man just out of the seminary."

"You should tell Miss Edmonia that," commented Lucille.

"If he were my sweetheart I would call that

rather tame praise," and Berta tossed her head proudly. "I would not marry a preacher at all if I could not find one who was a star, even while he was at the seminary!"

"I have no idea of marrying a preacher," said Agnes. "I am not good enough, by a great deal. But if I were going to, I don't believe I should choose one who was such a genius in his youth. He would be sure to grow conceited, and that would spoil everything else."

"Uncle Felix said," quoth Estelle, "the preacher was certainly a young man of great promise. He believed he had already done some good work in the mountains during his vacations."

"That would certainly please Miss Edmonia," said Lucille. At that moment, the folding-door slowly moved back, and Miss Morrison, smiling and blushing, appeared.

"Oh! Miss Edmonia, did you hear us talking about you?" Estelle looked up in half-scared retrospection.

"Yes, while waiting in the parlor for Mrs. Wallace to be called, I heard my name, and, recognizing the familiar voices, came right in, lest I should hear something you would rather I did not."

"You need not be afraid to hear anything

we would say of you!" exclaimed Lena, ingeniously.

"I hope not, dear," smiling affectionately at her. "In fact, I am never afraid of what anybody may say to my face, and do not in the least mind what may be said out of sight; provided, if bad, I never hear of it, because, good, bad or indifferent, it cannot really hurt me. But to hear what is not intended to be heard, though sometimes pleasant"—here she smiled around the circle, until the girls blushed in conscious relief—"is often an injustice both to speaker and listener."

The moment's silence was abruptly broken by Lena. "Well, anyhow, tell us, Miss Edmonia, was it *your* preacher who preached for us last Sunday?"

A reproachful "Oh!" escaped several lips, and those who did not speak it, looked it, as a blush too vivid for comfort swept into Miss Morrison's face, and she dropped her eyes with a foolish little laugh. Almost instantly recovering herself, she said, demurely, "I suppose I might as well acknowledge I have promised to try to be content to listen to that same young preacher for the rest of my life. Don't you think he will do pretty well for a constancy?"

With a gay laugh, they owned the tables

turned. "One thing certain," said Berta, saucily, "he will have to be very, very good, and very, very smart, or we will not let him have you."

For only answer Miss Morrison gave a satisfied little shake of the head, and arched her brows, as much as to say, "Leave us to settle that question," at which the girls laughed gleefully. Then Mrs. Wallace came in, for it was at her house that the girls had gathered, and Miss Morrison turned to her host with a touch of her finger to her lip, which the girls did not fail to understand and enjoy.

Although thus admitting the girls to her confidence, there was always a sweet reserve which limited the personal touch of the "too many" or the "careless tongue" from which every true woman instinctively shrinks under the circumstances.

Sending Nannie Lindsay off to school with a creditable outfit by the first of February was almost equal to another wedding in the general interest excited. Little Selina had always had the most extravagant admiration for her older, prettier sister, and was ambitious for her to be as well dressed as any girl at the school. She was fully intent upon doing it all herself, but Miss Morrison begged to contribute a pretty dress. Uncle Felix slipped into Estelle's pocket

one day a bundle of bank-notes labeled, "For Nannie Lindsay's cloak," and the Wallaces again came to the rescue with hats, one for best, and one for rainy days. For the rest, the most the girls could do was to keep Selina's eager little fingers constantly supplied with work. Sometimes they would buy a lot of edging, and sneak it back into her basket without her knowledge, to be sold over again. So the young lady finally went off, as well provided for as possible, leaving Selina proud and happy. Nannie wrote back that she had stood a good examination, and intended to study hard and do them all credit. The little sister at home was so elated over this letter she wanted everybody to read it.

After this things dropped back into their old, quiet routine for awhile. Miss Morrison made several futile efforts to settle the matter of her successor, in order, as she said, that there might be no break in their meetings and no risk of an interregnum. But, like most young people, her little flock persisted in leaving the future to take care of itself, at least until it was more evidently imminent.

"Any way," said Berta, on one of these occasions, most likely it will not affect us, as father and mother are talking of sending us away from home to school next fall."

“Where?” questioned Agnes, a bit enviously.

“To Miss Hampton’s, in Staunton. Mother knew her as a girl, and has always said she wanted us, if possible, to have two or three years with her.”

“Still, I do not think you ought to lose all interest in the Ivy Vine, if you do go away,” said Estelle, in an aggrieved tone, adding, with a sigh, “With you and Effie gone, and Miss Edmonia married, I am afraid the Ivy Vine will die. There’ll be no need to elect a new leader.”

“That’s true,” said Effie, soberly. “It will make a pretty big break in our little circle. We certainly must try to keep in touch with the work, for of course we will want to be in it when we come home. We can at least send our contributions, and though it will be so hard on those of you who are left, I do hope you will not let it die. There is our mountain work, you know; we must keep up the expenses some way, and you may be sure Berta and I will do what we can to help.”

Effie had waxed very earnest in her plea for the Ivy Vine, and Estelle felt every word she said, but all the more she sighed at thought of the future, and sighed again after the Blairs had left them.

Agnes sighed also. Only a girl's half sigh, it is true, but it was followed by, "I wish I were going off to school, too."

Estelle glanced quickly up at her sister in surprise, all thought of distress over the Ivy Vine forgotten for the time. To herself it would never occur to wish to leave home. She felt as if she could not be happy for a day anywhere else than in Bridgeton. As for school, while she had always conscientiously done her best in every class, she could not but acknowledge it was duty rather than pleasure. Not so with Agnes. She had a genuine delight in acquiring knowledge, made warm friends of all her teachers, and was popular with her school-mates. The ambition for a higher education than their own little town could afford had often crept unbidden into her mind, though it had never gone beyond that half-sigh, nor even that in the presence of any one at home.

"Yet, if she wants it so much, it is a pity for her not to get it," was Estelle's brooding thought as soon as she knew, and as they walked home silently together Estelle was saying to herself, "I don't see why papa cannot let her go now in place of Janet, if she will only ask him!"

As they entered the house the girls instinctively felt a shadow fall over them. The mur-

mur of low voices—that of their father and mother — was drawing them on to the library.

“You see, we go beyond our income every year now. The expenses of Janet’s education have been heavy, and while, as you know, I am more than glad for her to have had it, yet I do not feel we have the right to give her what we can hardly call our own, for a mere pleasure trip.”

This was what they heard their father say, and turned, with heavy hearts, to go upstairs, that they might not hear their mother’s possibly excited argument. At any rate, Agnes’ ambition and Estelle’s hopes for her were nipped in the bud. Agnes sighed no more. A wholesome girl is not apt to waste sighs on an impossibility. As for Estelle, who did not want it for herself, somehow she could not let the matter rest. She kept saying to herself over and over again, “It certainly is a pity for Agnes not to have the education, if she wants it.”

Finally, Estelle said it aloud to Uncle Felix, telling him, at the same time, the circumstances under which Agnes had inadvertently allowed her ambition to crop out.

Uncle Felix took the matter seriously, said it would be a considerable item, but added, in that

hopeful way of his, "No doubt there will be some way to manage it; if not this year, next, and, fortunately, you are both young enough to wait."

"Oh! but I do not want to go—only Agnes," Estelle hastened to assure him.

"And why not you—the oldest ought to go, if only one?" He bent his eyes keenly down to hers.

"Because I do not particularly love to study; I was never bright at my books as Agnes is," she acknowledged, in simple candor. "Besides, it would never do for both of us to go away and leave papa and mamma at the same time, don't you think?"

"And you will be content to let Agnes get ahead of you?"

"Yes, indeed; she is that, any way, because she really loves to study."

"And is there no branch of study that tempts you—music—drawing—?"

"Oh! I would dearly love to take drawing and painting from some one who could teach me all about it," she exclaimed, impulsively; "but, then, it's no matter, anyhow," she added almost immediately.

Uncle Felix patted her cheek, and called her a sweet, unselfish little girl, and there the mat-

ter ended for the time. But, somehow, Uncle Felix always managed to accomplish whatever he set his mind on, and the result was, as soon as it was positively decided for Berta and Effie Blair to go in the fall, Uncle Felix announced that Agnes was to go with them. At the same time, he confided to Estelle that a very fine art teacher was coming down from Staunton to make up a class in Bridgeton for the next session, and he had given her name as first pupil.

It was a busy set of girls that spring, and they did not begin to realize the breaking up of their circle until after Miss Morrison's quiet wedding.

Janet came home somewhat discontented at first over not getting her trip to Niagara with the graduating class, but was in a measure reconciled to find she was in time for the college commencement.

"And you are really going away next year, and will not even be here to see me graduate?" Mr. Brent said to Berta the last night of commencement.

"I fear it is even so," returned Berta, allowing her tone to express a note of regret, "for the sessions close about the same time, and we will have to remain for examinations for the next term."

"If I had only known, I might have graduated this year."

"How so?"

"By taking two years' course in one."

"Why did you not do it, anyway, if you could?"

"I don't know; there was no hurry; I was having a very good time since the President's family have made friends with me, and I thought I was about as well off in Bridgeton as anywhere else."

"Then, perhaps, you are going to remain a little while? We are always so glad when some of the students do," Berta said, with a coy note of invitation in her voice.

"Unfortunately, my respected sire commands my immediate presence, and I will be obliged to leave Sunday night."

"Sunday!" repeated Berta, with a look of incredulous disapproval.

"Yes, Monday is his limit."

"Then, why not go Saturday?"

"And miss my engagement with you Sunday night! Not I!"

"Rather than it should lead you to travel on the Sabbath," she said, in a low, uncompromising tone, "the engagement is already cancelled."

"You don't mean it?" But he could not look

in her face and not know she did mean it. And all the persuasive arguments of his silver tongue could not move her.

“No doubt you are right,” he acquiesced at last, a little stiffly. “And, as you wish it, I shall certainly consider the engagement off, and take your advice.”

He watched in vain for the slightest shadow of relenting in the girl face before him. That was the last Berta saw of him for two years.

CHAPTER XX.

FRESH GROWTH OF THE IVY VINE.

LIKE a brood of newly-weaned chickens, the Ivy leaves met on the first Saturday of September, and huddled together around Lucille Wallace, as if trying to warm away the lonesome feeling in the sunshine of her smile. It was in Mrs. Wallace's cosy parlor into which the afternoon sun was streaming with an abundance of good cheer, but the fact was nevertheless patent, they were making a new beginning with most of the enthusiasm left out. And without enthusiasm, Emerson says, "Nothing great was ever accomplished."

Berta and Effie had always been the leading spirits among them. Agnes also had been the more enthusiastic of the Graham sisters, and then Miss Morrison had been such a steady and steadying helm to them in the work they had undertaken. After her marriage, they felt completely at sea as she had feared they might when she so earnestly urged them to choose her successor, while she could still be there to help her in the start. It was perhaps hardest of all on

Lucille. When it was proposed she should take Miss Morrison's place she begged they would wait and see if they could not find some one older and more experienced. Hence they had worked along in a kind of headless way for a while, unable to settle on any one else. Then in desperation, they determined to disband for the summer. Lucille had finally agreed to accept the honor they wished to confer upon her, though with many misgivings.

As a singular coincidence, too, they had gone back to first principles in numbers as in everything else. Virgie and little Agatha Wallace, Estelle Graham and Lena McBride — Estelle the only one who had been in at the beginning.

As for the fibre of the concern, Virgie and Agatha were always earnest workers in whatever they did at all, and little Agatha peculiarly full of a sweet, artless sentimentality. But then, they had neither of them been a part of the original problem. Having come in by the method of addition, they had assumed a personal, rather than an aggregate responsibility. Besides, the home problems were often so serious and distracting they could not feel, as the four young founders, that hardly anything was more important than their Ivy Vine. Lena McBride

was much in the same category. Nobody had received greater benefit from the general influence of the meetings and the work itself than Lena. Everybody noticed it. And nobody was more loyally devoted to it than she. Yet, Lena was not born a leader, and if responsibility should ever come her way, it would have to come without her seeking—as a clear case of providential indication. Then, she would take it up, and do her best.

The burdened sigh which followed Estelle's glance around the quadrangular group, though smothered in its inception, showed where the weight was pressing. This little band was a child of her own brain, for she had been the first to propose it; and while she had left the leadership, and in a measure the responsibility, to others as long as she could, she had carried it as a whole continually on her heart, and now it seemed as if every prop had been removed to let the whole burden down upon her shrinking shoulders.

Lena McBride, who abhorred a vacuum in conversation, broke into the first embarrassed pause with, "I'm afraid we are going to have an awfully dull time this winter!"

Estelle, as sensitive for others as for herself, gave a quick look at the pink flush on Lucille's

face, and turning to Lena said, with an unwonted ring of decision, "I expect it will be whatever we make it. I don't suppose there is any reason why we four should not accomplish as much, and have as good a time as the first four, especially as we still have them for contributing members."

"Yes, and perhaps we can persuade the absent girls to be corresponding members as well—to send us new, helpful ideas occasionally," Lucille added, laying a gratified hand on Estelle's, and speaking in a braver tone already.

"If we could only have Olive to meet with us," Estelle said with a sigh.

There was a little snap of inspiration in Lucille's gentle brown eyes. "Why not? I wonder if we mightn't go out and meet with her sometimes? You know she sits up nearly all day now, and it would be only a pleasant walk for us probably for some time yet."

They resolved that Lucille and Estelle should go out, and feel the way, and arrange for the next meeting there if agreeable.

They then turned their attention to the pressing business of raising money for the Double Mountain School.

A parting donation from Miss Morrison, and from the two young men, Messrs. Forsythe and

Rutherford, who had been interested in the work, and who had now graduated and gone, had tided them over the summer. The regular contribution of five cents a week from their present number could not be counted on for much, but with those of other church members might suffice to pay for the horses to carry the young men out. Lesson papers had been provided for until January, but there were always a number of small contingent expenses, and then the Thanksgiving treat, and Christmas were before them.

“Why cannot we have a fair as the grown people do every year?” asked Estelle, her zeal thoroughly enkindled by the necessities of the case.

“Oh! yes,” said Virgie, “and we might, in addition to our little fancy articles, have ice-cream and cake. I expect that would be more profitable than anything else.”

“And then,” suggested Lena, “if we have it just before Christmas, folks can buy some of their Christmas gifts of us instead of making them.”

“But the ladies generally have theirs at that time, with the same object, do they not?” deprecated Lucille. “And what will they think of our impertinent rivalry!”

“And,” continued Estelle, reverting inexplicably to her usual shyness, “I expect we had better be careful also to make different kinds of things.” She was thinking for the first time of her mother’s zealous interest in the accustomed annual fair, and of her probable criticism of the girls proposed plans.

A feeling of being checkmated fell over the little group for a moment. But before it had time to work discouragement, Lena spoke again, “Why cannot we ask the grown folks to let us have a table at their fair?”

An exclamation of relief greeted her happy thought, and the remainder of the time was devoted to planning confidently on this basis.

As Estelle cut across the narrow back street, the nearest way from the Wallaces to her own home, whom should she meet but Mrs. Schmidt.

“I have just been to your house to see you; there’s a little gal from Double Mountain come to my house this morning. She says her name is Marth’El’n, and she goes to the Double Mountain Sunday-school.”

Estelle readily recalled the little Martha Ellen, whose bright eyes had smiled up at them from behind her mother’s elbow at the house to which she had gone with Effie Brent on their pioneering expedition.

“What does she want, and how did she happen to come to you?” asked Estelle.

Mrs. Schmidt giggled with a vague feeling of importance. “Well, as for that, ’taint likely she knows one house from another. There was two or three of ’em, with popcorn and things to sell, and this little gal happened to stop at our house while the others went on to the next. The child looked awful tired, so I ses, ‘Pretty long walk from the Mountain, ain’t it?’ She said, ‘Yes, but I wouldn’t a-minded if ’twan’t for maw and paw bein’ sick, and nobody to work ’cept me.’ ‘Nobody to work?’ ses I; ‘what’s the matter with your maw and paw?’ ‘They’s both of ’em down with fever,’ ses she. She ses she didn’t sleep none hardly last night for jumpin’ up and down to give ’em water, but ’lowed she was ’bliged to come to town to make some money, and buy coffee, ’cause that was all they seemed to want.”

A soft sigh escaped Estelle under pressure of this new responsibility. She felt so helpless to face it. Why should everything be coming upon her—the one least capable of doing and saying the right thing!

“Is the little girl still at your house?” Estelle asked vaguely.

“Yes, I gave her some bread and milk, and

told her to lie down, and take a nap while I went out a bit. The child was that sleepy and tired she was off before I could more than get her to the bed."

Estelle stood silently ruminating. A picture came to her mind from one of her old childhood's geographies, of old Atlas with the weight of the world on his back. She had always pitied the old fellow, strong as he looked. Now it seemed as if his burden had slipped over on her shoulders. If Miss Edmonia were only here, how simple it would be to go to her, and let her decide what was best to do. Somehow, Lucille, lovely as she was, still seemed a kind of stranger in the work. How could she know about the Double Mountain people from a single visit among them. Berta and Effie would have sought counsel with their mother, who was as much interested in the mountain work as they were. "I wish mother was!" Estelle blushed for the disloyalty of her thought, nevertheless she could not go to her mother. "And papa is too busy to be bothered—Uncle Felix?"

Mrs. Schmidt was beginning to fear she had come to the wrong person, and said apologetically, "I was kinder 'fraid the child would be down with fever herself if something wasn't done."

“Yes, I’m afraid so too!” Estelle came slowly back to herself and to her companion. “I’ll tell you what, you keep the child with you until I see what can be done.”

“If I had any way to get out there, I’d let the child stay in town a bit and rest, and I’d go and nurse the father and mother,” the kind-hearted creature said modestly. “I reckon Mr. Schmidt could get along without me for awhile, like he did before.”

It was some relief to the tension of the occasion when Jennie Schmidt indulged in her natural, good-natured giggle, and with a more confident step Estelle turned about, and started toward her uncle’s store.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE IVY LEAVES STILL BUSY.

ONCE seated beside Uncle Felix, in his little back room, Estelle wondered why she had ever troubled herself over the matter at all. Everything seemed so simple and easy now. He asked her a good many questions, had her tell him all that Mrs. Schmidt had told her, and all she herself knew of the family of little Martha Ellen, then said, with an air of satisfied decision, "I think Mrs. Schmidt's plan a very good one. The best thing you girls can do is to accept her proposition to go out and nurse the sick, while the little girl stays in town to do her work as far as she can, which will no doubt be rest and recreation to her, for Mr. Schmidt will be as good and kind to her as if she were his own child. However, as Mrs. Schmidt will be carrying on the work of the Ivy Vine at some expense to herself, I think she ought to be paid something for the job." With that, he laid a dollar in Estelle's hand as a "nest-egg," and giving her a loving kiss, went back to his place in the store, while Estelle, with a lighter heart,

went to talk it over with Lucille, and call an extra meeting of the girls that very evening. They were fortunate in meeting Græme Gordon at the door, who volunteered to drive Mrs. Schmidt out that afternoon instead of waiting for morning, and thus the plan was promptly inaugurated. Only after the details were all settled did they begin to realize that here was a new demand upon their exchequer. It was larger, too, than their utmost dreams, for the fever became almost epidemic for some weeks that fall. Nevertheless, they determined to meet it bravely, and let it be only a spur in the work of getting up their exhibit for the ladies' fair. Besides, in meeting this pressing emergency, so far beyond their regular income they found many a place for glad self-denial never thought of before. Mrs. Schmidt was kept at her post as long as she was needed, and proved herself quite a skillful sick nurse. Many a time thereafter she was called upon for town service in the same line, for there had occasionally been great need of some one in that capacity, and this small addition to her income did not come amiss, you may be sure.

Mrs. Schmidt never lost her interest in Double Mountain people. She and her husband frequently went out with the students to help

with the singing. Eventually, each took a class, and became permanently a part of the regular force. The little Martha Ellen, when released from duty at Mr. Schmidt's, got her parents' consent to go and live with Mrs. McBride as general help about the house. Here she learned many useful lessons in domestic economy and household comfort, and some in reading, writing and arithmetic from Lena in her leisure hours.

Meanwhile, the girls were busy as bees getting ready for the fair. In the conference between the girls and their elders, in which the coalition had been formed, it had been agreed to set a time earlier by a month than had been the previous custom, bringing it just before Thanksgiving, instead of nearer to Christmas. In the matter of decoration, also, the young people were given full license. Janet Faulkner, who had held herself rather aloof from the work up to this time, on the plea of the long strain and restraints of school life, found full scope for her talents on this occasion, and threw herself very heartily into it, proposing and carrying out a very pretty design in a flower table. It involved more than one afternoon trip to the woods for ferns, mosses, etc., in which some or all the girls accompanied her, and the young men of

their acquaintance who volunteered were permitted to make themselves eminently useful.

The white, bare walls of the lecture-room were festooned with cedar and ivy, and brightened with paper flowers of home manufacture. All the tables were tastefully draped and arranged, the old staid simplicity of the matrons giving place to the more verdant taste of youth.

Janet's flower table was the cynosure of all admirers. On a small stand she had bewitched into existence a most perfect little bit of tropical scenery. A limpid lake—alias a bowl of water—with moss-draped border, great tall mountain ferns over-arching and surrounding it—mimic tree ferns. In the miniature moss-green avenues between two rows of fringy shade strayed a couple of doll lovers, while immediately behind them, in the grass or moss, appeared ominously the glistening eyes of a snake. On the margin of the lake a green toy frog, with glossy, protuberant eyes, was in the act of leaping into the water; one could almost hear his croak. On the still, shadowed bosom of the little lake sailed a tiny bark canoe, carrying two more minute lovers, drifting they cared not whither. The whole made such a pretty picture one did not feel disposed to challenge the prospective, however imperfect. Overhead hung a vine en-

wreathed tablet, "The Last Rose of Summer," and underneath, a bowl full of buds gathered wherever a straggler had escaped the early frosts and eked out from the various kindly private conservatories of the town, arranged into charming little boutonieres for the students to buy. One encouraging feature of college town life is that the students are always ready to patronize whatever comes along, especially if solicited to do so by pretty girls. Quite a number of them usually strayed into the annual fair, and supplied themselves with needle-books, book-marks, handkerchief-bags, etc. Now that ice-cream and cake, served by the daintiest girlies in town, were added to its attractions, every student who was so fortunate as to have any of his allowance left would be sure to be on hand. All our old friends are there, Brent, Comes, the Sinclair brothers, Duncan McCann, and others, and were often found hovering like bees around the flower-table. Janet was unusually vivacious, and kept up a lively movement of wit and sales. Quiet, sober Mr. McCann stood at her elbow most of the evening in devout admiration of her cleverness.

The fair proved a phenomenal success, this year. The girls had a neat little fund for their money-box, and the mothers could yet hold no

grudge, for they also had done better than usual.

Janet's interest proved rather ephemeral, it is true, still they knew they could depend on her when an entertainment of any kind was on hand, or any extraordinary effort needed, and this was by no means to be despised.

During the winter, Annie Wallace and Mildred Davis, the young daughter of one of the professors, were admitted as new members. Thus the Ivy Vine began to grow again, and always found plenty to do.

CHAPTER XXII.

A THORN AMONG THE IVY LEAVES.

THE experiment of carrying the meetings out to Olive Baylor was a happy thought. Her father and brothers, watching jealously, could not detect any bad effects, but rather the contrary, and were so glad to have her enjoy the company of her friends, and this added interest in life that they arranged to drive in for the girls every Saturday. Thus there had been only a few times when they had to meet away from her.

Olive had been accustomed, from her motherless childhood, to the responsibility of deciding things, hence it was an inexpressible relief to Estelle to have her judgment to lean on. It took all the burden out of everything; for Estelle still felt that it was in a measure on her, though Lucille had taken hold most efficiently during the fever epidemic and the fair. It was only in cases where a more personal local knowledge seemed needful that she showed any disposition to shirk the duty of leadership. Even when she did, it was in such a sweet, defer-

ential spirit towards Estelle or Olive or both, for they generally went together when either one was pressed to the front, that, to Estelle, at least, who needed it most, it proved a most beneficial process of development.

One of Lucille's most attractive traits of character was her perfect candor of action and speech, and its usual concomitant, taking for granted others were equally so. Yet toward the latter part of the winter, Estelle's sensitive nature detected an intangible reserve creeping into her manner, especially when they met with Olive.

The drive out would sometimes be waived aside as impracticable, when neither Hugh nor any one else could see any reason for it. One Saturday she positively declined to venture, vowing she would not try it again until spring. The next week, though a swiftly vanishing snow had made the roads much worse than before, Dr. Baylor, by some means, succeeded in overcoming her scruples, and took them all out in the carriage. He seemed to be very much elated over his conquest, and was in an unusually jovial mood all the way out, and insisted upon having Lucille sit in front with him, that she might see for herself how little there was to be afraid of. Once Estelle heard him say, "So you could

not trust Hugh to drive you, hey! pretty hard on a young fellow, Miss Lucille!" He turned and bent toward her until her face was like a rich carnation, then threw back his head, and laughed with what seemed to Estelle rather cruel enjoyment. His covert raillery evidently embarrassed Lucille as much as it puzzled Estelle.

When they drove up to the door, Paul and Elmer were there to meet them, but not Hugh. He had ridden into town on business, Olive said, and they did not see him at all. This was the last time they all met there for a good while. Lucille had her way thereafter. However new and strange and unaccountable her timidity about driving, it was such evident discomfort to her there was nothing to do but to yield to it. As the roads did soon after become impassable for carriages, the matter passed out of mind.

One Wednesday night, as Estelle was about to join Lucille for the walk home, Hugh stepped between, and, slipping her hand into his arm, walked off with her. They were so close at the moment Estelle could not help hearing his greeting, "I hope there is nothing to prevent my walking home with you this time, because if there is, I am afraid—I would have to disre-

gard it. You have kept me on starvation rations lately—I cannot stand it any longer.”

Estelle wondered what he could possibly mean, but she only dropped back with the other girls, and kept her wonderings to herself. She imagined Hugh looked troubled the next time she saw him. Lucille certainly did; her usual sweet serenity gave place to a vague abstraction, alternating with an expression of anxious perplexity, and Estelle felt dreadfully sorry for both of them without knowing any cause. With the instinct of a girl, she scented a love affair. But then, if they were in love with each other, what was there to be troubled about? Why did they not just go on and be happy? Another night he was evidently waiting for Lucille again, when, to his chagrin, he saw her at the other door with one of the students. He turned away rather disconsolately, and soon after joined Estelle. He hardly pretended to talk, and Estelle was too keenly sympathetic in his disappointment to be able to do so at first. The worst of it was they were walking a great part of the way, a few steps behind the other couple.

Estelle troubled her soul greatly trying to think of some way to relieve him of this small torture, yet knew it was not at all worth while to propose going another way; absence from

sight is no relief to jealousy, when a rival is where you would like to be. Hence they silently followed the other pair, who were apparently totally oblivious of them. They watched them go in, and close the door after them, then Hugh's step became sharply punctuated.

Presently he said, "Miss Estelle, I feel like a mean dog. I would not thus have used anybody else in the world. Such is human friendship, even when we most prize the friend."

"I am glad you know you can always depend on mine," was Estelle's cordial response.

There was a little grateful pressure in the good-bye hand-clasp, as he left her at the door, and Estelle did not see him again for some weeks.

In the course of time winter disappeared, and spring was abroad in the land. The rapidly bursting buds on tree and shrub whispered it to the birds; the wheat fields on the hillsides mirrored it in pictures of living green; the frogs were croaking to each other about it down in the meadows and hollows, while all the tiny insects had found it out, and were too busy to even talk about it.

Olive had sent several messages inviting the girls to renew their visits to her. Hugh and Dr. Baylor, on several successive Saturdays, had

come in with the carriage, but to no purpose. Lucille was strangely obdurate. On the third Saturday, Hugh came to Estelle. He looked troubled. "I hope you are not busy this morning, Miss Estelle; I want your undivided attention for a few moments, and thought maybe you would walk with me."

He waited until she finished baking a sponge cake for the morrow, then they strolled off up town toward the cemetery.

It was an old-fashioned spot, quiet and undisturbed. They sat down beside his mother's grave, and involuntarily began plucking out the grass, and the seedling weeds from the little flower plot.

Hugh had said very little since starting, and that on indifferent subjects. Now, with his hands occupied, and some excuse for his eyes to follow them, he began, "I hardly suppose I need to tell you; girls have sharp enough eyes to find out those things without being told. I wish yours might be sharp enough to find out where the tangle is, and to help me get it out. I am sure Lucille must know of my love, but she fences me off so adroitly I have never found it possible to tell her so, and I cannot for the life of me decide whether it is the shyness of responsive feeling, or whether she generously wishes

to spare me the pain of refusal. What do you think?"

The question came so abruptly it threw Estelle into as blushing an embarrassment as if it had been a proposal to herself. However, Hugh understood her perfectly, and did not even risk an apology; he merely waited, or rather went on commenting on Lucille's conduct toward himself in a way to concentrate Estelle's thoughts where he wanted them without any self-consciousness. He had great regard for Estelle's instincts when he could get hold of them.

"I am sure her avoiding you can be no proof that she is not in love with you," Estelle said at last, "though Lucille is rather reserved at best, and has grown so much more so of late, I'm afraid I cannot give you any proof that she is. Still, if I had noticed more closely—"

Hugh interrupted to say, "That very reserve may, in itself, be a proof of her being in love—the effort of extreme maiden modesty to conceal it. I never did believe in subjecting a woman to that kind of strain—I haven't a particle of the cat in me."

"He has comforted himself without help from me!" Estelle smiled to herself, and was glad at heart that he could, though she could not help

an anxious dread lest he be therein laying up for himself a disappointment. "Certainly it can do no harm to end the suspense, both yours and hers," she said aloud.

He held a self-centered silence for a few moments, then, "Olive does not know any of this, and I think I will not tell her at all if—I fail, because—it might prejudice her against Lucille, and lose her a good friend. I do not at all know how father found it out, and I cannot by any means make up my mind whether he is trying to encourage or discourage me. Sometimes he chaffs me as if he thought it a boy's ephemeral fancy, then again grows so churlish over the least hint of the subject I could half believe he wanted her himself. Well, Miss Estelle, I believe your advice is good, as it always is, and I will end the suspense at the earliest opportunity. Thank you more than I can tell—"

Estelle was too bashful to repudiate the credit, though fully conscious it was only half hers. He took her home, and left her at the gate, considerably brighter than he came; in fact, whistling like his old self, and Estelle wondered what she had done to help him.

Hugh had made her promise to try to persuade Lucille to let the Ivy Vine meet with Olive that afternoon; and he would come with

the carriage. About an hour before the time, Estelle betook herself to Mrs. Wallaces to keep her promise. She thought she caught a glimpse of Hugh's figure vanishing around the corner as she entered the gate into the yard. The door stood open, according to Bridgeton fashion, and seeing no one in sight, she walked in, and met Lucille coming out of the parlor, red-eyed and disconsolate. Estelle was inclined to turn away, and pretend she did not see, but Lucille faced the situation, as was her wont, asking, "Did you come, too, to propose our going out to the country? I have just told Mr. Baylor it would be impossible for me to go, but possibly you and Olive could get along without me, this time," then, seeing the protest in Estelle's eyes, added languidly, "You don't know what a dreadful headache I have."

This placed the question beyond appeal, and Estelle could do no less than agree to go and try.

It was Paul who drove them out, not Hugh. Nothing in the world but consideration for Lucille had induced Estelle to undertake to fill her place even once. And more than once she realized she had counted without her host, for she was too absent-minded and pre-occupied for anything. Fortunately there were no important

business matters to be attended to, and they made the meeting short.

As they stood in the yard waiting for Dr. Baylor, Hugh spoke to Estelle through the vines of the porch. "Don't turn," he said, "I am not quite equal to interviewing all these people. It is all over—will see and tell you about it tomorrow night after church—may I?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

HUGH.

POOR Hugh! It was indeed all over for him. But he found when the time came he could not endure the touch even of Estelle's gentle sympathy. In vain her glance shied timidly around among the students at the church door. He was not there. She dragged a little behind the others, to give him a chance to join her later, but he did not avail himself of it. Perhaps he meant to come to the house, she thought, and lingered in the porch for some time after her mother and father and Janet had gone in. Estelle was somewhat addicted to moonlight gazing, and none would think it strange she should indulge to-night, for the flood of silver radiance was marvellously beautiful. It had, moreover, something warm, soft and enfolding about it, in harmony with her tender, pitiful thoughts of Hugh. Insensibly her thoughts floated up into words of prayer. Still Hugh did not come. Perhaps he was sick with sorrow and disappointment. Or, it might be that Olive claimed him at home. Maybe it was only the dread of seeing Lucille with some one

else again—his rival, whoever that might be. Yet it was not like Hugh to forego an engagement for anything short of absolute necessity. Or perhaps he had been a little late, and had mistaken Janet for herself—they were near the same size and build—and concluded she had accepted a substitute.

The full-toned church clock struck ten, and soon after Estelle heard Janet and her visitor astir in the parlor. Slipping unnoticed past the door, she stole up stairs to get to bed and simulate sleep before Janet joined her. But the sleep she courted was long in coming. It was not mere idle curiosity which nagged her, nor resentment for being thus left in the lurch with a broken engagement, her every thought and anxiety were for Hugh, though she knew not what to fear for him. She did know his whole strong, manly nature was involved in his love for Lucille, that he was not the man to love lightly, and as quickly forget. She thought of her Uncle Felix, and wondered if Hugh also would have years and years of his life made a blank by this disappointment, and she longed with a great longing to see him and try to persuade him not to give up to it in that way. However, worry and regret and desire were alike helpless. The first news she heard in the

morning was that Hugh had started for California. Would she never know why he had failed to come? or what motive or influence had at last prevailed to induce him to don the white feather in the face of trial? Her own words of consolation and advice, all thought out and revised and re-revised during that moonlight wait to make them express most helpfully the yearning sympathy of her heart, had fallen back upon her in a blank heap—all for nought.

However, when she went down to get the mail, for lack of something better to do to satiate her restlessness, she found a letter—Hugh's full account of himself.

“Between such friends as you and I, who understand each other, apologies are out of place. You could not help knowing, and I made no effort to conceal the fact, I was seeking the interview entirely for my own behoof. An aching heart longed for sympathy, which you know so well how to give; a soul in bitterness craved to pour itself out before one who would not blame nor contemn. And yet, at the last minute I could not. Your very sympathy would have unnerved me, broken down my small store of manly endurance, and tempted me, perhaps, to speak of others in a way I should afterwards regret.

“And then, Estelle, I was not altogether selfish. I could not forego the comfort of having you share my trouble, but I could at least spare your sweet, sensitive spirit the sight of it. Hence I have stayed at home to-night, instead of keeping my engagement, to write it all out for you, to be read at your leisure and pleasure—in broken doses, if you will.

“I have not talked much to you of my love for Lucille, still I knew it was no secret to you, and I always found encouragement and hope in the interested smile I sometimes caught following us. I think I loved Lucille from the first moment I met her at Olive’s bedside. And I have loved her more every day and hour since. Up to that time love had been entirely foreign to my life. It did not enter into my calculations at all. I had a feeling that I belonged to Olive, that nothing must ever come between us. For this reason I fought off the recognition of my affection for Lucille for a while. Finally, I yielded to the seductive conclusion that if I could win Lucille, it would add more to Olive’s comfort and happiness than anything else I could do.

“I had no special doubts of being able to do so, such is the conceit of the animal, man, until lately. Then it was not because I suspected a

rival in the field, nor because she seemed more and more inclined to avoid me; beyond this and deeper, there was an intangible feeling whenever with her, that she was deliberately trying to build up a barrier between us. Still, I was not in the least prepared for what she told me last Saturday, nor, I think, will you be.

“After my talk with you Saturday morning, I felt brave and hopeful, and determined to do the manly thing. I would go home, and get myself thoroughly in hand, and let her come out to the meeting with the girls without embarrassment, then afterwards I would seize my opportunity. I had fully determined not to subject her or myself to another night of uncertainty. Well, it would not have made any difference in results—a few hours, more or less—nevertheless, when to failure is added the consciousness of the loss of self-control a man can but despise himself the more. I couldn’t wait. I met Paul on the street, and asked him to bring the carriage in for the girls, as I had a little matter of business to attend to, and might not go out until too late. I found Lucille in the parlor, and an embarrassed expectancy plainly indicated the likelihood of interruption, and also gave me a hint it was some one she did not wish me to meet. But I stumbled blindly on, resolved if

only one moment be mine to fill it with the confession of my love. It did not take many words. In fact, if I had tried to clothe my simple story in the most poetic and impressive language, she would have foiled the attempt. Although confused and flurried beyond anything I had ever seen, she talked as if for a wager.

“At last in desperation, imagining I heard footsteps on the porch, I blundered into the midst of something she was saying with, ‘But, Lucille, I love you; I came this afternoon especially to tell you so.’

“She stopped then, and grew deathly pale, clasping her hands together, when I made a motion to take one, with a grip which frightened me.

“‘I am so sorry you said it,’ she murmured at last. ‘It’s dreadful; oh! you don’t know how dreadful it is;’ and she put her face in her hands, and quivered all over as if in a convulsion. You may well believe I was miserable. I had hoped to confer happiness as great as I pleaded for, and lo! I had caused this agony to the one I loved.

“Stupefied and helpless, I could only wonder, and regret, and wait for her to explain herself. We must have looked very absurd to the third party, who opened the door, and walked in on

this little scene, and of all the people of the world, who should this third party be but father.

“I must say you women are wonderful creatures for self-control. At the sound of footsteps, she sprang up and faced him with an April smile. He held her hand, while looking from one to the other with a sharp interrogative. She lifted her eyes to *him*, not me, with the sweet, confiding grace I had hoped to see shining in them for me, and said, ‘Tell him, Dr. Baylor!’

“It hardly needed telling, but I listened, as I might have done to the hissing of the deadly shell aiming straight at my heart.

“‘Hugh, boy,’ he said, in a tone meant to be jovial, only he could not hide the pity of it, and the triumph, ‘Hugh, my boy, have you had the audacity to be making love to your stepmother? There! there!’ as I sprang to my feet like a stung beast, ‘you may make love to her all you want now. She insists upon it, she is giving herself to the whole family, and you must forget, my son,’ he put his hand on my shoulder. ‘that she is not giving herself exactly in the way you might have preferred.’

“She held out her hand, such a precious pleading in her eyes, it almost killed me. I took the hand a moment in mine, but I had no answer to the pleading eyes. I only bowed low and

departed. Father told me yesterday in a one-sided conversation that they had been engaged for two months or more, and she had been begging him all the time to take the family into confidence, but he knew what a prejudice there was against stepmothers, and hoped, by the short, sharp, surgeon's knife process, of keeping it a profound secret until the very time had come, to spare the children the dread, and to disarm criticism and objections by the inevitableness of it. 'Of course, I did not dream,' he said, 'yet I should have known it is always best to take a good woman's advice.' I managed to mumble, ungraciously, 'It could have made no difference any way.' And this is all I have to tell. I have nobody to blame, of course. It would be some consolation if I had. It is merely one of those unavertible disasters for which there is no help save grim endurance, only I could not stay and see the consummation. I start early to-morrow morning for California.

"This is my good-bye. Do not, I beg you, allow this to influence in the least your affection for Lucille. And, oh! comfort Olive for my sake. Take care of her in my place!"

It broke off abruptly here without signature, save his initials, H. B., and the little Latin word "*Vale,*" which he so often used at parting. Yes,

Hugh was gone. A new blank in life. A new responsibility for Estelle. She fully appreciated it, too, for none knew better than she what Hugh had been to Olive, guarding her life with a woman's instinctive tenderness, and a man's protecting strength. How should she ever take his place! Why had not Hugh left the charge to Lucille? Estelle's face burned to remember the time when Hugh thought she had been the cause of danger and suffering to Olive, and had depended on Lucille to soothe and restore. It was a comfort to know he could trust her now.

Perhaps what Hugh wanted her to do was to prepare Olive for the approaching marriage, help to reconcile her to it. Would she oppose it? Estelle could not tell. Olive had been, to all intents and purposes, the head of the house now for eight years, by virtue of being the only woman in it. No doubt, it would cost something to resign the homage of such a loyal little kingdom, and to have some one take the mother's place is always hard. Still, Olive had no foolishness about her. She was not apt to make herself unhappy over what could not be helped, and she was specially fond of Lucille.

Simple thinking had wound itself out; she must go out to see Olive, and—do what she could

for Hugh's sake. "Poor Hugh" was the burden of her thoughts for many a day.

Hugh had been careful in assigning reasons for his trip to steer so clear of Lucille and the approaching marriage as to prevent her being associated with his going in any way.

When the announcement of the marriage was made to the family Paul and Elmer felt sorely tempted to "raise a little dust" over the prospective change, but Olive did not disappoint those who knew her best, and was able to talk calmly of it, howbeit with a shade of reserve, as if needing to exercise some self-control. To Estelle she said she was glad her father could do it, because she was so little account since her sickness, for the comfort of the family, and Lucille was so lovely, he surely could not have chosen more wisely. Olive's example was potent in restraining the boys, for they well knew it meant the most to her.

After this visit, Estelle came to the conclusion her efforts to console in place of Hugh would be supernumerary. Nevertheless, many a time afterwards she realized how Olive clung to her.

Notwithstanding Hugh's charge, not to allow his disappointment to influence her feelings toward Lucille, Estelle couldn't help it. She noticed, with positive personal resentment, that

after Hugh's departure, Lucille lost the troubled embarrassment she had so often manifested, and suffered her face to express the serene, unostentatious happiness she evidently felt. Did Lucille suspect the true state of her feelings that she sought her more than was her wont, and discussed confidentially all her plans and arrangements! Of course, Estelle could not resist this, though there was always a deprecating consciousness of disloyalty to Hugh, and the old spiteful feeling would occasionally crop up until she saw the first interview between Olive and her new mother. "Nothing could be more unaffectedly tender and sweet," thought Estelle—an unexpected witness of it—and for the rest concluded to leave Providence to work out his will for the good of all without any more useless worrying on her part.

The quiet wedding took place in June, and the happy pair started off for a short trip, leaving Estelle with Olive until their return.

The return of Berta, Effie and Agnes for the summer threw new life into the Ivy Vine. And on Lucille's return from her bridal trip, she resumed her place as its head, so they got along splendidly, and before school time came again, the industry of the girls was manifest in a neat reserve stock of pretty articles for the autumn fair.

To Estelle it was a most happy and restful summer. She needed it after the unusual responsibilities of the year. She and Agnes, having never been separated before, did not realize how hard it had been on both. Yet Agnes had made fine progress in her studies and Estelle had done equally well with her drawing and painting. She had specially enjoyed the practical instruction in drawing from nature, and the excursions in the spring for that purpose.

The separation of the two sisters again in the fall was even harder than at first because they knew now what it was. But, busy days and months pass quickly. When Nannie Lindsay came home in February, Estelle knew the long session was half gone, and began to check off the remaining weeks on her almanac with a delicious sense of growing nearness to June.

CHAPTER XXIV.

UNCERTAIN FRUITS.

A NEW face among the feminine constituency of a college town always creates a breeze of sensation. For a while the name and attractions of the young lady will be bandied about among the students with all the zest of a new game—that is, among those who take the “calico ticket.”

Nannie Lindsay’s two years ended with the fall term, timing her home-coming in the dull reaction after Christmas.

She had fulfilled her promise to the girls and studied well. Though she did not take the full graduating course, she brought home several diplomas and certificates in special branches, with a letter commending her as qualified to teach these several branches. Unfortunately, another aim possessed her soul. From a little girl she had envied the young ladies who had plenty of beaux, and wondered if she would ever be so blessed when grown, or whether the beauty she was conscious of possessing even then, would be so shrouded in poverty and ignorance that the

students would never care to notice it. This was her opportunity, and she did not intend it should be lost. If any qualms of conscience visited her for failing to carry out the plans of those who had given her such advantages, she salved them over with the persuasion that, after she had had a little fun, a wealthy marriage would really help the family more than if she should "drudge her life away" teaching.

In the two years she had spent in a large boarding-school, and the intervening summer with her aunt, partly at Long Branch, she had learned some things which were not in the seminary curriculum. For instance, she had become as proficient in reading faces as French; had become as skillful in playing on human hearts as on the piano.

Something, too, she had learned of the artistic effect of simple draperies in touching up worn or sombre furniture, the brightening power of flowers, and the wonderful possibilities of light and shadow.

The little home her father had left them soon showed the efficiency of this part of her education. One or two of her own paintings, which her aunt had framed for the exhibition, adorned the walls; tidies and sofa pillows, manufactured during leisure moments while away from home,

helped to conceal the poorness of the furniture, and the square of carpet which Selina's earnings had bought in honor of her home-coming, was made the most of. In all her improvements, she had an eager little helper in Selina, who idolized her sister none the less because of the sacrifices she had made, and was continually making, for her.

As for the girl herself: a fair complexion, bright blue eyes, and light curly hair, is a rather ordinary, but often a very pretty combination. Nannie had, in addition, a brilliant color, bewitching dimples, pretty mouth and teeth, and a round, trim figure. Each of these was a point in the measure of her self-valuation.

It was not customary in those days to announce in the paper the goings and comings of society lights, and in a college town it was entirely unnecessary. There were generally plenty of Athenians among the students to do the requisite advertising of the advent of a pretty girl. Nanny Lindsay's little parlor soon became the most popular place about town.

* * * * *

A group of collegians stood on the campus one day animatedly discussing the new star when Prof. J. Carr Carter and Stanley Sinclair passed by.

Their friendship had grown and deepened with each succeeding year. To Stanley, the Professor was a constant intellectual stimulant, a delightful incentive to study, now that he knew him. On the other hand, Stanley's staunch friendship had often brought his own social popularity to bear between the Professor and class troubles, for Professor Carter was still occasionally pricked to sharpness by the invulnerable dullness or reckless levity of some member of his Greek class. To one who felt the glow in his soul at sight of a Greek letter it was perfectly incomprehensible how the most stupid could be dull or frivolous in the presence of the great masters of Greek literature. Besides, Stanley's genial good-fellowship, more apt to find the diamond than the poison in a companion, had been a fine tonic to the Professor's social disposition—its only safeguard, in fact, for since the death of his wife, a few months after that of their baby, he had lived a recluse as far as ladies were concerned.

"Have you been to call on Miss Lindsay; that seems the order of the day?" Stanley asked, turning to his companion, with a wary twinkle in his eye.

"I?" the Professor echoed, with the intonation of unlikelihood. Yet a slow smile followed,

ending in, "I had a kind of rencounter with her the other day. Perhaps I ought to have called."

Sinclair was only feigning innocence. He had heard the whole matter from Miss Lindsay, but listened interestedly again, for at the close of Miss Lindsay's recital she had said, "I am crazy to know the professor. Cannot you bring him to see me?" So, now Sinclair took care to remark, opportunely, "I think you should by all means pay your respects. You will find her charming, and perhaps at this hour we may escape the rabble. Shall we go?"

Rather to his surprise, the Professor agreed. Only Comes was there. His black eyes were like a poignard poised with necessity to prick somebody, for the interruption, when they entered. However, Miss Lindsay knew how to manage him. She turned at once to the newcomers with her whole attention. Comes instantly softened. She as instantly met the penitent appeal of his gentler eyes and tones with a swift, sweet flash of regret "for him alone." He did not stay long, however, and the electric speech of her hand in his one moment at parting sent him home happy, though all the world should make love to her in his absence.

"I am glad you have at last given me the right to know you, as I have heard so much about

you." Her blue eyes looked a bewildering reverent admiration at the Professor, with just a shy, confiding glance toward his companion.

If Prof. J. Carr Carter had fully imbibed what she was saying, being a diffident man, he might have felt some pleased curiosity with regard to current opinion of himself. His response was rather irrelevant, "Have you felt any serious inconvenience from your accident the other day?"

"Not much," she said, catching her lip under small white teeth, while a tiny pucker as of pain came between her brows, as she stretched her foot out a little carefully. "It was only a slight sprain, I am thankful to say, and is nearly well, except sometimes a twinge in moving it."

"I should have called earlier to inquire," he spoke, apologetically, "but, you know, I do not visit." The Professor's diffidence had been growing on him at a distressing rate during his seclusion. For that very reason, his friend, Sinclair, had jumped at the opportunity of bringing him into contact with the perfect ease and self-possession of Miss Lindsay.

"I do not like to hear you say that," she told him, with a sympathetic gravity. "I was in hopes you would come often enough to help me a little with my Greek. I studied it two years,

and have to confess, with shame, I know nothing in the world about it. My teacher was so dull and unenthusiastic, and—I could have loved it so!” She gave a quick glance on the sly at Sinclair, as much as to say, “See how cleverly I have profited by your hints,” and added, “At any rate, we will not call it visiting when you come to see me. But, really, don’t you think—” A pretty, shy hesitation seemed to trip her speech. She turned an appealing look to Sinclair to help her out, but he only shook his head laughingly. She made a new beginning, “Might it not be that the most brilliant intellects, instead of being blunted, are sharpened and brightened by contact with the small pebbles of our woman’s wit?” She saw the “bravo!” in Stanley’s eyes and in the noiseless applause of his hands, and flushed with pleasure.

Meanwhile the Professor looked with retrospective soberness at a picture of “Where Brook and River Meet.” In fact, his gaze was fixed so long she began to fear she had struck a wrong note. But presently his slow smile reappeared.

“I believe you are right, Miss Lindsay—” At this moment Russell Brent appeared on the scene, and several others quickly following, the Professor subsided, with his unfinished sentence, into an observant silence. Sinclair joined in

among the boys for a few moments, then, signaling his friend, they rose to go.

Miss Lindsay stepped out of the circle with them to say good-bye, and, looking up into the grave, matter-of-fact face of the Professor, said, "I shall be a restless ghost until you bridge that hyphen. How soon will you come again?"

As the door closed between Miss Lindsay and Prof. Carter, Mr. Brent sprang to his feet, and wheeled, facing her, his eyes sparkling with mischief. As she passed him to resume her seat, he leaned forward and asked, in a half whisper, "Miss Lindsay, how *did* you get him?"

"What do you mean, Mr. Brent?" a little stiffly.

"How did you get Professor Iceberg to come to see you? Do tell me?"

With mocking hauteur she retorted, "Pray, how did I get you, Mr. Brent?"

"Good!" he cried, with none the less relish that the laugh was turned upon himself.

As they were leaving, Duncan McCann made some excuse to turn back, and, despite Brent's call of "no fair," secured one little private moment before her supper-bell rang. He wanted to tell her he had found the hymn they had vainly tried to recall, and which, she said, had always been her favorite. They differed as to

the most suitable tune, and it became necessary to try several before deciding. He thought her voice and touch peculiarly adapted to sacred music, and they sang together whenever they could get a chance, which was seldom enough, McCann thought, considering she enjoyed it as much as he.

Thus Nannie Lindsay was diligently studying the tactics of conquest, even as did the great Napoleon, and applying them in her small sphere with a like consummate skill. If the innermost tablet of her consciousness could have been open to our eyes that night, her numerous admirers would possibly have been indexed somewhat after this fashion.

“Brent—Egypt. I’ll sharpen my wits on him.

“Prof. J. Carr Carter—Moscow. May I be able to out-Napoleon Napoleon. If I do, I shall plant my standard there.

“Sinclair—shame to call him Italy, but he is such a willing and delightful cat’s-paw.

“McCann—he is the good old tabby himself, who, for an occasional little kindly rub, will purr forever.

“Comes—were there ever such eyes! I fear he will be my Waterloo.”

Everybody was surprised to hear that Pro-

fessor Carter had called on Miss Lindsay, for everybody did hear of it.

"I am not sure you did him a kindness that time," Virgie said to Stanley Sinclair.

Stanley laughed. "She is wonderfully bright and fascinating. It was a perfect treat to see her handle him. I would not take anything for it."

McCann's eyes were shining, but Virgie still shook her head.

"Maybe she is not such a black sheep as she has been painted to you. You must have gotten your impressions from one of her discarded lovers," and he looked at McCann, in quiet raillery.

"I don't know why you should use the word Black in the same sentence with her," the young man said, a trifle hotly. "She does not 'cast pearls before swine'; but, to my certain knowledge, there is not a truer, lovelier Christian in town."

Virgie and Sinclair looked at each other under arched brows. Evidently it was too serious a matter for joking in that direction.

It was very evident to the girls that Nannie was playing a pretty wild row, and they felt some compunction over it, as in some small measure responsible. But the young men stood by her to a man.

CHAPTER XXV.

A GALA NIGHT FOR THE IVY LEAVES.

JUNE had come. Its roses had budded and bloomed, and a host of other floral beauties were blushing themselves into a glory of rivalry.

Nannie Lindsay had reigned as belle of Bridgeton for nearly five months without a rival. She was looking forward to the college party as the acme of her existence. Berta and Effie Blair and Agnes Graham would all be at home in time for it this year, as their school closed a week earlier. Berta and Effie had succeeded, as they had hoped, in graduating in two years. Agnes needed one more. But she had won a scholarship, which would enable her to get it without further expense to her father or Uncle Felix.

Estelle did not generally enjoy these public occasions very much, but this time she was so happy in having the girls at home she found their delighted anticipations were proving contagious. To fill up the measure of her joy Olive was to try it this year for the first time. She

had been so frail heretofore, her father had been afraid to permit it.

The college party was a kind of yearly *omnium Gallium*. One saw everybody there.

Græme Gordon had cornered his Cousin Effie early in the action.

"I am so glad you do not have to go back to school," he was saying, "it has been lonesome without you these two years."

"It can hardly matter much to you, I should think," she returned, "since you will be away yourself next winter."

"Nevertheless, it will make this difference, that I can come to see you when you are at home, though the university is a little farther off, which I could not do last year while you were at school."

Græme Gordon was expecting to take the medical course at the university.

Most of our acquaintances among the students were about to scatter, either to continue their preparation for life-work elsewhere, or to take direct hold of business for which they felt themselves already fitted.

There is always a sense of breakage or loss in thus loosening the ties of college friendships. Len and Stanley Sinclair had steadily grown in the affections of all who knew them; Stanley

for his almost womanly gentleness, and his delicate, chivalrous sense of honor and courtesy, and Len for sterling worth in a somewhat rougher mould, and for his beautiful loyalty and spaniel-like devotion to his younger, more gifted brother. Stanley, with Duncan McCann, expected the ensuing fall to enter the theological seminary. Len was going immediately into business with his father.

Mr. Brent and Mr. Comes were still oftenest seen together, though it never ceased to be a problem, what constituted the cementing bond between two such incongruous elements, and how the soft silk of Comes' wiley sophistry had, through three years of close intimacy, managed to evade the electric spark of Brent's inflammable spirit.

They, too, were among those who might depart. They had studied law for the past year under Judge Bland, but had about decided, as they were telling their friends, to finish their course elsewhere. At least, Brent had, with Comes it was a matter of indecision.

Many new student faces appear and disappear each year whom we must not even try to introduce. Nannie Lindsay evidently sways the multitude this year. There are not many of those present who may not be found at some

time during the evening attached to her train, and for the greater part of them it was for as much of the time as they could get near enough to hear and be heard. Mr. Comes' devotion is still constant and unequivocal. He has never cared for any other woman, and is rarely absent from her elbow. Duncan McCann, with his guileless faith in woman, was still her most abject victim. Stanley Sinclair understands her better, yet even he, too often for his own good, falls under the witchery of her eye, while Brent flutters in and out of the circle around her, like a butterfly protesting its indifference to the light. As for Prof. Carter, he was keeping out of her way to-night, but only under promise. She had proffered him the privilege of escort to and from, on condition that he would rather avoid her while there. "I am so dreadfully afraid people will begin to tease me about you," she said to him, with irreproachable naïvete, "and if they do, I know I will make a goose of myself."

Of course, the professor was all obedience, and *inter nos* the stipulation served her purpose well, as his presence was rather a restraint upon the younger men.

In another part of the rooms, Berta's beauty was beginning to tell on the susceptible. In

height, figure and style, she was a veritable queen among her peers, and her eyes magnificent, while her voice was inexpressibly rich and mellow.

By the side of the most beautiful you will inevitably find the Kentuckian.

“Miss Blair I am glad you returned in time to save me from that hopeless vortex of mortified vanity.” His gesture and glance indicated Nannie Lindsay.

As Berta’s eye followed, a vivid smile ran around that other circle.

“Miss Lindsay and her friends seem to be very happy?” with a faint query in her arched brows.

“Happy? Yes, as small boys playing with a loaded pistol. Tell me, please—” and resting his right elbow on his knee, he leaned forward, and from his steel-gray orbs sent a search-light into the unfathomed depths of hers— “tell me wherein consists the pleasure of having a lot of *Les Miserables* at one’s feet? You are a woman, can you enlighten me? It has always been a puzzle.”

He looked dead in earnest, yet there was an imp of quizzical mischief lurking somewhere in his expression.

Berta flushed and bridled a little under his persistent gaze.

“You could not expect a school girl to be wise in such matters, either experimentally or from observation,” she replied archly. “Still, if you will remove the restriction to ‘woman,’ we might discuss the subject theoretically.”

He tossed his fore-lock back with a merry laugh, which caught the jealous ear of Nannie Lindsay. Of others also, perhaps, for in the few succeeding moments there was an evening up of the two circles, and the theoretical analysis and discussion of flirting had several additional participants, and as many applauding listeners.

Meanwhile, Prof. Carter, bound over to keep at a respectful distance from his load-star, for such Nannie Lindsay had become by virtue of being the only lady he really knew, noticed Estelle Graham—a temporary wall-flower—and thought to play the benevolent for once in his life by way of getting rid of the time which was hanging rather heavily on his hands. Stanley Sinclair, his usual resource on such occasions, was looking too well satisfied with Agnes to admit of being disturbed. Prof. Carter had known Estelle, as he knew most people, through the mere formalities of life. For instance, being a member of the same college faculty as her father, he had met her on occasions when business or pleasure called them

together at her father's house; also in duty calls there. But Estelle was so easily abashed the effort to make conversation with her was seldom an easy task, and she was not apt to take such duty on herself, even in her own home, if there were any one else in whose favor she might shirk it. Besides, her father's great respect for Prof. Carter's learning caused her still more to feel, as she expressed it, "a mum little stupid" in his presence.

Consequently she had never volunteered a remark to him. On his part, he regarded her as an undeveloped child, extremely diffident. Herein, at least, he ought to be able to sympathize with her.

As he approached her, he could not but notice her glance about in every direction, as if for a way of escape, and his conscience smote him for making himself such an ogre to an innocent young girl. He determined on the spot to redeem himself, and—who could tell?—he might succeed in winning to himself another such true friend as Stanley Sinclair; he could see already in her face the same self-abnegation, and the same innate sincerity.

Estelle had come to the party with the intuitive foreknowledge that she would be a wall-flower, nor did she particularly care, provided

she could only remain unnoticed. She had a fancy for watching other people, as they talked, and found it infinitely more entertaining than trying to talk without interest. To her, being a wall-flower, was Elysium beside the effort to converse with the erudite professor. Nevertheless, the Professor came, and conquered. At the end of an hour she had discovered that a man may be agreeable, though ever so learned, and he had decided she was a much brighter girl than he had supposed, else she could not be such an intelligent listener. In his benevolent effort to break down the bars of her reserve and self-depreciation, he actually forgot for the time the arbitrary restriction which had primarily driven him to it, until the sound of Miss Lindsay's voice suddenly penetrated to him, and, looking up, he met her eye, conveying to him the clear impression that she was not altogether pleased with him, dutiful as he had tried to be. Becoming restless under it, and under necessity to make some change, he got up, saying in all sincerity, "Miss Estelle, you have given me a very delightful hour."

"I was just thinking the same," she returned, with wonderfully unembarrassed heartiness.

"You did not expect it, though, did you?" he questioned, with a slow gleam of mischief.

She blushed, but laughed, "No, because I thought it was going to be so stupid for you. And of course it was, only you have not let me find it out."

"You must take my word for it," he said, with a kind of blunt gentleness, "I have never enjoyed a college party until to-night. Now, take me over to your friend, Miss Baylor. I do not know her very well, and would like to know her better."

They had not gone many steps, however, before they were intercepted by Janet Faulkner.

"I was just coming over to relieve you, Professor; would have been earlier, but could not get away from the boys. I have been wondering restlessly for the last half hour whether my bashful young sister could make herself agreeable company for our wisest young professor. She doesn't always, you know."

Estelle plumed herself for flight as soon as cognizant of Janet's design to take possession of Professor Carter. But, having heard that much, naturally she waited to hear a little more.

"No, I cannot say I *know* the fact. She certainly has not proved it to me to-night," she heard him say, and looked back with a grateful flush; but he was already devoting his entire attention to Janet for the moment, and had

probably forgotten the errand he had proposed to her. However, as she noticed Olive had only Paul and one of his friends with her at the time, she sought her for her own behoof.

It was not very often that Estelle and Olive wanted for something to say, but after Paul and his companion left them they grew strangely quiet for the time and place. They were both, unconsciously, missing Hugh. He was such good circulating medium—kept the young men stirring at a party so there could be no wall-flowers when he was about.

Virgie presently succeeded in getting rid of a “bore” and joined them. Here Professor Carter found Estelle again, when “some of the boys” in search of Janet had come to his relief. For the rest of the evening she and Olive greatly enjoyed the vivacious *tete-a-tete* between Virgie and the Professor.

One day had already passed over the limit into another, when Nannie Lindsay appeared, peering around somewhat anxiously, with a small retinue of followers. She soon spied the object of her search, and sending each of her companions away with a fresh *bonbon* of pleasant words, she beckoned to the Professor, and whispered, “You have been good—almost to a fault. As a reward, I have dismissed every-

body else, and you are to have me all to yourself for the walk home, as you did coming, none of the second-fiddles and interruptions I know you so much detest. I managed we should have this one more nice, quiet talk together, notwithstanding the students plead and argued I should give them the preference, as they were going away. I will be ready now in just a moment." She lifted her face to his with its most witching expression, then tripped away, smiling back over her shoulder from the door, while he stood looking after her, wondering how anything human could be so exquisite, so pure, so altogether lovely.

This party was the closing feature of the commencement. The young men scattered immediately afterwards. Indeed, some good-byes were spoken that night. The next day was full of them.

Mr. Brent and Mr. Comes had both decided to return to the Law Class the next winter, as Nannie Lindsay had predetermined they should. "Without them as foils," she said to herself, "I fear I would never reach my Moscow."

CHAPTER XXVI.

UNDER THE CHURCH WINDOW.

BRENT and Comes did actually return to finish their law course in Bridgeton, as Nannie Lindsay had made up her mind they should. She, at times, almost regretted the easy accomplishment of her purpose, as she occasionally learned of a decided defection on Brent's part toward Berta Blair. However, thus far she had had no difficulty in drawing him back as soon as she knew of it. The method she had found most effective was to make the favor she doled out to Comes conditional on the unequivocal allegiance of Brent. Comes worshipped the very breath she breathed, and this cruel exaction was sometimes more than he could bear.

"You are the most merciless tyrant this world ever knew!" he flashed out at her one day through his white teeth, angrily clenched. "Why do you ask more of me, whom you profess to love, than of others, whose love you are only playing with?"

"Don't you know?" she said, soothingly. "O Comes!" and she turned on him the intoxi-

eating light of her blue eyes, while the color deepened into a flush on her round, dimpled cheeks, and her tones were meltingly tender. That was enough. He was eagerly ready to do her bidding again, even to the endurance of untold tortures from jealousy.

Virgie Wallace still took quite seriously this outcome of one of their benevolent schemes. One after another, she had seen her friends fall under the power of Nannie Lindsay's fascination, and there was no use saying a word to them; it did not amount to a pennyweight against one of her ravishing smiles. "Yet it does seem as if we ought to do something," she was saying to Effie and Estelle on one occasion, "because it stands to reason she could not be so attractive to college-bred men without education, and—without our help she might not have been able to avail herself of her aunt's offer."

"Still, it would hardly have been right for her to have missed it," said Effie, "and I don't know that we have any reason to regret helping her to get what she could."

"Except," interposed Estelle, "perhaps if we had not been so proud of her beauty, and fixed her up so nicely to show it off, she might not have been tempted to use it in this selfish way."

"I heard father say the other day," observed

Effie, "that the students, as a whole, had fallen to a lower grade this year than he had ever known. Nannie may be responsible, even for that, for Mrs. McBride says nobody has any idea how much time the young men spend there."

"Well," said Virgie, "there is no good in talking of her evil ways, unless there is something we can do about it. Would it do any good, do you think, for one of us to go to see her and have a plain talk with her? Because, if you think so, I suppose I am the one to do it, as I am older than she, and, being not so much home-folks, she may not feel called upon to resent it. I am perfectly willing to do it, if you all think best."

So Virgie filled her quiver with all sorts of arguments, drawn from her own candid, conscientious soul, pointed by real kindness and polished by native wit. But her report, given in a half-puzzled amusement, was,—“Nannie has evidently gotten into the habit of flirting, and cannot help it, even with a girl. After my little bit of experience, I cannot blame the young men. There certainly is a great deal of natural sweetness in the girl, and I really do not believe she realizes the harm she is doing.” Then she laughed self-derisively, and added, “I acknowledge myself defeated. If anybody else wants to try it, let them.”

“There is only one other thing I can think of to do,” observed Estelle, in her shy, sweet way, while Effie was wondering if her mother could have any influence.

“What is it you are thinking of, Estelle?” they all wanted to know.

“Get Uncle Felix to talk to her, some time,” she answered, “when he gets a good opportunity.”

The girls quite jumped at this proposition. Uncle Felix was the very one. Being a man, she would be the more apt to listen and heed, and such a staid, invulnerable old bachelor,—even Nannie would hardly find it worth while to exercise her wiles on him. They went immediately in a body to put the whole case before him.

He did not seem to be very hopeful, but promised to think it over. He surprised Nannie very much, shortly after, by asking her to take a walk with him. He had taken care it should be at a time when she would not miss more agreeable company.

They followed the road which would soonest bring them out of town, and Mr. Graham brought into requisition all his foreign lore and native talent for her entertainment, and her quick responsive repartee and merry laugh testi-

fied to his success so far. They sat down at last beside a little woodland stream, from whence they could catch pretty glimpses of the town through the trees. They dropped into a moment's silence, while he revised the little speech he had cut and dried for the occasion.

When he made ready to begin, she was looking down at the water with a shy, blushing restlessness that was not unbecoming. "She suspects what I am going to say, and I might as well come boldly out with my lecture."

"Nannie," he said, in his most patriarchal tone and manner, "I give you credit for sufficient acuteness to know I did not request this walk with you for idle pastime. You are perfectly aware I am no ladies' man."

"Very good of you, I am sure," she said, filling the pause without looking up.

"Being a fatherless girl, it would be only natural for any man to take a protective interest in you, especially being a member of the same church."

Here she glanced up with a slightly puzzled air. Evidently she had not yet caught the drift of his intention.

"Now, if I should see an unprotected little lamb straying into fields where I knew there would be danger and trouble, what could I do

but try to get it back to safety, and under such protection as would keep it there?"

A sudden start and flush of consciousness, which had every appearance of being natural, and which he did not exactly know the meaning of, embarrassed him, made him stumble in his speech, and gave her opportunity to say, deprecatingly, "Oh! Mr. Felix, I am sorry you said that. Don't say any more, and I will try to forget it. I did so hope you were only going to ask to be my good, true friend. That is what I wanted you to be. But when one has gone as far as this, it is so hard to be free and easy again," and she put her face into her hands with a touching gesture of distress. If she were laughing behind them, simple-hearted Uncle Felix did not suspect. He was only thinking, "It takes something of a brute to tell a pretty girl you do not love her, when you have, ever so unintentionally, given her reason to believe you do." His face grew red back to the edge of his hair, as he hastily tried to rectify himself. But she baffled him at every turn, and when they reached home, he could only say to himself, "I am nothing but an old fool, to get myself entangled in such a trap. The only cause I have for congratulation is that she had the good sense not to want me." And, in the simplicity of his

heart, he never dreamed she had purposely given this turn to the affair to avert the lecture she had sniffed in the air.

After this she was left to her own devices, and her unsophisticated victims to escape as best they might.

Howbeit, the most consummate flirt will sometimes stretch her lines too far. A time came when Comes knew, by all the rules of justice and equity, that it was his turn to go to church with Miss Lindsay. Yet she was holding him off for no better reason, as he could not help knowing, than that she was scheming for some one else.

“I will let you know in good time—Saturday at latest, and if I find I have an engagement,” she said, all sweetness, “why, I will send him off early, and see you for a little visit afterward.”

Comes said nothing, and she did not dream he had not accepted the sugar-plum as acquiescingly as usual. He was, on the contrary, in a wordless rage. He would, doubtless, have gone straight to the saloon, as he had done too often of late, if he had not, fortunately, met Effie Blair. Mr. Comes had never been anything of a ladies' man, and knew Effie only in the most formal manner incident to the customary invita-

tions and duty calls at the President's house. Effie, while not pretty, had a dignity and grace of carriage, and a sweet graciousness of manner, which atoned for the lack. She was looking uncommonly well this afternoon, and, under a sudden impulse, he turned and caught step with her, and allowed her to talk him into a good humor by the time they reached her door.

On Saturday afternoon Brent handed him a note from Miss Lindsay, claiming an engagement with him for Sunday night, as she had been able to stave off the other one in his favor.

An unreadable smile flashed under cover of his black eyes and black moustache. "For once the worm has not waited to be trodden on by her august queenship," he muttered, grumly.

Brent was shining his shoes with his accustomed Kentucky vim, his thoughts busy in unrecorded seas, so that this first remark fell unheeded.

"Russell, do you know," began Comes, in a spasm of passionate vehemence, "I believe Nannie Lindsay intends to marry Professor Carter if she can get him, and throw all the rest of us overboard without compunction!"

Russell looked up quickly, a twinkle of amusement in his steel-gray orbs.

"In fact, she had the cheek to intimate as much to me the other day," Comes continued, coloring under the steel-gray scrutiny before which his dark glance fell.

"It can be only well we should know the ground we stand on," his companion answered gravely, bending again to his task, while his heavy moustache gave no hint of amusement.

Comes sat gazing mutely at the dainty *billet-doux* in his hand. Presently, "Will you be there to-night?"

"Yes."

He drew up to the table then and wrote: "Sorry you should have broken anybody's heart to accommodate me, especially as I have another engagement for Sunday night, which I *cannot* break."

He was perfectly sure it was the Professor she had been angling for, and though she had apparently failed this time, he was still madly jealous of him. If he had suddenly looked up and caught the humor of Russell's smile fixed on him, it might have diverted him somewhat. But he did not. He was making up his mind not to see Nannie until after Sunday night. Nevertheless, ten o'clock found him irresistibly impelled in that direction. Lights and voices warned him the parlor was still full. He could

hear Russell's hearty laugh, and did not care to risk his ridicule. He walked round the square and came back again. As there was no response to his listening ear, he climbed the honeysuckle frame and peeped in the side window. Russell was still there, standing face to face with her; the rest gone. As Comes descended from his post, in cat-like quietude, he heard, "Don't ask me, Nannie. I never did a dishonorable thing in my life. I had no business to mention it, but it was too good a joke to keep."

"She does not appear much distressed over my defection; why should I be miserable!" mused Comes. "Perhaps I have only played into her hands, and she has secured the Professor, after all." One thing puzzled him. There was no doubt Russell Brent, for all his spasmodic devotion to Berta Blair, was as deeply in love with Nannie as himself. How, then, could he be so well satisfied to see her drifting away from him!" Another stroll up and down the square brought him back just as Russell passed out of the gate, and he had joined Nannie before she closed the door.

She extended her hand without the slightest surprise. "I knew you would come," she said, sweetly, "for all Russell said you wouldn't."

"Why did he say that?"

"I asked if you were not coming, and he handed me your note, and said 'no.'"

"Umph! what else did he say of me?" recollecting what he had heard.

Something in his tone and the darkening face startled her.

"Nothing," she said, indifferently, but she could not stay the tell-tale flush of consciousness.

"You had better tell me!" he warned, sharply.

If she held a power of fascination over him, so did he over her, and at this moment he reminded her of a magnificent thoroughbred with the bit between his teeth.

"What a grand creature you are!" she cried, impulsively, fear lost in admiration.

He smiled. Then sat down and talked placidly for the next fifteen minutes. Then he arose. "You must tell me what Russell said about me," he said, resolutely.

She tried to evade him, but he still held the bit in his teeth.

"He only said you had gotten into a regular school-boy tantrum over my note; that was all," she murmured, weakly yielding.

"Did you believe him, and help him laugh at me?" he muttered, crushing her hand in the fierce softness of his.

"If I did," and she threw back her head and

gazed up into his eyes, "it was to me only a proof of your love."

He softened, and the blue devils fled, as usual, at her touch.

"Still, it was a mean thing for Russell to speak of me in that way to any young lady, and he my professed friend," he said to himself on the way home. "I am glad it is not he that is to take my place to-morrow night. I can better endure to see the Professor there this time."

The engagement made with Effie Blair in a freak of jealousy had been a haunting dread. Yet he was to find, as he had found before, that she was uncommonly good company, and could make him, for the time, forget and be his most charming self.

As they entered the church door, whom should they see in front of them but Russell Brent with Nannie Lindsay.

The dark Spanish face flamed. The black eyes blazed.

Effie did not see, nor did the couple in front; only Uncle Felix noticed, wondered and watched.

Comes went beyond the other two, seated Effie, and chatted awhile, then said coolly, "By the way, will you excuse me a moment? I must speak to a friend."

He walked back, and, touching Russell on the shoulder, murmured, "A word with you!" and stalked on to the door.

"Pray for me!" Russell whispered, too lightly by far for the words, and followed him.

Five minutes later, as the minister's voice rose in invocation for God's mercy and blessing, a pistol shot rang out from under the window where Nannie Lindsay sat, and shivered the still atmosphere of the quiet, orderly town and congregation into fragments of bewildered terror.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BITTER BERRIES.

COMES was one of the few young men whom Uncle Felix did not know. He rarely needed to seek them. His store, which had now become the book-store of the place, was so bright and attractive, and supplied them with so many of the necessities of student life, they naturally fell into the habit of dropping in for purchases, and remaining to loaf, giving the owner many opportunities for personal talk, tender, impressive little lectures, and wise, wholesome advice.

But Mr. Comes had rather fought shy. He bought briefly, and departed promptly. Yet Mr. Graham had often followed his dark, handsome face, with its possibilities of good and evil, in fatherly yearning. Being a close observer, he made a special note of the face that Sunday night as it passed him. He thought he detected a danger signal. When, later, the young man went back toward the door, followed by the very person who had apparently excited his ire, Uncle Felix yielded to the impulse to keep them in sight.

He chose a safe shadow for his post of observation, though it were hardly needed, for both were too self-absorbed to care if a dozen policemen were dogging their steps. Mr. Graham could not hear the words, nor did he care to, but, presently, by a narrow band of light from the church window, he saw Russell's cool, courteous face flash into sudden fury, his hand involuntarily going back to his pistol pocket. Instantly a small stiletto flashed into sight in Comes' clutch, and Uncle Felix stepped between them, and threw up both right hands, though not in time wholly to divert their deadly aim. The bullet went into Comes' head, and the stiletto, in glancing, made an ugly gash above Russell's heart.

At the report of the pistol the congregation scattered in wild confusion. Effie, glancing back toward the window whence the sound had come, happened to catch sight of Nannie Lindsay with a face of pitiful agony, and quivering from head to foot like a storm-beset leaf.

No one else seeming to notice her, Effie went quickly to her, and tried to quiet her excitement with soothing words. But Nannie clutched her fiercely, and with a fearful distraught glare of the eye, whispered, "He's killed him! he's killed him! I don't know which, but one of them lies

dead under the church window, and whichever it is it is all my fault. Did I kill him? No, no, not I!" Then, dropping her voice, "Yes, one is dead, and it is all my fault!"

These words she kept repeating with low, incoherent mutterings, which greatly alarmed Effie. Everybody was wild with excitement and uncertainty; there was nobody to whom she could appeal for help. Effie put her arm around her, seeking, by her own enforced calmness to bring the poor girl back to herself, but her mind was evidently reeling with the shock. Effie was glad enough to see Prof. Carter approaching, at length, and greatly relieved to have his assistance in getting her charge home. Nor could they leave her then. Her mother was so overcome by her appearance and condition as to be of very little account, and Effie was unwilling to leave the whole burden on little Selina.

While Prof. Carter went in search of a doctor, Effie and Selina managed to get Nannie to bed, and with cold applications to allay somewhat the fierce fever of the brain.

The two young men had been carried across the street to Mr. Graham's back room. There two eminent surgeons, summoned in all haste from Lynchburg, with Dr. Baylor, had done whatever could be done for them. It was de-

cided not best to remove Mr. Comes. He was still unconscious, and life apparently a question of moments. In fact for three weeks the three lives hung by a thread over the portals of death, and a corresponding gloom pervaded the town.

Russell was the first to begin to improve. He gave a perfectly clear and truthful account of the whole affair to those whose business it was to know. He made no excuses for himself, except to aver that nobody could have been more surprised at the denouement than himself. As for his being armed, he had put on his pistol with his clothes ever since he was a small boy. "You must remember," he said, "we Kentuckians are a little closer to our pioneer days than these good people here, and have never gotten beyond the habit of going armed for any emergency. Comes, if he should recover his consciousness, could bear me witness of this. Dear old fellow! nothing was farther from my thoughts than to kill him until he said what no man—least of all, a Kentuckian—would pass unchallenged from—man or devil," he added, with the memory of Comes' face, as he threw the vicious vituperative at him.

Comes did not lack care albeit in a bachelor's den. He had no near relative living, but his guardian wrote that he should be supplied with

every comfort and assistance which money could pay for. He was the unconscious recipient of infinitely more. Hardly a mother's tenderness could have exceeded that with which Uncle Felix hovered about him night and day, watching every movement of the body, every change in the face, anticipating every want.

Mr. Graham had often fretted his imagination with wondering where he could have seen that face before. It had come to him now. It was, in every lineament, the face of the man who had, in the long ago, married the woman he had loved. And this was undoubtedly her child.

Many an hour he knelt beside his bed, his lips murmuring low-voiced petitions, not now for a stranger, whose personality had mysteriously impressed him, but for one whose soul was bound to his soul by indissoluble bands. He was pleading that the life might be given back to him, that so he might win the precious soul for his Master, and back to his mother's God.

After weary days of the best medical attention, and the most faithful nursing, his consciousness began to straggle back. Sometimes he vaguely murmured words of wooing to the girl he loved, so intensely winsome his listener no longer wondered his own sweetheart had been

won away from him by similar love-making; anon he would break forth in bitter invective against all other lovers. Never a word of reproach for her, except this, one day, in a weary, pathetic wail, "Why cannot you be content with me as I with you? Anyhow, I know you love me, and I can wait." Later, memory struggled to recover its hold. The incidents of Saturday and Sunday night passed into speech in a dim, repetitive procession. Russell's name was often mentioned; almost invariably in entire friendliness, except in connection with the last act. One morning, Uncle Felix ventured to leave him for a few moments, to go to the assistance of his young helper in the store. When he returned to his post, there was fullest consciousness and surprise in the brilliant black eyes which met his, and the patient gentleness of long sick helplessness. There was also a reminder of his mother in them. Mr. Graham sat down beside him, and turned his own eyes away to hide their suspicious moisture.

"How happens it that I am trespassing on your hospitality? What has happened to me, can you tell?" His smile was pleasantly apologetic, but back of it was the old incisive keenness of inquiry.

"Yes, something did happen to you," Uncle

Felix answered, cautiously, "you became unconscious from an accident, and were brought here because my little den chanced to be convenient. I hope you find it moderately comfortable?"

The young man looked around with a pleased gratitude, easily guessing how much had been done to make it so for him, and, for the time, he did not press his inquiries, just lay there in satisfied enjoyment, watching Mr. Graham as a sick child might. Indeed, finding every want attended to before he could express it, he felt almost as if he were verily a child again, as though all the years he would forget had never been. He was not trying to remember anything now. He had a feeling it were better, for the present at least, to accept whatever Mr. Graham told him as all there was to tell, and not to speculate on forbidden grounds. It was well for him, indeed. He would need to be strong and clear-headed when justice came to ask, "Wherefore didst thou seek the life of thy brother?" Uncle Felix was to have many quiet days with him ere that, reaching down into his confidence with his kind old heart, and his well-timed words.

More distressing than that of Comes was the case of Nannie Lindsay.

Mrs. Wallace and Mrs. McBride came

promptly to share the nursing, but the Ivy Leaves felt as if the sick girl were their peculiar charge. It was impossible, by any known means, to break her fever. The only change was from a dull stupor to the wildest raving. All through her delirium, the wail of remorseful conscience was something terrible. The conquests in which she had so gloried were now her imps of torture.

“I loved him, yet I killed him! Oh! Comes, was it you who died, or Russell? Poor Russell, I didn’t dream he cared so much! And just to think there are thirty of them, and they will all kill each other—and I will be thirty murderers! Oh! just to think, there were thirty of them. I let each one think I loved him, and the one I loved I killed! Oh! Comes, could you come back to me, I’d be so true!” This with passionate tenderness. Then she would begin, and name them one by one, and laugh in hollow mockery of merriment. This went on day after day, and night after night.

Prof. Carter came every day to inquire for her. It so happened, one evening in the midst of her ravings, she seemed to hear his voice, and called his name so distinctly he could not help hearing it. Involuntarily, he stepped nearer, pleased to hear his name uttered in her voice.

“He was the big gun,” she went on flippantly, “I used all the rest to help me make that dull old professor say he loved me. If he had only asked me, I would have married him, though I loved Comes—only Comes—I loved him, and yet I’ve killed him—oh! why don’t somebody stop those pistol shots? they are firing right through my head, and nobody cares, because I’ve shot thirty of them. I killed them with my pretty face and honied words, and they are all firing at me—all thirty of them.”

The Professor had heard too much, and had suddenly departed. He came only once afterwards, and then made his inquiries briefly and formally.

At the very last one brief lucid interval occurred. All the older girls had been taking their turn to sit with her during the day. Nannie smiled, as if gratified to find Virgie and Effie with her at this time. “You are very good to come and help mamma to nurse me,” with a touching humility, adding, “Tell me the truth, won’t you. Which of the young men was killed?”

The girls were glad to be able to assure her that they were both in a fair way to recover.

“Yes, they will live, but I must die. But it is better so—far better—for them—for all. I

would like to see Mr. Comes once more—if I could—but it is getting dark again already.” Then, laying her hand on Virgie’s, she gazed earnestly into her eyes, and said, “Tell the girls—all of you—who were so good to me—to take warning—from me, and—be satisfied with the love of *one* good man.” Almost immediately she fell into a stupor and sank rapidly.

Mr. Comes insisted upon coming to see her the next morning, but she showed no sign of recognition, and before night she was dead.

These incidents produced a profound impression on the young people of the town and on the students.

When the trial came on, it was promptly dismissed, as there had been no death, and the young men had each had a lesson which would diminish the probability of one in the future.

Nannie’s death was a bitter blow to Selina. And while she could not believe any harm of her beautiful sister, nor understand the self-accusing strain of her mutterings in the delirium of fever, nor suspect any connection between her death and the fight between two students, still there was a vague discontent, if not an actual heartache, in the memory of those last days. All she could do in self-sacrificing ministry had failed to bring comfort to the patient or to her-

self. Her sorrow hung over her in a pathetic, uncomplaining patience, as though she had lost all that made such self-sacrifice worth while.

The girls of the Ivy Vine, who had taken such an interest in her all along, felt the deepest sympathy. And, as they could think of nothing else to do, invited her to become an Ivy Leaf.

“Perhaps it will comfort her,” said Estelle, “to try to help and comfort others.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WATER FOR THE THIRSTY LEAVES.

“As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.”—*Proverbs*.

ESTELLE was a rather popular girl in a quiet way. That is to say, everybody liked her, chiefly because she had but little self-assertion, and rarely spoke unkindly of any one. Yet, she was a girl of few friendships, and those few were uncommonly strong.

Nobody knew—she was scarcely conscious herself, how much she had missed Hugh Baylor. He and Olive had been like a single friendship to her, so closely linked were they in her thoughts. Now, a part of that friendship had been torn away, and the thought of him, instead of adding pleasure, as hitherto, left a burden, a troubled sigh.

She had tried her very best to be faithful to his behest. Like a doleful refrain, his words rang continually in her ears, “Comfort Olive for my sake; take care of her in my place.” But, instead of drawing closer together, as would have seemed natural, some intangible restraint

barred the old intimacy. Was it the confidence he had reposed in her, and withheld from his sister? or was it some failure on her part? or was it that her place was being filled by others?

Estelle was as faithful as ever, and tried to be just the same, but her heart had a chronic ache for the account she would have to render to Hugh, if she should ever see him again.

As for Olive, her health had greatly improved of late. She was, in fact, well, though not perhaps as sturdy and all-enduring as in her earlier girlhood. She was more like her old, bright, jolly self than she had been since the fire, except for the unaccountable restraint between herself and Estelle. The strangest part of it was that she rarely ever mentioned Hugh when alone with Estelle, and feeling this limitation painfully, Estelle would not mention him. Consequently, she missed all the news from him save an occasional item casually dropped by some member of the family. In this incidental fashion, she had learned of his meeting one of the old students at San Francisco, who had gotten him into a position in business at once; that tiring of city life, he had gone into the interior to try fruit-raising; later still, that he was back in 'Frisco. Estelle felt the need of these two friends, all the more at this time, because of

Agnes' absence. Berta and Effie Blair were at home, and so glad to be at home it was a pleasure to be with them, and they were picking up their interest in the Vine beautifully. Estelle had always been fond of these girls, especially of Effie, and would have enjoyed her particularly this winter, except that in the existing coolness between herself and Olive, she would not permit herself to show any preference for Effie which could possibly be construed into disloyalty to Olive, or into giving the second place to her. Yet, while this discontent and depression were secretly preying upon Estelle, outwardly she was participating in all the good times the young people were having, and nobody suspected anything amiss, unless, perhaps, Uncle Felix's sharp eyes.

"It has been just a year to-day since Hugh left; it seems like ten," Estelle said to herself one Monday morning. The Sunday night's disappointment, and the next morning's blank, came back to her as vividly as though it had been but a day. Uncomfortably restless under the memories, she got her hat and went out. She had not gone far before she met her father returning with the mail.

"Any letters for me?" she asked, seeing he had a pretty good handful.

He looked over them and handed her one. Her heart gave a bound. It was from Hugh. She hurried home and stole off to herself to read it. How like himself it was from date to final line.

“I am sure you expected to hear from me long ago, and truly I intended to write. But I was too utterly miserable in those days to impose myself upon so good a friend as you have been to me. I knew I could trust you, and I am glad you have never betrayed my unfortunate love affair. Olive is foolish about me, and could not have found as much content in father’s marriage if she had known what it cost me.

“I cannot say I have gotten entirely over my disappointment, for although I can plainly see Olive has gotten more of what I wanted to give her through father than she would have done through me, still the time is not yet when I care to come back and see. I have never been able to give a very satisfactory reason to Olive for my sudden departure, because she knows nobody in the world cared less for travel, sight-seeing or adventure than I. I told her I thought I needed to be shaken out of my nest of ease and self-indulgence, and it seemed a good point in my life to experiment in that direction, all of which was very true, if not, strictly speaking, the whole truth.

“But I must tell you something of my life and doings, if I can find anything worth telling which has not already been reported to you from the home letters. The position I first secured was book-keeping. But I found it did not sufficiently occupy my mind. However, there is plenty of room for ‘a nice young man,’ so I had no difficulty in finding more active employment in the country among the fruit-growers.

“This is a young city and growing rapidly. Many of the people came from the older parts of the country, and are as nice as any at home. I have made the acquaintance of one or two delightful families. Still, they are not my own people, and—‘tell it not in Gath’—I get wofully homesick sometimes. I have never hinted this in writing home. Nor have I ever told them how I happened to go on that trip to the mines last summer, merely left them to surmise it was in the line I had marked out for myself of seeing the world and experiencing some of its hardships. The truth is this. One afternoon after business hours, being in a particularly homesick mood, I strolled down toward the station, half minded to take the train for home. As I stood there listlessly watching the passengers getting off and on, a familiar face caught my eye in a crowd. Strange to say, a thought of you flashed

into my mind. Yet it seemed incredible I could find even a flashlight of resemblance to you among that group of rough Western men—not a woman among them of any description. At that moment the train whistled and was off, and I had to carry my puzzlement to my room with me. I worried over it all evening until sleep overtook me, and this was about the result of my cogitations. It is wonderful what our imaginations can weave out of even so slight a thread. There never was but one person in the world who had the slightest shadow of likeness to you, and that was Julian. That thought carried me back to the fire and the mystery of his disappearance. I have at times strongly suspected Olive, and perhaps you, did not believe he was burned then; and, because it was the least horrible, I did not try to disprove it with Olive; in fact, you remember we were obliged, by every possible means, to keep her from thinking of the fire because the excitement affected her so alarmingly. After catching a glimpse of that face in the crowd, and thinking it all over, I came to the conclusion it was a possibility he lived, though I could not even imagine a reason for his absenting himself from home at that time and in that mysterious way. On the strength of this conclusion, I made arrangements with

my business firm (I was still book-keeping at that time), who had some interest in these mines, to take a short trip thither, and started the next day. I stayed there two weeks, saw every man in any way connected with the mines, but having transacted the business of the company, was obliged to return with the conclusion my imagination had played me false, and an optical illusion had led me on a fool's errand. Even this delusive reminder of your face made me so dreadfully homesick for the sight of it, I came near writing to you that night. I was very glad afterward I did not. But this is not the end of the story. Estelle, what will you think if I tell you I am almost positively sure I have seen Julian, and that he is alive and hereabouts? Somewhere, though very mirageical and difficult to locate!

"I saw the same face again yesterday, in a crowd as before; but if it was not Julian, it was somebody marvellously like him. Yet I cannot get my hand on him. I had no sooner seen him than he was as irrevocably lost again, as if he had sunk into the ground. However, as I said before, 'Frisco is not a very big place, and now that I am stationed here again, it will be hard if I do not find him, or the man like him, for I will explore every house and business

place in town if necessary. As it is still so uncertain and chimerical, perhaps it will be as well not to mention what I have told you, especially to Olive. I think she imagined herself in some measure responsible for his death, if the case were so, and the most casual mention of his name was more than she could bear. I would not for anything excite hopes which might have to be disappointed. You must not think I have no feeling for you, to be tempting you with these hopes with such slim foundation; but, really, I feel so certain this time I could not help telling somebody, and since I have had to spare Olive, whom should I tell, if not you? It touches you more nearly than any one else; but, unlike Olive, you are well and strong, and you never did have any nonsense about you. In short, you are the friend in need on whom one always depends. On second thought, suppose you tell Uncle Felix. I would like to have his prayers to help me in this search—to help me find Julian, if he be alive and here. For even if this face I have seen proves to be not his, I think I shall always believe he may be alive, and be continually looking for him. And now, Estelle, once more forgive me for calling on you to share my suspense and uncertainty. And, having retasted the comfort of an occasional chat with

you, even on paper, I doubt if I can forego the pleasure of indulging repeatedly, if you will show me, by answering, that it is not an imposition. Has Olive ever mentioned Julian to you since the day it came so near bringing on a convulsion? If not, you might, if you think best, some time when alone with her, remove the embargo and see how she takes it, and how she feels about him now. But do be careful. However, I know you will be, without any charge from me."

CHAPTER XXIX.

STRIKING ROOT IN NEW GROUND.

AGATHA WALLACE was little Agatha still, for even Annie had outgrown her in height. She had the same fair face and golden hair, the same blue eyes and guileless expression, as had the little girl whom Effie had rescued from the cloud-burst opposite their side-door some years before. She was a charming girl, just budding into a beautiful womanhood.

It was the latter part of the summer, and they all sat on the porch in the cool of the evening. A letter had been passing around the circle, and left a perceptible shadow wherever it paused.

“Poor dear Uncle!” Agatha exclaimed, dropping it into her lap, after reading. Several sighs echoed her words as she added, “It must be too doleful for anything in the world! Think of those wee tots all alone in the house, for, of course, he has to leave them sometimes, and actually taking one-year-old Sammy up into the pulpit with him, because there was no one to look after the child.” A pause. “Mamma

doesn't really need all three of us," reflectively. "It does seem as if one of us ought to go!" To this there was no responsive echo.

Lucille had long ago transferred her home duties and responsibilities to the household of her husband, as was only right she should.

"Virgie ought to go; she is next oldest," Agatha was saying to herself, but a simple, every-day movement of her mother's, handing her key-basket to Virgie to attend to supper, rebuked the thought.

"No, not Virgie; mamma could not do without her. She has always said she was going to be the one to stay at home and take care of mamma, and she has already succeeded in making herself indispensable."

Agatha drew a long breathed sigh, for Annie had still two years of study, and, besides, was too young, and there was nobody else except herself. "Why cannot Uncle get another wife? men often do," was her rather petulant thought, as she tried to forget the whole matter. It was very true her uncle had not once asked for any one to come.

The next week's letter was more pathetic than ever. Toward the close of it, Mrs. Wallace turned her back to the family with a suspicious choke in her voice, and hurried out to the

kitchen. This was more than Agatha could stand. She answered the letter herself that very day, offering to come and do the best she could for the little ones, as long as she should be needed.

It was no small sacrifice, as any girl will understand, to resign the good times of a college town, for which they were already planning with all the eager zest of young ladyhood, for a burden of unusual care and responsibility in a quiet country neighborhood, where "there will not, most likely, be a soul one will care to know."

You see, Agatha had forgotten all about their own life in the country, and though the time had hardly come for lovers and beaux, still, at times, in a dreamy, wistful way, she seemed to hear the clanking of knightly spurs in the dim distance,—to see, afar off, the air filled with the dust of an approaching destiny. Sure, it would pass her by unrecognized in the lonely solitude her uncle described.

Her uncle greatly feared she had made her offer without full knowledge of what was before her, and would, consequently, find herself unhappy in the endurance. Hence, in writing, he put the worse face on everything, by way of preparing her.

"And you will not be here for the 'Thanky-

tea,'” exclaimed Berta and Effie, who had always felt a proprietary claim upon little Agatha by right of discovery. “You were to have had your invitation this fall, and we had been thinking what a charming little *debutante* you would be!”

“Oh! thanks for the roses,” she laughed, a veritable pink bud herself, with an unadmitted dewdrop in the blue depths of her eyes. “By next year Annie can take my place.”

Berta and Effie hunted up all the interesting books they could find for her, and promised to keep up a brisk correspondence with regard to affairs of the Ivy Vine, and social events.

“But I am so sorry you have to go,” Effie said, clinging to her little friend with the warmest affection.

When the time came to start, Agatha almost felt as if she were going to be a missionary to some heathen land, her girl friends expressed so much sympathy, and the young men who had gotten back condoled with her so feelingly and so solemnly.

“It is a comfort to know you are all going to have such a good time without me,” she tried to say, laughingly, to those who had gathered to say good-bye, but before the words were well out of her mouth she broke down in a sob on her

mother's shoulder. However, she quickly regained her self-control, and went off bravely.

The trip was a day and night on the canal-boat, a primitive mode of travel; but for a long time the only choice one had in leaving Bridgeton was between the boat and the stage-coach, the latter meeting the train at the nearest point of approach to the town. In this case there was no choice. However, the small cabin sitting-room was not so bad, and there were so few other passengers, Agatha did not hesitate to appropriate the privileged rocking-chair. When she tired of the garrulousness of the neat young cabin maid, she took refuge in her book or her own thoughts.

At Lynchburg, a gentleman with two little girls got on the boat. The children were very lovely, and attracted Agatha at once. There was something pathetic about them, including the black ribbon on their hats, which made her think of Uncle John's desolate brood, and wonder if these also had lost their mother. Her heart went out to them with the thought, and when the children came down to store away their satchel and basket, wraps, etc., she laid aside her book and helped them to find the best place, then tried to draw them into conversation. To her disappointment, she found their father was

waiting to take them back on deck. "It is much nicer up there," they told her, and urged her to go up with them. But, as she was alone, and they in party, she excused herself. More than once afterward she wished she could be with them, for the cabin grew lonely with the night-fall, and the longing for home was almost unendurable. When the moon rose, with its well-nigh daylight brightness, and Agatha had looked longingly from the little cabin window, and was about to go to bed to keep from wishing she was enjoying the moonlight on the porch at home, the older of the two little girls came tripping down the stairway again to tell her, "Papa says you will find it refreshing to come up on deck a while before retiring." Without further hesitation, she followed the child up the ladder-like stairway. The gentleman came forward with a chair, which he placed close to those occupied by the children, and then, with a deferential bow in response to the little girl's, "Papa this is the lady," he went back to his paper and the captain, without waiting, or apparently caring, to know Agatha's name or to have her know his. The children chatted ceaselessly of everything they passed or thought of, looking up occasionally to see if she were listening or interested. They did not tell her in so many words their

mother was dead, but there was about them an air of we-have-to-take-care-of-ourselves, which indicated the fact most touchingly.

The country through which they were passing was lovely, with its brooding monotony of peace only broken by the shrill boat-horn, announcing the approach to a lock. Getting into the lock through the big, heavy gates, bumping down to a new level, and sailing out again, was a most interesting performance to the children, including Agatha, and it seemed very wonderful to look back and see the water over which they had travelled high up above their heads.

The night air was delicious, but the father presently called to Lallie it was time to go to bed, and all three went down together.

The little girls were quite independent, had learned how to help each other to do what they could not do for themselves, and soon stood, white-robed and bare-footed, beside their berth. They had their heads together whispering in rather anxious consultation. Agatha was too close to childhood herself not to comprehend and appreciate its small dilemmas. There was but one thing more to do before being ready to lay their heads down upon the pillow, and they did not know if it was just the thing to "say their prayers" in so public a place.

Agatha, without seeming to notice, got up and quietly drew together the curtain which divided their little cabin room from the rest of the world; then, without waiting to be entirely ready for her own devotions, knelt reverently beside her berth. The little girls instantly followed her example, and went to bed happy, while Agatha felt a little glow of thankfulness in her own heart for this privilege of helping God's little ones on the threshold of her new life. Early the next morning they reached the lock, where her uncle was to meet her. To her surprise she found her little travelling companions were getting off there also. But—"the country is a large place," she thought, and told them good-bye, fully realizing the unlikelihood of ever meeting them again.

Her uncle's warm greeting, and the distressing womanless appearance of everything about the house, especially the three forlorn little figures who crept shyly to her side within the first half-hour, soon made her forget her transient interest in the little strangers, and did much to reconcile her to the sacrifices she had made, and the exile from her own bright home.

And now that she is there, what shall she do? Shall she be content with keeping the house, mending the clothes, darning the little stockings,

washing hands and faces and watching to see that no accidents occur during her uncle's absence? That would have been much to father and children. But Agatha Wallace never did things by halves. Her favorite text was, "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as to the Lord," and she had come, not simply to satisfy her conscience and gratify her mother, but with full purpose of making a happy home for her motherless little cousins, and doing them all the good she could.

More than that, she soon found herself telling the young people of her uncle's congregation of the Ivy Vine at home, and helping them to organize one of their own. Then when the church organist married off into another State, nothing would do but Agatha must take her place, for the people had come to think Agatha could do most anything.

By a singular coincidence, the leader of the choir was the aunt of her two little travelling companions. It was true their mother was dead, and at the time she met them their father was bringing them to his mother and this sister to be taken care of. Miss Cora was about Agatha's age, and they soon became devoted friends. Thus Agatha had many opportunities to renew her acquaintance with her little friends.

As time wore on, Berta and Effie were rather disgusted to find Agatha growing so happy away from home, and writing such enthusiastic letters about the country. "It may be," she wrote once, "because for the first time in my life I can flatter myself I am essential to somebody's happiness and comfort. It is very certain, anyway, that, except for being away from homefolks and friends, I never was happier in my life."

CHAPTER XXX.

DRIFTING BACK.

AGATHA WALLACE had been with her uncle something over a year, and to no one year of her life could she look back with greater satisfaction. The children were contented, good, and devotedly attached to her, as she was also to them. Moreover, she had learned to love these dear, good people of her uncle's congregation, whom she had once thought to find so utterly uncongenial. Her work and labor of love among them had proved pure pleasure, for she had felt sure her help was needed, and therefore, she was in the very place God meant her to be. But something was the matter this calm, sweet, Sabbath morn.

She sat at the organ as usual, her friend, Cora Lenox, beside her, and their five little charges, her three and Cora's two, on the front seat near them. Only Agatha's music had a heavy, sombre sound, out of harmony with the joyous ring of Cora's voice. Evidently, Agatha was not her usual happy little self, and the reason of it was,

her uncle had made an announcement the night before which had thrown her completely out of her bearings.

As she sat there her loving glance wandered lingeringly from one to another of the kindly faces before her. How could she leave them and return to the aimless life of an ordinary girl—dressing for the beaux, going to parties, sleeping late in the morning, gossiping over last night's conquests. Once she had looked forward to such things as the natural filling of a girl's existence; now she wondered if one could be happy, *really* happy, without being useful.

True, she could help her mother, and she could work for the Ivy Vine again; but then, "mamma has Virgie—and here is my own Ivy Vine, and—that sort of thing is so different from knowing that somebody, just three little children, depend on you."

The misty regrets had gathered into tell-tale dewdrops on the long, shadowy lashes. "This is not the time nor place for such thoughts," she hastily checked herself, "for Uncle has already given out the text, and I have not heard one word of it." Yet the very sight of the preacher revived her trouble, for—Uncle John was going to be married.

It was actually hard for Agatha to give her

uncle the sympathy he sought in his new happiness. She caught herself continually passing supercritical judgment on the simplest word or act of his intended, though up to this time Cora Lenox had been her most intimate friend, a fellow-feeling having drawn them wondrously close together. Since she knew this friend was to take her place—supplant her in the affections of her little cousins—she felt actually spiteful, much more like condoling with the brother whom she was deserting than congratulating her on her prospective marriage. In fact, on Monday when her uncle finally induced her to go with him to see Cora, it stands on record against this unreasonable young lady that, instead of the usual form of words appropriate on such occasions, Agatha looked down at the two little girls who were clinging to her hands, and murmured, in a half-laughing, half-tearful tremble of voice, “I don’t see why you could not be content with what you had. These are just as sweet and attractive as ours!” Then, covered with confusion by the burst of merriment which ran round the circle, beginning with Mr. Lenox, she ran off with the children and took refuge in the grape-arbor. There is a tradition among the birds who nest and sing among the vines of this same arbor that Mr. Lenox followed her thither, and,

by way of consolation, proposed the fair exchange which is no robbery.

At any rate, when Agatha came home for a short visit soon after, she seemed to have entirely recovered her spirits. She brought her friend, Cora Lenox, with her, and they seemed equally interested in the vast amount of shopping that was going on.

Somebody else was coming home, too. Hugh had written he was going to succumb to the homesickness which had beset him. To Estelle he added, "You and I will talk it over when I get there, and decide how long a visit it shall be."

He did not name the day—it was impossible to do so in the then conditions of travel. He only said, most likely the first week of September, and in both letters added, he wanted to find Estelle and Olive together. "Does he know," wondered Estelle, "how it stands between us since he went away?"

Olive frequently came to town in the carriage, but she had gotten out of the habit of being away from home, and rarely remained all night. But she was so overjoyed at the prospect of her brother's return, she did not wait for an invitation, but herself proposed to come in and spend the whole week with Estelle. Full well she knew no one else would be quite so glad as they two,

and the perfect sympathy of anticipation broke down the barriers wholesale that had risen up between them. They almost forgot those barriers had ever been, on the days when they went down together to the gate to watch for the incoming stage, and those nights when they lay awake for hours talking of Hugh.

One night when the old, unclouded sympathy had been most fully restored, Olive said, "Estelle, do you know I was regularly angry with you for sending Hugh off as you did."

It was too dark to see Estelle's face, but Olive felt the sudden grip of the hand which held hers, and knew Estelle had wheeled toward her in surprise or unexpectedness, but she went on, "I knew he cared more for you than for any one else, and, though you seemed so unconscious of it, I had always hoped, when he came to tell you of it, you would not disappoint him—and me."

"Why, Olive, what can you mean?" Estelle found voice at length to exclaim. She was on her elbow now, gazing into Olive's dimly outlined face in utter amazement.

"You need not mind my knowing," Olive went on, calmly, ignoring Estelle's, as she thought, pretended innocence. "I have gotten over the hurt now, as he seems to have done.

But, Estelle, if he should ask you again, please—please say yes. I do not believe I could stand it another time, even from you.”

Estelle found breath at last, and laughed softly. “Olive, you don’t know what you are talking about. Hugh never cared for me *that* way. We were the best of friends, but I think he liked me mostly because I loved you so much. If it was anything more, I ought to have known. Certain and sure, he never told me so.” And then she determinedly diverted the conversation into another channel connected with Hugh, but at a safe distance from the cause of his departure.

Meanwhile the week was slipping by to its last days. Friday came, and the stage did not stop; Saturday, and still it passed on.

“Hope deferred maketh the heart sick.” Olive’s countenance fell to zero.

“I never knew him fail to keep his word before,” she bemoaned, tears welling up into her eyes. “Something has happened, I suppose, and I might as well go home and wait until we hear from him again.”

But Estelle would not hear of it. “Of course something has happened, but it is only delay. In such a long trip it would hardly be possible, I should think, to count certainly, even within a week.”

“Well, I know he will not come Sunday.”

“No, but he may stop over somewhere for Sunday, and come on Monday.”

So Olive stayed a while longer.

Wednesday afternoon they were again at their post of observation, under the lilac bushes at the front gate. “The very last time,” Olive said. “I told father this morning he might send one of the boys in for me to-morrow morning, whether Hugh came or not.”

Just then they both started, for the rumbling of the stage-wheels certainly sounded nearer. As it turned the corner into sight they seized each other by the waist and danced an impromptu jig. It was actually headed towards the house. What could that mean, but that Hugh had come. Estelle held Olive tightly, a little afraid of the excitement for her, though she had been so well all these months.

A stranger got out first—a tall, bearded fellow, who stood aside awkwardly for a moment, then busied himself giving directions to the driver. Hugh came forward, both hands extended, his dear face beaming with joy. And he did not let go of Estelle’s hand, though he was holding Olive so close with the other.

Estelle, with her usual sensitive concern for others, was noticing the stranger. She inter-

cepted a wistful glance toward Hugh and Olive, and wondered if he had no one to make glad by his return. Suddenly Hugh wheeled, with an apologetic ejaculation, and beckoned the stranger to join him. Estelle started. Did her ears deceive her!

As the tall fellow came forward, he glanced yearningly from Olive to Estelle, and from Estelle to Olive. But not until she felt the well-remembered grip of untamed strength did Estelle know for certain it was Julian. His rare smile revealed and questioned, and she threw her arms around his neck, crying out, "O Olive, it is Julian, too!"

Olive had already recognized him, and, realizing in his return the answer to her prayers and the fulfilment of her long-cherished hopes, she slipped down to her knees in Hugh's arms, with low words of thanksgiving.

Julian looked at her in timid deprecation. He dared not go near or speak to her, believing she could not but hate him for the harm he had done.

But Estelle whispered in his ear, "Go to her; speak to her; she has been longing and praying for your return." The next moment he was beside her, his head bowed well-nigh to the ground, as one might before a patron saint. Hugh and

Estelle turned their faces away and looked at each other.

The account Julian gave of himself was that, after setting fire to the house of his best friends, he had no right to expect any one to regret his being dead. It would be easier to bear, even for those who cared most for him, than the disgrace. He made off that night, struck the railroad at a point where he would not likely be known, got a job which paid his passage to Cincinnati, and thus gradually worked his way to the mines, near Pike's Peak.

It was Hugh who told what a man he had made of himself; how much good he had done among those rough miners, bringing into requisition all the unappropriated religious instructions of Sunday-school and home for the benefit of those who had had none, even starting a night-school for those who knew less than he, and were willing to learn what he could impart.

The owners of the mines had made favorable note of him in their visits of inspection, and had offered him a higher position, which Julian had promptly declined, preferring to remain where he could do a little good. He was in 'Frisco on business for the company the day Hugh caught his first glimpse of him, and was boarding the train to carry a message to another mine. The

second time Hugh had succeeded in tracking him, and they had a jolly meeting and talk about home.

Since then Hugh had never rested until he gained his consent to return. This was no light task, and Julian never would agree to any mention of him in home letters.

Mrs. Graham could hardly believe her own senses, as she had not for a moment doubted that her step-son was dead. Indeed, it was difficult to believe under any proof that in this tall, handsome, manly fellow she saw the awkward, disagreeable lad who had given her so much trouble.

Most touching of all was the meeting between father and son. Professor Graham happened to come upon the group while they still stood talking at the gate, as if loth to admit any one else into their fourfold joy. As his custom was, he did not look up, nor see them until the sound of Julian's voice startled him. The same moment Julian wheeled, and recognizing his father, knelt before him in honest penitence, murmuring, "Father, I have sinned, against heaven and thee. I am no more worthy to be called thy son!"

And the man esteemed cold, could only sob out his gladness on the shoulder of his lost and recovered son.

CHAPTER XXXI.

GOSSIPING AMONG THE IVY LEAVES.

ANOTHER year has passed. The Ivy Vine planted by the "We four" girls has grown in many ways. In the first place, our four early acquaintances, at that time in the eager flush of their teens, are now to women grown; some have even taken upon themselves the crowning glory of womanhood. Yet we have not much difficulty in recognizing those who are left. Lucille, Mrs. Dr. Baylor, has been obliged, by the increasing cares of her household, to resign the leadership. As the President rises and taps for order, we know it can be none other than Effie, for we see in her the gracious fulfilment of her girlhood's prophecy. While each repeats a chosen motto, and the minutes of the last meeting are being read, we look around for other familiar faces. There is Berta, as beautiful as ever. We might miss somewhat of the dash and brilliance of her youthful hauteur, but it is well supplanted by an imperial self-poise, and her eye and smile are no less bright than they were the evening Russell Brent sent a search-light into the blue depths.

Close by the table of the leader, in the secretary, so busy with pencil and paper, we find another old friend—Olive Baylor. A happy content broods in her sweet face that is good for heartache, and seems to hint of the reward a patient, loving soul has found, even in this world. And Agnes! what a lovely face! The broad, intellectual forehead and thoughtful brow, over which the brown kinklets have ample room to play; the eye, so quick to kindle into enthusiasm, and the mouth so ready for a responsive smile. No wonder the students go wild over her. And little Agatha Wallace? Yes, there she is, with her eyes of blue and her hair of gold. Her face still has the look of child-like innocence, which makes one think of angels; but in the last two years it has taken on a kind of matronly dignity, rather enhancing than otherwise. Lena McBride is as ready, as merry, and as good-hearted as ever, though she has learned to curb the impulsive boisterousness and bluntness, which had once been the regret of her friends. Virgie Wallace is conspicuously absent. She rarely leaves home, we are told, or goes where her mother does not care to go. We must not overlook little Selina Lindsay. Her busy little fingers hardly know how to keep still, and she does such beautiful work, and finds such

ready sale for it, the girls have been obliged to limit her contributions to the Ivy Vine to the proceeds of work done at the meetings. Her face has lost its expression of placid, pathetic patience and suffering, for she has gotten well. Dr. Græme Gordon, who is now practicing in Bridgeton, in the course of his medical studies, stumbled upon a remedy which had not been tried—skin-grafting—and it has proved a success. Each member of the Ivy Vine contributed to the grafts from her own healthy young skin. Hence Selina says she is literally a part of the Ivy Vine now. The rest of the faces we do not know so well. Besides, Effie is rapping for attention again, and, having intercepted a very smiling glance between herself and Berta, we are curious to know what she has to say.

“I have a piece of good news!” she announces. “Our first President reached town last night, and, as we have gotten through all business demanding our attention, I will call her in.”

She opens the door, and Mrs. Armstrong stands beaming upon them.

It was such a complete surprise, they threw away dignity and forgot they were not girls again — forgot she was not “Miss Edmonia” still.

The meeting was rather prolonged that day,

yet many unfinished narratives had to be left over for another day.

Monday morning early Effie called.

“Where’s Berta?” came naturally to her old friend’s tongue, “it doesn’t seem right to see one without the other.”

“Berta is coming but she wanted to bring Brother Russell with her, and he had gone downtown.”

“That’s so, you are both married. I can hardly realize it.”

“Yes. Græme said I did not need to show him off; you knew him of old.”

“Indeed I did. He was a dear fellow, and I am sure you have done well. I am as glad as I can be for you both. Berta’s choice did surprise me a little, because I only heard of him as one of Nannie Lindsay’s unfortunates.”

“He says—” began Effie.

“You had better leave me to explain,” interposed Mr. Brent, entering at the moment with his wife. He sat down in front of Mrs. Armstrong. “You see,” he said, bending toward her, with all the earnestness of a lawyer addressing his jury, “you see, in Kentucky, men, as well as horses, are born racers. It is contrary to nature to let any one come out ahead of us. I really was a little bit infatuated at first. She

was pretty and bright, you know; but that night at the college party—”

“Now, Russell, you are not in the confessional!” Berta held up a threatening finger, but she blushed and dimpled so charmingly it only tempted him on.

“From that time it was only the fun of the game for me. Her light had gone down before a brighter, though I don’t believe I ever did quite convince Comes I was simply holding the fort for him against the Professor. And now even the old porcupine—but I must not call him names any longer, since he is boarding at the Wallaces and in love with Miss Virgie. I tell you what, Mrs. Armstrong, when these Ivy Vine girls get hold of a man, there is no telling what they will not do with him! Why, look what Berta has done with me—!” He dodged as he saw her fan-hand rising, but went on, “If only Comes—” The playfulness died out of his tone; the dimples vanished from her cheeks. Mr. Brent threw back his head and stroked his moustache a thoughtful moment.

“What has become of your friend?” Mrs. Armstrong asked, to break the pause.

“He went back to his plantation. There was no inducement to stay here after Miss Lindsay’s death.”

“But,” interrupted Berta, “Agnes tells me he has been back several times to see her Uncle Felix. They are devoted to each other since Mr. Graham took care of him in his sickness.”

“I cannot bear to think of him down there in the lonely solitude of his plantation,” said Brent, feelingly. “However,” brightening again, “he has promised me a visit next winter, and Berta and I will do our best to marry him off to one of our pretty Kentucky girls.”

Here Olive Baylor and Agnes Graham were ushered in.

“Doesn’t this look like the dear old times?” Mrs. Armstrong glanced from one to the other in her own loving way.

“And I had better decamp, or you will be grafting me into the Ivy Vine,” Brent said, rising. “Mrs. Armstrong, you and your good man had better come out to our town and help Berta start a new plant.”

“I have already started one,” said Berta, modestly, “but I would give anything if it could have you at the beginning, as we had.” She gave a brief account of her flourishing little Ivy slip in Kentucky. Then she and Effie rose to go.

“Now, Olive, you and Agnes must tell me all about Estelle. It hardly seems like the Bridge-

ton where we started our Ivy Vine without Estelle.”

“Yes,” said Agnes, “Estelle was a regular sneak. When Uncle Felix thought she ought to go off to school first, and I afterward, she said, ‘Oh! no; nothing would induce her to leave home,’ and he and I both thought she was in earnest. But when Hugh came—”

“Ah! but Hugh is such a good beggar,” interposed Olive, “and Estelle never thinks of herself. I just know how he worked on her sympathies with his tales of home sickness and the good she might do. Besides, Julian—” She caught herself up with a flush.

“Yes,” resumed Agnes, opportunely, “Julian went back with them; but don’t you think, Miss Edmonia, he is coming home to study medicine, and then going back to practice among the miners. And, Olive—may I tell?” She looked teasingly at Olive, who blushed again.

“You do not need to tell,” Mrs. Armstrong laughed, laying her hand on each girl, as in the olden time. “And so you and Estelle, and Hugh and Julian, will be together; how nice that will be!”

“Some time while you are here, I must show you some articles Estelle has been writing for the Lynchburg *Portfolio* on the “Flowers of

California," and illustrating them herself. Father and Uncle Felix are so proud of her."

"And what of Agnes' own self?"

Agnes answered, with demure readiness, "Oh! I am teaching at the Academy." But her eyes were sparkling with a happy mystery. Evidently she had something to whisper in the ear. Perhaps it was that Stanley Sinclair had asked her if she would be willing to go to China with him, if he so decided; and she had told him, if he did not go, she might go without him, as she had so intended ever since Miss Morrison had read to them the history of the girl-wife.

Mrs. Armstrong was just saying, "You have told me nothing of the Wallaces as yet," when Lucille (Mrs. Dr. Baylor) and Agatha entered. Mrs. Baylor had the same grave sweetness of expression; the same smile, never too sunny to be sympathetic.

"You will have to come to see mamma and Virgie," they said. "Mamma sees so badly now she rarely goes out, and Virgie does not like to leave her."

After a little more gossip, the girls began, in turn, to question the questioner. She very gladly told them her husband had been preaching at the same place, Clump Creek, until now;

had recently received a call to a church in Lynchburg, and had gone to preach for them.

“Oh! I am so glad!” cried Agatha, delightedly. “Then you are going to be our pastor!”

Mrs. Armstrong laughed with the girls at Agatha’s way of telling her secret, and said it would certainly be an inducement, if the decision rested with her.

“Yes, I must go to see Mrs. Wallace and Virgie,” Mrs. Armstrong said to herself, thinking sadly of what Agatha had told her. From some one else she had learned that Mrs. Wallace was almost blind.

Professor Carter opened the door for her the afternoon she called, and she had hardly waited a moment in the home-like, well-remembered parlor, when Mrs. Wallace came in, extending her hand, and saying, in her old, cordial way, “It is so sweet of you to come to see us without waiting. Come, sit on the sofa by me, and Virgie will be down in a moment. Yes, Professor Carter boards with us now, and we like him so much. You know, the girls used to think he must be horrid, to be so harsh with the students; but we know now they just did not understand each other. He could not be more gentle and kind to me if he were my own son.”

She was as cheerily interested in everything

as of yore, and there was but slight hint of her blindness, either in her movements or appearance. "Surely," her visitor thought, "her trouble has been exaggerated to me."

Later, when Virgie had taken her mother's place, and sent her to give out supper, she noticed her visitor's look of surprised inquiry.

"Oh! yes; mamma still keeps house," she said. "It is such a gratification to her to think she can, and it keeps her from realizing how rapidly her sight is failing." The girl's voice sank almost to a sob; but she chirped up immediately, to explain how they all had learned to be careful to keep everything in its accustomed place. "For instance, when she washes the breakfast dishes, she always puts each cup and saucer and plate in the very same spot, so that if she has need of any article during the day, she can go and put her hand right on it. Of course, the rest of us try to be equally particular. Then, we try to keep the way clear all about the house—nothing for her to stumble over, so she can go where she pleases without fear or helplessness. One day last week Lucille's little Agatha was staying with us. I had put her to bed, and thought she was asleep, when she opened her eyes with a scared look, and said, "Oh! auntie, my blocks—down 'tairs—danmamma fall!" She scrambled

out of bed before I knew what she was doing, and trotted off down stairs to get them.”

“Virgie, you are the sweetest daughter I ever knew!” Mrs. Armstrong exclaimed, with loving warmth.

“Do you think so?” tears of gratified affection filling her eyes. “I ought to be, for I have the sweetest mother anybody ever had!”