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Title: Brenda's Bargain: A Story for Girls

Author: Helen Leah Reed

Illustrator: Ellen Bernard Thompson Pyle

Release date: September 8, 2011 [EBook #37335]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Heather Clark, Mary Meehan and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net> (This book was produced from scanned images of public domain material from the Google Print project.)

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BRENDA'S BARGAIN: A STORY FOR GIRLS

Brenda's Bargain

A Story for Girls

BY HELEN LEAH REED

**AUTHOR OF "BRENDA, HER SCHOOL AND HER CLUB" "BRENDA'S SUMMER AT ROCKLEY,"
"BRENDA'S COUSIN AT RADCLIFFE"**

ILLUSTRATED BY ELLEN BERNARD THOMPSON

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1903

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Published October, 1903

UNIVERSITY PRESS
JOHN WILSON AND SON
CAMBRIDGE, U. S. A.



But what startled Brenda was the sight of a girl sunk in a heap beside the broken glass

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BRENDA'S BARGAIN

I

THE BROKEN VASE

One fine October afternoon Brenda Barlow walked leisurely across the Common by one of the diagonal paths from Beacon Street to the shopping district. It was an ideal day, and as she neared the shops she half begrudged the time that she must spend indoors. "Now or never," she thought philosophically; "I can't send a present that I haven't picked out myself, and I cannot very well order it by mail. But it needn't take me very long, especially as I know just what I want."

Usually Brenda was fond of buying, and it merely was an evidence of the charm of the day that she now felt more inclined toward a country walk than a tour of the shops.

Once inside the large building crowded with shoppers, she found a certain pleasure in looking at the new goods displayed on the counters. It was only a passing glance, however, that she gave them, and she hastened to get the special thing that she had in mind that she might be at home in season to keep an appointment. Her errand was to choose a wedding present for a former schoolmate, and she had set her heart on a cut-glass rose-bowl. Yet as she wandered past counters laden with pretty, fragile things she began to waver in her choice.

"Rose-bowls!" the salesman shrugged his shoulders expressively; "they are going out of fashion." And Brenda wondered that she had thought of a thing that was not really up to date; for, recalling Ruth's wedding presents, she remembered that among them there were not many pieces of cut-glass, and not a single rose-bowl.

At last after some indecision she chose a delicate iridescent vase, beautiful in design, but of no use as a flower holder. Its slender stem looked as if a touch would snap it in two. It cost twice as much as she had meant to spend for this particular thing, and had she thought longer she would have realized that so fragile a gift would be a care to its owner. Self-examination would have shown that she had made her choice chiefly to reflect credit on her own liberality and good taste. But her conscience had not begun to prick her as she drew from her purse the twenty-dollar bill to pay for the purchase.

A moment later, as Brenda walked away, a crash made her turn her head. A second glance assured her that the glittering fragments on the floor were the remains of her beautiful vase. But what startled Brenda more than the shattered vase was the sight of a girl sunk in a heap beside the broken glass. She recognized her as the cash-girl whom the clerk had told to pack her purchase. Evidently she had let the vase fall from her hands, and as evidently she was overcome by what had happened.

Had she fainted? Brenda, bending over her, laid her hand on the girl's head. Aroused by the touch, the child raised her head, showing a face that was a picture of misery. Sobs shook her slight frame, and she allowed a kind-looking saleswoman who came from behind a counter to lead her away from the gaze of the curious. Meanwhile the salesman who had served Brenda brushed the bits of glass into a pasteboard-box cover.

"I'm very sorry," he said politely, "but we cannot replace that vase. As I told you, it was in every way unique. However, there are other pieces similar to it—a little higher-priced, perhaps—but we will make a discount, to compensate—"

"But who pays for this?" Brenda interrupted, inclining her head toward the broken glass.

"Oh, do not concern yourself about that, it is entirely our loss. Of course, if you prefer, we can return you your money, but still—"

"Will they make that poor little girl pay for the glass?"

"Well, of course she broke it; it was entirely her fault; she let it slip from her fingers. She is always very careless."

"But I paid for it, didn't I?" asked Brenda. "That is my money, is it not?" for he still held a bill between his fingers.

"Why, yes; as I told you, you can have your money back."

"I have not asked for my money, but I should like to have the vase that I bought to take home with me. It will go into a small box now."

"Do you mean these pieces?" The salesman was almost too bewildered to speak.

"Why, of course, they belong to me, do they not?" and a smile twinkled around the corners of Brenda's mouth. At last the salesman understood.

"It's very kind of you," he said, emptying the pieces from the cover into a small pasteboard box. "Mayn't we send it home?"

"Yes, after all, you may send it. Please have it packed carefully;" and this time both Brenda and the salesman smiled outright.

"It's the second thing," said the latter, "that Maggie has broken lately. She's bound to lose her place. It took a week's wages to pay for the cup, and I don't know what she could have done about this. It would have taken more than six weeks' pay."

"I should like to see her," said Brenda. "Can I go where she is?"

"Certainly, she's in the waiting-room, just over there."

"Come, come, Maggie," said Brenda gently, when she found the girl still in tears; "stop crying, you won't have to pay for the glass vase. You know I bought it, and I'm having the pieces sent home."

As the girl gazed at Brenda in astonishment her tears ceased to flow from her red-rimmed eyes. But the young lady's words seemed so improbable that in a moment sobs again shook her frame.

"It cost twenty dollars," she said; "I heard him say it. I can't ever pay it in the world, and I don't want to go to prison."

"Hush, hush, child!" cried a saleswoman who had stayed with her. "You must stop crying, for I have to go back to my place."

She looked inquiringly at Brenda, and Brenda in a few words explained what she had done.

"You are an angel," said the kind-hearted woman; "and if you can make Maggie understand, perhaps she will stop crying."

Now at last the truth had entered Maggie's not very quick brain. Jumping to her feet she seized Brenda by the hand.

"You mean it, you mean it, and I won't have to pay! But I'll pay you some time. Oh, how good you are! How good you are!"

"There, Maggie, you'll frighten the young lady, and you're not fit to go back to the store. Your eyes would scare customers away. I'll take word that you're sick, so's you can go home now; and, Miss, I hope Maggie'll always remember how kind you've been."

As the woman departed Brenda had a new idea, and when the message came that Maggie might go home she asked the little girl to meet her at the side door downstairs when she had put on her hat. "I want to talk with you," she said, "and will walk with you a little way."

Such condescension on the part of a beautiful young lady was enough to turn the head of almost any little cash-girl, and Maggie could hardly believe her ears, yet she hastened toward the side door where Brenda was waiting. The latter glanced down at a forlorn little figure in the scant, green plaid gown, which, although faded, was clean and whole. Her dingy drab jacket was short-waisted, and her red woollen Tam o' Shanter made her look very childish.

As the two stood there in the doorway two young men whom Brenda knew passed by. They were among the most supercilious of the younger set, and as they raised their hats they looked curiously at Brenda's companion. Brenda, though undisturbed, realized that she and Maggie were standing in a very conspicuous place.

"Come, Maggie," she said, "wouldn't you like a cup of chocolate? I'm going to get one for myself."

The little girl meekly followed her to a restaurant across the street, and when they were seated at an upstairs table near a window Maggie felt as if in some way she had been carried to a palace. There was really nothing palatial in the room, though it was bright and cheerful, with a red carpet that deadened all footfalls. But Maggie herself had never before sat at a little round table in a pleasant room, with a waitress attentive to her. A lunch counter was the only restaurant that she had known, and this was certainly very different. The hot chocolate with whipped cream, and the other dainties ordered for the two, made her half forget her grief for her carelessness. Gradually she lost a little of her shyness, and told Brenda about her work, and about the aunt with whom she lived.

"She wants me to keep that place, for it's one of the best shops in town. But she's awful cross sometimes, and I'm terribly afraid of losing it. You see," she continued, "my fingers seem buttered, and I don't run quick enough when they call. I feel all confused like, for there's so much coming and going. Ah, I wish that I had something else I could do!"

"When did you leave school, Maggie?"

"Oh, I'm a graduate; I'm fifteen past, and I got my diploma last spring. My aunt was good; she thinks girls ought to go to school until they get through the grammar school. She says my mother

and me, we've been a great expense, and the funeral cost a lot, so she needs every cent I earn."

Gradually Brenda understood about Maggie, and it seemed to her that she would like to talk with her aunt. Glancing at the little enamelled watch pinned to her coat, she saw that it was nearly four o'clock, and this reminded her that at four she was to walk with Arthur Weston. Hurrying her utmost, she could not keep the appointment. She would much prefer to go home with Maggie.

To think with Brenda was usually to act. So, finding her way to a telephone in the office downstairs, she called up her own house, and was surprised to have Arthur himself answer the call.

"But where are you?" he asked; "why can't you come home?"

"I've something very important to do, and I can walk with you any day."

"Really!"

"Yes, indeed."

"But you shouldn't treat me in this way. I shall rush out to find you."

"You can't do it, so you might as well give it up."

In spite of Arthur's slight protest his voice had its usual jesting tone, but before he could remonstrate further he was cut off, and Brenda had turned back to Maggie.

Though it was but a few months since the announcement of Brenda's engagement to Arthur Weston, these two young people had known each other long enough to have a thorough understanding of each other's character. Brenda knew that Arthur hated to be mystified, and Arthur knew that Brenda was wilful. Yet each at times would cross the other along what might be called the line of greatest resistance.

If Maggie was surprised that her new friend wished to accompany her home she did not show her feeling, and Brenda soon found herself in a car travelling to an unfamiliar part of the city. Near the corner where they left the car was a large building, which Maggie explained was a very popular theatre.

"I love to look at those pictures," said the girl, pointing to the gaudy bill-boards leaning against the wall. "I've only been there once, but I'm going Thanksgiving,—if I don't lose my place."

Her face darkened as she remembered that her prospect for having money to spare at Thanksgiving had greatly lessened this afternoon. Brenda did not like the neighborhood through which they now hastened toward Maggie's home in Turquoise Street. It had not the antiquity of the North End, nor the picturesqueness of the West End. There were too many liquor shops, and the narrow street into which they turned was unattractive. She did not like the appearance of many of the people whom she met, and she felt like clinging to Maggie's hand.

Still, the house itself which Maggie pointed out as the one where she lived looked like a comfortable private house. Indeed, it once had been the dwelling of a well-to-do private family. But inside, its halls were bare of carpets, and not over clean. Evidently it had become a mere tenement-house.

"I wonder what my aunt will say," said Maggie timidly, as they stood at the door of her aunt's rooms.

"We'll know soon;" and even as Brenda spoke Maggie had opened the door, and they stood face to face with a small, sharp-featured woman.

"Goodness me! Maggie, are you sick? What did you come home for? Oh, a lady! Please take a seat, ma'am," and Mrs. McSorley showed her nervousness by vigorously dusting the seat of a chair with the end of her blue-checked apron.

Brenda thanked her for the proffered chair, for she had just climbed two rather steep flights of stairs. She felt a little faint from the effort, and from the odors that she had inhaled on the way up. One tenant had evidently had cabbage for dinner, and another was frying onions for tea. Although Brenda herself could not have told what these strange odors were, they made her uncomfortable. While Maggie was explaining why she had returned home so early, Brenda glanced with interest around the room. It seemed to be a combination of kitchen and sitting-room. Above the large cooking-stove was a shelf of pots and pans, and there was an upholstered rocking-chair in one corner. There were plants in the windows, and a shelf on the wall between them with a loud-ticking clock. Under the shelf stood a table with a red-and-white plaid cotton table-cover. A glass sugar-bowl, a crockery pitcher, and a pile of plates showed that the table was for use as well as for ornament. Through a half-open door Brenda had a glimpse of a bedroom that looked equally neat and clean.

"I'm sure, Miss," said Mrs. McSorley when Brenda had finished her story, "I'm very much obliged to you. Maggie's a dreadful careless girl, and a great trial to me. She'll make it her duty to pay that money back to you."

"Oh, no, indeed, I couldn't think of such a thing; if any one was to blame it was I for buying so delicate a vase. Besides, they shouldn't have a small girl carry things about."

"Oh, no, Miss, it was just Maggie's fault. Her fingers are buttered, and sometimes I don't know what her end will be. I suppose I'll have to put her somewhere so's she can't do no mischief."

At these ominous words Maggie's tears fell again, and Brenda, as she afterward said to Arthur, felt her "heart in her mouth." For Mrs. McSorley, with her arms akimbo, and her high cheekbones and determined expression looked indeed rather formidable, and Brenda hesitated to suggest what she had in mind for Maggie's benefit.

"I've tried to do my duty by her," continued Mrs. McSorley, "just as I did by her mother, and we gave her a funeral with three carriages after she'd been sick on my hands for two years, and her only my sister-in-law; and I kept Maggie at school till she graduated, and she's got a place in one of the best stores in town on account of that. If she had any faculty she might have kept her place, but if people haven't faculty they haven't anything."

While her aunt was talking Maggie had hung up her things,—the Tam o' Shanter on a hook on the bedroom door and the coat on another hook in the corner. Brenda, watching her, thought that her orderliness might prove an offset for her buttered fingers.

Though there was little emotion on Mrs. McSorley's rather hard-featured face, she looked at her visitor with curiosity. She was so pretty, with her slight, graceful figure, waving dark hair, and the friendly expression in her bright eyes was likely to win even so stolid a person as Mrs. McSorley.

"She dresses plain and neat," said Maggie, after Brenda had left; "but she must be awful rich to wear a diamond pin to fasten her watch to the outside of her coat, and there was about a dozen silver things dangling from her belt."

Yet though Brenda made a good impression on Mrs. McSorley, the latter would not commit herself to say just what she would have Maggie do if she should lose her place. She'd set her mind on having the girl rise through the different grades. "I hate to have to switch my mind round—I'm that set," she had explained, adding, "Maggie thinks me stingy because I take all her earnings instead of letting her spend money for fine feathers and theatres like the rest of the girls hereabouts. But some time she'll be grateful." Then came Brenda's opportunity for saying a little about her plan for Maggie,—a plan so quickly made, so likely to be set aside by the grim aunt.

While Mrs. McSorley listened she moved around the room, filling the tea-kettle, lighting the lamp. At last, when Brenda had finished, her reply gave only a slight hope that she would agree to the plan. Yet Brenda felt that she had gained a point when Mrs. McSorley promised to go with Maggie in a few days to visit the school.

The lighted lamp reminded Brenda that outside it must be dusk. It would trouble her to find her way to the cars through unfamiliar streets, and she was only too glad to accept Maggie's offer to guide her, and Maggie was more than delighted to have this last chance for a little talk with "the kind young lady."

"You'll not cry," said Brenda, "even if they won't take you back; remember that you have a new friend."

"Oh, Miss, you're so good, and to think that you have nothing for your twenty dollars but those pieces of broken glass."

"Ah! it's very pretty glass," responded Brenda, "and I'm going to keep the pieces as a reminder."

What she meant was that she would keep the pieces as a reminder not to be extravagant, and as she looked at the little silver mesh purse hanging at her belt she smiled to think that since she left home in the early afternoon it had been emptied of more than twenty dollars, while she had nothing to show for the money,—nothing, indeed, except her new acquaintance with Mrs. McSorley and Maggie, and some fragments of glass.

II

A FAMILY COUNCIL

Brenda had to change from the surface car to one that would take her home through the subway. It was so late that she involuntarily stepped toward a cab standing on the corner opposite the Common. On second thought she decided to economize, since she had already had an expensive afternoon. After depositing her subway ticket she had to wait a few minutes for her car in a crowd, and some one scrambling for a car pushed some one else against her. Brenda, looking around, saw a handsome black-eyed girl with a dark kerchief pinned over her head.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she said, with a foreign accent, fumbling in a basket that she carried on her arm.

Later, as the car was emerging into the light of the open space near the Public Garden Brenda's hand went instinctively toward the silver-mesh purse that she wore at her belt. It was not there,

though she remembered having taken a coin from it as she bought her car ticket. Though accustomed to losing her little personal possessions, Brenda especially valued this purse, and she set her wits at work to trace the loss. She remembered the little girl with the basket, and recalled that the moment before the child had begged her pardon she had felt something jerk her belt. Had she only put the two things together earlier she might have recovered the purse; for of course the child had taken it. Yet to prove this would have been difficult. She would never have had the courage to call a policeman, and remembering the little girl's large, soft eyes, she found it hard to believe her a thief. "An expensive afternoon!" she said to herself. "My twenty dollars gone in one crash, and then that pretty purse with two or three dollars more. What will they say when I tell them at home?"

Then she decided to say nothing about losing the purse. This was the kind of thing that they expected her to do, and her brother-in-law would tease her unmercifully. But Brenda was not secretive, and it was easy enough to speak about Maggie and the broken vase. The story did not lose by her telling, especially as the box with the broken pieces arrived when she was in the midst of her tale. The family was seated in the library after dinner, and each one begged for a little piece of the iridescent glass as a souvenir. But Brenda refused the request, on the plea that for the present she wished to have something to show for her money.

"Although even without the vase I feel that I've gained something," she concluded.

"Experience?" queried her father; "I always hoped you'd feel that experience is a treasure."

"Of course," responded Brenda, "but I was thinking of Maggie McSorley; she may prove of more worth than twenty dollars if she becomes my candidate for Julia's school,—a perfect bargain, in fact."

"If she keeps her promise—"

"If! why, Mamma, I am sure that she will."

"Speaking of losing," interposed Agnes, Brenda's sister, "Arthur lost his temper to-day when he found that you were so ready to break your appointment."

"Oh, he'll find it soon enough; besides, he can't expect me always to be ready to do just what he wishes."

"Well, this involved some one else. He had promised young Halstead to take you to his studio to see a picture, and he was greatly disappointed, for the picture is to be sent away to-morrow."

"There!" exclaimed Brenda, "why didn't I remember? I thought that we were simply going for a walk to Brookline, but they shut off the telephone, or cut me off, and that was why he couldn't remind me. I'm awfully sorry."

"You won't have a chance to tell him so this evening. What shall I say when I see him?"

"You needn't take the trouble, Ralph," replied Brenda; "we're to ride to-morrow, and I can explain."

"It will be his turn to forget."

But Brenda did not heed Ralph's teasing, for already at the sound of three sharp peals of the door-bell she had rushed out to meet her cousin Julia.

"Oh, Julia, I have found *just* the girl for your school; she is an orphan and hates study, and—"

"Well, upon my word!" exclaimed Ralph, "those are certainly fine qualifications,—'an orphan and hates study!'"

"I understand what she means, or thinks she means," responded Julia, as she laughingly advanced to the centre of the room, greeting the family cordially, while Agnes helped her remove her hat and coat.

"You've come for a week, I hope," exclaimed her uncle, kissing her.

"Oh, I shall be here several times in the course of the week, and I shall stay now overnight. But a whole week away from my work! Ah! Uncle Robert, you're a good business man, to suggest such a thing!" And, seating herself on the arm of Mr. Barlow's chair, Julia shook her finger playfully in his face.

"When do you have your house-warming?" asked Agnes, taking up the bit of sewing that she had dropped on Julia's entrance.

"We are not to have a house-warming, but later we shall invite you one by one, or perhaps two by two, to see the house."

"I suppose you've taken out all the good furniture, and in a certain way the Du Launy Mansion must be greatly changed."

"Don't speak so sadly, Aunt Anna; it is changed, and yet it is not changed. But I did not know that you were attached to the old house?"

"Hardly attached, Julia, for I was there only once, when I called on Madame Du Launy the year

before her death. But in its style of architecture and its furnishings it seemed so completely an old-time house that I regret that it has had to be changed into an institution."

"Oh, no, please, Aunt Anna, not an institution; anything but that. Why, we mean to make it a real home, so that girls who haven't homes of their own will feel perfectly happy. Of course we have had to make some changes in the house itself, and remove some of the furniture, but when you visit us you will see that it is far removed from an institution."

"How many nationalities have you now, Julia? You had a dozen or two waiting admittance when you were last here, had you not?"

"There are to be only ten girls in the home, and there are still some vacancies. Indeed you are a tease, Uncle Robert."

Yet, although her uncle and aunt had teased her a little, Julia was not disconcerted, and when Agnes asked her to tell them something about the girls already in residence, she entered upon the task with great good-will.

"Well, first of all, Concetta. It's fair to speak of her first, because she's Miss South's protégée. She is the genuine Italian type, with the most perfectly oval cheeks, and a kind of peach bloom showing through the brown, and her hair closely plaited and wound round and round, and the largest brown eyes. Miss South became interested in her last year when she was visiting schools. She found that her father meant to take her out of school this year to become a chocolate dipper."

"A chocolate dipper! I've heard of tin dippers,—but—"

"Hush, Ralph, you are too literal."

"Yes," continued Julia, "a chocolate dipper. You know there's an enormous candy factory there on the water front, and most of the girls think their fortunes made when they can work in it. But after Miss South had visited Concetta a few times she thought her capable of something better, and so she is to have her chance at the Mansion. But her uncle Luigi was determined to make Concetta a wage-earner as soon as possible. She did not need more schooling, he said."

"Fortunately, however, Concetta has a godmother who, although a working-woman, dingily clad, and apparently hardly able to support herself, is supposed to have money hidden away somewhere. On this account she has much influence in the Zanetti family, and a word from her accomplished more than all our arguments. Concetta is now freed from the dirty, crowded tenement, and I feel that we may be able to make something of her. Then there is Edith's nominee, Gretchen Rosenbaum, whose grandfather is the Blairs' gardener. She's pale and thin, and not at all the typical German maiden. She has a diploma from school of which she is very proud, and she says that she wants to be a housekeeper. The family are very thankful for the chance offered her by the Mansion."

"The Germans know a good thing when they see it, especially if it isn't going to cost them much," said Ralph.

"Then," continued Julia, "there are my two little Portuguese cousins, Luisa and Inez, as alike as two peas in a pod. Angelina told me about them, and their teacher confirmed my opinion that it would be a charity to save them from the slop-work sewing to which their old aunt had destined them."

"How much of an annuity do you have to pay the aunt?" asked Ralph.

Julia blushed, for in fact, in order to give the girls the opportunity that she thought they ought to have at the Mansion, she had had to promise the aunt two dollars a week, which the latter had estimated as her share of their earnings for the next two years. Julia did not wholly approve of the arrangement, although she knew that only in this way could she help the two little girls.

"Hasn't Nora contributed to your household?"

"Oh, yes, the dearest little Irish girl; we can hardly understand a word Nellie says, though she thinks she talks English. Nora ran across her and a party of other immigrants one day when she had gone over to the Cunard wharf to meet some friends. Nellie and a half-dozen others had become separated from the guide who was to take them to their lodging-place in East Boston. They were near the dock, and Nora became very much interested in Nellie. She took her name and destination, and later went to see her, and the result is one of our most promising pupils; that is, we have a chance to teach her more than almost any of the others. But there! I'm ashamed of talking so much shop."

"Oh, no, it's most interesting. You haven't finished?"

"Well, there are two or three other girls, of whom I will tell you more some other time, and there are one or two vacancies. I wish, Brenda, that you could send us a pupil. I'm afraid that you won't have much interest in the school unless you have a girl of your own there."

"But I have—I will—that is—can't you see that I have something very important to tell you?" and thereupon Brenda launched into a glowing account of Maggie McSorley and the prospect of her going to the Mansion. "I just jumped at the idea when it came to me," concluded Brenda, "for I have had so many things on my mind this summer that I didn't make the effort that I had

intended to find a girl for you. But now I shall do my utmost to persuade that cross-grained aunt, and I am bound to succeed."

"I wouldn't discourage you, but evidently you made little headway this afternoon," said her mother, "in spite of the pretty high price that you have paid for the pleasure of Maggie's acquaintance."

"Just wait, Mamma; just wait. When I really set out to do a thing I generally succeed. I found out to-day that Mrs. McSorley rather begrudges Maggie her home, although she feels it her duty to keep her. She says that Maggie has a way of upsetting things that is very trying, and she's had to give up to her the little room that she used to keep for a sitting-room. Oh, I'm certain that I can persuade her to spare Maggie."

Then the conversation drifted on to other sides of the work, and Julia's enthusiasm half reconciled Mr. and Mrs. Barlow to the fact that she was to be away from them.

"Home is a career, and we need you more than any group of strange girls possibly can," Mr. Barlow had protested, when Julia had shown him the impossibility of her settling down quietly at home.

"You have Brenda and Agnes. Suppose that I had gone to Europe for two or three years after leaving college. I am sure that then you would not have complained, for you would have thought this a thing for my especial profit and pleasure. Now when I shall be so near that you will see me at least once a week, you are not altogether pleased, because you think that I am likely to work too hard."

"Oh, papa needn't worry," cried Brenda; "I shall see that you have enough frivolity. You shall not overwork the poor little girls either. I feel sorry for them now, with you and Pamela and Miss South egging them on. But I have various frivolities in mind, and you must encourage me."

"I never knew you to need encouragement in frivolity. A little discouragement would be more likely to have a wholesome effect."

Thus they chatted, and Mr. Barlow, looking up from his evening paper from time to time, was convinced that Julia's new interests had certainly not yet taken away her taste for the lighter side of life.

Indeed, on the whole, he had no decided objection to the scheme that Julia and Miss South had started to carry out. As his niece's tastes so evidently ran in philanthropic directions, he knew that in the end she must be happiest when following her bent.

Miss South herself would have been the last to claim originality for the much-discussed school. There were other social settlements in the city, and one or two other domestic science schools in which girls had a good chance to learn cooking and other branches of household work. Yet the school at the Mansion had an object all its own. Miss South felt that each year many young girls drifted into shop or factory who might be encouraged to a higher ambition. For many of them evidently thought first of the money they could immediately earn, and there was no one to suggest that if they prepared themselves for something better they would later have more money as well as greater honor. So she tried to find girls willing to spend two years at the Mansion, while she watched them and advised them and guided them into what she believed would be the best avenue of employment for them. Some people thought that she meant to train all the girls to be domestics; others thought she aimed to keep them out of this occupation. She meant to train them all in housework so thoroughly, that, whether they entered service or had homes of their own, they should be able to do their work properly. She meant, if any of these girls showed special talents, to encourage them to pursue their natural bent.

"Would you let them study art or music?" some one had asked in surprise.

"Yes; why not?"

"Why, girls from the tenement districts!—it doesn't seem right to encourage them in this way."

"Oughtn't any young thing to be encouraged to follow its natural bent? It's a case of individuals, not of sections of the city."

"I've always been sorry," explained Miss South, "for the bright girls who drop out of school at fourteen that their able-bodied parents may snatch the little wages they can earn in the factories. The ten or twelve girls we may have here at the Mansion are very few compared with the hundreds who need the same kind of chance. But I am hoping that through these a broader influence may be exerted."

Although many critics naturally thought that Miss South did wrong in giving girls of a certain class ideas above their sphere, on the whole she was commended for undertaking a good work. There were some also who pitied Mrs. Barlow on account of Julia's partnership in the scheme.

"This is what comes of letting a girl go to college," and they wondered that Mrs. Barlow herself did not express more disapproval.

"You'll have only orphans," said Mr. Elton, a cousin of Mrs. Barlow's, who took much interest in the work; "for in my experience fathers and mothers of the working class are just lying in wait for the earnings of their half-grown daughters. To fill your school you will either have to kill off a few

fathers and mothers, or else consider only orphans to be suitable candidates. To be sure, you might offer heavy bribes to parents. But of course you can get the orphans easily, if they have cruel aunts or stepmothers."

"As to cruel aunts," responded Julia, "judging from my own experience, as was said of Mrs. Harris, 'I don't believe there's no such a person;' and in spite of Ovid and Cinderella, I have my doubts about cruel stepmothers."

"We'll see," said Mr. Elton. "At any rate, you'll have to bribe your girls, and when I meet them my first question will be, How much do they pay you to stay?"

One of the most delightful features in fitting up the house for its new use had been the eagerness to help shown by many of Miss South's former pupils.

Ruth, for example, in furnishing the kitchen, had said, "This will show that I have a practical interest in housekeeping, even though I am to spend my first year of married life in idle travel."

"With your disposition it won't be wholly idle," Miss South had responded.

"Well, I do mean to discover at least one or two new receipts, or better than that, some new articles of food, that I can put at the service of the Mansion upon my return."

"We certainly shall have you in mind whenever we look at these pretty and practical things."

III

BRENDA AT THE MANSION

One fine afternoon, not so very long after she had wasted her twenty dollars and made a friend of Maggie McSorley, Brenda in riding costume opened the front door. As she stood on the top step, somewhat impatiently she snapped her short crop as she gazed anxiously up Beacon Street.

On the steps of the house directly opposite were three girls seated and one standing near by. They were schoolgirls evidently, with short skirts hardly to their ankles, and with hair in long pig-tails. As she looked at them, by one of those swift flights of thought that so often carry us unexpectedly back to the past Brenda was reminded of another bright autumn afternoon, just six years earlier. Then she and Nora, and Edith and Belle, an inseparable quartette, had sat on her front steps discussing the arrival of her unknown cousin, Julia.

How much had happened since that day! Then she had been younger even than those girls across the street, and Julia, who had come and conquered (though not without difficulties) was now a college graduate.

But Brenda was not one to brood over the past, and when one of the girls shouted, "We know whom you're looking for," she had a bright reply ready.

Soon around the corner came the clicking of hoofs on the asphalt pavement. Brenda, shading her eyes from the sun, looked toward the west.

"Late, as usual, Arthur!" she cried, a trifle sharply, as a young man, flinging his reins to the groom on the other horse, ran up the steps toward her.

"Impatient, as usual!" he responded pleasantly, consulting his watch. "As a matter of fact, I'm five minutes ahead of time. But I'd have been here half an hour earlier had I known it was a matter of life and death."

The frown passed from Brenda's face. The two young people mounted their horses, and the groom walked back to the stable.

"Have a good time!" shouted one of the girls, as the two riders started off.

"The same to you!" cried Arthur.

"Ah, me!" exclaimed Brenda, as they rode on, "I feel so old when I look at those Sellers girls. Why, they are almost in long dresses now, and I can remember when they were in baby carriages."

"Well, even I would rather wear a long dress any day than a baby carriage," responded Arthur. "There, look out!" for they were turning a corner, and two or three bicyclists came suddenly upon them. Brenda avoided the bicyclists, crossed the car tracks safely, and soon the two were trotting through the Fenway.

The foliage on the banks of the little stream was brilliant, and here and there were clumps of asters and other late flowers. They rode on in silence, and were well past the chocolate house before either spoke a word.

"Why so silent, fair sister-in-law?"

"Oh, I was only thinking."

"No wonder that you could not speak. I trust that you were thinking of me."

"To be frank," replied Brenda, "that is just what I was not doing. In fact I was thinking of a time when I did not know of your existence."

"Mention not that sad time, mention it not! fair sister-in-law."

When Arthur used this term in addressing Brenda she knew that he was bent on teasing; for although her sister had married Arthur's brother, her engagement to Arthur, announced in June, might very properly be thought to have done away with the teasing title "sister-in-law."

"Don't be silly, Arthur," cried Brenda; "you can't tease me to-day. Several years of my life certainly did pass before I had an idea that you were in the world. I was thinking of the time before we knew each other, when I was so jealous of Julia."

"Jealous of Julia!"

"Oh, I hadn't seen her when I began to have this feeling."

"But why—what made you jealous if you hadn't seen her?"

"I can't wholly explain. Perhaps it wasn't altogether jealousy. You see I didn't like the idea of her coming to live with us."

"You must have got over that soon. You and she have always seemed to hit it off pretty well since I've known you."

"Oh, yes, ever since you have known us; and I've always been ashamed of that first year. Though Belle led me on, just a little."

As Arthur still seemed somewhat mystified, Brenda described Julia's first winter in Boston; and she did not spare herself, when she told how she had shut her cousin out from the little circle of "The Four."

"Really, however, Nora and Edith were not at all to blame. They liked Julia from the first. Then what a brick Julia was when she made up that sum of money that I lost after we had worked so hard at the Bazaar for Mrs. Rosa."

Though Arthur had heard more or less about these things before, he enjoyed hearing Brenda narrate them in her quick and somewhat excited fashion.

"Why, you may believe that I really missed Julia when she was at Radcliffe, and I'm fearfully disappointed that she won't be at home with us this winter."

"She isn't going back to Cambridge, is she? I certainly saw her degree, and it was on parchment."

"Oh, Arthur, how you do forget things. I'm sure that I wrote you about the school that she and Miss South were to start."

"I was probably more interested in other things in the letter. But has she lost her money, and hence starts a school?"

"Arthur, I believe that you skip pages and pages."

"No, indeed, dear sister-in-law, but some pages sink more deeply in my mind than others. Has Julia lost her money, and therefore must she teach?"

"You are hopeless, though I believe that really you remember all about it. It's Miss South's scheme. You see she has that great Du Launy house on her hands, and it's a kind of domestic school for poor girls, and Julia is to help her."

"What kind of a school?"

"A domestic school; I think that's it; to teach girls how to keep house and be useful."

"Indeed! Then couldn't you go there for a term or two, Brenda? That kind of knowledge may be very useful to you some time."

Whereupon Brenda urged her horse and was off at a gallop, so distancing Arthur for some seconds before he overtook her. On they went through the Arboretum, and around Franklin Park, then over the Boulevard toward Mattapan and Milton. It was dusk when they turned homeward, and dark, as they looked from a height on the city twinkling below them.

As Arthur left her to take the horses to the stable Brenda called after him, "I may take your advice and enter the school for a year or two."

"We'll see," responded Arthur.

Now, although Brenda had no real intention of entering the new school, either as resident or pupil, she was deeply interested and extremely anxious to see what changes had been made in the Du Launy Mansion, and she was to make her first visit there a day or two after this ride with Arthur Weston.

The school itself was not as new as it seemed. It had existed in Miss South's mind long before she had a prospect of carrying out her plans. Many persons thought it a fine thing for her when she

was able to give up her teaching and live a life of leisure in the fine old mansion with Madame Du Launy.

Yet Miss South had wholly enjoyed her work at Miss Crawdon's school, and she had said good-bye to her pupils with regret. Kind though her grandmother was, she had sacrificed more than any one realized in becoming the constant companion of an exacting old lady. Still, as this was the duty that lay nearest her, she devoted herself to it wholly.

Although Madame Du Launy had lived in a large and imposing house, containing much costly furniture, her fortune was smaller than most persons supposed. The larger part of her income came from an annuity that ceased with her death. Miss South had not enough money left to permit her to keep up the great house in the style in which her grandmother had lived; for out of it small incomes were to be paid during their lives to three old servants, and after their deaths this money was to go to Lydia South's brother Louis. To Louis also went the money from the sale of certain pictures and medieval tapestries that the will had ordered to be sold. As to the Mansion itself, Lydia South could do what she liked with it and its contents,—let it, sell it, or live in it.

"She'll have to take boarders, though, if she lives there," said some one; "aside from the expense it would be altogether too dreary for a young woman to live there alone."

But Miss South had no doubt as to what she should do. Here was the chance, that had once seemed so far away, of carrying out her plans for a model school. She found that it was wisest for her to retain the old house for her purpose, as she could neither sell it nor rent it to advantage. The neighborhood was not what it had once been. Almost all the older residents had moved away; two families or more were the rule in most of the houses in the street, and not so very far away were several unmistakable tenement-houses. Miss Crawdon's school had left the street a year or two before, and if she should sell the house no one would buy it for a residence. Julia, who was to be her partner in the new scheme, thought the Du Launy Mansion far better suited to their purpose than any house they could secure elsewhere.

"The North End would be more picturesque, and we could do regular settlement work among those interesting foreigners. But there is more than one settlement down there already, and here we shall have the field almost to ourselves."

Changes and additions to the house had been made during the summer, and not one of Julia's intimates, excepting those who were to live in the Mansion, had been permitted to see it. Nora and Edith and Brenda had implored, Philip had teased, but all had been refused. "You must wait until everything is in readiness."

When, therefore, Brenda and Nora one morning found themselves walking up the little flagged walk to the old Du Launy House, they speculated greatly as to the changes in the house. Outside, on the front at least, there had been no alterations, and everything looked the same as on that morning when the mischievous girls had ventured to pass under the porte-cochère to apologize for breaking a window with their ball. It was the same exterior, and yet not the same. It had, as Brenda said, "a wide-awake look," whereas formerly almost all the blinds had been closed, giving an aspect of dreariness. Now all the shutters were thrown back, blinds were raised, and fresh muslin curtains showed at many windows instead of the heavy draperies of Madame Du Launy's time.

In place of the sleek butler who had seemed like a part of the furnishings, permanent and unremovable, Angelina opened the front door, beaming with satisfaction at the dignity to which she had risen. Indeed she fairly bristled with a sense of her own importance, and answered their questions in her airiest manner.

"Oh, Manuel's doing finely at school, Miss Barlow. I can't be spared much now to go to Shiloh, but I was there over Sunday, and my mother's got two boarders, young women that work in the factory and don't make much trouble for her. So you see I'm not so much needed at home. John's got a place, too, in the city this winter, so that I'll see him sometimes," and Angelina giggled in her rather foolish way.

As she ushered them into the sitting-room Julia emerged from the shadows of the long hall to greet them, and then there was a confusion of sounds, as Nora and Brenda eagerly asked questions at the very moment when Julia was trying to answer them.

"Yes," said Julia, as they sat down in the reception-room, "this is the same room where I first saw Madame Du Launy, the day I took Fidessa home. But you've both been here since?"

"Oh, yes, and I can see that it hasn't been so very greatly changed. There's that picture of Miss South's mother that brought about the reconciliation, as they'd say in a novel," responded Nora gayly. "I'm glad that you haven't made the reception-room as bare as a hospital ward; I had my misgivings, as I approached the door."

"Oh, we wished this to be as pleasant and homelike as possible; you can see that there are many things here that I had in my room at Cambridge," and she pointed to a Turner etching, and a colonial desk, and an easy-chair that Brenda and Nora both recognized.

"The greatest changes," continued Julia, "are in the drawing-rooms;" and leading the way across the hall, Brenda and Nora both exclaimed in wonder. Two drawing-rooms, formerly connected by folding-doors, had been thrown together, and with the partitions removed, the one great room was really imposing.

"You could give a dance here," cried Brenda, pirouetting over the polished floor.

"Who knows?" replied Julia with a smile.

"I'm afraid that you'll have nothing but lectures and classical concerts, and other improving things," rejoined Brenda.

"Who knows?" again responded Julia.

"But it's really lovely," interposed Nora; "I adore this grayish blue paper,—everything looks well with it. And what sweet pictures! why, there's that very water color that Madame Du Launy wanted to buy at the Bazaar. To think that it should come to her house after all! And there's your Botticelli print; well, I believe that it will have an elevating effect; I know that it always makes me feel rather queer to look at it."

"Strange logic!" responded Nora, as they wandered through the large room. "I suppose that you chose the books, Julia; they look like you,—Ruskin, and Longfellow, and Greene's 'Shorter History;' surely you don't expect girls like these to read such books. Why, I haven't read half of them myself; and such good bindings. I really believe that these are your own books."

"Why not? We have had great fun in choosing the books we thought they might like to read from my collections, and from the old-fashioned bookcases in Madame Du Launy's library. The best bindings are her books. Many of them had never been read by any one, I am sure; and as to the covers, we shall see that they are not ill-treated. We have a theory that they may be more attracted by handsomely dressed books; for there's no doubt," turning with a smile toward Miss South, "that they think more of us when arrayed in our best."

"I love these low bookcases," continued Nora; "and I dare say that you'll train them up to liking this Tanagra figurine, and the Winged Victory, and all these other objects that you have arranged so artistically along the top."

"And how you will feel," interposed Brenda, "when some girl in dusting knocks one of these pretty things to the floor. That bit of Tiffany glass, for instance, looks as if made expressly to fall under Maggie McSorley's slippery fingers."

"Oh, that reminds me, Brenda, Maggie has come," said Miss South.

"No; not really?"

"Yes, her aunt brought her over very solemnly two or three days ago. She said she thought it her duty not to trouble you again, as Maggie had already been so much expense to you. She came here the day after you saw her, and I explained our plans, and what we should expect from every girl who entered. She promised that Maggie should stay the two years, and showed a canny Scotch appreciation of the fact, that although Maggie could earn little or nothing while here, at the end of the time she would be worth much more than if she had spent the two years in a shop."

"But how does Maggie feel?"

"Oh, I should judge that resignation is Maggie's chief state of mind. We are going to try to help her acquire some more active qualities," said Miss South.

"Come, come;" Brenda tried to draw Nora from the centre table on which lay many attractive books and periodicals. "I'm very anxious to see Maggie. Can't we see her now, Julia?"

"I believe she's in the kitchen, and as this is one of our most attractive rooms, you might as well go there first."

"The kitchen, you remember, is practically Ruth's gift," said Julia, as they stood on the threshold of a broad sunny room in the new ell, to which they had descended a few steps from the main house. "She paid half the expense of building the ell, and her purse paid for everything in the kitchen."

"But how beautiful; why, it isn't at all like a kitchen!"

"All the same it is a kitchen, though we have tried to make it as pleasant as any room in the house—in its way," concluded Julia smiling.

Advancing a few steps farther, Nora and Brenda continued their exclamations of admiration. The walls, painted a soft yellow, reflected the sunshine, without making a glare. The oiled hardwood floor had its centre covered with a large square of a substance resembling oilcloth, yet softer. A large space around the range was of brick tiles. The iron sink stood on four iron legs with a clear, open space beneath it; there were no wooden closets under it to harbor musty cloths and half-cleaned kettles, and serve as a breeding place for all kinds of microbes. A shelf beside the sink was so sloped that dishes placed there would quickly drain off before drying. The wall above the sink was of blue and white Dutch tiles, and between the sink and the range a zinc-covered table offered a suitable resting-place for hot kettles and pans. Below the clock shelf was another, with a row of books that closer inspection showed to be cook-books. All these details could not, of course, be taken in at once, although the pleasant impression was immediate.

"Plants in the window, and what a curious wire netting!" cried Brenda.

"Yes, it is neater than curtains, keeps out flies, and though it is so made that outsiders cannot

look into the room it does not obscure the light. The shades at the top can be pulled down when we really need to darken the room."

Nora stood enraptured before the tall dresser with its store of dishes and jelly moulds, then she gazed into the long, light pantry, the shelves of which were laden with materials for cooking in jars and tins and little boxes, all neatly labelled and within easy reach. On the wall were several charts—one showing the different cuts of beef and lamb, another by figures and diagrams giving the different nutritive values of different articles of food. On the walls were here and there hung various sets of maxims or rules neatly framed, among which, perhaps the most conspicuous, was:

"I. Do everything in its proper time.

"II. Keep everything in its proper place.

"III. Put everything to its proper use."

IV

AN EXPLORING TOUR

Examining and admiring everything in the kitchen, the girls had half forgotten Maggie, until the sound of singing attracted their attention.

"Hold the Fort," exclaimed Brenda; then, after listening a moment, "But no, the words sound strange."

"Oh, it's one of their work songs," said Miss South, and listening again, they made it out.

Now the cleaning quite to finish,
Pile up every plate,
Shake the cloth, and then with neatness
Fold exactly straight.
Quick, but silent, every motion
Taking things away,
To the pantry, to the kitchen,
With a little tray."

"Their song betrays them," said Miss South; "this part of the work should have been done earlier," and pushing open the door that led from the other end of the pantry, the four found themselves in the girls' dining-room.

"How is this?" asked Miss South so seriously that one of the young girls holding the table-cloth dropped an end suddenly, and both looked sheepish.

"It was such a lovely day that we went out and sat on the back steps," said one of them frankly, "and then we forgot all about this room."

"But it's the rule, is it not, to put this room in perfect order before you wash the dishes?"

"Yes'm—but we forgot."

"Well, I'm not here to scold, but I only wish that you had been as careful about this as about your kitchen work; I noticed that you had left everything there very neat."

"Yes'm," was the answer from both girls at once.

"Where's Miss Dreen, Concetta?"

"Oh! she said she'd go to market right after breakfast, and leave us do what we could without her."

"I understand," said Miss South, as she introduced each of the young girls to the visitors.

"Miss Dreen, the housekeeper," she explained, as they turned to go upstairs, "supervises the girls in the kitchen. I suppose that she left them alone to test their sense of responsibility. She will require a report on her return."

"Well, if they are as frank with her as with us, she will have little to complain of. One looked like an Italian, and I thought that they were never ready to tell the truth."

"That depends on the girl," said Miss South; "but I have confidence in this one. The other, by the way, is German. Edith's protégée, you remember. I wonder where Maggie is," she continued; "she ought to have been there, for we have three girls together serve a turn in the kitchen each week, and we had her begin to-day."

"I wish that Maggie were as pretty as Concetta," said Brenda, in a tone louder than was really necessary, "for Maggie is mortal plain;" and then, at that moment, she ran into somebody in a turn of the hallway, and when in the same instant the door of an opposite room was opened she saw Maggie McSorley gazing up at her with tear-stained eyes.

"Why, Maggie, I came downstairs expressly to find you. Have you been crying?" A glance had assured her that the tears had not been caused by her hasty words. Indeed, the swollen eyes showed that the child had been crying for some time.

"What is the matter, Maggie?" asked Julia, while Nora and Miss South passed on toward the reception-room. "Miss Barlow has come to see you, and she may think that we have not been kind to you."

"Oh, no, 'm, you've been kind;" and Maggie began to sob after the fashion in which she had sobbed during her first interview with Brenda.

At last by dint of much questioning they found that she and Concetta had disagreed when they first set about clearing the table, and while scuffling a pitcher had been broken.

"I didn't do it—truly; Concetta said I'd surely be sent home in disgrace, and she picked up the pieces to show you, and locked the dining-room door so's I couldn't go back and finish my work, and put the key in her pocket; and what will Miss Dreen say, for it was my day to tidy up the dining-room."

Brenda and Julia saw that they had been rather hasty in forming an opinion of Concetta's innocence and gentleness. They did not doubt Maggie when she showed the swelling on her head, near her cheek-bone, that she said had been caused by a blow.

"Evidently you and Concetta cannot work together at the same time. We'll send Nellie down to the kitchen this week. Now, Brenda, I'll leave you with Maggie for a little while, and she can tell you what she is learning here."

But the interview was far from satisfactory to either of the two. Maggie, always reticent, was now doubly so, as her mind dwelt on the insult she had received from the Italian girl, "dago," as she said to herself. On her part Brenda hated tears, and as she had not witnessed the quarrel, she felt for Maggie less sympathy than when she had seen her weep over the broken vase. Brenda asked a few questions, Maggie replied in monosyllables, and both were relieved when Miss South suggested that Maggie take Brenda up to see her room.

Meanwhile the two young girls in the kitchen were engaged in an animated discussion. In Brenda's presence Concetta's great, dark eyes had expressed intense admiration for the slender, graceful young woman flitting about with pleased exclamations for everything that she saw.

"Ain't she stylish?" Concetta said to her companion as the visitors turned away, "with all them silver things jingling from her belt, and such shiny shoes. Say! don't you think those were silk flowers on her hat?"

Concetta had not been able to give to her English the polish of her native tongue, and the grammar acquired in her teacher's presence slipped away under the influence of the many-tongued neighborhood where she lived.

"She's a great sight handsomer than that Miss Blair," and she looked at her companion narrowly.

"Yes, I wish she'd brought me here instead of Miss Blair; she seems so lively, and Miss Blair is so—so kind of slow."

Gretchen knew very well that she was wrong in speaking thus of the one whose interest had made her an inmate of the delightful Mansion, yet as she and her companion continued to talk Brenda gained constantly at the expense of Edith.

It not infrequently happens that those persons whom we ought to admire the most are those whom we find it the hardest to admire, sometimes even to like. Gretchen owed everything to Edith, who had been very kind to her at a time when her family were in rather sore straits. But appearances count for more than they should with many young persons. Whatever Edith wore was in good taste, and costly, even when lacking in the indefinite something called style. Nora the girls would have put in the same class with Brenda, as quite worthy for them to copy when they should be old enough to dress like young ladies. They did not know that Nora's clothes cost far less than Brenda's, and that Edith's dress was usually twice as costly. It was undoubtedly Brenda's brightness of manner and her generally graceful air that they translated into "stylishness"—the kind of thing that they thought they could make their own by imitation and practice when they were older.

Now it happened that neither Concetta nor Gretchen had the least idea that Maggie was Brenda's special protégée. Had they known this their tongues might have flown even faster, as they jeered at the absent Maggie for being a regular cry-baby. Their own wrongdoing in teasing Maggie sat lightly on their little shoulders. It was their theory that might makes right, and as they had been able to get rid of the girl they didn't like, they believed themselves evidently much better than she.

With her rather listless guide Brenda made the tour of the upper stories. There were twelve pretty bedrooms for the girls, of almost uniform size, although varying somewhat in shape. The furniture in each was the same, but to allow a little scope for individual taste each girl was permitted to decide upon the color to be used in draperies, counterpane, and china. Blue and pink were the prevailing choice, for the range of colors suitable for these purposes is limited. Nellie asked for green, and had it even to the green clover-leaf on the china; and another girl

begged for plain white, unwilling to have even a touch of gilt on the china; "it makes me think of heaven," she confided to Julia, "to see everything so white and still when I come up to my room at night."

Maggie had chosen brown for her room, a choice that had especially awakened the ridicule of Luisa, who had said that if she could have her own way there should be a mixture of red, yellow, and blue on all her possessions.

"Why, it's ever so pretty, Maggie," said Brenda, "and you are keeping it neat; but I can't say that those broad brown ribbons tying up the window curtains are cheerful, and I never did like a brown pattern on crockery-ware; but still if you like it—"

"Well, I don't like it quite as much as I expected."

"Then perhaps later you can make some changes; I would certainly have blue ribbons."

"Oh, I don't know, Miss Barlow, there's so many other colors, and I can't tell which I'd like the best."

"I must send you two or three books for your bookshelf."

"Thank you, Miss Barlow," said Maggie coldly, without suggesting, as Brenda hoped she might, some book that she particularly wished to own.

Just then, to her relief, Julia passed through the hall.

"Come upstairs with me and I will show you the gymnasium that we have had built. Edith, you know, paid for it all."

So up to the top of the house the two cousins climbed, followed by Nora and Maggie. Two large rooms had been thrown into one, and as the roof was flat, a fine, large hall was the result. This was fitted up with light gymnastic apparatus, and Julia explained that a teacher was to come once a week to teach the girls. "In stormy weather, when we can't go out, this will be a grand place for bean-bags and similar games, and, indeed, I think that the gymnasium will prove one of the most attractive rooms in the Mansion."

At this moment a Chinese gong resounded through the house.

"Twelve o'clock; it seems hardly possible!" and Julia led the way for the others to follow her downstairs.

From the school-room above three or four girls now appeared, and others came from various parts of the house where they had been at work, among them Concetta and Gretchen.

"Let me count you," said Miss South, after they were seated; "although I can make only nine, I cannot decide who is missing."

As Concetta raised her hand Gretchen tried to pull it down.

"You're not in school; she don't want you to do that."

But the former continued to shake her hand, until Miss South noticed her.

"Please, 'm, it's Mary Murphy; she told me she was going to sneak home after breakfast. Her mother said she didn't sleep a wink for two nights thinking of her dear daughter in such a place; so's soon as she'd read the letter she said she'd go right home."

"Very well," said Miss South, "I'm much obliged to you for telling me;" and then, to the disappointment of all, she made no further comment on Mary Murphy's departure.

The half-hour in the library passed quickly. Each girl reported what she had done thus far, and in some cases Miss South gave instructions for the rest of the day. One or two had special questions to ask, one or two had grievances. Promptly at half-past twelve Miss South gave the signal, and they filed away to prepare for dinner.

"It's a kind of dress inspection. You will understand what I mean if you have ever visited an army post."

"You did not find much fault."

"No, Nora, but I observed many things, and before night I shall have a chance for private conversation with several who stand in special need of it. There were Concetta's finger-nails, and Luisa's shoestrings, and Gretchen had her apron fastened with a safety-pin. Ah! well, we can't expect too much."

"They really are very funny," interposed Julia. "The other day I heard Inez talking to Haleema as they were making a bed: 'Ain't it silly to have to put all these sheets and things on so straight every day when they get all mussed up at night.'"

"My mother never used to make the beds," said Haleema reminiscently.

"No, nor mine; we used just to lump them all at the foot of the bed, and pile the blankets from the children's bed on the floor."

"It would be nice and handy to hang them over the foot here."

"Yes, they'd get so well aired, and it would save all this bother."

"I'm almost sure that they would have tried this plan," continued Julia, "had they not seen me standing in the hall. However, Haleema did venture to say that she wondered why we insist on having the bureau drawers shut, after they've all been put in good order. It's only when they have nothing in them that she thinks that they should be closed. She also prefers to use the chair in her room for some of the little ornaments that she brought from home, and when she sits down she crouches on the rug."

"Sits Turkish fashion, I suppose you mean."

"Perhaps it is Turkish fashion, although I imagine that there is no love lost between the Syrians and the Turks."

"Haleema is much neater than Luisa, and although we think of her as less civilized, she hasn't half as much objection to taking the daily bath that Luisa considers a perfect waste of time."

"It's very discouraging," said Julia with a sigh.

"Oh, one needn't mind a little thing like that. One or two that I could mention think it a great waste of time to wash the dishes after every meal."

"Ugh!" and an expression of disgust crossed Brenda's face at the mere thought of using the same plates and cups unwashed for a second meal.

"There's a slight strain on the one who supervises their table manners. I've just been through my week. You see," and she turned in explanation toward Nora and Brenda, "each resident serves for a week as head of the girls' table at breakfast, and it is her duty to correct all their little faults as a mother would. At the other two meals they have only Miss Dreen, for we think that they ought to be free from the restraint of our presence at these other meals."

"Do you try to guide conversation, too?"

"Oh, yes, but thus far our presence has seemed a decided damper, and the solemnity of breakfast is in great contrast with the hilarity at the other two meals. At tea-time their laughter sometimes reaches even as far as the library."

"They are ready to learn, and particularly ready to imitate. I am really obliged to watch myself constantly," said Julia, "lest I say or do something that may return against me some time, like a boomerang."

"Then I fear that I should be a poor kind of resident," rejoined Brenda, "for it has been said that I speak first and think afterwards. However, in the presence of Maggie McSorley I am always going to try to do my best; for apparently it's my duty to bring her up for the next few years, and I won't shirk. But I wish that it had been Concetta instead of Maggie on whom I stumbled. I'm going to tell Ralph that I've found a perfect model for his new picture. Wouldn't you let her pose?"

"Ask Miss South," responded Julia.

But Miss South, without waiting for the question, only shook her head, with an emphatic "No, indeed."

V

PHILIP'S LECTURE

Angelina was smiling broadly, "grinning from ear to ear" some persons would have expressed it, as she ushered two visitors into the room where Miss South, Julia, and Pamela were sitting one afternoon toward six o'clock, for Pamela was one of the residents at the Mansion.

"Why, Philip; why, Tom!" cried Julia, rising from the lounge where she was looking over a folio of engravings, "this *is* a pleasure."

"Yes, we thought we'd accept promptly your kind invitation to drop in upon you at any time, so that we could see the Mansion and its contents just as they are."

"Oh, yes, they are always ready for inspection."

"We hope that you will ask us to stay to dinner," added Tom, after he had followed Philip's example and had shaken hands with the others.

"Oh, certainly! especially as you have made it so evident that you are ready to accept."

"That is delightful! You see we feared to wait for a formal invitation, lest you might show us only the company side of things, and we are anxious to see you just as you are."

"Ah! we have no company side. We decided in the beginning to welcome our friends at any time,

if they would take us just as we were."

"This doesn't look like an institution," said Tom, glancing around the pretty room.

"No, we haven't seen the real inmates yet. I suppose you keep them under lock and key," interposed Philip.

"Hardly," responded Miss South, "because—"

Then, as the door was pushed open for a minute, shouts of merriment from another part of the house showed that if in duration vile, the inmates were at least in full possession of some of their faculties.

Then the party broke up into two groups. Tom in his vivacious way told of his experiences as a fledgling lawyer. This was his first visit to Boston since he had been admitted to the bar, and he described himself as just beginning to believe that he might escape starvation from the fact that one or two clients had made their appearance at his office.

"It's lucky for my friends that a little practice is coming my way, for I was ready, for the sake of business, to set any of them by the ears. Why, the other day when I was out with my uncle, and the cable car stopped too suddenly, I almost hoped that he would sprain his ankle—just a little, that I might have the chance to bring suit against the company."

"How cruel!" exclaimed Julia, into whose ear he had let fall these rash admissions.

While Tom ran on in this frivolous fashion, Philip was talking more seriously with Pamela and Miss South. Indeed, seriousness was a quality that Philip now showed to an extent that seemed strange to those who had known him in his earlier college years. Much responsibility had recently come to him on account of his father's failing health, and in the West he had been so thrown on his own resources that he no longer regarded life as unsatisfactory unless it offered him amusement.

"I have wondered," he was saying to Miss South, "if you really wished me to give that talk on the Western country."

"Yes, indeed, we are very anxious to have it. We are counting on you to open our lecture season."

"Oh, I'm only too happy, although you must remember that I'm not a professional; but my lantern is in order, and I have nearly a hundred slides. Many of them are really fine,—even if I do say it," he concluded apologetically.

"I'm sure they are," responded Miss South, "and I can tell you that we older 'inmates,' as you call us, are equally anxious to hear you."

"You mean, to see the pictures; they will be worth your attention, but as to my speaking—"

"You'd scarce expect one of my age
To speak in public on the stage,"

interposed Tom mockingly, as he overheard the latter part of the sentence. Whereat Philip, somewhat embarrassed, was glad to see Angelina at the door announcing "Dinner is served," and leading the way with Miss South the others followed them to the dining-room.

As they took their places Philip found himself beside Pamela. He had seen her but two or three times since her Freshman year at Radcliffe, and in consequence would hardly have dared venture to allude to that sugar episode through which he had first made her acquaintance. But Pamela, no longer sensitive about this misadventure, brought it up herself. Though Philip politely persisted that it had seemed the most natural thing in the world to see before him on a Cambridge sidewalk a stream of sugar pouring from an overturned paper-bag, Pamela assured him that to her he had appeared like a hero on that memorable occasion, since he had saved her from a certain amount of mortification.

"But I'm wiser now," she said; "I hadn't studied philosophy then," and she quoted one or two passages from certain ancient authors to show that she had attained a state of indifference to outside criticism.

Gradually Pamela told Philip much about her school, to prove that it wasn't simply philosophy that helped her enjoy her work.

"So it really is your interest in them that makes your pupils so fond of your classes."

Then, in answer to her word of surprise, he added:

"Oh, my little cousin, Emily Dover, one of your most devoted admirers, has been telling me—I believe that you have the misfortune to instruct her."

"Ah, the good fortune! She is a bright little thing, if not a hard student."

"You could hardly expect more from one of our family."

"Why, your sister seems to me fairly intelligent."

Could this be Pamela, actually speaking in a bantering tone, unawed by a young man

considerably her senior?

"I am glad," he said a moment later, "that you are surviving not only the experiment of teaching my little cousin, but this experiment at the Mansion."

"Oh, this isn't an experiment, it's—it's—"

"The real thing?"

"Yes, it really is. If you wish to understand it, you must come here some day when the classes are at work. Miss South or Edith will be happy to show you about."

"But I am a working-man now. At the time when I might properly visit the school I am afraid that there would be no classes in session."

"Of course I'm busy myself, too," said Pamela, "and sometimes I feel that I am here on false pretences."

"Remembering your reputation, I don't believe that you are very idle."

"Oh, of course I help; but then some one else could as well do my work."

"Tell me exactly what you do."

But Pamela shook her head, and with all his urging Philip could not make her describe her exact sphere of activity. Yet Miss South or Julia could have told that no resident was more useful than Pamela, who devoted her evenings to the girls, talking to them, playing games, and in all that she did directing their thoughts toward the appreciation of beautiful things. Every Saturday she took two or three to the Art Museum, and later she meant them to see any exhibitions that there might be in town. One or two critics were inclined to laugh at this work. "It would put strange ideas into the heads of the girls. They would want things that they could never own." But Pamela was satisfied when she saw the rapturous glance of appreciation on the faces of Concetta and Inez, the most artistic of the girls, and the awakening interest in the others.

But how could she explain all this to Philip in casual conversation at a dinner-table?

Maggie, helping Angelina, found this, her first experience in waiting on company, very trying. To overcome her timidity Miss South had purposely assigned her to this task. But who could have supposed that she would let the bread fall as she passed it to Philip, tilting the plate so far that a slice or two fell on the table before him.

"There!" and he smiled good-humoredly, "the Mansion realizes the extent of my appetite, and evidently I am to receive more even than I ask for."

Poor Maggie's next mishap was to drop a dessert plate as she started to take it from the sideboard.

"It was because you looked at me so hard," she said afterwards to Angelina; "I couldn't think what you wanted, you were shaking your head so fierce."

"Why, it was the finger-bowl, child. You forgot it. There should be one on every plate. When I told you to get extra things for company, I meant finger-bowls too. We always have them on the dessert plates."

"Oh, yes," said Maggie, as if her not getting them had been the merest oversight, although really this was her first experience in waiting at dinner, and she had not a good memory for the details that had been taught her.

But shy as she was, she did not hesitate to take part in the conversation once or twice. Miss South and the others showed no surprise when twice her voice was heard replying to questions that Philip had expected Miss South or Pamela to answer.

After the older people returned to the library, Angelina confided to Maggie that Mr. Philip Blair was to give a lecture at the Mansion in a week or two. "I know all about it, because Miss Julia told me a few days ago."

Haleema, the little Syrian girl, who was helping Maggie in her dish-washing, paused in her singing to listen to Angelina's accounts of the wonderful adventures that Mr. Blair had had in the West.

"Ho!" said Haleema, "it ain't nothing to go bear-hunting, if you don't get killed. Why, I've had two uncles and ten cousins killed by the Turks," and then she went on singing cheerfully,—

"As quick as you're able set neatly the table,
And first lay the table-cloth square;
And then on the table-cloth, bright and clean table-cloth,
Napkins arrange with due care."

The air to which she sang was "Little Buttercup," and her voice was clear and sweet, but as she began the second stanza,—

"Put plates in their places at regular spaces,"

Angelina interrupted her. "This isn't the time for singing this song, this is dish-washing time;" and, overawed by Angelina's imperative manner, Haleema was silenced.

As to the lecture itself, it is needless to say that Philip a few evenings later had an appreciative audience. All the girls were in a twitter at the prospect of this their first entertainment, Angelina most of all. She had arranged her hair in an elaborate coiffure, which, she informed Haleema, she had copied from a hairdresser's window in Washington Street.

"Ah, then, perhaps you have one of those things—a whip, I think they call it?"

"A what?"

"A whip, a long piece of hair to tie on, for I did not know that you had so much hair, Miss Angelina."

"Oh, a switch."

Angelina looked at Haleema sharply and made no further reply. Haleema had addressed her by the flattering "Miss Angelina," which Manuel's sister, when none of the residents were present, tried to exact from all the younger girls at the Mansion, and therefore she would not reprove her for her insinuation about "the whip."

Nevertheless Angelina held her head rather stiffly as she filled her part as head usher.

Each girl at the Mansion had been permitted to invite two guests—a girl of her own age and an older person. And almost every one invited was present. Angelina's brother John was the only boy there. He had shot up into a fairly tall youth, with a very intelligent face. He was attending evening school in the city, and working through the day for a little more than his board. Julia knew that she could depend on him to help her when at times Angelina proved refractory. Tonight John was to operate the lantern while Philip talked about the views.

The girls held their breath in admiration as slide after slide was thrown on the screen. Gorges, cañons, mountain-passes followed one another in quick succession. The wonderful cañon of the Arkansas, the Marshall Pass, the Garden of the Gods, the tree-shaded streets of Colorado Springs, the railroad up Pike's Peak, and all the weird and wonderful sights of the Yellowstone Park.

"He's really very handsome," whispered Nora to Julia during a pause between the pictures when Philip's regular features were thrown in silhouette upon the sheet. Then she continued, "Don't you remember how we used to laugh at him, and call him a dandy, when he was a Sophomore; but now he looks so manly, and his lecture has been really interesting."

Pamela, seated on the other side of Nora, heard these words with surprise. She had not known Philip in the days when he was considered somewhat effeminate.

All the girls expressed their pleasure as each new picture came in sight, and yet I am afraid that their loudest applause was given to a series of colored pictures showing the adventures of a farmer with an obstinate calf that he vainly tried to drive to the barn, succeeding only when he put a cow-bell around his own neck.

At last the lights were turned on, but all were still seated as Angelina rushed to pick up the pointer and to help roll up the screen. There was no real need of her doing this, but she was anxious to impress the two girls whom she had invited from the North End with a sense of her own importance. Just as she had picked up the pointer, standing in full sight of all, she was aware of a titter that was turning into a full laugh. Instinctively she put her hand to her head, and looking around she met the childlike gaze of Haleema, who was holding aloft a braid of black hair.

"Here, Miss Angelina, is your whip—I mean switch."

Conscious of the strange appearance of her head since the towering structure had fallen, annoyed by the smile on the faces of those before her, and dreading the reproofs of her elders, Angelina fled shamefacedly from the room.

Maggie and Concetta and the other young girls were able to bear this mishap with less discomfort than Angelina herself; for the latter in her way was apt to be domineering, and they knew that for a little while she would not come down to the dining-room where chocolate and cakes were to be served.

Serving their guests, the young housekeepers were at their best. Each had her appointed duty. One carried plates and napkins, another arranged the little white cloths on half a dozen small tables placed around the room. One girl poured the chocolate, and another put the whipped cream on the top of each slender cup. None of them hesitated to tell her friends what portion of the feast she had prepared, whether sandwiches, whipped cream, or the wafer-like cookies.

"I wish that Brenda had been here," said Edith, as she and Nora and Philip walked home.

"Oh, Brenda wouldn't give an evening to this kind of thing at this season; she says that it's the gayest winter since she came out."

"I don't see how she can stand going out every evening," rejoined Edith, who was wearing mourning for a relative, and hence was not accepting invitations to dinners and dances.

"I suppose she thinks it her duty to enjoy herself here. She says it pleases her father and mother to have her enjoy herself."

"Girls have strange ideas of duty," remarked Philip, "though it seems to me that those girls at the Mansion have just about the right idea."

VI

IN THE STUDIO

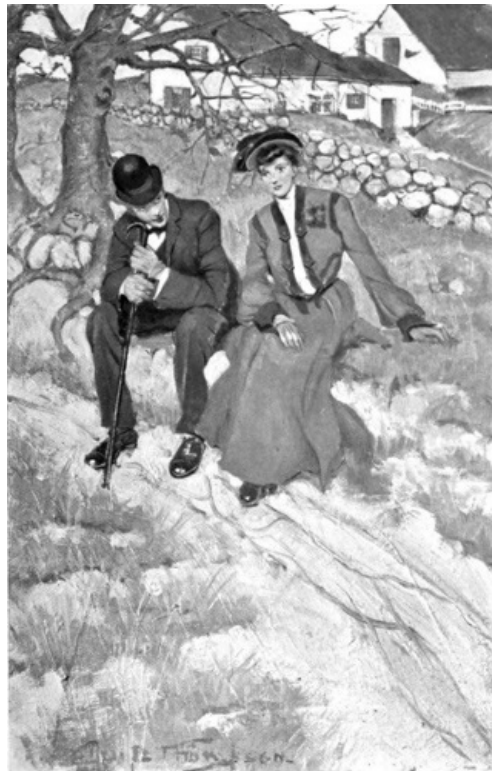
As autumn sped on Brenda was not very ardent in following up the Mansion work. But what a perfect autumn it was! How bracing the air! How much more delightful to spend the daylight hours in long rides out over the bridle-path, along the broad boulevard, or in the narrower byways of the suburbs. Sometimes, instead of riding, Arthur and Brenda would walk even as far as the reservoir and back. One afternoon in late November they had circled the lovely sheet of water that lies embosomed among the hills of Brookline, and, waiting for a car, had sat down on a wayside seat.

"Except for the bare trees it's hard to believe that this is November," Brenda had said.

"Yes," responded Arthur. "Days like this almost redeem the bad character of the New England climate."

"Oh, Arthur, there isn't a better all-round climate anywhere."

"After a winter in California, I should think that you'd know better than that."



Waiting for a car they had sat down on a wayside seat

The argument went a little further, and Brenda made out her case very well, quoting the surprise of Californians and Southerners, who had come to Boston expecting an Arctic winter, to find only an occasional frigid day.

"Those must have been exceptional winters;" and Arthur shrugged his shoulders in a way that always provoked Brenda as he concluded, "Say what you will, it is always a vile winter climate."

"Then I'm sure," retorted Brenda, "I don't see why you plan to spend the winter here."

"Oh, indeed! I fancied that you knew the reason."

Taking no notice of this pacific remark, Brenda continued:

"Yes, if I were you I wouldn't stay in so dreadful a place; you certainly have no important business to keep you. Why, papa said—"

She did not finish the sentence. Arthur frowned ominously, and he abruptly signalled a car just coming in sight.

Brenda hardly understood why Arthur was so silent on the way home. She did not realize that her allusion to her father had annoyed him. Arthur knew that Mr. Barlow did not altogether approve of his lack of a profession. After completing his studies he had not wished to practise law. A slight impediment in his speech was likely to prevent his being a good pleader, and the opportunity that he desired for office practice had not yet offered. His personal income was just enough to permit him to drift without a settled profession. There was danger that he might learn to prefer a life of idleness to one in which work had the larger part.

Yet Arthur's intentions were the best in the world. He really was only waiting for the right thing to present itself, and although Brenda had not quoted her father's words, his imagination had flown ahead of what she had said, and he was angry at the implied criticism.

"No, I can't come in," he said, as he left Brenda at her door. "I have an engagement."

"Oh, what—"

Then Brenda checked herself. If he did not care to tell her, she could afford to hide her curiosity. After he left her she wondered what the engagement was.

"I'll see you at the studio to-morrow." This was Arthur's parting word, in a pleasanter tone than that of a moment before.

"Yes, perhaps so; I'm really not sure."

The next day, toward four o'clock, Brenda and her little niece, Lettice, mounted the stairs to the studio. The stairs were long and narrow, for Ralph Weston, on his return from Europe, had chosen a studio in the top of one of the old houses opposite the Garden, in preference to a newer building.

When his wife and her sister had protested that he would see them very seldom if he persisted in having this inaccessible studio, "It may seem ungallant to say so," he had said, "but that is one of my reasons for choosing to perch myself in this eyrie. I am all the less likely to be interrupted when seeking inspiration for a masterpiece. If I were connected with the earth by an elevator I should never be safe from interruption. In fact, I should probably urge you and your friends to spend your spare time here. But now, knowing that it would be an imposition to expect you to climb those stairs more than once a week, I feel quite secure until Thursday rolls around."

"Oh, you needn't worry. That glimpse across the Garden from your window showing the State House as the very pinnacle of the city is beautiful, but we can live without it, if *you* can exist without us;" and Brenda drew herself up with dignity.

On this particular afternoon as she reached the studio door with Lettice clinging to her hand she was flushed and almost out of breath.

Within the studio her sister Agnes, giving a few last touches to the table, exclaimed in surprise at sight of the little girl.

"Why, Lettice, what in the world are you doing here?"

"Oh, auntie found me in the park, and she sent nurse off."

Then Brenda explained that Lettice looked so sweet that she just couldn't bear to leave her behind, "and nurse," she added, "fortunately had a very important errand down town, and was so glad that I could take Lettice off her hands, and so—"

"The lady protests too much, methinks," interposed Ralph. "But you really need not apologize. I am always glad to have Lettice here, even though her mother does think her too young to receive at afternoon teas."

"At four years old—I should think so. There, dear, you mustn't touch anything on the table," for the little girl, on tiptoe, was trying to reach a plate of biscuit.

Lettice withdrew her hand quickly, and, when her wraps were removed, allowed herself to be perched on a tabaret, where her mother said she was safe from harming or being harmed.

The studio was filled with trophies that Mr. and Mrs. Weston had collected abroad. The high carved mantle-piece was the work of some medieval Hollander, the curtain shutting off one end of the room was old Norman tapestry—the most valuable of all their possessions. Each chair had, as Brenda sometimes said, a different nationality. Her own preference was for the Venetian seat, with its curving back and elaborate carving. As it grew darker outside the studio was brightened by the light from a pair of Roman candlesticks.

Only one or two of the paintings on the wall were Mr. Weston's work. When asked, he always said that he had very little to show, and that he did not believe in boring his guests by driving them, against their judgment, perhaps, to praise what they saw.

"Mock modesty!" Brenda had exclaimed at this expression of opinion.

"If I were sure that that was a genuine Tintoretto, I should believe that you were afraid of coming in direct competition with an old master; though, to tell you the truth, I'm glad that your work is a little brighter and livelier," she concluded.

One or two callers had now come in, and Brenda took her place at the tea-table, that Agnes might be free to move about the large studio. Soon the nurse appeared, and Lettice, protesting that she was a big girl and ought to stay, was ignominiously carried home.

"Where's Arthur?" asked Ralph, as he stood near Brenda, waiting for her to pour a cup of tea for a guest.

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," responded Ralph ceremoniously. "I fancied that you might have heard him say what he intended to do."

Ralph went off with the tea, and Brenda continued to pour for other guests. But her mind was wandering. She served lemon when the guest had asked for cream, and generously dropped two lumps into the cup of one who had expressly requested no sugar. In spite of herself her eye travelled often to the door, and an observer would have seen that her mind was far away. When at last she saw Arthur entering the room some one was with him, and the two were laughing and chatting gayly.

"Oh, we had such a time getting here," cried the shrill voice of Belle. "Mr. Weston's been making calls with me in Jamaica Plain, and the cars were blocked coming back, so that it seemed as if we should never get here."

"But we're glad to arrive at last;" and Arthur moved toward the table, while Belle lingered for a word or two with Agnes and her husband.

"Poor thing!" exclaimed Belle, when at last she joined Arthur beside the table. "Poor thing! have you been shut up here pouring tea all the afternoon? You ought to have been with us; we've had a perfectly lovely time."

"You don't care for sweet things, so I won't give you any sugar," said Brenda, without replying directly to Belle.

"Come, Belle, you must see this sketch of Lettice. It is the one you were asking about." Agnes had come to the rescue.

As Belle turned away, Arthur tried to make his peace, for he saw that in some way he had displeased Brenda. He explained that he had merely happened to meet Belle, who was out on a calling expedition. He had accompanied her to one or two houses, because when she had paid these visits she intended to go to the studio. "I really meant to call for you, although you were so uncertain yesterday about coming," he concluded apologetically.

"Of course you knew I would come. I always do on Thursdays," replied Brenda; "but you were not obliged to call for me if you had something pleasanter to do."

"Ah, Belle is never out of temper." Arthur spoke significantly, annoyed by Brenda's unusual dignity of manner. Then, as she turned to speak to some one at the other side of the table, he crossed the room and joined Belle.

Since the death of her grandmother two years before, Belle and her mother had been away from Boston. They expected to spend the coming season in Washington, as they had the preceding. Belle now pronounced Boston altogether too old-fashioned a place for a person of cosmopolitan tastes, and she dazzled the younger girls and the undergraduates of her acquaintance by talking of diplomatic and state dignitaries with the greatest freedom. According to her own estimate of herself, she was one of the brightest stars in Washington society.

Although she and Brenda were less intimate than formerly, when Belle was in town she was with Brenda more than with any other girl of her acquaintance. Despite her insincerity and her various other failings, now much clearer to Brenda than in her school days, Belle had certain qualities that made her very companionable, and Brenda was inclined to overlook her less amiable traits. Indeed, she had clung to Belle in spite of the protests of various other girls. But today she felt impatient with Belle. Her high, sharp voice grated on her ear. Her witticisms seemed particularly shallow, and almost for the first time Brenda realized that the words with which Belle raised a laugh from those present carried a sting for some one absent.

Again Belle approached her. "I suppose your cousin never indulges in frivolities like this. I hear that she has withdrawn altogether from the world into some kind of a home or institution."

"There, Belle, how silly you are! If you'd spend more time in Boston, you'd at least hear things straight. Julia is just as fond of frivolity as any of us, only it's the right kind of frivolity."

"Oh, excuse me," exclaimed Belle with mock sorrow. "I had entirely forgotten your new point of view. You used to feel so differently about your cousin."

"Well, it is irritating to hear you talk about her being in an institution. Surely you've heard about Miss South and the old Du Launy Mansion; and if you go up there and call, you'll see that they

are not shut out from the world."

"Dear! dear! why need you take everything so seriously. There! why, it's half-past five! I'm really afraid to go home alone."

This was said as Arthur came within earshot, and, of course, he could only offer to go home with her, as she professed to be in too great a hurry to wait for Brenda and the rest of the party.

"But I will come back for you," murmured Arthur, as he turned away.

"No, thank you; you needn't," responded Brenda stiffly; "I have Ralph and Agnes, and really I don't care for any one else."

"Very well, then, we'll say good evening;" and the two young people went off after Belle had said her farewells very effusively to all in the studio.

As Brenda sat alone in a corner of the studio after the other guests had gone, she had an opportunity to think over the events of the past few years which some of Belle's sharp remarks had brought up. Ralph and Agnes were busy discussing designs for some picture-frames that he was to have made, and, sitting apart, Brenda in a rather unusual fit of reverie recalled some of the happenings of the six years since her cousin Julia had first come into her life. When first she learned that her orphan cousin, who was a year and a half her senior, was to become a member of her family, she had been far from pleased. Without feeling jealousy in its meanest form, she was annoyed lest the presence of Julia should interfere with her enjoyment of her little circle of intimate friends. Edith Blair, Nora Gostar, Belle Gregg and she had formed a pleasant circle, "The Four," into which she did not care to have a fifth enter. Consequently she was far from kind to her cousin, and would not invite her to the weekly meetings of the group, when they gathered at her house to work for a bazaar. Belle prompted and upheld Brenda in her attitude toward her cousin, while Nora and Edith were Julia's champions. Later Julia had an opportunity to behave very generously toward Brenda, and from that time the cousins were good friends. Belle's departure for boarding-school and her later absence in Washington had naturally lessened her intimacy with Brenda. Julia, after two years at Miss Crawdon's school with Brenda, had entered Radcliffe College, where in her four years' course she had made many friends, and had been graduated with honor. Belle, as well as Julia and Brenda, had been one of Miss South's pupils at Miss Crawdon's school, but she was one of the few with no interest whatever in the work begun at the Mansion—a work which the majority had been only too glad to help.

Belle had never shown herself to Brenda in so unlovely a light as on this particular afternoon at the studio. Yet she had often been far more disagreeable in her general way of expressing herself. The difference was that now Brenda herself had begun to look at life in a very different way. She had a higher standard; she understood and admired her cousin, even though in many ways they were very unlike, and Belle in contrast seemed particularly shallow.

Then, too, to be perfectly honest with herself, she had to admit that she was surprised and not pleased that Arthur Weston should show so much interest in the society of Belle.

"Come, Brenda, are you dreaming? We are ready to go home."

At the sound of her sister's voice Brenda rose quickly, and was ready with a laughing reply to one of her brother-in-law's witticisms.

Brenda was not inclined to be melancholy, and the half-hour of retrospect had been good for her.

VII

IN DIFFICULTIES

On the same floor with the gymnasium at the end of the hall was a room whose door was usually locked. In passing up and down it was not strange that occasionally the girls would rattle the handle in their anxiety to catch a glimpse of the inside of the room. But the door was always fastened, and this fact allowed them to speculate widely as to what the room contained.

"It is full of clothes and jewels that belonged to Miss South's grandmother," announced Concetta. "She was a very strange old lady, and as rich as rich could be, and when Miss South wants any money, she just sells some of the things from this room."

"Oh, then the things must be beautiful; I wish we could see them!"

"Well, we'll watch and watch, and perhaps some day we shall find it open."

Once or twice, however, on their way to the gymnasium the girls had noticed this door ajar, and great had been their curiosity about it; for Concetta, who was never backward in wrongdoing, had announced that she meant to go in at the close of the gymnastic lesson, and look into some of the trunks that were piled against the wall.

"No, no," replied Gretchen, to whom she confided her intention, "that wouldn't be right."

"Why not?"

"Oh, we've never been told that we could go in there."

"But nobody said we couldn't go."

"I'm sure Miss South wouldn't like it."

"Ah, I shall go just the same; when I looked in just now, one of the trunks was open, and on the top I saw a wig, all white curls, and a pink satin dress. I'd like to have those things to dress up in. Just as soon as I can I'm going into that room."

It happened, however, to Concetta's disappointment that when the girls came out from the gymnasium the room in the ell was locked. But she remembered the room, and another day in passing she noticed that the door was slightly ajar. She now said nothing to Gretchen, but had a whispered conference with Haleema and Inez, with the result that these three lingered behind when the others went downstairs.

As the last footfall died away, the three girls stole quietly to the room in the ell. Concetta laid her finger on her lips in token of silence, for she was by no means sure that some older person might not be within hearing.

"Oh, they're all out this afternoon except Miss Dreen," said Haleema confidently, "and she's down in the kitchen giving a cooking lesson."

"See! see!" added Concetta, as she tiptoed ahead of the others, "there's no one here; come on." And in a minute the three were inside the mysterious room.

"Those are the chests of jewels!" and Concetta pointed to the three large chests ranged along the wall.

At the end of the room were several large trunks.

"I wish that we could look inside them," said Haleema.

"Oh, no," and there was real terror in Inez's tone.

"Don't be afraid; they're all out," said Concetta.

"Yes, even Miss Angelina," added Haleema; "she's gone to a lecture."

"Miss Angelina," responded Concetta, mimicking her tone. "She's no Miss Angelina."

"But you always call her that."

"Oh, that only to her face; I should never call her that behind her back. Why, she's only a girl, just like we are; why, she used to live down there at the North End, near where Luisa's mother lives. But there, shut the door, Haleema, so that we can look at these things."

The three little girls bent over the trunk, the lid of which Concetta had boldly opened. On the top lay the pink satin gown that she had described in such glowing terms. Haleema slipped her arms into the sleeves, and strange to say the bodice fitted her very well.

"You oughtn't to touch it," cried Inez.

"You are such a scarecrow," said Concetta, whose English was not always perfect.

"Scarecrow! you mean 'fraid-cat," corrected Inez.

"Oh, well, it's all the same thing."

What did a little question of English matter, when now they were so near the mysterious treasure; for Concetta had noticed what the others had not seen, that a bit of bright-colored fabric was hanging from one of the chests, and she rightly conjectured that this trunk was unlocked. Even while she spoke to Inez she was fingering the lid of the chest, and in a moment it was thrown back. Many were the exclamations of the three as garment after garment was drawn out from the depths; they were chiefly of bright-colored and delicate materials, and Madame Du Launy would have turned in her grave had she seen these little girls trying on the things that at one time in her life had so delighted her.

"I don't see any jewels," said Haleema disappointedly.

"Oh, we'll find them; there are some boxes at the bottom. But see here!" and Concetta drew out a mysterious, queerly shaped package. Opening it rather gingerly, for at first she was uncertain what it contained, and then with a skip and a jump—

"Oh, let's dress up; here are wigs and—"

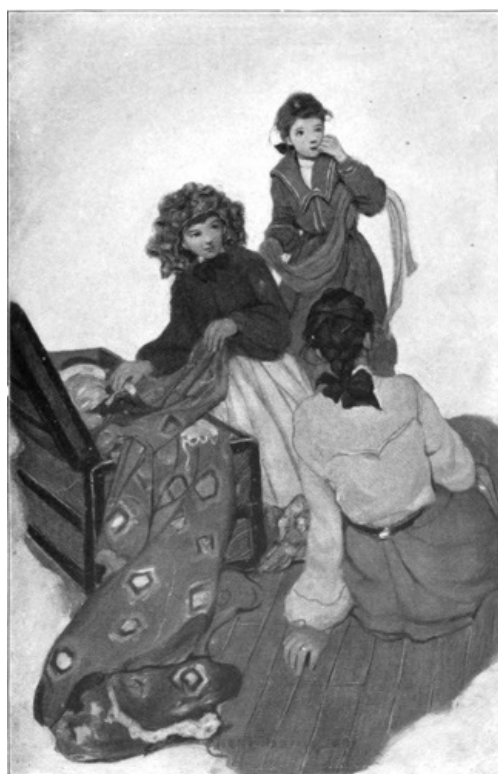
"No, no," said Inez, "perhaps some one might find us out."

"No matter, no matter," and she waved the various wigs in the air.

"Are they anybody's real hair?" asked Inez, in an awestruck tone, pointing to the gray toupee and the short curled wig that Concetta held in her hand.

"Of course not, child. Oh, see! Haleema has found a box of paint," and they laughed loudly at the bright red spots on Haleema's cheeks. Then Haleema put on the curled wig. The others shrieked

with laughter. "Your eyes look blacker than black."



"I think I hear some one coming upstairs"

"Ah, this is better than Angelina's whip," and then they all shouted again, recalling the episode of Angelina and the switch.

"Hush! hark!" cried Concetta, with her hand at her ear; "I think I hear some one coming upstairs."

"Shut the trunk! Let's go into the closet;" and as she spoke the other two followed her into the closet. It was a large closet with a transom that let in a certain amount of light, and at first their situation seemed rather amusing to the three. Haleema, who had gone in last, had closed the door with a snap, and after a few minutes had passed she started to open it again. But, alas! she could not lift the latch. Evidently it had closed with a spring, and they would have to wait until some one should come to their relief.

At first, as before, they giggled a little; then, as they realized their situation, they sobered down.

"Suppose no one should come; we might have to stay all night."

"They may think that we've run away, and so they won't look for us."

"Oh, some one will remember that we didn't go downstairs; they'll come up here the first thing."

"No, no, don't you remember how the others all ran down ahead of us? They won't remember."

"Gretchen's the only one who might think of this room. I told her the other day that I meant to come in some time."

"That won't do no good," rejoined Haleema; "she'll be glad to have you shut up."

"We're better off here than we would be in that trunk," continued Haleema thoughtfully. "I read a poem the other day about a girl that got shut up in a chest, and she did not get out until she was dead. She was an Italian, too," she said, looking suggestively toward Concetta, "and her name was Jinerva."

Whereupon Concetta began to weep softly, either in sympathy for her countrywoman or from fear that as an Italian she was more likely to suffer than the others.

"Oh, that's nothing," said Inez; "why, we had a history lesson once about the Black Hole. Everybody that went into it died, and there were dozens of people."

"Why did they go in?" asked Concetta with a languid interest.

"Oh, it was in war; I don't remember much about it, only they all died."

"Well, this isn't a black hole," said Haleema cheerfully; "there's quite a little light comes in at that window." And she began to hum,

"'When a spring lock that lay in ambush there
Fastened her down forever.'

There, that's the last of that Jinerva poem; I couldn't help remembering it; I read it over several times."

"Oh, Haleema, and we're fastened in with a spring lock."

"Oh, we'll get out all right," said Haleema cheerfully; "'where there's a will, there's a way.'"

While she spoke she was moving about the closet.

"I wouldn't meddle any more; if you hadn't meddled with that trunk we wouldn't be in here now."

"I'm not meddling," she replied angrily, "I'm trying to find something." Her search continued for some time, and at last the others heard an exclamation of satisfaction.

"What is it?" asked Concetta. "What have you found?"

"A stick," responded Haleema. "Do you know, I believe that I can break that window."

As she spoke she stood on tiptoe, and reached toward the transom. But, alas! *she* was too short, and the stick was too short, and with all her efforts she could not reach the glass.

"We could not get out through that window," said Concetta scornfully. "We couldn't get out through that window, so what is the good of trying?"

"Oh, I didn't mean to get out through the window, but if I break the glass we can have more air. We won't smother to death."

At the suggestion of smothering, although Haleema had pronounced it an unlikely happening, Inez began to cry.

"Don't be a baby," said the little Syrian scornfully. "I guess there's more than one way of catching a bird, even if you can't put salt on his tail," from which it may be seen that Haleema was well on the way to becoming a good Yankee, since her proverbs were not strictly Oriental.

How long the time seemed! The light from the other room hardly showed through the transom. Though they could move about in the closet, their positions were naturally cramped. The air grew closer and warmer, and though they were in no danger of suffocation, they were becoming drowsy from the closeness and warmth.

Haleema strained her ears to hear any one who should pass near, yet even when she noted a distant step she realized that it would be hard to make herself heard. Still the three girls kicked on the door, and sang at the top of their voices, but in vain.

At last Haleema grew desperate.

"There's just one thing I can do," she said, "and I'll do it."

Thereupon she again seized the stick, and telling the others to go close up to the corners, she threw it toward the transom. The first time it fell back and hit her on the nose, the second time it merely grazed the wall beside the glass, the third time it touched the glass without breaking it.

"There," said Haleema, "I'm sure that I can do it," and with one mighty effort she took aim again, and the stick crashed through the glass. Most of the pieces went outside, but a few bits fell into the closet, and one of these scratched Haleema's forehead. In her triumph at accomplishing her end she did not mind the injury.

"There! you can come out of the corner. We'll get plenty of air from the room, and if any one should be passing, why, it will be easier to hear us. Sing, Concetta, at the top of your voice."

"I'm too tired," said Concetta crossly, "and dreadful hungry. I wish you'd have let that trunk alone, Haleema; that's what made all the trouble."

So the time dragged on, and at length Concetta, though she never would admit it, fell asleep. Haleema kept herself awake by telling wonderful stories—some of them fairy tales, and some of them stories of adventures that she professed to have passed through.

At last even her lively tongue was quiet, and she had given up kicking against the door, as a useless expenditure of energy.

In the meantime the absence of the three girls had become the subject of conjecture on the part of the others downstairs. No one apparently had noticed when they left the gymnasium, though Nellie thought that she had seen them on their way to the street floor.

"Perhaps they've just gone off for fun. Haleema's always up to some mischief."

"They may have run off for good, like Mary Murphy."

"Oh, no, there's no danger; that ain't likely. They know which side their bread's buttered on."

The three vacant places troubled Angelina as she sat at the end of the table opposite Miss Dreen.

"If I hadn't been away, they wouldn't have dared go off."

Anstiss, to whom at last they applied for advice, was uncertain what they ought to do. She was sorry that this was the evening that Pamela and Julia and Miss South had taken to dine with Lois in Newton. It would be late when they returned, and she did not like the responsibility that had fallen upon her.

While the discussion was going on, many thoughts were passing through Gretchen's mind. Not until tea-time had she learned of the disappearance of her schoolmates, and as she was not very quick-witted, she had not at first connected them with the end room. When she did recall Concetta's desire to explore it, she hesitated about speaking. In the first place, if Concetta heard that she had told of her previous efforts to pry into the mysteries of the trunks, she would surely take vengeance, especially if at the present time she happened not to be there. If she had been shut up in the room all this time, or in a trunk—and then the story of Ginevra came into Gretchen's mind, and she was half afraid to suggest that the end room be explored.

So positive, however, was Angelina that the girls had run away, or at least had taken advantage of Miss South's absence to spend the evening out, that no one suggested exploring the house thoroughly. Anstiss herself had gone to the room of each girl to assure herself that they were not in one of them, and had sat herself down to her hour's reading when she noticed that Gretchen was softly weeping.

"Why, what is the matter, child?" she asked, and Gretchen, wiping her eyes with a handkerchief that left a little dark streak, looked up for a moment, and then hung down her head without answering.

"Tell her," said Nellie, who sat beside her, with a nudge that made Gretchen wriggle her shoulders. To save herself, perhaps, from a second such demonstration, when Anstiss repeated her question Gretchen replied:

"I'm afraid that they're locked up in the attic."

"Who? Haleema and the other two?"

Anstiss had already started toward the door.

"Yes'm; I went upstairs just before you came in and I thought I heard a little noise from the end room."

"Then why didn't you look in? Was the door locked?"

"I don't know; I didn't try it. I was afraid that they might be dead."

"But you said that you heard a noise. Oh, Gretchen, you are a silly girl."

As she spoke Anstiss was wondering why she herself had not thought of the end room, since every corner of the house ought to have been thoroughly explored.

Then she ran upstairs to the top of the house, and then down the two or three steps to the end room, with five girls and Fidessa following her closely. She felt sure that she heard a noise from the direction of the room; nor was she wrong. Haleema, who had managed to keep herself awake amid all the discomforts of her position, was shouting at the top of her rather weak lungs. Yet she had made herself heard.

A glance around the small room and the sight of the broken glass on the floor outside showed Anstiss that the girls were in the closet. But here was a new difficulty. The door had shut with a spring that had locked it, and no one knew where the key could be found.

The fact, however, that they were discovered had restored the spirits of the girls inside the closet.

"Yes, we are starved," they admitted when questioned.

"Let's get a ladder, and send down a basket by a rope over the door," suggested Angelina; and before any one could object she had gone down to the kitchen. When she returned with a small basket containing three oranges and some slices of bread and butter, Anstiss praised her warmly for bringing just the right things. In her absence a ladder had been brought from a corner of the gymnasium, and it was very little work to lower the basket over the transom to the hungry girls within.

They had hardly finished their repast when the diners-out returned, and when they heard of the disturbance upstairs Miss South hastened at once to the scene.

"Why, no," she said, "I haven't a key; it is strange that that should have been a spring latch, for there's nothing very valuable in the closet. We did not intend to keep it fastened. There are many things of my grandmother's in these trunks, and though we knew that no one would meddle with them, we meant to keep them locked, as well as the door of this room. I was up here myself just before I went out, and I fear that I must have left the door open."

Not a word thus far of reproof for the meddlesome girls within the closet, although Miss South saw plainly that one trunk, if no more, had been ransacked.

A minute later Julia and Pamela appeared with the small tool-chest that was kept in the hall closet on the first floor, and then, to every one's astonishment, Miss South herself set to work upon the latch in the deftest possible way, and in a minute the lock was off and the door open.

"My! she did it as well as a man could," whispered Gretchen to Nellie. But Miss South heard the whisper, and, smiling, said, "As well as I hope every girl in the Mansion will be able to do before her term here is up."

When the door was opened the prisoners rushed out; their faces were rather grave. It is true that they were quite wide-awake, but now, almost for the first time, they realized the impropriety of their conduct, and dreaded facing their comrades. Everything considered, they were hardly prepared for the shouts of laughter that greeted their appearance.

"Oh, Haleema, you do look so funny!" and Haleema, putting her hand to her forehead, realized that she was still wearing the wig, while the observers saw what she could not, that the paint was daubed on very unevenly, and gave her a strange aspect.

VIII

THE FRINGED GENTIAN LEAGUE

The "Fringed Gentian League" was the girls' favorite club; or it would be truer to say that it was the favorite, partly because it was the only regular club at the Mansion, and also because all its doings were extremely interesting. Anstiss Rowe was the Honorary President and Julia the Honorary Secretary, and the club had met two or three times before it had elected its own officers. In starting, every one of the girls was invited to join, and every one accepted. Then Miss South informed them that a medium-sized room on the second floor in the wing was to be their club-room.

"I present the club," she said, when they first met in the room, "with these chairs and the large library-table, but I hope that you will gradually add to its furnishings from your own earnings."

"Earnings!" At first none of them understood, nor indeed did they learn for some time later just what she meant by "earnings."

The walls were covered with a cartridge-paper of a curious purplish blue, and that was what suggested to Gretchen the name for the League. Some of the girls rejected this as a poor suggestion.

"That would be a funny reason to give," said Concetta, "to name a club for a wall-paper; we ought to have a different reason."

Other girls gave other opinions, but while they were discussing it Gretchen had been saying to herself the stanzas of Bryant's poem. At last she looked as if she had come to a satisfactory reason, but she hesitated about giving it to the others, lest they should laugh at her. Accordingly she hastened to the honorary officers, who were busy with the large book that was to contain the names of the members.

"Why, yes, dear, that is a very good reason," responded Julia, while Gretchen blushed at the praise. But although she had had the courage to tell her elders, it was harder for the little German maiden to express her thoughts to those of her own age. She was a curious mixture of poetic fancies and practical ideas, and the fancies she always hesitated to reveal to others. But at last she permitted Julia to tell the girls why she thought "Fringed Gentian" a good name for the club. "Because it's a looking upward club; that is, a 'look to heaven' club. Recite it, Gretchen," urged Miss Julia, and the little girl began timidly,—

"I would that thus when I shall see
The hour of death draw near to me,
Hope blossoming within my heart,
May look to heaven, as I depart."

"Ugh!" cried Concetta, shaking her dark head. "How solemn; we don't mean to die in this club, Miss Julia."

"No, my dear; but the fringed gentian does not die instantly, as it looks upward. Blue is the color of hope, and the fringed gentian by this poem becomes a flower of hope, and so I think that you can give this reason, if you ever have to give a reason, why this League is called the 'Fringed Gentian' League."

It was therefore a following out of Gretchen's suggestion, that when they came to draw up the Constitution for the League, its purpose was defined in the language of much more important organizations.

"The purpose of this League shall be to encourage good thoughts and good books, and to keep our hearts looking upward." Although some of the more matter-of-fact objected that hearts did not really look up at all, the vote was in favor of the phrase, and the honorary officers said that no

club could have a loftier aim.

The officers were to be a President, a Vice-President, a Secretary, and a Treasurer. But they were not to be elected until the second meeting.

The honorary officers, indeed, had their hands full in advising the members as to what should and what should not be put in the Constitution. But at last it was all arranged in paragraphs: one to tell who should be the members, another to tell how many officers there should be and what their duties, and others defining the aims of the club, and one to state under what conditions a member might be put out of the club. Each girl was perfectly sure that such a thing would never happen. "It is always best to be prepared for the worst," said Maggie sagely, and the others acceded. Finally there was a paragraph providing for amendments, "for you may think of things you may wish to add to this Constitution, and it would be a pity to find yourselves tied to laws that you cannot add to or change."

In fact, it was well that this provision was made, for at the next weekly meeting the girls wished to add to the numbers of the League by having associate members. Maggie, who made the suggestion, was praised for it by Julia, who saw that in this way other girls might become interested in the work of the Mansion.

There was much discussion, of course, about the duties and privileges of the new members. But at last it was settled that there were to be no more than twelve associates. Each was to be elected unanimously by Mansion members of the League, and they were to have the privilege of attending all the regular meetings. They could take out books from the library, but unlike the regular members they were not to use the club-room at other times.

"I would advise you," Julia had said, "not to elect more than half your associate members at first, for should the list fill up too soon, you might then find yourselves unable to invite other very desirable members."

"Couldn't we have them too?"

"Ah! Concetta, the room is small, and even when the League has twenty girls, you will find it fairly crowded."

Guided partly by this advice, and also moved by the fact that the founders of the League had difficulty in agreeing on new members, only five associates had been added by Thanksgiving. One of these was a friend of Concetta's from Prince Street, a timid little Italian, and with her a Portuguese girl from the same house. It was again the advice of the honorary officers that the girls should be chosen from the same neighborhood, so that they could come and go together; for though the meetings were on Thursday afternoons, there were certain advantages in having the associates neighbors. Two others were Jewish girls from Blossom Street, and the fifth was a little German from Roxbury, a special friend of Gretchen's.

Edith was slow in seeing the advantages of the League, as the girls at the Mansion already formed practically a large club. But she soon understood that it was well for them to learn that organization is a good thing. She saw, too, that it would help interest them in things outside their regular work.

Angelina was honorary associate member, and Julia explained to her that she was to be present at all special functions, but that on account of her greater age—it pleased Angelina to have this set forth as an evidence of her superiority—she might better not attend the regular meetings, lest her presence should embarrass the younger girls. But "honorary associate member" had such a high and mighty sound that Angelina regarded the whole arrangement as complimentary to herself, and thus the feelings of all were saved.

In its early meetings the club naturally had its attention set on Bryant. Julia was pleased to find that nearly all the girls were willing to commit verses or even long poems to memory, and that there was a good-natured rivalry as to which of them should learn the longest. She was surprised, too, to find that these girls who knew so little of the real country could appreciate many of the beautiful pictures of woods and flowers and birds presented by the poet. "The Waterfowl" and "Green River" and "The Evening Wind" were especial favorites, and indeed they were fond of some of the more serious poems.

The girls of the League had other interests besides their reading, and they were encouraged to enter on certain bits of work that should not be entirely for themselves. One group was busy making scrap-books, to be given at Christmas to the Children's Hospital, and another was busy dressing dolls. The best scrap-book and the best-dressed doll were to receive a prize, and all were to be exhibited a day or two before Christmas. On Anstiss had fallen the task of deciding which girls should belong to the doll group, and which to the book group, and many were her difficulties in keeping the girls to their first intention. When Concetta, who had begun to dress a golden-haired doll, saw what a pretty scrap-book Nellie was making on sheets of blue cambric with edges buttonholed in red, she immediately threw down her doll with a gesture of impatience.

"I hate sewing, and it would be much pleasanter to paste pictures in a scrap-book."

"But if you make a scrap-book you must work at it, just as Nellie did, and you will have to buttonhole the edges." Whereat Concetta, making a wry face, protested that in spite of the buttonholing she would rather make the scrap-book.

"Very well, then; when you have the leaves ready, I will give you some directions for pasting pictures. What color will you choose for the leaves?"

"Oh, pink, with yellow edges;" and Concetta, turning her back to the discarded doll, sat down at the table beside Nellie.

A week or two later Anstiss was surprised to have Concetta report that she had finished her book. "But you were not to put the pictures in until you had shown me the buttonholed edges." Whereupon Concetta, a little shamefacedly, be it said, displayed her book with the pictures and embossed decorations put in fairly well, but with the edges of the leaves merely cut in scallops.

"A book like this," said Anstiss, "would be of no good to the little sick children. Almost as soon as they touched it, it would ravel out;" and with a touch or two her fingers fringed the edge of one of the pages.

Concetta hung her head. "I can buttonhole it now, only I'd rather dress my doll."

"It isn't your doll, Concetta; Gretchen has taken it. If you work the edges of the book now, I'm afraid that you will spoil the freshness of the pictures. I shall let the League decide what you are to do."

Upon this the girls were called by Angelina into business session, and the vote was that Concetta must begin a new book. It was not a unanimous vote, and Concetta, keenly noting the hands that were raised against her, as she determined it, registered a vow to get even.

Gretchen, who had the usual German skill with her fingers, was able to dress two dolls, a blonde of Concetta's in addition to the brunette that she had originally chosen, and Eliza made two scrap-books. But this was rapid work in proportion to the time that they had before them, and Anstiss did not encourage haste.

Concetta was not the only girl who wished to change her work, for one or two outside members absented themselves from several meetings because they were dissatisfied with what they accomplished.

Julia, visiting them in their homes, made them understand that there was only a friendly rivalry in the whole competition, and that no one would be permitted to criticise the work of another very severely.

The staff of the Mansion, therefore, set itself at work very earnestly to find reasons why each book and each doll should receive some special award. So there were first prizes and second prizes: first for the neatest, then for the prettiest books; and in the same way prizes were given for the dolls. Besides these prizes there were honorable mention awards and certain supplementary awards that Edith had begged to be allowed to present, that no girl need feel that her industry had been unappreciated.

"For after all, every one has really shown perseverance, and some, I am sure, displayed the greatest taste. Why, some of these dolls are so pretty that I should like to play with them myself."

"I am not so surprised at the dolls," said Miss South, "for most of these girls have had sewing lessons in the public schools, and their fingers have developed considerable skill along this one line. But I am interested in the skill shown in making the scrap-books. To be sure, some of them are daubed more than is necessary. Maggie's book, for instance, shows a little glistening halo of dried mucilage around many of the pictures. But what pleases me the most is their skill in grouping and arranging."

The girls themselves chose two of their number, Inez and Concetta, to be on the jury, and Pamela, Julia, and Nora made up the other three.

The first prize was given for the Bryant scrap-book that Phœbe had made. No one certainly could find any fault with it, so neatly were the pictures arranged, and so free from daubs were the broad margins.

Every one wondered where she had found so many pictures that exactly illustrated the poems chosen, and Phœbe assured them that this had been not at all difficult, since Miss South had let her look over dozens and dozens of old magazines, from which she had been able to choose those that best suited the words.

No one dissented from the award of a volume of Bryant's poems to Phœbe, but there was more discussion when the second prize, a framed photograph of Greuze's "Head of the Dauphin," went to Haleema for a flower book. In this she had put a great variety of flower pictures, some of them mere decalcomanie, embossed groups, others colored lithographs from periodicals of all styles, while not a few were nature pictures from the magazines in which flowers were conspicuous.

Concetta and Gretchen were partly right in thinking that the very prettiest of all was the book of children that Nellie had made.

"The little sick children in the hospital will like it best, anyway," said Concetta. She did not happen to like Phœbe very well, and for the time being Nellie was especially in her favor.

"Nellie's book certainly would be more entertaining to the little sick ones in the hospital, and if she had only trimmed the edge of her pictures more carefully, and had kept the margins free from mucilage, she would have had something better than third prize."

But Nellie herself was very well contented with the award, and her beaming face testified that she did not need a champion to stand up for her rights. Concetta, therefore, found herself a minority on the committee in deciding this question, for all the others were in favor of Phœbe's having the prize.

When it came to the dolls there was less difficulty, for Miss South had decreed that the award should go to the doll whose clothes showed the neatest sewing. There were no two opinions, and as Concetta herself was not on this committee of award, no one objected to her having the pretty case of scissors that the judges handed her, after they had carefully examined all the clothes of all the dolls—a piece of work that took considerable time and thought.

But entertaining though the judging and awarding had been, the pleasantest part of this whole work came when they took the books and the dolls to the hospital.

Naturally the girls did not all go together, but in two or three detachments, and their sympathies were moved to the utmost by the sight of the helpless little ones. They were delighted when they learned that this child or that would be in the hospital but a short time; and some of them—Nellie, for example—were moved to tears on learning that one or two whom they pitied might never be well.

"There is no harm in having their sympathies touched," said Julia, when some one remonstrated with her for taking these girls to the hospital, "for we older people at the Mansion intend that the outcome shall be some practical work."

IX

NORA'S WORK—AND POLLY

When Nora visited the Mansion, every one was delighted. Nellie's face naturally beamed at sight of her, for didn't Miss Nora belong to her more than to any one else? But all the others were fond of the bright, cheery young girl who not only remembered the name of each one, but had some directly personal question to ask. She could ask about their aunts and uncles and cousins, as well as about their nearer relatives by name, and this meant a good deal to these younger girls, who, although happy at the Mansion, remembered sometimes that they were among strangers, and were glad of any word that connected them with their own homes.

Nora was an outside worker, and very proud that her last year's lessons in a normal cooking class had fitted her to give regular lessons to a group of the Mansion girls.

"A penny saved is a penny earned," she had said gayly, when she made the offer of her services; "and if you will hear me conduct one class, and then take a good, long look at my certificate, you will decide, I am sure,—or rather I hope,—to let me belong to the staff."

Of course Miss South was only too happy, and she knew Nora's mental qualities so well as to believe that she would make a good teacher; nor was she disappointed after she had heard her conduct a class.

"I really begin to feel as if I were of some use in the world," Nora said, after her first lesson; while Miss South remonstrated, "Why, Nora, you always have been one of the most useful girls of my acquaintance. You are always busy at home, and so helpful to your brothers, and—"

"Oh, in the ordinary relations of life it would be very strange if I should not do what I can. But every one should reach out a little beyond her immediate circle; don't you think so?"

"Yes, indeed, I do think so, Nora; but for this reaching out, the work of the world could not be carried on, and I am more than happy when I see so young a girl ready to do her part."

Now Nora's disposition, as Miss South had said, had always been one of helpfulness to others. With less money to spend than most of her intimate friends, she had managed to enjoy life thoroughly, and she had been a most devoted sister and daughter.

Her brothers would confide their difficulties to her more readily sometimes than to their mother, although Mrs. Gostar was herself a most sympathetic person, and Nora was friend and adviser to half a dozen youths of Toby's classmates in College.

Yet in spite of her many home duties she found time for much outside work. She had a Sunday-school class of boys whose doings were a constant surprise and almost as constant an occupation for her. Sometimes their vagaries carried her even into the Police Court, where she was ready, if necessary, to say a good word for some boy brought up for a petty offence. When her brothers teased her about her burglar and highwayman protégés, she took their teasing in good part, and replied that as yet none of them had done anything bad enough to require her to give heavy bonds. "Which is fortunate, considering that I am not a large owner of real estate."

"But how much of your pocket-money goes in fines or in cab-hire when you are called out in sudden emergencies?" whereat Nora blushed to a degree sufficient to show that Toby had hit somewhere near the truth; for Nora's Sunday-school class, though not in a mission, was yet made

up of boys who were remarkably free from a sense of responsibility, and it was this sense of responsibility that Nora tried to impress upon them; and to assure them of her interest, she did all that she could for them in their every-day life, and not infrequently was to be met with some of them escorting her even on one of the fashionable thoroughfares. Nora did not flinch at the smiles that some of her friends bestowed on her when they met her with her cavaliers.

Yet her interest in these boys did not prevent her having as great an interest in the girls at the Mansion, and in many a little emergency she was the right-hand helper of Julia and Miss South. It was Nora, too, who kept up the most active communication with Mrs. Rosa and the Rosa children at Shiloh. Manuel, indeed, was her especial pride, although she persisted that she was not entitled to all the praise that the family lavished on her for having rescued him years before from being run over. Angelina's sister was not as self-sufficient as she, and was only too glad to look up to Miss Gostar for advice and praise. Moreover, Nora gave perhaps a little less time than the others to the work at the Mansion, because she was especially interested in a Boys' Club. Some of her Sunday-school boys were in it, though a few of the club thought themselves too old for Sunday school. What Nora managed to accomplish in the course of a week was always a wonder to her friends, who with fewer home duties still seldom had time for outside work. Though her two elder brothers had gone from home, one to the West and one to New York, Toby and Stanley made constant demands upon her. "They not only expect me," she said, laughing, "to see that their buttons and gloves are in order, but wish me to be at home whenever they have invited any special friends to the house, and at pretty frequent intervals they expect me to ask some girl or another in whom they have a special interest. But they are very good to me, too," she would conclude, "and without one or the other of them to escort me where I wish to go, I do not see what I should do. I'd even have to stay away from the Mansion sometimes."

The class in invalid cookery proved a great success, and Miss South, as she tasted one after another of the savory little dishes offered her by the proud cooks, said that she almost wished that she might be ill enough to have these jellies and broths recommended to her for a steady diet.

Gretchen, to whom she said this, seemed greatly amused by the idea, and smiled and smiled, and finally broke into a loud laugh.

"Would you really like to be sick in your bed," she asked, "just so's you could eat my jelly?" And then Miss South repeated her praise of Gretchen's work.

"By and by," continued Miss South, "you may wish to have an exhibition of your work, and before spring I am sure you will probably have learned to make several new things."

"Oh, yes, indeed," and Gretchen's face beamed with delight, for it really was her wish to excel in cooking, and the progress that she had made was one of the things that so pleased her grandfather, that he was likely to consent to her staying a second year. As to Gretchen herself, she was now quite determined to be a cook when she should be older, and Julia had made plans to send her to a regular cooking school at the end of a year. Her grandfather had said that he would gladly pay the cost of tuition, if Julia and the others would help in some other ways. The old man had several persons dependent on him, and it was his constant anxiety lest Gretchen should be left unable to earn a living when he should be taken away.

Though it was clear what Gretchen's future occupation should be, it was less easy for Miss South and her staff to decide about the others. Concetta's one talent for fine needlework seemed to imply that she was intended to be a seamstress, and the aim of those interested should be to train her, that her work might place her in a good position. As to the others, it was too early to decide what they should do or be.

Prompted by a spirit of mischief, one evening when Mrs. Blair asked her, Julia replied:

"How can I tell just what we are training them for? One or two are very fond of music, Inez is devoted to art, Angelina is sure that she would love to travel, and Gretchen is the only one who seems a born cook."

"But you don't mean that you would let all these girls follow their own tastes? Please pardon me for saying it, Julia. But I fear that you will not have the sympathy of—yes, of your friends, unless you turn all these girls into first-rate domestics. When you think how much need there is of good servants—really it is the most pressing problem."

"I wish that I could help solve it," Julia replied gravely; "and if I can, you may be sure that I will. The girls at the Mansion have certainly a greater love for all kinds of household duties than they had six months ago, and every one of them could be very useful in her own home or any other. But they are too young yet to decide on the future profession, just as I am sure that you would consider it too early for the average schoolgirl to decide her whole future life when she is only fifteen."

"Oh, but this is different; you have the chance of influencing these girls, and really it is your duty, when you consider the servant question—" and so *ad infinitum*; and, indeed, others of Julia's friends would continue the discussion. Usually Julia turned all criticism aside with a smiling and indefinite reply, although at times she would say, "Ah, I hope that I shall always be found ready to do what is best for each girl."

Casual criticisms like this from those who did not really understand her aim did not greatly

disturb Julia. They were more than balanced by the cordial appreciation of her aunt and Mrs. Gostar, and others who knew what she was really striving for. Then at intervals—though rather long intervals—she had a cheering word or two from Ruth, who, in spite of being on a protracted wedding tour in extremely interesting countries, evidently kept her thoughts constantly in touch with her Boston friends. "Of course I mean to be part of your experiment when I return home, and I mean to work like a Trojan to make up for my absence this year. Also, as I have written you before, I am collecting all kinds of weird receipts that I mean to have your poor little victims—for I am sure they call themselves victims—fed on next season."

One afternoon, after a rather hard morning in which everything had happened just as it should not, Julia heard a tap at her study door.

When she answered it Angelina ushered in—but no, Angelina had nothing to do with it—a flying figure flung itself upon Julia, and before its arms had been removed from her neck she recognized the soft accents of Polly Porson.

"It seems like I hadn't seen you for a century, although now that I do see you, you look as natural as life, and not a bit as if you were weighed down by the care of a hundred girls, such as I hear you have taken under your wing."

"Not a quarter nor an eighth of a hundred; but where in the world have you dropped from, Polly Porson? Have you come North, as you used to threaten, to buy a trousseau, or is your novel ready to offer to a publisher?"

At which confusing double question the usually nonchalant Polly blushed so exceedingly that Julia knew which part of the question had been answered.

"Who is he?" she asked so pointedly, that Polly, nothing loath, sat down to tell the story. She had sprained her ankle, it seemed, early in the autumn. "Why, I am sure I wrote you about it," she added, when Julia expressed her surprise, "and I'm sure that I told you about the doctor; didn't I say a great deal about him?"

"Well, perhaps you did, but I was so unsuspecting that I did not attach much importance to what you said, or I thought what you wrote was in mere appreciation for his skill. Besides, I begin to remember that you told me that he was a cousin, and one whom you especially disliked, though you believed that he had saved you from being permanently lame."

"Well, he is a cousin, as cousins go in the South, several degrees removed; and he was perfectly disagreeable at first because I had gone to College; but I've brought him round, so that he has made his own younger sister begin her preparation for Radcliffe."

"So in gratitude to him you are going to give up all your plans for independence and fame. Alas, poor Polly!"

"Oh, no, indeed; he says that I may write novels or do anything I like. You never saw such a changed man. I just wish that you had known him a year ago, so that you could mark the improvement."

Thus Polly rattled on, and yet, as in their College days, there was an undercurrent of wisdom in all that she said.

"To tell the truth," she explained, "one thing I came for was to see just how your experiment is working, for I have an idea that I shall be able to do something of the same kind in Atlanta—in a very small way," she added hastily, "not at all in this magnificent style; but it's very much needed, and I have some original ideas to combine with yours."

So Polly spent several days at the Mansion, learning, and teaching too; for her words of encouragement taught Julia that she had been unduly discouraged by various things outside, as well as by a certain amount of friction among her protégées. Polly's visit drew her away from her cares.

One evening Julia arranged a reunion of all the members of the class that she could collect at short notice, and though there were many gaps in the ranks, it was altogether a delightful evening, and each one present told all that she could, not only about herself, but about the absent.

All too soon Polly flew away, and though she protested that her shopping in New York was not to be regarded as preparation for a trousseau, Julia was sure that when the two should meet again there would be no longer a Polly Porson. "Not that your new name will not be just as becoming as the old one," she added, as they said their last words, "but for some selfish reason I do wish that I could have Polly Porson stay Polly Porson a few years longer."

"Nonsense!" cried Polly, as she bade her good-bye.

When Arthur wrote that he should be away Christmas, Brenda seemed undisturbed, although Ralph and Agnes were annoyed by his absence.

"But he has been in Washington less than a month, and probably he wishes to stay over New Year's. We'll keep his Christmas presents until he returns."

Ralph and Agnes exchanged a glance.

"Hasn't he written you?"

"Why, yes—but what?"

Then Ralph explained that Arthur had had an offer to be private secretary to a certain senator, and that this would keep him in Washington all winter. "I received my letter only last night," Ralph hastened to add, lest Brenda should feel slighted. Brenda's own letter arrived that very day, but as it was second to Ralph's she read it in no very gracious spirit.

Then, too, Arthur seemed to take it too much a matter of course that she would praise his remaining in Washington. Brenda, forgetting that she herself had really reproached him for his idleness in Boston, began to complain to her mother of his lack of dignity in taking the position of private secretary.

"My dear," Mrs. Barlow had responded, "I am glad to hear that Arthur is busy. As there is no likelihood of his practising law, it is much better for him to have his mind occupied. It would be bad for you both were he to spend the winter in Boston with nothing to do but walk or drive or go to dinners and dances."

"But he isn't very strong, Mamma."

"Perhaps not; on that account the climate of Washington will be better for him. We have the assurance, however, that his health will be completely built up in a year, and your father has plans for him. It is no secret, so I may tell you that a new branch of the business is to be established next winter, and it is of such a nature that Arthur's knowledge of law will be valuable, and he will be put in charge of the office work."

"Does Arthur know?"

"Yes."

"Then I cannot see why he need be busy this winter. I believe that he is just staying in Washington to annoy me."

"Nonsense, Brenda!"

But Brenda would not listen to her mother, and it is to be feared that her letters reflected her impatience, for Arthur's letters came at long intervals. Although she did not hear from him directly, she knew from Ralph and Agnes that he was well, and from another source she often heard about him.

Although Brenda and Belle saw much less of each other than formerly, or perhaps because of this, they kept up a vigorous correspondence. After Christmas Belle and her mother had gone to Washington, and in her very first letter she mentioned having met Arthur Weston at a certain reception; "And I can assure you, that, in spite of being cut off from Boston, he looks very cheerful."

After this Belle never failed to mention Arthur in her letters to Brenda. She told what a great favorite he was with this one or that one. "He is an immense favorite, and I almost ought to warn you that he is really too happy in the society of other people."

Poor Brenda! All she could do was to write glowing letters to Belle, telling her that she herself had never known so pleasant a winter in Boston. She left Belle to infer that she was enjoying herself even more than would have been possible had Arthur been nearer. If the truth were told, Brenda amused herself rather sadly. Society wearied her, but she had not strength of mind to give it up altogether. To the delight, however, of Maggie McSorley, she went more often to the Mansion, and even condescended to give the girls some lessons in embroidery. Since her earlier school-days Brenda's skill in needlework had developed wonderfully, and she could work very beautiful patterns on doilies and centrepieces.

But to design and fill out these patterns was one thing, and to impart any of her own skill was another. The latter required infinite patience on Brenda's part, and Brenda had never been noted for her patience. Yet the discipline was better for her even than for the younger girls as she guided their needles and watched them take the right stitches, and helped the careless Maggie pull out the threads where she had drawn them too tight, puckering the linen web, and, alas! too often soiling it hopelessly.

It was good discipline for Brenda, because strangely enough she found herself more inclined to blame than to praise, and she could not help noticing how much defter and neater than all the others were the fingers of Concetta. Indeed, the latter did not really need the instruction. She had already, like many little Italian girls, served an apprenticeship in embroidery under her aunt. She did not intend to deceive any one in joining Brenda's class, but she could not bear the idea that she, among all the girls, should be deprived of the chance to be near the charming young lady, as she called Brenda, simply because she knew more than the others; so she too puckered

her thread, and made occasional mistakes in fear lest perfection on her part should lead to her being excluded from the class.

Amy called herself a detached member of the Mansion staff. She could not give much time to assisting Miss South and Julia without neglecting her college work. But there were certain things that she could do in her leisure, and occasional spare hours she gave with great good-will to a class in literature. Amy was still devoted to her early love, "The Faery Queen," and once in a while, like Mr. Wegg, of fragrant memory, she dropped into poetry herself. She was winning her laurels in college, however, for more serious work than poetry—more serious, that is, in the eyes of the world; and already she was famous among her classmates for her literary ability.

Indirectly she had been the means of Haleema's going to the Mansion. It had happened in this way: during her first year in college she had gone once a week to play accompaniments at a College Settlement. In the chorus, for which she played, Haleema had been one of the most vociferous singers, and although Amy had not been able to see her much outside of the class, she had become much interested in the little girl, and had received one or two letters from her during the summer. What Haleema herself wrote, and what the head worker at the Settlement told her about Haleema's home life, convinced her that the little Syrian was exactly the kind of candidate desired for the Mansion school, and she was really pleased with her judgment when, after the first week or two, she heard Miss South and Julia praising the quickness and docility of her protégée. Haleema, however, was not a young person capable of great personal devotion, a fact that her pleading, poetic eyes seemed to contradict. As she sometimes confided to the other girls, she liked one person as well as another, and if she had gone a little further in her confidences, she might have said that the person in the ascendant was usually the one who at the time was doing some special favor for her. She appreciated presents, and had a hoard of pretty things stowed away in the bottom drawer of her bureau.

On Mondays Brenda often found herself going to the Mansion, chiefly because this was her only chance of seeing Amy. Monday, the Wellesley holiday, Amy gave in part to a Mansion class in literature, and when her little informal talk was at an end Brenda would seize her for a half-hour of "gossip," as she called it. Sometimes she arrived at the house before the class was over, and then, if she slipped into the class-room, Amy had not the heart to send her out. Amy protested that her work was by no means up to the standard that Brenda should look for in a teacher, while Brenda insisted that Amy's account of certain great poets and their work was so stimulating, that she should take up a course of reading herself; and, indeed, she did induce Amy to make out a list of books that she ought to read.

"I should rather they were interesting, but even if they are not really exciting, I'll promise to read at least three or four of them."

"To please me?" queried Amy.

"Well, partly to please you, but more to—to—well, to give me something to think about. Everything seems so dull and stupid this winter, that I'm going to try a homœopathic remedy and try to read dull books—just to see if I can't strengthen my mind."

Then Amy, noticing that Brenda seemed far from happy, wisely asked no questions, and as they walked across the Common to the station they talked of everything except the subject that lay nearest Brenda's heart.

"How is Fritz Tomkins?" Brenda asked, almost abruptly, referring to an old playmate of Amy's, now a Harvard Sophomore.

"Oh, Fritz is doing splendidly. I hardly ever see him, and I'm so pleased."

"What a funny way of putting it—pleased because you seldom see him."

"Why, yes, because I know that means that he is so busy with his work that he has no time for other things. He has come to Wellesley only once this winter, and he tells me that he never worked so hard in his life."

If Amy's speech was a little disjointed, Brenda understood her, and in contrast her mind wandered to Arthur Weston. He, too, was busy, and perhaps doing his duty by remaining at his post in Washington. But unlike Amy, she did not feel pleased that he could so contentedly keep his back turned to his Boston friends. Consequently she sent only the briefest answers to his letters, and his replies became at last, if possible, briefer than hers.

Belle, however, kept her informed of Arthur's doings, and Brenda was never quite sure whether the information that she gave her was intended to please or to trouble her. She wrote, for example, of a riding party to Chevy Chase, where Arthur and Annabel Harmon had led all the others in gayety.

"Annabel Harmon!" The name was familiar; and soon Brenda recalled one of Julia's classmates at Radcliffe, a popular girl, and yet one whom some of the best girls did not like. She had had some trouble with that strange Clarissa Herter. Although Brenda had never cared so very much for Clarissa Herter, she was pleased now to recall that she had heard that Clarissa had in the end been more popular, or rather better liked, than Annabel. She remembered that Annabel's father was a politician, and when a second letter came with Annabel's name still connected closely with Arthur's, Brenda thought more deeply on the subject. She wondered if, perhaps, Arthur was planning to stay permanently in Washington, and if he hoped to get some position through the

influence of Mr. Harmon.

Had Arthur been at home, Brenda would, undoubtedly, have given less time to the Mansion work; for in the first place, in starting the work Miss South had not counted on her aid. Other girls, more enthusiastic in the beginning, had given less service in the end, and Brenda was almost the only one who, without having promised much, was willing to do a great deal.

On the whole, Miss South was well pleased with the interest shown by her former pupils. There was Anstiss Rowe, for example, one of the most valued of the residents, who, after a year in society, had pronounced it all a bore. She had been one of the younger girls during Julia's days at Miss Crawdon's.

"You never knew," she said once to Julia, "my intense admiration for you. It would have spoiled it all had you known. But each of us little girls had to have some object of devotion, and you were my pattern of perfection."

"The idea!" responded Julia. "I suppose that I ought to blush, but what you say is too absurd."

"Oh, I suppose that you never wondered who used to send you those valentines; probably you had so many that you never thought about mine. But there was one with some lovely mother-of-pearl ornaments. In fact, I sent you two valentines that year, and two the next; but, of course, you wouldn't remember mine especially."

"It's all very touching, and, indeed, I do remember them, my dear Anstiss, for I have an idea that I received no other that year. At least, I have them safely put away at this very minute."

"Well, I suppose that you thought some extraordinary youth sent them."

"He would, indeed, have been extraordinary. But to tell you the truth, I suspected that some girl had a hand in them."

"We missed you when you went to College," said Anstiss meditatively.

Though Anstiss had pronounced society hollow and a bore, she had not entirely forsworn it, and at times she went home for a week or two, returning, however, always on the evening of her history reading. This was her special contribution to the school work.

Anstiss had her own protégée at the Mansion—a girl who had been in her Sunday-school class. Phœbe had been loath to leave school when her parents insisted, and Anstiss said it was merely avariciousness on their part, as her father was earning good pay. "When I came to investigate," she said, "I found that he was only her stepfather, and her mother said that she did not need her money. So in the end I was able to get her consent to her coming here. Phœbe was never very bright at school—"

Then Julia interrupted her.

"But she's doing splendidly here. Miss Dreen says that she's a born cook, and never makes a mistake."

"Yes, I know. And when she has finished her course I'm going to see what can be done to encourage her to study still further. She says she'd like to be a cook, but it seems to me that if she continues to be interested in her study, she might be a director of cooking somewhere."

"She'd earn as much by being a cook in some household."

"Yes, but after all she has hardly the physique, and certain qualities of hers lead me to think that she would be a good manager. We are going to have an exhibition soon, and although we do not expect the greatest results this first year, still I am sure that you will admit that the girls have learned something, and Phœbe shall exhibit one of her model luncheons. She has already served us some very good meals at a fabulously low cost. That is one of the things she is learning, to make the best use of inexpensive material."

It was Edith who had been listening attentively to all that Anstiss had said, and her reply, "I believe that I would rather see than eat those very, very inexpensive things," was given seriously. Edith was always glad to help the work at the Mansion when some matter of additional expense was brought to her, and she made conscientious visits to Gretchen, and in turn reported her progress to the old gardener. But there was a certain coldness in her manner that the young girls felt. They thought that she was not really interested in them, and her visits were never greeted with the delight that was so evident when Nora made her appearance. Edith was decided in her likes and dislikes. She could always be depended on to stand by a friend, and as certainly was she apt to be severe toward a wrongdoer. Though devoted to Julia and Miss South, she was less fond of Pamela and Anstiss.

"An artist's model! how Ralph would love to paint her!" Brenda had exclaimed to Miss South after first seeing Concetta. "How I wish that I had discovered her instead of Maggie."

"She may have more personal charm," Miss South had responded, "but Maggie is devoted to you, and some persons call her rather pretty, although," a little apologetically, "we all understand here at the Mansion that 'handsome is what handsome does' should be our chief rule of conduct. I never permit the girls to make one word of comment about the personal appearance of another."

"Oh, naturally," responded Brenda, accepting the implied reproof; "but the comparisons that I make will not come to the ears of the girls."

"No, not the comparisons, perhaps; but we try ourselves not to let them think that any girl is preferred by any one who comes here. All girls of fifteen are sensitive."

Yet Maggie, in spite of the fact that Concetta tried to make her jealous, was unwilling to believe that Brenda had a preference for Concetta.

"Miss Brenda asked Miss South to send me up to her house to get that parcel of embroidery patterns; she could have sent it down by her man just as well," concluded Concetta, with an important air; "or she could have asked you to come."

Then, when Maggie made no reply, except perhaps that she polished her glasses a little more vigorously, Concetta added:

"But I'm sure she just loves to have me come to her house. You see she always invites me to go up to her room, and she asks me all kinds of questions."

Then, as Maggie still continued provokingly silent, Concetta continued:

"You see, my country is a very interesting country, and I tell her all kinds of things that I have heard, especially about the beautiful cathedrals. She thinks I remember them all, but it is what I have heard the elders say, and she listens quite open-eyed, that, so young, I can remember so much. Don't you hate that you were born only in Boston."

"No, I don't," said Maggie gruffly; "I despise foreigners."

Then did Concetta become wisely silent, for she heard the step in the hall of one in authority, and she did not wish at the moment to bring Maggie to the point of tears. Maggie wept with unusual ease, and just now Concetta was not anxious to draw on herself a reproof, lest it should be followed by a withdrawal of the permission to go to Miss Barlow's.

It was true that Maggie had never swerved in her devotion, showing it often in unexpected ways. Whenever Brenda entered the room she followed her with her eyes, and when her goddess addressed her she always blushed deeply. Mrs. McSorley was constantly putting poor Maggie through a course of questioning, that the former might be made sure that little girl had done nothing likely to drive her out of this paradise.

XI

SEEDS OF JEALOUSY

Fortunately for many of the girls at the Mansion, they did not live under a very rigorous system of rewards and punishments. Every one was expected to report once a week what property she had injured, and this usually meant what dishes she had broken. She was also expected to tell what other things she had done that were not for the good of the school. One or two girls really liked to have a long list of misdemeanors. They seemed to think that it gave them an air of distinction, and Concetta was especially delighted to read from a written list:

"Bed not made until ten o'clock Monday.
Bureau drawers untidy for three days.
Forgot to put salt in the bread.
Let the kitchen fire go out.
Spilled ink on my best apron.
Broke one of our blue cups," etc.

Most of the girls were contented with one or two faults, and some were inclined to forget that they had any, until reminded by nudges from some of their neighbors. These "confession meetings" were held once a week, between four and five o'clock. A girl would have had to show herself unusually bad to be excluded from the pleasant hour that followed when Miss Julia played for them to sing, and then around the open fire gave them good advice for half an hour,—good advice that they never imagined to be anything but a bit of pleasant conversation, although they all said that they went away feeling as if they could be good forever.

It is true that the girls whose conduct was especially approved by Julia, regardless in many cases of their reports, were permitted to borrow some book from her bookcase that they especially wished to read. At first she had been surprised to find that few of these girls had any idea about choosing books.

Haleema didn't care to read; she liked to do other things better. Concetta loved to read, but had actually never read anything but stories; indeed, she was surprised to hear that people ever read anything else.

Little did Brenda realize that she was sowing the seeds of jealousy. She felt much pride in Maggie as having been her own discovery. She thought, with some complacency, that but for her

Maggie might still have been condemned to the tiresome round of a cash-girl's duties. She did several little kind things of which Maggie herself was unaware, that enabled Julia and Miss South to enlarge the work of the school in directions that were especially helpful to Maggie.

But with the best intentions in the world, Brenda could not help showing her preference for the pretty Concetta, whose dark eyes seemed mirrors of truth, and whose manners were always so charmingly deferential. Had she known that she was giving pain to Maggie by showing her preference in this way she would herself have been always ready enough to admit that this was not wise. But Maggie, although her tears flowed so easily, had the ability to keep her thought to herself.

Mrs. McSorley herself, with her Scotch canniness, had an exalted opinion of Brenda, and on Maggie's weekly visits home impressed on her the great advantages that she might expect from having the interest of a Back Bay young lady. "And if she likes any other girl better than you, it will be all your fault, and I'll take it a sign that you ain't doing your very best."

So Maggie had never said a word to her aunt about Miss Barlow's growing preference for Concetta. To have spoken of this would only have drawn a reproof upon herself. It was hard enough to confess her real faults, to tell over the list of things she had broken during the week. She had promised on first entering the Mansion to do this, and thus far she had kept her promise.

Now Maggie had her own little bit of a secret, and sometimes she drew from her pocket a crumpled half-sheet of paper, and wept when she saw at the bottom:

"From your loving Tim."

What would her aunt say, what would Miss Brenda say, if they knew that at intervals she received these misspelled letters from a jail-bird. Yes! "a jail-bird," that was what her aunt had called him, and though it was true that he had only been in the reformatory, and that his offence, as he had explained it, was due more to the fault of another man. Still he had been imprisoned, and Maggie was forbidden ever to speak to him again.

Yet he was her uncle more than Mrs. McSorley was her aunt. The latter was only an aunt-in-law, while Tim was her own uncle, and in spite of his faults she loved him. Of course he was a ne'er-do-well, but his smile was so jolly in contrast with the long-drawn, severe expression of Mrs. McSorley. The latter said that it was very easy for him to be jolly, when he never had the least care in the world for himself or for any one else. But Maggie remembered many kind things that he had done. "Since for him I'd never have been to the circus, and it was a whole day we spent at Nantasket, and he gave me that plush box of pink note-paper;" and Maggie would wipe away one of her ready tears as she thought of Tim, and she gazed at the tintype that she kept with a few other treasures in the plush-covered box.

Many a time she pondered what she should do if he should ever come to Boston, for he was now in Connecticut looking, as he said, for work. "And it won't be so very long," he wrote, "before I'll have me own house, and you for housekeeper; so learn all you can, for it won't be long."

For Maggie had written him once or twice since coming to the Mansion, and her letters had been more cheerful than those that had found their way to him when she was living with her aunt.

So Maggie had her day dreams; and the real secret of her patience, and her anxiety to learn everything relating to the work of the house, came from this hope, that she was to have the chance of showing her uncle what a good housekeeper she could be. Now Maggie should have realized that her aunt had done much more for her than her uncle; that Mrs. McSorley had shown her kindness in comparison with which Tim's occasional bursts of liberality were very small indeed. Where would she and her mother have been but for Mrs. McSorley? And Mrs. McSorley was only a sister-in-law, whereas Tim was her mother's own brother. Yet the kindness of Mrs. McSorley had been so overlaid with good advice and reprimands, that it did not stand out as kindness pure and simple. Maggie was as sure that Mrs. McSorley did not love her as she was positive that Tim did love her.

Among the girls at the home she found little Haleema almost the most sympathetic. At least Concetta disliked them both, and this was their first bond of sympathy. The girls were apt to be sent in pairs on errands, and occasionally on pleasure walks, and it had come to be the habit for Maggie and Haleema to go together. They had gone together in company with Julia to present their scrap-books and dolls to the Children's Hospital, and there it was that they had fallen in love with the prettiest little blue-eyed girl, who had been sent to the hospital with a broken leg. She was then almost well, and when Miss South saw how deeply interested the two were in her she allowed them to go each week on visiting day. Later, when little Jennie went home, the two continued to visit her; sometimes they even brought her to the Mansion to visit. There she soon became a great favorite, and poor Maggie saw that Jennie no longer owed everything to her and Haleema. Concetta won the child's heart by dressing her a beautiful doll, and all the others vied with one another in doing things for her.

It was especially hard for her when, in answer to a request from Concetta, Brenda herself sent a box of useful and pretty things for Jennie's use.

"It might just as well have gone through me," thought poor Maggie; though, on further reflection, she had to admit that Concetta deserved these things, because she had been bright enough and quick enough to think of asking for them.

A few days later, when she went to see Jennie she took with her a beautiful bouquet, purchased with money taken from the little hoard that she had so carefully saved. This was a real sacrifice on Maggie's part, and when she saw the joy with which the little girl received her gift she was more than repaid.

Moreover, in the hour that she spent with the little girl she was sure that Jennie cared for her as much as ever. Indeed, had she been able to reason more deeply, she would have discovered that a child discriminates very slightly as to the value of different gifts. Jennie, like other children, loved Maggie quite as well as she loved Concetta, and though she enjoyed the presents that each one brought her, she had no scale of values by which to measure them.

XII

DOUBTS AND DUTIES

"But of course you haven't given up your music. If I thought that you had, I should march straight East, and find the reason why. If it's on account of that Mansion school, you'd have to leave it instantly; so when you write tell me what you've been composing, and whom you are studying with this year. As for me, I really am rather idle, and I'm learning that a college education isn't really wasted, even if one practises only the domestic virtues. My mother has been far from well this year, and she's luxuriating in having me here to run things. Running things, you know, is rather in my line. But ah! how I wish that I could see you and Pamela and Lois again, and all the others of our class who are enjoying themselves fairly near the classic shades. I suppose that you go out to Radcliffe at least once a week, and do you feel as blue as I do to think it's all over? But don't forget to tell me about your music.

"Ever your "CLARISSA."

As Julia folded up this letter from her old classmate her face grew thoughtful. She certainly was not even studying this year, nor had she composed a note. It was kind in Clarissa to remember her little talent. Even Lois had spoken to her recently about hiding her light under a bushel. Was she doing this? Might her little candle, properly tended, shine out large enough to be seen in the world? Her uncle and aunt had remonstrated with her for neglecting her music, and Julia had promised to resume her work later. But thus far the exact time had not come, and she hesitated to tell them that she doubted that she had the talent that they attributed to her. This feeling of discouragement had come to her in the last year at Radcliffe, when she began to see that her ability as a composer had its limits. Now, with Clarissa's letter before her, she wondered if she had been right in letting one or two slight set-backs discourage her. She had continued her practising, and her rendering of the great composers was a continual uplifting to those who heard her. But the other,—her work in harmony,—was she right or wrong in laying it aside for the present? Was this the talent that she should be called to account for? Ought she to keep it concealed in a napkin? As she thought of this, Julia longed more than ever for Ruth—Ruth, with whom she had found it easier to discuss these personal questions than with any other of her friends. But Ruth, on her wedding trip, was thousands of miles away. It would be six months, at least, before they could meet, and she glanced at the map on which she marked a record of Ruth's wanderings, and noted that now she was in the neighborhood of Calcutta. "The other side of the world," she thought. "Ah! well, I will let things go on as they have been going, and next year, perhaps, I shall see more clearly what I ought to do."

Pamela was perhaps carrying out her ideals more thoroughly than Julia, for all her teaching was along the artistic lines that she loved the best. She was not always sure that the girls got just what she intended them to get from her little talks on the nature of beauty, and the relations of beauty to utility. She used the simplest language, however, and made her illustrations of a kind that they could easily comprehend. She had tried to show them the meaning of "Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful," and in expounding this she saw that she must try to train them to understand the truly beautiful. For her own room she had had some mottoes done in pen and ink artistically lettered, and one at a time she would set them in a conspicuous place, sure to attract the attention of the girls at their lessons.

Ruskin's "Every right action and true thought sets the seal of its beauty on person and face; every wrong action and foul thought, its seal of distortion," put up in plain sight, though at first it was not thoroughly understood, served as the text for a little talk, and each girl for the time being decided to curb her tongue, lest her face should show the effect of backbiting.

Samples of dress fabrics, samples of wall papers, gaudy chromos contrasted with simple photographs, queer and over-decorated vases in comparison with graceful Greek shapes, were all used by Pamela to enforce her lessons. Yet she often had misgivings that her words were not accepted as actual gospel by Nellie and Haleema and one or two others, whose preference for crude colors and fantastic decorations often came unexpectedly to the surface.

Nora laughed at her efforts to develop an æsthetic sense in these girls.

"They'll never have the chance to own the really beautiful things, and they might as well think

that these cheap and gaudy objects are beautiful."

But Pamela shook her head at this.

"Why, Nora, you surprise me! What I am trying to teach is the fact that beautiful things are often as cheap as ugly things. Of course, in one sense, they are always cheaper, because they give more pleasure and often last longer. But when a girl's taste is cultivated she can often find more attractive things for less money. Who wouldn't rather have a wicker chair than one of those hideous red and green plush upholstered affairs, and the wicker chair certainly costs less."

"You are absolutely correct, Pamela Northcote, and your sentiments do not savor of anarchism, though I hear that Mrs. Blair is greatly perturbed lest this work at the Mansion should interfere with the labor market, and prevent the householder of the future from getting her rightful quota of domestics."

"It would not surprise me," said Pamela, "if not more than two of the girls here actually became domestics. I think that Julia and Miss South are right in encouraging them to live up to their highest aspirations."

"Well, I doubt if any of them have begun to aspire very strongly yet. On the whole they are remarkably short-sighted, and when I ask them what they intend to be they are usually so taken by surprise that they can make no reply."

"Miss South feels that she can judge them only very superficially this year; but she hopes that next year she will know them so well that she can give them definite advice. In the mean time they are at the mercy of laymen like yourself and myself, and we have the responsibility of guiding them toward the heights of art, whether in the æsthetic or the culinary line."

Theoretically Pamela took some of the girls each Saturday to the Art Museum; really the average was hardly oftener than every other week. There were rainy Saturdays, there were days when Pamela had special work of her own, or an occasional invitation would come for her to go out of town. Three girls at a time were invited to go. Julia would not permit Pamela to leave the house with more than that number, lest she should be mistaken for the head of an orphan asylum.

Pamela made these trips so interesting that for a girl to be forbidden to go when her day came was the greatest punishment that could be inflicted on her. Julia and Miss South had discovered this, and the discovery had solved one of their greatest problems,—this question of punishment; for although the girls were old enough to be beyond the need of punishment, yet there were certain rules that only the very best never broke, and to the breaking of which certain penalties were attached.

Thus it happened that on this particular Saturday afternoon Haleema, whose turn it was to go, was not of the trio, and in her place was Maggie, triumphant in the knowledge that for a whole week she had not broken a single cup or saucer, nor in fact a dish of any kind.

"That means that I have my whole quarter to do as I like with," she said as they left the house.

"That means," interpolated Concetta, "that you'll put it in your little bank. She's a regular miser, Miss Northcote."

"No, I ain't," responded Maggie, "only just now I'm saving."

"That's right," said Pamela. "'Many a little make a mickle.'"

"Yes, 'm," and Maggie lapsed into her wonted silence.

Concetta, however, was inclined to be more talkative.

"Oh, she isn't simply saving, she's mean. Why, she got Nellie to buy her blue necktie last week; sold it for ten cents. Just think of that!"

"Well, well, that is no affair of ours."

"She sold a lovely story-book that her aunt gave her Christmas. She said it was too young for her, and she'd rather have the money."

"That may be, Concetta; but still I say that this is none of our business."

Yet although she thus reproved Concetta for her comments, Pamela wondered why Maggie wished to save. Economy was not a characteristic of girls of her age; though, recalling her own past need of money, Pamela felt that thrift was not a thing to be discouraged.

"Oh, please let us go to the paintings first," begged Concetta.

"No! no! to the jewelry," cried Gretchen; while Maggie, knowing as well as the others that they would first go where Miss Northcote chose, wisely said nothing, expressed no preference.

On their first visit they had walked through all the galleries to get the necessary bird's-eye view, and a second visit had been given almost wholly to the old Greek room. But all the casts and reliefs were as nothing in Concetta's eyes compared with the richness of color in Corot's "Dante and Virgil in the Forest," and the wonderful realism of La Rolle's two peasant women.

"I don't know whether they're Italians," said Concetta of the latter, "but there's something about

them that makes me think of Italy;" for Concetta had vague remembrances of her native land and of the picturesque costumes of the Italian women. Although she was proud enough to consider herself an American citizen, she still was pleased when people called her a true daughter of Italy, and she loved everything that reminded her of her old home.

Of all the things that she had seen, Gretchen declared that she would much prefer the great crystal ball to which a fabulous value was attached, although there were some exquisite gold necklaces that had an especial charm for her.

Now on this special day Pamela meant to combine instruction with pleasure, and so the quartette quickly found themselves in the Egyptian room.

"You don't think that beautiful, do you, Miss Northcote?" and there was more than a little doubt in Concetta's tone as she pointed to a granite bust of a ruler in one of the earliest dynasties.

"I like it better than the mummies," interposed Gretchen, before Pamela could reply; "they give me the shivers."

"I wish you'd take us into the mummy room," continued Concetta seductively; "there are some lovely blue beads there."

But Pamela was sternly steadfast to her purpose, reminding them that there would be other opportunities for them to wander about indefinitely, whereas now she wished them to get a little idea of history through these reliefs and statues. But I am afraid that of the three Maggie alone really listened very attentively to her explanation of the difference between the Egyptians and the Assyrians, which their works of art brought out so well.

But neither Thotmes, nor Assur-bani-pal, nor Nimrod, nor Rameses were names to conjure with, and in spite of her efforts to make her subject interesting, by connecting things she told them with Bible incidents, Pamela could not always hold their attention. To give up too easily would have seemed ignominious, and she decided to allow them a diversion in the shape of a visit to her favorite Tanagra figurines.

"That will be good," said Gretchen, in her rather quaint English, as they turned their backs on the grim relics of Egypt; "and we'll try to remember every word you've told us to-day."

"Then what *do* you remember?" said Pamela with a suspicion of mischief in her voice.

The three looked uncomfortable. On their faces was the same expression that Pamela often saw on the faces of her pupils in school when unable to answer her questions.

"The names were rather hard," ventured Concetta.

"Yes, but you must remember one fact,—at least one among all the things that I have been telling you."

"I remember one," ventured Maggie.

"Well, then, we shall be glad to hear it."

"Why the Assyrians used to make their enemies look smaller than they when they made reliefs of battles," ventured Maggie.

"And the Egyptians were very fond of cats," added Gretchen; and with all her efforts this was all the information Pamela gleaned from the girls after her hour's work.

But before she had a chance to try a new and better way of presenting the Tanagra figures to them, she heard her name pronounced in a well-known voice, and looking up she saw Philip Blair gazing at her charges, and at her too, with an air of amusement.

"This is a surprise. I did not realize that you were a lover of art," she said a little awkwardly.

"Oh, yes, indeed, though I can't tell you when I've been in this museum before. It looks just about the same, though, as it did when I was a kid."

"There are some new paintings upstairs," said Pamela; "though it's almost closing time now," she added, glancing at her watch.

When they saw that Pamela was fairly absorbed in conversation, the three girls wandered off toward another room where, Concetta whispered, there were prettier things to be seen.

"Do you bring them here often?" There was something quizzical in Philip's tone as he watched the three for a moment.

"Some of them every week; it's a great pleasure." Pamela was bound not to apologize.

"Do you think they'll get an idea of household art by coming here?"

"I'm sure I hope so, though that isn't my whole aim. It will take more than these visits here to get them to change their views of the really beautiful. Concetta is always telling me about some of the beauties in the house of her cousin, who married a saloon-keeper. They have green and red brocade furniture in their sitting-room, and a piano that is decorated with a kind of stucco-work, as well as I can understand her description, for it can hardly be hand-carving."

Emboldened by Philip's hearty laugh Pamela continued:

"She also thinks our pictures far too simple, 'too neat and plain,' I think she called them. Certainly she told me that she likes chromos in gilt frames."

"It is clearly, then, your duty to raise her ideals, though when it comes to a whole houseful of new ideas, you will certainly have all that you can do."

But from this lighter talk Philip and Pamela turned to more serious things, and as they walked through the long galleries, unconsciously they were showing themselves in a new aspect to each other. Philip, at least, who had had so many trips abroad, had profited more than many young men by his opportunities; and as they walked, Pamela, for almost the first time in her life, felt a little envious as he talked of this great painting and then of that,—of paintings that she had longed to see,—speaking of them as casually as she would speak of the flower-beds on the Public Garden. Ah! was she never to have this chance of crossing the ocean? It was but a passing shadow; for a swift calculation of her probable savings showed that, though the time might be long, there was still every probability that some time she could take herself to Europe. But meanwhile—

"Ah! you should see a real Titian, or a Velasquez like the one the National Gallery bought a few years ago; I saw it the last time I was over. Oh! I should love to show you some of my favorites in the Dresden Gallery."

"Yes, yes!" Pamela spoke absent-mindedly. She had suddenly remembered the existence of her charges.

"I wonder," she began, when her speech was cut short by Gretchen, who ran rapidly up to her from the broad hall outside, a look of alarm on her face as she grasped Pamela's arm.

"It's—it's Maggie!" she exclaimed excitedly.

"What is it? Has anything happened? Is she hurt?"

"I can't say as she's exactly hurt," responded Gretchen, "though she gave an awful scream; but you'd better come."



They walked through the long galleries

With Gretchen leaning on her arm, or rather dragging her on, Pamela hastened to the large room with its tapestries and cases of embroideries.

"No, no, not here; this little room," and Pamela soon saw Concetta and Maggie. The latter was weeping bitterly, the former stood near looking rather sulky. One of the custodians, with severity in every line of his face and figure, was talking to them "for all he was worth," as Gretchen phrased it.

In a glance Pamela saw what had happened. There was a hole in the top of the glass case, and the man held in his hand a large glass marble. Pamela remembered that Maggie had been tossing it up and down on her way across the Common.

"I didn't do it." Maggie was crying.

"Nonsense, Maggie! I saw you playing with it myself."

"But not now—not now."

Pamela glanced suspiciously at Concetta, but the little Italian was already at the other side of the room, pretending a great interest in a case of ivories. For the moment Pamela was overcome. Her old shyness had returned. Several bystanders were gazing at the strange group, and Pamela was at a loss what to say. Clearly it was her duty to offer to make restitution, but she could not speak; she did not know what to say; and when Gretchen, too impressed, doubtless, by the brass buttons on the coat of the official, said anxiously, "If he's a policeman, will he put us all in jail?" the climax had been reached, and Pamela herself felt ready to cry.

In a moment she saw Philip pass her; he had been not far behind all the time, and the few words that he spoke in a low voice made the grim features of the official relax.

"Oh, certainly, sir, certainly," he said, as Philip gave him his card. "I'll go with you to the office."

Philip paused only a moment to say to Pamela, "There, I leave you to your charges; let me know if they break anything more on the way home." Then, as if this was an afterthought, "By the way, it's all right about that glass; my father's a trustee, you know; I'm going to fix it in the office downstairs."

When Pamela told her of the incident, Julia only laughed. "I dare say it cost Philip a pretty penny; that kind of glass is very expensive."

"Oh, I feel so ashamed," said Pamela. "It was really my fault. I should not have let them leave me. I must repay the cost of the glass."

"Nonsense! Philip might as well spend his money for that as for other things. He never has been considered especially economical. Besides, it was at least partly his fault that you left the girls, or let them leave you;" and this was a fact that Pamela could not deny.

XIII

THE VALENTINE PARTY

When the "Leaguers" announced that they intended to have a valentine party, Julia and Miss South gave their assent with hesitation.

"It has a sentimental sound," said Julia,— "a valentine party! and I do wonder whom they wish to invite."

But when they were questioned the girls explained that they did not intend to ask a single person from outside, and, of course, not a single boy. The valentines that they most enjoyed sending were to other girls, and they wanted only girls at their valentine party.

These, at least, were the words of Concetta, their spokesman, and if any of the others dissented, they did not express their disagreement.

"But we expect you, Miss South, and Miss Bourne and Miss Barlow, and all the ladies who have been so very kind to us. Miss Northcote is in the secret, but every one else is going to be very much surprised."

"We'll try not to be curious, and I suppose that you wouldn't let us bribe Angelina to tell us."

"Oh, no'm; no, indeed. Miss Angelina," and Gretchen turned to Angelina, who was standing near, "if you tell we'll never—never—"

"Oh, I'm not afraid."

"We'll never call you Miss Angelina again—just plain Angelina."

"I wouldn't stand being called 'plain Angelina,'" said Miss South, patting Angelina's shoulder as she passed by.

Now for a week or two there was much secrecy, much whispering, many hours spent in the gymnasium at times when the rules about exercising did not require the girls to be there. Snippings of bright-colored paper were found in the hall, and not only bits of paper but of colored cambric; and Julia, and Nora when she came to the cooking-class, and all the other older persons interested in the Mansion, professed to be entirely mystified by what was going on.

But at last the eventful fourteenth of February arrived, and all the guests had assembled in the dining-room. The little stage had been set up, and the audience awaited the performance with

great interest. Each girl, as before, had been permitted to invite two guests, and a number of boys and men were present,—brothers, cousins, uncles, and an occasional father, and the women relatives were out in full force.

Angelina's sister had come in from Shiloh to spend a day or two, and she was doorkeeper in Angelina's place. As the guests went to their places, each one was given a heart-shaped card, the edges gilded, to which was attached by a pink cord a small pencil shaped like an arrow.

"Evidently we are to keep some kind of a score," said Nora, "but what it is to be I cannot imagine."

"Nor I," responded Brenda; "I haven't been taken into the secret, but I know that it is to be something exciting."

Brenda had not yet outgrown her love for emphatic words, and "exciting" once in a while reappeared as a reminder of her childish years.

They had not waited very long when the door from the little room behind was opened, and a barefooted maiden with a broad straw hat torn at the rim, and a blue calico gown looped up over a paler blue petticoat, appeared. She carried a rake, and "Maud Muller" was breathed around the room before Angelina, coming from behind the scenes,—that is, from the other room,—had had time to say, "Ladies and gentlemen, you are asked to listen to each character, and to make a record of two things: First, those who look the best, then those who speak the best, that is,—I mean—" and for the first time almost in the memory of those present Angelina seemed to have stage fright, and was unable to translate her sentences into the clearer and more elegant phrases that she had intended to use. Thereupon she retired in some confusion, and Maud, who was really Nellie, recited the simple lines of the charming poem:

"Maud Muller, on a summer's day,
Raked the meadow sweet with hay,
Under her torn hat glowed the wealth
Of simple beauty and rustic health."

"I doubt that Maud had exactly that brogue," said Nora. "If she had, I believe that the judge would have been too thoroughly fascinated to ride away."

After this came a strange, Spanish-looking figure, who took a kneeling attitude with bowed head. The solemnity of the effect was somewhat marred when Concetta—for she it was—turned her head around slightly to make sure that the audience was fully appreciative of her. Many were the guesses as to what she portrayed, and indeed it was one of the guests, a thoughtful girl, who ventured Ximena, "the angel of Buena Vista," and then every one else wondered why she had not been clever enough to think of this.

"From its smoking hell of battle, love and pity send their prayer,
And still thy white-winged angels hover dimly in our air."

After the women of Marblehead and Barbara Freitchie had made themselves known, "The Witch's Daughter" was given in series of tableaux, in which Maggie took the part of Mabel, and Angelina the part of Esek Harden, in a coat which, if not historically accurate, was at least a suitable kind of masculine attire for a girl to wear. Next came Haleema as the Countess, and Luisa as Amy Wentworth, in rather elegant clothes that surely must have come from one of the chests in the end room; and last, but not least, Anna and Rhoda, the two sisters in their long white gowns,—Anna timid and shrinking and Rhoda vehemently denouncing her; Inez the former and Phœbe the latter,—reciting some of the more tragic stanzas of the poem.

"Must we give up these pretty hearts?" asked one after another as Phoebe began to collect the cards.

"Oh, you can have them back again if your names are on them, we only want to count the votes;" and then there was a general murmur, for some people had forgotten to record their opinions and a little time was lost. But in the interval Julia played a Chopin waltz that several of the girls especially liked, and followed this with a few chords of one of the choruses they had been learning, in which they all joined very heartily.

When the score cards were brought back it was found that there was a tie for the favorite character between Haleema as the Countess, and Maggie and Angelina as Mabel Martin and Esek.

Angelina was in a state of excitement when this result was announced, and was determined that the decision should be immediately in her favor; while Maggie, disturbed by being so conspicuous, hoped that the prize might be given to Haleema.

"It isn't for you to decide," said Phœbe sagely; "they'll find some way of settling it—the ladies, I mean."

This, of course, proved to be the case, and when an umpire had been chosen whose decision all present agreed to respect, he decided that the first prize should go to the Mabel Martin actors. This was not entirely to the satisfaction of the followers of the Countess, and Concetta, who was sometimes on Haleema's side and sometimes against her, now became a very active partisan, and the two younger girls frowned ominously on Angelina and Maggie. So far at least as prizes were

concerned, Anstiss, as President of the League, had brought it about that every actor should have a prize, in each case an attractively bound book, with the only advantage for the winners of the first prize that they were allowed to have first choice. But there was a book for each of the others, and each girl, too, had the pleasure of hearing from her own friends that she really had made the very best representation of all. It was simply a case of where all were so good it was almost impossible to choose the very best.

Mrs. McSorley was especially proud of Maggie's performance, and her face almost lost its wonted grimness as she walked about among the girls and their guests. "I'm thinking that you'll amount to something, after all," she vouchsafed to her niece; and as this was almost the highest praise she had ever given, Maggie was more than content. It may be said here that in Turquoise Street Mrs. McSorley was much more eloquent than she had been to Maggie's face, and the neighbors for many a day heard the story of this very brilliant evening at the Mansion, and of the remarkable manner in which Maggie McSorley had recited and acted the part of the witch's daughter.

Another pleasant result of the evening was that Haleema became more friendly toward Maggie, for she had been impressed by Maggie's generosity in being willing to resign the first prize to her.

This, however, did not mean the winning of Concetta, who still seemed to feel it her duty to refrain from any direct praise or showing any friendliness for Maggie. But after this an observer would have seen that she seldom showed any direct unfriendliness, and this was one of the things that Maggie especially observed.

The fun of the valentine party was quite forgotten in the excitement that the girls of the Mansion, like every one else in the country, felt on that sixteenth of February; for that was the day when news was brought of the destruction of the "Maine." Angelina was the first to report it when she broke into the dining-room with a newspaper that she had bought from a boy at the front door. It had headlines in enormous, heavy black letters, and Miss South, in spite of her general disapproval of the headlines, could not resist reading the sheet that Angelina handed her.

"It means war, doesn't it?" cried Angelina in a tone that implied that she hoped that it meant war. But neither Miss South nor the other residents, nor the great world outside, knew whether peace or war was to follow the awful disaster. It was useless to forbid the girls reading the harrowing details. All, indeed, except Maggie and Inez seemed to take a special delight in perusing them, and in speculating about the families of the victims and the guilt of the Spaniards; for of course the Spaniards had done this thing. There were no two opinions on the subject, so far as the girls were concerned. Gretchen quickly became the heroine of the day when it was learned that she had a cousin who was a seaman on the "Maine," and when his name was read in the list of those who had escaped, her special friends, Concetta and Luisa, seemed to think that they, too, shared in the distinction, and they offered to do her share of the housework that she might have time to think it all over. Angelina was not altogether pleased that this honor had come to Gretchen.

"Julia," said Nora, whose day it was at the home, "I believe that she'd be willing to sacrifice John for the sake of being the sister of a victim," and in fact Angelina scanned the list of names, in the hope that she might find one that she might claim as a relative. But unluckily she could not fix on a single name that she could properly claim. When she read aloud the President's message to Sigsbee, her voice trembled with emotion:

"The President directs me to express for himself and the people of the United States his profound sympathy for the officers and crew of the 'Maine,' and desires that no expense be spared in providing for the survivors, and the care of the dead.

"JOHN D. LONG, *Secretary*.

"SIGSBEE, U. S. S. 'Maine.'"

"But there isn't any 'Maine' now," said Maggie, as Angelina read the last words, and then was the young girl moved to a word of genuine eloquence. "There will always be a 'Maine;' it will always live in the hearts of the American people!" and Julia, who happened to approach the group just at this moment, said "Bravo! bravo! Angelina, you are a true patriot."

XIV

CONCILIATION

One day not so very long after the valentine party, when it was still rather uncertain whether Maggie and Concetta were to be friends or enemies, the former had a chance to do Concetta a real favor. It was a morning when she had been very busy herself, as it was her week for taking care of the large reading-room, and she had been up very early in order to finish certain things before breakfast. First of all she had cleaned mirrors with powdered whiting until they shone; then she had polished the brasses; and finally, after spreading covers over everything that might harbor dust, she had swept the long room.

"Don't you hate sweeping?" asked Haleema, who was to help her dust and arrange the rooms.

"Not half as much as dusting. I really do hate that, it is so fussy, and, do you know," dropping her voice, "I heard Miss Julia the other day saying that she didn't like dusting either."

In spite of any dislike that she may have had for the work, Maggie was a willing worker, and soon she had the long room in perfect order.

Soon after breakfast, passing through the back hall, they came upon an array of lamps ranged on a long table.

"Where's Concetta?"

"I don't know. She was here a little while ago."

"Well, I've looked all over the house, and I haven't seen her for an hour."

"It's her day to do the lamps. She'll get a scolding if she doesn't fill them."

"Who'll scold her? I never heard any one in this house scold."

"Well, Miss Dreen, for one, is very particular, and she said that she'd punish the next girl who neglected the lamps."

"Oh, well," said Maggie, "perhaps she won't be back in time to do them,—that is, if she has gone off anywhere."

"She hasn't any right to go off in the morning."

"I don't mind doing the lamps," said Maggie,— "that is, I'm not so very fond of doing them, but I'd just as lieves, and it will save Concetta a scolding. I don't mind a bit."

So Maggie set to work with a will. She filled the lamps, trimmed one or two wicks, put in one or two new ones, washed and polished the chimneys, and when they were finished set them on a large tray to be ready for evening.

"Well, that's more than I would do," said Haleema.

"I wonder how these lamps get used," said Maggie; "except in the library they mostly use gas—the young ladies, I mean—and, of course, we only have gas in our room."

"Why, that's so," said Haleema, "though I never thought of it before."

But neither of the girls put her mind sufficiently on the subject to see that the care of the lamps was one of the devices of the two head workers at the Mansion for getting a certain kind of exact service from the young girls. The lamps were not needed. Often two of them were set in a little-used room where they burned just long enough to sear the wicks and cloud the shades, so that the young housekeepers could show their skill in cleaning them. Miss South made it her duty usually to keep in mind the girl whose task for the week it was to attend to the lamps, and when the results were thoroughly satisfactory she was loud in her praise, just as she felt it her duty to blame when the reverse was true. From the lamps the two little girls went to the bathroom.

"Oh, you oughtn't to dust without lifting down those bottles. Miss Dreen says that we ought never to leave a corner untouched."

"But I've dusted in between; it doesn't matter what there is under the bottles."

But Haleema was not to be rebuffed.

"I like bottles," she added. "They almost always have things in them that smell good," and she reached up on tiptoe toward the shelf. The first bottle that she reached just came within her grasp, and she pulled it toward her. When she pulled the stopper, it proved to be a fragrant toilet water, and even Maggie, admitting that it was delightful, yielded to the pleasure of inhaling it directly from the bottle. Emboldened by her success, Haleema drew another bottle down toward her and made a feint of drinking from it.

"Oh, don't!" cried Maggie, in genuine alarm, "it may be poison."

"Oh, they wouldn't leave poisons around like this. I'd just as lief as not taste anything here. I ain't afraid."

But although she spoke thus bravely, Haleema really did not venture to put the liquid to her mouth. Then she touched a third bottle, filled with a colorless liquid. She tried to pull out the rubber stopper, but it would not stir. Holding the bottle under one arm, she gave a second, more vigorous pull, when the stopper not only came out, but in some way the liquid flew out, and then—a loud scream from Maggie, who was wiping the edge of the bathtub. Haleema herself, half suffocated by the fumes of the ammonia from the harmless-looking bottle, had enough presence of mind to set it up on the marble washstand. But, alas! she set it down so hard that the glass broke and the ammonia trickled down, destroying the glossy surface of the hardwood floor.

All these things, of course, had happened in a very short time; not a minute, indeed, had passed after Maggie's first shriek before Julia and Miss South and two or three girls had rushed to the room.

The ammonia fumes at once told the story to Miss South, and without waiting for an explanation she had raised Maggie from the floor.

"Oh, dear, my eyes!" sobbed Maggie, and for a moment Miss South was frightened. Ammonia can work great havoc when it touches the eyes. Fortunately, however, as it happened it was not Maggie's eyes but her face that the ammonia had really hurt. Her eyes were inflamed, and she had to be kept in a dark room for a day or two, and her face had to be salved and swathed in cloths. But in the end no great injury had been done, and she won Haleema's everlasting gratitude by resisting the temptation to tell enquirers that Haleema's carelessness had caused the disaster; for great injury had been done the polished floor, and Haleema knew that she deserved reproof and punishment. Yet such was Maggie's reputation for destructiveness that she was supposed to have broken the bottle, and in the injury to her face she was thought to have paid a sufficient penalty.

When Concetta returned to the house an hour later, great was her surprise to find that her lamps had been cleaned, and when Haleema told her of Maggie's kindness she could not understand it.

"Perhaps she's trying for a prize."

"What prize?"

"Why, don't you know? At the end of the year the very best girl at the Mansion is to have a prize. I shouldn't wonder if it would be a gold watch."

"Oh, I don't believe it."

"Then you can ask Miss Bourne."

A few days later Concetta had a chance to put the question to Julia.

"Yes, indeed, there are to be two prizes: one for the girl who has tried the hardest, and the other for the one who has succeeded the best."

"Which will get them, Miss Bourne?"

"Ah, how can I tell?"

"I don't see how any one can tell; no one is watching us all the time."

"Some one does take account, Inez, of almost everything that you say and do."

"Oh, dear, I hate to be spied on," grumbled Concetta.

"No one is spying, I can assure you; but there are certain things that we notice carefully, and you have all been here so long that we know pretty well just what you are likely to do."

"I expect some one marks everything down in a book, like they used to at school?" Maggie put this as a question, but Julia did not reply directly.

"All the advice I can give you is to do as well as you can, and whether things are written in a book or not you will fare very well—at least, you will all fare alike."

"What will the prizes be, Miss Bourne?"

"Ah, I cannot tell exactly."

Thereupon the girls all fell to speculating not only about the prizes, but about the kind of conduct that would win one. While they were discussing this, Julia called to them from the floor above, "Have you forgotten that this is your shopping day?"

Then there was a scampering, and the girls who were to go with her began to get ready. Each girl went shopping with one of the staff every three months, and to-day the group was to consist of Concetta, Inez, Maggie, and Nellie. It was Julia's turn to take them, and this was not wholly to the satisfaction of Concetta.

"I thought Miss Barlow said that she would go with us this time," she murmured, as they left the house. She knew very well that if Brenda were their shopping guide they would be able to purchase according to their own sweet wills. She would be likely to approve everything that they bought, provided that they had money to pay for it, and it was even possible that she might supplement their allowance from her ever generous purse. Thus, indeed, had she done on the one occasion when she had taken them out, and her liberality had been even magnified by the lively tongues of those who had described it.

Shopping was not, of course, intended to occupy a large share of the attention of these girls; yet to buy clothing properly was thought as important by the elders who had them in charge, as marketing for the table, and each girl was given a chance to market under the supervision of Miss Dreen. They already knew the most nutritious and least expensive cuts of meat. They could tell what vegetables could be most prudently bought at each season, and some of them had already begun to show a decided independence of judgment even in small matters relating to the table.

Hardly any of them, however, had the same degree of judgment in matters of dress. On this account it had been thought wise to give each one a small allowance, and let her spend it as she

wished, with a certain amount of guidance that she need not feel to be restraint.

"What they spend for one thing they certainly will not have for another, and there is probably no other way in which they can better learn what to do."

To let them use their own judgment on this particular shopping trip, Julia made few restrictions. Each had the same amount of money to spend, and out of it they were to buy spring hats, shoes and stockings, and the material for two dresses, one of gingham and one of a heavier material. All that they had left after making these purchases they were to spend as they wished, and the sum had been so calculated as to leave a fair margin. There was only one restriction: to save time and energy that might be consumed in wandering around from one shop to another, Julia planned that they should do all their purchasing in one of the larger department stores, and while they were busy she did a few errands of her own. At intervals she met them at certain counters by agreement, but in almost every instance she found that they had made their purchase, so that her advice was usually superfluous.

"I thought that you were going to get a small sailor hat with a few flowers at the side," she could not forbear saying to Inez, who showed her a rather flimsy imitation tuscan, with some gaudy flowers and lace for trimming.

"Oh, but you should have seen the perfectly elegant hats they have upstairs, all tulle and flowers, and as big—" at a loss for an object of comparison. Concetta concluded, "as big as a bushel basket," after which Julia could not say that the hat that Inez had chosen was really of unreasonable size.

Concetta looked somewhat shamefaced as she announced that she had no hat.

"But you had the money for it."

"Yes, but I bought this, it's for the baby; I'd rather she'd have it," and Concetta opened a large box in which lay a pretty, pink silk coat. Closer examination showed that the silk was half cotton and the lace very tawdry, but Julia hadn't the heart to reprove her. Concetta's love for her baby cousin was genuine, and the coat undoubtedly represented a certain sacrifice on her part.

When they came to the dress materials, Maggie insisted on buying two cotton dresses instead of the woollen dress, the material for which had been provided by her money.

"Maggie's a miser," said Concetta, and Maggie reddened without making any explanation.

Some of the materials bought were open to more or less criticism, and later Julia meant to make certain of these mistakes the subject of a little talk. They had done very well, she thought, for the present, in buying practically all the things that she had intended to have them buy with their money. Each of them, too, had a small surplus, and Inez was the only one who proposed to use hers up by spending it at once for candy. A little persuasion turned her aside from this purpose, and Julia was careful that evening to offer her and the girls some especially fine confections when they gathered in her room after tea. They all seemed so receptive then that she thought it a good time to show them just how their fifteen dollars might have been spent to the best advantage,—a third for the dress materials, a third for shoes and hat, a third for stockings and the other smaller things; and comparing what they had done with her ideal purchases, she was interested to find that Nellie, the young Irish girl, had really come the nearest to her standard, and accordingly Nellie's face was wreathed in smiles as she learned that she was thought to have been the ideal purchaser; for although Maggie had also done very well, Julia was not wholly satisfied with her having substituted the cotton for the woollen dress.

That evening, as it was Saturday, they all played games in the large gymnasium, where there was space enough for the exciting French blindman's buff, in which, instead of having one of the players blinded, she had her hands tied behind her back, and do her best, often she could not catch the others.

When they were tired of active sports, hjalma and draughts and other games were ready for them, and occasionally they had charades or impromptu tableaux, in which all the powers of their elders were taxed; for the girls themselves lacked originality, and Miss South or one of the other older members of the household had to supervise all that they did.

In these sports sometimes little unexpected jealousies arose, and Julia, or Pamela, or Ruth, or Anstiss, as the case might be, had her hands full trying to keep peace. The least desirable characteristics of the girls came to the surface at times, and at times, too, their best qualities were displayed in an equally unexpected way. Phœbe alone of them all did not care for games. While the others were playing she was apt to bury herself in a book, and often Julia and Pamela would insist that she should put this aside to mingle with the others.

XV

WAR AT HAND

As the weeks went on, Angelina and her little group of special friends followed closely the

newspaper reports of the troubles in Cuba; that is, Angelina read the despatches and surmises, and told the others how things were progressing. Except in the case of such definite events as the destruction of the "Maine," the others were not extremely interested in what Concetta called "stupid" accounts of distant happenings. Angelina, however, was all excitement, and her theories were an interesting supplement to all that the Board of Enquiry didn't find out. When she read of Mr. Cannon's bill appropriating fifty millions for defence she was sure that war was near at hand. When Maggie said that there would be no money left in the country if so much was spent in war, Angelina made a rapid calculation that this meant less than a dollar for every person in the whole land, "and it would be a strange thing," she said, "if we couldn't afford that."

Even at the meetings of the League the conversation turned to war, and they hastened through their readings of the Quaker poet to talk about things that were rather far away from his teachings, except that he was always on the side of the oppressed, and in the war of his time was heard with no uncertain voice.

The stripping of the fleet for war and the movement of the troops that began early in April were described vividly by Angelina, after she had read about them. The girls all took more interest when war seemed really at hand, and Angelina was called upon to explain many things in which her knowledge hardly equalled her willingness to impart it.

"The mosquito fleet; oh, what can that be? Is it to bite the Spaniards?" Inez had asked, and Angelina had replied most scornfully:

"Of course not; it's a lot of long, thin iron boats that skim over the water as fast as a mosquito flies—all made of iron, of course, with long, thin legs that go out from the side like a mosquito's."

"Legs," exclaimed Haleema dubiously; "on a boat!" and Angelina responded hastily:

"Well, not real legs, only kind of paddles, that make them go faster;" and as no older person heard this original explanation, the girls continued to have their very special interest in the curious mosquito fleet.

When the first shot was fired and the little "Buena Ventura" was captured on April 22, young and old knew that peace was at an end, and there was no surprise when the declaration of war came a few days later.

"I've been looking for it," said Angelina, "ever since the 'Maine' was destroyed, and I should have been dreadfully disappointed if war hadn't come. But I was quite certain that there'd be fighting soon when I heard that an officer had been sent abroad to buy warships; for what in the world should *we*," with a strong emphasis on the "we," "want of warships if we hadn't made up our minds to have a war?"

During all these weeks Brenda had been no less interested than the younger girls in the question of what should be done for Cuba. Washington had become the centre of the world for her in the strongest sense of the word, and evidently for the time it was the centre of interest for the whole country.

Arthur's letters to her continued rather brief. He spoke of being overworked, and Belle in writing rarely failed to say that she had seen him at this or that social function, and almost as often she mentioned how popular he was. Brenda at last wrote one or two brief notes to Arthur, asking him to return for a dinner that she was giving before Lent; but he took no notice of these missives, at least he did not write to her until Lent itself was half over, and then he made a simple little reference to her request with a mere "I was sorry that I could not do what you wished, but you must have known that I could not before you wrote."

Then Brenda came to the point of deciding that she would never write to him again, and she threw herself into the work at the Mansion with much more zeal than Julia had ever expected from her. She was far less cheerful than the Brenda of old. It was not merely because she could not have her own way, but rather that she felt the shadow of the impending war cloud hanging over the country.

Every Thursday she assisted Agnes at the informal studio tea, and this was really her only amusement, and in the early spring the conversation around the tea-table hovered between the two subjects,—the prospect of war and the correct costume for the Festival.

The Artists' Festival was an institution that the artists of the city planned and enjoyed with the assistance of their friends. Each year those who were invited were asked to appear in costumes suited to a chosen period, the range of which might be several hundred years, but within the limits of time and place each costume had to be artistically correct, and meet the approval of the costume committee. This was to be Brenda's first experience of the Festival, and earlier in the season, when she and Arthur had talked about it, she had planned a certain style of fourteenth-century costume, and Arthur was to go as her page. Ralph had selected the plates, and though the time was then far off, they had talked very definitely of what they should expect from the Festival. But now—

Brenda decided to make a final test of Arthur. She would remind him of the approaching Artists' Festival.

"I shall be mortified to death," she had said to Agnes, "if Arthur does not return in season for it."

"Oh, I fear that he cannot, Brenda, from what he writes Ralph; I should judge that he has work enough to keep him busy all the spring."

"Well, it would be nothing for him to come here for two or three days and then return to Washington; he used to be so fond of travelling."

"You might write," responded Agnes. "Perhaps he may come."

But in answer to Brenda's brief and rather imperative note Arthur wrote simply that it was impossible for him to leave Washington now, greatly as he should have enjoyed the Festival. Then after a page of more personal matter he added that even if he could go to Boston, he should feel indisposed to take part in gayeties at a season when the affairs of the country were so unsettled.

"Humph!" said Ralph, when Brenda repeated this part of the letter to him. "They must be nearer war in Washington than we are here, for I can contemplate an Artists' Festival without feeling that I am deserting my country in its hour of need."

As for Brenda herself, when Arthur's letter was closely followed by one from Belle, in which she described a delightful dinner of the evening before at Senator Harmon's, she tore Belle's letter as well as Arthur's into small pieces; for Belle had told her that Arthur was one of the gayest of the guests at the dinner.

Yet even those who were pretty certain that war was near felt that there could be no harm in planning for the Festival. Pamela was naturally interested, but the medieval period chosen demanded more expensive materials and a more elaborate costume than she felt disposed to prepare. Julia was uncertain whether she cared to give the time to it, and Miss South declared that she herself had not the energy to go.

"So you, Anstiss, are the only one of us who will ornament the scene," said Julia; "though I really think that Pamela ought to go, it is so directly in line with the things that she likes."

"As to that, it is ridiculous, Julia, that you shouldn't be there. When you were out at Radcliffe you used to encourage operettas and tableaux and all such things, but now—"

"Well, now," responded Julia, "I feel as if I were working for a living and ought not to waste my time in frivolities."

"That is where you are very foolish. Soon we shall hear loud protests from your aunt and uncle; indeed, they will probably come and drag you away. They would be justified, too, if you continue in your determination to have your whole life bounded by these walls."

"Very comfortable walls they are, too, but I hate to wander too far in search of costumes, and the thousand and one little things that are necessary to make them complete. It is too much trouble for one evening's enjoyment."

"There!" exclaimed Miss South as Julia had finished, "I have an idea; come with me."

It was late and the pupils had all gone to bed, and Concetta, hearing unwonted steps going to the upper story, pushed her door open a little, and was surprised to see the strange procession winding upwards.

It took its way to the end room in the attic, and when she had lit the gas Miss South asked Anstiss to help her lift out a chest from a corner of the closet. Selecting a small key from her ring and opening the trunk, she began to unfold one or two garments.

"Oh, how beautiful! But who could have worn it?" exclaimed Julia, as a velvet gown trimmed with ermine and with a long train unfolded itself before them.

"Ah, but this is lovelier!" she added, as a dove-colored brocade with pattern outlined in pink was shown, intended evidently to be worn with the pink satin petticoat that accompanied it. Further delving into the trunk brought out pointed shoes, elaborate head-dresses, and other fantastic things.

"Did your grandmother ever wear these clothes?" asked Anstiss in surprise. "I should hardly think that they were of the style even of her day."

"Oh, these things are intended for costume parties," returned Miss South. "My grandmother described some of the occasions when she first wore them abroad. She took the greatest care of them, and every spring she herself supervised her maid when she shook them and did them up again in camphor. Strangely enough I have been so busy the past year that I had forgotten about these particular things. There are two complete costumes. One of them is entirely in the period of the Festival, and the other needs so little alteration that you and Pamela, Julia, will be completely equipped, with almost no thought in the matter."

"But why won't you go yourself?"

"I have quite made up my mind about that; for the present, at least, I have no desire for gayety."

It was really amazing that these two costumes should have been found so perfectly to meet all the requirements of the Festival. Julia, of course, could have had a costume especially designed for her by a costumer, but as she had said, in talking it over with Brenda, she was by no means in the mood for this, and she would have stayed home rather than waste the time in this way.

Brenda threw herself into the preparations for the Festival as if she had no other interest in the world. She was to be a principal figure in the group that Ralph had arranged. With an artist's sense of beauty, and an accuracy that no one had ever before suspected, Ralph planned the costumes, and insisted that they should deviate in no particular from his design. To effect this proved an unending occupation for Brenda and Agnes.

"There's one thing, Ralph, that has come out of this," said his wife one day after he had given her a lecture on the unsuitability of certain trimmings that she had selected. "After this I shall never worry about our future."

"Have you been doing so?" he asked in some surprise.

"Well, I have had misgivings as to what might happen if you should become blind, or if your pictures should fail to sell, or if Papa should lose his money, or—"

"How many more 'ifs,'" he asked; "I had no idea that you were a borrower of trouble. What have I done to deserve this thoughtfulness, or perhaps I should say thoughtlessness, on your part; for you say that now you have ceased to worry."

"Why, I am sure that you could transform yourself into a man milliner; in fact, I'm not sure that I may not try to persuade you to change to a more lucrative profession than that of a mere painter of portraits. From the very way in which you hold that little pincushion under your arm, I am sure that you would be a great success."

Ralph only smiled as he snipped a bit from the end of a velvet train. Then he moved off a little, that he might survey his work from a distance.

"It looks like a milliner's shop," said Brenda, pointing to the litter of silk and velvets, embroideries and fur, strewn over chairs, tables, and divan.

"Yes, and I feel much as if I were waiting for customers. I believe, however, that no more are expected this afternoon. I can therefore attend to my mail orders. Tom Hearst, by the way, is coming on, and I am designing something for him."

"Well, if Tom can spare the time, I should think that Arthur might."

"Ah, Arthur writes that he is too much concerned at the prospect of war. He apparently does not approve of our frivolous doings. The times are too serious."

"I do not see why he need take things so to heart. He is not a—a reconcentrado." Brenda's words may have seemed like an attempt at levity, but, indeed, she felt far from cheerful. She concluded with a weak, little "But you don't think that there will be a war, do you, Ralph?"

"I do, indeed, think that there will be a war, dear sister-in-law, but I also think that it may be some distance off, and that we might as well eat, drink, and be merry, in other words, enjoy the Artists' Festival," he rejoined.

XVI

THE ARTISTS' FESTIVAL

It was unfortunate that the Artists' Festival should have fallen on the evening of the day succeeding the formal declaration of war, or, as some of the younger people put it, that war should have been declared on the eve of the Festival; for, they urged, the arrangements for the Festival had been made before war had been even thought of, and so, if the President and Congress had only waited a day—

But public affairs take their course, and Boston is a very small corner of this large country, and though some persons may have absented themselves from a sense of duty to their country, Brenda agreed with Ralph that these never would be missed, so crowded did the hall prove after the French play had ended and the seats had been removed.

The patronesses, seated on a dais on one side of the hall, were gorgeous in robes of cloth of gold, with the elaborate head-dresses of the time.

The procession as it passed along was well worth seeing,—the trumpeters at the head, the craftsmen and village folk, the brown-robed monks singing a solemn chant, crusaders in scarlet coats, knights in armor, ladies in sweeping trains, and everywhere the high-horned cap with its graceful and inconvenient veil.

On the stage at the end of the hall a French play was given, perfectly rendered, complete in every detail of dress and scenery as well as of acting. But it was a tragedy, acted so perfectly that Brenda, perhaps, was not the only one who found it too gloomy for the occasion. The tournament that followed, in which two hobby-horse knights tilted against each other, was much more to her taste.

"Why, Brenda Barlow! I was wondering if we should see you."

Brenda looked up in surprise. The voice was surely Belle's, and immediately she recognized her friend. Belle did not wait for questions after the first greetings.

"Oh, a party of us came on from Washington last night. The rest are going back on Thursday, but I shall stay in New York for a month. Annabel didn't come, nor Arthur either. You must have been awfully disappointed that he wouldn't take any interest. I've always thought he was a little uncertain. How do you like my costume? We ordered them at the last minute from a costumer. I think he did very well, considering the time. Tell me, is mine frightfully unbecoming? I've been trying to make Mr. De Lancey tell me, but he simply says it's indescribably fetching. I can't be sure whether or not he's in earnest. Oh, let me present him to you; I forgot that you did not know each other."

A moment later, separated from her own party, she was walking with Belle and Mr. De Lancey into the adjacent supper-room, which had been arranged in semblance of a rose-garden. They ate sandwiches and currant buns served to them in baskets, and drank lemonade from pewter mugs. The rooms had been rather cool.

"It's the medieval chill," replied Brenda, when Belle asked her why she was so quiet.

"I believe it's worse in this rose-garden than in the large hall. I'm afraid that these paper roses will become frostbitten."

Soon Tom Hearst and Julia, in their search for Brenda, came upon her in the garden.

"Well, here you are! We've been looking everywhere. The rest of the group has gone upstairs to be photographed. There's a man with a flashlight in one of the studios. Aren't you coming?"

The posing of the group took some time, and then there were single pictures, and Agnes and Ralph were taken together.

An idea came to Brenda. "Why shouldn't we form a group by ourselves?" Brenda had turned to Tom Hearst with her question.

"I should say so," he responded enthusiastically. "I mean certainly. How shall I stand, or rather mayn't I prostrate myself at your feet as your humble page?"

"No, no, how absurd you are!" for Tom was already kneeling in an attitude of devotion.

"It's after twelve," the photographer reminded them, "and there are several waiting."

"In other words," said Tom, "we ought to hurry. So look pleasant, Miss Barlow,—that is, as pleasant as you can under the circumstances," and Brenda assumed her stateliest pose, having first seen that her train was spread out to its broadest extent.

"Really," exclaimed Ralph, who stood near, "you must send a copy of the picture to Arthur."

Brenda did not reply, but when they were again among the gay crowd she was quieter than she had been before, and to the astonishment of Agnes she was ready to go home long before the carriage came.

But, strange to say, Pamela, the conscientious, was much less disturbed than she should have been by the thought that this was the hour of her country's danger. The artistic beauty of the whole scene was such that for the time it occupied her mind completely, and she and Julia, with Tom and Philip as attendant cavaliers, were quite care free as they wandered among the gay throng. Yet her mind was turned a little toward the war when Philip began to tell her of his difficulties.

"In the natural course of events," he said, "I should have been in the Cadets. But I had thought I'd wait a year or two. Now the only thing is for me to enlist, or get an appointment as officer. They say that the President will appoint any number of officers. There is only one thing—"

Pamela waited for him to continue, and at last he took up the broken thread.

"I haven't said much about it to other people, but my father is far from well this spring. I notice this in little things, and he depends so on me that I hesitate about taking a step that will lead to my leaving home just now."

"It is often hard to choose between two duties," said Pamela; "but I believe the general rule is to choose the nearest, and in this case that is evidently your father."

"Where have you been all the evening, Philip? I have looked everywhere for you." Edith's voice had an unwonted note of irritation.

"Why, Edith, child, aren't you having a good time?"

"Oh, I don't know; I've had to listen to such a lot of stuff from Belle, and I haven't seen half the people I promised to meet."

"There, there, child, I know how you feel; Belle has been talking too much, but I will take care of you," and Philip pulled Edith's arm within his own. "A big brother is useful sometimes," he added, for he saw that Edith was a little perturbed. A moment later Nora joined the group, followed by Julia and Tom Hearst, and soon Brenda joined them.

"Why, here we have almost all the old crowd," exclaimed Tom. "If only Will were here—"

"And Ruth; you mustn't forget her."

"Indeed, no, and I dare say that he is thinking of us. I fancy that at this present moment he is just wild to be on this side of the world. With his exalted ideas of patriotism, it must be torture to him that he isn't on hand when there's fighting to be done."

"It seems to me that your sword hasn't been brandished very fiercely, at least, since the President's proclamation."

"Ah! just wait. Within a month I may be waving a flag in Cuba. This sound of revelry by night may be the last that I shall hear for a long time. My uniform may not be as becoming to me as this costume," and Tom threw back his head and strutted a few steps, as if to display to the best advantage the artistic costume that Mr. Weston had designed for him,—a most effective one with its crimson doublet, slashed sleeves, and long, silk trunk hose.

"Oh, don't talk about war," cried Brenda, almost pettishly, while Nora, whose sparkling eyes and bright smile showed that she, at least, had enjoyed the evening, said gently, "Come, Brenda, there are Agnes and Ralph beckoning to us; I suppose they wish to count us all to see that we are safe and sound before they start for home."

A little bantering, a word or two of good-bye to passing friends, and the merry group started for home, never, although they knew it not then,—never to be together again as they had been that evening.

In the next few weeks war news was of chief importance, and Brenda, never a newspaper reader, now turned to the daily papers with great interest.

One afternoon she came into Julia's room at the Mansion with her eyes suspiciously red.

"You haven't been crying?"

"Oh, no, not exactly crying, but—"

At this time a tell-tale tear fell, and Brenda dabbed her eyes fiercely with a crumpled handkerchief.

"There, there, tell me all about it," said Julia.

"Oh, it's nothing. Only I've just been at a meeting at the State House."

Then, by dint of a little questioning, Julia learned that Brenda had read the notice of a meeting to be held at the State House in the interests of the Massachusetts troops that should go to the war, and that she had decided to attend it.

"Oh, it was dreadful," she said, not restraining the tears that were now undeniably falling. "They talked about bandages and ambulances and the hundreds that would be killed, and the dreadful things that happened in the Civil War, and I couldn't help thinking how terrible it would be for Arthur and Tom and all the others we know."

"Arthur?" queried Julia; "I knew that Tom was going, but with his regiment from New York—but Arthur, why, he has never been in the militia?"

"Oh, no," responded Brenda, "it's all his being in Washington. I wish that he had never heard of Senator Harmon. It seems that he's to have a commission in the regular army. The President is to make any number of new officers, and you have to have influence. Ralph had a letter this morning,—and I know he'll be killed."

"Nonsense, child! If there is any fighting, it will be only on sea."

"Oh, you should have heard them talk at the meeting to-day; and Papa says that every young man should be ready to fight. He only wishes that he was young enough. Amy writes that Fritz Tomkins is crazy to leave college and volunteer, but his uncle won't let him, because his father is in China. But lots of men are leaving college to go into the army. Don't you think 'tis very noble in Arthur?"

The last sentence was a change from the main subject, for Arthur's college years were far away; but it showed where Brenda's heart lay, and Julia did not laugh at her.

"Come," she said, "let us go upstairs; you have never visited the home economics class, and you are just in time for it."

So hand in hand the two cousins went upstairs, and if Brenda was less cheerful than usual, only Julia noticed this.

"The dusty class," as some of the younger girls called it, because "Dust and its dangers" had been the subject of the lessons.

"How businesslike it is!" exclaimed Brenda, glancing around the plain room, fitted with its long wooden table, plain walls, at one end of which were many glass bottles and tubes.

"Test tubes," explained Julia, as Brenda asked a question; "and these gas jets that rise from the table are very useful in some of their experiments."

"Yes, that is some of Pamela's Ruskin," Julia added, as Brenda stopped before a simply framed card on which in illuminated text was the following:

"There are three material things, not only useful, but essential to life. No one knows how to live till he has got them.

"These are Pure Air, Water, and Earth.

"There are three immaterial things, not only useful, but essential to life. No one knows how to live till he has got them also.

"These are Admiration, Hope, and Love."

"It looks very scientific," said Brenda, "with all those bottles and tubes. I should call it a regular laboratory."

"So it is," responded Julia; "and though the girls are untrained, and rather young to understand thoroughly the scientific value of much that is taught them, they do enjoy the experiments."

At this moment the teacher entered the room.

"Tell me, Miss Soddern," said Julia, after introducing Brenda to the teacher,— "tell me if the girls have had any success with their bacteria; I know that they are very much interested in their little boxes."

"Oh, I'm going to have them report this morning. You must wait until they come."

In a moment the girls filed in, Concetta, Luisa, Gretchen, Haleema, and the rest whom Brenda knew best, and with them two or three girls from outside who were members of the League; for in this, as in other classes, it had seemed wise to enlarge the work a little. So the class had taken in some of those whom the membership in the League had interested in things that otherwise they might not have had the interest to study.

As they stood at their places around the table, Miss Soddern gave a resumé of what they had already learned about dust and its dangers. They talked with a fluency that surprised Brenda about bacteria and yeasts and spores and moulds, and in most cases showed by examples that they knew what they were talking about.

"I am glad that all these bacteria are not harmful," said Brenda, "for otherwise I should stand in fear of instant death when caught in one of our east winds," and she looked with interest at the plate that showed a great many little spots irregularly distributed within a circle. Each spot represented a colony of bacteria, and though the showing was rather overwhelming, it was not nearly as bad as another exposure made at a crossing in a certain city where the old-fashioned street-cleaning methods prevailed. An exposure made just after the carts had been collecting heaps of dirt showed an almost incredible number, quite beyond counting.

So interesting did Miss Soddern make her lesson that Brenda stayed quite through the hour.

"I've gathered one or two new ideas on the subject of trailing skirts," she whispered to Julia in one of the intervals of the lesson. "I always thought it was just a notion, this talk about their being so unclean, but now I shall always think of them as regular bacteria collectors. Also I've learned one or two things about dusting, and I'm going to watch our maid to-morrow, and if she isn't using a moist cloth, I'll frighten her by asking her why she insists on distributing death-dealing germs around the room."

Half of the class that day had to report the result of their own observation of bacteria colonies collected on the gelatine plate, and half were to prepare the little glass boxes to take home. Brenda watched the process with great interest,—the preparation of the boxes in a vacuum, so that there would be no air inside them when they should be first exposed in the new locality.

"It's something," said Julia, "to get these girls to acquire habits of accuracy."

"Oh, it reminds me of the class in physics at Miss Crawdon's," replied Brenda. "I never would take it myself, but some of the girls said that it was splendid; it taught one to be accurate."

At that moment Miss Soddern began to address the girls. They had been so absorbed in their work that they had talked very little during the hour.

"How many of you have anything to report regarding the boxes that you took home last week?"

One by one the outside girls gave accounts of their observations, each one vying with the others to describe the most prolific growth of bacteria.

"As the boxes were to be exposed simply in their living-rooms, I am surprised at the results," said the teacher in an aside to Julia; "I'm afraid that some one must have been stirring up the dust. What does your family think of these experiments?" she continued, turning to a bright-eyed American girl.

"Oh, they're so interested," the girl replied. "You've no idea how they've watched it; and since the bacteria have begun to develop,"—she said this with an important air—"they show it to company. Why, you may like to know that our visitors consider it more entertaining than the family album."

Miss Soddern herself did not dare to smile at this remark, but Julia and Brenda hastily excused

themselves.

"Audible smiling," said Brenda, "is more excusable out here than it would be in the school-room," and then both laughed outright.

"I never did care for family photograph albums," said Julia, "and now I see how easy it would be to have a scientific substitute."

XVII

IDEAL HOMES

The triangular quarrel between Concetta, Haleema, and Angelina had reached such a state that the three spoke only when actually under the eyes of their elders. Even as Maggie had felt jealousy at first, did Angelina now feel jealousy of Concetta.

On pleasant spring Sundays when Angelina walked out with John she would tell him her griefs, and so far as he could he would sympathize with her; but when she talked of running away, he would simply laugh.

"Why, if you wish to go back to Shiloh, I'm sure Miss Julia would let you; you have only to tell her and she would let you off."

Then Angelina would shake her head. "Ah! you have no idea how important I am. Why, I know they couldn't get along without me, and I'm sure that if I should leave, everything would stop. I'm surprised that you should suggest it, John."

"But you talked of running away."

"Well, so I might, if Concetta keeps on acting in that forward way, as if she were the most important person here. No, I won't desert Miss Julia, even if Miss Brenda does show so much partiality. I suppose it's my Spanish blood that makes me take it so hard."

John looked at Angelina bewildered.

"Spanish blood! why, we're not Spanish; I hadn't heard of it."

"There, John, you haven't a bit of romance; I should think that you could tell that we're Spanish just by looking in the glass, and I'm sure Spain and Portugal are very near together, and though mother says she was born a Portuguese she may be Spanish. A great many people are beginning to sympathize with me on account of the war."

There! the secret was out. The war with Spain had now come to the foreground, and Angelina wished in some way to be a part of it and of the general excitement. Had John been old enough to enlist she might have worked off some of her energy in urging him to do so. As it was, she amused those who had known her the longest by talking about her fears for her own safety; for although Manila Bay was an American victory, "of course," she would say, "every one has a prejudice against persons of Spanish blood," and Angelina would raise her handkerchief to her eyes, as if she were an exiled princess of Castile.

John only laughed at Angelina when she talked in this way to him, and wished that he could enlist and go toward the South, where the troops were gathering for the war.

"I should like to be a nurse," she then said, "for really this work here with these younger girls is very tiresome, and I don't think that Miss South and Miss Julia properly appreciate me."

"You are ungrateful," John would reply solemnly. "Why, if it wasn't for these young ladies I'm sure that mother wouldn't be alive now; she never could have lived if we'd stayed on in Moon Street, and it was just through them that we were able to have a home of our own, for those bare rooms in Moon Street were not a home."

John was an industrious youth, working hard, saving money, and studying evenings. He was devoted to Manuel, now a strong boy of nine, and anxious that he, too, should have a good education. Angelina's flightiness troubled him, but he hoped that she would in time outgrow it; for though the younger, he always felt that he was in the position of an older brother, and when it came to any particular action, Angelina usually took his advice, after first demurring, and professing that she would rather do something else. Now he felt that he was right in trying to make her keep her place at the Mansion; but even while he was trying to persuade her, he could see that Angelina was thinking of something else.

But the war did not entirely occupy the thoughts of Julia and Pamela and the others at the Mansion, and the former went on with the preparations for her special exhibition after the fashion that she had planned long before the fateful sixteenth of February. Gretchen and Maggie were her chief assistants in carrying out her plans, and they went about with an air of mystery that was particularly tantalizing to the others.

"What do you suppose it's going to be?" asked Concetta, with two buttons conspicuously fastened to her waist bearing the motto, "Remember the Maine."

"Some kind of a picture show, I guess; I saw two boxes of thumb tacks on Miss South's table. I tried to make Maggie tell, but she's as still as a mouse; she always is. Don't she make you think of one?"

"Yes, she does," replied Haleema. "I've a good mind to peek in now; there's nobody about."

At that moment Angelina came around the corner.

"I'm exceedingly surprised," she said, in her haughtiest manner, "that you should try to pry into what doesn't concern you."

"I didn't."

"Yes, you were trying to."

"No, I wasn't, and, besides, I have a perfect right to; I belong to Miss Northcote's class. So there! You needn't stand and watch me."

"I'll report you to Miss Dreen," said Angelina. "It's your day in the kitchen. I remember that."

Concetta's face clouded as Angelina passed on to the kitchen.

"I wish people would attend to their own business."

Concetta had hoped that Miss Dreen, who was a little absent-minded, would fail to notice her absence. Another grievance was added to the long list that she cherished against Angelina.

But after all they were not kept so very long in suspense, for on the Saturday after this little episode the doors were thrown open, and all the girls marched in to see what really had been going on behind the closed doors. Those in the secret were proud enough, and Maggie in particular displayed an unexpected talkativeness. At least she was able to explain the why and wherefore of the exhibit quite to the satisfaction of all who heard her.

The first exclamations of pleasure were called out by the sight that met their eyes. One side of the room had been divided by partitions to make two rooms. Each was furnished completely, and even those girls who were too old to play with dolls were fascinated by the house; for each of the two rooms was fitted up with absolute perfectness, from the wall-paper to the tiny cushions on the sofa. They were on a scale large enough for everything to be seen in detail, but a degree or two smaller than life size. Pamela justly prided herself on the completeness of it all, and this completeness had been made possible only by the kindness of Julia, who had told her to spare no expense in having the house furnished exactly as she wished it to be. She was safe in giving this wide permission, since Pamela's friends all knew that extravagance was absolutely impossible with her, and that she would use another's money more carefully even than her own.

Both rooms were furnished like sitting-rooms, but they differed utterly in style. Maggie put it correctly by saying that one was "warm and fussy-looking," while the other was "cool and restful."

The floor-covering on the former, painted to imitate a real carpet, was of bright colors and florid design. The reds and greens of which it was composed were just a little off the tone of the flowered wall-paper,—a greenish background with stiff bunches of red flowers, "that look as if they were ready to jump out at you," as one of the girls put it.

The little chairs and couch were upholstered in bright brocade velvet, each one different from the others, and none in harmony with the paper or with each other. On the tiny centre-table were one or two clumsy pieces of bric-à-brac, and the pictures on the walls were small chromos in ugly gilt frames. There were bright cushions on the divan, and crocheted tidies on every chair.

Nellie thought this room "perfectly beautiful." Her cousin's wife, whose husband was a prosperous teamster, had one almost like it, she said. "Oh what lovely easy-chairs! I hope I'll have a parlor as elegant as this some day."

The other room did not please her, it was too plain; whereas Concetta, within whose breast there must have lingered some remnant of Italian artistic instinct, thought it altogether beautiful.

This second room had a plain, dull-green wall-paper, on which hung a few photographs suitably framed. There was matting on the floor, and in the centre a green art-square. The chairs were of rattan, in graceful shapes, with green cushions, and one of artistic design in black wood with broad arms was comfortably cushioned for a lounging-chair. A bookcase, also of black wood, was filled with plainly bound books. On the rattan centre-table was a tall green vase with a single rose in it, and near by two or three small volumes of good literature. The ornaments on the mantle-piece were few and well chosen, and each had an evident reason for being there. The simple gilt moulding at the top was in contrast with the fussy frieze in the other room, and the plain net draperies at the windows were much more agreeable than the lace curtains in the other room, with their elaborate pattern and plush lambrequins.

Each girl as she came in was given a small blank-book, and was asked to note down what she thought of each room, and to state her reasons for preferring one room to another.

"Ought we to like one more than another?" Inez asked anxiously.

"Oh, Inez," said Haleema, "you are like sheep, you never stand alone," which, although not an

exact rendering of the proverb, at least partly described the disposition of little Inez, who was far from independent.

"My book isn't half full," said Phœbe, after she had written for several minutes.

"Ah, that isn't all," rejoined Maggie.

"No, indeed," added Pamela, who had been listening with much interest to all the comments. "You have entirely neglected this end of the room. You will probably find more to do here than at the other end."

Here the wall had been covered with a plain gray denim, against which were pinned samples of wall-paper of every quality and color. Some were quiet and in good taste, as well as inexpensive; others were evidently costly, and at the same time loud and glaring. Each piece was numbered, and the girls were asked to write in their books their opinion of these samples.

Again, on a table near the wall-paper lay a number of cards with pieces of dress fabric fastened to them, and the girls were asked to state which would probably hold their color the best, which would be suitable for a working dress, which for a durable winter dress; and near certain bright-colored fabrics were trimmings of various sorts, and they were asked to tell which would best harmonize with the fabric.

"It ought not to be so very hard for you to answer these questions," said Julia, as she found Concetta scowling over her blank-book. "I know that Miss Northcote has had much to say to you this winter about furniture and wall-papers, and you ought to remember the reasons she has given for calling one thing more beautiful than another. Then, as to dress materials, why, think of our shopping expeditions, and the trouble I have taken to make you understand what is best."

"Yes, 'm," said Concetta. "If there's to be a prize, I'll try to prefer the best things; but if there won't be one, why, I think I'll just say what I really think."

"Oh, Concetta! Concetta! you are hopeless," responded Julia; and though she smiled slightly at this frank confession, she felt a little depressed that her winter's work should have had no better effect.

At five o'clock the books were all collected and put in Pamela's care for discussion at the next meeting of her class, and a few minutes later the aunts or cousins of the girls, as the case might be, began to appear. Their "oh's" and "ah's" were genuine as they looked at the two rooms; the numbers were about equally divided between those who preferred the restful room and those who preferred the fussy and gaudy one. They were greatly surprised to find that the more showy room had had no more money spent on it than the other. To them it looked much the more expensive; whereas to Julia and Nora and the others it was a surprise that the cheap and shoddy things of the gaudy sitting-room had cost as much as those in the really æsthetic apartment.

All had been invited to the six-o'clock tea, and this had been designed to show the skill in cooking of some of the number,—or perhaps I should say skill in the preparation of a meal, since much that was to go on the table was prepared under the eyes of the visitors.

The dainty sandwiches, for instance, were so prepared. There were three or four different kinds, of lettuce, of cheese, and some with nuts laid between, to the great surprise of Mrs. McSorley. She had associated with the name only the sandwich of the ham variety. Then the cold chicken, creamed and served in the chafing-dish, and put steaming on the plates; the chocolate that Maggie prepared on a tiny gas range, crowned with whipped cream that she had whipped before their very eyes,—all these things had their effect. When Luisa showed the blanc-mange that she had made, "without any flavor of soup," Haleema remarked so mischievously, that Luisa had to admit that earlier in the season she had prepared some blanc-mange in a kettle which had not been washed since some strong-flavored soup had been contained in it. Each girl had one special dish that she had made the day before,—cake, or biscuit, or jelly. The results were very satisfactory to the admiring relatives, who went home particularly pleased with the Mansion and the young ladies, as well as with their own particular loaf of cake or mould of jelly, as the case may be. Each one, too, carried away a fine photograph of the Mansion, under which Pamela had written one of her ever applicable Ruskin quotations.

"The girls to spin and weave and sew, and at a proper age to cook all proper ordinary food exquisitely; the youth of both sexes to be disciplined daily in the studies."

This was at the bottom of the card, and at the top she had written:

"Never look for amusement, but be always ready to amuse."

"There," said Julia, after the last visitor had departed, "I don't suppose that any of our guests know that we are college women, nor probably have they heard the time-worn discussion as to whether college women are capable of understanding the management of a house, but it strikes me that we made a pretty good showing this evening."

"Ah," replied Miss South, "I am older than you, and I can say pretty confidently that no one need stand up for the college woman as home maker; she needs no defence. More than half the college graduates of to-day have homes of their own that are well managed, and have a high sanitary standard, and—but there, I am talking as if you needed to be convinced, whereas this is very far from being the case."

"Indeed, Miss South," said Nora, "even I, who am not a college girl—"

"Oh, but you are; don't forget the good work that you did as a special at Radcliffe."

"Thank you, Julia, but I'm only slightly a college girl. Well, even I always have plenty of ammunition ready when one or two persons I might mention have things to say about the uselessness of a college education."

"You are a good champion in any cause, and we thank you," said Julia, slipping her arm in Nora's, and making a low courtesy.

This exhibit of Pamela's was the end of the festivities at the Mansion. The evenings were growing warm, and the interests of the girls were turning in other directions. The meetings of the League were regular sewing circles, and the busy needles of the members struggled through the heavy denim that was to be used in comfort bags for the soldiers, or they hemmed flannel bandages, or applied themselves to other useful bits of work suggested by the Woman's Auxiliary of the Aid Association. While others worked, Angelina read aloud to them, for she was fond of reading; and those girls who had friends or relatives in the regiments that were going South were proud of the fact, and referred to it often.

But Maggie—poor Maggie! It seemed to her that she had reason to be prouder than any of them, for she not only had a letter, but a photograph, from a soldier, and to her Tim was a really heroic figure in his blouse and campaign hat. And the words had a sacred meaning, "I'm going to do something great before you see me again; I'll do something great, and by and by we'll have that home of our own."

She could not talk about this to any one, for the mention of Tim's name still aroused a very bitter spirit in Mrs. McSorley, and Maggie feared that if she confided even in Miss Julia, Tim's plans might in some way come to Mrs. McSorley's ears. Although living now afar from her immediate authority, Maggie still stood in great awe of her aunt, and though the rather scanty praises bestowed on her showed a change in Mrs. McSorley's spirit, Maggie knew how unwise it would be to speak to her of Tim.

Of the staff, Brenda was the only one who had little to say about the war. She had not written to Arthur nor he to her since the Artists' Festival; but she heard of him indirectly through Ralph and Agnes. His regiment had gone to Tampa before the end of May, and if he was waiting for her to reply to that unanswered letter, he waited in vain. Brenda, when once she had made up her mind, was very determined. She showed, however, that she was not happy. Her face had lost its color, and she had less animation.

"It all comes from staying indoors so much. Really, you must come with us to Rockley," her parents insisted.

But Brenda would not change her mind. She was now taking the place of Anstiss, who had been called home on account of the illness of her mother.

"I did not know that you could be so industrious, Brenda. Have you any idea how many hundred of these comfort bags you have made this spring?"

"No," said Brenda, so shortly that Edith knew that she had made a mistake in asking the question.

XVIII

WHERE HONOR CALLS

In all his life Philip Blair had hardly learned a harder lesson than that teaching him that it was his duty to stay at home with his father at a time when so many of his friends and classmates were setting off for the war. "They also serve who only stand and wait," echoed constantly in his ear, though unluckily almost as imperative was another refrain, "He that lives and fights and runs away, may live to fight another day." It seemed to him not unlikely that those who did not know him very well might put him in the latter class,—of those who avoided a present danger for an unlikely and distant good.

He could not deny the fact that his father was evidently ill, and as evidently needed him. This in itself was reason enough for his staying in Boston. He had so thoroughly mastered the details of the business, that it would have been false modesty to deny that his departure would make no difference. Even had his father been in perfect health, Philip's departure would have thrown a certain amount of care upon him; but in his present rather weak condition the young man felt that he had no right to add to his burden. He envied Tom Hearst his commission as captain in a regiment of regular troops, and he felt that his years on the ranch had especially fitted him for a place with the Rough Riders. What an opportunity this war might offer a young man for real distinction! and yet the chance was that he could have no part in it. Poor Philip! If some of his critics could have read his heart, they would have had less to say about his staying at home. Certain complications in his father's business had led him to give up his plans for studying law. He was now a business man, pure and simple, and almost any one would admit that he was

devoting himself to his father's interests.

In one of his downcast moods one evening he strolled over to the Mansion to take a message from Edith to Julia. His family had already gone down to Beverly, but Edith, with her usual conscientiousness, let hardly a week pass without sending some special message to Gretchen.

The evening was one of the close and sultry evenings of early spring, and as Philip drew near he was pleased to hear the voices of Brenda and Julia. The two were seated on a rattan settle that had been drawn out into the vestibule, and upon greeting them Philip discovered Pamela and Miss South near by. After delivering Edith's message the conversation drifted to the ever-engrossing subject.

"I hardly expected to find so many of you here," said Philip. "Surely some of you intend to go as nurses to help your suffering countrymen."

"Angelina," responded Miss South, "is the only one of us who is desperately in earnest about becoming a nurse."

"So far as I can remember she has all the qualities that a nurse ought not to have."

"Oh, you are rather severe; she is not quite so bad, yet I doubt that she would make a good nurse. But she really is interested, and I have known her to make many sacrifices this spring to help the soldiers."

"She thinks that the Red Cross costume would be very becoming, and that is the secret of her interest," said Brenda, with a slight tinge of bitterness.

"What do you hear from the seat of war?" asked Philip, turning to Brenda, as if to change the subject.

"Oh, I never hear anything. Agnes and Ralph have letters, but I have too much to do to bother about the war."

Brenda's tone belied her words, and Philip wisely attempted no rejoinder. A moment later she made an excuse for leaving the party in group.

"Ralph," explained Julia, "expects to go abroad in a few days; his uncle is very ill in Paris, and it is necessary that he should see him. I believe that Agnes is not sorry that he has decided to go. Otherwise, I am sure that he would soon be starting for Cuba."

"It's hard for any one to stay behind," said Philip; and then as Inez and Nellie came out from the house with a message for Miss South and Julia, the duty of entertaining Philip fell on Pamela. He never knew just how it happened, but soon he was opening his heart to her more freely than he had ever opened it to any one else; and when their little talk was over he felt that at least one person realized that in staying North at a time when men were needed in the South he was truly trying to do his best. Undoubtedly Julia understood this, and Miss South, and all sensible people who saw that Mr. Blair's health was now so precarious; but Pamela made it so clear to Philip that his duty to his father was really the higher duty, that he left the Mansion in a much more cheerful frame of mind than that in which he had approached it.

"It is just as she says," he thought, as he walked homeward. "If my country were attacked, or if our flag were in danger, then it would be the duty of every man to rush to the front. But now—why, when it comes to fighting on land, we'll just have another walkover like the battle of Manila Bay."

He stepped briskly down the hill toward his home.

"What a bright girl Miss Northcote is, and how thankful she must be that her teaching is almost over for the year. Though she never admits it, she must find teaching very tiresome."

Pamela was glad, indeed, that her school tasks were over in season to give her a week or two for special study, as she was anxious to do her very best in the work that she had chosen at Radcliffe this year. The two courses would count toward her post-graduate degree. Strangely enough, a few days before the examination she had a chance to put her own theories of duty into practice.

A telegram from Vermont told her that her aunt had been thrown from a carriage and seriously injured, and that in her moments of delirium she was constantly calling for her. It took Pamela but a few moments to decide, and packing a small trunk she was ready for the evening train North.

"My examinations can wait until next year," she replied to Julia's expostulations; "and even if they could not, this is really the only thing for me to do."

Though for many years her relatives had been far from sympathetic, Pamela recalled the days of her childhood, when they offered her a home, and when in a clumsy way they had tried to make her happy. Knowing how her uncle had depended on his wife, she could not bear to think of his helplessness, and to help him became at once her nearest duty.

Thus it happened that when Philip a few days later came again to the Mansion for counsel, he found Pamela gone. Julia, too, happened to be out, and Brenda, with whom he talked, was so downcast that he was obliged to put himself in the most cheerful frame of mind to assure her that there was not the least danger of actual fighting.

"Why, before you know it, they'll all come marching home, and there'll be processions and speeches and all the things that conquering heroes expect—"

"They won't be conquering heroes if they haven't done any fighting."

"Don't interrupt; and you can throw a wreath at Arthur's feet."

"I wasn't thinking of Arthur."

"Excuse me, but I think that you were; and then, well—and then they will live happy ever after."

"Philip Blair, you are too absurd. Conquering heroes and wreaths, indeed!"

But Philip's nonsense had made Brenda smile, and for the time she was decidedly more cheerful.

When Mr. and Mrs. Barlow went down to Rockley, Brenda had simply refused to go. When they told her that she would suffer in town from the heat, she replied that she did not care, she hoped, indeed, that she would suffer, and concluded by saying emphatically that she was tired of being a mere idler.

"But since you are so unused to hard work, and to the city in hot weather, you must not overdo now. I do wish, Brenda," and Mrs. Barlow's tone was unusually serious, "that you could do things in moderation. If you had taken a little more interest in the work at the Mansion last winter, perhaps you would not feel it necessary to go to extremes now."

"It isn't extremes now, only I have more time to give to Julia, and I don't feel like going to Rockley; and why should any one care, especially as you have Agnes and Lettice with you."

Mrs. Barlow for the time said no more. She managed, however, to persuade Brenda to spend a day or two each week at Rockley, usually Saturday and Sunday; and every Wednesday a large box of flowers was sent up to the school with a card marked, "With love, from little Lettice."

Concetta was now more than ever devoted to Brenda, and the latter found her conversation more entertaining than that of any of the others,—possibly because she heard more of it. Often during the hour before bedtime she sat on the old rattan settle in the vestibule, while the tongue of the little Italian girl rattled on over a great variety of topics. Maggie, passing in or out sometimes after watering the plants in the little garden, often felt like sitting down beside Brenda, but she was never asked to join the two, and, unasked, she would not venture. Then to console herself she would put her hand on the crumpled letter at the bottom of her pocket. There was one person who cared for her, and Tim, knowing that his letters would not be intercepted by Mrs. McSorley, wrote to her often. His description of his life with the troops seemed to her most wonderful, and oh! how she longed to show to the others that picture that he had had taken of himself in uniform and broad campaign hat.

Angelina's interest in the war turned chiefly on her belief that she was destined to be a nurse. A large red cross cut from flannel she had sewed to her sleeve, and she told the younger girls that as soon as her mother should give her permission she was going to Cuba. "As soon, at least, as there's been a perfectly dreadful battle; of course I don't want to go until I can be of real use."

As a matter of fact Angelina had little prospect of entering upon this career of nurse, though she cherished the hope that her mother and Miss Julia might some time give their consent.

From Tampa in June Arthur wrote home much about the condition of the volunteers who had gone to the war without suitable equipment, and the fingers of the young girls at the Mansion flew more swiftly, that they might the more surely increase their quota of comfort bags.

"Just think of Toby's having to work like a laborer," said Nora, two of whose brothers had already found their way to the army in the front at the South. "He says that if it were not for the hammock that he sleeps in at night he never could stand the heat; but oh, dear! I do hope that there won't be any real fighting. Where do you suppose that the Spaniards are now?"

"Off this coast, probably," said Edith; "they say there's a big pile of coal at Salem, and that the Spanish ships will be sure to try to get it. I wish we were going to Europe this summer, for I'm afraid that I should not enjoy seeing a battle."

"Well, I'd sooner see one than feel one, as might be the case if there should be fighting off this coast; but I am sure that this will not be the case, and we must feel that our part in the war is simply to keep up our own courage, and that of our friends and relations, especially of those who have gone to the war marching toward Cuba."

This was the sensible view to take, and Nora was only one of many girls whose chief work those long spring days consisted in cutting out garments, in hemming and sewing, in knitting bandages, and in following the directions of those older women who had organized themselves to care for the needs of the soldiers in the field.

Some of them, I am afraid (but we will whisper this), were a little impatient that nothing happened; that is, that there had been no fighting. But they were those who had no relatives and no friends in the army.

Brenda waited eagerly for each letter from Arthur, for he wrote frequently from Tampa to Agnes. Ralph had already reached Paris, and the house at Rockley seemed strangely quiet; for Lettice was a demure little girl, playing very quietly in her corner of the garden or the drawing-room.

Two letters of Arthur's had lain unanswered, and now Brenda was unwilling to make up for her neglect. "Arthur should write to me," she said to herself, although she really knew that she could hardly expect such a concession from even a young man far less proud than Arthur Weston. Yet Brenda for a time tried to nurse a grievance, rather vainly, it must be admitted, essaying to persuade herself that Arthur was in the wrong.

In the mean time, at the Mansion, she was really very helpful. She was especially zealous in taking the girls to some of the factories that Julia and Miss South thought it well for the girls to visit in little groups. Thus the process of biscuit-making, and spice-making, and half a dozen other processes had been made clear to them in the course of the spring, and Brenda said that in accompanying Miss South and the girls on these expeditions she gained much more than she ever had from the occasional historic pilgrimages that she had sometimes made with her cousins.

The girls of the Mansion made one or two historic pilgrimages, too. In Brenda there was not a deep poetic vein, and something akin to this is needed to make one thoroughly appreciate historic surroundings. In the bustling factories she found something with which her spirit was more in sympathy.

The questions asked by the girls with her diverted her; the explanations given by their guides in these places took her out of herself.

During the summer the girls were to be invited to New Hampshire; for Julia had been able to arrange with a farmer living not far from the home of Eliza, her former maid, to have half a dozen of the girls board with him for two months, while two were to be under the care of Eliza. Julia or Miss South was to be at the farmer's during all the stay of these girls, but on the whole the summer was to be considered a time of recreation rather than work, and what the girls should learn in the country was to be gained rather by observation than by direct teaching.

As the choice had been given them, three or four had preferred to return to their own families for the summer rather than to go to the country, and thus the number to be looked after was not too large for the successful carrying out of Julia's vacation plans. Her first intention had been to take a house and equip it for summer work, carried on upon the same plan as that of the Mansion in the winter, but her uncle and aunt and others had pointed out so clearly the disadvantages of this scheme that she had quickly given it up. The girls were likely to return to their duties in the autumn much fresher, and much readier to set to work, than if they had had the same kind of household tasks that fell to them in winter.

Mr. and Mrs. Barlow wished that Julia had planned to close the Mansion on the first of June instead of July, for they saw that Brenda had no intention of coming down to Rockley permanently until July.

"Surely you are not so very much needed at this season. Julia and Miss South could undoubtedly get some one else to take your place," her mother remonstrated; and Brenda merely replied:

"Oh, I am needed; I like to feel that I am needed, and besides it is my own choice; I am staying in town because I want to."

It was evidently useless to argue, and Mrs. Barlow made no further effort to persuade her to change her mind. Naturally, however, she was somewhat concerned to notice that Brenda was growing paler and thinner. She felt that no good could come from Brenda's staying so late in town.

XIX

THEY STAND AND WAIT

"Why so pensive?"

"Pensive! Am I? I did not mean to be; it is certainly not exactly polite when I have company." Julia smiled at Lois as she spoke, for Lois was making one of her infrequent visits to the Mansion, and the two girls had been reviewing many of the events of their college years.

"Yes, you were pensive; you looked as if something weighed on your mind. That particular expression has vanished now," concluded Lois; "but since I caught that very unusual look, please tell me what it means. Is it the war?"

"Oh, no, not wholly."

"Then partly; do you wish to go as a nurse?"

"Oh, no; that is a kind of personal service for which I have never thought myself especially well adapted. I leave that to experts like you and Clarissa, for I suppose that now Clarissa is on her way to Cuba, ready to do the bidding of the Red Cross. Why, Lois, with your bent in that direction I do not wonder that you are pleased at the prospect of going where you can really do some good."

"I am not altogether sure that I can go. My mother is opposed to my going, and to-day when I

went to see Miss Ambrose I found her seriously ill. I came to town to do an errand for her, but I could not resist running up here for a few minutes; I wished to know what you had heard from Clarissa."

"It was only the briefest note, but she seems perfectly delighted with the prospect before her of going. She is so strong that I am sure that no harm will come to her, and she will be a perfect host in camp or hospital."

"And the cap and apron will become her. Can you not see her with her cap tilted over her dark curls? I haven't the slightest doubt that she will pin a bow of scarlet ribbon somewhere on her gown, even though the regulations prescribe sombre costume."

"Indeed, I can see her at this very minute, a real ray of sunshine; but, Lois, I hope that Miss Ambrose is not very ill."

"I cannot tell. It is a nervous break down. All that she reads and hears about the war carries her back to the days of the Civil War. She lost several dear relatives and friends then, and the present excitement has caused what I should call a kind of reflex action. Unless this Spanish War proves longer than we expect, a few weeks rest will bring her around. I am glad that my examinations are just over, for I must spend my time with her."

"Naturally," responded Julia; "and after all, this will be as good a cause as nursing sick soldiers, though I understand your disappointment."

As the two friends talked, Julia's face lost the pensive expression that Lois had remarked when she first came in. The expression had no deeper reason than her feeling of dissatisfaction with her winter's work, a regret that what she had undertaken must hamper her now, when greater things were claiming the attention of so many other of her friends. Yet before Lois went home she had begun to see that she need not be dissatisfied with her own limitations.

"They also serve who only stand and wait," Lois had quoted apropos to herself, just as Philip had quoted it some weeks before, and Julia found this line of Milton's even more applicable to her own case than Philip had to his. For there was a prospect that Lois, if the war continued, might find it possible to offer herself as a nurse, while Julia was sure that the duties that she had assumed would prevent her doing this, even as Philip knew that he could not leave his father. Julia regretted, too, that she had not as much money to offer as she would have had but for her year's work at the Mansion.

Miss Ambrose, to whom Lois had referred, was not a relative, nor even an old friend. She had made the acquaintance of this elderly woman by chance toward the close of her Radcliffe course, and had found her way to Miss Ambrose's heart without special effort on her own part. An accident had enabled her to do Miss Ambrose a real kindness. The older woman had been greatly pleased to learn that Lois was studying at Radcliffe. Her own tastes in her younger days had inclined her to a college education, but, alas! at that time there was small opportunity for a woman to go to college. In interesting herself in Lois' college work she had seemed to live over again her own youth, and she was never weary of hearing the details of college life. Later, when Lois was on the point of leaving Radcliffe, because she had not the money to stay there longer, Miss Ambrose insisted on her accepting from her the sum necessary to enable her to remain. In view of the older woman's kindness, and also because a genuine friendship existed between the two, it was natural that Lois should wish to stay with Miss Ambrose while she was ill. Indeed, she was glad to do this, even though she had to curb her desire to be a nurse during the war.

When Lois left, Julia put herself through a little cross-examination; for a month or two she had not been wholly satisfied with her year's work. Had she used her time and her money in the best way? Was there not some other work that she might have carried on to greater advantage? Was it altogether wise to have given up so entirely her own personal interests? Ah! Clarissa was right; she was not justified in putting entirely aside her music—especially her work in composition. What, indeed, had she to show for the year? So her thoughts ran. Ten girls better trained in useful things than would have been the case without the Mansion teaching; but this year must be followed up by another year of teaching, and then in the end could she be sure that they would retain what they had learned? Concetta and Haleema had improved superficially, but she was by no means confident that they were really neater or really more truthful than in the beginning. Maggie—and here she smiled—broke fewer dishes, but her reticence was far from commendable. Frankness was a virtue that she herself constantly preached, yet she had been able to instil very little of this quality into Maggie's breast. In spite of all her precepts, too, Inez was still as willing as at the beginning of the year to put on her stockings with the feet untrimmed, and—"Difficulties are things that show what men are." Like a ray of sunlight this thought from Epictetus flashed across Julia's mind. After all, how few real difficulties she had had to meet during the year; and had not the successes been more than the failures?

Mary Murphy had been the only one of the girls to insist on leaving the school, although she had occasionally heard the others expressing their dissatisfaction, especially when some of them had undergone some of the discipline that they had to undergo. One of the first lessons to learn had been that of the general deceitfulness of girls, and of these girls in particular, who did not hesitate to make many little criticisms as unjustifiable as they were foolish.

After all, the balance sheet did not show a total against the experiment, even when all the things were counted that had to be called not quite successful.

"It is the warm weather," thought Julia, "that depresses me. Instead of dreading next year, when autumn comes I shall probably wish that I had twice as much to do."

Brenda was disturbed by no such doubts as those that assailed Julia. She was helping Julia that she might help herself forget that a war was hanging over the country, and that if there should be a great battle, if Arthur should be killed, she could never forgive herself. Yet, after all, what had she had to do with his going, unless, indeed, she had been foolish in repeating her father's criticism of Arthur's idleness. She could not forget that autumn ride and that half-jesting conversation, and the change in Arthur from that moment; but for that, perhaps, he would not have gone to Washington, and if he had not gone to Washington she was sure that he would not have volunteered so early. Had he been near them, certainly Agnes and Ralph would have shown him that it was his duty to stay at home, just as much his duty as it was the duty of Ralph or Philip.

Philip had stayed behind on account of his father, and Ralph felt it his duty to fly to Paris on account of his sick uncle. Arthur could have gone there in his place, and then he would have been perfectly safe. Now, even while Brenda was reasoning in this foolish fashion—yet it could hardly be called reasoning—she did not fully face the question as to whether she had not done wrong rather than Arthur. She still blamed him for not writing to her. What if she had not answered his last two letters? He was the one who had gone farthest away, and he should have written.

Now all of this was the very poorest logic, and no one understood this better than Brenda herself, slow though she was to admit that she had made a blunder.

Miss South heard frequently from her brother Louis, who had been one of the first to go to the front, and a box had been already sent from the Mansion filled with useful things for the men of his company, about whose privations in camp he had written very entertainingly. "How would you like it," he wrote, "to have to take your occasional bath in a rubber blanket? Yes! that is exactly what I do. We cannot bathe in the creek, for its muddy water is all we have to drink. So when I wish to bathe I dig a narrow trench some distance away, lay my rubber blanket in it, and carry enough water to fill it. In no other way could I get a decent—I mean a half-decent—bath." Then he told of the canned beef and hard bread that was his chief diet, and added that if the heat continued, he would have nothing worse to fear from the Cuban climate, "for to Cuba they say we shall go before the end of June."

Brenda, listening to the letter, wondered if Arthur, too, had had the same experiences.

More than all, she wondered if the troops now in camp would really go to Cuba, and if—if—

Then she would not let her thoughts go too far. She could not bear to think of the coming battles; for every one said that the Spaniards would not yield without a bitter conflict.

Maggie, whose devotion to her was unnoted by Brenda, watched the latter from day to day, and often saved her steps by anticipating her wishes. Maggie observed that Brenda's face was paler and thinner than when she first began to live at the Mansion. She noticed, too, that she no longer cared for pretty gowns. She wore constantly a blue serge skirt and shirt waist, suitable enough in its way for one who was a resident at a settlement; but Brenda had formerly cared little for suitability, and Maggie, though she would not for a moment have admitted that her idol looked less than beautiful, still wished that she had the courage to ask her to wear occasionally one of the dainty muslin gowns that she knew she had brought with her to the Mansion.

One day as Brenda strolled through the upper hall she saw the door of Maggie's room ajar. This reminded her that it was her turn to inspect the bureaus of the girls, and acting on impulse she went at once to Maggie's drawer. This inspection usually consisted only of a passing glance to make sure that the contents of the drawers were not in the state of hopeless confusion into which the bureaus of young girls have a strange way of throwing themselves.

Maggie's bureau, if not above criticism, was fairly neat, but as Brenda turned away something strangely familiar caught her eye. It could not be—yet it surely was—and she took the bit of silver in her hand to assure herself that it really was the chatelaine clasp of the silver purse that she had lost. As she took up the little piece of silver her hand trembled. There was no doubt about it; too well she recognized the elaborately engraved rose, surmounted by the double B, that had been her own especial design. How vividly came back to her the day on which she had lost the purse—the day of the broken vase, of the discovery of Maggie, of the deferred walk with Arthur; all came back to her vividly, and yet these things seemed years and years away. She had never associated Maggie with the lost purse, but now suspicion followed suspicion, and all in an instant Maggie McSorley had become not merely a tiresome little girl, but one deserving of reprimand if not of punishment.

Then discovery followed discovery. Just back of the silver clasp lay the picture of a young, good-looking soldier in campaign uniform, and Brenda could not help reading at the bottom the words, "From your loving Tim."

At that moment there was a step at the door, and immediately Maggie was beside her. The little girl reddened as she looked over Brenda's shoulder.

"My uncle," she exclaimed.

"Why, Maggie! How often your aunt has said that you haven't a relation in the world but herself and her husband."

"Then it's she that doesn't tell the truth," and frightened by her own boldness Maggie burst into tears.

Brenda did not feel like consoling her. Moreover, Maggie's next words, "Don't tell my aunt," were not reassuring; so Brenda went rather sadly downstairs. The clasp was still in her left hand; she had even forgotten to show it to Maggie. Near the library door she met Concetta, looking bright and cheerful. What a pleasant contrast to the weeping, unsatisfactory girl upstairs!

That evening Maggie did not appear again downstairs. She would take no tea, and Gretchen, who had gone above to inquire, reported that Maggie had a severe headache. As Julia left the rest of the family after tea to see what she could do for Maggie, Brenda seated herself at the library table beside Concetta, who was turning over the leaves of a book.

Half absent-mindedly Brenda fingered the clasp which had been in her pocket since the afternoon, and Concetta, as her eye fell upon it, put out her hand as if to seize it. Then as quickly she drew her hand away, pretending not to have seen the bit of silver. Brenda did not notice Concetta's action, though she was pleased to hear her say a word or two in excuse of Maggie's weeping proclivities.

"She's such a kind of tender-hearted girl. Yes, she told me the other evening that she hated to kill a mosquito; she'd rather let them bite her. Why, I'd kill hundreds of mosquitoes without thinking of it," concluded Concetta boldly; "and it made Maggie cry when the kitten got scalded the other day, but I wouldn't think of crying."

Brenda listened to Concetta quietly; she was wondering if she ought to disclose her suspicions to Julia. At length she decided that it was her duty to do so.

"Let us ask Miss South what she thinks. Perhaps there is some explanation that she can suggest."

Miss South, when consulted, was inclined to question the accuracy of Brenda's memory.

"Isn't it possible that you have forgotten just when you lost the purse?"

"No, indeed, I have not forgotten," said Brenda. "It made a great impression on me that I should have lost it on the very day when I had had to pay for that broken vase, and that was the day when I first went home with Maggie; but really I never thought of her having taken it, and I'm very, very sorry."

Brenda spoke in tones of genuine distress. It is true that she had never been very fond of Maggie, and that her first pride in her as an acquisition for the Mansion had soon passed away. Concetta and one or two of the other girls had interested her more. Yet in a general way she had had a good opinion of Maggie, which it hurt her very much now to be obliged to reverse.

Thus, as the school year closed, Brenda, like Julia, was beginning to have doubts about the value of the work that she had been doing; for if Maggie had the clasp, she must also have the purse and its contents. The money contained in it had amounted to only about three dollars, but the purse itself had been valuable, and doubtless Maggie had sold it. "I suppose she was afraid to sell the clasp on account of the initials," Brenda thought, a little bitterly.

Even though she had not liked Maggie as well as some of the other girls, she was not pleased that she had made this unpleasant discovery. She would have been more than glad if she had never seen that harmless-looking little clasp lying in Maggie's bureau, if Maggie had never told her that untruth about the soldier's photograph.

XX

WEARY WAITING

Toward the end of June letters from Arthur were infrequent. Indeed, but one had come from him since he had left camp for Cuba, and this, like the earlier letters, had been addressed to Agnes, not to Brenda. Letters were mailed to him twice a week, and various things had been sent to him that the family hoped might be of use in camp. But although Brenda helped pack the little boxes, and though she had bought, or at least selected, many of the things that went in the boxes, she did not write. She was still waiting for Arthur's letter.

The last week in June several of the girls from the Mansion went home to be with relatives for a few days before going up to the farm, and Brenda at last agreed to go down to Rockley. Mrs. Barlow had told her that she might bring with her any of the girls whom she wished to have with her. "Naturally, I suppose, you will wish to bring Maggie, as she is your especial protégée."

Mrs. Barlow had not realized the waning of Brenda's interest in Maggie, but Brenda, as she read the letter, knew that she would not invite Maggie. She had not yet spoken to Maggie about the silver clasp, but she saw that the time had now come to do it, and she nerved herself to the disagreeable task. Accordingly, a day or two before she was to start for Rockley she called Maggie to her room, but when Maggie appeared she was not alone. Concetta was with her. It hardly seemed wise to send Concetta away, and the two little girls sat down, as if to make an

afternoon visit. Hardly had she been seated five minutes, however, when Concetta spied the little silver clasp that Brenda had laid on the table near by. At first she put out her hand as if to take it, then even more quickly drew it back. But Brenda had noted the action, and after they had talked a few minutes of other things she brought up the subject of the lost purse.

She had described the pretty purse that she had so valued, because it was a present from one of whom she was especially fond, and told how its loss had distressed her. It must be admitted that her heart beat a trifle more quickly as she looked at the two, but neither of the girls appeared the least self-conscious. Then she held up the clasp—perhaps it wasn't just right to say this before Concetta—and added:

"It surprised me very much a day or two ago to find this little clasp in the possession of one of the girls here at the Mansion, for it is the very clasp that I lost with the silver purse."

Then Maggie reddened and looked at Concetta, and Concetta looked from Maggie to Brenda.

"Did you think that somebody stole it?" asked Maggie anxiously, and then she seemed to search Concetta's face for an answer.

"I hardly care to say what I think," replied Brenda. "I should not like to believe that any one had stolen it."

This time her gaze was so evidently directed toward Maggie that Maggie was almost driven to reply.

"I know that it was in my drawer, Miss Barlow, but—"

"Oh, it was I who gave it to her, I really did; but I didn't steal it." Concetta spoke very positively.

Brenda was certainly puzzled by the turn of affairs, the more puzzled because she realized as well as any one else in the house that Maggie and Concetta had never been good friends, yet it was Maggie whom she now heard saying:

"Oh, I'm sure, Miss Barlow, that Concetta isn't to blame."

"I never saw the purse," explained Concetta, "but the clasp was given to me—that is, I paid twenty-five cents for it. The girl I got it from lives in the next house to my uncle's; you can ask her about it."

"Well, I'm obliged to you, Concetta, for freeing Maggie from suspicion. It is indeed strange that the day I lost the purse was the very day on which I first saw Maggie. You remember, Maggie, the day when I went home with you."

"Yes, indeed, Miss Barlow, the day I broke that vase; that was a bad bargain for you."

"Why, I'm not so sure, Maggie; you see I seem to have found you in exchange for the vase, and perhaps, after all, I have had the best of the bargain. But tell me, Concetta, how it happens that you and Maggie are good friends now. Only a little while ago you seemed to be far from friendly, yet now you would not have been so ready to tell me about the silver clasp if you had not been anxious to help free Maggie from any chance of blame."

So Concetta—for in spite of occasional mistakes in English she was always more voluble than Maggie—explained that several times of late Maggie had been very kind to her, and she gave among her instances the day when Maggie had helped with the lamps; "and then I thought that she was dreadfully good when she never told about Haleema the day the ammonia got spilled, for it was Haleema that broke the bottle, but Maggie never told; and then," concluded Concetta magnanimously, "I got tired of hearing every one find fault with Maggie, so she and I are going to be great friends now. That's one of the things I've learned here, that it's better to be good friends with every one, 'to love your neighbor as yourself.' Miss South often talks to me about it, and so I'm trying to think that every one is as good as I am;" and Concetta tossed her pretty head, and her expression seemed to say that she did not find this sentiment the easiest one in the world to hold.

On investigation—for Concetta urged her to investigate—Brenda found her story true so far as it concerned the way in which she had come into possession of the silver clasp. The little girl from whom she had bought it referred her to an old woman who had a long story as to how it had come into her possession, and Brenda at last decided that it was useless to follow the clew further. But the outcome of all this was a better understanding between Brenda and Maggie, for Brenda, when she had once made a mistake, was never unwilling to rectify it. Whether this little girl had stolen it or whether the old woman was to blame she did not care. She felt sure that neither Maggie nor Concetta had taken the purse. She praised the latter for her frankness, and became so kind to the former, that Maggie actually blossomed out under her smiles.

Before the end of the month Pamela had written that she must stay in Vermont all summer, and in consequence could take no part in the vacation work that Julia had planned. Nora accordingly offered her services, and Amy wrote that she volunteered to spend August with the girls.

Brenda's cousin, Edward Elton, who happened to be present when the plans were discussed, expressed himself as being so gratified that Julia and Miss South would not be left to carry on the work quite alone, that Anstiss Rowe, ever a fun lover, began to speculate as to the reason for his concern.

"Do you suppose that this is on account of his interest in Julia? Julia has so many others to worry about her, that he need not be especially fearful on her account, or—there, I'll ask her—" and running up to Miss South, who had just been bidding Mr. Elton good-bye at the door, she put the question so suddenly that Miss South actually blushed. Then a certain idea came into Anstiss' mind, which just then she did not put into words.

It was the end of June before Brenda consented to go down to Rockley, and when she went Maggie accompanied her. The observing little girl was still disturbed as she noted how thin Brenda had grown, and even before Mr. and Mrs. Barlow noticed it, Maggie had seen that Brenda's step was a little heavy, that her bright manner had given place to listlessness. Her one interest seemed to consist in buying and collecting things for the benefit of the Volunteer Aid Association. No one now reproached her for extravagance, and when her father found that it would please her, he doubled his contribution to this Association, and sent another in Brenda's name.

One afternoon Julia came down and spent the night, and the two cousins wandered on the beach, just as they had in that summer that now seemed so long past—that summer that had been Julia's first at Rockley. Little Lettice, skipping along beside them, begged her aunt to tell her about the day when she had sat on the rock and had dropped her book on the heads of Amy and Fritz seated just beneath her. It always interested Lettice to hear this, for Brenda had a fashion of ending the story with "and if I hadn't dropped that book, I might never have known your cousin Amy." For Amy was "Cousin Amy" in the vocabulary of Lettice, who would have thought it a great misfortune never to have known this adopted relative, since nobody else in her whole circle of acquaintances had so many delightful stories to tell. But on this particular evening Brenda was not ready to repeat her story nor to tell any other, and little Lettice, with a grieved expression, ran on ahead of Brenda and Julia to skip stones in the water. Julia did not remonstrate with Brenda, for she realized that her cousin was not acting wholly from perversity.

Now Brenda was not the only one of the Mansion group whom the prospect of Cuban fighting troubled. Miss South's brother Louis was at the front, and two of Nora's brothers, and Tom Hearst, who had written several amusing letters from camp. Yet although those who were in the army tried to cheer the hearts of their friends at home, and although the latter wrote cheerfully in reply, all felt that the time was far from a happy one. The more timid, like Edith, had recovered from their fear that the Spanish fleet would pounce down upon the defenceless inhabitants of the North Shore. Yet some of them would have faced this danger rather than to live in dread that their sons and brothers were to meet the troops in actual conflict under the hot Cuban sun.

Even the strongest, even those who had no relatives in the army, were stirred, as they had seldom been stirred before, on that Sunday morning when they received the first news of the attack on Santiago. How terrifying were the broad headlines with letters two or three inches long, and how meagre seemed the information given in the columns below,—meagre, yet appalling: "The volunteers were terribly raked. Nearly all the wounded will recover." How much and yet how little this meant until the names of the killed and wounded should be given! Brenda herself would not look at those Sunday newspapers. Agnes summarized the news for her, and told her that in the short list given of wounded or killed she had not yet found one that she knew.

"Oh, when shall we hear everything?" cried Brenda. "Oh, Papa, can't you go; can't I go with you? I would so much rather be in Cuba than here."

"My dear child, you are foolish. In Cuba at this season! Even if you could go, what could you do? The killed and wounded are a very small proportion of those who are fighting, and we have no reason to think that Arthur is among them. To be sure, I wish that Ralph were here; we could, at least, send him South. As it is, I may go myself, but we can only wait until to-morrow, when there will be more complete reports."

Were twenty-four hours ever as long as those that passed before the Monday morning papers arrived?

After her sleepless night again Brenda shrank from reading the reports. Agnes, going over the long list of killed and wounded, gave an exclamation of surprise,—or horror,—then checked it, with an anxious look at Brenda. The latter, watching her narrowly, sprang forward.

"What is it Agnes? You must tell me at once."

"Poor Tom Hearst!" cried Agnes, as her tears fell on the paper; "he was killed by a bursting shell during the early part of the attack on San Juan Hill."

But Brenda apparently did not hear.

"Is Arthur's name there?" she asked impatiently.

"Why, yes," said Agnes reluctantly, "it—"

But before she could utter another word Brenda had fallen heavily to the floor, and for a few minutes everything else was forgotten. Indeed, from the moment when Brenda was placed on the couch in her room upstairs Agnes did not leave her side, and for twenty-four hours, by the direction of the physician whom they had hastily summoned, they did not dare to refer to Santiago.

When she came to herself Brenda learned that the report about Arthur had simply been "slightly

wounded;" that her father was expecting an answer soon to his telegram of enquiry, and that Philip Blair had started South.

A faint smile passed over Brenda's face.

"I was sure—I was afraid that he was killed—like poor Tom. Isn't it dreadful that he should die? he was always so full of life." Then she began to weep silently, and said no more about Arthur.

Now it happened that Brenda passed through a more severe illness that summer than Arthur. Her physician, in anxious consultation with the family, concluded that she had stayed too long in town. "I think, too," he said, "that she has had something to worry her. It would seem," he added apologetically, "that one situated as she is would have no cares; but it is hard sometimes to account for the workings of a young girl's mind. She may have magnified some little anxiety until it played serious injury to her nerves."

"It is this war," responded Mrs. Barlow. "I wonder that more of us do not have nervous prostration."

During those long weeks Brenda herself had little to say, even when she was well enough to sit up. When she spent long hours under the awning on the little balcony on which her windows opened, she seemed to take but a languid interest in the world around her.

In those first two or three days when Brenda's condition was at its worst, when there was even a question whether or not she would get well, no one thought much about Maggie, the newcomer at Rockley, whose grief was greater than she could express. She kept her place in a corner of the piazza, hoping and hoping that some one would ask her to do something for the sick girl. Gladly would she have exchanged places with the trained nurse who went back and forth to the sick-room, had she not known that the nurse could do the things that she in her ignorance was unequal to. At last there came a day when Brenda herself asked for her, and after that Maggie was always in the sick-room, except on those occasions when she was carrying into effect some request of Brenda's. How thankful she felt for the lessons in invalid cookery, that now enabled her to prepare a tempting luncheon that Brenda would eat after she had petulantly refused the equally good luncheon prepared by the nurse. Then there were hours when no one but Maggie could amuse Brenda, when, after listening to a chapter or two from the book that she had asked Maggie to read, the sick girl would draw the other into conversation. Any one who listened would have found that the subject about which they talked was war and battles—especially the eventful day of the Santiago fight, concerning which Brenda would allow no one else to speak to her.



She seemed to take but a languid interest in the world around her

Now it happened that one afternoon after Maggie had been reading to her, Brenda remembered the photograph that she had seen in Maggie's room, and again, as on that former day, she asked her about it. So Maggie was drawn to tell all about Tim, even the sad story of his imprisonment.

"But now," she concluded, "everything is going to be all right. His captain is going to have him recommended for promotion for saving life—great bravery," and she pronounced the words with extreme pride. "He saved an officer at the risk of his own life, and when the war's over he's coming to see me."

In fact, Maggie had good reason to be proud of Tim. She had read his name in the newspapers, and though his own letters were modest, she was sure that he had been a real hero.

But the strangest thing of all was a letter from Philip Blair, that Mrs. Barlow read one day aloud in Maggie's presence.

"After all," he wrote, "sick as Arthur is, we may be thankful that it is fever and a very slight wound that keep him on his back. From all I hear he had the narrowest escape, and but for a private soldier, Tim McSorley, he would probably have lost both legs." Then followed a description of the way in which Tim had rescued him almost from under the bursting shell; for, the newspaper report to the contrary, Arthur had not been badly hurt by the shell, only stunned, with a slight wound also from a grazing bullet. But the hardships of the campaign had so told on him that he was soon on the sick list, and when he reached Fort Monroe on the hospital ship he was in a raging fever.

Now to Philip in this eventful July had come an opportunity for usefulness, really greater than if he had gone to Cuba in the army. As his father could now spare him, he had given invaluable service to the sick. He had made one trip to Cuba and had had the grave of Tom Hearst marked properly, and he had travelled the length of the country from Florida to Boston to report to the Volunteer Aid Association the especial needs of the sick soldiers in the camps that he had visited. He was a real ministering angel—for angels are often masculine—to Arthur and other sick friends of his in the hospital at Fort Monroe; and those who knew how much he accomplished in this direction wondered how he found time for the long and cheerful letters that he wrote to the friends of the sick to keep up their spirits.

Lois, too, though belated, had a chance to serve as a nurse in one of the camps, and, while doing her duty there, had the satisfaction of knowing that she was not neglecting home duties; for both her family and Miss Ambrose were at last in such a condition that she felt justified in leaving them. Though few persons would have envied her her hard hospital work, Lois considered herself the most enviable of mortals, and all that she went through only confirmed her in her strong desire to be a doctor.

XXI

AN OCTOBER WEDDING

One fine October morning, almost three months to a day from the victory at Santiago, Julia and Nora, Edith and Ruth, stood on one of the broad piazzas at Rockley talking as rapidly as four intimate friends can talk. Ruth and Julia were hand and hand, for this was their first day together since Ruth's return from her year's wedding journey, and each was delighted to find the other unchanged. "A little older," Julia had said when Ruth pressed her for her opinion; and then, that her friend might not take her too seriously, "but I'd never know it."

"A little more sedate," Ruth had responded; "but you do not show it."

Then the four fell to talking over the events of this very remarkable year.

"Nothing can surprise me," Ruth said, "since I have heard of the engagement of Pamela to Philip Blair. I did not suppose that he had so much sense. Excuse me," she added hastily, noting Edith's surprised look; "I merely meant that Pamela's good qualities are the kind that the average man would be apt to overlook."

"Philip is not an average man," responded Edith proudly; "we all think that he is most unusual."

"Yes, indeed," interposed Nora; "my father says that he never saw any one develop so wonderfully, and when he was first in college every one thought that he was to be a mere society man, like Jimmy Jeremy. Wouldn't you hate it, Edith, if he had decided to devote his life to leading cotillions?"

"Oh, he never would have done that," said the literal Edith; "he would have found something else to do daytimes."

Then Nora, to emphasize Philip's development, told several anecdotes of his helpfulness and devotion to the sick soldiers.

But neither Edith nor Nora then told what Ruth learned later, that Mrs. Blair was far from pleased with the turn of events, as the quiet and almost unknown Pamela was not the type of girl she would have selected to be Philip's wife. Her objection, however, had been made before Philip's engagement was formally announced. When once it was settled, she accepted it with the best possible grace, and even Pamela herself scarcely realized the obstacles that Philip had had to overcome in gaining his mother's consent.

Edith had found it even harder to conceal her disappointment from Philip. Only to Nora did she say, frankly, "I hoped that it would be Julia. They were always such friends, and I am sure that no one ever had so much influence over him."

"We can give Julia the credit of having made Philip look at life in a broader way, and I am sure that they are still the greatest friends. But I happen to know, Edith, that she never felt the least little bit of sentiment for him, and never would."

More than this Nora could not be persuaded to say, and Edith, though with a slight accent of resignation, added:

"Oh, well, I'm very fond of Pamela already, and if I can't have Julia for a sister-in-law, I'm sure that she and I will get along beautifully. Only it will seem very strange to have such a learned person in the family."

But to return to the group on the piazza this bright autumn morning. Seldom have tongues flown faster than theirs. There were so many things to talk about, more absorbing even than Philip's engagement,—Arthur's wonderful escape, for example, of which Ruth had heard only the vaguest account. Now, as she wished to hear details, Nora naturally was ready to give them to her.

"A shot had passed through his ankle, and he couldn't drag himself away, so that there seems not the slightest doubt that he would have been struck again, and perhaps killed, for he was just in the line of the enemy's fire."

Nora spoke as if quite familiar with army tactics and military language, and since there was no one present to criticise her or to say whether her description was technically correct, she continued:

"Yes, we are quite sure that he would have been killed if it hadn't been for Tim McSorley, who dragged him away—"

"Ah," interposed Edith, "and isn't it strange this soldier proved to be a cousin or uncle of Maggie McSorley, a girl, you know, who is at the Mansion; and it's all the stranger because it was Brenda who discovered her, and this has made the greatest difference for Maggie. Brenda had got into the habit of snubbing her, but now she can't do enough for her."

"It's all very interesting," said Ruth, smiling slightly; "but Maggie herself hadn't anything to do with rescuing Arthur, had she?"

"Oh, no, indeed; but still it has made a difference, for Brenda naturally feels grateful to every one belonging to Tim McSorley. She is so impulsive. Then I think, too, that she saw that she had always been unfair to Maggie, and so now she can't do enough for her, just to make amends."

"Yes, and besides, although Maggie had nothing to do with rescuing Arthur, it was her uncle's letter to her that gave the first account of what had really happened to Arthur. I was in the room when she came running to Brenda with the letter; it was when Brenda was nearly beside herself, waiting for some real news, and I honestly think that that letter saved her from brain fever," added Julia.

"All's well that ends well," rejoined Ruth, "is too trite a proverb to quote to-day, yet, however it happened, we should be thankful that Brenda escaped brain fever. No day could be more ideally suited for a wedding than this, but if Brenda's illness had been more severe than it was, who knows when the wedding could have taken place. The day might have been postponed to December or some equally disagreeable month, and no tenting on the lawn then."

"I agree with you," said Julia; "and now I must run away, for there are still several things to do for Brenda, and in less than an hour the train will be here bringing Arthur and the rest of the wedding party. Let me advise you," she concluded, "to be arrayed in your wedding garments by that time, for on an informal occasion like this you will all be needed to help entertain. Many of the guests have never been here before."

When at last the wedding guests arrived, the truth of this statement was evident, for among them were very few of the old friends of the Barlow family.

"We have had one family wedding," Brenda had protested, when her friends expressed surprise at her plans; "and now, if I wish to have mine small and quiet, I think that I ought to be suited, and Arthur, too, for he wishes everything to be just as I wish it."

There was no gainsaying this reasoning, nor would Mr. and Mrs. Barlow have asked Brenda to change her plans. What remonstrances there were came from some of the relatives, and from many of Brenda's young friends not invited to the house, who felt that in some way they were to lose something worth seeing. As Brenda had decreed that it should be a house wedding, they were not even to have the privileges of lookers-on, as might have been the case at a church wedding.

But was ever any family perfectly satisfied with the plans made for the wedding of one of its members? Was there ever a wedding in preparing for which various persons did not think themselves more or less slighted? How, then, could Brenda expect to please all in her large connection? Now, in spite of her impulsiveness, Brenda had been considered rather conventional, and on this account many felt aggrieved that she had insisted on having the affair small and informal.

Yet after all it wasn't a very small wedding, and the drawing-rooms at Rockley were well filled, though with a far less fashionable assemblage than that which had surrounded and greeted Agnes and Ralph Weston six years before. There were naturally a certain number of relatives present, as well as Mr. and Mrs. Blair, Dr. and Mrs. Gostar, and a few other old friends of both Brenda's and Arthur's families.

Besides the "Four," and Julia and Amy and Ruth, there were Frances Pounder and two or three of Brenda's former schoolmates. Miss Crawdon, too, had been invited, and one or two teachers from her school.

Frances Pounder, as her friends still called her, was now Mrs. Egbert Romeyn, and her husband was to perform the marriage ceremony. Mr. Romeyn's church was in a mission centre on the outskirts of the city, and Frances gladly shared his parish labors. To the great surprise of all who knew her, she had really buried the pride and haughty spirit of her school days.

Anstiss and Miss South and the rest of the staff of the Mansion were present; and besides Philip Blair, and Will Hardon and Nora's brothers, and Fritz Tomkins and Ben Creighton, there were several other young men, Arthur's special friends chiefly, with a few of those who had known Brenda from childhood.

Then in addition to these were a number of "unnecessary people," as Belle called them in a stage whisper to Nora,—all the girls from the Mansion, for example, every one of whom had accepted the invitation, and the whole Rosa family, from Mrs. Rosa to the youngest child. Since the defeat of the Spanish, and especially since the destruction of Cervera's fleet, Angelina had had little to say about her Spanish blood. Indeed, she had been overheard giving an elaborate explanation to one of the Mansion girls of the difference between Spanish and Portuguese, with the advantage on the side of the Portuguese, from whom, she said, she was proud to be descended, "although," she had added, "I was born in the United States, and so I shall always be an American citizen."

Although Angelina was the especial protégée of Julia, rather than of Brenda, she took the greatest interest in the wedding. Had she been one of the bridesmaids she could hardly have taken more trouble in having her gown of the latest mode, at least as she had understood it from reading a certain fashion journal, with whose aid she and a rather bewildered Shiloh seamstress had made up the inexpensive pink muslin.

Mrs. Rosa, dazed by the invitation to the wedding, inclined not to accept it; but Julia, anxious to please Brenda, did all that she could to make it possible for the whole Rosa family to come from Shiloh to Rockley. The Rosas did not seem exactly essential to the success of the wedding, yet as Brenda had set her heart on their presence, there was no reason why she should not be humored.

To any one who did not know the circumstances, the presence of Mrs. McSorley and Tim may have appeared less explainable even than the presence of the Rosas.

Yet Tim, Maggie's Tim, was only second in interest in the eyes of many present to Arthur himself; for he it was who had saved Arthur's life on that memorable day of battle, and for this and another act of heroism he had received especial praise from his commanding officers.

It isn't every family that can have a hero in it, and Mrs. McSorley, after Maggie had shown her Tim's name in print, and some of his letters, had wisely concluded, as she said, to "let bygones be bygones;" and as the nearest relative after Maggie of the brave soldier, Arthur had sent her a special invitation. So it was that sharp-featured little Mrs. McSorley, almost to her own surprise, found herself at Rockley, though feeling somewhat out of place in the midst of what she considered great grandeur. She stood in the background, near one of the long glass doors opening on the piazza, ready to make her escape should any curious eyes be turned toward her. The Rosas, Angelina excepted, were near Mrs. McSorley, and Mrs. Rosa was in much the same state of mind as the latter.



Brenda had never looked so well

Yet after all, who has eyes for any one else when once the bride and bridegroom have taken their places. Punctually at the appointed hour the bridal party entered the room, and the murmur of voices was hushed. But when the impressive service was over, and young and old hastened forward with their congratulations, again the voices were heard—a subdued chorus of admiration. For although, as Brenda had decreed, this was a most informal wedding, though the service was simple, and there were no attendants but little Lettice and her cousin Harriet, yet no wedding of the year had been more beautiful. Brenda herself had never looked so well, and her simple muslin gown was infinitely more becoming than one more elaborate could have been. She carried a great bouquet of lilies-of-the-valley, and the little bridesmaids carried smaller bunches of the same flower. They wore little pins of white and green enamel, and pearls in the form of sprays of lily-of-the-valley, Arthur's gift to them, and they held their little heads very proudly, since this to them was the most important moment of their lives. Arthur, as a hero of the late war, was almost as interesting to the onlookers as the bride, and that is saying a great deal. Though a little against his own will, he wore his uniform, at Brenda's request, and thus gave just the right note of color, as the artistic Agnes phrased it. Over the spot where the two stood was a wedding-bell of white blossoms,—the one conventional thing that Brenda had permitted,—and in every possible place were masses of white chrysanthemums and roses and other white flowers.

The continued warm weather had enabled Brenda to carry out her long-cherished plan of having the wedding-breakfast in a tent on the lawn, and she and Arthur led the way outside as soon as they could. The others followed, and quickly all the guests were grouped in smaller marquees arranged for them around the large tent in which the tables were set. The caterer and his assistants were aided by a rather unusual corps of helpers,—the girls from the Mansion, who had begged Brenda's permission to serve her in this way. Every one of them was there, and Maggie, who had been at Rockley all summer, directed them, pleased enough that her knowledge of the house and grounds enabled her to be of real use on this eventful day.

"No," responded Brenda smilingly, as some one asked her what prizes there might be concealed within the slices of wedding-cake,—“no, this time I believe there is neither a thimble nor a ring, nor any other delusion. You see, at Agnes' wedding I received in my slice of bride-cake the thimble that should have consigned me to eternal spinsterhood, and Philip had the bachelor's button. Now you can picture my mental struggle when I found that I couldn't live up to what was so evidently predestined for me, and Philip doubtless has had the same trouble, and you can see why it is wiser that none of the guests to-day should be exposed to similar perplexity.”

"But you forget Miss South," said Nora, who was one of the group; "don't you remember that she found the ring in Agnes' cake?"

"Oh, yes, but that only proves my rule."

"Why, Brenda Barlow, how blind you are! Haven't you heard?"

"I'm not Brenda Barlow, thank you, and I haven't heard, but I can see," and she looked in the direction in which Nora had turned. There, surrounded by the rest of the "Four," with Mr. and Mrs. Barlow and Mr. and Mrs. Blair near by, stood Mr. Edward Elston, the picture of happiness.

Miss Lydia South, leaning on his arm, looked equally happy, and her attitude was that of one receiving congratulations.

"They did not mean to have it come out until next week," explained Nora, "but in some unexplained way it became known, and now I suppose we may all congratulate them."

In a moment Arthur and Brenda had offered Miss South their cordial good wishes. "I am more than glad to call you cousin," said Brenda, "and I do not know which to congratulate the more, you or Cousin Edward. But what will Julia and the Mansion do without you next year?"

"Oh, I shall be at the Mansion until after Easter," replied Miss South, "and for the remainder of the year I think that Nora and Anstiss are willing to do double work. Beyond that we cannot look at present."

"Arthur," said Brenda, as they moved away, "you are not half as cheerful to-day as you were at Agnes' wedding. You and Ralph seem to have changed places. It is he who is making every one laugh. It does not seem natural for you to be so serious."

Brenda seemed satisfied with Arthur's reply.

"For one thing," said Arthur, "I am thinking of poor Tom Hearst. I cannot help remembering that he was the life of everything then; it seems so hard that he should have been taken."

"Yes, yes," responded Brenda gently. "I, too, have been thinking about him. I was looking, last evening, at the photograph we had taken at the Artists' Festival—the group in costume with Tom in it. He was so happy then at the thought of going to Cuba; and now—just think, Arthur, it was only six months ago." Brenda's voice broke, she could hardly finish the sentence.

"There, there," interposed Arthur gently, "let us remember only that he died bravely;" and then in an unwonted poetical vein he recited a few lines beginning—

"How sleep the brave who sink to rest,
By all their country's wishes bless'd!"

and Brenda, listening, was partly cheered, though even as her face brightened she averred that she did not wish ever to wholly forget Tom Hearst.

To Brenda, indeed, any allusion to the war was painful. She could not soon forget those first days of anxiety, and the anxious weeks of her convalescence, when it was not a question of whether she *would* write to Arthur or not, but of whether she *could*. But now, with the future spreading so brightly before them, it was hardly the time to dwell on the mistakes of the past.

XXII

THE WINNER

One morning not so very long after the wedding the old Du Launy Mansion was "bustling with excitement." This, at least, was the way in which Concetta phrased it, and if her expression was not exactly perfect in the matter of its English, every one who heard her understood what she meant, and agreed with her. Girls with eager faces hurried up and down stairs, laughing gayly as they met, even when occasionally the meeting happened to take the form of a collision.

Lois, entering the vestibule, looked at the doorkeeper in surprise. She resembled Angelina, and yet it was not she.

"I'm her sister," the little girl explained; "I'm Angelina's sister. She's going to study all the time this winter."

"Oh, yes," responded Lois absent-mindedly; "so you are to take her place."

Lois had not known the whole Rosa family, and if she had ever heard of Angelina's sisters, had forgotten their existence. Her first start of surprise, therefore, had not been strange. But now as she went upstairs she did recall the fact that Miss South and Julia had decided that Angelina's rather indefinite duties as doorkeeper and assistant were not likely to fit her for the most useful career. Taking advantage accordingly of her professed interest in nursing, they had advised her to begin a certain course of training, by which she might fit herself to be a skilled attendant. "At the end of this course you may be inclined to return to the Mansion and help us with the younger girls whom we shall then have with us." The suggestion that she might some time teach the younger girls pleased Angelina, and almost to their surprise she accepted the offer. Her letters from the school to which she had gone, though she had been there so short a time, were highly entertaining. Those who were most interested in her were glad that Angelina had made the change. She had not yet sufficient age and discretion to assume the role of mentor and patroness that she liked to assume before the younger girls now at the Mansion.

"It is no reflection upon our school," Julia had said cheerfully, "that we send Angelina to another; but we shall have younger girls in our next year's class, and Angelina herself will then be older, and possibly wiser, so that if she then tries to guide our pupils, it will not be a case of the blind

leading the blind."

But this is a little aside from the entrance of Lois into the Mansion this bright October day. After she had passed the young doorkeeper her second surprise came in the shape of Maggie, who greeted her enthusiastically as she stood at the door of the study. Enthusiasm was a new quality for Maggie to manifest, and Lois would indeed have been unobserving not to notice that the Maggie who now spoke to her was altogether different from the Maggie McSorley whom she had known six months earlier. The other Maggie had been thin and pale, and her eyes were apt to have a red and watery look. But this Maggie was rosy-cheeked and bright-eyed, and her expression was one of real happiness. Lois had no chance to compliment Maggie on the change, for, before she could speak, from behind two hands clasped themselves across her eyes, while a deep voice cried, "Guess, guess,—"

"Clarissa!" exclaimed Lois, and then with her sight restored she turned quickly about to meet the smiling gaze of her old classmate.

"I knew you were coming soon to visit Julia, but I had no idea that it would be so soon."

"I hope that you are not disappointed," rejoined Clarissa. "I hurried on account of this wonderful prize-day. But how *did* you manage to play hide-and-seek with me in Cuba. By rights we should have met at the bedside of some soldier, or at least on the hospital ship. Tell me, now, wasn't it great, to feel that one was actually saving life?" and then and there the two friends sat down on the lowest stair and began to talk over all they had gone through during the past few months, regardless of the wondering glances of the girls who passed on their way up and down.

Lois, however, spoke less cheerfully of her experiences. She had happened to help attend to a number of extremely pathetic cases, and on the whole her work had touched her very deeply. A general improvement in Miss Ambrose's condition had enabled her to accept with a clear conscience an opportunity that had come to her for a brief term of service as nurse, and her family had put no further obstacles in her way. But on the whole, though glad that she had been able to help, she had found that she shrank from certain details of the work. An observer would not have imagined this condition of mind in Lois, for her hand was always steady, her mind always alert for every change in her patient, and she was unsparing of herself. But she had learned from her experience that it would be wiser for her to shape her future studies toward a scientific career, rather than in the direction of the active practice of medicine. To have attained this self-knowledge was worth a great deal to her.

On the other hand, nursing had strengthened Clarissa in her zeal for personal service, and she had decided to add to her Red Cross training a regular hospital course for nurses.

In the midst of their eager conversation the two friends suddenly were recalled to the present by seeing Julia at the head of the stairs.

"What a lowly seat you have chosen!" she cried. "But do go into the study; I'll be there in a moment."

When she joined them Lois apologized for having come so early.

"You wrote me that this was to be the most remarkable prize-day you had ever had, and I thought that I might make myself useful by arriving this morning. But if you tell me that I am in the way, I'll bear the reproof for the sake of the pleasure I've had in meeting Clarissa. I had not realized that her visit to you had already begun."

"Oh, we didn't tell you purposely. We wished to surprise you," and then the conversation drifted naturally to their Radcliffe days.

Julia herself brought it to an end by asking her friends to go to the gymnasium, where they could make themselves useful by talking to her while she did several necessary things in connection with the award of the prizes.

"It seems to me that it's always a prize-day here at the Mansion. Didn't you have several last winter?" asked Lois. "I remember the tableaux, and the valentines, and there were some prizes for scrap-books, and dolls, and—"

"Well," said Julia, with a smile, "if competition is the soul of trade, why shouldn't it be the soul of education? At any rate, we feel that at the Mansion we can accomplish a great deal by stimulating the girls with the hope of a future reward. The prize award to-day, however, is nothing new. Prizes will be awarded on last year's record. You must remember that we promised two—one to the girl who had improved the most, who had succeeded in reaching the highest standard, and one to her who tried the hardest."

"Ah, yes, I remember," responded Lois; "but I thought that they were to be given last year."

"We were too much occupied at the end of the season with thoughts of the war. We decided to postpone the prize-day until autumn."

"It's well that you did," said Clarissa, "otherwise you wouldn't have had the pleasure of hearing me make a speech on the happy occasion," and she drew herself up to her full height, as if about to begin an eloquent oration.

When afternoon came a baker's dozen of girls assembled in the gymnasium, which was tastefully

decorated with flags, branches of autumn foliage, and long-stemmed, tawny chrysanthemums arranged in tall vases.

Besides the pupils there were present all the staff of the Mansion, but no outsiders, since this, after all, was to be a family affair—no outsiders, at least, except Clarissa; for Lois, like Nora and Amy, and one or two other friends of Julia's, were accounted members of the staff, though their help was less definite than that of Julia and Pamela and the other residents of the Mansion.

As the girls took their places in a semicircle in front of the little platform, they talked to one another in an undertone.

"I hear that the prizes are perfectly beautiful. Miss Brenda, I mean Mrs. Weston, sent one of the prizes, but I don't know what it is."

"Whom did you vote for, Concetta?"

"Oh, that's telling; we were not to tell until all the votes were counted; but I think—"

"Hush! Miss Julia's going to speak."

Then as all the eager faces turned toward her, Julia began her informal address.

"I need not remind you that last winter you were told that two prizes would be awarded at the end of the season. The first to the girl who in every way had been the most successful—whose record was really the best. The second to the girl who had succeeded in making the most of herself. Miss South and I have watched you all carefully. Every day we made a record of your improvement—in some cases, I am sorry to say, of your lack of improvement. We have talked the matter over, and have asked Miss Northcote to help us decide; and after we three had made one decision, we referred it to every other person who had lived here the past year, or who had taught you even for a short time."

Julia's natural timidity heightened perhaps the seriousness of her tone, and the faces before her grew sober.

"Now at one time, as I think I told you, we thought of leaving it to you girls to vote on both the first and the second prizes; but on second thought we have seen that the first prize ought to be based on the records that have been kept. Accordingly," and she opened a box that lay on the table before her, "it gives me great pleasure to present this case of scissors to Phœbe, as a prize awarded her for having made the best record in work and in all other things during the past year."

Now Phœbe had been so quiet a girl, so colorless in many ways, that no one had thought of her as a possible prize-winner. She accepted the scissors with a smile and a word of thanks, and passed the red morocco case around the circle that all might see its contents—six pairs of scissors, of the finest steel, ranging in size from a very small pair of embroidery scissors to the largest size for cutting cloth.

There were whispered comments in the interval that followed. One girl expressing her astonishment that Phœbe had been the winner, another replying, "Why, she never did wrong, not once; didn't you ever notice?"

Then in a little while Julia spoke again.

"We have decided to let you vote for the girl who deserves the second prize. Remember it is to be given to the girl who has made the most of herself, who has shown the greatest improvement. Each must write her choice independently on one of these slips of paper, and at the end of ten minutes Miss Herter will collect the slips."

As they wrote, the faces of the girls were worth studying. Evidently the matter was one that demanded deep thought. They bit their pencils, and looked at one another, and at last wrote the name in haste and folded the slip with the air of having accomplished a great thing. There were some, of course, who wrote their choice instantly, and with no hesitation, and waited almost impatiently for Clarissa to collect the slips. But at last the votes were in, and as it did not take long to count them, the result was soon known.

"Nine votes—a majority—for Nellie, and it is confirmed by the staff," announced Clarissa in her clearest tones. At this there was much clapping of hands, and even a little cheering, for Nellie was a favorite, and no one begrudged her the set of ebony brushes and mirror for her table. Even Concetta and Haleema seemed content with the result, although more than one of the judges surmised that the slips that bore the names of these two girls were written each by the girl whose name it bore.

There was justice in this award to Nellie, who a year before had been the most hoidenish of young Irish girls, in speech more difficult to understand than any of the others, in dress untidy to an extent bordering on uncouthness, and in disposition apparently very slow to learn the ways of an ordinary household. By the end of the season her speech had become clear and distinct, though with a charming brogue; her dress had become neat and tasteful, and she could make most of her own clothes, and Miss Dreen considered her the deftest of her waitresses. Perhaps, however, the vote would not have been so nearly unanimous had not Nellie also endeared herself to the girls by a certain sunniness of disposition. She had not made a single enemy during the whole year. But in the midst of their congratulations—from which the blushing Nellie would

gladly have escaped—the girls again heard Julia's voice.

"I have here a letter from Mrs. Arthur Weston ["Miss Brenda," two or three explained to their neighbors], who expresses her regret that she cannot be with us to-day."

Julia would have been glad to read her cousin's letter to the girls, had it not been written in so unconventional a style as to make this impossible. There were passages, however, that it seemed wise to give at first hand, and with one or two slight changes of wording she was able to read them. But first she had a word or two of explanation.

"You may remember last year, when I told you that you were to have a small allowance of money to spend each month as you pleased, I spoke of this as 'earnings.' Although we of the staff had decided that we should not criticise your way of spending it, we thought that by calling the money 'earnings,' you might take better care of it. Well, I know that two or three of you opened small accounts in a savings bank. I know that others have spent the money in useful things for their relatives at home, and more than one, I am sure, has nothing to show for her money except the memory of chocolates and oranges, and perishable ribbons and other fleeting pleasures; but we have agreed not to criticise this expenditure, and I merely refer to them because *I* know that one of your number has been called a miser, because she was so intent on hoarding that she would not spend a cent for things either useful or frivolous."

All eyes were now turned toward Maggie, and for the moment she felt like running from the room.

"But before I continue," added Julia, "I must tell you a story," and then in a few words she related the episode of the broken vase; "and now," she concluded, "I will read directly from Mrs. Weston's letter:

"You may imagine my surprise," she read, "when a letter came to me a day or two ago from Maggie McSorley containing a post-office order for twenty-two dollars. This was to pay for the broken vase with interest. It seems she had been saving it all winter from that meagre little allowance you allowed her, and to make up the whole sum she did some work this summer—berry-picking, *I* believe. Arthur and I were very much touched, and I have put the post-office order away, for I am sure that I should never feel like spending it."

"Sensible!" exclaimed Miss South, under her breath.

Then Julia continued to read from Brenda's letter.

"So of course I want to make it up to Maggie, and I am sending a twenty-dollar gold piece, which you must promise to give her as a prize, on the same day when you give the other prizes, and she's to do exactly what she likes with it. It's a prize for her having learned not to break things. But I'm writing her that I am very glad she broke that vase, for if she had not, I should never have had the chance of having the help she gave me this last, dreadful summer."

Perhaps Julia need not have read so much of the letter, though in doing so she attained what she had in mind,—to show the girls that Maggie was not a miser, and to explain why Brenda had of late shown so much more interest in her than in some of the other girls.

So Maggie in her turn was congratulated, the more heartily even, because Miss South had added a word to Julia's speech by saying that, before Brenda's letter had come, she had contemplated a special prize for Maggie, since the latter had certainly succeeded in her efforts to overcome some of her more decided faults,—"*A reward,*' rather than '*a prize,*' perhaps we should call it, but, by whatever name, equally deserved."

That evening, after Clarissa had accepted Lois' invitation to go with her to her Newton home for a day or two, Julia decided to go to her aunt's to spend the night. The family had not yet returned to town, though the house was now ready for them. A care-taker and another servant were in charge, and, weary from her exertions of the afternoon, Julia was rather glad of the rest and quiet that the lonely house afforded.

But although she enjoyed the quiet, the very freedom from interruption gave her time for disquieting thoughts. She began to reflect upon her own loneliness, upon the fact that she was not really necessary to anybody. Her uncle and aunt were kindness itself, but even they did not depend upon her.

Every one—even little Manuel Rosa—was of special importance to some one else, while among all the people in her circle she alone seemed to stand quite by herself. The thought wore upon her, and deepened when she thought of Brenda's absence. Later, when she went to Brenda's room to put away some things that she had promised to pack for her, the cover slipped from a little pasteboard box that she had lifted from a shelf. Glancing within she saw some bits of broken, iridescent glass. The sight made her smile. "Brenda's bargain," she said; "how absurd that whole thing was,—the loss of the vase, the acquisition of Maggie; and yet I am not sure," she continued to herself, "but that Brenda gained by the exchange. I am not sure but that Maggie was a better investment than any of us at first realized. She has been one of the means, certainly, by which Brenda has gained a truer knowledge of herself."

Nor was Julia wrong in this. Maggie unconsciously had helped Brenda to a knowledge of herself; for the Brenda of the past year had been very different from the Brenda of six years before. The earlier Brenda, as Julia had first known her, had been unwilling to admit herself wrong, even

when her blunders stared her in the face. But the latter Brenda had profited by her own blunders, in that she had been willing to learn from them; and though Maggie had been only one of the elements working toward Brenda's uplifting, she had had her part in the progress of the past year.

Thinking of Brenda in this light, dwelling on the affection that had so increased as the two cousins had come to understand each other, Julia became more cheerful. She felt that she no longer stood alone, for even setting aside her circle of warm friends (how had she dared to overlook them?), was she not in her aunt's household a fourth daughter, and loved as well—almost as well—as Caroline, or Agnes, or Brenda?

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