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Title: The Second Chance

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Release date: July 15, 2007 [eBook #22076]

Language: English

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SECOND CHANCE ***

E-text prepared by Michelle LaPointe, Kincardine Ontario Canada 2007

THE SECOND CHANCE

by

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Author of

"Sowing Seeds in Danny"

Frontispiece by Wladyslaw T. Benda

_"Then I went down to the potter's house and behold he wrought a work on the wheels.

"And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again another vessel as seemed good to the potter to make it."_

—Jeremiah xviii, 3-4.

TORONTO
WILLIAM BRIGGS
PUBLISHER
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TO MY MOTHER
MRS. LETITIA McCURDY MOONEY

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CHAPTER I

MARTHA

In the long run all love is paid by love,
Tho' undervalued by the hosts of earth.
The great eternal government above
Keeps strict account, and will redeem its worth.
Give thy love freely; do not count the cost;
So beautiful a thing was never lost
In the long run.

—*Ella Wheeler Wilcox.*

THOMAS PERKINS was astonished beyond words. Martha had asked for money! The steady, reliable, early-to-bed, early-to-rise Martha—the only one of his family that was really like his own people. If he could believe his senses, Martha had asked for two dollars in cash, and had distinctly said that due bills on the store would not do!

If Martha had risen from her cradle twenty-five years ago and banged her estimable parent in the eye with her small pink fist, he could not have been more surprised than he was now! He stared at her with all this in his face, and Martha felt the ground slipping away from her. Maybe she shouldn't have asked for it!

She went over the argument again. "It's for a magazine Mrs. Cavers lent me. I would like to get it every month—it's—it's got lots of nice things in it." She did not look at her father as she said this.

Thomas Perkins moistened his lips.

"By George!" he said. "You youngsters never think how the money comes. You seem to think it grows on bushes!"

Martha might have said that spring frost must have nipped the buds for the last twenty-five years, but she did not. Ready speech was not one of Martha's accomplishments, so she continued to pleat her apron into a fan and said nothing.

"Here the other day didn't I send thirty-nine dollars into Winnipeg to get things for the house, and didn't I get you an eighteen-dollar wallaby coat last year, and let you wear it week days and all, and never said a word?"

Martha might have reminded him that she was watering and feeding the stock, and saving the wages of a hired man, while she was wearing the wallaby coat, but she said not a word.

"You get a queer old lot more than I got when I was a young shaver, let me tell you. I've often told you young ones how I left home, when I was nine years old, with the wind in my back—that's all I got from home—and with about enough clothes on me to flag a train with. There wasn't any of these magazines then, and I don't know as they do any good, anyway. Poor old Ann Winters sent away her good, hard-earned dollar to some place in the States, where they said: 'Send us a dollar, and we'll show you how to make fifty; light employment; will not have to leave home; either ladies or gentlemen can do it.' She saw this in a magazine and sent her dollar, and what she got was a pretty straight insult, I think. They wrote back, 'put an advertisement like ours in some paper, and get fifty people like yourself to answer it.' There's a magazine for you!"

Martha looked at him helplessly. "I promised Mrs. Cavers I'd take it. She's making a little money that way, to get a trip home this Christmas," she said, locking and unlocking her fingers, the rough, toil-

worn joints of which spoke eloquently in her favour, if the old man had had eyes to see them.

"You women are too easy," he said. "You'll promise anything. Yer poor grandmother let a man put a piano in the shed once when it was raining, and he asked her to sign a paper sayin' it was there, and he could 'come any time he liked to get it; and, by Jinks! didn't a fellow come along in a few days wantin' her to pay for it, and showing her her own name to a note. She wasn't so slow either, for she pertended she doubted her own writin', and got near enough to make a grab for it, and tore her name off; but it gave me father such a turn he advertised her in the paper that he would not be responsible for her debts, and he never put his name to paper of any kind afterward. There was a fellow in the old Farmers' Home in Brandon that asked me father to sign his name in a big book that he showed up in front of him, and I tell you it was all we could do to keep the old man from hittin' him. Of course, Martha, if ye didn't put it down in writin' she can't hold ye; but puttin' it down is the deuce altogether."

"But I want to give it," Martha said slowly. "I want the magazine, and I want to help Mrs. Cavers."

"Now, Martha, look a here," the old man said, "you're a real good girl, and very like my own folks—in the way you handle a hoe yer just like my poor sister Lizzie that married a peddler against all our wishes. I mind well, the night before she ran away, how she kissed me and says she: 'Good-bye, Tommy, don't forgit to shut the henhouse door,' and in the mornin' she was gone."

Lizzie's bereaved brother wiped his eyes with a red handkerchief, and looked dreamily into the fire.

Martha, still pleating her apron, stood awkwardly by the table, but instinctively she felt that the meeting had closed, and the two-dollar bill was still inside.

She went upstairs to her own room. It was a neat and pretty little room, and the pride of Martha's heart, but to-night Martha's heart had nothing in it but a great loneliness, vague and indefinite, a longing for something she had never known.

A rag carpet in well-harmonized stripes was on the floor; a blue and white log-cabin quilt was on the bed; over the lace-edged pillow covers there hung embroidered pillow shams. One had on it a wreath of wild roses encircling the words "I slept and dreamed that life was Beauty," while its companion, with a similar profusion of roses, made the correction: "I woke and knew that, life was Duty." Martha had not chosen the words, for she had never even dreamed that life was beauty. A peddler (not the one that had beguiled her Aunt Lizzie) had been storm-stayed with them the winter before and he had given her these in payment for his lodging.

She sat now on a little stool that she had made for herself of empty tomato cans, covered with gaily flowered cretonne, and drawing back the muslin frilled curtains, looked wearily over the fields. It was a pleasant scene that lay before Martha's window—a long reach of stubble field, stretching away to the bank of the Souris, flanked by poplar bluffs. It was just a mile long, that field, a wonderful stretch of wheat-producing soil; but to Martha it was all a weariness of the flesh, for it meant the getting of innumerable meals for the men who ploughed and sowed and reaped thereon.

To-night, looking at the tall elms that fringed the river bank, she tried to think of the things that had made her happy. They were getting along well, there had been many improvements in the house and out of it. She had better clothes than ever she had; the trees had been lovely this last summer, and the garden never better; the lilacs had bloomed last spring. Everything was improving except herself, she thought sadly; the years that had been kind to everything else were cruel to her.

With a sudden impulse, she went to the mirror on her dressing table, and looked long and earnestly at her image there. Martha was twenty-five years old, and looked older. Her shoulders were slightly bent, and would suggest to an accurate observer that they had become so by carrying heavy burdens. Her hair was hay-coloured and broken. Her forehead and her eyes were her best features, and her mouth, too, was well formed and firm, giving her the look of a person who could endure.

To-night, as she sat leaning her head on the window-sill, Martha's thoughts were as near to bitterness as they had ever been. This, then, was all it came to, all her early rising and hard work, all her small economies. She had not been able to get even two dollars when she wanted it. She sat up straight and looked sadly out into the velvet dusk, and the tears that had been long gathering in her heart came slowly to her eyes; not the quick, glittering tears of childhood that can be soon chased away by smiles—not that kind, no, no; but the slow tears that scald and wither, the tears that make one old.

It was dark when Martha lifted her head. She hastily drew down the blind, lit the lamp, and washed away, all traces of her tears. Going to a cupboard that stood behind the door, she took out a piece of fine embroidery and was soon at work upon it.

Hidden away in her heart, so well hidden that no one could have suspected its presence, Martha

cherished a sweet dream. To her stern sense of right and wrong it would have seemed improper to think the thoughts she was thinking, but for the fact that they were so idle, so vain, so false, so hopeless. It had all begun the fall before, when, at a party at one of the neighbours', Arthur Wemyss, the young Englishman, had asked her to dance. He had been so different from the young men she had known, so courteous and gentle, and had spoken to her with such respect, that her heart was swept with a strange, new feeling that perhaps, after all there might be for her the homage and admiration she had seen paid to other girls. In her innocence of the worlds ways, good and bad, she did not know that young men like Arthur were taught to reverence all women, and that the deference of his manner was nothing more than that.

Martha fed her heart with no false hope—she never forgot to remind herself that she was a dull, plain girl—and even when she sat at her embroidery and let the imagination of her heart weave for her a golden dream, it was only a dream to her, nothing more!

When Arthur bought Jim Russell's quarter-section and began farming independently, the Perkinses were his nearest neighbours. Martha baked his bread for him, and seldom gave him his basket of newly made loaves that it did not contain a pie, a loaf of cake, or some other expression of her good-will, all of which Arthur received very gratefully.

He never knew what pleasure it gave her to do this for him, and although she knew he was engaged to be married to a young lady in England, it was the one bright evening of the week for her when he came over, to get his weekly allowance.

Martha had never heard of unrequited love. The only books she had read were the Manitoba Readers as far as Book IV, and they are noticeably silent on the affairs of the heart. In the gossip of the neighbourhood she had heard of girls making "a dead set for fellows who did not care a row of pins" for them, and she knew it was not considered a nice thing for any girl to do; but it came to her now clearly that it was not a subject for mirth, and she wondered why any person found it so.

As for Martha herself, the tricks of coquetry were foreign to her, unless flaky biscuits and snowy bread may be so called; and so, day by day, she went on baking, scrubbing, and sewing, taking what happiness she could out of dreams, sweet, vanishing dreams.

CHAPTER II

THE RISING WATSONS

There is ever a song somewhere, my dear,
There is ever a something sings alway:
There's a song of the lark when the skies are clear
And the song of the thrush when the skies are gray.

—*James Whitcomb Riley.*

WHILE Martha Perkins was weaving sweet fancies to beguile the tedium of her uneventful life, a very different scene was being enacted, a few miles away, in the humble home of John Watson, C. P. R. section-man, in the little town of Millford, where he and his wife and family of nine were working out their own destiny. Mrs. Watson up to this time had spent very few of the daylight hours at home, having a regular itinerary among some of the better homes of the town, where she did half-day stands at the washtub, with, a large grain sack draped around her portly person, while the family at home brought themselves up in whatever way seemed best to them.

One day the fortunes of the Watson family suddenly changed, and in such a remarkable way it would convince the most sceptical of the existence of good working fairies. A letter came to Pearl, the eldest girl, from the Old Country, and the letter contained money!

When it became known in the community that Pearl Watson had received a magnificent gift of money from the parents of the young Englishman she had nursed while she was working for Mrs. Sam Motherwell, it created no small stir in the hearts of those who had to do with other young Englishmen. Parents across the sea, rolling in ancestral gold and Bank of England notes, acquired a reality they had never enjoyed before. The young chore boy who was working for five dollars a month at George

Steadman's never knew why Mrs. Steadman suddenly let him have the second helping of butter and also sugar in his tea. Neither did he understand why she gave him an onion poultice for his aching ear, and lard to rub into his chapped hands. Therefore, when she asked him out straight about his folks in the Old Country, and "how they were fixed," he, being a dull lad, and not quick to see an advantage, foolishly explained that he "didn't 'ave nobody belongink to him"—whereupon the old rule regarding second helpings was as suddenly restored.

On the Monday morning after Pearl's return home she was the first person up in the house. She made the porridge and set the table for breakfast, and then roused all the family except Danny, who was still allowed the privilege of sleeping as long as he wished and even encouraged in this.

After the family had eaten their breakfast Pearl explained her plans to them. "Ma," she said, "you are not to wash any, more, and isn't it lucky there's a new Englishwoman across the track there in 'Little England,' that'll be glad to get it to do, and no one'll be disappointed, and we'll go to the store to-day and get Sunday suits all round for the wee lads and all, and get them fixed up to go to Sunday-school and church twice a day. Ye'll have to learn what ye can while the clothes last. Mary'll have a new fur collar, and Ma'll have the fur-lined cape; and yer old coat, Ma, can be cut down for me. Camilla'll help us to buy what we need, and now, Ma, let's get them ready for school. Money's no good to us if we haven't education, and it's education we'll have now, every last wan of us. Times has changed for the Watsons! It seems as if the Lord sent us the money Himself, for He can't bear to have people ignorant if there's any way out of it at all, at all, and there's nearly always a way if people'll only take it. So, Ma, get out a new bar of soap and let's get at them!"

But in spite of all Pearl and her mother could'do, there was only enough clothing for two little boys, and Patsey had to stay at home; but Pearl beguiled him into good-humour by telling him that when he grew to be a man he would keep a big jewellery store, and in preparation therefor she set him at work, draped, in a nightdress of his mother's, to cut watches and brooches from an old Christmas catalogue.

"Now, Mary, alanna," Pearl continued, "you're to go to school, too, and make every day count, There's lots to learn, and it's all good. Get as much as ye can every day. I'm goin' myself, you bet, when I get things fixed up, and Teddy and all of us. We've got the money to git the clothes, and we'll go as far with it as the clothes'll last."

When Pearl, Mrs. Watson, and Camilla went that day to purchase clothes for the family, they received the best of attention from the obliging clerks. Mr. Mason, the proprietor, examined the cheque, and even went with Pearl to the bank to deposit it.

Then came the joyous work of picking out clothes for the whole family. A neat blue and white hairline stripe was selected for Jimmy, in preference to a pepper-and-salt suit, which Pearl admitted was nice enough, but would not do for Jimmy, for it seemed to be making fun of his freckles. A soft brown serge with a white belt with two gold bears on it was chosen for Danny, and gray Norfolk jacket suits for Tommy and Patsey—just alike, because Pearl said everybody knew they were twins, and there was no use denying it now. A green and black plaid was bought to make Mary a new Sunday dress, and a red and black plaid for "days." Pearl knew that when Mary was telling a story to the boys she always clothed her leading lady in plaid, and from this she inferred how Mary's tastes ran! Stockings and shoes were selected, and an assortment of underclothes, towels, toques, scarfs, and overshoes assembled.

It was like a dream to Pearl, the wildest, sweetest dream, the kind you lie down and try to coax back again after you wake from it. She could not keep from feeling Danny's brown suit and stroking lovingly his shiny brown shoes.

Then came a "stuff" dress for Ma, and Sunday suits for Pa, Teddy, and Billy. By this time the whole staff were busy helping on the good work. Mr. Mason had no fur-lined capes in stock, but he would send for one, he said, and have it still in time for Sunday, for Pearl was determined to have her whole family go to church Sunday morning.

"My, what an outburst of good clothes there'll be," Camilla said.
"Now, what are you going to have for yourself?"

Pearl had always dreamed of a wine-coloured silk, but she hesitated now, for she had heard that silk did not wear well, and was a material for rich people only, but that did not prevent the dream from coming back. While Pearl was thinking about it, Mr. Mason and Camilla held a hurried conference.

"What about your favourite colour, now, Pearl?" Camilla asked. "Isn't it a wine-coloured silk you always wish for when you see the new moon?"

Pearl admitted that it had been her wish for quite a while, but she wanted to see overcoats first; so overcoats were bought and overcoats sent on approval. There were yards and yards of flannelette

bought to be made into various garments. Pearl was going to have a dressmaker come to the house, who, under Camilla's direction, would make all sorts of things for the Watsons.

Pearl's purchases were so numerous that two packing boxes were sent up on the dray wagon, and it was a proud moment for her when she saw them carried in and placed in the middle of the floor of the "room."

"Now, set down," Pearl said firmly; "every wan of ye set on the floor, so none of yer stuff can fall, and I'll give ye what's for ye. But ye can't put them on till Sunday morning, that is the Sunday things, and ye can't put on any of them till, to-morrow morning, when ye'll be as clean as hot water and bar soap can make ye; for me and Ma are going at ye all to-night. There's nothin' looks more miserabler than a good suit of clothes with a dirty neck fornenst it."

Everybody did as Pearl said, and soon their arms were full of her purchases. Danny was so delighted with the gold bears that he quite neglected to look at his suit. Tommy was rubbing his chin on his new coat to see how it felt. Patsey was hunting for pockets in his, when some one discovered that Bugsey was in tears, idle, out-of-place tears! Mrs. Watson, in great surprise, inquired the cause, and, after some coaxing, Bugsey whimpered: "I wish I'd always knew I was goin' to get them!"

Mrs. Watson remonstrated with him, but Purl interposed gently. "L'ave him alone, Ma; I know how he feels! He's enjoyin' his cry as much as if he was laughin' his head off!"

An hour was spent in rapturous inspection, and then everything was placed carefully back in the boxes. That night, after supper, there came a knock at the door, and a long pasteboard box, neatly tied with wine-coloured ribbon, was handed in. On its upper surface it bore in bold characters the name of "Miss P. Watson," and below that, "With the compliments of Mason & Meikle."

Excitement ran high.

"Open it, Pearlie dear," her mother said. "Don't stand there gawkin' at it. There'll be something in it, maybe."

There was something in it for sure. There was a dress length of the softest, springiest silk, the kind that creaks when you squeeze it, and it was of the shade that Pearl had seen in her dreams. There were yards of silk braid and of cream net. There were sparkling buttons and spools of thread, and a "neck" of cream filling with silver spangles on it, and at the bottom of the box; rolled in tissue paper, were two pairs of embroidered stockings and a pair of glittering black patent leather slippers that you could see your face in!

"Look at that now!" Mrs. Watson exclaimed. "Doesn't it beat all?"

But Pearl, breathing heavily, was in a state of wordless delight. "It's just as well I wasn't for scoldin' Bugsey for cryin' over his suit," she said at length; "for if it wasn't that I'm feart o' spottin' some of these, I'd be for doin' a cry myself. I've got such a glad spot here in me Adam's apple. Reach me yer apron, Ma—it's comin' out of me eyes in spite of meself. Camilla must ha' told them what I would like, and wasn't it kind of them, Ma, to ever think o' me? And who'd ever 'a' thought of Mr. Mason being so kind, and him so stern lookin'?"

"Ye never can tell by looks, Pearlie," her mother said sententiously. "Many's the kind heart beats behind a homely face." Which is true enough in experience, though perhaps not quite in keeping with the findings of anatomical science.

That night there were prohibitory laws made regarding the taking of cherished possessions to bed by the owners thereof; but when the lights were all out, and peaceful slumber had come to the little house, one small girl in her nightgown went quietly across the bare floor to the lounge in the "room" to feel once more the smooth surface of her slippers and to smell that delicious leathery smell. She was tempted to take one of them back with her, but her conscience reminded her of the rule she had made for the others, and so she imprinted a rapturous kiss on the sole of one of them, where it would not show, and went back to her dreams.

All week the sound of the sewing machine could be heard in the Watson home, as Mary Barner, Camilla, Mrs. Watson, and one real dressmaker fashioned various garments for the young Watsons. Even Mrs. Francis became infected with the desire to help, and came over hurriedly to show Mrs. Watson how to put a French hem on her new napery. But as the only napery, visible or invisible, was a marbled oilcloth tacked on the table, Mrs. Francis was unable to demonstrate the principle of French hemming. Camilla, however, showed her mistress where to work the buttonholes on Patsey's nightshirt, and later in the afternoon she felled the seams in Mary's plaid dress.

Saturday night brought with it arduous duties, for Pearl was determined that the good clothes of her family would not be an outward show only.

On Sunday morning, an hour before church time, the children were all dressed and put on chairs as a precaution against accidents. Mrs. Watson's fur-lined cape had come the night before, and Camilla had brought over a real winter hat in good repair, which Mrs. Ducker had given her. Mrs. Ducker said it was really too good a hat to give away, but she could not wear it with any comfort now, for Mrs. Grieves had one almost the same. Mrs. Ducker and Mrs. Grieves had had a slight unpleasantness at the last annual Ladies' Aid dinner, the subject under discussion being whether chickens should be served with or without bones.

Camilla came for the boys on Sunday morning, and took them for Mrs. Francis to see, and also for the boys to see themselves in the long mirror in the hall. Danny sidled up to Mrs. Francis and said in a confidential whisper: "Ain't I the biggest dood in the bunch?"

When the others had admired their appearance sufficiently and filed back to the dining-room, Bugsey still stood before the glass, resolutely digging away at a large brown freckle on his cheek. He came out to Camilla and asked her for a sharp knife, and it was with difficulty that he was dissuaded from his purpose. When Mrs. Francis saw the drift of Bugsey's intention, she made a note in her little red book under the heading, "The leaven of good clothes."

Just as they went into church Pearlie gave them her parting instructions.

"Don't put yer collection in yer mouths, ye might swallow it; I've it tied up in yer handkerchiefs, and don't chew the knot. Keep yer eye on the minister and try to understand all ye can of it, and look like as if ye did, anyway!"

John Watson, coached by Pearl, went first and waited at the end of the seat to let the whole flock march past him. There was one row full and four in the row behind. Pearl sat just behind Danny, so that she could watch his behaviour from a strategic point.

The minister smiled sympathetically when he saw the Watson family file in. He had intended preaching a doctrinal sermon on baptism, but the eager faces of the Watson children inspired him to tell the story of Esther. Even Danny stayed awake to listen, and when it came to an end and Mr. Burrell told of the wicked Haman being hanged on the scaffold of his own making, Patsey whispered to Bugsey in a loud "pig whisper:" "That's when he got it in the neck!" Mrs. Watson was horrified beyond words, but Pearl pointed out that while it was beyond doubt very bad to whisper in church, still what Patsey said showed that he had "sensed what the story was about."

The next week she dramatized the story for the boys. Jimmy was always the proud and haughty Ahasuerus, his crown made of the pasteboard of the box his father's new cap came in. Bugsey was the gentle Esther who came in trembling to see if she would suit his Majesty. The handle of a dismembered parasol was used for the golden sceptre, and made a very good one after Mary had wound it around with the yellow selvage that came off her plaid dress.

"You lads have got to play educated games now," Pearl had said, when she started them at this one. "Bull-in-the-ring,' 'squat-tag,' 'button, button, who's got the button?' are all right for kids that don't have to rise in the world, but with you lads it's different. Ye've got to make yer games count. When I get to school I'll learn lots of games for ye, but ye must all do yer best now."

CHAPTER III

"KNOWLEDGE IS POWER"

Pap wunct he scold and says to me,
Don't play too much, but try
To study more and nen you'll be
A great man by and by.
Nen Uncle Sidney says: "You let
Him be a boy and play.
The greatest man on earth, I bet,
'Ud trade with him to-day."

PEARL started to school one Monday morning. She felt very brave until she got into the girls' hall, where the long row of "store" coats, fur caps and collars seemed to oppress her with their magnificence.

Maudie Ducker's 'coon coat and red scarf seemed to be particularly antagonistic, and she hung her mother's cut-down coat and her new wool toque as far from them as possible.

Outwardly calm, but with a strong tendency to bolt for home, Pearl walked into the principal's room, and up to his desk, where he sat making his register.

He looked up inquiringly and asked curtly: "What-do you want?"

"I am comin' to school, if you please," Pearl said calmly.

"What do you know?" he asked, none too gently, for it was one of his bad days.

"Not much yet," Pearl said, "but I want to know a whole lot."

He put down his pen and looked at her with interest. "We've plenty of room for people who don't know things, but want to. We're short of that kind. We've plenty of people here who think they know a lot and don't want to know any more, but you're an entirely new kind."

Pearl laughed—the easy, infectious laugh that won for her so many friends.

"You see," she said, "I've got to learn as fast as I can, now while the money lasts, for there's so many of us. I'm ignorant for me age, too. I'm thirteen now, and I haven't been to school since I was ten, but I should be able to learn a whole lot, for I'm going to come as long as this dress lasts anyway, and I've got sateen sleeves to put on over it past the elbows to save it, for that's where it'll likely go first, and I'm takin' long steps to keep my boots from wearin' out, and I'm earnin' a little money now, for I've got the job of takin' care of the school, me and Jimmy."

The schoolmaster forgot that he was discouraged, forgot that he had been having a hard time with Grade VIII's geography, forgot that he had just made up his mind to quit teaching. He saw nothing but a little girl standing eagerly before him, telling him her hopes, and depending on him to help her to realize them.

He put out his hand impulsively, and took hers.

"Pearl," he said, "you're all right!"

That night, when Pearl went home, she gave her family the story of the Magna Charta, drawing such a vivid picture of King John's general depravity that even her father's indignation was stirred.

"That lad'll have to mend his ways," he said seriously, as he opened the stove door to get a coal for his pipe, "or there will be trouble coming his way."

"And you bet there was," Pearl replied. "What did they do but all git together one day, after they got the crop cut, and they drawed up a list of things that he couldn't do, and then they goes to him, and says they: 'Sign this, yer Highness;' and he takes the paper and wipes his glasses on his hanky, and he reads them all over polite enough, and then he says, says he, handing it back: 'The divil I will!'"

"Did he really say that, Pearlie?" her Mother asked.

"Did he?" Pearl said scornfully. "He said worse than that, Ma; and then they says, says they: 'Sign it, or there'll be another man on yer job.' And says he, brave as ye please: 'I'll see ye some place before I sign it,' and with that what did they do but jist sit down where they were, lit their pipes, as unconcerned as could be, and says they: 'Take yer time, your Highness, we're not in a hurry; we bro't our dinners,' says they, 'an' we'll stay right here till ye find yer pen,' and they just sat there on their hunkers talkin' about the crops and the like o' that, until he signed it; which he did very bad-mannered, and flung it back at them and says he: 'There now, bad cess to yez, small good it'll do yez, for I'm the King,' says he, 'an' I'll do as I blame please, so I will. The King can do no wrong,' says he. 'Well, then,' says one of them, foldin' up the Magna Charta and puttin' it away careful in his breast pocket, 'the King can't break his word, I guess,' and wid that he winks at the rest of them, and they says, says they: 'That's one on you, yer Majesty!' But they couldn't put him in good humour, and they do say, Ma, that when the company was gone that that man cut up somethin' rough, cursed and swore, and chewed up sticks, and frothed at the mouth like a mad dog, and sure, the very next day, when he was driving through a place called 'The Wash,' drunk as an owl, he dropped his crown, and his little satchel wid all

his good clothes in it, and him being the way he was he never heard them splash. When he missed them he felt awful, and went back to hunt for them, puddlin' round in his bare feet for hours, and some say he had et too many lampreys, whatever that is, for his breakfast, but anyway, he got a cowl'd in his head and he died, so he did."

"Wasn't that a bad state for the poor man to die in, childer dear," said Mrs. Watson, wishing to give Pearl's story a moral value; "and him full of wickedness and cursin'!"

"And lampwicks, too, Ma!" Bugsey added.

"Where he wuz now?" asked Danny, who had a theological bent.

"Faith, now, that's not an easy thing to say for certain," said the father gravely. "Things look pretty bad for him, I'm thinkin'."

After some discussion as to John's present address, Pearl summed it up with a fine blending of charity and orthodoxy by saying: "Well, we just hope he's gone to the place where we're afraid he isn't."

The days passed fleet-footed with the Watson family—days full of healthy and happy endeavour, with plenty to eat, clothes to wear, Ma at home, and everybody getting a chance to be somebody. Pearl was the happiest little girl in the world. Every night she brought home faithfully what she had learned at school, at least the interesting part of it, and when the day's work had been dull and abstract, out of the wealth of her imagination she proceeded to make it interesting.

Under Pearl's sympathetic telling of it, they wept over the untimely fate of Mary, Queen of Scots, and decided that Elizabeth was a bad lot, and Mrs. Watson declared that if she "had aknowled all this before, she would never ha' called Mary, Mary Elizabeth, because that just seems like takin' sides with both parties," and she just couldn't "abear people that do that!"

Lady Jane Grey, the Princes in the Tower, Oliver Cromwell, the unhappy Charles I, were their daily guests, and were discussed with the freedom and interest with which dwellers in small towns are popularly supposed to discuss their neighbours.

All of the evening was not given up to pleasure. Pearl saw to it that each child did his stint of home work, and very often a spelling match was held, with Pearl as the teacher and no-fair-to-try-over. The result of this was that Teddy Watson, Class V; Billy Watson, Class III; Tommy and Jimmy Watson, Class IIA; Patsey and Bugsey Watson, Class I, were impregnable rocks at the head of their classes on whom the troublesome waves of "ei's" and "ie's," one "l" or two "l's," beat in vain.

Even John Watson, hard though his hands were with the handling of a shovel, was not immune from this outburst of learning, and at Pearl's suggestion even he was beginning to learn! He filled pages of her scribbler with "John Watson," in round blocky letters, and then added "Millford, Manitoba."

"Now, Pa," Pearl said one night, "ain't there some of yer friends ye'd like to write to, seein' as yer gettin' on so fine?"

John had not kept up a close touch with his friends down east since he came to Manitoba.

"It's fifteen year," he said, "since I left the Ottaway valley, but I'm thinkin' me sister Katie is alive. Katie was me oldest sister, but I'm thinkin' it would take a lot to kill her!"

"What was she like, Pa?" Pearl asked.

John smoked on reminiscently. "She was a smart girl, was Kate, wid her tongue. I always liked to hear her usin' it, on someone else. I mind once me poor, father and Katie went to a circus at Arnprior and father got into a bean and shell game. It looked rale easy at first sight, and me father expected to make a bunch o' money, but instead o' that, he lost all he had on him, and his watch, and so he came to Katie and told her what had happened. Well, sir, they say that Katie just gave a le'p and cracked her heels together, and, sir, she went at yon man, and he gave back the money, every cent of it, and me father's watch, too. The people said they never heerd language like Katie used yon time."

"She didn't swear, did she, John?" Mrs. Watson asked, in a shocked tone, giving him a significant look which, interpreted, meant that was not the time to tell the truth if the truth were incriminating.

"No," John said slowly, "Katie would not waste her breath swearin'. She told the man mostly what she thought of him, and how his looks struck her, and what he reminded her of. I mind she said a rang o' tang would lose friends if he changed faces with him, and a few things like that, but nobody could say that Katie used language unbecomin' a lady. She was always partick'ler that way."

"Would you like to write to her and see how she is, Pa?" Pearl asked.

"Well, now I don't care if I do," her father answered.

The letter was written with infinite pains. The composition was Pearlie's, and Pearlie was in her happiest mood, and so it really was a very pleasant and alluring picture she drew of how John Watson had prospered since coming west, and then, to give weight to it, she sent a snapshot that Camilla had taken of the whole family in their good clothes.

"It seems to me," Mrs. Watson said one night, "like as if we are gettin' on too prosperous. The childer have been gettin' on so well, and we're all so happy like, I'm feart somethin' will happen. This is too good to last."

Mrs. Watson had a strain of Highland blood in her, and there was a Banshee in the family two generations back, so it was not to be wondered at that she sometimes indulged in gloomy forebodings.

Every day she looked for something to happen. One day it did. It was Aunt Katie from "down the Ottaway!"

Aunt Kate Shenstone came unannounced, unheralded by letter, card, or telegram. Aunt Kate said you never could depend on the mails—they were like as not to open your letter and keep your stamp! So she came, carrying her two telescope valises and her handbag. She did not believe in having anything checked—that was inviting disaster!

Aunt Kate found her way to the Watson home under the direction of Wilford Ducker, who had all his previous training on the subject of courtesy to strangers seriously upset by the way Jimmy Watson talked to him when they met a few days afterward.

"You see, John," Mrs. Shenstone said to her brother, when he came home, "it seemed so lucky when I got your letter. I always did want to come to Manitoba, but Bill, that's my man, John, he was a sort of a tie, being a consumptive; but I buried Bill just the week before I got your letter."

"Wus he dead?" Bugsey asked quickly.

"Dead?" Aunt Kate gasped. "Well, I should say he was."
"My, I'm glad!" Bugsey exclaimed.

Aunt Kate demanded an explanation for his gladness.

"I guess he's glad, because then you could come and see us, Auntie,"
Mary said. Mary was a diplomat.

"Tain't that," Bugsey said frankly. "I am glad my Uncle Bill is dead, cos it would be an awful thing for her to bury him if he wasn't!"

Mrs. Shenstone sat down quickly and looked anxiously around her brother's family.

"John," she said, "they're all right wise, are they?"

"Oh, I guess so," he answered cheerfully, "as far as we can tell yet, anyway."

At supper she was given the cushioned chair and the cup and saucer that had no crack. She made a quick pass with her hand and slipped something under the edge of her plate, and it was only the keen eyes of Danny, sitting beside her, that saw what had happened, and even he did not believe what he had seen until, leaning out of his chair, he looked searchingly into his aunt's face.

"She's tuck out her teeth!" he cried. "I saw her."

Pearlie endeavoured to quiet Danny, but Mrs. Shenstone was by no means embarrassed. "You see, Jane," she said to Mrs. Watson, "I just wear them when I go out. They're real good-lookin' teeth, but they're no good to chew with. There must be something wrong with them. Mother never could chew with them, either—they were mother's, you know and I guess they couldn't ha' been made right in the first place."

Patsey, who was waiting for the second table, came around and had a look at them.

"Them's the kind to have, you bet," he said to Tommy, who was also one of the unemployed; "she can take them out if they ache, and let them ache as much as they've' a mind to." Tommy had had some experience with toothache, and spoke with feeling.

Mrs. Shenstone was a woman of uncertain age, and was of that variety of people who look as old when they are twenty-five as they will ever look. She was dressed in rusty mourning, which did not escape the sharp eyes of her young nephews.

"When did you say Uncle Bill died?" Jimmy asked.

"Just four weeks to-morrow," she said, and launched away into an elaborate description of Bill's last hours.

"Did you get yer black dress then?" Mary asked, before Pearl could get her nudged into silence.

"No; I didn't," Aunt Kate answered, not at all displeased with the question, as Pearl was afraid she might be. "I got this dress quite a while agone. I went into black when mother died, and I've never seen fit to lay it off. Folks would say to me: 'Oh, Mrs. Shenstone, do lay off your mournin',' but I always said: 'Mother's still dead, isn't she? and she's just as dead as she ever was, isn't she? Well, then, I'll stick to my crape,' says I; and besides, I knew all along that Bill was goin' sooner or later. He thought sometimes that he was gettin' better, but, land! you couldn't fool me, him coughin' that dreadful hollow cough and never able to get under it, and I knew I was safe in stickin' to the black. I kept the veil and the black gloves and all laid away. They say keep a thing for seven years and you'll find a use for it, if you've any luck at all. I kept mine just six years, and you see, they did come in good at last."

"I guess you were good and glad, weren't you, Auntie?" asked Tommy.

Mrs. Watson and Pearl apologized as best they could for Tommy.

"That's all right, now, Jane," Mrs. Shenstone said, chuckling toothlessly; "youngsters will out with such things, and, now since you've asked me, Tommy, I am not what you'd call real glad, though I am glad poor Bill's gone where there ain't no consumption, but I miss him every minute. You see, he's been with me sittin' in his chair for the last four years, as I sat beside him sewin', and he was great company, Bill was, for all he was so sick; for he had great sperrits, and could argue somethin' surprisin' and grand. 'You're a good girl, Katie,' was the last words he ever said. I never was no hand to make a big palaver, so just as soon as the funeral was over I went right on with my sewin' and finished up everything I had in the house, for I needed the money to pay the expenses; and, besides, I made the first payment on the stone—it's a lovely one, John, cost me \$300, but I don't mind that. I just wish Bill could see it. I often wish now I had set it up before he went, it would ha' pleased him so. Bill was real fond of a nice grave, that is, fixed up nice—he took such an interest in the sweet alyssum we had growin' in the garden, and he showed me just how he wanted it put on the grave. He wanted a horseshoe of it acrost the grave with B. S. inside, made of pansies. You see B. S. stands for Bill Shenstone, Blacksmith!

"He was a real proud man, yer Uncle Bill was, and him just a labourin' man, livin' by his anvil. Mind you, when I made him overalls I always had to put a piece of stuff out on the woodpile to fade fer patches. Bill never could bear to look at a patch of new stuff put on when the rest was faded."

"Well, he couldn't see the patch, could he, auntie?" Jimmy asked, making a shrewd guess at the location of it.

"Maybe he couldn't," Bill's wife answered proudly. "But he knew it was there."

"Where he wuz now?" Danny asked, his mind still turning to the ultimate destiny.

Mrs. Shenstone did not at once reply, and the children were afraid that her silence boded ill for Bill's present happiness. She stirred her tea absent-mindedly. "If there's a quiet field up in heaven, with elm-trees around it," she said at last; "elm-trees filled with singin' birds, a field that slopes down maybe to the River of Life, a field that they want ploughed, Bill will be there with old Bess and Doll, steppin' along in the new black furrow in his bare feet, singin':

There's a city like a bride, just beyond the swellin' tide.

He always said that would be heaven for him 'thout no harp or big procession, and I am sure Bill would never hear to a crown or such as that. Bill was a terrible quiet man, but a better-natured man never lived. So I think, Tommy, that your Uncle Bill is ploughin' down on the lower eighty, where maybe the marsh marigolds and buttercups bloom all the year around—there's a hymn that says somethin' about everlasting spring abides and never witherin' flowers, so I take it from that that the ploughin' is good all the year around, and that'll just suit Bill."

When the meal was over, Aunt Katie complacently patted her teeth back into place. "I never like no one to see me without them," she said, "exceptin' my own folks. I tell you, I suffer agonies when there's

a stranger in for a meal. Now, Jane, let's git the children to bed. Mary and Pearl, you do the dishes. Hustle, you young lads, git off your boots now and scoot for bed. I never could bear the clatter of children. Come here, and I'll loosen your laces"—this to Bugsey, who sat staring at her very intently. "What's wrong with you?" she exclaimed, struck by the intent look on his face.

"I'm just thinkin'," Bugsey answered, without removing his eyes from the knothole on the door.

"And what are you thinkin'?" she demanded curiously.

"I'm just thinkin' how happy my Uncle Bill must be up there...ploughin'...without any one to bother him."

Mrs. Shenstone turned to her brother and shook her head gravely: "Mind you, John," she said, "you'll have to watch yon lad—he's a deep one."

Aunt Kate had only been a few days visiting at her brother John's when the children decided that something would have to be done. Aunt Kate was not an unmixed blessing, they thought.

"She's got all cluttered up with bad habits, not havin' no family of her own to raise," Pearl said. "She wouldn't jump up and screech every time the door slams if she'd been as used to noises as Ma is, and this talk about her nerves bein' all unstrung is just plain silly—and as for her not sleepin' at nights, she sleeps as sound as any of us. She says she hears every strike of the clock all night long, and she thinks she does; but she doesn't, I know. Anyway, I'm afraid Ma will get to be like her if we don't get her stopped."

"Ma backed her up to-day when she said my face was dirty just after I had washed it, so she did," Mary said with a grieved air.

Nearly every one of them had some special grievance against Aunt Kate.

"Let's make her sign a Charta," Tommy said, "like they did with John."

The idea became immensely popular.

"She won't sign it," said Bugsey, the pessimist. "Let her dare to not," said Jimmy gravely, "and she shall know that the people are the king."

Pearl said that it would do no harm to draw up the paper anyway, so a large sheet of brown paper was found, and Pearl spread it on the floor. Mrs. Watson and Aunt Kate had gone downtown, so every person felt at liberty to speak freely. Pearl wasn't sure of the heading and so wrote:

Mrs. Kate Shenstone

Please take notice of these things, and remember them to do them, and much good will follow here and hereafter.

She read it over to the others, and everybody was well pleased with it.

After receiving suggestions from all, the following by-laws were recommended to govern the conduct of Aunt Kate in future:

1. Keep your nerves strung.
2. Don't screech at every little noise. It don't help none.
3. Don't make nobody wash when they are already done so.
4. Sleep at night, snore all you want to, we don't stay awake to listen to you.
5. Don't bust yourself to think of things for us to do. We kep the wood-box full long before we ever saw you, also waterpail and other errings.
6. Don't make remarks on freckles. We have them, and don't care, freckles is honourable. (This was Jimmy's contribution.)
7. Don't always say you won't live long, we don't mind, only Mrs. Jane Watson is picking it up now from you. We don't like it, it ain't cheerful.
8. Don't interfere about bedtime. We don't with you.
9. Don't tell about children raised in idleness that turned out bad. It ain't cheerful, and besides we're not.

Just then the cry was raised that she was coming, and the Magna Charta was hastily folded up, without receiving the signatures.

Aunt Kate, who was very observant, suspected at once that the children had been "up to something."

"What have you youngsters been up to now, while we were away?" she demanded.

There was a thick silence. Mrs. Watson asked the children to answer their Auntie.

Mary it was who braved the storm. "We've been drawing up a list of things for you," she said steadily.

Aunt Kate had seen signs of rebellion, and had got to the place where she was not surprised at anything they did.

"Give it here," she said.

"Wait till it's signed," Pearl said. "It's Charta, Aunt Kate," she went on, "like 'King John to sign."

"I didn't hear about it. Pearl explained.

"Let me see it, anyway." Pearl gave her the document, and she retired to her room with it to look it over.

"Say, Pearl," said Jimmy, "go in there and get out my catapult, will you? She may sign it and then cutup rough."

There was no more said about it for several days, but Aunt Kate was decidedly better, though she still declared she did not sleep at night, and Pearl was determined to convince her that she did. Aunt Kate was a profound snorer. Pearl, who was the only one who had ever heard her, in trying to explain it to the other children, said that it was just like some one pulling a trunk across the room on a bare floor to see how they would like it in this corner, and then, when they get it over here, they don't like it a bit, so they pull it back again; "and besides that," Pearl said, "she whistles comin' back and grinds her teeth, and after all that she gets up in the mornin' and tells Ma she heard every hour strike. She couldn't hear the clock strike anyway, and her kickin' up such a fuss as she is, but I'm going to stop her if I can; she's our aunt, and we've got to do our best for her, and, besides, there's lots of nice things about her."

The next morning Pearl was very solicitous about how her aunt had slept.

"Not a bit better," Aunt Kate said. "I heard every hour but six. I always drop off about six."

"Did you really hear the clock last night, Auntie?" Pearl asked with great politeness.

"Oh, it's very little you youngsters know about lying awake. When you get to the age of me and your mother, I tell you, it's different I get thinkin', thinkin', thinkin', and my nerves get all unstrung."

"And you really heard the clock?" Pearl said. "My, but that is queer!"

"Nothin' queer about it, Pearl. What's queer about it, I'd like to know?"

"Because I stopped the clock," Pearl said, "just to see if you could hear it when it's stopped," and for once Aunt Kate, usually so ready of speech, could not think of anything to say.

Aunt Kate went to bed early the next night, leaving the children undisturbed to enjoy the pleasant hour as they had done before she came. The next morning she handed Pearl the sheet of brown paper, and below the list of recommendations there it was in bold writing:

"Kate W. Shenstone."

"See that, now," said Pearl triumphantly, as she showed it to the children, "what it does for you to know history!"

"Say," said Jim, "where could we get some of them things, what did you call them, Pearl?"

"'Twouldn't do any good, she wouldn't eat them," Billy said.

"Lampreys or lampwicks, or somethin' like that."

"Now, boys," said Pearl, "that's not right. Don't talk like that. It ain't cheerful."

CHAPTER IV

Wanting is—what?
Summer redundant,
Blueness abundant.
Where is the blot?

—*Robert Browning.*

PEARLIE WATSON, the new caretaker of the Milford school, stood broom in hand at the back of the schoolroom and listened. Pearlle's face was troubled. She had finished the sweeping of the other three rooms, and then, coming into Miss Morrison's room to sweep it, she found Maudie Ducker rehearsing her "piece" for the Medal Contest. Miss Morrison was instructing Maudie, and Mrs. Ducker would have told you that Maudie was doing "beautifully."

Every year the W. C. T. U. gave a silver medal for the best reciter, and for three consecutive years Miss Morrison had trained the winner; so Mrs. Ducker was naturally anxious to have Maudie trained by so successful an instructor. Miss Morrison had studied elocution and "gesturing." It was in gesturing that Maudie was being instructed when Pearlle came in with her broom.

It was a pathetic monologue that Miss Morrison had chosen for Maudie, supposed to be given by an old woman in a poorhouse. Her husband had died a drunkard and then her only son, "as likely a lad as you ever saw," had also taken to "crooked ways and left her all alone." One day a man came to visit the poorhouse, and poor "old Nan," glad of any one to talk to, tells all her story to the sympathetic stranger, asking him at last wouldn't he try to find and save her poor Jim, whom she had never ceased to pray for, and whom she still believed in and loved. Then she discovered the man to be in tears, and of course he turns out to be the long-lost Jim, and a happy scene follows.

It is a common theme among temperance reciters, but to Pearlle it was all new and terrible. She could not go on with her sweeping—she was bound to the spot by the story of poor old Nan and her woes.

Miss Morrison was giving Maudie instruction on the two lines:

"It is the old, sad, pitiful story, sir,
Of the devil's winding stair."

Neither of them had time to think of the meaning—they were so anxious about the gestures. Maudie did a long, waving sweep with three notches in it, more like a gordon braid pattern than a stair, but it was very pretty and graceful, and Miss Morrison was pleased.

"And men go down and down and down
To darkness and despair."

Maudie scalloped the air three times evenly to indicate the down grade.

"Tossing about like ships at sea
With helm and anchor lost."

Maudie certainly gave the ships a rough time of it with her willowy left arm. Miss Morrison said that to use her left arm to toss the ships would add variety.

"On and on thro' the surging waves,
Not caring to count the cost."

Maudie rose on the ball of her left foot and indicated "distance" with the proper Delsarte stretch.

* * *

It was dark when Pearl got home. "Maudie Ducker has a lovely piece," she began at once; "but she spoils it—she makes a fool of it."

The family were just at supper, and her mother said reprovingly, "O Pearlle! now, sure Miss Morrison is teaching her, and they do be sayin' she's won three medals herself."

"Well," Pearlle said, unconvinced, "them kind of carrin's-on may do fine for some pieces, but old women wid their hearts just breakin' don't cut the figger eight up in the air, and do the Dutch-roll, and kneel down and get up just for show—they're too stiff, for one thing. Ye can't listen to the story the way

Maudie carries on, she's that full of twists and turnin's. Maudie and Miss Morrison don't care a cent for the poor owld woman."

"Tell us about it, Pearlie," the young Watsons cried. "Well," Pearl began, as she hung up her thin little coat behind the door, "this Nan was a fine, purty girl, about like Mary there, only she didn't have a good pa like ours; hers used to come home at night, full as ye plaze, and they were all, mother, too, scairt to death purty near. Under the bed they'd go, the whole bilin' of them, the minute they'd hear him comin' staggerin' up to the cheek of the dure, and they'd have to wait there 'ithout no supper until he'd go to sleep, and then out they'd come, the poor little things, eyes all red and hearts beatin', and chew a dry crust, steppin' aisy for fear o' wakin' him."

"Look at that now!" John Watson exclaimed, pausing with his knife half way to his mouth.

"That ain't all in the piece," Pearl explained; "but it's understood, it says something about 'cruel blows from a father's hand when rum had crazed his brain,' and that's the way poor Nan grew up, and I guess if ever any girl got a heart-scald o' liquor, she did. But she grew up to be a rale purty girl, like Mary Barrier, I think, and one day a fine strappin' fellow came to town, clerkin in a store, steady enough, too, and he sees Nan steppin' out for a pail of water one day and her singin' to herself, and sez he to himself: 'There's the girl fer me!' and he was after steppin' up to her, polite as ye plaze (Pearl showed them how he did it), and says he: 'Them pails is heavy for ye, miss, let me have them.'"

"And after that nothin' would do him but she must marry him, and he was as fine a lookin' upstandin' fellow as you'd see any place, and sure Nan thought there had never been the likes of him. After that she didn't mind the old man's tantrums so much, for she was thinkin' all the time about Tom, and was gittin' mats and dish-towels made. And they had a fine weddin', with a cake and a veil and rice, and the old man kept straight and made a speech, and it was fine. And now, Ma, here's the part I hate to tell yez—it seems so awful. They hadn't been married long before Tom began to drink, too."

"The dirty spalpeen!" John angrily.

"Ye may well say that, Pa, after all she had to stand from the old man. But that's what the piece said:

"But Tom, too, took to drinkin';
He said 'twas a harmless thing;
So the arrow sped and my bird of hope
Came down with a broken wing."

The Watson family were unanimous that Tom was a bad lot!

"Tom cut up worse than the old man, and she used to have to get some of the neighbours to come in and sit on his head while she tuk his boots off, and she'd have clean give up if it hadn't been for her little boy, like Danny there; but if I ever thought that our Danny would go back on us the way that young Jim went back on his ma, I don't know how I'd stand it."

"What did he do, Pearlie?" Mary asked.

"Soon as he got big enough nothin' would do him but he'd drink too, and smoke cigarettes and stay out late, and one day stole somethin', and had to scoot, and she says so pitiful:

'I've never seen my poor lost boy
From that dark day to this.'

Then the poorwoman goes to the poorhouse, mind you!"

"God help us!" cried Mrs. Watson, "did it come to that?"

"Yes, Ma; but what d'ye think? One day a finelookin' man came in to see all the old folks, silk hat and kid gloves on him and all that, and this poor woman got talkin' to him, and didn't she up and tell him the whole story, same as I'm tellin' you, only far more pitiful, and sure didn't she end up by beggin' him to be kind to her poor Jimmy if he ever comes across him; and tellin' him how she always prays for him and knows he'll be saved yet. She never held it against the young scamp that he never writ back even the scratch of a pen, just as full of excuses for him as Ma would be if it was one of you lads," and Pearl's voice quivered a little.

"But sure, now, it is wonderful how things turn out!" Pearlie went on, after she had wiped her eyes on the sleeve of her checked apron, "for wasn't this Jim all the time forninst her, and her not knowin' it, and didn't he grab her in his arms and beg her to forgive him; and he cried and she cried, and then he took her away with him, and she had a good time at last."

The next day Pearl borrowed the book from Maudie Ducker and learned the words, and for several evenings recited them to her admiring and tearful family. Then, to make it more interesting, Pearl let the young Watsons act it. Jimmy spoke right up and says he: "I bo'r to be the old man, and come home drunk," but as this was the star part, Jimmy had to let Tommy and Billy have it sometimes.

The first scene was the father's spectacular homecoming. The next scene was the wedding, and Jimmy made the speech after Pearl had coached him, and in most feeling terms he warned his son-in-law against the flowing bowl, and told what a good girl his little Nancy was, and what a bad pa he'd been; and then he broke down and cried real tears, which Pearl said was "good actin'." The third scene was where Tom came home drunk. It was somewhat marred by Mary, who was playing the part of the broken-hearted bride, and was supposed to burst into tears when she saw the condition of her husband, and say:

"So the arrow has sped and my bird of hope
Comes down with a broken wing."

Now Mary had her own ideas of how intemperate husbands should be dealt with, and she had provided herself with a small, flat stick as she sat waiting in what was supposed to be joyful anticipation for her liege lord's homecoming. When she discovered his condition she cut out the speech about the "bird of hope," and used the stick with so much vigour that it seemed he was in more danger than the bird of hope of having a broken wing. Billy, the bridegroom, was naturally indignant, but his father was disposed to approve of Mary's methods. "Faix, I'm thinkin'," he said, "there'd be less of it if they got that every time they cum home that way."

Scene IV was the young son (Patsey) fleeing from the hands of justice. Pearlie hid him behind the flour-barrel until the two sleuths of the law, Danny and Tommy, passed by, and then he was supposed to do his great disappearing act through the cellar window.

Scene V was the most important of all. It was the poorhouse, and required a good deal of stage-setting. All evidences of wealth had to be carefully eradicated. The cloth was taken from the table, and the one mat lifted off the floor. Newspapers were pinned over the windows, and the calendars were turned with their faces to the wall. The lamp with the cracked chimney was lighted instead of the "good lamp," and then Pearlie, with her mother's old black shawl around her shoulders, ceased to be Pearlie Watson and became poorhouse Nan, widowed, deserted, old as the world itself, with heartbreak and tears.

John Watson sat and listened to her with a growing wonder in his heart, but as the story went on even he forgot that it was Pearl, and shed many unashamed tears over the sorrows of poorhouse Nan.

Camilla came in one night and heard Pearl recite it all through.

The morning of the contest an emergency meeting of the W. C. T. U. was hurriedly called at the home of Mrs. Francis. What was to be done? Maudie Ducker and Mildred Bates had the measles, and could not recite, which left only four reciters. They could do with five, but they could not go on with four. The tickets were sold, the hall rented, the contest had been advertised over the country! Who could learn a recitation in a day? Miss Morrison was sent for. She said it was impossible. A very clever pupil might learn the words, but not the gestures, and "a piece" was nothing without gestures. Mrs. White again exclaimed: "*What shall we do?*"

Mrs. Francis said: "We'll see what Camilla says."

Camilla came and listened attentively while the woes of the W. C. T. U. were told her. It was with difficulty that she restrained an exclamation of delight when she heard that they were short of reciters. "Pearl Watson knows Maudie's selection," she said quietly, "and recites it very well, indeed!"

"Impossible!" Miss Morrison exclaimed. "She has had no lessons."

"I think she watched you training Maudie," Camilla ventured.

"Only once," Miss Morrison replied, "and she can not possibly know the gestures; but we will be glad to have any one fill in. People will not expect her to do very well when she has had no training," she added charitably.

When Camilla returned to the kitchen she was smiling gently. "There's a surprise coming to little Miss Morrison," she said.

* * *

That night the hall was full to the door, and people stood in the aisles. Everybody loves a contest. Pearl and the other four contestants sat in a front seat. The latter were beautifully dressed in white net over silk, with shoes and stockings of white, and numerous bows of ribbon.

By the draw that Miss Morrison made, Pearl came last on the programme, and Miss Morrison kindly asked the chairman to explain that Pearl had had no training whatever, and that she had only known that she was going to recite that morning Miss Morrison wished to be quite fair!

Camilla sat beside Pearl. She had dressed Pearl for the occasion, and felt rather proud of her work as she sat beside Contestant No. 5. Pearl's brown hair was parted and brushed smoothly back, and tied with two new bright red ribbons—Camilla's gift. It did not occur to Pearl that she was in the race for the medal. She was glad of a chance to fill in and help the contest along.

John Watson, Mrs. Watson, and all the little Watsons were present, and filled two side seats. Mr. Francis had heard something from Camilla that caused him to send tickets to the whole Watson family, and even come himself, which was an unprecedented event.

Lucy Bates was the first contestant, and made her parents and many admiring relatives very proud of the a flutter of lace.

Maude Healy—the star reciter of the Hullett neighbourhood—recited "How Father Signed the Pledge," in a good, clear, ringing voice, and the Hullett people thought they were just as sure of the medal as if they saw the chairman pinning it on Maude.

Two other girls recited, with numerous gestures, selections of the same class; in which wayward sons, stormy nights, and railway accidents figured prominently.

Then the chairman made the explanation in regard to Pearl's appearance, and asked her to come forward and recite. Camilla gave her hand an affectionate little squeeze as she left the seat, and, thus fortified, Pearlie Watson faced the sea of faces unflinchingly. Then came that wonderful change—the little girl was gone, and an old woman, so bowed, so broken, began to tell her story, old enough to most of us, but strong always in its gripping pathos—the story of a child cheated of her birthright of happiness because some men will grow rich on other men's losses and fatten on the tears of little children. The liquor traffic stood arraigned before the bar of God as the story went on, unfolding darker and darker chapters in the woman's life. It had been the curse that had followed her always, had beaten and bruised her, never merciful.

The people saw it in its awfulness, and the pity of it rolled over them as they listened to that sad, old, cracked voice.

When she came to the place where she begged the well-dressed stranger to try and save her boy, and, clasping her trembling hands besought the God of Heaven to bear with her Jim a little longer, and let her see the desire of her heart, her son redeemed and forgiven, there was an audible sob from some one in the back of the hall, and many a boy away from home, careless and forgetful of his own mother, remembered her now with sudden tenderness. The words of the prayer were stiff and unnatural, but when did the Spirit of God depend upon felicity of expression? It can abound wherever there is the honest heart, and when Pearl, with tears flowing down her cheeks, but with voice steady and clear, thanked the God of all grace for sending her the answer to her prayers, even the dullest listener got a glimmering of the truth that there is "One behind the shadows who keeps watch above His own."

When Pearl had finished, the audience sat perfectly motionless, and then burst into such a tornado of applause that the windows rattled in their casings.

John Watson sat still, but his heart was singing within him "Pearlie, Pearl, God bless her!"

When the judges met for their decision it was found that they had forgotten to mark Pearl as to memory, gesture, pronunciation, etc., as their rules required them to do.

Father O'Flynn, the little Irish priest, wiping his eyes suspiciously, said: "Gentlemen, my decision is for Number 5." The other two nodded.

And so it came about that Pearlie Watson was once more called to face the large and cheering audience, while Father O'Flynn, with many kind words, presented her with the W. C. T. U. oratorical prize.

Miss Morrison went home that night disturbed in spirit, wondering if, after all, there might not be something more in it than gestures, voice, memory, and articulation.

CHAPTER V

AT THE CHICKEN HILL SCHOOL

Ho! I'm going back to where
We were youngsters! Meet me there,
Dear old barefoot chums, and we
Will be as we used to be,
Lawless rangers up and down
The old creek behind the town.

—*James Whitcomb Riley.*

IF a river is measured by the volume of water in its current, the Souris River, on whose southern bank the little town of Millford is built, is but an insignificant stream; but if bold and precipitous banks, sheer cliffs, and a broad valley are to be considered, then the Souris may lay claim to some distinction. For a few weeks in the spring of the year, too, it is a swift and mighty flood that goes sweeping through the valley, carrying on its turbulent waters whirling ice-jams, branches of trees, and even broken bridge-timbers from the far country known as the "Antlers of the Souris." When the summer is very dry, the river shrinks to a gentle, trickling thread of water, joining shallow pools, overhung with gray-green willows that whiten in the breeze.

At Millford, the Souris flows almost straight east and keeps this direction for about three miles, and then turns sharply north toward the Sand Hill country, where six miles farther on it joins the Assiniboine.

On one of its banks, just before it takes the northern turn, stands the farmhouse of Thomas Perkins, a big white frame house, set in a grove of maples; a mile south is the big stone house of Samuel Motherwell, where Pearlle Watson wiped out the stain on her family's honour by working off the old ten-dollar debt of her father's.

Two miles farther east, on the old Turtle Mountain trail, stands the weather-beaten schoolhouse where Martha Perkins got her meagre education, and where Bud, her brother, was now attending. The schoolhouse is bare and unlovely, without tree or flower. The rain and the sun, the scorching winds of spring and winter's piercing blizzards have had their way with it for many years, and now it defies them all, for its paint is all gone, and it has no beauty for them to fade.

A straggling woodpile and a long straw covered shed stand near it. Three windows, curtainless and staring, are in each side, and a small porch with two steps leading up to it is at the south end. Here the gophers frolic in the quiet summer afternoons, and steal what is left of the children's dinners from the tin pails behind the door. The porch smells of crumbs.

Away to the east, Oak Creek runs through a wooded belt of fertile lands, its tall elms and spruce giving a grateful shade to the farmers' cattle. To the north are the sand-hills of the Assiniboine, where stiff spruce trees stand like sentinels on the red sand; but no tiny seedling had ever been brought to the school-yard, no kind hand had ever sought to relieve that desolate grayness, bleak and lonely as a rainy midnight in a deserted house.

Inside, the walls are dull with age, so dark and smoked you would think they could become no darker shade, but on the ceiling above the long stovepipe that runs from the stove at the door to the chimney at the other end, there runs a darker streak still. The stove is a big, square box, set on four stubby feet, and bears the name "Sultana."

Some small effort has been made to brighten the walls. One of Louis Wain's cat pictures, cut from a London Graphic, is stuck on the wall with molasses. There is a picture of the late King Edward when he was the Prince of Wales, and one of the late Queen Victoria framed with varnished wheat. There is a calendar of '93 showing red-coated foxhunters in full chase. Here the decorations end abruptly.

The teacher's desk is of unpainted wood, and on its lid, which lifts up, revealing the mysteries of mysteries below, there run ancient rivers of ink, pointing back to a terrible day when Bud Perkins leaned against the teacher's desk in class. A black spot on the floor under the teacher's chair shows just how far-reaching was Bud's offence.

The desks are all ink-stained and cut and inscribed with letters and names. Names are there on the old desks that can be read now on business and professional signs in Western cities, and some, too,

that are written in more abiding type still, on the marble slabs that dot the quiet field on the river-bank.

The dreariness of the school does not show so much in the winter-time, when the whole landscape is locked in snow, and the windows are curtained by frost-ferns. The big boys attend school in the winter-time, too, for when there is nothing for them to do at home the country fathers believe that it is quite proper to pay some attention to education.

It was a biting cold day in January. The Christmas and New Year's festivities were over, and the Manitoba winter was settling down to show just what a Manitoba winter can do in the way of weather. The sky was sapphire blue, with fleecy little strings of white clouds, an innocent-looking sky, that had not noticed how cold it was below. The ground was white and sparkling, as if with silver tinsel, a glimmer of diamonds. Frost-wreaths would have crusted the trees and turned them into a fairy forest if there had been trees; but there was not a tree at the Chicken Hill School, so the frost-wreaths lay like fairy lace on the edges of the straw-covered shed and made fairy frills around the straggling woodpile. Everything was beautiful, blue and silver, sparkle and dance, glitter and glimmer.

Out on the well-tramped school-yard the boys and girls were playing "shinny," which is an old and honourable game, father or uncle of hockey.

Big Tom Steadman was captain of one side, and his fog-horn voice, as he shouted directions and objurgations to his men and his opponents, was the only discordant note in all that busy, boisterous, roaring scene.

Libby Anne Cavers was on the other side, and Libby Anne was a force to be reckoned with, for she was little and lithe, and determined and quick, with the agility of a small, thin cat. She was ten years old, but looked about seven.

Big Tom had the ball, and was preparing to shoot on the opposing goal. He flourished his stick in the air with a yell of triumph, and in his mind the game was already won. But he had forgotten Libby Anne, who, before his stick reached the ground, had slipped in her own little crook, and his stick struck the empty snow, for Libby Anne was fast flying up the field with the ball, while the players cheered. It was neatly done.

Tom Steadman ran after her in mad pursuit, and overtook her just as she passed the ball to Bud Perkins, who was the captain of her side. Then Tom Steadman, coward that he was, struck her with his heavy stick, struck fair and straight at her poor little thin shins, a coward's blow. Libby Anne doubled up into a poor little whimpering, writhing ball.

A sudden horror fell on the field, and the game stopped. Bud Perkins looked at her poor quivering little face, white as ashes now, his own face almost as pale, and then, pulling of his coat, ran over to where Tom Steadman stood.

"Drop yer stick, you coward, and stand up to me," he said in a voice that rang with the blood-lust.

Tom Steadman was older and bigger, and he felt very sure that he could handle Bud, so his manner was full of assurance.

The school closed in around them and watched the fight with the stolid indifference of savages or children, which is much the same thing. Big Tom Steadman dealt his cruel sledge-hammer blows on Bud, on his face, head, neck, while Bud, bleeding, but far from beaten, fought like a cornered badger. The boys did not cheer; it was too serious a business for noisy shouting, and besides, the teacher might be aroused any minute, and stop the fight, which would be a great disappointment, for every boy and girl, big and little, wanted to see Tom Steadman get what was coming to him.

Bud was slighter but quicker, and fought with more skill. Big Tom could hit a knockout blow, but there his tactics ended. He knew only the one way of dealing with an antagonist, and so, when one of his eyes suddenly closed up and his nose began to bleed, he began to realize that he had made a big mistake in hitting Libby Anne when Bud Perkins was there. With a clever underarm hold, Bud clinched with him, and he fell heavily.

Libby Anne, limping painfully, put her "shinny" stick into Bud's hand.

"Sock it to him now, Bud," she said, "now you've got him."

Bud dropped the stick and tried to laugh, but his mouth would not work right.

"Get up, Tom," Bud said. "I won't hit you when you're down. Stand up and let me at you again."

Tom swore threateningly, but showed no disposition to get up.

"I guess he's had enough," Bud said. "He's sorry he hit you now, Libby Anne. He sees now that it's a dirty shame to hit a little girl. He never thought much about it before. Come away, kids, and let him think."

When school was called, the whole story of the fight came out.

Tom Steadman was the only son of one of the trustees—*the* trustee, indeed, the one who lived in the biggest house, was councillor of the municipality, owned a threshing-machine, boarded the teacher, and made political speeches—and so Bud's offence was not a slight one.

A school meeting was called, to see what was to be done. Young Tom was there, swollen of lip and nose, and with sunset shades around both eyes. Libby Anne was there, too, but she had been warned by her father, a poor, shiftless fellow, living on a rented farm, that she must not say anything to offend the Steadmans, for Mr. Steadman owned the farm that they were living on.

The trial was decided before it began. The teacher, Mr. Donald, was away attending the Normal, and his place was being filled by a young fellow who had not enough courage to stand for the right.

The question to be decided was this: Did Tom Steadman strike Libby Anne with intent to hurt; or did he merely reprimand her gently to "shinny on her own side"; or did she run under his stick when he struck at the ball? Tom Steadman said she ran under his stick, and he didn't see her, whereupon some of the children who were not living on rented farms groaned. Several of the children gave their testimony that Tom had without doubt struck her "a-purpose!" Then Mr. Steadman, Tom's father, a big, well-fed man, who owned nineteen hundred acres of land and felt that some liberty should be allowed the only son of a man who paid such a heavy school-tax, took charge and said, fixing his eyes on Bill Cavers, his poverty-stricken tenant: "Let us see what Libby Anne has to say. I should say that Libby Anne's testimony should have more weight than all these others, for these young ones seem to have a spite at our Tom. Libby Anne, did Tom strike you a-purpose?"

"Be careful what you say, Libby Anne," her father said miserably, his eyes on the ground. He owed Steadman for his seed-wheat.

Libby Anne looked appealingly at Bud. Her eyes begged him to forgive her.

Mr. Steadman repeated the question.

"Speak, Libby Anne," her father said, never raising his eyes.

"Did Tom hit you a-purpose?"

Libby Anne drew a deep breath, and then in a strange voice she answered: "No."

She flung out the word as if it burned her.

Libby Anne was a pathetic figure in her much-washed derry dress, faded now to the colour of dead grass, and although she was clean and well-kept, her pleading eyes and pale face told of a childhood that had been full of troubles and tears.

Bud stared at her in amazement, and then, as the truth flashed on him, he packed up his books, hot with rage, and left the schoolhouse.

Bill Cavers hung his head in shame, for though he was a shiftless fellow, he loved his little girl in his better moments, and the two cruel marks on her thin little shins called loudly for vengeance; but must live, he told himself miserably.

When Bud left the school Libby Anne was in her seat, sobbing bitterly, but he did not give her a glance as he angrily slammed the door behind him.

Two days after this, Bud was drawing wood from the big bush north of the Assiniboine, and as he passed the Cavers home Libby Anne, with a thin black shawl around her, came running out to speak to him.

"Bud," she called breathlessly, "I had to say it. Dad made me do it, 'cos he's scairt of old man Steadman."

Bud stopped his horses and jumped down. They stood together on the shady side of the load of poles.

"That's all right, kid," Bud said. "Don't you worry. I liked lickin' him."

"But Bud," Libby Anne said wistfully, "you can't ever forget that I lied, can you? You can't ever like me again?"

Bud looked at the little wind-blown figure, such a little troubled, pathetic face, and something tender and manly stirred in his heart.

"Run away home now, Libby Anne," he said kindly. "Sure I like you, and I'll wallop the daylight out of anybody that ever hurts you. You're all right, Libby Anne, you bet; and I'll never go back on you."

The bitter wind of January came down the Souris valley, cold and piercing, and cut cruelly through Libby Anne's thin shawl as she ran home, but her heart was warmed with a sweet content that no winter wind could chill.

CHAPTER VI

PEARL'S UNRULY CONSCIENCE

We turn unblessed from faces fresh with beauty,
Unsoftened yet by fears,
To those whose lines are chased by love and duty
And know the touch of tears.

—*Ella Wheeler Wilcox.*

THE Watson family attended school faithfully all winter. Pearl took no excuses from the boys. When Tommy came home bitterly denouncing Miss Morrison, his teacher, because she had applied the external motive to him to get him to take a working interest in the "Duke—Daisy—Kitty" lesson, Pearl declared that he should be glad that the teacher took such a deep interest in him. When Bugsey was taken sick one morning after breakfast and could not go to school, but revived in spirits just before dinner-time, only to be "took bad" again at one o'clock, Pearl promulgated a rule, and in this Aunt Kate rendered valuable assistance, that no one would be excused from school on account of sickness unless they could show a coated tongue, and would take a tablespoonful of castor oil and go to bed with a mustard plaster (this was Aunt Kate's suggestion), missing all meals. There was comparatively little sickness among the Watsons after that.

Aunt Kate was a great help in keeping the household clothes in order. She insisted on the children hanging up their own garments, taking care of their own garters, and also she saw to it that each one ate up every scrap of food on his or her plate, or else had it set away for the next meal. But in spite of all this Aunt Kate was becoming more popular.

Thus relieved of family cares, Pearl had plenty of time to devote to her lessons and the progress she made was remarkable. She had also more time to see after the moral well-being of her young brothers, which seemed to be in need of some attention—at least she thought so when Patsey came home one day and signified his intention of being a hotel-keeper when he grew up, because Sandy Braden had a diamond as big as a marble. Patsey had the very last Sunday quite made up his mind to be a missionary. Pearl took him into her mother's room, and talked to him very seriously, but the best she could do with him was to get him to agree to be a drayman; higher than that he would not go—the fleshpots called him!

Jimmy became enamored of the railway and began to steal rides in box-cars, and once had been taken away and had to walk back five miles. It was ten o'clock when he got home, tired happy. He said he was "hungry enough to eat raw dog," which is a vulgar expression for a little boy nine years old.

Even Danny began to show signs of the contamination of the world, and came swaggering home one night feeling deliciously wicked smoking a liquorice pipe, and in reply to his mother's shocked remonstrance had told her to "cut it out."

Those things had set Pearl thinking. The boys were growing up and there was no work for them to do. It was going to be hard to raise them in the town. Pearl talked it over with Mr. Burrell, the minister, and he said the best place to raise a family of boys was the farm, where there would be plenty of employment for them. So Pearl decided in her own mind that they would get a farm. It would mean that

she would have to give up her chance of an education, and this to her was a very bitter sacrifice.

One night, when everyone else was asleep, even Aunt Kate, Pearl fought it all out. Every day was bringing fresh evidences of the evil effects of idleness on the boys. Jimmy brought home a set of "Nations" and offered to show her how to play pedro with them. Teddy was playing on the hockey team, and they were in Brandon that night, staying at a hotel, right within "smell of the liquor," Pearl thought. The McSorley boys had stolen money from the restaurant man, and Pearl had overheard Tommy telling Bugsey that Ben McSorley was a big fool to go showing it, and Pearl thought she saw from this how Tommy's thoughts were running.

All these things smote Pearl's conscience and seemed to call on her to renounce her education to save the family. "Small good your learnin' 'll be to ye, Pearl Watson, if yer brothers are behind the bars," she told herself bitterly. "It's not so fine ye'll look, all dressed up, off to a teachers' convention in Brandon, readin' a paper on 'How to teach morals,' and yer own brother Tommy, or maybe Patsey, doin' time in the Brandon jail! How would ye like, Pearlie, to have some one tap ye on the shoulder and say, 'Excuse me for troublin' of ye, Miss Watson, but it's visitor's day at the jail, and yer brother Thomas would like ye to be after stepping, over. He's a bit lonesome. He's Number 23!'"

Something caught in her throat, and her eyes were too full to be comfortable. She slipped out of bed and quietly knelt on the bare floor. "Dear God," she prayed, "ye needn't say another word. I'll go, so I will. It's an awful thing to be ignorant, but it's nothin' like as bad as bein' wicked. No matter how ignorant ye are ye can still look up and ask God to bless ye, but if ye are wicked ye're re dead out of it altogether, so ye are; so I'll go ignorant, dear Lord, to the end o' my days, though ye know yerself what that is like to me, an I'll try never to be feelin' sorry or wishin' myself back. Just let me get the lads brought up right. Didn't ye promise someone the heathen for their inheritance? Well, all right, give the heathen to that one, whoever it was ye promised it to, but give me the lads—there's seven of them, ye mind. I guess that's all. Amen."

The next day Pearl went to school as usual, determined to make the best use of the short time that remained before the spring opened. All day long the path of knowledge seemed very sweet and alluring to her. She had been able to compute correctly how long eighteen cows could feed on a pasture that twenty-six horses had lived on eighteen days last year, the grass growing day and night, three cows eating as much as one horse; in Literature they were studying "The Lady of the Lake," and Alan-bane's description of the fight had intoxicated her with its stirring enthusiasm. Knowledge was a passion with Pearl; "meat and drink to her," her mother often said, and now how was she to give it up?

She sat in her seat and idly watched the children file out. She heard them racing down the stairs. Outside, children called gaily to each other, the big doors slammed so hard the windows rattled and at last all was still with the awful stillness of a deserted school.

It was a warm day in March, a glorious day of melting sunshine, when the rivers begin to think of spring, and 'away below the snow the little flowers smile in their sleep.

Pearl went to the window and looked out at the familiar scene. Her own home, straggling and stamped with poverty, was before her. "It does look shacky but it's home, and I love it, you bet," she said. "Nobody would ever know to look at it the good times that goes on inside." Then she turned and looked around the schoolroom, with its solemn-looking blackboards, and its deserted seats littered with books. The sun poured into the room from the western windows and a thousand motes danced in its beams. The room smelled of chalk and ink and mothballs, but Pearl liked it, for to her it was the school-smell.

"I'll purtend I am the teacher," Pearl said, "just for once. I'll never be one now; I'm goin' to give up that hope, at least I'm goin' to try to give it up, maybe, but I'll see how it feels anyway." She sat in the teacher's chair and saw the seats filled with shadowy forms. She saw herself, well-dressed and educated, earning a salary and helping to raise her family from ignorance and poverty.

"I am Miss Watson now," she said, as she opened the register and called the names of her own making. "Me hair is done like Miss Morrison's, all wadded out around me head, wid a row of muskrat houses up the back, the kind I can take off and comb on the palm o' me hand. I've got gold-fillin' in me teeth which just shows when I laugh wide, and I'll do it often, and I've got a watch wid a deer's head on it and me name on it, R. J. P. Watson, and I can talk like they do in books. I won't ever say 'I've often saw,' I'll say 'I have invariably observed.' I suppose I could say it now, but it doesn't seem to fit the rest of me; and I'll be sittin' here now plannin' my work for to-morrow, and all the children are wonderin' hard what I'm thinkin' of. Now I'll purtend school is out. There's three little girls out there in the hall waitin' to take me hand home, nice little things about the size I used to be meself. I may as well send them home, for I won't be goin' for a long time yet." She went into the hall and in a very precise Englishy voice dismissed her admiring pupils. "I am afraid I will be here too long for you to wait,

childer dear," she said, "I have to correct the examination papers that the Entrance class wrote on today on elementary and vulgar fractions, and after that I am goin' for a drive with a friend"—she smiled, but forgot about the gold filling. "My friend, Dr. Clay, is coming to take me. So good-bye, Ethel, and Eunice, and Claire," bowing to each one.

Pearl heard the scamper of little feet down the stairs, and kissed her hand three times to them.

"I'll just see if he's coming," she murmured to herself, going to the window.

He was coming, in her imagination and in reality. Dr. Clay was driving up to the school, looking very handsome in his splendid turn-out, all a-jingle with sleigh-bells. Pearl was so deep in her rainbow dream she tapped gaily on the window. He looked up smiling and waved his hand to her.

Just then Miss Morrison came out and he helped her into the cutter and they drove away. At the same moment Miss Watson with the gold-filled teeth, and the merry widow puffs, disappeared and Pearl Watson, caretaker of the Millford School, in a plain little serge dress, beginning to wear in spite of sateen sleeve protectors, turned from the window with a sudden tightening of the heart, and sought the refuge of her own seat, and there on the cool desk she laid her head, sobbing softly, strange new tears that were not all pain!

CHAPTER VII

THE SECOND CHANCE

For age is opportunity no less
Than youth itself, though in another dress,
And as the evening twilight fades away
The sky is filled with stars, invisible by day.

—*Longfellow.*

PEARL, having taken her resolve to leave school, did not repine, and no one, not even her mother, knew how hard the struggle had been. It all came out afterward that, John Watson, too, in his quiet way, had been thinking of the advantages of farm life for his growing family. So when Pearl proposed it he was ready to rise and second the motion.

Nearly all the land around Millford had been homesteaded, and was being successfully farmed, but there was one quarter-section in the crook of the Souris that had been abandoned. Bill Cavers had entered it some years before, and paid his ten dollar entrance fee, built a little house on it, and farmed it indifferently for two or three years; but poor Bill had to let it go at last. The numerous black whiskey bottles around his miserable buildings told the story. The land was good—it was only four miles from Millford—it could be re-entered on payment of ten dollars. John Watson went out to see the farm and came back well satisfied, so they decided to move out on it as soon as the snow was gone.

By selling the house and lot they had enough money to buy a team of horses, a waggon, and some machinery. For seed grain and everything else that was needed Pearl would take her money. Aunt Kate protested loudly against having Pearlie's money taken, and said if it wasn't that Bill's stone had come so high she'd spend her own rather than have Pearlie's touched. But Pearl stoutly insisted that helping her family in this way was just what she wanted to have done with her money.

Pearl had not seen the farm until she drove out with her father on the first load. "A movin' gen'rally looks sort of sad, doesn't it, Pa?" she said, as she settled herself on the dismembered beds. "But there's nothin' sad about this movin'. We're not goin' because we can't pay the rent, and there's goin' to be a notice of it in the paper, too."

"How do you know that, acushla?" her father asked her.

"I wrote it myself. I was afraid Mr. Evans might forget. He's all cluttered up wid politics, so I wrote it myself, and pinned it on his door."

"What did you say, Pearlie?"

"I wrote this: Mr. and Mrs. John Watson and their interesting family are leaving our midst to live on a farm, hoping to better their circumstances and give the boys a chance to grow up decent."

"Faith, that's puttin' it plain, Pearlie," her father laughed.
"You're gettin' to be real handy wid the pen."

"I have a far lovelier one than that done, Pa; but I couldn't bear to have it published in a newspaper, for every pryin' eye to see. So I wrote it out in purple ink, and will just keep it in me scrapbook."

"What was it, Pearlie?"

"I wouldn't say it for everybody, Pa, for they wouldn't understand; but I know you will. This is what I wrote:

Farewell, sweet childhood's happy home,
For now we sadly haste away.
We'll leave your happy scene with tears—
We tried to leave you yesterday,
But fate denied, for Adam Watt
Had broke the axle of his dray.

Farewell, sweet childhood's happy home,
We're going out four weary mile,
We've gone to seek another home
And may not see you for a while.
But every inch of thee is dear,
And every stick in thy woodpile.

Each mark upon thy wall is linked
With deepest meaning and with love,
See where young Bugsey spilled the ink,
Caused by his youngest brother's shove.

See where wee Danny picked a hole—
He knew no better tho', I guess.
The patch that covers it from sight
Is made of Pearlie's winsey dress.

All through the dreary winter time
Thou sheltered us from cold so bleak
Thou sheltered us from wind and rain,
Save where thy kitchen roof did leak.

When strangers come to live in thee,
And fill thy halls with noise and shout,
Still think, dear house, of those who once
Did from thy gates go in and out."

"It's just grand," her father said admiringly, "and it's true, too. I don't know where you get the things you think of."

The road lay along the bank of the Souris, which still ran high with the spring floods. The spring came early in Manitoba that year, and already the cattle were foraging through the pastures to be ready for the first blade of grass that appeared. The April sun flooded the bare landscape with its light and heat. From the farm-yards they passed came the merry cackle of hens. Horses and colts galloped gaily around the corrals, and the yellow meadow larks on the fence-posts rang out their glad challenge. The poplar trees along the road were blushing with the green of spring, and up from the river-flats, gray-purple with scrub oak and willow, came the indescribably sweet spring smell.

At the corner of Thomas Perkins's farm they turned straight north, following the river.

"There's our farm, Pearlie," her father said.

What Pearl saw was one long field of old stubble, gray and faded, cut out of the scrub, and at the end of the field, against a grove of poplars, stood a little house, so sad, so battered, so broken, that Pearl's stout heart almost sank. It was made of logs and plastered with mud, and had settled down on one side, looking as ungainly and tired as an old horse when he rests on one leg. There was a door in the side next the road, with one window at each side of it—windows with almost everything in them except

glass.

Pearl jumped down from the waggon and ran around her new home trying to find something good about it. When her father came in after tying up his horses, he found her almost in tears.

"Pa," she said, "this is sadder than I ever thought it would be. I wish it had been real dirty and shiftless; but look, Pa, they've tried to keep it nice. See, it's been whitewashed, and there's a place you can tell they've had a bit of oil-cloth behind the box the wash basin sat on, to keep the spatters off the wall. And see here, Pa," stooping to pick up a piece of cretonne from the rubbish on the floor—"this has been a paper holder—there's beads sewed on it around the flowers; and do you see yon little shelf? It's got tack marks on it; she's had a white curtain on it, with knitted lace. I know she has, and see, Pa"—looking behind the window casing—"yes, sir, she's had curtains on here, too. There's the tack. She had them tied back, too, and you can see where they've had pictures. I know just what Mrs. Cavers is like—a poor, thin woman, with knots on her knuckles. I could see her face in the house as we drove up to the door, kind of crooked like the house, and gray and weather-beaten, with teeth out. Houses always get to look like the people who live in them. They've tried—at least she has, and she's failed. That's the sad thing to me, Pa—she's tried. If people just set around and let things go to smash and don't care, that's too bad but there's nothing sad about it. But to try your livin' best and still have to go under—that's awful!"

Pearl walked to the window and wiped the cobwebs from it.

"I know how she felt when she was standin' here watchin' fer Bill, hopin' so hard that he's come home right this time, and bring the list of things she asked him to bring with his wheat-ticket. I can see she was that kind, always hopin'; if she wasn't that kind she wouldn't ever have sewed the beads on. She'd stand here and watch for Bill so full of hope and still so black afraid, and then it would come on dark and she couldn't see anything but Perkins's light winkin' through the trees, and then she'd lay out the supper, but not eat a bite herself, but just wait, and wait, and wait. And then when Bill did come she'd run out wid the lantern with her heart thumpin' so, and her knees all weak and wobbly—and Bill, you know how he'd be. Sandy Braden had got the wheat-ticket, and he hadn't paid a bill or bro't a thing for the house, and so at last she saw she was beat and done for; she saw that every hope she had had was a false one."

They were putting up the stove now, and when it was set in place Pearl said: "Let's get a fire goin' now, quick, Pa—and that'll cheer us up."

Her father went to the river and brought water, which they heated on the stove, and then he scrubbed the floor while Pearl cleaned the windows and put up the cheese-cloth curtains she had brought. She went outside to see how the curtains looked, and came back well pleased.

"Pa," she said, "I've got a name for it. We'll call it 'The Second Chance.'"

"For why, Pearlie?" her father asked curiously. "Well, it just came to me as I was lookin' round, what this farm has had to put up with Bill Cavers. Here it is as good a farm as any around here, and it's all run to weeds. I am sure this yard is knee-high with ragweed and lamb's quarter in the summer, and the fields are all grown up with mustard and wild-oats, and they're an abomination to any farm; and so it has just sort, of give up and got discouraged, and now it lets in any old weed that comes along, because it thinks it'll never be any good. But here comes the Watsons, the whole bilin' of them, and I can see over there, Pa"—taking him to the window—"the place the garden will be, all nicely fenced to keep out the cattle; and over there, under the trees, will be the chicken-house, with big white hens swaggerin' in and out of it and down the ravine there will be the pig-pasture, and forninst us will be acres and acres of wheat, and be hind the bluff there will be the oat-field. I can see it, Pa."

"Faith, and yer a grand girl at seein' things," her father said, with his slow smile, "and I just hope yer right."

"I'm sure of it," said Pearl, after a pause, "and that's why, we'll call it 'The Second Chance,' for it's a nice kind name, and I like the sound of it, anyway. I am thinkin', maybe that it is that way with most of us, and we'll be glad, maybe, of a second chance. Now, Pa, I don't mind tellin' ye that it was a sore touch for me to have to leave school, and me doin' so well, but I am hopin' still that some time, some place, perhaps, for me, too, like the farm, there may be a second chance. Do you see what I mane, Pa?"

"I see it, acushla," said her father. "And I'm thinkin' maybe there's one for me, too."

And all day long, as John Watson worked, there was a wish in his honest heart, so earnest a wish that it formed a prayer, that he might be able to give his children many of the things that had been denied him; and it came to him, vaguely at first, but growing ever clearer that in Pearl, Teddy and the rest of

them, and his desire to do better for them, than he had done for himself, he was getting his second chance.

The next day saw the whole family moved out and safely landed on the farm. Mrs. Watson, Aunt Kate and Pearlle were soon busy putting up beds and setting the house in order. Teddy, who was fifteen years old, and a strong boy for his age, was set to plow at once on the field in front of the house, for it was still early in April, and there was time to get in some crop. John Watson, when he got his family and household goods safely landed, went to work, assisted by Billy and Jimmy, to prop up the old stables and make them habitable for the two cows.

Mary was given the hardest task of all—to look after her four young brothers—not to let them play in the mud, for obvious reasons; climb trees, which is hard on the clothes; go in bare feet, which is not a safe thing to do until after the 24th of May; or fall in the river, which is a dangerous proceeding at any time. Mary was something of a child-trainer, and knew what fascination the prohibited has for people, and so marched her four young charges down to the river, regaling them, as they went, with terrible stories of drowning and shipwreck. They threw sticks in, pretending they were drowning sailors, but that soon grew monotonous, for the sailors all made their escape and went sailing serenely down the stream. The balm of Gilead trees exuded their healing perfume on the cool breeze that blew ceaselessly up the broad valley; a golden-brown chipmunk raced up a tree and scolded at them from the topmost branches; overhead, in the clear blue of the mid-heaven, a flock of wild geese, with flashing white wings, honked away to the Brandon Hills, en route for that northern lake that no man knows; while a flock of goldfinches, like a shower of marigolds, settled on a clump of willows, singing pauselessly.

"Let's catch them and sell them," said Tommy, who had the stubby hands of a money-maker.

"What'll ye do with the money?" Patsey asked.

But before Tommy could decide between an automobile and an Irish mail, the goldfinches had crossed the river and were fluttering over the purple branches of the leafless saskatoon bushes, which bordered the stream.

A jack-rabbit came gaily leaping down the road behind them, and at sight of him the four boys set off in eager pursuit. Bugsey got right in Tommy's way, which was a fortunate thing for the jack-rabbit, because only for that Tommy would have had him he is pretty sure of that.

After the rabbit had gone from sight and the baffled hunters returned to where Mary sat, Bugsey came in for a good deal of abuse from the other three. Then, to change the conversation, which was rather painful, Bugsey suggested: "What do you bet that fellow hasn't got a nest somewhere around here? Say we have a look for it."

A vigorous search began. Incidentally Tommy found a nest of mice, and Patsey discovered a hawk's nest in a tree and was halfway up before Mary saw him. She made him come straight down—climbing trees was too hard on the clothes; but when she came back from looking up Danny, who had dropped behind to look down a gopher's hole, she found that Patsey had discovered a plan whereby he could climb up for the lovely silver nest and not endanger the safety of his clothes, either. He stood below the tree with the coveted nest in his arms, covered with glory and scratches, but little else.

When the boys got home everybody had something to show but Danny. Tommy had his mouse's nest; Patsey had the hawk's nest; Bugsey had a fungus. Danny was the only empty-handed one, but Pearlle cheered him up wonderfully by predicting that he would get the very first wood-tick when the season opened.

CHAPTER VIII

A GOOD LISTENER

The prosperity of a joke lieth in the ear of thine friend.

—*Shakespeare.*

WHILE John Watson was busy fixing the dilapidated stables, he was joined by his nearest neighbour, Thomas Perkins, who was of a very sociable nature, and loved the sound of his own voice.

Thomas Perkins was a man of middle age, a stout man with a florid countenance and dewy blue eyes; his skin was of that quality that is easily roughened by the wind. He always spoke rapidly, and without punctuation.

"How do you do, Mr. Watson, how do you do? Just movin' in, eh? Well, sir, I'm glad to see you; the little house looked lonely since Bill and the wife left. Poor Bill, he was a decent chap, too; but he lost his bet."

"What was the bet about?" Mr. Watson asked, while the other man stopped to light his pipe.

"Well, you see, Bill bet the Government ten dollars that he could make a living on this farm, and the Government puts up the farm against the ten dollars that he can't. That's the way it goes. Nearly every body wins when they bet with the Government. I made the same bet twenty years ago, and it would take ten thousand dollars now to get me off of old seventeen, north half; you see, I won my bet, but poor Bill lost his. Still, it wasn't a fair race. Bill would have won it if the Government hadn't put the whiskey in his way. You can be pretty sure it's whiskey that wins it for the Government nearly every time when the homesteader loses. You'll win yours, all right, no fear of that. I made my start when I was nine years old; left home with the wind in my back—that's all I ever got from home—and I started right in to make my pile, and I guess I haven't done too bad, eh? What's that?"

Mr. Watson had not spoken, but the other man nudged him genially and did not resent his silence at all.

"First money I ever earned was from an old Scotch woman, picking potatoes at eleven cents a day, and I worked at it twenty-five hours a day, up an hour before day—there was no night there, you bet, it was like heaven that way; and then when I got my sixty-six cents, didn't she take it from me to keep. It was harder to get it back from her than to earn it—oh, gosh! you know what the Scotch are like. Ye see, my mother died when I was a little fellow, and the old man married again, a great big, raw-boned, rangey lady. I says: 'Not for mine,' when I saw her, and lit out—never got a thing from home and only had about enough clothes on me to flag a train—and I've railroaded and worked in lumber shanties. But a farm's the place to make money. How many of a family have ye?"

"Nine," John Watson said, after some deliberation.

"Well, sir, you'll save a lot of hired help; that's the deuce, payin' out money to hired help, and feedin' them, too. I lost two of my boys when they were just little lads, beginnin' to be some good. Terrible blow on me; they'd a been able to handle a team in a year or two, if they'd a lived—twins they were, too. After raisin' them for six years, it was hard—year of the frozen wheat, too—oh, yes, 'tain't all easy. Now, there's old Bruce Simpson, back there at Pelican Lake. It would just do you good to be there of a mornin'. He has four boys and four girls, and just at the clip of five o'clock them lads jump out of bed—the eight feet hit the floor at the same minute and come leppin' down the stairs four abreast, each fellow with a lantern, and get out to the stable and feed up. The four girls are just the same—fine, smart, turkey-faced girls they are, with an arm like a stove-pipe. You'll be all right with the help you've got—you'll have nearly enough to run a threshin' mill. Any girls?"

"Two girls," said John Watson.

"Two! That's not so bad—they'll be needed all right to help the missus. I have two girls, too; but one of them's no good—too much like the mother's folks. You know the Grahams are all terrible high-headed people—one of the old man's brothers is a preacher down in the States—Professor Graham, they call him—and sir, they can't get over it. Martha, my oldest girl, she's all right—straight Perkins, Martha is—no nonsense about her; but Edith, she's all for gaddin' round and dressin' up. 'Pa,' she says one day to me, 'I want a piano'—that was the Graham comin' out of her—and I says, says I 'Edie, my dear, run along now and let me hear you play a toon on the cream separator or the milkin'-stool,' says I; 'there's more money in it.' But, by George! the wife kept at me, too, about this piano business, just pesterin' the very life out o' me, until I got sick of it. But I got them one at last—I was at a sale in Brandon, last fall, and I got one for eighty dollars. I told them it cost four hundred—you have to do it, when you're dealin' with wimmin'—they like things to cost a lot. Well, sir, I got the worth of my money, let me tell you. It's a big, long, dappled one, all carved with grapes and lions. Two or three people can play it at once, and it's big enough to make a bed on it when there's company. But what do you think of this now? Oh, it has clean disgusted me. They don't like it because it won't go in the parlour door, and there isn't room for it in the hall, and if you'll believe me, it's sittin' out there in the machine-shed—so I've got to take it down to Winnipeg and try to change it.

"You see, that's what comes o' lettin' young ones go to school. Since Edie got her education she thinks she knows more than the rest of us. My boy, young Bob—but we call him Bud—he's been to

school a good deal; but he and Steadman's boy had a row, and I guess Bud was put out—I don't know. I was glad enough to get him home to draw poles from the big bush. Old George Steadman is a sly old rooster, and the other day he comes up to me in Millford, snuffin like a settin' goose, and I saw there was something on his mind. 'What's wrong, George?' I said. 'It's about them oats you promised me for seed,' he said. I had promised him some of my White Banner oats this spring. 'Ye'll let me have them, will ye?' says he. 'I was wonderin' if it made any difference about the boys quarrelin',' says he. I says: 'No, George, it don't make no difference; if you have the money you can have the oats, but don't expect me to take no security on mortgaged property,' says I."

Mr. Perkins slapped his patient listener on the back and laughed uproariously.

"You see, that was the worst thing I could say to him, for he's so eternally proud of his land. He has nineteen hundred acres all paid for, and him and the missus is always talkin' about it."

"Did he have much when he started?" John Watson asked.

"Well, I should say not. His wife had some money; but, you bet, she has it yet. She was a Hunter; they're as tight as the bark to the tree, every one of them—they'd skin a flea for the hide and tallow. Well, I'll just tell you, she lent him forty dollars to buy a cow with the first year they were in this country, with the understandin' he'd pay her back in the fall. Well, the crop didn't turn out well and he couldn't pay her, so she sold the cow, and the kids had to do without milk. Well, I must be goin' now to see how things are goin'. I don't work much—I just kinda loaf around and take care of the stock. How would you like a yoke of oxen to plough with? I got two big husky brutes out there in the pasture that know how to plow—I got them on a horse deal—and they've never done a stroke of work for me. Come on over with me and I'll fix you up with harness and all. I got the whole thing."

John Watson looked at him in grateful surprise and thanked him for such welcome help.

"Oh, don't say a word about it, John," Mr. Perkins said genially, "I'll be glad to see the beggars having to work. Look out for the black one—he's a sly old dog, and looks to me like an ox that would keep friends with a man for ten years to get a good chance to land a kick on him at last."

When John Watson went over for the oxen, Mrs. Perkins came out bareheaded to make kind inquiries for his wife and family. From within came the mellow hum of the cream-separator, as Martha, the steady member of the family, played a profitable tune thereon.

That night Pearl called all her family to come out and see the sunset. The western sky was one vast blue lake, dotted with burning boats that ever changed their form and colour; each shore of the lake was slashed into innumerable bays, edged with brightest gold; above this were richest shades' of pale yellow, deepening into orange, while thick gray mountains of clouds were banked around the horizon, bearing on their sullen faces here and there splashes of colour like stray rose-petals.

John Watson watched it silently, and then said, more to himself than to anyone else: "It is putty, ain't it?"

CHAPTER IX

MRS. PERKINS'S TURN

Tell you what I like the best
Long about knee-deep in June
... Some afternoon
Just to git out and rest
And not work at nothing else.

—James Whitcomb Riley.

OUT in the poplar grove behind the house, on a fine, sunshiny Saturday, afternoon, Pearl Watson and Billy were busy making a hammock under Aunt Kate's directions. They had found an old barrel in the scrub, and Aunt Kate was showing them how, with the staves, they could make the loveliest hammock by boring two auger holes in each end and running ropes thro' the holes.

When the hammock was completed and swung between two big trees, Pearl ran into the house for her mother.

"Ma," she said, "we've made this hammock mostly for you, and you're to get in first." She took a quilt and pillow off one of the beds and brought her mother out to the hammock, which was now held down by the four youngest boys. By a quick movement Pearl spilled them out on the grass and, spreading the quilt on the staves, soon made her mother comfortable.

"Now, Ma, here's where you're to come every after-noon," she said. "Aunt Kate'll see that you do it when I'm not here to watch you; but, anyway, I know I can trust you. Look up to the clouds and listen to the birds and think of the nicest things you ever heard, and forget that there ever comes holes in the little lads' pants, and forget that you ever had to wash for other people, and just remember we've a farm of our own and the crops' growin', and so is the garden just as fast as if you was up watchin' it."

Aunt Kate, standing by, looked in wonder at her little niece.

"Faith, Pearlie, you have quare ways," she said. "Ye're as much like yer Uncle Bill as if ye belonged to him. He'd have taken great comfort out of you and yer quare speeches if he was here, pore fellow."

"He's in a better place, Katie, dear," said Mrs. Watson piously.

After a pause, Pearl said: "You see, Ma, a person has to get soaked full of sunshine and contented feelings to be able to stand things. You've just got to lay in a stock of them, like a squirrel does the nuts for the winter, and then when trouble comes you can go back and think over all the good times you've had, and that'll carry ye over till the trouble passes by. Every night here there'll be a lovely sunset, all blue and gold, like the streets of heaven. That ought to help some, and now the leaves are comin' and new flowers every day nearly, and the roses'll be here in June, and the cherry blossoms will be smellin' up the place before that, and at night ye'll hear the wild ducks whizzin' by up in the air. They'll all keep us heartened up more'n we need just now, but we better be settin' it away to use when we need it."

"Look! Who's yon?" Aunt Kate asked, looking down the road.

A quaint-looking, stout old lady was walking toward them.

"That'll be Mrs. Perkins comin' to see us," Mrs. Watson said, in alarm. "Let me out o' this, Pearlie. It's a lazy trollop she'll think I am if she ketches me lyin' here."

"Lie where you are, Ma," Pearl said firmly. "It'll do her good to see some one restin' easy. I know her, Ma, she's Martha's mother, and they're great workers."

When Mrs. Perkins arrived, Pearl went forward and introduced her to her mother and Aunt Kate, with due ceremony.

Mrs. Perkins was a short, stout woman, whose plump figure was much like the old-fashioned churn, so guiltless was it of modern form improvers. Mrs. Perkins's eyes were gray and restless, her hair was the colour of dust, and it was combed straight back and rolled at the back of her neck in a little knob about the size and shape of a hickory nut. She was dressed in a clean print dress, of that good old colour called lilac. It had little white daisies on a striped ground and was of that peculiar shade that people call "clean looking." It was made in a plain "bask" with buttons down the front, and a plain, full skirt, over which she wore a white, starched apron, with a row of insertion and a flounce of crocheted lace.

Pearl brought out chairs.

"Well, now, you do look comfortable," said Mrs. Perkins, with just a shadow of reproach in her voice that did not escape Pearlie. "It must be nice to have nothin' to do but just laze around."

"She's done a big day's work already," Pearl said, quickly. "She worked all her life raisin' us, and now she's goin' to take a rest once in a while: and watch us rustle."

"Well, upon my word, you can talk some, can't you?" Mrs. Perkins said, not altogether admiringly. Aunt Kate gallantly interposed on Pearl's behalf by telling what a fine help she was to her mother, and soon the conversation drifted into an amiable discussion of whether or not peas should be soaked before they are planted.

Then Pearl and Mary went into the house and prepared the best meal that the family supply of provisions permitted. They boiled eggs hard, and spiced them the way Pearl had seen Camilla do. Pearl sliced up some of Aunt Kate's home-made bread as thin as she could, and buttered it; she brought out, from the packing box that they were still in, one of the few jars of peaches, and then made the tea. She

and Mary covered the table with a clean white flour-sack; they filled a glass jar with ferns and anemones for a centre-piece and set the table as daintily as they could, even putting a flower beside each pate.

"Land alive!" Mrs. Perkins exclaimed, when they carried the table out under the trees, where she sat with Aunt Kate and Mrs. Watson. "I haven't et outside since we used to have the picnics in Millford in old Major Rogers's time. I mind the last one we had. I seen old Mrs. Gilbert just fillin' the stuff into her basket, and I do believe she tuk more home than she brought, though I ain't the one to say it, because I do not like to talk against a neighbour, though there are some as say it right out, and don't even put a tooth on it."

"Don't you go to the Pioneers picnics, now?" Pearl asked, as she poured the tea.

"No; I haven't gone since Mrs. Burrell came. I don't like her. She isn't what I think a minister's wife ought to be, mind you; she said an awful queer thing at our place the very first time she was there. She was askin' me why we didn't get out to church, and I was tellin' her about all the chores we had to do, milkin' and feedin' the stock, and that, and she didn't say much, but when she got down to pray before she left, she started off all right, and I wasn't really noticin' what she was sayin' until I hears her say: 'Lord, take away the cows and the pigs and the hens from these people, if it is the pigs and the cows and hens that's keepin' them from attendin' church, for it is better for them to do without milk or butter or eggs all their lives than to be eternally lost.' Them was just her words. Well, it just about made me faint to think of losin' all that, and I says: 'Take that back, and we'll go'; I was so flustered. And now, some of us has been drivin' down once a day; but, mind you, I don't feel real easy when I'm near her. The idea of her plottin' harm against innocent critturs that never done her any harm!"

Pearl said to Mary when they went back into the kitchen, "Mary, that woman hasn't got the right idea of things. It don't do you a bit of good to eat outside if you're thinkin' hard of anybody. It'll take a queer old lot of blue sky and fresh air and singin' birds and cherry-blossoms to soak all that out of her; but of course it'll help some."

Mrs. Perkins stirred her tea with pleasure. She found it a real delight to have good listeners who did not interrupt her. All her life she had had to tell her stories against a counter-attraction, that is, if her husband was present, for he was always telling one of his own at the same time, and that sort of thing wears on the stoutest nerves.

"You'll soon have a real nice place here, Mrs. Watson," she said, looking around. "Poor Mrs. Cavers would have had things nice if she had had her own way. She was the greatest woman for makin' little fixin's—she and my Martha were always doin' something—dear me, the way she'd stick up for that man, and make excuses for him! 'Mr. Cavers has a headache,' or 'Mr. Cavers is quite tired out.' Mr. Cavers, mind you. Oh, I tell you, she was fetched up different. Any one could see that. When I saw her first she was as pretty a girl as you'd see, and Bill was a fine-lookin' man, too. We never knew he would drink, and I don't think he ever did until Sandy Braden got his license and opened up a bar. I'll never forget the first night he came home drunk. She came runnin' over to our house and told us she was afraid he was dyin'. Pa and I went over with her, and I told her right out, plump and plain, what was wrong with him just as soon as I saw him. I'll never forget the way she backed up from me, givin' queer little screeches, and then she came back quick, her eyes just blazin', and says she, grabbin' me by the shoulders, 'I don't—believe—it,' just as slow as that, and then she begged me to forgive her, the pore lamb, and straightened right up as stiff as a poker, but all white and twitchy, and from that day to this she has never let on to a livin' soul about him drinkin', but she's just as nice to him as if he was a good man to her."

Pearl listened to this story with sympathetic interest. She had known this all the time—the beads on the cretonne had told the story.

"And when her little Georgie died, if ever a woman was tried sore it was her. She sent Bill for the doctor, and he fell in with a threshin' gang and forgot to come home; yes, and that poor woman was alone with little George choking with croup. Libby Anne ran over for me, but he was too far gone. Bill came home in the mornin' so drunk we couldn't make him understand that the child was dead, and he kept askin' us all the time how little Georgie was now. I came home in the mornin' to help to milk, and Martha went over to stay with her. Martha can't ever forget the sad sight she saw when she went in. Bill was on the lounge drunk. Little George lay on the bed dead, and she was sittin' there makin' the shroud, and even then she made excuses for Bill to Martha, and said he'd been up all night, and was tired."

When Pearl went back into the kitchen she reported progress to Mary.

"She's talkin' kinder now, Mary. The fresh air and the wind through the trees is beginnin' to tell on

her. Give me another cup of tea for her."

CHAPTER X

THE NEW PUPILS

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
Has had elsewhere its setting, and cometh from afar,
Not in entire forgetfulness, not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God—who is our Home.

—*Wordsworth.*

WHEN school opened after the Easter holiday, the Watson family began to attend. It was two miles to the bare little schoolhouse at the cross-roads. The road lay straight across the prairie, green now with the tender green of spring, and dotted thick with blue anemones. A prairie fire, the fall before, had burned away all the old grass, and so everywhere the country was of the richest dazzling green, varied only in the shades—the tender, soft green of the young wheat, the bluish green of the oat-fields, with here and there splendid groves of poplars, making a scene which, to Pearl's eyes, was of untold beauty.

Away to the south the Tiger Hills were veiled in blue smoke, as if some distant prairie fire was raging through the meadows beyond. Across the long reach of upland pasture—swiftly and almost noiselessly—swept the mixed train of the Canadian Northern, its huge smoke plume standing straight up in the morning air, white and gray like billows of chiffon, suddenly changing to deepest black.

"They're stokin' up for the grade," Jimmy said, as he stood watching it. Jimmy had not stolen rides on freight-cars without learning something.

Danny, although not quite of school age, was with the party because he refused to stay at home. Aunt Kate encouraged him in the idea, and made him a pair of pants and fixed up a striped sweater of Bugsey's for him. So Danny, fully clothed in boy's attire, was very much in evidence.

When they were crossing the fire-guard around the school, Bugsey grew faint-hearted and began to cry. "I'm feart he'll bate me," he whimpered.

Bugsey had been to school in Millford, of course, but his teacher there had been Miss Morrison, and the teacher here was a man.

Patsey showed signs of being infected with the tear-germ, too, and so Pearl quickly forged ahead with the unaffected members of her party, to get them under cover before they had time to think of it.

School was called when she arrived in haste and walked up to the teacher's desk, followed by Danny, Mary, Jimmy, and Tommy. Danny was hiding his face in her skirts. Tommy and Jimmy were outwardly calm, but Pearl knew that it would take very little to stampede them.

"We're coming to school, if you please," Pearl said, keeping a tight hold of Danny.

The teacher was a man of middle-age, with heavy eyebrows and great dignity of manner. He looked at the Watson family in silence.

"Speak to them, or they'll bolt," Pearl said, with the authority that comes of being the eldest girl in a large family.

The teacher saw the situation and rose to it. "Come here, Johnny," he said at a venture. "Are you a little gun-shy?"

"My name ain't Johnny, if yer meanin' me," said Jimmy, with a fine show of courage.

Pearl introduced her flock hastily and told the teacher to hang on to Danny while she went for the others.

When Pearl came in leading the other two boys the teacher exclaimed in wonder.

"This'll be all until winter-time," Pearl assured him, "and then Teddy and Billy will be comin'."

"I guess we're sure of the Government grant now," the teacher said, smiling. He helped Pearl to convince the boys that they were in the hands of friends, and even brought out the contents of his pocket and searched through his desk to get Danny to take a cheerful view of life again.

The Watson family, when they were at last settled in their new seats, did a great deal to relieve the bareness of the dingy school-room. All at once the room seemed to be very much alive and stirring.

While the teacher was busy with the boys, Pearl's sharp eyes were looking over her new schoolmates. Instinctively she knew that the pale little girl ahead of her must be Libby Anne Cavers. She had wondered often, since coming to the farm, how Libby Anne would regard the Watson family. Would she think that they had taken away her old home? Impulsively Pearl leaned over and presented Libby Anne with a new slate-rag securely anchored by a stout string to the neck of a small bottle filled with water. This new way of slate-cleaning had not yet reached the Chicken Hill School, where the older method prevailed, and as a result, Libby Anne's small slate-rag was dark gray in colour and unpleasant in character, and nearly always lent to her less provident neighbours.

Libby Anne turned her pale face and frightened eyes toward the big new girl, and in that glance Pearl read all her sad child history. Libby Anne was just what she had pictured her to be, little and thin and scared. She put her hands on Libby Anne's thin shoulders and, drawing her back, whispered in her ear: "I like ye, Libby Anne."

Libby Anne's face brightened, though she made no reply. However, in a few minutes she pulled the cork from the little bottle and gave her slate a vigorous cleaning with the new rag, and Pearl knew her oblation of friendship had been favourably received.

Mr. Donald, the teacher, was a student of human nature, as every successful teacher must be, and before the day was over he was sure that in Pearl Watson he had a pupil of more than ordinary interest. At the afternoon recess he called her to his desk and asked her about her previous school experience.

Pearl told him frankly her hope and fears. "I want to learn," she said. "I want to know things, because I love to learn, and besides, I have to be able to tell the boys and Mary what's what. We're awful poor, but we're happy, and there's none of us real stupid. All we want is a chance. I just ache to know things. Do you ever?" she asked him suddenly.

"I do, Pearl," he answered. "I do, indeed."

"Oh, well," she said, "I guess you know all of the things I'm thinkin' about; but I suppose the farther a person goes the more they see that they don't know."

"That's it, Pearl," he said, smiling. "The larger the circle of light, the larger the darkness around it."

Pearl pondered a minute.

"That's just what I've often thought, but I didn't know how to say it. Well," she went on, "I often wonder what makes the wind blow, and what makes you fall when you step off things, and how does the hail come when it's scorchin' hot; and I've often wondered what holds the clouds up, and I'd like to know what's goin' on, and what people think about things."

She stopped suddenly, and looked closely into his face. She had to be sure of a sympathetic listener.

"Go on, Pearl," Mr. Donald said, kindly. "I am interested. Tell me what else you are wondering about."

"Well," she said, "I'll tell you the biggest wonder I have. I would not tell it to every one, for if they've never thought of it it is just as well for them, for there's a danger of thinkin' too far in it. I am wonderin' often why God let the bad men crucify the dear Lord, and Him that kind and sweet and gentle. I often think about it at night, and can't sleep. I think about all the angels, big strappin' fellows, flyin' around the cross, feelin' so sorry for Him, and just wantin' so bad to hold Him up in their arms, but knowin' they dassent interfere without orders, and I often imagine to meself that the word did come to the angels to jump in and save Him, and I can just see how tender they would lift Him down from the cross, and the two poor fellows with Him, and they would float away off into the blue sky, leaving the bad people down below, the soldiers and the high priests and all of them, gawkin' up, wid their mouths open, watchin' them growin' smaller and smaller, until they were gone clean from sight; and then Pilate would say to them: 'Didn't I tell you to watch what you were about? Let me tell yez, ye have put your foot in it good and plenty this time.' But then I think of what really did happen, and it just breaks my

heart to think of it."

Pearl's tears overflowed her eyes, but she wiped them away and went on steadily. "I wonder if you could tell me why it happened, Mr. Donald. I know God did it for the best. I am not sayin' a word against Him, mind ye, for I know what He's like, and how good He is, and all; but it was awful to let our Lord die that like."

Mr. Donald felt his own heart strangely moved at the little girl's distress.

"I am not very well up in these things, Pearl," he said; "but if He hadn't died he could not have shown us the resurrection."

"Oh, I don't mind Him dyin'," said Pearl quickly. "Everybody has to die, and when they've lived right and done the best they could for every one, it is just glorious to die and go home. It's just like people comin' home from college with their examination papers marked high, and their certificates and medals to show how hard they worked; or I guess it's more like soldiers comin' home all tired out, and sunburnt, showing their scars—we can show our hands all hard with work for other people, and our faces cheerful and patient. That's what'll count up there, I guess. It's all right to die, but I can't see why He had to die that way—it was terrible, and it wasn't comin' to Him."

"Perhaps it was to show us how much He loved us," the teacher said gently.

"He shows us that in lots of ways," Pearl said. "He says He loves us, and ye can't live one day without feelin' that there's love in the world, and I'm sure it didn't come from anywhere else but God—oh, no, it didn't need, that to show us."

The teacher was looking at her in wonder.

"I tell you what to do, Pearl. Ask Mr. Burrell; he'll be able to tell you."

After school that night Pearl opened the theological discussion again.

"Mr. Donald," she said, "don't you think we should try to get some one to preach here and have a Sunday-school? These children here, except Lib. Cavers, don't know anything about the Bible. I've been asking them about Easter Sunday. They don't know anything about it, only it's a time to see how many eggs you can hold, and they think that God is a bad word. It would just be fine if we could have a Sunday-school and learn verses. Our Jimmy got a black Testament for fifty verses, said exactly like the book. You would be superintendent, wouldn't you?"

Mr. Donald coloured painfully. "I don't know, Pearl—we'll see," he said evasively.

That night when he went back to his boarding-place—the big brick house on the hill—he was strangely disturbed and troubled. He had told himself years ago that religion was a delusion, a will o' the wisp. But there was something in Pearl's face and in her words that seemed to contradict the logic of his reasoning.

Charles Donald was a man who tried hard to make a stoic of himself, to convince himself that he was past feeling the stings of evil fortune. He had suffered so deeply that he told himself that nothing could ever hurt him again. A spiritual numbness had come upon him, which he took to be the compensation for the variety of hard knocks he had experienced. He was a genial, pleasant, gentle man, but his face bore that look of settled sadness that comes into the eyes of people for whom the world has held an awkward hour.

He was regarded by the people in the school district as a good teacher, and, indeed, he had quite conscientiously put before his pupils as much of the curriculum as they could conveniently grasp. He was kind and patient with his pupils always, but he had never exerted himself to change their outlook upon life, or to put nobler ideals before them.

"They are happier as they are," he often thought to himself. "The ox in the field, so long as the grass is good, is happier than most of us with all our wisdom, and well he should be, for his days are free from care, and when his days are over there's the quick blow and the sharp knife, and that is not so bad."

But after Pearl came to school, he found himself going over his neglected library to find the books that would throw light on the many questions that she brought forward, and every evening he went carefully over the lessons, taking a distinct pride now in making them of interest to her.

In this way, having more to employ his thoughts, he soon began to think of the past less sadly. Pearl's optimism was contagious.

CHAPTER XI

THE HOUSE OF TROUBLE

There! little girl—don't cry!

—*James Whitcomb Riley.*

A MILE from the Chicken Hill School stood the little vermin-infested house in which the Cavers family lived after they abandoned the weed-choked farm on the river-bank. This unpretentious log house had been the first home of Mr. and Mrs. Steadman, and was part of the "improvements" specified by the Government to show that a homestead is entered in good faith. The land had been rich and productive, and from it George Steadman had made the money to buy the half-section of school land just across the road and to erect the magnificent brick house and splendid barns that were the pride of his heart.

George Steadman was so keen after money that he even overworked his farms, and now his old farm was so impoverished that it was unable to grow a heavy crop. This was the principal reason he had for letting it to such an undesirable tenant as Bill Cavers. No wide-awake tenant would take it, and, besides, if he had rented it to almost any person else, he would have had to spend some money fixing up the house, which was in a most dilapidated condition.

Bill Cavers had lost the ambition that he once had, and now did not care very much what sort of house he lived in. Bill was content to live the simple life, if the liquid refreshment were not simplified too much, and Mrs. Cavers never complained.

The Caverses had only one child living, Libby Anne, eleven years old; but there were several little unmarked mounds in the Millford cemetery that Libby Anne and Mrs. Cavers sometimes piled high with white cherry-blossoms or blue anemones. Little George had lived to be two years old, and Libby Anne remembered that when he died there was a funeral, with horses and buggies in the yard, and the minister prayed and there was singing, and Martha Perkins brought over little cookies with pink seeds on them, and it was fine!

But for days and days Libby Anne would steal up the narrow stairs, fully expecting to find her little brother sleeping under the pink quilt on his mother's bed, but there wasn't even the dint of him on the quilt, and Libby Anne at last went up with her eyes shut to feel around the bed, so as not to be disappointed so soon. Then her mother told her about the beautiful country that little George had gone to, and Libby Anne was glad to know that no one there was ever cold or hungry, and that nobody's father ever came home drunk. One day in school Libby Anne told the teacher what heaven was like, and when she mentioned this last and greatest advantage of living there he told her gently that she must not say such things.

For some time after coming to the Steadman farm things had gone better with the Caverses, for a strong influence was brought to bear on Bill, to keep him sober. Mr. Steadman had never taken any interest in the liquor question—he had no taste for whiskey himself, and, besides, it costs money—but now, with Bill Cavers for his tenant, he began to see things differently. If Bill Cavers drank he would not be able to pay the rent. So Mr. Steadman desired Bill to be a sober man, and to this end had a very straight talk with him on the subject of total abstinence.

Bill Cavers was a very poor farmer, as one look at his abandoned homestead would show; that he was not a success as a husband no one would doubt after seeing Mrs. Cavers; and that he was a conspicuous failure as a father, Elizabeth Anne Cavers, his daughter, with her frightened eyes and sad mouth, would abundantly testify. But there was one capacity in which William Cavers was a spectacular success, and that was in maintaining the country's revenue from malt and distilled liquors, for Bill was possessed of a thirst that never faltered.

Bill was quite different from the drunkard who consumes and never produces, for he would work and work hard; and he was strictly honest with every one except himself and his family. Sandy Braden was not afraid to trust Bill with all the whiskey he wanted, for Bill would surely pay. His wife might not have respectable clothes to come to town in, and Libby Anne knew what it was like more than once to go hungry to bed, but Bill always paid what was chalked up against him at the Grand Pacific without question. All the neighbours called Bill Cavers a good, straight fellow.

When Bill was sober, he bitterly regretted the way he had wasted his money, and he often made solemn protestations as to his future conduct, the strange part of it being that at such times he fully believed that he would never drink again, and his wife was always, sure that he would not.

In this way life was harder for her than it would have been for a less sanguine woman, who would have long ago given up all hope, but Mrs. Cavers always saw her husband as he had been in his good days; his drinking had never ceased to be a shock to her; she never could accept it as the inevitable, but constantly looked for better days to come.

Mrs. Cavers often told Libby Anne about the lovely home she had when she was a little girl, and showed her just how the flower-beds were laid out and how the seat was put in the big elm-tree outside her mother's window, where she often sat and read and dreamed; and so it was no wonder that her mother's old home in Ontario, where her grandmother and Aunt Edith still lived, became to Libby Anne a sort of Paradise Valley, the delectable country of her dreams, and through all her colourless childhood there ran a hope like a thread of gold that some time she and her mother would go back.

The last summer that they had been on their own farm this hope had been very real, for her father had said one day, when he was in his best mood, that if the crop turned out well they would all go down east for three months.

Then what a busy, hopeful time began for Libby Anne and her mother. Everything was bent toward this one end. Mrs. Cavers made butter and sold it. Libby Anne looked faithfully after the eggs, and made every old hen give an account of herself each night. By getting the neighbours to subscribe to a magazine, Mrs. Cavers was able to add a few dollars to her savings. The kind-hearted neighbours, who knew of the projected visit, were all ready to help.

Martha Perkins gave Libby Anne ten fine young turkeys, half-grown, to help to buy new clothes for herself, and the thought of the lovely red curly cloth coat that she would be able to buy when she sold her turkeys comforted her not a little when, tired out with her other work, she came to gather them in for the night, and they obstinately would scamper away into the trees; as unconcerned as if there was never a wolf or a mink or a weasel in the world.

No crop was ever watched with greater hope and fear than that one. Every bank of cloud that gathered in the west seemed to sit like a dead weight on Libby Anne's heart, for it might bring hail, and a hailed-out crop meant that they could not go home, and that was—outer darkness. Perhaps it was the child's wordless prayers that stayed the hail and the frost and the rust, for certain it is that none came, and the crop was most abundant.

Libby Anne and Mrs. Cavers worked in the field to save a hired man's wages. Libby Anne was a tireless little worker, and though many, many times her thin arms must have ached, she never complained, because every sheaf that she carried brought her nearer the Promised Land.

People driving past looked with pity at the tired-looking woman and the little girl in the faded derry dress carrying sheaves almost as big as herself, and one day Mrs. Burrell, the minister's wife, spoke to them sympathizingly. Libby Anne flashed back at her almost scornfully. "Don't you know we are going home?" she said, her tired face kindling.

At last the grain was harvested and threshed, the neighbours kindly assisting, and Bill began to sell his grain. He paid his store bills, his binder-twine bill, his blacksmithing, and made the payment on his binder. Libby Anne sold her turkeys and got her coat, and the day was set for them to go east—December the first, the first excursion!

The day before they were to start, Bill went to town to cast his vote; the Provincial elections were held that year on the last day of November. There was a good deal of excitement over the election, for Sandy Braden, the popular proprietor of the Grand Pacific Hotel, was running against a Brandon man, and Millford was standing solid for their own man. The bar could not be opened until after five o'clock, when the voting was over, but after that there was nothing to prevent good-fellowship abounding.

It did abound all night. There was a bonfire in front of the hotel when the returns began to come in, for Sandy was winning easily, and Sandy certainly showed his gratitude for the way the boys had stood by him.

Mrs. Cavers and Libby Anne waited all that long night. They tried to keep up each other's courage, making all sorts of excuses for Mr. Cavers's absence. Mrs. Cavers knew, but she did not tell Libby Anne, that he was going to cash the wheat-tickets that he had saved for the trip, for the train went so early in the morning he was afraid he might not have time then.

Libby Anne went again and again into the little bedroom to look at the trunk already strapped. Surely people always went if the trunk was strapped, and she tried and tried to feel what it was like yesterday.

Just as the sun was rising on the first day of December ushering in the first day of the winter excursions, they heard him coming. He was coming with the Thomas boys, who were often his

companions on similar occasions. Some one had loaded them up and started them for home, trusting to a drunken man's luck not to get killed.

Round the turn of the road they came singing, and Libby Anne and her mother listened with sinking hearts as the sound came nearer and nearer:

"Who's the best man in this town?
Sandy Braden, Sandy Braden."

they sang, putting the words to that good old rollicking Scotch tune of "Highland Laddie."

Bill fell out of the waggon at the door. He was covered with dirt, his clothes were torn, and one eye was blackened, but he was in a genial mood, and tried to dance on the door-step. They got him in at last and put him to bed, where he slept profoundly until the next afternoon. He brought home out of his wheat-tickets thirty-five cents and the half of a dollar bill—the other half was torn away!

Libby Anne did not shed a tear until she saw her mother unstrap the trunk to get out something, and then suddenly all the strength went out of the lithe little arms that had carried the sheaves so bravely, and she fell in a little heap on the floor, sobbing out strangely.

Her mother gathered her up in her arms and rocked her for a long time in the rocking-chair, crooning over her queer little rambling tunes without meaning; only once she spoke, and then what she said was this: "Libby Anne, I hope you will never be as lonely to see me as I am right now to see my mother."

Just then a still later consignment of Mr. Braden's supporters drove past the house gaily singing the same refrain:

"Who's the best man in this town?
Sandy Braden, Sandy Braden."

CHAPTER XII

PEARL VISITS THE PARSONAGE

Mylo—he jest plows—and don't
Never swear-like some folks won't.

—From *"Mylo Jones' Wife."*

THE Reverend Mr. Burrell, whom Mr. Donald recommended to Pearl as a proper person to consult on the questions that troubled her mind, was the Methodist minister in Millford. The first year of his pastorate there he had been alone, Mrs. Burrell having remained "in the East," with her own people.

Mrs. Ducker was the president of the Ladies' Aid Society, and given to serious thinking, so when she read an article in the Fireside Visitor dealing with the relation of the minister's wife to the congregation, she was seriously impressed with the fact that the congregation was suffering every day by not having the minister's wife on the ground. Mrs. Ducker thereupon decided that she would bring the matter forward at the very next meeting.

Now, it happened that the "rubberman" came to Millford the very day before the Ladies' Aid meeting was held, which may seem to be a very unimportant and irrelevant fact; but it really had a significant bearing on that meeting of the Ladies' Aid, for little John Thomas Forrest, dazzled by the offer of three lead-pencils for two rubbers, sold his mother's only pair, and being a cautious child, and not fond of disputatious conversation, did not mention the matter to his mother, but left her to discover her loss herself, which she did the day of the meeting.

It was a sloppy day in November. Mrs. Forrest had a cold, and she could not walk away over to Mrs. Ducker's without rubbers. Mrs. Forrest did not go to the meeting. If Mrs. Forrest had gone she would have, beyond doubt, raised objections. She always did, and usually very successful ones.

But when Mrs. Ducker, after the business was over, breathlessly declared that she thought Mrs. Burrell should come and join her husband, she found Mrs. Francis and Mrs. Bates quite imbued with

the same idea, for they likewise were subscribers to the Fireside Visitor. Mrs. Francis also gave prominence to the fact that Mr. Burrell needed some one to take care of him, for she had seen him that very day without his rubbers. Having no children of her own, Mrs. Francis did not know that the day after the "rubberman" had been in town quite a few people went without rubbers, not because they were careless of their health either, but because they had thoughtlessly left them in the front porch, where little boys can easily get them.

Half an hour after they began to discuss it, everybody felt that not only was the church suffering severely, but that they had been the unconscious witnesses of a domestic tragedy.

They formed a committee on "ways and means," another one to solicit aid from country members, and a social committee to get up a pie social to buy a new stair-carpet for the parsonage, and they appointed Mrs. Francis and Mrs. Ducker to approach Mr. Burrell on the subject of his wife's coming.

The unconscious object of their solicitude was quite surprised to receive that evening a visit from Mrs. Francis and Mrs. Ducker. Reverend John Burrell did not look like a man who was pining for the loved and lost—he was a small, fair man, with a pair of humorous blue eyes. A cheerful fire was burning in the Klondike heater, and an air of comfort pervaded his study.

The ladies made known their errand, and then waited to see the glad look that would come into their pastor's face.

He stirred the fire before replying.

"It is very kind of you ladies to think of fixing up the parsonage," he said. "Mrs. Burrell is having a very pleasant visit with her mother in Toronto."

"Yes; but her place is here," Mrs. Ducker said with decision, feeling around in the shadowy aisles of her mind for some of the Fireside Visitor's "It is lonely for you, and it must be for her."

Mr. Burrell did not say it was not.

Mrs. Francis was filled with enthusiasm over the idea of fixing up the parsonage, and endeavoured, too, to give him some of the reasons why a church prospers better spiritually when there is a woman to help in the administration of its affairs.

When the women had gone, the Reverend John Burrell sat looking long and earnestly into the fire. Then he got up suddenly and rattled down the coals with almost unnecessary vigour and murmured something exclamatory about sainted womanhood and her hand being in every good work, though that may not have been the exact words he used!

The work of remodelling the parsonage was carried on with enthusiasm, and two months later Mrs. Burrell arrived.

Mrs. Ducker, Mrs. Francis, and Mrs. Bates went to the station with Mr. Burrell to meet her, and were quite surprised to see a large, handsome, auburn-haired woman, carrying two valises, alight from the train and greet their minister with these words: "Well, John Burrell, I declare if you aren't out this raw day without your overcoat, and you know how easily you take a cough, too. I guess it is high time for me to come. Now, please do keep your mouth closed."

* * *

The first time Pearl was in Millford she called at the Methodist parsonage to see Mr. Burrell. The question of having service in the schoolhouse was bothering Pearl.

It was a dull brown house, with, a row of tall maples in front of it, and a pansy bed, made by filling the earth into old binder-wheels, on each side of the walk. Pearl at once thought of the old binder-wheel in the scrub at home, and in her quick fancy she saw the purple faces of prospective pansies looking up from it as it lay in front of the east window.

Mrs. Burrell came to the door in answer to Pearl's ring, but did not recognize her at the first glance. She told Pearl to have a seat in the parlour.

When Mr. Burrell came in he was pleased to see Pearl, who said, in response to his friendly greeting: "We're doin' fine, Mr. Burrell. We're goin' to have a crop and potatoes and lots of things. There's seven of us goin' to school and learning. Jimmy's at long division. I'm just finishing 'The Lady of the Lake.' Danny's doing digits, that's another name for figgers. Patsey's readin' at the Sweet Pea lesson, with ten of the hardest words for meanings. That's all right, but there's no church or Sunday-school. We left town to get a better chance to bring up the boys right, and the farm is fine only for what I'm tellin' ye.

Every Sunday the other children trap gophers and the people sleep or visit. I do be hearin' them tellin' about it at school, and last Sunday, mind ye, wee Patsey and Bugsey wanted to make a kite, and of course ma wouldn't let them, but Jimmy up and says—he was in it, too, do you mind—he says: 'Let's make it out of an Onward, and that will be all right; sure that's a Sunday paper.'"

Mr. Burrell laughed sympathetically, but shook his head, too, so Pearl knew he was with her on the proper observance of the Sabbath.

"And Mr. Burrell," she went on, "I am worried about Danny—he's that artful and deep—if ever a child should be learnin' verses he's the wan. Yesterday he hit his thumb when he was hammerin' with the little tack-hammer, and instead of just yellin' and stickin' his finger in his mouth the way he did before, he said right out plain—well, you know what the beavers build to broaden out the water—well, that's what he said."

"Is it as bad as that, Pearlie?" Mr. Burrell asked in a shocked voice, which was contradicted by the twinkle in his eye.

"It is," Pearl answered, "and I was wonderin' if you could come and preach to us on Sunday afternoons, and encourage them to get a Sunday-school. There's lots of room in the school, and there's a fine big shed for the horses if it was raining, and there's no need of so many services here," she concluded with alarming frankness. "What I mean is," she explained in answer to his look of surprise, "there's lots of churches here, and all kinds of preachin' goin' on", with only a few scatterin' people out at each one."

Mrs. Burrell came in hastily and listened to the conversation.

"How far out is it, Pearl?" Mr. Burrell asked.

"About five miles, I think; just a nice drive for you and the missus."

"Does she want you to take another country appointment, John?" Mrs. Burrell asked; and Pearl noticed for the first time that her hair was just the colour of their horse at home—the one that was cross.

"That was Pearlie's suggestion," he answered.

"Well, indeed, he is not going to do any such thing; I should say not," and Mrs. Burrell shut her mouth with a click. "And, besides, nearly every Sunday it rains."

"Well, that's good for the crops," said Pearl, thinking of the twenty acres of wheat in front of the house and of the oat-field behind the bluff; "and, besides," quoting a favourite axiom of her mother's, "he ain't sugar or salt, and he won't melt."

"Well, what would happen our congregation if we had only one service a day? They would all be going to the Presbyterian."

"That won't hurt them," Pearl said hopefully. "They'll get good sermons from Mr. Grantley."

Mrs. Burrell could not think of what she wanted to say. Pearl kept her eye on Mr. Burrell—there was something in his face which made her hope.

After a pause he said to her: "Pearl, your idea is strictly first-class. I have wanted to take another outside appointment ever since I came here, but the congregation had objections. However, I'll talk it over with Mr. Grantley, and I'm sure we can arrange something."

Mrs. Burrell remembered then. She found the words she was looking for. "You'll do nothing of the sort, John. Going away every Sunday to two outside appointments and leaving our own people exposed to Presbyterian doctrine. That's a horrid, bare, desolate little school, anyway, and you couldn't do a bit of good to those people; I know you couldn't. I'll go to the Trustee Board meeting—they meet to-night—and I'll tell them you are physically unfit—you are wearing two thicknesses of flannel, with mustard quilted in between them, now on your chest, and you had onion poultices on your feet last night for your cough, and so you're not fit to go."

"Please, ma'am," said Pearl, "we won't mind. I didn't notice it at all, and I don't believe anybody will, if you don't tell them."

Mr. Burrell laughed so heartily that Mrs. Burrell told him he was a very frivolous man, and quite unfit for the position he held.

"Sure, you could come out yerself," Pearl said encouragingly, "and show us how to fix it up. It is bare,

as you said, but the land is there, and it could grow scarlet-runners and pansies, the same as you have yer self here by the cheek of the dure. If some one like yerself'd come and show us how to fix it up, we might have a purty place yet!"

"Fix it up on Sunday!" Mrs. Burrell cried, with vehement emphasis.

"Show us, I said," Pearl corrected her, "and I guess it would be a real good work to fix it up, too."

"It is lawful to do well on the Sabbath day, you know, Mattie," Mr. Burrell quoted gently.

Mrs. Burrell sniffed audibly.

"The trustees meet this evening, Pearl. Now, if you will stay in, I'll drive you out to-morrow morning. Mrs. Burrell will be glad to have you stay here."

Mrs. Burrell seconded the invitation.

"But I am going to the meeting, John," she declared decidedly. "I'll tell them that you are not to undertake it."

"My dear, I understood the Ladies' Aid were meeting to-night," her husband said, with the forced enthusiasm of a person who tries to draw a child's attention from a prohibited pleasure.

"It does, too; but I am going to the other meeting," answered his amiable spouse.

Mr. Burrell looked at Pearl in alarm.

"But I want you to stay, Pearl," Mrs. Burrell said quickly, and with more kindness than she had yet shown.

Pearl thanked her, but said she would have to go to see her father first and see if she could stay. Mrs. Burrell went out into the kitchen to get tea ready, while Mr. Burrell went to the door with Pearl.

In the little square hall they held a hurried conference. "Will she go to that meeting?" Pearl asked in a whisper.

He nodded.

"Will she cut up rough?"

Mr. Burrell thought it likely that she would.

"Don't let her go," said Pearl, who evidently believed in man's supremacy.

He made a gesture of helplessness.

Pearl wrinkled her forehead, and then took a step nearer him and said slowly: "Hide her false teeth—she won't go if she has to gum it."

He stared at her a second before he grasped the full significance of her suggestion.

"Things like that have been done," Pearl said, reassuringly. "Ma knew a woman once, and whenever she wanted to keep her man at home she hid his wooden leg. I suppose, now, she hasn't——" Pearl looked at him meaningly.

"Oh, no!" he said hastily. "We can't do that."

Pearl went out, leaving the Reverend John Burrell clearly demonstrating the fact that he was too frivolous a person for his position.

When Pearl came back, after getting her father's permission to stay for the night, she found Mrs. Burrell in a more amiable frame of mind, and after tea was over she was much relieved to find that Mrs. Burrell had given up the idea of going to the trustee meeting, but was going to the Ladies' Aid meeting instead, and was going to take Pearl with her.

Before the meeting, Pearl went over to see Camilla and Mrs. Francis. Mrs. Francis was the secretary of the Ladies' Aid, but was unable to go to the meeting that night on account of a severe headache. Pearl, always ready to help, asked if she could take the minutes of the meeting.

"Thank you so much, Pearl," Mrs. Francis said. "It would relieve me if you would write down everything that happens, so that I can make a full report of it. It is so sweet of you, dear, to offer to do it for me; and now run along with Camilla, for I know she has a lot of things that she is longing to show you."

Camilla took Pearl upstairs to her room, and there spread out before Pearl's enraptured vision a wonderful creation of white silk and lace.

"The lace has little cucumbers in it," Pearl said, looking at it closely, "and it's the loveliest dress I ever saw. Have you worn it yet?"

Camilla did not at once reply, and then, quite by intuition, Pearl guessed the truth.

"Camilla!" she exclaimed. "You are going to be married to Jim."

Camilla put her gently.

"Yes, dear, I am," she said. Pearl, sat thinking deeply.

"Are you happy, Camilla?" she said at last. "Are you that happy you feel you can never lose a bit of the glad feeling?"

Camilla held her tighter, and kissed her again. "I've thought about it a little," Pearl said after a while, "and I thought perhaps that would be how people felt, and then it didn't matter if it was all dark and gloomy outside, or even if the wind was howlin' and rattlin' the windows, you wouldn't mind, for all the time you would be singin' inside, just bustin' for joy, and you'd feel that contented sort of feelin', just as if the sun was pourin' down and the birds singin' and the hills all white with cherry-blossoms; is that anything like it, Camilla?"

"It is very like that, Pearl," she said.

"And, Camilla," she went on, "do you feel like you could die to save him from any trouble or pain, and even if he did go wrong—Jim never will, I know, but I am just supposin'—even if he did go wrong you'd never go back on him, or wish you hadn't took him, but you'd stay with the job and say to yourself: 'He's my man, and I'll stay by him, so I will!'"

Camilla nodded her head.

Pearl's eyes suddenly filled with tears.

"And, Camilla, do you ever think if you were to lose him it wouldn't be so bad as' never to have had him, and even if the time came that he had to go, you could bear it, for you'd know that somewhere you'd find him again waitin' for you and lovin' you still, just the same; and even if it was long, long years ago that you were left alone, you'd never forget him, but you'd always know that somewhere, up in the air or in the clouds or maybe not so far, he was there dear as ever, and you'd always keep thinkin' in your heart: 'He's the only man for me.'"

Camilla's arms tightened around her, and Pearl felt something warm on her cheek.

"How do you know all this?" Camilla whispered, after a while.

Pearl laughed and wiped her eyes on her handkerchief. "I don't know," she said. "I never knew that I did know it all till just now. I've thought about it a little."

Camilla laughed, too, and went over to the wash stand to bathe her eyes, while Pearl, in wonder, inspected the dress.

"Now, Pearlie Watson, I want you to do me a favour," said Camilla gaily.

"As many as you like," was Pearl's quick answer.

"I want you for my bridesmaid. You are my good luck, Pearl. Remember you sent Jim to me. If it hadn't been for you I might never have met him."

Pearl's eyes sparkled with delight, but no words came.

"And see here, Miss Watson, I have been reading up all about weddings, and I find it is a very correct thing for the bride and bridesmaid to be dressed alike. Miss Watson, will you please stand up and shut your eyes?"

Pearl stood up.

Over her head she felt Camilla putting something soft and deliciously silky. Camilla was putting her arms in unmistakable sleeves, and pulling down an unmistakable skirt.

"Open your eyes, Pearlie."

When Pearl opened her eyes she found herself dressed in a white silk dress, exactly the same as the one that lay on the bed—cucumbers and all!

"Oh, Camilla!" was all she could say, as she lovingly stroked the dress.

"Jim would not think of having anybody but you, and Dr. Clay is going to be the groomsman."

Pearl looked up quickly.

"Dr. Clay told me," Camilla went on, "that he would rather have you for the bridesmaid when he was going to be the groomsman than any other girl, big or little."

Pearl clasped her hands with a quick motion.

"Better'n Miss Morrison?" she asked, all in one breath.

"Yes; better than pose so, for he said on earth."

"Oh, Camilla!" Pearl said again, taking deep breaths of happiness, and the starry look in her eyes set Camilla wondering.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LADIES' AID MEETING

Oh, wad some power the giftie gie us,
To see oorselves as ithers see us.

—*Robert Burns.*

PEARL went to the Ladies' Aid Meeting, which was held at Mrs. Ducker's, and was given a little table to sit at while she took the notes. Pearl was a fairly rapid writer, and was able to get down most of the proceedings.

Camilla copied the report into the minute-book, and as Mrs. Francis did not think about it until the next meeting, when she came to read it she found it just as Pearl had written it, word for word. The reading caused some excitement. The minutes were as follows:

* * *

The Ladies' Aid met at the home of Mrs. Ducker. There were seven present when it started; but more came. Mrs. Burrell doesn't know why they can't come in time. She told them so. Mrs. Bates said, Lands sakes, she had a hard enough time getting there at all. She left a big bag of stockings all in holes. Mrs. Forrest says it's been so hot the holes are the most comfortable part of the stockings, and if she was in Mrs. Bates's place she'd let the girls go barefoot. Mrs. Bates is going to let Mildred go, but she can't let Blanche—she's so lanky—she'd look all legs, like a sand-hill crane. Burrell says, Let's open the meeting by singing, "How Firm a Foundation" but Mrs. Ducker says, Oh, don't take that, it's in sharps; take "Nearer, Still Nearer"—it's in flats, and Maudie can handle the flats better. Then they sang, and Mrs. Burrell and Mrs. Ducker prayed. Mrs. Ducker prayed longest, but Mrs. Burrell prayed loudest, and for most things. Mrs. Bates read the last report, and they said it was better than usual, she'd only left out one or two things. Then they collected the money. Nearly every one paid; only Mrs. Burrell couldn't find hers, she was sure she had it in her glove when she came in, and she couldn't see how it ever fell out. Mrs. Ducker will get it when she sweeps if it's in the house at all. Mrs. Williams had her ten cents in a tea-cup all ready, but when she went to get it it was gone, and she's afraid she gave that cup to one of the boarders by mistake. Mrs. Williams says that's the worst of keeping boarders, your home is never your own. Mrs. Forrest says if she only knew which one got it, she should charge it up to him. Mrs. Williams wouldn't ever think of doing that. Total receipts of evening, \$2.20.

Then Mrs. Burrell asked what about the new stairs carpet. She's ashamed every time she takes any one upstairs, it's going something awful. Mrs. White hasn't had time to think anything about it, she's been doing up rhubarb; it's so nice and tender in the spring. None of Mrs. Bates's folks will eat rhubarb, and so she never does any up, though she really is very fond of it herself, done with pineapple, the shredded pineapple—half and half. Mrs. Ducker is doing rhubarb, too, it's nice in the spring when everything else goes flat on you. Mrs. Burrell says, What about the stairs carpet, now if you're done with the rhubarb?

Mrs. Forrest said linoleum is better than carpet. Mrs. Ducker said it's too cold on the feet. Mrs. Grieves said, Land sakes, let them wear their boots—they don't need to go canterin' up and down the stairs in their bare feet, do they? Mrs. Burrell said linoleum would do all right if they couldn't afford carpet; but there wasn't any decent linoleum in town, and even if there was you have to pay two prices for it, but she saw in the Free Press that there was going to be a linoleum sale in Winnipeg on Saturday. Mrs. Ducker does not like sales. Mr. Ducker got a horse at a sale one time, and the very first time they hitched it up it took blind staggers. Mrs. Forrest thinks there would be no danger of the linoleum havin' it, though. Mrs. Burrell said she wished they'd talk sense. Mrs. Snider said she would move that Mrs. Burrell gets whatever she wants for the stairs and the Ladies' Aid will pay for it. Carried. Mrs. Burrell said what about the knives and forks committee. Mrs. Bates hasn't been able to go out since she fell down stairs. There's a black patch on her knee yet. Mrs. Bates blackens easy. Mrs. Snider has had her hands full, goodness knows, since Aunt Jessie has been laid up with erysipelas. Aunt Jessie is pretty hard to wait on, and doesn't like the smell of the ointment the doctor gave her, it's altogether different from what she got when she was down in the States. Mrs. Burrell said she would get the knives and forks herself if anybody would make a motion. Two made it, and three seconded it. Carried.

Mrs. Burrell said, How are the things getting on for the bazaar? Mrs. Ducker had a box of things sent from Mrs. Norman in Winnipeg. Mrs. Snider thinks Mrs. Norman must have been at a sale: You can get things so cheap there sometimes. When Mrs. Snider was in at Bonspiel time, she saw lovely lace stockings for eleven cents a pair, and beautiful flowered muslin, just the very same as they ask sixty-five cents here, going for twenty-nine cents. (Couldn't get all they said here, everybody talked at once about sales.)

Mrs. Burrell said: Where'll we hold it, anyway, if we do get enough stuff? Mrs. Ducker thought the basement of the church. Mrs. Bates can't get used to holding sales in churches. Her mother never could either. Mrs. Burrell said when the church was having the sale, what was the odds where it was held? No use turning up your nose at a sale and still take the money. Mrs. Smith moved that sale be held in church, though if the stuff didn't come in faster, a piano box would do. Mrs. Allen said, hurry up, do, please. She left the baby with Jim, and he's no good at all if She begins to fuss. Mrs. Snider seconded the motion.

Mrs. Burrell said, where will we meet next time? Mrs. Graham said, come to my house. Mrs. Forrest said it was too far. Mrs. Graham said the walk would do her good, she had just been reading in the Fireside Visitor that that's what's wrong with lots of people, they don't walk enough. Mrs. Forrest is glad to know this, for she has often wondered what was wrong with lots of people, but Mrs. Forrest doesn't think much of the Fireside Visitor—it's away off sometimes.

Mrs. Brown would like to come every time if she had company home. Mrs. Burrell said bring Mr. Brown. Mr. Brown wouldn't come. You couldn't get him within three acres of a Ladies' Aid Meeting. Never could. Decided to meet at Mrs. Burrell's.

R. J. P. WATSON, Sec.

Just for this time.

Pearl and Mrs. Burrell became very good friends before Pearl left the next morning. Mrs. Burrell, while they were washing up the breakfast dishes, apologized in her own way for her outburst against the country appointment.

"I'm a crabbed old woman, Pearl, dear," she said.

"Not old," Pearl said promptly, with wisdom beyond her years. She did not deny the other adjective.

"I'm a crabbed old woman, Pearl," she repeated; "but I am always afraid he'll catch cold and get sick he is so reckless, and never seems to have serious thoughts about himself, or realize what wet feet will do for him if he persists in them; and really, child, it's hard to be a minister's wife. You've so many people to please, and when you're pleasing one, some one else doesn't like it. Now, did you notice Mrs.

Maxwell wasn't at the meeting? She got miffed with me over the smallest little thing. You know her boy, Alec, plays lacrosse, and there's going to be a big game here on the 1st of July, at the Pioneers' Picnic, and she was talking about it—he's so foolish that way for a woman of her age. I said to her, just as kindly as I am speaking to you now: 'I do hope Alec will be able to control his temper,' I said. 'I know it's hard for people with that complexion to control their temper.' You see, I know, for my youngest brother has hair just like Alec Maxwell, and I told her this, and I did it all so kindly. But what do you suppose? She tossed her head"—Mrs. Burrell showed Pearl the way—"and she says. 'Just look after your own, Mrs. Burrell. I guess Alec can control himself as well as most red-headed people.' Red-headed, mind you! I was so upset about it. Of course, I know there is a tinge of red in mine—more of a gold, I guess it is, just when the sun shines on it—but no one would think of calling it red, would they, Pearl?"

"No, indeed," Pearl answered truthfully. "It isn't a bit red."

Pearl was thinking that sorrel was nearer the colour, but she knew she must not say it.

"I am always getting people offended at me when I do not mean any offence. John just laughs at me when I tell him. He often says, 'Mattie, you are a wonder in your own way,' and I am not sure just what he means by it; but often, Pearl, I'm afraid I haven't tact."

Pearl assured Mrs. Burrell that she shouldn't worry about it.

"Sometimes I think I do pretty well, and say the right thing. One night I met Miss Rose, your friend, and Mr. Russell out walking. I met them going past the McSorley house, and you know they're building a piece to it since the twins came. So I said to Mr. Russell: 'Be sure to get a big house at first, so you won't have to be adding to it all the time; it's so expensive to enlarge a house.' I guess Mr. Russell took it all right, because he said: 'Yes, Mrs. Burrell, just as solemn as can be, but I don't believe John liked it, because he began to talk to Miss Rose right away. I often think, Pearl, if my own little girl had lived I would have been a lot happier; I wouldn't be depending, then, so much on other people for my happiness. I am a poor, cross old woman, and I really do not mean to be. I feel real kind to people, and would be if they would let me.'"

"You're all right, Mrs. Burrell," Pearl said soothingly. "You've been kind to me, and I like you just fine."

Mrs. Burrell looked at her gratefully.

"I believe you do, you blessed child; you see the good in everybody."

When Pearl went home that day she announced to her family that she was happy in four places. "I'm happy because we're goin' to have church now, that's one; and I'm happy because Mrs. Burrell gave me all those pansy plants, that's two; and I'm happy because Camilla is goin' to be married, and she has made me the loveliest white silk dress you ever saw, just the spittin' image of her own, because I'm to be her bridesmaid, that's three; and I'm happy because"—she hesitated, as a sudden shyness seized her—"oh, well, I'm just happy."

CHAPTER XIV

"IN CASE——"

Ah! well for us all some deep hope lies
Deeply buried from mortal eyes.

—Whittier.

PEARL went around the settlement the next week, to tell the people that there would be church in the schoolhouse the next Sunday afternoon.

On Monday evening, coming home from school, she went into the Perkins home. She had not seen Martha since she had lived at the Motherwells' the year before. It was a large frame house, with a well-kept garden in front and a hedge of purple and white lilacs in full bloom. Pearl was standing looking at the hedge in mute enjoyment, when Martha came out to get green onions and lettuce for tea.

"Take some lilacs, Pearl," she said, pointing to them. "They are pretty, aren't they?"

"Oh, Martha!" Pearl cried, "you must be happy living with these things. Don't you just wish you could gather up all the poor little children? Mr. Donald was reading to us out of a magazine to-day, and showing us the pictures of how they are crowded together in the cities, and never see any grass, just all side walks and black dirt. Wouldn't you love to let them all have a look and a smell and armful and be happy for once?"

"I guess it doesn't do much good to be once if it doesn't last."

"Well, I don't know," Pearl said, after some deliberation. "I believe it does. I've often heard Ma tell about the day she and Pa were married, how the sun just danced on the flowers and the grass, and she carried a big sheaf of lilacs, and when she came to this country, and it was all so new and bare, and no flowers only the wild ones, and she hadn't got used to them, she often thought of them lilacs and pretty near smelled them again, and cried over them, and got real happy just thinkin' of them. You know there's a lot in lilacs, more than their beauty. Some flowers have a lot in them, just like people. Now, there's the wild sunflower, it's a pretty flower, with real rich colours, yellow and brown; but nobody ever cries over it, or has a good time over it in any way, because it doesn't make you think of anything."

"It's just a weed," Martha said with conviction.

"Well, now," Pearl went on, "even some weeds have something in them. There's the blue cockle and the ball mustard. They're bad weeds, but they're pretty. They've got a sort of a bold-as-brass look about them, and they have to be pulled, but they're pretty."

"Yes; they're pretty," Martha agreed. She had often thought about the cockle as she pulled it out of the garden. The flaming purple of it, so strong and bold and defiant, seemed to mock her and sneer at her sallow face and streaky, hay-coloured hair. In her best moments she had often wondered how it could be so bad when it was so beautiful, but there were times, too, when she had almost envied the bold and evil cockle, and thought bitterly that somehow it had the best of it.

"But what's the use of its lovely flashing purple?" Pearl said, as if in answer to her thoughts. "Nobody likes it, and it just gets rooted up and flung in heaps. It only takes up room and spoils crops and makes people mad. Look at the mignonette—it isn't pretty, but everybody loves it and plants it, and don't think a garden's a garden without it. Oh, I tell ye, Martha, beauty ain't everything, unless, ye can back it up with something better. Lots of the finest people on earth ain't much to look at, but nobody thinks of that."

Pearl was pinning a spray of lilac on her print dress as she talked. Then she made known her errand.

"Yes, I'll go," Martha said, readily. "And so will Bud. He likes Mr. Burrell. Pa and Ma will go, too, I guess. I'll be glad to have somewhere to go on Sunday afternoons—it's lonesome since Edith went to Winnipeg. Come in, Pearl. You've never been in our house yet, have you?"

Pearl followed her into the big kitchen, spotlessly clean and comfortable. Three windows let in the afternoon sunlight, windows that sparkled from a recent washing; a trailing fuchsia in full bloom, in an old wash-basin painted green, was suspended from the ceiling in front of the east window. There were flowers in every window, abundant in bloom, showing that a loving hand was caring for them. On the wall was a paper-holder made of cretonne with beads outlining the flowers.

"Did Mrs. Cavers make that?" Pearl asked quickly. "Yes," Martha said. "Mrs. Cavers gave it to mother years ago."

There was a bookshelf made by stringing together empty spools, with two boards covered with flowered cretonne for the shelves, but the only books on it were a cook-book, covered with oil-cloth, and Kendall's Horse Book. A framed picture of "Dan Patch" was on the wall.

"That belongs to Bud," she said smiling. "He's the greatest boy for horses—he's always training the colts, down in the pasture. He has one now that is a pacer. He's always wanting to run his colts in the races, but father won't let him. I've never been a race in my life, have you?"

"Oh, yes," Pearl said. "I've been at every race that I ever was near enough to go to, or lacrosse match or baseball match, or anything. You sure must come to the Pioneers' Picnic this year, Martha; we will have a splendid time."

"I've never had time to go," Martha said slowly. "I've always had to stay home and look after things, and besides, I don't know many people and I don't like going among strangers. I often get lonesome

now since Mrs. Cavers has gone to live on the other farm, and I am real glad you came over, Pearl. I hope you and I will be good friends."

Pearl looked at her with quick sympathy.

"You bet we will, Martha," she said heartily.

Martha's pale face flushed with pleasure. Pearl was quick to notice what a fine forehead and what steady, calm eyes she had, and that she would be a good-looking girl if her hair were combed becomingly. Poor Martha, who stayed so much at home, knew but one way of hair-dressing, which was to part it in the middle and comb it straight back—the way hair was done when her mother was young. She was dressed in a clean, starched dress of gray print, plain as a nun's. Pearl noticed that her teeth were clean and even, and her active brain was doing a rapid summing-up of Martha's chances for beauty.

"Look at how pretty her teeth are," she was thinking to herself; "she may not know how to do her hair, but you bet she takes care of them. Whether or not yer hair's combed right is a matter of style, but clean or dirty teeth is a matter of the heart. Martha's heart's all right, you bet; and say, wouldn't she look fine in a wine, coloured dress, made long, with lots of fluffy things to make her look rounder and fatter, and her hair like Miss Morrison's, all kinky and puffed, with a smashin' big combs with diamonds—no, I wouldn't just like a big comb either, it wouldn't suit her face. I just wish Camilla could live in the house with her for a while. She'd make Martha look a different girl. She's got hair, too," Pearl was thinking, "but she rolls it into such a hard little nub you'd never know. It needs to be all fluffed out. That nub of hair is just like Martha herself. It's all there, good stuff in it, but it needs to be fluffed out."

"Stay for tea, Pearl," Martha was saying. "Father and Mother are away, and there's only Bud and me at home."

Pearl readily agreed. She had told her mother that she probably would not be home for tea. Pearl's social instincts were strong.

Martha took her into the parlour, a close, stuffy little room, and showed some of her treasured possessions. There were the hair-wreath, the seed-wreath, and the wax flowers, which, to Pearl, were triumphs of art. There were three huckaback cushions standing stiff and grand on the high back of the lounge, and another one made of little buns of silk beside them, all far beyond the reach of mortal head.

"Do you never use them, Martha?" Pearl asked, touching them gently. "Do you know, I like cushions that are not half as pretty, but look more friendly like and welcome. But these are just lovely," she added quickly.

An enlarged picture of Mr. Perkins was on one wall, while on the opposite side of the room hung one of Mrs. Perkins.

Pearl told the other children about them when she went home. "There they are," she said, "just glarin' straight at each other, day and night, winter or summer, just the same, neither one of them givin' in an inch. 'I can stare as long as you,' you'd think they was saying, the way they've got their eyes glued on one another; and it ain't cheerful."

A hanging lamp, with its fringe of glittering pendants, hung over a table made of spools like the bookshelves, and covered with a drape of tissue paper table-napkins, cut into a deep fringe around the edge.

The table that held the family Bible had a cover made of rope, hanging in huge tassels down at each corner. Under the carpet had been placed newspapers, to make it wear better, and it crackled noisily as they walked over it. On the window curtains were pinned little calendars and Christmas cards, stuck on ribbons.

To Pearl these decorations were full of beauty, all except the wool wreath, which hung over the lounge in a deep frame covered with glass; but its indigo and mustard coloured roses and swollen bright green leaves made her suspicious that it was not in keeping with the findings of good taste.

There was something in Pearl's sympathetic interest that encouraged Martha to show her the contents of a cupboard upstairs in her room.

There were quilts in abundance. Martha held them up lovingly in different angles to show how they "make a pattern every way you look at them." There were the "Pavements of New York" in blue and white, the "Double Irish Chain" in red and white, "Fox and Geese" in buff and white; there were daintily

hemstitched sheets and pillow covers; there were hooked mats in great variety, a lovely one in autumn leaves which seemed a wonderful creation to Pearl; there were pin-cushions, all ribbon and lace, and picture-frames ready for pictures, made of pine cones that Martha had gathered on the sand-hills of the Assiniboine.

When Pearl had feasted her eyes on all these wonders and praised them abundantly, Martha opened her trunk and showed her a still more precious store of hand embroidery, such beautiful garments as Pearl had never dreamed of.

"Martha," she cried impulsively, "are you going to be married, too?"

Martha's pale face flushed painfully, and Pearl was quick to see her mistake.

"No, I am not, Pearl," she answered steadily.

"Not just now," Pearl said, trying to speak carelessly; "but, of course, you will some time. Such a clever girl as you are will be sure to get married. You're a dandy housekeeper, Martha, and when it comes to gettin' married, that's what counts."

"Oh, no, Pearl, there are other things more important than that," Martha spoke sadly and with settled conviction. She was standing at the foot of the bed, looking out between the muslin curtains at the level stretch of country, bordered by the wooded river bank. She had been looking at this same scene, varied only by the changing seasons, for many weary, wearing years, and the big elms on the river bank had looked back indifferently, although they must have known that Martha was growing old, that Martha was fading, and that the chances of the trunk and cupboardful ever being used were growing less. The long arms of the windmill on the barn caught the sunlight and threw it in a thousand dancing splinters on the floor behind her.

"Being a good housekeeper hasn't got anything to do with getting married," she said again, and her voice was tense with feeling. "I can work and keep house, and sew and bake; but no man would ever fancy me' why should he? A man wants his wife to be pretty and smart and bright, and what am I?"

The strain in her voice struck Pearl's heart with pity.

"I am old, and wrinkled, and weatherbeaten. Look at that, Pearl." She held up her hands, so cruelly lined and calloused: "That's my picture; they look like me."

"No, no, no!" Pearl cried, throwing her arms around Martha's thin shoulders, and holding her tight in her strong young arms. "You're only twenty-five, and that's not old; and your looks are all right if you would only do your hair out bigger and fluffier, and you'd get to be a better figure if you'd breathe deep, and throw back your shoulders, and sleep with your windows open. I read all about it, and I'll get it for you. It was in a paper Camilla gets—a long piece called 'How to Be Pretty, though Plain.' I am doin' the things, too, and we'll do them together, Martha. See here, Martha, here's the way to breathe, and here's the way to throw back your shoulders"—suiting the action to the word—"and a cold bath every morning will give you rosy cheeks."

She kissed Martha impulsively. "Oh, you bet you'll get married, Martha, and I'll be your bridesmaid—me and Bud will be it—and Lib Cavers will be maid of honour and carry a shock of lilacs, and I'll write a piece about it for the paper."

Martha smiled bravely, and Pearl was too polite to notice that her eyes were suspiciously dewy.

"Oh, no, Pearl," she said, as she put away all the things carefully, "I guess I'll never be married; but I love to make these things, and when I'm sewing at them I often imagine things, foolish things that'll never be; but I have them all ready, anyway"—she was closing down her trunk lid—"I have them ready, anyway—in case—well, just in case—".

CHAPTER XV

THE SOWING

"And other fell on good ground."

"EVERYTHING else is pretty only the old school," said Mary Watson. "Look at the sky and the grass and the spruce trees on the sandhills—all nice colours only the old school, and it's just a grindy-gray-russet inside and out."

Mary was a plain-spoken young lady of ten.

"Well, we can clean it, anyway," Pearl said hopefully. "If we get it clean it won't look so bad, even if it ain't pretty; and we can get lots of violets, though they don't show much; but we'll know they're there; and we can get cherry-blossoms and put them in something big on the desk for the minister to look over, and they'll do him good, for he'll see that somebody thought about it."

Maudie Steadman did not think much of the idea of violets and cherry-blossoms. Maudie was fat, and had pale freckles all over her face and on her hands. She talked in a jerky way, and was always out of breath.

"Perhaps we could get Maw's tissue-paper flowers. She's got lovely purple roses and yellow ones, and the like o' that," Maudie said.

Pearl considered it awhile.

"No, Maudie," she said. "Paper roses are fine in the winter, but in the summer, if you use them, it looks as if you don't think much of the kind that God's puttin' up, and you think you can do better yourself. So I think with lots of meadow rue for the green stuff and violets and blossoms, it'll be all right. Anyway, when the people get in with their Sunday clothes on, and the flowers on their hats, it'll take the bare look off it."

When Sunday came it seemed as if it were a day specially prepared for the beginning of religious instruction in the Chicken Hill School. The sky was cloudless save for little gauzy white flakes—"puffs of chiffon that had blown off the angels' hats," Mary Watson said they were. The grain was just high enough to run in waves before the wind, and even Grandfather Gray, Mrs. Steadman's father, admitted that the "craps were as far on as he'd ever seen them"; but in order that no one could accuse him of stirring up false hopes, he pointed out that "the wheat has a long way to go yet before the snow flies, and there's lots that might happen it."

By half-past two o'clock, the time set for the service, the yard was well filled with buggies and waggons, while knots of men, looking uncomfortable in high collars, stood discussing the crops and the price of horses, all in the best of humour. When they saw the minister's gray horse coming, the minister himself became the subject of conversation.

"It beats me," George Steadman said, springing the lid of his pipe with his thumb as he struck a match on the sole of his boot, "it beats me what a man sees in preaching as a steady job. It's easy work, all right, only one day in the week; but there's no money in it. A man can make more money at almost anything else he goes at"—he was thinking of short-horns—"and be more independent. It certainly beats me why they do it."

"Did ye ever hear, George, of greater rewards than money, and a greater happiness than being independent?" Roderick Ray, the Scottish Covenanter, asked gently, as he unbuckled his "beast" from the cart. Roderick Ray had a farm on Oak Creek, three miles east of the schoolhouse. "Yon man is a Methodist, an' I'm na' sa fond o' them as o' some ithers, but I can see he has the root o' the matter in him for all; and I'm thinkin' that he has the smile o' his Lord and Master on him, an' that's better nor gold, nor siller, nor houses, nor lands, nor cattle on a thousand hills; for, after all, George, these things slip frae us easy and we slip away frae them easier still, an' it's then we'll hear the Good Man ask: 'An' hoo did ye spend the years I gave ye? Did ye warn the sinner, teach the young, feed the hungry an' comfort the sad?' An' I'm thinkin', George, that to all this yon little man, Methoda body though he be, will be able to give a verra guid answer an' a very acceptable one."

The men sat on one side of the school, and the women on the other. Even a very small boy, when he found himself sitting with the women, made a scurry across to the other side. Danny Watson alone of the male portion of the congregation was unaffected by this arrangement, and clung to his sister Pearl, quite oblivious of public opinion.

Mrs. Cavers and Libby Anne sat beside the window, in the seat ahead of Danny, Mary, and Pearl. Mrs. Cavers's eyes were on the group of men at the woodpile, for Bill was among them, very much smartened up in his good clothes. She had had some difficulty in persuading him to come. He wanted to stay at home and sleep, he said. While the men talked beside the woodpile, Sandy Braden, the hotelkeeper, drove up with his pacing horse and rubber-tired buggy. He stopped to talk to the men. Sandy was a very genial fellow, and a general favourite.

Mrs. Cavers sat perfectly still; only the compression of her lips showed her agitation.

"Come on, Bill, and I'll give you a good swift ride," she heard him say.

Bill hesitated and looked around uneasily. Sandy gave him a significant wink and then he went without a word.

Inside, Mrs. Cavers gave a little smothered cry, which Libby Anne understood. She moved nearer to her mother in sympathy.

Mrs. Cavers leaned forward, straining her eyes after the cloud of dust that marked the pacing horse's progress, clasping and unclasping her hands in wordless misery. Bill was gone—she had lost him again. The wind drove ripples in the grain, the little white clouds hung motionless in the sky, but Bill was gone, and the sun, bright and pitiless, was shining over all. Then the other men came in and the service began.

The singing was led by Roderick Ray, who had the Covenanters' blood in his veins. He carried a tuning-fork with him always, and fitted the psalm tunes to the hymns, carrying them through in a rolling baritone, and swinging his whole body to the motion.

The Reverend John Burrell was a student of men. He had travelled the North-West before the days of railways, by dog-train, snow-shoes, and horse-back, preaching in the lumber camps and later on in the railway camps, and it was a deep grief to him when his health broke down and he was compelled to take a smaller appointment. He liked to be on the firing-line. He was a gentle, shrewd, resourceful man, whose sense of humour and absolute belief in the real presence of God had carried him over many a rough place.

As he stood before his congregation this day in the schoolhouse, a great compassion for the men and women before him filled his heart. He saw their lives, so narrow and bare and self-centred; he read the hard lines that the struggle with drought and hail and weeds had written on their faces; and so he spoke to them, not as a stranger might speak, but as a brother, working with them, who also had carried burdens and felt the sting of defeat; but who had gone a little farther down the road, and had come back to tell them to persevere, for things were better farther on!

He had had to do with travel-stained, wayfaring men for so long that he had got into the way of handing out to them at once, when he had the opportunity, the richest treasures of his Father's storehouse. When they looked to him for bread they were not given a stone, and so, standing in the bare schoolroom that day, he preached to them Christ, the Saviour of mankind, and showed the way of life eternal.

There was something very winsome about Mr. Burrell's preaching, not because of his eloquence, for he was a man of plain speech, low-voiced and gentle, but because he spoke with the quiet certainty of one who sees Him who is invisible. Near the front sat Bud Perkins and Teddy Watson, athletic-looking young fellows, clear-eyed and clean-skinned, just coming into their manhood, and there was a responsiveness in the boys' faces that made the minister address his appeal directly to them as he set before them the two ways, asking them to choose the higher, the way of loving service and Christlike endeavour.

When the service was over, Mrs. Burrell went around shaking hands with the women. "I am so glad we thought of holding service here," she said genially. "You people do turn out so well. Is this Mrs. Cavers?" she asked, as she shook hands with Mrs. Steadman.

Pearl Watson put her right.

Mrs. Steadman, in a broad black hat resplendent with cerise roses, stiffened perceptibly, but Mrs. Burrell did not notice this, but rattled on in her gayest humour. "I always do get those names mixed. I knew there were the two families out here."

She then turned to Mrs. Slater and Mrs. Motherwell. "It is a bare-looking school, isn't it?" she said amiably. "You women ought to try to fix it up some. It does look so wind-swept and parched and cheerless." Mrs. Burrell prided herself on her plain speaking.

At this Mrs. Steadman, who was a large, pompous woman, became so indignant that the cerise roses on her hat fairly shook. "I guess it doesn't keep the children from learning," she said hotly; "and that's mostly what a school is for."

"Oh, you are quite wrong, Mrs. Steadman," Mrs. Burrell replied, wondering just how it had happened that she had given Mrs. Steadman cause for offence. "Perhaps you think it doesn't prevent the children

from learning, but it does. There's plenty of other things for children to learn besides what is in the books. Maybe they didn't learn them when you were young, but it would have been better if they had. Children should have a bed of flowers, and a little garden and trees to play under."

"Well, you can have them for yours," Mrs. Steadman said harshly, narrowing her eyes down to glittering slits. She knew that Mrs. Burrell had no children living; but when Mrs. Steadman's anger rose she tried to say the bitterest thing she could think of.

Mrs. Burrell was silent for a moment or two. Then she said gently: "My little girl has them, Mrs. Steadman. She has the flowers that never fade, and she needs no shade from trees, for no heat shall fall upon them there. I wasn't thinking of my own, I was thinking of yours and the other children who come here."

"Well, I guess we've done more for the school than anybody else anyway," Mrs. Steadman said loftily. "We pay taxes on nineteen hundred acres of land, and only send two children."

Mrs. Slater and Mrs. Motherwell joined the conversation then, and endeavoured to smooth down Mrs. Steadman's ruled plumage.

"She ain't goin' to dictate to us," Mrs. Steadman declared vehemently, after Mrs. Burrell had gone to speak to Mrs. Watson and Aunt Kate. Mrs. Steadman had a positive dread of having any person "dictate" to her.

Teddy Watson hitched up Mrs. Cavers's horse. There was still no sign of Bill, and after a little talk with Martha Slater she and Libby Anne drove sadly home.

Bud Perkins got the minister's horse ready and stood holding it while Mr. Burrell was talking to Roderick Ray, who wanted to be sure how Mr. Burrell stood on election. When the conversation was over Mr. Burrell walked over to where Bud was holding his horse. A sudden impulse seized him. "Bud," he said gently, laying his hand on the boy's shoulder, "I wonder if you are the good ground? I wonder if you are going to let the seed grow?"

Bud turned and looked the minister straight in the face, while a fine flush came into his own. "I am going to try," he said simply.

Mr. Burrell took hold of Bud's hand and said earnestly: "God only knows what can be made of a young man who is willing to try."

Bud's eyes were shining with emotion as he returned the handclasp. And thus the good seed was sown in the fertile soil of Bud Perkins's heart, destined to be cruelly choked by weeds in the evil days to come, but never quite forgotten by the Master Sower!

* * *

On the way home Bud was strangely lent, and Martha, with quick intuition, divined the cause. A great wave of emotion was surging through the boy's heart, a great new love for every one and everything; he wanted to do something, to suffer, to endure. Every ripple that ran over the grain, every note of the robin and meadowlark, the rustle of the leaves above them as they drove through the poplar grove on the school section, were to him the voices of God calling him to loving service.

"Martha," he said suddenly, "I haven't been very good to you, have I, old girl? Lots of times I could have been nicer and helped you more. I want to be better to you now. I never thought of it before, but I know that I've often let you do things that I might have done myself. I am going to be kinder and better, I hope."

Martha was not ready of speech. "You're all right, Bud," she said. "I knew how you feel, and I'm glad."

CHAPTER XVI

SPIRITUAL ADVISORS

Like tides on a crescent sea-beach
When the moon is new and thin,

Into our hearts high yearnings
Come welling and surging in—
Come from the mystic ocean
whose rim no foot has trod.
Some of us call it longing
And others call it God.

—*W. H. Carruth.*

WHEN Bud and Martha reached home, Bud went straight to his father who was sitting in his stockinged feet, yawning over a machinery catalogue. "Dad," he said, "I'm going to be a better boy than I've been."

"How's that, Buddie?" Mr. Perkins asked suspiciously.

Bud coloured uncomfortably. "I've made up my mind to be e a Christian, father," he answered, after a pause.

"All right, Bud, that's all right," the old man answered, letting the catalogue fall to the floor. "A little religion is a fine thing, and no one should be without it. I'm a religious man myself, Buddie, if any one should ask you. I can always ask a blessing at the table when there's company—you know that yourself—and I've attended church for years; I never miss goin' the Sunday the Foresters get preached to. I favour the Church of England, myself, though your ma's folks always patronized the Methodists. I like the Church of England best because they can give you such a dandy funeral, no matter who you are, by George! and no questions asked. They sure can give a fellow a great send-off. This little Burrell is a Methodist, isn't he?"

"Yes, he's a Methodist," said Bud.

"Well, now, Bud, I don't want to discourage you, but you have to be careful how you get mixed up with them Methodists; they go too far and are apt to overdo things. You mind when there was them big revival meetings at Millford a few years ago. Well, sir, Brown, the druggist, got religion and burned up all his pipes and tobacco; they tell me they were as fine a stock of briar-roots and amber mouthpieces as any person would care to see; people who raked over the as ashes tell me it was a' terrible sight altogether—and he was a smart man up to that time, makin' good ney sellin' rain-water for medicine. Now, Buddie, go slow. I don't mind you goin' to church and chippin' in your nickel when the plate passes, and it's all right to buy stuff at their sales. I mind when the Church of England ladies raffled off that quilt, I bought two ten-cent throws, and never kicked when I didn't get it. I says: 'Oh, well, it's gone for a good cause.' But don't let them get too strong a hold on you."

"But, father," Bud said earnestly, "I want to stand up for everything that's right. I want to be straight and honest, and help people, and I've just been thinkin' about it—it's not fair to plug wheat the way we've been doing—it's not right to pretend that it's all first class when there's frozen grain in it."

Thomas Perkins grew serious.

"Buddie, dear," he said, "you're gettin' cluttered up with a lot of bum ideas. A farmer has to hold his own against everybody else. They're all trying to fleece him, and he's got to fool them if he can. I'm honest myself, Bud, you know that; but there's nothing pleases me quite so well as to be able to get eighty-seven cents a bushel for wheat that I would only be gettin' fifty-three for if I hadn't taken a little trouble when I was fillin' it up."

"But it would make a fellow feel mean to get caught," Bud said, trying to get hold of an argument that would have weight.

"A fellow needn't be caught, Bud, if he ain't too graspin'. You don't need to plug every time. They know blame well when a fellow has some frozen wheat, and it don't do to draw in No. I hard or No. I Northern every time. It's safest to plug it just one grade above what it is. Oh, it's a game, Bud, and it takes a good player. Now, son, you run along and bring up the cows, and don't you be worryin' about religion. That's what happened me brother Jimmy, your own poor uncle. He got all taken up with the Seventh Day Adventists, and his hired help was gettin' two Sundays a week—he wouldn't let them work Saturday and they wouldn't work Sunday. Your poor uncle was afraid to let them work on Saturday, for, accordin' to his religion, you'd be damned if you let your hired help work just the same as if you worked yourself; but he used to say he'd be damned if he'd let them sit idle and him payin' them big wages, and it was a bad mix-up, I tell you. And then there was old man Redmond, he got religion and began to give back things he said he'd stole—brought back bags to Steadman that he 'said he stole at a threshin' at my place; but they had Steadman's name on them. It made lots of trouble, Bud, and I never saw

anything but trouble come out of this real rip-roarin' Methodist religion, and I don't want you to get mixed up in it."

Bud went down the ravine that led to the river with a troubled heart. There was something sweet and satisfying just within reach, but it eluded him as he tried to grasp it. Bud had never heard of conviction of sin, repentance and justification, but he knew that a mysterious something was struggling within him. He found the cows, and turned them homeward. Then he flung himself on the grassy slope of the river-bank and gave himself to bitter reflections. "There is no use of me tryin' to be anybody," he thought sadly. "I don't know anything, and I'd just make a fool of myself if I was to try to do anything."

A flock of plovers circled over his head, rapidly whirring their wings, then sailing easily higher and higher into the blue of the evening sky. He looked after them enviously.

"Things don't bother those chaps," he said to himself.

He started up suddenly. Some one was calling his name. Looking across the ravine, he saw Pearl Watson standing outside the fence.

"Hello, Bud!" she shouted. "What's wrong?"

He ran down the bank and up the opposite side of the ravine.

"I am all out of humour, Pearl," he said. "I wish I had never been born. I'm a big awkward lump."

Pearl looked at him closely.

"That's the devil, Bud," she said gravely. "He gets into people and tells them they're no good, an' never will be. It's just his way of keepin' people from doin' good things. You see, Bud, the devil ain't so terrible particular about gettin' us to do bad things as just to keep us from doin' good ones. If you do nothin' at all it will please him all right, for all you've got to do to be lost is to do nothin'. It's just like a stick in the river. If it just keeps quiet it will go down stream, and so it is with us—things is movin' that way. Now, Bud, them's wrong thoughts you're havin' about not bein' any good. You can see, hear and talk, and sense things—that's all anybody can do. You're big and strong, and most likely will live fifty years. Here, now, God has set you up with a whole outfit—what are you goin' to do with it?"

"That's what I don't know, Pearl," he said. "What can I do? Where can I go where I'll be any real use?"

"You don't need to leave home, Bud," Pearl said; "you don't need to be et up by cannibals to be a Christian. Stay right at home and go on and work and do your work better than ever; just do it as if God Himself was lookin' over your shoulder; and be that kind and gentle that even the barn cats'll know who you're tryin' to be like. Earn all the money you can, too, Bud. Do you know what I'm goin' to do with my first money I earn? I'll be seventeen before I can teach, and with the first money I get I'll send some to support a little girl in India. She'll be called Pearl and I'll bring her up a Bible-woman."

"I'm all discouraged," Bud said.

Pearl leaned over the fence and said earnestly: "Bud, when I get discouraged I take it as a sign that I haven't been keepin' prayed up, and I go right at it and pray till I get feelin' fine. I'm goin' to pray now."

She knelt down on her side of the fence. He did the same.

"Oh, God!" she said, "here's Bud all balled up in his mind, wantin' to do right, but not knowin' how to go at it. I guess you've often seen people like that, and know better how to go about strengthenin' them up than I can tell You. Bud's all right of a boy, too, dear Lord, when he gets a real grip on things. You should have seen him wallop the daylight out of young Tom Steadman when he hit Lib Cavers. I wasn't there; but they tell me is was something grand. Bless him now, dear Lord, and never, never let go of Bud. Even if he lets go of You, keep your grip on him. For the dear Saviour's sake, Amen."

They rose from their knees and shook hands silently through the barbed wire.

"I wish I could believe as easy as you, Pearl," Bud said.

"Look over there, Bud," she cried, pointing to the little house beside the bluff. The setting sun had caught the western windows and lit them into flame. "It's just like that with any of us, Bud. That old windy is all cracked and patched, but look how it shines when the sun gets a full blaze on it. That's like us, Bud. We're no good ourselves, we're cracked and patched, but when God's love gets a chance at us we can shine and glow."

"You're a great kid, Pearl," he said.

She laughed delightedly. "I'm like the windy," she said; "God puts good thoughts in me because I keep turned broadside and catch all that's comin' my way. Go home now, Bud, and don't ever say you're discouraged again."

They shook hands again silently through the fence, and parted.

Through the tall elms and balms that fringed the river Bud could see the Souris slipping swiftly over its shining pebbles, a broad ribbon of gold coming out of the West, and it seemed as if some of the glory of the sunset was coming to him on its sparkling waters. His eye followed its course until it disappeared around the bend. A new tenderness for it and a new sense of companionship filled his heart.

"Good old Souris," he said, as he turned homeward.

* * *

On the Watson farm there were many improvements being made. The old machinery that littered the yard had been taken away to the poplar grove near by, where the boys spent many happy hours constructing threshing-machines. On Arbour Day, under Pearl's inspection, each child went to the river flat and dug up a small maple tree, and planted it in front of where the new house was going to be. Pearl had the exact location of the new house firmly fixed in her mind before she had been many days on the farm, and soon had every person, even Aunt Kate, helping to beautify the grounds. A wide hedge of the little wild rosebushes which grew plentifully along the headlands, was set out behind where the house was to stand, to divide the lawn from the garden, Pearl said, and although to the ordinary eye they were a weedy looking lot, to Pearl's optimistic vision they, were already aglow with fragrant bloom. Aunt Kate sent down east to her sister Lib for roots of sweet Mary, ribbon-grass, and live-forever, all of which came, took root, and grew in the course of time.

Pearl's dream of a fine chicken-house under the trees began to assume tangible form when Mrs. Slater came to call, and brought with her a fine yellow hen and thirteen little woolly chicks. Mrs. Motherwell came, too, and brought with her a similar offering, only hers were Plymouth Rocks. Mrs. John Green brought nine little fluffy ducklings and their proud but perplexed mother, a fine white Orpington. Gifts like these often accompany first calls in the agricultural districts of the West. They answer the purpose of, and indeed have some advantage over, the engraved card with lower left-hand corner turned down, in expressing friendly greetings to all members of the family.

Temporary dwellings were hastily constructed of packing boxes for the hens and their respective flocks, but after seeding, a real henhouse, made of logs with a sod roof, was erected.

One thing troubled Pearl's conscience. She was not sure that they had been real square with the Caverses. It was quite legal for them to take possession of the farm, of course, for Bill Cavers had abandoned it; but should they not pay something for the improvements that had been made? The house had sheltered them, and the stable, such as it was, was better than no stable—it did not seem right to take it for nothing. She spoke to her father about it, and he readily agreed with her, and said they would "do something" when they saw how the crop turned out.

Pearl worked hard at school, and made such rapid progress that one day Mr. Donald told her, after reading one of her compositions, that he believed he could "put her through for a teacher" in a couple of years, she was doing so well. Pearl stared at him speechless with joy. Then she went to the window and looked out at the glorious June day, that all at once had grown more glorious still. The whole landscape seemed to Pearl to be swimming in a golden mist. An oriole flew carolling gaily over the woodpile, singing the very song that was in her own heart. When she came back to the teacher's desk her eyes were shining with happy tears.

"Just to think," she said in a tremulous voice, "that I can do me duty to the boys and git me stifficate at the same time! I just feel like I ought to apologize to God for ever doubtin' that I'd get it." Then she told the teacher of the fears she had when coming out on the farm, that she would have no further chance of an education. "And now," she concluded, "here I am doin' me duty and gettin' me chance at the same time. Ain't that happiness enough for any one?"

The teacher looked at her wonderingly. "You're a cheerful philosopher, Pearl," he said gravely, "and you make me wish I was twenty years younger."

Pearl looked in her dictionary to find what "philosopher" meant, but even then she could not imagine why Mr. Donald wanted to be twenty years younger.

After Pearl's visit to the Perkins home, when Martha showed her all her treasures, her active brain had been busy devising means of improving Martha, mentally and physically. After consulting with

Camilla, Pearl went over to see Martha again, full enthusiasm and beauty-producing devices. She put Martha through a series of calisthenics and breathing exercises she had learned at school, for Martha was inclined to stoop, and Camilla had said that "a graceful carriage was one of the most important things."

Martha had never had any money of her own, having always sold her butter to the store and received due bills in return. Thomas Perkins was not mean about anything but money—he would gladly give to his children anything else that he possessed—but he considered it a very unlucky thing to part with money. Pearl saw plainly that cold cash was necessary for carrying out her plans for Martha, and so, acting on Camilla's suggestion, she got customers for Martha's butter who would pay her cash every week.

She got for Martha, too, a lotion for her hands which, put on regularly every night, was sure to soften and whiten them. She showed her how to treat her hair to make it lose its 'hard, stringy look. Camilla had written out full instructions and sent a piece of the soap that would do the work.

When Martha got her first butter money she sent for the magazine that she had wanted her father to give her the money for before, and when the first number came, she read it diligently and became what the magazine people would call a "good user." Pearl had inspired in her a belief in her own possibilities, and it was wonderful to see how soon she began to make the best of herself.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PIONEERS' PICNIC

It is always fair weather
When good fellows get together.

—*Old Song.*

THE Pioneers' Picnic was the great annual social event of the Souris Valley, and was looked forward to by young and old. It was held each year on the first day of July, on the green flats below the town of Millford. In John Watson's home, as in many others, preparations for it began early.

One very necessary part of the real enjoyment of a holiday is cash, cold, hard cash, for ice-cream, lemonade; and "Long Toms" can only be procured in that way.

Tommy and Patsey for the first time bitterly regretted their country residence, for if they had been in Millford, they said, they could have delivered parcels and run errands and have had a hundred dollars saved easy. Pearl suggested the black bottles that were so numerous in the bush as a possible source of revenue, and so every piece of scrub and the bluff behind the house were scoured for bottles. Thirty-seven were found, and were cleaned and boxed ready for the day.

Then Bugsey's conscience woke up and refused to be silenced. "Lib Cavers ought to have them," he said sadly.

The others scouted the idea. Bugsey was as loath to part with them as the others; but they had their consciences under control and Bugsey had not.

"She couldn't take them in and sell them," said Tommy, speaking very loudly and firmly, to drown the voice of his conscience. "It wouldn't be dacent, everybody knowin' where they came from, and what was in them, and where it went to, and who it was, and all."

Tommy had ideas on what constituted good form.

Pearl was called upon to settle it and, after some thought, gave her decision.

"If you give Lib Cavers one package of 'Long Tom' popcorn and one of gum for a present, it'll be all right. Don't tell her why yer givin' it to her—just say, 'Present from a friend,' when you hand it to her."

"Maybe she don't like popcorn, anyway," Bugsey said, beginning to hope; "and I don't believe her ma will let her chew gum; and it don't look nice for little girls," he added virtuously.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said Tommy, who was a diplomat. "We'll give it to her ma to give to her."

"Offer it, you mean," corrected Patsey; "'give it' means she tuk it."

Aunt Kate had been busy making suits for her young nephews all spring, for Aunt Kate was very handy with the needle. She had made shirts for Teddy and Billy with elaborate "flossin'" down the front, so elaborate indeed that it threatened to upset the peace of the family. Billy rebelled openly, and Teddy said when he was out of his Aunt's hearing, that he would rather go without a shirt than wear that scalloped thing. Aunt Kate was serene through it all, and told them how fond their Uncle Bill had been of that same pea-vine pattern. Pearl saw at once that there was going to be a family jar, and so saved the situation by getting Martha Perkins to make wide silk ties for the two boys, wide enough to hide the ramifications of the pea-vine—and then to avoid the uncomfortable questioning of Aunt Kate, she hid her glasses on the evening of June the thirtieth. "Anyway," Pearl said to herself, "she might get them broke on a big day like the 'First,' and she can see plenty without them, so she can."

The 'morning of July the first broke clear and sparkling, and before six o'clock the whole Watson family were stirring. Out in the garden the four little boys were pulling radishes and tying them into bunches. Mary, her hair done in many tight little pigtails, was doing a flourishing business' in lettuce. Jimmy was at the head of the green onion department. The Watsons had the contract of supplying green vegetables to the hotel for the day.

Pearl and Aunt Kate were sorting out clothes, while Mrs. Watson got the breakfast.

Down on the river-bank John Watson was cutting down poles for the new stable that he was going to put up in the fall. There was a great contentment in his heart as he looked at his twenty acres of wheat and the same of oats. The season had been so favourable that although the grain had been sown late, it was now well advanced. A field of fifteen acres farther up the river had been cleared and ploughed and would be in crop next year, and as he looked at his land in the sparkling morning sunshine something of Pearl's optimistic vision came to him, and in his fancy he saw all the roots and scrub cleared away and replaced by magnificent fields of grain, dappled with light and shade, his pasture full of cattle, a comfortable house instead of the weatherworn one before him, himself and the "Missus" enjoying peace and plenty; and the children growing up in wisdom's ways; and Pearlie—his heart's treasure, little Pearl, with the "natest fut in the country, and the sparrow shins of her"—Pearlie getting her chance.

"Faith, there's few of them can bate our Pearlie, I'm thinkin', if she can only get the chance."

By ten o'clock active preparations began on the junior members of the family. Mary's hair showed that putting in fourteen hard braids the night before is worth the trouble. She had a lovely barred muslin made out of an old one of Aunt Kate's that she couldn't wear now, being in mourning.

There were new suits for some, clean suits for all, and the only disturbance that occurred was when Danny would not "hold still" while Pearl fastened the front of his blouse; but just a hint of leaving him at home, made a better boy of Danny at once.

Bugsey, who was the first one dressed, went out to watch the weather, and in a short time came running in, in tears. There was a cloud coming up, and Bugsey, the pessimist, knew it was going to rain.

Pearl backed Danny out of the door, holding tight by his tie-strings, to look at the weather. Sure enough, black clouds had formed in the west, and were marching relentlessly up the sky. The whole family came out to look. In the east the sun blazed bright and unconcerned. The old pig ran past them carrying a wisp of hay in her mouth, and by common impulse three of the boys threw sticks after her. She was just trying to make it rain—she couldn't go to the picnic herself, and she'd just like to see it rain! Little whirls of wind circled around in the hip-yard, and there was an ominous roll of distant thunder. Loud wails broke from Bugsey, Danny, and Mary, and when the edge of the cloud went over the sun and the whole landscape darkened the wails became general.

"Come into the house," commanded Pearl, "it's only goin' to be a shower and lay the dust. Cheer up, there's enough blue 'sky to make a pair of pants, and it's not time for us to be goin' yet, anyway."

The tearful family followed her into the house and sat in doleful silence watching the big drops that began to beat on the western window.

Pearl was a strong believer in work as a remedy for worry. Jimmy was put to tightening up the buttons on his new suit. Tommy blackened boots with lampblack and lard, and Bugsey, who was weeping copiously, was put to counting radishes as a little bit of "busy work."

Pearl kept up a brave show of confidence in the weather, but Mrs. Watson's and Aunt Kate's contributions to the conversation were all of a humid character and dealt with spoiled feathers,

parasols blown inside out, and muslin dresses so spattered with mud that they were not worth bringing home.

Pearl continued her preparations in the face of great discouragement. Aunt Kate foretold a three days' rain—it looked to be settlin' that way, and besides, look at that old gray hen, she hadn't gone in, and that was a sure sign of a long rain. This brought a renewed downpour in the house.

Pearl grew desperate. "Look at all the other hens that did go in," she said, as she tied the bows in her own hair. "I don't see the sense of taking that crazy old ike of a hen's word for it against all the other hens that have gone in. She's a mournful old thing, and is staying out to make the other ones feel bad, or else she don't know enough to go in. Hurry up, Mary, and get all that stuff in; it's a quarter to eleven now, and we've got Tommy to do yet when he's done with the boots. It's none of our business whether it rains now or not. We're not wantin' to go just now."

"Pearlie, dear," her mother said, "you're raisin' too many hopes in them."

"Hopes!" Pearl cried. "Did you say hopes, Ma? They look like a bunch with too many hopes, settin' there blubberin' their eyes out and spoiling their looks."

By eleven o'clock everything was ready but the weather, and then, as if it suddenly dawned on the elements that this was hardly a square deal on Pioneers' Picnic day, the clouds parted right over John Watson's house, and a patch of blue sky, ever widening, smiled down encouragingly. Sorrow was changed to joy. Bugsey dried his eyes when he saw the sun shining on the Brandon Hills.

A little breeze frolicked over the trees and flung down the raindrops in glittering showers, and at exactly a quarter past eleven the Watson family, seated on three seats in the high-boxed waggon, drove gaily out of the yard.

"Sure, we enjoy it all the better for getting the scare," said Mary the philosopher.

The Perkinses, in their two-seated buggy, were just ahead on the road. Even Martha, encouraged by Pearl, was coming to the picnic.

Behind the Watsons came the Caverses and the Motherwells.

"Let's ask Libby Anne to ride with us," said Tommy, but Mary, with fine tact, pointed out that she would see the bottles, and it might hurt her feelings, "for, mind you," said Mary, "she knows, young and all as she is."

Mary was one year younger herself.

Along every trail that led into the little town came buggies and waggons, their occupants in the highest good humour. There was a laughing ripple in the meadowlark's song, as if he were declaring that he knew all the time that the rain was only a joke.

Across the river lay the Horsehoe slough, a crescent of glistening silver, over which wild ducks circled and skimmed and then sank into its clear waters, splashing riotously, as if they, too, were holding an "Old Boys' Reunion." It was the close season for wild fowl, and nobody knew it better than they.

Coming down into the valley, innumerable horses, unhitched and tied to the wagons, were to be seen. The rain had driven away the mosquitoes, and a cool breeze, perfumed with wild roses and cowslips, came gently from the West. The Watsons drove to a clump of poplar trees which seemed to offer shade for the horses. Bugsey and Tommy carried the box of bottles to the drug-store, admonished by Pearl to drive a close bargain.

Pearl went with Jimmy and Patsey, who took the green vegetables to the hotel. Jimmy had been accustomed to bringing milk to the back door and was quite an admirer of Mr. Braden, the genial proprietor.

Mr. Braden himself came into the kitchen just as they knocked at the door. He was faultlessly dressed, and in a particularly happy mood, for the first of July was one of his richest harvests, both in the dining-room and in the bar, where many a dollar would be laid on the altar of "auld lang syne"; and besides this, Sandy Braden was really glad to see all the old timers, apart from any thought of making money. He paid Jimmy for the vegetables, and gave him an extra quarter for a treat for himself and the others.

Acting on a sudden impulse, Pearl said: "Mr. Braden, you know Bill Cavers, don't you?"

Mr. Braden said he did.

"Well," said Pearl, "they've all come to town to-day. Mrs. Cavers hasn't been here for ever so long, but Bill promised to stay sober to-day if she'd come."

Pearl hesitated.

"Well, what else?" he said.

"They're goin' to have a photo taken to send home to her folks in Ontario. Mrs. Cavers is all fixed up, with her hair curled, and Libby Anne has a new dress made out of her mother's weddin' one, and Bill is lookin' fine—he hasn't been drunk since that Sunday you took him away from the school when we were havin' church."

Mr. Braden suddenly stopped smiling.

"And what I want to ask you, Mr. Braden, as a real favour, is not to fill Bill up until they get the photo taken, anyway. You know how his lip hangs when' he's drunk—he wouldn't look nice in a photo to send home. Mrs. Cavers went all white and twitchy that day you took him away from church. I was right behind her, and I guess that's how she'd look in a photo if he got drunk, and she wouldn't look nice, either; and even Libby Anne wouldn't be lookin' her best, because she gets mad when her father is drunk, and says she'd like to kill you, and burn up all your whiskey, and lots of things like that that ain't real Christian. So you see, it would spoil the whole picture if you let him get drunk."

Sandy Braden was not a hard-hearted man, and so, when Pearl told him all this with her eyes on him straight and honest and fearless, he was distinctly uncomfortable.

He tried to get a grip on himself. "Who told you to come to me about it?" he asked suspiciously.

"Nobody told me," Pearl said. "I never thought of it myself until I saw you lookin' so fine and such fine clothes on you, and you so full of good humour, and I thought maybe you're not as bad as I always thought you were, and maybe you don't know what a bad time Mrs. Cavers and Libby Anne have when Bill drinks."

"You see," Pearl continued, after she had waited in vain for him to speak, "you've got all Bill had anyway. You mind the money they saved to go home—you got that, I guess, didn't you? And you'll not be losin' anything to-day, for Bill hasn't got it. He gave all the money he had to Mrs. Cavers—he was afraid he'd spend it—and that's what they're goin' to get the photo with."

Sandy Braden continued to look at the floor, and seemed to be unconscious of her presence.

"That's all I was wantin' to say," Pearl said at last. He looked up then, and Pearl was struck with the queer white look in his face.

"All right, Pearl," he said. "I promise you Bill won't get a drop here to-day." He tried to smile. "I hope the photo will turn out well."

"Thank you, Mr. Braden," Pearl said. "Good-bye."

Sandy Braden went back to the bar-room and told his bartender not to sell to Bill Cavers under any consideration. The bartender, who owned a share the business, became suspicious at once.

"Why not?" he asked.

"Because I don't want Bill Cavers to get drunk, that's all," he said shortly.

"Out with it, Sandy. Who's been at you? the W. C. T. U. been interviewing you?"

"That's none of your business Bob. If I choose to shut down on Bill Cavers it's nobody's business, is it?"

"Well, now, I guess it's some of my business," the bartender said. "Don't forget that I have a little interest in this part of the joint; and besides, you know my principles. I'll sell to any one who has the money—we're out for the coin, and we're not runnin' any Band of Hope."

"Now, see here, Bob, this man Cavers drinks up every cent he earns, and to-day I happen to know that he is trying to keep straight. They've come in to get a photo taken, and she hasn't been off the farm for years."

The bartender laughed.

"Bill will take a hot photo when he gets about two finger-lengths in him! No, it's not our business who buys. We're here to sell. That's one thing I don't believe in, is refusin' liquor to any man. Every man has a perfect right to as much liquor as he wants."

Sandy Braden was about to make a spirited reply, but some one called him in the office and in the excitement of the day's events he forgot all about Bill Cavers until his attention was called toward him later in the day.

* * *

Meanwhile the boys had disposed of their bottles to the drug-store, receiving in payment a bountiful supply of gum, licorice, and drug-store candies, and a Union Jack for each one. There was quite a run on bottles before an hour, for the Hogan twins cornered the market by slipping around to the alley at the back of the store and securing the bottles that stood in a box in the back shed. Then they came around to the front and sold them again, flags being the consideration every time, for the twins were loyal sons of the Dominion.

The drug-store man had bought his own bottles twice before he found out, but it is a proof of the twins' ability as financiers that they did not come back after he found it out. Lots of silly little boys would, but there is an advantage in being twins!

Down below the town, on the river-flat, the old timers were getting together. Under a grove of tall elms a group of the older men were recounting the stirring scenes of the boom days, when flour was ten dollars a bag, and sugar twenty-five cents a pound; and the big flood of '82, when the Souris, the peaceful little murmuring stream that now glinted through the trees below them, ran full from bank to bank and every house in Millford had a raft tied to its back door.

In the picnic grounds, which had been cleared out for this purpose years before, the women, faded and worn, most of them, with many long years on the prairie, but wonderfully brightened up by meeting old friends, spread their table-covers on the long, rough tables, and brought out the contents of their baskets.

Mrs. Watson introduced her sister-in-law to all the old friends, who at once received her into the sisterhood, and in a few minutes Aunt Kate was exchanging opinions on lemon pies with the best of them.

Then, speaking of pies, some one recalled Grandma Lowry's vinegar pies—that triumph of housewifely art, whereby a pie is made without eggs or milk or fruit, and still is a "pie!"

"Wasn't she a wonder? Did you ever see the beat of old Grandma Lowry?" they asked each other, looking up the hillside where they had laid her the year before, and hushing their voices reverently as if they were afraid that they might disturb her slumbers.

"I brought some of the vinegar pies to-day," Mrs. Slater said. "I thought it would be nice to remember her that way. She brought me over two of them the first Christmas we were in the country. I never will forget Grandma Lowry."

A little old woman in black stopped cutting the cake suddenly and looked up. Then she began to speak in a slow, monotonous voice. "She came to me," she said, "when my three boys were down with diphtheria in the dead of winter, and sat with my little Charlie the last night he was on earth. I says to her: 'Lie down, Mrs. Lowry'—she'd been up two nights already—but she says—I'll never forget just the way she said it—she says: 'Mary, I helped little Charlie to come into the world, and if it so be that he's goin' to leave it, who's got a better right than me to' be with him?'"

The shade of the elm-trees was getting smaller and smaller as the sun rose higher, and some of the old-timers were sitting in the sun before they noticed it, so interested were they in Mr. Slater's story of the surveying party that crossed the Assiniboine that fateful night in November, '79, when only five out of the eight got over.

Then the women announced, by beating on a dishpan, that dinner was ready, and every tree and bush gave answer—it was the old miracle of Roderick Dhu's men rising from copse and heath and cairn. Gray-haired men came running like boys, catching at each other's coat-tails, tripping each other, laughing, care-free, for it was Pioneers' Picnic day, and that is the one day when gladness and good-fellowship have full play, and cares and years with their bitter memories of hail and frost fall from them like a garment. Hungry little boys fell down out of trees, asking where was the pie! Little girls in fluffy skirts stood shyly around until some motherly soul ushered them down the line where she said there was plenty of room and lots of good eating.

Demure young ladies, assisted by young fellows in white aprons, poured tea and coffee from huge white pitchers, making frequent journeys to the stove over among the trees, and sometimes forgetting to come back until some one had to go for them!

There were roast chicken and boiled ham set in beds of crispest lettuce and parsley. There were moulds of chicken jelly with sprigs of young celery stuck in the top. There were infinite varieties of salads and jellies and pickles; there were platters full of strawberry tarts, made from last year's wild strawberries, which had been kept for this very occasion; there were apple pies covered with a thick mat of scalded cream. There was Mrs. Motherwell's half-hour cake, which tradition said had to be beaten for that length of time "all the one way"; there were layer cake, fig cake, rolled jelly cake, election cake, cookies with a hole, cookies with a raisin instead of a hole; there were dough nuts, Spanish bun and ginger-bread. No wonder that every one ate until they were able to eat no more.

Pearl helped to wait on the others. Danny did not say a word, but just laid about him. At last he called Pearl to him, and, in a muffled whisper, asked: "What is there now that I haven't had?" Pearl then knew that he was approaching the high-water mark.

* * *

Having overruled Martha's objections to mingling with her fellow-men at picnics, and having persuaded her to come and see for herself if picnics were not a good thing, Pearl felt responsible for her enjoyment of it.

Pearl had some anxious thoughts on the subject of a proper dress for Martha for the picnic, when she found that her best summer dress was a black muslin, which to Pearl seemed fit only for a funeral.

She wondered how to bring forward the subject without appearing rude, when Martha saved her from all further anxiety one day by coming over to ask her to help her to pick out a dress from the samples she had sent for. The magazine had begun to bear fruit.

They decided on a white muslin with a navy blue silk dot in it, and then Pearl suggested a blue ribbon girdle with long ends, a hat like Camilla's, a blue silk parasol, and long blue silk gloves.

When Pearl saw Martha the day of the picnic, it just seemed too good to be true that Martha could look so nice. She had braided her hair the night before and made it all fluffy and wavy, and under the broad brim of her blue hat it didn't look the colour of last year's hay at all, Pearl thought. Martha herself seemed to feel less constrained and awkward than she ever did before. Mrs. Francis would have called it the "leaven of good clothes."

Pearl was wondering what she was going to do with Martha, now that she had got her there, when she saw Arthur Wemyss, the young Englishman.

She took him aside and said: "Arthur, you are the very fellow I want to see. I've got Martha Perkins with me to-day, and she's pretty shy, you know—never been to any of these picnics before—and I'm so busy looking after all our young lads that I haven't time to go around with her. Now, I wonder if you would take her around and be nice to her. Martha's just a fine girl and young, too, if she only knew it, and she should be having a good time at picnics."

Arthur expressed his willingness to be useful. He would be glad, he said, to do his best to give Miss Martha a pleasant time.

And so it came about that Arthur, in his courteous way, escorted Martha through the throng of picnickers, found a seat for her at the table, and waited on her with that deference that seems to come so easy to the well-bred young Englishman.

Arthur was an open-hearted young fellow, and finding Martha very sympathetic, told her about his plans. Thursa was coming from England in December to marry him, and he was going to have a house put up just as soon as the harvest was over. His father had sent him the money, and so he was not depending entirely on the harvest. He showed her the plan of the house and consulted her on the best position for the cellar door and the best sort of cistern. He showed her a new photo of Thursa that he had just received. She was a fluffy-haired little thing in a much befrilled dress, holding a fan coquettishly behind her head. Martha noticed how fondly he looked at it, and for a moment a shivering sense of disappointment smote her heart. But she resolutely put it from her and feasted her eyes on the lovelight in his, even though she knew it was the face of another woman that had kindled it.

Arthur was a wholesome-looking young man, with a beaming face of unaffected good-humour, and to Martha it seemed the greatest happiness just to be near him and hear his voice. She tried to forget everything save that he was here beside her, for this one dear sweet afternoon.

When the thought of Thursa's coming would intrude on her, or the bitterer thought still that she was only a plain, sunburnt, country girl, with rough hands and uncouth ways, she forced them away from her, even as you and I lie down again, and try to gather up the unravelled threads of a sweet dream, knowing well that it is only a dream and that waking time is drawing near, but holding it close to our hearts as long as we can.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LACROSSE MATCH

What's come of old Bill Lindsay and the
Saxhorn fellers, say?
I want to hear the old band play.

—*James Whitcomb Riley.*

THE great event of the Pioneers' Picnic was the lacrosse match between Millford and Hillsboro. It was held at three o'clock in the afternoon, and everybody was there.

The Millford lacrosse boys were in serious financial difficulty— "everything gone but their honour," as one sentimental member had put it, and if the columns of the Hillsboro Gazette were to be trusted, that was gone, too. But in the big game on this occasion they hoped to retrieve their fallen fortunes.

Everybody felt that the real business of the day had begun when the two lacrosse teams drew up on the field. The women had finished their clearing up after dinner, and piled rhubarb leaves on their baskets to keep the eatables cool for supper.

Bud Perkins and Teddy Watson were playing for Millford, and Mrs. Perkins, Mrs. Watson, and Aunt Kate were in a pleasurable state of excitement, though they told the other women over and over that lacrosse was a dangerous game, and they did not want the boys to play. Mrs. Breen, too, whose son Billy was Millford's trusty forward, experienced a thrill of motherly pride when she heard the crowd breaking into cheers as the Millford boys in their orange and black jerseys lined up on the field.

Pearl had gathered up her four brothers after dinner and washed them clean at the river, also made repairs on their drooping stockings and twisted collars, and, holding tight to Danny, marshalled them across the end of the field to where Arthur and Martha sat with Jim and Camilla, and Tom Motherwell and Nellie Slater.

Dr. Clay came driving around the end of the field. When he saw Pearl he stopped and asked her if she would come and sit in his buggy to watch the game.

"I can't leave the boys, thank you, doctor," she said; "there's been three of them lost since noon, and they've all got their good clothes on."

"Well, of course, we'll have to keep track of them, in that case," he said, smiling, "because it would be a real loss to lose them, clothes and all. I tell you what we'll do, Pearl. I'll give you the horse and buggy—pile them all in, and it will be the easiest way of minding them."

The doctor drove to a clear space where the boys would have a good view of the game, and then went away to get a bag of peanuts for them.

In the centre of the field the referee placed the ball between Bud Perkins's stick and McLaren's, of Hillsboro. There was a moment of intense excitement and then away went the ball toward Hillsboro's goal, half a dozen in pursuit. The whole field was alive with black and orange, blue and white, legs and arms and sticks darting in and out in a way that would make your eyes ache to follow them. Once the ball came to the side, causing a receding wave of fluttering muslin. Mrs. Maxwell, whose son had that shade of hair which is supposed to indicate a hasty temper, was shouting directions to him as loudly as she could. Mrs. Maxwell's directions were good ones, too, if Alec could only have followed them. "Shoot, Alec!" she called. "Shoot it in! Run, Alec! Shoot it in!"

Millford's only lawyer, the dignified and stately Mr. Hawkins, came majestically down the line, carrying a camp stool under his arm. He had found it necessary to change his position, incensed at the

undignified behaviour of the Hillsboro girls, who had taken up their position on one side of the field and were taking a lively interest in the game. He had ventured a slight rebuke, whereupon the whole battery of their indignation had been trained on him, with the result that he withdrew hastily. He sat down just in front of Mrs. Perkins and Mrs. Watson, and began to take an interest in the game. The ball was near Millford's goal and a scrimmage was taking place, a solid knot of players that moved and writhed and twisted.

Suddenly Bud Perkins shot out from the others, carrying his stick high above his head as he, raced up the field. "Bud! Bud! Bud!" Millford cried in an ecstasy of hope and fear. He sprang, dodged, whirled, the whole field in pursuit, and then, when in line with Hillsboro's goal, he shot low and swift and sure!

A great cheer burst from the crowd, hats were thrown in the air, little boys turned handsprings, and Millford went stark, staring mad.

Mrs. Perkins was not naturally an excitable woman, and she looked the very soul of meekness in her respectable black dress and little black bonnet tied tightly under her chin, but if your only boy—the only living out of three—your boy that had been real delicate and hard to raise—if he had dodged the whole field and shot a goal, straight as a die, and the whole town were cheering for him, mad with joy, you might have been roused a bit, too. When Mrs. Perkins came to herself she was pounding her parasol on the broad, dignified shoulders of Millford's most stately citizen, Mr. E. Cuthbert Hawkins, who moved away rather haughtily.

Over near the lemonade booth, Bud's father was explaining to an interested group just how Bud came to be such a smart boy.

"Young Bud has never worked the way his dad did," he said. "I ain't like some men that rob the cradle for farm hands and puts little lads building roads when they are so small they have to be weighted down with stones in their pockets to keep them from blowin' away. Young Bud has run in the pasture all his life, you may say, and it would be queer if he hadn't some speed in him. He comes of pretty good stock, let me tell you, registered in every strain, if I do say it. Look at that for a well-rounded leg!" Mr. Perkins made it easy for every one to do so. "Eighteen inches around the calf, and tapered to the toe!" He patted it lovingly. "I tell you, there was action there a few years ago!"

Meanwhile the play went on faster than ever. Hillsboro scored a goal through the Millford goal-keeper's stick breaking, and the score stood one to one until within fifteen minutes of the time. The Millford boys were plainly nervous. Victory meant the district championship, and confusion to their enemies.

The game was close and hard—no long throws—every inch contested—it had ceased to be a game, it was a battle! One minute the ball went close to Millford's goal and Mrs. Watson and Mrs. Perkins clutched each other's hands in wordless dread; but the wiry form of Teddy Watson shot up in the air and the ball bounced back into the Millford captain's stick. As he ran along the edge of the crowd with it, one of the Hillsboro girls slashed at him viciously with her red parasol. The captain passed the ball safely to Alec Maxwell, whose red hair made him a shining mark for the Hillsboro girls. But Sandy was not a bit disconcerted by their remarks. Big Dave Hunter, his check, was after him. Big Dave was a powerfully built fellow with a chest like a Clyde and a cheerful expanse of freckles. As Alec Maxwell threw the ball to Bud Perkins, Big Dave's long reach intercepted it, and then he made one of those grand rushes for which he was known and dreaded by his opponents, and which are still remembered by the old boys who played the game. This time Dave's good old trick miscarried, for Teddy Watson, slender as he was, neatly body-checked him—the ball fell from his stick into that of Alec Maxwell, who, boring his way through the Hillsboro defence, shot on goal and scored.

The home crowd went wild with cheers, for time was up, and the score stood two to one in Millford's favour. Thomas Perkins was hilarious. "Come on, John!" he said to John Watson, "let's have a little Schlitz. I never take anything stronger now, since the boy grew up. What! You don't drink Schlitz? It's harmless as hay-tea, but perhaps you're right."

CHAPTER XIX

Oh, Thou who hast lighted the sun,
Oh, Thou who hast darkened the tare,
Judge Thou
The sin of the Stone that was hurled
By the Goat from the light of the sun
As she sinks in 'the mire of the tarn.

—Kipling.

WHEN Pearl got her four lively young charges settled down she had time to look about her. Up and down the line of spectators her eye searched for Libby Anne and Mrs. Cavers, but they were nowhere to be seen, and Pearl became more and more troubled.

"I'd like fine to see that faded old raincoat of hers," she said to herself, "and Lib's little muslin hat"; but every raincoat that Pearl saw was new and fresh, and every muslin hat had a bright and happy little face under it, instead of Libby Anne's pale cheeks and sad, big eyes.

Dr. Clay came over with a bag of popcorn for them, and Pearl told him the cause of her worry.

"They had their dinner all right," she said in a low voice to the doctor, as he leaned over the wheel. "Bill was fine, and do you know, he is real nice when he's sober? I waited on them, and Mrs. Cavers seemed so happy; it pretty near made my heart stop beatin' every time I thought of it, and how nice it would be if he'd keep straight. Libby Anne had two licorice kittens and a package of gum saved up in a bag; she said she wouldn't eat them to-day, for she was havin' a good enough time when she could see her mother enjoyin' herself so well. Lib is only ten years old, but she knows as much as some grown-up people. The last I saw of them they were going up to Mrs. Burrell's to fix up a little before they had the photo taken. I think I'll go and see about them, Doctor; I can't enjoy myself for wonderin' if they're all right.

"I'll go with you," the doctor said, calling Jimmy Watson to come and hold the horse and look after the boys.

Down the almost deserted street the doctor and Pearl went, looking for any member of the Cavers family. Flags hung motionless in the bright sunshine. The trees that formed the arch over the road were beginning to droop in the heat of the afternoon.

The photographer's tent was the first place they went to. A young lady and gentleman were posing for a photo, the young lady all gone to blushes and the young man very gorgeous in tan boots and a red tie.

Pearl did the talking.

"Did you take a photo of Mr. and Mrs. Cavers and Libby Anne?"

"What are they like?" the photographer asked.

"She is a little woman, pale and tired-looking; looks as if she sat up a lot at night," Pearl answered.

"I know who you mean, then," he said. "She has been up here with her little girl looking for some one, but I do not know where she went from here."

Pearl's heart sank. "He's broke his word!" she said angrily, when they were on the street. "He promised me he would not give Bill any liquor until he got his picture taken, anyway." Pearl's eyes were throwing off rings of fire.

"Who promised?" the doctor asked.

"Sandy Braden. I told him all about the photos when we went there this morning with the onions and other stuff, and he seemed real nice about it; but it doesn't look as if he meant it."

"I don't know, Pearl. Sandy Braden is not a bad fellow. He wouldn't go back on his word. I'm sure of that. You go up to Mrs. Burrell's and I'll go down to the hotel and see if, they know anything about Bill."

The bar-room was full. Even the lacrosse game was not a strong enough attraction to draw away all the crowd; the products of Walker and Seagram still held their own.

Bob Steele, the bartender, was telling about Bill Cavers going to have his photo taken.

"They got around Sandy easy," he was saying; "but that's one thing I won't let any one interfere with.

As long as I've been selling liquor I've never refused to sell to any man. I refuse no one. Every man has a perfect right to whatever he wants to eat or drink—I claim that for myself, and I hold that no one has a right to interfere with another man's liberty."

The crowd in the bar-room gave maudlin approval.

"And so you just bet Bill Cavers got all he wanted. He came in here soon after dinner, and the first man that asked him to drink got turned down. Think of Bill Cavers refusin' good liquor! But when he heard it bubblin' in the glass his knee just wobbled—that's the beauty of sellin' our goods, it advertises itself, and works nights and Sundays. I says: 'What'll you have, Bill?' and he said—Bill's an honest fellow—he said: 'I've no money, Bob.' But I says: 'That makes no difference, your credit is good here—you've always paid—and so name yer drink, Bill,' and I poured out a glass of Three Swallows; and you bet by the time Bill was ready to quit he would sure look well in a picture. I was takin' a risk of losin' money, too. Bill's honest enough, but there's a strong chance that there'll be judgment against his stuff this fall. But I've always said a man has a right to all the liquor he wants, and I'm prepared to stand by it even if I drop money on it. It may be foolish"—looking around for applause, but his audience were not in the mental condition to discuss fine ethical points—"but I'm prepared to do it."

Dr. Clay, standing on the outer edge of the crowd, heard all this. He made his way to the bar. "Where is Bill Cavers, now?" he asked.

The gleam in the doctor's eyes should have warned the bartender to be discreet in his answers. "Well, I can't just say," he answered with mock politeness, resenting the tone of the doctor's question. "He didn't leave word with me, but I guess he's getting his photo taken."

"Did you set him drunk and then turn him out in this blazing sun?" the doctor asked, in a voice so tense with anger that the audience, befuddled as they were, drew closer to see what it was all about.

"We never keep people longer than is necessary," the bartender said, with an evil smile, "and besides, Bill was due at the photographer's."

Before the doctor knew what he was doing his right arm flew out and landed a smashing blow on the bartender's smirking face, a blow that sent him crashing into the bottles behind him. He recovered in an instant, and the doctor's quick eye caught the flash of a knife in his hand as he came over the bar at him. With a swift blow the doctor knocked the knife from his hand, and, grasping him by the coat collar, he dragged him to the back door, and then, raising him on the toe of his boot, landed him in the middle of the mud-puddle that had been left by the morning's rain.

The bartender was just gathering himself up when Sandy Braden drove up to the stable door with his pacer.

Meanwhile Pearl had continued the search for Mrs. Cavers and Libby Anne. She was on her way to Mrs. Burrell's when she caught sight of something like a parasol down in the trees where the horses were tied. She ran down to the picnic grounds hastily, and there, in a grassy hollow, shaded by a big elm, she found the objects of her search.

Bill Cavers, with purple face and wide open mouth, lay breathing heavily. Libby Anne was fanning him with her muslin hat, and Mrs. Cavers was tenderly bathing his swollen face with water Libby Anne had brought from the river. Her own eyes were red with crying and hopeless with defeat.

"We've just found him, Pearl," she said. "He's been here in the hot sun I don't know how long. I never saw him breathing so queer before."

"I'll get the doctor," said Pearl.

She ran back up the road and found the doctor talking to Sandy Braden, at the stable behind the hotel.

"Come on, Doctor!" Pearl cried breathlessly. "I found them. You come, too"—to, Mr. Braden—"it will take you both to carry him."

Sandy Braden hesitated, but there was something in Pearl's compelling eyes that made him follow her.

They reached the grassy slope. Mrs. Cavers had made a pillow of her coat for his head, and was still bathing his face. The doctor hastily loosened the drunken man's clothing and listened to the beating of his heart. Its irregular pounding was unmistakable, it was making its last great fight.

Dr. Clay took out his hypodermic syringe and made an injection in Bill's arm. Bill stirred uneasily. "I

don't—want—it—Bob," he said thickly. "I promised—the—missus. She's—with me—to-day."

Sandy Braden endeavoured to quiet Mrs. Cavers's fears.

"It's the heat, Mrs. Cavers," he said; "but it'll soon wear off—he'll be all right soon, won't he, Doc?"

The doctor made no reply, but listened again to the sick man's heart. It was failing.

Mrs. Cavers, looking up, read the doctor's face.

She fell on the ground beside her husband, calling him every tender name as she rained kisses on his livid cheeks, uttering queer little cries like a wounded animal, but begging him always to live for her sake, and crying out bitterly that she could not give him up.

Sandy Braden, who had often seen men paralyzed with liquor, gently tried to take her away, assuring her again that he would be all right soon. She noticed then for the first time who it was who had come with the doctor, and shaking off his hand, she sprang up and faced him, with blazing eyes that scorched into his very soul.

Sandy Braden put up his hand as if to ward off her fury.

Bill moved his lips, and she knelt beside him once more, her thin gray hair falling over her shoulders. The sick man gazed into her face, and a look of understanding came into his bloodshot eyes.

"Ellie," he said with great effort, "I—did—not—want—it—at first," and with his eyes still looking into hers, as if mutely pleading with her to understand, the light faded from them ... and the last long, staggering breath went out. Then fell silence ... that never-ending silence ... and quite perceptibly the colour went in patches from his face. Dr. Clay gently touched Mrs. Cavers's arm. "Yes, Doctor, I know ... he's dead." She talked like people do in their sleep.

"I did my best, Will," she said, as she smoothed his thick black hair. "I tried my hardest to save you, and I always thought I would win ... but they've beat me, Will. They were too strong for me ... and I'm sorry!" She bent down and tenderly kissed his forehead, damp now with the dews of death.

There was not a leaf stirring on the trees. Every bird in the valley was still. Only the gentle lapping of the Souris over the fallen tree in the current below them came to their ears.

Sandy Braden's face was as white as his shirt-bosom as he stood looking at Bill's quiet face.

A cheer from the lacrosse grounds came like a voice from another world; the world of life and pleasure and action.

Mrs. Cavers, roused at the sound, stood up and addressed the hotel-keeper.

"Excuse me, Mr. Braden," she said, "I was almost forgetting. Mr. Cavers, I know had not enough with him to pay for ... all this." She motioned toward Bill's dead face. "This ... must have cost a lot." She handed him some silver. "It is all I have with me to-day ... I hope it is enough. I know Mr. Cavers would not like to leave a debt ... like this."

Mechanically Sandy Braden took the money, then dropping it as if it burned him, he turned away and went slowly up the road that he had come, reeling unsteadily. A three-seated democrat, filled with drunken men, was just driving away from his stable. They were a crowd from Howard, who had been drinking heavily at his bar all the afternoon. They drove away,—madly lashing their horses into a gallop.

Sandy Braden hid in a clump of poplars until they got past him. Looking back toward the river he could see Mrs. Cavers kneeling beside her husband, and even at that distance he fancied he could see Bill's dead face looking into hers, and begging her to understand. Just as the democrat passed pants burst into maudlin song:

"Who's the best man in this town?

Sandy Braden, Sandy Braden.

Who's the best man in this town?

Sandy Braden, Sandy Braden."

And then it was that Sandy Braden fell prone upon the ground and buried his face in the cool, green grass, crying: "God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

When the victorious lacrosse team came down the street, they were followed by a madly cheering throng. They went straight to the hotel, where, by the courtesy of the proprietor, they had always been given rooms in which to dress.

Bob Steele met them at the office door, all smiles and congratulations, in spite of a badly blackened eye.

"Come on in, boys!" he called. "It's my treat. Walk right in."

Most of the boys needed no second invitation. Bud Perkins hesitated. His father was just behind him. "Take a little Schlitz, Buddie. That won't hurt you," he said.

Bud went in with the others. Every one was in the gayest humour. The bartender called in the porter to help him to serve the crowd. The glasses were being filled when a sudden hush fell on the bar-room, for Sandy Braden, with a face as ghastly as the one he had just left on the river-bank, came in the back door.

He raised his hand with a gesture of authority. "Don't drink it, boys!" he said. "It has killed one man to-day. Don't touch it."

Even the bartender turned pale, and there was a moment of intense silence. Just then some one rushed in and shouted the news of Bill Cavers's death. The crowd fell away until Sandy Braden and the bartender were left face to face.

"How much have you in the business here, Bob?" he asked in a perfectly controlled voice.

The bartender told him.

He took a cheque-book from his pocket and hastily made out a cheque.

"Now, go," he said, as he gave it to him. "I will not be needing a man in here any more."

He took the keys from his pocket and locked the back door. Then coming out into the office, where there were a few stragglers lounging in the chairs, he carefully locked the door leading into the bar.

"I'm done, boys," he said shortly. "I've quit the business."

CHAPTER XX

ON THE QUIET HILLSIDE

They shall go out no more, oh ye,
Who speak earth's farewell thro' your tears,
Who see your cherished ones go forth
And come not back, thro' weary years.
There is a place—there is a shore
From which they shall go out no more.

—*Kate Tucker Goode.*

WHEN sympathetic neighbours came to stay with Mrs. Cavers that night, and "sit up" with the dead man, she gently refused their kind offer. "It is kind of you, dear friends," she said, "but I would rather stay alone to-night. It is the last thing I can do for him, and I shall not be lonely. I've sat here plenty of nights waiting for him, not knowing how he would come home—often afraid he would be frozen to death or kicked by the horses—but to-night he is safe from all that, and I am not worrying about him at all. I've got him all to myself, now, and I want to sit here with him, just him and me. Take Libby Anne with you, Martha. I am thinking of a sweet verse that seems to suit me now: 'They shall go out no more.' That's my comfort now; he is safe from so many things."

The next day was the funeral, a cloudless day of glittering sunshine and bright blue sky. The neighbours came for miles; for Bill's death and the closing of the bar had made a profound impression.

"I wonder will Sandy Braden come," Thomas Perkins said, as he tied his horse to a seeder in the yard. "Bill was a good customer of his, and I wouldn't be surprised if Sandy came."

"You're a good guesser, Thomas," another man said, "for here he comes."

"Sandy'll open up again, I think," said George Steadman, "in a few days, when he gets over this a little. He's foolish if he doesn't, with the busy time just startin', and money beginnin' to move."

"Well, I don't know," said Sam Motherwell. "From what I hear, Sandy says he's got his medicine, and won't take chances on getting any more. It'll be a good thing for the town if he has closed for keeps. Sandy has made thousands of dollars over his bar."

"Well," George Steadman said; in his most generous tone, "I don't begrudge it to him. Sandy's a decent fellow, and he certainly never made it out of me or mine. He's a fool if he closes up now, but if he does, some one else will open up. I believe a bar is a help to the town all right!"

"It hasn't been much of a help here," Thomas Perkins said, waving his hand at the untidy barnyard.

"Oh, well, this is an exception. There's always some man like Bill that don't know when to quit. This business here is pretty rough on me, though," Mr. Steadman said, in a truly grieved tone; "losin' my tenant just before harvest; but I blame nobody but Bill himself. He hasn't used me square, you all know that."

"Stop, George, stop!" The broad Scotch of Roderick Ray's voice had not been heard before in the conversation. "Hoo hae we used Bill? He was aye fond o' it an' aye drank it to his hurt an' couldna stop. What hae we done to help him? Dye think it fair to leave a trap-door open for a child to fall doon? An' if ye found him greetin' at the bottom, wad ye no tak him up an' shut the door? Puir Bill, we found him greetin' an' bruised an' sore mony times, but nane o' us had the humanity to try to shut the door until he fell once too often, an' could rise na more, an' now Sandy himsel' has shamed us a', an' I tell ye, he'll no open it again, for he has better bluid in him nor that; and our sins will lie upon our own heads if we ever let yon death-trap be opened again!"

Just then Sandy Braden, wearing a black suit, drove into the yard and tied up his horse.

* * *

The little house was filled to overflowing with women; the men stood bareheaded around the door. Mrs. Cavers sat beside the coffin with an arm around Libby Anne. Mrs. Steadman, with the cerise roses still nodding in her hat, said on the way home that it did seem queer to her that Mrs. Cavers and Libby Anne did not shed a tear. Mrs. Steadman did not understand that there is a limit even to tears and that Libby Anne in her short years had seen sadder sights than even this.

The Reverend John Burrell conducted the funeral.

"Shall we gather at the river?" he gave out as the first hymn. Some sang it falteringly; they had their own ideas of Bill's chances in the next world, and did not consider the "river" just the proper figure of speech to describe it.

The minister then read that old story of the poor man who went down to Jericho and fell among thieves. Mr. Burrell's long experience with men had made him a plain and pointed speaker, and given him that rare gift, convincing earnestness. Now he laid his hand on the coffin and spoke in a clear, ringing voice, that carried easily to every person in the house and to those who stood around the door.

"Here is a man who is a victim of our laws," he said, in beginning. "This is not an exceptional case. Men are being ruthlessly murdered every day from the same cause; this is not the only home that it has darkened. It is going on all over this land and all the time because we are willing, for the sake of a few dollars' revenue, to allow one man to grow rich on the failings of others. We know the consequences of this; we know that men will be killed, body and soul, that women will go broken-hearted, that little children will be cheated of their childhood. This scene to-day—the dead man in his coffin, the sad-faced wife and child, the open grave on the hillside—is a part of the Traffic. They belong to the business just as much as the sparkling decanters and the sign above the door. Every one of you, no doubt, has foretold this day. I wonder have you done anything to prevent it? Let none of us presume to judge the brother who has gone. I would rather take my chances before the judgment-seat of God with him, the victim, who has paid for his folly with his life, than with any one of you who have made this thing possible. 'Ye who are strong ought to bear the infirmity of the weak.' I do not know how it will be with this man when he comes to give an account of himself to God, but I do know that God is a loving, tender Father, who deals justly and loves mercy, and in that thought to-day we rest and hope. Let us pray."

"Impress this scene on our heart, to-day, dear Lord," he prayed; "this man cut down in his prime; this woman old with sorrow, not with years; this child, cheated of her father's love. Let us ask ourselves how long will we sit idly by, not caring. And oh, God, we pray Thee to bless the one man who, among us all, has said that as far as he is responsible this traffic shall cease; bless him abundantly, and may his troubled heart find peace. May he never forget that there is a fountain where all sin and uncleanness may be washed away. Remind our hearts this day of how He died to save us from the sins of selfishness and greed, and ever lives to cheer and guide us. Let us hear the call that comes to us to-day to do a man's part in protecting the weak, the helpless, and the young. Let the love of this woman for her husband call to our remembrance Thy unchanging love for us, and if it be in keeping with Thy divine laws, may the precious coin of her unfaltering devotion purchase for him a holding in the heavenly country. For the sake of Thy dear Son we ask it."

The funeral went slowly along the well-beaten road that skirts the sand-hills of the Assiniboine, and crawled like a long black snake through the winding valley of Oak Creek, whose banks were hanging with wild roses and columbine, while down in the shady aisles of the creek bed, under the stunted oak that gives it its name, pink and yellow lady's slippers gave out their honeyed fragrance.

"It is hard to die and leave all this behind," Thomas Perkins said; looking down the valley, where the breezes rippled the leaves. "I always think it must be hard to snuff out in June or July and have to pass out without knowin' how the crop'll turn out; but I guess now, from what I've heard, when the clock strikes quittin'time, a fellow won't be worryin' about the crops."

On the quiet hill, dotted with spruce, that looks down on the Souris, they laid Bill Cavers away. Very gently the coffin was lowered into its sandy bed as the minister read the beautiful words of the burial service and the neighbours and friends stood silent in the presence, the majestic presence of Death. Just before the sand was filled in, Ellen Cavers, tearless still, kissed the roses she held in her hand and dropped them gently on the coffin.

One by one the neighbours walked away, untied their horses, and drove slowly down the hill, until Libby Anne and her mother were left alone. Bud and Martha were waiting at the gate for them. Mrs. Cavers, looking up, noticed that one man stood with bowed head near the gate. It was Sandy Braden, his face white and full of sadness.

Mrs. Cavers walked over to where he stood and held out her hand. "Mr. Braden," she said, looking at him with a glimmer of tears in her gentle eyes.

He took her hand, so cruelly seamed and workworn; his was white and plump and well-kept. He tried to speak, but no words came.

Looking up she read his face with a woman's quick understanding. "I know," she said.

CHAPTER XXI

FROZEN WHEAT

For them 'at's here in airliest infant stages,
It's a hard world;
For them 'at gets the knocks of boyhood's ages,
It's a mean world;
For them 'at nothin's good enough they're gittin',
It's a bad world;
For them 'at learns at last what's right and fittin',
It's a good world.

—James Whitcomb Riley.

THE summer was over, and the harvest, a great, bountiful harvest, was gathered in. The industrious hum of the threshing-machine was heard from many quarters, and the roads were dotted thick with teams bringing in the grain to the elevators.

In the quiet field on the hillside, where the spruce trees, straight and stiff, stand like faithful sentinels, the grass that had grown over Bill Cavers's grave was now sere and gray; only the hardy

pansies were green still and gay with blossoms, mute emblems of the love that never faileth.

Mrs. Cavers and Libby Anne were still living on the rented farm. After Bill's death the neighbours, with true Western generosity, had agreed among themselves to harvest the crop for her. The season had been so favourable that her share of the crop would be a considerable amount.

It was a typical autumn day in middle September. The golden and purple flowers of the fall bespangled the roadside—wild sunflowers, brown-centred gaillardia, wild sage, and goldenrod. The bright blue of the cloudless sky set off the rich tints of autumn. The stubble fields still bore the golden-yellow tinge of the harvest, and although the maple leaves were fast disappearing before the lusty winds of autumn, the poplars, yellow and rust-coloured, still flickered gaily, the wild rosehaws and frost-touched milkweed still gave a dash of colour to the shrubbery on the river-bank.

There had been an early frost that fall, which had caught the late wheat, and now the grain which was brought into the elevators had to be closely graded. The temptation to "plug" the wheat was strong, and so much of it was being done that the elevator men were suspicious of every one.

Young Tom Steadman was weighing wheat in the Farmers' Elevator while the busy time was on, and although there was no outward hostility between him and Bud Perkins, still his was too small a nature to forget the thrashing that Bud had given him at the school two years ago, and, according to Tom's code of ethics, it would be a very fine way to get even if he could catch Bud selling "plugged" wheat.

The first load that Bud brought in Tom asked him if he had plugged it. Bud replied quite hotly that he had not.

"I suppose," said Tom, "you stopped all that since you joined the Church."

Bud's face flushed, but he controlled his temper and answered: "Yes, that's what stopped me, and I'm not ashamed to say so."

The manager of the elevator, who was present, looked at him in surprise. "Were you ever caught?" he asked.

"No," said Bud; "I was not."

"Well, then, you're a fool to ever admit that you did it," he said severely.

"I can't help that," Bud said. "I am not going to lie about it."

"Well, it makes people suspicious of you to know you ever did it, that's all," Mr. Johnston said.

"You are welcome to watch me. I am not asking you to take my word for it," Bud replied.

"You're a queer lad," said the elevator man.

Bud's wheat was closely examined, and found to be of uniform quality.

The wheat went up to the dollar mark and Thomas Perkins decided to rush his in to the elevator at once. He stayed at home himself and filled the bags while Bud did the marketing.

All went well for a week. Contrary to his own words about being suspicious of Bud, the elevator "boss" was, in his own mind, confident of the boy's honesty.

One day, just as Bud's second last bag was thrown in, young Steadman gave a cry of delight, and picked out a handful. Number II Northern was the grading that Bud had been getting all the week. Young Steadman showed it triumphantly to the elevator "boss" who examined it closely. *It was frozen wheat!*

Bud was gathering up his bags when the elevator man called him over.

"Look at that," he said, holding the wheat before him.

Bud looked at it incredulously. "That's not mine," he said.

Young Steadman's eyes were on him exultingly. He had got even at last, he thought.

"We'll have to see about this, Bud," the elevator man said sternly.

The other bag was emptied, and Bud saw with his own eyes that the middle of the bag was filled with frozen wheat! He turned dizzy with shame and rage. The machinery in the elevator with its deafening,

thump-thump-thump, seemed to be beating into his brain. He leaned against the wall, pale and trembling.

The same instinct which prompted Tom Steadman when he hit Libby Anne Cavers prompted him now. "I thought you said you wouldn't do such a thing since you joined the Church," he said, with an expression of shocked virtue.

Bud's cup of bitterness was overflowing, and at first he did not notice what had been said.

Tom took his silence to mean that he might with safety say more. "I guess you're not as honest as you'd like to have people think, and joinin' the Church didn't do you so much good after all."

Bud came to himself with a rush then, and young Tom Steadman went spinning across the floor with the blood spurting from his nose.

* * *

Bud was fined ten dollars for assault, and of course it became known in a few hours that the cause of the trouble was that Bud had been caught selling frozen wheat in the middle of his bags.

Through it all Bud made no word of defence. No one knew how bitter was the sting of disgrace in the boy's soul or how he suffered. When he went home that afternoon there was a stormy scene. "I told you I would not sell 'plugged' wheat," he said to his father, raging with the memory of it, "and, without letting me know, you put it in and made me out a thief and a liar."

The old man moistened his lips. "Say, Buddie," he said, "it was too bad you hit young Steadman; he's an overgrown slab of a boy, and I don't mind you lickin' him, but they'll take the 'law' on ye every time; and ten dollars was a terrible fine. Maybe they'd have let you off with five if you'd coaxed them."

"Coax!" said Bud, scornfully. "I wouldn't coax them. What do I care about the money, anyway? That's not what I'm kicking about."

"Oh, Buddie, you are a reckless young scamp to let ten dollars go in one snort, and then say you don't care."

With an angry exclamation Bud turned away.

* * *

The next time Bud went to Millford Mrs. Burrell saw him passing the house and called him in. She had heard an account of the affair from the wife of the elevator "boss," and had told it to Mr. Burrell, who promptly declared he did not believe it, whereupon Mrs. Burrell grew indignant. Did he doubt Mrs. Johnston's word?

Mr. Burrell cautioned her not to speak of it to any one, and went out at once to see Bud. Mr. Burrell had only been gone a few minutes when Bud himself came driving past the house. Mrs. Burrell told herself that Providence had put Bud in her way. Mrs. Burrell blamed Providence for many things quite unjustly. "Come in, Bud," she called from the door; "I want to see you."

Bud knew the minister's wife but slightly; he had seen her at the services in the schoolhouse. He had intended going in to see Mr. Burrell, for he felt that he must tell some one that he was not guilty, and he felt that the minister was the one whose opinion he most valued. So he went in gladly, hoping that Mr. Burrell might be there.

"Now, Bud," Mrs. Burrell began, with her severest air, "I am sorry to say what I have to say, but it's all for your own good, and it really hurts me to say it."

"Don't say it then!" burst from the boy's white lips; he was too sore to stand any more.

"I must say it, Bud," she went on, as conscientious in her cruelty as Queen Mary. "You have done very wrong, and you must repent. I could not sleep a wink last night, thinking of it, and Mr. Burrell did think so much of, you, too."

"*Did* think!" Bud inferred from the heavy emphasis that Mr. Burrell's regard was all past, and he hid his face so that she might not see how deeply she had hurt him.

"But you are young yet, and your life is all before you, and you must repent and begin all over again. 'While the lamp of life holds out to burn, the vilest sinner may return.' You must pray for strength, so you won't be tempted to be dishonest again, and you really should apologize to young Mr. Steadman. Mrs. Johnston says his face is very sore."

Bud looked up quickly and said with flashing eyes: "I'm glad of that. I wish I had smashed him again—the pup!"

Then Mrs. Burrell was shocked utterly. "My dear boy," she said, "I am afraid your heart is very hard and wicked. Mr. Burrell thought you were soundly converted, too, but you seem to be really rebellious against God, who is kinder and better than any earthly parent. This is a matter for earnest and agonizing prayer."

Bud stood up and looked at her with eyes that flamed with anger. Unfortunately Bud, like Martha, was entirely lacking in humour; otherwise his heart would have been saved many a cruel hurt. "I don't want your prayers," he said, when he could control himself.

Something in the boy's face touched Mrs. Burrell's heart with pity. "Perhaps I've been wrong," she said. "I do make mistakes sometimes. I may have made one now."

"You certainly have," he said, as he took his hat and left the house.

Mrs. Burrell watched him going down the path with his long, swinging stride, and her heart was strangely troubled. She had a conviction that she had done no good, and perhaps had done a great deal of harm. "When I try to do good, evil comes of it," she said sorrowfully, and then she went to her own room and prayed; and it was an earnest and agonizing prayer, too; though very different from the prayer she had in mind when she spoke to Bud, for the burden of it all was this, that God would in some way overrule all her mistakes for good, and not let the boy suffer because of any word of hers.

She continued to plead until her heart found peace in the thought that has comforted so many of us in our sore need, that perhaps when He sees the faulty, crooked lines we are drawing, the Great Surveyor will, in His mercy, put in for us, here and there, the correction lines.

When Bud drove home that night his thoughts were far too bitter for a boy of eighteen. A sense of injustice was poisoning the fountains of his heart, and so, when he met Mr. Burrell, he felt he could stand no more. The whole world was against him now, he thought, and he would let them see he didn't care. He would never tell any one now about the wheat. He would never give away his father; but he would leave Millford right straight, leave it for ever, so when Mr. Burrell drew in his horse to speak to him, Bud turned his head and drove rapidly away. Mr. Burrell went home very sad about it all, wondering if Bud were really guilty, but determined to stand by him just the same.

When he got home Mrs. Burrell told him about her interview with Bud. She was thoroughly repentant now, and tearfully declared that she knew now she had been very unwise.

Mr. Burrell drove back that night to see Bud, but he was too late, for Bud had gone.

Arriving at his home, Bud stabled his horses, and then went into the house. His father was filling bags in the granary, but Bud felt that he could not bear to see him. He went to his own room and hurriedly changed his clothes. He had only one thought—to get away—to get away where no one knew him. In the last few hours the whole world had changed for him—that Mr. Burrell should so easily believe him guilty had overflowed his cup of bitterness.

A red and silver scripture text, in the form of a shield, hung on his bedroom wall; Martha had given it to him, some time ago, and it had often brought him comfort and inspiration.

"He is able to deliver you," it said.

Bud read it now scornfully, and with a sudden impulse tore it down and crushed it in his hands. "There's nothing in it," the boy cried bitterly.

He went out to the pasture and whistled to his pacing colt, which came to him at once. The boy laid his head on the colt's velvet neck and patted it lovingly.

"I'll come back for you, Bunko," he said. "You're mine, anyway."

The colt rubbed his head against Bud's arm.

Across the ravine, where the fringed blue gentian looked up from the sere grass, the cows were grazing, and Bud, from habit, went for them and brought them up to the bars.

The sun was setting when Bud reached the Cavers's house, for he could not go without saying good-

bye to Libby Anne. She was driving their two cows in from a straw stack, and called gaily to him when she saw him coming.

"I've come to say good-bye, Lib," said Bud simply.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"I don't know—anywhere to get away from here." Then he told her what had happened.

"I'm glad you took a smash at Tom Steadman," she said, her big eyes flashing, when he had finished. Then suddenly she began to cry. "I don't want you to go," she sobbed. "You won't ever come back; I won't see you ever again."

"Don't say that, Libby," Bud cried in real distress—she looked so little and pale in her black dress—"I will come back some time, and I won't forget my little girl. You're my girl, you know, Lib."

"I'm your girl all right," the child said unsteadily. "But I want you to stay. I can't make up things like Pearl and Mary Watson can—I can do some pretendin' games pretty good now, but I can't pretend about you—I'll know you're gone all the time, Bud," and she caught her breath in a quivering sob.

Then Bud lifted the little girl in his arms and kissed her over and over again.

"Don't cry, Libby," he said. "I'm going away to make lots of money, and you mustn't fret. Every night I want you to say to yourself: 'I'm Bud's girl, and he won't forget me;' and whenever you get lonely or downhearted, just say that. Now Libby Anne, tell me who you are."

"I'm Bud's girl, all right," she answered gravely.

The sun had gone down in a crimson haze, and a misty tenderness seemed to brood over the world. The September evening was so full of peace and beauty with its muffled tinkle of cowbells and the soft song of the whippoorwill that came at intervals from the maple bush on Oak Creek, it was hard to believe that there were troubled hearts anywhere.

The hoarse whistle of a long freight train on the C. P. R. boomed harshly through the quiet air. "I must go, Lib," said Bud.

Libby Anne stood looking after him as he went quickly down the road. The evening twilight soon hid him from her sight, but she still looked down the winding road until it dipped down in the valley of Oak Creek.

Suddenly from the river-bank came the weird cry of a prairie wolf, and Libby Anne, turning with a shudder, ran home in the gathering dusk.

CHAPTER XXII

AUTUMN DAYS

There's a wonderful charm in the autumn days,
When Earth to her rest is returning;
When the hills are drowned in a purple haze,
When the wild grape sweetens, and all in a blaze
Of crimson the maples are turning.

—*Helena Coleman.*

WHEN autumn came to the Souris valley and touched the trees with crimson and gold, it found that some progress had been made on the farm that was getting its second chance.

Down on the river flat the hay had been cut and gathered into two stacks, which stood beside the stable, and the two Watson cows now fattened on the rich growth of aftergrass.

The grain, which had been an abundant crop, had been threshed and drawn at once to the elevator, for there was no place to store it; but as the price was one dollar a bushel for the best, and seventy

cents for the poorest, John Watson had no cause for complaint. The stable, which he had built of poles, was now roofed by a straw stack and was intended for a winter shelter for the two cows.

In the early spring Pearl had planted a bed of Polly's poppies, and all summer long they had flamed red and brilliant against the poplar grove behind the house, which sheltered them from the winds. The weeds around the buildings were all cut down and the scrub cleaned out for a garden the next year. In the holidays the boys had fenced this with peeled poplar poles.

A corner of the wheat-field before the house had already been used for a garden, and had been a great source of delight and also of profit to the family. The boys had complained a little at first about having to pull mustard and shepherd's purse and french-weed, with which the farm was infested, but Pearl presented weed-pulling in a new light. She organized two foraging parties, who made raids upon the fields and brought back the spoils of war. Patsey was Roderick Dhu, who had a henchman bold, called Daniel the Redhanded. Bugsey was Alan-bane, and Tommy was to have been his henchman, Thomas Trueman, but Tommy had strong ideas about equal rights and would be Alan-bane's twin brother, Tommy-bane, or nothing. They were all dark-visaged, eagle-eyed Highlanders, who made raids upon the Lowlands to avenge ancient wrongs.

Pearl had learned about the weeds at school, and soon had her whole family, including Aunt Kate, organized into a weed-fighting brigade. Even the golden dandelion was ruthlessly cut down, and Mary, who was strong on experiments, found out that its roots were good to eat. After that any dandelion that showed its yellow face was simply inviting destruction.

In school Pearl was having a very happy time, and she and her teacher were mutually helpful to each other. Pearl's compositions were Mr. Donald's delight. There was one that he carried with him and often found inspiration in to meet the burdens of his own monotonous life. The subject was "True Greatness," and was suggested by a lesson of that name in the reader. Needless to say, Pearl's manner of treating the subject was different from the reading lesson.

"A person can never get true greatness," she wrote, "by trying for it. You get it when you're not looking for it. It's nice to have good clothes—it makes it a lot easier to act decent—but it is a sign of true greatness to act when you haven't got them just as good as if you had. One time when Ma was a little girl they had a bird at their house, called Bill, that broke his leg. They thought they would have to kill him, but next morning they found him propped up sort of sideways on his good leg, singing! That was true greatness. One time there was a woman that had done a big washing and hung it on the line. The line broke and let it all down in the mud, but she didn't say a word, only did it over again; and this time she spread it on the grass, where it couldn't fall. But that night a dog with dirty feet ran over it. When she saw what was done, she sat down and didn't cry a bit. All she said was: 'Ain't it queer that he didn't miss nothing!' That was true greatness, but it's only people who have done washings that know it! Once there was a woman that lived near a pig-pen, and when the wind blew that way it was very smelly, indeed; and at first when she went there to live she couldn't smell anything but straight pig, but when she lived there a while she learned to smell the clover blossoms through it. That was true greatness."

* * *

Camilla's wedding had been a great event in Pearl's life. It had taken place early one Wednesday morning in the church at Millford. It was a pretty wedding, the paper said. The altar of the church was banked high with wild roses, whose sweet perfume made Pearl think of school-books—she always kept her books full of rose petals, and to her it was a real geography smell.

Mr. Burrell and Mr. Grantley both took part in the ceremony, to show there was no hard feelings, Pearl thought, for Camilla was a Presbyterian and Jim was a Methodist.

Mr. Francis brought Camilla in, and Pearl followed. Jim and the doctor stood at the altar, while down from the choir-gallery, which seemed to be overflowing with roses, came the strains of the wedding-march. Pearl had never heard it before, but it seemed to her now as if she had always known it, for in it throbbed the very same joy that was beating in her own heart. It was all over in a minute and they were coming down the aisle, her hand on the doctor's arm. The carriage was waiting for them at the door, and they drove back to the house, everybody talking and laughing and throwing rice.

When the wedding breakfast was over, and Jim and Camilla had gone on the train, Pearl and the doctor and Mr. and Mrs. Francis drove back to the house. Everything was just as they had left it—the flowers were still on the table, and the big clock in the hall was still going, though it seemed a long, long time that they had been away. Mrs. Francis was quite worn out by the efforts of the morning, and said she must go and rest. Would Pearl box up the wedding cake in the little white boxes? "It is a severe strain to lose Camilla," she said, "even for two weeks. Two weeks is fourteen days, and that means

forty-two meals without her."

"We'll attend to the wedding-cake, and put away the presents and run things generally," the doctor said.

In the dining-room Dr. Clay cut up wedding-cake and packed it in boxes for mailing, while Pearl quickly cleared away the dishes. She was quite a pretty little girl in her white silk dress. She was tall and slight, and lithe and graceful in her movements, with pansy-brown eyes and a smooth, olive skin that neither sun nor wind could roughen. But the beauty of her face was in the serene expression which comes only to people whose hearts are brave and sweet and honest.

The doctor watched her with a great admiration in his face. "Pearl, how old are you?" he asked suddenly.

"I am fifteen," she answered.

He took one of her shapely little sunburnt hands and held it gently in his; then with his other hand he took a pearl ring from his pocket and was about to slip it on her finger, but, suddenly changing his mind, he laid it in her hand instead.

Pearl gave an exclamation of delight.

"It's yours, Pearl," he said. "Put it on."

She put it on her finger, her eyes sparkling with pleasure.

"Oh, Doctor Clay!" she said, breathlessly.

He, smiling, watched her as she held her hand up to look at it. "It is just a remembrance, dear," he said, "of some one who thinks that there is no little girl in the world like you."

When Pearl went home, she gave an account of the wedding to her family.

"Gettin' married ain't so much when you get right up to it," she said. "They had a terrible busy time getting ready for it that morning. Mrs. Francis was a long way more excited than Camilla, and broke quite a few dishes, but they were all her own; she didn't get into any of Camilla's. She set fire to her hair when she was curling it, but after that she did fine. Camilla looked after everything and wrote down in a notebook all the things Mrs. Francis is to cook while she is away. Camilla's a little bit afraid that she'll burn the house down, but the neighbours are all going to try to see after things for her. Camilla had her hair done the loveliest I ever saw, all wavy, but not frizzy. We went to the church and got that done before we came back to the house to eat. Camilla had a big bunch of roses that Jim gave her, tied with white satin ribbon, and mind you, they didn't cut off the ends, that's how free they were with the ribbon. I held them along with mine while Jim put on the ring—that's mostly an account of the what I was for—and Jim kissed her right before every one, and so did Mrs. Francis, and so did I, and that was all until we came to the house, and then Mrs. Francis kissed her again and did me, too, when she got started, and kissed Jim, too, and he kissed me, and we had a great time. The meal was called a breakfast, but say, kids, there was *eating* for you! Maybe you think a breakfast is mostly porridge and toast and the like o' that. Well, now, there wasn't a sign of porridge—oyster soup came first."

"Wha's 'at?" Danny asked. The wedding details had reached the place where Danny's interest began.

"They're the colour of gray stones, only they're soft, and if you shut your eyes they're fine, and while you're wondering whether or not you'll swallow them, they slip down and you begin to look for another; and then there was little dabs of fried fish laid on a lettuce leaf, with a sprig of parsley beside it, and a round of lemon. They took the lemon in their fingers and squeezed it over their fish. It looked a little mussy to me, but I guess it's manners all right; and then there was olives on a little glass dish, and every one took one—they taste like willow bark in spring. Mrs. Burrell said she just loved them, and et a lot. I think that's carryin' your manners too far. I et the one I took and thought I did well. Mr. Burrell asked the blessin', and gave Jim and Camilla lots of good advice. He said to be sure and get mad one at a time. And then we had lots of other stuff to eat, and we went to the train, and Camilla told me to watch that Mrs. Francis didn't let the tea-kettle boil dry while I was there, and I guess that was all."

But of the incident of the pearl ring, strangely enough, she said not a word.

When Thomas Perkins found out that Bud had really gone he was plunged in deepest grief. He came over to where John Watson was ploughing stubble, the very picture of self-pity. "Pretty hard on a man, John, pretty hard," he began as soon as he came within hearing distance, "to lose his only boy and have

to hire help; after losin' the twins, too, the year of the frozen wheat—fine little fellows they was, too, supple as a string of suckers. And now, by golly, Bud's gone, John, with the good new eighteen-dollar suit—that's what I paid for it in cold cash in Brandon last winter—and I'll have to keep my hired man on if he don't come back, and this beggar I have, he can eat like a flock of grasshoppers—he just chunks the butter on his bread and makes syrup of his tea. Oh, yes, John, it's rough on a man when he begins to go down the other side of the hill and the bastin' threads are showin' in his hair. It's pretty hard to have to do with hired help. I understand now better'n ever why Billy Winter was cryin' so hard when his third wife died. Billy was whoopin' it up somethin' awful when Mr. Grantley went out to bury the woman, and Mr. Grantley said somethin' to comfort Billy about her bein' in a better place—that was a dead sure bet, anyway—but Billy went right on bawlin'—he didn't seem to take no notice of this better place idea—and after a while he says right out, says he: 'She could do more work than three hired girls, and she was the savin'est one I've had yet.'"

"Bud'll come back," said John Watson, soothingly. "The poor lad is feeling hurt about it—he don't like to have people thinkin' hard of him."

"Wasn't ten dollars a ter'ble fine, John, only eighteen?" Mr. Perkins said.

"It isn't the money I'm thinkin' of, it's feelin's; poor Bud, and him as honest a lad as ever drew breath." John Watson had a shrewd suspicion of who had "plugged" the grain.

"Well, I don't see why he need feel so bad," the other man said. "Nobody minds stealin' from the railways or the elevator men. They'd steal the coppers off a dead man's eyes—eh, what? But where Bud ever got such notions of honesty, I don't know—search me. It's a fine thing to be honest, but it's well to have it under control. Now, there's some kind of sharp tricks I don't hold with. They say that Mrs. George Steadman sold a seven-pound stone in the middle of a crock of butter to Mason here some years ago. She thought he'd ship it away to Winnipeg and nobody'd ever know; but as sure as you're born, when she got home she found it in the middle of her box of tea. He paid her twenty-five cents a pound for it, but, by golly! she paid him fifty cents a pound for it back. Now, I don't hold with that—it was too risky a deal for me. This Mason's a sharp one, I tell you—you'll get up early if you ever get ahead of him. In the airly days, when we all had to go on tick for everything we got at his store—they do say that every time one of us farmers went to town that Mason, as soon as he saw us, would say to his bookkeeper: 'Tom Perkins is in town; put him down for a dollar's worth of sugar and a quarter of chewin' tobacco.'"

Pearl came out with a pail to dig some potatoes in the garden.

"Well, my pretty dear," Mr. Perkins said amiably, "how are you feeling this evening?"

"I am real well, thank you," Pearl said, "and I hope you are, too."

"Well now, my dear, I am not," he said. "You know, of course, that Buddie's gone."

"Yes, I know," said Pearl, "but I know Bud didn't do it. Bud is a good boy, and too honest to do any thing like that. Bud wouldn't plug grain. What does Bud care for a few cents more on every bushel if he has to lie to get it?"

"Look at that now, John!" Mr. Perkins cried, nudging Mr. Watson gaily. "Isn't that a woman for you all over, young and all as she is? They never think how the money comes, the lovely critturs."

"Money isn't everything, Mr. Perkins," said Pearl earnestly.

"Well, my little dear, most of us think it is pretty nearly everything."

"God doesn't care very much about money," she answered. "Look at the sort of people he gives it to."

Mr. Perkins looked at her in surprise. "Upon my word, that's true," he said. "Say, Pearlie, you'll be taking away the preachers' job from them when you get a little bigger, if they're not careful."

Pearl laughed good-humouredly and went on with her potato-digging.

Thomas Perkins went home soon after, and even to him the quiet glory of the autumn evening came with a sense of beauty and of God's overshadowing care. "I kinda wish now," he said to himself, "that I had gone and cleared up the boy's name at first. I can hardly do it now. They would think I hadn't had the nerve to do it at first. Say, what that kid said is pretty near right. Money ain't everything." He was looking at the bars of amethyst cloud that streaked the west, and at the lemon-coloured sky below them. Prairie chickens whirred through the air on their way to a straw pile near by. From the Souris valley behind him came the strident whistle of the evening train as it thundered over the long wooden

bridge. A sudden love of his home and family came to Thomas Perkins as he looked over at his comfortable buildings and his broad fields. "If Bud were only over there," he thought, "how good it would be! Poor Bud, wandering to-night without a home, and through no fault of his own."

Just for the moment Mr. Perkins was honestly repentant; then the other side of his nature came back. "I do hope that boy will think to grease' his boots—they'll go like paper if he doesn't," he said.

CHAPTER XXIII

PEARL'S PHILOSOPHY

For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of man's mind,
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.

—*F. W. Faber.*

IT WAS a dreamy day in late October, when not only the Tiger Hills were veiled in mist, but every object on the prairie had a gentle draping of amber gray. "Prairie fires ragin' in the hills," said Aunt Kate, who always sought for an explanation of natural phenomena, but Pearlie Watson knew better. She knew that it was a dream curtain that God puts around the world in the autumn, when the grass is faded and the trees bare and leafless. She explained it to the other children coming home that night.

"You see, kids," said Pearl, "in the summer everything is so well fixed up that there's no need to hide anything, and so the sun just shines and shines, and the days are long and bright to let every one have a good look at things. There's the orange-lilies pepperin' the grass, and there's cowslips and ladies' slippers, if it's yellows you like, and there's wild roses and morning-glories, and pink ladies' slippers, if you know whereto look for them, and the hills are all so green and velvety, and there's the little ponds full of water with the wind crinklin' the top of it, and strings of wild ducks sailin' kind o' sideways across them. Oh, it's a great sight, and it would be a pity to put a mist on it. But now the colour has faded and the ponds have dried up, and the grass is dead and full of dust, and it's far nicer to have this gray veil drawn in close around. It helps you to make a pretty picture for yourself. Now, look over there, near Tom Simpson's old house—that ain't a train track at all, but a deep blue sea, where boats sail day and night, and 'Spanish sailors with bearded lips' walk up and down clankin' their swords and whisperin' about hidden treasures."

Pearl's voice had fallen almost to a whisper.

"To-night when the moon rises the tallest one, the one with the deep scar on his cheek, will lead the way to the cave in the rock; the door flies open if you say the password 'Magooslem,' and there the golden guineas lie strewn upon the stone floors. And look back there at Lib Cavers's house—do you see how dreamy like and sleepin' it is, not takin' a bit of notice of anything? It don't look like a house where there's ever dirty dishes or anybody feelin' sad or lonely, and I don't believe that's Cavers's house at all," went on Pearl, making a bold appeal to the imagination of her audience—"that's just a dream house, where there is a big family of children, and they're goin' to have pancakes for supper—pancakes and maple syrup!"

At this association of ideas Bugsey made a quick move for the dinner-pail, in which he had a distinct interest. Bugsey was what his parents called a "quare lad" (his brothers often called him worse than that), and one way he had of showing his "quareness" was that he did not even eat like other people. On this particular day the Watson children had for dinner, among other plainer things, a piece of wild cranberry pie, with the pits left in, for each child. Patsy's piece had gone at the first recess; Danny's did not get past the fireguard around the school; Tammy's disappeared before he had gone a hundred yards from the house (Tommy was carrying the dinner-pail); but Bugsey, the "quare lad," did not eat his in school at all, but left it to eat on the way home.

Now cranberry pie with the pits in is a perishable article, and should not be left unguarded in this present evil world, where human nature has its frailties. When Bugsey looked into the pail, he raised a wail of bereavement, and at the same moment Tommy set out for home at high speed accelerated no doubt by the proddings of conscience. Bugsey followed, breathing out slaughter, and even made the

murderous threat of "takin' it out of his hide," which no doubt was only intended figuratively.

"Come back here, Bugsey Watson!" cried Pearl authoritatively. "What do yez mane by it? S'posin' he did ate yer pie? It ain't as bad as if he knocked an eye out of yer. You shouldn't have left it in the pail to tempt him anyway. If you'd et it when you should ye'd had it and, anyway, don't be ye wasting yer temper fightin' for things like pie, that's here to-day and away to-morrow. It's a long way worse for him that has the mean feelin' than it is for you, so it is." In her excitement Pearl went back to her Irish brogue. Tommy by this time was a long way down the road, still making his small legs fly, thinking that the avenging Bugsey was in pursuit.

So intent were the children on the pie dispute that they did not hear the approach of a buggy behind them, until Sandy Braden with his pacing horse drove by. When he saw Pearl he reined in with a sudden impulse.

"Will you come and ride with me? I'll drive you home," he said, addressing her. "Bring that little chap with you," he added, noticing the shortness of Danny's fat legs.

Pearl assented to this, and she and Danny climbed into the rubber-tired buggy.

They drove for a short distance in silence, and then, pulling his pacer to a walk, Mr. Braden said: "I have always wanted to tell you, Pearl, that I did not break my word that day. I left word with the bartender not to give Bill Cavers any liquor, but he did give it to him, and I have been sorry ever since about it, and I wanted you to know."

"I am glad you told me," Pearl answered quickly, "for I've often been sorry for you, thinkin' what sad thoughts you must be havin'."

"My thoughts are sad enough," he said gloomily, "for it was my whiskey that killed him, even if I didn't hand it out to him myself."

Pearl did not contradict him.

"Isn't it queer how things happen?" she said at last thoughtfully. "God does His level best for everybody! He tries to take them easy at first, to see if they'll take telling, and if they do, all right; but if they won't take telling, He has to jolt them good and plenty. But He always knows what He's doin'."

"I'm afraid I have not such unbounded faith in the Ruler of the Universe as you have," he said at last "Bill Cavers didn't get exactly a fair deal."

"Oh, don't worry about Bill Cavers now," said Pearl quickly. "Bill's still in God's hands, and God has a better chance at him now than He ever had. God never intended Bill to be a drunkard,—or you to be handing liquor out to people; you can bank on that. And he never intended Mrs. Cavers to be all sad and discouraged. God would do good things for people if they would only let Him, but He has to have a free hand on them. When you see people goin' wrong or cuttin' up dog, you may be sure that God didn't put it down that way in the writin's. Some one has jiggled His elbow, that's all. And it's great how He makes it up to people, too. Now, you'd be surprised to see how cheerful Mrs. Cavers is. When I went over after our threshin' to take her the money—"

"What money?" he interrupted.

Pearl hesitated. "Well, you know we took their farm when they left it, and there was some cleared on it, and the house is better than none, and so we gave her a little to help her and Libby Anne to get ready to go back to her folks down East."

"How much did you give her?" he asked.

"Two hundred dollars. She didn't want to take it, but really was glad of it, and Pa and Ma and all of us have been feeling better ever since. But I was goin' to tell you how cheerful she is, and Libby Anne is happier than she used to be. Poor little Lib, she's so thin and pale, she's never had a good time like other children."

Sandy Braden winced at her words, for an illuminated conscience showed him what had cheated Libby Anne out of her childhood.

"Poor little kid!" he said.

"I knew," said Pearl, after a pause, "that day that Jimmy and I went in with the onions that you didn't really know what a mean business you were in, or you wouldn't do it. You did not look to me like a man that would hit a woman."

"That's the part of it I can't forget," he said bitterly. "I can't forget the look of that thin little wisp of a woman, and Lord! how she glared at me! She could have killed me that day. I don't go much on religion, Pearl. I don't see much in religion, but I certainly would not hit a woman if I knew it."

"Where did you learn that?" Pearl asked quickly. "You wouldn't know that if it wasn't for religion. Mr. Burrell was telling us last Sunday that there's no religion teaches that only ours. You say you don't go much on religion, and still it's religion that has put any good in you that there is, and don't you forget it."

"That's not saying much for it, either," he said gloomily.

"Well, now, I think it is,"—said Pearl. "In lots of countries you'd pass for an awful good man. It's on'y when you stood up beside Christ, who was so good and kind and straight, that you can see you're not what you ought to be. If it wasn't for the Bible and Christ we wouldn't know how good a man should be."

"I haven't read the Bible for a goad many years," he said slowly. "I don't believe I ever read much of it."

Pearl looked straight into his face, and said without a minute's hesitation: "Well, I'll bet you a dollar some one read it for you and passed it on to you."

Sandy Braden looked straight ahead of him, down the deeply tinted prairie road, at the hazy outlines of the sand-hills, with their scattered spruce trees, blurred now into indistinctness—that is, his eyes were turned toward them, but what he really saw in one of those sudden flashes of memory which makes us think that nothing is ever entirely forgotten, was a cheerful old-fashioned room, with a rag-carpet on the floor and pictures in round frames on the wall. The sun came in through the eastern windows, and the whole place felt like Sunday. He saw his mother sitting in a rocking-chair, with a big Bible on her knee, and by her side was a little boy whom he knew to be himself. He saw again on her finger the thin silver ring, worn almost to a thread, and felt the clasp of her hand on his as she guided his finger over the words she was teaching him; and back through the long years they came to him: "Love one another as I have loved you." He remembered, too, and smelled again the sweet-mary leaves that were always kept in his mother's Bible, and saw again the cards with big coloured birds on them that he had got at Sunday-school for regular attendance, and which were always kept between its pages; and while he mused on these things with sudden tenderness, there came back again the same numb feeling of sorrow that he had had when he came home, a heartbroken boy, from his mother's funeral that day so many years ago, and buried his face in the sweet-mary leaves in the old Bible, and blotted its pages with his tears; for it seemed more like her than anything else in the house. He remembered that the undertaker's black mat with its ghastly white border was still in the front window, where the coffin had rested, and that the room smelled of camphor.

Pearl saw that memory was busy with him, and said not a word.

At last he spoke. "You're right, Pearl," he said. "Some one did read it and pass it on to me, and it would have been better for me if I'd stayed closer to what she taught me."

"Ain't it queer how things turn out?" Pearl exclaimed, after a long pause. "Now, I've often wondered why Christ had to die—it seemed a terrible thing to happen to Him, and Him that lovin' and kind—do you mind how gentle and forgivin' He was?"

Sandy Braden nodded.

"Well, Mr. Donald and I have been talkin' about it quite a bit, and at first we thought it shouldn't have happened, but now it looks as if God had to strike hard to make people listen, and to show them what a terrible thing sin is. Death ain't nothin' to be afraid of, nor sufferin' either. Sin is the only thing to be real scared of. It wasn't the rusty nails through His hands that made the dear Lord cry out in agony—it was the hard hearts of them that done it. Bill Cavers's death has done good already, for it has closed your bar, and no one knows how many men and boys that may save; and you're a different man now, thinking different thoughts, ain't you?"

"I'm a mighty unhappy man," he said sadly. "I'm different that way, that's a sure thing."

Pearl looked at him closely, as if she would see the inner working of his mind.

"Mr. Braden, I know just what you're like," she said. "Did you ever see a man 'trying to stand still on a bicycle? That's no harder than what you're tryin' to do. You've stopped doin' wrong, but you haven't gone on, and you're in great shape to take a bad fall. If you'd just get busy helpin' people you'd soon get over bein' sad and down-hearted. You're feelin' bad over Bill Cavers's death. Why don't you make Bill's

death count for something good? You're a smart man, and everybody likes you. If you was to teach a Bible class every one would come to hear you."

"I'll bet they would," he said, shrugging his shoulders and laughing almost bitterly.

"Well, then," said Pearl, "don't let the chances all go by you. Do you know, I often look at trees and feel sorry for them?"

"Why?" he asked curiously.

"Because they can't do a thing to help each other; and I often wonder if they're the people who wouldn't lift a finger to help any one when they were livin', and so they were turned into trees when they died, and now they see grubs and worms crawlin' over their own folks, maybe, and they can't lift a leaf to help them. Mr. Donald read us a story in school about a man who was awful mean while he lived and wouldn't help anybody, and when he died he had to wander up and down the world and see people starvin' and all sorts of sad sights, but he couldn't do a single thing for them, though he wanted to bad enough, because he had forged a chain that bound him hand and foot while he was livin', all unbeknownst to himself. Did you ever read that little book, Mr. Braden?"

"I did," he said. "I read that story, but I had almost forgotten it. I haven't thought of it for years."

"It's a good story," said Pearl meaningly.

"I guess it is," he answered, smiling.

When they reached the Watson home, Mrs. Watson and Aunt Kate came out and thanked Mr. Braden profusely for his kindness in "givin' the childer a lift." Danny, who had been bored by the serious nature of the conversation, had gone to sleep, and was carried snoring into the house.

Mr. Braden admired the display of poppies and asters, which still made a brave show of colour against the almost leafless trees of the bluff, and when Pearl ran over to pick him a bouquet of asters, was it by accident—or does anything ever happen by accident—that she put in some leaves of sweet-mary?

CHAPTER XXIV

TRUE GREATNESS

A shipwrecked sailor, waiting for a sail;
No sail from day to day, but every day
The sunrise broken into scarlet shafts
—A blaze upon the waters to the east,
A blaze upon the waters to the west,
—but no sail.

—From *Enoch Arden*.

ALMOST every person in the neighbourhood was interested in Arthur Wemyss's new home which he had built on the bank of Plover Creek, a small stream that dawdled aimlessly across the prairie from Lang's Lake to the Souris River. Plover Creek followed the line of least resistance all the way along, not seeming to care how often it changed its direction, but zigzagging and even turning around and doubling on itself sometimes. Its little dimpled banks, treeless save for clumps of silver willow, gave a pleasing variety to the prairie scenery.

It was on one of the highest of these banks that Arthur had built his house, and it was a pleasant outlook for any one who loves the long view that the prairie gives, where only the horizon obstructs the vision.

Behind the house, which faced the setting sun, was an old "buffalo run," a narrow path, grass-grown now, but beaten deep into the earth by the hoofs of innumerable buffalo that long ago came down to the little stream to drink. It had been a favourite killing-place, too, for the Indians, as the numerous

buffalo bones, whitened by the sun and frost of many seasons, plainly showed.

Arthur had made a fantastic "rockery" of skulls and shanks and ribs, and filled it in with earth, enough to furnish growth for trailing nasturtiums, whose bright red and yellow blossoms were strangely at variance with their sombre setting.

Arthur had won for himself many friends among the people of the neighbourhood by his manly, upright ways and by his courteous manner, and every one in the neighbourhood, particularly the women, were interested in the coming of Thursa. Mrs. Motherwell, Mrs. Slater, and Mrs. Watson had each promised to set a hen on thirteen eggs—which number is supposed to lose its unluckiness when applied to eggs—to give Thursa a start in poultry. Arthur thanked them warmly, but just for a minute he found himself wondering how Thursa would look feeding chickens. He knew that she was adorable at tennis or golf, and although attending to fowl is not really more strenuous than these, still it is different. But everything looks rosy at twenty-five, and Arthur was supremely happy dreaming of the coming of Thursa.

His father and mother had sent him a phonograph for his Christmas present the previous year, and it had been an unending source of comfort and pleasure to him as well as to his neighbours and friends. There was one record that Arthur put on only when he was alone, for it was Thursa's own voice singing to him from across the sea—the song of all others he loved to hear, for every note, every word of it, throbbed with tenderness and love:

"The hours I spent with thee, dear heart,
Are as a string of pearls to me;
I count them over, every one apart,
My rosary, my rosary."

Often when his day's work was over and he sat in his little house, as the velvet-footed dusk came creeping down the Plover Creek, Thursa's bird-like voice, so clear and precious and full of dearest memories, would fill the little room with heavenly sweetness and carry him back again to the dear days at home, when they wandered hand in hand beside the English hedges "white with laughing may."

There was only one person in the community with whom Arthur felt really at home and to whom he could speak freely, and that was Martha Perkins, for although Martha did not talk much she was a pleasant listener, and Arthur always came away rested and cheered. "She is a jolly good sort, Martha is," he often told himself, "a real comfortable sort of person." In return for Martha's kindness to him Arthur brought her books and magazines when he found that Martha now spent most of her time reading instead of working at the never-ending needlework.

All through the harvest Arthur had had working for him a stolid-faced son of toil, whose morose face began to "get on his nerves," and it was partly to get away from this depressing influence that Arthur went much oftener to see Martha than he had up to this time. His man was "no company and spoiled his solitude," he said. When the harvest was over and his farm hand had gone it seemed quite natural for him to keep up his visits regularly, and since Bud had gone the family were very glad of his cheery presence.

One Friday night Arthur did not come for his bread as was his custom, and when Martha took it over herself the next morning she found him suffering from a bad attack of la grippe. Then followed for Martha five sweet days of never-to-be-forgotten happiness, when Arthur, fevered and restless, would exclaim with joy when she came in. Martha was a born nurse, quiet, steady, and cheerful, and no matter how Arthur's head was aching when she came in, he always felt better just to have her near, and the touch of her hand, work-hardened though it was, on his forehead, always had the effect of soothing him.

She went every night and morning to Arthur's house, bringing with her enough tempting eatables to feed two healthy men; for Martha was strongly imbued with the idea that to eat well was a sure road to recovery. In Arthur's case her faith was justified, for on the morning of the sixth day she found him so much better that she realized the happy days were over. Arthur no longer needed her.

"My word, Martha," he said, "you have been a welcome sight to me this week. You are like the good fairy of the tales. I have been noticing how you have improved the house. Thursa will thank you when she comes: I am sure you and Thursa will be the greatest pals ever. I was just thinking, Martha, what a comfortable sort of person you are anyway. You do know how to make people feel easy in their minds. It is wonderful. I never saw any one like you in that way."

Any person looking at Martha then would not have called her a plain girl, so radiant did her face become at these words of praise.

"It's my only gift," she said with her slow smile. "I cannot sing or talk or look nice. I can only bake and scrub and sew and keep things tidy."

"Well, that is a gift, I tell you, a real good one. People who talk sometimes talk too much, and you can't live on singing, you know, though it is one of the greatest gifts." He was thinking of Thursa's chirrupy little treble, which to him was the sweetest music on earth. "Thursa will brighten us all when she comes. Just to hear her laugh, Martha, would chase away the blues any day. She has the most adorable little ways. You do not mind hearing me rave about her, do you, Martha? You know, you are the only person I can talk to about her, and when you see her you won't blame me at all."

Martha was putting on her wraps to go home, and fortunately he could not see her face.

"That's all right, Arthur," she said bravely. "I like to hear you talk—about her," which came as near to being a deliberate falsehood as Martha had ever told in all her honest life.

* * *

The arrangements for Arthur's wedding were all made. Thursa was coming the first week in December and would stay with Martha until Christmas Day. Arthur's house was not quite ready yet. Martha, glad to feel that she was of any service to him, made great preparations for the coming of Thursa.

Her own bedroom, which was to be used by Thursa, was re-papered and painted; the new rag carpet that Martha had put away in her cupboard "in case" was put on the floor; new lace curtains, bought out of the butter money, replaced the frilled art muslin that had been at the windows. Martha's best pin-cushion, her best stand-covers and pillow-shams were all brought out for Thursa's use. It seemed very fitting to her that her treasures should be used by Arthur's bride. She thought of it all sadly, but without bitterness.

One afternoon Aunt Kate and Pearl came over, and Martha invited them to come upstairs and see the room she had made ready for Thursa.

"Upon my word, Martha," Aunt Kate said, as she looked admiringly at Martha's tastefully arranged room, "you're fixin' up as if you were goin' to be married yerself, and I just hope this English girl of his is all he thinks she is, and not a useless tool like some of them are. I mind well one Englishwoman who lived neighbour to me down in Ontario, nice woman, too, but sakes alive, she was a dirty housekeeper. She was a cousin to the Duke of something, but she'd make a puddin' in the wash-basin just the same. I'd hate awful to see Arthur get a girl like that. I suppose you haven't heard him say whether she's been brought up thrifty. It means a lot, let me tell you. I've seen women that could throw out as much at the back door as their man could bring in the front. You don't know, do you, whether or not she's savin'?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," Martha said. "I don't think she has much experience, but she can learn. It's no trick to do housework."

"Well, now, Martha, you're wrong, for it is a trick," Aunt Kate said positively. "It's the finest thing a woman can know. A man will get tired of a pretty face, but he ain't likely to tire of good vittles and well-mended clothes; and if he came home hungry and found her playin' the piano and no dinner ready, it would make him swear, if anything would."

Aunt Kate went down-stairs then to help Mrs. Perkins do some sewing, and Pearl and Martha were left alone.

"It's awful good of you, Martha, to help Arthur's wedding along so well," Pearl said, "but I know you are glad to do it. People ought to be kind to any one that's gettin' married, I do think. They need flowers and kind things said about them far more than people do when they are gettin' buried. Pshaw! When a person's dead they're clean out of the bush and not needin' help from any one; but getting married is awful. Ma saved the lilacs she had when she was married, and put them in a gem-jar, and I've often heard her tell what a comfort they were to her when she came home all tired and couldn't get the stains out of some one's tablecloth. She had a piece of the cake, too, sealed up in a vaseline jar, and the very maddest I ever saw Ma was when she found Danny eatin' it—he et her clove apple the same day, and we couldn't do a thing to him because it was his birthday."

Martha looked at Pearl wonderingly. There were no dried lilacs or sealed vaseline jars in her family, but she understood vaguely what it might mean.

"You are going to be the bridesmaid, Pearl," Martha said. "Arthur told me so!"

"Oh, goody!" Pearl cried, but a sudden thought occurring to her, she said, "You should be it yourself,

Martha. Why don't you?"

"I'll tell you why, Pearl," said Martha. "I would look awful beside Thursa. She is fair and fluffy-haired, and she'd make me look worse than usual. Arthur asked me, but I told him I couldn't very well. Anyway, there is the gravy to make and the pudding-sauce, and I'll have to be right there over it. You'll do it, won't you, Pearl?"

"Oh, yes, I'll do it," said Pearl. "Sure thing. Glad of the chance to wear the white dress Camilla made me and my bracelet—and—and all!" She was about to ask Martha, question, but changed her mind suddenly and went on: "I just hope there'll be a lovely blue sky and snow on the ground and a real glitterin' sunshine, like what Christmas ought to be, with everything so lovely that it just hurts, and so much Christmas in it that you're dead sure the air is full of angels. And, Martha, we'll put blue ribbons on the table to make them think of the blue sky that was over them on their weddin' day. I tell you, Martha, it's a great thing to have blue skies to think of, even if you haven't got blue skies over you. It heartens a person up wonderful to know that up through the clouds the sky is blue anyway. It's just like havin' on a clean shirt, Martha, even if your outside clothes are not very clean. So, if there's a blue sky we'll try to pin down some of it, so they can use it when they need it. When is she comin', Martha?"

"Next week, she is in Brandon now. She is staying there a few days to see the shops, Arthur said."

Pearl wrinkled her forehead. "Isn't it a wonder she don't come hustlin'? You'd think she'd be far more anxious to see him than any store. She's seen loads of stores, and she hasn't seen him for two years. Say, Martha, there was an English painter in Millford when we lived there who sent home for his girl, and comin' over on the boat didn't she meet another fellow she liked better and she up and married him. Wouldn't it be awful if Thursa was to do that after Arthur gettin' all ready, too?"

Martha did not answer, and Pearl, looking up, was startled at the expression of her face—it was like the face of a shipwrecked sailor who has been looking, looking, looking over a desolate waste of water, dreaming of hope, but never daring to hope, when suddenly, before his weary eyes, there flashes a sail! Of course, it may not be a sail at all, and even if it is a boat it may never, never see the shipwrecked sailor, but still a great hope leaps into his face!

Pearl saw it all in Martha's face in that moment; she remembered Martha's saying that often when she sat at her embroidery she imagined foolish things that could never come true.

"Isn't she a brick?" Pearl thought to herself. "Gettin' ready for this weddin' just as cheerful as if her heart wasn't breakin'!" Then Pearl, in her quick imagination, made a new application: "Just like if it was me gettin' ready for Miss Morrison to marry—" She stopped and thought, with a stern look on her face. Then she said to herself grimly: "I believe this is the greatest piece of True Greatness I've seen yet, and if it is, then I haven't got a smell of it."

"No word from Bud, is there, Martha?" asked after a while.

"Nothing, only the card from Calgary saying he was working on a horse-ranch west of there. It's lonely without him, I tell you, Pearl. I wonder will he ever come back?" said Martha wistfully.

"Sure he will!" cried Pearl. "Bud'll come back, and it'll all be cleared up, and don't you forget it."

"I don't know how, Pearl."

"Some way we don't expect, maybe, but it'll all come right. Everything will in time," Pearl answered cheerfully.

At tea-time the conversation naturally turned to weddings. Mr. Perkins had been in a doleful frame of mind until the visitors came, but under the stimulus of fresh listeners he brightened up wonderfully. Here were two people who had not heard any of his stories. He was full of reminiscences of strange weddings that he had been at or had heard of. One in particular, which came back to him now with great vividness, was when his friend, Ned Mullins, married the Spain girl down "the Ot'way."

"Ned had intended to marry the youngest one," he said, "but when we got there, by jinks, there was Jane, the oldest one, all decked out with ribbons and smilin' like a basket of chips, while the pretty one, Rosie, that Ned wanted, was sittin' in a corner holdin' a handkerchief to her eyes. Old man Spain said he'd let no man cull the family—he'd have to take them as they come, by George! Poor Ned was all broke up. They wouldn't let him say a word to Rosie—they seemed to know which way her evidence would run. The timber-boss took Ned aside; I can hear him yet the way he said, 'Marry the girl, Ned, me boy; the Spaniards are too numerous for us! We mustn't make bad blood wid them!' Father Welsh was there all ready, kinda tapping his foot impatient-like, waiting to earn his money. Old Geordie Hodgins was there; he was one of the oldest river-drivers on the Ot'way, a sly old dog with a big wad o'

money hid away some place, some said it was in the linin' of his cap. Old Geordie never looked at a girl—Scotch, you know, they're careful. Well, old Geordie began kinda snuffin' like he always did when he got excited. Well, sir, he got up and began to walk around, slappin' his hands together, and all the clatter stopped, for every one was wonderin' what was wrong with Geordie; and old man Spain, he says: 'What's wrong, Geordie? Sit down, blame you, and let's get on wid the weddin'.' And then old Geordie straightens up and says, 'I'll take the old one, if ye like, and let Ned have the wan he wants,' and with that the little one with the red eyes bounces right out of her corner and she slaps a kiss on Geordie that you could hear for the brea'th of an acre. Old Geordie wiped it off with the back of his hand and says he, 'Look out, young Miss, don't you do that again or Ned'll have to take the old one after all.' And by jinks, as soon as she heard that the old one, who wasn't so slow after all, she bounced up and landed one on Geordie that sounded like an ox pullin' his foot out of the mud, and, then Ned he came to himself and says he, 'See here, Geordie's gettin' more'n his share; where do I come in?' and then John McNeish, the piper, struck up his pipes, and we were all off into an eight-hand reel before you could wink. There wasn't enough girls to go round, and I had to swing around Bill Fraser with the wooden leg, and Bill was kinda topply around the corners, but we got the two couples married and they both done well."

Mrs. Perkins was something of a raconteur herself, and she, too, was ready with a story on the same subject. She and her husband never interfered with each other's story-telling. Each chose his or her own story and proceeded with it quite independent of the other one. But it was confusing to the audience when the two stories ran concurrently, as they did to-day.

Mrs. Perkins's story was about her youngest sister's husband's brother, who was the "biggest cut-up you ever saw." He'd keep a whole room full of people "in stitches, and he was engaged to a girl called Sally Gibson—she was one of the Garafraxa Gibsons that ran the mill at 'the Soble'—well, anyway, this Sally Gibson gave him the slip and married a fellow from Owen Sound, and some say even kept the ring," though Mrs. Perkins was not prepared to say for sure; but, anyway, this was pretty hard on her youngest sister's husband's brother. Henry Hall was his name and he had bought the license and all. "He was terrible cut up and vowed he'd marry some one and not lose his license altogether, so he came over to where Bessie Collins lived, and he came in at the back door, and there was Bessie scrubbin' the floor, and he says: 'Bessie, will you marry me?' and she says, knowin' what a cut-up he was, she says, 'Go on, Hank, you're foolin',' and he says: 'I'm not foolin', Bessie,' and he told her what Sally Gibson had went and done, and then Bessie says: 'Well, wait till I've finished this floor and do off the door-step, and I don't care if I do.' So she went and primped herself some and they were married and they done well, too!"

* * *

When Pearl and her aunt were walking home that night Aunt Kate said: "I like them people better one at a time. I never did like a two-ring circus. I never could watch the monkey trundlin' a barrel up a gangway when the clown was jumpin' through rings; it always annoyed me to be losin' either one or the other. Did you get any sense of it, Pearlie?"

But Pearl's thoughts were on an entirely different theme. "Miss Morrison ain't what you'd call a real pretty girl, not like Mary Barner or Camilla," she said absently.

CHAPTER XXV

THE COMING OF THURSA

Each hour a pearl, each pearl a prayer
To still a heart in absence wrung.
I tell each bead unto the end, and there
A cross is hung!

—*My Rosary.*

EARLY in December Thursa came. Martha had asked Pearl to come over and help her to receive her guest, which Pearl was only too glad to do, for she knew how hard all this was for Martha.

"Just like sendin' out invitations to yer own funeral," Pearl said, as early in the morning of the eventful day she walked over the snowy road to the Perkins home. In spite of all, Pearl was determined to have Martha looking her very best. She was even prepared to put powder on Martha's face, and had actually secured some from Camilla for the occasion.

Martha had improved in many ways since the day she and Pearl had talked beside the lilac hedge. She stood straighter; she walked more gracefully; she was more at her ease in conversation. These were the outward visible signs; but the most important change that had taken place in Martha was that she now had a broader outlook on the world. It was no longer bounded on the north by the Assiniboine River and the Brandon Hills, and on the south by the Tiger Hills and Pelican Lake. The hours that she had spent studying the magazine had been well spent, and Martha had really learned a great deal. She had learned that there were hundreds and hundreds of other girls like herself, living lonely lives of endless toil and sacrifice, and who still kept alive the little flame of ambition and the desire to make the best of their surroundings and themselves; and from the stories, which she now read with consuming interest, she learned that there were other women who loved hopelessly, but yet without bitterness, whose hearts were enriched by it, and who went on with their work day by day, bravely fighting the good fight; and with all this Martha's heart was greatly sustained and comforted. Martha had some blue days, too, when she was deeply conscious of her own dullness, and was disposed to give up all her efforts; but Pearl Watson was always able to fire her with fresh enthusiasm, for it was Pearl's good gift that she could inspire people to worthy endeavour.

It was not long before Arthur noticed that Martha was brightening up and that she seemed easier to talk to. After his long days of solitude he was glad of an opportunity to talk to an interested listener, and so he found his way over to the Perkins home three or four nights every week.

He told her stories of his school-days and of the glorious holidays he had spent at his uncle's country home. Arthur was a close observer and an interesting talker, and even Mrs. Perkins sometimes sat up to listen to him. Thomas Perkins said he didn't take much stock in the stories that young English chap told, and so he usually retired to the kitchen, where he would sit studying the catalogues. Mr. Perkins preferred the centre of the stage, if he were on it at all, and certainly would not consent to do a "thinking part" for anybody.

* * *

"Don't you be a bit worried, Martha," Pearl said soothingly, as she was combing Martha's hair that morning; "you'll look just as well as she does. Englishwomen always look queer to me with those big rough coats on them, all crinkly at the seams. They always wear them coming over on the boat, and it looks to me as if they fell in a few times and the stuff shrunk something awful; and their hair is always queer, done in a bun on the small of their neck."

"But Thursa is not like that," Martha said. "She is little and slight, and has a skin as fair as a lily and pink cheeks."

Pearl stepped back to look at Martha's hair, done in a braid around the top, before replying:

"Skin like a lily, has she? Well, that settles it—we'll use the powder. Now, don't say a word, Martha—it ain't wicked at all—it's paintin' and powderin' that's wicked. Now, I could make a bright glow on each of yer cheeks by usin' the red leaf of one of the roses on my summer hat. I thought of that, and I tried it myself—it was a fine colour and would improve you, Martha, but I'm afraid it wouldn't be just the thing to do it, and anyway you are looking fine now, and your red silk waist will give you a colour."

They went down-stairs when Martha's toilet was complete, speculating on what Thursa would be like. Martha was plainly nervous, which Pearl saw, but would not recognize. They were not left long in doubt, for in a few minutes they heard Arthur driving up to the door. Pearl and Martha held each other's hands in suspense until the door opened and Arthur said quite simply:

"Martha, this is Thursa."

And then poor Martha had need of her full supply of true greatness as Thursa's fresh young beauty burst on her, for Thursa was of that most bewitching type of young English girl, clear-skinned and violet-eyed, with a head of curling golden hair. She wore a long green coat and a little green cap that did not begin to hold down the rebellious curls.

If Martha was embarrassed Thursa certainly was not. She kissed Martha impulsively and called her "the dearest thing," and then, turning to Pearl, cried gaily. "Come here, you brown-eyed witch. I should have known you anywhere. You two girls have spoiled Arthur, I am afraid, by dancing attendance on him. He will be so frightfully important and overlordish, but all that will be changed now. I am really a very domineering person."

When Martha took Thursa upstairs to remove her wraps she said, as she tucked in her curls before the glass: "It does seem so gorgeous to be away without an aunt. I have three of them at home, you know, and they have always taken the wildest interest in me, and there was always one ready to come with me every place. They are not old really, but they seem old to me, and I really expect they will never die. They have heaps of money, too, and so I simply had to be civil to them. I had a perfectly ripping time on the boat. My aunts put me in charge of the Bishop of Donchester, and he was a perfect love and went to his stateroom so early every evening, and slept in a steamer chair every afternoon until he got ill, the old dear, and then he didn't appear at all for three days, and I really had such jolly fun. It did seem such fun not to be bothered with some one stalking me all the time. There were such pleasant people, too, on shipboard!"

Martha remembered what Pearl had said about the English girl who had changed her mind coming over on the boat, and, making an excuse about having dinner to see to, went down stairs and sent Pearl up to Thursa. Pearl would get at the true state of affairs quicker than any one else.

"Did you have a pleasant journey?" Pearl asked, when she went upstairs.

"Oh, rather!" said Thursa. "It was simply heavenly to be away any place without an aunt. I was just telling Martha I have three of them—Aunt Honora, Aunt Constance, and Aunt Prudence. They have dangled their money over my head for years, but I don't care now if I never get it. They've always done everything for me. They picked out Arthur for me because his uncle is a bishop, and they do adore bishops."

"But didn't you like Arthur first—yourself—anyway?" Pearl exclaimed, hanging on to the chair in her excitement.

Thursa pursed her pretty lips. "Well enough—oh, yes, real well—and I liked him awfully when he decided to come to Canada—it was so splendid and dashing of him, I thought, and I was simply wild to come, too, for the adventures!"

"The what?" Pearl asked.

"The adventures. It must be perfectly jolly to chase Indians and buffaloes and bears. Wouldn't it be a lark to send one home?"

Pearl winked hard, wondering if it was an Indian, a buffalo, or a bear she wanted to send home.

After dinner, for which Arthur stayed, Thursa said she believed she would take a rest—she had so many letters to write, too, to people she met on shipboard, and such delightful people.

Arthur begged to be let stay 'a little while longer, but Thursa said very, decidedly he must go now and not come back until the next evening, for she really must get her letters done—there was one in particular that must be sent by next post. "Do you know a Mr. Smeaton in Brandon," she asked, "Mr. Jack Smeaton?"

Arthur did not know him.

"He was on the boat and was so jolly! He was teaching me Canadian words. We did have good fun over it. He told me to be sure and let him know how I liked you when I saw you."

Arthur winced.

"I said I would come and see anyway, for I said I couldn't believe you had changed so very much in two years. He said it was always well to take thirty days to consider any serious step, and he taught me the word for it—'a thirty days' option'—that's it, Arthur. That's what I have on you!"

She laughed merrily, but Arthur pleaded with her not to say such things.

Then Thursa became very serious. "Now, Arthur, for heaven's sake," she said, "don't act like the aunts. That's what I've listened to all my life. Calm yourself, my de-ar. That's what I've run away from. I might as well have stayed with them if you're going to do it. It's wicked of you, Arthur, it really is, to scold me, when I came so far just to see you, and when you know how tired I am."

Pearl and Martha retired hastily to the kitchen.

Arthur apologized in due form and Thursa's good-humour came back. "Now, then, Arthur, run along, because I am going to have a long sleep, and then I have some very serious thinking to do. The aunts said that is what I am incapable of doing, but I've done some that would have surprised them if they had just heard me at it. Now I am going to do some more. It's so horrible to be in a quandary. It is as

bad as it was when I was choosing a gown for my first party; I lay awake nearly a whole night trying to decide between a reseda and a pink-violet. It was perfectly maddening, and I did have such a head the next day."

"Are you in a quandary now, Thursa?" he asked gently. "Tell me about it."

"Oh, no, Arthur, dear me, no—I haven't got half my thinking done yet. I'll tell you after I get it done. I am so happy to think that I got away without any of the aunts that, really, I am not very worried about anything. You' know I wasn't perfectly sure that I was away until I was a day out, and once I got such a fright—there was something swimming behind the boat! But now, good-bye, Arthur. Kiss me, if you like. There, now, that will do. Yes, I do like you, Arthur, you're a good sort. Good-bye till to-morrow evening."

Two days later Arthur took Thursa over to see the house. She was quite rested now from her journey, and in her scarlet coat and hat she was more bewitching than ever.

"It is very pretty here in the summer-time, Thursa," he said, as they stood together in the little porch. "I had some flowers last year, and the trees are growing nicely. It will be the dearest place on earth to me when you are here. Won't it be glorious to be together always, dearie, you and I? I wonder if you know how beautiful you are, Thursa?"

Thursa knit her brows in deep thought. "I wonder if I do?" she said quite gravely. "I've heard quite a 'lot about it lately, and I don't object to hearing it as much as my aunts would wish me to, I fear. It seems pleasant, really!"

Arthur laughed joyously. Her beauty dazzled him.

Then they went into the house that he had built and furnished with much loving care. Thursa was interested in everything; the shining new pots and pans gave her great delight—she said they were "such jolly little dears," but what were they all for? Arthur tried to explain, but Thursa became impatient at the mention of cooking and washing dishes, and cried out petulantly. "Why don't you tame a squaw and have her do all this? I simply loathe cooking or washing up. It is horrid, messy work, Arthur, and I really never can do it. I know I can't. I never stayed in our scullery at home for one minute. Of course my aunts would not have allowed me to stay anyway, but that isn't why. I simply detest work of that kind."

Arthur's face showed his disappointment. "We will have to get some one to show you how," he said, after an unpleasant pause. "You will not dislike it so much after you learn how, Thursa. It is really pleasant work, housekeeping is, and I am sure you will learn to be a famous little housewife."

"Don't bank too strong on it, Arthur. Isn't that the right word? Mr. Smeaton taught me that. This idea of having to cook has upset me dreadfully."

She sat down in the rocking-chair and rocked herself in her agitation. "Arthur, I shall go staring mad if I have to mess around and try to cook. I know I shall. I feel it beginning on me, and I shall have rough hands, and my skin will get red and blotchy, just like a cook's, and there will always be a greasy smell on my clothes. I am going to cry, Arthur, I am, now, really, and nobody can stop me, and I do cry dreadfully when I start."

"Oh, don't cry, Thursa!" Arthur pleaded, with all the helplessness of a man in the presence of tears. "Don't cry, dearest. You'll break my heart if you cry the first day you come into your new home. I don't want you to cook or work or do anything, only just stay with me and love me and let me look at you—you are too beautiful to ever have to work, darling."

Contrary to her expectations, Thursa did not cry, but looked at Arthur with a very shrewd expression on her pretty face.

"I'd rather stay here and take a chance on it—that's a Canadian word, too—than go back to the aunts and have to work antimacassars and put up with them trailing around after me always—that was perfectly maddening—but it seems to me—" she went over to Arthur's new sideboard and looked critically into the glass—"it seems to me a girl like me—you see I am not what you might call a fright, am I, Arthur?—and here in Canada there are abundant opportunities for good marriages—I think I really should do pretty well."

Arthur stood beside her looking at her image in the glass. When her meaning became clear he turned away hastily to hide the hurt her words had given him.

"You mean I am not good enough for you. You are quite right, I am not. You are a queen among women, Thursa."

"Queen nothing!" Thursa cried impatiently. "You make love like they do it in Scott's novels. The aunts made me read it, and now I simply loathe anything that sounds like it. Now, Mr. Smeaton said I was a peach."

Arthur consigned Mr. Smeaton and all such cads to a hotter climate.

"Good for you, Arthur!" she said, laughing, "you can ride the high horse, too. I like you like that. Now, Mr. Smeaton said——"

"See here, Thursa," Arthur broke in, "did that cur make love to you?"

"Madly," she said.

"And you let him—and listened?"

She clapped her hands and laughed merrily.

"Listened? I didn't have to listen hard. He was near me, you know, and he did make love so beautifully. I wish you could have heard him."

"I'd have bashed his head for him," Arthur said hotly. "Who is he, anyway?"

"He has a dry-goods store in Brandon. He's a linen-draper really, and is only six-and-twenty, but he is awfully clever, and so charming. When I sent you word that I was staying to see the shops I meant I was staying to see his shop. He took me to his own home, and his mother and sisters were lovely to me. He wanted me to marry him at Montreal, and asked me again at North Bay, and twice in Winnipeg, and I really forgot to count how many times he proposed to me in Brandon; but I wanted to be perfectly fair, and would not marry him until I had seen you."

Arthur said not a word, but walked over to the eastern window. It was a pleasant day in early winter. He could see the curls of smoke rising from the neighbours' houses into the frosty air, and the long gray wreath of it that the morning train had left still lay on the Tiger Hills. A mirage had lifted the old spruce bush on the Assiniboine into vision. Every mark on the landscape stung him with remembrances of happy days when youth and love and hope were weaving for him a glorious dream.

He turned suddenly and caught her in his arms. "Don't go back on me, Thursa! I won't give you up!" he cried. "He can't love you the way I do. You haven't been in his mind, day and night, all these years. He doesn't love you, dear, like I do, and he can't have you. I tell you, I won't give you up. You are mine forever."

Suddenly his arms dropped and he put her away from him. "Let me think a minute, Thursa," he said, in his usual tone. "This has come on me suddenly. Stay here until I come back."

Outside the cold, bracing air fanned his burning face. He stood on the bank of the Plover Creek and looked with unseeing eyes around him, and found himself thinking of the most trifling things—he couldn't think about what he wanted to; his brain refused to act. Suddenly there came over him a great calmness, and with it a strong resolve. He would do the square thing. He loved Thursa, but there was something stronger even than that—something that must be obeyed.

When Arthur went back to the house his face was white with the conflict, but his resolve was taken. "Do you want to marry this Brandon man, Thursa?" he asked.

"I don't know. I am thinking. Don't hurry me now. I can't bear to be hurried. That's where Aunt Honora and I never could agree; she crowded me so. I am thinking very hard, really. Mr. Smeaton's offer is still open. I was to let him know. Of course, Arthur, you are a bishop's nephew, and that's something. Mr. Smeaton's family are all in trade."

"That does not matter in this country," said Arthur. "No, that's what he said, too. He is so witty and clever. He said I could write to the aunts that I had married the son of a leading M. P. of the West."

"Is his father a Member of Parliament?" Arthur asked quickly.

Thursa laughed delightedly. "M. P. stands for 'milk peddler,'" she said. "Wasn't he adorable to think of that?"

"Very clever indeed," Arthur said quietly.

"We did have screaming fun over it. He said we would spell it Smeatholym if it would make the aunts feel any easier, and he told me I could tell them how brave he was—that he once slew a wild oryx. He said he often drove a yoke of wild oryxen before him as gentle as lambs. I know Aunt Constance would

be deeply impressed with this. He even went so far, Arthur—he was so deadly in earnest—to give me the telegraph form to sign. It is all written if I decide to marry him."

"Let me see it!" said Arthur.

She opened her little bead purse and handed him a yellow telegraph blank, on which was written:

"Mr. John Smeaton,
"Rosser Avenue,
"Brandon,
"L. G. D. is past. O. for O."

"What does it mean?" he asked.

"You could never guess—it is so funny," she laughed. "'L. G. D.' is 'love's golden dream.' 'O. for O.' means 'open for offers.'"

Arthur's face was twitching with pain and anger, but with wonderful self-control he asked her again:

"Do you want to marry this man?"

"I think I do, Arthur. He's lovely."

Arthur handed her his pencil and motioned to her to sign the blank.

"Oh, Arthur!" she cried, "do you mean it? May I sign it? Do you not mind?"

She flung her arms around his neck and kissed him impulsively. Arthur made no response to her embrace, but the perspiration stood out in beads on his forehead.

"Sign it," he said, almost roughly. He turned away his head, while she signed her name.

She watched him anxiously. Why didn't he speak? This was dreadfully unpleasant.

"Thursa," he said at last, "will you sing for me that Rosary song? Just once. I want to hear it."

She sang it, sweet and tender as ever, every word a caress.

When she was done, he stood up and said very gently, but very sadly, "I wanted to be sure it was not ever meant for me. A clean cut is the easiest healed."

He went to his phonograph records and picked out the "Rosary." Only for a second he fondled it in his hand, then crushed it in pieces and threw them into the fire. "There now, Thursa," he said steadily, "that chapter is closed forever."

She looked at him in astonishment. "Why don't you get excited and threaten to shoot yourself and all that?"

"Because I have no notion of doing it," he said.

"Well, I do wish you would be a little bit melodramatic—this is deadly uninteresting. I would have loved to write home something really thrilling."

"This is thrilling enough for me, Thursa," he answered. Then, after a pause, he said, "Shall I send your telegram?"

"Not just yet," she answered. "You see, Arthur, I want to be sure. I know that Mr. Smeaton is lovely and all that, but I want to be sure he is a gentleman. I want you to go and see him; Arthur. I will do whatever you say."

She came and put her hands on Arthur's shoulders and looked up at him.

"Arthur, I have not treated you very well, but you'll do this for me, and if you find that he is not—" she hesitated—"I do not like to speak of him in this way, it doesn't seem right to doubt him, and I don't doubt him really; but you will do it, won't you, Arthur?"

"I will not do it!" he cried. "Don't ask me to do this!"

"And Arthur, if you come back and say that I must forget him, I will, try to, and I will marry you and try to like all these horrid little pots and pans. I truly will, and we will never speak of this again."

She was looking into his face as she spoke, and there was an earnestness in the depths of her violet eyes, a sweet womanliness, that he had never seen before.

"Oh, Thursa!" he cried, his voice quivering with tenderness. "You are making it hard for me—how can I help but perjure myself to win you? Any man would lie to you rather than lose you. Send some one else; I can't do it. I can't come back and tell you he is worthy of you."

Thursa drew his face down to hers and kissed his cheek.

"Arthur, I know you, and I will trust you. You couldn't lie; you don't know how, and you will do this, for me."

CHAPTER XXVI

IN HONOUR'S WAYS

O memories that bless and burn,
O barren gain and bitter loss,
I kiss each bead and try at last to learn
To kiss the cross.

—*My Rosary.*

ARTHUR went to Brandon that night, presumably on business relating to his house-furnishing. Not even Martha knew the nature of his visit to the Wheat City. It was late in the evening when he arrived, so late that he was unable to make any inquiries, but was forced to spend the night in uncertainty, with only his own gloomy thoughts for company. The varied night sounds of the city smote on his unaccustomed ear. The long hall of the hotel echoed the passing of many feet; doors slammed at intervals, and once a raucous voice called loudly for "Towels for '53"; from the room next his came the sound of talking and laughter; farther down the hall a young baby cried dismally. Through the babel of voices came the regular pink-pank of a banjo in the parlour below. Outside, the wind raged against the frosted windows, train-bells rang and whistles blew all night long, and the pounding of horses' feet on the pavement never ceased—there seemed to be one long procession of heavy drays passing down the street.

In the quiet of his own house on Plover Creek Arthur had almost forgotten the outside world that never sleeps—the rushing, careless, inexorable world, that cannot be stayed or entreated. He had lived his life in the country, and he loved its silent places, the kindly silences of the country nights that lie so soothingly on the heart and brain. To-night, the roar of the Brandon street was full of evil significance, for this man, this interloper, whom his soul hated so bitterly, was part of the great uncaring throng that surged past; this rushing, jostling, aggressive life was what he stood for, this man who had stolen from him his heart's dearest treasure.

All night long Arthur lay staring into the darkness, trying to, fight out the greatest battle of his life; on one side Thursa and the memory of her kisses on his cheek, and on the other side honour and honesty, and all the traditions of his house; sometimes telling himself sternly that there was but one course open to him, and then, suddenly overcome by his love for her, crying out bitterly that he would never, never give her up. The pitch-black night seemed interminable to him, but dawn came at last, deep blue behind the frost-ferns on the window, slowly fading to pale azure, then suddenly changing to rosiest pink as the sun rolled up over the sandhills of the Assiniboine and sent his cheerful rays over an untroubled white world.

At half-past eight Arthur was walking the street. No one would imagine, to look at the quietly dressed young Englishman, that he was going through a severe mental struggle. Without any difficulty he found the store for which he was looking. The words on the sign, "J. C. Smeaton & Co., Dry Goods," in black and gold, seemed charged with open hostility.

A group of women stood in front of the door waiting for it to be opened. They were looking longingly at the window display of lace blouses, which were going to be sold, according to a staring sign, at half the regular price. They were the typical bargain-hunters, sharp-eyed and distrustful, and not particularly amiable. Early rising on a cold winter morning is at the best no aid to amiability, even if by

the effort a ten-dollar blouse is bought for five.

The waiting group were discussing sales in general, and one woman was disposed to think that all sales were snares and delusions—she lived on Eighteenth Street, and had had to get up very early. Another woman exonerated herself from complicity in the matter of sales by saying that her sister-in-law had telephoned her to come down and get her a waist; she would never have come for herself, never! There was only one real optimist in the crowd—of course, optimism does not usually flourish before breakfast. She declared that Smeaton's sales were all right. If Smeaton advertised a sale it was a sale. People could say what they liked about Jack Smeaton, but she had always found him straight as a string.

Arthur hurried away—the woman's crude words of praise for the man he hated struck him like a blow between the eyes.

Arthur went first to a Church of England clergyman whom he knew slightly, and made inquiries. The clergyman was unable to give any information about the young man. He knew him well by sight, he said, but he had never spoken to him. He directed Arthur to go to one of the wardens of his church, a Mr. Bevan, who was one of the old-timers in Brandon and knew everybody.

To Mr. Bevan's office Arthur went, and waited there an hour, for the senior member of the firm of Bevan & Wallace, real estate brokers, did not begin the day very early. However, he did come at last, and looked sharply at Arthur's eager face as he made known his business.

"Smeaton?" Mr. Bevan cried, when Arthur was through speaking. "What do I know about young Jack Smeaton? What do you know about him? If you can tell me anything that he has been up to that is very bad, I'll be glad to hear it, the cheeky young beggar. Think of it! Last fall he went out making political speeches—I heard him! He's a rabid Grit, too, will stop at nothing to get a vote. Oh, yes, I know Jack Smeaton."

"Would you call him a man of honour?" Arthur asked.

"Man of honour?" the old man cried excitedly. "Bless your heart, what have I just told you? Didn't I say he was a Grit? Why don't you listen, man, to what I am telling you?" His voice fell to a confidential whisper. "Young Jack Smeaton is one of the strongest Grits in this city, and he has a very great influence on the young men, for they like him, mind you. Oh, he is a bad one, a deep one, and don't you forget it."

"Would you consider him a man worthy of trust?" Arthur said eagerly, trying to pierce through the old man's political prejudice.

"Trust!" the other man repeated, scorn, wonder, contempt in his voice. "Young man, where were you at the time of the last election? You talk like a man from Mars. Didn't you hear about the ballot-stuffing that went on here? How do you suppose the Grits carried this constituency? No, sir; I would not trust him, or any of them."

Arthur rose to go.

"My advice to you, young man, is to have no dealings with Jack Smeaton. He's pretty nearly sure to influence you, for, mind you, he has a way with him."

Arthur walked back to his room at the hotel with many conflicting emotions struggling in his heart. Jack Smeaton was evidently a man of strong character, and a flirtation such as he had carried on with Thursa would mean nothing to him—he had probably forgotten it by this time. Couldn't he honestly go back and tell Thursa that one of the church-wardens, to whom the clergyman had sent him for information, had told him emphatically to have nothing to do with Jack Smeaton? Thursa would ask to know nothing further. She had said, with that sweet look in her face, that if he came back and told her to forget this fellow she would marry him and do her best. Arthur recalled every tone of her dear voice, the touch of her soft little hands, as she drew his face down to hers when she said this. Thursa was his own. She had come from England as his affianced wife. What right had this adventurer to steal her away from him? Arthur clenched his fists and raged at the man who had done him this injury. He would go back to Thursa in the morning, and they would be happy yet. This man's name would never be mentioned again.

Arthur was not nearly so happy in this resolve as he expected to be. There was a distinct uneasiness in his heart that increased as the day went on. At five o'clock he stood outside the Smeaton store, to which he seemed drawn by a strange fascination. The man who was so largely in his thoughts was, no doubt, only a few feet away from him, happy, careless, prosperous, arrogant, having his own way by hook or crook. The clock struck the half-hour. The store would be closed six.

Arthur started back to the hotel. What did he care when the store closed? It was nothing to him. At the corner of Rosser and Eighth Street some Salvation Army people were holding a meeting, and as he passed through the crowd the tinkle of their cymbals in a familiar tune came to his ear. Then a dozen voices, clear and distinct, broke into singing:

If some poor wandering child of Thine,
Has spurned to-day the voice divine,
Now, Lord, the gracious work begin,
Let him no more lie down in sin.

It brought him back to the old life at home, this dear old hymn of his childhood, with its old-fashioned, monotonous tune, and it awakened in his consciousness the voices he was trying hard to silence. A light shone in upon him and showed him a straight path, a hard road, set with thorns, which he must follow. The colour suddenly went from Arthur's face as he realized which way the path of honour led.

Abide with me from morn till eve,
For without Thee I cannot live.

sang the Army, while Arthur, pale and trembling on the outer edge of the crowd, leaned against a lamppost for support. He did not hear the words they were singing, but the old tune beat into heart and brain the memories of his home and childhood. He saw his father's saintly face, proud and strong, unstained by any compromise with evil, and it called to him across the sea to play the man.

The Army had sung the hymn all through, and now they were kneeling in prayer; a thin-voiced girl led the petitions, while the others, frequently interjected exclamations of thanksgiving. Arthur did not hear a word of it, but into his troubled heart there came peace and the strength of God, which alone is able to make a man swear to his own hurt.

He walked rapidly back to the store he had left and asked to see Mr. Smeaton. Mr. Smeaton had his hat and coat on, about to leave the store, but he came back, and, taking Arthur into his office, offered him a chair.

Arthur remained standing, and, without speaking, gave the young man a searching glance. What he saw was a muscular young fellow, of about his own age, with clear gray eyes and curling brown hair. He was faultlessly dressed, and had an unmistakably straightforward expression and countenance.

"What can I do for you?" the young merchant asked.

Without a word Arthur took from his pocket Thursa's telegram. His hand trembled, and he had a queer, dizzy feeling as he did it, but he put it safely in the other man's hand.

Away across the sea, in the Rectory of St. Agnes, a gray-haired father and mother were praying for their boy so far away, and their prayer for him that day was not that he might have wealth, or ease, or fame, or the praise of men, nor that he might always gain his heart's desire—not that at all; they asked for him a greater gift still—that he might always walk in honour's ways.

Jack Smeaton's face was illumined with joy as he read Thursa's telegram.

"Did she send me this? Where is she? I want to see her—who are you?" he asked, all in one breath.

Something in Arthur's face told him who he was. "You are Arthur," he said gently.

Arthur nodded.

The two young men stood looking at each other, but for a full minute neither spoke.

"I have only one question to ask you, Mr. Smeaton," Arthur said at last. "Do you love her?"

"I do," the other man replied, "as God hears me." And Arthur, looking into his clear gray eyes, believed him, and his last hope vanished.

"I feel like a miserable sneak in your presence," Jack Smeaton said humbly. "Upon my word, that enchanting little beauty turned my brain. Isn't she the most bewitching little girl in all the world?"

"I have always thought so," Arthur said quietly. "I have behaved badly to you, Mr.—"

"Wemyss," Arthur said.

"Mr. Wemyss, and I humbly apologize."

"It is not necessary," Arthur said, with an effort. "Her happiness is the only thing to be considered. She was only a child when she gave me her promise, only seventeen, and I can see now that she would not be happy with me."

"Come with me now, Mr. Wemyss. I want you to meet my people. They will be glad to have you stay for dinner."

"Thank you," Arthur said, trying hard to speak naturally. "I would rather not."

"I shall go back with you to-morrow, if I may," Mr. Smeaton said. "I cannot just say to you all that is in my heart, but you have taught me a lesson on what it is to be a gentleman."

He held out his hand, which Arthur took without hesitation, and they parted.

That night as Jack Smeaton was selecting a pearl necklace for Thursa, along with all sorts of other beautiful gifts, he was pondering deeply one thought—that perhaps, after all, successive generations of gentle breeding do count for something in the make-up of a man, and having a bishop in the family may help a little, too.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE WEDDING

Life? 'Tis the story of love and troubles
Of troubles and love that travel together
The round world through.

—*Joaquin Miller.*

WHEN Arthur and Jack Smeaton arrived at the Perkins home the next morning, and announced that the wedding would take place at once, Mrs. Perkins, without waiting for further details, made an emergency visit to the hen-house and slew six chickens—there could be no wedding without fried chicken. Then she came back to find out who was to be the groom.

Mr. Perkins was hurriedly despatched for Pearl Watson, who was to be the bridesmaid, and Mr. and Mrs. Watson and Aunt Kate, who were to be the guests. Mr. Perkins, who had refused to leave the house without being dressed in his "other" suit, was in the hilarious humour that went with his good clothes when he reached the Watson home.

"By golly! John," he said, "that Arthur's a game one, and don't you forget it—he's simply handed his girl over to the other fellow; and I tell you he's done it handsome, just as cool and cheerful about it as if he liked the job. The little girl there, that Thursa, she's pretty enough to make men draw their shootin'-irons on each other. I'm fifty-three year old myself, but, by jingo! I was proud to be seen walkin' down the street with her yesterday in Millford; she drove in with me, and we walked around a bit. She had a hat as big as a waggon wheel, carrying as many plumes as a hearse. Whew! You should 'a' seen the people lookin' at us. She took my arm, mind ye, John; and say, now, I can't understand Arthur bringin' that other gent right back with him. Arthur went up to find out about this fellow, if he was the straight goods, and all that—she told me the hull thing yesterday. It was a secret, she said, but she just told me and the missus and Martha—she didn't see any one else—and she was that glad to-day when she saw this 'Jack' fellow that she kissed him and kissed Arthur, too—a kind of overflow meetin' his was—I stood around handy by, but she over-looked me some way; and then her and Jack went into the parlour to decide who was goin' to be boss and a few things like that, and I'll be blessed if Arthur didn't pitch right in to help Martha and the missus to get dinner ready. Never winked an eyelash, that fellow—the English have great grit, when you get a nice one. So hurry along now, we'll have to rustle. The minister's comin' at twelve o'clock sharp, and they're goin' away on the afternoon train. He's a right smart-lookin' fellow, this Jack—the little girl's doin' well, all right, all right; he maybe hasn't got as good a pedigree as Arthur, but he'll suit her better. She won't sass back to him, I'll bet, the way she would to Arthur. She'd give Arthur a queer old time, I know, but this chap'll manage her; he's got that sort of a way with him. I could see it, though I was only speakin' a few words to him."

Pearl was dressed in her cream silk dress, and carried a bouquet of roses.

"Land sakes!" Aunt Kate exclaimed, "where does anyone get roses at this time o' year, I'd like to know?"

"I lived in Ontario many a year, and that's what I never saw was roses in December. They must 'a' had a sheltered place to grow in." And every person who heard her was too loyal a Manitoban to enlighten her.

Thursa, in a trailing gown of white silk mull, came into the parlour leaning on Arthur's arm, and made the responses as demurely as the staid Aunt Prudence would have desired. Any one looking at Arthur's unmoved face would never have guessed at the tragedy that was taking place in the young man's heart.

The wedding breakfast was a very jolly meal, and everybody, Arthur included, was in the best of humour. Young Jack Smeaton clearly demonstrated that the old lawyer had expressed the truth when he said: "Jack Smeaton has a way with him." He discussed the various knitting wools with Mrs. Perkins, and told Thomas Perkins a new way of putting formalin on his seed-wheat to get rid of the smut, and how to put patches on grain bags with flour paste. Mrs. Perkins told very vividly the story of Mary Ann Corbett's wedding, where the bridegroom failed 'to appear, and she married her first love, who was acting in the capacity of best man, and the old man Corbett gave them the deed of one hundred and fifty acres of land, and a cow and a feather bed, and some other tokens of paternal affection, and they lived happy ever afterward.

While she was telling this, her husband, in his usual graphic way, told his story, which happened to be on this occasion an account of the death of his old friend, Tony Miner; which had happened the winter before.

"The last words Tony said—mind ye, he was sensible to the last—was to tell his missus not to let the undertaker do her on the price of the coffin. He was a very savin' man, was Tony, but he needn't have worried, for the old lady could see a hole in a ladder as quick as most people, and even an undertaker couldn't get ahead of her. The old lady went herself and picked out the coffin. They sent it out in a box, of course, with Tony's name on it in big black letters, and when they charged her a dollar for the box she wanted them to take it back, but they said they couldn't when it had the name on it; but I tell you, she's a savin' woman, and no wonder Tony died rich. She wasn't goin' to let the box go to waste when it cost money, so she made a door for the hen-house out of it, and there it is yet, with 'Anthony Miner' in big black letters on it. Some say she's goin' to make it answer for a headstone, but I don't know about that. She's a fine savin' woman, and no one can say she is superstitious anyway, or filled with false pride."

The two stories ran concurrently and filled in most of the time at the table. Mr. Perkins did not believe in having awkward pauses or any other kind.

Pearl could not help noticing the glow "on Martha's cheek and the sympathetic way she had of watching Arthur.

"My, but women are queer," Pea thought to her self. "Here's Martha, now, glad as glad that the other fellow has got Thursa, and still feelin' so sorry for Arthur she can't eat her vittles. Wasn't it fine that Martha had so' much good stuff cooked in the house and was able to set up such a fine meal at a minute's notice? I wonder if it ever strikes Arthur what a fine housekeeper she is? I'll bet Miss Thursa'll never be able to bake a jenny Lind cake like this, or jell red currants so you can cut them with a knife."

Thursa and Jack left on the five o'clock train. It was a heavy, misty day, the kind that brings a storm, and the loose snow that lay on the ground needed only a strong enough wind to make a real Manitoba blizzard.

The bride and groom, with Arthur and Martha, drove in the Perkins double cutter. Dr. Clay, who had not been able to come to the wedding, came out afterward, and he and Pearl drove behind.

At the station there was only time for a hurried good-bye. Thursa seemed to take a more serious view of life, now that the real parting had come. She held Arthur's hand in a close grasp. "You've behaved awfully decent, Arthur," she said earnestly.

Arthur smiled bravely and thanked her.

The last to say good-bye were Jack and Arthur. It was an embarrassing moment for both of them, but their handclasp was warm and genuine, and Jack said in a low voice: "I'll try to be worthy of her, old man, and of you."

Arthur spoke not a word.

The train pulled out of the station and made its way slowly over the long Souris bridge. They watched it wind up the steep grade until it was hidden by a turn of the hill, and even then they stood listening to the hoarse boom of the whistle that came down the misty valley. The wind, that seemed to be threatening all day, came whistling down the street, driving before it little drifts of snow as they turned away from the station platform.

Dr. Clay took Pearl over to Mrs. Francis, where she was to stay for the night. Arthur and Martha drove home in silence. When they reached the door Martha said: "Come in, Arthur, and stay; don't try to get your own supper to-night."

Arthur roused himself with an effort. "I think I'll go home, Martha, thank you."

Mr. Perkins came out and helped Arthur to put away the team. Martha stood watching him as he walked across the field to his own little lonely house. The snow was drifting in clouds across the fields, and sometimes hid him from sight, but Martha stood straining her eyes for the last glimpse of him. Her heart was full of tenderness for him, a great, almost motherly tenderness, for he was suffering, and he was lonely, and her heart's greatest desire was to help him.

Arthur went bravely back to his own desolate house—the house that he had built with such loving thoughts. The fire was dead, like his own false hopes, and the very ticking of the clock seemed to taunt him with his loss. The last time he had been here she was with him. It was there beside the window that she had told him about this man; it was there she had kissed him, and he had held her close to his heart for one sweet moment; it was there he had fought so hard to give her up. But he loved her still, and would always love her, the violet-eyed Thursa, the sweetheart of his boyish dreams.

He made an attempt to light the fire, but it would not burn—it was like everything else, he told himself, it was against him. He went out and fed his horses and made them comfortable for the night, and then came back to his deserted house, dark now, and chilly and comfortless.

With the light of his lantern he saw something white on the floor. He picked it up listlessly, and then the odour of violets came to him—it was Thursa's hand-kerchief, that she had dropped that day. He buried his face in it, and groaned.

The wind had risen since sunset, and now the snow sifted drearily against his windows. Down the chimney came the weird moaning of the storm, sobbing and pitiful sometimes, and then angry and defiant. He sat by the black stove with his overcoat on, holding the little handkerchief against his lips, while the great, bitter sobs of manhood tore their way through his heart.

All night long, while the storm raged around the little house and rattled every door and window, he sat there numb with cold and dumb with sorrow. The lantern burned out, unnoticed. At daylight he threw himself across the bed, worn out with grief and loneliness, and slept a heavy sleep, still holding the violet-scented handkerchief to his lips.

* * *

When Arthur woke the sun was pouring in through the frosted windows. He got up hastily and took off his overcoat; he was stiff and uncomfortable. He went hurriedly out to his little kitchen, thinking of the horses, which needed his care. An exclamation of surprise burst from his lips.

A bright fire was burning in the stove, and a delicious odour of frying ham came to his nostrils. His table was set with a white cloth, and on it was placed a dainty enough breakfast to tempt the appetite of any man.

He went hurriedly to the door and looked out—there were tracks through the high drifts of snow! He turned back to the table and poured himself a cup of steaming coffee. "Dear old Martha," he said, "she is a jolly good sort!"

Arthur was gloriously hungry, and ate like a hunter. It was his first square meal for more than twenty-four hours, and every bite of it tasted good to him. "I never even thanked Martha for all her kindness," he said, when he was done; "but that's the beauty of Martha, she understands without being told."

CHAPTER XXVIII

A SAIL! A SAIL!

The buds may blow and the fruit may grow
And the autumn leaves drop crisp and sere;
But whether the rain or the sun or the snow,
There is ever a song somewhere, my dear.

—*James Whitcomb Riley.*

THE first week after Thursa's marriage Arthur kept to his own house, and the neighbours, with fine tact, stayed away. Many and varied were the ways they took of showing the sincerity of their sympathy. A roast of "spare ribs," already cooked, was left one day mysteriously on his door-step; the next day a jar of pincherry jelly and a roll of jelly-cake were there. His mail was brought to him daily by one or other of the neighbours, and when it seemed to John Green's kind heart that Arthur's mail was very small and uninteresting, he brought over several back numbers of the Orillia Packet, one of which contained obituary verses that his own cousin had composed, and which Mr. Green marked with wavy ink lines, so that Arthur would be sure to see them. Mr. Green thought that his cousin's lachrymal symposium on the uncertainty of all things human should be very comforting to Arthur in his present mental state. Little parcels, too, came mysteriously through the mail to Arthur. One day it was a pair of socks, from an anonymous contributor; another time there came a pair of woollen mittens, red and blue, done in that intricate pattern which is known to the elect as "Fox and Geese." A little slip of paper, pinned on the wrist of one, stated that they were "from a friend," and Arthur shrewdly suspected that Aunt Kate Shenstone had sent them. The evil significance of the gift was not known to the giver, and not noticed by the recipient.

These new evidences of neighbourly solicitude carried the intended message, for they brought to his mind the comfort of knowing that there were loyal-hearted friends all around him who were sincerely sorry for his disappointment.

It was a week before Arthur left his own house, and then he went for his bread to the Perkins home. If he had not been so burdened with his own trouble he would surely have noticed how carefully Martha was dressed, how light her step, how happy her face. The tiny speck on the horizon had been a sail, sure enough. It might not be coming her way—it might never see the shipwrecked sailor—but it was a sail!

Pearlie Watson, the very day after the wedding, began to do some hard thinking on Martha's behalf. One fact—stood out above all others—there was a chance for Martha now, if she could only qualify.

Pearl talked it over with her Aunt Kate, who was a woman of the world, and had seen many marriages and much giving in marriage. Aunt Kate was hopeful, even confident, of the outcome of the present case.

"Of course Martha'll get him!" she said. "Why shouldn't she? I never in all my life seen better hard soft soap than what she makes, and her bread is as light as a feather, you could make a meal of it; and now since she's took to fluffin' her hair, and dressin' up so' nice, she's a good enough lookin' girl. She ain't as educated as he is, of course, but land alive! you couldn't beat that hard soft soap of hers, no matter what education you had."

Pearl shook her head and wished that she could share her aunt's optimism, but she felt that something more than a knowledge of soap-making was needed for a happy married life. On her way to school she thought about it so hard that it seemed to her that any one coming behind her would be sure to find some of her thoughts in the snow.

Mr. Donald, who saw that something was troubling her, inquired the cause of her worried face.

"Of course, I do not want to know if it is a secret, Pearl," he said; "but it may be that I could help you if I knew all about it."

Pearl looked at him before replying.

"It isn't a secret that I was told and promised, not to tell. It is something that I found out by accident, or, at least, all by my own self, and still it's not to be talked about, only among friends."

Mr. Donald nodded.

Pearl went on: "Maybe now you're just the one that could help me. I believe I will tell you all about it."

This was at recess. The children were out playing "shinney." They could hear the shouts of the contending sides. Pearl told him her hopes and fears regarding Martha. "Martha's all right at heart, you bet," she concluded; "she's good enough for Arthur or any one, really. If she had vulgar ways or swore when she got mad, or sassed her Ma, or told lies, or was stingy or mean or anything like that, it would be far worse and harder to get rid of, because nothing but a miracle of grace will cast out the roots of sin, and then even it is a big risk to marry any one like that, because you're never sure but one tiny little root may be left, and in due season it may bust up and grow."

"It may, indeed," Mr. Donald said, smiling. Then he added, when his smile had faded: "'Bust up and grow' are the words to express it."

"But if Martha could only get smoothed up in education, and know about William the Conqueror, and what causes tides, and could talk a little more and answer back a little smarter like, it would be all right, I do believe."

"I have known men to marry uneducated women, and be very fond of them, too," said Mr. Donald thoughtfully. "Some of the Hudson's Bay factors married squaws."

"I know," Pearl agreed. "Old Louie Baker, the surveyor's guide, told Pa about his squaw, Rosie. He Eked Rosie fine, and thought she was real pretty when there wasn't a white woman in sight, but when the white women began to come into the country he got ashamed of poor Rosie, and every day she seemed to get dirtier and greasier, and her toes turned in more; and, anyway, Mr. Donald, it's hard for a woman to feel that she isn't just up to the mark. Gettin' married ain't all there is to it, you bet. It's only in books that they say people git married, and leave it like that, for that's when the real hard times begin—keepin' it up and makin' it turn out well. That's the hard part."

Mr. Donald looked at her in wonder. "You have wisdom beyond your years, Pearl," he said gravely.

"All Martha needs is more education, and there's lots of it lyin' around loose—it's stickin' out of everything—it's in the air and on the ground, and all over, and it seems too bad if Martha can't grab holt of some of it, and her so anxious for it."

"The well is deep, and she has nothing to draw with," the schoolmaster quoted absently.

Pearl recognized the words, and quickly answered: "Do you mind that the woman was wrong about that when she said there was nothing to draw with? Well, now, I believe Martha has something to draw with, too—she has you and me, so she has. You have the education that Martha needs. I'm gettin' it every day. Can't you and I pass it on to Martha?"

"How, Pearl?" he asked.

"I don't know just yet. I haven't got it thought out that far. But there's some way, there's always some way to help people."

It was time to call school then, and no more was said until the next day, when Mr. Donald said to Pearl: "I believe events are coming our way. Mrs. Steadman told me last night that she was going to Ontario for three months, and I am to go elsewhere to board. I wonder would Mrs. Perkins take me in?"

Pearl gave an exclamation of joy. "Would she?" she cried. "You bet she would, and you could help Martha every night. Isn't it just dandy the way things happen?"

That night Pearl went to see Martha on her way home from school. Pearl was to find out if the teacher would be taken to board.

Martha was alone in the house, her father and mother having gone to Millford. When Pearl knocked at the door, Martha opened it. A spelling-book was in her hand, which she laid down hurriedly.

Pearl made known her errand. It was too good to be delayed.

"Say, Martha, isn't it great? He'll help you every night—he can tell you the most interesting things—he gets lots of newspapers and magazines, and he knows about electricity and politics and poetry and everything, and a person can get educated just by listening to him."

Martha stood looking at Pearl a minute, then suddenly threw her arms around her. "You are my good angel, Pearl Watson!" she cried. "You are always bringing me good things. Of course we'll take him,

and be glad to have him; and I'll listen to him, you may be sure; and Pearl, I just can't help telling you that I'm so happy now—I can't tell you how happy I am."

Martha's brimming eyes seemed to contradict her words, but Pearl, who understood something of the springs of the heart, understood.

"I can't help being happy," Martha went on. "I tell myself that it's wicked for me to feel so glad Thursa's gone, when he's so miserable over it. But she wouldn't ever have suited him, would she, Pearl? She'd have made him miserable before long, and herself, too; but that's not all the reason that I'm glad she's gone," she added, truthfully.

Martha's face was hidden on Pearl's shoulder as she said this.

"I know about it," Pearl said. "I found it all out that day when you were showing me the room, and I'm just as pleased as you are, or pretty near. Of course, it would never have done for him to marry Thursa, and the way it all turned out would convince any one that Providence ain't feelin' above takin' a hand in people's affairs. She was nice and pretty, and all that, but she's the kind that would always have sour bread, and you bet, sour bread cuts love; she'd be just like Dave Elder's wife, it tires her dreadful to sweep the floor; but she can go to three dances a week, and then she lies on the lounge all day and says her nerves are bad. But, Martha, you do right to be glad. It's never wrong to be happy. God made everything to have a good time. Look at the gophers and birds, and even the mosquitoes—they have a bang-up time while it lasts. We've got to be happy every chance we get. Whenever you see it passin' by take a grab at it. I mind, when I was a wee little thing, I had a piece of bright blue silk that I had found, and it was just lovely; it put me through a whole winter takin' a look at it now and then. I had to stay at home while Ma was washing, and it was pretty cold in the house sometimes, but the blue silk kept me heartened up. It's just like a piece on Arthur's phonograph—here and there in it there's a little tinklin' song, so sweet and liltin' it just cuts into yer heart; but, mind you, you don't get much o' that at a time. There's all kinds of clatterin' crash, smash, and jabber on both sides of it, cuttin' in on both ends of it, and just when yer gettin' tired of rough house, in she sails again sweeter than ever, just puttin' yer heart crossways with the sweetness of it. It keeps ringin' in my ears all the time, that dear little ripplin', tinklin' tune, and perhaps it needed all that gusty buzzin' and rip-roarin' to drive the sweetness clean into you. That's the way it is always; Martha; we've got to listen for the little song whenever we can hear it."

"I am listening to it all the time, Pearl," Martha said softly. "It may not be meant for me at all, but it is sweet while it lasts, and I can't help hearing it, can I, Pearl?"

Pearl kissed her friend warmly and whispered words of hope, and then, fearing that this might be faith without works, heard her spell a page of words from Bud's old speller.

CHAPTER XXIX

MARTHA'S STRONG ARGUMENTS

"How does love speak?"

THE next week Mr. Donald moved over to the Perkins home. His trunks had been sent over in the morning, and after school he walked home with Pearl. Mr. Donald had seen Martha at the services in the schoolhouse, but had not spoken to her. Pearl now brought him in triumphantly and introduced him to Mrs. Perkins and Martha.

The cleanliness and comfort of the big square kitchen, with its windows filled with blooming plants, the singing canary, the well-blackened range with its cheerful squares of firelight, the bubbling tea-kettle, all seemed to promise rest and comfort. Martha, neatly dressed in a dark blue house dress, with dainty white collar and apron, greeted him hospitably, and told him she hoped he would be comfortable with them. There was no trace of awkwardness in her manner, only a shy reserve that seemed to go well with her steady gray eyes and gentle voice. Pearl was distinctly proud of Martha.

When Mr. Donald went up to his room he looked around him in pleased surprise. It was only a small room, but it was well-aired, and had that elusive, indescribable air of comfort which some rooms have, and others, without apparent reason, have not. The stovepipe from the kitchen range ran through it,

giving it ample warmth. His room at Mrs. Steadman's had been of about the temperature of a well. It was with a decided feeling of satisfaction that the school-master hung his overcoat on a hook behind the door and sat down in the cushioned rocking-chair. A rag carpet, gaily striped in red, green, and yellow, covered the floor, and a tawny wolf-skin lay in front of the bed.

"This looks good to me," said the schoolmaster, stretching himself luxuriously in his chair and enjoying the warmth of the room, with the pleasant feeling that at last he had one little spot that he could call his own, where he could sit and read and think, or, if he wanted to, just sit and be comfortable. From below came the pleasant rattle of dishes and an appetizing odour of baking chicken.

Mr. Donald went to the wash-stand, and washed his hands, smiling pleasantly to himself. "Martha, like you," he was saying, "and I'll gladly make a deal with you. I have quite a stock of history and geography and literature and other things which we call knowledge, and I will gladly, part with it for just such things as these," looking around him approvingly. "Give me cream on my porridge, Martha, and I'll teach you all I know and more." A few minutes later Mr. Donald went down to supper.

Mr. Perkins did the honours of the table, and each wore his coat while he carved the chicken, as a token of respect for the new boarder. He hospitably urged Mr. Donald to eat heartily, though there was no special need of urging him, for Martha's good cooking and dainty serving were proving a sufficient invitation.

Mr. Perkins was in fine fettle, and gave a detailed account of the visit he and Sam Motherwell made to Winnipeg to interview the Department of Education about the formation of the Chicken-Hill School District. Mr. Donald was much amused by his host's description of the "Big Chief" of educational matters.

"You see, I knowed cousins of his down below, near Owen Sound," Mr. Perkins said, "though I didn't see that he favoured them at all at first; but when I got a look at him between the ears I could see the very look of the old man his uncle. Maybe you've seen him, have you? Long-faced, lantern-jawed old pelter, with a face like a coffin—they're the kind you have to look out for; they'd go through you like an electric shock! Well, sir, Sam and me was sittin' there on the edge of our chairs, and that old rack o' bones just riddled us with questions. Sam got suspicious that there was a job gittin' put up on us some way, and so he wouldn't say a word for fear it would raise the taxes, and that left all the talkin' to me. Now, I don't mind carryin' on a reasonable conversation with any one, but, by jinks, nobody could talk to that man. I tried to get a chance to tell him about knowin' his folks, and a few amusin' things that came to me about the time his uncle Zeb was married and borrowed my father's black coat for the occasion, but, land alive, he never let up on his questions. He asked me every blamed thing about every family in the neighbourhood. He had the map of the township right before him, and wrote down everything I told him nearly. I was scared to death we hadn't enough children to get the Gover'ment grant, and so I had to give twins to the Steadmans twice, both pairs of school age. I wasn't just sure of how many we needed to draw the grant, but I was bound to have enough to be sure of it. Sam Motherwell's no good to take along with you at a time like that; he kinda gagged when I gave George the second pair of twins, and when the old man went out he went at me about it, and said it was not a decent way to treat a neighbour and him not there to deny it. I told him: 'My land sakes alive! I hadn't said nothin' wrong about either George Steadman or the twins; and it's no disgrace to have 'em. Plenty of good people have twins.'

"Well, sir, when the old man came back he asked me a whole string of questions about them two pair of twins, just as if everything depended on them. I had to name them first thing. I got the girls all right—Lily and Rose I called them—but when he asked me about the boys I couldn't think of anything that would do for the boys except 'Buck' and 'Bright.' Of course I explained that them wasn't really their names, but that's what everyone called them, they were such cute little chaps and looked just alike, only Buck toed in a little. I kicked Sam to pitch in and tell something about their smart ways, but he just sat like a man in a dream; he never seemed to get over his surprise at them comin'. All this time the old lad was leafin' over a great big book he had, and askin' the greatest lot of fool questions about the twins. I told him that Lily and Rose was pretty little things with yalla hair and they sang 'The Dyin' Nun' at a concert we had in the church at Millford somethin' grand; and the two boys were the greatest lads, I said, to trap gophers—terrible shame not to have a school for them. Then the old chap looked at me, and his face seemed to be as long as a horse's, an' he says, lookin' square at me: 'I'm real glad you told me about Mr. Steadman's twins, because it's the first we've heard of them. Mr. Steadman is a mighty careless man to only register two children—Thomas J., born October 20, 1880, and Maud Mary, born sick a time 1882, and not a single entry of the twins, either pair; and here the first we hear of them is when they begin to feel the need of an education—Buck and Bright trappin' gophers, and Lily and Rose delightin' large audiences with 'The Dyin' Nun' and other classic gems. Any father might well be proud of them. I'll write to Mr. Steadman and tell him just what I think of such carelessness. Even if Buck does toe in a little that's no reason why him and his runnin' mate shouldn't have a place in the

files of his country. I'll mention to Mr. Steadman that we're deeply indebted to his friend and neighbour for putting us right in regard to his family tree.

"Well, Sir, I could see I had put my foot in it up to the knee, but I was game, you bet, and looked back at him as cool as a cucumber. I wasn't going to go back on them twins now when I had brought them into the world, as you might say; so I just said George Steadman was kinda careless about some things, he'd been cluttered up with politics for quite a while, and I guess he'd overlooked having the kids registered, but I'd speak to him about it. I'm a pretty good bluffer myself, but I couldn't fool that man. His face seemed to me to get longer every minute, and says he, when we were coming away, 'Give my love to the twins, Mr. Perkins, both pair—interestin' children, I'm sure they are.'

"My land sakes alive, you should have heard Motherwell pitch into me when we got out. Sam was as huffy about it as a wet hen.

"It's no good tryin' to fool them lads. I got my lesson that time, if I'd just had sense enough to know it; but if you believe me, sir, I got caught again. (Eh, what's that? Have another piece of chicken.) It was when I went to Montreal to see about the lump in my jaw. Did ye hear about the trouble we had that year, summer of '87? Big crop, but frozen—forty-seven cents, by George, best you could do. Well, sir, didn't I take a lump in my jaw—just like you've seen in those mangy steers. It wasn't very big at first, but it grooved something awful. I got a bottle of Mason's Lump jaw cure, but it just peeled the hide off me, and the lump grew bigger than ever. The missus here got scared she was goin' to lose me, and nothin' would do her but that I'd have to go to Montreal to see Dr. Murray. Now, I've always heard that he's awful easy on poor men, but takes it out of the rich ones, so you can bet I went prepared to put up a hard-luck story. I wore a boiled shirt, goin' down, but you bet I peeled it off before I went to see him, and I told him a pretty likely story about livin' on a rented farm, and me with a big family, most of them sickly like their ma's folks. He seemed awful sorry for me and wrote down my name and where I lived, and all that, and by George, I began to think he was goin' to pay my way back or give me the price of a cow or somethin'. He husked out the lump quick enough, had me come at seven o'clock—that man gets up as early as a farmer—and when I came to settle up he says to me: 'Mr. Perkins, if I was you I wouldn't live on a rented farm any longer. I'd go on one of my own—the north half of seventeen there—what's the matter with that? My secretary tells me you own that and there's two hundred acres under cultivation, and then there's that quarter-section of yours just across the Assiniboine, where you keep your polled Angus cattle. It really seems too bad for you to be grubbin along on a rented farm when you have four hundred and eighty acres of your own—good land, too.' Then he laughed, and I knew I was up against it, and I tried to laugh, too, but my laugh wasn't near as hearty as his. Then he says: 'It do beat all how many poor men with large sickly families, livin' on rented farms, come here to see me; but'—says; he, gittin' close up to me, and kinda tappin' me on the shoulder 'did you ever hear about an angel writin' in a big book—writin' steady day and night? Well, says he, 'here's one of them books,' and he whipped over the pages and showed me my name, where I lived and all. 'Ye can't fool the angels,' says he, 'and now I'll just trouble you for an even hundred,' says he. 'I have had three workin'-girls in to see me about their eyes today, and I done them free. I was writin' for some one like you to come along and settle for them when he was settlin' for his own. I paid it without a kick, you bet. Don't it beat the cars? Eh? What?'"

Mr. Donald laughed heartily and agreed with Mr. Perkins that honesty was the best policy.

While her father was telling his story Martha sat thinking her own thoughts. She had listened to his reminiscences so often that they had long ago ceased to interest her. The schoolmaster studied her face closely. "No wonder she is quiet," he thought to himself, "she has never had a chance to talk. There is no room in the conversation for any one else when her voluble parent unfurls his matchless tongue. Martha cannot or does not talk for the same reason that people that live in the dark in time lose the power to see, because they haven't had it to do."

That night Arthur came over for his bread. The schoolmaster noticed the sudden brightening of Martha's face when Arthur's knock sounded on the door, and the animated, eager way in which she listened to every word he said. There was a feeling of good-fellowship, too, between them which did not escape the sharp eyes of the schoolmaster. "Arthur likes her," he thought, "that's a sure thing; but I'm afraid it's that brotherly, sort of thing that's really no good. But, of course, time may bring it all right. He's thinking too much now of the fair-haired Thursa. It's hard to begin a new song when the echoes of the old song are still ringing in your ears."

Through the open doorway he could see Martha in the kitchen filling the basket that Arthur had brought over for his bread. The bread—three loaves—was put in the bottom, rolled in a snow-white flour-sack; then she put in a roasted chicken, a fruit-cake and a jar of cream.

"Strong arguments in your favour, Martha," the teacher said, smiling to himself as he watched her.

"They are good, sensible, cogent arguments, every one of them, Martha, and my own opinion is that you will win."

CHAPTER XXX

ANOTHER MATCH-MAKER

"Music waves eternal wands."

THE days went by pleasantly for the school-master, who became more and more interested in Martha's struggle for an education. He spent many of his evenings in directing her studies or in reading to her, and Martha showed her gratitude in a score of ways. Pearl was delighted with the turn events had taken, and before the month of January had gone declared that she could see results. Martha was learning.

There was one other person in the neighbourhood who was taking an interest in Martha's case and was determined to help it along, and that was Dr. Emeritus Emory, the music-teacher of the Souris valley.

Dr. Emory was a mystery, a real, live, undiscoverable mystery. All that was really known of him was that he had come from England several years before and worked as an ordinary farm-hand with a farmer at the Brandon Hills. He was a steady, reliable man, very quiet and reticent. That he knew anything about music was discovered quite by accident one day when the family for whom he worked were all away to a picnic and "Emer" was left to mind the house. One of the neighbour's boys came over to borrow a neck-yoke. "Emer," glad to be alone in the house, was in the parlour playing the piano. The neighbour's boy knocked and knocked at the back door, but got no response. Finally he went around to the front and looked in the window to see who was playing the piano, and there sat "Emer" "rippin' it off by the yard," the boy said afterward, "the smashin'est band music you ever heard."

Soon after that "Emer" left the plough, and Dr Emeritus Emory began to teach music to the young people of the neighbourhood and of the neighbourhoods beyond, for he was fond of long walks and thought nothing of twenty miles in a day. His home was where night found him, and, being of a genial, kindly nature, he was a welcome guest at many a fireside.

The music-teacher's reticence regarding his own affairs exasperated some of the women. There was no human way of finding out who he was or why he left home. Mrs. George Steadman once indignantly exclaimed, speaking of Dr. Emory,—"You can't even tell if he's married, or if she's livin'. Maybe she is, for all we know. He never gets no mail. George went and asked."

Dr. Emory was equally silent on the happenings at the houses at which he stayed. Mrs. Steadman pointed out to Mrs. Motherwell that "if the old lad wanted he could be real chatty, instead of sittin' around singin' his little fiddlin' toons. Here last week when he came to give Maudie her lesson he came straight from Slater's, and I was just dyin' to know if they was gettin' ready for Edith's weddin'. We heard it had been put off, and so I asked him out straight if he saw much sewin' around. 'They were sewin' onion seed,' says he. He seems kinda stoopid sometimes. But I says to him, makin' it as plain as I could, 'I mean, did ye see any sewin' around the house, did ye see anything in the line of sewin?' because I know people often put it away, but if he was half smart he'd see the bastin' threads or somethin', so I says, 'Did you see anythin' like sewin?' 'Just the sewin'-machine,' says he, thinkin' hard. 'I remember distinctly seein' it.' Then I just got my dander up, for I was determined to know about it, and I knew very well he c'ud tell me if he'd a mind to. I says, 'Do ye think Edith is gittin' ready to be married?' and says he, real solemn like—I thought for sure he was goin' to tell me somethin'—says he, 'Mrs. Steadman, I believe every girl is gittin' ready for her weddin' sometime. Maudie here is doin' an ocean-wave huckaback cushion now, I see. What's that for, I wonder? I suppose Edith Slater is gittin' ready. I don't see why she shouldn't,' and then he began to lilt a little foreign toon, and I was good and mad, I can tell ye; but ye can't get nothin' out, of him. He gits his livin' pretty easy, too, and he ought to be a little chatty, I think."

Dr. Emeritus Emory was not so engrossed in his profession as to be insensible to a good square meal and a well-kept room to sleep in, and so a chart of his peregrinations through the neighbourhood, with the meal-stations starred, would have been a surer guide to the good bread and butter makers than the

findings of the Agricultural Society which presumed every year at the "Show Fair" to pick the winners, and any young man looking for a wife would make no mistake if he "followed the stars."

Dr. Emory seldom passed the Perkins home without stopping, and although he had no pupil there since Edith left, he almost invariably planned his pilgrimage so as to be there about nightfall, for a good supper, bed, and breakfast and a warm welcome were not to be passed by.

If the music-teacher's way of getting his board and lodging was unique, he had also his own system of getting his laundry work done. Like all systems, it had its limitations; it required a certain understanding on the part of the lady of the house. This sometimes did not exist, and so it happened that the pair of stockings or the underwear that he left, quite by accident, in the room he had occupied were returned to him on his next visit, neatly wrapped in newspaper, but otherwise unchanged in condition.

But Martha Perkins never failed him. On his next visit the articles he had left were always returned to him, washed, ironed, and oven mended, and Martha always asked, as if there were some chance of doubt, if they were his.

Although he had never thanked Martha for her kindness, Dr. Emory was deeply sensible of it, an many a time as he came walking down the river-bank and saw the Perkins home, with its friendly, smoke curling up through the trees, a lively feeling of gratitude stirred in him. He had a habit of talking to him-self—gossiping, indeed, for it was only to himself that he discussed neighbourhood matters or his own affairs.

"Martha's a good girl," he said to himself one night as he came down the long Souris hill, "a very good girl. She puts a conscientious darn on the heel of a sock, quiet, unobtrusive, like herself. Martha should marry. Twenty years from now if Martha's not married she will be lonesome ... and gray and sad. I can see her, bent a little—good still, and patient, but when all alone ... quite sad. It is well to live alone and be free when one is young ... the world is wide ... but the time comes when one would like ...company—all one's own ...some one who ... cares."

The old man suddenly came to himself and looked around suspiciously at the bare oaks and willows that fringed the road. Not even to them would he impart the secret of his heart. But some vision of the past seemed to trouble him for he walked more slowly and seemed to be quite insensible of the beauty of the scene around him.

The setting, sun threw long shafts of crimson light across the snowbound valley and lit the windows of the distant farmhouse into flame. A white rabbit flashed across the road and disappeared in the brown scrub. The wind, which had blown all day, had ceased as evening approached, and now not a branch stirred in the quiet valley, over which the purple shades of the winter evening were creeping.

"It's a good world," he said at last, as if trying to convince himself—"it is full of beauty and music. I think there must be another world . . . over beyond the edge of things . . . a world that is perhaps a little kinder and more just—it must be. I think it will be—"

A flock of prairie chickens rose out of the snow almost at his feet and flew rapidly across the river and up over the other hill. His eye followed their flight—he loved those brave birds, who stay with us through the longest winter and whose stout hearts no storm can daunt.

Then softly he began to sing, a brave song of love and pain and enduring, a song that helped him to believe that:

"Good will fall,
At last, far off, at last—to all,
And every winter change to spring."

His voice wavered and trembled at first, as if it, too, felt the weariness of the years, but by the time he had sung the first verse all trace of sadness had vanished, and he went up the other, bank walking briskly and singing almost gaily.

Thomas Perkins, doing his evening chores, stopped to listen at the stable door as the old doctor came across the white field, then he shook his head and said. "By George, it's well to be him, not a blessed thing to bother him. It's great how easy some people get through the world."

That night, after a warm supper, the old doctor sat in the cheerful kitchen of the Perkins home and watched Martha quickly and deftly clearing away the dishes. Humming to himself an air from "Faust" no one would have thought that he was deliberately contemplating doing a match-making turn, but certain it is that his brain was busy devising means of suggesting to Arthur what a splendid girl Martha

was. There was this difference between Dr. Emory and Pearl Watson as match-makers,—Pearl played the game perfectly fair, calling to her aid such honest helps as the spelling-book and the pages of the Woman's Magazine. The doctor, who knew more of the devious paths of the human heart, chose other weapons for his warfare.

Arthur came over for his bread that evening also, and when Dr. Emory went to the organ in the parlour and began to play, every one in the house went in to listen. He did not often play without being asked, but to-night he suggested it himself. The parlour lamp was lighted, a gorgeous affair with a large pink globe on which a stalwart deer, poised on a rock, was about to spring across a rushing stream. But the parlour lamp seemed to expend all its energy lighting up, the deer and stream and the wreath of wild roses on the other side, and have very little left for the room. The doctor silently commended its dim light, for it suited his purpose better.

At Mr. Perkins's request he played Irish reels and jigs. Mrs. Perkins had only one favourite, "Home, Sweet Home," with variations; that was the only tune she was real sure of. When the Doctor got these two orders filled he began the real business of the evening with Handel's "Largo." Mr. Perkins began to yawn and soon took his departure, closely followed by Mrs. Perkins. They unitedly declared that they "didn't like a die-away ducky piece like that that hadn't any swing to it."

The Doctor's fine old eyes were shining with a real purpose as he played. "I'll suggest their thoughts for them," the old man was chuckling to himself. "Who can resist these dreamy love-songs?"—he was playing Schubert's "Serenade." "Twilight and music! If the moon would only show her face at the window! I'm letting loose a whole flock of cupids. Oh, I know, I know, I've heard their whispers—they tell you there is no death or loneliness—or separation—lying little rascals! But sweet, oh, wondrously sweet to listen to. Listen to this, Arthur—it's all yours—Martha's just as true and pure and sweet as all this—and she loves you, man alive, think of that. Sorrow and evil days and death itself will never change Martha—she's a solid rock for you to build your soul's happiness on. Dream on now, Arthur, as millions have dreamed before you; let your dreams keep pace with this—it will carry you on its strong tide—it will land you safe on the rainbow shore. It carries me even, and I am old and full of evil days. What must it be to you, Arthur, for you are young and can easily believe, and the girl who loves you is right beside you. Take the thought—it's bright with promise—it's full of love and comfort and home for you."

The schoolmaster stole away to his room upstairs and took a faded photograph from an old portfolio and kissed it tenderly.

* * *

Behind the lace curtains the full moon, with a golden mist around her face, shone softly into the dimly-lighted room, and still the old man played on, the deathless songs of youth and love—the sweet, changeless melodies which have come down the ages to remind us of the love that still lives, glorious and triumphant, though the hearts that loved are dust.

CHAPTER XXXI

MRS. CAVERS'S NEIGHBOURS

O! the world's a curious compound,
With its honey and its gall,
With its cares and bitter crosses—
But a good world after all.

—*James Whitcomb Riley.*

THE people of the neighbourhood were disposed to wonder why Mrs. Cavers lived on in the old tumble-down Steadman house after her husband's death. "Why doesn't she go home to her own people?" they asked each other—not in any unkindly spirit, but because they naturally expected that she would do this. Libby Anne had told the children at school so much about her mother's lovely home in Ontario, where her Grandmother and Aunt Edith still lived, that the people of the neighbourhood had associated with it the idea of wealth. Unfortunately, they were wrong about this. Mrs. Cavers's mother and sister lived in a pretty white cottage, just outside one of Ontario's large cities. Roses ran over the

porch, and morning-glory vines shut in the small verandah. It was a home of refinement and good taste, but not of wealth or even competence. Mrs. Cavers's only sister, Edith, and the sweet-faced mother lived there in peace and contentment, but every dollar of Edith's small salary as milliner's assistant was needed for their sustenance.

Mrs. Cavers had never let her mother and sister know what hard times she had come through. It was her good gift that she could hide her troubles even from them. Even now her letters were cheerful and hopeful, the kindness of her neighbours being often their theme. She made many excuses for not coming home to live. She was afraid the damp winters would not agree with Libby Anne; she had not disposed of all of her stock and machinery yet. These and other reasons she gave, but never the real one. She knew how hard it was to find a situation in Ontario, and now, faded and wrinkled and worn as she was, what chance had she among the many? She would stay in the West and get a position as house-keeper on a farm. She could earn her own living and Libby Anne's, and Libby Anne would go to school.

Mrs. Cavers was a brave woman and faced the issues of life without a murmur. She told herself over and over again that she should be thankful that she had her health and such kind friends and neighbours. But sometimes at night when Libby Anne was sleeping, and she sat alone by the fire, the weariness of the years rolled over her. If she could only see, her mother, she often thought, and feel once more that gentle touch of sympathy that never fails, if she could creep into her mother's arms, as she had often done as a child, and cry away all the pain and sorrow she had ever known—she could forget that life had held for her so much of ill.

The Watsons' gift of two hundred dollars came like a prisoner's release, for with it she could go home. She and Libby Anne would have a visit at home anyway. Then she would come back on the Harvesters' excursion and work for three months during the busy time, and perhaps go home again. She would not think of the future beyond that—it was enough to know that she and Libby Anne would go home in the spring.

It was in February that Libby Anne took a cold. When she had been away from school a few days Pearl Watson went over to see what was wrong. Libby Anne's flushed face and burning eyes so alarmed Pearl that next day she sent a note by her father, who was going to Millford, to her friend, Dr. Clay.

Dr. Clay went out at once to see Libby Anne, and, without alarming Mrs. Cavers, made a thorough examination of the child's lungs. He found that one of them undoubtedly was affected.

Mrs. Cavers was telling him about their proposed journey east, which the generous gift from the Watsons had made possible. They would go just as soon as Libby Anne's cold got better now—the damp weather would be over then.

The doctor's face was turned away. How' could he tell her? He could not tell her here in this forsaken, desolate little house. "Come for a drive, Mrs. Cavers," he said at last. "Let me take you and Libby Anne over to see Mrs. Perkins and Martha. It will do you both good."

Mrs. Cavers gladly assented, but would going out hurt Libby Anne?

"Oh, no!" the doctor assured her, "the fresh air will do her good."

When they drove into the Perkins yard Martha and Mrs. Perkins warmly welcomed them. The doctor had some calls to make across the river, but he would be back in time to take them home before dark, he said. When Mrs. Perkins had taken the visitors into the parlour the doctor followed Martha into the kitchen. He would tell Martha, for Dr. Clay, like every one else who knew her, had learned that Martha's quiet ways were full of strength. Martha would know what to do.

He told her in a few words.

"Has she a chance?" asked Martha, quietly.

"She has a good chance," he answered. "It is only in an early stage, but she must be put in a tent, kept in bed, and have plenty of nourishing food; either that or she must be sent to a sanitarium."

"Where is there one?" Martha asked.

"At Gravenhurst, Muskoka."

"Oh, not among strangers!" she said quickly.

"But her mother can't be left alone with her," said the doctor.

Martha stood still for some moments with one hand on the tea-kettle's shining lid. Then she spoke. "The tent can be put up here in our yard," she said.

"Mother and I will help Mrs. Cavers. I'll ask father and mother, but I'm sure they'll be willing. They never went back on a neighbour. We must give Libby Anne her chance."

The doctor looked at her with admiration. "Will you tell Mrs. Cavers, Martha? You're the best one to tell her."

"All right," she answered. "I will tell her."

The doctor drove away with a great reverence in his heart for the quiet Martha. Pearl had told him about Martha's hopes and fears, and the great ambition she had for an education. "She won't have much time to improve her mind now," he said to himself. "She never hesitated, though. She may not be acquainted with the binomial theorem, but she has a heart of gold, and that's more important. I wonder what Arthur is thinking. He's foolish to grieve for the tow-haired Thursa when queens are passing by."

When Martha went to the stable to consult with her father she found that he had been having trouble with the hired man, the one who, according to Mr. Perkins, "ate like a flock of grasshoppers." Ted had been milking a cow, when his employer came in to remonstrate with him about wasting oats when he was feeding the horses. Ted made no reply until he had the pail half-full. Then suddenly he sprang up and threw it over his employer.

"You howld w'eat-plugger," he cried, "you drove Bud aw'y with your meanness, but you can't put hon me. Do your bloomin' chores yourself!"

When Martha reached the barn she found her father wiping his clothes with an empty grain-sack. He told her what had happened.

"Jes' think, Martha, that beggar did not say a word until he got the pail half full, and then he soused it onto me, good hay-fed new milk, and from the half-Jersey too—he didn't care. This'll set ye back one churnin' too. But he won't dare to ask me for this week's wages. I paid him up just a week ago—that'll more than settle for the milk. So it ain't as bad as it might be." He was shoving a red handkerchief down the back of his neck, trying to locate some of the lost milk. "You wouldn't think that half a pail of milk would go so far, now, would you, Martha? but I tell ye he threw it strong."

Martha suggested dry clothes, and when he was dressed in them she told him about Libby Anne.

"Certainly she can stay here," Mr. Perkins cried heartily. "No one will be able to say that we went back on a neighbour. I always liked Bill, and I always liked Mrs. Cavers, and we'll do our best for the little girl. George Steadman is the one that ought to take her, but his missus is away, of course, to Ontario; they'd never take any one, anyway. People that don't look after their own ain't likely to do for strangers. When old Mrs. Steadman, George's mother, was there sick, Mrs. Steadman followed the doctor out one day and asked him how long the old lady would last; couldn't he give her a rough estimate—somethin' for her to go by like—for she was wantin' to send word to the paperhangers; and then she told him that they was goin' to have the house all done over as soon as Granny was out of the way, 'but', says she, 'just now we're kinda at a standstill.' One of Bruce Simpson's girls was working there, and she heard her."

A few days after this Libby Anne's tent raised its white head under the leafless maples that grew around the Perkins home. It was a large tent, floored and carpeted, and fitted with everything that would add to the little girl's comfort or the convenience of those who waited on her.

Dr. Clay told Mrs. Cavers that a friend of his had presented him with the whole outfit for the use of any one who might need it.

The neighbours, moved now by the same spirit that prompted them to harvest Mrs. Cavers's crop, came bringing many and various gifts. Mrs. Motherwell brought chickens, Mrs. Slater fresh eggs, Mrs. Green a new eiderdown quilt; Aunt Kate Shenstone came over to sit up at nights. Aunt Kate had had experience with the dread disease, and felt in a position to express an expert opinion on it. There was no cure for it; Bill had not recovered, neither would Libby Anne—this she told Mrs. Perkins and Martha. She knew it—it would let your hopes rise sometimes, but in the end it always showed its hand, unmistakable and merciless—oh, she knew it!

The doctor, knowing more about it than even Aunt Kate, was hopeful, and never allowed a doubt of the ultimate result to enter his mind.

Pearl Watson came in every night on her way home from school to see Libby Anne, and many were

the stories she told and the games she invented to beguile the long hours for the little girl. One night when she came into the tent Dr. Clay was sitting beside Libby Anne's bed, gently stroking her thin little hand. The child's head was turned away from the door, and she did not hear Pearl coming in.

Libby Anne and the doctor were having a serious conversation.

"Doctor," she said, "am I going to die?"

"Oh, no, Libby," the doctor answered quickly, "you're just staying out here in the tent to get rid of your cold, so you can go to your grandmother's. You would like to go to Ontario to see your Grandmother and Aunt Edith, wouldn't you?"

"I want to go to my grandmother's," she said slowly, "but I'd like to see Bud first. I'm Bud's girl, you know," and a smile played over her face. "Bud said I must never forget that I am his girl. Have you a girl, Doctor?"

The doctor laughed and looked up at Pearl. "No-body ever promised to be my girl, Libby," was his reply.

"I wish you had one, so you could tell me about it," she said, quite disappointed.

"I can tell you what it is like, all right—or at least, I can imagine what it would be like."

"Would you stay away from your girl and never come back, and forget all about her?" she asked wistfully.

Looking up, the doctor noticed that Pearl had picked up a newspaper and appeared to be not listening at all.

"If I had a girl, Libby Anne," he said, very slowly, "I might stay away a long time, but I'd come back sometime, oh, sure; and while I was away I'd want my girl to lie still, if she had a cold and was out in a tent trying to get better to go to her grandmother's, and I'd want my girl to be just as happy as she could be, and always be sure that I would come back."

"I like you, Doctor," she said, after a pause, "and if I wasn't Bud's girl I would like to be yours. Maybe Pearl Watson would be your girl, Doctor," she said quickly. "I'll ask her when she comes, if you like?"

"I wish you would, Libby Anne," he said gravely.

When he looked up Pearl had gone.

It was a week before the doctor saw Pearl. One night he met her coming home from school. It was the first day of March, and it seemed like the first day of spring as well. From a cloudless sky the afternoon sun poured down its warmth and heat.

The doctor turned his horses and asked if he might drive her home.

"Pearl," he said, with an unmistakable twinkle in his eye, "I want to see you about Libby Anne. I hope you will humour her in any way you can."

Pearl stared at him in surprise—then suddenly the colour rose in her cheeks as she comprehended his meaning.

"Even if she asks you to do very hard things," he went on.

"She hasn't asked me yet," said Pearl honestly.

"Is it possible that Libby Anne has forgotten me like that? Well, I believe it is better for me to do it myself, anyway. How old are you, Pearl?"

"I was fifteen my last birthday."

"Don't put it that way," he corrected. "That's all right when you're giving your age in school, but just now I'd rather hear you say that you will be sixteen on your next birthday, because sixteen and three make nineteen, and when you're nineteen you will be quite a grown-up young lady."

"Oh, that's a long time ahead," said Pearl.

"Quite a while," he agreed, "but I am going to ask you that question which Libby Anne has overlooked, just three years from to-day. We can easily remember the date, March the first. It may be a cold, dark, wintry day, with the wind from the north, or it may be bright and full of sunshine like to-day.

That will just depend on your answer."

He was looking straight into her honest brown eyes as he spoke. It was hard for him to realize that she was only a child.

"I don't like dark days," Pearl said, thoughtfully, looking away toward the snow-covered Tiger Hills, that lay glimmering in the soft afternoon sunshine.

Neither of them spoke for a few minutes. Then suddenly Pearl turned and met his gaze, and the colour in her cheeks was not all caused by the bright spring sun as she said, "I think, it is usually pretty fine on the first of March."

* * *

Before Libby Anne had been a week in the tent Mrs. Burrell came to offer consolation and to express her hopes for Libby Anne's recovery. Mrs. Burrell considered herself a very successful sick-visitor. In the kitchen, where she went first, she found Martha preparing a chicken for Libby Anne's dinner.

"It's really too bad for you to have so much to do, Martha," she began, when the greetings were over; "a young girl like you should be getting ready for a home of her own. Living single is all right when you're young, but it's different when you begin to get along in life. There's that young Englishman—, what's his name?—the one that his girl went back on him—he couldn't do better now than take you. I've heard people say so."

"Oh don't!" Martha cried, flushing Martha lacked the saving sense of humour.

Mrs. Burrell did not see the pain in the girl's face, and went on briskly, "I must go in and see Libby Anne and Mrs. Cavers. Of course I think it is very unwise to let every one go in to see the sick, but for a woman like me that has had experience it is different. I'll try to cheer them up, both of them."

"Oh, they're all right," Martha exclaimed in alarm. "They do not need any cheering. Pearl Watson is in the tent just now."

Martha's cheeks were still smarting with the "cheering" that Mrs. Burrell had just given her, and she trembled for Libby Anne and Mrs. Cavers.

Mrs. Burrell went into the tent resolved to be the very soul of cheerfulness, a real sunshine-dispenser.

Mrs. Cavers was genuinely glad to see her, for she had found out how kind Mrs. Burrell really was at heart.

"Oh, what a comfortable and cosy place for a sick little girl," she began gaily, "and a nice friend like Pearl Watson to tell her stories. Wouldn't I like to be sick and get such a nice rest."

Libby Anne smiled. "You can come and stay with me," she said hospitably.

Mrs. Burrell put her basket on the bed. "Everything in it is for Libby Anne," she said, "and Libby Anne must take them out herself. Pearl will help her."

Then came the joyous task of unpacking the basket. There were candy dogs and cats, wrapped in tissue paper; there were pretty boxes of home-made candy; there were gaily dressed black dolls, and a beautiful big white doll; there was a stuffed cat with a squeak in it, a picture book, and, at the bottom, in a dainty box, a five dollar bill.

"Oh, Mrs. Burrell!" was all that Mrs. Cavers could say.

Mrs. Burrell dismissed the subject by saying, "Dear me, everybody is kind to Libby Anne, I'm sure—it's just a pleasure."

Then Mrs. Cavers told her of the wonderful kindness the neighbours had shown her. That very day, two women had come from across the river—she had never heard of them before—and they brought Libby Anne two beautiful fleecy kimonos, and two hooked mats for the tent, and a crock of fresh butter; and as for the doctor's kindness, and Martha's, and Mr. and Mrs. Perkins's, and Arthur's and the Watson family's—only eternity itself would show what it had meant to her, and how it had comforted her.

Tears overflowed Mrs. Cavers' gentle eyes and her voice quivered.

"They love to do it, Mrs. Cavers," Mrs. Burrell answered, her own eyes dim, "and Mr. Braden, too. He's only too glad to show his repentance of the evil he brought into your life—he's really a reformed man. You'd be surprised to see the change in him. He told Mr. Burrows he'd gladly part with every cent he had to see somebody—" pointing to the bed—"well and strong; he's so glad to help you in any way he can; and I overheard him tell Mr. Burrell something—they were in the study and Mr. Burrell closed the door tight, so I couldn't hear very well, but I gathered from words here and there that he intended to do something real handsome for somebody"—again pointing with an air of great mystery to the little face on the bed.

Mrs. Cavers was staring at her with wide eyes, her face paler even than Libby Anne's.

"What do you mean?" she asked in a choked voice.

Mrs. Burrell blundered on gaily. "It's nothing more than he should do—he took your husband's money. If it had not been for his bar you would have been comfortably well off by this time, and I am sure he has so much money he will never miss the price Of this." She pointed to the tent and its furnishings.

"Do you mean to say—that Sandy Braden—bought this tent—for my little girl?" Mrs. Cavers asked, speaking very slowly.

"Yes, of course," replied the other woman, alarmed at the turn the conversation had taken, "but, dear me, he, should make some restitution."

"Restitution?" the other woman repeated, in a voice that cut like thin ice—"Restitution! Does anyone speak to me of restitution? Can anything bring back my poor Will from the grave? Can anything give him back his chance in this world and the next? Can anything make me forget the cold black loneliness of it all? I don't want Sandy Braden's money. Let it perish with him! Can I take the price of my husband's soul?"

Mrs. Cavers and Mrs. Burrell had gone to the farther end of the tent as they spoke, and Pearl, seeing the drift of the conversation, had absorbed Libby Anne's attention with a fascinating story about her new dolls. Yet not one word of the conversation did Pearl miss.

Mrs. Burrell was surprised beyond measure at Mrs. Cavers's words, and reproved her for them.

"It's really wrong of you, Mrs. Cavers, to feel so hard and bitter. I am astonished to find that your heart is so hard. I am really."

"My heart is not hard, Mrs. Burrell," she said, quietly, her eyes bright and tearless; "my heart is not hard or bitter—it's only broken."

That night when Mrs. Burrell had gone, Pearl told Martha what she had heard. "You see, Martha," she said, when she had related the conversation, "Mrs. Burrell is all right, only her tongue. It was nice of her to come—the things she brought Libby Anne are fine, and there's nothing wrong with her five dollars; if she'd a been born deaf and dumb she would have been a real nice woman, but the trouble with her is she talks too easy. If she had to spell it off on her fingers she'd be more careful of what she says, and it would give her time to think."

The next time the doctor came, Mrs. Cavers insisted on paying him for the tent and everything that was in it. There was a finality in her manner that made argument useless.

The doctor was distressed and earnestly tried to dissuade her.

"Let me pay for it, Mrs. Cavers, then," he said. "Surely you are willing that I should help you."

"Aren't you doing enough, doctor," she said. "You are giving your time, your skill, for nothing. Oh doctor, don't you see you are humiliating me by refusing to take this money?"

Then the doctor took the money, wondering with a heavy heart how he could tell Sandy Braden.

CHAPTER XXXII

How fair a lot to fill
Is left for each man still!

—*Robert Browning.*

THE early days of March were bright and warm and full of the promise of spring. Mouse ears came out on the willows that bordered the river, and a bunch of them was proudly carried to Libby Anne by Jimmy Watson, who declared that he had heard a meadowlark. One evening, too, as she lay in her tent, Libby Anne had heard the honking of wild geese going north, and the bright March sun that came through the canvas each day cheered her wonderfully. Libby Anne always believed that Bud would come home in the spring—he would surely come to see the big brown tumbling flood go down the Souris valley. Nobody could stay away from home in the spring, when the hens are cackling in the sunshiny yard, and water trickling down the furrows, and every day may be the day the first crocus comes. Bud would surely come then, and she would get all better, and she and her mother would go to Grandma's, and so Libby Anne beguiled her days and nights with pleasing fancies as she waited for the spring.

But although the snow had left the fields in black patches and the sun was bright and warm, the anemones delayed their coming and the ice remained solid and tight in the Souris.

One day, instead of the dazzling sunshine, there were lead-gray clouds, and a whistling wind came down the valley, piercing cold, carrying with it sharp little hurrying snowflakes.

Up to this time Libby Anne had made good progress, but with the change in the weather came a change in her. Almost without warning she developed pleurisy.

The doctor's face was white with pain when he told her mother the meaning of the flushed cheeks and laboured breathing. She had been doing so well, too, and seemed in a fair way to win against the relentless foe, but now, restlessly tossing on her pillow, with a deadly catch in her breathing, what chance had such a frail little spar of weathering the angry billows?

When the doctor went back to his office he saw Sandy Braden passing and called him in. He told him of the new danger that threatened Libby Anne.

"What can we do, Clay?" he cried, when the doctor had finished. "Is there anyone that can give her a better chance than you? How about that Scotch doctor, MacTavish? Isn't he pretty good? Can't we get him?"

"He's too busy, I'm afraid. I don't think he ever leaves the city," Dr. Clay replied. "He's the best I know, if we could only get him—though perhaps we will not need him. I'll watch the case, and if there is any chance of an operation being necessary we can wire him."

The next day Dr. Clay wired for the famous specialist, and in a few hours the answer came back that Dr. MacTavish could not leave the city. Dr. Clay had gone back to Libby Anne's bedside before the message came, and so it was to Sandy Braden that it was delivered.

It took Sandy Braden an hour to write his reply, and the wiring of it cost him four dollars, but it really was a marvel in its way—it was a wonderful production from a literary standpoint, and it was marvellous in its effect, for it caused Dr. John MacTavish, late of Glasgow, Scotland, to change his mind. He was just about to leave his house to deliver an address before the Medical Association when this, the longest telegram he had ever received, was handed to him. He read it through carefully, looked out at the gathering snowstorm, shrugged his shoulders, read it again, this time aloud, then telephoned his regrets to the Medical Association.

The storm, which had been threatening for several days, was at its height when the train, four hours late, came hoarsely blowing down the long grade into Millford. Sandy Braden was waiting on the storm-swept platform for the doctor, and took him at once to his hotel, where a hot supper was waiting for him.

When the doctor had finished his supper he was in a much better humour, which, however, speedily vanished when his host informed him that the patient was in the country, and that they would drive out at once.

"I won't go," declared Dr. MacTavish bluntly. "I won't go out in a blizzard like this for anyone. It's fifteen degrees below zero and a terrific wind blowing, and the night as black as ink. I won't go, that's all there is about it."

"Now look here, Doctor MacTavish," Sandy Braden said, persuasively, "I know it's a dreadful night

but I have the best team in this country, and I know every inch of the road. I'll get you there!"

"I won't go," said the doctor, in exactly the same tone as before.

"And besides," Sandy Braden went on, other man had not spoken, "the little girl is ill, an operation is necessary, and the doctor is counting on you. It is now we need you, and you must come. Think of the poor mother—this little kid is all she has"——

"I know all that, and I'm sorry for her, and for you, too, but I won't go a step in this storm. Don't waste your breath. Don't you know you can't move a Scotchman? I know my own business best."

Sandy Braden controlled himself by an effort.

"Doctor MacTavish," he said, "we are wasting, time, and that little girl may be gone before we get there. I suppose you are used to this kind of thing, but, mind you, it means a lot to us, and this little girl is not going to die if human power can save her. Will five hundred dollars bring you? If money is any use to you say what you want and I'll give it to you." He was shaking with the intensity of his emotion.

Dr. MacTavish turned on him with dignity—he was thoroughly exasperated now.

"See here," he said brusquely, "I don't want your money—it's not a matter of money—I won't go out in this storm. Money won't buy me to freeze myself. Didn't I tell you I'm Scotch and canny?" he added, half apologetically.

Sandy Braden's eyes flamed with sudden anger.

He took a heavy fur coat from a peg in the hall. "Put that on," he commanded. "We will start in about two minutes. The horses are at the door."

The doctor indignantly protested. Without a word Sandy Braden seized his arm with an iron grip and bundled him into the coat, none too gently.

"You are Scotch, are you?" he said, looking the doctor straight in the eye, while he still kept a grip of his shoulder. "Well, I'm Irish, and we're the people who hit first and explain afterward." He opened the door and pushed the doctor ahead of him out into the raging storm.

The best team in the Braden stable was at the door, impatiently tossing their heads and pawing the snowy ground, ready to measure their mettle with the storm.

"Get in," Sandy Braden commanded, and without another word Dr. MacTavish got into the cutter, while one of the men who had been holding the horses came and tucked the robes around him.

Sandy Braden jumped in beside him, took up the reins, and with an "All right, boys, let them go"—they were off!

All evening Doctor Clay stayed beside Libby Anne's bedside, soothing her restless tossing and carefully watching every symptom. Her fever was steadily mounting, and she complained of a pain in her side. Mr. Donald, who like everyone else in the household had been since her illness her devoted slave, came once and stood at the foot of the bed. Libby Anne looked up, knew him, and smiled faintly.

Dr. Clay had not mentioned to Mrs. Cavers the coming of the great city doctor, for since the storm had risen to such violence he had given up all hope of seeing him; for no one, he thought, could drive against such a blinding blizzard, even if the train did get through, which was doubtful.

The tent was banked high with snow all round, but the terrific wind loosened the tent ropes partially, and the canvas swayed and bellied in the storm. At the entrance, where the path came in between two high banks, the snow sifted in drearily, making a little white mound on the floor, like a new grave.

Through the roar of the storm came at intervals the old dog's mournful cry. The lamp on the table, turned low though it was, flickered in the draft, and the storm mourned incessantly in the pipe of the Klondike heater. Through all the other sounds came the rapid breathing of the little girl as she battled bravely with the outgoing tide. Martha and Mrs. Cavers sat on the lounge opposite the bed.

The opening of the tent door let in a sudden gust of wind and snow that caused the lamp to flicker uncertainly. A man in a snowy fur coat entered and hastily slipped off his outer garments. Mrs. Cavers did not look up. Martha turned the lamp higher.

Dr. Clay, looking up, gave an exclamation of delight.

"Doctor MacTavish, you're a brick!" he cried, springing to his feet.

"I was afraid you wouldn't come."

The great man, warming his hands over the stove, made no reply, except to shrug his shoulders—he was looking intently at the little girl's face. Then he shook hands with Dr. Clay gravely and asked about the case. After hearing all that Dr. Clay had to tell him, with an imperative gesture he signified that Mrs. Cavers and Martha were to leave the tent. But something in Mrs. Cavers's despairing face revealed to him the stricken mother. He touched her gently on the arm and said, in that rolling Scotch voice that has comforted many, "We'll do what we can for the bairn."

The two women found their way with difficulty into the house, holding tight to each other as they struggled through the storm. How did this great city doctor get here? Who brought him? Who would brave this terrible storm? were the questions they asked each other. They opened the kitchen door again and again to see if there was any trace of the driver who had brought the doctor, but the square of light from the kitchen door revealed only the driving storm as it swept past.

Down in the shelter of the barn Sandy Braden unhitched his steaming horses. With the help of his lantern he found a place for them in the stable. All night long, as he waited for the dawn, there was one thought in his brain as he paced up and down between the two rows of horses, or as he looked out of the stable door at the little misty patch, of light that now and then flashed out through the storm, one agonizing, burning thought that caused the perspiration to run down his face and more than once forced him to his knees in an agony of prayer. And the burden of his heart's cry was that the little girl might live.

Before daybreak the storm died away, and only the snowdrifts, packed hard and high, gave evidence of the night's fury. Sandy Braden stole quietly up to the tent and looked in, the beating of his own heart nearly choking him. Dr. MacTavish slept on the lounge, the peaceful sleep of a child, or of a man who has done good work. Beside the bed sat Dr. Clay, watching, alert, hopeful. From the tent door where he stood he could see the little white face on the pillow and he knew from the way the child breathed that she was sleeping easily. The eastern wall of the tent was rosy with the dawn. Then he went back to the stable, hitched up his team, and drove home in the sparkling sunshine.

Dr. MacTavish woke up soon after, and Dr. Clay went into the house to tell Mrs. Cavers. She had spent the long night by the kitchen fire listening to the raging of the storm, Martha close beside her in wordless sympathy, and when Dr. Clay came in with the good news that the operation was over, and the great man believed that Libby Anne would live, she was almost hysterical with joy.

"Can I go and see her, doctor?" she cried. "I must go and thank him for coming. Wasn't it splendid of him to come this dreadful night?"

"Come on, Mrs. Cavers," he said, his beaming.

"Oh, my dear woman, don't thank me for coming," the doctor said, laughing, when in broken phrases she tried to tell him what she felt. "Never did a man come more against his will than I. But I had no choice in the matter when that big giant got hold of me. He coaxed me at first"—laughing at the recollection—"then tried to bribe me—I forget what fabulous sum he offered me—half of his kingdom, I think. I mind he asked me if money were any use to me, but I stuck it out that I wouldn't come until he said he'd break every bone in my body, or words to that effect. So, my dear lady, your good man deserves all the credit—he simply bundled me up and brought me. I believe he swore at me, but I'm not sure."

Mrs. Cavers stared at him uncomprehendingly.

"Say, Clay," the doctor went on gaily, "there was a glint in that man's eye last night that made me decide to risk the storm, though I'm not fond of a blizzard. I believe he would have struck me. Where is he now? I like him. I want to shake hands with him."

Mrs. Cavers sank on the lounge, white and trembling.

Dr. Clay saw the mistake the other man was making and hastened to set him right.

"Do you mean to tell me, Clay, that that man who brought me here is not the little girl's father? Well, then, who in the world is he?"

"His name is Sandy Braden," Dr. Clay replied, "and he is—just a neighbour."

"Well, then," the doctor cried in astonishment, "let me tell you, madam"—turning to Mrs. Cavers—"you have one good neighbour."

Much to the doctor's surprise, Mrs. Cavers buried her face in her hands, while her shoulders shook

with sobs. After a few minutes she raised her head, and looking the doctor in the face, said brokenly:

"Doctor MacTavish, you are right about that, but I have not only one good neighbour; I have many."

Then she stood up and laid her hand on the young doctor's arm. "Dr. Clay," she said, "tell Sandy Braden I have only one word for him"—her eyes grew misty again, and her voice tremulous—"only one word, and that is, May God bless him—always."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE CORRECTION LINE

It's a purty good world, this is, old man,
It's a purty good world this is;
For all its follies and shows and lies,
Its rainy weather, and cheeks likewise,
And age, hard hearing, and rheumatiz;
We're not a faultin' the Lord's own plan;
All things jest
At their best,
It's a puny good world, old man.

—*James Whitcomb Riley.*

ON THE Sunday afternoon following the big storm, when the delayed passenger train on the C. P. R. slowly ploughed its way through snowbanks into the station at Newbank, there alighted from it a young man with bearded face. The line had been tied up since the storm on Thursday night, but early on Sunday afternoon the agent at Newbank, where the railway crosses the Souris on the long wooden bridge, gave out the glad word that "she" would be down "sometime soon," and the inhabitants—seventeen in number—congregated on the small platform without delay. They were expecting neither friends nor parcels. But there would be a newspaper or two, pretty old now, as some people reckon the age of newspapers, but in Newbank a newspaper is very wisely considered new until it has been read, and news is always news until you have heard it, no matter how long after the occurrence.

Another good reason for all the inhabitants putting in such a prompt appearance is that some one might get off, and hearing other people tell about an arrival is not quite the same thing as seeing it for one's self.

On this particular occasion, as old No. 182 came sweeping majestically into the station, everybody was glad that they were there to see it. There was snow on the engine, snow on the cars, and snow every place, that snow could possibly stick. While the train waited the conductor walked around the platform speaking genially to every one. Even the small boys called "Hello, Dave!" to him. "Dave" had run on this line since it had been built, three years before, and everybody knew him. He discussed the tie-up on the line with the postmaster, apparently taking no notice of the fact that the train was pulling out. However, as the last coach passed him, he swung himself up with easy grace, quite as an afterthought, much to the admiration of the small but appreciative band of spectators.

On the platform were left the mailbag, two Express parcels, and three milk cans. The people of Newbank stood watching the train as it ran slowly over the long bridge, shaking all the valley with its thunder, then they turned and walked over to the store to get their newspapers and discuss the news.

"Say, I'd hate to live in one of them out-of-the-way places where you never get to hear what's goin' on," said Joe McCaulay, sententiously. "It's purty nice, I tell ye, to get a newspaper every week, jest as reg'lar as the week comes."

This had been a particularly interesting arrival of the train, for there had been one passenger. He did not wait long enough for anyone to have a good look at him, but struck right across the drifts toward the river, as if he knew where he was going. There was only one person who claimed to have seen his face, and that was a very old lady who was unable to go to the station on account of rheumatism, but who always kept a small hole thawed in the frosting of her bedroom window, and managed in this way to see a good deal of what was going on outside. When the other members of her household came

home, and told of the young man's coming off the train and hurriedly setting out across country without letting anyone see him or ask him where he came from, where he was going, who he was, what did he want, or any simple little thing like that, the aged grandmother triumphantly informed them that he was just a boy with his first crop of whiskers—he carried nothing in his hand—he wasn't even a pedlar or a book-agent—he didn't look around at all—he was sure of the road, but he must have some reason for not wanting to be known. Not many rheumatic old ladies, with only a small eye-hole in a frozen window, would have observed as much, and she was naturally quite elated over the fact that she had seen more than the people who went to the station, and the latter were treated to some scathing remarks about the race not always being to the swift, but the way she expressed it was that it is not "always them that runs the fastest that sees the most."

The young man whose coming had aroused this comment walked rapidly over the hard-packed drifts. There had been no teams on the road since the storm, and there was not much danger of meeting anyone, but in any event, he thought his crop of black whiskers would be a sufficient disguise. He did not want any-one to know him. Not that he cared, he told himself, recklessly, but it would be just as well not to see any of them. It seemed ages to the lad since he had left this place, though it was only six months since he had said good-bye to Libby Anne in the purple September twilight.

Things looked odd to him as he walked quickly over the drifts toward the old Cavers house. The schoolhouse was more dingy and desolate-looking; the houses and barns all seemed smaller; there was the same old mound on the Tiger Hills on the southern horizon,—the one that people said had been built by the Mound Builders, but when you came up to it, is just an ordinary hill with a hay-meadow at the foot; the sandhills, too, were there still, with their sentinel spruce-trees, scattered and lonesome. Looking over at the schoolhouse, Bud remembered the day he thrashed Tom Steadman there—it came back to him with a thrill of pleasure; and then came the memory of that other day at the school, when he had told Mr. Burrell that he was going to try to let the good seed grow in his heart, and when he had been so full of high resolves. Small good it had done him, though, and Mr. Burrell had been quick to believe evil of him. Bud's face burned with anger even now. But he could get along without any of them!

Since leaving home six months before, Bud had had a varied experience. He went to Calgary first, and got a job on a horse-ranch, but only stayed a month; then he worked in a livery stable in Calgary for a while, but a restless mood was on him, and he left it, too, when his first month was served. He then came to Brandon and found work in a livery stable there. The boy was really homesick, though he did not let himself admit the fact. His employer was a shrewd old horse-man, and recognizing in Bud a thoroughly reliable driver, soon raised his wages and gave him a large share of the responsibility. He had in his stable a fine young pacer, three years old, for which he was anxious to secure a mate. Bud told him about his pacing colt at home, and the liveryman suggested that Bud go home and bring back the colt, and they would have a team then that would make the other fellows "sit up and take notice."

"I've surely earned that colt," Bud was thinking bitterly when he came near the Cavers' house. "If the old man won't give him to me, there are other ways of getting him."

He noticed with alarm that there were no signs of life around the Cavers house, but then remembered that this being Sunday, Mrs. Cavers and Libby Anne would be at church in the schoolhouse. He would go in and wait for them; he knew just how Libby Ann's eyes would sparkle when she, saw him—and what would she say when she saw what he had in the little box in his pocket?

The day had grown dull and chilly, and a few snowflakes came wandering listlessly down—as if the big storm had not entirely cleared the air. No barking dog heralded Bud's approach; no column of smoke rose into the air. The unfrosted windows stared coldly at him, and when he turned around the corner of the house he started back with an exclamation of alarm, for one of the panels of the door had been blown in and a hard snowdrift blocked the entrance.

He went to the curtainless window and looked in. The stove was there, red with rust; two packing-boxes stood on the floor, and from one of those protruded Libby Anne's plaid dress. Through the open bedroom door he could see Libby Anne's muslin hat hanging on the opposite wall. It looked appealingly at him through the cold silence of the deserted house. His first thought was that Libby Anne and her mother had gone East, but as the furniture was still in the house, and the boxes of clothing, this thought had to be abandoned. But where were they? Why were Libby Anne's clothes here?

Just then Bud noticed the little hand-sleigh that he had made for Libby Anne, standing idly behind the stove, and it brought to his eyes a sudden rush of tears—his little girl was dead; the little girl who had loved him. He remembered how she had clung to him that night he came to say good-bye, and begged him to come back, and now, when he came back, there was only the muslin hat and the sleigh and the plaid dress to tell him that he was too late!

Bud retraced his steps sadly to the road and made his way to the schoolhouse, which lay straight on his road home. In his anxiety for Libby Anne, he forgot about it being the hour for service. The schoolyard was blown clean and bare. In the woodpile he noticed "shinney-sticks" where their owners had put them for safe-keeping—he knew all the "hidie-holes," though it was years and years since he had played "shinney" here. His boyhood seemed separated from him by a wide gulf. Since leaving home he had been to church but seldom, for Bud made the discovery that many another young man makes, that the people who go to church and young people's meetings are not always as friendly as the crowd who frequent the pool-rooms and bars. Bud had been hungry for companionship, and he had found it, but in places that did not benefit him morally.

The minister's cutter, in front of the shed, called to his remembrance the fact that this was the hour for service, which no doubt was going on now. "It's a wonder they still keep it up," he thought, rather contemptuously.

It seemed the most natural thing in the world for him to go into the porch—he, would hear what was going on, anyway, and perhaps he could see if Mrs. Cavers were there. Suddenly some one began to sing—the voice was strange, and yet familiar, like something had heard long, long, ago. When he realized that it was Mrs. Cavers he was listening to, a sudden impulse seized him to rush in. Libby Anne must be there beside her mother—she was always beside her.

"was it for crimes that I have done, He groaned upon the tree?"

Mrs. Cavers was singing alone, it seemed, in her sweet thin voice.

"Oh, no," Bud said to himself, "I guess it was not for any crimes she ever did."

The day had grown darker and colder, biting wind began to whirl hard little around the porch. Mrs. Cavers sang on:

"Well may the sun in darkness hide,
And shut his glories in.
When Christ, the mighty Saviour died
For man, the creatures sin."

Then he heard Mr. Burrell say, quite distinctly: "Ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins and are in love and charity with your neighbours, and intend to lead a new life ... draw near with faith and take this holy sacrament to your comfort ... meekly kneeling upon your knees."

Bud heard a few moving forward—he knew who they were, just the same few—he had gone with them once, more fool he was—what was the use of that man talking about love and charity when the very first chance he got he would turn a fellow down?

"... Who in the same night that he was betrayed took bread and brake it, saying: 'Take, eat; this is my body which was broken for you this is my blood of the New Testament, which was shed for you'"

This one sentence came out to him clearly, fastening itself on his mind, and though in a vague way he heard the service through, his mind was busy with the thought that the Saviour of men had been betrayed by a friend, betrayed to his death, and had died blessing and forgiving his enemies.

"... the same night that he was betrayed."

The solemnity of it all fell on the boy's heart. He had knelt there once, and heard those words and taken these tokens of the Lord's death, with his heart swelling with love for Him who had not even refused to die. It had been a glorious day of June sunshine, when through the open windows came the robin's song and the prairie breeze laden with the perfume of wolf-willow blossoms and sweet-grass. He remembered how the tears had risen unbidden to his eyes—happy tears of love and loyalty—and he had felt that nothing could ever separate him from the Master whom he loved. But now he stood on the outside of the door—he was an outsider—he had no part in this. He made a step backward—he would go away—he would hear no more—he had come back for the pacing colt—he was done with this neighbourhood and home—he was done with religion!

"Drink ye this in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed for you."

The voice sounded at Bud's elbow, as if calling him to stay. He hesitated—they were not nearly done yet—there was no danger of anyone coming out—everyone stayed for the whole service, he knew, even if they didn't take part.

"Our Father, who art in heaven," he heard them all repeat, and quite unconsciously he began to follow the words with them. It was like an old friend coming out to meet him.

"Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them who trespass against us."

Bud stopped abruptly, he couldn't say that—he would not forgive—he had been bitterly wronged, and he would never forgive—he had done what was right, and what had he got for it? He tried to summon back to him the anger that had kept alive his resolve to stay away from home. Instead of anger and bitterness he found his heart swelling with the old love for the One who, the same night that he was betrayed, took bread and broke it, saying: "Take, eat; this is my body, which was broken for you."

Some one was praying—it was Mr. Burrell—every word came to Bud clearly.

"Dear Lord," the minister prayed, "be one with us to-day, and grant that the great appeal which Thou dost make in the broken body and the shed blood may find an answer in every heart that hears. Compel us with it to consecrate our lives to Thee. If there is any root of bitterness in our lives, let us bring it to where the shadow of the Cross may fall upon it. Oh, dear Lord, bless all those who have wandered from Thee. Bless the dear boy of our prayers who may have wandered far, but who, we believe, will never be deaf to the call of the Spirit. We praise Thee for prayers answered—for sick ones healed—for lives redeemed—and we humbly crave Thy mercy for us all. Amen."

What strange power was in these words to make Bud Perkins suddenly realize that only one thing mattered? He opened the door and walked in. The people heard the door open and some one come quickly toward the front. They saw the minister step down from the platform and into the aisle, where he clasped a black-bearded youth in his arms. For a full minute no one spoke; then Roderick Ray, the Scottish Covenanter, broke into singing:

"O dying Lamb, Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power
Till all the ransomed church of God
Be saved to sin no more."

What a scene of rejoicing was in the schoolhouse that dark March day! Roderick Ray slapped Bud on the back again and again, crying: "Wonderful! Wonderful!" Mr. Perkins hung on to Bud's arm as if he were afraid he might lose him again, and told him over and over again what a time he had been having with hired help. "There's nothing like your own you bet." Even George Steadman shook hands with Bud, and told him he was glad to see him back again.

While Mrs. Cavers, in answer to his eager inquiry, was telling Bud all about Libby Anne's illness, and the great kindness of his father and mother and Martha Pearl Watson whispered to Mr. Perkins: "Now's the time to clear up Bud's name about that wheat plugging. Tell them who did it." In the excitement of the moment there did not seem anything odd in the suggestion. Pearl was shrewd enough to know that the psychological moment had come.

Mr. Burrell was still standing with his hand on Bud's shoulder, as if he could never let go of him. Pearl whispered to the minister to ask the people to sit down for a few minutes, for Mr. Perkins had something to say to them. Mr. Burrell did as Pearl had asked him. Then Mr. Perkins addressed a few words to the congregation which were probably as strange a closing as any sacramental service has ever had.

"Well, friends," he said, "I believe I have a few words to say. I should have said them before, I guess. In fact, I should have said them when the thing happened, but I'm a terrible man to put off things that I don't like to do. But I'm so glad to get Buddie home that I don't mind tellin' ye that he didn't have nothin' to do with that wheat pluggin'—that was my idea entirely—in fact, Bud raised Cain about us ever pluggin' grain, and said he'd not stand for it any more. I ain't much used to speakin' in church, as you know. I've always kept my religion in my wife's name, and I may not be talking in a suitable way at all. I'm a good deal like old Jimmie Miller was at a funeral one time. Jimmie had took a glass or two too much, and just when the minister asked them to walk around and view the remains, old Jimmie jumped up and proposed the health of the bride and groom. Well, of course, someone grabbed him and pulled him down, and says: 'Sit down, man, this is a funeral!' 'Well,' says Jimmie, speakin' pretty thick, 'I don't care what it is, but it's a very successful event any way.' That's the way I feel—it's the happiest day I've known for quite a while." Thomas Perkins suddenly stopped speaking and blew his nose noisily on a red handkerchief. The neighbours, looking at him in surprise, realized that there was strong emotion behind his lightly spoken words.

It seemed to be quite a natural thing for them to sing "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow," and for the hand-shaking to begin all over again. They were only a handful of very ordinary people in a desolate-looking, unpainted schoolhouse that dark Sunday afternoon, but a new spirit seemed suddenly to have come over them, a new spirit that made them forget their worries and cares, their sordid jealousies and little meannesses, the spirit of love and neighbourly kindness, and there were some

there who remembered that old promise about the other One who will come wherever "two or three are gathered together," and thought they felt the Unseen Presence.

A few hours later Bud was sitting in the cushioned rocking-chair of the tent before a cheerful fire that blazed in the Klondike heater. On the lounge sat his father, mother and Mrs. Cavers.

Libby Anne, in a pale blue kimono, and wrapped in a warm shawl, was on Bud's knee, holding in her hands a gold locket and a chain, and saying over and over to herself in an ecstasy: "Bud did come back and I'm Bud's girl."

Mr. Perkins was in radiant good-humour. "By George, it's great to have Buddie home!" he said, "and our kid here gettin' better. Let me tell you, Buddie, we've had a pretty dull, damp time around here; things have been pretty blue, and with no one to help me with the stock since Ted left. I was tellin' ye about Ted, wasn't I? Well, sir, we've been up against it all right, but now I'm feelin' so good I could whoop and yell, and still, I kinda feel I shouldn't. I'm a good deal like old Bill Mills, down at the Portage, the time the boys 'shivared' him. You see, just the day after the first woman was buried old Bill started in to paint up his buckboard, and as soon as the paint was dry he was off huntin' up another woman; and he got her, too, a strappin' fine big Crofter girl—by George! you should see her milkin' a cow—I passed there one day when she was milkin', and I can tell you she had a big black-and-white Holstein cow shakin' to the horns! Well, anyway, when Bill and the girl got married, the boys came to 'shivaree' them. The old woman was just dead two months, and when the noise started Bill came out, mad as hops, and told them they should be ashamed of themselves making such a racket at a house where there had so lately been a funeral! That's how it is with us, eh, what? By George, it's great altogether to have Buddie home."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE CONTRITE HEART

Who knows whither the clouds have fled?
In the unscarred heaven they leave no wake.
And the eyes forget the tears they have shed,
And the heart forgets its sorrow and ache.

—James Russell Lowell.

DURING Libby Anne's illness Mrs. Cavers had been so anxious about her that she had hardly given a thought to anything else; but when the little girl's perfect recovery seemed assured, she was confronted again by the problem of their future. Libby Anne's illness, in spite of the neighbours' and the doctor's kindness, had made a hole in the two hundred dollars the Watsons had given her. She still had some money left from her share of the crop, but she would need that for new clothes for herself and Libby Anne; there would be the price of their tickets, and the other expenses of the journey, and she must save enough to buy her ticket back to Manitoba.

Of course, there were still the two cows and the hens, which the neighbours had kindly taken care of for her, and there was some old machinery, but she did not expect that she would get much from the sale of it.

The first day that Libby Anne was able to walk, Dr. Clay came out to see her, and brought to Mrs. Cavers a letter from the new tenant who had rented the Steadman farm. The letter stated that the writer was anxious to buy all her furniture, machinery and stock, and wanted to make her an offer of three hundred dollars cash for them.

Mrs. Cavers read the letter with astonishment. She had never hoped for such a price. "Now, doctor," she said, "you've been to me one of the best friends any one ever had. Tell me one thing—is Sandy Braden paying part of this?"

Dr. Clay was prepared for the question and answered evasively. "I'll bring the man here to see you—he's an old Indiana farmer with lots of money, and you know your implements are in very good shape. I went out with him to the farm, and together we figured out what the stuff was worth. Here is the list; he is perfectly satisfied if you are."

Mrs. Cavers shook her head doubtfully. "I know that the stuff is not worth more than half that amount, and I know very well that either you or Mr. Braden has fixed this up for me to let me still feel independent and have my trip back home. I know that, but I'm going to take it, doctor, without a word. I am not even going to try to thank you. I haven't seen my mother or any of my own people for twelve years. It has been my sweetest dream that some day I would go back home, and now it looks as if the dream were coming true. I am like a little hungry boy who has been looking at a peach in a shop window for days and days and days, desiring without hope, when suddenly someone comes out and puts it in his hand—he will quite likely run away with it without so much as thanking his kind friend, but he's grateful just the same. That's the way it is with me, doctor; I am grateful, too, so grateful that I can't talk about it."

A month later Mrs. Cavers and Libby Anne arrived safely home, and Libby Anne's enraptured eyes beheld the tall maple trees, the bed of red and yellow tulips, and the budding horse-chestnuts of her dreams. The grandmother, a gentle, white-haired old lady, looked anxiously and often at her widowed daughter's face, so worn and tired, so cruelly marked by the twelve hard years; and although Mrs. Cavers told them but little of her past life that was gloomy and sad, yet the mother's keen eyes of love read the story in her daughter's work-worn hands, her gray hair, and the furrows that care and sorrow had left in her face. She followed her about with tenderest solicitude, always planning for her comfort and pleasure. She often sat beside Mrs. Cavers when, in the quiet afternoon, she lay in the hammock on the veranda. Always as they talked the mother was thinking of the evil days that the world had held for her poor girl, and planning in every way her loving heart could devise to make it up to her, after the fashion of mothers the wide world over.

To Mrs. Cavers, the spring and summer days were full of peace and happiness. The quiet restfulness of her mother's home—the well-appointed rooms, the old-fashioned piano, with its yellow keys, in the back parlour, the dear familiar pictures on the walls—all these seemed to soothe her tired heart. The garden, with its patch of ribbongrass, its sumach trees and scarlet runners, was full of pleasant associations, and when she sat in the little vine-covered summer-house and listened to the birds nesting in the trees above, the long twelve years she had lived seemed like a bad dream, hazy and unreal—the real things were the birds and the vines, and her mother's love.

July came in warm and sultry, but behind the morning-glory vines that closed in the small veranda it was always cool and pleasant. One day Mrs. Cavers, lying in the hammock, was looking at the sweet face of her mother, who sat knitting beside her. All afternoon, as she lay there, she had been thinking of the hot, busy days on the farm which she must soon face—the busy, busy farm, where the work has to be done, for the men must be fed. Each day she seemed to dread it more—the early rising, the long, long hours, the constant hurry and rush, the interminable washing of heavy, white dishes in a hot little kitchen, reeking with tobacco smoke. She had gone through it many times, cheerfully, bravely, for there had always been in her heart the hope of something better—good days would surely come, when her husband would do better, and they would be happy yet. This thought had sustained her many times, but the good, days had never come, and now—how could she go back to it with no hope. There was nothing ahead of her but endless toil, just working every day to earn a living. Oh, was life really such a priceless boon that people should crave it so!

"Must you really go back to the West, Ellie dear?" her mother asked, as if she read her daughter's bitter thoughts.

Mrs. Cavers sat up and smiled bravely. "Oh, yes, mother, it's the West for me; but some day we'll come back again for another one of these dear, lovely visits. I always felt I would never really be rested until I got back here and had you to sit beside me. But, of course, I must go back for the harvest—it is really a beautiful country, and especially so in the fall of the year, and I have some business there which I must go and attend to." She did not tell the nature of the business.

"Ellie, I would like to have you always with me, and your dear little girl—there's only the four of us, and we are so happy here. Why can't you stay with us?"

Mrs. Cavers knew why, but she could not tell her mother that she had very little in the world beyond the price of a ticket back to Manitoba.

"I've been praying every day since you came, Ellie, that we would never need to part again," her mother said wistfully. "I can't let you go, it seems."

Just then the gate clicked and a heavy step came rapidly up the walk. Mrs. Cavers, starting to her feet, found herself face to face with Sandy Braden as he came up the steps.

For a few seconds neither of them spoke. Then Mrs. Cavers held out her hand. "Mr. Braden," she

said. Words failed her.

"I want to speak to you for a few minutes," he said.

She opened the door and led him into the little parlour.

"Mrs. Cavers, I know that my presence is full of bitter memories for you," he began. "You have no reason to think kindly of me, I well know; but no one else could do this for me, or I would not force myself on you this way——"

She interrupted him. "You were kind to me and my little girl once; you did for us what few would have done. I have never thanked you, but I have always been and always will be grateful; and when I think of you—that is what I remember."

There was a silence between them for a few seconds. Then he spoke.

"I don't know how to begin to say what I want to say. I did you a great wrong—you, and others, too; not willfully, but I did it just the same. I can never make amends. Oh, forgive me for talking about making amends—but you're not the only one who has suffered; it's with me night and day. I can see Bill's face that day—on the river-bank! I liked Bill, too. As you know, I closed the bar that day forever, but it was too late—to help Bill."

Mrs. Cavers was holding the back of a chair, her face colourless and drawn.

"I heard a few days ago that you were coming back to Manitoba to work, to earn your living and the little girl's. I can't stand that—I had to come—Oh, don't scorn me like that—let me help you. If it had not been for my bar you would have had plenty. I want you to take this; it's the deed of a half-section of land near Brandon—it will keep you in plenty. I'm a blundering fellow—I've put it roughly, but God knows I mean it all right."

He stopped and wiped the perspiration from his face.

"I can't take it," Mrs. Cavers said, without moving.

"You must!" he cried, moving nearer to her. "Don't refuse! Oh, Mrs. Cavers, you were merciful to me once—do you mind how you held out your hand to me that day? God bless you, it was like a drop of water to a man in hell. Have mercy now; take a little of the burden from a guilty man's heart."

"I do forgive you freely, and I wish you well, but—I—I—can't take your money," she whispered hoarsely.

He walked up and down the room for a few moments, then turned to her again.

"Mrs. Cavers, I've been a guilty man, careless and hard, but that day—on the river-bank—I saw things as I never saw them before, and I'm trying to be square. My mother"—his voice broke and his eyes glistened—"my mother has been in heaven twenty years. She always told me about God's mercy to—the very worst—that He turned no one down that came to Him. My mother was that kind herself, and knowing her—has made it easier for me to believe that—God is always merciful—and always willing—to give a fellow a—a second chance. I can't look for it or ask it until—you take this. Now, Mrs. Cavers, I know you don't like me—why should you?—but won't you take it?"

She hesitated, and was about to refuse again, when he suddenly seized her arm and compelled her to meet his gaze.

"For God's sake!" he cried.

Mrs. Cavers took the document in her trembling hands.

Sandy Braden turned to leave the room, but she detained him.

"Mr. Braden," she almost whispered, her voice was so low, "I have a mother like yours, one who makes it easy to believe that God is always loving and kind—I want her to thank you for me. Tell her all about it—she'll understand, just like your own mother would—these dear old mothers are all the same."

Mrs. Cavers went back to the veranda and brought her mother into the parlour; then she went out, leaving them alone.

What passed between them no one ever knew, but an hour later Sandy Braden went out from the little white cottage with a new light shining in his face, and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, in his heart. He went back into the world that day destined to do a strong man's part in

the years to come.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE LURE OF LOVE AND THE WEST

If you've heard the wild goose honking, if you've
seen the sunlit plain,
If you've breathed the smell of ripe grain, dewy, wet,
You may go away and leave it, say you will not come
again,
But it's in your blood, you never can forget.

THERE is a belief, to which many sentimental people still hold, in spite of all contradictory evidence, that marriages are arranged in heaven, and that no amount of earthly wire-pulling can alter the decrees of the Supreme Court. Many beautiful sentiments have been expressed, bearing on this alluring theme, but none more comprehensive than Aunt Kate Shenstone's brief summary: "You'll get whoever is for ye, and that's all there is to it."

Theoretically, Mrs. Burrell was a believer in this doctrine of non-resistance, modified, however, by the fact that she also believed in the existence of earthly representatives of the heavenly matrimonial bureau, to whom is entrusted the pleasing duty of selecting and pairing. Of this glorious company, Mrs. Burrell believed herself a member in good standing, and one who stood high upon the honour roll. Therefore, having decided that Arthur should marry Martha Perkins she proceeded to arrange the match with a boldness that must have made the angels tremble.

She planned an evening party, and wrote to Arthur asking him to bring Martha, but forgot to send Martha an invitation, which rather upset her plans, for Martha declined to go. Mrs. Burrell, however, not to be outdone, took Arthur aside and talked to him very seriously about his matrimonial prospects; but Arthur brought the conversation to an abrupt close by telling her he had not the slightest intention of marrying, and had quite made up his mind to go back to England as soon as the harvest was over.

When Mrs. Burrell was telling her husband about it she was almost in tears.

"If he goes to England, John, we'll never see him again; he'll marry an English girl—I know it. They're so thick over there he can't help it, when he sees so many dangling after him! He'll just have to marry one of them."

"To thin them out, I suppose you mean," her husband said, smiling. "Don't worry, anyway, and above all things, don't interfere. Leave something for Providence to do."

After Mrs. Cavers and Libby Anne had gone, life in the Perkins's home settled down to its old pleasing monotony. The schoolmaster found Martha a willing and apt pupil, and came to look forward with pleasure to the evenings he spent helping her to understand the world in which she was living. Dr. Emory paid his regular visits, seeking with the magic arts of music to draw Arthur's thoughts down the pleasant lanes of love. Pearl Watson, like a true general, kept a strict oversight of everything, but apparently took no active part herself; only on Saturday afternoons, which she usually spent with Martha, she had Martha tell her the stories she had read during the week. At first the telling was haltingly done, for Martha was not gifted with fluent speech, but under the spell of Pearl's sympathetic listening, her story-telling powers developed amazingly.

When the summer days came, with their wealth of flowers and singing birds, to Martha the whole face of Nature seemed changed; she heard new music in the meadowlark's ringing note, and the plaintive piping of the whippoorwill. The wild roses' fragrant beauty, the gorgeous colouring of the tiger-lilies and moccasin flowers, the changing hues of the grainfields at noon-day as the drifting clouds threw racing shadows over them, were all possessed of a new charm, a new power to thrill her heart, for the old miracle of love and hope had come to Martha, the old witchery that has made "blue skies bluer and green things greener," for us all. There was the early rising in the dewy mornings when the river-valley was filled with silvery mist, through which the trees loomed gray and ghostly; there was the quivering heat of noonday, that played strange tricks on the southern horizon, when even the staid old Tiger Hills seemed to pulsate with the joy of summer; and, then the evenings, when the day's work was

done, and the western sky was all aglow with crimson and gold.

One quiet Sunday evening in harvest time, Martha and Arthur stood beside the lilac hedge and watched the sun going down behind the Brandon Hills. Before them stretched the long field of ripening grain. There was hardly a leaf stirring on the trees over their heads, but the tall grain rustled and whispered of the abundance of harvest.

As they listened to the rustling of the wheat Martha said: "I have been trying to think what it sounds like, but can think of nothing better than the bursting of soap-bubbles on a tub of water, and that's a very unpoetical comparison."

"I think it's a very good one, though," Arthur said, absently.

"And it seems to whisper: 'Plenty, plenty, plenty,' as if it would tell us we need not rush and worry so," she went on. "I love to listen to it. It has such a contented sound."

Arthur sighed wearily, and looking up, Martha saw his face was sad with bitter memories.

"What is it, Arthur?" she said, drawing nearer in quick sympathy.

"I'm all right," he answered quickly, but, with an effort; "just a little bit blue, perhaps."

"How can anyone be blue to-night with everything so beautiful and full of promise?" Martha cried.

"There are other things—beside these," he said gloomily.

Martha shrank back at his words, for she knew of whom he was thinking. Then a sudden rage seized her, and she turned and faced him with a new light burning in her eyes.

"You must forget her!" she cried. "You must! She cares nothing for you. She, never loved you, or she would not have treated you so badly. She soon let you go when she got what she thought, was a better chance. Why do you go on loving her?" She seized his arm and shook him. "It's foolish, it's weak—why do you do it? I wouldn't waste a thought on any one who cares nothing for me—it isn't—it isn't—" she stopped abruptly, and the colour surged into her pale face.

"Oh, Arthur, forgive me for speaking so." All the anger had gone from her voice. "I cannot bear to see you so unhappy. Try to forget her. The world is wide and beautiful."

In the western sky a band of crimson circled the horizon.

"Martha," Arthur said gently, "you are one of the truest friends a fellow ever had, and I know you think I am foolish and sentimental, but I am just a little bit upset to-day. I saw her last night—she and—her husband were on the train going to Winnipeg, and I saw them at the station. She's lovelier than ever. This sounds foolish to you, I know, Martha, but that's because you don't know. I hope you will never know."

Martha turned away hastily.

"All this," he continued, waving his hand toward the evening sky and the quiet landscape, "all this reminds me of her. You know, Martha, when you look at the sun for a while you can see suns everywhere you look; that's the way it is with me."

The colour was fading from the sky; only the faintest trace of rose-pink tinged the gray clouds.

"I think I shall go home to England," Arthur said, after a long silence. "I shall go home for a while, and then, perhaps—pshaw! I don't know what I shall do." In the failing light he could not see the pallor of Martha's face, neither did he notice that she shivered as if with cold.

The sunset glory had all gone from the clouds; there was nothing left now but the ashes.

"I am sorry you are going," Martha said steadily. "We will miss you."

The schoolmaster, who was sitting by the kitchen window, noticed Martha's white face when she came into the house and guessed the cause. Looking after Arthur as he walked rapidly down the road to his own house, Mr. Donald shook his head sadly, murmuring to himself: "Lord, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

When Martha went up to her own room she sat before the mirror as she had done that at other night two years before, and looked sadly at her face reflected there. She recalled his words: "She is lovelier than ever"—this was what had won and held his love. Oh, this cruel, unjust world, where the woman

without beauty has to go lonely, hungry, unmated—it was not fair; she stretched out her arms in an agony of longing.

"Thursa cares nothing for him, and I would gladly die to save him pain!" she whispered hoarsely.

She tore off her collar roughly and threw it from her; she took down her hair and brushed it almost savagely; then she went to the open window, and, leaning on the casement, listened to the rustling of the wheat. It no longer sang to her of peace and plenty, but inexorable, merciless as the grave itself, it spoke to her of heart-break and hopes that never come true.

* * *

In September Arthur went to England. After he had gone, Martha went about her work with the same quiet cheerfulness. She had always been a kind-hearted neighbour, but now she seemed to delight in deeds of mercy. She still studied with the school-master, who daily admired the bravery with which she hid her heartache. Martha was making a fight, a brave fight, with an unjust world. She would study—she would fit herself yet for some position in life when her parents no longer needed her. Surely, there was some place where a woman would not be disqualified because she was not beautiful.

Arthur had written regularly to her. Looking ahead, she dreaded the time when he would cease to write, though she tried to prepare for it by telling herself over and over again that it must surely come.

Arthur's last letter came in November, and now with Christmas coming nearer, Martha was lonelier than ever for a word from him. The week before Christmas she looked for his letter every day. Christmas eve came, a beautiful moonlight, sparkling night, with the merry jingle of sleighbells, in the air, but no letter had yet come.

Mr. and Mrs. Perkins and Bud had driven in to Millford to attend the concert given by the Sunday-school, but Martha stayed at home. When they were gone, and she sat alone in the quiet house, a great restlessness seized her. She tried to read and then to sew, but her mind, in spite of her, would go back to happier days. It was not often that Martha allowed herself to indulge in self-pity; but to-night, as she looked squarely into the future and saw it stretching away before her, barren and gray, it seemed hard to keep back the tears. It was not like Martha to give way to her emotions; perhaps it was the Christmas feel in the air that gripped her heart with new tenderness.

She finished making the pudding for the Christmas dinner, and put the last coat of icing on the Christmas cake, and then forced herself to dress another doll for one of the neighbour's children. Sometimes the tears dimmed her eyes, but she wiped them away bravely.

Suddenly a loud knock sounded on the door. Martha sprang up in some confusion, and hastily tried to hide the traces of her tears, but before she was ready to open the door it opened from without and Arthur stood smiling before her.

"Oh, Arthur!" she cried, her face glowing with the love she could not hide. "I was just thinking that you had stopped writing to me."

"Well, I have, too," he laughed; "letters are not much good anyway. I knew you were here, for I met the others on the road," he continued, as he hung his overcoat on its old nail behind the door, "and so I hurried along, for I have a great many things to tell you. No," in answer to her question, "I have not had supper—I couldn't wait. I wanted to see you. I've made, a big discovery."

Martha had put the tea-kettle on and was stirring the fire.

"Don't bother getting any supper for me until I tell you what I found out."

She turned around and faced him, her heart beating faster at the eagerness in his voice.

"Martha, dear," he said, "I cannot do without you—that's the discovery I made. I have been lonely—lonely for this broad prairie and you. The Old Country seemed to stifle me; everything is so little and crowded and bunched up, and so dark and foggy—it seemed to smother me. I longed to hear the whirr of prairie chickens and see the wild ducks dipping in the river; I longed to hear the sleighs creaking over the frosty roads; and so I've come home to all this—and you, Martha," He came nearer and held out his arms. "You're the girl for me."

Martha drew away from him. "Arthur, are you sure?" she cried. "Perhaps it's just the country you're in love with. Are you sure it isn't just the joy of getting back to it all. It can't be me—I am only a plain country girl, not pretty, not educated, not clever, not—"

He interrupted her in a way that made further speech not only impossible but quite unnecessary.

"Martha, I tell you it is you that makes me love this country. When I thought of the sunlit prairie it was your dear eyes that made it glorious. Your voice is sweeter than the meadowlark's song at sunrise. You are the soul of this country for me—you stand for it all. You are the sunshine, the birdsong, the bracing air, the broad outlook, the miles of golden wheat. Now, tell me, dear, for you haven't told me yet, are you glad to see me back?"

"But what would your mother say?" Martha asked, evading his question.
"Arthur, think of the people at home."

He opened his pocket-book and took out a leather case. Springing the lid, he handed it to her, saying: "My mother knows all about you, and she sends you this."

Martha took out the beautiful necklace of pearls and read the tender little note, inside the case. Her eyes filled with happy tears, and looking up into Arthur's smiling face, her last doubt vanished.

A few hours later, when the old clock on the wall, slowly struck the midnight hour, telling them that another Christmas morning had come, they listened to it, hand in hand without a spoken word, but in their hearts was the echo of all the Christmas bells that were ringing around the world.

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