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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK REELS AND SPINDLES: A STORY OF MILL LIFE ***

REELS AND SPINDLES

A Story of Mill Life

BY

EVELYN RAYMOND

AUTHOR OF "A DAUGHTER OF THE WEST," "A LITTLE LADY OF THE HORSE," ETC.

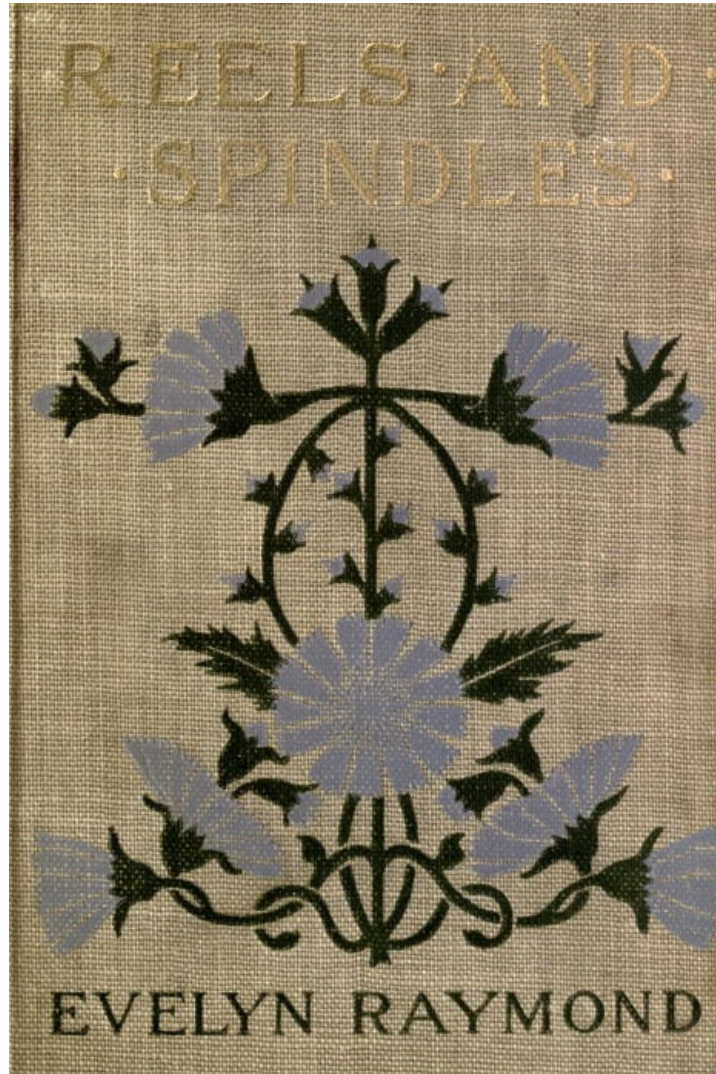
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REELS AND SPINDLES.





"SHE PULLED A BOOK FROM HER POCKET AND BEGAN TO READ."

PREFACE.

It was love for others which made Amy Kaye make use of the first opportunity which offered, even though it was an humble one and she was handicapped by ignorance. But having once decided what course was right for her, she followed it with a singleness of purpose and a thoroughness of effort which brought a prompt success. The help she was to others was no small part of this success. For in an age of shams and low ideals the influence of even one sincere girl is far-reaching; and when to that sincerity she adds the sympathy which makes another's interests as vital to her as her own, this influence becomes incalculable for good.

It is the author's hope that the story of "Reels and Spindles" may aid some young readers to comprehend and make their own this beauty of simplicity and this charm of sympathy which are the outcome of unselfishness.

E. R.

BALTIMORE, April 3, 1900.

CONTENTS.

[Pg 5]

CHAPTER

- [I.](#) A BYWAY OF THE ARDSLEY
- [II.](#) THE MILL IN THE GLEN
- [III.](#) FAIRACRES
- [IV.](#) HALLAM
- [V.](#) A KINSMAN OF THE HOUSE
- [VI.](#) SETTLEMENTS
- [VII.](#) THE "SPITE HOUSE" OF BAREACRE
- [VIII.](#) NEEDS AND HELPERS

- [IX.](#) THE WATERLOO OF BONAPARTE LAFAYETTE
- [X.](#) HOME-MAKING
- [XI.](#) THE YOUNG OLD MAN AND OLD YOUNG GIRL
- [XII.](#) BAD NEWS FROM BURNSIDE
- [XIII.](#) AMY PAYS A BUSINESS CALL
- [XIV.](#) PEPITA FINDS A NEW HOME
- [XV.](#) FACING HARD FACTS
- [XVI.](#) AMY BEGINS TO SPIN
- [XVII.](#) THE DISAPPEARANCE OF BALAAM
- [XVIII.](#) THE FASCINATION OF INDUSTRY
- [XIX.](#) MOTIVES AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS
- [XX.](#) IN THE OLD HOME
- [XXI.](#) A PECULIAR INVITATION
- [XXII.](#) TWO WANDERERS RETURN
- [XXIII.](#) FREDERIC KAYE'S WELCOME HOME
- [XXIV.](#) FAIRACRES IS CLOSED
- [XXV.](#) MYSTERIES AND MASTERIES
- [XXVI.](#) A PICNIC IN THE GLEN
- [XXVII.](#) A DOUBLE INHERITANCE IN A SINGLE DAY
- [XXVIII.](#) ONE WONDERFUL AUTUMN DAY
- [XXIX.](#) CONCLUSION

[Pg 6]

ILLUSTRATIONS

[Pg 7]

["She pulled a book from her pocket and began to read"](#) *Frontispiece*
["Take care! You'll drop sperm on the rug, tipping that candlestick so!"](#)
["Then I'm glad, glad that you are to have Pepita"](#)
["She so gently manipulated the swollen ankle and bound it with the lotions"](#)
["He began to gather up the coins"](#)

REELS AND SPINDLES.

[Pg 8]

CHAPTER I.

A BYWAY OF THE ARDSLEY.

The white burro had a will of her own. So, distinctly, had her mistress. As had often happened, these two wills conflicted.

For the pair had come to a point where three ways met. Pepita wanted to ascend the hill, by a path she knew, to stable and supper. Amy wished to follow a descending road, which she did not know, into the depths of the forest. Neither inclined toward the safe middle course, straight onward through the village, now picturesque in the coloring of a late September day.

"No, Pepita. You must obey me. If I'm not firm this time, you'll act worse the next. To the right, amiable beastie!"

Both firmness and sarcasm were wasted. The burro rigidly planted her forefeet in the dust and sorrowfully dropped her head.

Amy tugged at the bridle.

"Pepita! To—the—right! Go on. In your native Californian—*Vamos!*"

[Pg 9]

The "Californian" bugged not, but posed, an image of dejection. The happiness of life had departed; the tale of her woe seemed pictured in every hair of her thickly coated body; she was a broken-hearted donkey.

Amy Kaye was neither broken-hearted nor broken-spirited, and she was wholly comfortable. Her saddle was soft and fitted well. The air was delightful. She pulled a book from her pocket and began to read. In five minutes she was so absorbed that she had forgotten Pepita's little mannerisms.

After a while the "Californian" moved her head just enough to gain a corner-wise glimpse of a calm and unresponsive face beneath a scarlet Tam; and evidently realizing that she had become a mere support to the maid who owned her, uttered her protest.

"Bra-a-ay! Ah-umph! Ah-umph—umph—mph—ph—h!"

Amy read on.

Pepita changed her tactics. She began to double herself together in a fashion disconcerting to most riders; whereupon Amy simply drew her own limbs up out of harm's way and waited for the burro's anatomy to settle itself in a heap on the ground.

"All right, honey."

Then she resumed her book, and the beast her meditations. Thus they remained until the rumble of an approaching wagon caused the now submissive animal to rise and move aside out of the road.

[Pg 10]

Again Amy tested the bridle, and found that she might now ride whither she pleased.

"Is it so, beloved? Well, then, that's right; and when you do right because I make you, it is one lump of sugar. Open your mouth. Here. But, Pepita, when you do right without compulsion, there are always two lumps. Into the forest—go!"

Pepita went. Suddenly, swiftly, and so recklessly that Amy nearly slid over her head.

"Very well! What suits you suits me. I'm as good a sticker-on as you are a shaker-off. Besides, a word in your ear. It would be quite the proper, story-book sort of thing for you to try and break my neck, as a punishment, since I'm almost running away."

Though she had always lived within a few miles of the spot the girl had never before visited it. That she did so now, without knowledge of anybody at home, gave her a sense of daring, almost of danger, as new as it was fascinating. True, she had not been forbidden, simply because nobody had thought of her wandering so far afield; yet the habit of her life had been such as to make anything out of the common seem strange, even wrong.

"However, since I'm here, I'll see what there is to see and tell them all about it afterward—that is, if they will care to hear," she ended her remark to the burro with a sigh, and for a bit forgot her surroundings. Then she rallied, and with the spirit of an explorer, peered curiously into all the delightful nooks and corners which presented; not observing that the road grew steadily more steep and rough, nor that Pepita's feet slipped and stumbled, warningly, among the loose stones, which were so hidden by fallen leaves that Amy could not see them. Along the sides, seasoning at convenient intervals, were rows of felled timber, gay with a summer's growth of woodbine and clematis, now ripened to scarlet and silvery white.

[Pg 11]

Amy was an artist's daughter. At every turn her trained eye saw wonderful "bits" of pictures, and she exclaimed to Pepita:—

"If father were only here! See that great rock with its gray-green lichens and its trailing crimson tendrils! Just that on a tiny canvas, say six by eight or, even, eight by twelve, how it would brighten mother's room!"

The "Californian" kicked the leaves impatiently. She had no eye for "bits" of anything less material than sugar, and she had long since finished her one lump; she was tired of travelling in the wrong direction, with her head much lower than her heels, and she suddenly stopped.

It was quite time. Another step forward would have sent them tobogganing into a brawling stream. With a shiver of fear Amy realized this.

"O-oh! Oh! You knew best, after all! You wouldn't come till I made you; and now—how shall we get out! Hark! What's that?"

[Pg 12]

The burro had already pricked up her ears. There was a shout from somewhere.

Amy managed to slide off and fling herself flat against the slope. When she tried to climb back to a less dangerous spot the twigs she clutched broke in her hands and the rocks cut her flesh. The adventure which had been fascinating was fast becoming frightful.

"Hil-loa! Hil-l-loa!"

Clinging desperately to the undergrowth, she managed to move her head and look down. Far below in the ravine somebody was waving a white cloth.

"Hilloa, up there!"

She was too terrified to speak; yet, after the salute had reached her several times, she dared to loose one hand and wave a returning signal.

"You—just—hold on! I'll come—and get—you!"

As "holding on" was all that either Amy or Pepita could do just then, they obeyed, perforce; although, presently, the burro had scrambled to a narrow ledge, whence she could see the whole descent and from which, if left to herself, she would doubtless have found a way into the valley.

They clung and waited for so long that the girl grew confused; then tried to rally her own courage by addressing the "Californian."

"It's so—so absurd—I mean, awful! If that man doesn't come soon, I shall surely fall. My fingers ache so, and I'm slipping. I—am—slipping! Ah!"

[Pg 13]

Fortunately, her rescuer was near. He had worked his way upward on all fours, his bare feet

clinging securely where shoe-soles would have been useless. He approached without noise, save of breaking twigs, until he was close beside them, when Pepita concluded it was time to bid him welcome.

"Br-r-r-ray! A-humph! A-humph—umph—mph—ph—h!"

The climber halted suddenly.

"Sho-o!"

Also startled, Amy lost her hold and shot downward straight into the arms of the stranger, who seized her, croaking in her ear:—

"Hilloa! What you up to? Can't you wait a minute?"

Then, with a strong grasp of her clothing, he wriggled himself sidewise along the bank to a spot where the rock gave place to earth and shrubs.

"Now catch your breath and let her go!"

The girl might have screamed, but she had no time. Instantly, she was again sliding downward, with an ever-increasing momentum, toward apparent destruction, yet landing finally upon a safe and mossy place; past which, for a brief space, the elsewhere rough stream flowed placidly. She caught the hum of happy insects and the moist sweet odor of growing ferns, then heard another rush and tumble. But she was as yet too dazed to look up or realize fresh peril, before Pepita and the other stood beside her.

[Pg 14]

"Sho! That beats—huckleberries!"

Amy struggled to her feet. She had never heard a voice like that, which began a sentence with mighty volume and ended it in a whisper. She stared at the owner curiously, and with a fresh fear. "He looks as queer as his voice," she thought.

She was right. His physique was as grotesque as his attire; which consisted of a white oilskin blouse, gayly bordered with the national colors, trousers of the most aggressive blue, and a helmet-shaped hat, adorned by a miniature battle-axe, while a tiny broom was strapped upon his shoulders.

"Huh! pretty, ain't I? The boys gave 'em to me."

"Did—they?"

"Yes. You needn't be scared. I shan't hurt you. I'm a Rep-Dem-Prob."

"Ah, indeed?"

"Yes. I march with the whole kerboodle. I tell you, it's fun."

It was "Presidential year," and Amy began to understand, not only that the lad before her was a "natural," but, presumably, that he had been made the victim of village wit. She had heard of the "marching bands," and inferred that the strange dress of her rescuer was made up by fragments from rival political uniforms.

[Pg 15]

"Yes. I'm out every night. Hurrah for Clevey-Harris!"

"You must get very tired."

"No. It's fun. I drag the gun carriage. That's on account o' my strength. Look a' there for an arm!" And he thrust out his illy proportioned limb with a pitiable pride.

"I see. But now that you've helped me down the bank, will you as kindly show me the way home?"

"Never slid that way before, did you? Only thing, though. I'll show you all right if you'll let me ride your donkey. Funny, ain't she? Make her talk."

"I think she's very pretty; and you may ride her, certainly, if she will let you."

A puzzled and angry expression came over the youth's face as he looked toward the burro, who had already begun to make hay for herself out of the lush grasses bordering the Ardsley.

"Make her talk, I say."

"She'll do that only to please herself. She's rather self-willed, and besides—"

"Who do *you* march with?"

"March? *March!* I?"

"Yes."

"Why, nobody. Of course not. Why should you think it?"

The lad scrutinized her dress and gazed abstractedly upon the white "Californian." Just then, a "parade" was the dominant idea in the poor fellow's limited intelligence. Amy's simple white flannel frock, with its scarlet sash, and the scarlet cap upon her dark curls, suggested only another "uniform." The girls with whose appearance he was familiar were not so attired.

[Pg 16]

Neither did they ride upon white donkeys. Yet a donkey of venerable and unhappy appearance did nightly help to swell the ranks of the country's patriots, and the beast which he knew enjoyed a sort of honor: it drew an illuminated "float" wherein rode a greatly envied fifer.

"What makes you ask that?" again demanded Amy, now laughing; for she had just imagined what her mother's face would express, should her daughter become a part of a "parade."

"Oh! because."

Pepita now took share in the conversation. "Br-r-rr-a-y! Ah-huh-um-umph! Ah-umph—u-m-ph—ah-umph—umph—mph—ph—h-h-h!" she observed.

Never was a remark more felicitous. The lad threw himself down on the grass, laughing boisterously. Amy joined, in natural reaction from her former fear, and even the "Californian" helped on the fun by observing them with an absurdly injured expression.

"She is funny, I admit; though she is as nothing compared to her brother Balaam. If you like that kind of music, you should hear their duet about breakfast time. Which is the shortest way to some real road?"

[Pg 17]

"Come on. I'll show you."

"Thank you; and, you are so tall, would you mind getting me that bunch of yellow leaves—just there? They are so very, very lovely I'd like to take them home to put in father's studio."

"What's that? Where's it at? Who are you, anyhow?"

"Amy Kaye."

"I'm 'Bony,'—Bonaparte Lafayette Jimpson. Who's he?"

"My father is Cuthbert Kaye, the artist. Maybe you know him. He is always discovering original people."

The speech was out before she realized that it was not especially flattering. Her father liked novel models, and she had imagined how her new acquaintance would look as a "study." Then she reflected that the lad was not as pleasing as he was "original."

"No. I don't know him. He don't live in the village, I 'low?"

"Of course not. We live at Fairacres. It has been our home, our family's home, for two hundred years."

"Sho! You don't look it. An' you needn't get mad, if it has. I ain't made you mad, have I? I'd like to ride that critter. I'd like to, first rate."

Amy flushed, ashamed of her indignation against such an unfortunate object, and replied:—

[Pg 18]

"I'd like to have you 'first rate,' too, if Pepita is willing. You get on her back and show me which way to go, and I'll try to make her behave well. I have some sugar left. That turning? All right. See, Pepita, pretty Pepita! Smell what's in my fingers, amiable. Then follow me, and we'll see what—we shall see."

"Bony" was much impressed by Amy's stratagem of walking ahead of the burro with the lump of sugar held temptingly just beyond reach. For the girl knew that the "Californian" would pursue the enticing titbit to the sweetest end.

Yet this end seemed long in coming. For more than a mile their path lay close to the water's edge, through bogs and upon rocks, over rough and smooth, with the bluff rising steeply on their right and the stream preventing their crossing to the farm lands on its left. But at length they emerged upon a wider level and a view that was worth walking far to see.

Here the lad dismounted. He was so much too large for the beast he bestrode that he had been obliged to hold his feet up awkwardly, while riding. Besides, deep in his clouded heart there had arisen a desire to please this girl who so pleased him.

"Hmm. If you like leaves, there's some that's pretty," he said, pointing upward toward a brilliant branch, hanging far out above the stream.

"Yes, those are exquisite, but quite out of reach. We can get on faster now; and tell me, please, what are all those buildings yonder? How picturesque they look, clustered amid the trees on the river's bank."

[Pg 19]

Her answer was a rustle overhead. She fancied that a squirrel could not have climbed more swiftly; for, glancing up, she discovered the witless youth already upon the projecting branch, moving toward its slender tips, which swayed beneath his weight, threatening instant breakage. Below him roared the rapids, hurrying to dash over the great dam not many yards away.

"Oh! how dare you? Come back—at once!"

"Scare you, do I? Sho! This is nothing. You just ought to see what I can do. Catch 'em. There you are. That's prettier than any. Hello! Yonder's a yellow-robin's nest. Wait. I'll get it for you!"

Amy shut her eyes that she might not see; though she could not but hear the snapping of boughs,

the yell, and the heavy splash which followed.

CHAPTER II.

[Pg 20]

THE MILL IN THE GLEN.

"Hi! ducked myself that time, sure!"

Amy ventured to open her eyes. There, dripping and grinning, evidently enjoying the fright he had given her, stood her strange new acquaintance. His hand still clutched the scarlet branch with its swinging nest that he had risked his safety to secure, nor would relinquish for so trivial a matter as a fall into the water.

"You—you might have been drowned!"

"But I wasn't."

"I should have felt that it was all my fault!" she exclaimed, now that her fear was past, growing angry at his hardihood.

He stared at her in genuine surprise; all the gayety of his expression giving place to disappointment.

"Don't you like it? They always build far out."

"Oh, yes. It's beautiful, and I thank you, of course. But I want to get home. You must show me the way."

"Make the donkey carry 'em."

"Very well."

So they piled the branches upon the back of the dumbly protesting "Californian," Amy retaining the delicate nest and gently shaking the water from it. [Pg 21]

"She don't like 'em, does she?"

"Not at all. Idle Pepita likes nothing that is labor. But I love her, even though she's lazy."

"What'll you take for her?"

"Why—nothing."

"Won't swop?"

"No, indeed."

"Why not?"

"Oh! dozens of 'whys.' The idea of my selling Pepita! For one thing, she was a gift."

"Who from?"

"My uncle Frederic."

"When? Where? What for?"

"Oh! what a question asker. Come, Pepit! Tcht!"

Shaking her body viciously, but unable to rid herself of her brilliant burden, the burro started swiftly along the footpath running toward the distant buildings, and over the little bridge that crossed just there. Both path and bridge were worn smooth by the feet of the operatives from the mills, which interested Amy more and more, the nearer she approached them. Once or twice, on some rare outing among the hills where her home lay, she had caught glimpses of their roofs and chimneys, and she remembered to have asked some questions about them; but her father had answered her so indifferently, even shortly, that she had learned little.

Seen from this point they impressed her by contrast to all she had ever known. There was a whirl and stir of life about them that excited and thrilled her. Through the almost numberless windows, wide open to the air, she could see hundreds of busy people moving to and fro, in a sort of a rhythmic measure with the pulsating engines. [Pg 22]

As yet she did not know what these engines were. She heard the mighty beat and rumble, regular, unchanging, like a gigantic heart of which this many-storied structure was the enclosing body; and she slowly advanced, fascinated, and quite heedless of some staring eyes which regarded her curiously from those wide windows.

A discontented bray and the touch of a hand upon her shoulder suddenly recalled her, to observe that she had reached the bottom of a steep stairway, and was face to face with another stranger.

"Beg pardon, but can I be of service to you?"

"Oh! sir. Thank you. I—I don't know just where I am."

"In the yard of the Crawford carpet mill."

"Is that the wonderful building yonder?"

"Yes. Have you never seen it before?"

"Not at near hand. I am here by accident. I was lost on the river bank, a long distance back, and a strange lad helped me so far. I don't see him now, and I'm rather frightened about him, for he fell into the water, getting me this nest. He doesn't act just like other people, I think."

[Pg 23]

"No. Poor 'Bony'! He has run up into the street above us, yet even he knew better than to have brought you just here," and he glanced significantly toward a large sign of "No Admittance."

"Is it wrong? I'm very sorry. I'll go away at once, when I'm shown how."

Gazing about, her perplexity became almost distress; for she found herself shut in a little space by buildings of varying heights. Behind her lay the difficult route over which she had come, and on the east uprose a steep bank or bluff. Against this was placed a nearly perpendicular sort of ladder, and this steep stair was the only visible outlet from the ravine.

The gentleman smiled at her dismay.

"Oh, that isn't as bad as it looks. I fancy you could easily climb it, as do our own mill girls; but this pretty beast of yours, with the fanciful burden, how about him?"

"I don't know. She might. She's right nimble-footed—when she chooses to be."

"So 'he' is a young lady, too? Well, I have great faith in girls, even girl donkeys, as well as in those who own them. There will certainly be a way out; if not up the bank, then through the mill. By the by, if you've never visited such a place, and have come to it 'by accident,' wouldn't you like to go through it now? I'm the superintendent, William Metcalf, and am just about to make my rounds, before we shut down for the night. I'd be pleased to show you about, though we must first find a safe place where we can tie your donkey. She looks very intelligent."

[Pg 24]

"Oh, indeed, sir, she is! She's the dearest burro. She and her brother Balaam were sent to my brother and me from California. Her name is Pepita, and I am Amy Kaye. I live at Fairacres."

At this announcement the gentleman looked as if he were about to whistle, though courtesy prevented. He bowed gravely:—

"I'm very glad to know you. If you'll excuse me for a moment, I'll find something with which to tie the burro."

He soon returned, bringing a leather strap.

"We'll fasten her to the stair, but it will be better to put these branches on the ground. Having them on her back frets her."

"Thank you. You're very kind."

Pepita did not endorse this opinion. In the matter of tying she gave them all the trouble she could, and allowed them to depart only after a most indignant bray. Her racket brought various heads to the windows, and the visitors were as much of interest to the artisans as themselves were to Amy.

She followed her guide eagerly, too self-unconscious to be abashed by any stare; and though he had shown many strangers "over the works," he felt that explaining things to this bright-eyed girl would be a pleasanter task than ordinary.

[Pg 25]

"I like to begin all things at the foundation," he remarked, with a smile, "so we'll go to the fire-room first."

This was down another short flight of steps, and over a bridge spanning the race, which deep, dark watercourse immediately caught Amy's attention.

"How smooth and swift it looks; and so black. Isn't that man afraid to stand there?" indicating a workman stationed upon the sluice gate, engaged in the endless task of raking fallen leaves away from the rack.

"Oh, no! not afraid! The work is monotonous, but it must be done, or there'll be the mischief to pay. Now, here are the fires."

A soot-grimed man approached the door of the furnace room, and respectfully touched his forehead to his superior, then glanced toward Amy.

"I'm afeared the little lady will soil her pretty frock," he remarked, with another pull at his forelock.

"Thank you for thinking of it. I'll try to be careful," she answered, tiptoeing across the earthen floor, to stoop and peer into the roaring furnaces. "I should be afraid it would burn the whole place up. How hot it is! Is it all right?"

"Yes; they're doing prime to-day. We takes care of the danger, miss. But hot? Well, you should

[Pg 26]

ought to be here about midsummer, say. Ah! this isn't bad, is it, boss?"

"Very comfortable. You like your job, eh, Ben?"

"Sure; it's a good one. Steady, an' wages regular. Good day, miss, you're welcome, I'm sure," he concluded, as she thanked him again for opening the furnace doors and explaining how it was he managed the great fires.

"Now, the engine room; to see the object of all that heat," said Mr. Metcalf.

"If only Hallam were here!" exclaimed Amy.

"Is he your brother?"

"Yes. Oh! it all seems just like fairyland; even better, for this is useful, while fairyland is merely pleasant."

"Then you deem useful things of more account than pleasant ones? Hmm; most young ladies who have visited us have seemed afraid rather than pleased. The whirl of the machinery frightened them."

"It frightens me, too, and yet—I like it. The power of it all awes me."

"Well, your enthusiasm is certainly agreeable."

Nor was he the only one who found it so. Even the usually silent workmen in the fireproof storehouse, where the bales of wool were piled to the ceiling with little aisles of passage between, were moved to explanation by the alert, inquiring glances of this dainty visitor. So she quickly learned the difference between Turkish and Scottish fleeces, and remarked to her guide on the oddity of the sorted ones, "that look just like whole sheepskins, legs and tail and all, with the skins left out." In the scouring room she saw the wool washing and passing forward through the long tanks of alkaline baths; and in the "wilying" house her lungs were filled by the dust that the great machines cleaned from the freshly dried fleeces. Indeed, she would have lingered long before the big chute, through which compressed air forced the cleansed fibres to the height of four stories and the apartment where began its real manufacture into yarn.

[Pg 27]

Mr. Metcalf took her next to this top floor; and though the deafening noise of the machinery made her own voice sound queerly in her ears, she managed to ask so many questions, that before she again reached the ground floor and passed outward to the impatient Pepita, she had gained a clear general idea how some sorts of carpets are made.

"And now, Miss Amy, that our little tour is over, I'd like to hear what, of all you've seen, has most impressed you," said Mr. Metcalf, kindly.

"The girls."

"The—girls? In the spinning room?"

"Everywhere; all of them. They are so clean, so jolly, and—think! They are actually earning money."

"Of course; else they wouldn't be here. Does it strike you oddly that a girl should earn her own living?"

[Pg 28]

"I think it's grand."

"Hmm. You caught but a fleeting glimpse of them. There's a deal of reality in their lives, poor things."

"Why! Are you sorry for them?"

"No,—and yes. They haven't much leisure, and I dare say that you are an object of envy to every mill girl who has seen you to-day."

"Oh! I hope not. I liked them so. It seems so fine to really earn some of the money which everybody needs so much, just by standing before one of those 'jennies' and doing what little they did. They laughed often, as if they were glad. Nobody looked sorrowful, so I don't see why you pity them."

"It may be misplaced, for, after all, they *are* happy in their way. I do not think it is always the best way; still—Why, here's 'Bony.' Well, young man, what mischief's up now? Do you march again to-night?"

"No. I'm going with her."

"Best wait till you're invited," suggested the superintendent.

The lad said nothing, but kept on tying into a compact bundle all the branches heaped upon the ground, and to which he had made a considerable addition during Amy's inspection of the mill. He had begged a bit of rope from the office in the street above; and when he had secured the boughs to his satisfaction, he slung them across his shoulder.

[Pg 29]

"Come on. I'll pack 'em for you to where you live."

He seemed none the worse for his fall into the water, and Amy laughed; not only at the readiness

with which he constituted himself her assistant, but also at Pepita's frantic efforts to ascend the steep stairway.

"Thank you. But if we can get her up there, above, she can carry the stuff herself. I can walk, when I am told the road."

"Up she goes she!" shouted the startling Lafayette, and gave the unprepared burro a sharp prod with a stick he held.

Astonished, Pepita leaped to escape the attack and landed her forefeet upon the fourth stair.

"Hi! There you be! You're a regular Rep-Dem-Prob! Up you go—I tell you!"

"Oh! you dreadful boy!" exclaimed Amy, and tried to take the stick from the fellow's hand.

"Don't. He isn't hurting her, and she *is* going up!" laughed the superintendent, as the burro made another skyward spring. But his merriment suddenly ceased.

The "Californian" could use her nimble feet for more than one purpose. She resented the indignity of her present position in the only manner possible to her, and when a third prod touched her dainty flesh, she flung one heel backward, with an airy readiness that might have been funny save for its result.

CHAPTER III.

[Pg 30]

FAIRACRES.

"How dreadful! Is he killed?" cried Amy, pale with fear.

For the indignant Pepita had planted her active hoof squarely in the mouth of the lad who was tormenting her, and had knocked him backward from the stair. During a brief time he lay, dazed by the blow, with a trickle of blood rapidly staining his features.

"Wait. Don't get frightened. There may not be much damage done. That boy has as many lives as a cat. I'll see to him," returned Mr. Metcalf, quietly.

With a strong, kindly touch, the gentleman helped the unfortunate "Bony" to his feet; whereupon, the lad flew into a fearful rage and started up the ladder, in pursuit of the burro.

His movement roused Amy also to action, and she followed him so swiftly that she reached the top, and the broad road there, almost as soon as he. Before then, however, he had caught up a barrel stave, which happened to be lying in a too convenient spot, and was belaboring Pepita with all his might.

The latter, after her ascent of the steps, had remained standing at their head, gazing dreamily downward in her own demure manner and evidently considering that she had quite properly adjusted matters.

[Pg 31]

Amy succeeded in reaching them just as the third blow was descending upon Pepita's flank and by a deft movement arrested the stroke. The stave flew out of the lad's grasp, and his astonishment at her strength cooled his anger.

"Don't you strike her again! You shall not. Aren't you ashamed of yourself to beat a helpless creature like that? If you are still able to act so—so brutally—you can't be much hurt. I was terribly frightened and sorry, but now I don't care. She served you just right."

Then the red Tam dropped on the burro's neck and a torrent of affectionate words was poured into the creature's indifferent ears.

"Sho! Huckleberries! She's drove my teeth clean down my throat!" slowly ejaculated the youth.

This was about half true. One tooth had been broken out by the blow upon the lad's jaw and another had been loosened. The copious bleeding of these wounds gave him a startling appearance, and when Amy looked up a shudder of repellent pity ran through her. Then she seemed to see her mother's gentle face and, conquering the aversion she felt, she pulled out her handkerchief and began to wipe the discolored, ill-shapen lips of the half-wit.

He submitted to the operation in amazed silence. Even Mr. Metcalf had nothing to say, though he watched with keen interest the outcome of this little transaction.

[Pg 32]

"There. If I had some water, I could do it nicely. I'm sorry you were hurt. But don't you ever strike my Pepita again! Next time she might kill you. It was her only way of defending herself, for she hasn't sense like you—"

Regarding the imbecile face before her, Amy's sentence ended in confusion. Nor did it add to her comfort that the unhappy fellow now began to weep in a whimpering sort of way, that might have suited a spoiled child of a few years.

"Why, what is it? Do you suffer so terribly! Oh! I am so sorry!"

"There, my dear Miss Amy, let it pass. This is only one of 'Bony's' charming habits," said Mr. Metcalf, smiling derisively. "He has rather outgrown his age. Haven't you, lad? Well, it's all right. I'm sorry for you. You're sorry for yourself; and our young lady here is sorry for us both. Come. Brace up. Be a man. What would the 'boys' think of you, in this uniform, crying? Eh!"

"Huh—huh—huh—huh-h-h!" responded the natural.

"I'm going home, Bonaparte. Good night. Thank you for the leaves. Mr. Metcalf, will you tell me the nearest way, please?"

Amy picked up the fallen bundle of boughs, which the superintendent had brought with him from the yard below, and laid them upon Pepita's back. [Pg 33]

"These have given us some trouble, but they are still too beautiful to lose."

The gentleman directed her, courteously escorted her through the gateway, which bore another of those prohibitory "No Admittance" signs, and watched her walk briskly away, thinking what a bright feature of the landscape she made.

"Not a beautiful girl, by any means, yet one of the most wholesome, honest, and engaging ones who ever stepped foot within this old mill. Odd, too! A Kaye. I wonder if she will ever come again to what, if all had gone as was expected, might easily have been her own great property. Well, that was pretty to see: the way in which she wiped the face of poor 'Bony.' The lad grows sillier every day, it seems, and the 'boys' are making him worse by their nonsense. Where is he now? I'll have a talk with him and try to keep him out of the parades. They are not good for him," reflected Mr. Metcalf.

But the talk had to be postponed; for there was "Bony" already far along the road toward Fairacres, following doggedly in Amy's footsteps, though she repeatedly assured him that she could manage quite well without him and preferred to be alone.

"No, I'm going," he asserted; and when she could not dissuade him, she gave up trying to do so and led him to talk of himself—his most interesting subject. So that, by the time they had come to the front of the old mansion, she knew his simple history completely, and her pity had almost outgrown her aversion. [Pg 34]

"See, Cleena! Cleena Keegan! See what I have brought!"

The shout summoned a large woman to the door, who threw up her arms with the answering cry:

—

"Faith, an' I thought you was lost! Whatever has kept you such gait, Miss Amy?"

"Oh! adventures. Truly, Cleena. Real, regular adventures. See my leaves? See this lad! He got them for me. He is Bonaparte Jimpson."

"An' a curious spalpeen that same," casting a suspicious glance over the youth's strange attire.

"I'm Bonaparte Lafayette Jimpson," he explained gravely and, to Amy's surprise, timidly.

"The mischief, you be! An' what's Napoleon Bonyparty's gineral's pleasure at Fairacres, the night?"

"Cleena, wait. I'll tell you. Yes, you will have time enough. The train isn't due till after six, and they'll be a half-hour longer getting home from the station. Sit you down, Goodsoul, just for one little bit of minute. The scrubbing must surely be done by now. Isn't it?"

"Humph! The scrubbin's never done in this dirty world. Well, an' what is it? Be quick with you!"

Amy coaxed the old servant down upon the doorstep of the freshly cleaned kitchen, whither they had now gone, and speedily narrated her afternoon's experiences. [Pg 35]

"So you see, dear old Scrubbub, that he must have a fine feast of the best there is in the house. Besides," and she pulled the other's ear down to her lips, "I'd just like to have father see him. He isn't pretty, of course, but he's *new*. I wonder, could he pose?"

"Pose, is it?" groaned Cleena, with a comical grimace. "Pose! Sure, it's I minds the time when the master caught me diggin' petaties an' kept me standin', with me foot on me spade, an' me spade in the ground, an' me body this shape," bending forward, "till I got such a crick in me back I couldn't walk upright, for better 'n a week. Posin', indeed! Well, he might. He looks fit for naught else."

"Pooh, Cleena! you know it's an honor. But, come now, I want to put all these leaves up in the dining room. Will you help me?"

"Will I what—such truck! No, me colleen, not a help helps Cleena the day."

"Oh, yes, you will. I'll bring the step ladder and hand them to you, while you put them over the doors and windows. We'll make the place a perfect bower of cheerfulness, and if our dears, when they come—Oh, Cleena! they may need the cheerfulness very much."

However, it was not Amy's habit to borrow trouble, and she ran lightly away, calling to the boy on the porch:—

"I'm going to put Pepita in the stable. If you'd like to see her brother, you can come with me."

[Pg 36]

"Sho! Ain't he black!" exclaimed "Bony," as they led Pepita into the great stables and he discovered Balaam.

Amid ample accommodations for a dozen horses, the two burros seemed almost lost; but they occupied adjoining box-stalls which, if rather time-worn and broken, were still most roomy and comfortable.

"Why, huckleberries! It's bigger 'n the mill sheds. And only them two. Will he swop?"

As he asked this question the lad pulled from his pocket a miscellaneous collection of objects, and invitingly displayed them upon the palm of his long hand.

"No, I think not. I fancy we are not a 'swopping' family. But I must choose some name for you besides that dreadful 'Bony.' Bonaparte is too long. So is Lafayette. Let me see. Suppose we make it just 'Fayette'? That is short and pleasant to speak, and I like my friends to have nice names. Would you like it?"

"Bully!"

"Why—why, Fayette! That doesn't sound well."

"Sho! Don't it? One all black an' t'other all white. Hum."

"Br-r-r-ray! Ah-umph—h-umph—umph—mph—ph—h-h-h!" observed Balaam to his sister.

Fayette laughed, so noisily and uproariously that the burros brayed again; and they kept up this amusing concert until Amy had brought each an armful of hay, and had directed her companion where to find a pail and water for their drink.

[Pg 37]

Then they returned to the house and beheld Cleena in the dining room, already mounted upon the step-ladder, trying to arrange the branches with more regard to the saving of time than to grace. But she made to the picture-seeing girl a very attractive "bit."

Indeed, Cleena Keegan was a person of sufficient importance to warrant a paragraph quite to herself. She was a woman of middle age, with a wealth of curling, iron-gray hair, which she tucked away under a plain white cap. Her figure was large and grandly developed. She wore a blue print gown, carefully pinned back about her hips, thus disclosing her scarlet flannel petticoat; both garments faded by time and frequent washings to a most "artistic" hue. Upon her shoulders was folded a kerchief of coarse white muslin, spotlessly clean; and as she stood, poised among the glowing branches, with the dying sunset light touching her honest face to unusual brightness, she was well worth Amy's eager wish:—

"Oh, Cleena! That father were only here to see and paint you just as you are this minute!"

"Humph! It's meself's glad he isn't."

"Why! That's not nice of you, Goodsoul. Yet it's a great pity that a body who is such a 'study' in herself can't fix those branches a bit more gracefully. You're jamming the leaves all into a little mess and showing the stems! Oh, Cleena, I wonder if I can't reach them."

[Pg 38]

"Truth, it's meself's willin' you should try. Belike I'd be handier at the pullin' them down nor the puttin' them up."

With head erect she descended from the ladder, and stood, arms akimbo, regarding the results of her labor. Even to her it suggested something not "artistic," and at Fairacres anything inartistic was duly frowned upon.

"Faith, it's not the way the master would do it, I see that, but—"

Before either she could finish her sentence or Amy mount the ladder, Fayette had run to its top and stood there rapidly pulling from the wall the branches Cleena had arranged. Thrusting all but one between his knees, he fastened that over the window-frame so deftly and charmingly that Amy clapped her hands in delight.

"Oh, that's lovely! Try another—and another!"

He obeyed. His vacant face flushed with a glow of enthusiasm equalling, if not exceeding her own, and even Cleena spent some moments of her rarely wasted time in watching him.

Her own face had again become a "study," yet of a sort to provoke a smile, as her gaze roved from his handiwork, over the length of his ungainly person, to rest upon his bare and not too cleanly feet; then travelled slowly upward again, trying to settle once for all his rightful position in the social scale. Her thought might have been thus expressed:—

[Pg 39]

"His foot's heathen. His head's the same. His clothes—they're the heathenest of all. I'd disdain 'em. But, arrah musha! The hand of him! The master himself couldn't better them fixin's."

Then she hastened to her kitchen, and soon the appetizing odor of a well-cooked meal was in their nostrils, and the two young decorators realized that they were very hungry.

"There, that will do. It is perfect. Thank you ever and ever so much, Fayette."

"Shucks!"

"Now I'll light the candles. I always do when the people are coming home from town. They go there quite often; at least father does, though mother hasn't been before in months. The candles are terrible extravagance, Cleena says, but they're so pretty."

Fayette carried away the step-ladder, then returned to watch Amy as she set the old-fashioned candelabra upon the already daintily spread table. She had bordered the white cloth with some of the most dazzling-hued leaves, and when the wax tapers threw their soft radiance over the whole charming interior, poor Fayette felt his weak head grow dizzy and confused by the beauty of it all.

He dimly realized that he was in a new world, which soothed and appealed to his clouded nature as did the birds and the flowers. That impulse, which he could neither express nor understand, which sent him so constantly into the woods and solitudes, was gratified now. This was as delightful as his favorite pastime of lying upon the grass and gazing upward into the sunlit sky. [Pg 40]

"Sho! It's pretty. I like it. I'm glad I come. I'll stay."

Amy had almost forgotten him.

"Yes, of course you'll stay till after supper. I'll—"

But a shadow fell across the threshold of the still open door, and looking up she saw a stranger,—an old man of rather forbidding aspect, whose glance passed swiftly from herself to the youth near the big fireplace.

There followed an instant of mutual and frowning recognition between these two; then Fayette disappeared through an inner doorway, while the newcomer remained at the entrance, his hat in his hand, and an assumed suavity in his manner.

Yet there was still a note of anger in the tone with which he observed:—

"I have called upon business with Cuthbert Kaye. Your father, I presume. Is he at home?"

"Not yet. He went to the city, yesterday, with my mother and brother. I expect them back on the next train. Will you come in?"

"Yes, thank you. I'll wait."

He accepted the great chair Amy rolled toward him, and let his gaze slowly sweep the cheerful apartment. Yet he knew it by heart, already, and his face brightened as he saw how little it had been changed since these many years. Apparently not one of its quaint and rich old furnishings was missing, and the passage of time had but added to the remembered charm of the place. Even the chair into which he sank had a familiar feel, as if his back had long ago fitted to those simple, comfortable lines. The antique candelabra—how often had he watched his grandmother's fingers polishing them to brilliancy. [Pg 41]

But the girl was new. The only modern thing, save the freshly gathered leaves,—which also seemed but a memory of his childhood,—to remind him of the present and the errand upon which he had come.

"She's Kaye, though, to the bone. Dark, crisp hair. Those short curls are like a boy's. Her eyes are the Kaye eyes; and that toss of her head, like her great-grandmother come to life again. All our women had it. Ah, well. If things—hmm."

The visitor became absorbed in his thoughts, and his wandering gaze came home to rest, seemingly, upon the tips of his own boots, for he did not notice when Amy disappeared and Cleena entered.

"Alanna! But this is a smart decent piece of work, now, isn't it?"

At this sudden and derisive remark the gentleman looked up.

"Oh, ho! You, is it?"

"Faith an' it is. An' likin' to know what brings you this gait."

"Keep a civil tongue in your head, woman. I'm not to be put off this time by any false stories. Here I am, and here I shall stay until I see your master."

Steadily and silently confronting one another for some seconds, they measured each other's wills. The unwelcome guest was not sure but that the woman would lift him bodily and fling him out of doors. She looked ably strong and quite minded so to do; but, after a further reflection, she appeared to change her mind as well as her tone.

"Hmm—yes. There's no irreverence meant. Come in by, to the library yon. There's pictures to see, an' books a plenty. Leave the master be, like a gentleman now, as you was born, till he eats his meal in peace. A body can bear trouble better on a full stummick nor an empty. Come by."

To his own amazement, the caller rose and followed her. He told himself he was a simpleton to have left the cheery supper room and the certain presence of the man he wished to see for an hour of solitary waiting in an unknown place. [Pg 42]

"Library." There had been none in his grandmother's time. But he knew it well—from the outside. A detached, strong little building, of hewn stone like the mansion; one of Cuthbert Kaye's many "follies." Planned with a studio on the second floor above the spacious book room on the first. Well, it made the property so much the more valuable. Yes, after all, he would better visit it while the coast was clear.

[Pg 43]

"Sure, sir, an' it's here the master do be spending all his time. Here an' above. You was never in the paintin' study, now was you?" she asked suggestively.

"No."

"Alanna! An' you two of the same blood!"

"Hmm—yes, of course I'll go, since I'm here."

So he followed her up the graceful staircase, with its softly covered steps, and into a room which rumor said was worth travelling far to see; and though thus prepared, its half-revealed beauty astonished him.

"Well, it is a fine apartment. It must have cost a power of money. And—it explains many things."

"Money, says you? It did that," echoed Cleena, with a pious sigh.

"Yes, yes. I suppose so. It's rather dark, however, for me to see as I would like. Isn't there a lamp here?"

"Lamp, is it? Askin' pardon for forgettin' me manners, but it's never a lamp will the master have left in this place. If one comes, indeed, 'tis himself brings it. Forby, on occasion like this, I'll fetch it an' take all the blame for that same. It's below. I'll step down;" and she departed hastily, leaving him alone.

CHAPTER IV.

[Pg 44]

HALLAM.

As the stage from the railway station rolled up to Fairacres, Amy was waiting upon the wide porch. She had put on her daintiest frock, white, of course, since her father liked her to wear no other sort of dress; and she had twisted sprays of scarlet woodbine through her dark hair and about her shoulders. Before the vehicle stopped, she called out eagerly:—

"Oh! how glad I am you're here! It's been such a long two days! Are you all well? Is everything right, mother dearest? Did you have a nice time?"

The father reached her first, remarking, with a fond smile:—

"You make a sweet picture, daughter, with that open doorway behind you, with the firelight and candlelight, and—Ah! did you speak, Salome?" turning toward his wife.

"The man is waiting, Cuthbert. Has thee the money for him?"

Mr. Kaye fumbled in one pocket, tried another, frowned, and appeared distressed.

"Never mind, dear. Hallam can attend to it."

But the crippled lad had already swung himself over the steps upon his crutches, and the artist remarked, with a fresh annoyance:—

[Pg 45]

"He must put it in the bill, Salome. Why always bother with such trifles? If one could only get away from the thought and sound of money. Its sordidness is the torment of one's life."

Mrs. Kaye sighed, as she paid the hackman from her own purse, then followed her husband into the house.

His face had already lost all its expression of annoyance, and now beamed with satisfaction as he regarded Amy's efforts to celebrate the home-coming.

"Good child. Good little girl. Truly, very beautiful. Why, my darling, you'll be an artist yourself some day, I believe."

"The saints forbid!" murmured a voice from the further side the room, where Cleena had appeared, bearing a tray of dishes.

Nobody heard the ejaculation, however, save Hallam, and he didn't count, being of one and the same opinion as the old serving-woman. All the lad's ambitions lay toward a ceaseless activity, and the coloring of canvases attracted him less than even the meanest kind of manual labor.

Nor did Amy share in her father's hope, though she loved art for his sake, and she answered, with conviction:—

"Never such an one as you are, father dear."

But all this while the daughter's eyes had been studying her mother's face, with the keen penetration of sympathy, and the whispered advice:— [Pg 46]

"Be especially gentle with Hallam to-night, my child," but confirmed the answer she had already found in that careworn countenance.

Yet Hallam showed no need of consolation as he sturdily stumped across the room and exclaimed, cheerfully enough:—

"Fetch on the provender, Goodsoul. We're all as hungry as bears. What's for us?"

"What should be? save the best rasher of bacon ever blessed eyesight, with tea-biscuits galore. For second course—My! but that pullet was a tender bird, so she was. An' them east-lot petaties would fain melt in your mouth, they're so hot-foot to be ate."

"The pullet? Not the little brown one you have cared for yourself, Cleena?"

"What for no? Eat your victuals askin' no questions, for that's aye bad for the appetite."

Both Amy and Cleena knew, without words, that this last city trip had been a failure, like so many that had preceded it. Once more had the too sanguine father dragged his crippled son to undergo a fresh examination of his well-formed though useless limbs; and once more had an adverse verdict been rendered.

This time the authority was of the highest. A European specialist, whose name was known and revered upon two continents, had come to New York and had been consulted. Interested more than common by the boy's fair face and the sweet womanliness of the mother, the surgeon had given extra attention to Hallam, and his decision had been as reluctantly reached as it was final. [Pg 47]

"Only a miracle will ever enable him to walk. Yet a miracle may occur, for we live in an age of them, and nothing seems impossible to science. However, in all mortal probability, he is as one dead below his knees. My lad, take your medicine bravely and be a man in spite of it all. Use your brain, thanking God for it, and let the rest go."

"That's an easy thing for you to say, but it is I who have to bear it!" burst forth the unhappy boy, and was at once ashamed of his rude speech, even if it in no wise offended the sympathetic physician.

The return journey had been a sad and silent one, though Hallam had roused at its end with the sort of bravado that Amy had seen, and which deceived her no more than it did any of the others; but she loyally seconded his assumed cheerfulness, and after they had gathered about the table, gave them a lively description of her afternoon's outing, ending with:—

"For, mother dear, you hadn't said just where I might or might not ride, and I'd never seen the carpet mills, though I now hope to go there often; and, indeed, I think I would like to work in that busy place, among all those bright, active girls."

Then her enthusiasm was promptly dashed by her father's exclamation:— [Pg 48]

"Amy! Amy Kaye! Never again say such a thing! Let there be no more of that mill talk, not a word."

Mr. Kaye's tone was more stern than his child had ever heard, and as if he recognized this he continued, more gently:—

"But I am interested in that silly Bonaparte. I almost wish you had kept him till I came."

Amy happened to glance at Cleena, who had warned her not to mention the fact of the strange gentleman calling; nor had she known just when Fayette went away, though she supposed he had done so after so suddenly leaving the dining room.

"Why, Goodsoul, you are as beaming as if you had found a treasure."

"Faith, an' I have. Try a bit of the chicken, mistress, now do;" and she waved the dish toward the lady, with a smile that was more than cheerful.

"Well, Cleena, it's heartening to see anybody so bright. The work must have gone finely to-day, and thee have had plenty of time for scrubbing. No, thank thee; nothing more. Not even those delicious baked apples. The best apples in the world grow on that old tree by the dairy door, I believe," replied the mistress, with another half-suppressed sigh.

As she rose to leave the table, she turned toward her husband:—

"I hope thee'll soon be coming upstairs, Cuthbert." [Pg 49]

It was noticeable that Cleena paused, tray in hand, to hear the answer, which was out of common, for the old servant rarely presumed upon the fact that she was also the confidential friend of her employers.

"Well, after a little, dear; but, first, I must go over to the studio."

"Arrah, musha, but, master! The painting's all right. What for no? Indeed, then, it's the mistress herself needs more attention this minute nor any picture ever was drawn."

"Why, Cleena!" exclaimed the lady, in surprise. Such an interference had never been offered by the devoted creature to the head of the house.

"Asking pardon, I'm sure; though I know I know. I've lighted a fire in the sittin' room above, an' it's sure for the comfort of both that yous make yourselves easy the night."

"That's true, husband. Do leave the picture till morning. We're all tired and needing the rest."

Always easily persuaded where physical comfort was at stake, the artist acquiesced, and with his arm about his wife's slender waist he gently led her from the room.

Cleena heard him murmuring tender apologies that he had not before observed how utterly fatigued she looked; and a whimsical smile broke on the Irishwoman's face as she cleared the table and assured the cups and saucers, with a vigorous disdain, that:—

"Them two's no more nor a couple of childer still. But, alanna! Never a doubt I doubt there'll be trouble with old Cleena when the cat leaps the bag. Well, he's in it now, tied fast and tight." [Pg 50]

Whereupon, there being nobody to see, the good woman executed a sort of jig, and having thus relieved her feelings departed to the kitchen, muttering:—

"It wasn't for naught Miss Amy fetched a simpleton home in her pocket. Sure, I scared the life clean out of *him*, so I did, an' he'll stay where he's settled till he's wanted, so long as I keep fillin' his stummick with victuals like these. Will I carry a bit o' the fowl to the lib'ry—will I no? Hmm. Will I—nill I?"

Having decided, Cleena passed swiftly from the house into the darkness and in the direction of the distant library.

Meanwhile, up in the little chamber which had once been their nursery and was still their own sitting room, Amy had drawn a lounge before the grate, and, after his accustomed fashion, Hallam lay upon it, while his sister curled upon the rug beside him.

But she did not look at him. She rested her chin in her palms and gazed at the dancing flames, as she observed:—

"Even a king might envy us this fire of pine cones, mightn't he? Isn't it sweet and woodsy? and so bright. I've gathered bushels and bushels of them, while you were away, and we can have all the fun we want up here. So now—can't you just begin and tell, Hal dear? Part of it I guess, but start as you always do: 'I went from here—' and keep right on till you get back again to me and—this." [Pg 51]

She purposely made her tone light, but she was not surprised when her answer was a smothered sob. Indeed, there was such a lump in her own throat that she had to swallow twice before she could say:—

"No, darling, you needn't tell one word. I know it all—all—all; and I can't bear it. I won't—I will not have it so!"

Then she turned and buried her face in the pillow beside her brother's, crying so passionately that he had to become comforter himself; and his thin fingers stroked her hair until she grew ashamed of her weakness and looked up again, trying to smile.

"Forgive me, brotherkin. I'm such a baby, and I meant to be so brave! If I could only take your lameness on myself, and give you my own strong, active legs!"

"Don't, Amy! Besides, how often have you said that very same thing? Yet it isn't any use. Nothing is of any use. Life isn't, I fancy."

Even the vehement Amy was shocked by this, and her tears stopped, instantly.

"Why, Hal!"

"Sounds wicked, doesn't it? Well, I feel wicked. I feel like, was it Job or one of his friends? that it would be good to 'curse God and die.' Dying would be so much easier than living." [Pg 52]

The girl sprang up, clinching her brown hands, and staring at her brother defiantly.

"Hallam Kaye, don't you talk like that! Don't you dare! Suppose God heard you? Suppose He took you at your word and made you die just now, this instant? What then?"

Hallam smiled, wanly, "I won't scare you by saying what then, girlie. If He did, I suppose it would all be right. Everything is right—to the folks who don't have to suffer the thing. Even the doctor—and I liked him as much as I envied him—even he preached to me and bade me not to mind, to 'forget.' Hmm, I wish *he* could feel, just for one little minute, the helplessness that I must feel always, eternally."

Hallam was dearer to his sister than any other human being, and the despair in her idol's tone promptly banished her anger against his irreverence. She went down on her knees and caught away the arm with which he had hidden his face, kissing him again and again.

"Oh! there will be some way out of this misery, laddie. There must be. It wouldn't be right, that anybody as clever and splendid as you should be left a cripple for life. I won't believe it. I won't!"

"How like father you are!"

Amy's head tossed slightly, and a faint protest came into her eyes, but was banished as soon because of its disloyalty. [Pg 53]

"Am I? In what way? and why shouldn't I be?"

"You never know when you're down nor why you shouldn't have all that you want."

"Isn't it a good thing? Would it help to go moping and unbelieving?"

"I suppose not. Anyway, it makes things easier for you and him, and so, maybe, for the rest of us."

The sister dropped back into her favorite attitude upon the rug and regarded her brother curiously.

"Hal, you're as queer as can be, to-night. Seems as if there was something the matter with you, beyond what that know-nothing doctor said. Isn't there?"

"Don't call the poor man hard names, girlie. He was fine, and I was impertinent enough for the whole family. Only, I reckon he was too high up to feel anything we could say. But there *is* something. Something I must tell you, and I don't know how to begin. Promise that you won't get into a tantrum, or run and disturb the little mother about it."

"Hallam Kaye! Do I ever?"

"Hmm! Sometimes. Don't you? Never mind. Sit closer, dear, and let me get hold of your hand. Then you'll understand why I am so bitter; why this disappointment about my lameness is so much worse than any that has gone before. And I've been disappointed often enough, conscience knows."

Amy crept up and snuggled her dark head against Hallam's fair one, remarking, with emphasis:— [Pg 54]

"Now I'm all ready. I'll be as still as a mouse, and not interrupt you once. What other dreadful trouble has come? Is it a grocery bill, or Claflin's for artists' stuff?"

"Something far worse than that."

"What?"

"Did you ever think we might have—might have—oh, Amy! I can't tell you 'gently,' as mother bade—all it is—well, we've got to go away from Fairacres. *Its not ours any longer.*"

"Wh-a-at?" cried the girl, springing up, or striving to do so, though Hallam's hold upon her fingers drew her down again.

"I don't wonder you're amazed. I was, too, at first. Now I simply wonder how we have kept the place so long."

"Why isn't it ours? Whose is it?"

"It belongs to a cousin of mother's, Archibald Wingate. Did you ever hear of him?"

"Never. How can it?"

"I hardly understand myself, though mother's lawyer tried to explain. It's something about indorsing notes and mortgages and things. Big boy as I am, I know no more about business than—you do."

"Thanks, truly. But I do know. I attended to the marketing yesterday when the wagon came. Cleena said that I did very well."

"Glad of it. You'll have a chance to exercise your talents in that line." [Pg 55]

"But, Hal, mother will never let anybody take away our home. How could she? What would father do without his studio that he had built expressly after his own plan? or we without all this?" sweeping her arm about to indicate the cosiness of their own room.

"Mother can't help herself, dear. She was rich once, but she's desperately poor now."

"I knew there was trouble about money, of course. There never seems to be quite enough, but that's been so since I can remember. Why shouldn't we go on just as we have? What does this cousin of our mother's want of the place, anyway?"

"I don't know. I don't know him. I hate him unseen."

"So do I. Still, if he's a cousin, he should be fond of mother, and not bother."

"Amy, we're all a set of simpletons, I guess, as a family, and in relation to practical matters."

"Speak for yourself, John."

"That isn't all. There's something—something wrong with father."

"Hallam Kaye! Now I do believe you're out of your head. I was afraid you were, you've talked and acted so queerly. I'm going for Cleena. Is your face hot? Do you ache more than usual?"

"Don't be silly. I'm as right as I ever shall be. Listen. I found it all out in the city. Father had gone [Pg 56]

to some exhibition, and mother and I were waiting for the time to go to the doctor. A gentleman called, and I never saw anybody look so frightened and ill as mother did when she received him, though I knew it wasn't about me. She hadn't hoped for anything better in that line. She called the man 'Friend Howard Corson,' and he was very courteous to her; but all of a sudden she cried out:—

"Don't tell me that the end has come! I can't bear both sorrows in one day!' And then she looked across at me. I smiled as bravely as I could, and, Amy, I believe our mother is the very most beautiful woman in this world."

"Why, of course; and father's the handsomest man."

"Certainly," agreed the lad, with rather more haste than conviction.

"Well, what next?"

Before the answer could be given, there burst upon their ears an uproarious clamor of angry voices, such as neither had ever heard at Fairacres; and Amy sprang up in wild alarm, while Hallam groped blindly for the crutches he had tossed aside.

CHAPTER V.

[Pg 57]

A KINSMAN OF THE HOUSE.

"It's from the library!" reported Amy, who had first reached and opened the window. "I can't make out anything except—yes, it is! That's Fayette's voice. Hear that croak?"

"The foolish boy? Here yet?"

"So it seems. I'll go and find out."

"Wait. That's Cleena talking now, and another voice, a man's. What can it all mean?"

Amy ran down the stairs and out of the house so swiftly that she did not observe her father following with almost equal haste. Behind him sped Mrs. Kaye, far more anxious concerning her husband than the noise outside.

"Slowly, Cuthbert. Please do take care. Thee must not hurry so, and I hear Cleena. She'll look out for everything. For my sake, don't run."

Hallam upon his crutches came last of all, and for a moment the entire family stood in silent wonder at the scene before them.

Two men were wrestling like angry schoolboys; and the light from a lantern in Cleena's hand fell over them and showed the distorted face of "Bony" in one of his wildest rages. His contestant was gray haired and stout, and was evidently getting the worst of the struggle. The library door was open, and it seemed as if the half-wit were trying to force the other backward into the building.

[Pg 58]

One glance revealed something of the situation to Mrs. Kaye, and, as the wrestlers paused for breath, she moved forward and laid her hand upon the old man's arm.

"Archibald, what does this mean?"

The low voice acted like magic. Fayette slunk away, ashamed, and the other paused to recover himself. But his anger soon returned and was now directed against the astonished woman herself.

"Mean! mean? That's for you to say. Since when has a Kaye stooped to the pettiness of locking up an unwelcome visitor like a rat in a trap? A pretty greeting and meeting, Cuthbert, after all these years!" he cried, turning next toward the artist, with indignant contempt.

But the object of his wrath scarcely heard what he said. His own eyes were fixed upon the ruined panel of his beautiful library door, and he caught up the lantern and peered anxiously to learn the extent of the disaster.

The wife again answered, as if speaking for both:—

"Archibald, no. Whatever indignity thee has suffered, none of thy kin know anything about it or could be parties to it. Thy own heart must tell thee that; and now explain what it all means."

[Pg 59]

At the old familiar speech, the man's expression altered, and when he replied it was in a far gentler tone.

"I came to see Cuthbert; for the thousandth time, isn't it? Failing him again, though I didn't mean to fail, I had to talk with—thee," his voice tripping slightly over the pronoun, "and that virago brought me here to wait. Then she locked me up and set this idiot to watch. There are no windows to get out of from above, nothing but that skylight, so I finally forced the door at the foot of the stairs, and then again this. Here was that ruffian, armed with a cudgel, and—the rest thee knows."

"I am very sorry, cousin. I can but apologize for what I would never have permitted had I known," and the mistress's gaze rested upon Cleena most reproachfully.

Yet that bold-spirited creature was in no wise disturbed, and replied, with great enjoyment:—

"Sure, mistress, I did but do what I'd do again, come same chance. What for no? If it wasn't for him, yon, there'd be peace an' plenty at Fairacres the now. Faith, I harmed him none."

"Cleena!"

"Askin' pardon if I overstepped me aut'ority, mistress. Come, General Bonyparty, I'm surmisin' you an' me better be fixin' things up whiles the family goes home to their beds." [Pg 60]

Just then Mr. Kaye's silent examination of the injury done his beloved studio came to an end. He set down the lighted lantern with the ultra caution of one who dreads fire above all accidents, and turned toward his wife. However, he took but few steps forward before he paused, staggered, and would have fallen had not the ill-treated visitor sprung to his aid,—to be himself pushed aside, while Cleena caught up her master and strode off toward the house, as if she were but carrying an overgrown child in her strong arms. Indeed, the artist's weight was painfully light, nor was this the first time that Cleena's strength had thus served his need; though this fact not even Hallam nor Amy knew.

The wife hurried after her fainting husband, and Amy started also; then reflected that it was she who had brought Fayette to the house, and was, in a measure, responsible for what had since happened there.

But the lad gave her time for neither reproof nor question, as he eagerly exclaimed:—

"'Twa'n't none o' my doin's. She made me. She told me to set here an' keep Mr. Wingate in, an' if he broke out I wasn't to let him. I don't know what for. I didn't ask questions. 'Twa'n't none o' my business, anyway. So I was just trying to jab him back. She fed me first rate. Say, is that your brother?" [Pg 61]

"Yes. Oh, Hal! what shall we do?"

"You run to the house and see if mother wants anybody to go for the doctor, while I try to help this boy stop up the doorway. It's going to rain, and it would break father's heart if anything here were harmed."

A curious smile crossed the stranger's face, but he advanced to lend his aid to the lad, Fayette, and succeeded in getting the parts of the door so far into place that they would prevent any damage by rain, except in case of severe storm. The broken lock was, of course, useless, and as the mill lad saw the cripple fingering it, he remarked:—

"You needn't be scared. I'll stay an' watch. I won't march to-night. Oh, I can do it all right. I often stay with the watchmen round the mill, an' I've got a good muscle, if anybody wants to tackle it," with which he glared invitingly toward the late prisoner.

A protesting groan was the only reply; and the lad received this with a snort of disdain.

"Druther let old scores rest, had ye? All right. Suits me well enough now, but I ain't forgot the lickin's you've given me, an' I ain't goin' to forget, neither."

Fayette's look was again so vindictive that Hallam interposed, fearing another battle between these uninvited guests.

"Well, I wish you *would* watch here for a while. As soon as Cleena can be spared, she shall bring you a blanket. And anyway, if you'll keep everything safe, I'll try to find something to pay you for your trouble." [Pg 62]

"Hmm, I'd take your donkey an' give back considerable to boot."

"My donkey? Balaam? Well, I guess not."

"I could do it. I could, first rate. I've got money. It's in the savings bank. 'Supe' put it in for me."

"I couldn't think of it, not for a second. Mr. Wingate—is it?"

"Archibald Wingate, and your kinsman, young sir."

"So I heard my mother say. She would wish you to come to the house with me, and we'll try to make you comfortable. I must go—I am wild to know what is wrong with my father."

"We will, at once," answered the other, coldly. "Your father was always weak—was never very rugged, and he hasn't lived in a way to make himself more robust. A man's place is in the open; not penned like a woman behind closed doors and windows."

"Beg pardon, but you are speaking of my father."

"Exactly, and of my cousin. Oh, I've known him since we sat together under our grandmother's table, munching gingerbread cakes. Ah, she was a famous cook, else the flavor of a bit of dough wouldn't last that long."

"I've heard of my great-grandmother's talent for cookery. Father and mother often speak of it, [Pg 63]

and some of her old recipes are in use in our kitchen to-day."

Mr. Wingate had kept an even pace with Hallam's eager swings upon his crutches, and they were speedily at the old house door, with a kindly feeling toward one another springing into life within the heart of each; though but a little while before Hallam had exclaimed to Amy, in all sincerity, "I hate him unseen."

With the ready trustfulness of youth, Hallam began to think his mother's and the lawyer's words had not meant literally what they expressed.

On Mr. Wingate's side, the sight of Hallam's physical infirmity had roused regret at the action he must take. Up till this meeting he had lived with but one object in view—the possession of Fairacres; nor did he now waver in his determination. There had simply entered into the matter a sentiment of compassion which was a surprise to himself, and which he banished as completely as he could.

Amy met them at the door with the gratifying report:—

"Father is about all right again. It was a sudden faint. Cleena says that he has had them before, but that mother had not wished us told. There is no need of a doctor, and Cleena is to get the west chamber ready for Mr. Wingate to sleep in. I'm to freshen the fire and—here is mother herself."

The house mistress came toward them, vial and glass in hand, on her way back to the sick-room. The hall was dimly lighted, and as she turned at the stair's foot and passed upward, with that soft gliding motion peculiar to herself, she seemed to the entering guest like a sad-faced ghost of a girl he had known. Halfway up she paused upon the landing and smiled down upon them; and the serenity of that smile made the hard facts of the case—illness, poverty, and home-breaking—seem even more unreal than anything else could have done.

[Pg 64]

Amy looked into Mr. Wingate's eyes, which were fixed upon their mother. "Isn't she like the Madonna? Father has so often painted her as such."

"Yes—hmm. He ought to. A Madonna of Way and Means. Say, little girl, you are bright enough, but you act a good deal younger than your years. How happens it you've never learned to look after your father yourself, and so spare your mother? Can you do anything useful?"

"That depends. I can arrange father's palette, and crack his eggs just right, and buy things—when there's money," she finished naively.

"It all seems 'father.' What about your mother? What can you do, or have you done, to help *her*, eh?"

Amy flushed. She thought this sort of cross-questioning very rude and uncalled for. As soon as she had heard this man's name she had realized that it must be he of whom Hallam had spoken, and whom she, also, had decided she "hated unseen." But, in truth, hatred was a feeling of which the carefully sheltered girl knew absolutely nothing, though it came very near entering her heart at that instant when the shrewd, penetrating gaze of her kinsman forced her to answer his question.

[Pg 65]

"Why—nothing, I'm afraid. Only to love her."

"Hmm. Well, you'll have to add a bit of practical aid to the loving, I guess, if you want to keep her with you. She looks as if the wind might blow her away if she got caught out in it. Now, good night. You and your brother can go. I'll sit here till that saucy Irishwoman gets my room ready. Take care! If you don't mind where you're going, you'll drop sperm on the rug, tipping that candlestick so!"



"TAKE CARE! YOU'LL DROP SPERM ON THE RUG, TIPPING THAT CANDLESTICK SO!"

Hallam had been standing, leaning against the newel post, with his own too ready temper flaming within him. But there was one tenet in the Kaye household which had been held to rigidly by all its members: the guest within the house was sacred from any discourteous word or deed. Else the boy felt he should have given his new-found relative what Cleena called "a good pie-shaped piece of his mind."

He had to wait a moment before he could say "good night" in a decent tone of voice, then swung up the staircase in the direction of his mother's room.

Amy was too much astonished to say even thus much. She righted the candlestick, amazed at the interest in rugs which Mr. Wingate displayed, and followed her brother very slowly, like one entering a dark passage wherein she might go astray.

[Pg 67]

She stopped where Hallam had, before their mother's door, which was so rarely closed against them. Even now, as she heard her children whispering behind the panel, Mrs. Kaye came out and gave them each their accustomed caress; then bade them get straight to bed, for she would be having a long talk with them in the morning, and she wanted them to be "as bright as daisies," to understand it.

"Mother, that man! He—he's so dreadful! He scolded me about the candlestick, and—and you—and he made me feel like a great baby."

"I wish he might have waited; but, no matter. Good night."

It was a very confused and troubled Amy who crept into bed a little while afterward, and she meant to lie awake and think everything out straight, but she was too sound and healthy to give up slumber for any such purpose, and in a few minutes she was asleep.

CHAPTER VI.

[Pg 68]

SETTLEMENTS.

On the following morning the guest was the first person astir at Fairacres, not even excepting

Cleena, who rose with the birds; and when she opened her kitchen door, the sight of him pacing the grass-grown driveway did not tend to put her in good humor.

But there was little danger of her breaking bounds again, in the matter of behavior. A short talk had passed between her mistress and herself, before they bade each other good night, that had not left the too devoted servant very proud of her overzeal; and she now turned to her stove to rattle off her indignation among its lids and grates. But she kept "speakin' with herself," after her odd fashion, and her tone was neither humble nor flattering.

"Arrah musha! The impudence of him! Hasn't he decency to wait till all's over 'fore he struts about that gait? But, faith, an' I'll show him one thing: that's as good a breakfast as ever he got in the old lady's time, as one hears so much tell of."

Whereupon, with this praiseworthy ambition, a calm fell upon poor Cleena's troubled spirit, and when, a couple of hours later, the family assembled in the dining room, everybody was astonished at the feast prepared; while all but the stranger knew that a week's rations had been mortgaged to furnish that one meal. However, nobody made any comment, though Mr. Wingate found in this show of luxury another explanation of the Kayes' financial straits.

[Pg 69]

"Cuthbert will not be down this morning, Archibald. I hope thee rested well. Hallam, will thee take thy father's place?"

Mrs. Kaye's manner, as she greeted her kinsman, betrayed little of what must have been her real feeling toward him, nor had her children ever seen her more composed and gentle, though Hallam noticed that she was paler than ever, and that her eyes were dull, as if she had not slept.

"It's going to be a miserable day outside," remarked the guest, a little stiffly.

"Inside, too, I fancy," answered Amy. "I hate undecided things. I like either a cheerful downpour or else sunshine. I think wobbly weather is as bad as wobbly folks—trying to a body's temper."

Mr. Wingate laughed, though rather harshly. Amy was already his favorite in that household, and he reflected that under different circumstances than those which brought him to Fairacres, he would have found her very interesting.

"The weather should not be allowed to affect one's spirits," said Mrs. Kaye.

[Pg 70]

"No, mother; I suppose not. Yet, it was so pretty here, last night; and now the leaves over the windows are all shrivelled up, while this border on the tablecloth is as crooked as can be. It all has such an afterward sort of look. Ah, it *is* raining, good and fast."

Mrs. Kaye excused herself and went to look out toward the library. The wind was howling in that direction, and she exclaimed, anxiously:—

"Cleena, go at once and see if it is doing any harm out there! That broken door and window—put something against them, if it is."

"I don't think there's any danger of harm. I've sent for a carpenter more than an hour ago," observed Mr. Wingate.

"Thee?"

For a moment there was a flash in the matron's eyes, but she did not remark further, though Hallam took up her cause with the words:—

"I suppose you meant it for kindness, but my father does not allow any one to interfere with that place. Even if it rained in, I think he would rather give his own orders."

"Probably," answered the guest, dryly, while Cleena deposited a dish of steaming waffles upon the table with such vigor as to set them all bouncing.

"Sure, mistress, you'll be takin' a few of these, why not. I never turned me finer, an' that honey's the last of the lot, three times strained, too, an' you please."

[Pg 71]

"Waffles, Cleena? Did thee take some up to the master? I am sure he would enjoy them."

"Indeed, I did that. Would I forget? So eat, to please Cleena, and to be strong for what comes."

Even Mrs. Kaye's indifference was not proof against the tempting delicacy, and doubtless the food did give her strength the better to go through a trying interview. For immediately breakfast was over, she rose, and, inviting the visitor into the old parlor, bade her children join them.

"What our cousin Archibald has to say concerns us all. I leave it to him to tell the whole story," and she sat down with Amy snuggled beside her, while Hallam stood upon his crutches at her back.

Somehow, Mr. Wingate found it a little difficult to begin, and after several attempts he put the plain question abruptly:—

"When can you leave, Salome?"

She caught her breath, and Amy felt the arm about her waist grow rigid, but she answered by another question:—

"Must thee really turn us out, Archibald?"

The plain, affectionate "thee" touched him, yet for that reason he settled himself all the more firmly in his decision.

"What has to be done would better be done at once. It is a long time, Salome, since I have had any recompense for the use of this—my property—" [Pg 72]

"Your property?" cried Hallam.

"Yes, mine. Mine it should have been by lawful inheritance, save for a rank injustice and favoritism. Mine it is now, by right of actual purchase, the purchase of my own! Your mother seems to desire that you should at last learn the whole truth, and I assure you that I have advanced more than twice the money required to buy this place, even at an inflated market value. So, lad, don't get angry or indignant. I make no statements that I cannot prove, nor can your parents deny that I notified them to vacate these premises more than two years ago."

"Mother, is that so?"

"Yes, Hallam."

"Why didn't we go, then?"

"Our cousin had a heart and did not force us."

"Why do you now, sir?"

"Because I'm tired of waiting. The case grows worse each day. I'm sick of throwing good money after bad, while, all the time, such folly as is yonder goes on," pointing toward the distant studio. "One man is as good to labor as another. Cuthbert Kaye has had money all his life; *my* money, of which I was defrauded—"

"Archibald! Beg pardon, but that is not so."

"But it is so, Salome. If you have been hoodwinked and believed false tales, it is time these youngsters learned the facts. They are Kayes, like you and me. It is honest blood, mostly, that runs in all our veins. Well then, the life they are living is not an honest life. No man has a right to more than he can pay for. Can Cuthbert—" [Pg 73]

"Archibald, thee shall leave him out of the question!" cried the wife, roused from her firm self-control. There was something so appealing in her tone that her children watched her in alarm.

"Very well. So be it. Since he is not man enough to stand by you in the trouble he has brought upon you—"

"If thee continues, we will leave the room."

"Why haven't I been able ever to meet him then? Why has he always thrust you between himself and me? If he thought because you were a woman I would forever put off the day of judgment, he has for once reckoned without his host. I tell you the end has come."

Mrs. Kaye sank back in her chair, trembling; but still her lips were closed until the angry guest had finished his speech and had walked off some of his excitement in a hasty pacing of the long room. At length he paused before her and said, more quietly:—

"There is no need of our having recourse to legal force. You should leave without being put out. That is why I came, to arrange it all to your satisfaction. You are a good woman, Salome, as good as any of your race before you, and just as big a simpleton when your affections are touched. A little more firmness on your part, a little less devotee sort of worship of a—" [Pg 74]

"Archibald, remember thee is speaking of what does not concern thee. There is no need for rudeness, nor, indeed, 'legal' violence. Had I understood, two years ago, that thee needed—needed—this old home for thyself, I would have left it then. It has, of course, been to our advantage to occupy it, but it has also been to thine. An empty house goes swift to ruin. Everything here has been well cared for, as things held in trust should be. We will leave here as soon as I can find a house somewhere to shelter us."

Mrs. Kaye rose, as if to terminate the interview; but Mr. Wingate cleared his throat and lifted his hand as if he had something further to say.

"I suppose you have thought about this many times, Salome. What are your plans?"

"They are not definite. House-hunting is the first, I suppose, since we cannot do without a roof to cover us."

"How—I can't forget that we are kinsfolk, Salome—how do you propose to live? I am a plain business man, as practical as—I mean, use common sense. There are few houses to rent in this out-of-the-way town, where everybody, except the mill folks, owns his own home,—and even some of them do. I've come into possession of a house which might suit you—'Hardscrabble.' I'll let you have it cheap."

"'Hardscrabble'! The 'Spite House'?"

[Pg 75]

"Yes."

"Oh, Archibald!"

"Exactly. I knew how it would strike you. We both know the story of the place, but our grandfather's enemy took good care to make his tenement comfortable inside, even if it was ugly as sin outside."

For a while Mrs. Kaye remained silent, debating with herself. Very soon she was able to look up and smile gratefully.

"Thee knows as well as I what a stab thee has given my pride, Archibald; but there is that saving 'common sense' in the offer, and love is stronger than pride. Tell me what rent thee will ask, and I will take the place if I can."

"Ten dollars a month."

The prompt, strictly business-like answer fairly startled its hearer. Then she smiled again.

"I have never lived anywhere save at Fairacres, thee knows. I must trust thee in the matter. I have no definite ideas about the values of houses, but I think I can pay that. I must. There is nowhere else to go. Yes, I will take it."

"It's dirt cheap, Salome. You will never think kindly of me, of course, but I'm dealing squarely, even generously by you. If 'thee'd,'" for the second time he dropped into the speech of his childhood, which his cousin Salome had always retained, and she was quick to observe this, "if thee had trusted me years ago, things might have gone better with us both. When will thee move?"

[Pg 76]

"To-day."

"To-day? There's no need for quite such haste."

"Thee said 'the sooner the better,' and I agree. Get the lease ready as soon as possible, and I will sign it. I've only one thing to ask about that: please don't have the name put as either 'Hardscrabble' or 'Spite House.' I'd like it called 'Charity House.'"

"Upon my word, Salome, you're the queerest mixture of business and sentiment that I ever met. You're as fanciful as a girl, still. But the name doesn't matter. Call the place 'Faith' and 'Hope' as well as 'Charity,' if you wish, after you get there; but I won't alter the lease which I brought along with me last night."

"Brought already, Archibald? Thee expected me to go to that place, then?"

"Under the circumstances, Salome, and, as you've just admitted, I didn't see what else you could do. I've sent 'Bony' into the village for my lawyer, because I want you should have things all straight. He'll witness our signatures to the lease, and if you'll pick out such furniture as you most especially care to have, I'll try to spare it, though the mortgage covers all."

But the speaker's glance moved so reluctantly and covetously over the antique plenishing that Mrs. Kaye promptly relieved his anxiety.

"It would be a pity to disturb these old, beloved things in their appropriate places—"

[Pg 77]

"You're right," interrupted the gentleman. "I've a better notion than that. I'll leave whatever is in 'Spite House' for your use, and not break up Fairacres at all."

"Is it still furnished, then?"

"Yes, according to old Ingraham's ideas—for hard use and no nonsense. He had a big family and nothing much but his temper to keep it on. However, if there's anything actually needed, I suppose I could advance a trifle more. It would be for your sake, only, Salome."

"Thank thee, but I hope not to run further into thy debt, Archibald, save in case of direst need. And do not think but that I fully understand and appreciate all the kindness which has permitted us to stay at Fairacres so long. In some things, as thee will one day discover, thee has mistaken and misjudged us; but in one thing I have understood and sympathized with thee, always, and with all my heart: the passionate love which a Kaye must feel for his home and all this."

There was pathos and dignity in the quiet gesture which Salome Kaye swept over the apartment that had been her own for all her life; but there was also courage and determination in her bearing as she walked out of it, leaning lightly upon Amy's shoulder, and with Hallam limping beside her. Somehow, too, Archibald Wingate did not feel quite as jubilant and successful as he had anticipated, and he welcomed, as an agreeable diversion, the approach of a buggy, conveying his friend, Lawyer Smith, to witness the lease and to give any needful advice in the matter.

[Pg 78]

"Hello, Smith. Quite a rainy day, isn't it? I've been studying that row of old pines and spruces. How do you think the avenue'd look if I was to have 'em trimmed up, say about as high as your head, from the ground? Give a better view of the old Ardsley Valley, wouldn't it?"

The lawyer stepped down from his vehicle, backward and cautiously, then turned, screwed up his eyes, and replied deliberately:—

"Well, it might; and then again it mightn't. It's taken a good many years for those branches to grow, and once they're off they can't be put back again. If I was in your place, I'd rather let

things slide easy for a spell; then—go as you please. Have you come to a settlement? Will they quit without lawing?"

"Yes, they'll quit at once. Say, woman! You, Cleena, bring me a hatchet, will you? I'll just lop off a little limb on one side, and see the effect. Hurry up!"

"Faith, I'll fetch it!" responded Cleena, loudly. But when she did so, she advanced with such a menacing gesture upon the new proprietor of her old home that he shrank back, doubtful of her intent. "Ain't it enough to break hearts, without breakin' the helpless trees your own forebears planted long by?—Aha, my fine gineral, so you're bad penny back again? Well, then, you're the handle o' time. By the way you tacked up them boughs, you'll be clever at packin'. Come by. I'll give ye a job."

[Pg 79]

Thus, partly to Lawyer Smith's caution and partly to Cleena's indignation, the fine evergreens of Fairacres owed the fact that they, for the time being, escaped mutilation.

CHAPTER VII.

[Pg 80]

THE "SPITE HOUSE" OF BAREACRE.

By nightfall it was all over; and Cleena, Hallam, and Amy, with their self-constituted bodyguard, Fayette, were gathered about a big table in the kitchen of the "Spite House," to eat a supper of bread and milk, and to discuss the events of that memorable day. Strangely enough, as Amy thought, none of them realized anything clearly except the facts of fatigue and hunger.

"Arrah musha! but the face of that lawyer body, when I tells him I was takin' the loan of his bit buggy wagon for the master an' mistress to ride to Burnside the morn, an' how as old Adam would sure send it back by a farm-hand, which he did that same. An' them two goin' off so quiet, even smilin', as if—But there, there! Have some more milk, Master Hal. It's like cream itself, so 'tis; an' that neighbor woman in the cottage yon is that friendly she'd be givin' me three pints to the quart if I'd leave her be."

"Well, dear old Adam will be glad to see them on any terms, he is so fond of father and mother. But knowing they're in such trouble, he'll have the best of everything for them to-night."

[Pg 81]

"Yes, Adam Burns is as likely as any man creature can be, which I've never been bothered with meself, me guardian angel be praised."

"Well, Cleena, I've seen you work hard before, but you did as much as ten Cleenas in one to-day."

The good woman sighed, then laughed outright. "It's been a hard row for that wicked body to hoe."

"Who, Cleena?"

"That sweet, decent kinsman o' your own. Was many an odd bit o' stuff went into the van 't he never meant should go there. The face of him when I went trampin' up the lib'y stairs, an' caught him watchin' Master Hallam packing the paint trash that he'd allowed the master might have. 'Take anything you want here, my boy,' says he. So, seein' Master Hal was working dainty an' slow, I just sweeps me arm over the whole business; an' I'm thinkin' there'll be 'tubes' a plenty for all the pictures master'll ever paint. In a fine heap, though, an' that must be your job, Master Hal, come to-morrow, to put them all tidy, as 'tis himself likes."

"I'll be glad to do it, Cleena; but in which of these old rooms am I to sleep?"

Cleena had taken a rapid survey of the dusty, musty bedchambers, and her cleanly soul revolted against her "childer" using any of them in their present condition. So for Amy she had put Mrs. Kaye's own mattress on the floor of what might be a parlor, and spread it with clean sheets; for Hallam there was in another place his father's easy lounge; and for herself and Fayette, who insisted upon staying for the night, there were "shakedown" of old, warm "comforts."

[Pg 82]

"And it's time we were all off to Noddle's Island. It's up in the mornin' early we must be. So scatter yourselves, all of ye, an' to sleep right away. Not forgettin' your prayers, as good Christians shouldn't."

"Of course not," answered Amy, drowsily; but Fayette looked as if he did not understand.

"Sure, *you'll* have to be taught then, my fine sir, an' I'll tackle that job with the rest of to-morrow's."

But when daylight broke and roused the active Cleena to begin her formidable task of scrubbing away the accumulated dirt of years there was no Fayette to be found. Dreamily, she recalled the sound of musical instruments, the shouts of voices, and the squealing of the rats that had hitherto been the tenants of "Spite House"; but which of these, if any, was answerable for the lad's absence, she could not guess.

"Well, I was mindin' to keep him busy, had he stayed; but since he's gone, there's one mouth less to feed."

It did not take the observant woman long to discover that the outlook for the comfort of "her folks" was even less by daylight than it had seemed the night before. Her heart sank, though she lost no time in useless regrets, and she did most cordially thank that "guardian angel" to whom she so constantly referred for having prevented her spending the last twenty-five dollars she possessed. This would long ago have wasted away had it not been placed in the care of that true friend of the family, Adam Burns, with whom her master and mistress had now taken refuge.

[Pg 83]

"Alanna, that's luck! I was for usin' it long syne, but the old man wouldn't leave me do it. 'No, Cleena, thee's not so young as thee was, an' thee might be wantin' it for doctor's stuff,' says he. Twenty-five dollars! That'd pay the rent an' buy flour an' tea, an' what not;" and with cheerful visions of the unlimited power of her small capital, the old servant stooped to fill her apron with the stray chips and branches the bare place afforded.

At that moment there fell upon her ears the familiar sound of Pepita and Balaam braying in concert for their breakfast.

"Now what's to feed *them* is more nor I know; yet never a doubt I doubt it would clean break the colleen's heart must she part with her neat little beast."

The braying roused Hallam and Amy, also, from a night of dreamless sleep; and as they passed out from the musty house into the crisp air of a frosty morning, they felt more cheerful than they considered was quite the proper thing, under the circumstances. Then Amy looked at her brother and laughed.

"Isn't it splendid after the rain? and isn't it funny to be here? Yesterday it seemed as if the world had come to an end, and now it seems as if it had just been made new."

[Pg 84]

"Every morn is a fresh beginning," quoted Hallam, who loved books better than his sister did.

"Let's go down to the gate, or place where a gate should be, and take a good look at our—home."

"All right. Though we've seen it at a distance, I suppose it will appear differently to us at near hand."

"And uglier. Oh, but it's horrid! *horrid!*" and with a sudden revulsion of feeling Amy buried her face in her hands and began to cry. "I hate it. I won't stay here. I will not. I'd rather go home and live in the old stable than here."

"That wouldn't have been a bad idea, only we shouldn't have been allowed."

"Who could have hindered that? Who'd want an empty stable?"

"Our cousin Archibald!" answered Hallam, with scornful emphasis. "I believe he feels as if he had a mortgage on our very souls. Indeed, he said I might sometime be able to earn enough to buy the place back, as well as pay all other debts. He said he couldn't live forever, and it was but fair he should have a few years' possession of 'his own.' He—Well, there's no use talking. I wish—I wish I were—"

"No, no! you don't! No, you don't either, Hallam Kaye! I know what you began to say, and you shall not finish. You shall not die. You shall get well and strong and do all those things he said. I'm ashamed of myself that I cried. I felt last night as if my old life were all a beautiful dream, and that I had just waked up into a real world where I had to do things for myself and for others; not have others do for me any longer."

[Pg 85]

"That was about the state of the case, I fancy."

"Well, that isn't so bad. It shouldn't be, that is; for I have such health and strength and everything. Nothing matters so much as long as we are all together."

"Nobody knows how long we shall be. I don't like these 'attacks' of father's, Amy. I'm afraid of them. It will kill him to live here."

It needed but the possibility of giving comfort to somebody to arouse all Amy's natural hopefulness, and she commanded with a shake of her forefinger:—

"Hallam Kaye, you stop it! I won't have it! If you keep it up, I shall have to—to cuff you."

"Try it!" cried the brother, already laughing at her fierce show of spirit; yet to tempt her audacity he thrust his fingers through her short curls and wagged her head playfully.

She did not resent it; she could resent nothing Hallam ever did save that morbid talk of his. She had been fighting with this spirit ever since she could remember, and their brief "tussle" over, she crept closer to him along the old stone wall and begged:—

[Pg 86]

"Cleena has tied the burros out to graze in the weeds, and that will be their breakfast, and while we're waiting for ours, I wish you'd tell me all you know about 'Spite House.' I've heard it, of course, but it's all mixed up in my mind, and I don't see just where that cousin Archibald comes in."

"Oh, he comes in easily enough. He's a descendant of old Jacob Ingraham as well as of the house of Kaye. I believe it was in this way: our great-grandfather Thomas Kaye and Jacob were brothers-in-law, and there was some trouble about money matters."

"Seems to me all the mean, hateful troubles *are* about money. I don't see why it was ever made."

"Well, they had such trouble anyway. Great-grandfather had just built Fairacres, and had spent a great deal to beautify the grounds. He was a pretty rich man, I fancy, and loved to live in a great whirl of society and entertain lots of people and all that. He was especially fond of the view from the front of the house and had cut away some of the trees for 'vistas' and 'outlooks' and 'views.' There were no mills on the Ardsley then. They came in our own grandfather's time. It was just a beautiful, shimmering river—"

"Hal, you're a poet!"

"Never," said the boy, with a blush.

"But you are. You tell things so I can just see them. I can see that shimmering river this instant, in my mind, with my eyes shut. I can see boats full of people sailing on it, and hear music and laughter and everything lovely." [Pg 87]

"Who's the poet now?"

"I'm not. But go on."

"It seems that old Mr. Ingraham thought he had been cheated by great-grandfather—"

"Likely enough he had. Else I don't see where he got all that money to do things."

"But, missy, he was *our* relative. He was a *Kaye*."

"There might be good Kayes and bad Kayes, mightn't there?"

"Amy, you're too honest for comfort. You may think a spade's a spade, but you needn't always mention it."

"Go on with the story. In a few minutes Cleena will call us to our 'frugal repast,' like the poor children in stories, and I want to hear all about this 'ruined castle' I've come to live in, I mean 'dwell,' for story-book girls—'maidens'—never do anything so commonplace as just 'live.' Hally, boy, there's a lot of humbug in this world."

"How did you find that out, Miss Experience?"

"I didn't trouble to find it, I just read it. I thought it sounded sort of nice and old, so I said it."

"Humph! Well, do you want to hear, or will you keep interrupting?"

"I do want to hear, and I probably shall interrupt. I am not blind to my own besetting sins." [Pg 88]

"Listen. Just as great-grandfather had everything fixed to his taste and was enjoying life to the utmost, old Jacob came here to this knoll that faces Fairacres—Oh, you needn't turn around to see. The trees have grown again, and the view is hidden. On this knoll, if there was anything tall, it would spoil the Fairacres' view. So Jacob built this 'Spite House.' He made it as ugly as he could, and he did everything outrageous to make great-grandfather disgusted. He named this rocky barren 'Bareacre,' and that little gully yonder he called 'Glenpolly,' because his enemy had named the beautiful ravine we know as 'Glenellen.' Polly and Ellen were the wives' names, and I've heard they grieved greatly over the quarrel. Mr. Ingraham painted huge signs with the names on them, and hung up scarecrows on poles, because he wouldn't let a tree grow here, even if it could. There are a few now, though. Look like old plum trees. My, what a home for our mother!"

Amy's face sobered again, as she regarded the ugly stone structure which still looked strong enough to defy all time, but which no lapse of years had done much to beautify. Nothing had ever thrived at Bareacre, which was, in fact, a hill of apparently solid stone, sparsely covered by the poorest of soil. The house was big, for the Ingraham family had been numerous, but it was as square and austere as the builders could make it. The roof ended exactly at the walls, which made it look, as Amy said, "like a girl with her eyelashes cut off." There were no blinds or shutters of any sort, and nothing to break the bleak winds which swept down between the hills of Ardsley, and which nipped the life of any brave green thing that tried to make a hold there. A few mullein stalks were all that flourished, and the stunted fruit trees which Hallam had noticed seemed but a pitiful parody upon the rich verdure of the elsewhere favored region. [Pg 89]

"Has nobody ever lived here since that wicked old man?"

"Oh, yes. I think so. But nobody for long, nor could anybody make it a home."

"It looks as if it had been blue, up there by the roof."

"I believe it was. I've heard that every color possible was used in painting it, so as to make it the more annoying to a person of good taste, such as great-grandfather was."

"Heigho! Well, *we've* got to live here."

"Or die. It's hopeless. I can't see a ray of light in the whole situation."

"You dear old bat, you should wear specs. I can see several rays. I'll count them off. Ray one: the ugly all-sorts-of-paint has been washed away by the weather. Ray two: the air up here is as pure as it's sharp, and there's nothing to obstruct or keep it from blowing your 'hypo' away. Ray three: [Pg 90]

there are our own darling burros already helping to 'settle' by mowing the weeds with their mouths. What a blessing is hunger, rightly utilized! And, finally, there's that worth-her-weight-in-gold Goodsoul waving her pudding-stick, which in this new, unique life of ours must mean 'breakfast.' Come along. Heigho! Who's that? Our esteemed political friend, 'Rep-Dem-Prob.' I'd forgotten him. Now, by the lofty bearing with which he ascends to our castle of discontent, I believe he's been out 'marching.'"

It was, indeed, Fayette whom they saw climbing over the rocks. He wore his oilcloth blouse and his gay helmet, and soon they could hear his rude voice singing and see the waving of his broom.

"He? Coming back again? Why, we can't keep him. We can't even 'keep' ourselves."

"Yet never a doubt I doubt he means to tarry," quoted Amy, laughing at her brother's rueful countenance.

CHAPTER VIII.

[Pg 91]

NEEDS AND HELPERS.

"Sure, I thought ye had lost yourself or been ate by the rats!" cried Cleena, as Fayette rather timidly peered in at the open kitchen door. "But all rogues is fond o' good atin', so I suppose you've come for your breakfast, eh?"

"No. I've et."

"Must ha' been up with the lark then. No, hold on. Don't go in there. They're master Hallam an' Miss Amy still, an' always will be. They eats by themselves, as the gentry should. If there's ought left when they're done, time enough for you an' me."

"I've had my breakfast, I told you."

"Didn't seem to set well on your stummick either, by the way your temper troubles ye. Are ye as ready to work as ye was yesterday?"

"Yes. What I come back for."

Cleena paused and studied the ill-shaped, vacant, though not vicious, face of the unfortunate waif. Something drew her sympathy toward him, and she pitied him for the mother whom he had never known. In the adjoining room she could hear the voices of her own "childer," with their cultured inflection and language, which was theirs by inheritance and as unconsciously as were "Bony's" harsh tones and rude speech his own.

[Pg 92]

"Arrah musha! but it's a queer world, I d'know. There's them an' there's him, an' the Lord made 'em both. Hear me, me ginerel. Take a hold o' that broom o' yours, an' show me what it's made for. If you're as clean as you're homebly, I might stand your good friend. What for no?"

Fayette had returned Cleena's cool stare with another as steady. He liked her far better and more promptly than she liked him, yet in that moment of scrutiny each had measured the other and formed a tacit partnership. "For the family," was Cleena's watchword, and it had already become the half-wit's.

Cleena went to the well, tied her clothesline to the leaky old bucket and lowered it. On the night before she had obtained a pail of spring water from the cottage at the foot of the knoll, from the same friendly neighbor who had sold her the milk. But their own well must be fixed. To her dismay she found that it was very deep, and that the bit of water which remained in the bucket when it was drawn up was quite unfit even for cleaning purposes.

This worried her. A scarcity of water was one of the few trials which she had been spared, and she could hardly have met a heavier. As she turned toward the house she saw that Fayette had carefully set out of doors the old chairs and the other movable furniture which the kitchen had contained, and that, before sweeping, he was using his broom to brush the cobwebs from the ceiling. The sight filled her with joy and amazement.

[Pg 93]

"Saints bless us! That's the first man body I ever met that had sense like that!" and she lifted up her voice in a glad summons:—

"You, Napoleon Ginerel Bonyparty, come by!"

"Before I finish here?"

"Before the wag o' dog's tail. Hurry up!"

"The wind'll blow it all over again."

"Leave it blow. Come by. Here's more trouble even nor cobwebs, avick! First need is first served."

This summoned Hallam and Amy out to see what was going on, and after learning the difficulty and peering into the depths of the old pit they offered their suggestions. Said Amy:—

"We might draw it up, bucket by bucket, and throw it away. Then I suppose it would fill with clean water, wouldn't it?"

"If we did, 'twould break all our backs an' there's more to do than empty old wells. Master Hal, what's *your* say?"

"Hmm, we might rig up some sort of machinery and stir it all up, and with chemicals we could clear it and—"

"Troth we could, if we'd a month o' Sundays to do it in an' slathers o' time an' money spoilin' to be spent." [Pg 94]

Hallam was disgusted. Already he had blamed himself for his haughty refusal of Mr. Wingate's offer, on the previous day, to send a practical man to look over the premises and "set them going," as any landlord would.

But the lad had replied, as one in authority to decide for his absent parents: "We won't trouble you, sir. What happens to us, after we leave Fairacres, is our own affair. If you get your rent, that should be sufficient for you."

After that the offer was not renewed; for Mr. Wingate was not the man to waste either money or service, and the lad's tone angered him.

Regrets were now, as always, useless, and Cleena's open disdain of Hallam's suggestion sent him limping angrily away; though Amy laughed over her own "valuable contribution to the solution of the dilemma," and by her intentional use of the longest words at hand caused Fayette to regard her with a wonderment that was ludicrous in itself.

"Well, Goodsoul, we've helped a lot. Ask our 'Rep-Dem-Prob' what his 'boys' would do."

"What for no? Sure, he's more sense nor the whole of us. Say, me gineral, what's the way out?"

Fayette colored with pride. He had an inordinate vanity, and, like most of his sort, he possessed an almost startling keenness of intelligence in some respects, as contrasted with his foolishness in others. Moreover, he had been disciplined by poverty, and had always lived among working people and, for a long time, about the carpet mills. [Pg 95]

"Well, the 'Supe's' force-pump."

"Hmm, I know, I know. But what's the 'Supe' an' his pump? Is he fish, flesh, or fowl, eh?"

"He's the 'Supe' to the mill. Ain't ye any sense?"

"No. None left after botherin' with you. What's it, Miss Amy?"

"I know. You mean Mr. Metcalf, don't you?"

"Yes."

"What would he do? How could he help us?"

"Lend me the donkey. I'll ride and tell him. All them houses—see them mill cottages, down yonder?"

"Certainly. They look very pretty from here, with all the trees about them."

"They've got wells. Once in six months the wells has to be cleared out. That's orders. Me an' another fellow goes down 'em, after the pump's drawed out all it can. We bail 'em out. I clean cisterns, too. Ain't another fellow in the village as good at a cistern as me. See, I'm slim. I can get down a man-hole 't nobody else can. Shall I go?"

"I'll ask Hallam."

Who, upon consultation, replied:—

"I suppose it's the only thing we can do, but it does go against my inclination to ask favors of anybody."

"Hal, that's silly. We must send Fayette to Mr. Metcalf, and will you write the note, or shall I?" [Pg 96]

"You, since you've seen him, personally."

"Which is the only way I could see him," laughed the girl, and ran into the house to find a sheet of paper. Then the mill boy was given his choice of the burros, to ride as messenger; and having selected Balaam, departed down the slope in high glee. When he reached the mill, and Mr. Metcalf was at liberty to see him, he began a voluble description of all that had occurred since his chance meeting with Amy in the wood; but the superintendent cut the story short.

"Now, see here, 'Bony.' This is the chance of your life. Understand? They are, I should think, the very nicest folks you ever saw. Well, treat them square. None of your monkey shines nor nonsense. Do everything you can to help them. Of course you can have the pump, though you can't carry it up to 'Hardscrabble' donkey-back. That fellow is as black as his brother, or sister, is white. They're the prettiest donkeys I ever saw. How my youngsters would like such. Well, go round to John. There's no teaming to be done this morning, and he shall take the pump there in the wagon. He'll help you too, no doubt, for a small payment."

"Say, 'Supe.'"

"Well?"

"I don't believe they've got any money. Don't look so they had a cent. Ain't it queer? With all them purty things an' the way they act an' talk. Ain't like nobody I ever saw before. Ain't never saw anybody liked each other so much. I'm goin' to stay." [Pg 97]

"Have they asked you?"

"No."

"Well, run along and get hold of John before he goes home for a nap, as he might, with nothing needed here."

Then, when Fayette had left him, Mr. Metcalf took up Amy's note and reread it.

The second perusal pleased the gentleman even more than the first. He thought that the little letter was very characteristic of the girl he had met, and he specially liked her statement that his former kindness presupposed a later one. So he stopped John, the teamster, as he was driving out of the mill yard, with the request:—

"You stay up there all day, if you can be of any use. Got your dinner with you? and the horses'? Good enough. I've heard about that family being turned out from their old home, and whether it was justly done or not doesn't alter the fact of its hardness. Lend them a hand, as if it were for me, John, and I'll make it all right with you."

"It's all right already, sir. I saw that girl, when she was down here that day; saw her take her fine little handkerchief out of her pocket and wipe that idiot's, or next door to idiot, wipe his lips as nice as if he was her own brother. Ain't one of the mill girls'd do *that*. They'd be too dainty. She wasn't, because she was quality. It always tells. Pity though that such folks have so little common sense. Now—" [Pg 98]

But Mr. Metcalf warded off any further talk of the good John, who had lived at Ardsley all his life and knew the history of the Kaye household almost better than they knew it themselves.

"I'll ask you to tell me about them another time. Just now I guess you'd better hurry to get them a decent drink of water. Hold on, 'Bony.' Ride over to the office door. I'll send a note back to Miss Kaye, and want you to carry her a little basket."

So this was the note which answered Amy's, and that proved its writer to be a gentleman, even though he had begun life a humble ash-boy in just such a mill as he now managed so ably:—

"MY DEAR MISS AMY: The kindness is wholly on your side in allowing me to serve you, and I hope you will command me in any further matter wherein I can be of use.

"I am sending the pump by John Young, our teamster, with instructions to remain under your orders for the rest of the day. You will find that 'Bony' thoroughly understands the business of well-cleaning, but you will have to restrain him from venturing into any great hazard, because, poor lad, he has not the caution to balance his daring." [Pg 99]

"I am offering, also, a little basket of fruit which came my way this morning, and which looks, I fancy, as if it wanted to be eaten by just such a girl as you.

"FAITHFULLY YOURS,

"WILLIAM METCALF."

When Amy read this note aloud to Hallam and Cleena, she did so in a proud and happy voice.

"Well, I've written letters for mother, and father, too, sometimes, but I've not had many of my own. This is. I'm going to keep it always. The very first one that has come here. Isn't he just the dearest man? Oh! I am so happy I must just sing. It's such a beautiful world, after all, and maybe we've had all our old things taken away just to teach us that *folks* are better than *things*. I feel as if I'd come out of a musty room into the open air."

"Amy Kaye! You should be ashamed of yourself. Have you no heart at all? As for musty rooms, if you can find any to beat these at 'Spite House,' you'll do well."

"I know. I'm 'bad,' of course, but come on. I'll fetch you all father's tubes and brushes that are in such a muddle, and you can sort them right near the well, and watch John fix it, and take care of Fayette; I'm going in and help Cleena, in any way I can."

Amy's cheerfulness was certainly infectious. It was also helpful to Hallam's gloomy mood that just then there should be the well and cistern cleaning, Mr. Young having discovered a cistern beneath a pile of decayed boards, at a little distance from the house. But the water in both being unfit for use, Amy bravely picked up a couple of pails and started down hill to their new [Pg 100]

neighbor's cottage.

"Wait, Amy, I'll rig up something," called the cripple; and by the aid of a rope, a barrel stave, and some wire he managed to hang the pails on either side Pepita's saddle. "So all you'll have to do will be walk up and down and make her behave," referring to Pepita's uncertain temper.

"If I had a barrel I'd better that job," said John the teamster. "I'd drive down once and get all you needed for the day."

"But there isn't any barrel that will hold water," answered the girl. "So I'll play 'Jack and Jill' with Pepita, as long as Cleena wishes. Besides, the cottage children think she's beautiful, and they are so kind they help me fill the pails each trip, as well as give us the water in them."

John wiped his brow and looked admiringly upon her. "Keep that spirit, lass, and it'll make small difference to you whether your purse is empty or full. But 'give' you the water? I should say yes. The Lord gave it to them in the first place, free as the air of heaven. Well, there'll be water to spare up here, too, soon, for we've got the pump about ready for work."

[Pg 101]

It was a long time, though, before any impression was made upon the accumulation of water in the deep well. After a while, however, less came with each draft, and it was thicker and fouler. Finally, the pump ceased to be of any use, and was drawn up and laid beside the broken curb. Then came the interesting part of the task, as well as the perilous.

Keeping an eye upon all of Fayette's movements, John had allowed him "to boss the job," partly because the lad did fully understand his business, and partly to give him pleasure. But now was need for utmost caution.

"Will you fetch me a candle?" the teamster asked Cleena; and when she had done so he fastened it to the end of the clothesline and slowly lowered it into the shaft. The flame was instantly extinguished.

"Hmm, have to wait a spell, I reckon. Might as well tackle the cistern."

"What made the candle go out? Was there a wind?" asked Amy.

"Carbonic acid gas," answered her brother.

"Huh," said Fayette, contemptuously, "'twa'n't neither. Just choke damp an' fixed air. Soon's the candle'll stay lighted, I'll go down. Cistern's the same, only wider. Got a powder here'll fix it, if it don't clear soon."

After the cistern was cleaned, and this was a much easier task than the well, Fayette returned to the curb, again lighted the candle, and lowered it. The foul and poisonous gases had mostly passed away, and the flame continued to burn as far down as the clothesline would reach.

[Pg 102]

"That's all right; I'll tackle it now."

"No, you'll not. None o' your foolhardiness here."

"Who made you boss o' me, John Young?"

"I did. I'll prevent you, if I have to hold on to you. Best leave it open till to-morrow, or longer even," said John. "I'm going to eat my dinner now. Come and have some."

"Bime-by. I'm goin' to take off my shoes. Work best when I'm barefoot."

The answer gave John no concern, for he knew this peculiarity of Fayette's; so he walked quietly away toward the old shed where he had tied his horses, to give them their food and secure his own. Before he reached them, however, he heard a loud shout, and, turning, saw the foolish boy capering about on the beam which had been laid across the top of the well, and from which the rope and bucket were still suspended.

"'Bony,' you fool, get off that! A misstep and you're gone!"

"All right, I'll get off!"

There was a wild waving of arms, a burst of derisive laughter, and "Bony" had disappeared.

CHAPTER IX.

[Pg 103]

THE WATERLOO OF BONAPARTE LAFAYETTE.

The teamster's cry of horror brought everybody to the scene. Cleena was the first to reach it and to find John standing by the mouth of the well, whitefaced and trembling.

"What's it? What's down there? What mean ye yellin' that gait? Speak, man, if ye can."

He could only point downward, while he strained his ears to catch any sound that might come from below.

Then Cleena shook him fiercely. "Speak, I tell ye! Where's the boy?"

The other still pointed down into the shaft, but he made out to say:—

"I heard him laugh, then shout, and he must have gone stark crazy."

"He down there? That poor, senseless gossoon? Where was you that you'd leave him do it?"

"I was walking—wait! I hear something."

Four white, terror-stricken faces now bent above the old well, while Cleena's arms clasped her "childer" tightly, fearing they, too, might be snatched away from her.

"Saints save us, it's bewitched! Oh, the day, the day!"

[Pg 104]

"Shut up, woman! Keep still. I hear something."

Again they stooped and listened, and Amy's keen ears reported, joyfully:—

"It's Fayette! It is, it is! It sounds as if he were speaking from the far end of a long, long tube. But he's alive, he's alive!"

"He might as well be dead. His bones must be broken, and he can't live long in such an air as that," said Hallam.

"I don't know. That he's alive at all proves that the air isn't as bad as I thought. Besides, he may not have broken any bones. He's had fearful falls, before this, and he always came out about sound. But the rope doesn't reach much more than two-thirds down. I've heard they dug this well a hundred and fifty feet deep. They had to, to reach water from top this rock."

"A hundred and fifty feet! How can we possibly reach him?"

"Not by standin' talkin'. Whisk to the cottage, Amy, an' beg the length of all the rope they have. To save a lad's life—be nimble!"

The girl was away long before Cleena finished speaking, while the latter herself darted into the house, caught off the sheets and blankets from the beds, and tore them into strips. Never wasting one motion of her strong hands, and praying ceaselessly, she tied each fresh length and tested it with all her force.

[Pg 105]

Meanwhile Amy almost flew over the space between "Spite House" and the cottage, arriving there nigh breathless; but gasping out her errand, she rushed straight to the line in the drying yard and began to tear it from its fastenings on the poles.

"You're wanting my rope, miss? Somebody in the well? Heaven help him! But wait! If it's *cleaning* the well he is, why of course he'd be down there. Who is it?"

"Fayette. Maybe you know him as 'Bony.'"

"The half-wit? Pshaw, Miss. Don't look that frightened. He's all safe, never fear. Nothing hurts him. The Lord looks after him. I'm afraid this rope won't hold, it's so old. Wait, I'll go, too. Never mind the children, they'll have to take care of themselves."

All the while she was talking the kindly woman had been rolling the line, retying it where their haste broke its worn strands, and following Amy up over the slope. Now she paused for one second to remonstrate:—

"You, Victoria, go back! There's William Gladstone trying to creep after us. Beatrice, Belinda, go home. You mustn't follow mother every time she turns her back! Go home, I tell you. Go—right—straight—back—home. My! but this *is* steep!"

A shriek, shrill and piercing as only infant lungs could utter, made even Amy stop, eager though she was to reach the well where poor "Bony" might already have breathed his last. The one backward glance she cast showed the numerous children of the house of Jones toiling industriously skyward, in their mother's footsteps. Victoria, who was "eight and should have known better," had left William Gladstone to take care of himself, with the result that, being less than two years old and rather unsteady on his legs, he had toddled up to the biggest stone in the path, tried to step over it, lost his balance, and fallen. The hill was so steep that once the fat little fellow began to roll downwards he could not stop, and the terrified outcry first showed the mother his danger.

[Pg 106]

"He'll bump his head against a rock and—"

Mrs. Jones did not finish her sentence, but faced about and ran frantically down the slope, catching up her baby and smothering it with kisses, although she had assured the little fellow, at least a dozen times that day, that "he was the very plague of her life." She had dropped the rope, and Amy caught it, then turned and ran as fast upward as her neighbor was going in the other direction. Behind Amy still followed Victoria, Beatrice, and Belinda.

"You should go back. Your little brother's hurt," shouted she.

"Yes'm. He is often," coolly replied Victoria, who could have the minor excitement of examining the baby's bruises any day, but who did not intend to lose the greater one of "a man down the well" for any commonplace home matter.

[Pg 107]

Just before she came to the crest of the knoll Amy hesitated, and stood still. It seemed to her she could not go on and face the possible, even probable, tragedy at the top, and into the midst of her awestruck waiting there was hurled this startling question:—

"Say, miss, where do you s'pose you'll have the funeral? May I come?"

"Ugh! Oh, you horrid little thing!"

Victoria appeared so amazed at the effect of her inquiry that she stared back into Amy's face, wide-eyed and open-mouthed.

"Wh-h—why!"

"I shouldn't have said that. But you go right straight back home. Your mother wants you. I don't. Oh, dear! How could you say it?"

"Why, 'cause I like to go to funerals. I go to every one Ma does. She's got a real nice 'funeral dress,' an' so have I."

Amy fled. She had never seen anything like little Victoria, and she was so indignant that she almost forgot her dread of what might lie before her. She reached the group about the well, who were now utterly silent, and seemed to be watching with more astonishment than terror something happening within it.

Amy, also, stretched her neck to see, though she shut her eyes, and this naturally prevented; nor did she open them till she felt Cleena clutch the skirt of her frock and heard her exclaim:— [Pg 108]

"Faith, but he's the biggest monkey out o' the Zoo! Arrah musha! I'll teach him scaring folks out o' their wits, an' wastin' good bedclothes on such havers! Huh!"

For this was the marvel that now presented. Poor, silly Fayette, looking more foolish and grotesque than ever, climbing upwards into the daylight, blinking and sputtering, his back against the stones of one side the shaft, his feet against the other, his hands clutching, pulling; both feet and hands almost prehensile, like the creature's to which Cleena had likened him, yet safe, unbruised, and only mud-splashed and laughing.

With a final, agile movement he reached the top, threw his arms about the beam, and leaped to the ground beside them. Then he laughed again, hilariously, uproariously, and not for long.

In Cleena Keegan's indignant soul a plan had been rapidly forming.

"So you'd be givin' us all the terrors, would ye, avick? Sure, a taste o' the same medicine's good for the doctor as his patient. I'll just give ye a try of it, an' see what ye say. Hmm, them sheets might ha' lasted for years, so they might; an' them blankets, my heart!"

Before anybody, least of all the astonished "Bony," could comprehend what she would be about, Cleena had tripped and thrown the lad to the ground. She was more powerful than even his boasted muscle, and he quite unprepared for what she meant to do. The life-line made from her cherished bedclothing was twisted about his wet shoulders like a flash. Yet there seemed nothing violent nor vindictive as she rolled him over and over, wisely winding and binding first his hands and feet. After that the punishment she administered was but a question of endurance on her part, and the length of the line. [Pg 109]

"There, you blatherskite! What's your guardian angel thinkin' of ye the now, you poor, ignorant, heathen gossoon? Well for ye that old Cleena has met up with ye to beat some bits o' sense into your idle pate. Tight, is it? Well, not so tight as the bands o' me heart when I looked to see ye brought up to me dead. 'Twon't hurt. Lie there an' rest."

Cleena finished her harangue and her task together. After that she stood up straight and strong, and regarded the teamster with a questioning eye.

"Is it true, what he says, that he's nor kith nor kin, hereabouts?"

"I guess it's true," answered John, laughing at the ludicrous appearance of Fayette upon the ground. "He was born in the poorhouse, an' I've heard his mother died. His father had before then, I know. I used—"

Cleena was in no mood for long stories, and she foresaw that one was imminent. She interrupted without ceremony— [Pg 110]

"So, if I take him in hand to train him a bit, what for no? There'll be no one botherin' an' interferin', is it?"

"I guess there won't anybody worry about 'Bony.' He's right handy around the mill, an' he does odd jobs for a many people; but if you want him, I 'low you can have him 'for a song.'"

"I'll have no song singin', not I, nor from him. But if I don't make a smart, decent lad where there lies a fool, my name isn't Cleena Keegan, the day. Now what's about the well?"

"That's what I want to know, Cleena," cried Amy. "How did he, could he, fall into it and climb out of it alive?"

"Easier than you think, miss. He slid down the rope as far as it went, I suppose, then caught his

feet in the stones of the sides, then his hands, and went down just as he came up. He didn't go into the water in the bottom, of course; but he's proved that the well is safe enough, and to-morrow morning he ought to be made to go down, properly fixed, with a rope around his waist and the tackle for bailing it out. It'll be a job, then, even after to-day's beginning. But I'll tell the boss about it, and I don't doubt he'll send the other man that helps 'Bony' in the mill village, and get things right this time. What say, boy? Think you'll take matters a little soberer to-morrow, if I come back to help?"

[Pg 111]

Fayette lay with closed eyes and made no answer, but Cleena spoke for him, and as one in authority:—

"Faith an' he will. An' I'm thankin' ye, sir, for all ye've done the day. Sure, by this hour to-morrow, we should begin to see daylight 'twixt the dirt."

"I 'low you will. You're a master scrubber, and no mistake. Well, good-by. Anything I can do for you village way?"

"I'm beholden to you, sir, an' so are my folks, but there's not. I'm for sending the childer down on their donkeys to see how fares the mistress an' master; an' they'll fetch back what's lackin' o' food an' so on, when they come. It's hungerin' sore will the sweet lady be for a sight of her own."

"Oh, Cleena, is that so? May we go? But—that will leave you quite alone," said Amy.

Hallam smiled. "She'll not be so very much alone, after all, dear," and he nodded significantly toward the still apparently sleeping Fayette.

Then they went away to saddle the burros, and after having received a mysterious message which they were to deliver to Adam Burn, to the effect that "he'll know what to send o' them things in his box."

"And it's as clear as the sunshine just what you are asking, dear old Goodsoul. That Friend Adam shall give us your dollars out of his box. You transparent old pretender! Well, never mind, Scrubbub. Some day our ships will come home, and then—you shall live in lavender," said Amy, hugging the faithful woman, and smiling, though tears of gratitude were in her dark eyes.

[Pg 112]

Which eyes, happening to look downward, saw Fayette's own half open, and watching this little affectionate by-play with deep interest. No sooner, however, did he perceive that Amy had discovered this fact than his lids went down with a snap.

"Ah, ha, Fayette! I saw you. I'm sorry for you, but just you tell Goodsoul, here, that you'll remember not to shame your 'guardian angel' any more, and she'll let you up. I know her. Her heart's made of honey and sugar, and everything soft and sticky. I believe she's caught you in it, now, bad as you are, and if she has, you'll never get quite clear of her love and too demonstrative kindness."

Then she cried to Hallam, who was limping toward the tethered burros: "Now for a race. These dear little beasties would trot a good pace if they realized they were on the road to mother and father and Friend Adam Burn's big oat-bin!"

As they passed through the gateless entrance to "Bareacre," Hallam turned, and with something of Amy's cheerfulness waved his hand to Cleena.

"We'll be back before dark, Goodsoul. Don't keep that lad tied any longer. Don't."

[Pg 113]

"Arrah musha! Can't I do what I will with me own? There's somewhat to pass 'twixt him an' me afore he gets free o' them bonds."

Evidently, there was; nor was she sorry to see all go and leave her alone with Fayette. Of what occurred during their brief absence at the Clove, nobody ever heard; but when the brother and sister rode up the slope, just as the evening fell, Fayette appeared to meet them and take their burros for them. His manner was subdued and gentle, and on his homely face was a look of exceeding peace.

Amy nudged Hallam mischievously. "Another lull before another storm, isn't it?"

Hallam regarded the half-wit critically. "No. But I think he's 'met his Waterloo.'"

"Oh, is that what we are to call her in future? She's already as many names as a Spanish princess." Then she lifted her voice to summon Cleena.

"Heigho, 'Waterloo!' Father and mother are doing finely, and send love, and dear old Adam sent something much more substantial, but not what you asked for. Just plain beefsteak and potatoes, and a jolly chicken pie that's in a basket on Hallam's crutch. Those crutches are the handiest things!"

"Faith, so they be. An' there's a fire out of some wood the cottage woman sent, an' the steak'll broil while the taties roast, like the whisk of a squirrel in the tree."

[Pg 114]

So "Waterloo" became another of good Cleena's "love names." For it's ever the tone and not the words that makes a sweet sound in one's ears, and the woman's heart thrilled, and her weary shoulders lifted because of the love which sang through Amy's innocent jest.

CHAPTER X.

[Pg 115]

HOME-MAKING.

For one whole week the artist and his wife remained at the Clove. During that time "Spite House" had undergone the most thorough cleaning and overhauling of its existence. The walls had been scraped of the ancient and discolored whitewash that covered them, and a fresh coat of sweet-smelling lime applied.

"It's like a new-mown field, I think," said Amy, on the day that this whitewashing had taken place, to Fayette who was artisan in chief—always under Cleena's orders.

"An' I must be the daisy that grows in it," he returned, catching a glimpse of his lime-splashed face in the tiny pocket mirror he always carried.

"A whole bunch of daisies, indeed. But isn't it jolly? I never did so much hard work in my life; my hands are all blistered and sore, my feet ache—whew! And I never, never was so happy."

Fayette paused midway to the shed, which he had repaired with bits of boards, begged or offered in various sources. The whitewash brush over his shoulder dripped a milky fluid upon his bared head, and occasionally a drop trickled as far as the corner of his capacious mouth.

[Pg 116]

But he minded nothing so trivial as this, and he stared at Amy in the same wonderment with which he had regarded her from the beginning of their acquaintance. She also paused and returned his gaze with an amused scrutiny.

"Fayette, that stare of yours is getting chronic. I wish you'd give it up. Everything I do or say seems to astonish you. What's the matter with me? Am I not like other girls? You must know many down at the mill."

"No, you ain't."

"How different? I'd really like to know."

"Ain't seen you cry once,—or not more 'n once," he corrected truthfully. "An' you left all them things up there, an' the trees, an' the posies, an' everything like that way."

For one moment Amy's breast heaved and her voice choked. Then she jerked her head in a fashion she had when she wished to throw aside unpleasant things and replied:—

"What would be the use of crying? If it would bring them all back, I'd cry a bath-tub full. But it won't. Thinking about it only makes it worse. *It had to be*, and in some ways I'm thankful it did. It was all unreal and dreamlike up there. I knew nothing about the sorrows and hardships in the real world. But how I am talking! I wonder, do you understand at all what I have said?"

[Pg 117]

"I couldn't help cryin' when the bluebird's nest fell an' smashed all the eggs," remarked Fayette, whimpering at the recollection. His words were "like a bit of blue sky, showing through a cloud," as the girl often expressed it, when the untaught lad revealed something of his intense love of nature, so strongly in contrast to his otherwise limited intelligence.

"Well, we must forget what's past and go to work. I'll tether the burros out of the roadside while you clean up their shed; and when they come back to find it all sweet and white, like Pepita herself, they'll be as pleased as Punch. Wonder we never thought of having the old stable at Fairacres whitewashed."

"Didn't have me, then," answered the lad.

"Fayette, you're as vain as a peacock. You always say 'ME' as if it were spelled with the biggest kind of capital letters."

"Do I? Hmm," responded Fayette, with a vacant smile.

Then Amy went into the house where Hallam and Cleena were arguing about what rooms should be arranged for the personal use of master and mistress, because Hallam thought his father's likes and habits should take precedence of all others.

During this time of separation from him, the son had grown to think of his parent as a whimsical invalid, only. Oddly enough, with his own physical infirmity, he had come to look upon any bodily weakness of other lads or men as something almost degrading. He had always felt himself disgraced by his own lameness. It was this which had given him so bitter and distorted an outlook upon life, and involuntarily there had crept into his love for his father a feeling of contempt as well.

[Pg 118]

Something of this showed in his talk with his sister, over this selection of rooms, and shocked her. Then, with loyal indignation she proceeded to enlighten him as to her own view of the subject.

"Now, see here, Hallam Kaye. I don't believe, I can't believe, and I never will believe that from being a brilliant scholar and a wonderfully talented artist my darling father has suddenly become

a—a—the sickly, selfish man you seem to imagine."

"Amy! I never said that. I never thought it. I only remember that he has always had the best of everything, and I supposed he always should."

The tears of excited protest rushed into her eyes, but she dashed them away. "Queer, I never cry, hardly ever, unless I'm mad. I am mad at you, Hal Kaye, right straight clear through. You wait and see how father is, after this trouble. All his life he has been petted by mother, who adores him; and that not too agreeable cousin Archibald said the truth about his having had so easy a path all his life. I tell you it isn't for his children to sit here in judgment upon him, nor criticise anything he does; but one thing I believe, he's had a good hard waking up. He hasn't realized the truth. How should he? Mother has always smiled and smiled and seen to everything. He was a genius. He was never to be disturbed. He never has been. Not till now. Now he has been tumbled off his cushions whack! and presently he'll get up—all right."

[Pg 119]

"Whe-e-ew! You don't mince matters in speaking of your relatives, do you, sweet sister?"

"Not a bit. Just you wait. All the histories we've ever read, all the tales we've ever heard, of gentlemen and gentlewomen, 'aristocrats,' who have had to suffer anything dreadful, show that they have borne the troubles as no meaner person could. The good there is in being of 'family,' it seems to me, is the self-respect that holds us upright, no matter what blows are dealt."

Again Hallam blew a long note. But he looked at his excited little sister with a new admiration.

"Upon my word, Amy, my dear, you are positively eloquent. Who knows but you may one day take to the 'stump,' become a public orator, and lecture, to fill the coffers of that 'family' of which you are so proud."

"No, thank you. I don't need to go abroad to lecture. I find enough subjects right in my own household. Between you and 'Bony' and Miss Scrubbub my life's a burden to me. Now hear me, both of you; for in the language of 'Bonaparty General Lafayette,' 'there ain't none o' ye got no sense 'cept me,' and 'me' says: Fix up the north chamber for a studio. Put all father's things in there. Fix the middle room, which faces east and the sunrise, for a bedroom; and this warm southwestern one for a private sitting room, for mother darling, where she can retreat to think upon her husband's greatness and her children's folly; and where the sweet blessed thing will never be alone one single minute, unless every other member of the family is sound asleep. So that's for the 'retreating' of Friend Salome Kaye. Oh, that she were here this minute! that I could hug the heart right out of her! Fly around, Amy, 'an' set the house to one side,' à la Friend Adam's old housekeeper."

[Pg 120]

It was wonderful what four pairs of arms could accomplish when love actuated them. "Spite House" had seemed hopelessly bare and dirty when the little household first entered it, but it was far from that by the end of a week's stay. Bare and bleak and unadorned it was still, and the surroundings seemed to forbid that it would ever be any better. But there was not an inch of its surface, outside or in, that had not been cleaned and polished, by scrubbing or whitewash brush. Even the moss-grown roof had been swept by Fayette, standing barefooted and unsupported on the sloping shingles, while he vigorously attacked them. To Hallam this seemed a desecration. The moss had been the one redeeming feature of the roof's ugliness.

"Saints save us! If we leave go that muck up yon, it'll be like me dressin' for mass an' no rackin' down me hair, so it would. No, Master Hal, if riches we can't have, cleanness we can. An' that's aye more pleasin' to God."

[Pg 121]

The plain, strong furniture which had been in the house had been placed to best advantage; and in the parents' rooms above, as well as the one family living room below, were gathered all that had been brought from dear Fairacres.

A load of wood and another of coal, which Cleena supposed had been sent by Friend Adam and paid for with her money, gave a comfortable look to the woodshed, and in the storeroom was a bag of flour, a side of bacon, a fair supply of vegetables, and a barrel of apples. These the village grocer's lad had brought in his delivery wagon, and it was useless to ask him by whose order. Since they were needed, however, it was well to take them in and to consider them as belonging with the wood and coal.

Finally, the Saturday afternoon arrived on which Hallam and Amy were to go to the Clove, to pass First Day with Adam Burn and their parents, returning before nightfall with the latter, to begin their reunited family life.

Dressed in their freshest clothes, upon Balaam and Pepita, groomed by the willing hands of Fayette, they journeyed gayly down the slope over the familiar road, eager for their visit and the warm welcome awaiting them.

[Pg 122]

"Do you know, Amy, it's queer that we've never been about alone much, even on these country roads, till now? Losing our home seems to have broken down ever so many restrictions."

"Well, don't you like it? Doesn't it make you feel freer and healthier?"

"Maybe. I'm not enthusiastic over our poverty. I'd be glad enough to go back to Fairacres."

"So would I, if we could live there honestly. I wouldn't go, not for one day, if I could help it, to live in debt as we did."

"Aren't we living in debt just the same now, and much more uncomfortably?"

"I suppose so; though it's different. This time it isn't going to last, and we haven't shut our eyes to it."

"Why isn't it going to last? How can we stop it? I see nothing ahead except starvation."

"Hallam Kaye, the very first thing you ought to learn is to be cheerful. You don't want to be a dead weight on anybody, do you? Well, you will be if you can't look ahead at all to anything bright. You and I are going to work and mend the family fortunes. Then we're going back to Fairacres and do all the good we can with the money we've earned."

"If I were sound—"

"And sensible, you'd race me again to the gate of the Clove."

[Pg 123]

Burnside-in-the-Clove was a bonny place. The "burn," from which the farm took its name almost as much as from the family which had dwelt there for generations, ran through the velvet lawn and was spanned by a rustic bridge where the well kept driveway curved toward the roomy house.

"Oh! it's so lovely here. The many, many windows, each more cheery and inviting than its neighbor; the old-fashioned door, opened almost all the time; the hammocks, the benches, the flowers, the cool, sweet dairy—this is a *home*. I guess I'll make ours here instead of at Fairacres, after all," laughed Amy, as they paced sedately over the gravel, the better to enjoy the scene, and now that they had arrived, in no such haste for the meeting with their people.

"I like to go slowly now, don't you, Hal? Because that makes the pleasure 'long-drawn out' and all the sweeter. In a minute mother's face will be in the doorway, with father looking over her shoulder. Friend Adam, blessed man, will hobble after, if he is not too lame; and then we shall jump off and the 'man' will take the burros, and we will go in and hug everybody all round, and eat the biggest kind of a supper—living on dry bread and milk two meals a day can give an appetite! And then one of dear old Adam's 'Spirit' talks; and bed and sleep, and breakfast and meeting, and—"

"'Spite House'!"

[Pg 124]

"No, Hallam, truly not. Our mother couldn't live in such a place. To-morrow a new life will begin on the barren knoll. 'Charity House' she will have it, and wherever our mother goes, softness and kindness and loveliness are sure to follow."

"Yes, that is so," answered the cripple, thoughtfully. "Well, hear me, Amy. I guess I have been about as much of a wet blanket as I could be, but I'm going to try my very hardest to make things easy for father and mother. Just now, as we rode down the valley into all this peace and quiet, I seemed to see myself exactly as I am. Heigho! but look how green the grass is still, late in the year as it is, and how beautiful the vines on the stone walls. The maples are like a golden glory. My father must have been wonderfully soothed by so much loveliness about him, though he's going to feel it all the—"

"Take care, Sir Optimist, that is to be. You're taking the wrong turn, comrade. Come away from the down to 'has been,' and climb to 'will be,' short metre."

It was all as they said. The mother's gentle face in the doorway, looking rested and less faded for the week passed in the society of a simple, noble man; the father's gay and debonair, as Amy remembered it—how long ago, was it? And last of all Friend Adam, in gray attire, his broadbrim crowning his snowy hair, his expression one of childlike happiness and freedom from care.

[Pg 125]

He welcomed them both with all heartiness, but Amy was dearest. She had always been, perhaps because she bore the name of his long dead wife, and had always seemed to stand as a child to his childless life.

So after the fine supper was over, while before a blazing fire in another room Mr. and Mrs. Kaye discussed with Hallam all the events of the past week, Amy and the old man who had lived for more than eighty years a blameless, helpful life sat by a window in another place and looked out into the moonlight saying little, but enjoying all.

"Dear father Adam, shall I tell thee"—for with him she always drifted into the sweet speech which was hers by birthright and his for all his life—"shall I tell thee how it seems to me, as if thee had learned every single lesson life and God has had to teach. Thee has had poverty and sorrow, and endured the wrong that others have done thee. Thee has seen thy kindred go away and leave thee alone. It is just like a good soldier who has been in a thick fight and a sailor who has swam in deep waters, but has come out safe on the other side. Thee is so calm and happy, like Mrs. Jones's little Belinda, who sits in the sun and sings and croons to herself, with never a plaything or anything good about her except her own serene happiness. Isn't it?"

"Maybe, child. It may be. It should be, certainly. There should be no care in either extreme of life. *Both ends are so close to the Father's house.*

[Pg 126]

"Thee is right though, about the middle of life, little Amy. It is a time of struggle and rebuff."

"But to-night it seems as if it could never have been so with thee. Tell me, father Adam, how thee has kept thyself so simple and good."

"Nay, little one, not that. Simple, indeed, but not good. There is none good but One. Yet there are certain things that help. I'll tell thee what has helped me most, that is, in my daily life in the world, from which we can never escape while the heart beats."

The dear old man rose, limped toward an ancient secretary, and took from it a small book. Just an ordinary account book, ruled for the keeping of small affairs, but arranged with every page inscribed by the trembling fingers of this all-thoughtful friend.

"I have been thinking what a muddle it would be to thee, Amy, and I fixed this for thee. On one side is the debt and the other side the credit. Thee will have to keep the reckonings for thy family, I foresee; for thee is practical. Look. Is the light sufficient?"

Amy held the little volume so that the rays of the harvest moon fell clearly over them, and the old, quaint script was as legible as copperplate. She questioned, and he explained just how the book should be kept, and she found his "system" exceeding plain and direct, as was everything about him. But there were two legends inscribed upon the covers which had little in common with the figuring to be done between them,—or so Amy thought; and when she asked him what they meant, he quietly explained:—

[Pg 127]

"They have been my rules of life, Amy, and I think it would be well for thee if thee also adopted them. They are short and easy to remember, but they cover all. 'Simplicity, Sincerity, Sympathy,' on the front page; and on the last, when the first rule seems sometimes to fail and the heart needs cheer, there is this other: 'Love is all powerful.'"

"Thank thee, dear Adam, so much. Not only for the book and the help it will be, but for the 'Rules' and—for thyself. I will make them mine, and thee shall tell me if I am succeeding. Now, I know thee is sitting up beyond thy time. I'll help thee to the living room and then to thy own."

Nor was Amy ever to forget that peaceful hour with this ripe old Christian; and she never again sat in the rays of the harvest moon without recalling the lessons she learned that night.

CHAPTER XI.

[Pg 128]

THE YOUNG OLD MAN AND THE OLD YOUNG GIRL.

It seemed to Amy that she had never remembered so lovely a First Day as that one at Burnside Farm. Things happened just as she had foretold. Mrs. Kaye and Adam went to meeting in the little phaeton into which it was so easy for him to climb, and Hallam and she rode beside it; for "Old Shingleside," as the meeting-house was called, was at some distance from the Clove. It crowned a wooded hill-top, and behind it lay the peaceful burying-ground, with its rows of modest tombstones and wider rows of grass-covered, unmarked mounds.

The windows of the meeting-house were all open, and the mild air came in and warmed them; for as yet the plain box stoves held no blazing logs within, and the rows of old-time foot-stoves reposed securely upon their tops. Later, when the weather turned, these little wood-rimmed, perforated tin boxes would be filled with coals from the fire and placed beneath the feet of the elderly folk who came to worship.

The girl looked into her mother's face and found it beaming with the still delight of one whose heart was deeply moved. She had always been a member of this simple congregation, but of late years Salome Kaye had been obliged to forego the pleasure of gathering with it. The distance from Fairacres was too great for her to walk, and it was long since the horses and carriages that had once filled Fairacres stables had disappeared.

[Pg 129]

Hallam, also, from his place on the men's side, saw the joy in the face he loved, and thought:—

"I wish mother would consent to ride one of the burros to meeting, then she could come as often as she wished. But she doesn't think it decorous. Well, I'm glad she's having the comfort to-day; but what is Friend Adam saying? It sounds like a farewell."

He shot a startled glance across to Amy, among the women, and she responded. Then both regarded Adam anxiously. He stood in the speaker's place, where he was always found in meeting time. His body swayed gently back and forth, though his hands rested upon his cane as if he needed its support. His voice fell into the rhythmic measure to which they were accustomed whenever he became the mouthpiece of the Spirit, but his words were as of one who departs for a distant country and wishes many things to be remembered.

His message was brief, yet delivered with all the fire and eloquence of youth; but when he had finished and cast his eyes about him, something like a sob burst from his withered lips:—

"It's so queer. He looks so happy and yet so sad. Well, he's giving the hand of greeting to his neighbor, and so meeting's over."

[Pg 130]

There was no trace of sadness now. In the friendly hand-shaking that became general was, as Amy had seen, the signal for the closing of the meeting, whereupon old neighbors and friends fell promptly to giving and receiving news of mutual welfare or trouble, as the case might be; and

after a while there was a driving away of vehicles, the nods and signals of gray bonnets and broad brims, until the while party from the Clove were the very last left lingering on the grass before the steps.

"Well, it's been a good day, Salome. And now the Word comes: 'For here we have no continuing city, but seek one to come.'"

The old man's eyes fixed themselves earnestly upon the weather-beaten structure; then with a bright smile he turned away and climbed into the phaeton which Amy had brought.

Old Fanny mare trotted homeward at an almost giddy pace, and the burros did their utmost to keep up with her, though their chronic laziness overcame them at times, and they fell behind. After which Hallam and Amy would prod their indolent beasts till they had "made a spurt and caught up."

"No use, children," laughed Adam Burn. "Fanny is a well-trained 'Quaker.' She knows meeting days as well as I do, and she never fails to go there as slowly as she returns swiftly. She thinks, if horses think, and I think they think—doesn't thee think so, Amy? She thinks she has done her duty, and her conscience is as clear as her stomach is empty. On meeting days she has always an extra feed. That's why she spins along like this."

[Pg 131]

He was very jolly, and as full of fun as Amy herself. They found Mr. Kaye pacing the driveway, waiting for them, and as eager for his dinner as Fanny for hers.

They were soon gathered about the table, and again old Adam's jest was the readiest, his cheerfulness the most contagious, and his suggestions the most practical.

"I advise thee, Cuthbert, to have a lot of good soil drawn up and spread over the top of Bareacre knoll. Thee can have the use of the team here till—for some time. There is plenty of muck in the hollow, and I'd be glad to have it cleared out. Then thee must sow grass, or grain and grass mixed, and Salome can have as many roots and cuttings of the green things here as she wishes. Get them all in this autumn. By another spring they will begin to grow, and a little greenery will transform the place."

Mrs. Kaye thanked him, but Amy looked up from her dish of rice pudding and smiled.

"Thee isn't helping us to keep the rule of 'don't run in debt' that thee told me was so good."

"Cuthbert and I will settle that. Eat thy pudding, child." But he shook his head at her so merrily she did not mind the rebuff.

[Pg 132]

After dinner came the big carryall, with its back part loaded so that the springs touched, and with the "man" upon the front seat, ready to drive the Kayes to their new home.

"Why, Adam, dear old friend, this is too much; it really is. I cannot let thee do it," protested Mrs. Kaye, astonished at the sight. For there were vegetables of every sort that grew at Burnside, with hams and bacon, some very lively chickens, and baskets heaped with the grapes and pears for which the Clove was famous.

"Too much, Salome? I think not. Not judging by the samples of appetites I've seen this noon. Say nothing. Thee knows how gladly I give it, and would give much more. Here, Amy, is a little letter for thee. I wish thee to keep it without reading until—" he hesitated, looked at her gravely, and finished his sentence—"until thy own heart tells thee that the right time is come. For Hallam, too, there is a bit of writing, and that he may read at any time he chooses."

"That's right now, then," laughed the lad, and eagerly tore the sealed envelope.

Adam Burn winced a little at the ragged edge this made on the paper, for he was a careful person and hated slovenliness. But he could not refrain a smile as he saw the expression of disappointment growing upon Hallam's face, where he sat upon black Balaam, his crutches crossed before him, looking down at the open sheet he had found. The envelope dropped to the ground, and Amy picked it up; but her brother did not show her the message he had received, and she was puzzled to hear their old friend say:—

[Pg 133]

"The truth which I have written there is better for thee than a fortune, Hallam."

"It may be, but, under the circumstances, I'd rather have the fortune."

"Thee'll find it, lad, never fear. Thee'll find it."

Amy thrust the envelope into her pocket, along with the letter Adam had given her, and a moment later they all passed out of the yard, and turned toward the knoll of Bareacre. The last glimpse they had of their friend showed him standing in the sunshine, leaning upon his cane, and gazing after them as they vanished from his sight.

"There is something different about that blessed old man to-day," said Amy to Hallam, riding with him beside the carryall.

"Well, I suppose it makes him feel badly to know we are not going back to Fairacres. He always does feel other people's troubles more than his own."

"What was in your letter, Hal?"

"Humph! It couldn't be called a letter. From anybody else I would have thought it insulting."

"Not from him, dear. He couldn't insult anybody. He'd not have the heart to do it. Do you mind telling?" [Pg 134]

"Not a bit. I dare say you could take example by it too. For it was a sort of sermon in few words, —'The perfection of a man is the stature of his soul.' That's all."

"I don't see yet just what it means, but I think it is that you shouldn't mind being lame. That you should let your soul grow so big you would forget your poor legs, and other folks would forget them too."

Nothing more was said, and even Amy felt that they had had enough of "sermons" for one day, and it was a relief to the thoughtfulness upon them all to reach Bareacre, and to see Cleena, with Fayette beside her, waiting to welcome them.

"Hal, isn't it odd? The poorer we are the more folks we have. Fayette means to live there with us, and so, it seems, do all the little Joneses. My! Who is that?"

"A scarecrow, I should think. Nobody I ever saw before."

Seated upon a rocking-chair which she had herself brought out from the house was a young girl of about Amy's age, though from her dress and manner she might have been at least several years older. Amy caught a vision of something very gay and brilliant, rivalling the forests upon the hillsides in variety of tint, but never in their harmony.

"Whew! Whoever she is she makes my eyes ache; and what a picture for father to see, the first at his new threshold!" [Pg 135]

Yet apparently without noticing anything unpleasing, Mr. Kaye assisted his wife from the carryall and walked with her to where the stranger still sat and rocked. She did not rise at their approach, and returned the courteous greeting of the master and mistress of the house with the barest of nods.

"How do? I come to pay a call."

But not upon them. For the first time in their lives the artist and his lovely wife were relegated by this self-possessed young person to the land of "old folks," in whom she felt no interest.

With a twinkle in his eye that met an answering one in hers, the gentleman handed Mrs. Kaye on toward the eager Cleena, and turned to his children:—

"My dears, a visitor for you, I think."

So Amy and Hallam rode up and dismounted, while the former went forward slowly, smiling a welcome, yet feeling oddly disconcerted before this unknown girl.

"I'm Gwendolyn Jones. Ma said it wasn't no more 'n friendly to come an' call. I don't have no time 'cept Sunday an' Saturday-half. Then I generally go to Wallburg to do my shopping. It's such a trouble, shopping is, ain't it?"

"I don't know. I never did any," answered Amy, simply. She was amused by Gwendolyn, but regretful that the visit had been timed just then. She had counted upon showing the interior of the new home to her parents, with all the best features accented, and now she must leave them to see things for themselves. Besides, she was conscious that she had herself been noticed only in the slightest degree by this maiden whose big brown eyes were fixed upon Hallam with a steady gaze that annoyed him exceedingly. He was always more conscious of his lameness in the presence of a stranger, and the people he had met, heretofore, had been so well bred that beyond the first involuntary surprise at his condition they had ignored it entirely. [Pg 136]

To his amazement Gwendolyn exclaimed:—

"So you're the lame fellow, are you? Well now, you don't look it, not above your waist. You look real likely in your face, and your shoulders is broader than Lionel Percival's. He's considered well growed, too."

"Is he?" asked poor Hallam, understanding that some sort of reply was expected.

"Yes; 'Bony' feels real sot up, don't he, taking care of them donkeys? Oh, I tell you, 'Bony' is a case."

"Is he?" again feebly ejaculated Hallam. He looked helplessly toward Amy, but she was disappearing indoors, too eager to be with her parents to loiter with this unprepossessing guest.

"Yes, he's telling all over the mill, and village too, how that he belongs to your folks now. He's going to live here, ain't he?" [Pg 137]

"He may be. It will be just as Cleena wishes, I fancy. She is the one who has taken him in charge."

"That's the work girl, ain't it?"

To the young Kayes and their parents their faithful servant had never been anything save just "Cleena." Her position in their family was as assured as their own, and that she might be thought a "work girl" by others, was a novel idea to the lad. It gave him something natural to think about;

and he stood leaning on his crutches, with a smile upon his face, looking down upon the girl in the rocking-chair, chewing gum and swaying so composedly.

"Why, yes; I suppose she is. She certainly works, and all the time. But I should hardly call her a 'girl.'"

"Say, you must be tired, standing so long. Take this chair. I'll step in and get another."

Again Hallam smiled. The girl, in her ignorant kindness of heart, had broken a minor law of that courtesy in which he had been educated. She had offered him the chair in which she had herself been sitting, instead of the fresh one she meant to get. But he declined both, saying:—

"Please don't trouble. I can easily bring one for myself."

Because she was curious to see how he would do this, she watched him and sat still. Now he was quite able to wait upon himself in most ways, and handled his crutches so deftly that they often seemed to Amy, as to him, "but an extra pair" of feet or hands, as the case might be. [Pg 138]

So he swung himself into the house and out again, once more looking for his sister, and hearing her voice above stairs explaining, exhibiting, and regretting:—

"Isn't it too bad, mother, that this young lady should have come just now? Hal has worked so hard and done so much. Anyway, father, you must not, indeed you must not, go into your studio till he can take you there. It would be such a disappointment, for he's arranged and rearranged till I'm sure even your fine taste will be pleased."

He lingered a moment to catch the answer, and it filled his foreboding soul with great content.

"It is all very excellent thus far, dear, and we'll surely leave the studio for him to show. I had no idea you could so transform this barn of a place. From the outside it was ugliness itself, but you have all done wonders. We shall be very happy here."

"Can that really be father speaking? and we feared he would be utterly crushed. Amy was right. Blood tells. And there's something better even than blood to help him now. That's love. Dear old Adam was right, too: so long as we have each other we can be happy."

Then he caught up a light chair under his arm and swung himself back to play knight-errant to this unknown damsel. [Pg 139]

She found him very agreeable, for he was a gentleman and could not fail in courtesy toward any woman, old or young. So agreeable, indeed, that she remained rocking, chewing, and talking, till the shadows of the autumn evening crept round them, and Cleena, watchful for her "child," and indignant at the intrusion of this stranger, appeared.

"Arrah musha, Master Hallam, will you be sittin' here catchin' your death? Come in by, immediate. The supper is on, an' the master waitin'. Sure, that's bad luck, for the first meal we're all together in the new home. Come by."

Hallam rose. It was impossible for him to avoid asking Gwendolyn to remain, and she, utterly ignoring the sniffs and scowls of Cleena, promptly accepted.

Of that meal it is not worth while to write. The girl did have the grace to keep reasonably quiet, though occasionally she would feel that this silence was not doing herself justice, and would break into the cheerful conversation of the others with a boldness and self-assertion that made Amy stare.

Finally she departed, and Mr. Kaye sighed his relief.

"Well, Friend Adam is the youngest old person, and Gwendolyn Jones is the oldest young person I ever saw," remarked Hallam, as he lighted his mother's bedroom candle and bade her good night.

CHAPTER XII.

BAD NEWS FROM BURNSIDE.

"Yes, it is to be 'Charity House' now," said Salome Kaye, with that quiet decision of hers which, as Amy described it, "Never makes any fuss, and never wobbles."

"That's the best and the worst about mother. She never says 'yes' when she means 'no,' and she never says either till it's all settled. I remember how, when I was little, I used to ask, 'Is it decided?' and when she answered, 'Yes, it's decided,' I gave up teasing. Mountains might crush, but never move her."

"So it's 'Charity House' forever and a day. The trouble with you, mother, is that all you say—or the little you say—always means something. 'Charity House' is, I suppose, just as full of meaning as everything else. Isn't it? Let me guess. It's 'Charity' because cousin Archibald lets us live here for what he calls a 'starvation rent.' That's the meanest kind of 'Charity,' and it's a lie, too."

"Hallam!"

"But, mother, it is. I've heard these people talk, and they all say that the old curmudgeon—"

"Hallam, thee is proving that a 'Charity House' is the very sort of home thee needed."

[Pg 141]

"Well, motherkin, it's true. He is curmudgeon-y. He's tried for years to get a tenant for this property, and not even the mill folks would touch it. He took advantage of us and made us think we were getting a great deal for nothing."

"Are we not? Look about thee."

"Of course, it's big enough."

"What a curious place it is," said Amy; "like a box that eggs come in. See, this is it," and she rapidly sketched upon a paper the diagram. "Two partitions run this way, north and south, and two run at right angles. That's three rooms deep on each floor, look at it from any point of view. Each room is as like its neighbor as its twin. Hmm, I didn't realize it, but there are eighteen rooms if we count the halls and the 'black hole.'"

"Almost as large as 'Fairacres,' thee sees."

"It's not so bad, if it weren't so fearfully bare," remarked Hallam, examining Amy's sketch. "But it's queer."

The entrance hall was the middle front room of the old building. From this a flight of stairs ran up and ended in "the middle room" above, with a narrow flight behind into the attic. The upper middle room was therefore an open space, from the sides of which a narrow gallery had been reserved to surround the well-like opening of the stairway. Next the stairs the gallery was furnished with a strong plain railing, to prevent the accident of falling into the "well," and all the bedrooms had doors opening upon it.

[Pg 142]

This upper space was dark, save when the bedroom doors were open and gave it light. So, also, was the room below; and beneath this, still, was the "black hole," the extension of a cellar under the kitchen.

Whatever the original purpose of this "hole," which received no light nor ventilation except through the kitchen cellar, it was now the terror and despair of Cleena's cleanly soul. She had wasted many good candles in trying, by their light, to sweeten and make wholesome this damp, miserable place. But despite all it remained almost as she found it.

"The pit of original sin," Hallam named it, advising her to give over the task of purification. "You've sprinkled pounds of chloride, splashed whitewash galore, swept and scrubbed and worn yourself out, and it's hopeless. Well, I never heard that any of the Ingrahams died of pestilence bred down there, so I fancy it won't hurt us."

"Faith, it shan't that. I'll keep the front cellar door open into it incessant, an' I'll—"

"Waste your substance in lime. Don't, Goodsoul. But it's on my mind as it is on yours. If I were as strong as I wish, I'd turn rabbit and burrow galleries out from the middle vault under the middle rooms each side of the house. That would give light and air and keep everything dry."

[Pg 143]

Neither Cleena nor Hallam noticed that Fayette had been a close listener to this conversation, nor heard the muttered exclamation:—

"I'll do it! Huckleberries! I'll s'prise 'em!"

This had been some days before Amy drew the diagram of the house, which she now tossed into the waste-basket. From that it was rescued by the half-wit and treasured carefully; for to the purpose formed in his mind it would prove a great help.

"But go on, mother dear. What's the other sort of charity you mean?"

"That by all the advantages which we have had over these new neighbors we should be helpful to them. We possess nothing of our own, absolutely, not even our better training and—"

"Arrah masha! Sure the pullet was bad enough, but this baby'll be me death! An' me steppin' me great foot—There, there, darlin'. Cry no more, cry no more!"

The interruption was Cleena, and the cause "Sir" William Gladstone.

"Again, Goodsoul," jeered Amy.

"Again is it? An' me goin' down that hill betimes this mornin' to remind me neighbor as how it wasn't necessary to send all the childer up here to wonst. Not a//!"

One of the first things which Cleena had made Fayette do was cut and smooth a path from the door of "Charity House" to that of the cottage below. She foresaw that there would be frequent errands to and fro, and the loose stones, with the tangle of running blackberry vines, were dangerous to life and limb. Then, because Hallam's lameness was also in her mind, she had persuaded the mill boy to add a row of driven stakes with rope strung along their tops.

[Pg 144]

"But never at all has Master Hal, for whom it was made, gone down or up by that same. Me fathers, what's a body to do!"

"We're living in 'Charity,' Goodsoul. And I've observed that, look out of window when I will,

there's always a yellow headed Jones-let ascending to us by the easy road you've fixed. Belinda, the small, is apt to lead the way. She likes it up here. She likes it very much."

"Hmm, that's what the mother be's sayin'. But is that any reason at all, avick, why they should be let?"

"Mrs. Jones thinks it is. She feels that we are flattered by the preference her offspring show for our society; but between ourselves, Cleena, I think it's more raisin-bread than affection. You made a dire mistake in beginning to feed them."

"An' isn't it I that knows it? Now, this baby—"

"Yes, that baby. What's happened to him? He's spotted white and black, like a coach-dog. What's he licking from his fingers?" [Pg 145]

"It's spoilin' the bakin' o' bread is he the day. Takin' the coals from the bucket, each by each, an' pressin' them deep in that beautiful dough. Will I wash his face, eh? Never a wash I wash, but home to his mother he goes the same as he is. If the sight does not shame her, I'd know."

"I'll take him, Cleena, and I'll bring back the milk for the day."

So with her pail in one hand and the other guiding the still uncertain steps of William Gladstone, Amy started.

"It's a pity, Sir William, it really is a pity that you ever learned how to climb. You've progressed so alarmingly. First time you tried it you could only stumble and fall backward. Now—you hitch along famously. Heigho! here's Victoria. All the high personages of Merrie England are honoring us 'the day.' Well, Victoria Regina, what's the errand now?"

"Nothing, only thought I'd tell you about that old Quaker man you like."

"Everybody likes. What about him?"

"He's gone away. Ma says he won't never live to come back again."

"Victoria—Jones, what are you saying?"

"That Mr. Quaker Burn, up Clove way, had been took to Ne' York."

"I guess you're mistaken. We would have heard about it if it were so. Now, if you please, though, I should like Master Gladstone to be 'took' home. If you'll hold his other hand we'll get him there the quicker." [Pg 146]

"I guess I'll go up and set a spell; you take him," remarked Victoria, and turned to ascend the slope.

Amy sighed: "Something must be done to stop this!" Then she lifted her eyes and scanned the white dusty road which circled Bareacre knoll, and across which lay the Jones's cottage. A wagon was driving leisurely along this highway, and it had a most familiar appearance. A moment's watching showed it to belong to the Clove Farm, and it was Adam Burn's "hired man" who was driving in it. Her heart sank. What if Victoria had spoken the truth?

So she hurried her young charge to his home, and waiting only to have her pail filled with the milk, ran back to intercept the approaching vehicle.

"Good morning, Israel. How's dear old Adam?"

"Only the Lord knows. Sarah Jane's got him."

"She hasn't! Don't tell me!"

"But she has, though."

"Where?"

"York."

"When?"

"Yesterday."

"Why?"

"Same old story. If she hadn't gone to Europe, she'd had him last year. I knew how 'twould be when she come home this summer an' begun to send him the letters. She's the powerfulest hand to do her duty that ever was. Everything else has to give way." [Pg 147]

Amy's hand trembled so that her milk began to trickle over the sides of her pail.

"That's what it meant, then, that dear, precious old fellow. He knew he was going to leave us, that First Day we spent at the farm. That was why his words in the meeting-house were so like a farewell. It is too bad! It must have broken his heart."

"No, it didn't. He didn't want to go, not a mite; but there wasn't no heart-break, *not in sight*. If there was, he kept it hid. But he went all round the place, into every shed and building, pointing out things that should be done, and being most particular about the flowers and garden. He told

me to take care of everything just as if he was coming back to-morrow. But he'll never. He'll never."

"Israel, you shall not say that! He must come back!"

"Oh, he'll come, of course, one way: that's feet foremost. He's a sight feebl' 'n he ever let on, an' this riotous livin' at York, what with balls and parties and wine suppers, he won't last long. They'll kill him out of hand amongst 'em."

"Oh, Israel, the idea of Adam Burn at 'balls and parties and wine suppers,' when he's so simple and sweet and abstemious. I don't believe he ever tasted wine during all his pure, beautiful life. I'm not worrying about that. It's the leaving the things he loved will hurt him so. Why couldn't Sarah Jane have left him in peace? O dear! O dear! This will be a fresh sorrow for mother."

[Pg 148]

"So I suppose. For all of us, too. It's going to be lonesome for me, I reckon. Though Mis' Boggs won't have so much to do. She wants to give up the job, an' go live with our son, Jim. But Sarah Jane told us to stay, an' so we'll have to."

"Is this dreadful woman who's spirited Adam away any kin to *you*?"

"Course not. But you needn't laugh. You don't know that lady. She's masterful, and she's rich—'rich as Cr[oe]sus,'—and don't know what to do with her money. When the old man was lookin' around an' chargin' me 'bout things, she broke in with: 'Oh, don't worry, father-in-law. The trumpery stuff isn't worth so much thought. I'm not a relic hunter, and let it go,' says she. Then he reminds her that he wanted it kept right for—Whew! I near let the secret out, didn't I? He told me he wrote you a letter. He gave it to you, didn't he? Well, if you'll carry the message for me, I won't climb 'Spite' hill this morning. There's a few things to fetch up in the open wagon, and I'll see your folks about hauling that muck. Good-by. The spirit's taken clean out of me. Twenty-five years me and him has lived together, and to part sudden like this. Twenty-five years by the clock, and a better man than him never trod the footstool."

[Pg 149]

With that Israel brought the mare around, and giving a mournful nod of his head drove dejectedly away.

Amy flew up the hill. She paid little heed now to the spilling of the milk, for she began to realize in all its force the calamity which had befallen them; and she burst into her mother's sitting room flushed and indignant, demanding:—

"What right had Sarah Jane to take him away?"

Mrs. Kaye's heart sank. She understood what this hysterical question implied. It had been a contingency long foreboded by her, though against its justice she could find nothing to say.

"Every right, dear. She is his son's widow. She is acting, no doubt, as she thinks her husband would wish."

"But he didn't want to go."

"She probably felt he was too old to live alone, without relatives. Indeed, I know that she would have taken him long ago, if she had been living in this country herself. As soon as she came home she has attended to her—her duty, as she sees it. As I suppose, anybody would see it, who was indifferent whether he went or stayed. I hope, though, that she'll bring him back to Burnside in the spring."

"Do you know her, mother?"

[Pg 150]

"Not well. When we were both younger I used to see her sometimes. She was never very fond of Burnside, however. It was too quiet for her. She is a wealthy woman, who likes to do a great deal of good. She is at the head of many charitable associations, and she has always had wonderful executive ability."

"Does that mean being what Israel called 'masterful'?"

"About the same thing."

"Will she be good to our dear Adam?"

"Certainly. She will see that he has every comfort possible. He will, doubtless, have a servant especially appointed to wait upon and care for him, and he will be made to share in all the enjoyments of the house. She believes that it is the duty of all to live actively in the world and do good aggressively, so to speak. But Adam is so old and feeble, he has passed his days in such simplicity, I can feel what a change for him it will be. Still, if he were to fall seriously ill, he would be better off at his daughter-in-law's than here. Ah, yes. I suppose it is for the best—for him. For us—well, it will be hard to think of Burnside without his gracious presence. He was my parents' oldest, closest friend, as he has been mine."

Mrs. Kaye rose, folded up her mending, and left the room. "I must tell Cuthbert," she remarked, as if to herself, and her face was very sad.

When Amy found her brother and told him the news his comment was:—

[Pg 151]

"That's a bad business for us, girlie."

"Of course. Don't you suppose I feel it?"

"As long as Adam Burn was near, mother would never have been allowed to really suffer for anything. I mean that he would have managed to keep an eye upon her and have helped us out, till we could help ourselves. Do you know where that letter is he gave you? Have you read it? I should think this might be that 'right time' of which he spoke."

"The letter? In my other dress pocket. I'll get it."

But when she had searched not only in her pockets but in every other possible place, the letter could not be found; and though Mrs. Kaye assured them that there was probably very little of importance in it, her children could not help imagining something quite to the contrary; and to learn the unread message became the great desire of their hearts.

"Well, in any case, we have what he said to you, Hal, about soul growth and that."

"Humph! Such talk is all well enough, but how is it going to help when we reach our last dollar? Did you ever think, Amy, seriously think how we are going to live? Just where our actual bread and butter is to come from?"

"No. Why, no, not really."

"Then it's high time you did."

CHAPTER XIII.

[Pg 152]

AMY PAYS A BUSINESS CALL.

At about the same moment, on a "Saturday-half" in November, Amy Kaye and Gwendolyn Jones left each her own home to visit that of the other. They met on the slope of "Bareacre" and paused for mutual greetings.

"How do? I was just going up to your house," said Gwendolyn, turning her back to the wind that just then blew strongly.

"Good afternoon. Were you? And I was going to yours."

"My! How cold it is. Winter'll be here before we know it. Makes a body think about her clothes. That's why I was coming. I thought, maybe, you'd like to go shopping with me."

"You're forgetting, I fancy, that I told you I never did that. I shouldn't know how to shop, nor scarcely what it means," laughed Amy.

"That's what me and ma was saying. You seem such a little girl, yet 'Bony' says you're 'most as old as I am."

"But I don't feel old, do you? I wish I might never grow a day older, except that if I do I may be more useful to my people." [Pg 153]

"Won't you go, then?"

"Maybe, if you will do something for me, too. I'm not on the road to buy anything, but to sell. I thought that you might know of somebody who would like a burro. Do you?"

"I'd like one myself, first-rate, only I'm saving for a wheel. I'm buying it on the instalment plan. I pay a dollar a week, and after I get my winter things I'll pay more. Do you ride?"

"Nothing so fine as a bicycle; just either Pepita or Balaam."

"It's awful hard to have to walk everywhere, and the good thing about a wheel is that it don't have to eat."

"And the bad thing about a burro is that it does."

"Are you in earnest? Do you want to sell it?"

"No; I don't *want* to at all, but I'm going to if I can. Do you know anybody who really might buy Pepit?"

"Guess I do. Guess the 'Supe' would."

"The 'Supe'—Mr. Metcalf?"

"Yes; I heard him say he'd like to get such a pair of mules or donkeys, or whatever they are, for his children. He's got a slew of them, and he gets 'em every conceivable thing. I wouldn't wonder if he did, if you was to ask him."

"Will he be at the mill to-day?"

"No; he's at his house, I guess. The mill's shut up, only the watchman there. The 'Supe' don't hang around there himself so much since the new 'boss' came." [Pg 154]

"Maybe his house would be out of your way. If you'll tell me how to find it, I can go by myself. I wouldn't like to give you trouble."

"Oh, 'twouldn't be a mite. I'd like it. There'd be time enough afterward for Mis' Hackett's. She keeps open till near midnight, Saturdays. She gets lots of the mill trade, and she'd like to have it all. But Wallburg's far nicer. Don't you love Wallburg?"

"I was never there except once, when father had a guest from town. Then mother sent for a carriage, and they took their friend to see the city. Hallam and I rode our burros, but we were very tired when it was over. Even then we passed through the residence streets only."

"Pshaw! It's where the stores are that I like. I always wish I was made of money when I'm in a store. They do have such lovely things."

"Doesn't your mother buy your clothes?"

"My mother? *My mother?* Well, I guess not. The idea! If a girl earns her own money and pays for all she has, I guess she's a right to pick 'em out. Don't you?"

"Why—yes. I suppose she has a right, if her mother allows. But I should think it would be very trying to select one's own things. I should be so afraid I wouldn't choose correctly, and not please her taste." [Pg 155]

"My land! What if you didn't? It's you that has to wear them, isn't it? Have a piece of this gum. It's a new sort. Mis' Hackett keeps it and charges two cents a stick. Other kinds are only one cent, but this is prime."

Gwendolyn was kind-hearted. She was also very vain. She felt that it was a fine thing to be acquainted with "aristocratics" like the Kayes; yet in her heart she was rather ashamed of Amy's plain attire, the simplicity of which seemed to Gwendolyn a proof of Mrs. Kaye's incapacity to "shop"; and its being white—though of soft warm wool—of her want of taste. She supposed, also, that any girl who could, would buy gum, and decided that her new acquaintance must be very poor indeed.

"Take it. I can get plenty more. I earn real good wages now."

"Do you?" asked Amy, so wistfully that the other was confirmed in her opinion of the poverty.

"I should think you would like to work in the mill, wouldn't you? If your folks have lost their money, it would seem real handy to have a little coming in."

"Yes, it would, indeed. But I couldn't do it."

"Why not? You're strong enough, I guess, if you aren't so big."

"Yes, I'm strong and well. But father has forbidden me to think of it." [Pg 156]

"Pshaw! He'd come round. If you want to do it, I *would*; and once you were settled he wouldn't care, or he couldn't help himself, anyway. He's kind of queer, isn't he? I've heard that."

"Queer? Yes; just as queer as a splendid gentleman like him must always seem to common people," flashed the daughter, all the more disturbed because she realized that there had been once, if not now, just a little truth in the suggestion.

"Pshaw! I didn't mean to make you mad. O' course, I hadn't ought to have spoke so about your own father. I s'pose I'd be mad, too, if anybody said things about pa. They do, sometimes, or about ma, their naming us children by fancy names, as they did. You see, they're English, pa and ma are, and so they named us after English aristocratics. Ma's a master hand for reading novels, too, and she gets notions out of them. We take the *Four Hundred Story Paper*, and the *Happy Evening Gazette*. Do you take them?"

"No; I never heard of them."

"My land! you didn't? Ain't that queer? Why, they're splendid. They have five serial stories running all the time. As fast as one is finished another is commenced. Umm, they're awful exciting. You can't hardly wait from week to week to get the new instalments. Trouble is, ma says, we'd ought to each of us have a copy, we're so crazy to get hold of it when it comes. Some of the girls take fashion papers, and we lend them 'round. Some lend, I mean. Some are stingy, and won't. They have patterns in them. You can get some of the patterns free, and some cost ten or fifteen cents. Say, how do you like my dress?" [Pg 157]

Amy looked critically at her companion's attire. She admired it far less than Gwendolyn had her own simple frock, and she found the question difficult to answer without giving offence. She compromised by saying:—

"Your mother must be very industrious to have made it, with all the housework and the children."

"If you ain't the greenest girl I know! My mother couldn't make a dress like this to save her life."

"O—oh!" stammered Amy.

"Indeed, she couldn't. This was made by a dressmaker. The best one in Ardsley, too. She charged me five dollars, and ma said it was too much. I think it was, myself, but what can you do? You

must look right, you know; if you don't the girls will make fun of you, and the boys won't take you any place. Is there any boy you like, much?"

"Why, of course; though I know only three. Is this the way, around the corner?"

"Three? Who're they?"

"Hallam, and Fayette, and William Gladstone. Doesn't the mill village look cosy? The cunning little houses with their porches and gardens and neat palings. Such a lot of folks living together should have good times, I think."

[Pg 158]

"Oh, they do; prime. That's the 'Supe's' house, that big one, upon that little hill. That whole row belongs to the different 'bosses,'—of the setting room, the weavers, and the rest. The 'Supe' is real nice, I think, though some say he's stuck up. He was a poor boy, once,—as poor as a church mouse. Say, don't you feel sort of afraid to call on him, after all?"

"Why? No, indeed. Afraid? Why should I?"

"Oh, because."

Amy laughed and hastened forward. Nothing more was said until they reached the door, shadowed by vines from which not even yet all the leaves had fallen. The whole place had a sheltered, homelike appearance, which spoke well for the taste and kindness of its owners.

"Yes; Mr. Metcalf is in. Would you like to see him? Ah, Gwendolyn, is it you? Walk in." Yet even Amy noticed that the maid's manner in welcoming her companion was less cordial than in welcoming herself. She concluded that there might be some truth in the assertion of this family considering themselves rather better than their neighbors.

They were ushered into a cheery sitting room, which seemed also a sort of library, for there were bookcases around the walls, and a table was spread with the current literature of the day. The room was small by comparison with those to which Amy had been accustomed, but what it lacked in size it made up for in comfort. A coal fire glowed on the hearth, a bird sang in its cage before the window, and about the floor were scattered the playthings that told that it was the resort of children.

[Pg 159]

The girls were not kept waiting. Mr. Metcalf entered almost at once, nodded kindly to Gwendolyn, and cordially extended his hand to Amy.

"I am very pleased to see you, Miss Amy. Sit nearer the fire, for it's right cold to-day."

"Thank you, but I'm not cold, and I don't wish to detain you. Gwendolyn tells me that it is your holiday, too, and that you go to Wallburg."

Mr. Metcalf glanced across at the other girl, who bridled and simpered as she adjusted her hat and settled her skirts.

"She goes there herself, I fear, rather too much. Eh, Gwendolyn?"

"I go when I please," answered the mill girl, pertly. She resented something in the tone of her superintendent, feeling that out of work hours he had no authority over her.

"Oh, of course. By the way, there's the stage just ready for the other end of the village. Do you see it, Miss Amy? The shop mistress, Mrs. Hackett, sends one over every Saturday afternoon to carry our folks free to her place of business. She's an enterprising person, but, unfortunately, as soon as she had adopted this plan, two other merchants of the town set up rival stages also. It's very funny, sometimes, to see the respective drivers' efforts to secure passengers, and therefore custom."

[Pg 160]

At the mention of stages, Gwendolyn rose and looked through the window. Then she turned toward Amy like a person in great haste.

"Tell the 'Supe' what you came for, Amy, so we can get a ride over,—that is, if you want to go shopping with me after all."

But poor Amy could not reply just then. It had come over her with a rush what her errand really meant to her, and she was wholly indifferent to the charms of a stage or even "shopping."

"Don't wait for me, please,—that is, of course, I will keep my word, but—"

"All right, then, some other day. I'll be up to see how you made out, and if Mr. Metcalf don't want it maybe I'll hear of somebody else who does. By, by. Good day, sir," and off she tore, banging the door and shouting loudly to the driver of Mrs. Hackett's stage.

Mr. Metcalf watched her in silence till she had climbed the steps at the rear of the omnibus, and then he remarked:—

"That girl has so much sense that she ought to have more."

"That's a doubtful compliment, isn't it?" asked Amy, smiling.

[Pg 161]

"I suppose so, though it's quite true. She is warmhearted, generous to a fault, and as silly as they make them. However, she has given me the pleasure of seeing you to-day, and I hope that you will tell me how I can be of use to you. From Gwendolyn's words I judge that you came upon

some special errand."

"Yes; I came to ask if you would like to buy my white burro."

"Ah, you are tired of her? I mean you wish to sell her? Has she been misbehaving or interfering with 'Bony' again?"

"No, she has been very, very good, and I don't at all wish to part with her; but I want some money very badly, and that is the only thing—the only way I could get it."

"I am very glad you came to me. Ever since I made Miss Pepita's acquaintance, that day at the mill, I've wished I could find another like her for my little Nanette. How much do you ask for the burro?"

"I don't ask anything. That is, I don't know how much she is worth."

"I think you told me that she was a gift to you?"

"Yes, from my uncle in California."

"Hmm, I've heard of him," commented the gentleman, briefly. "Now, I am almost as much in the dark in regard to the value of such animals as you are, but, at a rough estimate, I will offer you fifty dollars. Then I will make inquiries, and if I find I have named too small a price, I will add the balance. Is that satisfactory?"

[Pg 162]

"Oh, yes, indeed. Thank you. I—I shall be glad to have Pepita in such a nice place."

At home Amy had spoken to none save Cleena about this intention of hers, and that good creature had sighed and wiped her eyes, but had not uttered one word of protest. The girl sighed, too, now, and the superintendent felt it would be kind to cut the matter short.

"When can I send for her?"

"Oh, at—at any time, I suppose. Or, if you don't mind, I'd like to ride her here myself. Just once more."

Mr. Metcalf looked at his watch.

"In a few moments John will be passing by Bareacre on his way to the other village. You might drive up with him and ride her down here afterward. There will be ample time before dark, and you must tell your people not to be anxious, should there be any delay."

"Very well; and maybe Hallam, my brother, will come, also. Though he hasn't been told yet, and might not—"

"Very well. Excuse me for a moment. I will speak to John."

He did not add, nor Amy reflect, that it was a very long and roundabout way to reach "the other village," by passing over rough and steep Bareacre hill; but John was willing enough to take it, when he was told who was to be his companion on the route. He had liked Amy from the first, and had grown to know her fairly well during his time of helping the Kaye household to settle.

[Pg 163]

"All right, boss. Sorry the little thing is to give up her donkey. She set a powerful store by it, I 'low. Well, all ready? How do, Miss Amy? So me an' you're going to take a trip together, eh? Then I can find out for myself how the well is doing. Don't see much of 'Bony' since your folks took him in hand. Giddap, there, Jinny! Here we go!"

To pass the time agreeably John talked of everything which he imagined might be of interest to the silent girl beside him, but he elicited few replies, and had the stream of his words flow, for once, without interruption. Yet it seemed a very, very slow ride to Amy, and when it came to an end, she scarcely waited to thank John for his "lift" before she sped to the shed where Pepita was tied, and shutting the door behind her, threw her arms around the neck of the gentle beast, to cry as freely as she pleased.

"Bray! Br-a-ay! Ah-umph! Ah-u-umph!" inquired the burro, turning her head around as far as she could by reason of Amy's embrace.

"Oh, you darling, you dear old darling. Don't talk to me. Don't look at me as if you thought I had no heart. Do you think I don't love you, that I will sell you, Pepit'? But—it must be. It must be. Better you than Balaam, and even he—"

[Pg 164]

"Ah-umph! A-ah-umph! Br-r-r-ay! Bray-bray-bray! B-r-a-y-a-u-m-p-h!!" protested Balaam, with great haste and emphasis; and this sound was an added pang in the heart of the unhappy Amy, who felt that she was not only breaking her own heart by this separation, but the hearts of this four-footed pair as well.

Then she heard a sound along the frozen ground, and instantly she lifted her head, pulled her Tam over her eyes to hide the traces of tears, and called out, gayly:—

"Is that you, Hal dear? What do you think? You and I are to ride down to Mr. Metcalf's, right away now. Is Fayette in the house? I want him to help me groom Pepita to 'the Queen's taste,' as he says. Halloo to him, for me, please."

But instead of that the brother hobbled into the shed and asked:—

"Why should we go there? I don't want to. I've no fondness for paying visits."

"But you must go this time, Hal. You really, really must. I'll tell you why, by and by."

CHAPTER XIV.

[Pg 165]

PEPITA FINDS A NEW HOME.

When the cripple firmly declined the visit, Cleena found some errand for Fayette to do at the "general store" in the mill village. Hallam thought it a little queer that he was not greatly urged in the matter, and that Cleena should ask him to let Fayette ride Balaam.

"For you know, Good soul, how I hate to have anybody ride him, except myself. Not even Amy is really welcome, though she does sometimes. I don't see why she goes, anyway. What have we to do with any of these people? When mother is ill, too. If I were a daughter, I'd stay at home."

Cleena wheeled about from scrubbing the kitchen table and retorted, impatiently:—

"Don't you go throwing blame on Miss Amy, lad. Arrah musha! but she's the more sense of the lot of us, so she has, bless her bonny heart. An' that sunbright an' cheerful, no matter—"

"She's not very cheerful this afternoon, Cleena. I believe she'd been crying, just now, when I found her in the shed. I fancy she'll find a ride anything but funny, on such a day as this. I like the warm fire better than the road in such weather."

[Pg 166]

"Get back to it then, child. There's your book yon, on the settle. Wait. Carry in a bowl of porridge to the mistress, an you can? Heigh! Move them crutches easy now, an' not spill the stuff all over me nice floor."

In her heart Cleena was very proud of her deft-handed "child," who could do so many helpful things, even though a cripple, and she watched him cross the wide room, swinging easily along on his "other feet," yet holding the bowl of steaming liquid upright and safely. Then she sighed, and going to the door called:—

"Me General Bonaparty, come by!"

Fayette was digging, even though the ground was frozen, and it would be months before anything could grow again. But the simple fellow was a "natural farmer," and it was his intention to "let her lie fallow this winter. Next summer I'll show you a garden'll make your eyes bung out. I'm the best gard'ner anywhere's round, I am."

He now replied:—

"What fer? I want to get this side gone over, this afternoon. Then come Monday I'm goin' to get some trees down brook way, an' get John to haul 'em up an' set 'em out, an' get Miss Amy—"

"Faith, what else'll you 'get' with your 'get' an' 'get,' I'd know. Come by, I tell ye, to wonst."

When Cleena spoke in that tone, it was noticeable that Fayette always obeyed. He now threw down his spade, though reluctantly, and sauntered to the kitchen door.

[Pg 167]

"A woman hain't got no sense nohow, stopping a man from his work."

"An' all the sense a man body has, me fathers, is to keep a woman standin' in her doorway. I'm wantin' ye to go to the store down below. Master Hallam's for lettin' ye ride Balaam. Off with ye, now, an' clean the beast's coat, sayin' nothin' of Miss Amy's own little white. Will she ride with ye? What for no? Proud you be, says I, to be escortin' of the like o' her."

Fayette's eyes shone. The desire of his heart was to possess Balaam for himself; failing this, to have the privilege of using the pretty creature occasionally.

"How happened it? How does she want to go there in such a wind? Blows the hair right off your head, I 'low. I'd ruther go alone, I would."

"'Ruthers' is all froze up. Haste along with ye now, an' be off. Mind ye talk pretty to my colleen, 'cause—No matter."

Fayette made swift work of the grooming, and only a few moments later Amy and he rode out of the enclosure. As she descended the slope, the girl turned and waved her hand cheerfully to Cleena, then set her face toward the valley and relapsed into silence.

Fayette endured this as long as he could, for though he rarely needed anybody else to speak, this afternoon he was annoyed by his companion's preoccupation.

[Pg 168]

"What's the matter, Amy? You ain't said a word since we started."

"Haven't I? and we're almost there, already. Well, I was thinking. That's all. I'll try to do better on the way home."

"Feelin' bad about your ma? Land, she'll get well. All she wants is a bit o' boneset tea, or sage an'

sassafras. I'll go yarb hunting to-morrow, if I get my garden ploughed. Cleena'll stew it. Say, have you heard my new one? Hark to this."

He pulled from his pocket a small jewsharp and began to "play" upon it in the most nerve-rasping manner.

"Oh, Fayette, another? Why, you must have a half-dozen already. I come upon them everywhere about the house, in the rooms where you are."

"Ain't got none now but this. I bought it to Mis' Hackett's. Cleena's took my others. Got 'em all in her kitchen draw'. 'Low she'll get this if you tell on me."

"I'll not need. You'll have it out to show her how talented you are, and then—away goes your pride, your jewsharp, and all."

"Hmm, she better try. I'll teach her a lesson some day she ain't goin' to ferget. That woman bosses me too much. I ain't a-goin' to stand it. You'll see. I'll clear out an' leave the whole kerboodle first you know. Sho! Here we be."

[Pg 169]

"Indeed. Well, I'm sorry to have reached the place so soon, though it is pretty cold."

"You go in and see the 'Supe's' folks. I'll ride along an' do my arrants. Cleena'd ruther trust me than you, wouldn't she? I'm a master hand for a trade, an' she knows it. Say, I do wish he'd sell me Balaam."

"You must drop that subject, really, Fayette. Even if Hallam were to part with his burro, it would not be to you."

The simple lad's fierce temper rose in full force at Amy's blunt words.

"Like to know why not? Ain't my money as good as anybody's? Ain't I 'stuck up' enough to suit? He never rode in a parade, he didn't. Told me so himself."

"Nor do I think he ever will, and, of course, one person's money is as good as another's, excepting that we could never trust how long you would be kind to dear old Balaam. Hal would take much less to have the creature well treated than—I mean—Oh, don't get so angry; it's not worth while."

The more she tried to smooth matters over, the more indignant the other became. His harp was still between such discolored teeth as Pepita's former assault had left him, and added to the grotesqueness of his appearance as he glared upon Amy. To finish what she had begun, she remarked:—

[Pg 170]

"Just tie him there, at that second post, please, and you'd best put his blanket on him."

"Tie him? I'm goin' to ride him to the village to let the boys see him an' try him. I promised I would. Tie him! I shan't neither!"

"You certainly will not ride him to wherever those dreadful boys are. Nobody shall touch him, except you or me, and you ought not."

Fayette gave her one more angry glance, leaped from his saddle with a jerk, and bestowed upon the unoffending burro a vicious kick. Then he disappeared down the street, and Amy tied Pepita in haste, that she might look after the other animal also.

Just then she heard a step upon the path behind her, and the superintendent's pleasant voice, saying:—

"Well, young lady, you are certainly prompt, and promptness is a cardinal virtue—from a business man's point of view. See, here is the little girl for whom you are giving up your pet."

"Ah, indeed."

Amy smiled upon the child, who might have been ten years of age, and the fragile little creature appeared to smile in return. Then it came over the visitor that there was something out of common in that uplifted, happy face, and that the smile was not in response to her own greeting. The wide blue eyes looked upward, truly, but with the blank stare of one who sees nothing.

[Pg 172]

"Ah, is it so?" cried Amy, a second time, watching with what hesitation the little girl moved along the path, and how persistently she clung to her father's hand.

"Yes, blind; quite blind—from her birth," said Mr. Metcalf, sadly.

Amy was on her knees in a moment, clasping the child's slight body in her arms and saying:—

"Then I'm glad, glad that you are to have Pepita. She is the dearest, nicest burro—except when she's bad—and will carry you wherever you want to go,—that is, if she is willing. You dear little girl, she shall be yours, without that money either. I never knew about you before, or you should have had her before, too."



"THEN I'M GLAD, GLAD THAT YOU ARE TO HAVE PEPITA."

Mr. Metcalf smiled, well pleased. His blind daughter was the idol of his flock, and anybody who was attracted by her became interesting to him. Amy had been so, even before this incident, but he liked her heartily now.

"So, Miss Amy, though you hated to part with your burro for money, you would do so willingly for love and sympathy?"

"Why, of course. If I'd only known—"

"You will not make a good business woman, at this rate. But this wind is sharp. I mustn't keep Nanette out here long, else her mother will worry, and that wouldn't do. Suppose, since you know more about donkeys than I do, that you give my girl her first riding lesson. Reach Miss Amy your hand, dear heart."

[Pg 173]

Amy caught the little white-mitted fingers in her own and kissed them impulsively. Then she rose and placed the child on Pepita's saddle.

"Take hold of the bridle, so, in both hands, now, till you learn how. I'll keep my arm about you. No, dear, you cannot fall. I wouldn't let you, even if Pepita would, and she's in a gentle mood today. Aren't you, Pepit'?"

"Br-a-ay! Ah-ump!" responded the burro. She did not always have her replies so ready, and, for an instant, it seemed as if she would frighten her new mistress. But there was always something absurdly amusing in Pepita's tones, and after the first shock of hearing them had passed, Nanette burst into a merry laugh that made the others laugh too.

"Oh, doesn't she talk nicely! Does she always answer so quick?"

"No, indeed. Sometimes the naughty little beast will not say a single bray. She has many moods, has Pepit'. You'll find them all out, though, after a while. Now, how do you like it? Isn't the motion soft and gentle?"

"Oh, if mamma could see!" cried the happy little girl, turning her sunny face toward Amy. Then she suddenly pulled off her mittens and drew her new friend's head down so that she could feel the unfamiliar features. Swiftly, lightly, the tiny finger-tips passed over every one, then travelled upward and lost themselves in the close rings of hair under the scarlet Tarn. "Now, I'll know you forever. What color is your hair? What is your hood, or bonnet?"

[Pg 174]

"My hair is very dark brown, or almost black, I think. My Tarn is red. But do you know colors?"

"I know what they are like to me. Papa says that maybe that is not the same as they are in the truly world, but I don't care. They are pretty and suit me, my blind colors do. I like you. I like you very much. I think you are lovely, lovely to give me your don-key—"

"But I didn't. That is, I will, since I know about you; but I asked your father to buy her first. I wouldn't—"

"Oh, never mind. It's all the same, isn't it? It would be in my blind world. She was yours and now she is mine, and you're lovely. Oh, I wish mamma could see!"

"Why, can't she, dear? Is she—"

"No," interrupted the superintendent, smiling. "No, she isn't blind. The only body in our household who is able to see beautiful things with her eyes shut is Nanette, here; and the only trouble with the mother is that there is a new baby in her room just now, so she hasn't time or strength to get up and look out of window at new burros. She thinks the new babies are the nicer of the two sorts. Eh, Nan, child?"

[Pg 175]

"I suppose she does, but I don't. Pooh! there have been three new baby sisters that I can remember, and once I was a new baby sister myself, to my brothers. They're so common, you know; but I don't think of any girl anywhere, except you, and now me, that has had a new snow-white donkey. Do you?"

"No, I do not," laughed Amy.

Mr. Metcalf invited Amy into the house, while he led the burro around to the little stable in the rear, which was to be Pepita's new home. Amy would have liked to throw her arms about the hairy white neck, but pride forbade, and so the parting was made without any sign of distress on either side. Pepita was eager for shelter, and her late mistress to hear what the blind child was saying.

"It's right this way into the sitting room. I love the sitting room best. That's where papa has his books and papers, and it smells like him. He smokes, you know, but only in this room or out of doors. Oh, do help me think! Mamma, dear heart, says I am to name this last little new baby. Just fancy it! I, myself! And it bothers me terrifically. I would want a nice long name, the longest that's in the books; but papa says that there are so many little folks who like us and come to live with us, that we mustn't spend time on long names. Oh, I've just thought! I'll name her 'Amy.' That's short, isn't it? Could a body nickname it? We don't like nicknames here. I'm the only one. I'm sometimes 'Nan' to papa. When the baby last before this one came, mamma named her Abby after Grandmother Abigail. Then she thought we couldn't ever stop to say Ab-i-ga-il, so she shortened it to Abby. Next thing, listen. Abby was crying one day and Rex heard her, and grandmother asked, 'What's that?' 'cause she's deaf and doesn't hear straight, and Rex said, 'Oh, that's nothing but little Ab!' She was just three days old then, and mamma thought if her name got cut in two so quick as that, she wouldn't have any at all in a week or two longer. So she's just Ruth now; and when the boys say 'Ruth-y,' papa makes them put a nickel in the box. Do you have a nickel box on your bookcase?"

[Pg 176]

"No, indeed. Tell me about it. I've never heard of such a thing."

"Why, it's this way. Feel me your hand. I'll show you." And as if she could see perfectly, Nanette guided Amy to the further side of the room, where stood a pretty, polished box upon the bookshelf. The box had a slit in its cover, and it jingled merrily in the blind child's hand.

"Hear! We must have been pretty bad this month. But that makes it all the better for the little 'fresh airers,' doesn't it? Sometimes, when I think about them, I just want to do things—*not nice things*—all the time, so as to make more money for them. But of course it wouldn't be honorable, and I wouldn't do it."

[Pg 177]

"Do you put the nickels in when you are 'naughty'?"

"Yes, for crossness and unpolite words and messing at table and—lots of things. Once—" Nanette paused and turned her eyes toward Amy for a long time. Then she again passed those delicate finger-tips over the other's face, and decided:—

"Yes, I can trust you. Once one of us, I couldn't tell you which one, but one of us told a wrong story, a falsehood, an untruth. One of the dreadful things that made our dear Lord kill Ananias and Sapphira dead. Wasn't that awful? Mamma and papa didn't know what to do. A nickel didn't seem much pay for a lie, did it? So they made it a dollar. Yes, ma'am, one whole dollar. That's twenty nickels. Oh, it was so unhappy those days! I was gladder than ever that I was blind. I think I should have died to see the bad face of the one that did it while it was bad. But mamma says such a lesson is never, never forgotten. You see, we haven't any right to be bad, have we?"

"I suppose not, dear. What a wise little thinker you are!"

"Papa says I think too much. That's why, one why, he was so glad to get me the burro. He hopes it will stop me some. But in a home a body must remember it isn't his home nor her home, but the home of everybody that belongs. If I should be naughty, it would throw things all out of—of smoothness, don't you know. I can't be naughty all by myself. If I could—no, I wouldn't like it either. When I'm selfish or bad, I always feel as if I had on a dirty apron, and I do just hate dirty

[Pg 178]

clothes!"

"And you do just love to talk, little one," cried the superintendent, coming in and catching up his daughter in his strong arms. "We tell her, Miss Amy, that she makes up for what she doesn't see by what she does say. Eh, midget?"

Nanette cuddled her fair head against her father's beard, and turned her eyes toward Amy. It seemed impossible to believe that those beautiful eyes could not really behold whereon they rested, and the tears of sympathy rose to Amy's own as she tried to comprehend this.

"Isn't he a dear, funny papa? But you just wait until you see my mother. She's the nicest thing in this whole world. Oh, papa, shall I call the baby 'Amy'?"

"If you like, darling. It's a pleasant, old-fashioned name."

"I'll tell you a better one, though it's longer. That is 'Salome.'"

"Who's she?" asked Nanette.

"My mother. As you feel about yours, I think she is the sweetest thing in this whole world."

"Sa-lo-me, Sa-lo-me," repeated the child, slowly. "That is pretty. What do you say about that, papa?"

"As you and mother please, darling. It is a good name. But now, dear, run away. I have to talk business with this new friend of yours, and where you are—eh?" [Pg 179]

"Yes, I do talk, don't I? I love to talk. Good-by, Amy. Please come again to see me, and every time you must ride on Peppy—what is her name?"

"Pe-pi-ta. It is Spanish and very pretty, I think."

"Pay-pee-tah," repeated Nanette, imitating the sound and ignorant of the spelling.

"Now, Miss Amy, I've had your saddle put upon your brother's burro. You can ride him home, and I will have 'Bony' carry the other saddle. To-morrow he shall bring the girl's saddle back to Nanette, and I echo her invitation that you should come often to visit us and ride upon your own, old favorite. Here is the envelope with the money, and since you must go at all, I'll urge you to go at once. There is another squall coming, and it will darken early."

As she rode homeward a doctor's phaeton passed her. It was being driven rapidly, and a face peered out at her from beneath the hood. Then it stopped and waited for her to approach.

"Do you belong at the 'Spite House'?"

"Yes; why?"

"Make haste. Drive on."

CHAPTER XV.

[Pg 180]

FACING HARD FACTS.

"Make haste. Drive on."

The words sang themselves into Amy's brain as she urged Balaam up the slope, and for days thereafter they returned to her, the last vivid memory of that happy time before bereavement came.

Then followed a season of confusion and distress; and now that a fortnight was over she sat beside a freshly made mound in Quaker burying-ground, trying to collect her thoughts and to form a definite plan for her future.

The end of a gentle, beneficent life had come with merciful suddenness, and the face of Salome Kaye was now hidden beneath this mound where her child sat, struggling with her grief, and bravely endeavoring to find the right way out of many difficulties. Finally, she seemed to have done so, for she rose with an air of grave decision and kneeling for one moment in that quiet spot, rose again, and passed swiftly from the place.

Hallam was at the cemetery gate, resting sadly against the lichen-covered stone post, and waiting for her return. Indian summer had come, a last taste of warmth and brightness before the winter closed, and despite their sorrow nature soothed them with her loveliness. In any case, whether from that cause or from her own will, the girl found it easier than she had expected to speak with her brother upon their material affairs.

[Pg 181]

"Shall we stop here a little while, Hal dear, to talk, or will we go on slowly toward home? I've been thinking, up—up there beside mother, and I've found a way, I hope."

"I don't care where, though I'd rather not talk. What good does it do? I hate it. I hate home. I hate this place worse—Oh, it's wicked! It's cruel! Why did she ever have to leave Fairacres! She might

be—"

Amy's hand went up to Hallam's lips. "Hush! Do you suppose God blunders? I don't. If He had meant her to stay with us, He would have found a way to cure her. To think otherwise is torture. No. No, no, indeed no! Father is left and so are we. We have got to live and take care of him and of ourselves."

"I should like to know how. I—a miserable good-for-naught, and you—a girl."

"Exactly, thank you, just a girl. But a girl who loves her brother and her father all the more because—*she* loved them too. A girl who has made up her mind to do the first thing and everything that offers, which will help to make them comfortable; who is going to put her family pride in her pocket and go to work. There, it's out!"

[Pg 182]

"Go—out—to—work, Amy—Kaye!"

"Yes, indeed. Don't take it so hard, dear."

In spite of himself he smiled. Then he remembered. "I don't see how you can laugh or jest—so soon. As if—but you *must* care."

"Just because I do care, so very, very much. Oh, Hal, don't dream I'm not missing her every hour of the day. I fancy I hear her saying now, this moment, as she used to say when I'd been naughty and was penitent: 'If thee loves me so much, dear, thee will try to do the things I like.' The one thing she liked, she *lived*, was a brave helpfulness toward everybody she knew. She didn't wait for great things, she did little things. Now, the first little things that are facing us are: the earning of our rent and of our food."

Hallam said nothing. He knocked a stone aside with the end of his crutch, and groaned.

"I'm going to work in the mill," she continued.

"Amy! Father expressly forbade that, or even any mention of it. You, a Kaye!"

"He has given me permission, even though I am a Kaye." She tried to smile still, but found it hard in the face of his want of sympathy, even indignation.

"Do you think he knew what he was saying when he did it?"

"Yes, Hallam, I do. It seems to me that father is more like other folks since this trouble came than he was before. I was worried and asked the doctor, for I remembered mother always used to spare him everything painful or difficult that she could. The doctor said:—

[Pg 183]

"'It may be that this blow will do more to restore him than all her tender care could do.'

"And then I asked him something else. It was—what was the matter with him—if it was all his heart. He said, 'No, indeed. It's his head.' He was in a great fire, at a hotel where he was staying, a long time ago. He was nearly killed, and many other people were killed. For a while he thought that mother had been burned, they had gotten separated some way, and it made him—insane, I suppose. But when she was found, in a hospital where he was taken, he got better. He isn't at all insane now, the doctor says, but is only a little confused. Mother never had us told about it, because she wanted we should think our father just perfect, and for that reason she drew him into this quiet life that we always have lived. If he wanted to spend money foolishly, she never objected. She hoped that by not opposing any wish he would get wholly well. Part of this Cleena has told me, for she thought we ought to know, now, and part the doctor said. Oh, Hal, I think it will be grand, grand, to take care of him as nearly like she did as we can. Don't you?"

Hallam's eyes sparkled. "Amy, I always said she was the most beautiful woman in the world, in character as well as person."

[Pg 184]

"To us, she certainly was. My plan is this: I will go to Mr. Metcalf and ask him to give me a place in the mill. If those other girls can work, so can I."

"Do you know who owns the mills now?"

"Yes; our cousin Archibald Wingate."

"And you would work for him? You would demean yourself to that? Yet you know how, when he offered us money last week, or to do other things for us, both father and I indignantly declined."

"Yes, I know. I, too, was glad we didn't have to take it, though I do not believe he is as bad as we think. We look at him from *this* side; but if we could from the *other*, he might not seem so hard-hearted. He said he was sorry. He seemed to feel very badly."

"Yes, and when he came and asked Cleena to let him see—her, just once more, she gave him a reproof that must have struck home. She told him he was practically the cause of mother's death,—his driving her from Fairacres,—and I shall always feel so, too."

"I hope not, dear."

"Well, I hate him. I hope I can sometime make him suffer all he has made us."

"But, Hal, that is vindictive. To be vindictive is not half as noble as to be just. Mother was just. While it grieved her to leave her home, she fully appreciated how much he must long for it. It was

[Pg 185]

their grandmother's, you know, and he felt he had a right there. I do not blame him half as much as I pity him. He's such a lonely old fellow, it seems to me."

"Humph! I wouldn't work for him and take his money. I should feel as if it were tainted."

For a moment Amy was staggered by this view of her brother's. Then it dropped into its proper place in the argument, and she went on:—

"It would be pleasanter to work for somebody else. But there *is* nobody else. I think Mr. Wingate has very little to do with the employees of the mill. It's Mr. Metcalf who pays them, and he's a dear, good friend already. I'm going to see him this afternoon. I asked Gwendolyn to tell him I was coming, but I suppose he thinks it is about selling Balaam. He's ready to take him off your hands if you want to part with him. That seventy-five dollars he paid for Pepita and the saddle and harness was such a blessing. It carried us through; we couldn't have done without it, unless we'd let Mr. Wingate help."

"Never! Well, I suppose he'll have to take him. If I can't work, I can give up, as well as you."

"No, Hal, I don't want to sell him yet. Wait till the last thing and we can't help it. Do try to think kindly of what I'm doing, dear. Down in my heart I'm pretty proud, too. But you start home. I'll take a bit of lunch and then start out to seek my fortune. Wish me luck, laddie; or, rather, bid me God-speed." [Pg 186]

She lifted her face for his kiss, and he gave it heartily. It was to the sensitive, proud, undisciplined boy the very hardest moment of his life, save and apart from his bereavement.

"To think, Amy, little sister, that I, who should be your protector and supporter, am just—this!"

"Hush! you shall not point so contemptuously to those poor legs. I think they are very good legs, indeed. There's nothing the matter with them except that they won't move. They've been indulged so long—"

"Amy, I don't understand you. First you seem so cheerful; then you make light of my lameness. Are you forgetful, or what?"

"Not forgetful, nor hard-hearted. Just 'what,' which means that I believe you could learn to walk if you would."

"Amy! Amy!!"

"Hallam!"

"Do you suppose I wouldn't if I could?"

"Hal, do you ever try?"

He looked at her indignantly; then he reflected that, in fact, he never did try. But to convince her he made an effort that instant. Tossing his crutches to the ground, he tried to force his limbs forward over the ground. They utterly failed to respond to his will, and he would have fallen had not Amy's arms caught and supported him. [Pg 187]

"There, you see!"

"For the first attempt it was fine. Bravo! *Encore!*"

Yet she picked up his "other legs" and gave him, then led Balaam away from the late thistle blooms he was browsing. Hallam mounted, crossed his crutches before him, and lifted his cap. Amy tossed him a kiss and turned millward, while he ascended the hill road. But no sooner was she out of sight than her assumed cheerfulness gave way, and for a time it was a sad-faced girl who trudged diligently onward toward duty and a life of toil.

Gwendolyn had delivered her message, and the superintendent welcomed Amy to his office at the mill with a friendly nod and smile; but, at that moment, he was deep in business with a strange gentleman, negotiating for a large sale of carpets, and after his brief greeting he apparently forgot the girl. She remained standing for some moments, then Mr. Metcalf beckoned an attendant to give her a chair and the day's newspaper.

Her heart sank even lower than before. The superintendent appeared a different person from the friend she had met in his own home. Her throat choked. She felt that she should cry, if she did not make some desperate effort to the contrary; so she began to read the paper diligently, though her mind scarcely followed the words she saw, and would deflect to those she heard, which were very earnest, indeed, though all about a matter no greater than one-eighth cent per yard. [Pg 188]

"How queer! Two great grown men to stand there and argue about such a trifle. Why, there isn't any such coin, and what does it mean? Well, I'm eavesdropping, and that's wrong. Now I will read. I will not listen."

Running in this wise, her thoughts at last fixed themselves upon a paragraph which she had perused several times without comprehending. Now it began to have a meaning for her, and one so intense that she half rose to beg the loan of the newspaper that she might show it to Hallam.

"The very thing. The very thing I heard those doctors talking about in mother's room. I'll ask for it, or copy it, if I can, and show my boy. Who knows what it might do?"

There was a little movement in the office. The gentleman in the big top-coat, with his eyeglasses, his gold-handled umbrella, and his consequential air, was leaving. He was bowing in a patronizing sort of way, and Mr. Metcalf was bowing also, smiling almost obsequious. He was rubbing his hair upward from his forehead, in a way Amy had already observed to be habitual when he was pleased. Evidently he was pleased now, and greatly so, for even after the stranger had passed out and entered the cab in waiting, the superintendent remained before the glass door, still smiling with profound satisfaction.

Then, as if he had suddenly remembered her, he turned toward Amy.

[Pg 189]

"Well, miss, what can I do for you to-day? I saw you were interested in our argument over the fraction of a cent, and I'm glad to tell you I won. Yes, I carried my point."

The girl was disgusted. Though she liked to know her friends from every side of their characters, she was not pleased by this glimpse of Mr. Metcalf's.

He saw her feeling in her face and took it merrily, dropping at last into the manner which she knew and liked best.

"A small business, you're thinking, eh? Well, Miss Amy, let me tell you that on this one deal, this one sale, my gaining that fraction of a cent means the gaining to my employer of several thousand dollars. And that is worth contesting, don't you think?"

"It doesn't seem possible. Just that tiny eighth! Why, how many, many yards you must sell!"

"Indeed, yes. The mills are constantly turning out great quantities and, fortunately, the market is free. We dispose of them as fast as we can finish. We could sell more if we could manufacture more. But this is not what has brought you here, I fancy. Tell me your errand, please. I have much to get through with before closing."

The return to his business manner again chilled Amy's enthusiasm, but she thought of her father and what she hoped to do for him, and needed no other aid to her courage.

[Pg 190]

"I've come to ask a place in the mill. I want to work and get paid."

"Certainly. If you work, you will be paid. What makes you want to do it? Does your father know?"

"He has consented. I think he understands, though he didn't seem to care greatly, either way. I must do it, sir, or something. It was the only thing I knew about."

"You know nothing about that, really. The girls here are from an altogether different class than that to which you belong. You would not find it pleasant."

"That wouldn't matter. And aren't we all Americans? Equal?"

"Theoretically. How much do you suppose you could earn?"

"I don't know. Whatever my work was worth."

"That, at the beginning, would be not more than two dollars a week, and probably less. It would be fatiguing, constant standing in attending to your 'jenny.' I really think that you would better abandon the idea at once. Try to think of something nearer what you have known."

Yet he saw the deepening distress in her face and it grieved him. He was bound, in all honesty to her, to set the dark side of things before her, and he waited for her decision with some curiosity.

"If you'll let me try, I would like to do so."

CHAPTER XVI.

[Pg 191]

AMY BEGINS TO SPIN.

"Well, deary, it's time. Oh, me fathers, to think it! Wake up, Amy, me colleen, me own precious lamb."

Six o'clock of a gray November morning is not an inspiring hour to begin any undertaking. Amy turned in her comfortable bed, rubbed her eyes, saw Cleena standing near with a lighted candle in her hand, and inquired, drowsily:—

"Why—what's happened? Why will you get up in the middle of the night? Don't bother me—yet."

"Faith, an' I won't. Upon honor it's wrong, it's all wrong. What'll your guardian angel think of old Cleena to be leavin' you do it! Body an' bones, I'll do naught to further the business—not I!"

The woman's voice was tremulous with indignation or grief, and all at once Amy remembered. Then she sprang from her cosy nest, wide-awake and full of courage.

"Hush, dear old Goodsoul, I forgot. I forgot, entirely. I was dreaming of Fairacres. It was a beautiful dream. The old house was full of little children and young girls. They were singing and laughing and moving about everywhere. I can hardly believe it wasn't real; but, I'm all right now."

[Pg 192]

I'll be down stairs in a few minutes. Don't wake anybody else, for there's no need. Is it six o'clock already? It might be midnight or—any time. Why, what's this?"

"A frock I've made for you, child."

"*You* made a frock for me? Why, Cleena!"

"Sure, it's not so handy with the needle as the broom me fingers is. But what for no? Them pretty white ones will never do for the nasty old mill. This didn't need so much. The body'll about fit, thinks I, if I sew it fast in the front an' split it behind. The skirt's not so very long. She was a mite of a woman, God rest her. Well, I'll go an' see the milk doesn't boil over, an' be back in a jiffy to fasten it for you. Ah, me lamb! Troth, a spirit's brave like your own will be prospered, I know."

Then Cleena went hurriedly out of the room. The frock which she had prepared for Amy's use in the mill was remodelled from an old one of her mistress's. As has been said, Amy had never worn any sort of dress except white. The fabric was changed to suit the season, but the color was not. Even her warm winter cloak was of heavy white wool, faced here and there with scarlet, to match the simple scarlet headgear that suited her dark face so well. Quite against the habits of her own upbringing, Mrs. Kaye had clothed her daughter to please the taste of her artist husband, and therefore it had not greatly mattered that this taste dictated a style more fanciful than useful. [Pg 193]

Now everything was altered, and Cleena had consulted Mrs. Jones with the result just given. But from a true delicacy, the faithful old servant did not stay to watch the girl as she adopted the new garb which belonged to the new fortunes, though she need not have been afraid.

For a moment Amy held the gray dress in her hand, feeling it almost a sacrilege to put it on. She remembered it as the morning gown of her mother, plain to the extreme, yet graceful and precious in her sight because of the dear wearer. Then she lifted the garment to her lips, and touched it lightly.

"Mother, darling, it is a good beginning. It seems to me it is like a sister of mercy putting on her habit for the first time. It is a protection and a benediction. If I can only put on my mother's beautiful character with her clothing, I shall do well, indeed." Then she examined the alterations which Cleena had been instructed by the cottager to make, and was able to smile at them.

"The new sewing and the old do not match very well, but it will answer, and it does fit me much better than I would have thought. My! but I must already be as large, or nearly so, as she was. Well, no time for thinking back now. It's all looking forward, and must be, if I am to keep my courage."

Then she knelt beside her bed, prayed simply and in full faith for success in her efforts to provide for her beloved ones, and went below, smiling and gay. [Pg 194]

"Think of it, Cleena Keegan. This is Monday morning. On seventh day I expect to bring back two splendid dollars and put into your hands. I, just I, your own little Amy. Think of the oatmeal it will buy."

It was not in Cleena's heart to dampen this ardor by remarking how small a sum two dollars really was, considered in the light of a family support; and, after all, oatmeal was cheap. Fortunately, it also formed the principal diet of this plainly nurtured household, and even that very breakfast to which the young breadwinner now sat down.

But the meal was exquisitely cooked, and the hot milk was rich and sweet. Also, there lay, neatly wrapped in a spotless napkin, the mid-day luncheon, which Cleena had been told to prepare, and which Mrs. Jones suggested should be of something "hearty and strong" for "working in the mill beats all for appetite."

Then Amy took the big gingham pinafore, that Cleena had also prepared, and with her little parcels under her arm, skipped away down the slope to the Joneses' cottage, where Gwendolyn was to meet and escort her to her first day's work.

"Pshaw! I thought you wasn't coming. We'll be late if we don't hurry. Hmm. Wore your white cloak, didn't you? Well, I guess the girls won't laugh at you much. A dark one would have been better." [Pg 195]

"But I have no dark one, so it was this or nothing. How fast you walk, almost as if you were running!"

"We'll be late, I tell you. I don't want to get docked, if *you* do."

"What is 'docked'?"

"Why, having something taken from your wages."

"Would that be done for just so short a time?"

"Yes, indeed. The time-keeper watches out and nobody has a chance to get off. To be late five minutes means losing a quarter day's wages. They count off a quarter, a half, three-quarters, or a whole, according to time."

"Then Gwendolyn, let's run. I wouldn't make you lose for anything."

"All right."

When they arrived at the mill, Gwendolyn said:—

"You come this way with me. Hang your cap and coat right here, next to mine. Never mind if the girls do stare, you'll get used to that. I felt as if I should sink the first day I came, though that was ages ago. Hello, Maud, where was you last night?"

Amy did not feel in the least like "sinking." She had overcome her drowsiness, and the light was already growing much stronger. She looked around upon these strangers who were to be her comrades at toil, with a friendly interest and curiosity. Some of her new mates regarded her with equal curiosity, though few with so kindly an interest as her own. The unconscious ease of Amy's bearing they esteemed "boldness," or even "cheek," and her air of superior breeding was distasteful to them.

[Pg 196]

"My, ain't she a brazen thing! Looks around on the whole crowd as if she thought she could put on all the airs she pleased, even in the mill. Well, 'ristocrat or no 'ristocrat, she'll have to come down here. We're just as good as she is and—"

"A little better, too, you mean," commented a lad, just passing.

The girl who scorned "'ristocrats" paused in fastening her denim apron and looked after the youth, who was, evidently, a personage of importance in the eyes of herself and mates. They watched his jaunty movements with undisguised admiration, and his passing left behind him a wake of smiles and giggles which to Amy seemed out of proportion to the wit of his remark.

However, there was little loitering, and the long procession of girls, with its sprinkling of men and boys, swiftly ascended the narrow open staircase to the upper floors. This staircase was built along the side wall of the great structure, flight above flight, an iron frame with steps of board. The only protection from falling upon the floor below, should one grow dizzy-headed, was a gas-pipe hand-rail; and even this might not have been provided had not the law compelled.

[Pg 197]

As she fell into line behind Gwendolyn and began the upward climb, Amy grasped this slender support firmly; but everything about her seemed very unlike her memory of her first visit here. Then the sun was shining, she was under the guidance of the genial superintendent, and the scene was novel—like a picture exhibited for her personal entertainment. Now the novelty was past, the scene had become dingy, and herself a part of it.

All around her were voices talking in a sort of mill *patois* concerning matters which she did not understand. But nobody, not even Gwendolyn, spoke to her, and a sudden, overpowering dismay seized her stout heart and made her head reel. Then she made a misstep and her foot slipped through the space between two stairs. This brought the hurrying procession to a standstill, and recalled attention to the "new hand."

"My sake! Somebody's fell. Who? Is she hurt? Oh, that donkey girl. Well, she ain't so used to these horrid stairs as we be."

"Hold back! She's sort of giddy-headed, I guess."

Amy felt an arm thrown round her waist, a rather ungentle pull was given her dangling foot, and she was set right to proceed. But for an instant she could not go on, and she again felt the arm supporting and forcing her against the bare brick wall, so that those below might not be longer hindered.

[Pg 198]

Then she half gasped:—

"Oh, I am so sorry. I didn't mean—"

"Of course you didn't. Never mind. You ain't the first girl has had her foot through these steps, and you won't be the last. After somebody has broke a leg or two, then they'll put backboards to 'em. Not before. Is your head swimming yet?"

"It feels queerly. It jars so."

"That's the machinery and the noise. The whole building just shakes and buzzes when we get fairly started. Don't be scared. You're all safe. Lots of girls feel just that way when they first come. Lots of 'em faint away. Some can't stand it at all. But you'll get used, don't fear. I was one of the fainters, and I kept it up quite a spell. The 'boss' of the room got so mad he told me if I didn't quit fainting I'd have to quit spinning. So I made a bold face and haven't fainted since. You see, I couldn't afford to. I had to do this or starve."

By this time Amy's fright was past, and she was regarding her comforter with that friendly gratitude which won her the instant liking of the other, who resumed:—

"Pshaw! The girls didn't know what they were saying. You don't look a mite stuck up. You aren't, are you?"

"Indeed, no. Why should I be? But I do thank you so much for your kindness just now, and I'm sorry if my blundering has made you late. Will you be 'docked'?"

[Pg 199]

"Oh, no. We've time enough. Gwen is always in a desperate hurry. She likes a chance to talk before she begins work. She's a nice girl, but she isn't very deep. Say, have you seen her new winter hat?"

"No; has she another than that she wore this morning?"

"My! yes."

The "old hand" and the "new" were now quietly climbing to the top floor where their tasks were to be side by side, and Amy had time to examine her companion's face. It was plain and freckled, boasting none of that "prettiness" of which Gwendolyn was so openly proud, but it was gentle and intelligent, and had a look of delicacy which suggested chronic suffering, patiently borne. Amy had not far to seek the cause of this pathetic expression, for Mary Reese was a hunchback. In her attire there was as much simplicity as in Amy's own, but without grace or harmony of coloring.

"You're looking at my clothes, aren't you? Well, they're the great trouble of my life. After I pay my board and washing, I don't have more than fifty cents left. I do the best I can, but I'm no hand with a needle, and Saturday-halves are short. I thought you were the loveliest thing I ever saw, that day you went round the mill with the 'Supe.'"

"Oh, did you see me then? Did I see you? What is your name? Ah, are we up there already?"

[Pg 200]

"You can ask questions, can't you? Yes, I saw you. My name is Mary Reese. If you saw me, you certainly didn't notice me, and I'm always mighty glad when folks don't turn for a second stare at my poor shoulders."

"Mary, nobody would, surely," cried Amy, and flung her arm protectingly across the deformity of her new friend.

"You dear, to think you'd do that when you know me so little. Well, there's many a body touches my hump 'for luck,' but I can't remember when anybody did for—love. I'm not going to forget it, either. Even a homely little hunchback has her own power among these people. There, we're here. This is our 'jenny.' I'm so glad we are to work on the same machine. There'll be another girl on your side till you learn; then she'll be taken off and we'll be alone. I'll like that. Shall you?"

"I—think—so," responded Amy, absently, her attention now engrossed by the excitement about her. Girls were hurrying to take their places before the long frames filled with reels, on which fine woollen threads were being wound by the revolutions of the machinery overhead. These reels whirled round so rapidly that Amy could not follow their motion, and the buzz-buzz, as of a thousand bees humming, filled her ears and confused the instructions of the girl who was to give her her first lesson in winding and "tending."

[Pg 201]

Across the great frame Mary nodded encouragingly, but it is safe to say that Amy had never felt so incompetent and foolish as she did while she was striving to understand what was expected of her.

"No, no, no; you must be quicker. See, this spool is full. This is how. 'Doffer,' here!"

The lad who had created the ripple of admiration on his passage to this room, now approached. His motions were exact and incredibly swift. It was his duty to remove full spools and replace them by empty ones, and he did this duty for sixteen spinning frames. Seeing the "new hand's" astonishment at his deftness he became reckless and, intending an unusually dexterous movement, miscalculated his reach, and the result was a momentary tangle among the whirling spindles.

"Stupid, see what you're at!" cried Amy's instructor, as by a swift movement of her foot she brought the rapidly circling frame to a standstill. "Now, you've done it!"

"And I'll undo it," he returned, casting a side glance at the stranger.

"If those who've worked here so long make mistakes, I'll not give up," she thought; and Mary came round from behind the frame in time to read this thought.

"Don't you mind. You see, we have to be on guard all the time. If we're not, something happens like this. Wait. While they're fixing those spools, you watch me tie these threads. That's what you have to do. To keep everything straight and fasten on the new ends as the old ones run out."

[Pg 202]

"But I don't see you 'tie' it. There is no knot."

"Of course not. We couldn't have rough things in the thread that is going to make a carpet. We just twist it—so. Do you see? It can't pull apart, and it makes no roughness. Try; keep on trying; and after you have practised awhile, you'll be as swift as swift."

"I feel as slow as slow."

The "new hand" smiled into the eager face of her willing helper, and the poor hunchback's heart glowed. That so bright a creature should ever come to be a worker in that busy mill, side by side with her own self, was stranger than the strangest of the cheap novels she read so constantly.

"It beats all, don't it?" demanded Mary, clasping Amy's little brown hand.

"What, dear? What beats what? Have I done that one better? Do you think I'll ever, ever be able to keep up my side of the 'frame' after this other one leaves me?"

Mary's laugh was good to hear. Mr. Metcalf, entering the room, heard it and smiled. Yet his smile was fleeting, and his only comment a reprimand to "Jack doffer" for his carelessness.

"It must not happen again. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," answered the youth, humbly.

[Pg 203]

Of Amy herself the superintendent took no notice whatever beyond a curt nod. She did not understand this, and a pain shot through her sensitive heart. Then she reflected that he might not have seen her.

"Do you suppose he did, or that he knew me? You see, I've always worn white before, and maybe he did not recognize me."

"Oh, he saw you all right. He wouldn't more 'n nod to his own wife, if he's on his rounds, and full of business. I've heard that he was very pleasant outside the mill and among his folks, but I never saw him any different from just now. Seems to me he looks on us like he does the spools on the spinners. I always feel as if I were part of the machine—the poorest part—and I guess you will, too. There, it's fixed and starting up. Hurry to your place and don't get scared. Sallie's cross, but she can't help it. She used to be one of the 'fainters.' Yes; that's right. Now all there is, is to keep at it till twelve o'clock whistle."

That meant nearly five hours of the steadiest and most difficult labor which Amy had ever undertaken. Yet these others near her, and the crowds of spinners all through the great apartment, appeared to take this labor very easily, and were even able to carry on a conversation amid the deafening noise.

Amy watched so intently, and tried so faithfully to do just what and all that was expected of her that she did, indeed, make a rapid progress for one beginning; and when the welcome whistle sounded, she was surprised to see how instantly every frame was stopped, and to hear Mary saying:—

[Pg 204]

"If you don't want to go with anybody else, I'd admire to have you eat your lunch with me."

"I'd like to, certainly, but I don't believe I can eat. My head is whirling, whirling, just like those dreadful spools. Isn't it terrible?"

"No, I don't think so. I don't notice them now, except to make them say things. But come along, we have a half-hour nooning. We might have a whole hour, but most of the hands like to give up part of their dinner-time every day and then take the afternoon off on Saturday. The 'Supe' doesn't care, so that's the way we get our 'Saturday-half.' I sometimes wish we worked the other way, but of course we couldn't. If part stops, the other part has to, 'cause every room depends on some other room to keep it going."

"Why, I think that's beautiful, don't you? Like a big whole, and all of us the needed parts."

"No, I don't. I don't see one single beautiful thing about this hateful old mill. At least, I didn't before this morning, when you came."

Amy looked into Mary's face a moment. Then she stooped and kissed it gently. Small though Amy herself was, for her age, she was still taller than her new friend, and felt herself far stronger.

Away in another place Gwendolyn and her mates observed this little by-play, and one girl remarked:—

[Pg 205]

"Hmm. That settles *her* hash. If she's going to take up with that horrid Mary Reese, there won't anybody go with her. Not a single girl, and as for the fellows—my!"

To this flirtatious young person to be ignored by "the fellows" meant the depth of misfortune. Happily, however, Amy had never hear the word "fellow," as at present applied, and to do anything for the sake of attracting attention to herself she would have considered the extreme of vulgarity.

Mary guided her to a quiet corner behind some bales, and filling a tin cup with water from a faucet, proceeded to open her own luncheon. Then she watched Amy, who, almost too weary to eat, loitered over the untying of the dainty parcel Cleena had made up. When she at last did so, and quietly sorted the contents of the neat box, she was surprised by Mary's astonished stare.

"What is it, dear? Aren't you hungry?"

"Hungry? I'm starved. But—see the difference. It goes even into our victuals. Oh dear, there isn't any use!" and, with a bitter sob, the mill girl tossed aside her own rude parcel of food and dropped her face in her hands.

Girlhood is swiftly intuitive. The boarding-house lunch which the hunchback had brought was quite sufficient in quantity, but it was coarse in extreme, and meats had been wrapped in one bit of newspaper along with the sweets, so that the flavor of each article spoiled the flavor of all. Yet it was the first time that Mary had rebelled against such an arrangement.

[Pg 206]

Now it was different. Amy's speech, Amy's manner and belongings, opened before the slumbering ambition of the mill girl a picture of better things, which she recognized as unattainable for herself.

Then she felt again the clasp of firm, young arms about her own neck, and a face that was both smiling and tearful pressed close to her own.

"You dear little girl. I see, I understand. But you've never had a chance to try how I've lived and I've never tried how you do. Let's change. Yes; I insist, for this once. You eat my lunch, and I'll eat yours. It will do Good soul's great heart no end of good when I tell her about it, and it will make me comprehend just how life looks from your side. Remember, we're both poor girls together now, and I—insist."

Amy had a will, as has been remarked. So, in a few seconds, the two lunches were exchanged, and for almost the first time in her life Mary Reese knew what it was to feed daintily and correctly.

"It makes me feel as if I was straighter, somehow. And you're a dear, dear girl."

"Thank you, of course it does. I wouldn't like to do anything that hurt my own self-respect, even in such a little thing as eating. But, you see, I had my darling mother. Now I've had to let her go; yet if you'll let me, I'll be so glad to teach you all she taught me. It will be keeping her memory green in just the very way she'd like."

[Pg 207]

"Teaching isn't all. The difference is *born* in us."

"Nonsense. Think of Mr. Metcalf. They say he was a foundling baby, and yet he's a gentleman."

"Even if he doesn't speak to you in work hours?" asked Mary, with a mischievous glance that would have surprised her mill mates had they seen it. Already the leaven of kindness was working in her neglected life, and for the moment she forgot to be upon the defensive against the indifference of others.

"Even anything. But, hear me, Mary Reese. Here am I, as poor as poor can be, but determined to succeed in doing something grand. Guess what?"

"I couldn't tell. The whistle will blow again in a minute."

"I'm going to build a Home for Mill Girls, where they shall have all things that any gentlewoman should have. I haven't the least idea how nor when nor where. But I'm going to do it. You'll see. And you shall help. Maybe that's just why God let me come here and be a mill girl myself."

After a pause the other spoke. "It seems queer to hear you say such things. Yet you're not what I call 'pious,' I—guess."

"Don't be afraid. I'm not goody-goody, at all. But it's the most interesting thing mother taught me: the watching how everything 'happens' in life, like a wonderful picture or even a curious, beautiful puzzle. Each part, each thing, fits so perfectly into its place, and it's such fun to watch and see them fit. Yes, I believe that's the key to my coming."

[Pg 208]

For a moment these girlish dreamers clasped hands and saw visions. The next, a whistle sounded and, still hand in hand, they returned to their frame and to this toil which was part of a far-reaching "plan." On the way they passed "Jack doffer," wearing his most fetching smile, and a new necktie, recklessly disported during work hours for the sole purpose of dazzling the bright eyes of the pretty "new hand."

Unfortunately for his vanity, the "new hand" never saw him, because of those still lingering visions of a Home with a capital H; and oddly enough, the youth respected her the more since she did not. Later on things would be altered; but neither of them knew that then.

CHAPTER XVII.

[Pg 209]

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF BALAAM.

"Me Ginerall Bonyparty, come by!"

The lad in the depths of the cellar vouchsafed no reply. He heard distinctly, and Cleena knew that he did. This did not allay her rising wrath.

"The spalpeen! That's what comes o' takin' in folks to do for. Ah, Fayettey," she called wheedlingly.

Good Cleena had almost as many titles for her "adopted son" as her "childer" had for her. Each one suggested to the simple fellow some particular mood of the speaker. "Ginerall" meant mild sarcasm, and when "Bonyparty" was added, there was indicated a need for prompt and unquestioning obedience. "Fayettey" was the forerunner of something agreeable, to which might or might not be appended something equally disagreeable.

Said Hallam, once: "Freely translated, 'Fayettey' stands for ginger cookies, and sometimes the cookies must be earned."

The call came the third time:—

"Napoleon Bonyparty Lafayette Jimpson, come out o' that! Two twists of a lamb's tail an' I'll fasten ye down!"

[Pg 210]

The reconstruction of Fayette gave Cleena plenty of employment, and in one thing he

disappointed her, sorely and continually: he utterly and defiantly refused to work in the mill or elsewhere that would bring in wages. Since Amy had become a daily toiler, this attitude on his part angered the poor woman beyond endurance.

Yet there was not any laziness about Fayette. Nobody could have been more industrious, or more illy have directed his industry. As long as it was possible to work in the ground he had labored upon the barren soil of Bareacre, and those who understood such matters assured the Kayes that they would really have a fine garden spot, when another spring came round.

"Surely, he that makes the wilderness to blossom is well engaged, Cleena," Mr. Kaye had remonstrated once, in his quiet way.

"Faith, yes, master, but till them roses bloom there might be better doin'," she had returned. In her heart she respected Mr. Kaye's judgment less even than the mill boy's, though she veiled this contempt by an outward deference.

To-day was a crisis. For good or ill, Cleena had determined to have the question of wage-earning settled. Either the lad must go to work and bring in something to pay for his keep, or he must "clear himself out."

"D'ye mean it?"

[Pg 211]

"Yes, avick, I means it! Up with ye, or stay below—for as long as I please."

Fayette threw down his pick and crawled forward through the trench he was digging. The idle suggestion of Hallam had taken firm hold of the natural's mind, and with a dogged persistence, that he showed also in other matters, he had now been daily laboring upon the cross-shaped excavation which was to ventilate the cellars of "Charity House." He had made a fine beginning, and so explained to Cleena, as his mud-stained face appeared above the cellar stairs.

"A beginnin' o' nonsense. When all's done, what use? Sit down an' taste the last o' the cakes me neighbor sent up. Here, you William, keep out o' that! It's for Miss Amy, dear heart. Four weeks an' longer she's been up before light, trudgin' away as gay as a mavis, with never a word that she's bothered. Alanna, Mister Gladstone, what's now?"

A surplus of small Joneses had swarmed over the lower floor of the house on the hill, and their presence was now accepted by Cleena with little opposition, because of the generosity of their parents.

"True for ye, the babies be forever under me foot, but one never comes atop the rise but there's doubled in his little fist the stuff to make him welcome. It may be a cake, or a biscuit, or a bowl o' milk even. It's something for some one."

"The 'some one' is generally the bearer of the loaf, or cake, eh, Cleena?" asked Hallam, who was lingering in the kitchen, gathering what warmth he could from the stove there. The coals provided in the autumn were long ago consumed, and out of the scanty supply she had been able to procure since then, Cleena wasted little below stairs. In the master's studio above a fire was always burning, and if, as he sometimes did, he asked whence the supply, the faithful servant put his inquiry aside with some evasive remark.

[Pg 212]

He had now work at hand which engrossed him entirely, and to which heat and physical comfort were a necessity. He was painting a life-sized portrait of his wife, and not one of the household could do aught but wish him God-speed on so precious a labor.

Meanwhile, Hallam lay so silent upon the settle beside the stove that neither of them, Cleena nor Fayette, noticed him.

"Here you, William, Beatrice, Belinda, come by! Set yourselves down in the corner, yon. Here's a fine bag o' scraps for you two little maids. Pick 'em over that neat your mother'll be proud; and, William, take out these things from Miss Amy's box till you puts them back as straight as straight. Sure, it's long since herself's had the time, an' he's a smart little gossoon, so he is."

The little girls emptied the bag of pieces on the floor, and sorting them into piles began to roll them into tidy bundles. Along with improving Fayette, Cleena had early set out upon the same lines with the small Joneses. Even William Gladstone, the mite, was already learning to distinguish between soiled hands and clean, and to enjoy the latter.

[Pg 213]

So now, while she talked, Cleena set the child to take out and replace with exactness the few treasured letters and cards, or papers, which were Amy's own, and kept in her big japanned box.

Once, idly, Cleena observed the child lingering over a square packet, like an old-time letter, sealed with red wax. It was this bit of color which the little one fancied, and she smiled to see his delight in it.

"The blessed baby! Sure, he's the makings of a fine man in him, so he has. Take a look, Fayette, if yerself would copy yon."

"You'll let that youngster play with your things once too often. He's a *hider*, Lionel Percival says so."

"Humph! An' what that silly heeram-skeeram says means naught. Now, hear me, me ginal. This ends it. You goes to work, or you goes to play. Which is it?"

"I—I won't."

"Which is it?" repeated Cleena, sternly.

The natural fidgeted. In his heart he was afraid of his self-constituted "mother." He had no wish to return to the drudgery of the mill. He was wholly interested in his cellar-digging. He had heard tales of mining, and in some way he had obtained a miner's lantern. This he fastened to his "parade hat," and wore to lighten his underground labors.

[Pg 214]

Vague visions of untold wealth floated in his dull brain. Somewhere in the world he knew that other men were digging in other trenches for gold. He had heard the "boys" say so often, and some of them had even gone to do likewise. He had seen gold sometimes in Mr. Metcalf's office safe. Not much of it, indeed, but enough to fire his fancy. All the time he toiled he was looking for something round and glistening, like the coins he had seen. He was not in the least discouraged because he had found none. There was time enough, for he had not much more than begun what he hoped to complete. Yet, as Cleena knew, he had made a considerable opening under the west room and had carried out many barrowfuls of earth. This he had utilized upon his garden, which was almost as interesting to him as his mining.

"Which is it, avick?"

"Must I?"

"Troth, must ye? Indeed, look here." Leaning over the table she spread before her charge's eyes a dilapidated pocket-book. It had been the receptacle for the family funds, but it was now quite empty. Fayette stared hard. Then he whistled.

"You don't say so! All gone? Every cent?"

Cleena nodded. Her face was very grave. It frightened the lad. He glanced toward Hallam, apparently asleep on the settle, and whispered:—

[Pg 215]

"Where's hers? What she earns?"

"Humph! That little! Well, it's gone. The last week's wage to buy her shoes. Faith, the poor little feet! Steppin' along to her duty with never a turn aside, an' the holes clean through the soles. Oh, me fathers, that ever I should see the day!"

Overcome by her memories of far different circumstances, Cleena bowed her gray head upon her arms above the empty purse and shook in suppressed grief. So faithful was she that she would not have counted even her life of value if by sacrificing it she could have restored unto her "folks" the departed joy and comfort of their house.

Fayette reached over and lifted the purse. He was not satisfied until he had examined it for himself. Then he rose and took the lantern from his hat.

"I'll fetch some," he said briefly, and turned toward the door.

But Hallam had not been so fast asleep as he seemed, and he demanded whither Fayette was bound.

"It's nothin' to worry about, Master Hal. Just a little matter o' business 'twixt me ginerel here an' meself. Can't a body wear out her shoes without so much ado?" she asked, thrusting into view her great foot with its still unbroken, stout, calfskin brogan upon it.

Hallam smiled. "You can't deceive me, dear old Scrubbub. It's not you that's wanting new shoes, and if Fayette is going millward, I am going too."

[Pg 216]

"Master Hal, what for now? An' what'll the master be sayin' if he's wantin' you betimes? Isn't it bad enough to keep him content without Amy, let alone yerself? No, no; go up by. It's warmer in the paintin' room, an' sure a body's still as you can't bother nobody, even a artist."

But the cripple limped across the room and took from a recess his cap and the short top-coat he wore when he rode Balaam. It was as warm as it was clumsy, and gave his slender figure a width that was quite becoming. Like Amy's, his headgear was always a Scotch Tam, and when it crowned his fair face Cleena thought him exceeding good to look upon.

"Arrah musha, but you're the lad for me! An' after all, no matter if the winds be cold, a ride'll do ye fine, an' make the oatmeal taste sweet in your mouth."

"It's time something did. Oatmeal three times a day is a trifle monotonous. Heigho! for one of your chicken pies, Goodsoul."

He was sorry as soon as he said that. Not to be able to give her "childer" what they desired was always real distress to Cleena. So he laughed her regret away, with the question:—

"If I bring home a pair of fowls, will you cook them?"

"Will I no? Fetch me the birds, an' I'll show you. Go on, Fayettey, an' saddle the beast."

[Pg 217]

But Fayette was not, at that moment, inclined to do this office for the other lad. He had resolved upon a kindly deed, one which involved self-sacrifice on his part, and like many other wiser people he was inclined to let the one generous act cover several meaner ones.

It was his heart's desire to own Balaam. If he took some of the money which the superintendent was keeping for him and gave it to Cleena for the housekeeping, he lessened his chance of obtaining his object by just that much. If he gave Cleena the money, he wanted everybody to understand that he fully realized, himself, how magnanimous he was.

However, in many respects Hallam was his hero, and between the two there had been, of late, a little secret which Fayette was proud to share. Each day he would ask, with extreme caution:—

"You hain't told nobody yet, have ye?"

Commonly the cripple would answer: "No; nor shall I. There's no use."

"Sho! Yes, there is. Read it an' see. If it's in the paper, it's so. Huckleberries! You ain't no more pluck than a skeeter."

Then Hallam would reread the scrap of newspaper he carried in his pocket; and each time, after such a reading, a brighter light shone in the eyes of both boys, and the foundling would observe:—

"It's worth tryin'. I say, it's worth tryin'. I ain't tired yet. Keep her up."

[Pg 218]

Hallam knew the half-column of print by heart. It had been brought him by Amy, on the day she went to Mr. Metcalf's office. She had asked the loan of the newspaper, and had received it as a gift. She had hurried home, full of enthusiasm, and showed it to Hallam. He had not been enthusiastic, and had apparently tossed the article aside as worthless to him. Amy was too busy to give the matter further thought, and did not know that after she had left the room her brother had read the paragraph a second time, and had then carefully preserved it.

Even now, as they started for the mill, Fayette requested to "hear it again," but Hallam declined.

"It's too cold. And if I don't hurry and do what I set out to, I'm afraid I'll back out."

"Is it somethin' ye hate to do?"

"Yes; it—Don't let's talk about it."

"Just the way I feel. I'd ruther live on one meal a day 'n do it. Once I give it to her, I shan't never see no more of it. Oh, I know *her*! She's a regular boss, she is."

"Cleena? But she's a dear old creature, even so."

"Oh, I like her. I like her first rate. She's a good cook an' middlin' good-lookin'. I hain't got nothin' again her. They say, to the village, how 't John Young talks o' sparkin' her."

"What? Teamster John? Our Cleena? Well, he'd better not!"

[Pg 219]

In his indignation Hallam nearly slipped from his saddle. He did let one of his crutches fall, and Fayette picked up that, took the other, and cheerfully "packed" them to the end of their journey.

"Why not? His wife's dead."

"Yes. But—our Cleena! Cleena Keegan! Well, there's no danger of her encouraging him. Between her own 'folks,' yourself, and the Joneses, I think she has all she can attend to without taking in a man to worry with."

The subject was idlest village gossip, but it served to divert Hallam's thoughts from his impending errand, and he arrived at the office of the mill in good spirits. Then he remembered a saying he had heard in the community:—

"All roads lead to the mill," and quoted it for Fayette's benefit.

"That's so. But, say, I hate that old Wingate that's got it now. He licked me when I worked for him. Licked me more 'n once, just because I fooled a little with his horses. I was bound out to him from the poor-farm, an' I run away. He treated me bad. I'm goin' to get even with him some day. You watch an' see."

"Well, here we are. Is this the office? Will you go in with me and help me find the superintendent? I've never been here, you know."

"Huckleberries! Ain't that queer? And Amy comes every day."

[Pg 220]

Fayette meant no reproach. His thoughts were never profound, but Hallam flushed and felt ashamed.

"That's true. The more disgrace to me. Well, cripple or not, that's the last time anybody shall ever say, truthfully, that my little sister has set me an example of courage and effort. Hurry up. Open the door."

A moment later both lads stood within the little room wherein so many big money transactions took place; and it is doubtful if any speculator coming there had felt greater anxiety over the outcome of his visit than these two whose "operations" were to be of such a modest limit.

"Boss, I've come after my money. I want the whole lot."

"Good day, 'Bony'; good day, Hallam Kaye, I believe."

Hallam bowed, and before his courage could wane, replied:—

"Yes; I'm sorry to interrupt you in business hours, but—will you buy Balaam, Pepita's brother?"

Before the gentleman could answer, Fayette had clutched Hallam's shoulder.

"What's that? Did you come here to sell that donkey?"

"I came to try to sell it, certainly."

"Then I'm sorry I ever touched to help you. I want him myself. I come to get my money a purpose. My money is as good as his. He shan't have it. I'll have it myself." [Pg 221]

Mr. Metcalf interrupted:—

"But, 'Bony,' you can't afford to keep such an animal. It would take all your capital to pay for him. Wait. Sometime, if you're industrious, you'll be rich enough to have a horse and carriage. Indeed, I mean it; and, yes, Hallam, I will very gladly buy your burro. I've wanted him ever since Amy let us have Pepita. I—"

"You shan't have him, then. You never shall. I want him, an' I'll keep him. You see!"

The door opened and shut with a bang. Whether purposely or not, it was impossible to say, but in his outward rush the half-wit brushed so rudely past Hallam that he knocked his crutch from his grasp, so that he would have fallen, had not the superintendent caught and steadied the lad to a seat.

"That's 'Bony' all over. As irresponsible as a child and ungovernable in his rage. Yet, never fear; he'll be back again, sometime."

"But—he has taken Balaam. What can I do now?"

Mr. Metcalf walked to the window and looked out. There was a dash of something black disappearing at the turn of the road.

"Humph! That's bad. He's taken the road to the mountains. When his 'wood fit' comes over him, summer or winter, he vanishes. Sometimes he is gone for months." [Pg 222]

"And he's taken Balaam with him," repeated the other.

"Yes; he certainly has;" but when the superintendent looked toward Hallam he was startled by the hopeless expression of the lad's fine face.

CHAPTER XVIII.

[Pg 223]

THE FASCINATION OF INDUSTRY.

"Sit down, lad, and rest. It will not be long before noon, and then I will send for your sister to come here."

"Thank you. Do you think he will stay long, this time?"

"'Bony'? It's just as the fit takes him. There's no accounting for his whims, poor unbalanced fellow. In some respects he is clever and remarkably clean-handed. In fixing parts of the machinery, I would rather have his help than that of most professionals, he is so careful about the minutest details. Yet, of course, it would be out of the question to rely upon him. There's another thing. He's a most excellent nurse. For days at a time, when there's been sickness in the mill village, he has devoted himself faithfully to whoever seemed to take his fancy. His big, ungainly hand has a truly wonderful power of soothing. When I had rheumatic fever, he was the only person I could endure to have in the room with me. His step was lighter even than that of my wife, and I really believe I should have died but for his care."

The superintendent was talking, simply to entertain and divert his visitor from the lad's own present annoyance, but he little knew how full of import his casual remarks were to his hearer. [Pg 224]

"Do you mean that he is magnetic? that there is something in the claim he makes of being a 'healer'?"

"Quite as much as in the claim of any such person. There are, of course, some human beings so constituted that they can influence for good the physical conditions of other people. I am very sorry that his present whim has seized him. I would like the burro, and you would like the price of him. Well, all in good time. Meanwhile, if I can help you, please tell me."

"There was only one way in which you could, so far as I know. That was by buying my pet. I—I don't suppose," Hallam continued, with hesitancy, "that there is anything such a—a useless fellow as I could do to earn money here?"

"I am not so sure about that. What sort of work would you like?"

"Any sort."

Mr. Metcalf went into another room and presently returned with some oblong pieces of cardboard. These had a checked surface, and upon these checks were painted or stained partial patterns, designs for the carpets woven in the mills.

"Your father is an artist. Have you learned anything about his work, or of coloring?"

"Something, of course, though very little. I would not be an artist."

[Pg 225]

"Indeed? But there are artisans whose work is simple, mechanical, and reasonably lucrative. Our designers, for instance, make an excellent living. Do you see these numbers at the sides of the patterns?"

"Yes."

"They are for the guidance of the weavers. The threads of the carpets are numbered, and these numbers correspond. Therefore, the weaver can make his carpet from his pattern with mathematical exactness. We require many such copies of the original design. If you would like to try this sort of work, I will give you a temporary job. The boy who usually does it is ailing, and I have allowed him a vacation. The wages are small, no more than Amy earns, but the work isn't difficult, and is the only thing I have now, suitable for you."

Incidentally the gentleman's eyes turned toward Hallam's crutches leaning against the arm of the chair where he sat; but instead of feeling humiliated by the glance, as the sensitive cripple often did, this casual one fired his heart with a new ambition. He recalled the words of the surgeon, and was no longer angry with them.

"I will be a man in spite of it all," flashed through his brain. Aloud he said:—

"I will be very glad to try the work."

"Very well. When can you begin?"

"Now."

Mr. Metcalf smiled.

[Pg 226]

"All right. A lad so prompt is the lad for me. But I had imagined another sort of fellow,—not so energetic, indeed."

"I've not been worth much. I've been lazy and selfish; but I mean to turn over a new leaf. I'll try to be useful, and if I fail—I fail."

"But you'll not fail. God never sent anybody into this world for whom He did not provide a place, a duty. You will succeed. You may even get to 'the top,' that roomy plane where there are so few competitors. I want you to count me your friend. I, too, am a self-made man. There are few obstacles one cannot conquer, given good health and determination."

Then once more the employer's gaze rested upon the crutches, and his heart misgave him that he had roused ambitions which could not be realized. The poor cripple was handicapped from the start by his infirmity.

Hallam again saw the expression of the other's face, and again it nerved him to a firmer will.

"Even that shall not hinder, sir; and now if you will explain to me the work, I'll make a try at it right away."

Mr. Metcalf placed the designs upon a sloping table, at one side the office, and Hallam took the chair before it, as requested. Then the superintendent went over the system of numbering the designs, and illustrated briefly.

"Now you try. I'll watch. Go on as if I were not here. If I do not speak, consider that you are working correctly."

[Pg 227]

Hallam's intelligence was of a fine order, and he had always been a keen observer. Before Mr. Metcalf had finished his explanations the lad had grasped the whole idea of the work, and he took up the pen the gentleman laid down with the confidence of one who understood exactly what he had to do.

"'Knowledge is power,' there is no truer saying," remarked the teacher, watching the tyro's eager efforts. "It's as easy as A B C to you, apparently."

"It seems very simple. I think I would enjoy it better, though, if I could see the application."

"How the patterns are used?"

"Yes."

"Come this way."

Which was not by the shorter one of the stairway on the cliff, up which Fayette had once forced the reluctant Pepita, but around by the sloping wagon track and into the lower rooms of the great building. Already the lad knew most of these by the descriptions his sister had given him, but no description could equal the facts. As she had done, so he experienced that thrill of excitement, as he realized the mighty, throbbing life all around him, of which the wonderful machinery and the

human hands and brains which controlled it seemed but parts of one vast whole. His eyes kindled, his cheeks flushed, and, as Amy had done, he forgot in his eagerness over the new scene that others might be observing him and his deformity.

[Pg 228]

At the weavers' looms he was "all eyes and ears," as one remarked. Seeing the woollen threads stretched up and down, perfectly colored and looking like a greatly elongated pattern, gave him a complete insight of the task for which he had been engaged.

"I thought I understood it before. I think I could not make a mistake now. A mistake would mean disaster wouldn't it?"

"It would," answered the superintendent, delighted to find his new helper such a promising aid. "See, here is the pattern. Watch the weaver awhile, then come with me to the 'setting room.' There is where Amy will be if she keeps on as industriously as she has begun. I tell you brains count. You are both gifted with them, and it should make you grateful—helpful, too. I think the least of all a man's possessions that he has a right to keep to himself is his brain."

Hallam looked up in surprise. Amy's acquaintance with the superintendent had begun most auspiciously, and he had desired to be considered her "friend," even as now her brother's. Yet since her coming to work in the mill, Mr. Metcalf had not exchanged a dozen sentences with her. She saw him daily, almost hourly. He was everywhere present about the great buildings. In no department was anybody sure of the time of his appearance, yet not one was overlooked. This kept the operators keyed to an expectancy which brought out from them their best, for the approbation of this observant 'boss' meant much to each. Yet he rarely spoke in a harsh tone to any, nor had any ever heard him utter an oath. This, in itself, gave him a distinction from all other mill superintendents under which most of these operatives had served, and added, it may be, a greater awe to their respect of him.

[Pg 229]

"I've been color mixer in a carpet mill these forty years, and Metcalf's the only 'Supe' I ever knew could run one without swearing," often remarked the master of the dyeing room. "He does; and a fellow may count himself lucky to work under such a man."

The color mixer, being a most important personage in the institution, had influence among his *confères*, with good reason. His trade was an art and a secret. Like all trade secrets it commanded its own price. He was said to enjoy a salary "among the thousands," and to have rejected even richer offers for the sake of the peaceful discipline at Ardsley.

Then the two visited the "setting room," where the mill girls reached the highest promotion possible in their business. The "setting" is the arrangement upon frames of the threads of the carpet, perfectly adjusted. A girl sits upon each side the frame, which holds from two hundred threads to slightly an advance upon that number. It is clean and dainty work, and the operator is fortunate who can secure the position. It is the same "thread" which, drawn over wires, in the weaver's hands, makes the loopleftike surface of Brussels carpeting, which was the only sort manufactured at Ardsley.

[Pg 230]

"You find it fascinating, don't you? So did Amy. Well, if you work here, in any department, you will have opportunity to study the whole science, from beginning to end. But I'm to meet Mr. Wingate in ten minutes in his private office. Let us go back."

Amy, away up on the fourth floor where she worked, knew nothing of this visit, and was a little dismayed when she received a summons to go down "to the 'Supe's' room for her nooning."

She was now alone with Mary at her "jenny," and had already become so expert that those who understood such matters prophesied she would soon be promoted to the "twisting and doubling." That very morning the "boss" of their room had said to her:—

"We never had a girl come here who got on so fast. It mostly takes months to learn a half-machine. After another three she can mind both sides. That means about four dollars and a half a week. Well, you've been quick and faithful, and nobody could envy your good luck."

As she picked up her lunch basket and descended toward the office, more than one called after her a good wish.

"Don't you be scared of the 'Supe.' If he scolds and you aren't to blame, just tell him so, and he'll like you the better."

[Pg 231]

"Maybe he's going to promote you a'ready, though I don't see how he could. I won't be jealous if he does, though," cried another; and Gwendolyn, the inquisitive, resolved to keep up Amy's spirits by accompanying her to the interview.

"But, Gwen, did he send for you?"

"No; course not. If he did, I shouldn't feel so chipper. There ain't no love lost 'twixt the 'Supe' and me."

"Then maybe—"

"Trash! I'm going. Ain't I the one that fetched you here in the first place? Hadn't I ought to stand by you, thick or thin?"

"Yes, I suppose so," answered Amy, more frightened by Gwendolyn's suggestive manner than by any consciousness of blunders made. Nor did she remind her neighbor that for a time, at first,

while Amy's popularity had not been determined, the other had shrewdly held aloof, waiting the turn of the tide. Fortunately, this had been in the "new hand's" direction, and since then Gwendolyn's attentions had been almost overpowering.

But, indeed, Amy did not even think this. "Simplicity, sincerity, sympathy"—she was faithfully striving to make this the rule of her own life, and therefore she could not imagine anything lower in the lives of others. But she still kept her frank tongue, and she gave it rein, as the pair hurried officeward.

[Pg 232]

"Dear Gwen, if you only wouldn't chew that gum! It makes you look so queer, and spoils all the pretty outline of your cheek. Besides, I'm sure Mr. Metcalf doesn't like it. He always frowns when a gum-chewer has to speak with him about her work."

"Pshaw, what a fuss you are! There, then, though that's the first bit off a new stick, I've thrown it out the window. *Is* my cheek pretty? How do you manage to see things without looking? I never see you take your eyes off your frame, yet not a thing goes on in that room you don't seem to hear or know."

"I'm sure I don't know, unless it's because having lived all alone, without other girls, I love to hear the voices and see the bright faces. Oh, I do love *folks*! And it seems to me that every single girl in that mill is far more interesting than the best story book I ever read."

"Well, if you don't beat! But, say, Amy!"

"Well?"

"I don't believe there's another girl there would tell me I was pretty without saying something else would spoil it."

"Oh, indeed, there must be. If it's the truth, why shouldn't one say it? But if it's the truth, again, you have no right to deface the beauty. Do give up the gum."

"Why haven't I a right?"

[Pg 233]

"I don't know why. I simply know you haven't, any more than I have to be untidy or disagreeable. I never realized until I came to be always among so many people how each one could pain or please her neighbor. And it seems to me each of us should be the sweetest, the best natured, the truest, it is possible. Heigho! I'm turning a preacher, and it's a good thing that there's the office, and I must stop. Brace your courage, Amy, and knock at the door."

She did so and was promptly admitted; but did not see the superintendent, who thus served her, for he purposely stepped behind the door, so that her first glance fell upon Hallam seated at the sloping table and busily at work. She caught her breath, regained it, and rushed forward with a little shriek.

"Hallam! Hallam Kaye! You here! you—working?"

"Yes; I'm here. My first day at wage-earning. Didn't provide any lunch. Can you spare some for me? Ah, Gwendolyn, good day."

Then another person appeared in the doorway—one whom nobody present cared to see just then, though the superintendent stepped from his hiding-place, the mirth dying out of his genial face as he bowed respectfully to his superior, Mr. Archibald Wingate, the owner of Ardsley Mill and of most of the surrounding property.

"Good day, Metcalf. Eh? What? Amy? Hallam? You here?"

[Pg 234]

"Yes, cousin Archibald. We are both here and working for you," answered Amy, quietly. Then she surprised even herself by extending her hand in greeting.

CHAPTER XIX.

[Pg 235]

MOTIVES AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS.

For an instant it seemed as if the old man would respond to the proffered civility; but his hand dropped again to his side, and Amy had the mortification of one who is repulsed. However, she had little time for thought. The master of the mill passed onward into his "den" and closed its door with a snap. On the ground glass which admitted light through the upper half the door, yet effectually screened from observation any who were within, was printed in large letters:—

"Private. No Admittance."

Then the girl turned an inquiring face toward the superintendent, who took her hand and shook it warmly.

"Allow me to congratulate you, Miss Amy. You have done well,—famously, even. There's not been a girl in the mill, since I've had charge, who has learned so swiftly and thoroughly. What's the secret of it? Can you guess?"

She had not been summoned for a reprimand, then. In her relief at this, the young operative scarcely heard the question put to her, and the gentleman replied to it himself.

[Pg 236]

"I can tell you. It's your untiring perseverance, your persistent effort to do your best, without regard to anything or anybody about you. If all our girls would take example by you, promotions would be more frequent."

Gwendolyn resented the glance with which the superintendent now favored her, and Amy would have preferred not to be so openly praised. She drew a chair to the table where Hallam sat, and hastily spread her luncheon upon it.

"Come, Gwendolyn, bring yours. While we're eating, Hal shall tell us what this all means."

He did so, rapidly, and between mouthfuls, for the half-hour's nooning had already been cut short by the unexpected meetings; and when the whistle sounded and the girls hurried back to their room, Amy carried a very thoughtful face.

"Why, what a funny girl you are! You look as if you'd been scolded, after all, 'stead of praised and promised promotion. What's wrong?"

"Fayette. To think he could run away with Balaam, after all we—or Cleena has done for him. Of course, he's done things for us, too; but I thought if we were kind to him, and made him feel that he was dear to somebody, he would improve and grow a splendid man."

"Can't make a purse out of a pig's ear," quoted Gwendolyn, seriously. "But don't you fret. He'll be back again, as humble as a lamb. You couldn't dog him away from 'Charity House,' I believe. He's been just wild over you all ever since he first saw you and your white burro. Say, Amy, I'm going to try and not chew any more. Your brother don't like it, does he, either?"

[Pg 237]

"No; he detests it. He doesn't like anything that is unwomanly or coarse."

Then they separated, but in the heart of each was a fresh determination: in Gwendolyn's that she would make herself into a "real lady," according to the standard of this brother and sister whom she admired, or saw admired of others; and in Amy's, to better deserve the encouragement of her employers, and to support Hallam to the utmost in his new ambition.

But as she resumed her work she reflected, with much perplexity: "I don't understand yet why Mr. Metcalf is so delightful out of mill and so different here; nor why cousin Archibald still persists in being unfriendly, since he has gotten everything he wants."

But she was still too ignorant of life to know that it is commonly the inflicter of an injury who shows ill feeling, and not the recipient of it.

The afternoon passed swiftly, as all her days did now, and at the signal for leaving labor, both the girls hurried to don their outer things and join Hallam. But Amy had still a word for Mary.

"To-morrow is half-holiday, you know, dear, and I've talked with Cleena. She wishes you to come and spend the night at 'Charity House,' and we'll fix things about that club all right."

[Pg 238]

"What's that about a club?" asked another girl, noticing how the hunchback's face brightened. "Are you two going to join ours?"

"Maybe; maybe not. Maybe we'll compromise and have but one. Though we can do little until after Christmas, it's so near now."

"Oh, don't get up another. We have just lovely times in ours. All the boys come and—but I'll not tell. I'll leave you to see. They wanted I should ask you, and your brother, too. He's real nice looking, 'Jack doffer' says, even if he is lame."

Amy's cheek burned, and her quick temper got her into trouble.

"My brother Hallam is a very, very handsome boy. Even with his lameness he's a thousand times better looking than any boy in this mill, and what's more, he's a *gentleman!*"

Then this champion of the aristocracy, which she thought she disdained but now discovered she was proud to call her own class, walked off with her nose in the air and her dark eyes glittering with an angry light.

"There, now you've done it!" cried Gwendolyn, in amazement. "But ma said it wouldn't last. She says that's the way with all the heroines in her novels that lose their money and pretend to be just plain folks afterward. They never are. They're always 'ristocrats an' they can't help it."

[Pg 239]

"Oh, well, they shouldn't try," remarked this young "heroine," fiercely. "I don't care at all what they say about me, but they'd best let my Hal alone."

"Hoity-toity, I don't see as he's any better than anybody else."

Amy stopped short on the path from the mill to the ladder upon the bluff. Suddenly she reflected how her mother would have regarded her present mood. "He that ruleth his own spirit."

The words seemed whispered in her ear. A moment later she turned and spoke again, but her voice was now gentle and appealing.

"Yes, he is better, though I'm not. He is better because he is just what he seems. There is no

pretence about him. He doesn't think that plastering his hair with stuff, and wearing ugly, showy clothes, and a hat on the back of his head, or swaggering, or smoking nasty cigarettes, or being insolent to women, are marks of a gentleman. He's the real thing. That's what Hal is, and that's why I'm so proud of him, so—so touchy about him."

"Amy, what does make a gentleman, anyway, if it isn't dressing in style and knowing things?"

"It's the simplest thing in the world; it's just being kind out of one's heart instead of one's head. It's being just as pure-minded and honest as one can be, and—believing that everybody else is as good or a little better than one's self. So it seems to me." [Pg 240]

"We *are* different, then. I never should know how to say such things. I don't know how to think them. It isn't any use. You are you, and I am me, and that ends it."

Amy did not even smile at the crooked grammar. This was the old cry of Mary, too, and it hurt her.

"Oh, Gwen, I am so sorry. It *is* of use. There *isn't* any difference, really. We are both girls who have to earn our living. Our training has been different, that is all. I want to know all you know; I want you to know all I do. I want to be friends; oh, I want to be friends with every girl in the world!"

"Pshaw! do you? Well, I don't. I don't want but a few, and I want them to be stylish and nice. You'd have a lot of style if you could dress different."

Poor Amy. This was like a dash of cold water over her enthusiasm. Just when she fancied that Gwendolyn was aspiring to all that was noble and uplifting, down she had dropped again into that idea of "style" and fashion and good times. But she remembered Mary. In the soul of that afflicted little mill girl was, indeed, a true ambition, and she felt glad again, from thoughts of her.

"Hallam, how can you climb all the way to 'Charity House'? You will drop by the way. It's hard, even for me." [Pg 241]

"I can do it. I must. There is nothing else to be done."

So they set out together, through the darkness. The days were at the shortest, and Christmas would come the following week. Hallam and Amy looked forward with dread to the festival, remembering their mother had striven, even under disadvantages, to keep the holiday a bright one for her children. There had never been either many or costly gifts at Fairacres, but there had been something for each and all; and the home-made trifles were all the dearer because Salome's gentle fingers had fashioned them.

Now Gwendolyn was full of anticipation, and from her talk about it her neighbors judged she meant to expend a really large sum of money in presents for her friends.

"But, Gwendolyn, how can you buy all these things? You told me you earned about five dollars a week, and you've bought so many clothes; and—I guess I'm not good at figures. My poor little two dollars and a half, that I get now, wouldn't buy a quarter of all you say."

"Oh, that's all right. Mis' Hackett, she charges it. I always run an account with her."

"You? a girl like you? What is your mother thinking about? I thought to buy a wheel that way was queer; but how dare you?"

"Why, I'm working all the time, ain't I? Anybody that has regular work can get anything they want at Mis' Hackett's, or other places, too. Ma and pa do the same way." [Pg 242]

"But—that's *debt*. It must be horrible. It seems like going out of one debt into another as fast as you can. Oh, Gwen, don't do it."

"Pshaw! that isn't anything. Why, look here, that's the very way your own folks did. If they hadn't been in debt, they wouldn't have had to move from Fairacres, and all that. Would they?"

Both Hallam and Amy were silent. The keen common sense of the mill girl had struck home, and again Amy realized that her vocation was not that of "preaching." Finally, the cripple spoke:—

"It's like it, yet it isn't. We had something left to pay our debts. It wasn't money, but it was money's worth. We paid them. We are left poor indeed, but we haven't mortgaged our future. That's all. But we are too young to talk so wisely. If your parents approve, they probably know best. Hark! there is a wagon coming."

They all paused, and drew aside out of the road to let the vehicle pass. It was so dark that they could distinguish nothing clearly, and the lantern fastened to the dashboard of the buggy seemed but to throw into greater shadow the face of the occupant. To their surprise, the traveller drew rein and saluted them:—

"Hello. Just getting home, eh?"

All recognized the voice. It belonged to Mr. Wingate.

"Yes, just getting home," answered Amy, cheerily.

"Growing pretty dark, isn't it? Hmm, yes. Heard you lost your donkey, Hallam."

"For the time, I have, sir," responded the lad, rather stiffly. He hated this man "on sight," or out of it, and it was difficult for him to conquer his aversion. All the kindness he had felt toward him, on the night of Mr. Wingate's first unwelcome visit to Fairacres, had been forgotten since; because in his heart he believed that his mother's death was due to her removal from her home. Yet he wished to be just, and he would try to feel differently by and by. Meanwhile, his unused strength was fast waning. He had met with a great disappointment that day, for he was going home empty-handed. He had lost his beloved Balaam, and he had nothing to show for it. In all his life he had never walked so far as from the mill to the Bareacre knoll, and even his crutches seemed to wobble and twist with fatigue. Amy had noticed this, and made him pause to rest more than once; but the night was cold, and he felt it most unwise to risk taking cold by standing in the wind. Poverty was teaching Hallam prudence, among many other excellent things.

"None of us can afford to be sick now," he reflected.

"Hmm. That half-witted fellow ought not to be allowed to go free. He's done me a lot of mischief, and I guess he injures everybody who befriends him. The last thing he ought to be trusted with is horse-flesh, or mule-flesh either. Well, I'm going your way, and it's a tough pull on a pair of crutches. If you'll get in, I'll give you a lift as far as the bars."

[Pg 244]

Everybody was astonished, and everybody waited for Hallam's reply in some anxiety. Amy knew his mind, and she knew, also, that he was very weary. She hoped that he would say:—

"Thank you; I'll be glad to accept," but his answer was a curt: "Thank you; I would rather walk."

"Very well. Suit yourself."

The horse was touched sharply, and bounded up the hill road at an unusual pace.

"Oh, Hal, why didn't you ride? You are so tired."

"Well—because."

"You'd better. Old man don't like to have his favors lost," remarked Gwendolyn. "I've heard lots say that, even though he hasn't been at Ardsley so very long."

Now, in the lad's heart, besides his unwillingness to "accept favors from an enemy," there had been another motive. Until that evening he had not realized how lonely and dark was the homeward walk for his sister, after her long day of toil, and even with the company of Gwendolyn. In this his first experience it had come upon him with a shock, that it was neither pleasant nor safe for Amy, and he resolved she should never again be left without his escort, if he were possibly able to be with her.

But he could not, or felt that he could not, tell this to the girls; much less to Mr. Wingate, finding it easier to be misjudged than to explain. Yet had the mill owner known the fact, it would have gone far toward propitiating him, and toward rousing his admiration for his young kinsman.

[Pg 245]

So with the best intentions all around, the breach between Fairacres and "Charity House" was duly widened.

The trio of mill workers trudged wearily upward, and the mill master hurried recklessly through the gloom toward a home he had coveted, but found a lonely, "ghost-haunted" solitude. For though there are no real spectres to frighten the eye, there are memories which are sadder to face than any "haunt" would be.

"Stir up the fire, man. Don't you know it's a bitter night outside?" he cried, as he entered it.

The master's tone boded ill for the servant if obedience were not prompt. So though a great blaze roared upon the wide hearth in the old room where we first met this gentleman he was not content, nor was the good dinner which followed appreciated. Nothing was right that night for Archibald Wingate.

Nothing? Yes, one thing gave him great satisfaction, so that, late in the evening, sitting before the blaze he had complained of, he rubbed his hands with a quiet glee.

"If you please, sir, there's a black donkey wandered into the place to-night. It went straight to the stable and to one of the box stalls on the west. It seemed to know the way. The stable boy says it's one of them belonged to the—the folks was here before we came. I thought you'd like to know, sir; and, if you please, is it to remain?"

[Pg 246]

"Yes, Marshall, it is to remain."

And again the old gentleman smiled into the dancing flames and rubbed his smooth palms.

CHAPTER XX.

[Pg 247]

IN THE OLD HOME.

After one o'clock on the afternoon before Christmas was a mill holiday; and while the great looms

were silent, those who usually toiled at them took their way into Wallburg city to do their Christmas shopping. Though a few, indeed, were able to satisfy their needs at the local stores, and among these, for once, was Gwendolyn. She had come up the knoll after dinner hour, to invite Amy's presence at the gift buying, and concluded her invitation by saying:—

"Even if you won't get anything yourself, you might come and look at the pretty things. It's surprising how many you find you can pick out in a few minutes. They've the loveliest dolls there 't I'm going to get for Beatrice and Belinda. Victoria's so big she's outgrown doll—"

Cleena could hold her tongue no longer.

"Toys, is it, alanna! Better be shoes for their feet; an' as for Queen Victory an' her dolls, more's the shame to you as sets her the example o' growin' up before her time. Vases for the mother, is it? An' she after patchin' the sheets off her bed. Pardon unasked advice, which same is unsavory, belike, an' get the makin' of a new pair. That's sense, so it is."

[Pg 248]

It was sense. As such it commended itself to Gwendolyn, during her walk to the village, and bore results for the comfort of her family; for though she did run in debt to make her Christmas gifts, at least she now altered her usual habit completely, and for each member of the household provided some article of use. Even Mrs. Hackett paused in her busy attendance upon the crowd of customers to remark:—

"Well, now, Gwen, that's a good plan. I guess your folks will be proud of what you're giving them this year. Yes, I'm more 'n willing to trust you for 'em. A girl that'll spend her money as you are, isn't going to cheat me in the long run. Yes, the wagon'll be going out late to-night and will fetch 'em all for you. Flannel and sheeting and such are a mighty sight heavier to carry than notions. But say, I'll put in a little candy for the youngsters, seein' they're disappointed of their dolls."

Meanwhile, up at "Charity House," Amy had drawn Cleena into a corner to discuss their own plans, and especially to ask concerning a proposed trip to the city, by her father, and immediately after the holidays.

"You know, Goodsoul, that he hasn't been there alone in a long time. Is it safe for him to go now? If he should have one of his attacks, what would happen? Should Hallam go with him? and—worst of all—how can we spare the money?"

[Pg 249]

"Faith, Miss Amy, I'd leave the master be. It's the fine sense he's gettin' the now. It would hearten the mistress could she see how he does be pickin' up. Always that gentle I d' know, as if the sorrow had been a broom sweepin' his soul all free of the moilder an' muss was in it long by. Only yesternight, whilst I was just washin' off me table afore layin' me cloth, into the kitchen he steps an' sits himself down by the door, lookin' out toward Fairacres. It was as soft as summer, like it is this eve, but faith! a 'green Christmas makes a fat graveyard."

The very word made them both silent for a moment, and then Amy resumed:—

"Father has packed up a half a dozen or more of his small canvases, studies of heads most of them are, I believe, and all are unframed. What do you suppose he means to do with them?"

"Sell them. What for no?"

"But mother never liked to have him. These are all pictures he did long ago."

"The quicker they'll go off the hand then."

"Do you approve?"

"With all me heart."

Amy dropped her face on her palms and considered the matter. Even with her habit of dealing with facts rather than fancies, she still found life a most perplexing and complex affair. The only help she gained toward understanding it was that clew taught her by her mother of matching the days and the events as one matches a fascinating puzzle. Out of this thought she spoke at last, though quite to the bewilderment of honest Cleena.

[Pg 250]

"It seems as if our losing all that belonged to us were making us sturdier folks, improving us all. Mother needed no improvement, so she hadn't to face the battle long. Well, one thing I know, she would be glad for us all, and some way I feel her very near to-day. Only, if I could just talk with her and ask her things."

"Sure ye can, me colleen. I mind it's no far to the land where she's gone. But about the money. See here; how got I this?"

And Cleena whipped out a handkerchief from her jacket pocket and unfolded it with utmost care. In this were a number of silver pieces, from half-dollars to dimes, and added together made the "smart decent sum" of five dollars and fifteen cents.

"Why, Cleena! Where? I thought all ours was spent as soon as earned."

"Where? An' I to be mendin' a few clothes for me neighbors. Even that man John fetches me a blouse now an' again, to put in a fresh pair o' sleeves or set on a button that's missin'. Sure, ye didn't think Cleena was one would be leavin' her childer bring in all the wage. Only—" and the good creature's fine face clouded dismally.

[Pg 251]

Amy's arms were around the other's neck, and her soft cheek pressed against the shoulder that had borne so many burdens for her and hers.

"Only what, you darling Scrubbub?"

"Only I was mindin' to buy a few trinkets for you an' Master Hal. 'Tis Christmas comes but once a year, an' sure me heart should give good cheer—"

"Cleena, Cleena! A poet! What next?"

"Arrah musha, no! Not one o' them sort. But it's in the air, belike. Christmastide do set the blood running hitherty-which. So they say in old Ireland. It's this way, me darling. Gifts for you an' Hal—or the trip to town for the master. Which, says you? For here's the silver will pay either one, an' it's you an' him shall decide."

"Then it's decided already. At least, I'm sure Hallam will so agree when he comes in. You know he's stopped at Mr. Metcalf's to see some books on designing. Hallam thinks that either he might learn to do it or that perhaps even father might give some odd moments to it, though I don't know as he would hardly dare propose it. The idea was Mr. Metcalf's, and he hasn't much 'sentiment' about him. He said that if there was any way in which father could make a living, he would be happier if so employed. It sounded dreadful to me at first, and then it seemed just sensible."

"That last it was, and so I b'lieve the master'll say himself. But child, child, you do be gettin' too sober notions into your bonny head. Oh, for that Balaam the spalpeen stole! But since ye can't ride, why then it's aye ye must walk. Either way, get into the open. There's not many such a day 'twixt now and Easter. Away with ye! Haven't I me pastry to make an' to-morrow Christmas? Go where ye've no thought, an' let the spirit carry ye. Then there'll be rest. But be home by nightfall, mind."

[Pg 252]

"Cleena, you dear, the kindest, truest, best woman left in this world!"

"Indeed, that's sweet decent speech, me dear; but seein' your 'world's' no bigger nor Ardsley township, I 'low I'll not be over set up by that same. Run away, child, run away!"

"Cleena, you're watching down the road. Why? Why?—I demand; and you talk of pastry, the which hasn't been in 'Charity House' since we came to it, save and except that dried apple pie sent in by Mrs. Jones."

"Ugh!" cried Cleena, making a face of contempt. "The match o' that good soul's pastry for hardness an' toughness isn't found this side of the Red Sea."

"Cleena, is that old John coming here to-day? Is it *he* you are watching for?"

"Why for no? If a man's more nor his share an' nobody to cook it, why shouldn't he be a bringin' it up an' lettin' a body fix it eatable? Sure, it's John himself. Ye're too sharp in the wits, an' I don't mind tellin' ye; it's all charity, Miss Amy. Him livin' by his lone an' gettin' boardin'-house truck. If he says to me, says he, 'Shall I fetch the furnishin' o' the best Christmas dinner ever cooked an' you be after preparin' it,' says he, 'only givin' me one plateful beside your nice kitchen fire,' says he, could I tell the man no, and me a good Christian? Ye know better, Miss Amy. Think o' the master, an' Master Hal, to-morrow comes. What's the good o' John, then, but to find food for me folks? Run along!"

[Pg 253]

Mr. Kaye had already gone off for one of his long tramps, over the fields and through the woods, to which he was now much given. He had taken such, at first, to subdue the restlessness which followed upon his wife's death, and as some sort of break in his unutterable loneliness. But nature had helped him more than he had dreamed; and to the pure air, the physical fatigue, and consequent sound sleep was due much of the cure of his mental illness that all who knew him now noticed.

So there was nobody who needed Amy just then, and she set off from "Charity House" at a brisk pace, resolved, as Cleena had advised, to forget all worry and labor, and "just have one good, jolly time."

She took the road upward toward the woods behind Fairacres, meaning to gather a bunch of late ferns for the decoration of the morrow's dinner table, since Cleena promised it should be a feast day, after all.

Before she quite realized it even, she had deflected from her course, remembering just then a certain glen in the grounds of her old home where rare ferns grew to prodigious size, and where no cold of winter seemed to harm them. Then once upon the familiar path every step was suggestive of some bygone outing, and led her to explore farther and still farther.

[Pg 254]

"Ah, the frost-bleached maiden-hair. Nowhere else does it last like this. It's almost as white as edelweiss, and far more graceful. I must put that in my basket, if nothing else." So she pulled it gently and with infinite care, lest she should break the delicate fronds that had outlasted their season by so long. Then there were others, dainty green and still fragrant, which she gathered eagerly; with here and there a bit of crimson-berried vine, or a patch of velvet moss.

Always she kept to the depth of the little ravine, through which ran a tiny, babbling brook. This had long ago been named "Merrywater," nor had it ever seemed gayer and more winsome than then. It was like reunion with some old beloved playmate, and Amy forgot everything but the

present enjoyment as she stooped and dabbled in the water here and there. Sometimes she came to the fantastic little bridges which Hallam had used to lie upon the bank and construct out of the roots and pebbles she brought him. Where these had fallen into decay she repaired them; and at one time was busily endeavoring to force a grapevine into place when she heard a sound that made her pause in her task and spring to her feet.

[Pg 255]

"Ah-umph! A-h-u-m-ph! A-H-U-M-P-H!!!"

"Pepita! No—Balaam! Balaam, Balaam—Balaam!"

She was off up the bank in another instant. The sound was from the old stable, so dear, so familiar to her. As she ran she caught up here and there great tufts of sweet grass, such as had been neglected by the mowers, but were dear to donkey appetites.

"Oh, the precious! The blessed little beast! Won't Hallam be glad! Won't this be a Christmas gift indeed, to bring him back his own pet! How glad I am I took this way to walk, and how queer it is that he should be back in his very own old home. Is it so queer, though? Wouldn't I come, too, if I were just a burro and were set free to follow my own will? I can hardly wait to reach him."

In a moment she had done so, and had filled the manger with the still luscious grass, while climbing upon its front she had thrown her arms about the animal's neck and was assuring him, as she might a human being, that he had been sadly missed and would be most welcome home.

On his part the burro was fortunately silent, though his great, dark eyes looked volumes of affection, and he laid his big ears gently back to be out of Amy's way, while she caressed him. She smoothed his forelock, ran her fingers through his mane, patted his shaggy head, and told him that his "big velvet lips were the softest things on earth."

[Pg 256]

"Ahem!"

This remark, if such it could be called, fell upon Amy's ears so suddenly that she half tumbled backward from her perch upon the manger, and just saved herself by springing lightly down, or she thought it was lightly, until she wheeled and faced the intruder.

None other than Archibald Wingate, making a horrible grimace, and holding up one of his pudgy feet as if he were in great pain.

"Oh, I beg your pardon! I didn't know it was your foot, or you were you—I thought it was only the hay on the floor."

"Ugh! Great goodness! Umm. If you ever have the gout, young woman, you will understand how it feels to have anybody jump down full force upon your toes. Ouch! O dear! O dear!"

Amy had never been accustomed to seeing people make ado over physical suffering. She did not understand this man before her, and a thrill of distress ran through her own frame, like the touch of an electric battery.

"Oh, I am so sorry! I wouldn't have done it for anything if I had known. Can't I do something now to help you? Let me rub it or—or—lead you. You look—" In spite of her good intentions, the horrible contortions by which Mr. Wingate's countenance expressed his feelings affected her sense of the ridiculous, and she smiled. As instantly ashamed of the smile, she buried her face in her hands, and waited what would come next.

[Pg 257]

"Huh! Yes, you look sorry, of course you do, laughing at an old man after you've nearly broken his foot in two. Hmm. You're a sorry lot, the whole of you; yes, you are! O-oh!" Yet he, too, and in spite of himself, laughed; but it was at his own pitiful joke about his kinsmen being a "sorry lot."

Fortunately, Amy did not understand a jest of this nature, but she was swift to see the brightening of his face. She put her hand on his arm, and tried to draw his hand within her own.

"Maybe it won't be so bad. Lean on me, and I'll help you to a seat or to the house. And thank you, thank you so much for putting Balaam in the stable, and taking such good care of him. If Hal had known, he wouldn't have worried so about the little beast. He's been so tenderly cared for, we couldn't bear to think of him as off in the open fields with nobody but Fayette."

Mr. Wingate said not a word. He simply ceased groaning and grimacing, and he slipped his arm through Amy's, while a curious expression settled on his face. He did not lean at all heavily upon her, however, and he merely glanced toward the burro as the pair walked to the stable door. Then the animal thought it time to protest. Amy had brought him fresh grass, but she had dropped it all outside his manger, where he could not reach it. This was aggravation in the extreme. More than that, whenever, in the old days, she had been afflicted with one of these outbursts of affection, there had generally been a lump of sugar connected with it. To lose affection, hay, and sugar, all in one unhappy moment, was too much even for donkey patience.

[Pg 258]

"AH-UMPH! H-umph! A-h-u-m-p-h!"

"Whew! he's split my ears open. Plague take the beast!" cried Mr. Wingate, hurrying forward, and now stepping with suspicious freedom from lameness.

Amy hurried, too, wondering at his sudden recovery. "Oh, do you dislike his talk? I love it. I always laugh when I hear it, it is so absurd, and Pepita's was even funnier. She had a feminine note, so to speak, and she whined like a spoiled baby."

"What do you know about spoiled babies?"

"Why—nothing—only William Gladstone, he's a trifle self-willed, I think."

"William Gladstone! What do you mean? Who are you talking about? Are you all crazy together?"

"Not the English statesman, certainly. Just Mrs. Jones's youngest son. And I don't think we're crazy."

"I think you are, the whole lot. Well, will you come into the house with me? How did you know the donkey was here? Who told you?" [Pg 259]

"He told me," laughed Amy. "Yes, I'll go in if you wish, if I can help you."

"How did he tell you?"

"I was gathering these ferns in the glen, and I heard him bray. See, aren't they beautiful? They're for the table to-morrow. The prettiest ferns in all Fairacres grow along the banks of 'Merrywater.'"

"Yes, I know. I used to gather them when I was a child. My grandmother liked them, though she called them plain 'brakes.' So you're not afraid to trespass, then? And you're able to have a dinner-party even so soon after—and with all the pretended devotion. But Cuthbert—"

Amy's hand went up to her kinsman's lips. It was a habit of hers, sometimes playfully sometimes earnestly used, to ward off anything she did not wish another to say to her, and she had done it before she thought; but having so done she would not withdraw her silent protest. This man should never say, nor would she ever hear, a word against her father. Of that she was determined, even though she must be rude to prevent.

For a moment Archibald Wingate resented the girl's correction. Then, as her hand dropped to her side and her gaze to the ground, he spoke:—

"You are right. I had no business to so speak. I honor you for your filial loyalty and—Come into the house. I have something I wish to discuss with you. So you want to thank me for taking care of Balaam, do you? You may feel differently after you have heard what I have to say. Oh, you did give me a twinge, I tell you!" [Pg 260]

"Would it relieve the pain if I bathed the foot for you? Or is there anybody else to do it?"

"Would you do that for *me*?"

"Certainly."

"Ring that bell."

Amy obeyed. It was the familiar one which summoned, or had summoned, Cleena from her kitchen.

A man answered the call.

"Marshall, have a foot-bath brought in here. This young lady is going to dress my foot for me. For once there'll be no blundering heavy-handed servant to hurt me."

Over and over and over Amy washed and soothed the red, misshapen foot. The repugnance she had felt to touching it had all vanished when she saw how acute must have been the old man's suffering and his now evident relief.

"I thought you made a big fuss. Now I don't see how you walk about at all."

"I walk on my will," answered he, grimly. "You're a good girl; yes, you are. You're a real Kaye. Our women were all good nurses and tender-handed. It's a pity—such a pity!"

Amy thought the prodigious sigh that moved his mighty breast was for his own distress, and echoed his regret sincerely. "Yes; it is a pity. It seems to me it should be cured. I wish it could." [Pg 261]

"So do I. Say, little woman, suppose you and I try to cure it."

Amy looked up. She had been speaking simply of his disease. She now saw that he had not been thinking of that at all. For the moment, while she so gently manipulated the swollen ankle and bound it with the lotions Marshall handed her, he had been quite comfortable, and the keen twinkle in his eye set her thinking. Was it the family feud he wished might be healed? He, who was the very foundation and cause of it?



"SHE SO GENTLY MANIPULATED THE SWOLLEN ANKLE AND BOUND IT WITH THE LOTION."

She caught his hand in both hers, eagerly.

"Do you mean that we might live at peace; in love, as kinsfolk should? Now—this peace day—when the Christ child comes? Is it that?"

But Marshall made a little motion which might be warning or contempt. The old man's face hardened again.

"What are you asking? Look, you've wet my cuffs! Your hands just out of hot water and all liniment!"

"Never mind your cuffs. *Look out for your heart.* You're a poor, lonely old fellow, and I'm sorry for you."

Before he knew what she was about, Amy had thrown her arms about her cousin's neck and imprinted a kiss—somewhere. It didn't much matter that it landed squarely on the tip of his pudgy nose. Archibald Wingate was so little in the habit of receiving kisses that he might easily have imagined this was quite the customary place for their bestowal.

[Pg 263]

CHAPTER XXI.

[Pg 264]

A PECULIAR INVITATION.

It would be difficult to tell which was the most startled. Amy stepped back from the unresponsive object of her affectionate impulse and blushed furiously. She feared that he would think her bold and silly, yet she had only meant to be kind, to comfort him because she pitied him. Now, she was painfully conscious that Marshall was standing near, coolly observant, with a cynical smile upon his thin lips. It was a curious fact, which Amy instantly recognized, that this master of whom so many people stood in awe should himself stand in awe of his own valet.

"Ahem—shall I remove the bath, sir? Has the young person finished?"

Amy had not been accustomed to hearing herself spoken of as a "person," and the word angered her. This restored her self-possession. She looked up, laughing.

"I don't know how I came to do that, cousin Archibald. I hope you'll forgive me."

"Oh, I'll forgive you. I don't know how you did it, either. Well, man, why are you standing there, grinning like a Cheshire cat. I tell you she has finished. You can take away the things."

[Pg 265]

"Very well; it is time for your nap, sir."

The worm turned. "What if I don't take one to-day? What will happen?"

"I don't know, sir, except that you will probably be ill. The doctor's orders are, when you have an attack—"

"Hang you and the doctor and the attacks, all together! You can leave the room, can't you? When I want you, I'll ring."

Because he was too astonished to do otherwise, Marshall obeyed. He was a privileged person. His master did not often cross his will. There being no other apparent heirs, Marshall had, in his own imagination, constituted himself Mr. Wingate's heir. Why not? A lifelong service, an untiring devotion to whims of all sorts, a continual attention to the "creature comforts" which were so greatly a part of Archibald's life—these merited a rich reward. Marshall intended to receive this reward, should he be lucky enough to outlive his employer. He felt that he would fill the position of owner of Fairacres with dignity and profit. He did not like this new interest Mr. Wingate was taking, by fits and starts, in the deposed family who were his relatives and—enemies. In Marshall's opinion the breach between these kinsfolk ought not to be healed. Amy's presence in the house was a disastrous portent. She must be gotten out of it as soon as possible, and in such a way that she would not care to come again. But how?

[Pg 266]

The servant revolved this question, as he carried away the bath, and so profoundly that he failed to notice where he was going and stepped down a forgotten stair so unexpectedly that he fell and drenched himself with the water from the tub.

"Plague on her! Now, I'm in for it!" Which meant that before he could remove the damage to his attire Amy would probably have gained whatever she came to seek. He did not believe that anybody would visit his master without having "an axe to grind," for he judged all men by himself.

However, having tasted the sweets of rebellion against this iron rule of Marshall, Mr. Wingate determined to enjoy it further.

"He's a meddling old fool. He's a good servant, too. There isn't another man in the world would put up with my tempers as he does. Never a word in return, and as smooth as silk."

Amy laughed. "He looks to me as if he had had his hair licked by kittens. It's so slick and flat. Do you have to mind him always?"

"Mind him? I—mind my *servant*, eh?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon. Of course—"

Mr. Wingate's face was scarlet. The weakness which he had hardly acknowledged to himself had been instantly discovered by this bright-eyed girl. It wasn't a pleasant thing to have so observant a person about. He had something to say to her, however, and he would do it at once and get rid of her. All his newly aroused affection died in his resentment against her judgment.

[Pg 267]

"I want to go to the studio. There is something there I don't mean to keep, and don't wish to destroy, without consulting some of you."

Amy followed him quietly out of the house toward the building where her father had spent so many hours, and which she held in strictest veneration. Did it not still enclose the "great picture" which even she had never seen, and which had been kept screened from the sight of all?

So she still expected to find the white curtain undisturbed; and as she entered the studio, paused—amazed. The canvas covered the end of the apartment; but after one hasty glance Amy shielded her eyes in a distress that was almost terror.

"Hmm. It *is* very realistic, isn't it? The thing is horrible. I don't wonder that Cuthbert's wits got scattered, working on it. It would drive me crazy in a week, and I'm a hard, matter-of-fact man. I kept it, because by right I might have kept everything that was here. I supposed I was getting something worth while. But this! I don't want it. I couldn't sell it. I hate to destroy it. What's to be done?"

"Oh, I wish I hadn't seen it!"

"So do I. I see it sometimes in the night and then I can't sleep. I mean I imagine I see it, for I never come here after dark. It's a wonderful picture, sure enough. A horrible one."

[Pg 268]

The canvas fascinated Amy. It depicted a great fire. It was ugly in extreme. The big, bare building was in flames, everywhere. The windows seemed numberless, and at almost every window a face; on these faces all the gamut of fright, appeal, and unutterable despair. They were human—*living*. The girl felt impelled to run and snatch them from their doom; also the impulse to hide her eyes, that she might not see.

Mr. Wingate had taken a chair before the painting, and was looking at it critically.

"I tell you that's a marvellous thing, and it's as dreadful as masterly. There's only one way I can see by which a man could get any money out of it: that's by cutting out the separate faces and selling them singly. A body might endure to see one such countenance in his collection, but not more; or, it might be destroyed altogether. It explains why Cuthbert never recovered from the shock of the accident he was in. He never lost sight of it. He must have begun this while it was fresh in his brain, and he did his utmost to keep it fresh. Poor Salome, she had a hard life."

"She had a happy life. She loved my father. He loved her. Whatever he did was right, just right in her eyes. You needn't pity her. But, oh, if she were only here to consult! Why did you show it to me? Why did I have to see it?"

[Pg 269]

"Because it couldn't be helped. The thing *is*; it exists. Now what is to be done with it?"

"I—will ask my father."

"I don't know that that is wise. It might bring about a return of his malady, and I'm told he is improving in all respects."

"I must do it; it is his. There is no other way."

"What if it makes him worse again?"

Poor Amy! All her Christmas cheer had died from her heart. She felt that it would be almost wicked to remind her father of this, his "life work," of which she had not heard him speak since he left Fairacres. Yet it was his. He had given years to its completion, so far as it had neared that point.

Mr. Wingate regarded her keenly. "Well?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know what to say. Have you nothing to propose?"

"Only what I did. To cut it up and sell the faces as so many small canvases. That would partially repay me for the things he still owes for—the paints and so on. But I detest the thing so I hate to spread the misery of it."

"Repay you? Do you mean that you believe you have a right—you *own* that picture?"

"Certainly."

"Why, it is the labor of—it means many years out of my poor father's life. Can such a thing be 'owned' by anybody except him?"

[Pg 270]

"Yes, of course. Hark you. You go home and tell him what I offer. I will take the picture off his hands and allow him—hmm—maybe two hundred dollars; or, he can take it and owe me that much more. In any case I want to get rid of it. I won't have it left here much longer. I shall have other uses for this room, maybe. Anyway, I mean to get that off the place."

Amy moved slowly toward the door. She did not know how to reply, and she felt her cousin was a very hard, unjust man. Yet she agreed with him that the picture was enough to make a person wish it out of sight, even out of existence.

At the doorway he arrested her steps, by laying his hand upon her shoulder.

"Help me down; I'm afraid of stairs. And there's another thing—that donkey."

"Oh, yes; I had forgotten Balaam. May I ride him home? Will you have him brought around for me?"

"Eh? What? Not so fast—not quite so fast! No, I don't mean the stairs. I can manage this pace for them. I mean the donkey. It came here of its own accord. It gave me an idea. If your brother wants to sell him—By the way, how do you expect to pay the rent?"

Amy stopped short, halfway down the stairs, and so suddenly that Mr. Wingate remonstrated.

[Pg 271]

"If you'd give warning of these spasmodic actions of yours, it would be more comfortable for those depending on you. There, please move along."

"The rent? I had not thought. Didn't my mother attend to that?"

"For the first quarter year, she did. To whom must I look now?"

Unmindful, since this new distressing question had been raised, how much she inconvenienced him, Amy sat plump down and leaned her head against the hand-rail.

It always appeared to aid her reflective powers if she could rest her troubled head against something material.

"I'll try to think. I earn two dollars and a half a week."

"Oh, my foot hurts again. Let's get into a decent room and talk it over there. I hate draughty halls and unwarmed rooms. There's a fire in the little side parlor off the dining room. That's my own private den. I want to get there and lie down. That rabbit pie I had for lunch doesn't agree with me, I'm afraid. Do you like rabbit pie?"

"No, indeed; I wouldn't eat one for anything."

"Why not?"

"I should fancy the pretty creatures looking at me with their soft eyes. They're the gentlest animals in the world."

"The most destructive, you mean."

[Pg 272]

She did not contest. Besides, she was now in great haste to leave Fairacres and regain the shelter of her own home. Strange, she reflected, how quickly she had ceased to think of this house, her birthplace, as a home; since all that went to make it such had gone elsewhere.

"About that rent money. If Hallam is able to keep at work we may together earn five dollars a week. That would be twenty dollars a month. The rent is ten. We will be able to pay it, I think."

"Do you imagine you will be able to live upon the remainder? Upon two and a half dollars a week, four grown persons?"

"If we have no more, we shall have to do so, shan't we?"

"Excuse me; but what would you eat? I saw no sign of scrimping and pinching that day I first came here—to stay."

"Oh, then Cleena was determined you should say no blame of her housekeeping. She gave you all in one meal. We've often laughed over it since."

"Humph! But this two and a half per week, what would it buy?"

"Meal and milk. Sometimes oat meal, sometimes corn. Once and again an egg or something for father. Oh, we'd manage."

"Hmm, hmm; you'd rather live on that than run in debt? You younger Kayes, who are all I seem to take account of now—Salome is gone."

[Pg 273]

"We will run in no debt we cannot pay, unless we are ill and it is impossible to help. Hal and I settled that long ago. So far we have managed, and now he is working too, I feel as rich as—rich."

"Exactly. Amy, if this old house were yours, what would you do with it?"

The answer was prompt and decided.

"Make it into a Home for Mill Girls."

"Whew! What in the world! Fairacres? The proudest old mansion in the country, or in this part of it! Are you beside yourself?"

"I should be with delight, if I could make that dream a reality."

"I gave you credit for more sense. But, business—that donkey. How much did Mr. Metcalf intend to pay for it?"

"I suppose the same as he did for Pepita. Seventy-five dollars—burro, harness, and all."

"At ten dollars a month, that would take you along well into next summer. Tell Hallam that I will keep the animal and allow him eight months' rent for it. That's giving you a half month, you see. Will you?"

"Yes, I'll tell him," answered she, with a catch in her voice. "Only I had hoped to take him home with me. It would have made such a delightful Christmas for us all. You don't know how much we love those pretty creatures."

[Pg 274]

"Pretty! Opinions differ."

"And would it be quite right to make any such arrangements, after having asked the superintendent to buy it, and he agreeing? Wouldn't he be the one to say something about it?"

"Amy, you're incorrigible. You're a radical. A thing is either absolutely right or it is absolutely wrong—according to your standard. You'll be in trouble as long as you live, for you'll find nobody else with such antiquated notions as yours. There are a great many things that are expedient."

"I hate expedient things. I like just the easy, simple 'no' and 'yes' that was my darling mother's rule. I'm glad I'm at least a birthright Friend."

Mr. Wingate was silent. He seemed to drop into a profound reverie, and the girl hesitated to disturb him, eager as she now was to be away. Finally, as she had made up her mind to speak, he did so himself.

"Amy, do you ever use the plain speech now?"

"Sometimes—between ourselves. For mother's sake we can never let it die."

"Will thee use it to me now and then? It was the habit of my boyhood. Salome was my oldest friend. We've played together in this very room, again and again. She was my good angel. Until—No matter. You are her child. Not like her at all in face or manner. She was always gentle, and shrank from giving pain. Truthful and puritanical as she was in her ideas, she had the tact, the

[Pg 275]

knowledge to say things without hurting those whom she corrected. She corrected me often and often, when we were young, but she hurt me—never. Now, you—heigho!"

"Now, I hurt—thee. Of course. I speak first and think afterward. But does thee know, cousin Archibald, thee is the very queerest man I ever met?"

"Have you—has thee—known many?"

"Very few. Thee is so good on one side and so—so—not nice on the other. Like a half-ripened pear. But I am sorry for thee. I wish I could do thee good. Do I speak it as thee wishes?"

"Indeed, yes. It is music, even though the words are unflattering enough. Well, I'll not keep thee longer. And I don't ask you to call attention to this whim of mine by saying 'thee' in public," he remarked, himself falling back into the habit of their intercourse.

"No; if I say 'thee,' it is to be always, whenever I remember—like a bond to remind me I must be kind to thee for my mother's sake. If she did thee good, I must try to do thee good too."

"In what way?"

Amy reflected. The first, most obvious way, would be by cheering his solitude. Yet she hesitated. The thing which had come into her mind involved the desires of others also. She had no right, until she consulted them, to commit herself. Yet she disliked to leave this lonely old fellow, without trying to make him glad.

[Pg 276]

She sat down again in the chair from which she had risen and regarded him critically.

"Oh, cousin Archibald, if thee were only a little bit different!"

"Thee, too!" he laughed—actually laughed; and the action seemed to clear his features like a sunburst.

"Oh, of course. Well, it's this way. To-morrow's Christmas, isn't it?"

"So I've heard."

"And somebody—Teamster John—has sent Cleena 'the furnishing of a good dinner,' she told me. I don't know when we may have another such a meal, one that thee would think fit to eat. I'd like to ask thee to come and share it with us, instead of staying here alone, all grumpy with the gout. But it isn't my dinner, thee sees, and I'm going home to tell my people everything. About the picture and the donkey and all. If, after that, they agree with me that it would be nice to ask thee to spend the holiday with us, I'll bring thee word. If I do, will thee come?"

Mr. Wingate leaned back in his easy-chair and hugged his gouty foot for so long and so silently that Amy grew impatient and rose.

"Anyway, I must go home. I've been here ever so much later than I meant to stay. Good-by."

"Wait! How impetuous you—thee is. Well, I've received a great many invitations to dine, from the banquets of bank presidents down to the boiled dinners of my own workmen, but I doubt if I ever received one so honest and so honestly expressed."

[Pg 277]

"Will thee come, if thee is asked?"

"Yes; I'll come—*if I'm asked*. Don't thee bother to walk all the way back again, though. If by nine o'clock to-night I have heard nothing to the contrary, I shall understand that I am expected to dine with my tenants at 'Spite House.' At what hour, please?"

"On Christmas, dinner is usually at three o'clock. And, if thee pleases, it is no longer 'Spite' but 'Charity House.' My mother changed all that. Thee must not dishonor her wishes if thee loves her."

A wonderful, an almost beautiful change passed over the old man's face.

"Amy, thee speaks as if she were here still."

"She is to me. She always will be. Good-by."

She was gone, and the house seemed bigger and emptier after she had left it. But Archibald Wingate would not have had anybody know with what almost childish anxiety he waited the striking of the clock, as the hour of nine drew near. He had been judged a hard and bitter man. He was very human, after all. The small brown hand of his young cousin was pointing a new, strange way, wherein he might happily walk, and in secret he blessed her for it. But he was a man who liked his own will and to follow his own road still; though he might do his utmost to bend that road in the direction she had elected. Meanwhile, he would have his supper sent in and sitting at ease before his own hearth-blaze review many plans.

[Pg 278]

So he did, and after the supper a comfortable nap, from which he roused with a start, fancying the old clock in the hall was striking the hour.

"Eh? What? Is it nine already? That timepiece must be fast."

"It's only me, sir, Marshall, with a bucket of coals. And, if you please, there's a young person outside insists upon seeing you, sir. Am I to bid him go away until morning?"

In his disappointment the master's face really paled. Marshall noticed it and wondered, but he knew enough, sometimes, to hold his tongue. This seemed to him to be one of the times, and he therefore made no comment, nor even inquired for the master's health.

"No, don't send anybody away. I fancy that was never the custom at Fairacres, on Christmas Eve, be the visitor who he might. We'll not disturb the old ways, more than we can help. After all—Bid the messenger come in."

CHAPTER XXII.

[Pg 279]

TWO WANDERERS RETURN.

The "young person" to whom Marshall referred in such contemptuous terms was Lionel Percival Jones. He so announced himself, as he was ushered into the presence of the great man.

"I've come to bring a letter from Amy Kaye."

"Indeed; would it not sound better if you said 'Miss Kaye,' or 'Miss Amy'? She is a kinswoman of mine."

Lionel Percival was astonished. He had prepared himself for this visit with the utmost care. He had oiled his curly auburn locks with a scented pomatum, and parted them rakishly in the middle. He wore his most aggressive necktie and his yellowest shoes, also his Sunday suit of clothes. With the exception of the necktie and the pomatum, he would not have attracted attention to himself anywhere, and so would have been well dressed. With these, he seemed to be all-pervading. He had instantly, by means of them, offended Mr. Wingate's taste, and put himself at disadvantage.

"Why, I'd just as lief say 'Miss,' but she's a mill girl, same as my own sister. I didn't go to mean no harm."

The mill owner winced. Then inquired:—

[Pg 280]

"Is there an answer expected?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. Wait here."

The master of Fairacres limped into the adjoining room and turned his back toward the door between, hiding his face from the lad's observation as he read.

"Humph! She left it open, which is correct enough with reliable messengers. Probably, though, he had the curiosity to read what she had to say,"—in which he wholly wronged the bearer. But Mr. Wingate had yet to learn that even lads who attire themselves atrociously may still be true gentlemen at heart, and sin in taste through ignorance only.

This was the note:—

"DEAR COUSIN ARCHIBALD WINGATE: My father and Hallam will be very happy to have thee dine with us to-morrow, Christmas Day. Cleena says that dinner will be served at three o'clock. If thee knew her as well as I do, thee would understand that she means not a minute before nor one afterward. If thee pleases, I would rather not have any 'business' talk of any sort to-morrow. I would like it to be a day of peace, as my mother always kept it for us. Thee may meet some other guests, but we will try to make thee happy.

"Good night,

"AMY."

It was a very cheerful and smiling old gentleman who returned to the room where Lionel Percival waited for the reply, a brief but stately acceptance of the invitation; for since Amy had set him the example, the mill owner considered that she regarded such formality essential.

[Pg 281]

Then he called in Marshall and bade him see that the messenger had a bit of supper before his return walk, which proceeding made the valet stare, and the boy feel exceedingly proud. It would be something of which to boast among his comrades at the mill.

The morning proved a cloudless one, mild and merciful to such as suffered from gout, and Mr. Wingate drove himself to "Charity House" in his own little phaeton. He felt this was an occasion when Marshall's too solicitous attentions might be in the way. He held a debate with himself, before setting off, whether he should or should not add to the feast from his own larder, and he decided against so doing by the simple test of "put yourself in his place."

But there was plenty and to spare. Teamster John did nothing by halves. Those who have least of this world's goods are always the most generous. Cleena had prepared each dish with her best skill and waited upon her guests with smiling satisfaction. Afterward, in the kitchen, she and John discussed the strange reunion of their "betters," and Cleena speculated upon it in her own fashion:—

"Sure, there's never fish, flesh, nor fowl could withstand the loving ways of me little colleen. And to hear them talkin' together, like lambs in the field. Them—" [Pg 282]

"I never heerd lambs talkin'," observed John, facetiously.

"Then it's deaf ye've been belike. Oh, me fathers, if here doesn't come me own General—Napoleon—Bonyparty! Where have ye been avick, avick?" she demanded, pushing hastily back from the board and hurrying out of doors. "Well, it's proof o' yer sense ye comes back in due time for a bit o' the nicest turkey ever was roast. But it's shamefaced ye be, small wonder o' that! Howsomever, it's a day o' good will. Come by. Wash up, eat yer meat, an' give thanks. To-morrow—I'll settle old scores. Come by."

Yet when Fayette entered the kitchen and learned from John who were the guests in the dining room beyond, he scowled and would have gone away again. However, he had forgotten Cleena. That good woman, having received her prodigal back, did not intend to relinquish him. She saw his frown, his hasty movement, and shutting the door put her back against it.

"You silly omahaun! If your betters forgives an' eats the bread o' peace, what's you to be settin' such a face on the matter? Come by. Be at peace. There's the blessed little hunchback eatin' cranberry sauce cheek by jowl with her 'boss,' an' can't you remember the Child was born for such as you, me poor silly lad? Come by."

Fayette "came by" at last, silently and because he was half famished, and could not resist the savory odors of the tempting food Cleena offered him. Yet in his heart there was still anger and evil intent; and though he was amazed to find Mary Reese a guest at the Kayes' table, as well as their "mortal enemy," Mr. Wingate, he made no further comment, and as soon as the meal was over retreated without a word to his chamber and shut the door. [Pg 283]

"It's like he might ha' just stepped out yesternight, he drops into ways so quick," said Cleena.

"But he's not the same lad. He'll give somebody trouble before long. You do wrong, woman, to harbor him. He's vindictive and dangerous."

The trustful Cleena laughed the teamster to scorn.

"Faith, give a dog a bad name an' he'll earn it. Let the lad be. In old Ireland we call such the 'touched of God.' We judge not, an' that's the size of a man—how he betreats the helpless ones. Put that in your pipe an' smoke it."

Surely, John thought, there was a deal of good sense and heart kindness in this stalwart daughter of Erin. He was Yankee himself, to the backbone; yet, as he pushed back from the table, satisfied and at ease, he pulled from his pocket a small paper parcel. It was his Christmas gift for his hostess, and intended to suggest many things. She was bright enough to comprehend his meaning, if she chose. Would she? She gave no sign, if she did, as she unrolled the package and placed its contents—a small flag of Ireland and its mate, in size, of the United States—behind the kitchen clock, where the blended colors made a bit of gayety upon the whitewashed wall. [Pg 284]

"Long may they wave!" cried the donor.

"Troth, I'm not seein' no wavin'. They're best as they be, with the timepiece betwixt. Each in its place, as the Lord wills, an' mine's here. So here I bides till I'm no longer wanted."

"It's a biggish house," quoth the undismayed suitor. "There's room in it for me, too, I cal'late."

But if Cleena heard this remark she ignored it, passing swiftly into the dining room to remove the dishes of the first course, and substituting the luxury of a basket of fruit which she had accumulated somehow, as only herself could have explained.

Maybe there is no trivial thing that so greatly helps to bridge over a trying situation as good breeding. The breeding which is really good, out of the inner life: kindness and the reluctance to inflict pain. It was such breeding that enabled the oddly assorted company at that Christmas dinner table to pass the hours of their intercourse not only in peace, but with absolute enjoyment.

Finally, when the elders pushed back their chairs, Mr. Kaye proposed that Amy should sing some of the old-time ballads familiar to the childhood of both himself and his kinsman. So Hallam took out his mother's guitar and tuned it, and his sister placed herself beside him. [Pg 285]

"Ah, how well I remember that little instrument," cried Mr. Wingate, "and the commotion it caused among the Friends. Music used to be the most 'worldly' and undesirable thing, but they are more tolerant now. Give us 'Lang Syne,' youngsters. It's the song for the day and—this hour."

It was. They sang it lustily, and Amy was amazed to hear how finely that deep voice of their cousin could fill in the pauses of her own treble, sweet but not strong. Then there was "Annie Laurie," and "Edinboro' Toon," and "Buy my Caller Herrin'," and others; till Cleena drew John to the door to listen and applaud, forgetting for once the big pile of dishes standing unwashed upon her kitchen table.

"For, aye, it's a time o' peace, thank God. An' her that has gone is among us never a doubt I doubt. What's a bit o' idlin' when a sight for saints is afore ye? If Fayette, now—"

But Fayette was not there. Neither was he in his own room when Cleena sought him there. He had left it while she was off guard and had made his escape unseen. Forces of good and evil were tormenting him: the struggle to do right and please these good friends, and the greater yearning to seek the wrong path to revenge.

Yet, after all, what was this poor human waif to these happier folk? So he asked himself as he sneaked away in the twilight which hid his departure. [Pg 286]

Had Amy heard the question, she would have answered it promptly: "Much, Fayette. Everybody one knows is something to one's self."

But she did not even hear of his brief visit, for, having discovered his fresh defection, Cleena decided to keep the matter to herself.

It was getting quite late when Archibald Wingate drove away from "Charity House" toward Fairacres, and as he went he pondered of many things. Once or twice he fancied he saw a lurking shadow in the road, that was not due to either bush or tree which bordered it. But he thought little of the matter, so engrossed was he with the recollections of the evening.

"Queer, what a pleasant time I had. Yet we are all, practically, enemies. Each side feels that the other side has been at fault. Anyway, I seem to hear Salome saying: 'Judge not my children by the mistakes of their parents.' Nor will I; of that I am resolved. I'll give even that top-lofty lad, Hallam, a fair show, by and by. I must test him a little longer first, then I'll begin. That is, if he's made of the right stuff. As for Amy, she's a witch. She's wheedled the heart right out of me with her bright, unflinching, honest eyes. Talked to me about getting up a 'club' for the mill folks. 'The right sort of club, with books and pictures and everything helpful.' The saucebox! and she earning the mighty wage of two-fifty per week. Well, all in good course. I haven't toiled a lifetime to attain my object, then relinquish it without a little enjoyment of it; though, after all, possession isn't everything. The struggle was about as enjoyable as the result. But I succeeded! I am master of Fairacres, of Ardsley Mills, of half all Ardsley township. The old family is still on top. But, I'll buy Cuthbert's great picture and burn it up—sometime. Hmm. Wonder where that visionary Frederic Kaye is, of whose unpractical schemes I am reaping the benefit. Odd—buried himself in California, so to speak, and the only visible proofs that he had ever reached that happy land are a couple of braying burros.—Hello! hello, I say! Who's that? What's up?" [Pg 287]

The shadow which had dogged the track of the mill owner's phaeton had suddenly become a reality. His horse was seized, forced backward, the horsewhip wrenched from its socket, and before he could defend himself Mr. Wingate's head and shoulders felt the cuts of the whip, delivered in swift and furious intensity.

"Hold on! hold—on! What—who—stop, stop, *s-t-o-p!* You're killing me! What's wanted? It's murder—*murder!*"

And again after another visitation of stripes, that awful cry of "mur-der!"

The word holds its own horror. No one can thus hear it shouted, in the stillness of the night, unmoved. It affected even the ferocious assailant of the lonely old man, and arrested his further blows. [Pg 288]

"Murder." That meant death, prison, everything that was hateful. Even to Fayette's dull brain there penetrated some realization of what his present deed implied. For this was he who had waylaid an "enemy" on the highroad and beaten him into unconsciousness.

Then he remembered his own wrongs, and his anger flamed afresh.

"Thought you could do all the lickin', did ye? How many times did *you* have *me* thrashed? What did you care if the man who thrashed me 'bout killed me? What was I, only 'Bony,' out o' the poor farm! Ugh, you old rascal! Take that, and that, and that. Huckleberries! but it's fun to settle such scores."

The old horse which Mr. Wingate drove stood quiet in the road, else the matter might have had a different ending; for had she run and dragged her now helpless master, he would surely have been killed. As it was, she did not move, so there was nothing to deaden the sound of the sharp blows Fayette administered; and in the silence of the place and night this sound carried far.

It reached the ears of a foot passenger, toiling up the mill road toward Fairacres and quickened his pace. So that when the half-wit finally paused for breath, he felt himself caught by his collar and heard a stern voice demanding:— [Pg 289]

"What's this? Hold! Stop! This—*here*, in *Ardsley?*"

Fayette looked up. The man who had gripped him was much taller than he, and seemed in that dim light a giant for strength. The capture brought back all those visions of punishment and the prison. In a twinkling the agile lad had writhed himself free from his short coat and leaped away into the darkness.

The newcomer heard a sound of retreating footsteps and mocking laughter, then turned his attention to the injured man in the phaeton.

"An old fellow, too, he seems. Hello! Are you alive? Hey! Can't you speak? That's serious."

The stranger's actions were alert and decided. He gently raised the bent figure of the unconscious Mr. Wingate to as comfortable a position as he could, stepped into the vehicle, and took up the reins.

"If nothing is changed, the nearest house is old Fairacres. But I didn't look for such a home-coming. Get up there, nag!"

Not since the days of her youth had the sorrel mare been forced into such a pace as then. The rescuer drove for life and death, and as if all turnings of the old road were familiar to him. Nor did he slacken rein until he reached the front door of the mansion, and sung out in a voice to wake great echoes:—

"Hello, there! Come out! A man in distress!"

[Pg 290]

This hello reached the stable, where Fayette was loosing Balaam, and roused that intelligent beast to speak his opinion concerning these disturbances of his rest.

Marshall, hurrying to answer the imperative demand at the front door, heard the burro's bray of protest, though he paid it small attention then, because of the nearer demand. Holding his candle high above his head, he slid back the bolts and peered out, but the sight which met his gaze set him trembling like an aspen.

"Why—my land! Master, what—what's happened? Have they murdered you out of hand? Ah, but my mind misgave me how 'twould be. To think it—to think it!"

"Hush! Put down the candle. Give a lift; he's powerful heavy. Is this your master?"

The servant retreated. This might be the very person who had done the mill owner such terrible injury. He would put his own precious anatomy out of harm's reach.

"Oh, you fool! Come back. You're safe. Leave that door open. I'll bring him in myself. Make way there—quick!"

Marshall tried to barricade the entrance to the room beyond the hall by means of his own plump body, and was promptly kicked aside, as the stranger strode past him, bearing the unconscious man upon his shoulder, very much as if he had been a bag of meal.

[Pg 291]

"Is this your master?"

"Y-ye-s. Who—are you—ordering—"

"Hot water—lights—a doctor—everything—*at once*. I'm Frederic Kaye."

CHAPTER XXIII.

[Pg 292]

FREDERIC KAYE'S WELCOME HOME.

The excitement at Ardsley was intense. Never had its quiet precincts been disturbed by a crime so unprovoked and dastardly.

"To strike a man in the dark."

"To waylay an old fellow like that. The man is a coward, whoever he be, that did it."

"Poor old 'boss.' He wasn't to say over lovable, in ordinary, but I'd pity even a scoundrel got treated that way."

"He ought to be punished with his own stripes."

"Oh, he'll get what he deserves. Never fear. If old man Wingate had been poor—well, you might say. But a rich man has friends."

Such talk all through the mill, on that day after Christmas, interfered seriously with the customary labor. But it was small wonder; and though he tried to enforce discipline and keep things running smoothly, even Mr. Metcalf himself was greatly disturbed and anxious.

The news of the assault upon the mill owner had spread rapidly. At first the story told by the stranger, who had so suddenly and opportunely appeared upon the scene, was given credence. Then, when it was remembered that this stranger, now known to be Frederic Kaye, had been injured and supplanted by Archibald Wingate, a faint suspicion began to rise in men's minds.

[Pg 293]

Only those who have suffered from it know with what terrible rapidity an unjust rumor grows and spreads. Inoculated by this evil germ, even the fairest judgment becomes diseased. Those who had best known Frederic Kaye, the old people who recalled his frank, impetuous, happy-go-lucky boyhood, here in the town where he was born and bred; those who had received good from his hand, and nothing but good; even these joined with the baser sort in considering the night attack upon the mill owner "quite natural. Just what might have been expected."

"Of course no one knows what sort of life Kaye's led out there in Californy. The jumping-off place of creation."

So, instead of finding himself among friends, the returned citizen discovered that he was among enemies, under the basest of suspicions. He had remained all night at Fairacres, with the doctor so hastily summoned there. This gentleman was an old acquaintance, and from him Mr. Frederic, as he had always been called in distinction from Mr. Kaye, the artist and his brother-in-law, learned the history of the past weeks. Yes, even of years.

[Pg 294]

"It's a pity, a great pity! When I failed to pay what I owed on the property here, and Salome, my sister, saw that I would lose everything unless somebody came to my aid, she did so. I hoped, I fully expected, to be able to return what she advanced. All the world knows now that I was not."

"She was not the first person who has been ruined by injudicious indorsement."

The Californian winced. His home-coming was proving a terrible disappointment to him, and he little dreamed how much worse than disappointment was yet in store.

"Well, bad luck has pursued me. I have lost in every speculation I ever undertook. The last I tried was the evaporation of fruits. There's money in it, if I had the capital—"

"Then you did not know how badly things were going with your sister?"

"I never dreamed it. You knew her well—Salome was never a whiner. If she had even intimated the straits which she was in, I would have thrown up every chance and come back at once, to put my shoulder to the wheel in some shape. I wouldn't have permitted it."

"How happen you here just now?"

"My niece, Amy, wrote me of her mother's death. It was a brief, heart-broken little letter. I have it here. It brought me home, but I still fancied that home was this house." The gentleman took from his pocket a small envelope and read its enclosure aloud. It was, as he had stated, extremely short and gave only the facts.

[Pg 295]

"MY DEAR UNCLE FREDERIC: Our mother is dead. She is buried at Quaker cemetery. My father and Hallam are well. So is Cleena. I don't know how to write to you because you are really a stranger to me. The burros are both well. Your loving

"AMY KAYE."

"There, that's all. It was enough to bring me clear across the continent, however. My heart aches; I should have come sooner. Oh, for one sight of Salome's beautiful face before—" He dropped his head on his hand and a sob shook the strong frame.

The doctor rose and busied himself about his patient. He respected the brother's grief, and he liked this man, unthrifty and neglectful as he might have been.

Then Marshall made a sign, and the physician left the room so quietly that Mr. Kaye did not hear him go. Outside, in the hall, the valet was waiting, almost breathless with eagerness.

"Will he live?" he questioned in a whisper.

"Time will tell. I hope so," was the unsatisfactory response.

"Well, if he don't, that's his—murderer."

[Pg 296]

The other sprang back as if he had been struck.

"Man, take care what you say! How dare you?"

"Ain't it reasonable? Didn't he say he was the man that owned the mill, this house, everything before master did? Who else had a grudge against the poor old man?"

"Lots of people, I reckon. It won't hurt him to tell the truth. He was as testy as a snapping turtle—you know that. Plenty of folks disliked him. Most likely the person who attacked him was a tramp who hoped to find money. By the way, did anybody look to see if there had been robbery as well as assault?"

"I did. No; there wasn't anything stole, so far as I know. That's what, one thing—why it must have been—"

Dr. Wise laid his hand on Marshall's shoulder.

"Look here, man, you stop that talk. Not another word of it. How dare you, I say how dare you, thrust suspicion upon an innocent man? I'd stake my life on the integrity of any Kaye was ever born. Unfortunate this returned wanderer may be, but—If you let me hear one single word more of such fol-de-rol, I'll make it hot for you. Understand? Haven't we got enough on our hands to keep your master alive? There must be quiet here, absolute quiet. It's your business to have it

maintained; and if you don't, I'll have you punished as accessory to the deed. Hear me?"

All this had been delivered in the lowest tone possible, yet each syllable was as distinctly enunciated as if it had been shouted. The doctor knew Marshall. He chose that idle threat of "accessory" as the safest means to accomplish his own object. [Pg 297]

This was all very well, so far as it went. Unfortunately, the doctor was not the only person to whom the valet had already announced his suspicion. There were other servants in the kitchen, and they had been swiftly poisoned by his opinion. So that when, after a sleepless night of watching beside his kinsman's bed, Frederic Kaye set off for "Charity House" and his relatives, he was even then a marked man.

Into the sacredness of reunion, when the little family on the knoll were discussing all that had befallen them, on either side, and the two men were renewing old affections, while Hallam and Amy were forming new ones for this new uncle, there came an alarming summons.

A local officer of the law presented himself before the group and on behalf of the public safety arrested the stranger.

"Arrest me? Why, what in the name of justice do you mean?"

"Just what I say. For the attack upon a peaceful citizen, who lies at the point of death, brought there by your villainous hand," repeated the sheriff, solemnly. He so seldom had opportunity to exercise his office that he now embellished it with all the dignity possible.

"Indeed, take care of your words, friend! It was a case of rescue, not attack. You are slightly mixed in your ideas, sir. I found him suffering a terrible horsewhipping at the hands of somebody whom I do not know, who slipped away from me when I seized him, and disappeared in the darkness. I was too anxious over Mr. Wingate to notice, or even care, which direction the rascal took. But—aha, it's too absurd!" [Pg 298]

"Remember that whatever you say will be used against you," cautioned the officer of the law.

"Let it. I could ask no better treatment."

"You say you grabbed a fellow. What was he like?"

"It was too dark to see distinctly. He appeared rather tall and slim. I don't remember that he said a word, but he laughed harshly as he ran. Somehow, that laugh gave me the impression that the man was demented. But I have nothing else to judge by, and I would not be unjust. The thing for which to be thankful is that Dr. Wise hopes my kinsman's injuries are not fatal."

"Hmm. All the same, sir, you will have to go with me."

Frederic Kaye turned toward his friends a countenance which expressed as much amusement as annoyance. Cuthbert Kaye had risen, and his face was white with indignation. The sight of this, determined his brother-in-law to yield quietly to the inevitable. He had heard much during his night with Dr. Wise of the artist's recent condition, and he felt it would be criminal to let him become excited now. So he laid his hand affectionately upon the trembling shoulder, and remarked, with laughing disdain:— [Pg 299]

"Why, lad, don't think of it. It's a ludicrous mistake, of course, and the best, the simplest way to correct it is for me to go with this gentleman; and I doubt not I'll be back in time for dinner. Why, Cleena, woman, take care! It's delightful to find you so loyal to your 'black sheep,' but fisticuffs won't answer, nor even a shillalah."

This was a diversion, and everybody laughed. For Cleena had advanced threateningly toward the sheriff, raising her rolling-pin, that she happened to have in hand, as if she would bring it down upon his offending head. Her hand dropped to her side, but her eyes did not cease to hurl contempt upon the officer, as, under cover of the merriment resulting, Frederic Kaye himself led the way out of the house toward the "bar of justice."

Because Cleena fancied that Amy had taken cold, the girl had remained at home that morning, but she now begged to be allowed to return to the mill.

"I want to go and see Mr. Metcalf. He'll be the very one to help Uncle Frederic, if he needs help, and I'd rather tell him the story myself."

"If you go, I will too," said Hallam, quickly. "I'll have no holidays you do not share."

"Nonsense! Your work is 'piece work.' If you get behind at one time, you can make it up at another. The superintendent told me you could soon bring it home to do, if you wished." [Pg 300]

"But I shall not wish—not for the present. Let us both go."

Mr. Kaye looked up as if he would remonstrate. Then he took up a western newspaper that their guest had laid down, and began to read. But his children had seen his glance, and interpreted it to themselves by a swift exchange of their own. Amy's eyes spoke to her brother's, as plainly as words:—

"We mustn't leave him alone to-day," and Hallam's had telegraphed back:—

"No, I see that. One of us must stay."

"Well, father, Hal is not half so necessary to the success of Ardsley Mill as I am. He's going to help you mount those sketches this morning, while I hunt up Uncle Frederic, and try to get a 'day off' to visit with him. Cleena must dish up the remains of the yesterday dinner for us, and we'll keep Christmas over again. Isn't it just lovely, lovely, to have one's relatives turn up in this delightful fashion? First, Cousin Archibald, behaving just like other folks; and now this romantic arrival of the long-lost uncle. Good-by. I'll be back as soon as I can."

Mr. Kaye and Hallam repaired to the upper floor as Amy went away, but Cleena remained standing for a long time, motionless in the middle of the room. Her head was bent, and her gaze fixed, as if she were studying some matter deeply. Finally she roused with a mighty sigh and stalked out of the room.

[Pg 301]

"Sure, the pother o' life. It's an' up an' down, so fast it makes a body dizzy in their wits. That boy, Fayette, one day as good as a fine fish o' Friday; the next—eatin' me heart out with the worry. Never a doubt I doubt 'twas himself belabored the old man on his road home. There's bad blood 'twixt 'em. But I'll aye see if he's in his bed the now."

So she ascended to the back chamber that Fayette used. To her knock there came, at first, no response; but she kept on with her tapping and interspersed this with coaxing tones, and finally a voice answered her.

"What you want?"

"Yerself, avick."

"Well, you can't have me."

"Can I no? It's two makes a bargain."

"Clear out."

"After you is manners for me. Come by."

"Leave me alone."

"I'd take shame to myself. Have ye heard the fine doin's? No?"

"What doings?"

"The lad's back from foreign parts, Miss Amy's uncle. He's the one has donkeys in his pocket. Heard ye ever o' him?"

"Where's he at?"

[Pg 302]

"Faith, I d' know. Belike he's after takin' a stroll about, meetin' old friends. What for no? Come on an' help me get a fine dinner out o' scraps."

"Suppose he'd give me one?"

"Never a doubt I doubt, *he'll give ye all ye deserve*. Come by. There's kindlin' to split an' praties to peel, an'—Whist! What's that I hear?"

Fayette's curiosity was very strong. It had led him into trouble more than once. It now induced him to open the door and peep through.

"What's that, Cleena? Anything happenin'?"

"Arrah musha, but I think yes!"

"What?"

"Sure, if ye're askin', I'm believin' it's Willyum Gladstone happenin' down in your minin' hole."

"Huckleberries!"

The door flew open, Fayette rushed by as if he could not move half fast enough. It seemed to Cleena he cleared the stairs with two bounds, and an instant after she heard him hurrying into the cellar at the same headlong pace.

"Hmm. I thought that'd fetch him," she chuckled. Then she suddenly remembered that she had once heard the lad speak of using "giant powder," or some such explosive in his work of the underground passage. She had strictly forbidden this, and had carefully watched lest any suspicious material might be brought upon the premises. She had even persuaded Teamster John to examine the trench and the articles which Fayette had placed there. He had found nothing wrong, and the pick and the shovel had been so long disused that they had rusted. Of late Cleena had let William Gladstone play down there in the soft dirt, while she was busy at other things.

[Pg 303]

"Alanna, the day!"

Cleena followed her leader only a trifle less swiftly, and reached the top of the cellar stairs just in time to receive a whirling object plump in her arms. The object was the incipient statesman, and in a second more the half-wit had also reached the kitchen floor and had shut the door behind him.

"I'll teach him to interfere with my gold mine!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

[Pg 304]

FAIRACRES IS CLOSED.

"Oh, Mr. Metcalf, may I come in?"

The superintendent was alone in his office and admitted Amy at once. "Such strange things have happened, I've not come to work to-day, but to ask your help. My Uncle Frederic—"

"Sit down, child, you are breathless with haste. You needn't talk. I have heard your news. Dr. Wise has sent me a message. I am expecting him here immediately."

"Isn't it dreadful?"

"Very," answered the gentleman, and his grave face emphasized his words. He knew Archibald Wingate better than anybody else could know him. He was the rich man's confidential employee, from whom no weaknesses were hid. He believed the mill owner to be vindictive, and he had heard his often-expressed contempt for the "whole family of Kaye, so far as its men are concerned." Of course, this had been some time ago; before Fairacres had become Mr. Wingate's home. Since then his enmity toward his relatives had seemed to slumber, it had even altered to a sort of friendliness; yet Mr. Metcalf had no faith in the endurance of this friendliness should any test be put upon it. The attack of the night before had pointed suspicion very strongly toward one of "the Kayes," and should the victim recover, he would, doubtless, prosecute to the full extent of the law the person who had assaulted him.

[Pg 305]

"Do you know how he is?"

"Of whom do you ask?"

"Cousin Archibald, of course. I am so sorry for him. If I hadn't to work, I would go and take care of him, if he'd let me."

"I don't think he would. Besides, you would not be either strong or wise enough. He must have trained nursing, the best obtainable. I hear that he has recovered consciousness and is resting quietly. What complications may arise one cannot foresee. He has been a high liver, and he is an old man; but I hope for the best. I hope it not only for his sake, but everybody's concerned."

"Wasn't it queer that that man, that officer,—a sheriff he called himself,—should come after my uncle? It frightened my father, so Hallam stayed with him. I'm sorry to be away from my place to-day, but Cleena fancies I have taken cold. Then, too, since Uncle Frederic came, of course I should devote myself to him. He's just splendid. So big and strong and jolly. Even under his sorrow about my mother he is as sunshiny as possible. He's like a fresh west wind that 'airs' a house so wonderfully. I do want you to see him; and I came to ask if you'd just go and explain to that sheriff how silly it is to suspect him."

[Pg 306]

Mr. Metcalf regarded Amy for a moment in silence. With all her good sense, she was as ignorant as a child of many things in practical life. He answered her very gently:—

"I expect to see him soon, that is my intention. Dr. Wise and I will become his 'bail', so that he can soon be set at liberty."

"I do not understand you. What do you mean?"

"Why, this: your uncle has been arrested upon suspicion of waylaying and assaulting Mr. Wingate. He will be imprisoned unless somebody becomes surety for him, that he will appear at court when summoned to stand his trial and prove his innocence if he can. It is right you should know this, though extremely disagreeable for me to speak of it."

Amy's face paled as he talked. She did not wonder that her father had been frightened. The thing was horrible, and the disgrace of it crushed her. She bowed her head beneath its weight, and sat silent so long that the superintendent was moved to rise and comfort her.

"Don't take it so to heart, my child; there is, of course, some great mistake. The thing is—to find out who the real assailant was and bring him to justice. This, unfortunately, will be a difficult matter."

"No; I won't mind it. Why should I? If he had done this wicked thing, I should be right to feel shame; but he didn't. Oh! I've just thought of something that might help. Uncle Frederic said he caught the man by the collar, and the man slipped out of his coat and ran away. Where is the coat? Has anybody looked for it?"

[Pg 307]

"Several persons, my own messenger among others. There is no trace of any garment anywhere near the highroad. If we could find that, as you say, it would simplify matters greatly. Come with me; I heard Nanette wishing she could show you her Christmas gifts. To hear her describe each, one would imagine she could see them. She is so interested about Balaam, too. She wonders where he is, and if he misses Pepita as much as she would miss one of her numerous sisters. When Dr. Wise has been here and we have concluded our business, I will call for you, probably, with your uncle. I have a new horse I'm anxious to try, and things are so unsettled here to-day—"

"Unsettled?"

"Yes; Ardsley doesn't often have such a sensation as its wealthiest citizen being horsewhipped. It's difficult to get the hands to work regularly. It's just as well you do not try, till it's blown over. You would be asked no end of questions, idle as the people who would put them."

In his kind heart he wished to save her not only the questions, but the shadow which might rest upon her because of her misjudged relative. By nightfall, or earlier, he was determined to have the Californian set at liberty. It was an outrage that one who acted the good Samaritan should receive such reward, and he believed that two as influential townsmen as Dr. Wise and himself could, by their indorsement of the prisoner, turn the tide of public opinion in his favor. [Pg 308]

So Amy went again to the Metcalf home and forgot all her cares in the midst of its bright young people. The hours went swiftly round, and it was not till the gate clicked and a trio of gentlemen came striding up the path that she remembered how anxious she had been.

Then she sped out of the house and flung herself into her uncle's arms.

"Oh, I'm so glad they found out their mistake! How ashamed that sheriff will be! Please, Mr. Metcalf, may I show him his own little Pepita, that was? And thank you for helping him to explain, or for the 'bail,' and everything. Thank you, too, Dr. Wise. Do you know how Mr. Wingate is?"

"Improving. He's pretty badly scared and shocked, but I think he will come out all right."

"Can he tell who struck him? That would clear everything up all right."

"Yes; it would be a simple solution of the matter. I am hoping he will be able to tell, after a while; but for the present my object is to prevent, as far as possible, his recalling the incident. He must not be excited, else there may be fever. But all in good time, I think. Now Mr. Metcalf has invited us to ride behind his new horse. I have an hour of leisure, and I propose to show this old Ardsley boy the changes a few years have made, even in our quiet town. Did I hear anything about a small girl named Amy being one of the party?" [Pg 309]

"Indeed, you did. Oh, what a treat! A real Christmas gift. To ride behind a brand new horse, beside a brand new uncle, in a brand new carriage, is enough to turn my head; so forgive me if I'm silly—sillier than common. And oh, Mr. Metcalf, can't Nanette go too? She's so little she takes up no room worth mentioning, and I love her."

It was a merry party. Amy believed that all the morning's trouble had been overcome, and did not realize that being out on bail was in itself sort of an imprisonment to a man of honor. Until the real culprit was found Frederic Kaye would still be under suspicion; yet he could enjoy his parole, and this ride had been purposely planned by his friends as a means of influencing that variable public opinion which had first promptly misjudged him.

Therefore, they drove through the principal streets of the town, past all its business places, and lingered by the haunts of the village gossips, that Ardsleyites might see and comment.

"Well, if that don't beat all!" exclaimed Mrs. Hackett to her customers. "There's Dr. Wise and the 'Supe' driving Mister Fred all over creation. I guess they don't believe anything against him, bad as things look. I don't know as 'tis right, either. I guess I'll wait and see before I make up my mind." [Pg 310]

But having already spread the "news" by means of every villager who had visited her place of business that morning, this was rather late in season to stem the tide of rumor; though on the principle of "better late than never," it may have done some good.

When the ride was over and the Kayes deposited at the door of "Charity House," Amy was in the wildest of spirits. It seemed to her as if the world were the loveliest, friendliest place, and her gayety infected all about her. The gentlemen accompanied Mr. Frederic into the new home and spent an hour delightfully with the artist, amid his pictures. Then Cleena, aided by Amy, brought in a tray of luncheon, and they stayed to share it.

"Blessings on Teamster John's turkey. What a lot of comfort it has given lots of folks!" remarked Amy to Cleena, in the kitchen, as she surveyed the neatly arranged tray.

"Yes, so be. Arrah musha, were the man as sensible as his fowl I'd know. But, colleen, keep an eye to that back door. Fayette's behind, in the store closet. It's behind he must stay or there's mischief a-brewin'."

"Indeed, I wonder he isn't putting himself forward, to attract Uncle Frederic's notice, as he always does of strangers. Well, poor lad, I fancy the introduction can wait. When you've carried in the tray, I'll go and serve them." [Pg 311]

But after the light meal was over and the guests departed, Hallam became absorbed in the new magazines that his uncle produced from his valise; while the elder Kayes dropped back into the reminiscences that were so interesting to themselves and so dull to Amy. Try as she would, now that all was quiet, she could not keep from her mind a picture of Archibald Wingate, riding home from a pleasant visit and suffering such mischance.

"My first little dinner-party, too. I must go and see him. I must tell him that I am sorry. I must offer to help."

So, after a while, as the afternoon waned, Amy put on her outdoor things, and telling only Cleena her errand, set off for Fairacres. She was admitted by a strange servant, and was passing straight toward the room which her cousin occupied when she was met and prevented by Marshall.

"If you please, miss, he's allowed to see nobody."

"Not even me? Surely, I will not disturb him. I won't even speak to him, if that will hurt him. I just want to satisfy myself how badly he's injured, and maybe smile at him. Just that little bit. Oh, Mr. Marshall, isn't it so sad! I'm so very, very sorry."

"Yes, and well you might be, miss. No, not even to look at him. He's not to be worried by nobody." [Pg 312]

So Amy went sorrowfully home again, and as she had to resume her labor in the mill at such an early hour the following day, she could not repeat her visit until another night came round. Frederic Kaye had gone to the mansion, however, and had been coldly assured by the officious Marshall that "the master was doing well." This bulletin had been issued through the upper half of the old-fashioned door, which opened across its middle, and to effect an entrance the caller would have had to force the bolts of the lower half. The valet regarded the Californian with suspicion that, as the latter admitted, was not ill-founded; and he had not forgotten the feel of the stranger's boot-toe on the night of the accident. So he kept a safe barricade of the premises, and Frederic also went away unsatisfied.

For several days these visits were repeated, with similar results; but when Sunday came round and she had daylight for her purpose, Amy again hurried to Fairacres.

"I'll see him this time, if I have to climb over Marshall's objecting shoulders," she merrily cried to Cleena, as she departed.

But when she reached the old homestead she found it desolate. The light snow which had fallen overnight lay everywhere undisturbed. No paths had been cleared nor entrances swept. The windows were closed and shuttered as Amy never had seen them. Even the stables were shut up and deserted; and after a half hour of vain efforts to arouse somebody, the disappointed girl returned to "Charity House." [Pg 313]

"Troth, ye went away like a feather, an' you come home like a log. What's happened, me colleen?"

"He's gone. I can't see him. I can't tell him. Oh, I'm so sorry, so sorry!"

To comfort her, Uncle Frederic paid a visit to Dr. Wise, and came back with news that was not very satisfactory. Without consulting the physician, Mr. Wingate had suddenly decided to go south for the winter. Marshall had attended to everything. The horses and cattle had been sent from Fairacres to one of the outlying farms belonging to the estate. There was no reference to future return, and Mr. Metcalf had been instructed to settle all accounts. Beyond this there was no mention of anybody, and no address was left except that of the mill owner's city bankers, who would forward any necessary papers. Mr. Wingate had gone away for absolute rest, and wished not to hear from Ardsley unless under extreme necessity.

So Amy's dream of a reunited family, of that peace and happiness which should exist between Fairacres and "Charity House," came to an end. But other hopes and plans took its place, and she returned to her mill work on the Monday, too busy and eager to spend time in useless regret.

"The best thing about life," observed this wise young person to her Uncle Frederic, "is that it has to keep right on. There's so much to do, and the days are so short, if a body grieves one moment he's sure to laugh the next. And, uncle, I've such a lovely idea about a 'club' for the mill folks. To take the place of one that—doesn't seem to help them much. I believe you're the very man to arrange everything, and that you were sent home just in time." [Pg 314]

"Wh-e-w! A Daniel come to judgment? No, a faithful daughter of a brave, unselfish woman. You'll never be Salome, little girl, but maybe you will be an improvement even on her. All her good sense with a little more—snap."

"Considerable more snap than wisdom, I fancy," laughed she, and sped down the hill to join Gwendolyn for her walk millward.

CHAPTER XXV.

[Pg 315]

MYSTERIES AND MASTERIES.

"Sure, Mister Frederic, I'd be proud to show ye the cellar that's doin' below. Would he mind comin' the now?"

"A 'cellar below' is surely in its proper place. I'll be delighted to view it, Mistress Goodsoul."

"Alanna, it was ever yourself had a jest an' a twist of a body's words! To my notion, it's a tidy job, but I sometimes misgives it's no all right for the house."

"Then it surely should be looked after. Who's doing it for you?"

"That silly one I was tellin' you about. He's—he's—" The woman glanced over her shoulder, as if she feared to be heard. This was a curious circumstance in the case of one so frank as she, and her old friend commented on it.

"Why so mysterious, Cleena? Secrets afoot? But it's after Christmas, not before it."

"Come by."

He followed her gayly down the stairs into the one central cellar, and from this slightly farther into another, being opened toward the side. She carried a lighted candle in her hand, and pointed with pride to the neatness of the work as far as it had proceeded. [Pg 316]

"Nobody could ha' done it finer, eh?"

"It seems all right. The walls will have to be supported, of course, though it looks a solid rock. Old Ingraham obeyed the Scripture injunction in letter, if not in spirit. What does Cuthbert think of this?"

"The same as of most things—nothin' at all. So long as he's his bit pictures an' books to pore over, the very house might tumble about his ears an' no heed. There's been no nerve frettin' nor crossness since the mistress was called—not once. He's a saint the now. But it's aye good ye're come home, Mister Fred."

"And it's good to hear you say so, old friend. Yet if it suits you just as well, I'd prefer to have you say it up in the open. I'm not a lover of dark cellars, or of holes that may be cellars some day. Come out of it; it gives me the 'creeps.'"

"Ye believe it's all safe, eh?"

"Safe enough so far."

"Come by. If you like not this place, you must e'en bide the kitchen a bit. I've somewhat to speak to you."

Cleena started back over the way they had come, and Mr. Kaye was following her, when he stumbled against something soft, and fell headlong in the mud; but he was up again in an instant, no worse for the accident save by the soil upon his clothing. He had grasped the thing over which he had tripped, and held it up to the candle-light.

"Hello! Seems to me I've seen this garment, or felt it, before. That peculiarity of a cloth coat with a leather collar is noticeable. Whose is it, Cleena?" [Pg 317]

"Fetch it," she commanded tersely, and he obeyed her. Once in the better lighted kitchen she extinguished the candle, carefully closed all the doors, and seated herself near her visitor. She had taken the coat from him, and laid it upon her own knees. Her manner was still full of that mystery which consorted so oddly with her honest, open face.

"I thought so. I thought so, so I did."

"Very likely."

"Cease yer haverin', lad. There's matter here."

"Considerable. Upon my clothes, too. The matter seems to be of the same sort—rather brown and sticky, what the farmers call 'loom.'"

"Know you whose coat this be?"

"Never a know I know," he mimicked, enjoying his bit of nonsense with this old friend of his youth.

"It's Fayettey's."

"Your superior cellar digger? Whew!"

He had now become quite as serious as she desired. "Cleena, this is a bad business. This coat was on the back of the man who horsewhipped Mr. Wingate."

"I thought it; but, mind you, me lad, he's not for punishin'."

"Hold on, he certainly *is*. Don't you know that I—I, a Kaye, am under suspicion of this dastardly thing? Of course you do. Well, then, I'm going to step out from under the suspicion with neatness and despatch. How long have you been hiding this, Cleena?" [Pg 318]

"The poor chap's been here ever since. Only once a day he slips out, but he's back by night. Oh, he's safe enough the now."

"Glad of it. Like to have him handy; and as soon as you've finished what you have to say, I'll walk into the village and inform the sheriff, or somebody who should know."

"You'll do naught like it."

"Why, Cleena, woman, have you lost your good sense?"

"Have I saved it, no? Hear me. I know 'twas me poor little General Bonyparty 't did the deed. I

knew, soon as I heard the tale o' the coat. You're no so stupid yerself. You recognized it immediate. It was a part o' his uniform he wore a-paradin'. His notion 'twould save the collar clean o' the jacket I fixed him. He's never no care in all his hard life till he met up with me. The poor little gossoon!"

"Cleena, Cleena, turncoat! Wasn't I once, on a day gone by, another 'poor little gossoon'? But come, drop nonsense; it's a disgracefully serious business for me and for your whole family."

"It's because o' the family I say it. The lad's for no punishin'. Not yet. You're big an' strong, an' uncommon light o' heart. It'll do ye no harm. The suspicioned you must be till—Wait lad. You loved the mistress, Salome?"

[Pg 319]

"Why, Cleena, you know it!"

"Love you her childer?"

"Dearly; for their sakes I must shake off this obnoxious misjudgment." He shrugged his shoulders as if the obloquy were a tangible load that could be shifted.

"Hallam, the cripple, that's walked never a step since a diny dony thing, an' a bad nurse set him prone on the cold stones o' the nasty cellar house where her kind lived. That winter in the town, an' me mindin' the mistress with Miss Amy a babe. How could we watch all the time? He must have the air, what for no? An' her with a face as smooth as bees-wax. Down on the cold, damp stones she'd put him, whiles off with her young man she'd be trapesin', an' him made a cripple for life."

"Yes, Cleena, I remember it all. And how, as Amy tells me, almost a fortune has been spent to restore him. But if ever I earn enough to try again, I'll never rest till every doctor in the world, who understands such things, shall tell me there is no hope."

"Good lad. Aye, aye, *good lad!*"

The gentleman looked at her in amazement. This had been the old servant's term of commendation when he had refrained from some of his youthful and natural mischievousness. She seemed to mean it just as earnestly now. Suddenly she leaned forward and placed her hands upon his knees.

[Pg 320]

"Say it again, avick. You'd do all in your power for me darlin' Master Hallam, what for no?"

"What idleness to ask! I would give anything in this world to see him cured."

"The Kayes are aye proud, in troth. Yer honor, lad; *even yer honor?*"

"Hmm, well—yes. Even my honor."

"Hark to me."

For five minutes thereafter Cleena talked, and not once did her listener interrupt. Her words were spoken in that sibilant whisper that is louder than ordinary speech, and not one of them was lost. When she had finished, she rose and demanded, laying her hand upon Mr. Kaye's shoulder:

"Now, Mister Fred, will ye leave me ginerall be?"

"Yes, Cleena. For the present, till a final test comes, he shall be safe from any interference from me. I'll take him under my personal protection. I'll make myself his friend. He shall have a fair chance. If he fails—"

"He'll no fail! he'll no fail, laddie! Such as him is the Lord's own. Whist, alanna, here he comes."

Fayette approached the entrance, walking stealthily, and casting furtive glances toward that part of the building where the guest had hitherto remained. Apparently satisfied that the coast was clear, he crept to the door and tapped it twice.

[Pg 321]

Cleena nodded her head, and Frederic Kaye opened to admit the boy, who would have retreated when he saw the stranger, had not his arm been caught and held so firmly he could not writhe himself free.

"Leave me alone. What you doin'?"

"Why, I haven't had the pleasure of meeting you since Christmas night."

"'Twasn't me. I never done it. Leave me be. Huckleberries! I'll smash ye!"

"Why, Fayette, I'm astonished. Be quiet, listen. I know you—I know all about you. You have got to behave. You must stay here and do exactly what Cleena and I tell you to do. You'll be treated well. I'll show you how you can make a lot of that money you like so much; upon condition, though—upon the one condition that you simply behave correctly. You are wise enough to understand me. If you disobey or prove tricky—well, I have but to hand you over to the law and you're settled. Do you understand?"

"You mean, if I don't mind, they'll jail me?"

"That's it, exactly. You're cleverer than I hoped."

"All right; I'll do it. Say, I believe Balaam's sick."

"Balaam? Have you got him, too? Are you a horse thief as well as highwayman? Well, poor fellow, it's lucky your lot is cast in this peaceful valley instead of on the frontier. Where is he?"

"I rode him to a place I know. There was plenty o' fodder once, but it's been took. He hain't had much to eat, an' maybe that's it. I was bound old Wingate shouldn't get him." [Pg 322]

"Look here, young man, call nobody names. That's not allowed. And now you travel after Balaam. If he's too sick for you to manage alone, I'll go with you; if not, you must do it. How far away is he?"

"Not more 'n a mile."

"Fetch him. I've something to tell you, for your own benefit. I'll teach you how to grow mushrooms, down in that cellar you're digging. Well-grown ones will bring you a dollar a pound. I know, I've raised them. I'd made a fortune only I love daylight and hate darkness. If you can stand the underground part just for fun, you'll make it pay."

"Huckleberries! I'll get him. I'll hurry back."

As if he expected the new enterprise to begin that very night the lad started down the hill. Already there was a manlier bearing about his ill-shaped body. The necessity for hiding which he had felt had been removed, and he was a free lad again.

An hour later Frederic Kaye saw him reappear, riding the apparently restored burro, and smiled grimly.

"Hmm. Well, I'm in for it. I'm to remain under the cloud for an indefinite time. If it succeeds—I'll not regret. If it doesn't, maybe the Lord will square it up to my account, against the thoughtless neglect I showed Salome. Now, I'll go out and interview my old acquaintance of the Sierras. I wonder is his voice as mellifluous as erstwhile!" [Pg 323]

"Br-a-a-ay! Ah-umph! A-h-h-u-m-p-h!!" responded Balaam, from afar.

CHAPTER XXVI.

[Pg 324]

A PICNIC IN THE GLEN.

It is amazing how fast time flies when one is busy. At "Charity House" all were busy, and to all the winter passed with incredible swiftness.

To Amy each day seemed too short to accomplish half she desired, and each one held some new, fascinating interest in that study of life which so absorbed her.

"You're the funniest girl, Amy. Even the lengthening of the days, getting a little lighter in the mornings, week by week, so we can see the sun rise and such things, as we walk to work—I'd never think of it, 'cept for you."

"Now you do think of it, isn't it interesting?"

"Yes, I like it. Things seem to mean something, now I know you. Before, well—'pears like I didn't think at all; I just slid along and took no notice."

"But it's so wonderful. Everything is wonderful,—even the way the months have gone. Here it is spring, the bloodroot lying in a white drift along the brookside, and the yellow lilies opening their funny tooth-shaped petals everywhere in the woods. Yet only a minute ago, as it seems, the dead leaves were falling, and I was on my way for the first time to work in the mill. I belong there now, a part of it. I have almost forgotten how it used to be when I was so idle." [Pg 325]

"Seems to me you could never have been idle, Amy. Anyway, you've got on splendid. The 'Supe' says he never had a girl go ahead so fast. Isn't it grand, though, to be out of the mill this lovely day? Saturday-half means ever so much more fun now than it used to do, and doesn't cost half so much money. Don't worry you half so much either, as it did to go shopping all the time. Say, Amy, I've about got Mis' Hackett paid up."

"I'm delighted; it must be wretched to feel one's self in debt, I think."

"It's mighty nice to feel one's self out of it. I've got you to thank for that, too, 'long of lots of other things. Isn't the club doing fine? We wouldn't have had that, either, but for you."

"Nonsense! Indeed, you would. Hallam was as interested as I in the subject; and as soon as we told Uncle Fred, he was even more eager than we. But it is to father we all owe the most, I think."

"So do I. To dream of a splendid gentleman like him, and such a painter, taking so much time and trouble just for a lot of mill folks, I think it's grand. I don't understand how he can."

"Seeing that his own two children are 'mill folks,' I can, readily," answered Amy, laughing. "But, indeed, I know he would go on with it now just as thoroughly, even if we were not in the case at [Pg 326]

all."

This talk occurred one lovely afternoon when the half-holiday made a club picnic a possible and most delightful thing. The two girls, Gwendolyn and Amy, were a little earlier than the others, and were on their way to the appointed meeting place, "Treasure Island," a small piece of wooded ground rising in the middle of the Ardsley's widest span. From the island to the banks, on either side, were foot-bridges, and in the grove tables and benches had been built by the lads of the organization. It was an ideal picnic ground, and these were ideal picnickers; for those who toil the hardest on most days of the week enter most heartily into the recreations they do secure.

The girls were passing down into the glen where Amy had once lost her way and been rescued by Fayette. It seemed so long ago that she could hardly realize how few months had really elapsed.

She spoke of the matter to her companion, who seemed to be in a reflective mood that afternoon, and who again remarked upon the change in the mill boy, also.

"Your uncle and Cleena Keegan have made him different, too. He's as proud as Punch of his mushroom raising, isn't he? He owes that to Mister Fred; but, odd! he's as scared of Cleena as if she owned him. He didn't forgive that thing about Balaam, and seems to feel he has a right to him, same's Mr. Metcalf has."

[Pg 327]

"Poor old Balaam, he's made a lot of trouble, first and last; but I guess he's all right now, only Cleena won't let Fayette talk of him. She says it's 'punishment,'—the only sort she can inflict. I don't understand why she wants him punished, anyway."

"Maybe for stealing him that Christmas night out of Mr. Wingate's stable."

"Possibly; I don't know. She's like a mother puss with her kitten. One minute she pets him to foolishness, the next she gives him a mental slap that reduces him to the humblest, most timid mood. Well, I'm glad the burro business is settled, though it's odd how Fayette covets that animal; and the exercise of going up and down to his work, the days he has to go, isn't hurting Hallam at all. I never knew him to be so well and strong as he seems this spring."

"Amy, how was it about Balaam? Ma says she never heard the rights of it yet. And say, she likes that book you lent her, about the woman went round the world alone, visiting them hospitals, better 'n any novel she ever read. She's going to give up the other story papers soon as the subscription runs out an' take one o' them library tickets you were telling about, or your uncle, where they send the books to you by mail and you can have your choose of hundreds. Say, wouldn't it be prime if we could get a big library here?"

"Grand! We will, some day, too."

[Pg 328]

"My! You say such things as if you expected them to be. How, I'd like to know?"

"Well, if in no other way, by just us mill folks banding together and making a beginning. Indeed, I think my father would give his own little library as a start. There's a fine one at Fairacres, and I'm hoping when Cousin Archibald comes back he'll get interested in our work and help along."

"Might as well look for miracles."

"I do. I'm always finding them, too. There's one at your very feet. Don't tread upon it, please."

Stooping, the girl pulled Gwendolyn's dress away from a tiny green speck, growing in dangerous proximity to the wood road.

"What's it?"

"This baby fern."

"All that fuss about a fern!"

"It's life, it's struggle. See, so dainty, so fine, yet so plucky, forcing its soft frond up through the earth, among all these bits of rocks; never stopping, never fearing, just trusting the Creator and doing its duty. It would be a pity to end it so soon."

"Amy, did I ever! Well, there it is again. I shall never be able to crush anything like that without remembering what you've said just now. I—I wish you wouldn't. It makes me feel sort of wicked. And that's silly, just for a fern."

"Gwen, anything that makes us more merciful can't be silly. Heigho! there are the picnickers all coming along the banks and over the bridges. Truly, a goodly company, yet we began with just you and Lionel, Mary Reese, Hallam, and me. Now there are a hundred members, old and young. There's one of the everyday miracles for you!"

[Pg 329]

The vigorous young association which went by the name of the "Ardsley Club" flourished beyond even Amy's most sanguine expectation. Three rooms of "Charity House," the sunny western side of the higher story, had been cheerfully offered by Mr. Kaye as a home for the club. These rooms he had had fitted up under his own supervision, though the work had been done by the members themselves, in hours after mill duties were over. The color mixer had supplied the material with which the once ugly white walls were tinted; and upon the soft-hued groundwork there had been stencilled a delicate conventional design. At one end of the large room designated the "reading room" a scroll bore the legend which old Adam Burns had given Amy as a "rule of life":

"Simplicity, Sincerity, Sympathy," and opposite gleamed in golden letters the other maxim: "Love Conquers All."

"Love, Simplicity, Sincerity, and Sympathy, which is the synonym of Love, and forms with it the golden circle," was adopted as one of the by-laws, and it is true that each member endeavored to keep this one law inviolably. The result was a spirit of peace and goodwill rarely found in a gathering of so many varying natures. It had been Mr. Kaye's idea to make the affair one of no expense to the members, outside of his own household, but Frederic promptly vetoed that.

[Pg 330]

"In the first place, there are none of us rich enough to do such a thing. There will be lights, firing, musical instruments, books, current literature, games—any number of things that cost money. Amy's idea is fine. A club of the right sort will be a powerful factor for good in this community of mill workers, but it must be made self-supporting. If you give the use of the rooms and will act as instructor along some lines,—art and literature, which you comprehend better than financiering, respected brother,—you will have done your generous share. Amy and Cleena will keep the rooms in order, with occasional aid from the girl members—after we secure them. A small sum, contributed by each member, will run the whole concern. People who are as constantly employed as these mill operatives have not the leisure nor means to acquire a book education, but a more intelligent, wider-awake, more receptive class is not to be found. Yet let nobody dare to approach them with anything at all in the nature of 'charity' or mental almsgiving. Your democrat beats your aristocrat in the matter of pride every time, and that is a paradox for you to consider. I relinquish the floor."

"After having exhausted the subject," laughed Hallam. But the subject had not been exhausted. Amy proposed the matter the very next day, at "nooning," and secured the members as mentioned by her to Gwendolyn. In a week the membership had doubled; and as soon as the affair was really comprehended, that it was a mutual benefit organization in the highest sense of the word, applications were plentiful.

[Pg 331]

Uncle Frederic had been a literal globe-trotter, and his journeyings on foot made him able to discourse in a familiar way of things no guide-book ever points out. Nor did Cleena's good cookery come in for any poor show among these healthy, happy folk. The club paid for the simple refreshments provided at their weekly "socials," and Cleena prepared them. Even this day, for their out-of-door reunion, she had made all the needful preparations, and had been so busy she had scarcely remembered to keep a close watch upon Fayette.

"But troth, it's no more nor right he should take his bit fun with the rest," she remarked to herself, as she pulled the last tin of biscuits from the chimney oven and spread them with sweet butter and daintily sliced tongue. "He's aye restless betimes; and—but it's comin', it's comin', me blessed gossoon!"

But to whom Cleena's exclamation referred it would have been difficult to say,—though possibly to Fayette, as her next words seemed to indicate. For the good creature still "conversed with Cleena" in every instance when she happened to be left alone, it being a necessity of her friendly nature that she should talk to somebody.

[Pg 332]

"Me ginerals never got over the burro business yet, alanna! An' it do seem hard how 't one has so little an' t' other so much. That Mr. 'Super' Metcalf now, as fine a man as treads shoe leather, never a doubt I doubt, yet himself judgin' it fair, since the man Wingate wanted the beast, the man Wingate should have him. Anyway, there he stands, brayin' his head off in the 'Supe's' stable, in trust for the old man'll never bestride him. Nobody rides him at all, Miss Amy says; yet here's me ginerals heart-broke for him; an' the cripple goin' afoot; an' all them little Metcalfs envyin' an' covetin'; an' all because a man who's word is law said he'd take him for rent an' just kept him, whether or no. But a good job it was when Mister Fred come home, with money for rent an' a few trifles, but not much besides. Well, where's the need? Eight dollars a week is Miss Amy's wage now, God bless her! an' Master Hal's nigh the same,—let alone them bit pictures the master's be's doin' constant. Mister Fred's the knack o' sellin' 'em too. Well, if the mistress could see—and hark, me fathers! What's that?"

Down in the fragrant glen and on the little island the hungry "Ardseyites" waited long for the promised supper; and up on Bareacre knoll things were happening that would provide another sensation for the little town, quiet now since the Christmas horsewhipping episode.

CHAPTER XXVII.

[Pg 333]

A DOUBLE INHERITANCE IN A SINGLE DAY.

Almost before she asked it, Cleena answered her own question.

"The powder! the powder! It's Fayette a-meddlin'! Oh, is he killed, the witless gossoon?"

Then she turned toward the stairway leading into the cellar, and from whence she had heard the dull roar, and now imagined she saw smoke as she certainly did smell suggestive fumes. She needed not to descend, however, for at the stair's head the lad rushed against her, bruising her with something hard and heavy that he carried, and thus dispelling her first fear of his personal

injury.

"Fayetty—Fayetty! Hold by! What's amiss? What's—"

He deposited a box upon the kitchen table, plump in the tray of biscuits, and catching Cleena about the waist began to execute a grotesque dance with her for helpless partner. After a moment she was able to extricate herself from his frantic clutch and to demand sternly:—

"Ye omahaun, are ye gone daft?"

"It's money, Cleena Keegan! *It's money!* The cellar's full of it! Money, money, money! Chests full, cellars full—oh! oh! oh!" [Pg 334]

Then did her eye fall upon the box and the spot where it rested, and indignation seized her soul. With one grasp of her strong hands she flung it to the floor, where it fell heavily, cracked, and burst asunder.

Both were then too astonished to speak. Fayette's wildest dreams had, evidently, come true. Cleena could not believe her eyes. Never in all her life had she seen so many precious coins. They were dimmed by age and moisture, yet, unmistakably, they were of gold, with a few that might be silver. All the fairy tales of her beloved Ireland rushed through her mind, and she regarded the half-wit with a new veneration.

"Sure, you're one o' them elf-men, I believe; that different from ordinary you can even make dollars o' doughnuts. Arrah musha, 'twas a smart decent day when Miss Amy fetched you home to Fairacres! Sent, was ye, to make the old family rich; and the marvel o' cure in your long, lean hands. Troth, I'm struck all of a heap."

But Fayette was not. He had never been so active. He began to gather up the coins which had been scattered by the breaking of the chest and, for want of something better in which to store them, pulled Cleena's apron from her waist and piled them in that. She sat on, silently regarding him. For a few minutes she honestly believed that he was a genuine specimen of the "little people" who were said to make green Erin their favorite home. But when he began to gabble in a hoarse, excited tone of how he had long been expecting this "find"; how he had watched his opportunity when all the household should be absent that he might disobey and use the explosive that would lessen his labor so greatly, she came back to common sense. [Pg 336]



"HE BEGAN TO GATHER UP THE COINS."

"So you've been lookin' for it, have ye? Well, now you've got it, but ye might ha' been killed in the

job. What for no? With Mister Fred gone to town an' him tellin' ye most explicit ye should no touch nor meddle at all. Was aught like this found in either of them mushroom ones?"

"I—don't—know," answered Fayette, slowly, still stooping and tying his bundle. "If there was—that man's—got it. It was *mine*. I begun the digging. I—"

"An' he finished, eh? Well, you take up your pack an' put it here in my dresser. Then go wash your face. Such a sight! Hold, did ye any more harm there below?"

"Harm! harm! to dig such a treasure as this out of my mine? Well, if I used only a little bit of powder and got so much, what a lot I might have found if I'd used more. I'll bet the whole ground is full."

"Oh, ye silly! Put that stuff down. It's makin' ye lose what little sense you've got. An', me neighbor, look here. See them beautiful biscuits all spoiled the day, the day!"

This reminded the lad that he was hungry. He had been hard at work all day in the underground passage, the third and last of those he had set out to make beneath "Charity House." The first two had been completed, the walls shored, the rich beds for mushroom-raising made upon the dark damp floors. Already these beds were dotted with the white growths, that in a marvellous short time would be full-grown mushrooms and finding a place upon many an epicure's table.

[Pg 337]

That very hour, even, Frederic Kaye was in the city negotiating for their regular sale at profitable prices; and wondering not a little, it may be, at the strange fact that "Spite House," instead of being the barren, unproductive spot at first supposed, would prove instead a veritable mine of support to the whole household. Of that other "mining," with its anticipated results in gold of which Fayette had sometimes babbled, Mr. Kaye took no account. Old Jacob Ingraham who built the house had been a hard, close-fisted man, if all accounts were true, and not at all likely to deposit his money in the ground, when there were investments which would help to increase it. But of old Jacob's wife, history said little, and Frederic never thought.

Fayette placed the apron in the cupboard, as he had been bidden, and when he would have added the broken box also, Cleena prevented.

"Oh, ye dirty boy! That—that mouldy, muddy, nasty thing! No, no! No, no!" and she tossed it unceremoniously into the box of kindling-wood. In the roomy "Dutch" oven in the wall she had baked many of her picnic biscuits, and she regarded the ruin Fayette had wrought among her sandwiches with an air absurdly sad.

[Pg 338]

Now he had no scruples against a bit of dirt, and had already crammed his mouth full of the broken food, when Cleena looked round and saw him. His mouth was distended with laughter as well as bread, and this provoked her still further. Sweeping her long arm over the table, she brushed all the sandwiches into a big pan that stood conveniently near, and remarked grimly:—

"Not another bite o' better food do you get till them's all ate."

"All right. I like 'em. But what's the picnickers goin' to do?"

"The best they can. An' you're to help. Go wash your hands."

"I have."

"Again, once more; then show 'em to me."

The lad laughingly obeyed. Then demanded:—

"What for?"

Cleena replied by action rather than word. She tied a fresh gingham apron about his shoulders and brought the strings around in front so that his mud-stained clothing was entirely covered. Then she led him to her kneading-table and set a bucket of sifted flour before him.

"Make biscuit."

[Pg 339]

"How many?"

"Three hundred. Fall to, measure, I'll count."

She did. For two whole hours the pair labored in that kitchen, Fayette kneading, cutting out, slipping the pans into the ovens and removing them; while Cleena spread and cut tongue after tongue, till even more than the original supply had been reproduced. Then she paused and looked up.

There stood Teamster John in the doorway, smiling and watching Fayette's new occupation with genuine surprise.

"Shucks! makin' a cook out of him? Ain't ye rather late with your luncheon? I drove up to carry the baskets down to the 'Island.'"

"Humph! Ready they was, fast enough. But—man, look here," and she opened the cupboard door to draw forth the apron of gold.

"No, you shan't! He shan't touch it! It's mine—it's mine!" cried Fayette, and snatched the bundle from her hands. He had not tied it securely, and again the long-buried coins rolled into the

sunlight and spread themselves over the floor.

"To the—land's—sake!"

"They're mine—they're all mine—every single one. I found 'em. I blasted 'em out. Nobody shall touch them—nobody!"

"You—blasted them—out? From the cellar of this house? You—simpleton!"

"Like to ha' done it yourself, hey?"

[Pg 340]

"No; but I'm sorrier than I can tell that ever you were let to fool with powder. How'd Mister Frederic allow it?"

Cleena answered promptly, "He didn't. He strict forbid it. Yes, I know, I know. It was a chance. If me guardian angel hadn't been nigh, you might never ha' seen old Cleena again. Arrah musha, but I'm that shook up I'd know! What say? Is it time yet for their supper down yon, or what?"

"It'll be a little late, maybe, but never mind. My, my! Chests o' gold! Who'd believe it? Like a story book, now, ain't it? And where, in the name of common sense, did you get all this flour and meat an' fixings, Cleena, woman?"

"Mister Fred. The last day he went to town. He was to buy enough for one picnic, so he brought home enough for two. That's ever his way. He's the good provider, is Mister Fred. Bless him!"

"Exactly. Well, I'll tell you, it *is* late, so I'll just drive down to tell the youngsters they'd better come up here and eat their supper. They'll be crazy wild for a sight of that chest and what was in it; and if they don't come to-day, they'll be besieging you all day to-morrow. When a thing like this happens, it belongs to the town."

"Don't neither; belongs to *me*. I found it. I'll keep it. I dare ye!"

"All right, lad. Don't worry. I wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole. I've heard of such things afore now, and never once that they didn't bring trouble. All I'm thankful for is you didn't kill anybody nor smash up the house with your fool blastin'. You won't get another chance to try, if I have to come right here and stay myself;" and he smiled sweetly toward Cleena, who ignored the smile, but agreed with the suggestion.

[Pg 341]

"Yes; that's right. That's sense. What for no? Troth, to-morrow's a Sunday, an' not to be disturbed o' none such havers. What's a bit of old dollars dug out o' the mud? An' Monday's me wash. Faith, it's sense in small matters ye're havin', Teamster John. Drive yon an' make haste back. I'll spread me a cloth on the grass an' each may eat like a heathen, does he like, that same as he was down in the woods."

"But they shan't touch it—they shan't even see it! It's mine. I'll keep it, understand?"

Cleena understood not only the words, but the lad with whom she had to deal.

"Whist, alanna, would you hide yourself, then? Faith, no; run avick. Put on your Sunday suit, brush yer hair, make yerself tidy, then stand up like a showman at Donnybrook fair, an' pass the time o' day with who comes. What for no? The box an' the gold must be showed. Such a thing can't be hid. Well, then, gossoon, just show it yerself."

So when, not long after, the whole band of merrymakers came trooping over the knoll of Bareacre, they found not only their belated supper spread for them, but a sight to amuse their curiosity in the buried treasure, estimated at various sums by the excited beholders, and with an ever increasing value as the story passed from mouth to mouth.

[Pg 342]

"It will belong to 'Bony,' of course."

"No; to the Kayes. He doesn't own the house."

"Nor they. If they did, they wouldn't take it from him. They're not that sort of folks."

"But they're as poor as anybody now."

"Archibald Wingate owns the property. I should think it belonged to him."

"The 'Supe' will probably take it in charge."

So the talk bandied back and forth till poor Fayette's weak brain was in a whirl; and amid it all there was one name that fell upon his hearing with a sense of pain,—"Archibald Wingate." The man he hated. Well, of one thing he was resolved—this unearthed treasure might be the mill owner's, but if it were, he should never, never touch it.

Poor Fayette! So he still stood and proudly exhibited the wonder, and told over and again exactly how he had long suspected its existence, and had watched his opportunity, with this result. Since he was happy and watchful, Cleena felt he was secure—for the present. But all the time she longed for Mr. Frederic's return, or even for that of Mr. Kaye, who was abroad upon a sketching ramble. There should be somebody in authority present, since Hallam and Amy were both too young, and Teamster John—well, he might "do at a pinch." In any case, he must remain on guard till a better man appeared.

[Pg 343]

This better man did arrive, just as the evening fell, in the person of Uncle Fred, riding up the

driveway in old Israel Boggs's farm wagon. Amy was first to discover their approach and ran gayly to meet them, beginning her tale of the afternoon's adventure with her very salutation; but long before she reached the side of the wagon she saw that something was amiss with her jolly uncle. His face was very grave, and even his voice was hushed, so that though his greeting to his niece was even kinder than usual, it startled her by its solemnity.

"Why, Uncle Fred, what is the matter? What has happened?"

"I'll tell you presently. But how come so many here? I thought the picnic was at 'Treasure Island.'"

She nodded cheerfully to Israel, whose face was even more sad than Frederic Kaye's, and gave a rapid history of events. Strangely enough, neither of the two newcomers appeared much interested. It was as if some greater matter absorbed them, and their manner subdued Amy to silence; while the farmer tied old Fanny, and then followed his friend into the front part of the house, quite away from the excited groups surrounding Fayette and his wonderful exhibit.

[Pg 344]

Once inside the shelter of the passage, Mr. Frederic laid his hand upon Amy's shoulder, and said, very gently:—

"Prepare for a great sorrow, Amy dear. I have just come from the death-bed of our good friend, Adam Burn."

Never till that moment had the girl known how well she loved the saintly old man. Rarely meeting, he had still exercised over her young life one of its most powerful influences, and an influence all for good.

"Oh, Uncle Fred, it can't be. It mustn't be. He was so good, so kind, so—"

"Altogether lovely. Yes, dear, all that. Old Israel, here, needs comfort. Talk to him a little."

So she led the heart-broken Israel into the farthest room, and sitting down beside him persuaded him to speak with her of the one that had passed on, and in the act to find relief. Then she slipped away a moment and found Hallam, who, when he had heard this later news, quietly dismissed the club and brought the happy holiday to a reverent close.

"Land! that makes all such ilk," said Teamster John, pointing to Fayette's glittering heap, "to seem of small account. What's a litter of gold alongside of such as him?"

And not one among them all who had ever known Adam Burn found anything now worth discussing save the goodness and simplicity of their dead neighbor and friend.

[Pg 345]

But late that night, after Israel had gone back to the desolate Clove, to make such arrangements for the old man's burial as his friends at "Charity House" had deemed fitting, Uncle Frederic remarked, casually:—

"By the way, Amy, Mrs. Burn ('Sarah Jane,' you know) told me a bit of news, to the effect that you are the old man's heiress, because of your name that was his wife's. She says he gave you a sealed letter before he left Ardsley, which letter explained everything,—where the will was to be found, and the few directions necessary for the settlement of the estate. Your father and I are trustees, she thinks, until you come of age, but you are the heir. Good night."

"No, no, uncle, I don't want to be! I want nothing that is gained by his death. And—I lost that letter, anyway."

"Lost it? That's serious. However, it can doubtless be arranged. Good night."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

[Pg 346]

ONE WONDERFUL AUTUMN DAY.

The months flew by. The summer came and went. It was the hour for closing on a "Saturday-half," a whole year since Amy Kaye first visited the mills of Ardsley, and now she felt as they were a part of her very life. Beginning at the bottom she had industriously worked her way upward till she had just been promoted to the pleasant and well-paying task of "setter," in the big clean room, where the open windows admitted the soft air of another Indian summer.

Away, at the extreme end of the long apartment, was a sunshiny office, lately constructed for the personal use of Archibald Wingate. This office was partitioned from the setting room by a glass sliding door, and through this, as Amy now lifted her eyes, she could see the broad back of her relative bending above a desk full of correspondence.

At every setting frame there are two operators, for left hand and for right; and it was Amy's good fortune to have Mary Reese for her comrade, and a more sunshiny pair of workers could be found nowhere.

For Hallam, also, it had been a busy, happy year. Like Amy, having begun with the humblest task and smallest wage, he had now advanced to be bookkeeper in one department, while he still

[Pg 347]

retained his work of coloring and preparing the patterns for use in the weaving of the famous Ardsley carpets. He looked a far stronger, healthier lad than of old, and his disposition to think upon the dark side of things had now no time to develop, for activity effectually prevents brooding.

Fayette was still a member of the Kaye household, and seemed to belong there as much as any of the others. He had been busy, too, all the year through, with his mushroom-raising, his gardening, and now that the autumn had come round again, with odd jobs at the mill. His deftness would always procure him employment of some sort, yet only that morning Mr. Metcalf had remarked to Hallam, confidentially:—

"Queer, but I can never trust 'Bony.' He seems as honest and reliable as possible for a time, and then, suddenly, he will do something to disappoint me. I don't like his demeanor toward the 'boss.' Ever since Mr. Wingate returned, late this summer, and took to coming here every day, 'Bony' has come too. Have you noticed?"

"I know he comes. I hadn't connected the two comings, however. I guess he's all right. There's a splendid side to that poor lad's nature, if you but knew it. Some day, I hope before very long now, he and I are to surprise the world."

"Why, Hal, you're as gay as a blackbird. What's the surprise, eh? Too precious to disclose even to me?"

[Pg 348]

"At present, yes. In a little while, a few days—Heigho!" and the lad looked significantly toward his crutches, leaning against the desk where he wrote.

But the superintendent did not observe the glance. His mind was full of misgiving. Within a day or two he had had occasion to suspect that the half-wit had some uncanny scheme on hand. The lad's dislike of the old mill owner appeared to grow with the passage of time. The dull brain never forgot an injury, and it always seemed to Fayette that Mr. Wingate had wronged him. From the old days of his "bound out" life on the farm, when whippings and punishments were of almost daily occurrence, to the present, there had been no diminution in the mill boy's resentment. Now there was this later injury, or injustice, as he believed, about the money found in the cellar of "Charity House."

The facts were these: the glittering coins had, when estimated, been of about one thousand dollars' value. To Fayette this seemed an enormous sum; to Mr. Wingate, a trifle. In the chest with the treasure had been also a time-yellowed letter, or memorandum, signed by the wife of Jacob Ingraham, and decreeing that the property thus hidden had been placed by her own hands in the wall of the cellar of "Spite House" for the "benefit of my nearest of kin."

The document, in itself, was as curious as its hiding-place, and proved that the ancient dame had been a keen observer of men's failings, if not their virtues.

[Pg 349]

"For I have seen, in this, my lifetime, that gold profits a man nothing. It is ever a bone of contention, and he who has it is poorer than he who has it not. I hope this chest will do him good who finds it; and if it is never found, then the earth will be so much the richer by this small portion of the wealth it has lost. In any case, to prevent evil, and, if possible, to secure a blessing, I have said one prayer over each coin herein disposed, and so, in duty to my conscience, I lock the box and throw the key down the old well of this Bareacre knoll."

The letter had further added that nobody, not even Jacob Ingraham, had known of this bestowal of the chest, because had anybody, "most of all, he," so known, it would have been excavated and its contents scattered.

Now Archibald Wingate was, on his mother's side, the last direct descendant of Mrs. Ingraham, and the property was clearly his. To him, as soon as he returned from his prolonged stay out of town, the broken chest and intact contents had been given by the superintendent, who, Mr. Kaye promptly decided, would be the proper guardian of the treasure until his employer returned.

There had been a terrible scene with Fayette when Cleena told him this decision, and for several days thereafter the lad had not been visible. Some thought he had gone off in one of his wanderings through the woods and fields; but the truth was, he had been kept under lock and key by the energetic and masterful Cleena Keegan. She had assured that patient listener, herself, that:—

[Pg 350]

"Sure, it do be right. Will I lose all the good we have gained for the sake o' bad temper? The end's in sight,—the blessed end o' the secrecy, an' the weary struggle o' keepin' me ginal's nose to the grindstone, and now to leave go? Not while Cleena Keegan draws a free breath, an' can handle a silly gossoon, like him yon."

From the first it had been a strange and powerful influence that this good woman exercised over the foundling she adopted, and fortunately his imprisonment was not so very long, else it would have been impossible to conceal it from the rest of the household; not one of whom did, however, suspect such a proceeding.

When the object for which she had restrained him of his liberty seemed quite gained, Cleena let Fayette go; and, oddly enough, after his liberty was granted him, he no longer cared for it. He kept close to Bareacres, bare no longer, but teeming with the rich vegetation resulting from his own labor, guided by Frederic Kaye's trained judgment. The summer had proved a most

interesting as well as busy one to both these gardeners. The results of their mutual labor were harvested and stored for the family's winter use, and Fayette had returned to the mill. Idleness, or the want of that regular employment he had enjoyed, now reawoke the dark thoughts which had disturbed his clouded brain during the time of his "retreat" under Cleena's compelling will.

[Pg 351]

This day, when Amy watched her cousin through the glass partition, and waited with Mary for Hallam to complete his own task in a room adjoining the private office of Mr. Wingate, Fayette was hanging about the mill, as if himself waiting for some one.

Amy called to him once, and received a surly answer:—

"I'll go when I get ready. I ain't hurting nobody—yet."

"Of course not, who'd suppose so? I'd think you'd like a run in the woods after hours. There was a frost a few nights ago. There may be hickory nuts to gather."

"Gather 'em, then, if you want 'em. I don't. I've got other fish to fry. I'll fry 'em, too."

"Well, you're cross, 'Fayettey, me ginerall.' I'll not wait much longer, even for Hal. You can come home with him, and help him bring the patterns he is to show father, please."

"I thought you wanted to see Mr. Wingate, too, Amy," observed Mary, "about that legacy of yours. You're the queerest girl. Any other would be wild to have things fixed, but you don't seem to care a bit."

"Why should I? We are very comfortable at 'Charity House.' Mrs. Burn, dear Adam's daughter-in-law, has gone abroad again. If she had time, she'd cheerfully help us—if she could. We think the letter of instruction will sometime be found, and that will make all clear. We don't like law, and Adam would have hated it. No; we'll wait for a time longer, but I promised father I'd consult Cousin Archibald, and see when he would meet either father or Uncle Fred to discuss it.

[Pg 352]

"Meanwhile, old Israel and his wife are doing just the same at Burnside as if their master were still there. All I could think of taking the property for, it seems to me, would be to give my father such a lovely home again."

"Well, Amy, I must go. I want to finish reading that book Mr. Kaye lent me, this afternoon. I'll see you at the club to-night. Good-by."

With a kiss and a hand pressure, which revealed the depth of their friendship, Mary departed, and Amy turned to the open window to watch the cloud shadows drift over the lovely valley, wherein the Ardsley leaped and sparkled. As she gazed, thinking of many things, she became conscious, in an idle sort of fashion, that Fayette had passed out of doors, and was walking close beneath, or along the building's wall, and in a stealthy manner, suspicious in itself.

"Heigho! What now, I wonder. He's up to some mischief, I'm afraid. How queer he is at times. Why, even when he was told that Mr. Wingate knew him for the person who horsewhipped him last Christmas and had refused to take any notice of it, except to thank Uncle Fred for his rescue—even then Fayette would not say that he thought my cousin good. All he did say was: 'Well, he better not. He knows too much. If he locked me up or had me fined, I'd lick him again soon's I got out. He ain't no fool. But that don't make me feel any different. He ain't jailed me, but he's got my money. *Mine*; I dug it out the cellar an' blasted, to the risk o' my life. He keeps it, when he's got a bank full, they say. Kept Balaam, too, or give him to one of them Metcalf youngsters. Well, his time'll come. I'm not forgettin', if I do keep my mouth shut for a spell."

[Pg 353]

Recalling this speech, Amy tried to put herself in the half-wit's place, which effort made her pity him the more, yet watch his present man[oe]uvres none the less closely. But presently he disappeared in a distant lower doorway, and she forgot him and returned to her happy day-dreams.

Fayette had bided his time. On such an afternoon, at such an hour, he judged that nobody would be in the mill building save the distant watchman and that indefatigable toiler, Archibald Wingate, with whom was the half-wit's present business. He had seen the last whisk of Mary's blue skirt disappearing above the back-stairway, and, knowing that Amy and she were waiting for Hallam, concluded that the trio had departed together.

[Pg 354]

So he entered the little basement door gleefully. All seemed propitious, yet he meant once more and carefully to examine the preparations he had made, to see if there was any flaw anywhere. He was so absorbed, so excited, that he scarcely breathed as he crept slowly along the inside of the wall, just as a moment before he had passed along its outer surface. At one spot he paused and tried a simple-looking tube that had been brought from the outside, through a convenient aperture, into the inside of the building. The thing looked harmless, yet it ran along the groove where the floor and wall joined, clear into that cheery inner office, where Archibald Wingate sat that very moment, signing his name to one of the most generous letters of his life.

"There," he reflected, as he leaned back in his chair and tossed aside his pen; "there, that is foolish enough to satisfy even my impractical small kinswoman, bless her! A thousand dollars isn't much, but it's—a thousand dollars; and when I double it by another thousand, which has never been buried by any ancient ancestress, it makes a tidy sum for a foundling lad. Poor 'Bony,' he hates me like poison. I wonder, when he finds out that I've done this for him, when I place it in his hands myself, and tell him, furthermore, that I have asked Fred Kaye to send west for several

[Pg 355]

more of those burros he's given us a sample of, and that one is for the 'Rep-Dem-Prob' himself—I wonder, will there rise in his stunted heart some perception of what life should mean; of what it shall mean, during my last brief hold of it, to me? and all because of a girl's bright trustfulness and love."

It was a day for musings. Even Fayette, intent on evil, had his own—like Amy and the lonely old man in the silent office. He wondered, pausing for a moment, how "it would feel to be blown up. That day when I found the money he's took from me, if I'd had a bigger charge of powder, would I ha' knowed what struck me, if it had gone off sudden? Hmm. I almost hate to do it. He seems—he'll never guess, though, and he hadn't any right. He's been again' me from the first. I'll do it. He hain't had no mercy—I won't, neither."

So he crept softly back to the low entrance, and stooping, struck a match. The match burned well, and in an instant had communicated its own flame to the cheap fuse that ran along the wall. In the far-off office, concealed beneath the mill owner's desk, there was already waiting a powerful explosive, which Fayette had purloined from the store of the workmen who were excavating for the new wing of the building. In a moment more the fuse would have burned unnoticed to its fatal end, and an awful crime, of whose enormity the dull criminal had no real comprehension, would have been committed.

But Hallam had caught the prevailing mood. He, like the others left lingering about the silent building, had fallen into a reverie which, judging by his bright expression, was full of happiness. For many months, and for the first time in his life, he had kept a secret from his father and Amy. If that can be called a secret which was known also to Cleena, to Uncle Frederic, and to Fayette, upon whose aid alone the success of this mystery had depended. The lad had been faithful. At most times his help had been rendered freely, out of love and sympathy; at others there had been compulsion on Cleena's side and from the other one of the quartette, who had himself suffered false blame and the disgrace of suspicion because of the secret.

[Pg 356]

"To-morrow, please God, it shall end. I couldn't bear to tell them, who love me so, until I was sure, sure. The old surgeon said it might be a miracle would be enacted for my benefit. Well, it has, it has! I've known it, really, almost from the beginning, though it's been so hard and at times so seemingly hopeless. But if I hadn't loved them even more than myself, I wouldn't have kept on trying. To-morrow—the experiment in their presence! Will it ever come!"

The lad stood up and arranged the papers in his own desk. Then he heard, or fancied that he did, a slight sound in the deserted building. The corps of operatives had been well drilled to watch for any sign of that dreaded element, fire, and he was alert now,—the more that, following this, there was a slight odor, pungent and more alarming than even the first sound.

[Pg 357]

He wheeled about and—what was that? In the dimness of the angle where it lay, away out toward that closed office with its unsuspecting occupant, a tiny spark was making its steady, creeping progress. For an instant Hallam gazed at it astonished, the next he realized its full meaning and horror. Could he reach it? Was there time?

With a shriek of warning he rushed forward,—stumbling against, leaping over obstacles,—gaining upon that menacing point of fire and fume, which now seemed to race him like a living thing.

The miracle was wrought—two miracles! A few more seconds, and it would have been too late; but now the lame walked and, as it were, the dead came back to life.

Hallam's shriek, the uproar of overturned obstructions, reverberated through the empty building and brought Archibald Wingate, Amy, and poor Fayette face to face with the panting, excited rescuer. All comprehended at once what had been attempted and how prevented. The mill owner laid an iron grip upon the half-wit's shoulder, who made no effort to escape; for at last, at last, there had penetrated to his dim intelligence the wide, the awful difference between good and evil. When he saw the once crippled lad, whom his own hands had restored to health, thus fling away his life with unstinted hand, that he might save the life of another,—once his enemy also,—there had roused within the dormant brain of the foundling a sudden perception of Hallam's nobility and his own baseness. Therefore, stunned by this new knowledge, he stood humble and unresisting.

[Pg 358]

Amy's great heart comprehended just what and how her poor protégé was suffering. With her, to think was to act. She sprang to him and laid her small hand on his other shoulder, and the tender sympathy of this touch thrilled him more than the hard grasp of his master.

"Oh! but Hallam—Hallam—you *walked!* *walked!* you ran! You—you—who never—"

Her voice choked, ceased, and she turned from Fayette to fling herself headlong into her brother's arms. For the first time in their lives he could receive her and support her firmly. Then she stepped back and shook him. Gently at first, then violently. His crutches were—nobody cared where, though certainly not at hand; yet he stood fixedly, resisting her attacks, and again catching her to him with that overflowing joy that only such as he could guess.

"But I don't understand. Tell—tell; not here, though. Is all safe? No danger any more?"

"No," said Fayette to her demand, "there ain't no danger. Not 'less the fuse had burned out to the end. It's under the desk. He'll find it. I—I—but it's put out. I—"

[Pg 359]

"You didn't mean it, did you, boy? You could not. You didn't understand."

"No, I didn't, I didn't," whimpered the stricken fellow.

Mr. Wingate relaxed his hold. How could he retain his fury against such an enemy? It was too unequal. The lad was dangerous, he must be punished, he—

Hallam read these unspoken thoughts.

"For my sake, Cousin Archibald, forgive him. It is he who has made me able to save you this day, even though it was he who put you in such peril. Months ago, Amy read in a paper how a lad was cured whose case was just like mine. There was only will power on the cripple's part, and the daily, sometimes hourly massage by one of those persons whose physical magnetism, or whatever it is, was strong. 'Bony' was such a person, and I just such a cripple. We began. For weeks I couldn't move my legs without using my hands to help. Then one day I found, just after the rubbing was over, that I could push one foot along the floor a tiny way. That gave us both courage. He has been untiring. We were soon on the road to what I believed, though with lots of set-backs, would be a cure. Uncle Fred knew; that's why he wouldn't let Fayette be arrested or punished for assaulting you. He took the blame himself, if the boy would stick to me. Cleena knew, too—"

"And not us, father nor me!" exclaimed Amy, in a hurt tone.

[Pg 360]

"No; that was to be my blessed surprise for you two. It was to your own suggestion, which I suppose you forgot soon after, with the newspaper scrap you brought, that I owe the beginning. It was Cleena kept us at it. She wouldn't let us give it up,—no, not if she had the whole crowd under lock and key on a bread and water diet; eh, Fayette?"

The shamefaced fellow looked up, with a slight gleam in his eye, then dropped his gaze again.

Hallam went on: "To-morrow, the First Day that mother loved, I was going to make an experiment before you all—my surprise. I have practised in private continually, and uncle, as well as Cleena, has urged me to tell you before; but I kept it till the anniversary—you know."

"Ah," said Archibald Wingate, with a sudden recollection, "so it is. She was my best friend, my best beloved. You are her children. All my hard middle life seems to have slipped out of my memory, like a bad dream, and I am back in our youth-time again, with Salome and Cuthbert and Fred,—all gay and glad together. I wonder, I wonder what she would bid me do to you, poor fellow," he finished, regarding the abject natural with a pitying air.

"I know! Forgive him, else thy Salome and my mother were not one."

"Amy, thee is right. Come into the office, all of you."

[Pg 361]

"Is it safe?" she asked, hanging back.

"We'll make it safe. 'Bony,' or Fayette, take that stuff you put under the desk and step out there to the Ardsley. Behind that rock is a deep hole. I used to fish there as a lad. I can see if you obey. Drop that death powder into the stream and come back."

Fayette obeyed, and they watched him, shivering. But when the water flowed on after an instant, undisturbed and merrily singing its deathless song, they breathed deeply and with complete relief.

"Look here, Fayette; you think I've been a hard man. So I have—so I have. You've been a bad boy too, eh?"

"Yes; I won't never—"

"Of course you won't. Look here, I say. What's this—this heap of stuff I took out of the safe? Did you ever see it before?"

"Yes; it's the money I blasted out."

"Well, if it were yours, would you promise never again to blast anything or anybody or anywhere? Your very own to keep forever, if you liked."

"Huckleberries! Do you mean it?"

"If you promise, I mean it."

"Oh, I do—I do. I'll keep my word. I meant to try and I did. But it's over. I'm glad; I wasn't happy, never. I promise, whether or no, money or not."

"I believe you'll keep that promise: Hallam and Amy, here, are witnesses. Now, listen: I, too, promise. I'll not only give you this old hoard, but this besides." He swept into view a pile of golden eagles, larger than any there save himself had ever seen, and placed it beside that time-worn lot of similar material. In bestowing his gift he had provided to have it in such shape as he knew the half-wit would best comprehend. "This is for you, also. It is just as much more as you found. I give it to you because my little cousin here has taught me it is better to give than to receive. You must take both piles, in this new hand-bag, and ask Mr. Metcalf to take care of it for you. You trust *him*, don't you?"

[Pg 362]

"Yes—yes," answered Fayette, in breathless eagerness.

"Now, the condition: if you ever again, by word or deed, do any sort of injury to any human being or to any helpless animal, I will have you punished, punished in full for all you have done wrong in the past. Do you understand?"

"Yes," sobbed the grateful and greatly excited youth. Somewhere he had heard, maybe from Cleena's lips, something about heaping coals. He felt at that moment as if the living coals were lying upon his own poor head.

"Then go; and if it will give you any pleasure to know it, I believe that you are now about the richest of the mill operatives living in Ardsley village."

Stumbling, through his tears, and truly far more grateful for the prevention of his crime than even for his unexpected good fortune and full forgiveness, Cleena's Fayettey went. [Pg 363]

As his footsteps died away, Amy, who seemed given to outbursts to relieve her full heart, threw her arms about the old man's neck and kissed him over and over.

"That's better, child, that's better. The first time thee planted it on my nose, I seemed to have a dim perception that this was not the regulation feature for such gifts, but it answered; though I like them better on my cheek, child. Thee's improving. Now let's go home. Yes; it's the carryall. There's room for us all. On the way I'll tell thee—"

"No, no; wait till we get home. Don't let's leave anybody out any more. By thy face I can see it's something delightful thee is going to tell. Oh, make the old horse travel, travel—fast, fast!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

[Pg 364]

CONCLUSION.

On half-holidays Cleena had always the best dinner of the week. To its enjoyment were usually brought the best appetites of the week as well; for there was leisure and talk and laughter, and that interchange of experiences which kept their family life so united.

Archibald Wingate joined the party at this present half-holiday dinner; yet even with such cheerfulness about him could not but shiver now and then, as he recalled his narrow escape of the afternoon. To have taken his meal alone, on that day, would have been to suffer greatly.

But Amy had brought him in and placed him in the seat of honor, and amid the general rejoicing over Hallam's wonderful recovery and surprise, they had made him feel that he was a sharer. They had just drawn back from the table, and were going into the sitting room, when there came a tap at the door that Cleena answered. It was a small tap, very low down on the panel, but it was given due importance; for wasn't the visitor Master "Willyum Gladstone Jones," and wasn't Cleena just making fine progress in teaching him his "manners"? [Pg 365]

So they all paused to wait the child's important entrance, and to smile over Goodsoul's greeting:—

"The top o' the evenin' to you, Mister Jones. An' what may be givin' us the pleasure of a visit from your lordship the now? A what? Speak up; a box is it? Miss Amy's box. Never a doubt I doubt you've made messes of its insides, by the way. No? Then your improvin', to that extent I must even be givin' ye a bite o' this fine apple pie. Hmm; exactly. Well, give the young lady her bit property, again' I slips on a plate an' teaches ye how to eat decent, as ye should."

So the little fellow, who had just been promoted to his first trousers and felt as all boys do in such a case, walked proudly across the room and offered Amy a japanned casket.

"Why, Sir William, how came you by that? I haven't seen it for ever so long. I used to keep my few letters in it. I wonder if they're here now."

"Ev'y one. My mamma seen 'em all. She said the top one—I don't know. Somefin."

"Arrah masha! but I remember one day, long syne, he was aye botherin' an' I set him to orderin' the box neat an' nice. He must ha' took it away with him an' me not payin' no attention. Well, a box o' such truck's neither here no more there, I forecast."

Amy had stopped to admire the new garment, fashioned from an old one of Hallam's, and having thus satisfied the little one's innocent pride, now opened her recovered keepsake. She lifted the letters idly, dropped them, and again catching one that had, indeed, lain upon the top, sprang up and waved it overhead. [Pg 366]

"The letter! the letter! The lost one of Adam!"

"No; is it really? To come in such a way—"

"On such a day—oh, Hal!"

She caught her brother's hands and wrung them in delight, then ran to her father and placed the letter before him.

He looked at it critically.

"Yes; that is Adam Burn's handwriting. His own familiar seal. These people who have had it in keeping—"

"I hid it. Zen I dugged it out. Same like Fayettey," explained Sir William, between mouthfuls.

"The blessed baby! that explains."

"Let us go into the parlor and read it. It is yours, daughter; you must yourself break the seal."

"Oh, I'll break it fast enough."

"Hmm. Young lady, I thought you were the girl who didn't want to be an heiress," commented Uncle Fred, teasingly.

Amy's face sobered.

"You are right. I didn't so wish then, when the shock and sorrow were fresh; but now I do. Just think of all the comfort for all you folks in that lovely home."

"Then I must lose my tenants, eh?" asked Mr. Wingate, smiling.

[Pg 367]

"Thee'll lose nothing! Wait. If thee has plans to tell, so have I."

The letter was a simple one, plain, and leaving no room for any sort of legal difficulty. Amy could enter upon her heritage that day, if she wished. The place where the will was stored was designated, and they knew it would there be found. But after the reading a little silence fell upon them all.

The old mill owner was the first to break this. He did it almost reverently.

"Speaking of wills, and after the events of the day, I've been thinking of mine. By the way, Amy, I suppose thee'll cease to work for me now."

"I don't see why I should, unless my father needs me at home. We will see about that afterward. Tell us thy plans, please. I'd like to hear them."

"And I'd like to have thee make them for me."

"Make them? I?"

"Yes; in truth and deed. If thee were me and had as much money as I have, and were just such a lonely, childless, forlorn old man, what would thee do, that would accomplish the most good? according to thy judgment, which I have found a fairly sound one."

The elder Kayes listened in astonishment. They had been prepared by various matters for a great change in their kinsman, though not for one so radical. But the father began to perceive how this change had been wrought, and his heart gave thanks for the devoted, sunshiny daughter who seemed to shed an influence for happiness and goodness on all whom she knew. It was due to her, he believed, that this new Archibald had replaced the old.

[Pg 368]

"Does thee mean it, truly?"

"Yes; I mean it. Let me hear. If it is possible, I will carry out the wishes thee expresses, knowing they will be all for the benefit of somebody deserving."

"Well, then, I'd help the unpractical Kaye family to get settled at Burnside Farm, on the condition that for my services I was given a big, delightful room in the old farmhouse, to live in and with them, forever and ever and ever, so long as the dear Lord permitted—that's if I were thee, Cousin Archibald."

"But would that ne'er-do-well Kaye family take in an old curmudgeon, does thee think?"

"Never. A curmudgeon is a thing they detest. They'd take in a nice, fat, old fellow, whose heart was so big it made his body grow to hold it, and who meant to do all the good with his money that his money would do, and not leave it for anybody to squabble over after he died."

"Excellent, Miss Wisdom; proceed."

"After I'd got a niche at Burnside, I'd take 'Charity House' and remodel it into a Modern Industrial School. I'd have 'designing' taught, in regular classes, by a well-known artist, named Cuthbert Kaye. I'd have agriculture under the instruction of another expert, Frederic Kaye. I'd have a school of scientific cookery—not by you, my Cleena, but by somebody who hates pies and adores oatmeal and *et cetera*. No, really, I do think the mill folks should understand more about foods and their uses. They'd save so much money and—dyspepsia."

[Pg 369]

"Hurry up. Where do I come in?"

"At the mercantile college end of the establishment, learned brother. There should be a splendid library, a gymnasium, a swimming pool—"

"A swimming pool on the top of Bareacre knoll!"

"Please don't interrupt, Hal. It's impolite. I'd have it—somewhere. I'd have a paddock full of

burros—"

"They're already ordered," cried Archibald, forgetting everything in his enjoyment of her happy face.

"Am I to continue? May I let my fancy riot?"

"Yes, indeed; give thyself full freedom for once."

"Then I'd take beautiful Fairacres, that has been a happy home for generations, and I'd make it a Happy Home, with capital letters. I'd call to it all the tired and ailing mill folks in the country. I'd make its disused studio and book rooms into a hospital, and where father painted his picture of pain, that he destroyed, let all pain be soothed; and all the other big chambers into havens of rest for other girls who, unlike me, have no fathers, nor Uncle Freds, nor Hallams, nor Cousin Archibalds, nor anybody. I'd have Mary Reese trained to be its Little Mother; and Archibald Wingate should be full manager of all, beloved and venerated, reaping the happiness he has himself bestowed; and oh, cousin, if it might be true! and if I were not out of breath! There! have I 'rioted' enough?"

[Pg 370]

Mr. Wingate turned his head sidewise and looked admiringly upon the unselfish girl who had planned so much for others, and had not, apparently, remembered to plan anything for herself.

"Yes; thee has rioted enough. But, little one, if thee pleases, if my other kinsfolk here so please; if the dead past is indeed the dead past, and the future may be our happy own, there is no reason under the blue heaven why thee has not prophesied aright. What say, my friends? Shall Amy's word be that which the Spirit has moved her to say? Shall we make it real and tangible, this beautiful, helpful dream of hers? You are all interested alike. You are my next of kin. After me you will inherit—or these others whom she has named. Was Amy's word the true Word, Cuthbert? The word Salome would have spoken?"

"It was the true Word, Archibald. Let it be as Salome's child has spoken," said Cuthbert Kaye, grasping his kinsman's hand.

And all Ardsley now knows that as it was then agreed, so it is, and will remain.

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[Pg 371]

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[Pg 374]

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