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Title: Miss Ashton's New Pupil: A School Girl's Story

Author: Sarah Stuart Robbins

Release date: May 10, 2009 [eBook #28743]

Most recently updated: January 5, 2021

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Roger Frank and the Online Distributed
Proofreading Team at <https://www.pgdp.net>

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MISS ASHTON'S NEW PUPIL: A SCHOOL
GIRL'S STORY ***



Twenty white-robed girls in ghost-like procession headed for the Fräulein's room.—Page 189. *Miss Ashton's New Pupil*.

MISS ASHTON'S NEW PUPIL

A SCHOOL GIRL'S STORY

By MRS. S. S. ROBBINS

Author of "Hulda Brent's Will," "Paul's Angel," etc., etc.



A. L. BURT, PUBLISHER,
52-58 DUANE STREET, NEW YORK.

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MISS ASHTON'S NEW PUPIL.

CHAPTER I

MISS ASHTON RECEIVES A LETTER.

Miss Ashton, principal of the Montrose Academy, established for the higher education of young ladies, sat with a newly arrived letter in her hand, looking with a troubled face over its contents. Letters of this kind were of constant occurrence, but this had in it a different tone from any she had previously received.

"It's tender and true," she said to herself. "How sorry I am, I can do nothing for her!"

This was the letter:—

DEAR MISS ASHTON,—I have a daughter Marion, now sixteen years old. Developing at this age what we think rather an unusual amount of talent, we are desirous to send her to a good school at the East.

We have been at the West twenty years as Home Missionaries. When I tell you that, I need not add that we have been made very happy by being able to save money enough to give Marion at least a year under your kind care, if you can receive her into your school.

I think I can safely promise you that she will be faithful and industrious; and I earnestly hope that the lovely Christian character she has sustained at home, may deepen and brighten in the new life which will open to her in the East.

May I ask your patience while she is accustoming herself to it; of your kindness I am well assured.

Truly yours,
E. G. PARKE.

"The child of a poor, far western missionary, so different from the class of girls that she will be with here," thought Miss Ashton as she slowly folded the letter.

She sat for some time thinking over its contents, then she took her pen, and wrote:—

DEAR MRS. PARKE,—Send your daughter to me. I have great interest in, and sympathy with, all Home Missionary work. I wish I could do something to lighten the expenses she must incur; but this is a chartered institution, and at present all the places to be filled by those who need assistance have been taken. I will, however, bear her in mind; and should she prove a good scholar, exemplary in her behavior, I may be able to render her in the future some acceptable assistance.

Wishing you all success in your trying and arduous life, and the help of the great Helper,

I am, truly yours,
C. S. ASHTON.

Miss Ashton did not seal this note; she tossed it upon her desk, meaning to look it over before it was mailed; but she had no time, and, with many misgivings as to what might come of it, she allowed it to go as it was.

Her school had never been fuller than it promised to be on the opening of this new year. Through the summer vacation letters had been coming to her from all parts of the country asking to put girls who had finished graded and high school education under her care. Established for many years, the academy had grown from what, in the religious world, was considered a "missionary training-school," and from which many able and faithful women had gone forth to win laurels in the over-ripe harvest fields, to a school better adapted to the wants of the nineteenth century.

While it held its religious prestige, it also offered unusual advantages to that important and numerous class of girls who, not wishing a college education, were yet desirous to spend the years that should change them from girls into women in preparation for a future great in its aims, and also great in its results.

Miss Ashton, large-hearted and strong-headed, seeing wisely into this future, had succeeded in offering to this class exactly what it had demanded.

Ably seconded by an efficient and generous board of trustees, with ample funds, excellent teachers to assist her, a convenient and handsome building in which to hold the school, she had readily made it a success. There were more applications for admittance than she could find room for; indeed, every available corner of the house had been promised when she received Mrs. Parke's letter.

Sometimes it happened that a scholar for some unforeseen reason failed to appear; that might make an opening for Marion. She wanted this Western girl; the missionary spirit of olden times came back to her with a warmth and freshness it would have cheered the hearts of the long-absent ones in heathen lands to know. The crowd of scholars began to gather. They came from

the north and the south, the east and the west, with a remarkable promptness. On the day for the opening of the term every room was full, and many who had delayed applying for places—taking it for granted there was always a vacancy—were sent disappointed away.

There seemed to be positively no spot for Marion; and, in spite of all the cares and perplexities which each day brought her, Miss Ashton could not forget it. It became a positive source of worry to her before she received a letter stating the day on which Marion would arrive.

“That’s not a good beginning, to be a week after the opening of the term,” she thought. “I hope she will bring a good excuse.”

CHAPTER II.

MARION ENTERS SCHOOL.

It was a beautiful September twilight when a young girl came timidly into the main entrance of the Young Ladies’ Academy at Montrose.

Six days and four nights ago she had left her home in Oregon, delayed by the sickness of one of the companions under whose escort she was to come to Massachusetts.

Before this journey she had never been more than ten miles from home, and it was a wonderful new world into which the cars so quickly brought her.

Mountains, plains, rivers, cities, villages, seemed to fly by her as the train dashed along. She had no time to miss the familiar scenes of her own home.

The flat prairie, over whose long reaches gay flowers blossomed, the little villages dotted here and there, with now and then a small, white steeple pointing heavenward,—her father’s church among them, with the neat parsonage, so much of which he had built with his own hand, and the dear ones she had left behind her there.

To-day she had reached her destination, and a smiling girl had met her at the door and ushered her into the lower corridor of the academy.

It was just after tea, an hour given up to social enjoyment, and the corridor was full of young girls, busy and noisy.

The stranger shrank back into the recess of the door; she hoped no one would see her: if she could only escape until the principal came, how glad she should be!

Little groups kept constantly passing her; many from among them turned their heads and looked at her inquiringly; some smiled and bowed, but no one spoke, until a tall girl who had passed and repassed her a number of times left her party and came to her.

“You are our two hundredth!” she said, holding her hand out cordially toward her. “We are glad you have come! Now we are the largest number that have ever been in this school at one time. Shall I take you to Miss Ashton?”

Marion held very tight to the hand that was given her as they passed together down through the lines of scholars toward the principal’s room. More smiles and cheery nods met her, and now and then she caught “two hundredth” as she passed.

A knock at a door was immediately answered by a pleasant “Come in.”

“Oh, it’s you, Dorothy, is it? I’m always glad to see you,” said Miss Ashton, rising from the table at which she had been writing.

“I’ve brought you your new pupil,” said Dorothy.

“And I’m very glad to see her. It is Marion Parke, I presume. You have had a long, hard journey, but you look so well I need not ask how you have borne it.”

As she was giving Marion this welcome, Miss Ashton, with the quick look by which her long experience had accustomed her to judging something of character, saw in the timid new pupil a very different girl from what in her troubled thoughts of her she had expected her to be.

Two large gray eyes from under long, drooping eyelids met hers with an appealing look; lips trembled sensitively as they tried to answer her, and a delicate color came slowly up over the rounded cheeks.

“I am very sorry to be late,” Marion said with a self-possession that belied the timidity her face expressed; “but sickness of my friends with whom I was to come, detained me.”

“I had no doubt there was a sufficient reason,” Miss Ashton answered kindly. “You are a week behind most of the others, but you can make the time up with diligence. Dorothy, please take Marion to the guest-room for to-night. I will see you later. I am very glad you are here safely. You will have time after tea to write a few lines home. Give my love to your mother, please.”

Dorothy led the way to the guest-room. It was a pretty room near Miss Ashton’s, kept for the convenience of entertaining guests. Dorothy threw open the window-blinds, and Marion saw

before her a New England village.

In the near distance rose hill upon hill, their sides covered with elegant residences, and what she thought were palaces, crowning their tops. The light of this September twilight covered them with a mantle of gold, lit up the broad river that ran at the base of the hills like a translucent band, turned the tall chimneys of factories in the adjacent city, usually so disfiguring, into minarets, blazing with rich Oriental coloring.

"Is it not beautiful?" Dorothy asked, slipping her arm around Marion's waist, and drawing her nearer the window; "we have it always—*always* to look at, morning, noon, and night, and it is never the same twice. I was born and brought up by the sea, and I've been here three years, yet I love it better and better every day."

"I was born and brought up on the prairies."

"The land seas," added Dorothy. "How strange they must be! I would like to see the prairies.

"The grand thing about this is, it belongs to you all the time you stay here, just as much as if you really owned it; nobody can take it from you; there it is, and there it must remain. That is the reason they built our academy on this high hill, so it should be ours, a part of our education, —'Grow into us,' Miss Ashton says, and it does."

While they stood looking at it the twilight deepened; the golden flush faded away. Over hill and river crept the shadows of the night, and out from the adjoining corridor sounded a loud gong, the first one Marion had ever heard. She turned a frightened face toward Dorothy, who said, "Our gong; study hours begin now, so I must go: I shall see you to-morrow." Then she hurried away, and Marion was left alone; but she had hardly gone, before there was a gentle tap upon her door, then it opened, and Miss Benton, one of the teachers, came in.

"What, all alone in the dark! That's lonely for a new pupil. Let me light your gas, and then I will take you down to tea; you must be very hungry."

Her voice was kind, and her manner gentle. She lighted the gas, then slipped Marion's arm into hers, and took her through the long, bright corridors to the dining-hall. Here, a pleasant-faced matron came to meet her. She gave her a seat at a table, which she told her would be hers permanently, then seated herself by Marion's side and talked to her cheerfully as she ate. It was all so homelike; every one she had met was kind and friendly. It would be her own fault certainly if she were not contented and happy here, Marion thought.

Tea over, she tried to find her way alone back to her room, but there were corridors leading to stairs, corridors leading to recitation rooms, corridors leading to a large hall dimly lighted, corridors leading everywhere but where she wanted to go, and, for a wonder, no one to be seen of whom she could ask direction. There was something so ludicrous in the situation, that every now and then Marion burst into a merry little laugh; and after a time one of her laughs was echoed, and, turning, she saw a short, fat little woman with very light hair, and light blue eyes, who came directly to her, holding up two small hands and laughing.

"You, new der Mundel," she said; "Two Hundert they call you. What for you hier?"

"I've lost my way. I can't find my room," said Marion, still laughing.

"What der Raum?"

Marion was startled. Was this an insane woman who was walking at large in the corridors? What sort of a jargon was this she was talking to her?

Had it been wholly German, or even correct German, Marion would have understood her, at least in part; but this language, what was it? The speaker, much to the amusement of the whole school, used a curious medley of neither English nor German in her attempt to speak the English, seeming to forget the proper use of her own language.

Marion answered her now with a half-frightened, "Ma'am?"

"You not stand under me? I am your teacher, German. I am Fräulein Sausmann. Berlin I was born. I teach you der German. Come, tell me, Two Hundert, vere vas your der Raum, vat you call it? Your apartament, vere you seep?" shutting up her small eyes tight, and leaning her head on one hand, to represent a pillow.

"The guest-room," said Marion, now understanding her.

"Der guest-room? Oui, oui, Madamoselle. I chapperon you,—come!"

Seizing one of Marion's hands, she led her to her room, opening the door, then, standing on the tips of her small feet and kissing her on both cheeks, she said in English, "Good-night," kissed her own hand, and, throwing the kiss toward Marion, disappeared.

Marion found her trunk in her room unstrapped, and, tired as she was, began to make preparations for spending the night there.

She did not suppose for a moment it was to be permanently hers, but fell asleep wondering what could be next in waiting for her.

CHAPTER III.

GLADYS HAS A ROOM-MATE.

When Dorothy left Marion at the call of the gong for study hours she went at once to her own room.

She had two room-mates, both her cousins; one, Gladys Philbrick, was a Florida girl, the only child of a wealthy owner of several orange-groves. She was motherless, and needed a woman's care, and the advantages of a Northern education, so her father sent her to live with relatives in the small seaport town of Rock Cove.

The other, Susan Downer, was the child of a sister of Mr. Philbrick; her father followed the sea, and her brother, almost the one boy in Rock Cove who did not look upon a sailor life as the only one worth living, was at the present time a student at the academy at Atherton, only a few miles from Montrose. Dorothy herself was the child of a fisherman—her own mother dead, and she left under the care of a weak stepmother, whose numerous family of small children had made Dorothy's life one of constant hardship.

When Mr. Philbrick, in one of his visits to Gladys at the North, became acquainted with this little group of cousins, he had no hesitation—being not only an educated man, but also one of a great heart and generous nature—in making plans for their future education. In carrying these out, he had sent Jerry Downer to Atherton; Gladys, Susan, and Dorothy to Montrose.

Her cousins were already busy with their books when Dorothy came into the room; and, careful not to disturb them, she sat quietly down to study her own lessons, but she could not fix her mind upon them. Marion alone down-stairs, homesick, with no one to say a kind word to her, or to tell her about the school, "a stranger in a strange land," she kept repeating to herself; "and such a sweet-looking girl. It's too bad!"

Try her best not to, she still found herself watching the hands of the clock. For a wonder she was anxious to have study hours over; she wanted to tell her cousins about Marion.

As it proved, they were quite as anxious to hear; for no sooner had the clock struck nine, and the gong struck again for the close, as it had for the opening of study hours, than they shut their books, and Gladys said,—

"Tell us about Two Hundred? What a way you have, Dorothy, of always finding out people who want you!"

"She was all alone," said Dorothy, by way of answer; "and she looked so lonely."

"Tell us about her," said Susan. "Never mind the lonely; new scholars always are; that's a part of their education, Miss Ashton says. We should have been if we hadn't been all together. What is she like?"

"She's lovely," said Dorothy. "She is pretty, and she isn't. Her hair just waves all over her head; and her eyes were blue, and they were hazel, and they were—"

"Gray!" put in Gladys.

"Yes, I suppose they were gray; but they were all colors, but cat colors, until it grew too dark for me to see her."

"We shall like her. I wish she could have a room near us. Her eyes tell true tales."

"She can," said Gladys instantly. "She can room with me. I am the only girl in school who hasn't a room-mate. You wait"—and Gladys, without another word, hurried out of the room. She very well knew that after nine Miss Ashton disliked a call unless there was some imperative necessity for it, so she knocked so gently on the closed door that she was hardly heard; and when at last Miss Ashton appeared, she looked so tired, and her smile was so wan, that Gladys, eager as she was, wished she had been more thoughtful; but, in her impulsive way, she blundered out,—

"She can come to me. I'm all alone, you know."

"Who can come to you, Gladys?" If it had been any other of her pupils, Miss Ashton would have been surprised; but three years had taught her that this Florida girl was exceptional.

"Two Hundred! Dorothy says she is lovely, with big eyes, and lonely"—

"You mean Marion Parke?"

"Yes, that's her name. We all call her Two Hundred."

"Then you must not call her so any more. It would annoy her."

"I never will if you'll please let her come and room with me. It's such a cheerful room, and I'll be ever so nice to her, Miss Ashton; try me, and see."

"But, Gladys, you know your father pays me an extra price for your having your room to yourself."

"I think, Miss Ashton,"—looking earnestly in Miss Ashton's face,— "he would be ashamed of me if I wasn't willing to share it with her. Please! I'll be as amiable as an angel."

Miss Ashton knew the cousins well. She knew, if she excepted Susan, of whom she felt always in doubt, she could hardly have chosen out of her school any girls from whom she would have expected kinder and safer treatment for the new-comer. "How could I have doubted God would provide for this missionary child!" she thought, as she looked down into the earnest face beside her; but she only said,—

"Thank you, Gladys; I will think it over!" and Gladys, not at all sure her offer would be accepted, went back to her room.

The next morning, it must be confessed, things looked differently to her from what they had on the previous night. It was such a luxury to have a whole room to herself; to throw her things about "only a little," but that little enough to make it look untidy. She did not exactly wish she had waited until she knew more of Marion, and she tried to excuse her reluctance to herself by the doubt whether she ought not to have consulted her cousins, as their parlor was a room common to them all; but it was too late now, and when she received a little note from Miss Ashton, saying she should send Marion to her directly after breakfast, she made hasty preparations for her reception.

The dining-hall was filled with small tables, around which the girls had taken their seats, when Miss Benton came in with Marion. Generally a new-comer was hardly noticed among so many; but the peculiarity of Marion's admittance, rounding their number to the largest the school had ever held, made her a marked character for the time. Every eye was turned upon her as she, wholly unconscious of the attention she attracted, walked quietly behind the teacher to a seat next to Gladys.

"Gladys, this is your new room-mate," said Miss Benton. Then she introduced her to the others at the table, and left her.

"Grace before meat," whispered Gladys to her as the customary signal for asking a blessing was given. Miss Ashton rose, and every head in the crowded hall was reverently bowed as she prayed.

They were the first words of prayer Marion had heard since she knelt by her father's side in the far-away home on the morning of her departure. "The same God here as there!" Among this crowd of strangers this thought came to her with the comfort its realization everywhere, and at all times, brings. Even here, she was not alone.

There was a low-toned, pleasant hum of conversation at the table during breakfast; the teacher who presided drew Marion skilfully into it now and then; and she was the centre of a little group as the school went from the hall to the chapel, where a short religious service was every morning conducted.

This was under Miss Ashton's special care, and she took great pains to make it the keynote of the school-life for the day. So far in the term, what she said had its bearing on the immediate duties before them; but this morning she had felt the need of meeting the cases of homesickness with which the opening of every new year abounded, and which seemed, to the pupils at least, matters of the greatest and saddest importance.

She chose one of the most cheerful hymns in the collection they used, by which to bring the tone of the school into harmony with her remarks; and, after it was sung, she said:—

CHAPTER IV.

SETTLING DOWN TO WORK.

"If I were to ask, which I am too wise to do,"—here a smile broke out over the faces of her audience—"those among you who are homesick to rise, how many do you suppose I should see upon their feet?"

A laugh now, and a good deal of elbow-nudging among the girls.

"In the twenty years I have been principal of this academy, I have seen a great deal of this sickness, and I have sympathy with, and pity for it. It has been often told us that the Swiss, away from their Alpine homes, often die of it, but I have never yet found a case that was in the least danger of becoming fatal; so far from it, I might say, that when, since the Comforter sent to us in all our troubles has taken the sickness under his healing care, my most homesick pupils have become my happiest and most contented; so, if I do not seem to suffer with you, my suffering pupils, it is because I have no fear of the result.

"I have a prescription to offer you this morning. Love your home—the more the better; but keep a great place in your hearts for your studies. Give us good recitations in the place of tears. *Study*—study cheerfully, earnestly, faithfully, and if this fails to cure you, come and tell me. I shall see I have made a wrong diagnosis of your condition."

Another laugh over the room, in which some of the unhappy ones were seen to join.

"A few words more. I take it for granted that when a young girl comes to join my school, she

comes as a lady. There are qualifications needed to establish one's claim to the title. I shall state them briefly:—

"Kindness to, and thoughtfulness of, others; politeness, even in trifles; courtesy that wins hearts, generosity that makes friends, unselfishness that loves another better than one's self, integrity that commands confidence, neatness which attracts; tastefulness, a true woman's strength; good manners, without which all my list of virtues is in vain; cleanliness next to godliness; and, above all, true godliness that makes the noblest type of woman,—a Christian lady."

Then she offered a short, fervent prayer, and the school filed out quietly to the different classrooms for their morning recitations.

She spoke to Marion as she passed her, and Marion knew that the dreaded hour of her examination had come. She followed Miss Ashton to a room set apart for such purposes; and, to her surprise, the first words the principal said to her were,—

"Come and sit down by me, Marion, and tell me all about your home!"

"About home!" Marion's heart was very tender this morning, and when she raised her eyes to Miss Ashton, they were full of tears.

"I want to learn more of your mother,"—no notice was taken of the tears. "I had such a nice letter from her about your coming, so nice that, though I hadn't even a corner to put you in, I could not resist receiving you; and now you are invited to come into the very rooms where I should have been most satisfied to put you. I will tell you about your future room-mates; I think you will be happy there."

Then she told her of the three cousins, dwelling upon their characters generally, leaving Marion to form her particular opinion as she became acquainted with them.

What the examination was Marion never could recall. Her father was a college graduate. Her mother had been educated at one of our best New England schools, and her own education had been given her with much care by them both.

Miss Ashton found her, with the exception of mathematics, easily prepared to enter her middle class; and the mathematics she had no doubt she could make up.

Probably there was not a happier girl among the whole two hundred than Marion when, with a few kind, personal words, Miss Ashton dismissed her. Her past studies approved, and her future so delightfully planned for.

Miss Ashton gave her the number of her room in the third corridor, telling her that the same young lady she had seen on the previous night was waiting to receive her.

When, after some difficulty, she found her way there, the door was opened by Dorothy, who had been watching for her.

"This is our all-together parlor," she said. "Gladys, you know, and Susan,—this is my cousin, Susan Downer. We are glad to have you with us."

It was a simple welcome, but it was hearty, and we all know how much that means.

Gladys led her to the window. "Come here first," she said, "and look out."

It was the same view she had seen from the guest-room the night before, only now it was soft and tender in the light of a half-clouded autumn sun.

"My father said, when he saw it, it ought to make us better, nobler, and happier to have this to look at. That was asking a great deal, was not it? because, you see, we get used to it. But there's the sea; you know how the sea looks, never the same twice; because it's still and full of ripples to-day, you don't know but the waves will be tumbling over Judith's Woe to-morrow."

"I never saw the ocean," said Marion. "That is one of the great things I have come to the East to see."

"Never saw the ocean?" repeated Gladys, looking at Marion as curiously as if she had told her she never saw the sun. "Oh, what a treat you have before you! I almost envy you. This is well enough for a landscape, but the seascapes leave you nothing to desire. Now, come to our room. You are to chum with me, and we will be awful good and kind to each other, won't we?"

"How happy I shall be here!" was Marion's answer, as she looked around the rooms. "I wish my mother could see it all!"

"I wish she could," said Dorothy kindly.

The rooms in this academy building were planned in suites,—a parlor, with two bedrooms opening from it. These accommodated four pupils, unless, as was frequently the case, some parents wished their daughter—as did Gladys's father—to have her sleeping-room to herself. In this case extra payment was made.

Marion found her trunk already in Gladys's room, and the work of settling down was quickly and pleasantly done, with the help of her three schoolmates. Lucky Marion! She had certainly, so far, begun her Eastern life under the pleasantest auspices.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. PARKE'S LETTER.

And now commenced Marion's work. She was not quite fitted in higher mathematics, and Miss Palmer, not disposed to be too indulgent in a study where stupid girls tried her patience to its utmost every day of her life, conditioned her without hesitation.

Miss Jones found her fully up, even before her class, in Latin and Greek; her father having taken special pains in this part of her education, being himself one of the elect in classical studies when in Yale College. Her words of commendation almost made amends to Marion for Miss Palmer's brief dismissal; almost, not quite, for, in common with nine-tenths of the scholars in the academy, Marion "hated mathematics."

Miss Sausmann tried her on the pronunciation of a few German gutturals, then patted her on the shoulder and said,—

"Marrione, you vill do vell; you may koom: I vill be most gladness to 'ave you koom. I vill give unto you one, two, three private lessons. You may koom to-day, at four. The stupid class vill not smile at you; you vill make no mistakens." Then she kissed Marion as affectionately as if she had been a dear old friend, and watched her as she went down the long corridor. Some words she said to herself in German, smiled pleasantly, waved two little hands after the retreating figure, and smiled again, this time with some self-congratulatory shakes of the head.

The truth was, though German was an elective study, it was by no means a favorite in the school, and, it may be, Miss Sausmann was not a popular teacher. Broken English, too great an affection for, and estimation of the grandeur of, the Fatherland, joined with a quick temper, do not always make a successful teacher.

The girls, moreover, had fallen rather into the habit of making fun of her, and this did not add to her happiness. In Marion she thought she saw a friend, and very welcome she was.

The arrangement that put four scholars in one room for study, also was not the wisest on the part of the architect of Montrose Academy. If he had taught school for even one year, he would have found how easy it was for a restless scholar to destroy the quiet so essential to all true work.

In Marion's room there was not a stupid or a lazy girl; but they committed their lessons at such different times, and in such different ways, that they often proved the greatest annoyance to each other.

One of the first obstacles Marion found as she bent herself to real hard work, was the need of a place where her attention was not continually called from her book to something one of her room-mates was doing or saying.

To be sure, it was one of the rules of the school that there should be perfect quiet in the room during study hours, but that was absolutely impossible; and Marion, especially with her mathematics, found herself struggling to keep her thoughts upon her lesson, until she grew so nervous that she could not tell x from y , or demonstrate the most common proposition in an intelligible way; and now she found to her surprise a new life-lesson waiting for her to learn, one not in books. So far, her life had all been made easy and sure by the wise parents who had never allowed anything to interfere with their child's best interests; as they had made more and greater sacrifices than she ever knew, to send her East for her education, so nothing that could prepare her for it had been forgotten or neglected.

The very opportunities she had craved had been granted her, and she found herself hindered by such trifles as Gladys moving restlessly around the room, her own lessons well learned, lifting up a window curtain and letting a glare of sunshine fall over her book, knocking the corner of the study table, pushing a chair; no matter how trifling the disturbance, it meant a distracted attention, and lost time; or, Susan would fidget in her chair, draw long and loud breaths, push away one book noisily and take up another, fix her eyes steadily on Marion, look as if she were watching the slow progress she made, and wondering at it.

Even Dorothy, dear, good Dorothy, was not without her share in the annoyance. If she had any occasion to move about the room, "she creeps as if she knew how it troubles me, and was ashamed of me," thought nervous Marion.

In her weekly letters home she gave to her mother an exact account of her daily life, and among the hindrances she found this nervous susceptibility was not omitted. It had never occurred to her that it was a thing under her own control, therefore she was not a little surprised when she received the following letter from her mother:—

"MY DEAR CHILD,—You are not starting right. What your room-mates do, or do not do, is none of your concern. Learn at once what I hoped you had learned, at least in part, before leaving home, to fix your mind upon your lesson, to the shutting out of all else while that is being learned. I know how difficult this will seem to you, with your attention distracted by everything so new about you; *but it can be done*, and it must be if you are to acquire in the only way that will be of any true use to you in the future. Remember that the very first thing you are to do, in truth the end and aim of all education, is to develop and strengthen

the powers of your mind. Acquisition is, I had almost written, only useful in so far as it tends to this great result. When you leave school, if your memory is stored with all the facts which the curriculum of your school affords, and you lack in the mental control which makes them at your service, your education has only made your mind a lumber-room, full perhaps to overflowing, but useless for the great needs of life. Now you will wonder what all this has to do with your being made uncomfortable, so that you could not study, by the restlessness of your room-mates. If you begin at once to fix your mind, as I hope you will soon be able to do, on your lesson, you will be delighted to find how little you will be disturbed by anything going on around you, and how soon your ability to concentrate your working powers will increase.

“Try it faithfully, my dear one, and write me the result. I want to send you one other help, which I am sure you will enjoy. In your studies, make for yourself as much variety as possible. By *that*, I mean when you are tired of your Latin do not take up your Greek; take your mathematics, or your logic, or your literature,—any study that will give you an entire change. Change is rest; and this is truer even in mental work than in physical. Above all, *do not worry*. Nothing deteriorates the mind like this useless worry. When you have done your best over a lesson, do not weary and weaken yourself by fears of failure in your recitation room. Nothing will insure this failure so certainly as to expect it. Cultivate the feeling that your teacher is your friend, and more ready to help you, if you falter, than to blame you. You think Miss Palmer is hard on you in your mathematics, and don’t like you. Avoid personalities. At present, you probably annoy Miss Palmer by your blunders; but that is class work, and I do not doubt a little sharpness on her part is good for you; but, out of the recitation room, you are only ‘one of the girls,’ and if you come in contact with her, I have no doubt you will find her an agreeable lady. There is a tinge of self-consciousness about this, which I am most anxious for you to avoid. I want you to forget there is such a person in the world as Marion Parke, in your school intercourse; but more of this at another time.”

Here follows a few pages written of the home-life, which Marion reads with great tears in her eyes.

What her mother has written her Marion had heard many times before leaving home, but its practical application now made it seem a different thing. She could not help the thought that if her mother had been in her place, had been surrounded as she was by the new life,—the teachers, the scholars, the routine of everyday,—if she had seen the anxious, pale faces of many of the girls when they came into the recitation room, and the tears that were often furtively wiped away after a failure, she would not have thought it so easy to fix your attention on your lesson, undisturbed by any external thing, or to bend your efforts to the development of your mind, above every other purpose: but, after all, the letter was not without its salutary effect; and coming as it did at the beginning of Marion’s school career, will prove of great benefit to her.

CHAPTER VI.

SCHOOL CLIQUES.

The trustees of Montrose Academy had not only chosen a fine site upon which to erect the building, but they had also very wisely bought twenty acres of adjacent land, and laid it out in pretty landscape gardening. There was a grove of fine old trees, that they trimmed and made winding paths where the shade was the deepest and the boughs interlaced their arms most gracefully. They cut a narrow driveway, which proved so inviting that, after a short time, there had to appear the inevitable placard, “Trespassing forbidden.” A small brook made its way surging down to the broad river that flowed through the town; this they caused to be dammed, and in a short time they had a pond, over which they built fanciful bridges. The pond was large enough for boats; and these, decked with the school color,—a dainty blue,—were always filled with pretty girls, who handled the light oars, if not with skill, at least with grace, and, as Miss Ashton knew, with perfect safety.

During the fine days of the matchless September weather, this grove was the favorite resort of the girls through the hours allotted to exercise; and here Marion, having found a quiet, shaded nook where she could be sure of being alone, brought her book and did some of her best studying.

“It’s easy enough,” she thought with much self-gratulation, “to fix your mind on what you are doing, with nothing to disturb you; but it’s a different thing when there are three other minds that won’t fix at the same time. I just wish mother would try it.”

One day, however, when her satisfaction was the most complete over an easily mastered Latin lesson, a laughing face peeped down upon her through her canopy of green leaves, and a voice said,—

“Caught you, Marion Parke! Now I’m going straight in to report you to Miss Ashton, and you’ll see what you’ll get.”

"What shall I?" asked Marion, laughing back.

"She'll ask you very politely to take a seat by her on the sofa, and then she'll look straight in your eyes and she'll say,—

"'I am very sorry, Marion, to find you so soon after joining my school breaking one of my most important regulations.' (She always says regulations; we don't have any rules here.) 'I had expected better things of you, as you are a minister's daughter, and came from the far West.'"

"Is studying your lesson, then, breaking a rule?"

"Studying it in exercise hours is an unpardonable sin. Don't you know we are sent out into the open air for rest, change, exercise? You ought to be rowing, walking, playing croquet, tennis, base-ball, football. You've to recruit your shattered energies, instead of winding them up to the highest pitch. We've been watching you, but no one liked to tell you, so I came. I won't tell Miss Ashton this time, if you'll promise me solemnly you'll join our croquet party, and always play on our side! Come; we're waiting for you!"

"Wait until I come back," said Marion, rising hastily, and gathering up her books. "I didn't know there was any such a rule—regulation, I mean."

Then, half frightened and half amused, she went back to the house, straight to Miss Ashton's room.

Miss Ashton was busy, but she met her with a smile.

"Miss Ashton," said Marion, "I am very sorry; I didn't know it was against your wishes. I found such a lovely, quiet little nook in the grove, and I've been studying there when Mamie Smythe says I ought to have been exercising."

"Then you have done wrong," said Miss Ashton gravely. "I understand that the newness of your work makes your lessons difficult, but there is nothing to be gained by overwork. Come to me at some other time, and I will talk with you more about it. Now go, for the pleasantest thing you can find to do in the way of healthful exercise. There are some fine roses in blossom on the lawn; I wish you would pick me a nice, large bunch for my vase. Look at the poor thing! See how drooping the flowers are!"

Mamie Smythe's croquet party waited in vain for Marion's return; but on the beautiful lawn, where the late roses were doing their best to prolong their summer beauty, Marion went from bush to bush, picking the fairest, and conning a lesson which somehow seemed to her to be a postscript to her mother's letter, that was, "Study wisely done was the only true study."

The lawn itself, cultured and tasteful, had its share, and by no means a small one, in the work of education. Clusters of ornamental trees, dotted here and there over its soft green, were interspersed with lovely flower-beds, in which were growing not only rare flowers, but the dear old blossoms,—candytuft, narcissus, clove-pinks, jonquils, heart's-ease, daffodils, and many another to which the eyes of some of the young girls turned lovingly, for they knew they were blossoming in their dear home garden.

As Marion was going to her room, after taking her roses to Miss Ashton, she found Mamie Smythe waiting for her.

"O you poor Marion!" she said, catching Marion by the arm, "I—I hope she didn't scold you; she never does—never; but she looks so hurt. I never would have told on you, and nobody would. We all knew you didn't know; I'm so sorry!"

"I told on myself," said Marion, laughing, "and she punished me. Don't you see how broken-hearted I am?"

"What *did* she do to you? Why, Marion Parke, she is always good to those who confess and don't wait to be found out!"

"She sent me out to pick her a lovely bunch of roses."

"Oh!" said Mamie. Then a small crowd of girls gathered round them, Mamie telling them the story in her own peculiar way, much to their amusement; for Mamie was the baby and the wit of the school, a spoiled child at home, a generous, merry favorite at school, a good scholar when she chose to be, but fonder of fun and mischief than of her books, consequently a trouble to her teachers. She was a classmate of Marion, and for some unaccountable reason, as no two could have been more unlike, had taken a great fancy to her, one of those fancies which are apt to abound in any gathering of young girls. Had Marion returned it with equal ardor, the two, even short as the term had been, would be now inseparable; but Marion had her room-mates for company when her lessons left her any time, and Gladys and Dorothy had already learned to love her. As for Susan, she seemed of little account in their room. She would have said of herself that she "moved in a very different circle," and that was true; even a boarding-school has its cliques, and to one of the largest of these Susan prided herself upon belonging. Just what it consisted of it would be difficult to say, certainly not of the best scholars, for then both Gladys and Dorothy would have been there; not of the wealthiest girls, for then, again, Gladys Philbrick was one of the richest girls in the school; not of the most mischievous, or of idlers, for then Miss Ashton would have found some way of separating them; yet there it was, certain girls clubbing together at all hours and in all places, where any intercourse was allowed, to the exclusion of others: walking together, having spreads in each other's rooms, going to concerts, to meetings, anywhere and everywhere, always together.

Miss Ashton, in her twenty years of experience had seen a great deal of this; but she had

learned that the best way of dealing with it was to be ignorant of it, unless it interfered in some way with the regular duties of the school. This it had only done occasionally, and then had met with prompt discipline. As several of the leaders had graduated the last Commencement, she had hoped, as she had done many times before, only to be disappointed, that the new year would see less of it; but it had seemed to her already to have assumed more importance than ever, so early in the fall term.

She very soon saw Mamie Smythe's devotion to Marion, and knowing how fascinating the girl could make herself when she wished, and how genial was Marion's great Western heart, she expected she would be drawn into the clique. On some accounts she wished she might be, for she had already begun to feel that where Marion was, there would be law and order; but, on the whole, she was pleased to see that her new pupil, while she was rapidly making her way into that most difficult of all positions in a school to fill, that of general favorite, was doing so without choosing any girl for her bosom friend.

"She helps me," Miss Ashton thought with much self-gratulation, "for she is not only a winsome, merry girl, but a fine scholar, and already her Christian influence begins to tell."

CHAPTER VII.

AIDS TO EDUCATION.

In the prospectus of Montrose Academy was the following sentence:—

"The design of Montrose Academy is the nurture of Christian women.

"To this great object they dedicate the choicest instruction, the noblest personal influences, and the refinements of a cultivated home."

It was to carry out this, that religious instruction was made prominent.

Not only was the Bible a weekly text-book for careful and critical study, but, in accordance with an established custom of the school, among the distinguished men and women who nearly every week gave lectures or addresses to the young ladies, were to be found those who told them of the religious movements and interests of the day. Not only those of our own country, but those of a broader field, covering all the known world.

Returned missionaries, with their pathetic stories of their past life.

Heads of the great philanthropic societies, each one with its claim of special and immediate importance.

Professors for theological seminaries and from prominent colleges, discussing the prevailing questions that were agitating the public mind.

Trained scholars in the scientific world, laden with their rich treasures of research into nature's hidden secrets.

Musicians of wide repute, who found an inspiration in the glowing young faces before them, that called from them their choicest and their best.

Elocutionists, with their pathetic and humorous readings, always finding a ready response in their delighted audience.

These, and many others of notoriety, were brought to the academy; for Miss Ashton had not been slow in learning what is so valuable in modern teaching,—*variety*.

If there were fewer prayer-meetings in the corridors among pupils and teachers than in olden times, there was in the school more alertness of mind, a steadier, stronger ability to think, and, consequently, to study, and, therefore, judiciously used, more power to grasp, believe in, and love the great Christianity to whose service the academy was dedicated.

Nor was it by these lectures alone that the educational advantages were broadened.

The library every year received often large and important additions. It would have been curious to note the difference between the literature selected now, and that chosen years ago. Then a work of fiction would have been considered entirely out of place on the shelves of a library consecrated to religious training. Now the pupils had free access to the best works of the best literary authors of the day, in fiction or otherwise. Monthly magazines and newspapers were spread upon the library table. There was but one thing required, that no book taken out should be injured, and that no reading should interfere with the committal of the lessons.

In the art gallery the same growth was readily to be seen. The portraits of the early missionaries who had gone out from the school, and whose names had become sainted in the religious world, still hung there; but the walls were covered now with choice paintings,—donations from the rapidly increasing alumnæ, and from friends of the school. Here the art scholars found much to interest and instruct them, not only in the pictures, but in the models and designs, which had been selected with both taste and skill.

There was a cabinet of minerals; but this was by no means a favorite with the pupils, though here and there a diligent student might be seen possibly reading "sermons in the stones," who could tell!

There seemed, indeed, nothing to be wanting for the "higher education" for which the institution was designed, but that the pupils should accept and improve the privileges offered them.

Marion Parke was not the only one who found herself confused by the sudden wealth of opportunity surrounding her. Other pupils had come from the north and the south, the east and the west, many from homes where few, if any, of the advantages of modern life had been known. That Marion should have appreciated, and to some extent have appropriated, them as readily as she did, is a matter of surprise, unless her educated Eastern parents are remembered, also the amenities of her parsonage home. Certain it is, that watching her as so many did, and as is the common fate of every new pupil, there was not detected any of the "verdancy" which so often stamps and injures the young girl. It was the girl next to her who leaned both elbows on the table, and put her food into a capacious mouth on the blade of her knife.

It was the one nearly opposite her that talked with her mouth so full she had difficulty in making herself understood; and another, half-way up the table, to whom Miss Barton, the teacher who presided, had occasion to say, when the girl, having handled several pieces of cake in the cake-basket, chose the largest and the best,—

"Whatever we touch here, Maria, we take."

A hard thing for Miss Barton to say, and for the girl to hear; but it must be remembered that this is a training as well as a finishing school, and that there is an old adage with much truth in it, that "manners make the man."

It may seem a thing almost unnecessary and unkind to suggest, that even the most brilliant scholarship could not give a girl a high standing in a school of this kind, if it were unaccompanied with the thousand little marks of conduct which attest the lady.

Maria, after her rebuke from Miss Barton, left the table in a noisy flood of tears, of course the sympathy of all the girls going with her. Miss Barton was pale, and there were tears in her eyes; but no one noticed her, unless it was to throw toward her disapproving looks.

The fact was, that she had spoken to Maria again and again, kindly and in private, about this same piece of ill-manners, and the girl had paid no heed to it. There seemed nothing to be left to her but the public rebuke, which, wounding, might cure.

Marion took the whole in wonderingly. Was this, then, considered a part of that education for which purpose what seemed to her such a wealth of treasures had been gathered?

Here were lectures, libraries, art galleries, beautiful grounds, excellent teachers, a bevy of happy companions, and yet among them so small a thing as a girl's handling cake at the table, and choosing the largest and the best piece, was made a matter of comment and reproof, and, for the first time since she had been in the academy, had raised a little storm of rebellion on the part of pupils towards a teacher.

When she went to her room, Susan had already told the others, who sat at different tables, what had happened. Susan was excited and angry, but Dorothy said quietly,—

"And why should Maria have taken the best bit of cake, even if it had been on the top? I wouldn't."

"No: you would have been the last girl in the school to take the best of anything," said Gladys, giving Dorothy a hug and a kiss; "and as for Miss Barton, she's a dear, anyway, and I dare say she feels at this moment twice as bad as Maria."

"Sensible girl, am I not, Marion?" seeing Marion come into the room. "Don't you take sides in any such things; you mind what I say! Teachers know what they are doing; and if any of us are reproved, why, the long and short of it is, nine times out of ten we deserve it. It's 'for the improvement of our characters' that everything is done here."

"I believe you," said Marion heartily; and, trifling as the event was, she put it with the long array of educational advantages which she had come from the far West to seek. "It requires attention to little as well as great things"—she thought, wisely for a girl of sixteen—"to accomplish the object of this finishing-school."

CHAPTER VIII.

DEMOSTHENIC CLUB.

"Well! what of that! If college boys can have secret societies, and the Faculties, to say the least, wink at them, why can't academy girls? I don't see!"

This is what Jenny Barton said one evening to a group of girls out in the pretty grove back of the

academy building.

There were six of them there. Jenny had culled them from the school, as best fitted for her purpose. She had two brothers in Harvard College, and she had been captivated by their stories of the "Hasty Pudding Club," of which they were both members. "So much fun! such a jolly good time! why not, then, for girls, as well as for boys?"

When, after the long summer vacation, Jenny came back to school to establish one of these societies, to be called in after years its founder, and at the present time to be its head, this was the height of her ambition, the one thing that she determined to accomplish. These six girls that in the gloaming of this September night are waiting to hear what she has to say were well chosen. There was Lucy Snow, the one great mischief-maker in the school. No teacher but wished her out of her corridor; in truth, no teacher, not even Miss Ashton, who never shrank from the task of trying to make over spoiled pupils, was glad to see her back at the beginning of a new year. There was Kate Underwood, a brilliant girl, a fine scholar, and the best writer in the school. There was Martha Dodd, whose parents were missionaries at Otaheite; but Martha will never put her foot on missionary ground. There was Sophy Kane, who held her head very high because she was second cousin of Kane, the Arctic explorer, and who talked in a grand manner of what she intended to do in her future. There was Mamie Smythe, "chock-full of fun," the girls said, and was never afraid, teachers or no teachers, rules or no rules, of carrying it out. There was Lilly White, red as a peony, large as a travelling giantess, with hands that had to have gloves made specially to fit them, and feet that couldn't hide themselves even in a number ten boot. She was as good-natured as she was uncouth, and never happier than when she was being made a butt of. These were to be the nucleus around which this society was to be formed; and as they threw themselves down on the bed of pine-leaves which carpeted the old stump of a tree upon which Jenny Barton was seated, they were the most characteristic group that could have been chosen out of the school. Jenny had shown her powers of leadership when she made the selection.

The opening sentence of this chapter was what she said in reply to some objection which Kate Underwood had offered. Kate liked to be popular, to be admired and courted for her talents: it was the *secret* society that would prevent this. This, Jenny Barton understood; and in the long debate that followed she met it well.

There should be a public occasion now and then. Did not the Harvard societies give splendid spreads, and have an abundance of good times generally?

The society was established, and its name, after a long and warm debate, chosen: "The Demosthenic Club." "For we are going to debate, you know; train for lecturers, public readers, ministers, actresses, lawyers, and whatever needs public speaking," said President Jenny. Vice-President Kate Underwood gave her head an expressive toss, and, if it hadn't been too dark to see her smile, there might have been seen something more than the toss; for while they talked, the long twilight had faded away, the little ripples of the lake by whose side they were sitting had gone to sleep on its quiet bosom. The air was full of the chirrup of innumerable insects; two frogs, creeping up from the water, adding a sonorous bass, and the long, slender pine-leaves chimed into this evening lullaby with their sad, sweet, Æolian notes.

But little of all of this did this Demosthenic Club notice as, coming out at length from the darkness of the grove, they saw the sky full of stars, the academy windows blazing with gas-light, and knew study hours had been begun.

Not to be in their rooms punctually at that hour was an infringement upon the "regulations" not easily excused, and to begin the formation of their society by incurring the displeasure of their teachers did not promise well for their future.

"Take off your boots," whispered Mamie Smythe, as they stood hesitating at the door. In a moment every pair of boots was in the girls' hands, and they were creeping softly through the empty corridors toward their respective rooms. As fate would have it, the only one who reached her room was Lilly White. To be sure, Fräulein Sausmann, the German teacher, heard steps in her corridor, and, opening her door a crack, peeped out. When she saw Lilly White creeping along on the toes of her great feet, her boots, like two boats, held one in each hand, she only smiled, and said to herself, "Oh, Fräulein White! She matters not. She studies no times at all," and shut her door.

All the others were taken in the very act; and their shoeless feet, their confession of a guilty conscience, were reported to Miss Ashton.

"Seven of the girls! that means a conspiracy of some sort," said this wise teacher. "I must keep an eye upon them."

How much any one of this "Demosthenic Club" suspected of their detection by their corridor teachers it would be difficult to say, for, except by a glance, no notice was taken of them at the time. Jenny Barton told the others triumphantly at their next secret session, how she had hidden her shoes behind her, and taken little, mincing steps, so to hide her feet, and imitated the whole performance, much to the amusement of the others. "Ah, but!" said Mamie Smythe, "that wasn't half as good as what I did. When I met Miss Stearns pat in the face, and she looked me through and through with those great goggle eyes of hers, I just said, 'O Miss Stearns, I was so thirsty I couldn't study; I had to go and get a drink of ice-water!'

"Then the ugly old thing stared at the boots I had forgotten to hide, as much as to say, 'It was very necessary, in order to go over these uncarpeted floors, to take off your boots, I suppose, Mamie Smythe!' If she had only said so right out, I should have answered,—

“Why, Miss Stearns, I did it so not to make a noise;’ that’s true, isn’t it, now?” looking round among the laughing girls.

“And you ought to have added,” put in Kate Underwood, “you didn’t want to disturb any one in study hours; that was true, wasn’t it?”

“Exactly what I would have said; but then, when she only goggle-eyed me, what could a girl do?”

“Do? Why, do what I did,” said Lucy Snow. “I walked right up to Miss Palmer, she’s so ill-natured, and likes so much to have us all hate her, that you can do anything with her, and I said,—

“Miss Palmer! I know it’s study hours, but I ate too much of that berry shortcake for tea, and I went to find the matron, to see if she couldn’t give me something to ease the pain.’

“‘I think’ said she (the horrid thing), ‘if you would put on your boots, it might alleviate the pain; but for fear it should not—you didn’t find the matron, I suppose?’

“‘No, ma’am,’ I said, ‘I didn’t see her; I had to come away no better than I went.’

“‘I am very sorry for you; you appear to be in great pain.’

“I was doubling up like—like a contortionist,” and she smiled, and said,—

“‘Come into my room, as you can’t find the matron, perhaps I can help you.’

“So in I had to go; and, girls, if you can believe it, after fumbling around among her phials, she brought me something in a tumbler. It was half full and looked horrid! I tell you, I shook in my stocking feet, and I began to straighten up, and whimpered,—I could have cried right out, it looked so awful, so *awful*, but I only whimpered,—‘I’m better, a good deal, Miss Palmer; I’ll go to my room, and if I can’t study, I’ll go to bed.’

“‘You must take this first. I don’t like to send you away in such severe pain, particularly as you couldn’t find the matron, without doing something to help you. You know I am responsible to your parents for your health!’

“‘My parents never give me any medicine,’ I snarled, for I was getting ruxy by this time.

“‘Perhaps you would have enjoyed better health if they had, and would have been less liable to these sudden attacks of pain,’ she said; and, girls, if you can believe it, when I looked up in her face, there she was in a broad grin, holding the tumbler, too, close to my mouth.

“‘I’m—I’m lots better,’ I whimpered.

“‘I’m glad to hear it,’ the ugly old thing said; ‘but I must insist on your drinking this at once, or I shall have to take you down to Miss Ashton’s room; she is more responsible than I am, and I am sure would not pass any neglect on my part over.’

“By this time the tumbler touched my lips, and, girls, I was so sure that she would take me down to Miss Ashton,—and there is no such thing as keeping anything away from her, for you know how she hates what she calls a ‘prevarication,’—that I just had my choice, to drink that nasty stuff, or to betray the Demosthenic Club, or to tell a fib, and have my walking-ticket given me, so I opened my mouth wide, and swallowed one swallow, then was going to turn away my head, but Miss Palmer held the tumbler tight to my lips, as I have seen people do to children when they were giving castor oil. I took another, and tried again, but there was the tumbler tighter still, so down with it I went, and—and—she had no mercy; she made me drain it to the last drop; then she put it on the table, and said,—

“‘Now, Lucy, you can go to your room; I think you will feel well enough to study your lesson, but if you do not, come back in a half-hour, and I will give you another, and a stronger dose. Put on your boots before you go; you may take cold on the bare floors, in your condition. Good-night.’

“She opened her door, and held it open in the politest way until I had passed out, then I heard her laugh—laugh out loud, a real merry, ringing laugh, every note of which said as plainly as words could,—

“‘I’ve caught you now, old lady. How is the pain? Did the medicine help you?’

“I tell you, girls, it was the hardest pain I ever had in my life, and I never want another.”

“Tell us how the medicine tasted,” said Lilly White.

“Tasted! why, like rhubarb, castor oil, assafoetida, ginger, mustard, epicac, boneset, paregoric, quinine, arsenic, rough on rats, and every other hideous medicine in the pharmacopœia.”

“Good enough for you; you oughtn’t to have lied,” said Martha Dodd, her missionary blood telling for the moment.

But the other girls only laughed; the joke on Lucy was a foretaste of the fun which this club was to inaugurate.

Now, if Miss Palmer did not report to Miss Ashton, and she break up the whole thing, how splendid it would be!

Undaunted, as after a week nothing had been said to them in the way of disapproval, they went on to choose the other members of the club; to appoint times and places for meeting; and to organize in as methodic and high-sounding a manner as their limited experience would allow.

CHAPTER IX.

MISS ASHTON'S ADVICE.

That the formation of such an insignificant thing as this Demosthenic Club should have affected girls like Dorothy Ottley and Marion Parke would have seemed impossible; but it was destined to in ways and times that were beyond their control. When the club was making its selection of members, among those most sought were Marion and Dorothy. Marion, with her cheery, social Western manners, made her way rapidly into one of those favoritisms which are so common in girls' boarding-schools. She always had a pleasant word for every one, and always was ready to do a kind, generous act. She was so pretty, too, and dressed so simply and neatly, that there was nothing to find fault with, even if the girls had not been, as girls are, in truth, as a class, generous, noble, on the alert to see what is good, rather than what is otherwise, in those with whom they live. As for Dorothy, she was the model girl of the school. The teachers trusted and loved her, so did the pupils. No one among them all said how the sea had browned and almost roughened her plain face; how hard work, anxiety, and poor fare had stunted her growth; how carrying the cross children, too big and too heavy, had given a stoop to her delicate shoulders, and knots on her hands, that told too plainly of burdens they were unable to lift. All that the school saw or thought of was the gentle love that was always in the large gray eyes, the kind words that the firm lips never failed to speak, and the steady, straightforward, honorable life of the best scholar.

"If we can only get those two," said President Jenny Barton, "our club is made."

"They are so good, they'll spoil the fun," said Mamie Smythe.

"For shame!" said Martha Dodd. "You don't suppose the daughter of a missionary would join a club of which good girls could not be members!"

"Or the cousin of so famous a man as Kane, the Arctic explorer," said Sophy Kane.

"Don't dispute, girls; we seem to spend half our time wrangling," and the president knocked, with what she made answer for the speaker's gavel, noisily on the table. "I nominate our vice-president, Miss Underwood, to inform these young ladies of their having been chosen, and to report from them at our next meeting.

"Is the nomination accepted?"

"Ay! ay!" from the club.

In accordance with this request, Kate Underwood had interviewed Marion and Dorothy secretly, and had received from both a positive refusal.

"I have no time for secret societies," said Dorothy with a good-natured laugh. "I want twice as many hours for my studies. Thank you, all the same, Kate."

"Secret society! what is that?" asked Marion. "What is it secret for? What do you do in it that you don't want to have known? I don't like the secret part of it. My father used to tell me about the secret societies in Yale College, and they were full of boys' scrapes. He nearly got turned out of college for his part in one of them; and if I should get turned out from here, it would break his heart. No, thank you, I'd better not."

So, sure that *no* from them meant no, Kate had reported to the club, and received permission to invite Susan Downer and Gladys Philbrick in their places.

"Sue will come of course, and be glad to," the club said. "Really, on the whole, she will be better than Dorothy, for Dorothy always wants to toe the line."

Of Gladys, they by no means felt so sure. "She is, and she isn't," Lucy Snow said; "but she has lots of money, and that means splendid spreads."

"But she won't—she won't"—Martha Dodd stopped.

"Won't what?" asked the president in a most dignified manner.

"Won't go through the corridors with her boots in her hands," said Mamie with a rueful face, "and get dosed. She'd stamp right along into Miss Ashton's room, and say,—

"Miss Ashton, I'm late. Mark me, will you?"

"She will keep us straight, then. I vote for Gladys;" and the first to hold up her hands—both of them—was Missionary Dodd.

So Gladys and Susan were invited to become members of the club, and accepted gladly, not knowing their room-mates had declined the same honor.

It was in this way that the club was to influence the rooms.

October, the regal month, when nature puts on her most precious vestments, dons her crowns of gold, clothes herself in scarlet robes, with girdles of richest browns, has a half-hushed note of sadness in the anthems she sings through the dropping leaves, listens for the farewell of departing birds, and tries in vain to call back to the browning earth the dying flowers. This month was always considered in Montrose Academy the time for settling down to hard work in

earnest. Vacation, with its rest and its pleasures, seemed far behind the life of the two hundred young girls who had entered into, and been absorbed by, the present, and who were roused by ambitions for the future.

Marion's room-mates went thoroughly into the work required of them.

"Your faithfulness during the first six weeks of the term," Miss Ashton had said to them in one of her morning talks, "will determine your standard for the year. Do not any of you think you can be indolent now, and pick up your neglected studies by and by.

"You may trust my experience when I tell you that, in the whole number of years since I have been connected with this school, I never knew a pupil who failed in her duties during the first half of the first term of the year, who afterwards did, indeed could, make up the lost opportunities.

"It is not only what you lose out of the passing recitation that you can never find again, but, of even more consequence, it is what you lose in forming honest, faithful habits of study.

"There are many different ways of studying. I have often tried to make these plain to you. I will repeat them. First, learn to give your whole attention to your lesson; *fix your mind upon it*. This sounds as if it would be an easy thing to do; but, in truth, it is very difficult. I am sorry to say I do not think there are a dozen girls among you who can do this successfully, even after years of training. You can train your body to accomplish wonders, but it is hard to believe that the mind is even more capable of being brought into subjection by the will than the body; and, to do that, to make your mind your servant, is to accomplish the greatest result of your education. Only as far as your study and your general life here do that, are they of any true value to you.

"You will ask me how are you to fix your attention when there are so many things going on around you to distract your thoughts? I can only answer, that as our minds are in many respects of different orders, so, no general rule can be given. If you will, each one, faithfully make the attempt, I have no doubt you will succeed, in just the same proportion as you are faithful.

"It may be as well, as I consider this the keystone of all good study, that I should leave the other helps and hindrances for some future talk; and it will give me a great deal of pleasure if I can hear from any of you at the end of a week's trial, that you have found yourselves helped by my advice."

It speaks well for Miss Ashton's influence over her school that there was not a pupil there who was not moved by what she had said.

To be sure, its effect was not equally apparent. There were some who had scant minds to fix, and what nature had been niggardly in bestowing, they had frittered away in a trifling life; but for the earnest girls, those who truly longed to make the most of themselves and to be able to do a worthy work in the life before them, such advice became at once a help.

"It sounds like my mother's letter to me," Marion Parke said to Dorothy, as they went together to their room. "She insists that it is not so much the facts we learn, as the help they give us in the use of our minds. I wonder if all educated people think the same?"

"All thoroughly educated people I am sure do," answered Dorothy. "Sometimes I feel as if my mind was a musical instrument; and if I didn't know every note in it, the only sounds I should ever hear from it would be discords,"—at which rather Irish comparison, both girls laughed.

CHAPTER X.

CHOOSING A PROFESSION.

There was one peculiarity of Montrose Academy that had been slow to recommend itself to the parents of its pupils. That was the elective system, which was adopted after much controversy on the part of the Board of Trustees.

The more conservative insisted that the prosperity of the past had shown the wisdom of keeping strictly to a curriculum that did not allow individual choice of studies. The newer element in the Board were equally sure that to oblige a girl to go through a course of Latin and Greek, of higher mathematics, of logic and geology, who, on leaving school, would never have the slightest use for them, was simply a waste of time. A compromise was made at length, by which, for five years, the elective system should be practised, it being claimed that no shorter time could fairly prove its success or its failure; and during this period certain studies of the old course should be insisted upon. First and foremost the Bible, the others chosen to depend upon the class.

The year of Marion's entering the school was the second of the experiment; and, after joining the middle class and having her regular lessons assigned to her, she was not a little surprised, and in truth confused, by Miss Ashton asking her, as if it was a matter of course, "What do you intend to *do* in the future?" as if she expected her to have her future all mapped out, and was to begin at once her preparation for it. Miss Ashton saw her embarrassment, and helped her by

saying,—

"Many of the young ladies come here with very definite plans; for instance, your room-mate Dorothy is fitting for a teacher, and a very fine one she will make! Gladys is making special study of everything pertaining to natural science,—geology, botany, physics, and chemistry. She intends when she goes back to Florida to become an agriculturist. I dare say you have already heard her talk of the wonderful possibilities to be found there. Her father is an enthusiast in the work, and she means to fit herself to be his able assistant. Susan wants to be a banker, and avails herself of every help she can find toward it.

"You see our little lame girl Helen! She is to be an artist, and devotes all her spare time to courses in art. She is in the second year, and has made wonderful progress in shading in charcoal from casts and models. She uses paints, both oils and watercolors, but those do not come in our regular course.

"If we see any special talent in a pupil in any line, we do not confine ourselves to what we can do for her, but we call in extra help from abroad.

"Kate Underwood is to be a lawyer. Mamie Smythe has a new chosen profession for every new year, but as she is an only child, and her mother is wealthy, she will never enter one.

"I might go on through perhaps an eighth of the school, and point out to you girls who are studying with an aim. For the greater number, they are content to go on with the regular curriculum; as their only object, and that of their parents for them, seems to be to secure sufficient education to make them pass creditably through the common life of ordinary women.

"I thought you might have a definite object in view; and as you are now fairly started in your classes, and, as your teachers tell me, are doing very well, if you had a plan, you could find time to choose such other studies as would help you."

This was new to Marion; she asked for time to think it over, which Miss Ashton gladly allowed her.

She had in her heart made her choice, but that, with all the other advantages offered, she could do anything except in a general way to help this choice forward, she had never dreamed. Her room-mates noticed how silent and thoughtful she was after her talk with Miss Ashton, and wondered what could be the cause, surely she was too faithful and far too good a scholar for any remissness that would have to be rebuked; but no one asked her a question.

It was after two days that Marion wrote her mother, and her letter caused a great surprise in the Western parsonage. This is in part what she wrote:—

"Miss Ashton has asked me what I am to *do* in the future. It seems they not only give you the regular curriculum, but are ready to allow you elective studies, by which you can fit yourself for your particular future.

"I wonder if you will think me a foolish girl when I write you that, if you both approve, I should like to be a doctor! Don't laugh! I have seen so much sickness that there was no really educated physician to relieve, and am, as you have so often called me, 'a regular born nurse,' that the profession, if a profession I am capable of acquiring, seems very tempting to me. There is no hurry in the decision, only please think it over, and write me your advice."

It was not long before an answer came:—

"You are quite capable of choosing for yourself; and if you turn naturally to the medical profession, you will have our full approval of your choice."

When Marion read this, she felt as if she had grown suddenly many years older. She looked carefully over the list of studies, to see from which she could gain the greatest help, and in a short time after her conversation with Miss Ashton she reported herself as a future M.D.

This was not a rare profession for a young girl to choose. Miss Ashton knew that already there were a number with that in view. What she doubted was, whether a quarter of them would ever carry out their intention; and this was one thing which, favoring on the whole as she did the elective system, she could but acknowledge told against it,—the uncertainty which their youth, and the natural tendency of a girl's mind to change, gave. She had known them in one year, or even a shorter time, an enthusiast in one profession, then, becoming tired of it, and sure another was more suited to their abilities, turn to the new choice.

One thing, however, was certain: she comforted herself by remembering, that the mental discipline which they had acquired would stay with them, even after the whim of the time had ceased to influence them.

There was an immediate effect, however, which Marion's decision had upon her. It interested her in those of her schoolmates who were looking forward to a definite and useful future. She could recall now how often her room-mates had spoken of what they intended to do, but she had only listened to it as she had to what they said about their homes and their friends.

How it became known to them that she, too, had made her choice for the future, she wondered over; but it was not long before they began to call her "Dr!" as if she had already earned the title.

Nellie Blair Gorham she had from the first of her entering the school taken a deep interest in. The small, deformed, pale girl had a pathos in her whole appearance that touched deeply Marion's sympathies. They were in different classes, and, so far, had come little in contact; but

now she felt irresistibly drawn to the art studio during the hours when Helen was there, and, standing near, watched her as she worked.

Helen had all the shrinking sensitiveness which her misfortunes and her poverty—for she was poor—would naturally give her. Marion was strong of body, and strong of mind, with a gentle, loving, sympathetic nature speaking from every look and action; the one, the counterpart of the other.

Marion made an immediate choice, under Miss Ashton's instruction, of the studies that would help her in the future; and so, with redoubled interest in this school-life, she bent to her work, learning day by day the value of trying to fasten her mind upon that, and that alone.

CHAPTER XI.

VISIT OF COUSIN ABIJAH.

One afternoon when Marion's lessons had proved unusually difficult, her room-mates noisy, and obstacles everywhere, it seemed to the diligent scholar, she answered a tap on her door, to find Etta Lawrence, the girl who waited in the hall to announce visitors, with a face full of amusement.

"There's a man down-stairs asking for you, Marion," she said. "He started to follow me up-stairs; and when I showed him into the parlor, and told him I would call you, he said,—

"'Tain't no odds, I can jist as well go up; I ain't afraid of stairs, no way.' I had hard work to make him go into the parlor, and I left him sitting on the edge of a chair, staring around as if he never had seen such a room before." Then Etta burst into a merry laugh, in which all the others but Marion joined: she stood still, looking from one of the girls to another, as if she couldn't imagine what it all meant.

"You must go down to the parlor," said Dorothy, seeing her hesitation.

"It's some one from out West," added Sue.



"Did you wish to see me?" asked Marion, looking inquiringly at the man. Page 69. *Miss Ashton's New Pupil.*

"Perhaps it's your father. Hurry! hurry!" said Gladys, thinking how she would hurry if her own father had been there.

Thus encouraged, Marion, with heightened color and a rapidly beating heart, followed Etta down into the parlor, and there, still seated on the edge of his chair, twirling an old felt hat rapidly round between two big, red hands, she saw a tall, lean man in a suit of coarse gray clothes. He had grizzly, iron-gray hair, stubby white whiskers, a pale-blue eye, a brown face streaked with red.

He sat a little nearer the front edge of his chair as she entered the room, and waited for her to speak. Evidently he was not prepared for the kind of Western girl he saw before him.

"Did you wish to see me?" looking inquiringly at him.

"Be you Marion Parke?"

"Yes."

"I am Abijah Jones, your cousin, three times removed; your great-aunt Betty told me to come out here and make a call on you. She's set on seeing you at Thanksgiving, and I guess you'd better humor her, for she took a spite at your father cause he wouldn't farm it, and would have an education; but she allers kind of favored him more than the rest of us, and has allers hankered after him. That's why I'm here."

"I'm glad to see you, Cousin Abijah," her Western hospitality coming to her rescue. "Tell me about my Aunt Betty; she is well, I hope."

Once launched upon the subject of Aunt Betty, between whom and himself there seemed to have been always a family war, he began to feel entirely at home in his strange surroundings, his voice rising to a pitch that resounded through the large room with a peculiar nasal twang Marion had never heard before. She saw one face after another make its appearance through the half-open door, and she knew very well this unusual visitor was giving a great deal of amusement to those who saw him.

Accustomed to see rude characters at the West as she was, never before had Marion met one who seemed to her so utterly oblivious of all common proprieties. She felt sure that if he remained long, the whole school would be made aware of his peculiar presence; and though she struggled hard not to be ashamed of him, and to make his call as pleasant as she could, she was much relieved when she saw Miss Ashton, who, hearing the strident voice, had come to ascertain its source.

As a New England woman, she at once recognized the type. Marion could only introduce him as her "Cousin Abijah."

"Three times removed," put in Cousin Abijah, without rising from his chair, only twirling his hat a little faster in Miss Ashton's stately presence.

She held her hand out to him cordially, and when he put his great brown knotty fist within it, a dull red color came slowly into his seamed face. It was not from any want of self-respect, far from it; he would not have been abashed if Queen Victoria with all her court in full dress had entered the room. A real out-and-out country New Englander knows no peer the wide world over.

Seating herself near him, Miss Ashton soon drew him into a pleasant conversation, to which Marion listened in much surprise. Even the man's voice dropped to a lower pitch, and what he said lost the asperity that had made it so disagreeable. After a few minutes, she proposed to him to show him around the building, where she was sure he would find much to interest him, and, what was a very unusual thing for her to do, she went with him herself. A visitor of this kind was rare in the academy. She well knew the amusement he would create, and when they met, as they did often, groups of girls in the corridor, who stared and smiled at her uncouth companion, she silenced them by a look, which they could not fail to understand.

Kind Miss Ashton! Marion, as well as Cousin Abijah, will never forget it.

"Now, Marion," she said, when they returned to the parlor, "I will excuse you from your next recitation, and you can take your cousin over to the neighboring city. There is a great deal for him to see there, and I will give you a note which will admit you to some of the large factories.

"You can go with him to the station, and see him off in the cars. You will come home, I know, safely and punctually."

Then, if Cousin Abijah had been the President of the United States she would not have bidden him a more cordial "good-by."

Marion, strengthened by Miss Ashton's kindness, invited her cousin before they left to visit her room. She took him through the long corridors, fully conscious that out of many doors curious eyes were peeping at them as they passed, and that smiles, sometimes giggles, followed them. Dorothy and Gladys were both there, and made him pleasantly welcome. He did not admire the view from the window, as Marion expected, for he had had far finer mountain views around him all his life; but he looked curiously at the bric-a-brac and pictures, of which the room was full, and will carry home with him wonderful stories of the Western girl's room.

Then came the visit to Pomfret, the inspection of some of the finest mills, and of the pleasantest parts of the manufacturing city; and Marion bade this country cousin good-by, with the hearty hope that his visit had been a pleasant one.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TABLEAUX.

Friday night, the work of the week being ended, was given to the young ladies as a holiday evening, which, within bounds, was entirely at their disposal. No study was required of them, and it was generally occupied by diversions of one kind and another, in which the whole school were at liberty to join. Sometimes it was a dance, the teachers enjoying it as heartily as their pupils; sometimes it was a concert, and generally it was well worth hearing, for this academy was noted for its skilled musicians. Again, it would be a play, even *Antigone* not being too ambitious for these amateur actors or *tableaux vivants*, which never failed to be amusing.

This night was one chosen by the Demosthenic Club for their secret meetings. As its members did not like to lose any of the social fun, these meetings were held so secretly that every one in the building knew of their time and place, much to the annoyance of the club; and no one, so far, not even the club itself, was better informed of what was done and said there than Miss Ashton. It seemed to her a harmless sort of an affair. There was no difference in the scholarship of its members, the sessions were short, no mischief followed them, and if it made the girls contented and happy it was all right.

How she came to have this perfect understanding it would be difficult to tell, only she was found, in some unknown and mysterious way, to always have the reins in her own hands, no matter how restive the colts she had to control.

The club had grown from the original number of seven, to twelve, the new members having been chosen from among the brightest and most mischievous girls in school. This made Miss Ashton wonder at their uniformly quiet behavior, and increased the vigilance of her watch.

About three weeks after the visit of Cousin Abijah, it was announced that a series of tableaux would be given on Friday evening, illustrating a poem written by Miss Kate Underwood.

Kate's poetical abilities were well known and greatly admired by the school, even the teachers gave her credit for a knack at humorous sketches rather unusual. She was to be, perhaps, a second John Saxe, possibly an Oliver Wendell Holmes, who could tell? The gift was worth cultivating, particularly as it did not interfere with Kate's soberer and more disciplinary studies.

Miss Ashton did not think it necessary to see the poem. It was probably witty, if not wise, and wisdom need not intrude its grave face always into the freedom of the Friday nights; indeed, she rather winked at the performance, as she and her associate principal were to be out of town on that night, and "high fun" in the hall served to keep the girls from any more serious mischief.

All the club were pledged to the most profound secrecy as to what the tableaux were to be; and, for a wonder, there were no revelations made, even to the "dear, intimate friend," who was not a member, and who generally shared the most "profound secret," no matter from what source it emanated.

After evening prayers, the hall was given to the club, and as every arrangement had been made previously for the decoration of the stage, the work was completed and the doors thrown open at an early hour.

The hall was soon filled, and the buzz of expectation began long before the curtain was raised; when it was, it showed an interior of a farm kitchen of the olden times. Clothes-bars had been skilfully placed so as to represent a low ceiling, and from them depended hams wrapped in brown paper coverings, sausages enclosed in cloth bags, herbs tied in bunches and labelled in large letters, "Sage, Camomile, Fennel, Dock, Caraway."

There were ears of corn, sweet, Indian, pop, likewise labelled; tomatoes, strung in rows to dry, and strings also of newly sliced apple.

Under this motley ceiling the room showed plainly it was the living-room of the house. There was a large cooking-stove that shone so you might have seen your face in it, a row of wash-tubs, leaning bottom side up against the wall, two wooden pails and three tin ones, standing on a shelf over the tubs, and these in close proximity to the only window in the room. Just before this window was a small table with a Bible, a well-worn one, on it, and a pair of steel-bowed spectacles. One yellow wooden chair, and what was called "a settle" near the stove, a large cooking-table, and one more chair, made the furniture of the room.

Before this table sat an old woman, dressed in a black petticoat, and a red, short gown that came a little below her waist. She wore a cap that fitted close to her head, made of some black cloth, innocent of bow or frill; from under it, locks of gray hung down about her face and neck. She had a swarthy skin, two small eyes, hidden by a large pair of glasses, a mouth that kept in motion in spite of the necessity of stillness which a tableau is supposed to demand, as if she were reading the letter she held in her hand aloud. The laugh and clapping which this scene called forth had hardly subsided when, from behind a hidden corner of the stage, a sweet, clear voice began to read the descriptive poem.

"It's Kate Underwood herself," was whispered from seat to seat. "There's no other girl in school that can read as well as she can."

The poem gave a brief description of the kitchen as it appeared on the stage, then a more lengthy one of the old woman, with the contents of the letter she was reading. It was from a niece at a boarding-school, who proposed, in a brief and direct way, to visit this aunt during her coming vacation. The tableau was acted so well, and with such piquancy, that claps and peals of laughter from the audience, and finally calls for "Kate Underwood," who demurely makes her appearance from behind the curtain, drops a stage courtesy, and disappears. The poem had been (this audience constituting the judges) excellent, the very best thing Kate ever wrote; and as for the tableaux, were there ever any before one-half so good?

Now, while to almost all in the hall there had been nothing said or done that could injure the feelings of any one, to Marion Parke it seemed an unkind take-off of her cousin during his recent visit to her.

Something in the tall, gaunt girl, in her rough, coarse dress, in the grotesque awkwardness of her movements, reminded Marion of Cousin Abijah; and while she had laughed with the others, and had refused to allow her feelings to be hurt, she left the hall uncomfortable and unhappy, wishing he had never come, or that all the school had shown the kind consideration of Miss Ashton; nor was she helped in the least when she heard Susan telling in great glee how the whole plan had come to them after the visit of that uncouth old cousin of Marion Parke.

CHAPTER XIII.

GLADYS LEAVES THE CLUB.

Dorothy was the first to see Marion at the door of their room after the tableaux. She hoped she had not heard what Sue had said, but that she had she could not doubt when she saw the pained expression on Marion's face. In the after discussion of the entertainment, Marion took no part, but went quietly to her bed, with only a brief "good-night."

"They have hurt her feelings, and they ought to have been ashamed of themselves," said kind Dorothy to the two members of the club sitting beside her. "Girls, if that is what you mean to do in your Demosthenic Club, I am most thankful I never joined it, and the sooner you both leave it the better."

"Grandmarm!" said Sue, her hot temper flashing into her face, "when we want your advice, we will ask it."

"What's up, Dody? Whose feelings are hurt, and who ought to be ashamed of themselves?" asked Gladys. "I don't know what you are talking about."

"About Marion and the Demosthenic Club!" answered Dorothy briefly.

"What for? What has Marion to do with the club?"

Dorothy looked straight into Gladys's face for a moment. Whatever other faults Gladys had, she had never, even in trifles, been otherwise than honest and straightforward. There was nothing in her face now but surprise; so Dorothy, much relieved that she was not a partaker in the unkindness, explained to her that, as Susan had just told them, the club had taken Marion's country cousin for a butt, and had made him, with the old aunt,—the knowledge of whom must have come to them from some one in their room,—the characters in the farce; and that Marion, coming into the room just as Susan was telling of it, had heard her; and it had hurt her feelings.

Now, strange as it may seem, it was nevertheless true that the club, knowing Gladys well, and how impossible it would be for her to do anything that might injure another, had carefully kept from her any direct participation in it. She knew in a general way what was to be done, but was ignorant of particulars.

No sooner had the whole been made known to her, than without a word, though it was after the time when the girls were allowed to leave their rooms, without the slightest effort to move softly, she passed the doors of several teachers, up into another corridor, not stopping until she tapped at Jenny Barton's room.

The tap was followed by the muffled sound of scurrying feet, of a table pulled hastily away, of whispers intended to be soft, but in the hurry having a strangely sibilant tone, that made them almost words spoken aloud, to the impatient Gladys.

She rapped a second time, a little louder than the first, and the door was opened by Jenny, in her nightdress. The gas in the room was out, and there was no one to be seen.

"Why, Gladys Philbrick!" she exclaimed crossly, pulling Gladys hastily in; "you frightened us almost out of our wits. Girls! it's only Gladys!"

Out from under the beds and from the closets in the two bedrooms crept one after another the girls of the club. All were there but Susan and Gladys; and they would have been invited, but it was well known that if Gladys broke a rule of the school, she never rested until she had made full confession to one of the teachers. She was not to be trusted in the least; and, of course, Susan could not be invited without her, so the knowledge of the spread which was to succeed

the tableaux had been carefully kept from them. No wonder at Jenny's reception of her!

Somewhat staggered by this, and by the appearance of the hidden, laughing girls, Gladys stood for a moment staring blankly around her, then she asked, singling Kate Underwood out from among the others,—

"Kate! did you write that poem to make fun of Marion Parke's country cousin?"

"Why do you ask?" answered Kate, turning brusquely upon Gladys.

"Because, if you did, and if, as Sue says, you got up those tableaux to make fun of him, I think you are the meanest girl in the school; and as for the club—a club that would do such a thing, I wouldn't be a member of a moment longer, not if you would give me a million dollars!"

"Well, as we have no million to give you, and wouldn't part with even a copper to have you stay, you can have your name taken off the roll any time," said the president majestically.

"All right, it's done then; but my question is not answered. Kate Underwood, did, or did you not, intend to make fun of Marion Parke's cousin?"

"When I know by what right you ask me, I will answer you; until then, Gladys Philbrick, will you be kind enough to speak in a lower voice, unless you wish to bring some of the teachers down upon us, or perhaps you will report us to Miss Ashton; I think she has just come in the late train, I heard a carriage stop at the door."

"You want to know my right?" answered Gladys, without taking any notice of Kate's taunts. "It's the right of being ashamed to hold a girl up to ridicule for what she couldn't help, and a girl like Marion Parke. I hoped you could say you didn't mean to; but I see you can't." Then Gladys, without another word, left the room, leaving behind her a set of girls who, to say the least, were not in a mood to congratulate themselves on the events of the evening.

The spread was hastily put on the table again, but it was eaten by them with sober faces and troubled hearts.

"Well," said Sue, as Gladys came noisily into their room, "now I suppose you've made all the girls so mad they will never speak to me again."

"I have told them what I think of them," and Gladys looked at Sue askance over her shoulder as she spoke, "and I advise you to quit a club that can be as unkind as this has been to-night."

"When I want your advice I will ask it; I advise you to keep it until then. Whom did you see?"

"All of them, hiding under beds and in closets."

"That means a spread without leave, and we not invited. You're a tell-tale Gladys; they are afraid of you."

"Good!" said Gladys with a scornful laugh.

"Girls," said a gentle voice from the bedroom door, "don't mind; it's foolish in me I dare say, and—and the tableaux were real funny," and an odd attempt at a laugh ended in a burst of tears.

In a moment both of Gladys's arms were around Marion's neck.

"You dear, darling old Marion," she said, whimpering herself.

"Too much noise in this room!" said Miss Palmer's voice at their door. "I did not expect this, Marion! Dorothy, what does it mean?"

"We are going to bed, Miss Palmer," said Dorothy, opening the door immediately. "It was about the tableaux we were talking."

"You should have been in bed half an hour ago; I am sorry to be obliged to report you. Let this never happen again. Your room has been in most respects a model room until now."

Not a girl spoke, and if Miss Palmer had come again fifteen minutes later, she would have found the gas out and the girls in bed.

CHAPTER XIV.

KATE UNDERWOOD'S APOLOGIES.

The scholars noticed that when Miss Ashton came into the hall a few nights after the Friday evening tableaux she looked very grave.

"What's gone wrong? Who has been making trouble? Look at the girls that belong to the Demosthenic Club! I'm glad I am not a member!"

These, and various other remarks, passed from one to the other, as Miss Ashton walked through the hall to her seat on the platform.

It was the hour for evening prayers. Usually she read a short psalm, but to-night she chose the twelfth chapter of Romans, stopping at the tenth verse, and looking slowly around the school as

she repeated,—

“Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.” Then she closed her Bible and repeated these verses:—

“These things I command you, That you love one another. Let love be without dissimulation. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. By love serve one another. But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith. And I pray that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and in all judgment. Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than himself. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

“But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you; for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.

“Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love.’

“I hesitate,” said Miss Ashton, after a moment’s pause, “to add anything to these expressive and solemn Bible words. They convey in the most forcible way what seems to me the highest good for which we can aim in this life,—the perfection of Christian character.

“I presume you all realize in some degree the world we make here by ourselves. Set apart in a great measure from what is going on around us, closely connected in all our interests, we depend upon each other for our happiness, our growth, our well-being. We are helped, or we are hindered, by what in a large sphere might pass us by. Nothing is too small to be of vital importance to us; the aggregate of our influences is made up of trifles. I have said this same thing to you time and time again, and yet I am sorry to find how soon it can be forgotten. If I could impress upon you these tender, beautiful gospel truths I have repeated, I should have had no occasion to detain you to-night. You would all of you have been bearing one another’s burdens, instead of laying one upon delicate shoulders.

“‘Taught of God to love one another.’ Do those learn the lesson God teaches who, without, we will say, bearing any ill-will, injure the feelings of others? It may be by unkind words; it may be by an intentional rudeness; it may be by neglect; it may be by a criticism spoken secretly, slyly, circulated wittily, laughed at, but not forgotten. ‘The ways that are unlovely;’ how numerous they are, and how directly they tend to make hearts ache, and lives unhappy, no words can tell!

“Young ladies, if your lives with us sent you out into the world, first in accomplishments, thoroughly grounded in the elements of an education, that after all has only its beginning here, leaders in society, and yet you wanted the nobility of that love which the Bible claims is the fruit of the spirit, we should have to say, we have ‘labored in vain, and spent our strength for naught.’ I wish I could see among you that tenderness of spirit that would shrink as sensitively from hurting another, as it does from being hurt yourselves. I am looking anxiously for it in this new year. I am looking hopefully for it; you will not disappoint me I am sure.”

Then she asked them to sing the hymn “Blest be the tie that binds,” made a short prayer, and waited before leaving the room for the hall to be cleared. It was well she did; for no sooner had the last girl left the corridor, before Kate Underwood came rushing back to the platform, and catching hold of Miss Ashton’s hand said,—

“I didn’t do it, I *didn’t* do it, Miss Ashton, to hurt Marion Parke’s feelings! I like her so much; I think she is—is, why is about the best girl in the whole school. I only meant—why I meant he was such an old codger it was real funny; I thought it would make a nice tableau, and I never thought Marion would recognize it: I wouldn’t have done it for the world!”

Then she stopped, looked earnestly in Miss Ashton’s face, and asked,—

“Do you believe me, Miss Ashton?”

Now, Miss Ashton knew Kate to be a very impulsive girl, doing many foolish, and often wrong things, only sometimes sorry for them, so she did not receive her excited apologies with the consideration which they really deserved.

She said, perhaps a little coldly,—

“I am glad you have come to see the matter both more kindly and reasonably, Kate. Yes! I do believe you: I do not doubt you feel all you say; but, Kate, you are so easily tempted by what seems to you fun. I can’t make you see, fun that becomes personal in a way to injure the feelings of any one ceases to be fun, becomes cruelty. There is a great deal of that in this school this term. Hardly a day passes but some of the girls come to me crying because their feelings have been wounded, and I am truly grieved to say, you are oftener the cause of it than any other girl. To be both witty and wise is a great gift; to be witty without being wise is a great misfortune; sometimes I think it has been your misfortune. You are not a cruel girl. You are at bottom a kind girl; yet see how you wound! You didn’t *mean* to hurt Marion Parke; you like her, yet you did: you made fun of an old country cousin, whose visit must have been a trial to her. You are two Kates, one thinks only of the fun and the *éclat* of a witty tableau; the other would have done and said the kindest and the prettiest things to make Marion Parke happy. Which of these Kates do you like best?” Miss Ashton now laid her hand lovingly over the hands of the excited girl, who answered her with her eyes swimming in tears, “Your kind, Miss Ashton.” Then she put up her lips for the never-failing kiss, and went quietly away, but not to her own room.

There was something truly noble in the girl, after all. She went to Marion's door and, knocking gently, asked if Marion would walk with her to the grove.

Much surprised, but pleased, Marion readily consented, and the two went out in the early darkness of an October night alone, the girls whom they met in the corridors staring at them as they passed.



Marion turned, threw both arms around Kate's neck, kissing her over and over again.—Page 89.

"Marion!" said Kate, "I ask your pardon a thousand, million times! I never, *never* meant to hurt your feelings! I forgot everything but the fun I saw in the old farm-scenes, and the new fashionable school-girl out for a vacation; I did truly. I—I don't say it would ever have occurred to me if that cousin of yours hadn't come here, because that wouldn't be true, and I'm as bad as George Washington" (with a little laugh now), "I can't tell a lie; but can say that I never would have written one word of that miserable farce if I had ever dreamed it would have hurt your feelings: will you forgive me?"

Marion had listened to this long speech with varying emotions. As we know, she had been wounded by the tableaux, but her feelings had been exaggerated by her room-mates, and if the matter had been dropped at once she would probably soon have forgotten it. Kate's apology filled her with astonishment. How could it ever have come to her knowledge that she had been wounded, and how came she to think it of enough importance to make an apology now.

Instead of answering, Marion turned, threw both arms around Kate's neck, kissing her over and over again.

Kate, surprised in her turn, returned the kisses with much ardor.

It was a girl's forgiveness, and its recognition, without another word.

Then they walked down into the grove, their arms around each other's waists, and the belated birds, scurrying to their nests, sang evening songs to them.

On the side of the little lake that nestles in the midst of the grove, two petted frogs, grown large and lazy on the sweet things with which their visitors so freely regaled them, heard their steps, hopped up a little nearer to the well-worn path, and saluted them with an unusually loud bass.

Whether it was the influence of Miss Ashton's words, or the generous act of apology,—the noblest showing of a noble mind that has erred,—it would be hard to tell; but, certain it is, Kate Underwood had learned a lesson this time which, let us hope, she will never forget.

When Marion went back to her room it was quite time for study hours to begin; but her room-mates had so many questions to ask about Kate's object in inviting her out to walk, that a good half-hour passed before they began their lessons.

Marion did not feel at liberty to repeat what Kate had said, and so she frankly told them.

CHAPTER XV.

MISS ASHTON'S FRIDAY NIGHT.

Miss Ashton, a little timid from the use made of the liberty she had given for the Friday night entertainments, decided for a time to take the control of them into her own hands, and as something novel, that might be entertaining, she proposed that the school should prepare original papers, to be read aloud, the reading to be followed by "a spread" given by the Faculty. She made no suggestion with regard to the character of the papers to be sent in, other than to say that she knew very well there were some good writers in the school, and she should expect every one to do her best.

This proposal was gladly accepted. The girls clapped when she had finished, and some began to stamp noisily, but this a motion of the principal's hand checked.

There began at once to be conjectures as to whose piece would be the best. Nine-tenths of the girls agreed it would be Kate Underwood, the other tenth were for Delia Williams, who, when she tried for an honor, seldom failed to secure it; and hadn't she once written a piece on Robert Browning, of which not a scholar could understand a word, but which, it was reported, Miss Ashton said "was excellent, showing rare appreciation of the merits of a great poet"?

One thing was certain, there was hardly a girl in school who had not, before going to bed that night, wandered around in her dazed thoughts for some subject upon which she could write in a way that would surprise every one.

Lilly White, the dunce of the school, had hers written by the beginning of study hours. It covered three pages of foolscap paper, and had at least the merit of being written on only one side.

Among the few books Marion Parke had brought from her Western home, was an old magazine, printed by a Yale College club, and edited by her father when he was a member of the college.

This had in it one short story suggested by the West Rock at New Haven. In this rock was a rough cave, and here, tradition said, the regicides Goff and Whalley hid themselves from pursuit, after the murder of Charles I. The story was well told, not holding too rigorously to facts, but at the same time faithful enough to real incidents to make it not only interesting but valuable.

These were tender and touching scenes of a wife and a betrothed, who, through dangers of discovery and arrest, carried food and papers to the fugitives.

The story had always been a great favorite of Marion's. One day when she felt homesick she had taken it out, read it, and left it on the top of her table, under her Bible. Being very busy afterwards, and consequently the homesickness gone, she did not think of it again; she did not even notice that it had been abstracted from the table and another magazine, similar in appearance, put in its place.

If Miss Ashton had foreseen the deep interest the school were taking in the proposed entertainment, she might have hesitated to propose it. The truth was, it took the first place; studies became of secondary importance. "What subjects had been chosen for the pieces? how they were to be treated? how they progressed? how they would be received?" These were the questions asked and answered, often under promise of secrecy, sometimes with an open bravado amusing to see.

It was a relief to all the teachers when the Friday night came. The girls in gala dress crowded early into the hall; Miss Ashton and the teachers, also in full dress, followed them soon; and five minutes before the time appointed for the opening of the evening entertainment the hush of expectation made the room almost painfully still.

Miss Ashton had requested that the pieces should be sent in to her the previous day. She had been surprised more at their number than their excellence, indeed, there was but one that did not, on the whole, disappoint her; that one delighted her.

She intended to read, not the best only, but the poorest, thinking, perhaps, as good a lesson as could come to the careless or the incapable would come from that sure touchstone of the value of any writing,—its public reception.

The names were to be concealed; that had been understood from the beginning, yet, with the exception of Kate Underwood, who was more used to the public of their small world than any of the others, there was not a girl there who had not a touch of stage fright, either on her own account, or on that of her "dearest friend."

There were essays on friendship, love, generosity, jealousy, integrity, laziness, hope, charity, punctuality, scholarship, meanness. On youth, old age, marriage, courtship, engagement, housekeeping, housework, the happiness of childhood, the sorrows of childhood, truth, falsehood, religion, missionary work, the poor, the duties of the rich, houses of charity, the tariff, the Republican party, the Democratic party, woman's suffrage, which profession was best adapted to a woman, servants, trades' unions, strikes, sewing-women, shop-girls, newspaper boys, street gamins, the blind, the deaf and dumb, idiots, Queen Victoria and the coming

Republican party into the government of England, the bloated aristocracy, American girls as European brides, the cruelty of the Russian government, Catholic religion, Stanley as a hero, Kane's Arctic adventures.

Miss Ashton had made a list of these subjects as she looked over the essays, and when she read them aloud, the school burst into a peal of laughter.

She said, "I cannot, in our limited time, read all of these to you. I will give you your choice, but first, let me tell you what remains. There are six poems of four and five pages length. The subjects are:—

"The Lost Naiad; Bertram's Lament; Cowper at the Grave of His Mother; A New Thanatopsis; Ode to Silence; Love's Farewell.

"I promise you," she said, "you shall have these, if nothing more."

A slight approbatory clapping, and she went on:—

"If I am to read you the titles of the stories I have on my desk, it will go far into the allotted time for these exercises; but, as some of you may think they would be the most interesting part, I will give you your choice. Those in favor, please hold up their hands."

Almost every girl's hand in school was raised, so Miss Ashton went on:—

"Bob Allen's Resolve; The Old Moss Gatherer; Lady Jane Grey's Adventure; The Brave Engineer; How We didn't Ascend Mt. Blanc; Nancy Todd's Revenge; Little Lady Gabrielle; Sam the Boot-black; Christmas Eve; Thanksgiving at Dunmoore; New Year at Whitty Lodge; Poor Loo Grant; Jenkins, the Mill Owner; Studyhard School; Storied West Rock; Phil, the Hero; How Phebe Won Her Place; Norman McGreggor on his Native Heath; Our Parsonage; How Ben Fought a Prairie Fire; The Sorrows of Mrs. McCarthy.

"These are all," and Miss Ashton laughed a merry laugh as she turned over the pile. "I am much obliged to you for your ready and full answer to my proposal. If I am a little disappointed at the literary character of some of the work, I am, as I have said, pleased by your ready response. If I should attempt to read them all, we should be here at a late hour, and lose our spread, so I will give you the poems, as I promised, and as many of the essays and stories as I can crowd into the time previous to nine o'clock."

Miss Bent, who was the teacher of elocution, now stepped forward, and out of a pile separated from the larger one of manuscripts took up and read the six poems; then followed, in rapid succession, essays and stories, until at ten minutes before nine, the school having evidently heard all they wished with the spread in prospect, Miss Ashton said,—

"I have reserved the best—by far the best—of all these contributions for the last. Miss Bent will now read to you 'Storied West Rock!'"

Miss Bent began immediately, and though the hands of the clock crept on to fifteen minutes past nine, not a girl there watched them; all were intent on the absorbing interest of the story.

When it was finished, Miss Bent said, "This is so excellent that I feel fully justified in departing from the promise Miss Ashton made you, that your pieces should not have the name of the writer given; with her leave, it gives me great pleasure to say, this touching and excellently written story was composed by one of our own seniors, Susan Downer."

"Three cheers for Susan Downer!" cried Kate Underwood, springing from her seat; and if ever boys in any finishing school gave cheers with greater gusto, they would have been well worth hearing. Even Susan found herself cheering as noisily as the rest, and would not have known it, if Dorothy, her face radiant with delight, had not stopped her.

Then followed the spread, "the pleasantest and the best one that was ever given in Montrose Academy," the girls all said.

CHAPTER XVI.

STORIED WEST ROCK.

When Marion Parke went back to her room the night after Miss Ashton's entertainment, she was in a great deal of perturbation. The title of Susan Downer's story, on its announcement, had filled her with surprise, for since her coming to the school she had never before heard West Rock mentioned. When she had asked about it, no one seemed even to have known of it, and that Susan should not only have heard, but been so interested as to choose it for the subject of her story, was a puzzle! But when the story was read, and she found it, in all its details, so exactly like her father's, her surprise changed to a miserable suspicion, of which she was heartily ashamed, but from which she could not escape. Sentence after sentence, event after event, were so familiar to her, nothing was changed but the names of the women who figured in the story.

The first thing she did after coming to her room was to take the magazine from under the Bible,

and open to the story. There was an ink-blot on the first page, which some one had evidently been trying to remove with the edge of a knife. It must have been done hastily, for the leaf was jagged, and most of the ink left on.

This Marion was sure was not there the last time she had opened the magazine; some one had dropped it recently. Who was it?

She hastily re-read the story. Yes, she had not been mistaken, Susan Downer's story was the same!

Was it possible that two people, her father and Susan, who had never been in New Haven, but might have known about Goff and Whalley from her study of English history, though not about West Rock as her father had seen and described it, could have happened upon the same story? How very, very strange!

Marion dropped the magazine as if it was accountable for her perplexity; then she sat and stared at it, until she heard the door opening, when she snatched it up, and hid it away at the bottom of her trunk.

It was Dorothy who came into the room; and Marion's first impulse was to go to her and tell her all about it, ask her what she should do, for do something she felt sure she must.

Dorothy saw her, and called,—

"Marion! isn't it splendid that Sue wrote such a fine piece? I feel that she is a real honor to our class and to Rock Cove! Her brother Jerry will be so happy when he hears of it."

"Why, Marion!" catching sight of Marion's pale face, "what is the matter with you? You look as pale as a ghost. Are you sick?"

"No-o," said Marion slowly. "O Dody! Dody!"

"Marion! there is something the matter with you. Sit down in this chair. No, lie down on the lounge. No, on your bed. You'd better undress while I go for the matron. I'll be very quick."

"Don't go, Dody! Don't go," and Marion caught tight hold of Dorothy's arm, holding her fast. "I'm not sick; I'm frightened."

But in spite of her words, indeed more alarmed by them, Dorothy broke away and rushed down to the matron's room, who, fortunately, was out. Then she went for Miss Ashton, but she also had not returned. So Dorothy, unwilling to leave Marion alone any longer, went back to her.

While she was gone, Marion had time to resolve what she would do, at least for the present; she would leave Susan in her own time and way to make a full confession, which she tried to persuade herself after a little that she would certainly do. So when Dorothy came back she met her with a smile, told her not to be troubled, that it was the first time in her life such a thing had ever happened, and she hoped it never would again.

"But you said you were frightened," insisted Dorothy, "and you looked so pale; what frightened you?"

Marion hesitated; to tell any one, even Dorothy, would be to accuse Susan of such a mean deception. No; her resolve so suddenly made was the proper one: she would keep her knowledge of the thing until Susan herself confessed, or assurance was made doubly sure; for suppose, after all, Susan had written the story, how could she have known about it in that magazine? She had never lent it to her; she had never read it to any of her room-mates, or to any one in the school, proud of it as she was. Indeed, the more she thought of it, the more sure she was that she ought to be ashamed of herself for such a suspicion, and, strange as it may seem, the more sure she also was, that almost word by word Susan had stolen the story.

"I was frightened at a thought I had, a dreadful thought; I wouldn't have any one know it. Don't ask me, Dody, please don't; let us talk about something else," she said.

Then she began to talk rapidly over the events of the evening, not, as Dorothy noticed, mentioning Susan or her success. Dorothy wondered over it, and an unpleasant thought came into her mind.

"Can it be that Marion is jealous of Sue, and disappointed and vexed that her piece wasn't taken any more notice of? I'm sure it was an excellent story, 'How Ben Fought a Prairie Fire.'" Marion had read it to her before handing it in, and she had been much interested in it, but it didn't compare with Susan's, and it wasn't like Marion to feel so. She never had shown such a spirit before.

Neither Susan nor Gladys came to their room until the last moment allowed for remaining away. Susan was overwhelmed with congratulations on her success. The teacher of rhetoric told her she felt repaid for all the hours she had spent in teaching her, by the skill she had shown in this composition, and if she continued to improve, she saw nothing to prevent her taking her place, by and by, among the best writers in the land. Kate Underwood pretended to be vexed, "having her laurels taken away from her," she said "was not to be borne;" and Delia Williams, the rival of Kate in the estimation of the school, made even more fun than Kate over her own disappointment. Some of the girls made a crown of bright papers and would have put it on Susan's head, but she testily pushed it away.

Susan's love of prominence was well known in the school, and even this small rejection of popular applause they wondered over.

And when the girls began to cluster around her, and to ask if she had ever been to that West

Rock, if there was really such a place, and if all those things she wrote of so beautifully had ever happened? she was silent and sulky; and in the end, crowned with her new honors, at the point in her life she had always longed for, and never before reached, she looked more like a girl who was ashamed of herself, than like one whose vanity and love of praise had for the first time been fully gratified.

She dreaded going to her room; she was afraid something to mar her success was waiting for her there. She wished Marion Parke had never come from the West, that Gladys had never been weak enough to take her in for a room-mate. In short, Susan was more unhappy than she had ever been before. Gladys, full of frolic with a large clique of girls in another part of the room, had not given her a thought.

To have Susan write so good a story had been the same surprise to her that it was to every one; but the reading was no sooner over, than she had forgotten it, and if the teacher had not told her it was time she went to her room, she would also have forgotten there was any room to go to.

When she saw Susan she said, "Come on if you don't want to get reported. I say, Sue, haven't we had a real jolly time?" but much to Susan's relief not a word about "Storied West Rock."

Dorothy had been waiting for Susan, and when the gas was out and they were all in bed, she whispered to her,—

"O Sue! I'm so glad for you." Dorothy thought a moment after she heard a sound like a smothered sob, but Susan not answering or moving, she concluded she had fallen quickly asleep, and that was a half snore; so she went to sleep herself, but not without some troubled thoughts about Marion and her unusual behavior.

When Marion and Susan met the next morning, Marion noticed that Susan avoided her, never even looked at her; and when Dorothy and Gladys went away to a recitation, leaving them alone, Susan hastily gathered up her books, and going into her bedroom, shut the door.

Marion thought this over. To her it looked as if Susan felt guilty and was afraid; but she had determined not to watch her, not even to seem to suspect her. "How should she know that I remember the story?" she thought, "or, indeed, that I have ever so much as read it? I will put it off my mind; I will! I *will!*"

But, in spite of her resolutions, Marion could not; and as days went on she took to wondering whether by thus concealing what she knew, she was not making herself a partner in the deception.

Susan, not being at once accused by Marion, came slowly but comfortably to the conclusion that she had not even the vaguest suspicion that anything was wrong; still, she sedulously avoided her, and when Dorothy noticed and asked her about it, answered crossly, "She never had liked that girl, and she never should to the longest day of her life."

"And Marion certainly does not approve of Susan. How unfortunate!" thought this kind Dorothy.

CHAPTER XVII.

NOVEMBER SNOWSTORM.

When November had fairly begun, the grove was leafless; the boats taken out of the little lake and stored carefully away, to await the return of birds and leaves; the days grown short, dark, and cold; the "constitutionals" matters of dire necessity, but not in the least of pleasure; study assumed new interest, and the worried teachers, relieved for a time of their anxieties over half-learned lessons, began to enjoy their arduous work, finding it really pleasant to teach such bright girls.

The girl who made the best recitation was the heroine of the hour, rules were observed more faithfully, a tender spirit went with them into the morning and evening devotions, Faculty meetings became cheerful. This seemed to Miss Ashton one of the most prosperous and successful fall terms she had ever known; she congratulated herself constantly on its benign influences, and often said, "I have fewer black sheep in my flock than I have ever gathered together before."

There was one reason for this prosperity which she fully realized. Thanksgiving was not far distant, and on that happy New England festival, the school had a holiday of three or four days.

It was a practice to send then to the parents or guardians of the pupils an account of their progress in their studies. The system of marking had not been abandoned in the school; and many a lazy scholar, whom neither intreaties nor scolding seemed to touch, was alarmed at the record which she was to carry home. Such a thing had been known as girls refusing to leave the academy even for Thanksgiving, rather than to face what they knew awaited them with their disappointed parents.

But from whatever cause the change had come, it was destined to have a severe shock before

the festival day came.

Montrose Academy had been purposely built within a few miles of the old and famous school for boys in Atherton. The reasons for this were, the ease with which the best lecturers could be obtained from there in many departments (a competent man finding plenty of time to lecture in both academies), and the general literary atmosphere which a social acquaintance engendered.

Of course this social acquaintance was not without its drawbacks, and it had been found necessary for both principals to require written permits for the visits which the boys were inclined to make upon the girls at Montrose.

So far, during this term, the boys had been fully occupied by their athletic games; but as the ground became one series of frozen humps, hands grew numb, and feet cold, the interest in them subsided; and yet the love of misrule, so much stronger in a boys' than in a girls' school, grew more active and troublesome.

Jerry Downer, a brother of Susan Downer, was a member of this famous school; and it soon became known among a class of boys who studied the Montrose catalogue more faithfully than they did their Livy, that he had a sister there, that she was a lively girl, not too strict in obeying rules, fond of fun, "up to everything," as they described her; so it not infrequently happened that Jerry was invited by a set, with whom at other times he had little to do, to ride over with them to Montrose, he calling on his sister and cousins, while they apparently were waiting for him.

In this way Jerry had been quite frequently there, no objection being made by Miss Ashton, as a note from her to the principal of Atherton Academy brought back a flattering account of Jerry as a scholar, and as a boy to be fully trusted.

Jerry had improved in every respect since he went to Atherton. He was now a tall, broad-shouldered, active, well-dressed young man, who rang the doorbell of the majestic porch at the Montrose Academy with that unconsciousness which is the perfection of good manners, and which came to him from his simplicity, and went in among the crowd of girls, neither seeing nor thinking of any but those he had come to visit.

Susan, in her own selfish way, was proud of him, so he was always sure of a reception that sent him back to his studies ambitiously happy.

On the fifteenth of November there fell upon Massachusetts such a snowstorm as the rugged old State never had known before. It piled itself a foot deep on the level ground, heaped up on fence and wall, covered the trees with ermine, until even the tenderest twig had its soft garment; bent telegraph poles as ruthlessly as if communication was the last thing to be cared for, blotted telephoning out of existence, delayed trains all over the north, turned electric and horse cars into nuisances, filled the streets and the railroad stations with impatient grumblers, had only one single redeeming thing, the beauty of its scenery, and a certain weird, uncanny feeling it brought of being suddenly taken out of a familiar world and dropped into one the like of which was never even imagined before.

There was one part of the community, however, that looked upon it with great favor.

"Now for the jolliest of sleigh-rides!" said a clique of Atherton boys. "Hurra for old Jerry Downer! We'll make him turn out this time!"

The roads between the two places were soon well worn, and not two days after the astonished world had waked to its surprise, Samuel Ray's best sleigh was hired, four extra sets of bells promised for the four horses, and a thoroughly organized "spree" was decided upon.

It was no use to ask Jerry to help them in any thing contrary to the rules; but through him they might convey to certain girls there the knowledge of their coming, and their plans for the evening. They would give Jerry a note to his sister; she would hand it to Mamie Smythe; and, once in her possession, the whole thing would take care of itself.

The bells were taken off from the horses and put carefully away in the bottom of the sleigh before it left the stable; the boys did not have it driven to the dormitories, as it did when they had a licensed ride, but met it at Wilbur's Corner.

They had a ready reason for this, and for the absence of the bells when Jerry noticed and inquired about them. It would not do to give him the least occasion to suspect them.

It was a beautiful night, with a bright moon making the cold landscape clearer and colder. There wasn't a young heart in either of these two educational towns that would not have leaped with joy over the pleasure of a sleigh-ride then and there.

A very merry ride the boys had as soon as they had cleared the thickly settled part of the town, breaking out into college songs, glees, snatches of wild music that the buoyant air caught up and carried on over the long reaches of the ghost-like road before them.

Jerry had a fine baritone voice, and he loved music. How he led tune after tune was a marvel and a delight. As they passed solitary farmhouses, where only a light shone from a back kitchen window, the quiet people there would drop their work and listen as the sleigh dashed by.

When the party reached Montrose, Jerry was told that "while he was making his visit they would drive on, and if they were not back in time he had better go home by the train, as they knew he would not like to be out late."

"And by the way," said Tom Lucas, taking a ticket out of his pocket, "here is a railroad ticket I bought the other day; you'd better use it, old fellow. I shall never want it—that is, if we are not

back in time for you."

The boys knew Jerry worked hard for every cent he had, and Tom would have felt mean if he had let a ride to which he had invited him be an expense.

The first thing he did when Susan came into the room was to give her the note intrusted to him; and Susan, understanding only too well what it meant, delivered it without any delay to Mamie Smythe.

Jerry's call was always a treat to his friends; and to-night, Marion coming with them, he had an evening the pleasure of which, in spite of what followed, he did not soon forget.

When it came time for him to leave, he saw with surprise that he could only by running catch his train, and, as the boys had not come back for him, he hurried away.

He found when he reached Atherton that the study hour had already passed, and, going to his room, he was met with,—

"I say, Jerry; Uncle John don't expect *you* to go stealing off on sleigh-rides without leave. Give an account of yourself."

"The party had leave, and when that is given, Uncle John don't trouble himself to single out every boy, and call him up to ask if he had his permission to go. It's all right."

But, in spite of this assertion, Jerry began to have suspicions that, as the boys had failed to come for him to return with them, it might, after all, be not quite in order; and with these doubts he did not find committing his lesson an easy task.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SLEIGH-RIDE.

When Susan hurried away from her brother to find Mamie Smythe and give her the note, she knew full well what it probably contained. Jerry had told her he had come over with a party of boys, and had the very best sleigh-ride he had ever had in his life; and when she asked the names of his companions, she recognized some, who, for reasons best known to herself, Miss Ashton had forbidden to be received as visitors to the academy. Mamie Smythe read the note with a heightening color. This was it,—

"Sleigh waiting corner of Bond and Centre Streets. Supper at Bascoms' Hall engaged for a dance. Bring six lively girls! 8 P.M. sharp.

SUB ROSA."

For a moment Mamie looked doubtfully into Susan's face. She would not have chosen her for one of the "lively girls;" but, now, as Susan knew something was going on, perhaps it would be best to ask her, if—Mamie had conscience enough to dally with this *if* for a moment; perhaps she might have longer, if there had been time, but as it was now half-past seven, and the time was "eight sharp," and the girls were to be chosen and notified, there was not a moment for parleying, even with so respectable a thing as her conscience, so she showed Susan the note.

"Oh, dear! that's too bad!" said Susan, as she finished reading it. "Jerry is here, and he won't go away before eight. What can I do? it would be just splendid!" And the tears actually came into her eyes.

"That's a pity!" and Mamie, more relieved than sorry, tried to look regretful. "But don't you tell. Promise me, Susan Downer, let come what may, you won't tell."

"I'm no tell-tale, Mamie Smythe, and I'll thank you not even to hint at such a thing. You'll all get expelled, as like as not, and, come to think of it, I'm real glad I'm not to go with you."

Before her sentence was finished, Mamie had flown out of the room, and wild with delight over the "fun" before her, she rapidly made her choice among the girls, not giving them time for consideration, but hurrying them with all speed into their best clothes. They crept out, one by one, through different ways. Myra Peters jumped from a window when she heard Miss Palmer's door open, sure that otherwise she would be found.

That her dress caught, that for a moment she hung between the moonlit sky and a deep snow-bank, seemed to her of no consequence, so she could escape. She left a bit of her best dress hanging on a hook, but this she did not know until afterwards.

The girls met in the street, near the large front gate, where a tall Norway spruce hid them entirely from the front windows of the academy. Certainly they were not a merry group when they came together. All they had to say to each other was in hushed and frightened tones the peril of their escape.

When they reached the corner of Bond and Centre Streets there stood the sleigh! How tempting it looked with its warm fur robes, its four gayly caparisoned horses, its driver, slapping his hands together to keep them warm, and the boys coming to meet them with such a merry

welcome!

Did they forget there was such a thing as consequences? Who can tell?

We would not if we could describe any further the occurrences of the evening. It was past twelve when the six girls, tired, frightened, locked out of the house by every door, found themselves—sleigh, horses, bells, boys, all gone—shivering under the back balcony, as forlorn a set of beings as the calm moon shone upon.

It was not for some time that Myra Peters remembered the window out of which she had clambered. If that were unlocked here might be an entrance that at this time of night would be wholly unobserved.

"But if it is?" asked the most frightened of the girls.

"Julia Abbey, you are always croaking," scolded shaking Mamie Smythe. "The next time I ask you to go anywhere, I shall know it!"

"I—I hope you never will; it—it don't pay," sobbed Julia.

One of the girls had tried the window, found it still unlocked, and had partly raised it. Now the question was, who would be the first one to go in? It was Mamie Smythe who felt the responsibility of the ride, and therefore the necessity of putting on a brave face, and taking whatever consequences followed.

"I'll go, girls," she said. "Some of you lift me."

Mamie was small and light; it was not a difficult thing to do, as she clung to the window-sill, and in a moment she had disappeared. Then her head came out of the window.

"All right, girls," she said in a whisper. "Come quickly, and as soon as you are in go softly right to your rooms. It's still as a mouse here."

Now there was a pushing among the girls, not who should venture as before, but who might go. They were too cold and alarmed not to be selfish, and their struggle for precedence delayed them, until Mamie impatiently called the one to come by name.

In this way, one after another safely entered, crept to their rooms unheard and unseen, leaving the tell-tale bit of dress hanging on the hook, and forgetting to fasten the window behind them.

If they had been all together in one corridor, their pale faces and poor recitations might, at least, have excited the teachers' suspicion that something was wrong; but, as it was, it only seemed to be an event of not very uncommon occurrence that some one should come into the class poorly prepared.

It now wanted ten days of Thanksgiving. Only a few of the pupils,—those who had come from Mexico, Texas, Oregon, San Francisco, and other distant places,—but had all their plans made for spending the festival at home; and these, with one exception, were invited away. The school was on the tiptoe of expectation, when, one morning after prayers, Miss Ashton sent for Susan Downer to come to her room.

This was the first time such a thing had happened to Susan, and if she had been an innocent girl she would have been elated by it; but, alas, we well know that she was not, so it was with much trepidation that she answered the summons.

"Susan," said Miss Ashton kindly, "I am in a good deal of trouble; I thought you might help me. How long is it since your brother came to see you?"

What a relief to Susan! Miss Ashton had often inquired about Jerry, and once came into the room to see him, so she answered glibly,—

"Week before last, on Wednesday."

"He came in the evening, I believe."

"Yes, ma'am: it was a beautiful moonlight night, and a party of boys that were taking a sleigh-ride brought him over."

"Did he go back with them?"

"I suppose so," said Susan unhesitatingly. Jerry had not told her of his possible return in the cars.

"Does your brother know many of the young ladies here?"

"He knows his cousins, of course, and Marion Parke, and some of the girls that happened to come into the parlor when he was here, to whom I introduced him."

"Can you tell me the names of the girls?"

Susan hesitated a moment. What could Miss Ashton want to know for? What could Jerry have done to make her suspect him?

All at once the thought of the sleigh-ride flashed upon her, and she colored violently. He had brought the note for Mamie Smythe. The girls had gone on the sleigh-ride. She had heard the whole story from them on their return.

Miss Ashton watched the color come and go; then she said quietly,—

"The names of the girls to whom you have introduced him, please."

Now, it so happened that these girls were not among the sleighing-party, and after a moment's

hesitation Susan named them.

"Thank you," Miss Ashton said pleasantly. "That is all now."

"All now, *now*," repeated Susan to herself, as she went back to her room. "Is there anything more to come by and by I wonder?"

Miss Drake, Susan's teacher in logic, found her a very absent-minded pupil during the next recitation, and gave her the lowest mark for the poorest lesson of the term.

In truth, the more Susan thought the matter over, the more troubled she became. Miss Ashton never would have asked those questions without a particular purpose. That she had no suspicions about "Storied West Rock" was plain, for not a question tended that way, but all toward the sleigh-ride; for the first time since it had taken place Susan felt glad that she had not gone.

She attached little importance to the giving of the note to Mamie Smythe. How was she to know its contents? She was not in the habit of opening other people's notes. To be sure, her conscience told her, she did know them, and, besides, that troublesome old adage would keep coming back to her, "The partaker is as bad as the thief."

Should Miss Ashton put the question point-blank to her, "Susan Downer, did, or did you not, know of the sleigh-ride?" What should she answer? To say she did, would be to bring not only herself, but all the other girls into trouble, perhaps to be the means of their being expelled.

To say she knew nothing about it would be to tell a *lie*. Susan dealt plainly enough with herself now, not even to cover it with the more respectable name of falsehood, and it was so hard to escape Miss Ashton if she were once on the track; she *would* find out, and if she did not expel her too, she would never respect her again.

It must be acknowledged, Susan's was a hard place; but she is not the first, and will by no means be the last, to learn that the way of the transgressor is often very, very hard.

"I don't care," was Susan's conclusion, after some hours of painful thought. "Thanksgiving is most here, and she'll forget it before we come back."

CHAPTER XIX.

DETECTIVES AT WORK.

Miss Ashton's forgetfulness was not of a kind to be depended upon. Mr. Stanton, the janitor, had come to her a few days after the sleigh-ride to tell her that he had found a back window unlocked; that he was sure he had locked it carefully before going to bed, and that under the window was the print of footsteps.

He "kind o' hated," he said, "to be a-telling on the gals, but then, agin, he hadn't been there nigh eighteen years without learning that gals were gals, as well as boys were boys, and weren't allers—not zactly allers—doin' jist right; perhaps it was best to let Miss Ashton know, and then—there now—he hated to do it awfully. If the gals found it out it might set 'em agin him."

"Mr. Stanton," said Miss Ashton gravely, "if you had made this discovery and kept it to yourself, you would have lost your place in twenty-four hours. Please show me the window."

The snow, for a wonder, remained as it was on the night of the ride, and looking from the window Miss Ashton saw the distinct marks of a number of feet around the bank into which Myra Peters had fallen. She also saw, and took off, the piece torn from her dress. This would surely give her a clew to one of the girls; but, before using it, she would make herself acquainted as far as possible with the time and circumstances when it had occurred.

Mr. Stanton could fix the morning when he found the window unlocked, and Miss Ashton remembered that on the previous evening Susan Downer's brother had been there to call.

This put a really serious aspect upon the matter. She immediately connected it with the boys from the Atherton Academy. She called a Faculty meeting, hoping some of the teachers had heard the girls go and come, or the sleigh, if indeed it had been a sleigh-ride that tempted them.

But none of them had heard the least noise after bedtime, nor even unusual sleigh-bells. If it had not been for the open window, the footprints, and the torn bit of dress, Miss Palmer, who prided herself upon, and made herself unpopular by, her vigilance, would have said it could not have happened; as it was, there was no denying it, and no question that something must be done.

Susan Downer's examination had proved so far satisfactory to Miss Ashton, that it had shown her there had been a sleigh-ride given by the Atherton boys; and she said reluctantly to herself, "I am afraid the reliable-looking young man, Jerry Downer, had a hand in it. How strange it is that we can trust young people so little!"

Then Miss Ashton felt ashamed of this feeling; for in her long experience she had known a great many true as gold, who had gone out from her training to be burning and shining lights in the

world.

The quickest way to get at the bottom of the whole, she thought after much deliberation, would be to take the bit of torn dress into the hall, and ask to which young lady it belonged.

Accordingly, after morning prayers, she asked the school to stop a few moments, held the piece of cloth up in her hand, and simply said,—

“The owner of it might need it for repairing her dress, and if she would remain after the others left, it would be at her disposal.”

The majority of the school laughed and chatted merrily about it. Some few came up to see if it could have by any luck belonged to the torn dresses of which not a few hung in their closets.

But no one claimed it! Here, then, was a dilemma! It would not be possible to go to every room, and examine the wardrobe of every scholar; besides, now it was known that the bit had been found, and might easily be made to lead to a discovery of the guilty ones, what more natural than that the dress should be hidden away, or sent from the academy building to prevent the possibility of detection!

Miss Ashton was disappointed over this failure. She was not much of a detective, and had less reason for being so than falls to the lot of many teachers.

She wrote to the principal of the Atherton Academy, inquiring whether he had given leave to a party of his boys to take a sleigh-ride on the night of the twentieth of November. She knew Jerry Downer had been one of them, as he had called on his sister, who was one of her pupils, on that night.

She received an immediate answer, saying, “He had not given leave for any sleigh-ride on that night, and was both surprised and sorry that a boy he had always considered so reliable as Jerry Downer should have been among them. He would inquire into the matter at once.”

And he lost no time; sending for Jerry, he put the question point-blank, his usual straightforward way of dealing with his boys,—

“Did you go on a sleigh-ride the evening of the twentieth of November?”

“Yes, sir,” said Jerry unhesitatingly.

“Did I give you leave to go?”

“No, sir; but I supposed the party had asked you, or they would not have gone.”

“Your supposition was entirely erroneous. My leave had never been asked. Who besides yourself made up the party?”

Now Jerry hesitated: he could take the blame of his own going, but it would be mean in him to tell the names of his companions.

“Mr.—Uncle John (the principal smiled grimly as he heard this familiar name), I mean Dr. Arkwright,” said Jerry, the color browning, instead of reddening his sea-tanned face, “I am very sorry, sir; I thought they had leave; I would not have gone.”

“Don’t *think* again; *know*, Jerry Downer: that is the only way for a boy that wants to do right. You will tell me, if you please, the names of your companions.”

“Would that be honorable in me, sir?” asked Jerry, now looking the doctor straight in the eye.

A look of doubt passed over the principal’s face before he answered, then he said with less austerity,—

“I must find out in some way who among my boys have broken my rules; you can help me more directly than any one else.”

“Would it be honorable in me?” repeated Jerry.

“You are not here to ask questions, but to answer them. Are you going to refuse to help me by giving me the names of the boys?”

“I cannot, indeed I cannot; it would be so mean in me. You must punish me any way I deserve, sir; I am willing to bear it; but I cannot tell on the boys.”

“Very well, Jerry Downer; you are dismissed,” and he waved Jerry out of the room.

But after Jerry had gone, he went to the window and stood watching him.

“That is a generous boy!” he said; “but he has made a mistake. He will see it when he is older and wiser. He will learn that true manhood helps law and order, not even the idea of honor coming before it, noble as it is.”

Still the difficulty of unravelling the matter remained with him in as much doubt as it did with Miss Ashton; but with both of these excellent principals there was no question but that it must be sifted to the bottom, the delinquents discovered and punished.

The time for doing this was short; and should it be necessary to expel a pupil, the coming vacation offered a suitable occasion.

Soon after, Miss Ashton, going through the corridor one evening, found two girls in close and excited conversation,—Myra Peters and Julia Dorr.

They did not see her at first, so she was quite near enough to them to catch a few words.

“You may say what you please,” said Julia Dorr. “I’m as sure of it as sure can be; I’ve sat close

by you time and again when you had it on, and if I had been you I would have owned it."

"Owned it!" snarled Myra Peters, "will you be kind enough to mind your own business, and let other people's alone, Miss Interferer?"

"Well, interferer or not, I've half a mind to go and tell Miss Ashton."

"Tell Miss Ashton what?" asked a voice close beside them.

The girls turned, to find Miss Ashton there.

"Tell Miss Ashton what?" she asked again pleasantly; "I always like to hear good news. What is this about?"

Now, nothing had really been farther from Julia's intention than to tell on Myra. She was one of those who had gone up to the desk when Miss Ashton showed the piece of cloth, and had recognized it as like a dress she had seen Myra wear. That there was anything of more importance attached to it than the ability to mend the dress neatly, she did not think, so she answered readily,—

"Why, Miss Ashton, that piece of cloth you showed us was exactly like Myra's dress. I've seen it a hundred times; but she declares she never had a dress like it, and we were quarrelling about it. I wish you would show it to her close up, and see if she don't have to give in."

"I will; come to my room, Myra!" and she led the way there, Myra following with a frightened, sullen face.

Then she found the piece, and laid it on the table.

"Myra," she said, after looking at the girl kindly for a moment, "is this like your dress? Tell me truly; it is much the best thing for you to do."

Myra gazed at the cloth for a moment, then burst into a flood of tears.

"So you were one of the sleighing-party?" said Miss Ashton quietly. "Will you tell me who were with you?"

If Myra had not been taken so entirely by surprise, she might, probably would, have refused to answer, for honor is as dear to girls as to boys; but she sobbed out one name after another, until the six stood confessed.

"Thank you," was all Miss Ashton said, then she handed Myra the tell-tale cloth, and added, "You had better put it neatly in the place from which it was torn."

She opened her door, and Myra, wiping her eyes, went quickly out and back to her room.

Hardly conscious what she was doing, with an impatient desire to get away, she began to pack her trunk.

"I will go home, home, home!" she kept repeating to herself. "I never will see one of those girls again. Oh, dear, dear! If I only hadn't gone on that sleigh-ride; that abominable Mamie Smythe is always getting the girls in trouble: I perfectly detest her. What will my father say?"

CHAPTER XX.

REPENTANCE.

It is a common error that to send a girl into a boarding-school to finish her education is to bring her out a model, not only in learning, but in accomplishments and character.

Here were two hundred girls, coming from nearly two hundred different families, each one brought up, until she was in her teens, in different ways. Looking over the population of a small village, the most careless observer must see how unlike the homes are; how every grade of morals and manners is represented, and with what telling effect they show themselves in the characters of the young trained under their roofs.

It happened often that Montrose Academy was looked upon by anxious parents—who were just discovering, in wilfulness, disobedience, perhaps in matters more serious even than these, the mistakes they had made in the education of their daughters—as a sort of reformatory school, where Miss Ashton took in the erring, and after one or more years sent them out perfect in every good work and way.

While Miss Ashton made all inquiries in her power to prevent any undesirable girls from joining her school, she was often imposed upon, sometimes by concealments, and not unseldom by positive falsehoods, but oftener by the parental fondness which could see nothing but good in a spoiled, darling child.

It often happened that with just such characters Miss Ashton was very successful, not seldom receiving a girl of a really fine nature which had been distorted by home influences, and sending her away, after years of patient work, with this nature so fully developed and improved that her whole family rose to her standard.

Instances of this kind made Miss Ashton careful in her discipline. She well understood that a girl once expelled from a school, no matter how lightly her friends might appear to regard the occurrence, was under a ban, which time and circumstances might remove, but might not.

In the case of this sleigh-ride, the disobedience to known and strictly enforced rules made her more anxiety than any case of a similar kind had given her for years.

She knew now the names of the girls concerned: they had given her trouble before. Mamie Smythe she had often been on the point of sending home, but she was one of those characters with fine traits, capable of being very good or very bad in her life's work. The mother was a wealthy widow, Mamie her only child. Spoiled by weak and foolish fondness she had been; but her brightness, her loveliness, her cheery, witty, sunshiny ways remained.

Evidently, here she was the accountable one; she should be expelled as a lesson to the school, but to expel her meant, *what?*

She had wealth, she had position, she would in a few years be able to wield an influence that, in the right direction, would outweigh that of almost any other girl in school.

To be sent home, back to that weak mother, with a life of frivolous pleasures before her, what, under these circumstances, was it the wisest and best thing to do?

Favoritism for the rich or the poor was not one of Miss Ashton's faults. By this time the whole school knew of the ride, of its discovery, and was holding its breath over the probable consequences.

The girls said, "Miss Ashton grew thin and pale from the worry." The feeling of the school, most of whom were tenderly attached to her, was decidedly against those who had troubled her; and if she could have known the true state of the case, when she was neither eating nor sleeping, in her anxiety to do what was right, she would have found that the good for order, discipline, and propriety, which was growing from this evil done, was to exceed any influence she could hope to exert, even from the severest act of just discipline.

She was to be helped in a most unexpected way.

Two days after her interview with Myra Peters, there was a soft tap on her door, and opening it, there stood Mamie Smythe!

Her face, usually covered with smiles, was grave and even sad.

"Miss Ashton," she said, without waiting to close the door, "please don't be hard on the other girls. It was all my fault; I was the Eve that tempted them. I know it was wrong; I know it was *dreadful* wrong! I was worse than Eve; I was the serpent that tempted Eve! They wouldn't a single one of them have gone if it hadn't been for me! Do, please, Miss Ashton, punish me, and not them! They never, never, *never* would have gone if I hadn't tempted them. Please, please, Miss Ashton! I'll do anything; I'll get extra lessons for a year! I won't have a single spread; I'll be good; you won't know me, Miss Ashton, I'll be so good; and I'll bear any punishment. You may ferule me, as they do in district schools," and she held out a little diamond-ringed hand toward Miss Ashton; "I'll be shut up for a week in a dark closet, and live on bread and water. You may do anything you please with me, only spare them," and she looked so earnestly and imploringly up in Miss Ashton's face, that her heart, in spite of her better judgment, was touched; all she said was,—

"Tell me about it, Mamie."

"When Susan gave me the note," began Mamie. Miss Ashton started. "Susan who?" she asked, for Susan Downer had not confessed to any note; indeed, had virtually denied connection with the ride.

"Susan Downer, of course; she gave me the note. Her brother brought it to her, and I was wild with joy to have a sleigh-ride. It was such a bright moon, and the sleighing looked so fine, I wanted all day to ask you to let me have a big sleigh, and take the girls out, but I knew you wouldn't."

"Yes, I should have," interrupted Miss Ashton.

"That's just awful," said Mamie, after a moment's reflection; "and if I'd been brave enough to ask you, nothing of this would have happened."

"I hadn't time to think only of the girls—you know them all, Miss Ashton!"

"And who were the boys?" asked Miss Ashton, thinking perhaps she might aid the other troubled principal.

"The boys! oh, the boys!" and Mamie's face looked truly distressed now. "Please don't ask me, Miss Ashton. I'd cut my tongue out before I'd tell you!"

"Very well, go on with your ride."

Then Mamie repeated fully and truly all that a girl in the flush of excitement caused by a stolen sleigh-ride could be expected to remember, not palliating one thing, from the supper to the dance, and the clamber in at midnight through the open window.

If at some points a little laugh gurgled up from her fun-loving soul, as she told her tale, Miss Ashton understood, and forgave it.

"I thank you, Mamie," said she at last; and she stroked the little hand given to her so loyally for the sacrificial feruling, but she turned her eyes away. What Mamie might have read there, she

dared not trust to the girl's quick sight; indeed, she hardly dared to trust the feeling that prompted it in herself.

There was no use to have another Faculty meeting, and depend upon it for help; she must settle the trouble alone.

It was Susan Downer who was next called to the principal's room.

She went tremblingly. What was to happen to her now? Miss Ashton knew the girls' names who went on the sleigh-ride, and as yet no one had been punished. Could it be about "Storied West Rock"? How Susan by this time hated its very name, and how much she would have given if she had never known it, she could best have told.

"Susan," said Miss Ashton, as with a pale face and downcast eyes the girl stood before her, "when I asked you about your brother's visit to you on the night of the sleigh-ride, you did not tell me of the note he gave you, and you gave to Mamie Smythe. If you had, you would have saved me many troubled hours."

"You did not ask me," said Susan promptly.

"True. Did you know the contents of the note?"

"Mamie asked me to go with them, but I refused. I was afraid you wouldn't like it, and I'd much rather lose a ride any time than displease you;" and Susan, as she said this, looked bravely in Miss Ashton's face.

"That's all," the principal said gravely, and Susan, with a lighter heart than that with which she had entered, left the room; but Miss Ashton thought, as she watched the forced smile on the girl's face, "There's one that can't be trusted; what a pity, for she is not without ability!" Then she remembered the story she had read and praised, and wondered over it.

Two days before the time for the term to close, Miss Ashton received this note:—

OUR DEAR MISS ASHTON,—We, the undersigned, do regret in sackcloth and ashes our serious misconduct in going away at an improper time, and in an improper manner, on a sleigh-ride, without your consent and approval.

We promise, if you will forgive us, and restore us to your trust and affection, that we will never, NEVER be guilty of such a misdemeanor again. That we will try our best faithfully to observe the rules of the school, and endeavor to be good and faithful scholars.

Pray forgive and test us!

MAMIE SMYTHE, HELEN NORRIS,
JANE SOMERS, JULIA ABBEY,
MYRA PETERS, ETTA SPRING.

Miss Ashton smiled as she read the note. Repentance by the wholesale she had never found very reliable; and in this instance she would have had much more confidence if the girls had come to her, and made a full confession, without waiting to be found out.

It was not until after two sleepless nights that she came to the conclusion to give them further trial; and when she called them to her room, one by one, and had a long and faithful talk with them, sending them from her tenderly penitent, she felt sure her course had been a right one.

Then she made a short speech to the school, went over briefly what had happened, not in the least sparing the impropriety of the stolen ride, but, on account of the repentance and promises from the girls concerned, she had decided not to expel them now, but to give them a chance to redeem the character they had lost. The school clapped her enthusiastically as she closed.

CHAPTER XXI.

ACCEPTING A THANKSGIVING INVITATION.

A week before Thanksgiving, Marion Parke received this note from her Aunt Betty:—

DEAR NIECE,—If you haven't anywhere else to go, and have money to come with, you can take the cars from Boston up here and spend Thanksgiving Day with us at Belden. Your pa used to think a lot of coming here when he went to college—the great pity he ever went. He might have been well-to-do if he had stuck to farming, but he always hankered after an eddication, and he got it, and nothin' else. Your Cousin Abijah will drive over in his cutter and bring you here. Don't have nothing to do with Isaac Bumps; he'll charge you twenty-five cents, and tell you it's a mile and a half from the station to my house, but it's only a mile, and don't you hear to him, for your Cousin Abijah can't come until after the milking, and if the cows are fractious, it may make him belated.

I am your great-aunt,
BETSY PARKE.

Marion had previously received a letter from her father, saying,—

“If you have an invitation from your Aunt Betty to spend Thanksgiving with her in Belden, by all means accept it. I want you to see the town in which I was born; there is not a mountain or a valley there that does not often cover these flat prairie-lands with their remembered beauty. As they were a part of my boyish life, so are they a part of my man’s; and when you come home we can talk of them together. I was not born in the old farmhouse where your aunt now lives, but my father was, and his father, and his father’s father, and your Aunt Betty was a kind, loving sister to your grandfather long years ago.

“Go, and write me all about the old home, all about the old aunt, and make her forget, if you can, that I would not be a farmer.”

Before the coming of this letter, Marion had many invitations from her schoolmates to spend Thanksgiving with them at their homes. Her room-mates were very urgent that she should go to Rock Cove; and besides her longing to see that wonderful mysterious thing, the ocean, she had learned so much of their homes during the weeks they had been together, that she almost felt as if she knew all the friends there, and would be sure of a welcome.

But her father’s letter left her no choice, and a few cordial lines of acceptance went from her to her Aunt Betty by the next mail. Of this decision Miss Ashton heartily approved.

And now began in the school the pleasant bustle which precedes this holiday vacation. Recitations were gone through by the hardest. Meals were eaten in indigestible haste; devotional exercises were filled with “wandering thoughts and worldly affections.”

All through the long corridors and out from the open doors came crowded, eager words of inquiry and consultation. One would have thought who heard them, that these girls had been close prisoners, breaking away from a hard, dull life, instead of what most of them really were, happy girls bound for a frolic.

Miss Ashton heard it all without the least injury to her feelings. She had heard it for years, and, in truth, was as glad of her vacation as any of her girls.

A journey alone in a new country, with the beauty of the autumn all gone, and the rigors of a New England winter already beginning to show themselves, made Marion, self-reliant as she usually was, not a little timid as she saw the tall academy building lost behind the hills, between which the cars were bearing her on to New Hampshire. A homesick feeling took possession of her, and a dread that she might find Kate Underwood’s tableaux a reality when she should reach her old aunt in the mountain-girded farmhouse.

Three hours’ ride through a bare and uninteresting country brought her to Belden.

The day was extremely cold here. The snow, which had seemed to her very deep at Montrose, lay piled up in huge drifts, not a fence nor a shrub to be seen. All around were spurs of the White Mountains, white, literally, as she looked up to them, from their base to their summit. There were great brown trees clinging stiff and frozen to their steep sides; sharp-pointed rocks, raising their great heads here and there from among the trees.

Majestic, awful, solemn they looked to this prairie child, as she stood on the cold platform of the little station gazing up at them.

A voice said behind her, startling her,—

“You’d better come in, marm. It’s what we call a terrible cold day for Thanksgiving week. Come in, and warm you.”

Marion turned, to see a man in a buffalo overcoat, with whiskers the same color as the fur, eyes that looked the same, a big red nose, a buffalo fur cap pulled well down over his ears, with mittens to match.

He stood in an open door, to which he gave a little push, as if to emphasize his invitation.

Inside the ladies’ room of the station a red-hot stove sent out a cheerful welcome. To this the man added stick after stick of dry pine wood, much to Marion’s amusement and comfort, as she watched him.

“Come from down South?” he asked, after he had convinced himself of the impossibility of crowding in another.

“From the West,” said Marion pleasantly.

“You don’t say so. You ain’t Aunt Betty Parke’s niece, now, be ye?”

“I am Marion Parke. Did you know my father?”

“Let me see. Was your father Philip Parke? Phil, we used to call him when he was a boy, the one that would have an eddication, and went a home-missionarying after he got chock-full of books. Aunt Betty, she took it hard. Be he your father?”

“Yes,” said Marion, laughing; “he is my father.”

“You don’t say so, wull, naow, I’m beat. You don’t favor him not a mite; you sarten don’t. An’ you’re here to get an eddication too, be ye?”

“Yes; that’s what I hope to do. I’m sorry it’s so cold here; I should like to walk to my aunt’s if it were not.”

The man gave a chuckle, which Marion did not at all understand, jammed the stove full of wood

again, and remarked as he crowded in the last knot,—

“There’s your Cousin Abijah; I know his old cowbells a mile off! Better get warm!”

Marion was hovering close over the stove when the door opened and Cousin Abijah entered.

“There you be,” he called out hilariously as he saw her. “Not froze nuther! You’re clear grit! I told your Aunt Betty so, and she said ‘seein’ was believin’.’ As soon as I’ve thawed my hands a mite, we’ll be joggin’. Dan, that’s the hoss, isn’t the safest to drive in the dark.”

The early twilight was already dropping down over the hills before “the mite of thawing” was done, and then wrapped up in an old blanket shawl Aunt Betty had sent, and covered by two well-worn buffaloes, they started.

What a ride it was! Marion will never forget how Dan crawled along up a mountain road, where the path ran between huge snow-drifts, under beetling rocks that looked as if an avalanche might at any moment fall from them and crush horse and riders in the sleigh. Sometimes going under arches of old pine-trees, the arms of which had met and interlocked, long, long years ago; up steep declivities, where the horse seemed almost over their heads, down steep declivities, where they seemed over the horse’s head, never meeting any one, only hearing the dull moaning of the wind among the forest trees, and the louder moaning of old Dan, as he toiled painfully along.

At last there came an opening that widened until they crossed the mountain spur, and the little village of Belden lay before them.

Marion saw a church steeple, a few houses, a sawmill, and great spaces covered with snow. To one of these houses, on the outskirts of the village, Cousin Abijah drove. The house was a two-storied old farmhouse, innocent of paint or blind. There was not a fence round, or a tree near it. On one side was a wooden well-top, with a long arm holding an iron-bound bucket above it, the arm swinging from a huge beam, from which, in its turn, swung two large stones, suspended from the well-sweep by an iron chain. A well-worn foot-path came from a back door to it, and on this path stood a yellow dog, nose in air, and tail beating time on a snow-bank.

It was the only living thing to be seen, and Marion’s heart sank within her. She was cold, tired, and homesick; and she saw at once that around the small front door, before which Cousin Abijah in his gallantry had stopped, no footstep had left a mark. The snow-bank reached to the handle, clung to it, and as absolutely refused entrance, as did a shrill voice which at once made itself heard, but from whence Marion could not conjecture. It said, however, “Go round to the back door! What’s good enough for me, is good enough for them that come to see me!”



“I hope I see you well,” said a not unkindly voice, as Marion stepped out of the sleigh.—Page 143. *Miss Ashton’s New Pupil*.

CHAPTER XXII.

AUNT BETTY'S RECEPTION OF HER GUEST.

When the sleigh stopped before the back door, it was slowly opened, and Marion saw a tall, lank old woman with thin gray hair, small, faded blue eyes, a long, sharp nose, and thin lips, standing in it.

"I hope I see you well," said a not unkindly voice, and something like a smile played over the hard old face. A knotty hand was held out toward her, and when she put hers timidly within it, it drew her into a large kitchen, where a cooking-stove, that shone like a mirror, sent out rays of heat even to the open door.

It was like Kate Underwood's "Tableau kitchen," yet how different! It had such an air of cleanliness and comfort, that everything, even to the old chairs and tables, the long rows of bright pewter that adorned a swinging shelf, the hams clothed in spotless bags, hanging from the old crane in the big chimney, all had a certain air of refinement which went at once to Marion's heart.

Aunt Betty took off one of the lids of the stove, jammed in all the wood it could be made to hold, then moved a straw-bottomed chair, laced and interlaced with twine to keep the broken straw in place, close to the stove, and motioned Marion to sit down in it.

Then she stood at a little distance looking at her curiously. "You don't favor the Parkes," she said, after a slow examination. "You look more like your Aunt Jerushy; she was on my mother's side. Your brown hair is hern, and your gray eyes; you feature her too. When you're warm through, you can go up-stairs and lay off your things. I don't have folks staying with me often, but I'm glad to see you."

This she said with a certain heartiness that went straight to Marion's heart. She held up her face for a welcoming kiss, and, blushing like a young girl, Aunt Betty, after a quick look around the room, as if to be sure no one saw her, bent down, and kissed for the first time in twenty years.

Then Marion followed her up some steep stairs, leading from the kitchen to an unfinished room under the rafters. Here everything again was as neat as wax, but how desolate! An unpainted bedstead of pine wood, holding a round feather-bed covered with a blue-and-white homespun bed-quilt; a strip of rag carpet on a floor grown beautiful from the care bestowed upon it; a small table covered with a homespun linen towel, a Bible in exactly the middle of it; two old yellow chairs, and not another thing.

It was lighted by a three-cornered window, which Marion learned afterward, being over the front door, was considered the one choice ornament of the house.

In spite of its desolation, its neatness was still a charm to her. It was, as she knew, the family homestead, and that subtle influence, so strong yet so indescribable, seemed to her to brood over the room. Here generation after generation of those whose blood was running now so blithely through her veins had lived, died, and gone out from it. Gently reverent she stood on its threshold. Aunt Betty, looking at her curiously, wondered at her.

It had never been warmed excepting from the heat that had come up from the kitchen stove. For the first time in her long life, Aunt Betty found herself wishing there was a chimney and a large air-tight stove in it; it would be fitter for a young girl like this visitor.

But Marion had been by no means accustomed to luxuries. She made herself at home at once. She hung her hat upon a nail which was carefully covered with white cloth to prevent its rusting anything, and put her valise, not upon the table with the Bible, or on the clean, blue bed-quilt, but up in a corner by itself.

Aunt Betty watched all these movements, every now and then nodding her gray head in silent approval.

Then they went back to the kitchen, Marion taking a Greek play with her to read,—one of Euripides. She had promised herself much pleasure during this short vacation in finishing the play which her class were studying at the end of the term.

Aunt Betty, walking back and forth around the kitchen, stopped now and then at her elbow, and peeped curiously inside the open leaves.

An object of Marion's in taking the book had been to relieve her aunt of any feeling that she must entertain her; if she had been older and wiser she would have seen her mistake.

She was trying to puzzle out a line of the chorus, when a voice said close to her ear,—

"Be that a Bible you are readin'?"

Marion gave a little start, certainly there was nothing very Scriptural in the play.

"No-o-o," she stammered; "it's a Greek play, a—a tragedy."

"A tragedy! you don't read none of them wicked things!" severely.

"Why, yes, auntie, when they come in the course of my study. It's in Greek!"

"Greek! and you're a gal! Your father allers was cracked about it, but this beats all!"

Marion failed to see it in just that light, but she said pleasantly, "I'll put it away if it troubles you."

A long arm pointed up-stairs, and Marion followed its direction.

When she came down, it seemed to Aunt Betty, in spite of her displeasure, that the rays of sunlight that were glimmering so faintly at the head of the stairs came down with her and lighted up the dingy old kitchen.

"Now give me something to do," said Marion dancing up to her with one of the prettiest steps she had learned at the academy. "It's Thanksgiving, you know, to-morrow, and we have such lots and lots to do at home; there's pies and puddings and cakes and a big turkey to prepare, and a chicken pie, and nuts to crack, and apples to rub until you can see your face in them."

Aunt Betty's mouth and eyes opened as wide as they could for the wrinkles that held them while Marion told of the festival dinner, then she looked down at Marion's feet, and, not satisfied with the glimpse she caught of a pair of little boots, she lifted Marion's dress, then asked,—

"Be you lame?"

At first Marion was puzzled, then she remembered how she had danced into the room, so, with a merry peal of laughter, instead of answering, off she went into a series of *pirouettes* that might have astonished more accustomed eyes than those of her old Aunt Betty.

When she had danced herself out of breath she said, "Does that look like being lame? Better set me at work and let me use my feet to some more useful purpose!"

So still and stiff Aunt Betty stood that Marion could hardly restrain herself from catching hold of her and whirling her around in a waltz.

But fortunately she did not, for the first words her aunt said were,—

"Do you have Satan for a principal at your school, Marion Parke?"

"Satan! Why, auntie, we have Miss Ashton, and she's the loveliest Christian lady you ever saw. We girls think she is almost an angel! Do you think it's wicked to dance?"

"Sartain I do;" and the shake of Aunt Betty's gray head left no doubt she was in earnest.

"Then I'll not dance while I am here," and Marion sat herself down demurely in the nearest chair.

Aunt Betty looked at the big clock in the corner of the kitchen. The early dark was already creeping into the room, hiding itself under table and chair, showing the light of the isinglass doors of the cooking-stove with a fitful radiance, making Marion lonely and homesick, for you could hear the clock tick, the room was so still. Then Aunt Betty lighted two yellow tallow candles that stood in iron candlesticks on the mantel-shelf, put up a leaf of the kitchen table, covered it with a clean homespun cloth, put upon it two blue delft plates and cups, a "chunk" of cold boiled pork, a bowl of cider apple-sauce, a loaf of snow-white bread, and a plate of doughnuts.

"Come to supper!" she said, and Marion went. How hungry she was, and how good everything, even the cold boiled pork, looked, she will not soon forget!

Before they seated themselves, Aunt Betty stood at the back of her chair, and, leaning on its upper round with her eyes fixed on the pork, she said,—

"For all our vittles and other marcies we thank Thee."

Marion, when she became aware of what was taking place, bowed her head reverently; but when she raised it she could not conceal the smile that played around her mouth.

She did not know this was the same grace which had been said over that table for one hundred and twenty years; yet it made her feel more at home, and she began to chat with her quaint old relative in her pleasant way, telling her of her home, of their daily life there, of the good her father was doing, and how every one loved and respected him.

Aunt Betty listened in silence, only now and then uttering a grunt, which, whether it was commendatory or condemnatory, Marion could not tell. It was a long, dull evening that followed. At eight, one of the tallow candles, much to her joy, lighted Marion to her bed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ACADEMY GIRL'S THANKSGIVING AT THE OLD HOMESTEAD.

Marion never knew that shortly after she fell asleep a tall, gaunt woman with a gray-and-white blanket over her shoulders stole softly into her room, holding her candle high above her bed, and standing over, peered down at her.

As she gazed, a half-smile crept into her rugged face. "Pretty creatur!" she said aloud; then, with deft and careful fingers she tucked the bed-clothes close around the sleeping girl, smiled

broadly, and crept out.

The next morning when Marion waked, through the odd little oriel window the late winter light was struggling fitfully in. At first she could not tell where she was: the rafters over her head, the bare white walls that surrounded her, the blue-and-white homespun quilt that covered her, were unlike any thing she had ever seen before.

She was on her feet in a moment, half frightened at the dim light. Had another night come? Had she slept over Thanksgiving?

When she went to the kitchen, Aunt Betty was there busy over the cooking-stove. She was about making an apology for her lateness, but she was interrupted by,—

“Taint never too late to pray; you may read the Bible.” She pointed without another word to the old family Bible. Marion took it, opened it slowly, waiting to be told where to read.

“Thanksgiving,” said Aunt Betty briefly.

“It’s all Thanksgiving my father says. He thinks the Bible was given us to make us happy.”

“Thirty-fourth Psalm, then,” and a quiet look came into the old seamed face.

When Marion had read it, her aunt rose from her chair, stepped behind it, tilted it on its front legs, and folding her hands on its top began to pray.

Like the grace at table, it was the same old prayer that had gone up from that same old kitchen for one hundred and twenty years. Its quaint simplicity was a marvel to the young girl who listened, but a breath of its devotion reached and touched her heart.

Then followed breakfast. Marion wondered, as they two sat at the table alone, how the old aunt could have borne the loneliness for so many long years.

To her, on her first Thanksgiving away from her cheerful home, there was something positively uncanny in the silence which settled down over the house; even the old yellow dog, with his nose between his front paws, slept soundly, and the great red rooster that had lighted upon the forked stick that before the back door had held the farm milk-pails for more than a century, instead of calling for his Thanksgiving breakfast, as orthodox New England roosters are expected to do, just flapped his wings lazily, and turned a much becombed head imploringly toward the kitchen window.

What was to be done with the long, dull festival day? Marion may be forgiven if she cast many longing thoughts back to the academy, to the pleasant bustle that filled the long corridors, the merry laughs of the girls, the endless chatter, the coming and the going that seemed to her never to cease. She was homesick to see Miss Ashton, her room-mates, and Helen, over whose daily life she had already installed herself as responsible for its comforts and its pleasures, and who, homeless and poor, remained almost by herself in the great empty building.

She was not, however, left long in doubt as to the day’s occupations. Hardly had the breakfast dishes been put away, when Aunt Betty said,—

“Meetin’ begins at ten. We hain’t got no bell, and we’ll start in season. You can put on your things.”

The clock said nine; meeting began at ten. Five minutes were all she needed for preparation. Here was time for a few lines at least of that Greek tragedy. She had read one line, when the door opened, and there stood Aunt Betty.

“Listen, Aunt Betty!” she said. “Hear how soft these words are.” Then she rattled off line after line of the chorus. This is Greek, she said, pausing to take breath. “Listen! I will translate for you.”

She carried her book to the oriel window, so the light would fall more clearly on its page, and began,—

“Before the mirror’s golden round,
Curious my braided hair I bound,
Adjusted for the night;
And now, disrobed, for rest prepared,
Sudden tumultuous cries are heard,
And shrieks of wild affright.
Grecians to Grecians shouting call,
‘Now let the haughty city fall;
In dust her towers, her rampiers lay,
And bear triumphant her rich spoils away.’”

“Doesn’t that roll along sublimely? Can’t you hear the cries and the shouts of the Grecian host?”

“I can hear Marion Parke making a fool of herself. Be you, or be you not, goin’ to meetin’ with me?”

“Meeting? Why, of course I am. I wouldn’t miss it for anything. I’ll be ready in half a minute. Will you?”

Aunt Betty, in her short black skirt, her old gray sack, and her heavy shoes, did not make much of a holiday appearance. Something of this crept slowly into her brain as she looked down, so she turned quickly, and went away without another word.

Marion gave some girl-like twists to her brown hair, pinned a gay scarlet bow to the neck of her

sack, and, looking fresh and pretty as a rosebud, went to the kitchen, where she had to wait some time before Aunt Betty made her appearance.

Cousin Abijah had brought the old horse and sleigh round to the back door. Here a long slanting roof ran down to the lintel of the door, and up to the plain cornice snow-drifts lay piled. What a winter scene it was! Marion, never having seen the like before, gazed at it in wondering admiration.

When Aunt Betty and Marion started for the village meeting-house, the thermometer was fifteen degrees below zero.

Aunt Betty took a rein in each hand, and as soon as the snow-banks bordering the narrow path to the road were safely passed, began a series of jerks at the horse's mouth, which Dan perfectly well understood, too well, indeed, to allow himself to be hurried in the least.

"One foot up, and one foot down,
That's the way to Lunnon town,"

laughed Marion when they had gone a few rods.

"Click! Click!" with more decisive tugs from Dan's mistress; but the "Clicks," as well as the tugs, were of no avail, and Marion, afraid to venture another comment, turned her eyes from the horse to the scenery around her.

Notwithstanding the extreme cold, the ride to the little meeting-house Marion will never forget. When she left the farmhouse it seemed to her a short walk would bring her to the foot of the snow-clad mountains; but, to her surprise, when they reached the church they were towering up above the small village like huge sentinels, so still, so grand, that, hardly conscious she was speaking aloud, Marion said,—

"I never knew before what it meant in the Bible where it says, 'The strength of the hills is his also.' Wonderful! wonderful!"

"Eh?" asked Aunt Betty, only a dim comprehension of what Marion meant having crept in beneath the big red hood that covered her head.

Marion repeated the verse, and to her surprise her aunt answered it with, "'Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying grace! grace unto it.'" Not a word did she offer in explanation; she only twitched the horse's head more emphatically, and did not speak again until she reached the meeting-house door.

What a desolate-looking audience-room it was! Up in one corner roared a big iron stove, which, do its best, failed to warm but a few feet of the spaces around it. A gray-bearded minister in his overcoat was reading from the pulpit a hymn, as they went in, and a dozen people, most of them men, were scattered round in the bare pews.

They all looked pleased to see an addition to their number, and some nodded to Aunt Betty; all stared at the new-comer.

There was no sermon, but a short address, which Marion strove to remember, that she might repeat it to her father, as having come from the old pulpit before which he had worshipped as a boy; but, do her best to be attentive and decorous, her teeth chattered, and the "Amen" was to her the most interesting part of the services.

The ride home was even colder than the one to the meeting; for a brisk north-east wind had risen, and came howling down from the mountains in strong, long gusts that betokened a coming storm.

Dan obstinately refused to move one foot faster than he chose, and before they reached home they were thoroughly and, indeed, dangerously benumbed with the cold.

Little thought had they of Thanksgiving, as they clung to the warm stove and listened to the rising of the wind. It was Marion who first remembered the day, and looked about for some way of keeping it. Poor, pinched, half-frozen Aunt Betty had entirely forgotten it.

Now Marion made herself perfectly at home. She found old-fashioned china that would have been held precious in many houses, decorating with it the table in a deft and tasteful way that warmed lonely Aunt Betty's heart, as she watched her, more than the blazing fire could; and while she worked, she talked, or sang little snatches of college songs learned at school, which rippled out in her rich voice with a melody never heard in the old farmhouse before.

It was not long before Aunt Betty came to her help, and such a bountiful dinner as she had prepared made Marion wish over and over again that Helen, alone in that large academy building, could have been there to share it with her.

"Thanksgiving night!" Marion kept saying this to herself over and over again, as she sat alone with Aunt Betty over the kitchen stove.

A little oblong light stand was drawn up between them, holding a small kerosene lamp. Not a book but the Bible, and a copy of the Farmer's Almanac suspended by a string from the corner of the mantel, was to be seen. Marion, having heard so much of the intelligence of the New Hampshire farmers, supposed of course there would be a library in the house, and had brought only her Greek Tragedy with her. This she did not dare open again, so there she sat, Aunt Betty, not having yet entirely recovered from the effects of her cold ride, alternately nodding and rousing herself to a vain effort to keep her eyes open. And all the time the storm was increasing,

the wind rocking the house with its rough blasts, until it seemed to utter loud groans, and the sharp cold snapping and cracking the shaking timbers with short volleys of sound like gunshots. Frightened mice scurried about in the low roof over the kitchen; and rats, lonely rats, seeking company, came to the top of the cellar stairs, pushing the door open with their pointed noses, and blinking in beseechingly with their big round eyes.

Marion, who had never heard anything of the kind before, was really frightened.

"O Aunt Betty," she said piteously, "do, please, wake up and tell me if there are ghosts here!"

Aunt Betty just stared at her; she was wide awake now.

"There are such dreadful noises, and such mice, and—and rats!"

"Nonsense!" said Aunt Betty, listening. "Don't be a coward! It's only the storm."

"It's fearful! What can we do?"

"Pop corn!"

Marion could not help laughing at the inconsequent answer; but anything was better than the noisy stillness of the last hour, and bringing a large brass warming-pan and some corn, they were soon busy popping the corn.

It would have been difficult to say which of the two enjoyed the sport the most. It carried Marion home, where the family were all gathered together before the brisk fire in the cheerful sitting-room. Aunt Betty was young again. Nat and Sam, Bertha and Molly, and little Ruth filled the big, empty kitchen, laughed merrily over the crackling corn, held out small hands to catch it as the cover swung back, pelted each other with it till the spotless floor crunched beneath their dancing feet. It had been long years since they had come home to her before on Thanksgiving night, but here they were now, all evoked by Marion's glad youth.

The moment the old clock struck nine, warming-pan, corn, and dishes vanished from sight.

A long tallow-dip Aunt Betty held out to Marion, and pointed up-stairs.

Marion obeyed; and though all night long the wind howled, the mice and the rats held high carnival, Marion slept soundly, and never knew that Aunt Betty, with her candle held high above her head, made another visit to her bedside, and there, bending her old knees, offered up her simple prayer, asking in much faith and love God's blessing on this new-found niece.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MARION'S REPENTANCE.

No time had been mentioned for the continuance of Marion's visit; and coming as she had from the busy life of the school, where every minute had its allotted task, Thanksgiving week was hardly over before she began to be very homesick. In vain she strove against it, and by every pleasant device in her power tried to make her visit pleasant to her aunt. Even the short November days seemed to her endless, and the evenings had only the early bedtime to make them endurable.

On her first coming, she had told Aunt Betty the day the vacation was over, and evidently she was expected to stay until then; but on the morning of the seventh day she became desperate, and for want of any other excuse hit upon one that would be most displeasing to her aunt.

"You don't like to have me study my Greek here, Aunt Betty," she said; "and, as I must review it before the term begins, I think I had better go back now."

Aunt Betty put her steel-bowed spectacles high up on her nose, and, after looking at her silently for a moment, said,—

"I don't take no stock in your Greek."

Marion laughed good-naturedly. "If you only would let me read it to you," she said, "you would like it as well as I do; it's so soft and beautiful."

"What's the matter with your Bible? Isn't that good enough for you?"

"But, Aunt Betty, you don't understand."

But Aunt Betty did understand enough to be very sure she did not want Marion to go, so she turned abruptly on her heel, and hid herself in the depths of the pantry.

Marion stood for a moment undecided what to do, then, seeing that if she would go that day she had very little time to lose, she went up-stairs, packed her valise, and the next time she saw her aunt was ready for her journey back.

The prospect of a mile walk through the half-broken roads, up steep hills, and down into drifted valleys, would have shown Marion the difficulties had she been a New Englander; but as she was not, her courage did not fail in the least when, without a word more, or any sign of a good-

by from Aunt Betty, she opened the door, letting in a cold she was a stranger to, and went out into it.

Of that walk she never liked to speak afterwards. Many times she stopped, almost but not quite willing to return; tired, half-frozen, and unhappy that her rest had terminated unpleasantly, yet so very, very homesick that she seemed driven on to the station,—if to reach it were a possibility.

Fortunately for her, when she had reached the last half she was overtaken by a man driving an empty wood-cart, who stopped and asked her if she “didn’t want a lift?” From what this saved her, no one could ever know.

In the mean time, Aunt Betty, with her eyes dimmed—but she did not know it was by tears—had watched her through a slit in a green paper window-shade.

Until she left the door, she did not believe she could do so foolish a thing as to attempt the walk to the station on such a morning; but when she saw her step off so courageously down the narrow foot-path, she began to have misgivings.

Notwithstanding her tears, the sight seemed to harden instead of soften her heart. “If the gal will go, go she will,” she said aloud, with some unforgiving wags of her head. “She’s stuck full of obstinacy as her father was afore her.” And by this time Marion was hidden from her sight by the deep snow-banks, and she turned from the window into her lonely kitchen with a heavy heart.

Marion, safely back in the academy, had, like Aunt Betty, her own troubled thoughts.

She found only Helen there among the scholars, and every teacher away but Miss Ashton, who evidently had not expected her back so soon.

Regular school duties did not begin until Tuesday of the next week, and now it was only Wednesday night. She might have remained in Belden a day or two longer, and then left with her aunt’s approval.

What kind of a return had she made to her aunt for her kindness?

Marion’s room, that she had thought of with so much longing as she sat in the farm kitchen, had lost its charm. She was very willing to believe it was because her room-mates were not there, and the fast falling darkness prevented her from seeing from her window the winter view, which even the grand old mountains that she had left behind her did not make her value less.

Self-deception was not one of Marion’s faults; she grew so quickly regretful for what had happened, that when Miss Ashton came to her door, troubled by the girl’s tired look on her arrival, she found her with red eyes and a swollen face.

“Tell me all about it,” she said, taking no notice of her tears, but turning up the gas to make the room more cheerful.

“What has gone wrong? Wasn’t your aunt glad to see you? Are you sick? Fancy I am mother, and tell me the whole story.”

She took Marion’s hand in hers, drew the young girl close to her, and stroked the bonnie brown hair with a loving mother’s touch.

“It’s all my blame,” said Marion, her voice trembling as she spoke. “My aunt was as kind as she could be, but it was so lonely, and”—with a smile now—“so noisy there.”

“Noisy!” repeated Miss Ashton.

“Yes, ma’am; there were ghosts and rats and mice; the very house groaned and shook, and the wind came howling down from the mountains, and all the windows rattled.”

Miss Ashton only laughed; but when Marion went on to tell the story of her leaving the house against her aunt’s wishes, she looked very sober.

She had no knowledge of Aunt Betty’s circumstances, surroundings, or character, but she knew well the nature of country roads during a New England winter. She thought from Marion’s own account that her homesickness had made her obstinate and unreasonable, and that her coming away must have been a source of anxiety to her aunt, while she was unable to prevent it.

“Marion,” she said at last, “didn’t you think more of yourself than of your aunt?”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Marion unhesitatingly.

“And to be selfish is always?”

“Mean. Don’t say another word please, Miss Ashton.”

“I am sure, Marion, in the future you will be more careful. It is such an easy thing to wound and worry those about whom we should always be thoughtful. If I were you, I would not let a mail go out without carrying a note to your aunt, telling her of your safe arrival here, and of your regrets for what has happened. It’s always a noble thing to say ‘I’m sorry,’ when one has done wrong.”

The next mail took the following letter:—

MY DEAR AUNT,—I am going to write you to-night, to tell you two things. One is, that I am safely back again at the academy, and the other, that I think it was both inconsiderate and unkind for me to leave you as I did, when I saw you thought I had better stay with you. I am ashamed and grieved that I did not do as you wanted me to. I hope most sincerely you

will forgive me and forget it.

I cannot easily forgive myself, and I am sure I shall never forget all your kindness to me, or the nice time we had with the bright warming-pan and the crisp pop-corn, or the wonderful mountains all wrapped in their ermine mantles.

Please forgive, and love your ashamed niece,
MARION PARKE.

Aunt Betty's correspondence amounted sometimes to two letters a year, so this penitent letter of Marion's remained in the post-office until the postmaster found a chance to send it to her. By that time, what she had suffered from anxiety had made her unable to cope with the perils of the winter before her, and she often said to the few visitors who came in to see her, "I've dropped a stitch I can never take up again," but never a word of blame for Marion did she speak; indeed, she had come to love the young girl so well, that it is doubtful whether, even in her heart, she harbored one hard thought toward her.

The letter finished, Marion's conscience gave her less uneasiness. No thought had she of the suffering her selfish action had occasioned. The visit had, after all, many pleasant memories, and for her only beneficial results. There had come to her from her repentance and Miss Ashton's kind reproof, a lesson, if not new, at least impressive, of the necessity of thinking of others more than of one's self.

She could not see her Greek Tragedy without a smile, indeed, she went so far as sometimes to think that its reception in the old kitchen of the farmhouse had given her a greater avidity for its study.

On the whole, this winter visit was by no means a lost one; and when Saturday brought more of the scholars back, and the term began, she was fully ready for it.

On Sunday morning Nellie, feeling lonely and sick, had come to Marion's room. Marion made a nice bed for her on her sofa, and sat by her side bathing her hot, aching head, now and then reading to her.

Toward night she complained of her throat; fearing Miss Ashton would send her to the nurse if she were told of it, she would not let Marion go to her, but begged to stay where she was so piteously that Marion gladly consented, asking leave of the teacher, but not mentioning Nellie's sickness.

The consequence was, that the disease progressed rapidly, and when morning came she was too sick even to object to the nurse, who, surprised and bewildered, sent for Miss Ashton at once.

Dr. Dawson, the physician of twenty years' academical sickness, being summoned, pronounced it a case of diphtheria, and ordered Nellie's removal to the rooms used as a hospital, and Marion's separation from the rest of the school, as she had been exposed to the same disease.

CHAPTER XXV.

DIPHThERIA.

On Tuesday the regular exercises of the day were to begin. All day Monday, carriage after carriage came driving up to the academy, depositing their loads of freight,—excited girls full of the freshness and pleasure gathered from their brief holiday. The long corridors were merry with affectionate osculations. Light, happy laughs danced out from rosy lips, and arms were twined and intertwined in the loving clasp of young girls. So much to tell! So much to hear! Miss Ashton, welcoming the coming groups, called it a "Thanksgiving Pandemonium;" but she enjoyed it quite as much as any of the rioters. In the evening, when they were all together in the large parlor, she turned the gathering into a pleasant party, helped to fill it with fun and frolic, and sent even the most homesick to their rooms with smiles instead of tears.

Not a word had been said of Nellie Blair's sickness. There is no place where a panic is more easily started and harder to control than in a girls' school; nor is there any cause that will so surely awaken it as a case of diphtheria. Its acute suffering, its often sudden end, its contagiousness, all combine to make it the most dreaded of diseases.

Some reason had to be given, of course, for the condition in which Marion's room-mates found their room on their arrival, also for Marion's removal. Miss Ashton had guardedly told them the truth, with the strictest request that they should keep it to themselves; but, in spite of her injunction, that night after the party broke up, there was not a girl in the hall who did not know and who was not alarmed by Nellie's sickness.

Anxious groups gathered together in the corridors and discussed it. Some fled to their rooms and wrote hurried notes home, asking for leave to come back at once. The panic had begun, augmented beyond doubt by the excitement consequent on the return. Miss Ashton was besieged by girls, all anxious to know the exact state of the case, and not a few clamoring for leave to go away, even that very night, from the contagion.

Had she any less influence over this frightened crowd, or they any less trust in her wisdom and kindness, half of the rooms would have been empty before morning; but, as it was, simply by telling them the truth, that Nellie had diphtheria, but that the doctor said that it was not a malignant case, and that there was not the slightest danger of its spreading, with even ordinary care, she succeeded in so far quieting their fears that they went to their rooms, though, if she had only known it, to discuss with even more excitement than they had shown to her the dreadful possibilities before them.

One girl actually stole out at midnight and, hurrying through the cold and darkness, went to the house of a cousin who lived near by, waking and alarming the family in a way that they found hard to forgive, and taking by this exposure so severe a cold that, serious lung symptoms developing, she was sent home, and her academical course ended. The next morning when the school gathered in the chapel, they found Dr. Dawson on the stage.

After the preliminary exercises were over, he rose, and said,—

“Young ladies, I understand you have taken fright on account of the case of diphtheria that is occurring here. I am an old man, as you see, and have had a hundred, perhaps five hundred cases as like this as two peas in a pod.” (He stopped, expecting a smile at least for his homely comparison, but every face was as sober as if he had come to sound a death-knell.) “Miss Blair *is* sick, I might say is *very* sick, but I am not in the least anxious about her, or about any of you. Under ordinary circumstances, and I consider these very ordinary, I think there is not any probability of another case in the house.

“Take an old physician’s advice. Stay where you are, go promptly and faithfully about your regular duties, don’t mention the word diphtheria, and don’t think of it. If I were a life-insurance agent, I would insure those of you who obeyed my injunctions for half the premium that I would those who worry over this, or run away. Again I say, go faithfully about your ordinary duties, and all of you” (dropping his voice into solemn tones now) “ask God to be with and protect you, and restore to you your sick companion.”

Then he took up his hat and marched down through the long, girl-bordered aisle, smiling and nodding to those he knew as he went.

On the whole, his speech did little to allay the panic. He had not only allowed that Nellie was *very* sick, but he had talked about “life-insurance,” and asking God for protection. Qualms of fear followed him as he went. Miss Ashton understood the assembly better than the wise physician, and before he had closed the door she regretted that she had asked him to address them.

One part of his advice, however, was sound; that regarding to the scholars at once resuming their work, and putting diphtheria out of conversation and mind. If only good advice could or would always be taken, what a different world it would be!

Fortunately here, among these two hundred girls, there were leaders both sensible and trusted, who did follow the doctor’s advice, went at once about their studies, and ably seconded the exertions of the teachers to resume the usual routine of work.

Among the most prominent of these was Dorothy Ottley. She had that indescribable moral power over the girls which comes, and one is tempted to say comes only, from a consistent, faithful, gentle, loving character. She did not draw to herself that impulsive love which is here to-day and gone to-morrow, so common among girls; but if any were sad or sick or in trouble they instinctively sought Dorothy, and they always found in her what they needed.

She was plain looking; her sea-browned face, her thin, light hair that wind and wave had bleached, the pathetic look that years of a hard life had stamped upon her, could not conceal, could not even dim, the strong, true soul that looked out of her gray eye, or change the effect of the honest words her lips always spoke. Now, wherever she went, the girls clustered around her, followed her example in prompt attendance on the regular duties, and somehow, no one could have told you just how, felt safer that she was there.

Marion, Miss Ashton kept from among them. If she had been exposed to the disease from Nellie’s being with her, it might be best not to allow her to mingle with the others; besides, they would shun her, and that Marion would find hard to bear. As it was not known except to her room-mates that she had returned from her vacation, this was easy to do; and so in the pleasant guest-room Marion went on with her studies without a fear of diphtheria, only thinking of, and anxious for, the sick friend.

It was Gladys who began the series of attentions that on the second day filled Nellie’s room with gifts of flowers, of fruit, of books, even of candy and pretty toys, which the girls had already begun to gather for the coming Christmas. Miss Mason, the trained nurse, was kept busy at certain hours answering the teacher’s knock who brought the gifts and the accompanying love,—and Nellie, poor Nellie, struggling with the pain and the uncertainty, was cheered and helped by loving attentions given to her for the first time in her desolate life.

Miss Ashton, hearing every hour from the sickroom, shared in the cheer and the help; there was a reward to her in this proof of the tenderness and generosity of that wonderful woman’s nature she had made it her life’s work to develop and train.

Each day there was a bulletin put up in the hall, stating Nellie’s condition. It was always cheerful. Miss Ashton wrote,—

“Nellie is cross this morning. Dr. Dawson pronounces it the best symptom he has seen

since she was taken sick."

"Nellie has asked for a piece of that mince-pie one of you sent her. Nurse says, 'No,' but looks much pleased at the request."

"Rejoicing in the hospital! a decided improvement in Nellie."

"Nellie teases to sit up."

"Nellie lifted onto the sofa! Dressed in my old blue wrapper! Looks white and funny."

"Nellie sends her love and thanks to all her kind, kind friends."

"Nellie teasing to see Marion Parke."

"Nellie pronounced out of danger."

"Nellie removed to Mrs. Gaston's, where she will stay until she is strong enough to resume her studies. Sends love and thanks."

The next day there were rumors around the school that Marion Parke, who had been missed by this time, and accounted for, was taken sick with diphtheria, and was much worse than Nellie had ever been.

Now, of course, the panic began anew; and as many of the girls had written home and obtained leave to return, more than that, commands to do so, as the sick girl's case was contagious, Miss Ashton found all her trouble renewed.

She had been besieged with letters from anxious parents, charging her not to trifle with their children's lives, but by all means to send them home at once if there was the least real danger; so now she had no hesitation in letting those go who wished, indeed it was a relief to her to have the number of her school smaller, and the anxiety lessened; but now it was only a scare. Marion did have a sore throat, but it was one which comes often with an ordinary cold, and Dr. Dawson laughed at it, gave her some slight medicines, and scolded Miss Ashton for having separated her so long from the girls.

The girls gave her a wide berth, but for this Miss Ashton had prepared her, and Marion was more amused than hurt by it.

Before a week had passed, the four room-mates were together in their old rooms, and Marion was made a heroine. All she had done for Nellie was exaggerated, with that generous exaggeration of which girls are so capable.

After all, this diphtheritic episode had only been injurious to the school inasmuch as it had broken into the regular routine, and thrown hindrances into the completion of work which was expected to be done before the coming on of the long holiday vacation.

That Christmas and New Year's came so soon after Thanksgiving was something for the teachers to deplore; but as they were in no way responsible for it, and as indeed Christmas was a religious holiday, well in keeping with the *animus* of the institution, they met it heartily, the more so than usual this year, as they hoped, the vacation over, to resume the regular course, both in study and discipline, without any further interruption.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CHRISTMAS COMING.

The Demosthenic Club had received two severe setbacks since its organization. One when Kate Underwood's tableaux fell under Miss Ashton's displeasure on account of the carelessness it had shown in injuring, for fun's sake, the feelings of a schoolmate; the other when members of the club had been guilty of a flagrant breach of the rules, by the stolen sleigh-ride with the Atherton boys.

"In spite of it all," Kate Underwood said, "we will just change its name, and go on as if nothing had happened. We are to be now the 'Never Say Die Club.' Vote on it, girls."

The new name was adopted by acclamation, and several other votes were carried at the same time, all in favor of law and order, showing how truly these girls had meant to keep the promises they had made in their extremity to Miss Ashton, to be law-abiding members of the school.

They held their secret meetings as often and as secretly as their constitution demanded; they discussed all questions that the interests of the times suggested. If they had a spread, it was before study hours, and with unlocked doors. On the whole, Jenny Barton, Kate Underwood, and Mamie Smythe took the lessons they had received into good, honest hearts, and grew, by the many resisted temptations which were born of the secrecy of their club, into better, nobler characters.

Miss Ashton, watching them with vigilant eyes, marked the improvement, and showed her value

of it by greater confidence in its leading members.

There was an important meeting to be held a week before the breaking up for the Christmas vacation. It was to be in Lilly White's room, where, indeed, most of their meetings were held, for Lilly had a room by herself, richly furnished, this being the only inducement her parents could offer her, that made her consent to the fearful ordeal of a few years at school,—to be dull and to be wealthy! Who would desire it for any child?

"You understand," said President Jenny Barton, after the meeting was called to order, "that this is to be no common affair. It's to be, well! it's to be a sort of atonement for—well, for those other affairs; and, girls, if we do anything about it, let's do it up handsome. What do you say?"

"Do it jist illigant, or let it alone," said Mamie Smythe.

"Jist illigant!" repeated one member of the club after another, until the president said,—

"Motioned, and carried. Now for our plan. Keep it a profound secret!"

Such a busy place as the academy became now, probably had its counterpart in every girls' boarding-school all over the length and breadth of our land.

Where there is good discipline and good scholarship, neither the rules nor the lessons are allowed to be slighted; but as December days shorten, and December cold strengthens, even the most indolent pupil finds herself under a certain stress of occupation which she cannot resist.

Shirking can find no place in the recitation-room. Moments that have been idled away now become precious, each one laden with its weight of some loving remembrance to be made for the dear ones at home.

Such treasures of delicate silks, laces, plushes, velvets, ribbons, embroideries, card-boards, tassels, cords, gilt in every shape and capable of every use; such pretty gift-books, booklets, cards, afghans, sofa-pillows, head-rests; such wonders of ingenuity in working up places for thermometers, putting them in dust-pans, tying them onto bread-rollers, slipping them behind wonderful clusters of sweet painted flowers; such pen-wipers, such blotters, work-baskets, paper-baskets, bureau coverings, bureau mats! napery of all varieties; and, after all, this enumeration is but the beginning of what in Montrose Academy was hidden in drawers, stowed away in most impossible and impracticable places, yet always ready to the hand for a spare moment. Two hundred girls,—for by this time most of the diphtheritic runaways had returned,—and all, without an exception, were Christmas busy! Christmas crazy! What a changed place it made of the school!

Benedictions on the hallowed holiday! If we put aside its religious bearing, think of it only as a time when heart goes out to heart, even the most selfish of us all will remember to show our love in a visible token of affection.

If, with all this, we can make our offerings hallowed by a tenderer love and a deeper affection for Him in whose honor the whole world keeps the festival, then, indeed, the day becomes to us the most blessed and beautiful of our lives!

Marion Parke saw it as it was kept here in an entirely new way. At her Western home, her father had made it a day of religious observance. Marion had always been leader in trimming their church with the pretty greens which their mild winter spared to them, and on Christmas Sunday they sang Christmas hymns, and listened to a Christmas sermon. On Christmas Eve they had a Christmas-tree, and hung it with such useful gifts as their necessities demanded and a small purse could provide. It was a happy, precious day, simply and heartily kept; but here she was lost in wonder, as she was called from room to room to see the rare and beautiful gifts which, it seemed to her, abounded everywhere. Money to purchase such things for herself to give away she had not, but she watched her room-mates, as they deftly prepared their gifts for their Rock Cove homes, with delight.

How busy and happy they were! Sometimes Marion's longing to send something, if only a little remembrance, home brought the tears into her eyes.

Gladys was the first to see this and to guess its cause. At once she began to purchase new silks, trimmings of all kinds, booklets, cards, increasing her store, until even her cousins, accustomed as they were to her fitful extravagances, wondered at her.

When her drawers, never too orderly, began to assume a chaotic appearance, she said fretfully one morning to Marion Parke, who was looking and laughing at the chaos,—

"I should think, instead of laughing at me, it would be a great deal better natured in you to help me put them into some kind of order. Your drawer isn't half full. Look here! open it, and let me tuck some of these duds in."

Marion opened hers, pushed the few things it contained carefully into a corner, and said,—

"You are very welcome to all the room you want. Remember, I am only here on sufferance; it is really all yours."

"Nonsense! help me, can't you? I shall pitch them in any way, and you are so tidy!"

Help her Marion did, and when the jumbled but valuable contents of the drawer were all transferred, Gladys shut it up with a gleeful laugh.

"Oh, how splendid it is," she said, "to have the drawer clean and clear again! Never one of those duds is going back, and you can use them or throw them away; put them in a rag-bag if you want to; I've nothing more to do with them."

Then Sue and Dorothy understood what the extravagance meant, but Marion did not; she only stood still, staring at Gladys, wondering what she could have said or done to vex her kind-hearted room-mate. And it was not until hours afterward, when she was alone with Dorothy, and Dorothy told her they were gifts to her, that she knew how rich in Christmas treasures she had suddenly become.

And here it is pleasant to tell, that this was only one of Gladys's thoughtful kindnesses. Little bundles of similar gifts were constantly going from her to the doors of the girls whose small means made Christmas presents luxuries in which they could not indulge. Even Gladys's liberal father wondered often over the amount of money which she wished for these holidays; but he trusted her, and in truth felt proud and glad that this only child had a noble, generous nature, which could, and did, think of others more than of herself; for in the account which she always sent him of the expenditure of these moneys, while there were many "give aways," there were few dollars spent on herself.

One day, in the regular mail-bag, there came this note to Miss Ashton:—

We, the undersigned, grateful for the undeserved kindnesses with which you have made our repentant days so happy, request the pleasure of your company in the parlor, Tuesday evening, December 22.

JENNY BARTON, SOPHY KANE,
KATE UNDERWOOD, MAMIE SMYTHE,
LUCY SNOW, LILLY WHITE,
MARTHA DODD,

and all the members of the "Never Say Die Club."

"What are those girls up to now?" Miss Ashton said with a pleasant laugh, as she read the invitation, but she accepted it without any delay, and when she was told by Miss Newton, the confidential helper of the whole school in any of their wants, that the parlor had been lent to the secret society for the evening, and no teacher was to be allowed entrance until eight o'clock, she smilingly acquiesced.

The club were excused from their recitations that afternoon, and it was amusing to see how much spying there was among the rest of the school to find out what was going on. All that could be seen, however, was the coming in of a big boxed article, unfortunately for the curious, so boxed that no one could even guess what it contained.

A general invitation had been given to the whole school, and before the appointed hour for opening the door, groups of girls in full evening dress began to fill the corridor and press close to the door.

When, punctual to the appointed moment, it was flung open, a burst of laughter followed.

Ranged around a covered object in the middle of the room stood twenty girls, dressed in gray flannel blankets made in the fashion of the penitential robes worn by nuns. They all wore stiff white hoods, with the long capes coming down over their shoulders, and each one carried in her hand a small tin pan filled to the brim with ashes.

They stood immovable until Miss Ashton entered the room, when the whole club sank upon their knees, bending their heads until they nearly touched the floor, dexterously placing the tin of ashes upon their backs.

No sooner had they assumed this position than a little flag was unfurled from the top of the covered object in the middle of the room, upon which was printed in large letters:—

"FORGIVE, AND ACCEPT."

Then the covering was slowly removed by some one hidden beneath it, and there stood an elegant writing-desk, on the front of which were the words:—

"A MERRY CHRISTMAS TO MISS ASHTON THE MERCIFUL
FROM HER GRATEFUL
NEVER SAY DIE CLUB."

CHAPTER XXVII.

CHRISTMAS IN THE ACADEMY.

Marion, two days before Christmas, was once more left alone in her room. The Rock Cove cousins had given her the most cordial invitation to go home with them for the vacation, but she had declined. In doing so, she had a half-acknowledged feeling that she was to suffer just penance for her misdeeds at Belden, and a dread of what unknown trouble she might meet at Rock Cove. This Eastern world was so different from the whole-hearted, kindly one she had left behind her, that instead of wanting to it, she grew timid, diffident of herself, even among the girls, and shy about venturing abroad. So she made her mind up bravely to stay where she was,

and spend her vacation in study.

Miss Ashton fully approved; for since Marion's sickness with her cold, she had shown an inclination to cough, and was often hoarse in the morning. A stay by the seaside in winter would be to run a risk. It might be dull for her to remain, but she loved her books, and there was plenty for her to do in order to keep up with her advanced classes; besides, there were twenty of the pupils whose homes were so distant they could not go there, and return, without taking more time than the vacation allowed, so they, also, were to remain, and Marion, though dull, need not be lonely.

All the teachers but Fräulein Sausmann were to be absent, and to her care Miss Ashton had to commit the young ladies during the vacation.

The wheels of the carriage that took her away from the academy had hardly ceased to be heard by the anxious listeners there, before Marion's door was opened just far enough to admit the Fräulein's good-natured face.

Never had her ample head of light hair looked so large, her blue eyes so blue, her nose so *retroussé*, or her thin lips so thin, to Marion, as now. Before she had time to welcome her, the Fräulein said in her high-pitched voice,—

"O Marione! Wir happiness time wir have der Christtag. Wir 'ave der Baum so high," holding up a plump little hand as high as she could reach. "Twenty, thirty das Licht! Christtag presented buful! You 'ave one, sieben, zwölf, four! You come happiness; nicht cry, nicht! nicht! Lachen! so!" and a merry peal of laughter Marion found no trouble in echoing.

"You come parlor Christtag night, you see! I, Santa Claus! Merry Christtag. Catch you! Nicht cry! Lachen! Lachen!"

She shut the door softly, but Marion heard her laugh as she went down the long corridor, such a merry, contagious laugh, that it carried away with it the loneliness from Marion's room.

There was to be a gathering in the parlor then,—der Baum. Twenty, thirty das Licht, and what else? Of one thing Marion felt sure, if she was to receive, one, sieben, zwölf, four presents, she must give some in return, but what, and to whom?

She was not long in doubt. Lilly White was among those who remained, and the Fräulein had hardly gone when she made her appearance with four other girls at her door.

"Oui, Fräulein Marione! Ab alio expectes, alteri quod feceris.

"That's French, Latin, and German. I picked it out of"—

"Don't tell, Lilly White," broke in one of the girls. "See if Marion can translate it."

"Come in and let me try," said Marion, laughing. "Oui—yes; Fräulein—Miss Marion; Ab alio expectes, alteri quod feceris—If any one gives you a present, be sure you give one back."

"A literal translation," said the same girl. "Miss Jones always said you were her best Latin scholar. Practically, however, it translates,—

"Come with us to Lilly White's room, and we'll show you a thing or two. But we mustn't all go together. If we do, the Fräulein will be popping down on us to be sure no mischief is brewing."

"I'll tell you what I will do; I will write in German 'No Admittance' on a big placard, and put it outside my door. What is the German, girls?" "Nicht Zulassung," said one of the girls promptly. "Write it, Lilly, in a big, bold hand."

They went together to Lilly's room; and she took a large square of pasteboard, and, without deigning to ask how the words were spelled, she printed in big letters:—

"NOTTZ ULLARSG."

"There!" she said, turning it triumphantly for the others to read. Then she hung it on the outside of the door, moved a table to the door, planted a chair upon it, mounted into the chair, and peeped down through the transom to watch for the Fräulein's coming.

The others watched her, and all business for the time was suspended.

Pretty soon they heard the pattering of the Fräulein's little feet along the corridor, then the sudden halting before their door.

Lilly, with a beet-red face, and frantic gestures of two big red hands, motioned them to be still. They heard,—

"N—O—T—T—Z." A significant grunt; then again, "N—O—T—T—Z;" a pause. Again, "N—O—T—T—Z U—L—L—A—R—S—G."

"Hindoostanee? No; Indianee: Marione Parkee!" Then a little laugh, followed by,—

"Marione! Marione! Ope die Thur! What you mean, Nottz Ullarsg?"

"No admittance," said Lilly White through the transom. "Why, Fräulein, don't you know your own German?"

"Know my own German?" repeated the Fräulein slowly. "Know—my—own—German? Nein! Nein! German, Lilly White! Nein Vater Land.

"Lilly White, open die Thur, quickest! My own German! Nein! Nein! Nein!"

"Marione Parke's Indianee!"

It was some moments before Lilly, the chair and the table, could be removed from the door, the Fräulein keeping up a series of impatient knockings while she waited.

Then Marion, as the one in whom she would feel the greatest confidence, was pushed to the small opening allowed, and told to say,—

“It’s Christmas, almost, dear Fräulein. It’s secrets here now. We can’t let you in.”

“Indianee?” asked the Fräulein, pointing to the placard. “What you mean, Marione?”

“It was meant to mean ‘No Admittance’ in German, Fräulein.”

Such funny little shrieks as the Fräulein uttered, no one could understand, not even Marion, who was looking in her face. There were anger and fun and amazement, chasing each other in quick succession, her hands beating time to each feeling, as an instrument utters its music to the touch.

To the amazement of all, it ended in the Fräulein shrieking out,—

“Lilly White! You be a—what you call um der thor, narr, dummkopf, fool, idiotte; you know German, nicht! nicht, you idiotte!”

In these hard words the little German teacher’s anger wholly vanished; pulling down the placard, she tore it in bits, gathered them up in her small white apron, made a sweeping courtesy, and trotted away.

As soon as she was fairly out of hearing, the girls began to busy themselves about their Christmas work. Lilly White’s room was full of things to be made into pretty gifts for the tree, of which the Fräulein’s share was by far the largest.

There is a wonderful degree of thoughtfulness among a company of girls. Not one there but knew of Marion’s circumstances, and how impossible it would be for her, out of her slender purse, to meet the demands of the occasion. If Gladys Philbrick had generously helped her to prepare the pretty gifts which were on their way to her far-away home, so these girls as generously planned that in the Fräulein’s festival she should not find herself in the embarrassing position of being the one who should receive, without making a return.

It was beautiful to see the delicacy with which they managed the whole, so that Marion hardly felt how much they gave, and how pleasantly she received.

On Christmas morning the whole house was early astir. All up and down the corridors, long before the dim light penetrated into them, white-robed figures flitted noiselessly from door to door. “Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!” was whispered inside, until a ghost-like procession of some twenty girls headed for the Fräulein’s room.

This was at the end of the second corridor, and as they approached it not a sound was to be heard from within but the satisfactory one of long and loud snores.

It had been agreed on the previous night that not a door should be locked on the inside, and Helen Stratton, “the cute girl,” who could do anything she tried to do, was chosen to open this door. This she did so noiselessly, that the whole twenty girls entered the room and surrounded the Fräulein’s bed without so much as interrupting a single snore. Then all at once a merry chorus broke out with,—

“Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas, Fräulein!”

The Fräulein stirred in her bed. Then another shout, louder than the first, and she sat bolt upright.

The gas in the hall had been lighted, and stole in through the transom sufficiently to give the ghost-like look the girls sought; but even with this, she was slow in comprehending what was happening.

One more shout, and she sprang out of bed, catching the one nearest to her, and giving her a good, hard shaking. “Der Christtag! Der Christtag! Fröhlich Weinacht! Fröhlich; I wishes you ‘arpy Christtag! What *you* call it?”

“Merry Christmas!” shouted the girls.

“Ah, Ja! Ja! Merrie Christmas! one Merrie Christmas, a t’ousand Merrie Christmas. Now you go dress! Miss Ashton say, ‘Fräulein, the young ladies tak cough.’ You catched me, I catched you to-nacht. You see! gute nacht! gute nacht!”

And like a very small queen, in her pretty nightdress, she waved the girls away, then locked her door; if they had come back only a few minutes later, they would have heard the same musical sounds coming from her bed.

But when the day had fairly dawned, it would have been difficult to find a more wide-awake, alert teacher than the Fräulein, or one that could have given a truer and pleasanter Christmas day and night.

"Fräulein, can you have prayers for the young ladies in the small reception-room on Christmas morning?" Miss Ashton asked with much hesitation the day before leaving.

"Ja! Ja!" answered the Fräulein, all smiles and nods.

"Very well, then, I will give the notice to-night. As Christmas is a religious festival, I shall be glad to have a religious as well as a festival observation of it. As for the matter of going to church, the young-ladies can do as they please; there need be nothing compulsory about it."

"I mistand," and the Fräulein congratulated herself on her correct English. "All wrong; nein! nein, all."

"Right," said Miss Ashton, laughing.

"Oui, Ja! Der Dank! Tanks. I learn Anglais soon. Patientia, Fräulein Ashton. I learn soon, by un by."

In compliance with this request, after a hasty Christmas breakfast, the girls assembled in the reception-room, and waited with more curiosity than devotion the coming of the Fräulein.

She had not been down to breakfast, and when she made her appearance now, it was as if an odd-shaped swan was waddling into the room. From head to foot she was dressed in a fluffy white stuff, that stood out all over her like snow-feathers.

A stifled laugh greeted her, but of this she took no notice; walking slowly to the table that had been prepared for her, she turned a solemn face toward the girls, opened a German prayer-book, and began to read the service for Christmas morning, stopping when she came to the places for the chant, and, motioning to her audience to rise and join her, she sang in sweet tones music familiar to the girls, in which, with the English words they were accustomed to, they all joined.

Then down she fell upon her knees, the others following her example, and with her eyes half shut, and her little hands folded reverently upon her prayer-book, she rattled off prayer after prayer with astonishing rapidity.

Now, though the young ladies had come in anything but a solemn frame of mind, which the Fräulein's droll appearance was not calculated to change, there was something so devotional, almost solemn, in her rapidly changing expression of face, that they became at once and unconsciously devout. Dropping on their knees, and covering their faces, they joined her "Amen" with hushed voices, and into their susceptible hearts the hallowing influence of the religious festival found ready entrance.

They were hardly prepared to see the Fräulein spring lightly upon her feet, to hear a merry laugh ring out, and "Good-morgen! good-morgen!" spoken with the accompaniment of a cloud of white batting, that flew off from her arms and shoulders as she laughed.

Queer little Fräulein! but good and kind as she was queer!

All day long she worked indefatigably alone in the big parlor. Not one of the girls was allowed even so much as a peep within the doors.

The day was a rarely fine one for a New England Christmas. The sun shone out of a cloudless sky; a warm south wind blew gently over the deep snow-drifts; little sparrows hopped delightedly upon the branches of the Norway spruces that grew close to the house, lifted their pretty wings as if to coax the wind and sun, while they chirped their cheerful Christmas carols, stole the late berries from the trees, and twisted their round heads so they could send loving glances up to the bevy of pretty girls that watched and smiled down upon them, as they fed them from their windows.

At seven o'clock the gong was sounded, and the young ladies in gala dresses filed into the bright parlor.

In the centre of the room was a large tree. Near it stood the Fräulein, smiling and courtesying to each one as she entered. A quaint little figure she was; yet, with all her quaintness, there was enough of dignity to suppress any merriment her appearance might have caused.

The number and variety of these gifts was a marvel to them. When they were fairly distributed, the Fräulein lifted the cover of an unopened box, and took from it a gift for every teacher.

Good, happy Fräulein! Not a thoughtful word or a kind act from these to you strangers in a strange land, but you have treasured in your homesick heart, and from the Vater Land you bring to them all to-day your grateful recognition of it all!

Perhaps the happiest of them was the lame Nellie, who, yet weak and pale from her sickness, had with the Fräulein's consent brought to the Christmas-tree little pictures which she had painted in her convalescence, as gifts to them all. She held tight to Marion's hand. In some way, she could not have told you how, she seemed to herself to have owed to this dear friend the ability to have painted them. It was a little cross she gave Marion, but she had hung on it a wreath of lovely rosebuds, meaning, through them, to convey to Marion how her love had made the cross of her suffering beautiful.

As the vacation had commenced on the twenty-third of December, and school did not begin again until the fifth of January, there was quite a time remaining after the excitement of

Christmas had passed.

The more scholarly and industrious of the girls remaining at the academy at once applied themselves to making up whatever deficiencies had occurred in their studies.

Marion found plenty to do, not only for herself, but also for Nellie, whose lessons had necessarily run behind during her illness.

The Fräulein found them together over their books much oftener than she thought was for their good. Having been thoroughly educated in the German methods of teaching, she was a firm believer in vacation benefits, also in muscular training, which she considered quite as essential for girls as for boys. In her imperfect English, and also by personal illustration, she had tried, ever since her connection with this school, to awaken the teachers, Miss Ashton in particular, to a greater sense of its importance. To be sure, there was a gymnasium in the building, and a regular teacher, who faithfully put her pupils through the exercises commonly allowed to girls. But these seemed to the Fräulein to be only a beginning of what might be done; so, now, finding herself for a time in sole authority in the school, she at once, as soon as Christmas was over, began to put her girls through what she considered so essential to their health.

She made her first attempt upon Marion and Nellie. Finding them both bent nearly double over their books, Nellie very pale, with dark rings under her eyes, and Marion with flushed cheeks and too bright eyes, she at once routed them from their books, made them stand up before her, and said,—

“Now, do”—and her English word failing her, she drew a long breath from the bottom of her chest, and motioned to them to imitate her.

Marion, never having attempted anything of the kind before, did so partially, and Nellie could only produce something that sounded like a gurgle in her small throat.

The Fräulein shook her head impatiently, and repeated the process over and over again, Marion gaining a little every time, but Nellie soon discouraged and tired.

“Bard! bard! nicht right—aushauchen tief—so, thus:” (deep breaths from the Fräulein). Then, seeming suddenly to remember that the girls did not know why she made the request, she tried in an Anglicized German, which no one could by any possibility have understood, to explain it to them. She tapped her own head, took up a book, appeared to read it, while she moved the leaves in time with her long inhalations and exhalations.

“Bon scholars! long—so!” Then suddenly she said, “Patientia!” and vanished from the room. In a few minutes the corridor was full of noisy girls, who came direct to Marion’s room, and in obedience to the Fräulein’s directions arranged themselves in a circle.

They had only the vaguest idea what they had been called for, but they knew the Fräulein always gave them “a jolly good time,” and came willingly. Merry enough they were for the next hour, and much to the Fräulein’s surprise, for they were quicker than German girls, they made so much progress that, after the second lesson, a plan that was to tell much in future for the well-being of the academy was fully developed.

The Fräulein drew up a paper in German, in which she detailed not only the benefits physically resulting from her system of deep breathing, but also the help it would be in resting the excited nerves with which so many of the young girls came into the recitation-room. Then, before presenting it to Miss Ashton, she roused the enthusiasm of her class by telling them how much she needed their help, as examples of the great good to be derived from her gymnastics. And the result was that they had not only the amusement of the exercises to help them pass the vacation, but also the benefit resulting from it, and the hope that through them it would become a part of the school-life.

When Miss Ashton returned, she was not a little surprised at the gain she so quickly recognized, nor was she slow in availing herself of its aid.

She had always felt that nothing was more necessary for a good working head than a perfect physical balance, and for that reason she allowed and encouraged a greater amount of amusement, which was relaxation from study, than was common in what is called a finishing school. It was almost the only boast in which she indulged, that, during the twenty years of her care of the academy as principal, she had never had a case of fatal sickness, or, indeed, of any severe enough to excite alarm.

During the fall she obliged the girls, as long as the weather would allow, to spend hours every day in the open air, giving them their choice of exercise,—walking, riding, boating, botanizing, geologizing, any and every thing that would bring to them rest and change. In winter there was dancing in the large hall, there were compulsory gymnastics, there were skating on the pond, coasting on the hills back of the academy, or, not so seldom as it might have been supposed would be the case among girls, snowballing in the most approved boy-fashion.

Indeed, once upon a time it was reported that, having come out, as she generally made a point of doing whenever any amusement was going on, to witness the sport, a girl more audacious than any of the others ventured to throw a snow-ball in the direction of her august person, and it was received with such a merry laugh, that another followed, and another, and another, until she was as ermine-covered as if she were dressed for a court reception; and not a girl among the laughing crowd but loved her better and respected her more.

“My best recitations,” she was often heard to say, “come after the best frolics. Give me pupils with steady nerves, bright eyes, and sweet, clear voices, and I will show you a school where they

study well, and the deportment is of the best.

"I am never so anxious about my girls as when the weather shuts them in-doors, and the cold makes them want to hug the radiators."

It was on account of the good common-sense by which this method of regulation was carried on, that the school was sought far and near; to this, in a great measure, it owed its success.

The gymnastic teacher already employed was a good one for the old methods; but there was something so inspiring in the Fräulein's enthusiasm on the theory of long breaths, that Miss Ashton made it at once a part of daily practice, and put her in as teacher for those classes.

Watching the result of the experiment, it took Miss Ashton but a short time to satisfy herself as to its immediate benefits; and as for the girls themselves, they were so amused and strengthened by the lessons that, after a little practice, it became a favorite diversion, and you would find them often in merry groups, inhaling and exhaling, perhaps not in exact accordance with the Fräulein's rules, but gaining at least in proportion to their enjoyment. As for the Fräulein, a very happy and proud teacher she boastfully declared herself.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WOMEN'S WORK.

The Christmas holidays being over, the young ladies returned slowly, and many of them reluctantly, to the school.

A few left for good; some of them on their own account, some at the request of the principal. New pupils took their places, and almost at once the regular routine of work began.

Miss Ashton in one of her short morning talks told them, while the past term had been in many respects a satisfactory one, there had been several occurrences which she should be sorry to see repeated. It would not be necessary for her to enumerate them; they were well known to the old pupils, and for the new ones, she sincerely hoped there would be no occasion for them ever to hear of them.

There were now some important things, upon strict attendance to which she should insist during the remainder of the year.

One was, a more honest observance of the study hours; another, less gossip: perhaps she should be better understood if she said a higher tone of social intercourse. A thing never to be forgotten was, that the school-life was a preparation for the longer one beyond, and that, a preparation for the one that never ends.

"Sometimes," she said, dropping into that hushed tone which every girl in the remotest seat from her desk heard so easily, "I think our lives are but the school in which we all have set lessons to learn, set tasks to perform; and our wise Teacher, so patient, so gentle, so loving with us, when the great examination day comes, will hold us strictly accountable for every slighted lesson, for every neglected duty.

"If I could only impress upon you to-day how vitally important here and hereafter the faithful discharge of even your smallest duties may be to you, I should know that when our year together is over, and I part from many of you for the last time, I should meet you again as 'crowns of my rejoicing.'

"I need hardly say, certainly not to the more intelligent, who would naturally gather information of this kind, how varied and important a woman's work in life has grown to be. You are all more or less familiar with the fact that we have now entrance into the best colleges, both here and abroad. You know how we are educated for every profession, and to what eminence many of us have climbed. You understand fully, that there is not a position in the literary, business, mechanical, or art world in which to-day a woman may not be found working successfully.

"You know, too, that where prizes have been offered in academical institutions, no matter for what object, it is by no means an uncommon thing for it to be awarded to a girl. Last week a class of fourteen women were graduated from the law department of the University of the City of New York. It is said to be the first law class exclusively of women that has ever been graduated.

"Two female medical graduates have been appointed house surgeons at two English hospitals. A society has been incorporated in New York entitled the 'Colonial Dames of America,' and to be located in New York City.

"Its objects are set forth to be, to collect manuscripts, traditions, relics, and mementoes of by-gone days for preservation; to commemorate the history and success of the American Revolution and consequent birth of the republic of the United States; to diffuse healthful and intelligent information with regard to American history, and tending to create a popular interest therein, and to inspire patriotism and love of country; to promote social interest and fellowship among its members, and to inculcate among the young the obligations of patriotism and reverence for

the founders of American constitutional liberty.

"A number of prominent ladies are included in the list of officers.

"In this connection I will read you a short article I found in my morning paper; and here, let me say, there is not a girl in the school who should not in some way manage to spend a half-hour every day in looking over a newspaper.

"I have heard intelligent gentlemen complain of the ignorance of women about the ordinary public life.

"'They will talk to you,' they say, 'about housekeeping and servants: they grow eloquent over their children, and sometimes their husbands; but take them out of the region of home, and they are dull company.'

"The exceptions of those who are up in the literary, political, scientific, and socialistic world is infinitely small, and all—all because they will not take the trouble to make themselves intelligent on the great questions of the day, by reading newspapers."

To go on, however, with what women are doing.

"The New Women's Propylæum, in Indianapolis, Indiana, is now completed, and was dedicated January 27.

"This building bears the distinction of being the first one erected by women not associated as a club or society. Primarily, its use is for purely business purposes, and secondly, with an educational object in view. Six or seven women, with Mrs. May Wright Sewall at the head, have raised the money and carried out the project. It seemed at first to the public generally like a wild scheme, but the women who had the matter in hand knew just what they wanted, and made every effort to carry out their plans successfully. The board of managers is made up of fifteen women.

"Mrs. Sewall says, 'The building of the Propylæum has been to all of us a valuable experience. We have been obliged to meet business men, and to familiarize ourselves with business methods, and have thus acquired an education unusual to women. The lot has a frontage of seventy-five feet, and a depth of sixty-seven feet. The building contains twenty-one rooms, there being two stories above an English basement. The lot cost \$5,500, and the building complete \$22,500, making a total of \$28,000; and \$2,000 has been put into furniture. The front of the Propylæum is of ashlar and rock-face work, and it is pronounced a very beautiful structure. The women take special pride in the kitchen, which is complete in every respect. In the front basement are two sets of doctors' offices, both of which were rented long ago; one set to Dr. Maria Gates, and the other to Dr. Mary Smith. Dr. Gates is a graduate of the Chicago Medical College, and Dr. Smith of the Michigan University. The latter is physician at the female prison and reformatory.

"'The east parlor is rented by the Woman's Club, the Matinée Musicale, the Indianapolis Art Association, and the Contemporary Club, each of which has arranged to meet on such occasions that they will not interfere with each other. The west parlor is rented for physical culture classes, and to the Christian scientists for their Sunday meetings. The assembly hall will be for rent for entertainments.'

"This is interesting, as showing what an active, intelligent set of women have done.

"Perhaps some day I shall be receiving newspaper notices of even more important and successful work accomplished by some of my pupils. Here is an interesting notice of women as inventors: 'Within the last century, women have entered for the first time in the history of the world as competitors with men in the field of original contrivances. In the last two years and a half they have secured from the government exclusive rights in five hundred machines and other devices. In the line of machinery, pure and simple, the patent-office reports show they have exhibited great inventive capacity. Among remarkable patents of theirs, are patents for electrical lighting, noiseless elevated roads, apparatus for raising sunken vessels, sewing-machine motors, screw propellers, agricultural tools, spinning-machines, locomotive wheels, burglar alarms.

"'Quite a sensation has been caused among the clerks in the New York post-office by the entrance of seven young women into the money-order department as clerks during the last month. The girls obtained their positions by surpassing their male competitors at the civil-service examination, and will receive the same pay as male clerks.'

"Here is another that will interest the ambitiously literary among you:—

"'Miss Kingsley, daughter of Charles Kingsley, has been awarded the decoration of the French academic palms, with the grade of "officer of the academy," for her valuable writings upon French art.'

"There seems, as you will notice from what I have read you, no bounds to what we women not only can do, but in which our success is generously allowed and honorably mentioned; but there are several things to which I may as well call your attention here.

"There is not now, there never has been, an honorable achievement, but it has been gained by steady, persevering effort. I think I could pick out from among the young ladies before me, those who in the future will be able to hold positions of trust and usefulness, perhaps renown; they are the girls who are true, honest workers, day in and day out, week in and week out. This honest work never has been, never will be, done where time is frittered away, where rules are

broken, where those numberless little deceits which I am grieved to say many a girl who should be far above them sometimes practises; it requires a noble character to do noble work.

"I am desirous, particularly so, to impress upon you all to-day, as it is the beginning of our longest, hardest, and most important term of the year, the necessity for every one of you individually doing her best as a scholar, as a lady, and, let me add, what I wish I could feel sure you would strive for beyond all other claims, as a Christian. A true Christian is as good a scholar as her natural abilities allow, a lady she must be everywhere, and at every time.

"In closing, I have one request to make of you; you will see, while it does not seem to bear immediately upon what I have been saying, there is a close connection.

"I want to turn your attention specially to women's work in this nineteenth century. When you learn in a more extended manner than I have been able to give you this morning, what they have done, what they are doing, and what they expect to do, you will realize more fully your share in the life before you.

"In order that you may do this, at some not distant time, we will all meet in the parlor, and I shall expect every one of you to bring to me some account of this work. From two hundred of you, we ought to gather enough to make us not only proud of being women, but ambitious to be among the leaders of our sex."

Then she dismissed the school.

CHAPTER XXX.

DECEIT.

Miss Ashton's talk had an excellent influence upon the school. Even the wealthy girls felt there was something worth living for but society and fashion. A large proportion of the pupils were from families in moderate circumstances; to them avenues of access to power and influence were opened. To the poor, of whom there were not a few, help in its best sense was offered in ways that faithful diligence would make their own.

In just so far as Miss Ashton had made these two things, faithfulness and diligence, the groundwork of all success, she had given the true character to her school; and as the work of the term began with this demand upon the attention of the pupils, there was a fair prospect of its being the best of the year. The holidays had come and gone. Not a room in the large building but bore evidence of its wealth in Christmas gifts.

New books covered many of the girls' tables, new pictures hung on their walls; chairs, old and faded, blossomed into new life with their head-rests, their pretty pillows and elaborate scarfs; ribbons of all colors decked lounges, tables, curtains; pen-wipers, lay gracefully by the side of elegant ink-stands, perfume bottles stood on *étagères*, while the numbers of hand-painted toilet articles, articles to be used in spreads, bric-a-brac of all kinds and descriptions, it would have been hard to number.

Pretty, tasteful surroundings are as much a part of a girl's true education as the severer curriculum that is offered to her in her studies, and Miss Ashton gave the influences of these Christmas gifts their full value when she weighed the harder work for the teachers which the vacation always brought.

To be sure, there came a time at the beginning of the term when the unwise parents were responsible for much bad work. Those of their children who had come back with boxes filled with Christmas luxuries—candies, pies, cakes, boxes of preserved fruits, nuts, raisins, and whatever would tempt them to eat out of time and place—had little chance to do well in the recitation-room until these were disposed of.

In truth, even more difficult, more of a hindrance in her school discipline, Miss Ashton often found the parents than their children.

She was sometimes obliged to say, "I could have done something with that girl if her mother had let her alone." One fact had established itself in her experience, that almost every girl committed to her care had, in the home estimation of her character, traits which demanded in their treatment different discipline from that given to any of the others.

She could have employed a secretary with profit, simply to answer letters relating to these prodigies, and nine out of ten proved to be only girls of the most common stamp, both for intellect and character.

Marion had spent her vacation time in a profitable manner. As mathematics was her most difficult study, so she had given her attention almost entirely to it; and even Miss Palmer, who was never good-natured when a pupil was advanced into one of her classes, and by so doing made her extra work, was obliged to confess she was now among her best scholars.

Thus encouraged, Marion received an impetus in all her other studies; and, of course, as good scholarship always will, this added to the influence which her sterling moral worth and kindly ways had already given her.

There was one dunce in her mathematical class who gave her great annoyance; it was Carrie Smyth, a Southern girl, into whose dull head no figures ever penetrated.

There was something really pitiable as she sat, book in hand, trying to puzzle out the simplest problem, and Marion often helped her, until Miss Palmer prohibited it.

"I will not allow it," she said decidedly. "If Carrie cannot get her own lessons we ought to know it, and to treat her accordingly. Whatever assistance she needs, I prefer to give her myself."

Marion obeyed, and Carrie cried, but the consequences followed at once.

Carrie soon learned to copy from Marion's slate whatever she needed, and, as Marion sat next her in the class, this was an easy thing to do; and as Miss Palmer, wisely, seldom asked Carrie any but the simplest questions, well knowing how useless any others would be, she escaped detection until, one day, grown bolder by her escapes, she copied from Marion more openly, Marion seeing her. That this might have happened once, but never would again, Marion felt quite sure; but what was her dismay, when she saw it continue day after day. She was ashamed to let Carrie know of her discovery, as many another noble girl has been under similar circumstances, but she knew well that it could not be allowed, and that to pretend ignorance of the fact was wrong.

She moved her seat, but, after staring at her blankly out of her dull eyes, Carrie moved hers to her side, and the class all laughed at this demonstration of affection; but Miss Palmer, who had taught long enough to know that it might mean something but affection, watched them. She had not long to do so before she discovered Carrie's trick, Marion's knowledge of it, and her embarrassment.

After recitation, she told them to remain, and when they were alone together she said,—

"Marion Parke! how long have you known that Carrie Smyth copied her sums off your slate?"

Poor Marion! She looked at Miss Palmer, then at Carrie; the color came into her face, and the tears into her eyes, but she did not answer a word.

Miss Palmer repeated her question with much asperity. Still no answer, but two large tears on Marion's cheeks.

"You do not choose to answer me" (a little more gently now): "I shall report your behavior to Miss Ashton. Carrie Smyth, how long have you been copying Marion's sums, instead of doing your own?"

"I've—I've never copied them, Miss Palmer," said Carrie, looking Miss Palmer boldly in the face.

"Carrie Smyth, I saw you do so!"

"I—I never did, never, Miss Palmer. *Never!*"

"Go to your room, Carrie Smyth. I am not surprised at your readiness to tell a falsehood; you have been acting one for weeks, and they are all the same, the acted and the spoken, in God's sight. Go to your room and pray; ask God to forgive you."

Then she opened a Bible which lay on a table near her, and in very solemn tones read these words, "But the fearful and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers" (glancing off now in a threatening manner at Carrie), "and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Carrie turned very pale. If Miss Palmer had asked her for the truth again, she would have told it, but she did not; she only motioned the girls from the room, and went herself to see Miss Ashton.

Incidents similar to this were not unusual in the school, and Miss Ashton always considered them the most painful and troublesome to deal with. She waited a day or two before taking any notice of it, then she sent for Marion, who went to her room with fear and trembling.

"Marion," said Miss Ashton, beckoning to her to come and sit on the sofa beside her, "I am very sorry on your account that this has happened. It would have been better if you had told Miss Palmer as soon as you knew what Carrie was doing; better for her, for of course she was deceiving, and we know what that means; better for Miss Palmer, for she could form no just estimate of Carrie's scholarship, for which she is responsible; and better for you, because, in a certain way, it made you a partaker in the deception."

"O Miss Ashton! I could not tell on her; I could not, *I could not!*" exclaimed Marion.

"I understand you perfectly," said wise Miss Ashton; "I only want you to see the situation as it is. If you had thought of it, you might have come to me. Everything of that kind I should know, then your responsibility would have ceased, and, without making a class matter of it, I could have influenced Carrie to do right."

"Now, if you fully understand me, run back to your lessons, only remember, in whatever perplexity for the future you find yourself, I am the house mother, and you are all my children; you would not have hesitated to tell your mother if you had found any of your brothers or sisters doing wrong, should you?"

"No, ma'am; I should have gone to her at once."

"And not felt that you were a tell-tale?"

"Not for a moment."

"Just so, then, it is here; we are all one family, and there is nothing mean in reporting to me, more than to a mother. It's the motive that prompts the telling that gives it its moral character. It is the noblest that can act wisely, and escape the odium of tell-tales; and, my dear Marion, I feel quite sure that for the future I can trust you."

Marion went away with a light heart. "Trust me? of course she can," she said to herself; "but I am so sorry for Carrie Smyth."

Carrie, in truth, even after listening to the terrible denunciations Miss Palmer had read to her, was to be pitied for her moral as well as mental dulness. She went through the ordeal of her talk with Miss Ashton with far less feeling than Marion had shown; and the only punishment she minded was being put back into the class of beginners, and being told that the next time she was found doing anything of the kind, and told a falsehood about it, she would be expelled from school.

This, on the whole, she would have liked, for study was detestable to her, and there was nothing but the ambition of her mother that made it seem necessary in her home surroundings.

Both Miss Palmer and Marion were delighted to have her leave the class. Marion kindly kept the reason for her having done so to herself, though many inquiries were made of her by the other scholars.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MARION'S LETTER FROM HOME.

Soon after the first of January, Marion received the following letter from her mother:—

"We have all been made so happy to-day, my dear child, by a letter from Miss Ashton. She writes us how well you have been doing, and how much attached to you she has become. All this we expected as a matter of course, but what delights and satisfies us most, is what she says of your religious influence in the school. We knew we were sending you into an untried life, that would be full of anxieties and temptations. With all the confidence we felt in you, we should hardly, no matter how great the literary advantages offered, have liked to put you where the character of your surroundings would have been less helpful; and to know that you, in your turn, are proving helpful to others, is indeed a great gratification. God bless, strengthen, and keep you, my darling, through this new year, is your loving mother's prayer.

"It almost seems to me that we miss you more and more as time goes. Phil counts the weeks now until you come home, and I found the little ones busy doing a long sum on their slates, which, when they brought to me to see if it was right, I saw was to ascertain first, how many days before you came, and then, how many hours. Bennie told me that tomorrow they were to calculate the minutes, and then the seconds. I suppose they have, for I see them studying the clock very often, particularly the minute hand.

"So you see how we miss and long for you at home.

"Your father is busier than ever. He is truly a workman of whom his Master need not to be ashamed. He keeps well and happy. Deacon Simonds came in last night to ask him to have some extra meetings, as the Methodists were going to have an evangelist here, and might draw away people from his church; but your father said in his gentle way, 'The parish was not too large as yet for him to do all the work required, and if any of his people could be benefited by the evangelist, and should wish to unite with that church, he should wish them Godspeed.' Then the deacon said something about the difficulty of raising the salary, which I minded more than your father. What a good, trusting man he is! Mrs. Hoppen ran in this noon with a large tin pan full of delicious doughnuts she had fried for us, and Hetty Sprague put two pumpkin-pies into my pantry window. Not a day passes but we are cared for in some way. I laugh, for it looks as if they thought now you are gone there was no one left to prepare goodies for the home. Tim Knowles dumped a load of coal into our cellar when your father was away, then came to the kitchen door and said,—

"'Mis' Parke, you tell the parson if he'll keep up the fire of religion in the church, I'll keep it up in his study stove, and it sha'n't cost him a copper cent. We all d'ought to have ways of sarving the Lord, and this 'ere is mine.' Then he hurried away, without giving me a chance to even say 'Thank you.'

"Sometimes it seems to me as if our whole parish felt as if you belonged to them, and they had sent you away to school, and were to pay your expenses, they are so wonderfully kind and thoughtful of us. Your sabbath-school class sent you their New Year's gift yesterday; I

know you will value it. Old Aunt Cutts is knitting you a pair of blue stockings; the dear old lady is taking so much comfort out of the work, that she has made them large enough for you to put both of your little feet into one; and Kate Sanders brought me her white feather to ask me if, now you had to dress stylish, I didn't think you could make use of it. I thanked her, and told her that you were wearing a hat so small I was sure the feather was too large for it. I think it was quite a relief to her, for that soiled and bedraggled feather is to her still, 'the apple of her eye.'

"So, my dear parish child, you have a great burden of responsibility to carry; but your mother knows how easily and how honorably it will be borne."

Marion read this letter with a variety of feelings. It had never been the home way to make her religious character a separate and distinct thing. It dominated the whole home-life. Do right, *do right!* She had almost never been told, do not do wrong, but always do right, and this meant simply and only, be a Christian. It was such a noble way to step upward from the beginning; not easy, oh, no, far from that, so often doing wrong in spite of precept and example, so often hesitating, until the delay weakened the power of doing right; yet so often, with hope and prayer to aid her, planting her foot firmly on the upper rung, singing as she went.

Since she had been in school her life had been so changed, such different temptations to do wrong, such different helps to do right, that she had thought little of her influence upon her companions. The letter of her mother was almost a shock, as, for the first time, it brought up to her what she felt had been her neglect.

All these months here, and what had she ever done or said that would tell for Jesus? Three room-mates; had she ever tried, from the first of her coming among them, to help them into a Christian life? To be sure they had their set times for private devotions, time required by the rules, when every pupil was expected to read her Bible, if nothing more. That they had all done, and Dorothy had "entered into her closet, and shut her door." There could be no doubt that she had prayed to her Father which is in secret, and her Father which seeth in secret had rewarded her openly; for, often, when she came back among them, her face had been so full of sweet peacefulness. "Dorothy's influence has been the one for good, not mine," Marion thought, with that true humility which is a Christian grace. As for Gladys, why she was Gladys, and there was no one like her. So generous and noble, so true and faithful; I must learn of her surely, not she of me; but Susan! It must be confessed, that in the busy days Marion had almost forgotten Susan's dishonesty. She did not like her, often she found it hard to be even patient, much less kind, to her, and Susan was sometimes very trying. She could, and did, say many unkind words, "spites me," Marion said to herself; but generally bore the ill-humor pityingly, feeling sorry for a girl who could do as Susan had done. The fact was, that while Marion did not have Susan's guilt often in her mind, Susan never forgot it when she saw Marion. *Never* may be too strong a word to use; but Susan was constantly uneasy in Marion's company, often positively unhappy, wishing over and over again she had never heard of "Storied West Rock," especially never, never been tempted to steal that story, and palm it off for her own.

Not a day of her life but she expected to be found out, to be disgraced before the school, perhaps to be expelled. Poor Susan! she is reaping now the result of her selfish lifetime ambition to be among the noted ones, to be thought of first, and treated like a heroine! Ambition is a very laudable thing; we should all try to do our best, but never should it lead us into doing selfish, mean, dishonorable things; then it becomes a sin and not a virtue.

It was the weakness, nay, something worse, in Susan's character, as we all know, always leading her into trouble, because it was so wholly selfish.

If Marion could have reasoned all this out as we can, she would have had fewer compunctions of conscience as she sat holding her mother's letter in her hand, thinking over its contents.

It was some time before she could fully enjoy all the items of family news it contained. Then they drew her pleasantly back to the dear home, the small parish, and the life-long friends she had left there.

Gladys had been watching her as she read the letter, amused and interested by the different phases of feeling her face showed; when she saw her fold it up, she asked,—

"What's happened, Marion? You've looked as if you had been at a funeral, and then at a wedding, while you were reading it."

"I have—almost," and Marion could laugh now. "Let me read you the last part of it; it is so like home."

Then Marion read them about the children's sum, and the parishioners' kindness; and Gladys, as she listened, planned how she could help Marion without her ever suspecting from whence the help came, and Dorothy thought what a different home it must be from that she had left at Rock Cove.

Marion, instead of studying her next lesson, as it was obviously her duty to do, sat with her book open before her, wondering how she could immediately enter upon a course of conduct that would give her a more enlarged and prominent religious influence. Never once suspecting that this was a way the tempter was taking to lead her from the true self-abnegation which is so vital to a growing Christian character. Single-eyed to God's glory!

Miss Ashton in the recitation looked at her inquiringly several times. What could have happened, she wondered, to make Marion blunder so? She was generally prompt, and, considering how much she had to do to keep up with her class, correct; but to-day she seemed

distraught, as if her mind were anywhere but upon her recitation. She stopped her after the lesson was finished, and asked her if she were sick; but Marion was well, nor was she, in her preoccupation, aware that Miss Ashton was not pleased.

She answered her carelessly, which increased the teacher's uneasiness, and made her ask a little sharply, "What is it, Marion? You did badly in your recitation to-day."

"Ma'am!" said Marion, looking at her in surprise.

"I said you made a bad recitation," repeated Miss Ashton. "What has happened?"

Then the color grew deeper and deeper in Marion's face. "My letter from my mother," she said, "O Miss Ashton, I am so sorry!"

"Sorry for what? Is any one sick?"

"No, Miss Ashton; but—but—there was so much to think of in it. I am so sorry I did badly."

Now Miss Ashton smiled. "If that is all," she said, "I will try to forgive you. Can't you tell me something about your home letter? I like to hear of them."

Then Marion poured out her whole heart, thanking her kind teacher simply and winningly for her own kind letter to the Western home, but giving no hint of the seed of evil the letter may have sown.

CHAPTER XXXII.

PENITENT.

Marion's first plan in order to extend her religious influence was to get up a small prayer-meeting in her room.

To be sure, the room was shared by three others, and she had never quite gotten over the uncomfortable feeling that she was an intruder, particularly as Susan so often showed hostility to her; but a prayer-meeting surely was a thing no right-minded girl ought to object to. Of Dorothy's approval she had no doubt. Gladys, if she did not wish to stay, would go away without the least hesitation. Susan! What Susan would do, who could tell? Knowing the need she had of a vital change in character, in order to be a Christian, Marion made no attempt to conceal from herself that her conversion alone was an object worth earnest and constant prayer; really the reward for the conquering of any diffidence she might have to overcome in instituting the meeting. It was not an hour after she had decided upon the twelve girls she would invite, before the tempter had her in his power again. She was planning the order of exercises for the meeting, which was as it should be; but it was not as right that she was leaping forward in her thoughts to the criticisms which the girls would make upon the part she should take, the hope that they would admire her fluency and spirituality, and say to her when they were leaving the room,—

"O Marion! how much good you have done us! We shall be grateful to you as long as we live."

If any one had told her that here, by this same desire for self-aggrandizement, or, to call it by its more common name of popularity, Susan had fallen, she would have been astonished indeed.

Prayer-meetings were by no means uncommon in this academy; but they were under the care of a teacher, and it was not long before the necessity of asking leave for the one in her room occurred to Marion; but here was a difficulty! Would not Miss Ashton ask her questions about this, which she would find difficult to answer; such as, "What made her propose it? What did she expect to accomplish?" If she did ask these, what could she say?

There followed another day of poor recitations, and Marion, for almost the first time since she joined the school, was undeniably cross. By night she was sitting on the penitential stool, ashamed, tired, and full of wonder as to what had happened to her. As is not unusual in such cases, she was inclined to blame every one but herself. Miss Palmer had lost her patience with her because she hesitated over a difficult place in her mathematical lesson, and had snapped her up before the class; Anna Dawson had laughed at her blunder, and the whole class had most unkindly smiled. Dorothy had put her arm around her and asked her if she was sick, when she knew there was nothing the matter with her. Even Gladys had stopped scratching with her slate-pencil, looking at her in a way that said as plainly as words could, "What a nervous thing you are, not to bear the scratching of a pencil without wincing;" and as for Susan, tormenting as she had been on other days, she had been angelic in comparison with this. After all, she had too much good common-sense and true religious feeling to sit upon her stool long without beneficial results. It was nearly time for the lights to be put out before she began to see the first thing to be done was the right one; that is always sure. Do the duty nearest to you, then those more distant fall readily into line and are easily met. This was, to see Miss Ashton, no matter how awkward it would be to tell her that the thought of the prayer-meeting was first put into her head by Miss Ashton's letter home; that before, her religious influence had not been a thing of which she had for a moment thought, but that now she wished to make it tell.

"I'll go at once," she said to herself. "I won't give it up because I'm a coward. I shall not sleep a wink unless it's settled. Life is short; death may come at any unexpected moment. I should not like to have my Judge ask why I had not done my duty, when, perchance, I, even I, might have been a poor, weak instrument, but still an instrument, in saving a soul."

In this spirit Marion went to Miss Ashton's room, quite forgetting the lateness of the hour, and knocked timidly at the door.

Miss Ashton, wearied by her day's anxieties, did not approve of these late calls, and only answered them for fear of sickness, so it was some time before she said, "Come in."

She was not surprised to see Marion, for Miss Palmer had already reported her failure in the mathematical class; but she said kindly,

"What is wrong now, Marion? Have you had another letter from home?"

"No, Miss Ashton; it is—it was—I mean, I wanted to ask you if you had any objection to my having a prayer-meeting in my room?"

"A prayer-meeting in your room?" repeated Miss Ashton. "Why do you ask it?"

This was the question Marion had expected; but now, with Miss Ashton looking straight in her eyes, she hesitated to answer it.

"I thought—I hoped," she blundered at last, "that I might do more good,—might, perhaps, save Susan."

"I see," and Miss Ashton looked very grave now. "Your mother has told you what I wrote her of your religious influence here, and you wish to increase it; but why Susan particularly?"

Now Marion found herself unexpectedly in deep waters. If she attempted to answer this question, what disclosures she would have to make! A tell-tale! A mischief-maker! A character of all others she despised, and so did, she well knew, the whole school. She hung her head, the color coming into her face, and the tears into her eyes.

"There is something wrong here," Miss Ashton thought, but she only said,—

"I know Dorothy is a good girl; I am very fond of Gladys; but why do you select Susan as the one in the whole school to be prayed for, or with?"

If an equivocation had been natural or easy to Marion, she might have been ready with several now, which perhaps would have satisfied Miss Ashton; but she was a straightforward, honest girl, who never in her whole life had been placed before where she hesitated what to answer; if she had been a culprit to-night, she would hardly have looked more utterly discomfited than standing there trying to look Miss Ashton in the face.

"You do not choose to answer me," Miss Ashton said after waiting a moment. "Very well, then, we will go back to the prayer-meetings; I think it would be unwise for you to attempt any such thing. You might at first find a few girls who would be willing to come, but they would soon tire of it, and you would find yourself alone, unless Dorothy's kind heart made her willing to remain. Let me tell you, my dear Marion, the best, in fact the only way for a pupil to exert a strong and lasting religious influence is by living a consistent Christian life. What you *are* always tells, never what you may appear. If you are truly desirous to exert this influence, you will let your companions see it in your daily walk and conversation. All the prayer-meetings you could have would be useless, if you yourself failed in a Christian grace.

"To be kind, loving, gentle, true, faithful in all your duties, great and small, that is what your parents and I hope for in you. I had almost said, and I am sure you will not misunderstand me, I would rather have the influence of good recitations, strict observance of rules, lady-like behavior in all places and at all times, than a prayer-meeting in your room every night in the week. Now it is late; go back, and if you do not wish to tell me what is wrong with Susan, I must be all the more observant of her myself. Good-night."

Marion said "Good-night" faintly; certainly this was a very different reception from what she had expected. "She wants me to be perfect," she said to herself fretfully, "and she knows that I never can be; then Susan! What have I done? Oh, dear! dear! I wish I had never thought about a prayer-meeting."

So far she had only dimly seen where her motives had been wrong, but she felt their check.

Fräulein Sausmann met her on her way to her room.

"Why, Marione!" she said, drawing her little self erect, and trying to look very dignified, "I am astonish! I am regret! You am very onright. You am to be gone to Fräulein Ashton next day and say you regret; I determine on it! Marione, you stand-under?"

"I have just come from Miss Ashton," said Marion gravely.

"You has just come! Very bad. You *schlecht Fräulein!* What you for done?"

"Nothing, Fräulein. At least," correcting herself as she remembered Susan, "I hope nothing *schlecht.*"

"You do not say right, Marione; I shame you German speak so *schlecht.*" Then the Fräulein laughed merrily, and standing on the tips of her little toes she kissed Marion on both cheeks.

The kisses went right to Marion's heart, cheered and comforted her so her face had a less troubled look as she entered her room.

Susan was sitting at the table studying, and the searching glance she gave her made the color rush into Marion's face.

"She's gone and told of me, the ugly, mean, old thing," thought Susan. "I knew she would sooner or later. Now I'm in for it!"

In vain she tried to fasten her attention on her book again. Over and over the consequences of the disclosure she went with beating heart. "Oh, if I had never, never, never done it!" she said to herself in the helpless, hopeless way that attends a wrong action. The short-lived celebrity the story had given her had all died away, nothing remained but this dreadful regret, and fear of what was to come.

When she saw Marion go into her bedroom, she had almost a mind to follow her and confess the truth. Then she thought Marion knew it already, had perhaps told Miss Ashton, and a better thing to do would be to go to Miss Ashton and make the confession; to go at once, this very night, before she had a chance to tell the whole school: perhaps if she did, Miss Ashton would be merciful, would scold and forgive her. She looked at the clock; if she made haste there would be five minutes before they must put their lights out! Once done, what a relief it would be!

She darted from the room, not daring to trust a moment's delay; but when she reached the corridor the lights were already turned out. All would soon be darkness, and then none were allowed to leave their rooms.

But Susan was desperate now; she knew her way down the long flights of stairs so well that she had no fear: her only thought was to reach Miss Ashton, to confess, to know her punishment, if punishment there were to be.

She flitted softly, like a ghost, through the long corridors, down the long stairs; but when she came to Miss Ashton's door her gas was turned out, and that meant she would not open her door again that night.

"I'll knock! Perhaps, just perhaps, she will let me in;" but there was no response to Susan's knock. She stood waiting until she shivered with nervous dread from head to foot, then she crept back to her room, and tossed restlessly through a weary night.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SPRING VACATION.

The bright light of a sunny day has a wonderful influence in quieting fears, and the next morning when Susan waked and found her room cheerful, everything looking natural and pleasant, her first feeling was one of shame for all she had suffered the night before. Nothing was easier now than to make herself believe she had been foolish in her suspicion of Marion; indeed, it was not long before she had made herself almost sure that Marion knew nothing about the stolen story, that she had wronged her in suspecting, even if she did, that she would be mean enough to betray her. For the first time since she copied it, she treated Marion not only kindly but affectionately, much to Marion's surprise, for she knew how near she had come to betraying Susan, and remembered Miss Ashton's saying, "If you do not choose to tell me what is the matter with Susan, I must be all the more observant of her myself." Would she watch her? Could she ever in any way find out about "Storied West Rock"? "At any rate," Marion comforted herself by thinking, "it will not be through me; but I wish I had not said even what I did."

She wondered over Susan's advances, and met them coldly, shamefacedly. "If you only knew," she said to herself, "how different you would act!"

Very important as these events seem to those particularly engaged, they make little apparent difference in the life of a large school.

Marion again made faulty recitations, and again her teachers were troubled by them; but Susan, having in a measure, she could hardly understand how, been thrown off her fears, was unusually brilliant in her classes, winning what she valued so much, words of approbation from her teachers.

The school work went on now with much success. The holiday break-up was fairly over. Washington's Birthday was not celebrated other than with an abundance of little hatchets of all designs and colors. Easter was too far away, and the *animus* of the school was for quiet study. Even the club held meetings less often. The two girls who had been the chief planners of whatever mischief originated from it, Mamie Smythe and Annie Ormond, were on their best behavior, knowing full well that another misdeed, no matter of what character, meant expulsion.

Upon these weeks preceding the Easter vacation, Miss Ashton had learned to rely for the best part of the year's work; so uneventfully, with the exception of now and then some slight escapade on the part of the pupils, the term rolled on to its spring rest.

Easter came in the early part of April this year, but the season was backward, even snowstorms coming now and then; and fierce winds, more like March than April, forbade any hunting for

early flowers, or looking, as so many longing eyes did, for the swelling of the bare branches of the trees, or the first shadowing of the green tassels that waited to show themselves to warm sunbeams.

There were no examinations in this school, or marking the grade of scholarship; but for all that, there was never a doubt who were the best scholars, or who would have taken the prizes if any had been given.

A week before Easter, Marion received a letter from her Aunt Betty, inviting her to spend the coming recess with her; but she declined it, asking that the visit might be deferred until the long summer vacation, when, as she was probably not to return home, she should be very glad to come. Evidently Aunt Betty had forgotten whatever was unpleasant in the Thanksgiving visit, and to be among the mountains through some of the hot summer weeks seemed to Marion would be pleasant indeed. But when the vacation came, and she found herself with only a few other girls almost alone in the great desolated building, she more than once regretted her decision.

A pleasant young teacher of gymnastics, Miss Orne, was left in charge, but she was tired, and more anxious to rest than to amuse the girls, so they were left pretty much to themselves, and passed the ten days of vacation in the best way they could.

"Girls will be girls," that was what Miss Ashton said when the pupils who had been at home came back with their summer outfits, and she found the whole attention of the school given for a few days to their examination and comparison.

"If I could hear you talk half as much about any branch of study, or your art lessons, as I hear you talk about your new clothes," she said with a pleasant laugh, "I should be delighted; but I suppose nothing seems more important to you now than the fashions, and, on the whole, I don't know but I am glad of it."

It was this interest in their many-sided life that gave Miss Ashton her great influence over them. The girls would take articles of apparel to her for her inspection, and find them doubly valuable if they met with her approval.

There was one set whose wardrobes were objects of especial interest: those were the graduating class. Next to her bridal dress, there seems to be no other that is thought so much of, not only by the girl, but by her parents.

It would be idle, perhaps out of place here, to say how much display and foolish extravagance there is at such a time. Where it can be well afforded, it is of comparatively little importance, but a great deal of heartache might be avoided, if the simplest costume were decided to be the most suitable. Parents whose means have been tried to the utmost to give their child the advantages of the school, who have never hesitated over any labor or self-denial in order to accomplish it, find themselves at last called to confront the question of dollars, hardly earned or saved, squandered on a dress almost worthless for future use, on pain of seeing their child mortified and unhappy because she cannot, on this eventful occasion, look as well as the others. Even Miss Ashton's influence, great as it was, had failed to accomplish any good result in changing this long-established custom; and for reasons best known to themselves, the present senior class had voted in their class meetings to make their graduation day one long to be remembered in the annals of the school.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

NEMESIS.

Until this year this academy had had a salutatory and a valedictory in the same way they did at Atherton Academy, given for the best scholarship as it was there; but as this was considered a finishing school, differing therefore from the boys' school, which was only preparatory for other and higher education, it had been decided to change the graduating exercises to the four best essays, read by their writers, an address by some distinguished orator, music, and the giving of diplomas.

All the graduating class were expected to write an essay, the Faculty to judge of their merits, and to choose from among them four of the best.

Not only the interest of the class, but of the whole school, was intense on the writing of these essays. The literary merit of the teaching was to be shown by them; and as no graduating class ever comes to its commencement without pride in, and love for its *alma mater*, so it seemed as if the future reputation of the academy must depend upon the way this class acquitted itself.

If it had been a boys' school, bets would have run high on the supposed best writers; here there was nothing of the kind, only those who had done well whenever compositions had been read to the school were chosen as girls of especial interest, watched, *fêted*, praised, encouraged, in short, prematurely made heroines of.

Among the most conspicuous was Susan Downer. Though so little had been said of late of her success in writing "Storied West Rock," it was now recalled; and, as the weeks flew by before commencement, she was daily, sometimes it seemed to her hourly, reminded of it, and importuned to be sure and do as well now.

Poor Susan! She knew how really unable she would be to do anything that would compare with it. Over and over again she made the attempt; but as writing was not one of her natural gifts, and as now, whenever she tried even to choose a subject, the theft came up before her, and she went through the whole, from the first temptation to the last crowned success, she could think of nothing else but the inevitable punishment that somewhere and at some time was waiting for her.

There was but one hope she thought left for her, to see her brother Jerry, and tease him into giving her one of his essays, that she might use it as it was if possible, if not, with alterations that would make it suit the occasion. She would tell him that she only wanted to read it and get some hints from it, and once in her possession, she could do as she pleased.

When she received his note refusing her invitation to come to the academy, her disappointment and her helplessness may be readily imagined, for she had allowed herself to depend upon him.

To write to him for an essay she knew would be useless; he would only laugh, and say,—

"Nonsense! what does Sue want one for?" but if he were with her, he was so kind and good-natured, he would do almost anything she asked.

But one thing now remained. Miss Randall, their teacher in rhetoric, who had the charge of the essays, gave subjects to those who wished them; she could apply to her, and perhaps find in the library something to help her.

Miss Randall gave her, remembering her former success, and hoping she would do even better now, an historical subject, "The Signal of Paul Revere."

"There have not been more than a hundred poems written on the same subject," she said in a little talk she had with Susan; "but if you can write poetry, and succeed, all the better for Montrose Academy. We will send it to the newspaper, and it may be the beginning of making your name famous."

What a temptation to a girl like Susan!

If—only IF she could find one of those hundred or more poems, find perhaps the whole of them, and make rhymes (easy work that), and be "famous," what a glorious thing it would be!

Here was, alas, no repentance, or even fears of doing wrong. It almost seemed as if the new temptation had obliterated memory of the old theft, and she was about to enter upon what she had always longed for, a career of fame.

She began to haunt the library, particularly the shelves of American poetry; but there was nothing to be found that had special reference to Paul Revere, not one of "the hundred and more pieces."

In this way she wasted a great deal of precious time, until, disappointed and discouraged, she was about asking for another subject, when she came upon a volume of collections of poetry written on the late war, and a sudden thought that this might be made to answer the same purpose unfortunately struck her. She had read this kind of poetry but little; but had enough literary taste to make her choose one of the very best, consequently most popular and well known, for her model. "Model," she said to herself when, delighted, she found how easily she could use it with alterations.

No miser was ever made more happy by a bag of gold than she by this discovery. "Famous! famous! An honor to Montrose Academy!"

In the end, when her poem was ready for Miss Randall's examination, she read it aloud to her room-mates, and their astonishment and delight over her success they were too generous to withhold.

Dorothy had worked very hard on her essay. It was carefully and well done; but Gladys's, short, brilliant, straight to the point, without pause or repetition, was an effort of which an older, more accustomed writer need not have been ashamed.

But neither of these, they decided, could hold any comparison with Susan's. It was Marion who, though she did not recognize the poem, could not forget "Storied West Rock," that listened with a troubled face, and only added a few faint words to those of the others' praise.

"She is an ugly, jealous old thing!" Susan made herself think, as she watched her narrowly; but then would come the thought, "I wonder if she suspects me?" remembering the story, and a cloud fell instantly over the bright sky of her hopes. But she was not to escape so easily; when she carried her poem to Miss Randall, she only glanced at the heading and down over the neatly written page, without reading a line, then said, "Come to me to-morrow afternoon at three, and we will read and correct it together. I hope you have made a success of it."

Susan almost counted the hours until three came; then, proud and happy, she presented herself at Miss Randall's door.

The teacher had the poem on a table before her, and by its side a book, the covers of which Susan recognized at once as being the volume from which she had stolen the poem.

"Sit down, Susan," said Miss Randall gravely.

Then without another word she began to read first a line of Susan's poem, then one from the poem in the book, pausing over the changed words, to substitute the one for the other.

In truth, the changes were very few, how few Susan had not realized until they were thus set before her.

"This is hardly what might be called a parody," Miss Randall said as she ended, looking gravely into Susan's face. "I suppose you had no idea of passing it off as your own work?"

How inevitably one wrong act leads to another! There is an old saying that "one lie takes a hundred to cover it," and it is true.

Susan had confidently expected this to pass for her own; but now, without a moment's hesitation, looking Miss Randall fully in the face, with a pleasant smile she said,—

"Oh, no, Miss Randall! I knew you would recognize it; you are too good a teacher of literature not to suppose you would be familiar with such a fine poem as that. I thought if I made a successful parody, it would be better than any poor thing I could write myself."

Miss Randall was for a moment staggered. Was the girl telling her the truth, or was it only a readily gotten-up excuse? She waited a moment before she answered, then she said coldly,—

"This will not pass at all. I am sorry you have wasted so much time upon it; you will begin at once upon your essay, and, for fear you will be tempted to use some thoughts not your own, I will change the subject. You will write an essay on 'Truth.' Good-afternoon."

"Miss Ashton!" said Miss Randall, presenting herself, a few moments after Susan's departure, in the principal's room. "I am afraid Susan Downer never wrote that excellent story, 'Storied West Rock.' I always have wondered over it, for it was far superior to anything else she has done since she has been in school, and now, I am sure, though she denies it in a very plausible way, that she has copied a poem, with only a few immaterial changes to make it fit her subject, intending to palm it off for her own."

Miss Ashton did not answer at once; she was busy thinking. With the other teachers, her surprise had been great at the ability Susan had shown in the story; and now, instantly, she connected this report of Miss Randall's with Marion's embarrassed mention of Susan's name, and her own intention to discover what was wrong. Perhaps Susan had stolen it, and Marion had become acquainted with the theft. It was not impossible, at any rate she must inquire into it, so she said to Miss Randall.

A day or two was allowed to pass before any further notice was taken of it, then Miss Ashton had decided to spare Marion, and call Susan directly to her. Susan had word sent to her that she was wanted in the principal's room, and obeyed the summons with a heavy heart.

"Susan!" said Miss Ashton, "I am willing to believe that you copied your poem with the innocent intention of passing it off as a parody, and that you really did not know it could not be accepted, but there is one other thing that troubles me. Some time ago you wrote an excellent story called 'Storied West Rock;' was that yours, or another parody?"



Susan dropped her head upon her chest, the color

Susan! Susan! Tell the truth now; tell it at once, simply, honestly. Do not conceal even how you have suffered from it, not even how unkind and cross you have been to Marion. Own it all at once, quickly, without giving the tempter even a chance to tempt you! Don't you know, don't you see, how much your future depends upon it?

Susan dropped her head upon her chest, the color surging into her face, and the tears dropping from her eyes; but she did not speak a word.

In the silence of the room you could have heard a pin drop.

Miss Ashton was answered. When she spoke there was tenderness and deep feeling in her voice.

"Will you tell me the truth, Susan?" she said. But Susan did not answer; she only burst into a fit of hysterical sobbing, and after waiting a few moments in vain for it to subside, Miss Ashton added, "You had better go to your room now. I hope you will come soon to me, and tell me the whole truth."

Susan rose slowly, lifting her swollen and discolored face up to Miss Ashton with an entreating look the kind principal found it hard to resist; but she did. She held the door open for Susan to pass out, and watched her go down the corridor with a troubled heart.

CHAPTER XXXV.

FAREWELL WORDS.

There was little difficulty when the time came in deciding the four essays to be chosen. Kate Underwood's was in most respects the best, and would take the place usually filled by the valedictory. Dorothy Ottley's was the next strongest, and by far the most thoughtful. To no one's surprise as much as to her own, Gladys Philbrick's was the most brilliant, and Edna Grant's, the best scholar in English literature, the most scholarly.

So the important question was settled a week before commencement, and the young ladies were given their choice, either to read their pieces or to speak them.

Greatly to the surprise of the teachers they all chose to speak them, and the elocution teacher was at once put to drilling them for the occasion.

The choice was pleasantly accepted by the school. Every one of the four were favorites, and whatever disappointment the rejected essayists felt, they kept wisely to themselves.

Susan Downer's essay on "Truth" was a miserable failure, and a disgraced future was the only one she could see opening before her.

She could not summon courage to make a confession to Miss Ashton; she decided, after hours and hours of troubled and vexatious thought, to be silent, trusting to her speedy removal from the school to silence all further questionings.

Such a busy week as this was now at the academy! The mail brought every day piles of letters to teachers and scholars, which must be answered. Invitations were to be sent. All the preliminaries of a great gathering were to be attended to, and both the excitement and the listlessness attendant on a closing year were to be met and combated.

It would be interesting if we could tell the story of each individual during this eventful period, but it would fill a whole volume by itself, so we must be contented by telling simply of those with whom we have had the most to do.

Miss Ashton tried as far as she could, with so much else to attend to, to have a little personal conversation with every pupil who had been under her care for the year. Sometimes she saw them alone, sometimes she took them in classes, according to the importance of what she had to say. Before talking with Marion she sent the following short letter to her mother:—

MY DEAR MRS. PARKE,—I should esteem it a personal favor if you would allow your daughter Marion to remain with me free from expense to you for another year. She has proved in all regards not only an excellent scholar, but, as I wrote you before, the influence of her lovely Christian character has been of great value to me. I shall be glad to do all I can to help her into the influential and well-balanced future I see before her. You need have no fear that a feeling of indebtedness to me will be a burden to her, delicate as her feelings are. I propose, by putting her at the head of my post-office department, to fully repay myself for all she will receive. This will not interfere with her studies or her needed recreation, but will come at hours she can easily spare.

Hoping this will meet with your cordial approbation,

Truly yours,
A. S. ASHTON.

It was not until an answer to this had been received that Miss Ashton sent for Marion to come and see her. Marion had in the mean time a letter from her mother, asking if she wished to remain. To which Marion had answered, "Yes! Yes!" So now all Miss Ashton had to do was to tell Marion how satisfied she was both with her and the arrangement, and Marion to tell her kind teacher of her delight in remaining.

Gladys was to return with her father after a pleasant summer spent at Rock Cove, and to her, Miss Ashton had much wise advice to give regarding her future. A motherless child, an indulgent, though wise father, no brothers or sisters, only a crowd of worshipping dependents; probably not to another girl in the whole school was there to come years which would test the character as hers was to be tested.

Excellent advice was given; the question was, Would it be followed?

For Dorothy there was less doubt. Miss Ashton had already found a school for her, where, excellently well-fitted, she could begin in the fall her career as a teacher. Of her success, only Dorothy felt a doubt.

Susan Downer, Miss Ashton had put off seeing until the last, hoping the girl would come herself and confess, if there was anything to confess; but as day after day went by, Susan shunning her when she could, and when she could not, passing her with averted face, Miss Ashton saw she must take the matter into her own hands and settle it one way or other; to ignore was to condone it. It was, therefore, only a few days before the close of the term when Susan, who had grown almost buoyant in her hope of escape, found herself summoned to what she was sure was to be her final trial.

"She can't expel me now," she said to herself triumphantly as she went to the room, "and she can't withhold my diploma, for that is for scholarship, and I stand well there, so I'm safe at any rate."

Still it was a trembling, pale girl that answered Miss Ashton's "Come in."

"I do not want you to leave me uncertain both of your truth and honesty," she said gently. "I have been waiting, hoping you would come to me of yourself, but as you have not, I *demand* now an answer to my question. Did, or did you not write 'Storied West Rock'?"

"I d—i—d."

Before she had time to finish the answer, Miss Ashton had said emphatically, "*not*; I know the truth, Susan! I want to spare you the falsehood I see you are about to tell."

"I am not going to ask you where you found the story; I only want you to see, and see so plainly that you can never forget it, how small and mean a thing such a deceit, or any deceit, is, and how sure in the end to turn to the injury of the one who commits it. Of all the class that are to leave me, you, Susan Downer, carry away with you my greatest anxiety for your future. God help and save you, you poor child!"

Miss Ashton's voice had tears in it as she ceased speaking, and those, more than any words she had spoken, reached and moved the girl before her.

"O Miss Ashton! Miss Ashton!" Susan cried, rushing to her, and throwing both arms around her neck. "Do, *do, do*, please forgive me? It was Marion Parke's book, and I thought no one would ever know. I've been so sorry. I'd have given worlds, worlds, *worlds*, if I had never seen it! O Miss Ashton, what shall I, shall I do?"

"Ask God to forgive you," Miss Ashton said solemnly. "It is another and a greater judge than I that has the power to do so. If I were only sure," but she did not finish her sentence, she only loosened Susan's arms gently from around her neck, then said "good-by" to her, and watched her once more as she went away down the corridor.

"And Marion Parke knew it all the time, but would not tell on Susan," she said to herself as she turned back into her room. "Marion is a girl to be depended upon, I am glad she is to stay with me."

"Kate Underwood," she said, when Kate's time came for the farewell counsel, taking both of the girl's hands in hers, "I'm proud of you. You have done of late what many older and wiser persons have failed to do,—learned the lesson, which I hope has been learned for your lifetime, that there is no fun in things, however written or spoken, that hurt other's feelings. I have seen you many times thoughtful and tender, when your face was alive with the ridiculous thing you saw or heard. Kate, I feel so much safer to let you go from me now than I should have six, even three months ago. Tell me, will you try not to forget?"

"I'll be good as long as I live. I'll never make fun, no, not even of myself," burst out Kate, "though now I'm dying to get before a mirror and see how I must have looked when you thought me so thoughtful. Was it so, Miss Ashton?" and Kate made up a face which a sterner rebuker than her teacher could not have seen without a smile.

"There's no use, Kate," she said; "go now, only don't forget."

And Kate made a sweeping courtesy and disappeared.

With Mamie Smythe she had a long talk, not one word of which did either divulge. In that hour it would be safe to say Mamie learned some life-lessons which it will be hard for her to forget.

And so the time passed on. Recitations ceased four days before commencement, and the girls, those even who thought themselves over busy before, found every hour brought a fresh claim upon their time.

"Our bee-hive," Miss Ashton called it, and the girls called her the "queen bee," and made many secret plans about the various gifts they were to give her the last night of the term. The ceremony this year was to be a public one, therefore of great importance.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WOMEN'S WORK.

The night before commencement Miss Ashton had reserved for the reading of notices of woman's work and success. This she did at that time, because she wished her pupils to carry away a full belief not only in their own abilities, but also in the position which, with diligence, these abilities would enable them to reach.

The whole school gathered in the hall. Miss Ashton had requested that the notices should be handed in to her a few days previous. Now she said, "Young ladies, I am both surprised and pleased at the readiness and faithfulness with which you have responded to my request. I have here," lifting a pretty, ribbon-tied basket, "at least one hundred different notices! Just think! *one hundred* instances in which women have tried, and have succeeded in earning not only a respectable, but a successful livelihood. This fact speaks so well for itself, that all remaining for me to do is to read you some of these notices. I must make a selection from among them, and the first one I will read I am sure will interest you:—

"Mlle. Sarmisa Bileesco, the first woman admitted to the bar in France, is said to have taken the highest rank in a class of five hundred men at the École du Droit, Paris, where she studied after receiving the degree of Bachelor of Letters and Science in Bucharest. She has begun to practise law in the latter city, where her father is a banker.'

"Here is another one in the same profession:—

"Mrs. Tel Sone is a leading lawyer in Japan, and has a large and profitable practice.'

"Miss Jean Gordon of Cincinnati, upon whom will be conferred the degree of Ph.G. at the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy, has earned the highest average ever attained by any woman graduate of that institution. Out of one hundred and eighty-four graduates of this year, only six obtained the highest rating of "distinguished." Miss Gordon was one of the six. She was the only woman in her class, and had to contend with bright young men.'

"Miss Gordon, I think," remarked Miss Ashton, "has a distinguished future before her.

"Female professors and lecturers are to be introduced into the Michigan University at Ann Arbor.'

"Two female medical graduates have been appointed house surgeons at two English hospitals.'

"An Ohio girl discovered a way of transforming a barrel of petroleum into ten thousand cubic feet of gas.'

"Another woman has constructed a machine which will make as many paper bags in a day as thirty men can put together.'

"An invention which you hardly would have expected from a woman, is a war vessel that is susceptible of being converted off-hand into a fort by simply taking it apart.'

"Chicago, March 25. Miss Sophia G. Hayden of Boston wins the one thousand-dollar prize offered for the best design for the woman's buildings of the World's Fair.'" (A sensation among the scholars, which pleased Miss Ashton). "Miss Lois L. Howe, also of Boston, was second, five hundred dollars, and Miss Laura Hayes of Chicago gets the two hundred and fifty dollars offered for the third best design.

"Miss Hayden is a first-honor graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Miss Howe is from the same institution. Miss Hayes is Mrs. Potter Palmer's private secretary.

"As soon as the awards were made, Miss Hayden was wired to come to Chicago immediately and elaborate her plans. The design is one of marked simplicity. It is in the Italian renaissance style, with colonnades, broken by centre and end pavilions. The structure is to be 200 × 400 feet, and 50 feet to the cornice. There is no dome. The chief feature of ornamentation is the entrance.'

"I am glad to tell those of you young ladies who feel symptoms of architectural genius only waiting for development, that year by year this institute is opening its door wider and wider to admit women. This last year the ten who are new members of it were for the first time invited to a class supper, going to it matronized by Mrs. Walker, the wife of the president.

"One other thing I want you to remark. These three young ladies, by their ability, and the

success which is the fruit only of faithful study, have done more for women's advancement than has been accomplished for years.

"A man who is a successful architect occupies an important and proud position; that a woman can do the same is no small help in the struggle she is now making.

"I recommend them to you as examples, particularly as I know there are a number among you who will not be content to let graduation from this school end your educational life.

"The next I shall read you is a notice of women as journalists:—

"'Let me give you a fact about women as journalists in my own office,' said the editor of one of the largest dailies to me a few days ago.

"'Five years ago I employed one woman on my staff, to-day I have over twenty, and the best work which appears in our papers is from the pen of women writers. Of course you cannot give women all sorts of commissions; but if I want a really conscientious piece of work done nowadays, I give it to one of our women. I find absolutely they do their work more thoroughly than do the men.'

"Young ladies, it has always been complained of women that, though they are quicker, guided by instincts that act promptly and for the greater part correctly, they are not patient or thorough. Now, as I have told you so often that it must sound trite to you to have me repeat it, it is only patient thoroughness that wins. I am glad to have this editor of one of our largest dailies give this indubitable testimony that we *can* be thorough if we will. For those of you who neither wish nor expect to continue study any further, I will read the opportunity offered for a bucolic life:—

"'Miss Antoinette Knaggs, a young woman with a good collegiate education, owns and manages a farm of two hundred acres in Ohio. She says she made money last year, and expects to make more this year. "I have tried various ways of farming," she says, "but I find I can get along best when I manage my farm myself. I tried employing a manager, but I found he managed chiefly for himself. Then I sub-let to tenants, and they used up my stock and implements, and the returns were unsatisfactory. So I have taken the management into my own hands, planting such crops as I think best, and I find I am a very good farmer, if I do say it myself.'"

"Said the daughter of a New Hampshire farmer to me a few days ago," continued Miss Ashton, "'When my father died my mother took the control of our whole large farm into her own hands. She managed so well that we have sold our farm and moved down to suburban Boston, where we can command the literary advantages she has taught us not only to prize but to love.' The collegiate education fitted Miss Knaggs to be a better, wiser farmer. I hope if it shall be the choice of any of you, you will find yourself abler for your life here."

"I am sure we shall," thought a Dakota young lady, whose father's broad ranch covered many a goodly acre, and whose secret wish had always been to own a ranch of her own.

"There seems to be no profession now from which a woman is shut out, though we hear of fewer among lawyers than in any other profession. I find only one more among all these notices. 'Fourteen women were graduated from the university of New York Law School last night, among the number being Mrs. George B. McClellan, daughter-in-law of the late General McClellan.' But I well know there have been women associated with their husbands in the law. Women also with their own offices, doing a large and important business.

"In England, civil service is open to them; and though it does not correspond of course with our law, still the same strict education is needed for success.

"Here is a paper which states the terms on which ladies enter the civil service.

"'They enter as second-class clerks, receiving \$325 a year, rising by fifteen dollars a year to \$400. Here the maximum, which is certainly small, is reached; but there is promotion by merit to clerkships, rising to \$550 a year, and a few higher places, which go up to \$850. Three lady superintendents each receive up to \$2,000, and four assistant superintendents each \$1,000. The work is not difficult, and the hours are seven a day. An annual holiday of a month is allowed.'

"These wages are no larger than would be paid here for the same services. I know women have no difficulty, if once elected, in filling clerkships and secretaryships, and they even have important places in the treasury department at Washington. A very telling record might be, probably has been, made of their successes there.

"In the medical profession we all know how rapidly they have risen to the front. Stories that sound almost fabulous are told of the income some of the most talented receive; and to show the popularity this new movement has attained, it is only necessary to state that at the present day it would be hard to find a town, north, south, east, or west, which has not its woman doctor. The medical colleges have large classes of them; and in Europe names of many American girls, if they do not lead in number, do at least in ability."

Here there was a resolute stamping and clapping, which pleased Miss Ashton too much for her to attempt to stop it.

"If I had more time I could tell you some wonderful but entirely true stories of difficult surgical operations being performed in foreign hospitals by young American women in so remarkable a way that they excited not only the applause of the fellow-students, but won prizes.

"As this is only one of the professions, I must hurry on to the ministry. We all know that in some of our denominations there are numbers of women who occupy the place of settled minister, and

do well. On the whole, however, they may be considered more successful as lecturers, Bible-readers, and elocution teachers; and then there is a wide open field to them as actresses and singers; indeed, no public or private way of earning a livelihood or a reputation is denied them.

"Teaching always has been theirs, and year after year the profession becomes more and more crowded and the requirements for good teachers more strict. Many of you, young ladies, I find are looking forward to this in your immediate future. I need not here urge upon you the necessity of being well prepared when your day for examination comes. I have held it up before you during all the past year.

"This is an incomplete list of the great things which I expect you young ladies of the graduating class to perform. I would not, however, on any account, forget that broad and specially adapted woman's work,—the different philanthropic schemes with which this nineteenth century abounds.

"So many are in women's hands; like women's boards of missions, children's hospitals, homes for little wanderers, young women's Christian homes, young women's industrial union, North End missions, Bible-readers, evangelists, flower committees for supplying the sick in charity hospitals, providing excursions for poor children, providing homes in the country for the destitute and orphan children, society of little wanderers, newspaper boys' home, boot-black boys' home.

"It is possible for me to name but a small part of them, but those of you who have the means of helping any one of these objects named, or any of the many others, will remember, I hope, that wonderful cup of cold water which, given, shall give to the giver the rich reward.

"This will probably be my last opportunity to speak to you alone as my school. Let me thank you heartily for all you have done this year, and some of you for four long years, to make our life together pleasant, and we hope acceptable to our great Taskmaster. I wish you now, for myself and all the other teachers, a pleasant vacation, and a safe return to those of you who are to come back to us."

There were many quiet tears shed among the girls, and Miss Ashton's eyes were not quite dry.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

COMMENCEMENT.

Commencement morning rose upon Montrose clear, bright, and hot. Almost with the first dawn of the early day the hum of busy preparation began. Every hour of the previous day and night had brought parents and friends, some from great distances, to attend the celebration.

The quiet town swarmed with strangers, all with faces turned toward the large brick building which, standing boldly prominent on its hill, had a welcoming look, as if the roses around it, that filled the air with their delicious fragrance, had blossomed that morning in new and charming beauty.

The lawn, plentifully besprinkled with small flower-beds, was elsewhere one broad sheet of velvet green; and the blossoms of every variety and every hue crowded the beds so cheerfully, so merrily, that many parents lingered as they passed them, their hearts warming at the sight of the Eden in which their daughters had lived.

Commencement exercises were to be held in the large hall, to which ushers appointed for that purpose took all the visitors before the entrance of the school, so it really made quite an imposing show when Miss Ashton, arm in arm with the president of the Board of Trustees, came slowly in, the gentlemen composing the board following, then the teachers, and after them the pupils in their gay holiday dresses. The senior class, of course the most prominent, coming onto the stage with the other dignitaries.

There was nothing of peculiar interest in the exercises that followed. Commencements all over the country are much the same. The four young ladies who were to read their essays acquitted themselves well. Gladys, to her father's great delight, with her soft Southern voice, her sparkling face, and her easy, self-possessed, graceful ways, was the undoubted favorite. A storm of applause followed the reading, and bouquets of flowers fell around her in great profusion.

It was the bestowing of the diplomas that attracted the most attention.

There was something touching in the gentle smile of the aged president as, calling each member of the class by her name, he spoke a few Latin words and handed her the parchment that made her for life an alumna of Montrose Academy. It was almost as if he had laid his hand on her head in benediction.

The pleasant dinner that followed was the next marked event of the day. To this all the school, and as many invited guests as could be accommodated, sat down, and the large hall was full of the cheerful voices of those who had come to congratulate and those who were congratulated. Nothing could have made a more fitting ending to the home-life of the busy year; so many

kindly, cheering words spoken, so much of hearty encouragement for the coming year.

Pupils and teachers, some of them together for the last time, but hardly among them an exception to the tender affection which bound them together.

Susan Downer had been graduated. She held her diploma in her hand as she went off the stage with the others, but she was far from happy. "Miss Ashton is glad to have me go," she thought. "She neither respects nor loves me."

No one noticed her dejection. Amidst the general happiness she seemed to herself forgotten, almost shunned. "And I had hoped," she thought, "to make this such a triumphal day!"

It would be idle to waste any sympathy on Susan. There is an old adage, "As you make your bed, so must you lie in it." She had done a dishonorable, untrue thing, and had repented only over its consequences.

It is very sad but true, that what we have once done, or left undone, said, or not said, can never be recalled. No repentance can efface its memory; no tears can blot it out; and only one, the great, kind Father, can forgive.

Susan to the last day of her life will have that act clinging to her. She can never forget it.

The moral is obvious, needing no words to make it plainer.

Immediately after dinner the school broke up and the departures began.

The farewells that were spoken, the tears that were shed, the oft-repeated kisses that were given, it would be difficult to tell.

By twilight the large building began to have a desolated look. Miss Ashton, pale and tired, stood bravely in a doorway, kissed and wiped away tears, and silently blessed pupil after pupil in rapid succession.

The Rock Cove party considerately made their farewells brief, and taking Marion with them hurried to the evening train that was to carry them home. Then down over the building settled the beautiful June twilight, and the year of study was over.

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