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CHANTICLEER:

A

THANKSGIVING STORY

OF

THE PEABODY FAMILY.

SECOND EDITION.

BOSTON: B. B. MUSSEY & CO.
NEW-YORK: J. S. REDFIELD.
1850.

PREFACE.

Shall the glorious festival of Thanksgiving, now yearly celebrated all over the American Union, (said the author to himself one day,) be ushered in with no other trumpet than the proclamations of State-Governors? May we not have a little holiday-book of our own, in harmony with that cherished Anniversary, which, while it pleases your fellow-countrymen, should it have that good

fortune, may acquaint distant strangers with the observance of that happy custom of our country? With the hope that it may be so received, and as a kindly word spoken to all classes and sections of his fellow citizens, awakening a feeling of union and fraternal friendship at this genial season, the writer presents this little volume of home characters and incidents.

November, 1850.

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CHAPTER FIRST.

[9]

THE LANDSCAPE OF THE STORY.

I see old Sylvester Peabody—the head of the Peabody family—seated in the porch of his country dwelling, like an ancient patriarch, in the calm of the morning. His broad-brimmed hat lies on the bench at his side, and his venerable white locks flow down his shoulders, which time in one hundred seasons of battle and sorrow, of harvest and drouth, of toil and death, in all his hardy wrestlings with old Sylvester, has not been able to bend. The old man's form is erect and tall, and lifting up his head to its height, he looks afar, down the country road which leads from his rural door, towards the city. He has kept his gaze in that direction for better than an hour, and a mist has gradually crept upon his vision; objects begin to lose their distinctness; they grow dim or [10] soften away like ghosts or spirits; the whole landscape melts gently into a pictured dew before him. Is old Sylvester, who has kept it clear and bright so long, losing his sight at last, or is our common world, already changing under the old patriarch's pure regard, into that better, heavenly

land?

It seemed indeed, on this very calm morning in November, as if angels were busy about the Old Homestead, (which lies on the map, in the heart of one of the early states of our dear American Union,) transforming all the old familiar things into something better and purer, and touching them gently with a music and radiance caught from the very sky itself. As in the innocence of beauty, shrouded in sleep, dreams come to the eyelids which are the realities of the day, with a strange loveliness—the fair country lay as it were in a delicious dreamy slumber. The trees did not stand forth boldly with every branch and leaf, but rather seemed gentle pictures of trees; the sheep-bells from the hills tinkled softly and as if whispering a secret to the wind; the birds sailed slowly to and fro on the air; there was no harshness in the low of the herds, no anger in the heat [11] of the sun, not a sight nor a sound, near by nor far off, which did not partake of the holy beauty of the morning, nor sing, nor be silent, nor stand still, nor move, with any other than a gliding sweetness and repose, or an under-tone which might have been the echo here on earth, of a better sphere. There was a tender sadness and wonder in the face of old Sylvester, when a voice came stealing in upon the silence. It did not in a single tone disturb the heavenly harmony of the hour, for it was the voice of the orphan dependent of the house, Miriam Haven, whose dark-bright eye and graceful form glimmered, as though she were the spirit of all the softened beauty of the scene, from amid the broom-corn, where she was busy in one of the duties of the season. Well might she sing the song of lament, for her people had gone down far away in the sea, and her lover—where was he?

Far away—far away are they,
  And I in all the world alone—
Brightly, too brightly, shines the day—
  Dark is the land where they are gone!

I have a friend that's far away,
  Unknown the clime that bears his tread;
Perchance he walks in light to-day,
  He may be dead! he may be dead! [12]

Like every other condition of the time, the voice of Miriam too, had a change in it.

"What wonder is this?" said old Sylvester, "I neither hear nor see as I used—are all my senses going?"

He turned, as he spoke, to a woman of small stature, in whose features dignity and tenderness mingled, as she now regarded him, with reverence for the ancient head of the house. She came forward as he addressed her, and laying her hand gently on his arm, said—

"You forget, father; this is the Indian summer, which is the first summer softened and soberer, and often comes at thanksgiving-time. It always changes the country, as you see it now."

"Child, child, you are right. I should have known it, for always at this season, often as it has come to me, do I think of the absent and the dead—of times and hours, and friends long, long passed away. Of those whom I have known," he continued eagerly, "who have fallen in battle, in the toil of the field, on the highway, on the waters, in silent chambers, by sickness, by swords: I thank God they have all, all of my kith and kin and people, died with their names untouched with crime; [13] all," he added with energy, planting his feet firmly on the ground and rising as he spoke sternly, "all, save one alone, and he—"

He turned toward the female at his side, and when he looked in her face and saw the mournful expression which came upon it, he dropped back into his chair and stayed his speech.

At this moment a little fellow, who, with his flaxen locks and blue eyes, was a very cherub in plumpness and the clearness of his brow, came toddling out of the door of the house, struggling with a basin of yellow corn, which, shifting about in his arms, he just managed to keep possession of till he reached old Sylvester's knee. This was little Sam Peabody, the youngest of the Peabodys, and as he looked up into his grandfather's face you could not fail to see, though they grew so wide apart, the same story of passion and character in each. The little fellow began throwing the bright grain from the basin to a great strutting turkey which went marching and gobbling up and down the door-yard, swelling his feathers, spreading his tail, and shaking his red neck-tie with a boundless pretence and restlessness; like many a hero he was proud of his uniform, although the fatal hour which was to lay him low was not far off. It was the thanksgiving turkey, himself, in [14] process of fattening under charge of Master Sam Peabody. Busy in the act, he was regarded with smiling fondness by his mother, the widow Margaret Peabody, and his old grandfather, when he suddenly turned, and said—

"Grand-pa, where's brother Elbridge?"

The old man changed his countenance and struggled a moment with himself.

"He had better know all," he said, after a pause of thought, in which he looked, or seemed to look afar off from the scene about him. "Margaret, painful though it be to you and to me, let the truth be spoken. God knows I love your son, Elbridge, and would have laid down my life that this thing had not chanced, but the child asks of his brother so often, and is so often evaded that he will be presently snared in a net of falsehoods and deceptions if we speak not more plainly to him."

An inexpressible anguish overspread the countenance of the widowed woman, and she turned aside to breathe a brief prayer of trust and hope of strength in the hour of trial.

The thanksgiving turkey, full of his banquet of corn, strutted away to a slope in the sun by the roadside, and little Sam Peabody renewed his question. [15]

"Can't I see brother Elbridge, grand-pa?"

"Never again, I fear, my child."

"Why not, grandfather?"

"Answer gently, father," the widow interposed. "Make not the case too harsh against my boy."

"Margaret," said the old man, lifting his countenance upon her with dignity of look, "I shall speak the truth. I would have the name of my race pure of all stains and detractions, as it has been for an hundred years, but I would not bear hardly against your son, Margaret. This child, innocent and unswayed as he is, shall hear it, and shall be the judge."

Rising, old Sylvester with Margaret's help, lifted the boy to the deep window-seat; and, standing on either hand, the widow and the old man each at his side, Sylvester taking one hand of the child in his, began—

"My child, you are the youngest of this name and household, to you God may have entrusted the continuance of our race and name, therefore thus early would I have you learn the lesson your brother's errors may teach." [16]

"That should come last," the widow interposed gently. "The story itself should teach it, if the story be true."

"Perhaps it should, Margaret," old Sylvester rejoined. "I will let the story speak for itself. It is, my child, a year ago this day, that an excellent man, Mr. Barbary, the preacher of this neighborhood, disappeared from among living men. He was blameless in his life, he had no enemy on the face of the earth. He was a simple, frugal, worthy man—the last time alive, he was seen in company with your brother Elbridge, by the Locust-wood, near the pond where you go to gather huckleberries in the summer, and hazels in the autumn. He was seen with him and seen no more."

"But no man saw Elbridge, father, lift hand against him, or utter an angry word. On the contrary, they were seen entering the wood in close companionship, and smiling on each other."

"Even so, Margaret," said Sylvester, looking at the child steadily, and waving his hand in silence toward the widow. "But what answer gave the young man when questioned of the whereabout of his friend? Not a word, Margaret—not a word, my child." [17]

"Is Mr. Barbary dead, grandfather?" the child inquired, leaning forward.

"How else? He is not to be found in pulpit or field. No man seeth his steps any more in their ancient haunts. No man hearkens to his voice."

"But the body, father, was never found. He may be still living in some other quarter."

"It was near the rock called High Point, you will remember, and one plunge might have sent him to the bottom. The under currents of the lake are strong, and may have easily swept him away. There is but one belief through all this neighborhood. Ethan Barbary fell by the hand—Almighty God, that I should have to say it to you, my own grandson—of Elbridge Peabody."

The child sat for a moment in dumb astonishment, glancing, with distended eyes and sweat upon his brow, fearfully from the stern face of the old man to the downcast features of the widow, when recovering speech he asked:—

"Why should my brother kill Mr. Barbary, if he was his friend? Was not Elbridge always kind, mother? I'm sure he was to me, and used to let me ride old Sorrel before him to the mill!" [18]

"Ever kind? He was. There was not a day he did not make glad his poor mother's heart, with some generous act of devotion to her. No sun set on the day which did not cheer her lonely hearth with a new light of gladness and peace from his young eyes."

"Margaret, you forget. He was soft of heart, but proud of spirit, and haughty beyond his age; you may not remember, even I could not always look down his anger, or silence his loudness of speech. Why should he kill Mr. Barbary? I will tell you, child: the preacher, too, had discerned well your brother's besetting sin, and, being fearless in duty, from the Sabbath pulpit he spake of it plainly and with such point that it could not fail to come home directly to the bosom of the young man. This was on the very Lord's day before Mr. Barbary disappeared from amongst us. It rankled in your brother's bosom like poison; his passions were wild and ungoverned, and this was cause enough. If he had been innocent, why did Elbridge Peabody flee this neighborhood, like a thief in the night?" [19]

"Why did my brother Elbridge leave us, mother?" said the child, bending eagerly towards the widow, who wrung her hands and was silent.

"He may come back," said the child, shaking his flaxen locks, and not abashed in the least by her silence. "He may come back yet and explain all to us."

"Never!"

At that very moment a red rooster, who stood with his burnished wings on the garden wall, near enough to have heard all that had passed, lifted up his throat, and poured forth a clear cry, which rang through the placid air far and wide.

"He will—I know he will," said little Sam Peabody, leaping down from his judgment-seat in the window. "Chanticleer knows he will, or he would not speak in that way. He hasn't crowed once before, you know, grandfather, since Elbridge went away; we'll hear from brother soon, I know we shall—I know we shall!"

The little fellow, in his glee, clapped his hands and crowed too. The grandfather, looking on his gambols, smiled, but was presently sad again.

"Would to Heaven he may," he said. "If they come who should, to-day, we may learn of him—for [20]
to-day my children should come up from all the quarters of the land where they are scattered—the East, the West, the North, the South—to join with me in the Festival of Thanksgiving which now draws near. My head is whitened with many winters, and I shall see them for the last time." Sylvester continued: "If they come—in this calm season, which, so soft and sweet, seems the gentle dawn of the coming world—we shall have, I feel, our last re-gathering on earth! But they come not; my eyes are weary with watching afar off, and I cannot yet discern that my children bear me in remembrance, in this grateful season of the year. Why do they not come?"

The aged patriarch of the family bowed his head and was silent. From the broom-corn the gentle voice stole again:

> Why sings the robin in the wood?
> For him her music is not shed:
> Why blind-brook sparkle through the field?
> He may be dead! he may be dead!

The murmur of Miriam's musical lamenting had scarcely died away on the dreamy air, when there came hurrying forward from the garden—where she had been tending the great [21]
thanksgiving pumpkin, which was her special charge—the black servant of the household, Mopsey by name, who, with her broad-fringed cap flying all abroad, and her great eyes rolling, spoke out as she approached—

"Do hear dat, massa?"

"I hear nothing, Mopsey."

"Dere, don't you hear't now? Dey're coming!"

With faces of curiosity, and ears erect, they listened. There was a peculiar sound in the air, and on closer attention they discerned, in the stillness of the morning, the jingling traces of the stage-coach, on the cross-road, through the fields.

"They are not coming," said old Sylvester, when the sound had died away in the distance; "the stage has taken the other road."

"Dat may be, grandfather," Mopsey spoke up, "but for all dey may come. Ugly Davis, when *he* drive, don't always turn out of his way to come up here. Dey may be on de corner."

As Mopsey spoke, two figures appeared on foot on the brow of the road, which sloped down toward the Homestead, through a feathery range of graceful locusts. They were too far off to be [22]
distinctly made out, but it was to be inferred that they were travellers from a distance, for one of them held against the light some sort of travelling bag or portmanteau; one of them was in female dress, but this was all they could as yet distinguish. Various conjectures were ventured as to their special character. They were unquestionably making for the Homestead, and it was to be reasonably supposed they were Peabodys, for strangers were rare upon that road, which was a by-way, off the main thoroughfare.

The family gathered on the extreme out-look of the balcony, and watched with eager curiosity their approach, which was slow and somewhat irregular—the man did not aid the woman in her progress, but straggled on apart, nor did he seem to address her as they came on.

CHAPTER SECOND. [23]

ARRIVAL OF THE MERCHANT AND HIS PEOPLE.

"It is William and Hannah," said the Patriarch, towering above the household grouped about him, and gaining an advantage in observation from his commanding height, "I am glad the oldest is the first to come!"

When the two comers reached the door-yard gate the man entered in without rendering the least assistance or paying the slightest heed to his companion, who followed humbly in his track. He was some sixty years of age, large-featured and inclining to tallness; his dress was oldmanish and

plain, consisting of a long-furred beaver hat, a loose made coat, and other apparel corresponding, with low cut shoes. He smiled as he came upon the balcony, greeting old Sylvester with a shake of the hand, but taking no notice whatever either of the widow, little Sam, or Mopsey. His wife, on the contrary, spoke to all, but quietly and submissively, which was in truth, her whole manner. She was spare and withered, with a pinched, colorless face, constrained in a scared and [24] apprehensive look as though in constant dread of an impending violence or injury. Over one eye she wore a green patch, which greatly heightened the pallor and strangeness of her features.

"Where's the Captain and Henrietta?" old Sylvester asked when the greetings were over.

"They started from the city in a chay," he was answered by William Peabody, "some hours before us,—the captain,—seaman—way of driving irreg'lar. Nobody can tell what road he may have got into. Should'nt be surprised if did'nt arrive till to-morrow morning. Will always have high-actioned horse."

William Peabody had scarcely spoken when there arose in the distance down the road, a violent cloud of dust, from which there emerged a two-wheeled vehicle at a thundering pace, and which, in less than a minute's time, went whirling past the Homestead. It was supposed to contain Captain Saltonstall and wife; but what with the speed and dust, no eye could have guessed with any accuracy who or what they were. In less than a minute more it came sweeping back with the great white horse, passing the house again like an apparition, or the ghost of a horse and gig. [25] With another sally down the road and return, with a long curve in the road before the Homestead, it at last came to at the gate, and disclosed in a high sweat and glowing all over his huge person, the jovial Captain, and at his side his pretty little cherry-faced girl of a wife, Henrietta Peabody, daughter of William Peabody, who, be it known, is old Sylvester's oldest son. There also emerged from the one-horse gig, after the captain had made ground, and jumped his little wife to the same landing in his arms, a red-faced boy, who must have been closely stowed somewhere, for he came out of the vehicle highly colored, and looking very much as if he had been sat upon for a couple of hours or more. The Captain having freed his horse from the traces, and at old Sylvester's suggestion, set him loose in the door-yard to graze at his leisure, rushed forward upon the balcony very much in the character of a good natured tornado, saluted the widow Margaret with a whirlwind kiss, threw little Sam high in the air and caught him as he came within half an inch of the ground, shook the old grandfather's readily extended hand with a sturdy grasp, and wound up, for a moment, with a great cuff on the side of the head with a roll of [26] stuff for a new gown for Mopsey, saying as he delivered it, "Dere, what d'ye say to dat, Darkey!"

Darkey brightened into a sort of nocturnal illumination, and shuffling away, in the loose shoes, to the keeping of which on her feet the better half of the best energies of her life were directed, gave out that she must be looking after dinner.

It was but for a moment only that the Captain paused, and in less than five minutes he had said and done so many good-natured things, had shown himself so free of heart withal, and so little considerate of self or the figure he cut, that in spite of his great clumsy person, and the gash in his face, and the somewhat exorbitant character of his dress, his coat being a bob as long and straight in the line across the back, as the edge of a table, you could not help regarding him as a decidedly well made, well dressed, and quite handsome person; in fact the Captain passed with the whole family for a fine-looking man.

"Where's my little girl Miriam?" asked the jovial Captain, after a moment's rest in a seat by the side of old Sylvester. "I must see my Dolphin, or she'll think I'm growing old."

Being advised that the young lady in question was somewhere within, the Captain rushed into the [27] house, pursued by all the family in a body, save William Peabody, who remained with old Sylvester, seated and in silence.

"How go matters in the city, William?" he said, removing his hand from his brow, where it had rested in contemplation for several minutes.

"After the old fashion, father," William Peabody answered, smiling with a fox-like glance at his father; "added three new houses to my property since last year."

"Three new houses?"

"Three, all of brick,—good streets—built in the latest style. The city grows and I grow!"

"Three new houses, and all in the latest style—and how does Margaret's little property pay?"

"Poorly, father, poorly. Elbridge made a bad choice when he bought it—greatly out of repair—rents come slowly."

"In a word, the old story, the widow gets nothing again from the city. I had hopes you would be able to bring her some returns this time, for she needs it sadly." [28]

"I do the best I can, but money's not to be got out of stone walls."

"And you have three new houses which pay well," old Sylvester continued, turning his calm blue eye steadily upon his son.

"Capital—best in the city! Already worth twice I gave for 'em. The city grows and I grow!"

"My son, do you never think of that other house reserved for us all?"

William Peabody was about to answer, it was nonsense for a man only sixty and in sound condition of body and mind to think too much of that, when his eye, ranging across the fields, espied in shadow as it were, through the dim atmosphere, the mist clearing away a little in that direction, an old sorrel horse—a long settler with the family and well-known to all its members—staggering about feebly in a distant orchard, and in her wanderings stumbling against the trees. —"Is old Sorrel blind?" he asked, shading his own eyes from the light.

"She is, William," old Sylvester replied; "her sight went from her last New-Year's day."

"My birth-day," said the merchant, a sudden pallor coming upon his countenance. [29]

"Yes, you and old Sorrel are birth-mates, my son."

"We are; she was foaled the day I was born," said William Peabody, and added, as to himself, musingly, "Old Sorrel is blind! So we pass—so we pass—young to-day—to-morrow old—limbs fail us—sight is gone."

They sat silently, contemplating the still morning scene before them, and meditating, each in his own particular way, on the history of the past.

To William, the merchant, it brought chiefly a recollection how in his early manhood he had set out from those quiet fields for a hard struggle with the world, with a bare dollar in his pocket, and when that was gone the whole world seemed to combine in a desperate league against him to prevent his achieving another. How at last, on the very edge of starvation and despair, he had wrung from it the means of beginning his fortunes; and how he had gone on step by step, forgetting all the pleasant ties of his youth, all recollections of nature and cheerful faces of friends and kinsfolk, adding thousand to thousand, house to house; building, unlike Jacob, a ladder, that descended to the lower world, up which all harsh and dark spirits perpetually thronged and joined to drag him down; and yet he smiled grimly at the thought of the power he [30] possessed, and how many of his early companions trembled before him because he was grown to be a rich man.

Old Sylvester, on the other hand, in all his memory had no thought of himself. His recollection ran back to the old times when his neighbors sat down under a king's sceptre in these colonies, how that chain had been freed, the gloomy Indian had withdrawn his face from their fields, how the darkness of the woods had retired before the cheering sun of peace and plenty; and how from a little people, his dear country, for whose welfare his sword had been stained, had grown into a great nation. Scattered up and down the long line of memory were faces of friends and kindred, which had passed long ago from the earth. He called to mind many a pleasant fire-side chat; many a funeral scene, and burying in sun-light and in the cold rain; the young Elbridge too was in his thoughts last of all; could he return to them with a name untainted, the old man would cheerfully lie down in his grave and be at peace with all the world.

In the meanwhile, within the house the Captain in high favor was seated in a great cushioned arm-chair with little Sam Peabody on his knee, and the women of the house gathered about him, [31] looking on as he narrated the courses and adventures of his last voyage. The widow listened with a sad interest. Mopsey rolled her eyes and was mirthful in the most serious and stormiest passages; while little Sam and the Captain's wife rivalled each other in regarding the Captain with innocent wonder and astonishment, as though he were the most extraordinary man that ever sailed the sea, or sat in a chair telling about it, in the whole habitable globe. Miriam Haven alone was distant from the scene, gliding to and fro past the door, busied in household duties in a neighboring apartment, and catching a word here and there as she glanced by.

It was a wonderful story, certainly, the Captain was telling, and it seemed beyond all belief that it could be true that one man could have seen the whales, the icebergs, the floating islands, the ships in the air, the sea-dogs, and grampuses, the flying-fish, the pirates, and the thousand other wonders the Captain reported to have crossed his path in a single trip across the simple Atlantic and back. He also averred to have distinctly seen the sea-serpent, and what was more, to have [32] had a conversation with a ship in the very middle of the ocean. Was there anything wonderful in that? it occurs every day—but listen to the jovial Captain!—a ship—and he had news to tell them of one they would like to hear about. They pressed close to the Captain and listened breathlessly; Miriam Haven pausing in her task, and stopping stone-still like a statue, in the door, while her very heart stayed its beating.

Go on—Captain—go on—go on!

"Well, what do you think; we were in latitude—no matter, you don't care about that—we had just come out of a great gale, which made the sea pitch-dark about us; when the first beam of the sun opened the clouds, we found ourselves along side a ship with the old stars and stripes flying like a bird at the mast-head. There was a sight, my hearties. We hailed her, she hailed us, we threw her papers, she threw us, and we parted forever."

"Is that all?"

"Not half. One of these was a list of passengers; I run my eye up, and I run my eye down, and there, shining out like a star amongst them all, I find, whose d'ye think—Elbridge Peabody—as large as life." [33]

Miriam Haven staggered against the door-post, the widow fell upon her knees, "Thank God, my boy is heard from."

Little Sam Peabody darted from the Captain's knee and rushed upon the balcony, crying at the top of his lungs, "Grandfather, brother Elbridge is heard from."

"I don't believe it," said William Peabody; the poor old blind sorrel had disappeared from sight into a piece of woods near the orchard, and the merchant had quite recovered his usual way of speaking. "Never will believe it. You hav'nt heard of that youngster,—never will. Always knew he would run away some day—never come back again."

The Captain's story was rapidly explained by the different members of the family, who had followed little Sam, to repeat it to old Sylvester, each in her own way. Miriam and Hannah Peabody, who at sound of the commotion had come forth from an inner chamber, whither she had been retired by herself, joined the company of lookers on.

"What all amount to," he continued, in his peculiar clipped style of speech. "Expect to see him [34]
again, do you. Mighty fine chance—where going to?"

The Captain could'nt tell.

"One of the Captain's fine stories—no—no—if that boy ever comes back again, I'll—"

There was a deep silence to hear what the hard old merchant proposed.

"I'll hand over to him the management of his late father's property, he was always hankering after, and thought he could make so much more of than his hard-fisted old uncle."

This was a comfortable proposition, and little Sam Peabody, as though it were a great pear or red pippin that was spoken of, running to his mother, said,

"Mother, I'd take it."

"I do," said the widow, "and call you all to witness."

William Peabody smiled grimly on Margaret; his countenance darkened suddenly, and he was, no doubt, on the point of retracting his confident offer, when his wife uttered in an under tone, half entreaty, half authority, "William," at the same time turning on her husband the side of the countenance which wore the green shade. He stifled what he intended to utter, and shifting [35]
uneasily in his seat, he looked toward the city and was silent. Whatever the reason, it was clear that when they were seated at the table, partaking of the meal, it was Captain Saltonstall that had the best attention from every member of the household, (and the best of the dish,) from all save old Sylvester, who held himself erect, as usual, and impartial in the matter.

"The ways of Providence are strange," said old Sylvester. "Out of darkness he brings marvellous light, and from the frivolous acorn he spreads the branches wide in the air, which are a shelter, and a solace, and a shadowy play-ground to our youth and old age. We must wait the issue, and whatever comes, to Him must we give thanks."

With this sentiment for a benediction, the patriarch dismissed his family to their slumbers, which to each one of the household brought its peculiar train of speculation; to two, at least, Miriam and the widow Margaret, they brought dreams which only the strong light of day could disprove to be realities.

CHAPTER THIRD. [36]

THE FARMER-FOLKS FROM THE WEST.

With the following day, (which was calm, gentle, and serene as its predecessor,) a little after the dispatch of dinner, the attention of the household was summoned to the clatter of a hurrying wagon, which, unseen, resounded in the distant country. Old Sylvester was the first to hear it—faintly at first, then it rose on the wind far off, died away in the woods and the windings of the roads, then again was entirely lost for several minutes, and at last growing into a portentous rattle, brought to at the door of the homestead, and landed from its ricketty and bespattered bosom Mr. Oliver Peabody, of Ohio; Jane his wife, a buxom lady of fair complexion, in a Quaker bonnet; and Robert, their eldest son, a tall, flat-featured boy, some thirteen years of age.

The countryman in a working shirt, who had the control of the wagon, and who had been beguiled by Oliver some five miles out of his road home, (to which he was returning from the market town,) under pretence of a wish to have his opinion of the crops—the poor fellow being [37]
withal a hired laborer and never having owned, or entertained the remotest speculation of owning, a rood of ground of his own,—with a commendation from Oliver, delivered with a cheerful smile, that "his observations on timothy were very much to the purpose," drove clattering away again. Mr. Oliver Peabody, farmer, who had come all the way from Ohio to spend thanksgiving with his old father—of a ruddy, youthful and twinkling countenance—who wore his hair at length and unshorn, and the chief peculiarity of whose dress was a grey cloth coat, with a row of great horn-buttons on either breast, with enormous woollen mittens, brought his buxom wife forward under one arm with diligence, drawing his tall youth of a son after him by the other hand—threw himself into the bosom of the Peabody family, and was heartily welcomed all round.

He didn't say a word of half-horses and half-alligators, nor of greased lightning, although he was from the West, but he did complain most bitterly of the uncommon smoothness of the roads in these parts, the short grass, and the 'bominable want of elbow-room all over the neighborhood. It was with difficulty he could be kept on the straitened stage of the balcony long enough to answer [38] a few plain questions of children and other matters at home; and immediately expressed an ardent desire to take a look at the garden.

"We got somefin' to show thar, Mas'r Oliver," said Mopsey, who had stood by listening, with open mouth and eyes, to the strong statements of the western farmer, "we haint to be beat right-away no how!"

Old Sylvester rose with his staff, which he carried more for pleasure than necessity, and led the way. As they approached there was visible through all the plants, shrubs and other growths of the place, whatever they might be—a great yellow sphere or ball, so disposed, on a little slope by itself, as to catch the eye from a distance, shining out in its golden hue from the garden, a sort of rival to the sun himself, rolling overhead.

"Dere, what d'ye tink of dat, Oliver," Mopsey asked, forgetting in the grandeur of the moment all distinctions of class or color, "I guess dat's somefin."

"That's a pumpkin," said Mr. Oliver Peabody, calmly. [39]

"Yes, I guess it is—*de tanksgivin punkin*!"

She looked into the western farmer's face, no doubt expecting a spasm or convulsion, but it was calm—calm as night. Mopsey condescended not another word, but walking or rather shuffling disdainfully away, muttered to herself, "Dat is de very meanest man, for a white man, I ever did see; he looked at dat 'ere punkin which has cost me so many anxious days and sleepless nights—which I have watched over as though it had been my own child—which I planted wid dis here hand of my own, and fought for agin the June bugs and the white frost, and dat mouse dat's been tryin to eat it up for dis tree weeks and better—just as if it had been a small green cowcumber. I don't believe dat Oliver Peabody knows it is tanksgivin'. He's a great big fool."

"I see you still keep some of the old red breed, father," said Oliver when they were left alone in the quiet of the garden, pointing to the red rooster, who stood on the wall in the sun.

"Yes," old Sylvester answered, "for old times' sake. We have had them with us now on the farm for better than a hundred years. I remember the day the great grandfather of this bird was brought among us. It was the day we got news that good David Brainard, the Indian missionary, [40] died—that was some while before the revolutionary war. He died in the arms of the great Jonathan Edwards, at Northampton; their souls are at peace."

"I recollect this fellow," Oliver continued, referring to the red rooster, "When I was here last he was called Elbridge's bird, that was the year before last."

"There is no Elbridge now," said the old grandfather.

"I know all," said Oliver, "I had a letter from Margaret, telling me the story and begging me to keep a watch for her boy."

"A wide watch to keep and little to be got by it, I fear," old Sylvester added.

"Not altogether idle, perhaps; we have sharp eyes in the West and see many strange things. Jane is confident she saw our Elbridge, making through Ohio, but two months after he left here; he was riding swiftly, and in her surprise and suddenness she could neither call nor send after him."

"You did not tell us of that," said the old man.

"No, I waited some further discovery." [41]

"Be silent now, you may easily waken hopes to be darkened and dashed to the ground. Which way made the boy?"

"Southward."

During this discourse, as though he distinguished the sound of his young master's name and knew to what it related, Chanticleer walked slowly, and as if by accident or at leisure, up and down the garden-wall, keeping as near to the speakers as was at all seemly. When they stopped speaking he leaped gently to the ground and softly clapped his wings.

A moment after there came hurrying into the garden, in a wild excitement, and all struggling to speak first, little Sam Peabody in the lead, Robert, the flat-featured youth of thirteen, and Peabody Junior, (who, it should be mentioned, having found his way into a pantry a couple of minutes after his arrival with the Captain, and appropriated to his own personal use an entire bottle of cherry brandy, had been straightway put to bed, from which he had now been released not more than a couple of hours), and to announce as clamorously as they respectively could, that Brundage's Bull had just got into "our big meadow." [42]

"Nobody hurt?" asked old Sylvester.

"Nobody hurt, grandfather, but he's ploughing up the meadow at a dreadful rate," said little Sam Peabody.

"Like wild," Peabody Junior added.

This statement, strongly as it was made, seemed to have no particular effect on old Sylvester. Oliver Peabody, on the other hand, was exceedingly indignant, and was for proceeding to extremities immediately, the expulsion of the Brundage bull, and the demanding of damages for allowing his cattle to cross the boundary line of the two farms.

Old Sylvester listened to his violence with a blank countenance; nor did he seem to comprehend that any special outrage had been committed, for it must be acknowledged that the only indication that the grandfather had come to his second childhood was, that, with his advancing years, and as he approached the shadow of the other world, he seemed to have lost all idea of the customary distinctions of rank and property, and that very much like an old apostle, he was disposed to regard all men as brethren, and boundary lines as of very little consequence.

He therefore promptly checked his son Oliver in his heat, and discountenanced any further proceedings in the matter. [43]

"Brundage," he said, "would, if he cared about him, come and take his bull away when he was ready; we are all brethren, and have a common country, Oliver," he added, "I hope you feel that in the West, as well as we do here."

"Thank God, we have," Oliver rejoined with emphasis, "and we love it!"

"I thank God for that too," old Sylvester replied, striking his staff firmly on the ground, "I remember well, my son, when your great state was a wilderness of woods and savage men, and now this common sky—look at it, Oliver—which shines so clearly above us, is yours as well as ours."

"I fear me, father, one day, bright, beautiful, and wide-arched as it is, the glorious Union may fall," said Oliver, laying his hand upon an aged tree which stood near them, "may fall, and the states drop, one by one away, even as the fruit I shake to the ground."

As though he had been a tower standing on an elevation, old Sylvester Peabody rose aloft to his full height, as if he would clearly contemplate the far past, the distant, and the broad-coming future. [44]

"The Union fall!" he cried. "Look above, my son! The Union fall! as long as the constellations of evening live together in yonder sky; look down, as long as the great rivers of our land flow eastward and westward, north and south, the Union shall stand up, and stand majestical and bright, beheld by ages, as these shall be, an orb and living stream of glory unsurpassable."

The children were gathered about, and watched with eager eyes and glowing cheeks, the countenance of the grandfather as he spoke.

"No, no, my son," he added, "there's many a true heart in brave Ohio, as in every state of ours, or they could not be the noble powers they are."

While old Sylvester spoke, Oliver Peabody wrenched with some violence, from the tree near which they stood, a stout limb, on the end of which he employed himself with a knife in shaping a substantial knob.

"What weapon is that you are busy with, Oliver?" old Sylvester asked.

"It's for that nasty bull," Oliver replied. "I would break every bone in his body rather than let him remain for a single minute on my land; the furtherance of law and order demands the instant enforcement of one's rights." [45]

"You are a friend of law and order, my son."

"I think I am," Oliver answered, standing erect and planting his club, in the manner of Hercules in the pictures, head down on the ground.

"I hope you are, Oliver; but I fear you forget the story I used to tell of my old friend Bulkley, of Danbury, who, being written to by some neighboring Christians who were in sore dissension, for advisement, gave them back word:—Every man to look after his own fence, that it be built high and strong, and to have a special care of the old Black Bull; meaning thereby no doubt, our own wicked passions;—that is the true Christian way of securing peace and good order."

Oliver threw his great trespass-club upon the ground, and was on the point of asking after an old sycamore, the largest growth of all that country, which, standing in a remote field had, in the perilous times sheltered many of the Peabody family in its bosom—when he was interrupted by the sudden appearance of Mopsey in a flutter of cap-strings, shuffling shoes, and a flying color in her looks of at least double the usual depth of darkness. It was just discovered that the poultry-house had been broken into over night, and four of the fattest hens taken off by the throat and [46] legs, besides sundry of the inferior members of the domicile; as wicked a theft, Mopsey said, as ever was, and she hadn't the slightest hesitation in charging it on them niggers in the Hills, (a neighboring settlement of colored people, who lived from hand to mouth, and seemed to be fed, like the ravens by some mystery of providence.)

Oliver Peabody watched closely the countenance of the patriarch, not a little curious to learn what effect this announcement would have upon his temper.

"This is all our own fault," said old Sylvester, promptly. "We should have remembered this was thanksgiving time, and sent them something to stay their stomachs. Poor creatures, I always wondered how they got along! Send 'em some bread, Mopsey, for they never can do anything with fowls without bread!"

"Send 'em some bread!" Mopsey rejoined, growing blacker and more ugly of look as she spoke: "Send 'em whips, and an osifer of the law!—the four fattest of the coop."

"Never mind," said old Sylvester. [47]

"Six of the ten'drest young'uns!"

"Never mind that," said old Sylvester.

"I'd have them all in the county jail before sundown," urged Mopsey.

"Oliver, we will go in to tea," continued the patriarch. "We have enough for tea, Mopsey?"

"Yes, quite enough, Mas'r."

"Then," cried the old man, striking his staff on the ground with great violence, rising to his full height, and glowing like a furnace, upon Mopsey, "then, I say, send 'em some bread!"

This speech, delivered in a voice of authority, sent Mopsey, shuffling and cowering, away, without a word, and brought the sweat of horror to the brow of Oliver, which he proceeded to remove with a great cotton pocket-handkerchief, produced from his coat behind, on which was displayed in glowing colors, by some cunning artist, the imposing scene of the signers of the Declaration of Independence getting ready to affix their names. Mr. Oliver Peabody was the politician of the family, and always had the immortal Declaration of Independence at his tongue's end, or in hand.

CHAPTER FOURTH. [48]

THE FORTUNES OF THE FAMILY CONSIDERED.

When Oliver and old Sylvester entered the house they found all of the family gathered within, save the children, who loitered about the doors and windows, looking in, anxious-eyed, on the preparations for tea going forward under the direction of the widow Margaret, and Mopsey. The other women of the household were busy with a discussion of the merits of Mrs. Carrack, of Boston, the fashionable lady of the family.

"I should like to see Mrs. Carrack above all things," said the Captain's pretty little wife, "she must be a fine woman from all I have heard of her."

"Thee will have small chance, I fear, child," said Mrs. Jane Peabody, sitting buxomly in an easy arm chair, which she had quietly assumed, "she is too fine for the company of us plain folks in every point of view."

"It's five years since she was here," the widow suggested as she adjusted the chairs around the table, "she said she never would come inside the house again, because the best bed-chamber was not given to her—I am sorry to say it." [49]

"She's a heathen and wicked woman," Mopsey said, shuffling at the door, and turning back on her way to the kitchen—"your poor boy was lying low of a fever and how could *she* expect it."

"In one point of view she may come; her husband was living then," continued Mrs. Jane Peabody, "she has become a rich woman since, and may honor us with a visit—to show us how great a person she has got to be—let her come—it need'nt trouble thee, nor me, I'm sure." Mrs. Jane Peabody smoothed her Quaker vandyke, and sat stiffly in her easy chair.

Old Sylvester entering at that moment, laid aside his staff and broad-brimmed hat, which little Sam Peabody ran in to take charge of, and took his seat at the head of the table; the Captain, who was busy at the back-door scouring an old rusty fowling-piece for some enterprise he had in view in the morning, was called in by his little wife; the others were seated in their places about the board.

"Where's William?" old Sylvester asked. [50]

He was at a window in the front room, where he had sat for several hours, with spectacles on his brow, poring over an old faded parchment deed, which related to some neighboring land he thought belonged to the Peabodys, (although in possession of others,) and which he had always made a close study of on his visits to the homestead. There was a dark passage, under which he made their title, which had been submitted to various men learned in the law; it was too dark and doubtful, in their opinion, to build a contest on, and yet William Peabody gave it every year a new examination, with the hope, perhaps, that the wisdom of advancing age might enable him to fathom and expound it, although it had been drawn up by the greatest lawyer of his day in all that country. His wife Hannah, grieving in spirit that her husband should be toiling forever in the quest of gain, sat near him, pale, calm and disheartened, but speaking not a word. He could not

look at her with that fearful green shade on her face, but kept his eyes always fixed on the old parchment. When his aged father had taken his seat, and began his thanks to God for the bounties before them, as though the old Patriarch had brought a better spirit from the calm day [51] without, he thrust the paper into his bosom and glided to his place at the table. It would have done you good to hear that old man's prayer. He neither solicited forgiveness for his enemies nor favors for his friends; for schools, churches, presidents or governments; neither for health, wealth, worldly welfare, nor for any single other thing; all he said, bowing his white old head, was this:

"May we all be Christian people the day we die—God bless us."

That was all; and his kinsfolk lost no appetite in listening to it—for it was no sooner uttered than they all fell to—and not a word more was spoken for five minutes at least, nor then perhaps, had not little Sam Peabody cried out, with breathless animation, and delight of feature,

"The pigeons, grandfather!" at the same time pointing from the door to the evening sky, along which they were winging their calm and silent flight in a countless train—streaming on westward as though there was no end to them; which put old Sylvester upon recalling the cheerful sports of his younger days. [52]

"I have taken a couple of hundred in a net on the Hill before breakfast, many a time," he said. "You used to help me, William."

"Yes, I and old Ethan Barbary," said the merchant, "used to spring the net; you gave the word."

"Old Ethan has been dead many a day. Ethan," continued old Sylvester, in explanation, "was the father of our Mr. Barbary. He was a preacher too, and carried a gun in the revolution. I remember he was accounted a peculiar man. I never knew why. To be sure he used to spend the time he did not employ in prayers, preaching and tending the sick, in working on the farms about, for he had no wages for preaching. When there was none of that to be had, he took his basket, and sallying through the fields, gathered berries, which he bestowed on the needy families of the neighborhood. In winter he collected branches in the woods about, as fire-wood for the poor."

"That was a capital idea," said Oliver the politician. "It must have made him very popular."

"Wasn't he always thought to be a little out of his head?" asked the merchant. "He might have sold the wood for a good price in the severe winters." [53]

"I remember as if it were yesterday," old Sylvester went on in his own way, not heeding in the slightest the suggestions of his sons, "he and black Burling, who is buried in the woods by the Great Walnut tree, near the pond, both fought in the American ranks, and had but one gun between them, which they used turn about."

"You saw rough times in those days, grandfather," said the Captain.

"I did, Charley," old Sylvester answered, looking kindly on the Captain, who had always been something of a favorite of his from the day he had married into the family; "and there are but few left to talk with me of them now. I am one of the living survivors of an almost extinguished race. The grave will soon be our only habitation. I am one of the few stalks that still remain in the field where the tempest passed. I have fought against the foreign foe for your sake; they have disappeared from the land, and you are free; the strength of my arm delays, and my feet fail me in the way; the hand which fought for your liberties is now open to bless you. In my youth I bled in battle that you might be independent—let not my heart, in my old age, bleed because you [54] abandon the path I would have you follow."

The old patriarch leaned his head upon his hand, and the company was silent as though they had listened to a voice from the grave. He presently looked up and smiled—"Old Ethan, I call to mind now," he renewed, "had a quality which our poor Barbary inherited, and for which," he added, looking toward his son William, "and for which I greatly honor his memory. He counted the money of this world but as dross. From his manhood to the very moment of his entering on the ministry, he never would touch silver nor gold, partly, I think, because it was the true Scripture course, and partly because a dreadful murder had once happened in the Barbary family, growing out of a quarrel for the possession of a paltry sum of money."

The bread she was raising to her lips fell from the widow's hand, for she could not help but think of the history of her absent son; and the voice of Miriam, who did not present herself at the table, was heard from a distant chamber, not distinctly, but in that tone of chanting lament which had become habitual to her whether in house, garden, or field. It was an inexpressibly mournful [55] cadence, and for the time stilled all other sounds. They were only drawn away from it by descrying Mopsey, the black servant, at a turn of the road, hurrying with great animation towards the homestead, but with a singularity in her progress which could not fail to be observed. She rushed along at great speed, for several paces, and suddenly came to a halt, during which her head disappeared, and then renewed her pace, repeating the peculiar manœuvre once at least in every ten yards. In a word, she was shuffling on in her loose shoes, (which were on or off, one or the other of them every other minute,) at as rapid a rate as that peculiar species of locomotion allowed. Bursting with impatience and the importance of her communication, her cap flaunting from her head, she stood in the doorway and announced, "We've beat Brundage—we've beat Brundage!"

"What's this, Mopsey?" old Sylvester inquired.

"I've tried it and I've spanned it. I can't span ours!"

On further questioning it appeared that Mopsey had been on a pilgrimage to the next neighbor's, the Brundages, to inspect their thanksgiving pumpkin, and institute a comparison with the [56] Peabody growth of that kind, with a highly satisfactory and complacent result as regarded the home production. Nobody was otherwise than pleased at Mopsey's innocent rejoicing, and when she had been duly complimented on her success, she went away with a broad black guffaw to set a trap in the garden for the brown mouse, the sole surviving enemy of the great Peabody thanksgiving pumpkin which must be plucked next day for use.

With the dispatch of the evening meal, old Sylvester withdrew to the other room, with a little hand lamp, to read a chapter by himself. The others remaining seated about the apartment; the Captain and Oliver presently fell into a violent discussion on the true sources of national wealth, the Captain giving it as his opinion that it solely depended on having a great number of ships at sea, as carriers between different countries. Oliver was equally clear and resolute that the real wealth of a nation lay in its wheat crops. When wheat was at ten shillings the bushel, all went well; let it fall a quarter, and you had general bankruptcy staring you in the face. Mr. William Peabody was'nt at the pains to deliver his opinion, but he was satisfied, in his secret soul, that it [57] lay in the increase of new houses, or the proper supply of calicoes—he had'nt made up his mind which. Presently Oliver was troubled again in reference to the supply of gold in the world—whether there was enough to do business with; he also had some things to say (which he had out of a great speech in Congress) about bullion and rates of exchange, but nobody understood him.

"By the way," he added, "Mrs. Carrack's son Tiffany is gone to the Gold Region. From what he writes to me I think he'll cut a very great figure in that country."

"An exceedingly fine, talented young man," said the merchant, who had, then, sundry sums on loan from his mother.

"In any point of view, in which you regard it," continued Oliver, "the gold country is an important acquisition."

"You hav'nt the letter Tiffany wrote, with you?" interrupted the Captain.

"I think I have," was the answer. "I brought it, supposing you might like to look at it. Shall I read it?" [58]

There was no objection—the letter was read—in which Mr. Tiffany Carrack professed his weariness of civilized life—spoke keenly of misspent hours—a determination to rally and do something important, intimating that that was a great country for enterprising young men, and, in a familiar phrase, closed with a settled resolution to do or die.

"I have a letter to the same effect," said the Captain.

"And so have I," said William Peabody, "word for word."

"He means to do something very grand," said the Captain. Something very grand—the women all agreed—for Mr. Tiffany Carrack was a nice young man, and had a prospect of inheriting a hundred thousand dollars, to say nothing of the large sums he was to bring from the Gold Regions. It was evident to all that he was going into the business with a rush. They, of course, would'nt see Mr. Tiffany Carrack at this Thanksgiving gathering—he had better business on hand—Mr. Tiffany Carrack was clearly the promising young man of the family, and was carrying the fortunes of the Peabodys into the remotest quarters of the land. [59]

"In a word," said Mr. Oliver Peabody, developing the Declaration of Independence on his pocket-handkerchief. "He is going to do wonders in every point of view. He'll carry the principles of Free Government everywhere!"

The consideration of the extraordinary talents and enterprise of the son imparted a new interest to the question of the coming of Mrs. Carrack; which was rediscussed in all its bearings; and it was almost unanimously concluded—that, one day now only intervening to Thanksgiving—it was too late to look for her. There had been a general disposition, secretly opposed only by Mrs. Jane Peabody, to yield to that fashionable person the best bed-chamber, which was always accounted a great prize and distinguished honor among the family. But now there was scarcely any need of reserving it longer—and who was to have it? Alas! that is a question often raised in rural households, often shakes them to the very base, and spreads through whole families a bitterness and strength and length of strife, which frequently ends only with life itself.

To bring the matter to an issue, various whispered conversations were held in the small room, lying next to the sitting-room, at first between Mrs. Margaret Peabody and Mopsey, to which one [60] by one were summoned, Mrs. Jane Peabody, the Captain's wife, and Mrs. Hannah Peabody. The more it was discussed the farther off seemed any reasonable conclusion. When one arrangement was proposed, various faces of the group grew dark and sour; when another, other faces blackened and elongated; tongues, too, wagged faster every minute, and at length grew to such a hubbub as to call old Sylvester away from his Bible and bring him to the door to learn what turmoil it was that at this quiet hour disturbed the peace of the Peabodys. He was not long in discovering the ground of battle, and even as in old pictures Adam is shown walking calmly in Eden among the raging beasts of all degrees and kinds, the old patriarch came forward among the women of the Peabody family—"My children," he said, "should dwell in peace for the short stay allotted them on earth. Why make a difference about so small a matter as a lodging-place—

they are all good and healthful rooms. I have seen the day when camping on the wet grounds and morasses I would have held any one of them to be a palace-chamber. The back chamber, my child," he continued, addressing the Captain's wife, "looks out on the orchard, where you always [61] love to walk; the white room, Hannah, towards your father's house; and Jane, you cannot object to the front chamber which is large, well-furnished, and has the best of the sunrise. The Son of Man, my children, had not where to lay his head, and shall we who are but snails and worms, compared with his glory and goodness, presume to exalt ourselves, where he was abased."

The old patriarch wished them a good night, and with the departure of his white locks gleaming as he walked away, as though it had been the gentle radiance of the moon stilling the tumult of the waters, they each quietly retired, and without a further murmur, to the chambers assigned them.

CHAPTER FIFTH. [62]

THE CHILDREN.

There was no question where the children were to lodge, for there had been allotted to them from time immemorial, ever since children were known in the Peabody family, a great rambling upper chamber, with beds in the corners, where they were always bestowed as soon after dark as they could be convoyed thither under direction of Mopsey and the mistress of the household. This was not always—in truth it was rarely—easy of achievement, and cost the shuffling black servant at least half an hour of diligent search and struggling persuasion to bring them in from the various strayings, escapes, and lurking-places, where they shirked to gain an extra half-hour of freedom.

To the children, however darker humors might work and sadden among the grown people, (for whatever hue rose-favored writers may choose to throw over scenes and times of festivity, the passions of character are always busy, in holiday and hall, as well as in the strifes of the world,) [63] to the Peabody children this was thanksgiving time indeed—it was thanksgiving in the house, it was thanksgiving in the orchard, climbing trees; it was thanksgiving in the barn, tumbling in the hay, in the lane. It was thanksgiving, too, with the jovial Captain, a grown-up boy, heading their sports and allowing the country as he did, little rest or peace of mind wherever he lead the revel; it was not four-and-twenty hours that he had been at the quiet homestead before the mill was set a-running, the chestnut-trees shaken, the pigeons fired into, a new bell of greater compass put upon the brindle cow, the blacksmith's anvil at the corner of the road set a-dinging, fresh weather-cocks clapped upon the barn, corn-crib, stable, and out-house, the sheep let out of the little barn, all the boats of the neighborhood launched upon the pond. With night, darkness closed upon wild frolic; bed-time came, and thanksgiving had a pause; a pause only, for Mopsey's dark head, with its broad-bordered white cap, was no sooner withdrawn and the door firmly shut, than thanksgiving began afresh, as though there had been no such thing all day long, and they were now just setting out. For half a minute after Mopsey's disappearance they were all nicely [64] tucked in as she had left them—straight out—with their heads each square on its pillow; then, as if by a silent understanding, all heads popped up like so many frisking fish. They darted from bed and commenced in the middle of the chamber, a great pillow-fight amicable and hurtless, but furiously waged, till the approach of a broad footstep sent them scampering back to their couches, mum as mice. Mopsey, well aware of these frisks, tarried till they were blown over, in her own chamber hard by, a dark room, mysterious to the fancy of the children, with spinning wheels, dried gourd-shells hung against the wall, a lady's riding-saddle, now out of use this many a day, and all the odds and ends of an ancient farm-house stored in heaps and strings about.

It was only at last by going aloft and moving a trap in the ceiling, which was connected in tradition with the appearance of a ghost, that they were at length fairly sobered down and kept in bed, when Mopsey, looking in for the last time, knew that it was safe to go below. They had something left even then, and kept up a talk from bed to bed, for a good long hour more, at least.

"What do you think of the turkey, Bill?" began Master Robert Peabody, the flat-featured, rising [65] from his pillow like a homely porpoise.

"I don't know," Peabody Junior answered, "I don't care for turkeys."

Little Sam Peabody, the master of the turkey, took this very much to heart.

"I think he's a very fine one," continued Master Robert, "twice as big as last year's."

"I'm very glad to hear you say that, Cousin Robert," said little Sam Peabody, turning over toward the quarter whence the voice of encouragement came.

"As fine a turkey as I've ever seen," Robert went on. "When do they kill him?"

Little Sam struggled a little with himself, and answered feebly, "To-morrow."

There was silence for several minutes, broken presently by Peabody Junior, fixing his pillow, and saying "Boys, I'm going to sleep."

Allowing some few minutes for this to take effect, Master Robert called across the chamber to

little Sam, "I wonder why Aunt Hannah wears that old green shade on her face?" [66]

"Pray don't say anything about that," little Sam answered, "Cousin don't like to hear about that!"

Master Robert—rather a blunt young gentleman—is not to be baffled so easily.

"I say, Bill, why does your mother wear that green patch over her eye?" he called out.

There was no answer; he called again in a louder key.

"Hush!" whispered Peabody Junior, who was not asleep, but only thinking of it, in a tone of fear, "I don't know."

"Is the eye gone?" Robert asked again, bent on satisfaction of some kind.

"I don't know," was the whispered answer again. "Don't ask me anything about it."

"I'm afraid Aunt Hannah's not happy," suggested little Sam, timidly.

"Pr'aps she is'nt, Sam," Peabody Junior answered.

"What is the reason," continued little Sam, "I always liked her."

"Don't know," was all Peabody Junior had to reply.

"Did you ever see that other eye? Bill," asked the blunt young gentleman, whose head was still running on the green shade. [67]

"Oh, go to sleep, will you, Nosey," cried Peabody Junior. "If you don't leave me alone I'll get up and wollop you."

The flat-featured disappeared with his porpoise face under the bed-clothes and breathed hard, but kept close; and when he fell asleep he dreamed of dragons and green umbrellas all night, at a fearful rate.

"I would'nt be angry, Cousin," said little Sam, when the porpoise gave token that he was hardbound in slumber. "He don't mean to hurt your feelings, I don't believe."

"Pr'aps he don't," Peabody Junior rejoined. "What could I tell him, if I wanted to; all I know is, mother has worn the shade ever since I can recollect anything. I think sometimes I can remember she used to have it on as far back as when I was at the breast, a very little child, and that I used to try and snatch it away—which always made her very sad."

"Don't she ever take it away?" asked little Sam.

"I never saw it off in all my life; nor can I tell you whether my dear mother has one eye or two. I know she never likes to have any one look at it. It makes her melancholy at once; nurse used to tell me there was a mystery about it—but she would never tell me any more. It always scares father when she turns that side of her face on him, that I've noticed; and he always at home sits on the other side of the table from it." [68]

"I wouldn't think any more about it to-night, Cousin," said little Sam. "I know it makes you unhappy from your voice. Don't you miss some one to-night that used to keep us awake with telling pleasant stories?"

"I do," answered Peabody Junior. "I'm thinking of him now. I wish Cousin Elbridge was back again."

"You know why he isn't?"

"Father says it's because he's a bad young man."

"And do you believe it, William?"

"I'm afraid he is—for father always says so."

A gentle figure had quietly opened the chamber-door, and stood listening with breathless attention to the discourse of the two children.

"You wait and see," continued little Sam firmly, "I'm sure he'll come back—and before long." [69]

"What makes you think so?" William asked. "I'm sure I hope he will."

"Because the red rooster," answered little Sam, "crowed yesterday morning for the first time since he went away, and the red rooster knows more than anybody about this farm except old grandfather."

Thinking how that could be, Peabody Junior fell asleep; and little Sam, sure to dream of his absent brother, shortly followed after. The gentle figure of Miriam Haven glided into the chamber, to the bed-side of little Sam, and watching his calm, innocent features—which were held to greatly resemble those of the absent Elbridge—with tears in her eyes, she breathed a blessing from her very heart on the dear child who had faith in the absent one. "A blessing!" such was her humble wish as she returned to her chamber and laid her fair head on the pillow, "a blessing on such as believe in us when we are in trouble and poverty, out of favor with the world, when our good name is doubted, and when the current running sharply against, might overwhelm

us, were not one or two kind hands put forth to save us from utter ruin and abandonment!"

CHAPTER SIXTH. [70]

THE FASHIONABLE LADY AND HER SON.

All the next day, being the Wednesday before thanksgiving, was alive and busy with the various preparations for the great festival, now held to be a sacred holiday throughout this wide-spread union. The lark had no sooner called morning in the meadow than Mopsey, who seemed to regard herself as having the entire weight of the occasion on her single shoulders, slipped from bed, hurried to the garden, and taking a last look at the great pumpkin as it lay in all its golden glory, severed the vine at a stroke and trundled it with her own arms, (she saw with a smile of pity the poor brown mouse skulking off, like a little pirate as he was, disappointed of his prize,) in at the back-door. The Peabodys were gathering for breakfast, and coming forward, stood at either side of the entrance regarding the pumpkin with profound interest. It fairly shook the house as it rolled in upon the kitchen floor. [71]

When little Sam, who had lingered in bed beyond the others, with pleasant dreams, came down stairs, he was met by young William Peabody.

"What do you think, Sam?" said Peabody Junior, smiling.

"I suppose Aunt Carrack has come," Sam answered. "It's nothing to me if she has."

"No, that isn't it.—Turkey's dead!"

Little Sam dropped a tear, and went away by himself to walk in the garden. Little Sam took no breakfast that morning.

Every window in the house was thrown wide open to begin with; every chair walked out of its place; the new broom which Miriam had gathered with a song, was used for the first time freely on every floor, in every nook and corner; then the new broom was carried away, and locked in a closet like a conjuror who had wrought his spell and need not appear again till some other magic was to be performed. All the chairs were set soberly and steadily against the wall, the windows were closed, and a sacred shade thrown over the house against the approaching festival. The key was turned in the lock of the old parlor, which was to have no company (save the tall old clock talking all alone in the corner to himself) till to-morrow. [72]

And so the day sailed on, like a dainty boat with silent oar on a calm-flowing stream, to evening, when, as though it had been a new-born meteor or great will-o'-the-wisp, there appeared on the edge of the twilight, along the distant horizon, a silvery glitter, which, drawing nearer and nearer, presently disclosed a servant in a shining band mounted on a great coach, with horses in burnished harness; with champing speed, which it seemed must have borne it far beyond, it came to in a moment at the very gate of the homestead, as at the striking of a clock. A gentleman in bearded lip, in high polish of hat, chains and boots, emerged, (the door being opened by a stripling also in a banded hat, who leaped from behind,) followed by a lady in a gown of glossy silk and a yellow feather, waving in the partial darkness from her hat. Such wonder and astonishment as seized on the Peabodys, who looked on it from the balcony, no man can describe.

Angels have descended before now and walked upon the earth—giants have been at some time or other seen strutting about—ghosts appear occasionally in the neighborhood of old farm-houses, [73] but neither ghost, giant, nor angel had such a welcome of uplifted hands and staring eyes as encountered Mrs. Carrack and her son Tiffany, when they, in the body entered in at the gate of the old Peabody mansion at that time. There was but one person in the company, old Sylvester perhaps excepted, who seemed to have his wits about him, and that was the red rooster who, sitting on the wall near the gate when Mr. Tiffany Carrack pushed it open, cocked his eye smartly on him, and darted sharply at his white hand, with its glittering jewel as he laid it on the gate.

"Nancy," said old Sylvester, addressing her with extended grasp, and a pleasant smile of welcome on his brow, "we had given up looking for you."

Was there ever such a rash old man! "Nancy!" as though she had been a common person he was speaking to.

Mrs. Carrack, who was a short woman, stiff and stern, tossing her feather, gave the tips of her fingers to the patriarch, and ordering in a huge leathern trunk all over brass nails and capital C's, condescended to enter into the house. In spite of all resolutions and persuasions to the contrary the door of the best parlor unlocked before her grandeur of demeanor, and she took possession [74] as though she had not the slightest connection with the other members of the Peabody family, nor the remotest interest in the common sitting-room without. Mr. Tiffany Carrack, with patent shanks to his boots which sprang him into the air as he walked, corsets to brace his body in, new-fangled straps to keep him down, a patent collar of a peculiar invention, to hold his head aloft, moving as it were under the convoy of a company of invisible influences, deriving all his motions from the shoe-maker, stay-maker, tailor and linen-draper, who originally wound him up and set him a-going, for whose sole convenience he lives, having withal, by way of paint to his ashy

countenance, a couple of little conch-shell tufts, tawny-yellow, (that being the latest to be had at the perfumer's,) on his upper lip; the representative and embodiment of all the latest new improvements, patents, and contrivances in apparel, Mr. Tiffany Carrack followed his excellent mother.

"Why, Tiffany," said old Sylvester, who notwithstanding the immensity of these people, calmly pursued his old course, "we all thought you were in California." [75]

The family were gathered around and awaited Mr. Tiffany Carrack's answer with a good deal of curiosity.

"That was all a delusion, sir," he replied, plucking at his little crop of yellow tufts,—"a horrible delusion. I had some thought of that kind in my mind, in fact I had got as far south as New Orleans, when I met a seedy fellow who told me that the natives had rebelled and wouldn't work any more; so I found if I would get any of the precious, I must dig with a shovel with my own dear digits; of course I turned back in disgust, and here I am as good as new—Jehoshaphat!"

It was well that Mr. Tiffany had a fashion of emphasizing his discourse with a reference to this ancient person, whom he supposed to have been an exquisite of the first water, which happily furnished a cover under which the entire Peabody family exploded with laughter at Mr. Carrack's announcement of the sudden termination of his grand expedition to the Gold Region. Without an exception they all went off in an enormous burst, the Captain, little Sam, and Mopsey leading.

"Every word true, 'pon my honor," repeated Mr. Carrack. [76]

The great burst was renewed.

"It was a capital idea, wasn't it?" he said again, supposing he had made a great hit.

The explosion for the third time, but softened a little by pity in the female section of the chorus.

Mrs. Carrack had sat stately and aloof, with an inkling in her brain that all this mirthful tumult was not entirely in the nature of a complimentary tribute to her son.

"I think," she said, with haughty severity of aspect, "my son was perfectly right. It was a sinful and a wicked adventure at the best, as the Reverend Strawbery Hyson clearly showed from the fourth Revelations, in his last annual discourse to the young ladies of the church."

"He did, so he did," said Mr. Tiffany, stroking his chin, "I remember perfectly: it was very prettily stated by Hyson."

"The Reverend Strawbery Hyson," said Mrs. Carrack. "Always give that excellent man his full title. What would you say, my son, if he should appear in the streets without his black coat and white cravat? Would you have any confidence in his preaching after that?" [77]

"Next to myself," answered Mr. Tiffany, "I think our parson's the best-dressed man in Boston."

"He should be, as an example," said Mrs. Carrack. "He has a very genteel congregation."

Old Sylvester, who had on at that moment an old brown coat and a frayed black ribbon for a neck-cloth, ordered Mopsey to send the two best pies in the house immediately to the negroes in the Hills. Mrs. Carrack smiled loftily, and drew from her pocket an elegant small silver vial of the pure otto of rose, and applied it to her nostrils as though something disagreeable had just struck upon the air and tainted it.

"By the way," said Mr. Tiffany Carrack, adjusting his shirt collar, "how is my little friend Miriam?"

"Melancholy!" was the only answer any one had to make.

"So I thought," pursued Mr. Carrack, rolling his eyes and heaving an infant sigh from his bosom. "Poor thing, no wonder, if she thought I was gone away so far. She shall be comforted."

Mopsey looking in at this moment, gave the summons to tea, which was answered by Mr. Tiffany Carrack's offering his arm, impressively, to his excellent mother, and leading the way to the table. [78]

It was observed, that in his progress to the tea-table, Mr. Tiffany adopted a tottering and uncertain step, indicating a dilapidated old age, only kept together by the clothes he wore, which was altogether unintelligible to the Peabody family, seeing that Mr. Carrack was in the very prime of youth, till Mrs. Carrack remarked, with an affectionate smile of motherly pride:

"You remind me more and more every day, Tiff, of that dear delightful old Baden-Baden."

"I wish the glorious old fellow would come over to me for a short lark," rejoined Mr. Tiffany. "But he couldn't live here long; there's nothing old here."

"Who's Baden Baden?" asked Sylvester.

"Only a prince of my acquaintance on the other side of the water, and a devilish clever fellow. But he could'nt stand it here—I'm afraid—everything's so new."

"I'm rather old," suggested Sylvester, smiling on the young man.

"So you are, by Jove—But that aint the thing I want exactly; I want an old castle or two, and a

donjon-keep, and that sort of thing.—You understand." [79]

"Something," suggested the grandfather, "in the style of the old revolutionary fort on Fort Hill?"

"No—no—you don't take exactly. I mean something more in the antique—something or other, you see"—here he began twirling his forefinger in the air and sketching an amorphous phantom of some sort, of an altogether unattainable character, "in a word—Jehoshaphat!"

The moment the eye of Mrs. Carrack fell upon the blue and white crockery, the pewter plates which had been in use time out of mind in the family, and the plain knives and forks of steel, she cast on her son a significant glance of mingled surprise and contempt. "Thomas," she said, standing before the place assigned to her, her son doing the same, "the napkins!"

The napkins were brought from a great basket which had accompanied the leathern trunk.

"The other things!"

The other things, consisting of china plates, cups and saucers, and knives and forks of silver for two, were duly laid—Mrs. Carrack and her son having kept the rest of the family waiting the saying of grace by old Sylvester, were good enough to be seated at the old farmer's (Mrs. Carrack's father's) board. [80]

When old Sylvester unclosed his eyes from the delivery of thanks, he discovered at the back of Mrs. Carrack and her son's chairs, the two city servants in livery, with their short cut hair and embroidered coats of the fashion of those worn in English farces on the stage, standing erect and without the motion of a muscle. There is not a doubt but that old Sylvester Peabody was a good deal astonished, although he gave no utterance to his feelings. But when the two young men in livery began to dive in here and there about the table, snapping up the dishes in exclusive service on Mrs. Carrack and Mr. Tiffany Carrack, he could remain silent no longer.

"Boys," he said, addressing himself to the two fine personages in question, "you will oblige me by going into the yard and chopping wood till we are done supper. We shall need all you can split in an hour to bake the pies with."

Thunderstruck, as though a bolt had smitten them individually in the head, this direction, delivered in a quiet voice of command not to be resisted, sent the two servants forth at the back-door. They were no sooner out of view than they addressed each other almost at the same [81] moment, "My eyes! did you ever see such a queer old fellow as that!"

When Mrs. Carrack and her son turned, and found that the two young gentlemen in livery had actually vanished, the lady smiled a delicate smile of gentle scorn, and Mr. Tiffany, regarding his aged grandfather steadily, merely remarked, in a tone of most friendly and familiar condescension, "Baden-Baden wouldn't have done such a thing!"

The overpowering grandeur of the fashionable lady chilled the household, and there was little conversation till she addressed the widow Margaret.

"Hadn't you a grown up son, Mrs. Peabody?"

The widow was silent. Presently Mr. Carrack renewed the discourse.

"By the by," he said, "I thought I saw that son of yours—wasn't his name Elbridge, or something of that sort?—in New Orleans."

"Did you speak to him?" asked the Captain, flushing a little in the face.

"I observed he was a good deal out at elbows," Mr. Carrack answered, "and it was broad day-light, in one of the fashionable streets." [82]

"Is that all you have to tell us of your cousin?" old Sylvester inquired.

"He is my cousin—much obliged for the information. I had almost forgotten that! Why ye-es—I couldn't help seeing that he went into a miserable broken-down house in a by-street—but had to get my moustache oiled for a Creole ball that evening, and couldn't be reasonably expected to follow him, could I?—Jehoshaphat!"

If the human countenance, by reason of its clouding up in gusts of pitchy blackness acquired the power, like darkening skies, of discharging thunderbolts, it would have been, I am sure, a hot and heavy one which Mopsey, blackening and blazing, had delivered, as she departed to the kitchen, lowering upon Mr. Tiffany Carrack,—"'*He thought he saw her son Elbridge!*' The vagabone has no more feeling nor de bottom of a stone jug."

The meal over, the evening wore on in friendly chat of old Thanksgiving times—of neighbors and early family histories; each one in turn launching, so to speak, a little boat upon the current, freighted deep with many precious stores of old-time remembrance; Mrs. Carrack sitting alone as an iceberg in the very midst of the waters, melting not once, nor contributing a drop or trickle to [83] the friendly flow. And when bed-time came again, how clearly was it shown, that there is nothing certain in this changeful world. By some sudden and unforeseen interruption, nations lose power, communities are shattered, households well-constructed fall in pieces at a breath.

Her sudden appearance in their midst, compelled another consultation to be taken as to the disposal of the great Mrs. Carrack for the night. It would never answer to put that grand person

in any secondary lodging; so all the old arrangements were of necessity broken up; the best bedroom allotted to her; and that her gentle nerves might not be afflicted, the old clock, which adjoined her sleeping-chamber, and which had occupied his corner and told the time for the Peabodys for better than a hundred years from the same spot, was instantly silenced, as impertinent. The Captain's high-actioned white horse, which had enjoyed the privilege of roaming unmolested about the house, was led away like an unhappy convict, and stabled in the barn; and to complete the arrangements, the two servants in livery were put on guard near her window, to drive off the geese, turkeys, and other talkative birds of the night, that she might sleep without [84] the slightest disturbance from that noisy old creature, Nature.

Mr. Tiffany Carrack, while these delicate preparations were in progress, was evidently agitated with some extraordinary design, in which Miriam Haven was bearing a part; for, although he did not address a word to that young maiden, he was as busy as his imitation of the antiquity of Baden-Baden would allow him, ogling, grimacing, and plucking his tawny beard at her every minute in the most astonishing manner, closely watched by Mopsey, the Captain, and old Sylvester, who strongly suspected the young man of being affected in his wits.

It was very clear that it was this same Mr. Tiffany Carrack who had entered in at the door of the sleeping chamber assigned to that gentleman, but who would have ventured to assert that the figure, which, somewhere about the middle of the night, emerged from the window of the chamber in question, in yellow slippers, red silk cloak trimmed with gold, fez cap, and white muslin turban, and, with folded arms, began pacing up and down under the casement of Miriam Haven, after the manner of singers at the opera, preparatory to beginning, was the same Tiffany? [85] And yet, when he returned again, and holding his face up to the moon, which was shining at a convenient angle over the edge of the house, the tawny tuft clearly identified it as Tiffany and no one else. And yet, as if to further confuse all recognition, what sound is that which breaks from his throat, articulating:—

> "Dearest, awake—you need not fear;
> For he—for he—your Troubadour is here!"

The summons passed for some time unanswered, till Mopsey, from the little end-window of her lodgement, presented her head in a flaming red and yellow handkerchief, and rolled her eyes about to discover the source of the tumult; scowling in the belief that it must be no other than "one of dem Brundages come to carry off in de dead of night de Peabody punkin."

A gentle conviction was dawning in the brain of Mr. Carrack that this was the fair Miriam happily responding to his challenge in the appropriate character and costume of a Moorish Princess; when, as he began to roar again, still more violent and furious in his chanting, the black head opened and demanded, "what you want dere?" followed by an extraordinary shower of gourd- [86] shells, which, crashing upon his sconce, with a distinct shatter for each shell, could not, for a moment, be mistaken for flowers, signet-rings, or any other ordinarily recognised love-tokens.

It immediately occurred to Mr. Carrack, with the suddenness of inspiration, that he had better return to his chamber and go to bed; a design which was checked, as he proceeded in that direction, by the alarming apparition of a great body with a fire-lock thrust out of the window of the apartment, next to his own, occupied by the Captain, presented directly at his head, with a cry "Avast, there!" and a movement on the part of the body, to follow the gun out at the window. Fearfully harassed in that quarter, Mr. Carrack wheeled rapidly about, encountering as he turned, the two servants in livery, still making the circuit of the homestead—who in alarm of their lives from this singular figure in the red cloak, fled into the fields and lurked in an old out-house till daylight. As these scampered away before him, Mr. Tiffany, to relieve himself of the apparition of the gun, would have turned the corner of the house; when Mopsey appeared, wildly gesticulating, with a great brush-broom reared aloft, and threatening instant ruin to his person. [87]

From this double peril, what but the happiest genius could have suggested to Mr. Tiffany, an instant and straightforward flight from the house; in which he immediately engaged, making up the road—the Captain with his musket, and Mopsey with her hearth-broom, close at his heels. If Mr. Tiffany Carrack had promptly employed his undoubted resources of youth and activity, his escape from the necessity of disclosure or surrender had been perhaps easy; but it so happened that his progress was a good deal baffled by the conflict constantly kept up in his brain, between the desire to use his legs in the natural manner, and to preserve that antique pace of tottering gentility which he had acquired from that devilish fine old fellow, the Prince of Baden-Baden, so that at one moment he was in the very hands of the enemy, and at the next, flying like an antelope in the distance. The gun, constantly following him with a loud threat, from the Captain, seemed, in the moonlight, like a great finger perpetually pointing at his head; till at last it became altogether too dreadful to bear, and making up the road toward Brundage's, which still [88] further inflamed the pursuit, in sheer exhaustion he rushed through an open gate into a neighboring tan-yard, and took refuge in the old bark-mill. There was but a moment's rest allowed him even here, for Mopsey and the Captain, furiously threatening all sorts of death and destruction, presently rushed in at the door, and sent him scampering about the ring like a distracted colt, in his first day's service; a game of short duration, for the Captain and Mopsey, closing in upon him from opposite directions compelled him to retreat again into the open air. How much longer the chase might have continued, it were hard to tell, for as his pursuers made after him, Mr. Tiffany Carrack suddenly disappeared, like a melted snow-flake, from the surface of the earth. In his confused state he had tumbled into a vat, fortunately without the observation of the inexorable enemy, although as he clung to the side the Captain discharged his musket

directly over his head.

"I guess that's done his business," said the Captain. "We'll come and look for the body in the morning."

Now it is strongly suspected that both Mopsey and the Captain knew well enough all along that [89] this was Mr. Tiffany Carrack they had been pursuing, and that as they watched him from the distance emerge from the vat, return to the homestead, and skulk, dripping in, like a rat of outlandish breed, at his chamber-window, they were amply avenged: the Captain, for the freedom with which the city-exquisite had treated the Peabody family, especially the good old grandfather, and Mopsey, for the slighting manner in which he had referred to absent young Mas'r Elbridge.

When all was peace again within the homestead, there was one who still watched the night, and ignorant of the nature of this strange tumult, trembled as at the approach of a long-wished for happiness. It was Miriam, the orphan dependent, who now sat by the midnight casement. Oh, who of living men can tell how that young heart yearned at the thought—the hope—the thrilling momentary belief—that this was her absent lover happily returning?

In the wide darkness of the lonesome night, which was it shone brightest and with purest lustre, in view of the all-seeing Mover of the Heavens—the stars glittering far away in space, in all their lofty glory, or the timid eyes of that simple maiden, wet with the dew of youth, and bright with [90] the pure hope of honest love! When all was still again, and no Elbridge's voice was heard, no form of absent Elbridge there to cheer her, oh, who can tell how near to breaking, in its silent agony, was that young heart, and with what tremblings of solicitude and fear, the patient Miriam waited for the friendly light to open the golden-gate of dawn upon another morrow!

CHAPTER SEVENTH. [91]

THE THANKSGIVING SERMON.

The morning of the day of Thanksgiving came calm, clear and beautiful. A stillness, as of heaven and not of earth, ruled the wide landscape. The Indian summer, which had been as a gentle mist or veil upon the beauty of the time, had gone away a little—retired, as it were, into the hills and back country, to allow the undimmed heaven to shine down upon the happy festival of families and nations. The cattle stood still in the fields without a low; the trees were quiet as in friendly recognition of the spirit of the hour; no reaper's hook or mower's scythe glanced in the meadow, no rumbling wain was on the road. The birds alone, as being more nearly akin to the feeling of the scene, warbled in the boughs.

But out of the silent gloom of the mist there sprang as by magic, a lovely illumination which lit [92] the country far and wide, as with a thousand varicolored lamps. As a maiden who has tarried in her chamber, some hour the least expected appears before us, apparelled in all the pomp and hue of brilliant beauty, the fair country, flushed with innumerable tints of the changed autumn-trees, glided forth upon the Indian summer scene, and taught that when kindly nature seems all foregone and spent, she can rise from her couch fresher and more radiant than in her very prime.

What wonder if with the peep of dawn the children leaped from bed, eager to have on their new clothes reserved for the day, and by times appeared before old Sylvester in proud array of little hats, new-brightened shoes and shining locks, span new as though they had just come from the mint; anxious to have his grandfatherly approval of their comeliness? Shortly after, the horses caught in the distant pastures, the Captain and Farmer Oliver having charge of them, were brought in and tied under the trees in the door-yard.

Then, breakfast being early dispatched, there was a mighty running to and fro of the grown people through the house, dresses hurried from old clothes-presses and closets, a loud demand [93] on every hand for pins, of which there seemed to be (as there always is on such occasions) a great lack. The horses were put to Mrs. Carrack's coach, the Captain's gig, the old house-wagon, with breathless expectation on the part of the children; and in brief, after bustling preparation and incessant summoning of one member of the family and another from the different parts of the house, all being at last ready and in their seats, the Peabodys set forth for the Thanksgiving Sermon at the country Meeting-house, a couple of miles away.

The Captain took the lead with his wife and Peabody Junior somewhere and somehow between them, followed by the wagon with old Sylvester, still proud of his dexterity as a driver, Oliver, much pleased with the popular character of the conveyance and wife, with young Robert; William Peabody and wife; little Sam riding between his grandfather's legs in front, and allowed to hold the end of the reins. Slowly and in great state, after all rolled Mrs. Carrack's coach with herself and son within, and footman and coachman without.

Chanticleer, too, clear of eye and bright of wing, walked the garden wall, carried his head up, and acted as if he had also put on his thanksgiving suit and expected to take the road presently, [94] accompany the family, and join his voice with theirs at the little meeting-house.

Although the Captain, with his high-actioned white horse kept out of eye-shot ahead, it was Mrs. Carrack's fine carriage that had the triumph of the road to itself, for as it rolled glittering on, the

simple country people, belated in their own preparations, or tarrying at home to provide the dinner, ran to the windows in wonder and admiration. The plain wagons, bent in the same direction, turned out of the path and gave the great coach the better half of the way, staring a broadside as it passed.

And when the party reached the little meeting-house, what a peace hung about it! The air seemed softer, the sunshine brighter, there, as it stood in humble silence among the tall trees which waved with a gentle murmur before its windows. The people, as they arrived, glided noiselessly in, in their neat dresses and looks of decent devotion; others as they came made fast their horses under the sheds and trees about—most of them in wagons and plain chaises, brightened into all of beauty they were capable of, by a severe attention to the harness and mountings; others— [95] these were a few bachelors and striplings—trotted in quietly on horseback. Before service a few of the old farmers lingered outside discussing the late crops or inquiring after each other's families, who presently went within, summoning from the grassy churchyard—which lay next to the meeting house—the children who were loitering there reading the grave-stones.

When the Captain arrived with his gig, under such extraordinary headway that he was near driving across the grave-yard into the next county—the country people scampered aside, like scared fowl; Mrs. Carrack's great coach, with its liveried outriders, set them staring as if they did not or could not believe their own eyes. With the arrival of old Sylvester they re-gathered, and, almost in a body, proffered their aid to hold the horses—to help the old Patriarch to the ground—in a word, to show their regard and affection in every way in their power. He tarried but a moment at the door, to speak a word with one or two of the oldest of his neighbors, and passed in, followed by all of his family save Mrs. Carrack and her son, who under color of hunting up the [96] grave of some old relation, delay in order to make their appearance in the meeting-house by themselves, and independently of the Peabody connection.

Will you pardon me, reader, if I fail to tell you whether this house of worship was of the Methodist, Episcopal, or Baptist creed, whether it had a chancel or altar, or painted windows? Whether the pews had doors to them and were cushioned or not? Whether the minister wore a gown and bands, or plain suit of black, or was undistinguished in his dress? Will it not suffice if I tell you, as the very belief of my soul, that it was a christian house, that there were seats for all, that things were well intended and decently ordered, and that with a hymn sung with such purity of heart that its praises naturally joined in with the chiming of the trees and the carols of the birds without and floated on without a stop to Heaven, when a meek man rose up:

"Some two hundred years ago, our ancestors (he said,) finding themselves more comfortable in the wilderness of the new world, than they could have reasonably looked for, set apart a day of Thanksgiving to Almighty God for his manifold mercies. That day, God be praised, has been [97] steadily observed throughout this happy land, by cheerful gatherings of families, and other festive and devotional observances, down to the present time. Our fathers covenanted, in the love of Christ, to cleave together, as brethren, however hard the brunt of fortune might be. That bond still continues. We may not live (he went on, in the very spirit and letter of the first Thanksgiving discourse ever delivered amongst us,) as retired hermits, each in our cell apart, nor inquire, like David, how liveth such a man? How is he clad? How is he fed? He is my brother, we are in league together, we must stand and fall by one another. Is his labor harder than mine? Surely I will ease him. Hath he no bed to lie on? I have two—I will lend him one. Hath he no apparel? I have two suits—I will give him one of them. Eats he coarse food, bread and water, and have I better? Surely we will part stakes. He is as good a man as I, and we are bound each to other; so that his wants must be my wants; his sorrows, my sorrows; his sickness my sickness; and his welfare my welfare; for I am as he is; such a sweet sympathy were excellent, comfortable, nay, heavenly, and [98] is the only maker and conserver of churches and commonwealths."

To such as looked upon old Sylvester there seemed a glow and halo about his aged brow and whitened locks, for this was the very spirit of his life.

As though he knew the very secrets of their souls, and touched their very heart-strings with a gentle hand, the preacher glanced from one member of the Peabody household to another, as he proceeded, something in this manner. (For William Peabody:) do I find on this holy day that I love God in all his glorious universe, more than the image even of Liberty, which hath ensnared and enslaved the soul of many a man on the coin of this world? (For buxom Mrs. Jane, in her vandyke:) Do I stifle the vanity of good looks and comfortable circumstances under a plain garb? (For the jovial Captain:) Am I not over hasty in pursuit of carnal enjoyment? (For Mr. Oliver: who was wiping his brow with the Declaration of Independence,) and eager over much for the good opinion of men, when I should be quietly serving them without report? (For Mrs. Carrack and her son:) And what are pomp and fashion, but the painted signs of good living where there is no life? These (he continued,) are all outward, mere pretences to put off our duty, and the care of our [99] souls. Yea, we may have churches, schools, hospitals abounding—but these are mere lath and mortar, if we have not also within our own hearts, a church where the pure worship ever goeth on, a school where the true knowledge is taught, a hospital, the door whereof standeth constantly open, into which our fellow-creatures are welcomed and where their infirmities are first cared for with all kindness and tenderness. If these be our inclinings this day, let us be reasonably thankful on this Thanksgiving morning. Let such as are in health be thankful for their good case; and such as are out of health be thankful that they are no worse. Let such as are rich be thankful for their wealth, (if it hath been honestly come by;) and let such as are poor be thankful that they have no such charge upon their souls. Let old folks be thankful for their wisdom in knowing that young folks are fools; and let young ones be thankful that they may live to see the time when they may

use the same privilege. Let lean folks be thankful for their spare ribs, which are not a burthen in the harvest-field; fat folks may laugh at lean ones, and grow fatter every day. Let married folks be [100] thankful for blessings both little and great; let bachelors and old maids be thankful for the privilege of kissing other folks' babies, and great good may it do them.

With what a glow of mutual friendship the quaint preacher was warming the plain old meeting-house on that thanksgiving day!

Finally, and to conclude, (he went on in the language of a chronicle of the time:)—Let no man look upon a turkey to-day, and say, 'This also is vanity.' What is the life of man without creature-comforts, and the stomach of the son of man with no aid from the tin kitchen? Despise not the day of small things, while there are pullets on the spit, and let every fowl have fair play, between the jaws of thy philosophy. Are not puddings made to be sliced, and pie-crust to be broken? Go thy ways, then, according to good sense, good cheer, good appetite, the Governor's proclamation, and every other good thing under the sun;—render thanks for all the good things of this life, and good cookery among the rest; eat, drink, and be merry; make not a lean laudation of the bounties of Providence, but let a lively gusto follow a long grace. Feast thankfully, and feast hopingly; [101] feast in good will to all mankind, Grahamites included; feast in the full and joyous persuasion, that while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, dinner-time, pudding-time, and supper-time, are not likely to go out of fashion;—feast with exulting confidence in the continuance of cooks, kitchens, and orthodox expounders of Scripture and the constitution in our ancient, blessed, and fat-sided commonwealth—feast, in short, like a good Christian, proving all things, relishing all things, hoping all things, expecting all things, and enjoying all things. Let a good stomach for dinner go hand in hand with a good mind for sound doctrine. Let us all be thankful that a gracious Providence hath furnished each and all with a wholesome and bountiful dinner this day; and, if there be none so furnished, let him now make it known, and we will instantly contribute thereto of our separate abundance. There are none who murmur—we all, therefore, have a thanksgiving dinner waiting for us; let us hie home cheerily, and in a becoming spirit of mirth and devotion partake thereof.

The windows of the little meeting-house were up to let in the pleasant sunshine; and the very horses who were within hearing of his voice, seemed by the pricking up of their brown ears to [102] relish and approve of his discourse. The Captain's city nag, as wide awake as any, seemed to address himself to an acquaintance of a heavy bay plougher, who stood at the same post, and laying their heads together for the better part of the sermon, they appeared to regard it, as far as they caught its meaning, as sound doctrine, particularly acknowledging that this was as fine a thanksgiving morning as they (who had been old friends and had spent their youth together, being in some way related, in a farm-house in that neighborhood) had ever known; and when they had said as much as this, they laughed out in very merriness of spirit, with a great winnow, as the happy audience came streaming forth at the meeting-house door. There were no cold, haughty, or distrustful faces now, as when they had entered in an hour ago; the genial air of the little meeting-house had melted away all frosts of that kind; and as they mingled under the sober autumn-trees, loitering for conversation, inquiring after neighbors, old folks whose infirmities kept them at home, the young children; they seemed indeed, much more a company of brethren, embarked (as sailors say) on a common bottom for happiness and enjoyment. The children were [103] the first to set out for home through the fields on foot; Peabody the younger, little Sam and Robert being attended by the footman in livery, whom Mrs. Carrack relieved from attendance at the rear of the coach.

If the quaint preacher had urged the rational enjoyment of the Thanksgiving cheer from the pulpit, Mopsey labored with equal zeal at home to have it worthy of enjoyment. At an early hour she had cleared decks, and taken possession of the kitchen: kindling, with dawn, a great fire in the oven for the pies, and another on the hearth for the turkey. But it was from the oven, heaping it to the top with fresh relays of dry wood, that she expected the Thanksgiving angel to walk in all his beauty and majesty. In performance of her duty, and from a sense only that there could be no thanksgiving without a turkey, she planted the tin oven on the hearth, spitted the gobbler, and from time to time, merely as a matter of absolute necessity, gave it a turn; but about the mouth of the great oven she hovered constantly, like a spirit—had her head in and out at the opening every other minute; and, when at last the pies were slided in upon the warm bottom, she lingered there [104] regarding the change they were undergoing with the fond admiration with which a connoisseur in sunsets hangs upon the changing colors of the evening sky. The leisure this double duty allowed her was employed by Mopsey in scaring away the poultry and idle young chickens which rushed in at the back entrance of the kitchen in swarms, and hopped with yellow legs about the floor with the racket of constant falling showers of corn. Upon the half door opening on the front the red rooster had mounted, and with his head on one side observed with a knowing eye all that went forward; showing perhaps most interest in the turning of the spit, the impalement of the turkey thereon having been with him an object of special consideration.

The highly colored picture of Warren at Bunker-Hill, writhing in his death-agony on one wall of the kitchen, and General Marion feasting from a potato, in his tent, on the other, did not in the least attract the attention of Mopsey. She saw nothing on the whole horizon of the glowing apartment but the pies and the turkey, and even for the moment neglected to puzzle herself, as she was accustomed to in the pauses of her daily labors, with the wonders and mysteries of an [105] ancient dog-eared spelling-book which lay upon the smoky mantel.

Meanwhile, in obedience to the spirit of the day, the widow Margaret and Miriam, having each diligently disposed of their separate charge in the preparations, making a church of the

homestead, conducted a worship in their own simple way. Opposite to each other in the little sitting-room, Miriam opened the old Family Bible, and at the widow Margaret's request read from that chapter which gives the story of the prodigal son. It was with a clear and pensive voice that she read, but not without a struggle with herself. Where the story told that the young man had gone into a far country; that he had wasted his substance in riotous living; that he was abased to the feeding of swine; that he craved in his hunger the very husks; that he lamented the plenty of his father's house—a cloud came upon her countenance, and the simplest eye could have interpreted the thoughts that troubled her. And how the fair young face brightened, when she read that the young man resolved to arise and return to the house of his father; the dear encounter; the rejoicing over his return, and the glad proclamation, "This, my son, was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." [106]

"If he would come back even so," said the widow when the book was closed, "in sorrow, in poverty, in crime even, I would thank God and be grateful."

"He is not guilty, mother," Miriam pleaded, casting her head upon the widow's bosom and clinging close about her neck.

"I will not think that he is," Margaret answered, lifting up her head. "Guilty or innocent, he is my son—my son." Clasping the young orphan's hand, after a pause of tender silence, she gave utterance to her feelings in a Thanksgiving hymn. These were the words:—

Father! protect the wanderer on his way;
  Bright be for him thy stars and calm thy seas—
Thanksgiving live upon his lips to-day,
  And in his heart the good man's summer ease.

Almighty! Thou canst bring the pilgrim back,
  With a clear brow to this his childish home;
Guide him, dear Father, o'er a blameless track,
  No more to stray from us, no more to roam.

At this moment a tumult of children's voices was heard in the door-yard, and as the widow turned, young William Peabody was seen struggling with Robert and little Sam, who were holding him back with all their force. As he dragged them forward, being their elder and superior in strength, Peabody Junior stretched his throat and called towards the house—"I've seen him—I've seen him!" [107]

"Who have you seen?" asked the widow, rising and approaching the door.

"Mr. Barbary." When Peabody Junior made this answer the widow advanced with a gleam on her countenance, and gently releasing him, said, "Come, William, and tell us all about it."

"Aunt Margaret," said Robert, thrusting himself between, "don't listen to a word he has to say. I'll tell you all about it. You see we were coming home from meeting, and little Sam got tired, and William and I made a cradle of our hands and were carrying him along very nice."

"Not so very nice, either," Peabody Junior interrupted, "for I was plaguy tired."

"That's what I was going to tell you, Aunt Margaret. Bill did get tired, and as we came through the Locust Wood, he made believe to see something, and run away to get clear of carrying little Sam any further." [108]

"I did see him!" said Peabody Junior, firmly.

"Where was he?" the widow asked.

"Behind the hazel-bush, with his head just looking out at the top, all turned white as dead folks do."

Mopsey was in immediately with her dark head, crying out, "Don't belief a word of it."

"I guess you saw nothing but the hazel-bush, William," said the widow.

"That was it, Aunt; it was the hazel-bush with a great mop of moss on it," Robert added.

Miriam sat looking on and listening, pale and trembling.

"If your cousin Elbridge and Mr. Barbary should ever come back," said the widow, addressing Peabody Junior, "you would be sorry for what you have said, William."

"So he would, Aunt," echoed Robert.

Mopsey was in again from the kitchen; this time she advanced several steps from the door-sill into the room, lifted up both her arms and addressed the assembled company.

"One ting I know," said Mopsey, "dere's a big pie baking in dat ere oven, and if Mas'r Elbridge don't eat that pie it'll haf to sour, dat I know." [109]

"What is it, Mopsey," asked Margaret, "that gives you such a faith in my son?"

"I tell you what it is, Missus," Mopsey answered promptly, "dast tanksgivin when I tumbled down on dis ere sef-same floor bringin' in de turkey, every body laugh but Mas'r Elbridge, and he come

from his place and pick me up. He murder any body! I'll eat de whole tanksgivin dinner myself if he touch a hair of de old preacher's head to hurt it." Suddenly changing her tone, she added, "Dey're comin' from meetin', I hear de old wagon."

CHAPTER EIGHTH.

[110]

THE DINNER.

As the Peabodys approached the homestead, the smoke of the kitchen chimney was visible, circling upward and winding about in the sunshine as though it had been a delicate corkscrew uncorking a great bottle or square old flask of a delicious vintage. The Captain averred a quarter of a mile away, the moment they had come upon the brow of the hill, that he had a distinct savor of the fragrance of the turkey, and that it was quite as refreshing as the first odor of the land breeze coming in from sea, and he snuffed it up with a zeal and relish which gave the gig an eager appetite for dinner. The Captain's conjecture was strongly confirmed in the appearance of Mopsey, darting, with a dark face of dewy radiance at the wood-pile and shuffling back with bustling speed to the kitchen with a handful of delicate splinters. "She's giving him the last turn," said the Captain.

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The shadow of the little meeting-house was still over the Captain, even so far away, for he conducted the procession homeward at a pace much less furious than that with which he had advanced in the morning; and Mrs. Carrack too, observed now, with a strange pleasure, what she had given no heed to before when the fine coach was rolling in triumph along the road,—birds twittering in the sunny air by the wayside, and cattle roving like figures in a beautiful picture, upon the slopes of the distant hills. Oliver, the politician, more than once had out the great cotton pocket-handkerchief, and holding it spread before him contemplating the fatherly signers, was evidently acquiring some new lights on the subject of independence.

A change, in fine, of some sort or other, had passed over every member of the Peabody family save old Sylvester, returning as going, calm, plain-spoken, straightforward and patriarchal. When they reached the gate of the homestead, William Peabody gave his hand to his wife and helped her, with some show of attention, to alight; and then there could be no doubt that it was in very truth Thanksgiving day, for the glory of the door-yard itself had paled and disappeared in the

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gorgeous festal light. There was no majestic gobbler in the door-yard now, with his great outspread tail, which in the proud moments of his life he would have expanded as if to shut the very light of the sun from all meaner creatures of the mansion.

Within doors there was that bustling preparation, with brief lulls of ominous silence which precede and usher a great event. The widow Margaret, with noiseless step, glided to and fro, Miriam daintily hovering in the suburbs of the sitting-room, which is evidently the grand centre of interest, and Mopsey toils like a swart goblin in her laboratory of the kitchen in a high glow, scowling fearfully if addressed with a word which calls her attention for a moment away from her critical labors.

As the family entered the homestead on their return, the combined forces were just at the point of pitching their tent on the ground of the forthcoming engagement, in the shape of the ancient four-legged and wide-leaved table, with a cover of snowy whiteness, ornamented as with shields and weapons of quaint device, in the old plates of pewter and the horn-handled knives and forks burnished to such a polish as to make the little room fairly glitter. Dishes streamed in one after

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the other in a long and rapid procession, piles of home-made bread, basins of apple-sauce, pickles, potatoes of vast proportion and mealy beauty. When the ancient and lordly pitcher of blue and white (whether freighted with new cider or old cold water need not be told) crowned the board, the first stage of preparation was complete, and another portentous pause ensued. The whole Peabody connection arranged in stately silence in the front parlor, looked on through the open door in wonder and expectation of what was to follow. The children loitered about the door-ways with watering eyes and open mouths, like so many innocent little dragons lying in wait to rush in at an opportune moment and bear off their prey.

And now, all at once there comes a deeper hush—a still more portentous pause—all eyes are in the direction of the kitchen; the children are hanging forward with their bodies and outstretched necks half way in at the door; Miriam and the widow stand breathless and statue-like at either side of the room; when, as if rising out of some mysterious cave in the very ground, a dark figure is discerned in the distance, about the centre of the kitchen, (into which Mopsey has made, to

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secure an impressive effect, a grand circuit,) head erect, and bearing before it a huge platter; all their eyes tell them, every sense vividly reports what it is the platter supports; she advances with slow and solemn step; she has crossed the sill; she has entered the sitting-room; and, with a full sense of her awful responsibility, Mopsey delivers on the table, in a cleared place left for its careful deposit, the Thanksgiving turkey.

There is no need now to sound a gong, or to ring an alarm-bell to make known to that household that dinner is ready; the brown turkey speaks a summons as with the voice of a thousand living gobblers, and Sylvester rising, the whole Peabody family flock in. To every one his place is considerately assigned, the Captain in the centre directly opposite the turkey, Mrs. Carrack on the other side, the widow at one end, old Sylvester at the head. The children too, a special

exception being made in their favor to-day, are allowed seats with the grown folks, little Sam disposing himself in great comfort in his old grandsire's arms.

Another hush—for everything to-day moves on through these constantly shut and opened gates of [115]
silence, in which they all sit tranquil and speechless, when the old patriarch lifts up his aged hands over the board and repeats his customary grace:

"May we all be Christian people the day we die—God bless us."

The Captain, the great knife and fork in hand, was ready to advance.

"Stop a moment, Charley," old Sylvester spoke up, "give us a moment to contemplate the turkey."

"I would there were just such a dish, grandfather," the Captain rejoined, "on every table in the land this day, and if I had my way there would be."

"No, no, Charley," the grandfather answered, "if there should be, there would be. There is One who is wiser than you or I."

"It would make the man who would do it," Oliver suggested, "immensely popular: he might get to be elected President of the United States."

"It would cost a large sum," remarked William Peabody, the merchant.

"Let us leave off considering imaginary turkeys, and discuss the one before us," said old Sylvester, "but I must first put a question, and if it's answered with satisfaction, we'll proceed. Now tell me," he said, addressing himself to Mr. Carrack, who sat in a sort of dream, as if he had [116]
lost his identity, as he had ever since the night-adventure in the fez-cap and red silk cloak: "Now tell me, Tiffany, although you have doubtless seen a great many grand things, such as the Alps, and St. Peter's church at Rome, has your eye fallen in with anything wherever you travelled over the world, grander than that Thanksgiving turkey?"

Mr. Carrack, either from excessive modesty or total abstraction, hesitated, looked about him hastily, and not till the Captain called across the table, "Why don't you speak, my boy?" and then, as if suddenly coming to, and realizing where he was, answered at last, with great deliberation, "It is a fine bird."

"Enough said," spoke up old Sylvester cheerfully; "you were the last Peabody I expected to acknowledge the merits of the turkey;" and, looking towards the Captain with encouragement, added, "now, knife and fork, do your duty."

It was short work the jovial Captain made with the prize turkey; in rapid succession plates were forwarded, heaped, sent around; and with a keen relish of the Thanksgiving dinner, every head [117]
was busy. Straight on, as people who have an allotted task before them, the Peabodys moved through the dinner,—a powerful, steady-going caravan of cheerful travellers, over hill, over dale, up the valleys, along the stream-side, cropping their way like a nimble-toothed flock of grazing sheep, keenly enjoying herbage and beverage by the way.

What though, while they were at the height of its enjoyment a sudden storm, at that changeful season, arose without, and dashed its heavy drops against the doors and window-panes; that only, by the contrast of security and fire-side comfort, heightened the zest within, while they were engaged with the many good dishes at least, but when another pause came, did not the pelting shower and the chiding wind talk with them, each one in turn, of the absent, and oh! some there will not believe it—the lost? It was no doubt some thought of this kind that prompted old Sylvester to speak:

"My children," said the patriarch, glancing with a calm eye around the circle of glowing faces at the table "you are bound together with good cheer and in comfortable circumstances; and even as you, who are here from east and west, from the north and the south, by each one yielding a [118]
little of his individual whim or inclination, can thus sit together prosperously and in peace at one board, so can our glorious family of friendly States, on this and every other day, join hands, and like happy children in the fields, lead a far-lengthening dance of festive peace among the mountains and among the vales, from the soft-glimmering east far on to the bright and ruddy west. If others still seek to join in——"

"Ay, father," said Oliver, "there is a great danger."

"Even as by making a little way," answered the patriarch, "we could find room at this table for one or two or three more, so may another State and still another join us, if it will, and even as our natural progeny increaseth to the third, fourth, tenth generation, let us trust for centuries to come this happy Union still shall live to lead her sons to peace, prosperity, and rightful glory."

"But," interposed Oliver, the politician, again, with a double reference in his thoughts, it would almost seem, to an erring State or an absent child, "one may break away in wilfulness or crime—what then?" [119]

"Let us lure it back," was old Sylvester's reply, "with gentle appeals. Remember we are all brethren, and that our alliance is one not merely of worldly interest, but also of family affection. Let us, on this hallowed day," he added, "cherish none but kindly thoughts toward all our kindred, and if him we have least esteemed offer the hand, let us take it in brotherly regard."

There was a pause of silence once again, which was broken by a knock at the door. Old Sylvester,

having spoken his mind, had fallen into a reverie, and the Peabodys glancing one to the other, the question arose, shall the strangers (Mopsey reported them to be two) whoever they may be, be admitted?

"This is strictly a family festival," it was suggested, "where no strangers can be rightly allowed."

"May be thieves!" the merchant added.

"Vagabonds, perhaps!" Mrs. Carrack suggested.

"Strangers, anyhow!" said Mrs. Jane Peabody.

The widow Margaret and Miriam were silent and gave utterance to no opinion.

In the midst of the discussion old Sylvester suddenly awakening, and rearing his white locks aloft, in the voice of a trumpet of silver sound, cried out:—"If they be human, let 'em in!" [120]

As he delivered this emphatic order there was a deep moan at the door, as of one in great pain, or suffering keenly from anguish of spirit, and when it was opened to admit the new-comers, the voice of Chanticleer, raised for the second time, broke in, clear and shrilly, from the outer darkness.

CHAPTER NINTH. [121]

THE NEW-COMERS.

It was old Sylvester himself who opened the door and admitted the strangers; one of them, the younger, wore a slouched hat which did not allow his features to be distinctly observed, further than that his eyes were bright with a strange lustre, and that his face was deadly pale. He was partly supported by the elder man, whose person was clad in a long coat, reaching nearly to the ground. They were invited to the table, but refusing, asked permission to sit at the fire, which being granted, they took their station on either side of the hearth; the younger staggered feebly to his seat, and kept his gaze closely fixed on the other.

"He had better take something," said old Sylvester, looking toward the young man and addressing the other. "Is your young friend ill?"

"With an ailment food cannot relieve, I fear," the elder man answered. [122]

"Will you not remove your hats?" old Sylvester asked again.

Turning slowly at this question, the young man answered, "We may not prove fit company for such as you, and if so the event shall prove, we will pass on and trouble you no further. If every thread were dry as summer flax," he added, in a tone of deep feeling, "I for one, am not fit to sit among honest people."

"You should not say so, my son," said old Sylvester; "let us hope that all men may on a day like this sit together; that, remembering God's many mercies to us all, in the preservation of our lives, in his blessed change of seasons, in hours of holy meditation allowed to us, every man in very gratitude to the Giver of all Good, for this one day in the year at least, may suspend all evil thoughts and be at peace with all his fellow-creatures."

The young man turned toward the company at the table, but not so far that his whole face could be seen.

"Have all who sit about you at that table," he asked, glancing slowly around, "performed the duty to which you refer, and purged their bosoms of unkindness toward their fellow-men? Is there [123] none who grasps the widow's substance? who cherishes scorn and hatred of kindred? Who judges harshly of the absent?"

There was a movement in different members of the company, but old Sylvester hushed them with a look, and took upon himself the business of reply.

"It may be," said old Sylvester, "that some of us are disquieted, for be it known to you that one of the children of this household is absent from among us for causes which may well disturb our thoughts."

"I have heard the story," the young man continued, "and if I know it aright, these are the truths of that history: There were two men, friends, once in this neighborhood, Mr. Barbary the preacher, and your grandson Elbridge Peabody. Something like a year ago the preacher suddenly disappeared from this region, and the report arose and constantly spread that he had fallen by the hand of his friend, that grandchild of yours. It began in a cloudy whisper, afar off, but swelled from day to day, from hour to hour, till it overshadowed this whole region, and not the least of the darkness it caused was on this spot, where this ancient homestead stands, and where the [124] young man had grown and lived from the hour of his birth. He saw coldness and avoidance on the highway; he was shrunk from on sabbath-mornings, and by children; but this was little and could be borne—the world was against him: but when he saw an aged face averted," he looked at old Sylvester steadily, "and a mother's countenance sad and hostile—"

"Sad—but not hostile," the widow murmured.

"Sorrowful and troubled, at least," the young man rejoined, "his life, for all of happiness, was at an end. He must cease to live or he must restore the ancient sunshine which had lighted the windows of the home of his boyhood. He knew that his friend had *not* fallen by his hand; that he still lived, but in a far distant place which none but a long and weary journey could reach."

"He should have declared as much," interposed the old patriarch.

"No, sir; his word would have been but as the frail leaf blown idly from the autumn-bough; nothing but the living presence of his friend could silence the voice of the accuser. He rose up and departed, without counsel of any, trusting only in God and his own strength; he bore with [125] him neither bag nor baggage, scrip nor scrippage—not even a change of raiment; but with a handful of fruit and the humble provision which his good mother had furnished for the harvest-field, he set forth; day and night he journeyed on the truck he knew his friend had taken to that far country, toiling in the fields to secure food and lodging for the night, and some scant aids to carry him from place to place. Pushing on fast and far through the western country, in hunger and distress, passing by the very door of prosperous kinsfolk, but not tarrying a moment to seek relief."

At this point Mrs. Jane Peabody glanced at her husband.

"And so by one stage and another, hastening on, he reached that great city in the south, the metropolis of New Orleans; often, as he hoped, on the very steps of his friend, but never overtaking him, with fortune at so low an ebb that there he was well-nigh wasted in strength, hunger-stricken, and tattered in dress; driven to live in hovels till some chance restored him the little means to advance; so mean of person that his dearest friend, his nearest kinsman, even his old playfellow there," pointing to Mr. Tiffany Carrack, "who had wrestled with him in the [126] hayfield, who had sat with him in childish talk often and many a time by summer stream-sides, would have passed him by as one unknown."

The glance which, in speaking this, he directed at Mr. Carrack, kindled on that young gentleman's countenance a ruby glow, so intense and fiery that it would seem as if it must have burned up the tawny tufts before their very eyes, like so much dry stubble. There was a glow of another kind in the Captain's broad face, which shone like another sun as he contemplated the two young men, glancing from one to the other.

"The young man, bent on that one purpose as on life itself," he continued, silencing his companion, who seemed eager to speak, with a motion of his finger, "through towns, over waters, upon deserts, still pursued his way; and, to be brief in a weary history, there, in the very heart of that great region of gold, among diggers and searchers, and men distracted in a thousand ways in that perilous hunt, to find his simple-hearted friend, the preacher, in an out-of-the-way wilderness among the mountains, exhorting the living, comforting the sick, consoling the dying—and then, for the first time he learned, what his friend had carefully concealed before, the motive [127] of his self-banishment to this distant country."

His companion would have spoken, but the young man hurrying on, allowed him not a word.

"You who know his history," he continued, addressing the company at the table—"know what calamity had once come upon the household of Mr. Barbary, by the unlawful thirst for gold; that he held its love as the curse of curses; he thought if he could but once throw himself in its midst, where that passion raged the most, he would be doing his Master's service most faithfully, more than in this quiet country-place of peaceful households, but when he learned the peril and the sore distress of his young friend, he tarried not a moment. 'To restore peace to one injured mind,' he said; 'to bring back harmony to one household is a clear and certain duty which will outweigh the vague chances of the good I may do here.' The young man cherished but one wish; through storm and trial and distress of every name and hue, if he could but reach home on the day of Thanksgiving, and stand up there before his assembled kindred a vindicated man, he would be requited fully for all his toil. He took ship; in tempest, and with many risks of perishing far away [128] unvindicated, in the middle of the wild sea—"

The widowed mother could restrain herself no longer, but rushing forward, she removed the young man's hat from his brow, parted his locks, and casting herself upon his neck, gave utterance to her feelings in the affecting language of Scripture, which she had listened to in the morning: "My son was dead and is alive again—he was lost and is found!"

Miriam timidly grasped his offered hand and was silent. The company had risen from the table and gathered around.

"Now," said William Peabody, "I could believe,—be glad to believe all this, if he had but brought Mr. Barbary with him."

The elder stranger cast back his coat, removed his hat, and standing forth, said, "I am here, and testify to the truth, in every word, of all my young friend has declared to you."

On this declaration the Peabodys, without an exception, hastened to welcome and address the returned Elbridge, and closed upon him in a solid group of affectionate acknowledgment. Old Sylvester stood looking loftily down over all from the outer edge of the circle, and while they [129] were busiest in congratulations and well-wishes, he went forward.

"Stand back!" cried the old man, waving the company aside with outspread arms, and advancing with extended hand toward his grandson. "I have an atonement to render here, which I call you all to witness."

"I take your hand, grandfather," Elbridge interposed, "but not in acknowledgment of any wrong on your part. You have lived an hundred blameless years, and I am not the one this day to breathe a reproach for the first time on your spotless age."

Tears filled the old patriarch's eyes, and with a gentle hand he led his grandson silently to the table, to which the whole company returned, there being room for Mr. Barbary as well.

At this crisis of triumphant explanation, Mopsey, who had under one pretext and another, evaded the bringing in of the pie to the last moment, appeared at the kitchen-door bearing before her, with that air of extraordinary importance peculiar to the negro countenance on eventful occasions, a huge brown dish with which she advanced to the head of the table, and with an [130] emphatic bump, answering to the pithy speeches of warriors and statesmen at critical moments, deposited the great Thanksgiving pumpkin pie. Looking proudly around, she simply said, "Dere!"

It was the blossom and crown of Mopsey's life, the setting down and full delivery to the family of that, the greatest pumpkin-pie ever baked in that house from the greatest pumpkin ever reared among the Peabodys in all her long backward recollection of past Thanksgivings, and her manner of setting it down, was, in its most defiant form, a clincher and a challenge to all makers and bakers of pumpkin-pies, to all cutters and carvers, to all diners and eaters, to all friends and enemies of pumpkin-pie, in the thirty or forty United States. The Brundages too, might come and look at it if they had a mind to!

The Peabody family, familiar with the pie from earliest infancy, were struck dumb, and sat silent for the space of a minute, contemplating its vastness and beauty. Old Sylvester even, with his hundred years of pumpkin-pie experience, was staggered, and little Sam jumped up and clapped his hands in his old grandfather's arms, and struggled to stretch himself across as if he would appropriate it, by actual possession, to himself. The joy of the Peabodys was complete, for the [131] lost grandson had returned, and the Thanksgiving-pie was a glorious one, and if it was the largest share that was allotted to the returned Elbridge, will any one complain? And yet at times a cloud came upon the young man's brow,—when dinner was passed with pleasant family talk, questionings and experiences, as they sat about the old homestead hearth,—which even the playful gambols of the children who sported about him like so many friendly spirits, could not drive away. The heart of cousin Elbridge was not in their childish freaks and fancies as it had been in other days. The shining solitude looking in at the windows seemed to call him without.

As though it had caught something of the genial spirit that glowed within the house, the wind was laid without, and the night softened with the beauty of the rising moon. With a sadness on his brow which neither the old homestead nor the pure heavens cast there, Elbridge went forth into the calm night, and sitting for a while by the road beneath an ancient locust-tree, where he had often read his book in the summer-times of boyhood, he communed with himself. He was [132] happy—what mortal man could be happier?—in all his wishes come to pass; his very dreams had taken life and proved to be realities and friends, and yet a sadness he could not drive away followed his steps. Why was this? That moment, if his voice or any honorable and sinless motion of his hand could have ordained it, he would have dismissed himself from life and ceased to be a living partaker in the scenes about him. Even then—for happy as he was, he dreaded in prophetic fear, the chances which beset our mortal path. The weight of mortality was heavy upon the young man's spirit.

Thinking over all the way he had passed, oh, who could answer that he, with the thronging company of busy passions and desires, could ever hope to reach an old age and never go astray? Oh, blessed is he (he thought) who can lie down in death, can close his account with this world, having safely escaped the temptations, the crimes, the trials, which make of good men even, in moments of weakness and misjudgment, the false speaker, the evil-doer, the slanderer, the coward, the hasty assailant, and, (oh, dreadful perchance,) the seeming-guilty-murderer himself. Strange thoughts for a prosperous lover's night, but earth is not heaven. With the sweat of [133] anguish on his brow he bowed his head as one whose trouble is heavy to be borne. Yet even then the thought of the sweet heaven over him, with all its glorious promises, came upon him, and as he lifted up his eyes from the earth, the moon sailing forth from the clouds, and flooding the region with silver light, disclosed a figure so gentle and delicate, and in its features so pure of all our common passions, it seemed as if his troubled thoughts had summoned a spirit before him from the better world. As he stood regarding it in melancholy calmness, it extended towards him a hand.

"No, no," he said, declining the gentle salutation and retiring a pace, "touch me not, Miriam, I am not worthy of your pure companionship. If you knew what passed and is passing in my breast, you would loathe me as a leper."

She was silent and dropped her eyes before him.

"Think not, my gentle mistress," he added presently, "my heart is changed towards you. The glow is only too bright and warm."

"If you love me not, Elbridge," she interposed quickly, "fear not to say so, even now. I will bear [134] the pang as best I can."

"You have suffered too much already," he rejoined, touched to the heart. "My long silence must have been as death to one so kind and gentle."

"I have suffered," was all she said. "One word from you in your long absence would have made me happy."

"It would, I know it would, and yet I could not speak it," Elbridge replied. "When, with a blight upon my name I left those halls," pointing to the old homestead standing in shadow of the autumn trees, "I vowed to know them no more, that my step should never cross their threshold, that my voice should never be heard again in those ancient chambers, that no being of all that household should have a word from these lips or hands till I could come back a vindicated man; that I would perish in distant lands, find a silent grave among strangers, far from mother and her I loved, or that I would come back with my lost friend, in his living form, to avouch and testify my truth and innocence."

"And had you no thought of me in that cruel absence, dear Elbridge?" asked Miriam. [135]

"Of you!" he echoed, now taking her hand, "of you! When in all these my wanderings, in weary nights, in lonely days, on seas and deserts far away, sore of foot and sick at heart, making my couch beneath the stars, in the tents of savage men, in the shadow of steeples that know not our holy faith, was it not my religion and my only solace, that one like you thought of me as I of her, and though all the world abandoned and distrusted the wanderer, there was one star in the distant horizon which yet shone true, and trembled with a hopeful light upon my path."

"Are we not each other's now?" she whispered softly as she lay her gentle head upon his bosom; "and if we have erred, and repent but truly, will not He forgive us?"

As she lifted up her innocent face to heaven, did not those gentle tears which fell unheard by mortal ear, from those fair eyes, drop in hearing of Him who hears and acknowledges the faintest sound of true affection, through all the boundless universe, musically as the chime of holy Sabbath-bells?

"You are my dear wife," he answered, folding her close to his heart, "and if you forgive and still cherish me, happiness may still be ours; and although no formal voice has yet called us one, by all [136] that's sacred in the stillness of the night, and by every honest beating of this heart, dear Miriam, you are mine, to watch, to tend, to love, to reverence, in sickness, in sorrow, in care, in joy; by all that belongs of gaiety to youth, in manhood and in age, we will have one home, one couch, one fireside, one grave, one God, and one hereafter."

An old familiar instrument, swept as he well knew by his mother's fingers, sounded at that moment from the homestead, and hand in hand, blending their steps, they returned to the Thanksgiving household within.

CHAPTER TENTH. [137]

THE CONCLUSION.

When Elbridge and Miriam re-entered the homestead they found the best parlor, which they had left in humble dependence on the light of a single home-made wick, now in full glow, and wide awake in every corner, with a perfect illumination of lamps and candles; and every thing in the room had waked up with them. The old brass andirons stood shining like a couple of bald-headed little grandfathers by the hearth; the letters in the sampler over the mantel, narrating the ages of the family, had renewed their color; the tall old clock, allowed to speak again, stood like an overgrown schoolboy with his face newly washed, stretching himself up in a corner; the painted robins and partridges on the wall, now in full feather, strutting and flying about in all the glory of an unfading plumage; and at the rear of all the huge back-log on the hearth glowed and rolled in [138] his place as happy as an alderman at a city feast. The Peabodys too, partook of the new illumination, and were there in their best looks, scattered about the room in cheerful groups, while in the midst of all the widow Margaret, her face lighted with a smile which came there from far-off years, holding in her hand as we see an angel in the sunny clouds in old pictures, the ancient harpsichord, which till now had been laid away and out of use for many a long day of sadness.

While Elbridge and Miriam stood still in wonder at the sudden change of this living pageant, old Sylvester, his white head carried proudly aloft, appeared from the sitting-room with Mr. Barbary, a quaint figure, freed now of his long coat, and bearing no trace of travel on his neat apparel and face of cheerful gravity. Leaving the preacher in the centre of the apartment, the patriarch advanced quietly toward the young couple, and, addressing himself to Elbridge, said, "My children, I have a favor to ask of you."

"Anything, grandfather!" Elbridge answered promptly. [139]

"You are sure?" Old Sylvester's eyes twinkled as he spoke.

"It would be the pleasure and glory of my young days," Elbridge answered again, "to crown your noble old age, grandfather, with any worthy wreath these hands could fashion, and not call it a

favor either."

Old Sylvester, smiling from one to the other, said, "You are to be married immediately."

The young couple fell back and dropped each the other's hand, which they had been holding. Miriam trembled and shrunk the farthest away.

"You will not deny me?" the grandfather said again. "You are the youngest and the last whom I can hope to see joined in that bond which is to continue our name and race; it is my last request on earth."

At these simple words, turning, and with a fond regard which spoke all their thoughts, Miriam and Elbridge took again each the other's hand, and drew close side to side. The company rose, and Mr. Barbary was on the point of speaking when there emerged upon the family scene, from an inner chamber, as though he had been a foreigner entering a fashionable drawing-room, Mr. [140] Tiffany Carrack, in the very blossom of full dress; his hair in glossy curl, with white neckcloth and waistcoat of the latest cut and tie, coat and pants of the purest model, pumps and silk stockings; bearing in his hand a gossamer pocket-handkerchief, which he shook daintily as he advanced, and filled the room with a strange fragrance. With mincing step, just dotting the ground, his whole body shaking like a delicate structure in danger every moment of tumbling to the ground, he advanced to where Miriam and Elbridge stood before Mr. Barbary.

"Why really, 'pon my life and honor, Miriam, you are looking quite charming this evening!"

"She should look so now if ever, Tiffany," said old Sylvester, "for she is just about to be married to your cousin Elbridge."

"Now you don't mean that?" said Mr. Tiffany, touching the tawny tufts tenderly with his perfumed pocket-handkerchief, "Oh, woman! woman! what is your name?" He hesitated for a reply.

"Perfidy?" suggested Mr. Oliver Peabody.

"Yes, that's it. Have I lived to look on this," Mr. Tiffany continued; "to have my young hopes [141] blighted, the rose of my existence cropped, and all that. Is it for this," addressing Miriam directly: he had been talking before to the air: "Is it for this I went blackberrying with you in my tender infancy! Is it for this that in the heyday of youth I walked with you to the school-house down the road! Was it for this that in the prime of manhood I breathed soft music in your ear at the witching time of night!"

As he arrived at this last question, Mopsey, in her new gown of gorgeous pattern, and, having laid aside her customary broad-bordered cap, with a high crowned turban of red, and yellow cotton handkerchief on her head, appeared at the parlor door. Mr. Tiffany paused: he saw the Moorish princess before him; rallying, however, he was proceeding to describe himself as a friendly troubadour, whose affection had been responded to, when the Captain placing his mouth to his ear, as in confidence, uttered in a portentous whisper, "THE VAT!"

Mr. Tiffany immediately lost all joint and strength, subsided into a chair at a distance, and from that moment looked upon the scene like one in a trance.

"After all," said Mr. Oliver, glancing at him, "I don't see just now that, in any point of view, this [142] young gentleman *is* destined to carry the principles of free government—anywhere."

The family being now all gathered, Mr. Barbary proceeded, employing a simple and impressive form in use in that family from its earliest history:

"You, the Bridegroom and the Bride, who now present yourselves candidates of the covenant of God and of your marriage before him, in token of your consenting affections and united hearts, please to give your hands to one another.

"Mr. Bridegroom, the person whom you now take by the hand, you receive to be your married wife: you promise to love her, to honor her, to support her, and in all things to treat her as you are now, or shall hereafter be convinced is by the laws of Christ made your duty,—a tender husband, with unspotted fidelity till death shall separate you.

"Mrs. Bride, the person whom you now hold by the hand you accept to be your married husband; you promise to love him, to honor him, to submit to him, and in all things to treat him as you are now or shall hereafter be convinced, is by the laws of Christ made your duty,—an affectionate wife, with inviolable loyalty till death shall separate you. [143]

"This solemn covenant you make, and in this sacred oath bind your souls in the presence of the Great God, and before these witnesses.

"I then declare you to be husband and wife regularly married according to the laws of God and the Commonwealth: therefore what God hath thus joined together let no man put asunder."

When these words had been solemnly spoken the widow Margaret struck her ancient harpsichord in an old familiar tune of plaintive tenderness, and the young bridegroom holding Miriam's hand in an affectionate clasp, answered the music with a little hymn or carol, often used before among the Peabodys on a like occasion:

Entreat me not—I ne'er will leave thee,
Ne'er loose this hand in bower or hall;

This heart, this heart shall ne'er deceive thee,
  This voice shall answer ever to thy call.

To which Miriam, after a brief pause of hesitation, in that tone of chanting lament familiar to her, answered—

Thy God is mine, where'er thou rovest,
  Where'er thou dwellest there too will I dwell;
In the same grave shall she thou lovest
  Lie down with him she loves so well. [144]

Like a cheerful voice answering to these, and wishing, out of the mysterious darkness of night, all happiness and prosperity to the young couple, the silver call of Chanticleer arose without, renewed and renewed again, as if he could never tire of announcing the happy union to all the country round.

And now enjoyment was at its height among the Peabodys, helped by Plenty, who, with Mopsey for chief assistant, hurried in, with plates of shining pippins, baskets of nuts, brown jugs of new cider of home-made vintage; Mrs. Carrack, who had selected the simplest garment in her wardrobe, moving about in aid of black Mopsey, tendering refreshment to her old father first, and Mrs. Jane Peabody insisting on being allowed to distribute the walnuts with her own hand.

The children, never at rest for a moment, frisked to and fro, like so many merry dolphins, disporting in the unaccustomed candle-light, to which they were commonly strangers. They were listened to in all their childish prattle kindly, by every one, indulged in all their little foolish ways, as if the grown-up Peabodys for this night at least, believed that they were indeed little citizens of the kingdom of heaven, straying about this wicked world on parole. Uncle Oliver, once, spreading [145] his great Declaration-of-Independence pocket-handkerchief on his knees, attempted to put them to the question as to their learning. They all recognised Dr. Franklin, with his spectacles thrown up on his brow, among the signers, but denying all knowledge of anything more, ran away to the Captain, who was busy building, a dozen at a time, paper packet ships, and launching them upon the table for a sea.

In the very midst of the mirthful hubbub old Sylvester called Robert and William to his side, and was heard to whisper, "Bring 'em in." William and Robert were gone a moment and returned, bearing under heavy head-way, tumbling and pitching on one side constantly, two ancient spinning wheels, Mopsey following with snowy flocks of wool and spinning sticks. Old Sylvester arose, and delivering a stick and flock to Mrs. Carrack and Mrs. Jane Peabody, requested them, in a mild voice and as a matter of course already settled, "to begin." A spinning-match!

"Yes, anything you choose to-night, father."

Rolling back their sleeves, adjusting their gowns, the wheels being planted on either side of the [146] fireplace, Mrs. Jane and Mrs. Carrack, stick in hand, seized each on her allotment of wool, and sent the wheels whirling. It was a cheerful sight to see the two matrons closing in upon the wheel, retiring, closing in again—whose wheel is swiftest, whose thread truest? Now Mrs. Jane—now Mrs. Carrack. If either, Mrs. Carrack puts the most heart in her work.

"*Now* she looks like my Nancy," said old Sylvester in a glow, "as when she used to spin and sing, in the old upper chamber."

Away they go—whose wheel is swiftest, whose thread the truest now?

While swift and free the contest wages, the parlor-door standing open, and beyond that the door of the sitting-room, look down the long perspective! Do you not see in the twilight of the kitchen fire a dark head, lighting up, as in flashes, with a glittering row of teeth, with a violent agitation of the body, with gusty ha-ha's, and fragments of an uproarious chant flying through the door something to this effect— [147]

Oh, de fine ladies, how dey do spin—spin—spin,
  Like de gals long ago—long ago!
I bet to'der one don't win—win—win,
  Kase de diamond-flowers on her fingers grow.
    Lay down your white gloves, take up de wool,
      Round about de whirly wheel go;
    Back'ard and for'ard nimble feet pull,
      Like de nice gals long—long ago!

Silence follows, in which nothing is observable from that quarter more than a great pair of white eyes rolling about in the partial darkness. Who was other than pleased that in spite of Mopsey's decision, old Sylvester determined that if either, Mrs. Carrack's work was done a little the soonest, and that her thread was a little the truest?

During the contest the old merchant and his wife had conversed closely, apart; the green shade had lost its terrors, and he could look on it steadily, now; and at the close William Peabody approaching the fireplace, drew from his bosom the old parchment deed, which in his hunger for money had so often disquieted his visits to the homestead, and thrust it into the very heart of the flame, which soon shrivelled it up, and, conveying it out at the chimney, before the night was past spread it in peaceful ashes over the very grounds which it had so long disturbed. [148]

"So much for that!" said the old merchant, as the last flake vanished; "and now, nephew," he addressed himself to Elbridge, "fulfilling an engagement connected with your return, I resign to you all charge of your father's property."

"Did you bring anything with you from the Gold Region?" Mrs. Carrack interposed.

"Not one cent, Aunt," Elbridge answered promptly.

"You may add, William," pursued Mrs. Carrack, "the sums of mine you have in hand."

William Peabody was pausing on this proposition, the sums in question being at that very moment embarked in a most profitable speculation.

Upon the very height of the festivity, when it glowed the brightest and was most musical with mirthful voices, there had come to the casement a moaning sound as if borne upon the wind from a distance, a wailing of anguish, at the same time like and unlike that of human suffering. By slow advances it approached nearer and nearer to the homestead, and whenever it arose it brought the family enjoyment to a momentary pause. It had drawn so near that it sounded now again, as if in mournful lamentation, at the very door, when Mopsey, her dark face almost white, and her [149] brow wrinkled with anxiety, rushed in. "Grandfather," she said, addressing old Sylvester, "blind Sorrel's dying in the door-yard."

There was not one in all that company whom the announcement did not cause to start; led by old Sylvester, they hastily rose, and conducted by Mopsey, followed to the scene. Blind Sorrel was lying by the moss-grown horse-trough, at the gate.

"I noticed her through the day," said Oliver, "wandering up the lane as if she was seeking the house."

"The death-agony must have been upon her then," said William Peabody, shading his eyes with his hand.

"She remembered, perhaps, her young days," old Sylvester added, "when she used to crop the door-yard grass."

Mopsey, in her solicitude to have the death-bed of poor blind Sorrel properly attended, had brought with her, in the event of the paling or obscuration of the moon, a dark lantern, which she held tenderly aside as though the poor old creature still possessed her sight; immoveable herself as though she had been a swarthy image in stone, while, on the other side, William Peabody, near [150] her head, stood gazing upon the animal with a fixed intensity, breathing hard and watching her dying struggle with a rigid steadiness of feature almost painful to behold.

"Has carried me to mill many a day," he said; "some pleasantest hours of my life spent upon her back, sauntering along at early day."

"Your mother rode her to meeting," Sylvester addressed his second son, "on your wedding-day, Oliver. Sorrel was of a long-lived race."

"She was the gentlest horse-creature you ever owned, father," added Mrs. Carrack, turning affectionately toward old Sylvester, "and humored us girls when we rode her as though she had been a blood-relation."

"I'm not so sure of that," Mr. Tiffany Carrack rejoined, "for she has dumped me in a ditch more than once."

"That was your own careless riding, Tiffany," said the Captain, "I don't believe she had the least ill-will towards any living creature, man or beast."

It was observed that whenever William Peabody spoke, blind Sorrel turned her feeble head in that direction, as if she recognised and singled out his voice from all the others. [151]

"She knows your voice, father, even in her darkness," said the Captain, "as the sailor tells his old captain's step on deck at night."

"Well she may, Charles," the merchant replied, "for she was foaled the same day I was born."

The old creature moaned and heaved her side fainter and fainter.

"Speak to her, William," said the old grandfather.

William Peabody bent down, and in a tremulous voice said, "Sorrel, do you know me?"

The poor blind creature lifted up her aged head feebly towards him, heaved her weary side, gasped once and was gone. The moon, which had been shining with a clear and level light upon the group of faces, dipped at that moment behind the orchard-trees, and at the same instant the light in the lantern flickering feebly, was extinguished.

"What do you mean by putting the light out, Mopsey," old Sylvester asked.

"I knew de old lamp would be goin' out, Massa, soon as ever blind Sorrel die; I tremble so I do' no [152] what I'm saying." It was poor Mopsey's agitation which had shaken out the light.

"Never shall we know a more faithful servant, a truer friend, than poor blind Sorrel," they all agreed; and bound still closer together by so simple a bond as common sympathy in the death of

the poor old blind family horse, they returned within the homestead.

They were scarcely seated again when William Peabody, turning to Mrs. Carrack, said, "Certainly!" referring to the transfer of the money of hers in his hands on loan, to Elbridge, "he will need some ready money to begin the world with."

All was cheerful friendship now; the family, reconciled in all its members, sitting about their aged father's hearth on this glorious Thanksgiving night; the gayer mood subsiding, a sudden stillness fell upon the whole house, such as precedes some new turn in the discourse.

Old Sylvester Peabody sat in the centre of the family, moving his body to and fro gently, and lifting his white head up and down upon his breast; his whole look and manner strongly arresting the attention of all; of the children not the least. After a while the old man paused, and looking [153] mildly about, addressed the household.

"This is a happy day, my children," he said, "but the seeds of it were sown, you must allow an old man to say, long, long ago. If one good Being had not died in a far country and a very distant time, we could not have this comfort now."

The children watched the old grandfather more closely.

"I am an old man, and shall be with you, I feel, but for a little while yet; as one who stands at the gate of the world to come, looking through, and through which he is soon to pass, will you not allow me to believe that I thought of the hopes of your immortal spirits in your youth?"

As being the eldest, and answering for the rest, William Peabody replied, "We will."

"Did I not teach you then, or strive my best to teach, that there was but one Holy God?"

"You did, father—you did!" the widow Margaret answered.

"That his only Son died for us?"

"Often—often!" said Mrs. Carrack.

"That we must love one another as brethren?" [154]

"At morning and night, in winter and summer; by the hearth and in the field, you did," Oliver rejoined.

"That there is but one path to happiness and peace here and hereafter," he continued, "through the performance of our duty towards our Maker, and our fellow men of every name, and tongue, and clime, and color? to love your dear Native Land, as she sits happy among the nations, but to remember this, our natural home, is but the ground-nest and cradle from which we spread our wings to fly through all the earth with hope and kindly wishes for all men. If the air is cheerful here, and the sun-light pleasant, let no barrier or wall shut it in, but pray God, with reverent hope, it spread hence to the farthest lands and seas, till all the people of the earth are lighted up and made glad in the common fellowship of our blessed Saviour, who is, was, and will be evermore—to all men guide, protector, and ensample. May He be so to us and ours, to our beloved home and happy Fatherland, in all the time to come!"

The old man bowed his head in presence of his reconciled household, and fell into a sweet slumber; not one of all that company but echoed the old man's prayer—"May he be so to us and [155] ours, to our beloved Home and happy Fatherland in all the time to come!"

On this, on every day of Thanksgiving and Praise, be that old man's blessed prayer in all quarters, among all classes and kindred, everywhere repeated: "May He be so to us and ours, to our beloved Home and happy Fatherland in all the time to come!"

And when, like that good old man, we come to bow our heads at the close of a long, long life, may we, like him, fall into a gentle sleep, conscious that we have done the work of charity, and spread about our path, wherever it lead, peace and good-will among men!

THE END.

Transcriber's Notes:

Author's name is not given in the text but other editions give it as Cornelius Mathews.

Contents Page. In the original text, some chapter titles were wrong; these have been corrected as follows:

> Chapter IV. Title was "The Children." Corrected to "The Fortunes of the Family Considered."
>
> Chapter V. Title was "The Fashionable Lady and Her Son."

Corrected to "The Children."

Chapter VI. Title was "The Fortunes of the Family Considered." Corrected to "The Fashionable Lady and Her Son."

Inconsistent hyphenation of words in original text has been retained (daylight, day-light; fireside, fire-side; headway head-way; and neck-cloth, neckcloth).

Inconsistent spelling of contractions in the original text has been retained.

Page 27, added missing quote mark. ("Three, all of brick)

Page 33, changed comma to fullstop. (speech. "Expect to see)

Page 35, changed comma to fullstop. (said old Sylvester. "Out of)

Page 36, unusual spelling of "ricketty" retained. (landed from its ricketty and bespattered bosom)

Page 39, "thoughtf" has been changed to "though" (watched over as though it had been my own)

Page 96, added missing quote mark. ("Some two hundred)

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CHANTICLEER ***

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