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"Eunice"

Chapter One.

Going Home.

One fair morning, a good many years ago, a number of schoolgirls were waiting at a little wayside station on the banks of the Connecticut River. They had crossed the river in a ferry-boat and were waiting for more of their number who were coming after them.

They were waiting patiently enough. It was a good place in which to wait, for the scene around them was very lovely. They were standing at the foot of Mount Tom, glorious in the morning sunshine, and looking over on the shadows which still lingered on the face of Mount Holyoke.

From the far north flows the Connecticut River broadening on its way, as Green Mountain and White send down on either hand, from melting snow-drifts and hidden springs, their tribute to its waters. Through forests and broken hill country, through meadows, sometimes broad and sometimes narrow, past town and village and lonely farmhouse, it flows before it makes a bend to pass between Mounts Tom and Holyoke, but in all its course it flows through no fairer landscape than that which spreads itself around the base of these two historic mountains.

Over all the land lay the promise of spring in the glory of cloudless sunshine. Only the promise as yet. The mountains were still bare and brown, with patches of snow lingering in hollow and crevice; and the great elms that were everywhere—in the village streets, along the roads that wound between the hills, and around the white farmhouses—showed no tinge of green as yet, but their brown buds were ready and waiting to burst; the meadows were growing green and the catkins were large and full on the willows by the brooks that hastened through them to the river. There was a soft tinge, half green, half golden, on earlier trees growing in sheltered places; and the promise of the spring was everywhere—more joyfully welcomed after a long winter than spring in the full glory of leaf and blossom.

They were thinking and speaking of other things—these waiting schoolgirls. Some of them walked about, softly speaking last words to each other, and some of them were watching the coming of the boat over the swollen waters of the river. But the beauty around them, the sweetness of the spring morning, the restful quiet on mountain and valley, were present with them all.

“Nellie Austin,” said a voice from the group that watched the boat, “do you see? Your ‘Faithful’ is coming after all.”

“My Faithful!”—and a young girl sprang forward as the boat touched the bank.

A slender girl, very plainly dressed, stepped out first—a girl with grave dark eyes and a firm mouth, which yet trembled a little as she answered her companion’s greeting.

“Faithful! my Faithful! you are coming home with me after all?”

“No, dear; I am going home to my Eunice. I thought I had better.”

“Have you heard again? Is she not well?”

“I have not heard again; but she is not very well, I am afraid. I must go and see.”

“But you will come back again? You will never, never think of not coming back!”

“Oh, yes, I hope so! I think so—unless she is really sick.”

“Oh, she is not so very sick, or you would have heard! What should I ever do without you? Now you must sit with me as far as I go. Here are the cars!”

There was no time to lose. The “cars” had come which were to carry the schoolgirls home for a fortnight’s rest and holiday. From the windows a good many people looked out with interest on the group of girls, and one said to his friend—

“They are from the seminary over the river yonder. We saw it as we came on.”

“Schoolgirls? No; they don’t look like schoolgirls. The greater part of them must be out of their teens, I should say.”

“Possibly, but all the same they are schoolgirls, though there may be a teacher or two among them.”

“Well, friend, after all that you have been telling me about your wonderful common school system, I should have supposed that the education of these sedate young persons might have been finished before the age of twenty.”

“Oh, I have no doubt that these young persons have had the benefit of common school and high school too, before they aspired to a place in the seminary over yonder; and the chances are that some of them since then have earned, either with hands or head, the means to carry them further on; and for these there can be no better place than the plain brick seminary on the other side of the river!”

“Well,” said his friend, “I can only repeat what I have said to you more than once already—you are a curious people in some ways—with your boys who are men, and your prim grave-faced young women who are schoolgirls. I should like to put a question or two to some of them, if I might.”

His friend shook his head.

“You may have a chance to do so before you leave the country, but not to-day, I think. You have no grown-up schoolgirls in *Old* England? Out of *New* England I don’t suppose we have so very many even in this country; and there are probably more in the seminary over there than in schools generally among us. It was built by special means for a special purpose. A woman built it—a woman who never owned a dollar that she had not first earned—a great and good woman. She gave herself, body, soul, and spirit, to the work of helping her countrywomen—her sisters, she called them all—who were hungering and thirsting, as she herself in her youth had hungered and thirsted, for knowledge.”

“With a view to making learned ladies of them all?”

“Learned ladies? Well, yes, perhaps—as a means to an end. You may think it strange, as others have thought; but this woman really believed His word who said, ‘Ye are not your own. Ye are bought with a price.’ ‘None of us liveth to himself.’”

“In a way, we all believe them, I suppose.”

“Yes, in a way. Well, she believed them in another way. She believed them and lived them all her life long. Learned ladies! Yes; but the keynote of all her teaching was this: ‘Not your own, but His who bought you. His for service or for suffering, for watching or warfare, for life or death.’”

“Well?” said his friend, as the speaker paused.

“Well, she is dead, and ‘her works do follow her.’”

There was no time for more. The train stopped, and several of the “schoolgirls” rose to leave. The travellers heard one “Good-bye” spoken.

“Oh, if you would come with me even yet, dear Faithful!”

“Another time I hope to go with you; but not this time.”

“Well, good-bye, my Faithful, good-bye. No, I am not going to cry, but I *will* kiss you, whatever any one may think about it.”

And then the speaker was gone. No one saw her companion’s face for some time after that. Nor did she see the receding mountains on which she seemed to be gazing. Her eyes were dim with tears which must not be allowed to fall.

“Fidelia Marsh,” said her companion at last, “what are you thinking about? Not little Nellie Austin all this time, surely?”

The young girl turned round. “I was trying to think how it would seem if I were never to see her or any of you all again;” and then she turned her face to the window, and sat silent till her turn had come to say “Good-bye.”

“Yes, this is my stopping-place.”

She smiled and nodded to those who were not within reach of her hand, and seemed to be cheerful enough in her good-bye, but she did not linger near the window when she reached the platform, as Nellie Austin and her friend had done.

It was a dreary little station, standing at the foot of a broken stony slope, with only one unfurnished house in sight. One lank official moved about at his leisure, and one embryo trader hastened to display his boxes of lozenges, and

his basket of unwholesome peanuts and last year's apples. There were doubtless prosperous villages along the wide road that crossed the railway, and pleasant farmhouses amid the high pastures and moist meadow lands hid away among the hills beyond; but the dingy house and the dull little station were all that could be seen from the windows of the cars, and Fidelia's companions said to one another that the place looked forlorn.

"And poor dear Fidelia! Does she not look forlorn as well?"

They had time to watch her as she went to claim her trunk, and they saw her shake hands with the leisurely official, who was evidently an acquaintance. But when she turned at last to the window she did not look "forlorn." A beautiful face looked up from under a big bonnet—a rarely beautiful face, delicate yet strong. There were slight hollows and a darkened shade beneath the lovely grey eyes set wide apart under a low broad forehead, and the pale rose-tint on her cheeks might have been deeper with advantage. The look of delicacy was due to the hard work she had been doing, but the strength was real, and she would last through harder work than ever she was likely to have at school.

Forlorn? No. Her face was radiant! The solemn-looking station-master had wrought the change.

"Well, Fidelia, you've got home, haven't you? Folks don't expect you, do they?"

"I didn't write that I was coming. I was not sure till the last minute. Are they all well about here?"

"Yes, I guess so. Eunice is well, any way. She was to meeting Sunday; and seems to me Lucinda said she was at the sewing-circle at the doctor's the other day. She'll be glad to see *you*, sick or well."

"I'm glad and thankful that she is well," said Fidelia softly. "I must say good-bye to the girls."

She turned quickly towards the faces at the windows.

"Have you heard good news, Fidelia?" called some one.

There was no time for words, but the joy on the girl's upturned face was better than any last words could have been, even though her lips trembled and her eyes were dim with tears.

And then the train swept on among the hills, and she who had been called "Faithful" turned her face toward her home, to get the first glimpse of the work which awaited her there. Not the work which she had been planning for herself during the last year, but her work all the same—the work which God had appointed her to do.

Declining the station-master's invitation to "go in and see Lucinda and wait for a chance to ride home," she went on her way with a cheerful heart. She followed the wide road, leading westward, only a little way. Then she went in at an open gate, and across a stony pasture, till she came to a narrow road leading at first through a thicket of spruce and cedar, where it was necessary carefully to pick her steps over the wet moss and stones, and over the network of brown roots which the spring freshets had laid bare. After a while the road began to ascend, and then the cedars and spruces were left behind, and birch and poplar and dogwood, but chiefly great maple trees, with branches high above all the rest, covered the hillside. It was up hill and down again all the way after that till the journey was done.

But she did not mind the hills or the roughness of the way. The fresh air and the free movement were delightful to her in her new freedom, and everything about her seemed beautiful. She caught sight of many a green thing growing among the dead leaves; and more than once she paused and stopped as if she would have liked to pick them. But her hands were full, and the nearer she drew to her home the more eager she grew to reach it. "I'll come again," she murmured. "Oh, I am so glad that Eunice is well!"

She reached the top of a hill steeper and higher than the rest, at a point from which could be seen a few miles of the railway, passing along the valley. Her thoughts came back to her companions, and she sighed, and all at once began to feel tired; and then she sat down to rest, and, as she rested, she took a book from the bag which she had been carrying in her hand.

"I am so glad that Eunice is well," she said to herself as she turned over the leaves. "She was at meeting, he said, and at the sewing-circle. Well, I am glad I came home all the same. And I can do something at 'The Evidences' while I am here."

She glanced on a page or two, and in her interest in them she might have forgotten her haste, and lingered, had not the sound of approaching wheels disturbed the silence a little. She rose in time to see the leisurely approach of an old grey horse and an old-fashioned weather-stained chaise. They were familiar objects to her, and some of the pleasantest associations of her life were connected with them; but her heart beat hard and her face grew pale as she watched their slow approach.

"Dr Everett," said she, "are you going to see Eunice?"

"Is it you, Fidelia? Are you just come home? No, I am not going to see Eunice. Is she not well? She'll be glad to see *you*, sick or well," added the doctor, as her other friend had done.

He was out of the chaise by this time, and offering his hand to help her over the crooked fence. But, instead of taking it, she gave one glance in the kind good face, and laid her own down on the rough bark of the cedar rail and burst out crying.

"It was full time for you to come home, I think, if that is the best greeting you have to give your friends. You've been overdoing, and have got nervous, I guess," said the doctor, moving aside first one rail and then another from the fence, to make it easier for her to get over.

“Oh, no, Dr Everett, it is not that! Nervous indeed! I don’t know what it means. Only I’m so glad to get home, and—so glad that Eunice is well—”

If she had said another word she must have cried again.

“Well, never mind. Get into the chaise, and I’ll drive you home; and then I’ll see about Eunice and you too.”

It was ridiculous, Fidelia told herself. It had never happened in all her life before. But it was more than she could do for awhile to command her voice or stop her tears. The doctor made himself busy with the harness for a little, and, having left his whip behind him, he cut a switch from a hickory-tree beside the road; and by the time he was ready to get into the chaise Fidelia was herself again.

“Have you been having a good time?” asked the doctor presently.

“Yes, indeed! I have enjoyed every minute of it. And I have been perfectly well, Dr Everett. I have never lost one recitation.”

“I suppose you have been at the head of the class and have got the medal.”

Fidelia laughed. “I’m not the best scholar by a good many. But I have got on pretty well.”

“Well, you have got up a step, I hear.”

“I have been taking some of the studies of the second year. My Latin helped me on, and—other things. And—I mean to graduate next year.”

“Do in two years what other girls are expected to do in three or four, and injure your health for life doing it? That would be a poor kind of wisdom, little girl.”

“Oh, I haven’t been doing too much, and I don’t mean to! But you know, two years means more to Eunice and me than it does to most people. Oh, it will be all easy enough! I was well prepared. You see Eunice knew just what was needed.”

“Yes, and Eunice is a good teacher.”

“Isn’t she?” said Fidelia eagerly. “I haven’t seen one yet to compare with her. Oh, if Eunice had only had my chance!”

“Softly, little girl! Your chance, indeed! Dear Eunice is far beyond all that sort of thing. She has had better teaching.”

“Yes; but Eunice would have liked it. You know she was at the seminary one of its first years. And she would have gone on. She told me the last night I was at home that it was years before she could quite give up the hope of going there again. And I don’t see why she shouldn’t. She is not thirty-two years old yet; and it was not just for young girls that the seminary was built; and—”

“My dear, Eunice has got past the need of all that. It would be like sending you and Susie back again to the old red schoolhouse, to send Eunice there.”

The doctor had cut his hickory stick, but he had not used it, and old Grey had been moving on but slowly. There was still a long hill to climb before they reached the spot where Fidelia could catch a first glimpse of home. Old Grey moved slowly still, but neither of them spoke another word till he stood still at the door.

It was a low wooden house, which had once been painted brown; but the weather-stains on the walls, and the green moss and the lichens on the roof, made its only colouring now. It had wide eaves, and many small-paned windows, and a broad porch before the door. A wild vine covered the porch and one of the windows, and the buds were beginning to show green upon it. The house stood in a large garden, which might be a pretty garden in the summer-time, but nothing had been done to it yet. The sunshine was on it, however, and it was beautiful in Fidelia’s eyes. She had lived in this old brown house more than half of the eighteen years of her life; she had been faithfully cared for and dearly loved; and there were tears in her eyes, though her face was bright, as she went in at the door.

HOME GREETINGS. *Page 24.*

“You are coming in, Dr Everett?” said she.

“Yes, I am coming in. Do you suppose Eunice has a glass of buttermilk for me this morning?”

“If she has not, she has got cream for you, I am quite sure,” said she, laughing.

Then they went in, and, finding no one, they went through the house to the garden beyond, where a woman with a large white sun-bonnet on her head was stooping over some budding thing at her feet. She raised herself up in a little, and came towards them, closely examining something which she held in her hand. So she did not see them till she came near the door where they stood. As she glanced up and saw them a shadow seemed to pass over her face. The doctor saw it; but Fidelia only saw the smile that chased it away.

“My little girl!” said Eunice softly.

Fidelia hid her face on her sister’s shoulder, and no word was spoken for a minute or two. Then they went into the house, and Fidelia said, with a little laugh,—

“I got homesick at the last minute, dear, and so I came home.”

“All right, dear. If you could spare the time, it was right to come. I am very glad.”

The doctor got his buttermilk and cream as well, but he sat still, seeming in no hurry to go away. He listened, and put in a word now and then, but listened chiefly. He lost no tone or movement of either; and when Fidelia went, at her sister’s bidding, to take off her bonnet and shawl, he rose and took the elder sister’s hand, putting his finger on her pulse.

“Are you as well as usual these days, Eunice?” said he.

For an instant she seemed to shrink away from him, and would not meet his eye. Then she said, speaking very slowly and gently,—

“I cannot say that I am quite as well as usual. I meant to see you in a day or two. Now I will wait a little longer.”

“Had you better wait?”

“Yes, I think so. I am not going to spoil Fidelia’s pleasure, now that she is at home for a few days, and I will wait. It won’t really make any difference.”

“Eunice,” said the doctor gravely, “are you afraid of—anything?”

A sudden wave of colour made her face for the moment beautiful. Tears came into her eyes, but she smiled as she said,—

“No, not afraid; I hope I should not be afraid even if I should be going to suffer all that I saw her suffer.”

“Eunice, why have you not told me before? It was hardly friendly to be silent with any such thought in your mind.”

“Well, it is as I said. A little sooner or later could make no difference.”

“And because you did not like to make your friends unhappy you ran this risk.”

The doctor was standing with his face to the door at which Fidelia at the moment entered, and his tone changed.

“Well, to-morrow you must send your little girl down to see my little girls, unless they should hear of her home-coming, and be up here this afternoon. No; they shall not come, nor any one else. You shall have this day to yourselves. And mind one thing—there must be no school-books about during vacation time. Miss Eunice, I will trust to you to see to that.”

And then he went away.

Chapter Two.

The Sisters.

“Are you really well, Eunice? You don’t look very well,” said Fidelia, kneeling down beside her sister, and looking wistfully into her face. “Are you sure that you are well?”

“I am pretty well, dear. I have been about all the winter pretty much as usual. Who has been telling that I have not been well?”

“No one has written, in so many words, that you were sick. But you don’t seem to have been about among the neighbours as much as usual, and you have given up your class in the Sunday school.”

“Yes, I gave it up for a while, but I have taken it again. I thought I had better give it up in the beginning of the winter, as I could not be quite regular, because of the bad roads. And Mr Fuller—the new teacher—could take it as well as not. He was glad to take it; and he is a born teacher. He has done good work among the boys on Sundays and week-days too. But he has gone away, and I have my class again. Was it because you thought I was sick that you came home, dear?”

“Well, I wanted to be sure about you. And I got homesick when I saw the other girls going. I am glad I came: I can help in the garden.”

“Yes; and ten days in the garden will do more good to your summer work than ten days at your books could do. I am very glad you have come home.”

“I only brought one book. I must take a little time for it. Now I will get dinner if you will tell me what to do. I am hungry.”

“Of course you are. And I can scarcely wait to hear all you have to tell me.”

She did not need to wait. Fidelia laid the table, talking all the time as she went from pantry to cupboard; and Eunice listened as she prepared the dinner with her own hands—as she did every day, for there was no “help” in the house. It was a very simple meal, and it was spread in the room in which it was prepared.

It was the winter kitchen and the summer dining-room—a beautiful room, perfect in neatness and simplicity, and in the tasteful arrangement of its old-fashioned furniture. There was a “secretary” of dark wood, which might have “come over in the *Mayflower*” between the windows, with a bookcase above it; there were a tall clock and two carved armchairs, a chintz-covered sofa which looked new beside the rest of the things, and a rocking-chair or two. There were pretty muslin curtains on the windows, and pictures on the walls; and except for the stove that stood against the chimney-place one might easily have mistaken the room, and called it the parlour, for there was no trace of kitchen utensil or kitchen soil to be seen. The utensils were all in the “sink room” which opened near the back door, and the soil was nowhere.

All the house was beautiful in its perfect neatness. Everything in it was old, and some of the things were ancient, and had a history. A story could be told of oak chest and bookcase and bureau. Some association, sad or sweet, clung to every old-fashioned ornament and to every picture on the wall.

“I don’t believe there is so pleasant a house in all the state as this is,” said Fidelia gravely.

Her sister smiled. “You have not seen many of the houses in the state,” said she.

“But I have seen several. And I think I know.”

They had the long afternoon to themselves. The elder sister had something to tell about the quiet winter days, many of which she had spent alone. She said nothing of loneliness, however; she called it restful quiet. She had had visitors enough, and every one had been mindful and kind, from Judge Leonard, who had sent his sleigh to take her to church on stormy Sundays, to Jabez Ainsworth, who had shovelled her paths and fed her hens and cow all the winter, and left her nothing troublesome or toilsome to do. She told of the work which had occupied her, the books she had read, and the letters she had received and written, and enlarged on several items of neighbourhood news which she had only had time to mention in her letter.

Then Fidelia had her turn: nothing that she could tell could fail to interest her sister as to the months in which they had been separated. Her studies, her friends, her room-mate, little Nellie Austin, the youngest pupil in the school; the teachers, the school routine, household affairs—all were full of interest to Eunice, who had been a pupil herself long ago; but she listened in silence to it all. Even when Fidelia began to plan a new life for them when her school days should be over, and she ready for work, she only said “Yes” and “No,” and “We must wait and see.” Fidelia was too eager in her speech and in her plans to notice the silence at the moment, but she remembered it afterwards.

The next morning Fidelia was awakened by a kiss from the smiling lips of her sister.

“Breakfast is ready,” said she.

“You don’t say so? And I meant to be up to get the breakfast myself?”

“You did better to sleep on.”

“I woke at five; and, oh, it did seem so good to shut my eyes with no dread of the bell, and so I went to sleep again!”

Eunice went out and in while her sister dressed; and the talk flowed on till breakfast was over and all the things put away. Eunice listened to it all with mingled feelings, rejoicing in her sister’s eager interest and in her success, but at the same time missing something for which she had longed and prayed, and for which she was telling herself that she must wait patiently a while.

Then Fidelia went out to the garden to see what was to be done there. She walked up and down the broad path, considering ways and means of planning how the very most could be accomplished during the fortnight of her stay.

“It will take most of my time; but I am glad I came, and I shan’t oversleep another day. For, whatever Eunice may say, she is not strong.”

The garden could not be neglected. Half their living came from the garden and the adjoining fields, where their pretty brown cow was patiently searching among the last year’s tufts of grass for some sweeter morsel. The pretty creature came to the fence to be petted and praised, and her mistress did not disappoint her.

“How much do you suppose your cow understands of all you’re sayin’ to her?” said a voice at her elbow.

Fidelia started.

“Oh, she understands! Good morning, Jabez;” and she held out her hand to a tall loose-jointed lad, with a sunburnt, boyish, but very pleasant face, who had come up the hill from the meadow unseen by her.

“You look *well*,” said he, after a moment’s examination of her face.

“Thank you,” said Fidelia, laughing.

“I mean, you don’t look sick,” said he.

“Why should I? What have *you* been doing this winter?”

“I have been at school. We had a new teacher—a chap from Amherst—one who has to teach and pay his own way. Yes, I got along pretty well—studied hard, if you can believe it.”

“Well, what have you done?”

“*Oh*, a little Latin and history of the United States! I could pass on that *now*, I guess. And I’ve got through the first three books of Euclid, and in Algebra I got through quadratic equations.”

She had spoken in a cool, indifferent way, but his eyes sparkled as he looked up.

“Well done, Jabez! I am glad. I must examine you some day.”

“Come on!” cried Jabez, throwing down the hoe he had been carrying. “I’m ready. Examine all you want to.”

“Oh, I don’t mean just this minute, but some time before I go! How is your grandmother these days?”

“She’s pretty well. And that makes me think that I promised her to help churn; I’ll have to be going. I came up to talk a little to Miss Eunice and you about the garden. I don’t suppose she’ll do much in it this year, since you won’t be here.”

THE WINTER KITCHEN. Page 34.

“I shall help to make it while I am at home, if the weather will let me. But your help will be needed after. Come and speak to my sister.”

They went into the house, and found Eunice preparing to make the bread which she had mixed early in the morning. Fidelia set the rocking-chair for her sister, and took the making of the bread into her own hands.

“About the garden, Miss Eunice? What are you going to do about it?” said Jabez.

“I shall want some help, I suppose—a good deal of help. Can I depend on you, Jabez?”

“Well, I’ve been talking a little with grandpa about what I want to do this summer. He wants me to work along with Mr Grimes for a spell. You know, Fidelia, Grimes has got grandpa’s farm on shares this year, and he would like to hire me.”

“Well, and why not?”

“I can do better—that’s about it.”

“And what do you wish to do?”

“Well, that’s just what I want to talk about.”

“I shall be glad to have your help when you can be spared,” said Eunice.

Jabez seemed to have a difficulty in sitting quietly in his chair. He fidgeted about, and let his hoe fall, and then picked it up and carried it out into the porch; then laid his cap on the floor, and straightened himself up, and said gravely,—

“Look here, Miss Eunice, I guess it won’t hurt anybody just to have a little talk about it. I want you to let me have your garden this summer—on shares if you say so; but I’d rather pay rent for it.”

“Why, Jabez, you surprise me!” said Eunice gently.

Fidelia laughed.

“Go on, Jabez. Tell us all about it.”

“Well, I will. In the first place, I want to show grandpa that I *can* do something; and, in the second place, I want to make some money this summer. I think I see my way clear to do both, if things happen right.”

“And what do you want money for?” asked Fidelia.

“Oh, well, I guess ’most everybody wants money! But look here now. I have not told grandpa yet—it wouldn’t help me with him, but I’d as lief tell *you* two as not. Supposin’ we have Mr Fuller here again next winter, I’m willing to go to school here, and do chores for Miss Eunice and at grandpa’s next winter, as I have this winter. But if he doesn’t come here, I’m going to Scranton Academy. And if I *do* go, I expect I’ll have to help pay my own way.”

Fidelia nodded and smiled.

“But your grandfather? You must consult him, Jabez,” said Miss Eunice, gravely.

“I mean to—after a spell. But it isn’t best to worry him with too many new ideas at once. Now see here, Miss Eunice—this is the whole concern. There was a lot of city company in our town last summer, and the cry among them was for fresh fruit and garden sass. There’s going to be more of them here this summer, down the street in the hotel, and over at the Corners, and all around. This part of the state’s got to be quite popular with city folks, and I should like to have the chance to supply them early.”

“But do you know anything about a garden?” asked Fidelia, greatly interested.

“Well, yes. Grandpa has kept me pretty close to work in ours. I’ve been down to the judge’s some, too; and Sandy Scott, his gardener, has given me a good many hints, and has promised to see to my work a little. I am not afraid, not a mite. And if you’ll let me have your garden, grandpa’ll let me have his, I guess; and between the two I can make something, I know.”

“I should have to think about it first, Jabez.”

“Oh, yes. I am not in a hurry for a day or two.”

“And I shouldn’t like to do anything that your grandfather might object to. I should have to talk with him about it.”

“And what about your grandmother’s churn in the meantime?” Fidelia added.

“That’s so! I’d ’most forgot it. I must hurry up. Here’s the doctor!”

Fidelia was gently patting the loaf she had just put into the pan as the doctor came in.

“Good morning, Miss Eunice! Fidelia, *that* is after all the true woman’s work. ‘Loaf-maker’—or is it loaf-giver?—is the true derivation of ‘lady,’ they say. But I hope you have nearly done. Her mother could not spare Susie to come up this morning, so I promised I would send you down.”

“I should like to go, but—”

“Cannot you spare her, Miss Eunice? You can walk, Fidelia, you know, and when I come back from the Corners I’ll bring your sister down with me, if she will let me; and Susie shall drive you both home in the evening.”

When the doctor had driven off, Jabez once more looked in at the door.

“There is no particular hurry, Miss Eunice. Only I’ve had my hot-beds all agoing three weeks ago, and I’d like to know as soon as ever you’ve made up your mind.”

“To-morrow, perhaps, I’ll let you know about it,” said Miss Eunice.

When her sister had gone, Eunice moved about the house, giving a touch here and another there, till her bread was ready for the oven; and then she set the front door wide open and sat down in the porch, for the day was as bright and warmer than yesterday had been. She had much to think about. It did not take her long to decide that Jabez should have the garden, if his grandfather did not object. She had not strength for the garden now, and Fidelia would have a better visit. How bright and eager the child was, and how much she had accomplished!

“I knew she would do well; and I must not be discouraged, though she has not yet caught the spirit of the place. She has been so intent on her work, that she has given herself no time to think of higher things. But His time will come. ‘One thing have I desired of the Lord’ for my darling, and He will grant it, *that* I know, whether I shall see it in this world, or wait till we meet in the next, where her mother and mine await us both.”

She closed her eyes, and sat motionless till the sound of wheels reached her ears.

“The doctor! I will not go down with him, and I hope he will be willing to wait till Fidelia goes before he speaks. I will go out to the gate, and he may not come in to-day.”

She rose and stood waiting for him at the gate.

“Well, Miss Eunice, what do you think about going down with me? Do you feel like it?”

Eunice smiled, and shook her head.

“I think not, doctor. My bread is not all baked yet.”

“What is this I hear about the garden? Are you going to let Jabez have it, as he wishes it so much?”

“Hadn’t I better, doctor? Without Fidelia it would be too much for me, I am afraid. I could work in it a little for exercise, even if Jabez had it.”

“Yes, I see. I should not wonder,” said the doctor; but his eyes were turned to the clouds that hung over the distant mountains, and he was thinking not at all of Jabez and the garden. His face was very grave.

“What a good face it is!” thought Eunice, as she watched it—“a true friend’s face!”

It was a good face, strong and kindly—a face to inspire confidence. It was brown and weather-beaten, and showed many wrinkles, and the soft waving hair above it was as white as snow. But it was not an old face. The eyes were soft

and bright, and the smile that came and went so readily upon it gave it a look of youth. Eunice could not remember the time when he had not been good and kind to her, and she loved him dearly. But she was a little afraid of him to-day. In a little, his eyes returned to her, standing at the gate.

“Miss Eunice, what am I thinking about? You must not stand there in the wind. I will go in with you. I am not in haste to-day. What is this I hear about your garden?”

But Eunice knew that it was not of Jabez or the garden he was thinking, as he followed her into the house. She went out of the room, and returned with a glass of milk on a tray, and her hand trembled as she set it down.

It was of Jabez and the garden that they spoke first, however. Eunice told all that he had said, and the good reason he had for wishing to make money during the summer.

“And he’ll do it too—school and college and all—I should not wonder!” said the doctor. “There seems to be a terrible hunger for knowledge among our young people these days. I am not sure that I like it. I am afraid of it.”

“Oh, doctor, you do not mean that?” said Eunice.

“In a way I do. Knowledge! No, I don’t object to the knowledge. But I have a great respect for many of the tanned faces about us, and for the hands that have been hardened by the plough and the axe. ‘The profit of the earth is for all. The king himself is served by the field.’ And I have no respect at all for those lads who take to their books and to a profession because it seems a step upward, or because such a life seems to promise an easier time. I don’t like to see our farmers’ boys turning their backs on the fields their fathers have tilled.”

“But there are more boys than there are farms, I doubt,” said Eunice, with a smile.

“Yes, that is so. But there are farms enough in the country for them all. And there is no one to take the deacon’s farm but Jabez. However, we may hope that ‘the profit of the earth’ will seem more to him after he has sowed and reaped for his own benefit.”

“I think Jabez would make a scholar. It is in him to succeed.”

“Possibly. Oh, yes, he is a smart boy! If he has got the notion, he’ll go ahead with it. He’s not a bad boy either, though the grandfather has had—or rather has dreaded—trouble with him!”

And so they talked on for a while about the garden and other things, till the doctor rose as if to go away; and then he said, speaking very gently, just what Eunice had all along known that he came to say—“Do you think you had better wait any longer, Eunice?”

“I suppose it will make me no worse to know just how it is,” she said faintly.

“It will be far better to know all that can be known. I cannot but think you may be dreading what will never come to you. You have had a lonesome winter. And you have had a hard life, dear.” Eunice smiled, but shook her head. “I don’t think I have been very lonesome. And I have not had a hard life—taking it all together. Think how happy my life was till I was twenty!”

“Yes, dear, I know. And since then it has been more than happy. It has been a blessed life of help to others. But it has been a hard life too, in one way. Let us see now how it is with you.”

“But first let me say one word,” said Eunice, laying her hand on the doctor’s arm. “I don’t think I am afraid. I think I am willing that it shall be as God wills. But it may be long; and I will not, while I can help it, have my Fidelia know what is before me. And, doctor, I shall need your silence and your help—”

“To deceive her?”

The doctor sat down again and covered his eyes with his hand for a moment.

“To deceive her,” repeated he, “and to break her heart afterwards with unavailing regret?”

“Oh, she will have to know after a while, but—not as long as we can keep it from her!” There was silence for a minute or two. “Well, we will wait and see. I will not speak to her till you shall give me leave to do so.”

Then there were a few grave questions, and a few quiet replies; and then the doctor said,—

“Take courage, Eunice! I would say to almost any one else, ‘There is no cause for anxiety.’ But having known so well the last years of your grandmother’s life, I can hardly say you have nothing to fear from the disease that was fatal to her; but I do say that, as far as I can judge from your present condition, you may reasonably hope for a good many years of comfortable health. You should have spoken to me sooner, and spared yourself a time of anxiety.”

He did not see the look of relief on which he had counted—at least he did not see it for a moment.

“Thank you, Dr Everett,” she said at last. “And now nothing need be said to Fidelia.”

“Why do you fear for Fidelia? Your sister is braver and stronger than you think.”

“Oh, I think she is brave and strong! It is not that. But I want her to have two or three untroubled years before the work of her life begins; and then—”

“And what is the work of her life to be? Is she to choose it for herself, or is it to be chosen for her, as your work has

been? Eunice, don't you think you may be too tender with your sister? Don't you think that the Lord has her and her life in His keeping, and that you need not take that burden on you?"

Eunice smiled. "We are bidden to 'bear one another's burdens,' you know."

"Yes; and we are told that 'every one shall bear his own burden.' You cannot shield your sister from all the troubles of life, and it is not well that she should be so shielded. However, all this will keep for another time; and I am more than thankful that there is nothing specially painful to tell her now." And then he asked—"Will you come down with me, as I promised the girls you should?"

"Not to-day, I think. I will rest, and be ready for Fidelia."

She was very tired, the doctor knew by the wavering colour on her cheek; and he shrank from the thought of telling her something which he wished no one but himself to tell. Afterwards, when he had spoken, he said to himself that he need not have been so much afraid.

"Eunice, I heard from my brother Justin lately. He is coming home. He is on his way. He may be here any day."

"Is he coming home at last? I am glad—for you especially. All his friends will be glad to see him again."

She spoke quietly and cordially, just as any of his friends might have spoken. Then there were a few more words, and then he went away.

Eunice waited till she heard the latch of the gate fall, and waited still till the sounds of his wheels died away in the distance. Then she rose and took her last loaves from the oven, and carried them away to their own place. Then she went slowly upstairs and laid herself down on her bed to rest. And there Fidelia found her sleeping, with the traces of tears on her face, but with God's own peace resting upon it also.

Chapter Three.

Eunice.

Eunice Marsh might well say that the first seventeen years of her life had been happy years. Her father, a man useful and much beloved, had during that time been minister of the only church in Hopeville, a town in the southern part of the state. She had lost her mother when she was a little child, but her loss had been well supplied by the love and care of her mother's mother, with whom she had lived, in the house that was now her home, till the time of her father's second marriage.

Her new mother did not love her own little daughter, when she came, more dearly than she loved Eunice, and so the happy years moved on to a sorrowful ending. Suddenly, in the midst of happiness and usefulness, with no warning which those who loved him could understand, the minister died. Then Eunice returned to her grandparents home on the hill, and her stepmother, with her little daughter, came there also, to stay for a little while; and they never went away again.

It was not a very large house, and the old people were far from being rich, but they offered the widow a home while she needed one. She did not need it long. She never quite recovered from the shock of her husband's death, and she died within the year, leaving her little girl to her sister Eunice, "to love and care for always—to be her very own."

"And, dear, I am not afraid to leave my little darling with you," said the dying mother with a smile.

After a while happy days came again to Eunice. Why should she not be happy? Those who had gone from her had only "gone before," and those who remained were very dear; and life was before her—a mystery!—but a mystery of gladness and blessing, as she believed.

Dr Everett had been the minister's classmate in college, and his life-long friend; and when the minister died, he became the guardian and the life-long friend of his daughters. In his house they found a second home, and from him Eunice had the counsel and the guidance which in their old age, and with their failing powers, her grandparents could no longer give her.

Strong, eager, ambitious, it would have pleased the girl well to be allowed to choose her own lot and work, and to make her own way in the world. But she was dutiful, and she loved her little sister dearly, and so she was willing to be restrained and guided, and to give herself to work which seemed at first very humble work, which almost any one might do, but which was God-given work—a blessing to others and to herself, as time went on.

Happy? Looking back over those first years, Eunice told herself that no one could have been happier than she was then. Yes, and afterwards also. For that which made much of the happiness was not taken from her at a single blow, nor was she called upon to choose between her duty and her happiness all at once. She knew there was no choice for her.

When Justin Everett, the doctor's youngest brother—and, like him, a physician—saw his way open to go West to an uncle, to establish himself with him in his profession, Eunice might have gone with him as his wife, if circumstances at home had been different. But it was impossible. There was no choice to be made, and nothing to be said.

Her grandfather had been stricken helpless, with little hope of ever being otherwise than helpless. Over her grandmother, younger than him by many years, hung an awful dread. She too must die, but she might be years in dying. Some one would have to watch by her dying bed, as she in her youth had watched by the dying bed of her

own mother, till the slow months wore on to years, before her tired eyes closed at last in painless rest.

No one needed to say to Eunice that she could not leave her grandmother to be cared for by others while she went away to find her own happiness. She never even paused to consider the matter. It was impossible. Her lover thought quite otherwise, and pleaded with her with words which made her glad, and which hurt her sorely, but which did not move her from her purpose. Over one thing only she hesitated. Should she give him back his word before he went away?

“No,” said Dr Everett; “you are both young. Wait.”

And so she waited, and was not unhappy. No woman can be unhappy whose life is lived not to herself but to others. Her service was truly willing service, and was its own reward. She had cares many and heavy, weary nights and anxious days, but she had kind friends who took care for her and helped her; and her cares, and labours, and daily self-denials, and the hourly sight of her grandmother’s faith and patience, and of her joyful release at last, did for heart and soul more than many prosperous years of untroubled happiness could have done.

The long suffering came to an end at last. Her grandmother died, and Eunice was left so spent with doing and watching, and so glad for the blessed release of her whom she loved so well, that she hardly seemed to feel the pain of the bitter blow that smote her afterwards—at least that was what her friends whispered among themselves. Even Dr Everett took comfort in the thought that she might have outgrown her girlish fancy during these long years that had changed her into a woman. But Dr Everett did not know then that the news of his brother’s engagement and approaching marriage had come to her two days before it had reached him, and that during these two days no one but her paralytic grandfather had seen her face and heard her voice. Even the child Fidelia had been sent away “for a change,” as she had more than once been sent away during the last months of the grandmother’s life; and Eunice’s battle with herself—if there was a battle—had been fought alone.

But, whichever way it was, it was not a matter about which many words could be spoken. She made no moan and she claimed no sympathy. She was “just as usual,” as far as he could tell, Dr Everett said, in answer to his wife’s questions when he returned from his first visit to the house after the news had been received. Even to her old friend she had made neither complaint nor confession; but he knew that she suffered, though she kept silence.

“It will make it easier for Eunice in one way,” the neighbours said to one another. “Eunice could hardly have gone away while her grandfather lived, and this has made the path of duty plain before her.”

But whether “the path of duty” was rough or smooth to the weary feet of Eunice no one ever knew from her lips. She was not unhappy, that was certain. She had the daily and hourly care of her grandfather to fill her thoughts and occupy her hands, and when he died she had an easier time and could rest. And she had Fidelia.

She had an easier life; but she could not sit idle at home, or go elsewhere for change or pleasure, as others might who had not their daily bread to earn. The means which her grandparents had provided for their old age had been nearly spent during their long illness. There was the house and garden and a field or two, and that was almost all; and Eunice chose to stay at home and make the best of them, rather than do any of the things which her friends were so ready to advise, and which she might have done. She might have nursed the sick, or taught a school, or worked with her capable hands or her clear head in one of the many ways open to New England girls; but she would not be separated from her sister, and she chose to stay at home.

“I will stay for awhile at least,” she said to Dr Everett when he spoke to her about her plans, and hinted that a change might be desirable for various reasons. “There is no hurry about it, I think; and just for the present I would rather stay at home.”

And the time had never come for her to go elsewhere, or to change her manner of life in any way, and it had lately been gradually revealing itself to her that the time could never come. She was beginning to say to herself: “That which I greatly feared has come upon me.”

All the long suffering through which she had seen her grandmother pass seemed to lie like a thick darkness upon her. Even before the departure of her sister for school she had felt or imagined symptoms, which she thought she could not mistake, of the terrible disease which had appeared at intervals in some member of her mother’s family for several generations; and there is no wonder that for a time her courage, and even her faith, failed her.

She was wrong to conceal her fears from Dr Everett. But she said to herself: “He cannot help me. If I am mistaken—if I am only nervous and over-anxious, it will pass away in time, with suffering to no one but myself. If the danger is real, nothing—no one can help me, not even my dear old friend.”

Even more than she dreaded the long suffering she dreaded the helplessness and weariness of illness, and the dependence upon others which it must involve. She shrank morbidly from the thought of becoming a centre of painful interest to her friends and to the neighbourhood; and she resolved to say nothing either of her suffering or her fears while concealment was possible. So, during the first months of winter, making an excuse of the cold, she stayed at home, and, when chance visitors came to her, exhausted herself with efforts to seem well and cheerful in their presence, and bore the long suffering of suspense alone.

Alone? Well, she thought so for a time. She wrote herself down as “a woman desolate and forsaken,” and it went ill with her—but only for a time. Even in her darkest moments she had never quite forgotten the refuge to which she might betake herself, and she found it at last.

After a time light broke through the darkness, and she caught a glimpse—not of the way—but of His face whose hand was leading her. The way mattered little. He knew every step of it, and its ending and the rest to which it led, and why should she fear?

It cannot be said that she no longer shrank from the thought of the long, slow suffering that might be before her; but she could after this leave it all with Him “who loved her and gave Himself for her,” and who would give her strength to bear His will.

When the sharpest winter weather was over, and the days began to grow long, she fell into her old cheerful ways again. She busied herself with her housework and her needlework, and went to church and to the sewing-circle, as the man at the station had said. She saw her friends more frequently; and the neighbours, seeing the sweet content on her face, “guessed likely that she was having a good time all by herself up there on the hill.” And so she was; and neither friend nor neighbour imagined that she had anything to conceal. Nor did Dr Everett himself, until the day when he met Fidelia, and brought her home. Then he lost no time in finding out all there was to know.

That morning, as he went slowly down the hill to his home, he more than once repeated to himself the words he had spoken to Eunice,—

“I see no special cause for anxiety,”—but each time he added gravely—“as yet.” And then he lost himself in musing on the terrible mystery of inherited disease and suffering, and only came back to Eunice again when he caught sight of the bright face of Fidelia standing at his own gate.

“Poor soul! Poor Eunice! So good and wise and lovely! What a fate is to be feared for her! And yet I am not sure that her strong and beautiful sister is so happy as she.”

And Eunice was smiling a little over the words which the doctor had tried to make so hopeful, scarcely taking from them the comfort which he meant her to take.

“No anxiety!” repeated she. “Well, it is quite true. Why should I be anxious? It will be all right. I am glad he came, and that the visit is well over.”

And then she put away the last of her warm white loaves, and went slowly upstairs to rest for awhile.

When Fidelia came home in the afternoon she found her sister sleeping, and she saw something which she had rarely seen before—the traces of tears upon her cheeks. But as she stood looking down upon her—even before her eyes opened—a smile came to her lips.

“Well,” she said softly, as Fidelia stooped to kiss her, “have you had a good time?”

“Don’t you feel well, Eunice?”

“Just as usual. Why have you come home so early?”

“It is not so very early. We had tea sooner than usual, because— Lie still awhile, and I will make your tea.”

“I must have slept long, if it is time for tea. Oh, yes, I feel quite well! You must tell me all about your visit when I come down.”

Fidelia went to the window, and as she rolled up the blind and let the light of the sunset into the room, she said, without looking round,—

“Eunice, who do you think has come to Dr Everett’s? His brother Justin.”

“Has he come already? The doctor told me this morning that he expected him, but he did not say when.”

She came forward to the glass and began to arrange her hair, which had fallen down, with the full light of the evening sunshine on her face. Fidelia made herself busy about the room for a minute, and then, turning to the window, stood regarding her sister.

Eunice was just as usual, except for the traces of tears upon her cheeks; and Fidelia was not even sure of the tears now.

“And did you see him? Has he changed much? Do you like him?” asked Eunice, busy still with her hair.

“Yes, I saw him. Changed? I can’t say. I don’t remember him. No; upon the whole, I don’t think I shall like him much.”

Eunice turned and looked at her, smiling.

“Oh, you’ll like him! I am not afraid of that.”

“Eunice, did you know that Justin Everett was coming home?”

“His brother told me this, morning. Of course I knew that he would come some time. I shall be glad to see him.”

“Will she be glad?” Fidelia was saying to herself, while she made ready her sister’s tea. “Will she truly be glad? Has she forgiven him, or has she forgotten him? I would give a great deal to know her thoughts this minute. Oh, I hope I shall be with her when he comes to see her first!”

A single word had done this—her sister’s name, spoken by Mrs Everett, when her husband told her that his brother was coming home. They did not know that she heard it. She was greatly startled and a little angry, though she could not have told why. In that friendly neighbourhood she could hardly have lived so many years without hearing some hint of the trial through which her sister had passed in her youth; and imagination came to the help of memory, and made her more angry still. She would not have remained to give the new-comer welcome if he had not taken them all

by surprise. She only saw him at the tea-table, where he sat, grave and almost silent, scarcely raising his eyes from his plate. She had not lingered a moment after the tea was over.

She was present at the first meeting between Eunice and Justin Everett, as she had hoped she would be, but it did not tell her much. It took place in unfortunate circumstances. He came up next morning, and, finding no one in the house, passed through into the garden, where he found Deacon Ainsworth and his grandson Jabez discussing with the sisters the important question, “Should Jabez have the garden?”

Jabez had intimated to his grandfather that Miss Eunice would like to see him about business if he could “step up” there some morning pretty soon; and the deacon had lost no time, and Jabez “had thought best to happen along so as to see the thing through,” as he told Fidelia in confidence. They had “talked the matter over” in the house without his help; now they were talking it over with it in the garden. In the house the deacon had got so far as to acknowledge that he saw no vital objection to Miss Eunice letting her garden to his grandson. In the garden he was not so certain. It would need steadiness and perseverance, and these Jabez might fail in, even with himself to keep the boy up to the mark.

“And if he should fail in doing well by you, Miss Eunice, I should rather feel as if you’d expect me to make it good to you. And I don’t know but I should feel as if I ought;” and so on. And then Dr Justin appeared.

The greetings all round were pleasant and cordial; and then it was supposed by Fidelia that the deacon would go away. But he had known Justin Everett all his life, or at least his “youthful years,” as he said, and never doubted that it was his duty and his privilege to give him welcome in his neighbour’s house as if it had been his own. So he rather took matters into his own hand, and “led the meeting,” as Jabez afterwards said. Fidelia was indignant. Eunice was not indignant. She was in her heart grateful to the good deacon for “assisting” at the occasion, though she might not have been quite pleased with his motives.

“I kind o’ wanted to know how it was going to be with Eunice, so I stayed,” he told his wife afterwards; but he owned that he didn’t know much about it after all. “If it had been the old doctor himself, I don’t know how she could have talked any other way to him. Friendly? Oh, yes, she was friendly and cool, but not too cool nor too friendly! Be you certain that Justin Everett’s wife is dead, Asubah?”

“Well, I declare for it! How you talk!” exclaimed Mrs Ainsworth. “As if you don’t know as well as I do that she’s been dead these two years and more! I hope to mercy you didn’t go to saying anything of that kind up there. I *should* like to see Fidelia Marsh’s eyes if she heard any such insinuations about her sister.”

But the deacon, though he had taken the lead in the conversation, said nothing indiscreet to Fidelia or any one else, and he rose to go at last, but not until Dr Everett came to take his brother away to see a patient.

Jabez in the meantime had, by an effective movement on the onion-bed, taken formal possession of the garden. He did not see, or he did not seem to see, his grandfather set out for home, and continued his work then and afterwards to such good purpose, that he had so strengthened his position as to leave nothing more to be said or done when in a few days his grandfather “stepped up” again, to talk the matter over. Fidelia was for many reasons glad that it was in his hands, but she could not reconcile herself to the deacon for having so utterly spoiled to them all the first visit of Dr Justin.

And she was not at home when Dr Justin made his second visit, and his last at that time. One night she came home from a long walk with her friend, Susie, to find her sister, as she almost always found her in the twilight, resting on the sofa, and this time again she thought there were traces of tears on her cheeks. After a little she was not so sure about the tears, but she was sure of the peaceful brightness of her sister’s smile of welcome, and of the sweet words with which she greeted her.

Chapter Four.

A Visit.

“A good place to rest in,” Fidelia Marsh was saying to herself, as she passed with her friend Nellie Austin under the great elms whose boughs met over the one long street which makes the larger part of the inland town of Eastwood. “A good place to rest in,” she repeated, when the chaise drew up before the door of the large house which was her friend’s home.

The house was one of the great square homesteads, built in the early days of the Commonwealth, and it stood in the morning sunshine just beyond the flickering shadows of the elm-trees in the street. It stood at a point where two ways met; and the south door opened on the wide road that led away to the hilly country beyond, and there were great elms there, too, to cast their shadows over porch and doorway when the room grew hot. A wonderful old grape-vine covered the porch, and there were lilac and locust-trees and rose-bushes by the white fence which enclosed a smooth green yard on three sides of the house. Beyond was a garden with fruit-trees and tall hollyhocks and great bunches of phlox, and a row of bee-hives facing the south; and that was all that Fidelia saw before she passed into the porch, to meet a kindly welcome.

Only at the last moment had she accepted her friend’s oft-repeated invitation to visit her in her home, and she had accepted for the same reason which had made her refuse it before. It was for the sake of Eunice. Fidelia had done well at the seminary during the summer term as far as study was concerned. She had done “splendidly,” her classmates declared with admiring exaggeration; but all the same, she was beginning to think she had done foolishly —to say no worse.

She had undertaken too much for her summer's work, and had been allowed to go on with it as perhaps no other girl there would have been allowed. Study seemed so easy to her, she was so ready and strong and cheerful, and altogether so sensible, that she had been left to pursue her own way with less close oversight as to health and strength than was usual at the seminary, and she had not proved herself worthy of being trusted in that direction. She had not needed to relight her lamp when the house was at last silent, nor to study by moonlight, but she had often stolen hours from her morning slumbers, and had carried her book to her walks and into her hours of recreation, and even into the morning and evening "half-hour" which is supposed by all concerned to be given to higher things.

Of course she had overdone it, and had failed at last. Or she thought she had failed, because she had at last done wearily and with an effort what she might have done easily and with secret triumph if she had been strong and well, "with all her wits about her." She had not failed in the opinion of her classmates, or even of her teachers. She had at examinations done as well as the rest—better than most; but she had taken little pleasure in her success, and she was afraid of what Eunice might think of it all.

For of course Eunice must hear all there was to tell. She could keep nothing back from Eunice, even if she would; and in her heart she knew that her sister's thought would be, that she had missed more than she had gained by her over-eagerness to succeed. And, looking at her pale cheeks and her big eyes in the glass, she determined at least to spare her sister the pain of seeing her till she had rested awhile, and looked like herself again. So she had at the last moment written to Eunice, and had made Nellie Austin happy by coming home with her.

She was heartily welcomed by all in the house, and not as a stranger. For Dr Austin had known her father and mother long ago, and Dr Everett was also a friend of his.

It was a good house in which to rest—cool and quiet and well-regulated, stirred only by the mild excitement which the comings and goings of Nellie's three young brothers made.

But though Fidelia rested she was hardly content. She was not at peace with herself nor at ease in her pleasant surroundings. Nellie had many friends to see after her long absence, and went here and there as happy as a bird, but, cautioned by her father, she did not urge her friend to go with her, and for the first few days left her much to herself. Dr Austin watched Fidelia quietly during this time, wondering a little where the charm was which had caught the heart of his volatile little daughter. This pale listless girl was little like the bright scholar who had carried all before her in her classes, and whose kindness and cheerfulness had been a help and refuge for the homesick and the easily discouraged among them. But he waited patiently. She had been doing too much, and needed rest and quiet and fresh air. If her lassitude continued many days longer, then, he told his wife, he would have something to say to her.

In the meantime Fidelia, half conscious of their observation of her and of their disappointment in her, was much ashamed of herself and anything but happy, and wished with all her heart that she had gone straight home to Eunice.

"At home, with something to do, I should never have been so stupid. To-morrow I will find some work. It is because, for the first time in my life, I have nothing to do that I feel so good-for-nothing."

"Suppose you go a-fishing with the boys to-morrow. They will like to have you go, and it will do you good," said a cheerful voice behind her, when she had got thus far.

Fidelia rose from the doorstep, and faced the speaker. It was cousin Abby Chase, who had come into the porch, and seated herself in a low chair with a bowl of raisins in her hand.

"I WAS JUST WISHING FOR SOMETHING TO DO; LET ME HELP YOU."
Page 69.

"I was just wishing for something to do; let me help you," said Fidelia.

"Well, if you would like to, I shall be glad of your help."

She took off her own spotless apron and gave it to Fidelia, and soon returned with another. Cousin Abby was a distant relation of the Austin family, who had come to live in the house in the young days of the doctor's mother, first as help and then as housekeeper, and always as valued friend. She was an old woman now, and blest with a wisdom which does not always come with years. She was willing to place herself aside, and to acknowledge that the work which she had done so long could be done better by others now.

If it had cost her anything to give up the work and the responsibilities which had filled her life for so many years, no one knew it from any word of hers. She was sweet-tempered and intelligent. She had always "loved good reading," as she said, and within certain limits she was well read. In the course of many Sunday afternoons she had read—a chapter or two at a time—the books of such of the grand old Puritans as found a place in the doctor's library. The "Missionary Herald" and "The Puritan" were always sent first to cousin Abby's room, and there were few of the questions, sectional or doctrinal, discussed in the one, and few of the missionaries or mission-fields presented in the other, during the last twenty years, with which she was not familiar. In the labourers in more than one mission-field she took personal interest, and gave good help to them in many ways. Her Christian influence was felt in the family, and extended beyond it. There was no one in the town of Eastwood who held a higher place in the general esteem or who deserved it more than did cousin Abby Chase.

"We are expecting company," said cousin Abby; "and Mattie had a bigger wash than ordinary, and so I thought I'd better set to and make some cake and things to-day, to help along."

"Company?" said Fidelia, her face betraying her doubt as to the pleasure of the prospect.

"Yes. We generally do have considerable company, summers, though we have been alone for a spell lately. We don't trouble about company much. They take us as they find us mostly; but just to-day they are Boston folks that are coming, and I wish we had known it sooner. Mrs Austin had a little rather be prepared for such folks."

"You must let me help you," said Fidelia. "I don't know much about such things—except just plain cooking; but I can do as you tell me."

And so she did, to good purpose.

“You take hold as if you knew how,” said Miss Abby admiringly.

They had a long busy morning together in the front kitchen, and amidst the beating of eggs and the rolling of paste much pleasant talk went on between them. It was almost as good for Fidelia as a talk with Eunice would have been. When, later, Dr Austin passed through the room, he stopped a moment to shake his head at the array of good things which greeted both nose and eyes.

“They look good, don’t they?” said Fidelia.

“Y-es,” said the doctor, with a shrug. “The question is, are they wholesome?”

“Oh, yes; they are the best of their kind! If they are used in moderation, they won’t hurt anybody,” said cousin Abby. “Miss Fidelia must be a good scholar if she studies as well as she works.”

“Do you?” said the doctor. “Well, never mind. The work has done you good; and I hope Abby will take you in hand and find you more to do another day.”

The work had really done Fidelia good. She folded her apron, and turned to her favourite seat in the south porch with a lighter heart than she had had for a long time. But her spirits fell again as she reached the door.

“The company” had arrived—“and a great deal of it,” Fidelia thought, at the first glimpse of the flowing garments of a group of ladies who had just alighted from a carriage, and were lingering on the lawn. She glanced down at her faded alpaca, which had been her second-best dress during the whole of the school year, and wished herself at home.

She was hot and tired after her work; and when she heard Nellie Austin’s voice calling her name, she made haste to get upstairs before she should be seen. But she could not resist the temptation to turn into cousin Abby’s room, from the window of which she could get another glimpse of the strangers.

They were not all strangers. By the side of one of the ladies, carrying her parasol and shawl, walked Dr Justin Everett. But it was a different Dr Justin from him who had sat constrained and silent at his brother’s table that first night, and who had responded so gravely the next day to Deacon Ainsworth’s untimely congratulations and questions. His high head was bowed as he listened, and he responded with smiles to his companion.

Then Nellie’s voice was heard again, calling,—“Faithful, my Faithful, where are you?” and what Fidelia would have liked to do would have been to hide in cousin Abby’s closet, or to run down the back stairs and take refuge in the kitchen again. She did not do either. She laid herself down on cousin Abby’s sofa, and shaded her face with a big feather fan that lay at hand. Nellie entered the room on tiptoe.

“Are you asleep, Fie? Are you sick?” said she softly.

“I am neither the one nor the other, though I might have dropped off in a minute or two if you had not come in to disturb me. Have you been in the front kitchen? Have you seen the nice things that cousin Abby and I have been making? I am a little hot and tired, that’s all.”

“Tired! I should think so! I am ashamed that I was not here to help you. You ought to rest; but it is nearly dinner-time. And, oh, Fidelia, I wish you would put on your white dress!”

“My white dress, indeed! That would be striking twelve o’clock too early in the day, my dear. I must save my white gown for Sunday. Yes, I know you want to show your friend at her best. It’s very good of you. But I shall do you more credit in my every-day wear. And, after all, don’t you think my gown looks as well as yours?”

“But they have seen me before; and, besides, I’m nobody.”

Fidelia laughed.

“Well, I don’t feel as if I was anybody in particular. No, dear, I’m not cross. I am going to be as entertaining as possible, and do you credit. And, besides, there’s the dinner-bell. It is too late now to think of changing anything.”

A pleasant surprise awaited her, and she found it easy not to be cross. Not only Dr Justin was there, but Dr Everett himself, returning home with his brother from the first brief holiday they had enjoyed together for many a year. She came into the dining-room with him, and sat beside him, and feared no stranger of them all.

“Tell me about my Eunice,” she said softly, as the talk flowed on around them.

“Eunice is all right. I am not sure that I shall be justified in saying the same to her about you. Are you well, child?”

“As well as well can be. Yes, I got thin and pale; but so did a good many others. It is a way they have over there, towards the end of the year. I came here to freshen myself up a little before showing myself to Eunice. When are you going home, Dr Everett?”

“I am going to-morrow. No, you cannot go with me. I am going round by W—, and shall not see home for two days yet.”

“Oh, dear, I am sorry—that I can’t go with you, I mean! It would be a good excuse to get away—to go with you. I promised to stay ten days, but I am getting homesick.”

“You had better keep your promise. Your sister has company just now, and does not need you.”

“Yes, I know; but that is one reason why I should be at home. Eunice must have too much to do.”

“No, she has not. It is Ruby Stone who is doing now. Don’t worry about Eunice. She is in good hands. Mrs Stone loved your sister before you were born; Eunice is all right.”

There was nothing more to be said, but Fidelia was by no means sure that she would not shorten her visit; and her next thought was that she need not see much of the visitors while she stayed. But she did see a good deal of them.

That night it rained. There could be no wandering under the elms by moonlight. It grew dark early, and chilly, and a fire of dry wood was made in the sitting-room, partly for the warmth and partly for brightness. The elder people gathered round it, and a great deal of pleasant talk went on among them.

The visitors—besides the two doctors—were Mr and Mrs Abner Kent, their daughter Ella, and their niece Miss Avery. They were from Boston, and belonged to one of the “first families” of that chief city. They were rich—so rich that, like the king and preacher, they might have possessed themselves of “whatsoever their eyes desired.” They had done something in that direction, their neighbours were inclined to think, for they had travelled much on both sides of the sea, and had brought home many of the rare and beautiful things which only much money can buy. Miss Kent was tall and dark, with a good face; Miss Avery was beautiful—small and fair, with shining curls, and pretty, coaxing ways; but Fidelia liked Miss Kent’s face best.

By-and-by several friends of the Austins came—the Rev. Mr Porson and his daughters, whom Fidelia had seen before, and others whom she had not seen. From the corner where she sat in the shadow she watched them all with great interest. She was listening to the talk that was going on between Dr Everett and the minister, but she lost nothing of all that was passing before her eyes, and all the time she was having her own thoughts about these people.

They were not just like Halsey folks, among whom she and Eunice had passed all their lives. It had been said of the town of Halsey that there were more good people in it, in proportion to its population, than in any other town in the county—perhaps even in the state; and Fidelia was of course bound to believe it. But though the Halsey people might be very good, they lacked something, Fidelia acknowledged, which these people had.

She thought of her friends at home, and tried to imagine one and another of them—Deacon Ainsworth and his wife, and Miss Green and her uncle the squire, sitting in the midst of these people. Eunice, with her plain dress and her plain ways, would have small chance of being understood or appreciated among them.

But Fidelia pulled herself up mentally when she had got thus far. Eunice, indeed! In all that was worth knowing or being, which of these ladies could compare with Eunice?

And yet it must make a difference to live such a life as most of these people lived—a life without hard work or pressing care, with time to enjoy reading, and study, and travel, with a chance to enjoy the sight of all that is grand and beautiful in nature and art. Even Eunice, good, and sweet, and superior to most people as she was—even Eunice would have been a little different in such a life.

Standing at the other end of the living room, smiling down upon Miss Avery, who had touched his arm to attract his attention, stood Dr Justin Everett. Miss Avery had a request to make, it seemed, and when he shook his head, seeming to refuse it, she clasped her pretty hands, and urged it eagerly. Whether her request was ultimately to be granted or not, did not appear. In the meantime they seated themselves in the window-seat, a little withdrawn from the rest, evidently content.

Fidelia could not withdraw her attention from them. She watched them with a feeling in which was both anger and pain rising in her heart. “Eunice,” she thought—“would Eunice care?” and she hated herself for thinking it, and put up her hands to hide the angry colour that she felt rising to her cheeks.

“Miss Faithful,” said a voice near her, “cousin Abby says you want to go fishing with us to-morrow. Do you?”

“Yes, indeed I do,” said Fidelia, rising and turning to the boy who had spoken.

“You have got a new name, my dear,” said Dr Everett, who had been watching her face unseen—“a new name and a good one.”

Fidelia nodded.

“Amos wants to see you, if you do,” said the boy. “He is in cousin Abby’s room. Can you catch fish?”

“I have done so, but I cannot boast of much skill,” said Fidelia. “I would like to try. Let us go and see Amos.”

So they went together to cousin Abby’s room. It did not take long to make all necessary arrangements. The chief thing was, that an early start should be made, and also that a good lunch should be put up. Fidelia laughed at the idea of her being too tired to follow the brook—to its source even, if that should be necessary; and she quite won the hearts of the three boys by her delight at the prospect of the day’s pleasure.

“Nellie ought to go,” said Amos. “She would like to go, I’m sure, but she can’t leave her company. They might go too, I suppose; but I guess city girls wouldn’t care about fishing.”

“I think it will be better for us to go by ourselves to-morrow,” said Fidelia. “It doesn’t do for too many people to go fishing together.”

“And girls especially. They will talk,” said Amos.

Fidelia laughed. “I won’t talk. You’ll see how quiet I can be.”

Chapter Five.

A Day’s Fishing.

An early start to Smellie’s Brook was accomplished, and in circumstances even more favourable than had been anticipated. Dr Everett had risen early and breakfasted with the fishing party, and he volunteered to drive as many as could “pile in” to the double buggy to the nearest point on Smellie’s Hill that could be reached on wheels. The elder boys were inclined to refuse the offer; but the doctor said,—

“The fields are wet with dew, and the lunch-basket is heavy; and you must consider that you have a lady with you.”

“Well, I guess we’d better go in the buggy a part of the way,” said Amos, the leader, after awhile.

The dewy fields would not have been agreeable to walk in, but they were beautiful to see, and so were the woods, into which after awhile the narrow road took them. The boys’ eyes were quick to see and their ears to hear, and the sights and sounds of the early morning were not lost upon them. Fidelia was silent, but her spirits rose as she listened to the talk between the doctor and the boys; and she laughed as merrily as any of them before they reached Smellie’s Hill.

“If you don’t feel as if you were going to have a good time, Fidelia, you can drive back again with me, and let the boys go on alone,” said Dr Everett, as he stopped at the steepest part of the hill to let the boys alight.

“Go back with you! No, indeed! I *am* going to have a good time. I feel better already.”

“You look better. I am glad you came. And look here, little girl, don’t you worry about Eunice. Don’t you know that nothing in the world can hurt Eunice? If there is any room for anxiety between you, it is Eunice who might worry about you. But she doesn’t, and need not, I hope. At any rate all is well with Eunice.”

A shadow fell on Fidelia’s face, and her eyes drooped beneath the doctor’s glance.

“Yes; she tells me she is pretty well now, but—”

The colour which the morning air had brought to her cheeks deepened as she looked up and met the doctor’s eye, but she said no more, nor did he. They had by this time reached Smellie’s Hill, and the doctor was going no further.

“If I had had time to think about things, I believe I should have taken the day and gone with you to the brook,” said he, as the boys were taking basket and rods from the buggy.

“Oh, couldn’t you possibly come?” said Fidelia eagerly; and the boys joined their entreaties to hers. It was not to be thought of, however, for he “was due elsewhere.” They watched him as he drove down the hill, and he would have smiled if he had heard all that was said of him before they took up their baskets and rods again.

Then they turned and took the path through Smellie’s pasture that leads to the woods and the rocky ledge beyond; and when they came within sound of the murmur of the brook, they hastened their steps.

“Fall and spring it is like a river, though it doesn’t look much now,” said Amos, as they came in sight of it.

It did not “look much” truly. A brooklet winding its way among rocks and stones, over which one might leap or even step at most places, but with here and there a pool which looked dark and deep enough to be the hiding-place of many a speckled beauty. And they had good proof of this before the day was done.

It was a good day for Fidelia; in the success and in the enjoyment she had a full share, though she acknowledged to herself that she did not deserve either. As the time went on she became more and more ashamed of the morbid feelings which had made her so eager to get away from the house and from all who were in it.

What was the matter with her? Was she envious of those other girls, who led such easy lives and had so many advantages? Could it be that she was so utterly ungrateful as to forget how full of good things her life had been made by the sister who had had so little in her own life but labour and care for others, yet who had accepted her lot, not with submission merely, but with sweet content and cheerfulness? Was it for Eunice she was jealous? Remembering the sudden indignation which had seized her at the first glimpse she had got of Dr Justin, smiling down on the pretty upturned face of Miss Avery, she could not deny it. Even now she grew angry as she thought about it.

Would Eunice have been angry if she had seen them? Had she suffered very much in giving up her happy prospects long ago? And afterwards, when she knew that another had taken the place in Justin Everett’s home which ought to have been hers, had she suffered? Had she forgiven him, or had she forgotten him? They seemed to be friends now—she knew that from her sister’s letters: would they ever be more than friends? That would be the right ending, Fidelia thought, but the thought did not give her unmixed pleasure.

“I should lose Eunice,” she said to herself; “and I am not sure that I like her Dr Justin very well.” And then she laughed—“I am getting on pretty fast, I think. Well, I can wait. Eunice will tell me at the right time if there be anything to tell. I won’t worry about her. Dr Everett is right. Nothing in the world can hurt Eunice much. I only wish that I were like her.”

Did she really wish it? She was not sure, and she was not ready to consider the question at that moment.

All these thoughts had been passing through her mind as she followed Amos along the margin of the brook; and when they stopped at Big Rock to arrange where each one was to go, not one was more eager and pleased with the prospects of the day than she.

The sky became overcast, which was a matter of rejoicing; the same could not be said of the threatening rain. But not enough fell to do any harm, and for fishing the day was pronounced perfect. When there are four rods, and only one basket for the fish, even moderate success tells quickly; and before Franky "guessed it was most time for lunch," there was a good show of trout.

It was decided that, to save time, they should not make a fire and feed upon the fish, but content themselves with what was to be found in cousin Abby's basket, which they might very well do. But they forgot about saving time, for they fell into a real boys' talk,—about hunting and fishing and adventures of all kinds, which made them forget how time was passing, and then they found that Franky had fallen asleep with his head on Fidelia's lap.

"I think we must let him have his sleep out," said Fidelia; "you remember, cousin Abby said we must be careful not to let him get too tired. You two go away to your fishing, and when Franky wakes we will follow you up the brook."

"But it is too bad you should lose your sport," said Ned.

"He won't sleep long. And, see, I have a book."

So the boys set off, and Fidelia had a quiet two hours with her book,—which ought to have been Butler's "Analogy," considering her next year's work at the seminary, but which was "Astoria"—much more appropriate for the time and place. Franky woke rested and much the better for his nap, but indignant at being allowed to lose so much time. But he forgot his vexation in the pleasure of listening to a story Fidelia told, and which lasted till they came in sight of Amos, happy and successful as ever, but a little tired also. So they sat down to rest and enjoy another lunch, and to talk about things in general.

Fidelia knew how to talk to boys. She knew every tree in the woods, and the note of every bird which chirped among the branches. She knew something about most plants that grew in field or wood, so there was no danger of falling out of talk. The boys were interested in what they heard, and each had something to tell. By-and-by Franky said—

"How many brothers have you, Miss Faithful?"

"Not one! I never had a brother."

"Well, they would have had good times, if you had."

Fidelia laughed—"I am not so sure. I have one sister."

"Yes, I know—Miss Eunice," said Amos.

"Yes, my Eunice. She is all I have got, and she is better to me than two or three brothers."

"Yes, I know," said Amos, nodding his head; "I heard Dr Everett talking about her with father. Oh, no, it wasn't doctor's talk; only how good she is, and how much she thinks of you!"

"Why do they call you Faithful?" asked Ned.

"No one calls me that but Nellie, and you must ask her why."

"I suppose it is because you never shirk," said Amos.

Fidelia looked grave.

"I don't deserve it for that reason," said she.

"You know Jabez Ainsworth, don't you?" said Amos.

"Oh, yes; I have always known him! We are good friends."

"He is a smart boy, isn't he?"

"Yes, he is smart, and good, though he gets into trouble now and then. He is seventeen."

She told them an amusing story or two about Jabez—about adventures which he had had and trouble into which he had fallen when he was a little fellow, because of a determination to get his own way. She ended with an account of his last venture in taking Eunice's garden for the summer, so as to make some money, because he "was bound to put himself through college, and *be* somebody."

Amos listened in silence.

"Do you suppose he'll do it?" said Ned.

"I think so. Oh, yes, he is sure to succeed! His grandfather will help him, perhaps, when he sees that he is determined to be educated. But, whether he helps him or not, Jabez is bound to succeed."

"I wonder if the hardest things aren't the easiest after all!" said Amos. "I mean, that we don't always care much about what we can get without much trouble."

“He means, *he* don’t care about going to college,” said Ned; “but father means he shall.”

“Oh, yes, I suppose I shall go! But I’d a good deal rather go West to Uncle John’s great farm.”

“You can do both,” said Fidelia.

“It takes five years to get through Amherst College.”

“Well, you can spare them. You are young. How old are you?”

“I was fifteen in May.”

“Only fifteen! I thought you were older than that.”

Amos looked pleased.

“How nearly are you ready for college?”

“I might go this fall; but father thinks I had better wait a year. I don’t care.”

“I think so too—if you don’t care. Next year Jabez may go too. I only wish he had your chance—and yet I am not sure. He may do all the better for having to work his way through. But for one to have your chance, and not to care for it, that I cannot understand!” added Fidelia gravely.

“My father is not a rich man,” said Amos.

“No—not as Mr Kent is rich. But an education such as he is able and willing to give his boys will be worth more—if they take the good of it—than all Mr Kent’s money would be. You don’t realise, your privileges, young man.”

She said a good deal more than that. Amos had heard much of it before, but somehow it sounded differently repeated by this girl with laughing lips and shining eyes, and with now and then a touch of only half-conscious scorn for the eyes that would not see and the hands that did not care to seize the chances for which others were eager to strive. Amos had not much to say as they rose and turned homewards.

By-and-by they stopped to rest, leaning for a little on the crooked fence on the brow of the hill, from which more than one tree-shaded town could be seen, and many cultivated fields and rough pastures, and broken stretches of woodland, with the light of a wonderful sunset lying on them all. It was a fair scene, suggestive of peace and plenty and contentment; and, looking on it, Fidelia lifted up her voice and sang—

“My country, ’tis of thee, Sweet land of liberty—Of thee I sing!” and so on to the end. Amos looked up amazed, and at the second verse struck in a true boy’s second. So did Ned; and even Franky, climbing up to the top rail of the fence, tuned his shrill pipe with the rest.

Of course they sang “My Country” to the tune which belongs to it—a tune which with these words, and with other words, has stirred and thrilled patriotic breasts on both sides of the sea for many a year and day. Fidelia and the Austin boys called it “America,” but on the other side of the sea it is called “God save the Queen.” They sang it there on the hill-top, with all their hearts. Then they sang “The Star-spangled Banner” and “Hail! Columbia!” as they took their way through field and wood; and more besides, till tired old ladies, rocking themselves in their chairs and taking their rest at open doors caught the sound and smiled; and boys and girls, milking their cows in pasture corners, paused in their work to listen.

Tired? That was the very last thing they were thinking of as they passed the south porch, on their way to the kitchen with their fish. Fidelia nodded and smiled to the party sitting there, waiting to be called to tea, but passed on to the kitchen with the boys, where the fish was displayed to the admiring eyes of cousin Abby and the doctor.

“And so Miss Fidelia did not scare away the fishes, as girls generally do?” said cousin Abby.

“I guess she didn’t. I tell you, she knows how!” said Ned.

“She’s first-rate,” said Frank.

Fidelia laughed—“I have had a good time. I should like to go again some day.”

“And why should you not? And Nellie shall go next time. I don’t believe she has had so good a time at home,” said the doctor, as his daughter came in.

“Oh, yes, I have had a pretty good time! But I should like to go fishing with the boys and Fidelia next time. You feel better, don’t you, Fie?” said Nellie, as they went upstairs together; and her friend assured her that the day’s tramp with the boys had done her good.

On the bed, as smooth as cousin Abby’s skill in ironing could make it, and adorned with here and there a knot of ribbon which Fidelia had not put on, lay the white dress which was “to be kept for Sunday.”

“I thought I had better have it all ready,” said Nellie hurriedly, “as I thought you might be late. We are going to have company this evening—just the Newtons, and Conways, and a few others. Mother thought she would like Mrs Kent and the girls to see some of our friends, and this was the best night for them to come. I am sorry it happened so, for you must be tired—though you don’t look tired.”

“I am not a bit tired. And don’t look so troubled, child. Oh, yes, I’ll wear the white gown—red ribbons and all! I’ll do

my best to do you credit."

"How you talk, Fidelia! But I do want you to look nice. Father says—"

But what her father said Fidelia was not to hear. A knock came to the door, and cousin Abby entered with a tray.

"Doctor said Miss Fidelia had better have her tea up here, and rest a spell till the company come. She mustn't get too tired, you know," said the old lady, smiling.

"Well, there! I might have had the sense to think of that myself, and saved you the trouble," said the delighted Nellie.

Fidelia said nothing, but she cleared a place on the table for the tray, and thanked the old lady with a kiss.

"If you should drop asleep for half an hour it wouldn't hurt you any," said Cousin Abby as she closed the door.

And, in the midst of her questioning as to why these people should be so kind to her, Fidelia did fall asleep, and woke only when, an hour later, Nellie returned ready dressed and eager to help her—

"You look quite nice!" was all Nellie allowed herself to say to her friend as they went downstairs together. "Now they'll see for themselves whether she is beautiful or not," she was saying to herself; but she knew it would not be wise to say it to Fidelia.

Of course Miss Austin had to be ready to receive their friends; and Fidelia fortunately found Amos entertaining the minister with an account of the day's sport and the pleasures of a day among the hills.

"Here is Miss Fidelia. She knows all about it," said the boy; and they had a pleasant half-hour together.

Nellie's triumph began when Judge Newton asked her whether the tall girl standing talking to the minister was the beautiful Miss Avery they had heard so much about. More than one asked the same question.

"Oh, no," said Nellie demurely, "that is only my room-mate, Fidelia Marsh! Wait till you see Miss Avery."

And she had another little triumph when, drawn towards the piano by the exquisite touch of Miss Kent, Fidelia almost unconsciously put out her hand to turn the page of the difficult music she was playing, and kept on turning it to the end. It was the look of surprise which passed between Miss Kent and her cousin that delighted Fidelia's friend.

"You play, do you not?" said Miss Kent, rising.

"Not as you play. Oh, please don't go yet!" said Fidelia earnestly.

"Sing something, Ella," said her cousin. "Sing this"—laying a song open before her. "No, Miss Marsh. I will turn the music. You must only enjoy it."

And Fidelia did enjoy it, as she had seldom enjoyed music before; growing pale and red by turns, as the thrilling voice rose and fell. For the moment the enjoyment was perfect. When it ceased, Fidelia would have slipped quietly out of the room. Miss Kent rose.

"You sing, I am sure, Miss Marsh?"

"No," said Fidelia gravely; "I do not sing."

"Fidelia!" exclaimed Nellie.

"No," repeated Fidelia; "I don't sing. I have only just found it out."

"And what is this Amos has been telling us about your starting the echoes among the hills on your way home to-night?" said Dr Everett, who had drawn near.

"*I* think you can sing," said Amos. "Oh, yes, I can sing to please Amos!" said Fidelia, trying to speak lightly, but troubled under the eyes of those who had gathered round the piano, and more troubled still by the rush of her own vexed thoughts.

"Is it envy?" she was saying to herself. "Is it pride and jealousy and discontent? Am I going to disappoint Eunice, after all? Oh, I am not good!"

She did not know who proposed it, or how it happened, but in a little Miss Kent seated herself at the piano again, and the young people gathered round her, "to sing something they all could sing,"—a much more enjoyable affair to most uneducated singers than just to sit and listen to fine music. Of course they began with "The Star-spangled Banner;" and if Fidelia's voice did not ring out quite as it had rung out to please the boys among the hills, it still caused the Boston cousins to exchange surprised glances, thus giving the watchful Nellie another moment of delight. They did not sing long, however; and when Miss Kent rose again, Fidelia moved away to the other end of the room, believing that the pleasure of the evening was over for her.

But it was not. She found herself in a little listening with much interest to the minister and the judge as they discussed a question which had come up before the last ministerial association of the county, and thinking it would be something to tell Eunice about when she went home. In the midst of it a voice said,—

"Miss Fidelia, I have a message for you from your sister."

“From Eunice?”—and she turned to see Dr Justin Everett standing beside her.

“Yes. I went to Halsey with my brother this morning, and have only just returned. We called to see your sister on our way.”

“She is well?”

“That is part of the message she sent to you. She says you are not to hurry home, as my brother seemed to think you meant to do. You are to stay and have a good time. She does not need you in the least. No; that is not part of her message. But she is going with Mrs Stone to pay a visit of a week over in Northwood, and you are to stay here till that is over. She will write fully to-morrow.”

“I am glad she is strong enough even to think of a visit to Northwood.”

“Yes; and Mrs Stone will take excellent care of her. The change will do her good. And your change will do you good also.”

“It has done me good already.”

Then he gave her another message from his niece, Susie Everett, and told her several items of Halsey news; and then some one came to interrupt their talk; and then the evening went on as all such evenings do, until the guests rose to go away. And Fidelia was saying to herself, while she listened to Nellie’s remarks on things in general, that Eunice and Dr Justin were good friends again, and she was not sure whether she was glad or sorry that it should be so.

Chapter Six.

Discontent.

In looking back on it afterwards, and in talking it all over with her sister, Fidelia could hardly decide whether she had had more pain or pleasure in the week which followed. It was a time she did not like to think about. There had been no real cause for pain, she acknowledged. She had acknowledged as much as that at the time, and she had known that she ought to be ashamed of herself.

That she—Fidelia Marsh—should have a single uncomfortable moment over a faded dress, or the appearance of a last summer’s bonnet, was humiliating—she who had never cared about her clothes! She had never thought much about her clothes in any way. Eunice had always done that for her, as she had done other things. At home she had thought herself as well dressed as her neighbours. At the seminary there had been no time to think about dress; and there had been other faded alpacas there as well as hers. Why should she think about her clothes now? She was ashamed of herself. But it was not clothes altogether. She did not “fit in” among these people. They were different from her—or, rather, she was different from them.

Everybody was pleasant and kind. Miss Avery even, whom she liked least, was especially friendly—she seemed to seek her out always. She sat with her on the lawn in the morning, and in the evenings brought a stool and sat at her feet, while they listened to Miss Kent’s music. They walked and talked together; and why should she not like Miss Avery, who seemed to like her and to wish to be with her? Why should she shrink from her questions about Eunice and their home life, and their friendship with the Everetts, and answer them briefly, and go over all that had been spoken between them in her own thoughts afterwards, in fear of having said something that she ought not to have said?

She liked Miss Kent, though she was a grave and silent person who did not seem to have much to say to any one. They had their love of music in common, and Fidelia was grateful for Miss Kent’s quietly given hints on that subject, and profited by them. She was at her ease with her, but she was not at ease with Miss Avery.

“And why not?” asked Nellie Austin, to whom she one day made the admission. “I’m sure she seems to think everything that is good about you. To-night, when you were sitting together, before the lamps were brought in, Mrs Kent said what friends you seemed to be; and Dr Justin said what a picture you made, sitting there in the fire-light.”

“Yes, I guess so! The picture of a hen and a humming-bird!” said Fidelia, laughing. “If he saw anything but Miss Avery and a feather duster it is a wonder. I have no doubt Miss Avery realised how pretty the picture was, as well as he. No, I am not cross nor sarcastic either, and I am willing to act as a set-off to her now and then, if it is to do her any good. But I can’t just say I like quite so much of that kind of thing.”

“Fidelia,” said Nellie gravely, “we shall have to let you go fishing again with the boys.”

“Yes, let us go. Is it too late to make a plan for to-morrow? We should have to make an early start.”

“It is too late to plan for to-morrow. Amos has gone to bed. And, besides, we couldn’t go to-morrow; we are going to Colonel Green’s. And the day after to-morrow we are all going to the Summit; and those who like can go by the way of Smellie’s Brook, and go to the Summit by the other path.”

“Well, I will go with the boys, and you had better come with us. That was the most delightful day I have had in Eastwood—the day I had with Amos and his brothers at the brook.”

“Thank you, for myself and all the rest. Faithful, what is the matter with you these days?” said Nellie, laying her hand gently on her friend’s hair, “There is something the matter, is there not, dear?”

“There must be, if you say so; but I can’t tell you what it is. I must be ‘gettin’ kind o’ nervous,’ as Deacon Ainsworth says of his wife. It’s queer, isn’t it? I, who never knew there were nerves, until I learned it out of a school-book! I guess I want Eunice. She’ll set me all right. I never had any bad feelings yet that she couldn’t deliver me from, in one way or another. Oh, yes; I shall be all right as soon as I see my Eunice!”

But she was not quite sure of it, even when she said it.

The next day, instead of going with the rest to pay a visit to friends in a neighbouring town, Fidelia chose to stay at home and help cousin Abby with her preparations for the expedition to the Summit, as the highest hill in the neighbourhood was called, and had a better time than if she had gone with the rest. She enjoyed helping Miss Abby, and she enjoyed her talk while the work went on. For Miss Abby Chase saw clearly—had all her life seen clearly—many things which eyes intent only on personal interests might easily have overlooked. Her talk did not flow on in “a straight stream,” so as to become wearisome; but now and then a remark was made, or a word of advice given, or a bit of personal experience told, of which Fidelia made a note, saying to herself: “I must remember to tell Eunice that. How Eunice would like to hear cousin Abby talk!”

They had not, for various reasons, been ready to begin “in the cool of the morning,” as was Miss Abby’s custom when there was anything special to do. The day was warm, and, though the work was pleasant work, it was hard work too in a way. But no feeling of weariness could interfere with the satisfaction with which they viewed results. The success was complete.

“They will spoil a good housekeeper if they make a schoolmistress of you!”—as Fidelia stood folding her apron, and regarding with admiring eyes a big chicken-pie which Mattie had just brought in from the oven. “But I don’t suppose you’d care about spending your life as a housekeeper, when you might have higher work to do.”

“Higher work? Yes, I suppose so. Teaching is either the highest work, or it is drudgery. I suppose it depends upon the teacher,” said Fidelia gravely. “But any sort of work is good if it is needed, and if it is well done—as we have done our work to-day,” added she, smiling.

“Yes; and it is something to do well the humblest work, when others are helped by it to do the highest. And then the Lord doesn’t always see ‘high’ and ‘low’ just as we do. And those who just help other folks’ works, and come into other folks’ lives, without having much of a life of their very own, may have a good time too—yes, and a good reward.”

“Yes,” said Fidelia, thinking of her sister. “Miss Abby, don’t you go visiting sometimes? Won’t you come to our house and see my sister? She would like to have you, and I am sure you would like each other.”

“I should be pleased to visit you and your sister. Yes, I should like her. I like what I have heard about her. I saw her once—she visited here a long time ago.”

“Did she? I don’t think I ever knew it. Was she a little girl? Was it with our father that she came?”

“No; she was a grown woman—a sweet and beautiful young woman. She stayed two or three days. There was company in the house, and I remember they all went one day to the Summit. It was with Dr Justin Everett that she came.”

“Ah!” said Fidelia, sitting suddenly down on the window-seat.

They had come into Miss Abby’s room by this time, and the old lady was resting in the rocking-chair while Fidelia lingered, going on with their talk.

“It was just about the time when her grandmother grew worse. No, I didn’t see much of her; I had more to do in those days. I saw her, but we did not speak together, and I have nothing special to tell you about her, dear, only that I saw her when she came. I have often thought of her since.”

Fidelia sat still, with her chin on her hand and her eyes fixed on the far-away hills; and Miss Abby could not but see the change that had passed over her face. But she did not speak.

The old trouble about Eunice was stirring at her heart. Eunice had always helped others; she had only come in for “a part in other folks’ lives,” as Miss Abby had said. Had Eunice “had a good time and a good reward?” She had been at least content during the last few years. Was she content still? Was she grieving over the past, or was she wishing for that which could never be hers?—“for that which is really not worth having or grieving for, if she only knew it!” thought Fidelia, with an angry flush rising to her cheeks, as the thought of Miss Avery, and the interest which Dr Justin seemed to take in her, came to her mind.

“She doesn’t care. I don’t think she would care; but, oh, I wish I were quite sure! Surely the Lord would never let that trouble come into her life again, after all she has done and suffered.”

She sat long with her eyes fixed on the hills beyond the river, on which the glory of the sunset lay; and when at last she turned to meet the grave looks of Miss Abby, she started and grew red, with a feeling that the old lady must know her thoughts. But Miss Abby only said,—

“Think of it! I had forgotten all about the eggs. I must go down again.” And when she had gone out and shut the door, she opened it again to say,—“You had better stay right here in my room, hadn’t you, and rest? There will be some noise in the other part of the house when they all get home. I may go over to see Sally Hanson a minute; I have something to take to her. But I guess you had better stay here.”

Whether she went to see Sally Hanson or not, she stayed away a good while, and it was growing dark when she

returned. Fidelia still sat with her cheek on her hand, and her eyes on the hills, hardly seen now in the gathering gloom.

“Well, dear, are you rested? You have been having a quiet time, haven’t you?”

“Oh, yes! I was not tired—only lazy. I suppose I ought to go and brush my hair and change my dress before they all come home. I wonder if I need go down at all? They will be tired enough not to wish to see any one.”

“Well, yes, I’d go down a spell, if I were you, for the sake of being friendly.”

“Do you suppose I should be missed?” said Fidelia, with a laugh which did not sound so pleasantly to the old lady as Fidelia’s laugh usually did.

“You don’t feel very well to-night, do you, dear? I guess you are over-tired, though you don’t know it. Or is there anything else the matter with you, Miss Fidelia?”

“If there is I don’t know, or at least I can’t talk about it.”

She rose and approached Miss Abby as she spoke, conscious that her words might sound strange; but turned to the window again, and stood looking out into the gloom, and there was silence for a time. Then Miss Abby said gently,—

“But you know just where to carry your trouble, dear. Whatever it may be, it isn’t beyond help, is it? How can it be to a Christian?”

Fidelia made no answer to this.

“Have you been living up to your privileges over there in the seminary, dear? I have always heard that it was a good place in which to grow in knowledge and in grace. You haven’t been so much taken up with your books as to neglect better things, have you? Fidelia, are you a Christian?”

There was a moment’s silence before Fidelia answered.

“I once thought I was a Christian. Now I do not know—I am not sure.”

“And so you got kind of down and discouraged, and no wonder, dear.”

Fidelia had to resist a strong impulse to rush away, when Miss Abby rose and came to the window.

“But you needn’t be discouraged. If you are not sure of your hope, you must just let it go, and come again to Him who is our only hope, and it will be all right with you. If you have fallen back, it must be because you have failed to ask His help, or your heart has been after other things. But you haven’t done anything, or neglected anything that He will not be glad to forgive if you’ll tell Him of it, dear. You needn’t be a mite discouraged. I’d be glad to help you if I could,” said Miss Abby, laying her hand gently on that of the girl. “I’m an old woman now, and I’ve seen a good many things in my time, and I have suffered some, too, but not any more than I’m glad to look back upon now. Anyhow, it never pays to get discouraged.”

“Discouraged!” thought Fidelia. “Why, I think I am wrong all through. I am not sure that even Eunice can set me right now.” Aloud she said—“No; it does no good to be discouraged.”

Then they heard the south gate open, and knew that the young people had returned; and, before Fidelia had time to escape, Nellie was calling her name on the stairs, and there was no time for more.

Of course they went downstairs together, and heard all about the visit, and whom they had seen, and what they had said and heard and done, and how sorry every one was that Miss Marsh had not gone with them. And no one would have suspected that Miss Marsh was “discouraged,” or even tired, so interested was she in it all. Indeed, she seemed to have more to say than usual, and even became boastful, as Nellie declared, when allusion was made to the preparations for next day’s expedition to the Summit.

Miss Avery was even more demonstrative in her friendliness than usual that night; and as she was so much fatigued that she found it necessary to recline on the sofa, she would have Fidelia bring a low seat and sit beside her, saying she had seen enough of all the rest for one day. Fidelia sat down willingly enough, but she would not give up her hand to be caressed, as Miss Avery desired; she was busy covering a ball for Franky; and in a little she found it necessary to go nearer the light, but not before Miss Avery had whispered a few words in her ear.

“What a good woman your sister must be! How lovely she must have been when she was young! Dr Justin Everett thinks her nearly perfect.”

She had no time to say more. Fidelia rose suddenly, and, without a glance toward her, walked across the room; and Dr Justin, coming in with letters in his hand, alone saw the paleness of her face and the anger in her eyes. Miss Avery rose from the sofa, and in her pretty eager way came forward to claim her letters.

“Now, Dr Justin, there must be one at least for me! Do say you have got one for me this time,” said she, clasping her hands imploringly.

The doctor laid the letters on the table without a word. It was Nellie who distributed them, and the last one was for Fidelia.

“Now you will be happy! It is from your sister,” said she.

There were letters for several of the others; and in the interest of receiving and opening them, Fidelia was allowed to slip out of the room unnoticed, and only returned in time to say good-night.

“And it must be ‘good-bye’ too, I am afraid, as I must go home to-morrow morning. Eunice wants me. No; she is not sick, but she wants me. I have told Mrs Austin all about it, and she says I ought to go. Amos has promised to take me to the depôt in the morning.”

“But our trip to the Summit?”

“You must stay for that!”

“One day can make no difference!”

Fidelia was sorry to miss the day’s pleasure, but a day would make much difference. The letter had been delayed one day already, and her sister had several reasons for wishing her to come home at once.

“But your packing! You will have to be up all night. You must let me help you, Miss Marsh! Now say you will,” pleaded Miss Avery with pretty beseeching gestures.

Fidelia laughed.

“My packing! It is all done already, thank you. You will see the last of me to-night.”

It was not quite the last to several of the party. The departure was not so early but that all the family were down, and even Miss Avery had a chance to say good-bye again from the window, as Fidelia and Amos drove off. She proposed that they should wait a little, that she might drive with them, but this was not to be thought of.

“Dr Justin wanted to drive you down, but I said I had promised,” said Amos gravely; “you don’t care, do you?”

“I should have been very sorry if you had forgotten your promise or broken your word. I would not have cared to trouble Dr Justin Everett.”

“Oh, it wouldn’t have troubled him any! He’d as lief come with you as not, I guess. If any one had come, it ought to have been Nellie; but I told her I had something to tell you, and she was very good about it. As for Miss Avery, I guess she didn’t care much about going. You like Miss Avery pretty well, don’t you?”

“Oh, yes! Not as I like Nellie, you know. But Miss Avery has been—very—”

“Kind and condescending!” said Amos, as Fidelia paused for a word.

They both laughed a little, but nothing more was said about Miss Avery. A good deal was said about things in general, but not a word which Nellie and all the rest of them might not have heard; and Fidelia began to think she had misunderstood the boy as to his having something to say to her. But when the horse had been securely fastened at a safe distance from the track, they turned to walk up and down the platform. During the few minutes that remained, Amos said,—

“I am going to tell father that I am going to college this fall or next, just as he thinks best.”

“Yes, of course,” said Fidelia. “Well?”

“That is all; and it isn’t ‘of course’ by a good deal. I had about made up my mind for something else. I was going West, to see how it looked out there, any way.”

“Not without your father’s knowledge?”

“No—I don’t know as I should have gone with his knowledge and consent. But he’d have let me go, I guess, if I had kept at him, even if he had hated to.”

Fidelia shook her head.

“That is not the kind of talk I should expect to hear from you, Amos, with such a father as you have.” Amos hung his head, but said,—“Well, I’ve changed my mind. I am going to college, and I am going to do my best. Yes; it is partly to please father, and partly because I see things a little differently. Do you remember what you said to me that day on the hill?”

“I am afraid I talked a good deal that day. I don’t think I remember anything particular.”

“It was about the honour of having a part in the highest work of all, and about the duty of preparing one’s self to do it in the best way. I am going to have a try for it, any way,” said Amos, with a break in his voice.

Fidelia put out her hand and touched his, but she did not speak for a full minute. She was thinking,—“A word of mine! That can’t be—discontented, worldly-minded girl that I have proved myself to be! I am not worthy.” Aloud she said,—“I am glad, Amos. Tell me more.”

“It was only a word you said, but it set me thinking; though I don’t see why it should, for mother, and cousin Abby, and even Nellie, have said about the same to me often. I suppose it was because it seemed new as you said it; and I had got kind of used to cousin Abby’s good advice, and even to mother’s. But I made up my mind that I would see the thing through this time, and decide one way or another. What Dr Justin said helped me some. I mean to try and be a good man—a servant of God,” added the boy, speaking with difficulty.

“Amos,” said Fidelia, “do you mean that you have become a Christian?”

“I mean that I wish to be a Christian, and to have a part in the very highest work, if the Lord will have me for His servant.”

“*If*, Amos? There is no ‘if’ on the Lord’s side.”

Then she paused, telling herself that she too had desired to have a share in the highest work, and asking herself whether she had not drawn back. She did not know. She only knew that she was all wrong, and that she too must begin again.

“I, too, shall have to decide once for all. Oh, I must!”

There was no time for more, for the shriek of the engine was heard in the distance.

“Amos, I am so glad! And I am glad you have told me. I wish I knew just the right thing to say to you. I can only say I am glad. I wish you could come and talk with my Eunice. Oh, dear—just as if you hadn’t your father and mother, and cousin Abby! But my first thought is always of my Eunice,” added Fidelia, with an uncertain smile. “Good-bye, dear Amos. Everybody in your home has been so good to me; and I am glad for them all. They will be very happy.”

There was not time for another word. As Amos turned from the window as the train moved on, he stumbled on some one—or, rather, some one stumbled on him—and he had no idea who it was till a voice called out,—

“Just in time, Amos! A miss is as good as a mile;” and he ran forward in time to catch a glimpse of Dr Justin Everett on the platform of the cars as the train moved on.

Fidelia had not seen the approach of Dr Justin; and it was a surprise, to say the least, when he entered the car, and, bidding her “Good morning,” took his seat beside her, as if that had been the most natural thing in the world to do.

“I did not know you thought of going to Halsey this morning. What about the Summit?” said Fidelia.

“It looks ungrateful to leave them, does it not? But it could not be helped; I did not know till late last night that I was expected elsewhere this morning. And I am at least no more to blame than you are.”

Fidelia made no answer to that. They could see the Summit as they turned a curve among the hills.

“It looks pleasant up there!” said she.

“Yes, with the morning sunshine on it.”

“I am sorry it happened that I could not go up with Nellie and the rest. I should have enjoyed it, and it would have been something always to remember.”

“Yes, it would have been something to remember,” said Dr Justin.

The sound of his voice had quite changed, and the look on his face also, Fidelia thought, as she glanced up at him.

“Have you ever been at the Summit?” said she; and then she remembered.

“Yes. Once I was on the Summit,” he answered gravely; and he did not remove his eyes from the mountain while it was in sight, nor did a word pass between them for some time after that. It was Dr Justin who spoke first, and his first words were about her friend Amos.

“I should like to take him West with me; and your friend Jabez Ainsworth as well. They are bound to go there first or last.”

“Oh, but you must not think of such a thing! His father would not like it. Amos is going to please his father now, he says, and go to college. Don’t speak of his going West, please.”

“Well, no; not just at present; but when these boys are ‘thoroughly furnished,’ as there is good hope they may be in time, the great West is the place for them, and for many more of their sort. They are needed there now, and will be needed still more in the future.”

“I like Amos. He will do his part well wherever he is,” said Fidelia.

“Yes, I am sure he will.”

“And Jabez, too, in a different way. Jabez and I have always been good friends.”

“Yes, I know. You have helped them both.”

“I have helped Jabez with his arithmetic and grammar, and with good advice, too, sometimes,” added she, laughing; “but as for Amos, if I have ever helped him, it has been without knowing it.”

“That is the best kind of help to give, I think,” said Dr Justin, smiling.

The Austin family was a safe subject to discuss, and they held to it for awhile. Fidelia told about her good fortune in having Nellie for her room-mate at the seminary, and of the many pleasant things they had enjoyed together during the year. When she thought about it afterwards, she wondered at the ease with which she had talked with him, and

hoped she had not talked too much.

As they drew near to the last stopping-place before reaching Halsey, Dr Justin stooped to lift his handbag, saying,—

“My brother is waiting for me here, I think. We are going to M— to see a patient of his, about whom he is anxious. Have you a message to send to any one in Eastwood: I go back there to-night.”

“I shall send a message to-morrow by mail, I thank you,” said Fidelia a little stiffly. She was indignant with herself in feeling a little disappointed that he was not going on to Halsey.

“Well, good-bye. We ought to be friends, you and I, and we shall be friends in time.” And then he was gone.

Chapter Seven.

Home Again.

Fidelia did not have to take her homeward way through fields and woods this time. Jabez was waiting with his grandfather’s “team,” which was more than capable of taking her and all her belongings.

“All well, Jabez?” said Fidelia, as she caught sight of his smiling sunburnt face.

“Oh, yes, pretty much as usual! Miss Eunice is first-rate;” and with this satisfactory though rather indefinite assurance Fidelia had to content herself till all things were safely bestowed in the wagon, and they were on their way home. Then she did not need to ask questions. Jabez had the faculty of putting a good deal of information into a few words; and as she listened, Fidelia got a summary of all that had been said and done—or at least attempted—in town-meeting, church-meeting, and even in school meeting, with personal and domestic items of the neighbours thrown in here and there as he went on. He had an interested and appreciative listener, and he knew it and did his best to be at the same time comprehensive and brief.

“And the garden, Jabez? I hope that has been a success,” said Fidelia at last.

“Well, yes—pretty middling;” and then a brief but clear and satisfactory statement of the sowing and planting, the transplanting, watering, and hoeing which had followed; of what the bugs and worms had taken, and what had come to maturity; of how all had in general been disposed of, and the net results in dollars and cents.

It was not a large sum, but it was the first money that Jabez had ever earned—that is, it was the first he had earned for himself, though he had done a good many fair days’ work for his grandfather. He had all he needed as to food, clothes, and schooling. He had been as well off as most boys in the state; and the boys in the state where Jabez lived were bound to believe that nowhere in the world were the boys better off than they were. But Jabez had never before owned a tenth of the money which by cents and dimes he had been accumulating through the summer; and his dollars meant more to him by a great deal than his first ten thousand—should he ever possess such a sum—could possibly do.

“It isn’t so much, but it is a beginning. I tell you, Fidelia, it feels good to be earning money for yourself—to be independent and to kind o’ see your way clear. If I were to set out for it, I could be a rich man before I died.”

“Would it pay, do you suppose?” said Fidelia gravely.

“Well, judging by the pains folks take to get rich, it ought to pay. There would have to be a good many other things along with it to make it amount to—well, to satisfaction.”

Fidelia laughed, partly at his way of expressing himself, and partly at the extreme gravity of his countenance.

“I expect more from you, Jabez, than just to die a rich man. Many can do as much as that.”

“Oh, well, I say before I die; but I mean a good while before, so that I should have the benefit a spell! I say I *could* do it.”

“I hope you haven’t let your lettuce and cucumbers put your Nepos and Euclid out of your head. If I were you, I would make up my mind to be a learned man rather than a rich man, though, as you remarked, there would have to be something else along, to make even that amount to satisfaction.”

“And better be a wise man than either one or the other. That would be about the right thing to end off with, wouldn’t it?” said Jabez, looking up with a smile. “But about Nepos—I’ve tackled him; and I find him pretty tough. As for Euclid—I’ve walked through the first four books without a hitch. I’ve had considerable satisfaction out of him. Give me any proposition you like—well, some time, as we’ve got almost home. And I’ve never asked you a word about what *you* have been doing. I have thought about you often enough.”

“That may wait too; I haven’t done very much.”

“But if Miss Eunice keep so pretty well, you’re going back again, aren’t you?”

Fidelia turned on him a startled look. She had been at ease of late with regard to her sister, partly because she had been much occupied, and partly because of the cheerful tone of her sister’s letters. Jabez’s words were spoken just as they had reached the top of the hill, where, on her last return home, she had caught sight of Dr Everett; and a sudden pang of the fear that had seized her then came back upon her now. She forgot to answer the lad’s question,

and took little heed of all that he was saying as they went down the hill.

But when they turned the little curve which the road made round a projecting rock, and came in sight of the house, her heart leaped up with a sense of relief, and a rush of happy tears came to her eyes. For at the gate, serene and smiling, stood Eunice, waiting. The light which fell on the expressive face came trembling through the boughs of the elm which waved and murmured above. But Fidelia only saw the face. Afterwards it all came back to her—the vine and the pale blossoms that lingered, and the flickering shadows never to be forgotten; but it was her sister's face that she saw first.

She might have been more beautiful in her youth which was past, but now she was more than beautiful. The "afterwards" had come—of the chastening, "not joyous, but grievous," which she had endured in her youth; and the "peaceable fruits" of the promise were appearing. Very fragile she looked, but cheerful and bright.

"To think that I ever should have been afraid for my Eunice!" said Fidelia with a sob, before her foot touched the ground.

"WELL, DEAR, SAFE HOME!" *Page 127.*

"Well, dear, safe home!" was her sister's gentle greeting.

"Home at last!" Fidelia answered.

Few words were spoken, either of welcome or rejoicing. Few were needed. It was not the way of either of them to say out easily all that was in her heart; and in a little they were sitting as quietly as they sat that last day, when Dr Everett brought Fidelia home. It was spring-time then; and now the summer was nearly over—the summer which had done something for Eunice, as her sister clearly saw, but which, even to herself, she could not name.

She was not so much stronger as Fidelia had hoped to find her. There was the same paleness, with the same quick flush coming and going on her cheek when anything moved her, beautiful but sad to see. She had been peaceful then, even cheerful, but there had been some tokens that the peace had been striven for, and had come slowly, perhaps to go away again. Now it was assured. And Fidelia said again to herself, "How could I have been afraid?"

As Eunice went on to tell how, after all, Mrs Stone had decided not to delay her departure after the day appointed, Fidelia was recalling with sorrowful amazement her troubled thoughts about Dr Justin and Miss Avery, and her doubts as to how Eunice might feel when she came to know. Neither the one nor the other, nor both together, could harm her, nor even trouble her peace. "Nor any one or anything else in the world," she added in her heart.

"I think I am a little glad that Mrs Stone went, after all," Eunice was saying, when Fidelia came back to the present again. "I am glad to have you to myself a little while: you must have a great deal to tell me after so long a time, and we won't hurry over it. It is good to have you at home again."

"It is good to be at home, though they were all very good to me in Eastwood."

"You are not looking very rosy even yet," said Eunice gravely.

"Oh, I am perfectly well; and so I was when I went there, only I was tired. Yes, I liked every one of them. They were all very good to me."

“And the visitors?”

“I liked them pretty well. I envied them a little, I am afraid. It was silly of me, wasn’t it, and wicked? But I have got over it, and I don’t suppose I shall ever be exposed to the same temptation again—I mean, I have seen the last, of them, I guess—of Miss Avery at any rate. I am glad too that Mrs Stone went away for awhile, though I would like to see her. What is she like?”

“She is good, and sensible, and strong. Some people might think her hard at first not knowing her well—but she is not hard. She has been in some hard spots since she used to take care of me as a baby, and she might have grown hard and sour also, if it had not been, as she says, ‘for the grace of God.’ But, hard or not, I love her dearly. She suits me.”

“You must have been glad to see her again.”

“Yes; when she came I was glad. I was not altogether glad at the thought of her coming. I suppose I was afraid a little of the old times coming back too clearly, and that I might be troubled and unsettled by the sight of her. But it has not been so—far otherwise,” added Eunice with a smile.

A momentary shadow had passed over her face, but Fidelia forgot it in seeing the brightness that followed it; and she sat thinking about it in silence, till the gate opened, and Susie Everett came in. But as they sat the next morning in the back porch, looking out on the large garden, the subject of Mrs Stone’s relations to them was renewed.

“I don’t suppose that Ruby will be away long, and before she comes I want you to understand how it is with her, and just what she would like to do. Of course you are going back to the seminary next year?”

“Of course I would like to go, if ways and means will permit I would like to graduate with my class.”

“I am afraid you have worked too hard, dear.”

“No, not too hard; but I don’t think I worked in the best way. I should do differently next year. At least I should try.”

“Tell me about it, dear.”

Fidelia sat silent a minute or two, then she said:—

“Some time I will tell you about it—not to-day. But about ‘ways and means.’ Perhaps I had better teach this year, as I meant to do at first.”

But Eunice had a plan to unfold, by which, should Fidelia approve, all would be made easy for them both. Mrs Stone wished to stay in Halsey for a time. The place was more like home than any other place could ever be to her, and she would like to share the home of the sisters for a time.

“Would you like it, Eunice?” asked Fidelia a little anxiously.

“Yes; for some reasons I would like it. Mrs Stone is kind and good, and she does not seem like a stranger to me, though she has been away so many years. She is capable too, and I am not so strong as I used to be.”

“But you are well, Eunice? You are not afraid any more—of—”

Fidelia could not utter the word which rose to her lips—a word which, indeed, had never been uttered between them.

“Yes, I am well—for me. No, I am not afraid any more. But, dear, I own to have been lonesome last winter, and a little downhearted sometimes.”

“I ought to have been at home.”

“No, dear. It was all right; and it is best that you should go again next year for various reasons, rather than to wait. And, besides—”

Then Eunice went on to explain that, though not a rich woman, Mrs Stone had enough for her own wants, and more. She had no near ties of kindred, and no special work in the world to look forward to, and work she could find in Halsey more easily than anywhere else.

“And, dear, if I had been asked to plan for my own comfort, and for a chance to make going away again easy for you at the same time, I could not have asked for anything more suitable than this. The obligation and the comfort will be mutual. Yes, I like the plan.”

“Would it be for always, Eunice?”

Eunice smiled and shook her head.

“Dear, I don’t much believe in making plans for always. ‘Short views’ are best, you know. We might try it for a year, and then decide.”

“Eunice, if I liked to take it, I might have the school at the Corners this winter; and I could be at home.”

“Yes; and that would be pleasant all round, if it were necessary. But I think it would be wiser for you to go back to the seminary this winter.”

Fidelia did not answer immediately. Indeed, she rose and went the length of the garden, and stood looking over the

fields to the river and the hills, and she was saying some hard things to herself as she stood there. In a little she turned and came slowly back again.

“Well, dear, what do you say?” said Eunice gently.

“I say that the plan is good, if you like it. It is I who am all wrong. It is hateful in me, I know, but, Eunice, I could not have any one come between you and me. Not *any one*, Eunice.”

“But, my darling,” cried Eunice, laughing a little, and stretching out her hands, “that could never be! Why, you are all I have got!”

Fidelia sat down on the step, and laid her face for a minute on her sister’s lap.

“I never knew till lately that I had an envious and jealous disposition,” said she in a little.

“But you need not be jealous of Ruby Stone, or of any one else, as far as I am concerned, dear. I am almost sorry now, that she did not stay another day, so that you might have seen her. Oh, you will like her, I am sure!—she is so sincere and simple, and so much in earnest.”

A great deal more was said about their plans, and about Mrs Stone, but not a word about Dr Justin Everett.

It was good to be at home again. A great many people, young and old, came to see Fidelia within the next three days. In the meantime Mrs Stone returned, and all necessary arrangements for the year were made between her and the sisters. Mrs Stone would have liked to rent the place or to buy it; but it was not to be thought of that the sisters should give up their home altogether, and so their plans were made for the year only.

Mrs Stone was a small dark-eyed woman, thin and brown, with deeper wrinkles between her eyes than her forty years should have shown. When she sat with her eyes cast down on her work, and her lips firmly shut, one who did not know her well might be excused for saying that she looked “hard.” But when she looked up, and spoke, or smiled, her face changed. She had a good and pleasant face, with some signs of trouble upon it.

Her married life had been a time of discipline to her, she owned to Eunice, when they first met, and to her she spoke of the troubles of the time; but she spoke to no one else of it. She was capable and active, and did what was to be done in the house with such evident pleasure and success that the housekeeping gradually fell into her hands, and Fidelia had more liberty than ever she had at home before. And she made a good use of her liberty. She had preparations for next year to make, and friends to visit, and began to feel more light-hearted—more like herself—than she had done for a good while.

There was much going on to make the time pass pleasantly. Nellie Austin and her brother Amos were visiting the Everetts; and in whatever was planned for their pleasure and the pleasure of the household Fidelia had a share. There were fishing parties and berrying expeditions; and they went sometimes to the woods, or to visit some mountain or waterfall, or chasm among the hills.

Dr Everett himself, when one of his rare days of leisure came, liked nothing better than to go with the young folks; and it was a day to be marked with a white stone when he could make one of the party. Dr Justin had more leisure, and could go oftener. Dr Everett was as merry and as eager for adventures as any of them. Dr Justin was quiet, and took the place of a looker-on rather than a sharer in the amusements of the young people. Privately some of them were inclined to think him something of a tyrant, for he kept them in order, and did not hesitate to assume and exercise authority when occasion called for it, nor to reprove—and that with sufficient emphasis—any of them who through thoughtlessness or selfishness interfered with the pleasure of the rest. But this did not often happen, and he was a favourite among them all.

Fidelia came to like Dr Justin better than at Eastwood she would have supposed possible. She went very often with the rest of the young people, and no one of them all enjoyed the delights of woods and fields and mountains more than she. Nellie Austin declared that she hardly recognised in her the dull, determined student of the first part of the year. She was light-hearted and happy; and she told Nellie, and herself as well, that she had good cause.

Eunice was well, and every day made it more clear to them that they had made no mistake in deciding to share their home with Mrs Stone. And then she was going back to the seminary and her beloved studies again.

Yes, Eunice was very well—“for her,” Fidelia sometimes added with a sigh, which meant that Eunice might never be altogether well and strong again. But she was happy—there could be no doubt about that. Dr Justin came sometimes as a visitor to the house, quiet and grave there as elsewhere; and his quietness and gravity was the reason that Fidelia liked him better than she had liked him at Eastwood, she told herself. Nothing could be more evident than that he exerted no disturbing influence on Eunice. They were friendly—they were even confidential, Fidelia sometimes thought. But she never spoke of Dr Justin to her sister, except as his name came in the account which Eunice always liked to hear of the expeditions in which she could take no part; and she day by day grew less afraid lest her sister might have something to tell her of him that she would not like to hear.

But she liked Mr Justin, she owned to herself; and after awhile she began to see that, though he had less to say to her than to Nellie and the rest, he was not less mindful of her than of them—that though he amused himself with them, and submitted to be teased by them, and even condescended to tease them in return, he had only grave respectful words for her, and indeed carried himself towards her as though he thought she might not care for friendly advances on his part; but he was always careful for her safety and comfort, and one day he told her why.

“I promised your sister that I would take care of you,” said he one day, when he found it necessary to insist on helping her, as well as the others, over some difficulty in the way.

“Eunice?” said Fidelia, startled. “Eunice knows that I am quite able to take care of myself.”

“But I thought you had been taken care of all your life?” said Dr Justin as she slowly followed the others up the steep ascent.

“By my Eunice! Yes.”

It would not have been easy for either of them to say much of Eunice, so they were silent as they went slowly on.

This was one of the marked days of that happy time to them all. The young people had made their arrangements for a blackberrying excursion; but when it proved that Dr Everett had a day of leisure, and could go with them, it was proposed that the blackberries should be left for another day, and that they should all go to the Peak to see the view. The young Austins were still there, and all the Everetts were to go except the mother. Jabez and young Mr Fuller, who had been teacher of last winter’s school, and a few others, made up the party. To climb “the Peak” was a thing to be done at least once or twice in the lifetime of every dweller in Halsey, and it was worth the trouble it cost.

At the last moment Mrs Stone declared her intention of joining the party—“just to see how it would seem to be there again;” and Deacon Ainsworth for a minute or two entertained the idea of going also, but thought better of it. He had serious doubts as to the moral effect of so much tramping up hill and down again, just to look at things, in a world where there is so much work that needed to be done. Blackberrying parties and fishing expeditions he could understand; but to give so much time to pleasure which generally turned out to be hard work that did not pay, was a doubtful matter to him.

All this was said to Jabez, who would have done better, he declared, to stick to the work he had undertaken. It would pay better.

“Well, but I don’t seem to have anything that needs to be done just to-day, grandpa. And it will pay to go there. Oh, yes, it will pay to go up there with the two doctors! They’ll have something to say about a good many things we’ll see up there—botany, geology, mineralogy, and all the rest of it. Why, you would enjoy it, grandpa! If it wasn’t for your rheumatism, I’d say, ‘Go.’ I expect to have a real good time.”

So did they all. They made an early start, driving as far as horses could be taken; then, taking an irregular course northwards along the western side of the mountain, they gradually reached a point from which could be seen the commencement of the two mountain ranges which extend through two neighbouring states. It was early still, and here they were to rest for awhile. The real climbing of the day was still before them. The view which they had come to see, was the view eastward from the Peak—the view of a long reach of the river, and the valley and the cultivated hill country beyond. Here they sat in the shadow of a great rock, looking northwards to the mountains.

There was little variety in the view—only a wide stretch of broken hill country, with the grey rock showing through in wide irregular patches, and along the dry water-courses—all changing into a haze of smoky blue in the distance, where the mountains seemed to touch the sky. Dr Justin and a friend, who in their boyish days had been often at the Peak, and through all the hills within sight of it, pointed out to each other, the position of their old familiar haunts—the best trout stream, Silver Lake, the Glen and the Gorge, and by the help of a field-glass tried to point them out to the others. They could see gleams of blue water here and there between the nearer hills; and higher up, a tinge of bright colour where the early frost had already been, but almost everywhere the summer green prevailed. It was a scene strange and beautiful; and to those who looked upon it for the first time, the charm and interest lay in its wide extent and in the utter silence and solitude resting upon it. There were farms and cottage homes, and even towns and mills and churches, scattered out of sight among the hills; workers and pleasure-seekers—the busy and idle—were going to and fro among them; but the only signs of human life or labour which came up to those who were gazing down on the wide expanse were the shriek of the locomotive and the wisp of vaunting vapour which for a moment lingered on its track.

Mrs Stone sat a little withdrawn from the rest, looking northward also, with a strange fixed look on her face—the look which made people who did not know her very well say she was hard. She shook her head, smiling a little, when Fidelia asked her if she would not like to look at the mountains through the glass.

“Well, no, I don’t seem to care much about it. I didn’t come to see anything in particular. I wanted to see how it would seem to be up here again—that is all.”

“And how does it seem?” asked Dr Justin, who had drawn near with his glass in his hand.

“Well, I don’t know as I could tell you. I am not sorry I came. I guess I have thought about this place as often as about any other place in the state in the last ten years. No; I am not sorry I came. I don’t know as I’m sorry I came last time. It is all right, I expect.”

"I EXPECT WE *ARE* LOST FOR THE TIME BEING." *Page* 145.

"Tell us about last time," said Fidelia softly.

"Some time I'll tell you, maybe. I guess I shall need all my breath before I get up the Peak. I am not so spry as I was last time I came."

"I'll help you up," said Fidelia.

"Oh, I guess I shan't need any help! I'll start now, and take it slowly. I don't suppose I shall miss the way."

"I will go with you," said Fidelia.

Dr Justin looked as if he would like to go too, but he did not. He shut the glass with a snap, and turned to the group still standing on the edge of the rock looking northwards; and the two set off together.

They went on slowly and silently till they came to a point where the path they had followed became two paths, the one going up the steep side of the mountain, the other holding northward along the ledge.

"Now I ought to know which path to take, but I don't feel sure about this," said Mrs Stone meditatively. "They say the longest way round is the nearest way home; and according to that we should hold on round the ledge. The path will take us somewhere."

But it did not seem to do so, for in a little they came up against a steep rock, and Mrs Stone owned herself at a loss and out of breath. Fidelia proposed that she should sit down and rest, while she went alone in search of the path.

"No; we'll keep together. I don't suppose we can be lost; at any rate two people are not so lost as one alone would be. We'll keep together."

They must have turned themselves round in some way, for they could not find the point where they had left the ascending path. By-and-by they came to a shelving rock where the bushes had been recently pressed down; some broken branches, still unwithered, lay near.

"This must be the near way that Jabez and the boys took," said Fidelia, "We ought to be able to find our way now."

But they did not find it after several attempts. Mrs Stone was firm in refusing to let Fidelia separate from her.

“Two are better than one,” said she.

At last they came to a point where they got a glimpse of the valley lying west of the mountain. The land-marks were familiar, only it seemed as though north and south had changed places, Mrs Stone said. Another attempt brought them back to the place where they had found the broken branches, and they had fancied themselves going in the other direction.

“Well, there! I guess we’d better sit down till some one comes to find us. Not that we are lost. I never heard yet of any one being lost on Shattuck Peak for more than an hour or two. Why didn’t I think of it before, dear? Are you too hungry and tired to sing, Fidelia? I shouldn’t wonder if they were beginning to worry about us up there. They’ll be listening.”

Fidelia clambered a little higher, and sang “The Star-spangled Banner,” smiling a little at the thought of the time when she sang it with the boys on Eastwood Hill. She wondered that she had not thought of lifting up her voice sooner.

But nothing came of it. Fidelia amused herself gathering some late flowers, and in searching about for other wild wood treasures, and then she sang again, and listened for an answering voice; but she listened in vain.

“I expect we *are* lost for the time being,” said Mrs Stone composedly. “We’d as well make the best of it, and see what we can do to pass the time. I wish I had brought my knitting. They’ll miss us pretty soon, and come to find us.”

“Tell me about the last time you were on the mountain,” said Fidelia.

“To pass the time? Well, that may do as well as anything. But it isn’t much of a story, and what is of it is not very pleasant to tell or to hear.”

The telling of that story involved the telling of much more; but there was time enough, before an answer came to Fidelia’s next song, for all Mrs Stone had to tell.

Chapter Eight.

Mrs Stone.

Mrs Stone did not tell her story straight on as she sat waiting there on the mountain side, but with many a break and pause, and with now and then an exclamation of wonder or indignation at her own foolishness, or the foolishness of some one else. But she told it quietly—making no moan for herself, though the troubles of her life had been neither light nor few.

“Yes, I have had a share of trouble, but no more than my share; and, take it altogether, I have had considerable enjoyment, too. There was Eunice—I could never tell the comfort I took with her when she was a little child. I was only a child myself—little more than twelve or thirteen years old—when my sister Myra let me go to take care of Eunice for a spell, when she came home, a motherless baby, to live with her grandmother Peabody on the hill. Her grandmother was a busy woman in those days, with many duties at home and elsewhere; and Eunice was a healthy, happy little creature; and after awhile she was mostly left to me night and day for years; and I did my very best for her, and we were very happy together till your father married again and took her home.

“I ought by rights to have gone with her, as they all wanted to have me; but sister Myra was married by this time, and lived on father’s old place, and she wanted me to come and make my home with her, as I had a good right to do, seeing the farm was as much mine as hers, by our father’s will. So I tried it a spell. She had two babies by this time, and I was good with babies, and could have helped her, and been contented after awhile.

“But Ezra Stone, Myra’s husband, wasn’t—well, he was peculiar. He was close—he came from a stingy family, and I don’t suppose he was more to blame for his stinginess than other folks are for being extravagant—he inherited it. Well, he thought I wasn’t needed there: he thought his wife hadn’t any too much to do with her babies, and her cows, and her housework—no more than other folks had, he said; and he said I might do better for myself some where else. And he kept at it in his worrying way, till he rather wore us out at last. And so, when Squire Peabody came over one day to say that his wife was sick and much in need of help, Myra said I had better go. I’d have a better time than I’d ever be likely to have in her house; and maybe after awhile I might be able to help her and the children more than I could now. So I went, and I stayed there till—well, till I was married.”

There was a long pause here, and Mrs Stone spoke very softly when she went on again.

“I didn’t see so much of Myra after that, as I ought to have done. I used to see her Sundays at meetings, and we met at some of the neighbours’ houses sometimes; but I did not go often to her house. I knew she wasn’t very happy. She was different from her husband. She had a big heart and a free hand, and hated his small ways. She was nervous too, and high strung; and when she had anything on her mind, it had to come out when occasion called for it. Yes, she could say hard things!

“But what she said touched her husband just as the water in the brook touches the stones in its bed. It never moved him; and she wore herself out at last. She had held out through a good deal for the sake of her boys; and when she gave up at last, the end was pretty near. I was with her the last few weeks. She hadn’t strength to say much, but it was—‘My boys, Ruby! Keep them in mind and help them all you can,’ whenever we were alone together.

“I think if she had asked me to come and take care of them, and make my home with them, I must have done it. But she didn’t. Ezra’s mother was living there then, and his sister Susan, and I wasn’t needed. But I did pity those pretty slender boys, and the baby between them all. But I couldn’t do anything about it, and I didn’t see much of them for a good while.

“Well, next June I got a letter, which I knew was from Ezra before I opened it; and I said to myself, ‘He wants me to sell out my share of the farm, or maybe sign off altogether for the benefit of Myra’s boys. I have been expecting it all along, and I shan’t do it.’

“But I was mistaken. That hadn’t come yet. It was a queer composition, that letter. It was to tell me that there was going to be a picnic at the Peak for two or three of the Sunday schools in the neighbourhood; and two of his boys were to be there, and wouldn’t I go and see them? There might be a good many easier ways to see them, I thought, than to go up the mountain to do it. However, some of the neighbours were going, so I said I would go.”

There was another pause here.

“I was in some trouble about that time myself. I never said anything to anybody, and I don’t suppose anybody suspected it. I had lost my sister lately, and that might well account for having less to say than usual. But I had lost another friend—one that would have been more than a friend if he had lived. We were not to say engaged. We hadn’t even kept company much; but when Jim Sedley died down there at Lowell it went hard with me, and for awhile the world seemed to have come to an end for me.

“But I went to the picnic with the rest, and I saw the boys and had a little talk with them, just long enough to find out that they missed their mother dreadfully, and that they were much in need of a mother’s care; and my heart ached for the little fellows; and, when they were called away to join in some play with the rest, I slipped off into the woods, so as to get away from the talk, and to think it all over by myself. But thinking didn’t help me much. There was one thing I could do. I could marry Ezra Stone, and so try to be a mother to them; and as the thought was in my mind I heard Ezra’s voice close to me. I would have hid myself or run away if I could have done it, for I was afraid that I would do or say something that I would be sorry for all my life. But I couldn’t get away; and there was Ezra saying how glad he was to see me, and that he had come to the Peak on purpose, and a lot more of the same kind.

“I was thinking about it all as I sat down there this morning,” said Mrs Stone after a little pause. “A hundred times in the days that followed I asked myself whether I could believe that the Lord was taking care of me that day, according to His promise. It was a great while before I could see it so. But I expect He was, though I never should have married Ezra Stone if I hadn’t gone up the Peak that day. At least I don’t believe I should.

“He didn’t begin about that, but about business. His sister Susan was going to be married to Nathan Pease, whose farm joined father’s old place; and he wanted to buy it, and would I be willing to sell my half of it? I never had calculated much on anything which was likely to come to me from the place; but Myra had always advised me to hold on to my share, and so I said I should have to think about it before I could say whether I would sell or not.

“There is no call to tell you all his talk. He didn’t seem to care about the place since Myra had gone, he said; and there did not seem to be much chance for him and his boys at the East. What he wanted to do was to take what he had and go West with them. There was the best of land to be had there cheap, and no such hard work needed, and a better climate. He knew just the place he could have out there in Wisconsin, and with a little money he could do well for his boys and himself; and he ended by asking if I would go West with him and help him do for Myra’s boys?

“He knew pretty well what my opinion of him was. I didn’t need to say anything about that. My sister hadn’t been much more than six months in her grave, and I didn’t waste words upon him. But all the time it was borne in upon me that it had got to be, and that it would come to that at last.

“‘It isn’t so much a wife that I want as a mother for Myra’s children,’ he said; ‘and I hope, when you come to think of it, you’ll see it your duty to come West with them. If you change your mind, you can let me know.’

“‘It isn’t very likely,’ said I; but all the time I felt that I would be as likely to go as not. I told him I would talk over business matters with Squire Peabody, and that I would sign any papers the squire told me to sign, when the right time came; but I let him understand that I meant to have the full value of my share. It would, I thought, be as safe for Myra’s boys in my hands as in his, though I didn’t just say that to him.

“Well, he went away, and I sat there thinking it all over, just on the spot where I sat to-day when you and the other girls were looking through Dr Justin’s spy-glass; and I told myself that I hadn’t much of anything to look forward to, and that, after all, I might as well do one thing as another. Life didn’t seem worth much to me, but I might make my life worth something to Myra’s boys. There is always duty left when hope is gone, and if I owed duty to any one, surely it was to my sister’s children—so I reasoned. I would wait and see.

“Well, the children came back, and had something more to eat, and sang some hymns, and then it was time to go. The boys kept close to me as we all went down to the place where the trains were waiting; and the poor little fellows cried, and did seem so forlorn when they went away, that I just couldn’t get them out of my thoughts for a long time.

“I didn’t think the sale of the farm would come off for awhile, but I was mistaken. Ezra came over to see the squire one day in October, and they talked it over, and matters were settled, and papers signed, and my share of the price of the land made over to me; and Ezra was to go away at the end of the month. The boys were to be left till spring, till he could make some kind of a home for them, and he said he depended more on me than on any one else to see that they were well done by till then: ‘For they are more and nearer to you than to any one else except myself,’ he said.

“‘It is not likely that I can do much for them while they are in your mother’s keeping,’ I said.

"'Oh, mother thinks everything of you!' he said, with a foolish laugh; 'and you've got your share all right. Squire Peabody has seen to that.'

"That was the first winter that Mrs Peabody's health began to fail. It wasn't long before your father died, and the squire took her South for the winter, and the house was left to my care; and they said, if I liked, I might have one or two of Myra's children to keep me company. So I went over and got Jim, the eldest, so as to give him a chance at our winter school, and the baby, as everybody called him, though he was nearly four years old.

"You've heard me tell about my Davie before. I needn't say much about him. The very first feeling of rest and comfort that had come to me, after months of lonesome pain, came the first time he fell asleep in my arms, with his little chapped hand upon my cheek: it was like the coming back of the time when I had baby Eunice to care for; but it was different; too, in some ways. Jim was as good and as bright a boy as need be, and we had a happy winter together.

"Well, in the spring the squire and his wife came home, and she seemed better. They hadn't been home long when a letter came from Ezra, saying he wanted the boys to be sent out to him. He couldn't, without considerable loss of time, go for them, but there were chances every day of people coming West, who would look after them all they needed. A chance of any one willing to trouble himself with the care of four boys, one of them little more than a baby, wasn't likely to come very soon, and the summer was over before we heard again; and all that time Jim and Davie had stayed on with me. Then there came another letter, saying that the boys were to be sent on alone. Nothing would be likely to happen to them, as they needn't change cars more than once before they reached Chicago, and he would meet them there.

"Then I wrote, saying the rest of them might go so, and I would keep Davie for some better chance; or, if his father said so, I would keep him altogether, and do for him till he was old enough to do for himself. Well, quicker than ever an answer came before, a letter came, saying 'No!'—Davie must come with the rest. He saw his way clear to do well by all his boys. Farming was a better thing out West than in New England. He wanted all his boys.

"Afterwards I thought of two or three ways I might have taken to keep the child with me, but nobody encouraged me much to undertake it; and I saw no better way at the time than just to go with them myself a part of the way, especially as a gentleman, who had to do with western railroads, offered me a free ticket to Chicago and back. The squire and Mrs Peabody said all they could to put me off the notion.

"'Ruby,' said she, 'if you go, you'll marry Ezra Stone.'

"'That's his idea, anyway,' said the squire; 'and Ruby, don't you do it.'

"'I know Ezra Stone,' said I, thinking all the time that what they said might be true. And so it was.

"Ezra met us at Chicago; and as soon as I saw his face I felt sick at the thought of letting Myra's children go off with him alone. 'What kind of a woman will he put over them?' said I to myself.

"Well, you know all about it. I did marry him, right there in Chicago. He didn't say much. Nothing he could have said would have had much influence with me one way or another. But I saw Myra's eyes looking at me every time that Jim or the baby smiled at me, and I couldn't let them all go away alone to I didn't know who or what. No, he didn't say much; and afterwards he rather twitted me with being ready the minute I was asked. I don't suppose I should have done any different if I had known just all that was before me. I wasn't a free agent in the matter.

"Yes—oh, yes!—I laid the matter before the Lord, or I thought I did. I knew that I wasn't going to have any easy time, and that it wasn't my own pleasure I was seeking; and that made me feel as though I was just trying to do my duty, and that the Lord would see me through. Yes, I was self-willed about it. I was faithless, I suppose, and afraid just to leave the boys in God's hands. Oh, yes, He did see me through; and more than made up for the trouble I had to endure, and I wouldn't have anything different from all that He sent me! But I am making a long story, and there isn't really much to tell.

"The next three years was just a dead level. Nothing happened but just summer and winter, and seed-time and harvest. But such harvests! Full and rich beyond any experience we had ever had of harvests. High prices were given too, and much money must have come in. But with that part of it the boys and I had nothing to do. There was nothing but hard work, early and late, to show as far as we were concerned.

"I did my best for them. I kept them at their books, Sundays and rainy days, and winter evenings; and they were smart boys and learnt well. They were good boys and pleasant-natured, taking after their mother, and I took comfort with them in many ways. They were good boys to work too. There wasn't a lazy bone in one of them; and, while they did the work that was expected of them, everything went well between them and their father. He let them pretty much alone at other times. His heart was set on just one thing, and that was making money, and the more he got the more he wanted. He didn't spare himself, and he didn't spare any one else, if the chance to make a dollar came along.

"Jim was doing the work of a man before he was fifteen; and every year brought more to be done, for more land was taken up as fast as it could be paid for. Ezra did have wonderful success. After the narrow stony fields of the old place, it was a sight to see the scores of acres of wheat growing so full and strong. It was threshed right there on the ground, and sometimes it was sold there; and if he had only been content with moderate success, he might have been living now, and well-to-do.

"I blame myself when I think of those times—the times that came after the first three years. I think maybe, if I had done differently, things might have turned out differently for us all. In this third spring my Eunice was born—my only baby, and while she stayed with us she made the world a better place for us all. The boys did think everything of her,

and her father too. But she died of croup. If we had had a doctor near us, or if I had known better how to deal with it, she might have lived, I thought, and that made it very hard to bear. Ezra felt so about it too, and we had a dark winter.

“But spring came, and the work had to be done. We couldn’t get all the help we wanted; and from daylight till dark Jim and his brothers had to be in the fields. Even little Davie had his share to do; and, though they were not inclined to shirk their work, it was hard for them, and they did sometimes complain. I complained for them, but I might just as well have held my tongue, and I did after awhile. They grew fast. Jim was as tall as his father when he was sixteen, and if he had had any chance he would have been a strong man in a few years. But he was slim and stooping, and had little flesh on his bones, and I worried about him a good deal; and one day I asked his father how many acres of wheat he supposed it would take to pay for the life and health of a boy like Jim.

“‘He’s *my* boy,’ said he, ‘and not yours, and it ain’t worth while for you to make the calculation. I know all about it.’

“‘He is my boy more than yours,’ said I, ‘if love means anything. I can’t make you answer me, but some time pretty soon you’ll have to answer his Maker and yours, and you’d best reckon up in time, for as sure as you go on as you are going now, you’ll have to bury him; and that’s my last word.’

“He gave an angry laugh at that, and said my last words came pretty often; but I saw him looking curiously at Jim that night, and I guess he’d have let him take it easier for a spell if Jim had known how to take it easy. But there was just so much to do, and he kept on along with the rest. It was Asher, the second one, who gave out first.

“Once or twice he had complained to me that he had dizzy turns, when he kind of lost himself, and I had doctored him a little, not thinking him very sick, till one day they brought him home from the field insensible; and, if he ever knew any of us again, he could never tell us so, and he died in just a week after he was brought home. Yes, we had a doctor. Jim went twenty miles for one without asking any one’s leave. He came twice, but he couldn’t help him. All the time he was sick I never spoke a word to his father about him unless he first spoke to me, till one day, when he came in from his work, he found his boy lying still and white, with his hands clasped on his breast, dressed ready for the grave.

“‘He’ll never be tired any more,’ I said.

“He turned and went out without a word; and Asher’s name was never spoken between us for years after that.

“It was different with Jim. He kept on till the winter he was eighteen; and I shall always be glad to remember how easy and pleasant his last days were made to him. It was a mild winter, and he kept about doing something or other most of the time. His father, let him do pretty much as he liked, and went on hoping that the spring would make him all right again. He even talked of sending him back to the old place for a change when the summer came; and Jim used to listen, and sometimes said what he would do when he got there. But he knew better. He knew he was dying, and he was not afraid. But he had something he wanted to do before he could be quite willing to go.

“One day, after he had been sitting beside me quietly thinking for awhile, he said—‘It’s hard on father.’

“‘Has anything happened to the fall wheat, or to any of the horses? What is it that is hard on him?’ said I.

“He shook his head, turning to me with a strange grieved look in his eyes.

“‘It is hard that he should have to lose another of his boys,’ said he.

“‘He should have taken better care of them, and he might have kept them,’ said I.

“‘Mother,’ said Jim, ‘I think *you* are hard on father sometimes.’

“‘Am I? Oh, well, I guess nothing that I’m likely to say or do will ever hurt him much!’ But I knew he was right in a way.

“‘Mother, come in here. I want you to lie down on the bed, and I will sit beside you. You are all tired out. And I have got something that I want to tell you.’

“What came into my mind when I turned and looked at him was a kind of wonder what the world would be like to me when he had gone out of it; but what I said was—‘I don’t feel more tired than common. You lie down on the bed, and I’ll get Davie’s jacket and mend it while we have a little talk.’ So I got the jacket and held it, though I couldn’t put a stitch in. My hands shook so that I couldn’t thread my needle. Jim took and threaded it for me. And then he lay still, with a look of trouble on his face that made me say at last,—

“‘I think I know what you are going to say, Jim. It will be a dreadful trouble to me and your father; but you oughtn’t to be troubled about it, Jim. You are going to a better place: you are not afraid, Jim?’

“‘No, dear mother, not for myself—nor for you. You’ll get over it after awhile, and you’ll come too—you and the boys. But, mother, I want father to come too.’

“I hadn’t a word to say. I must have been a wicked woman. For half a minute it seemed to me that heaven itself would be spoiled if Ezra Stone were there.

“‘And you must help him, mother,’ said Jim.

“‘I haven’t helped him much lately about anything,’ I said.

“‘No; I think you’re a little hard on father, mother;’ and then he turned on his pillow and put his two arms round my neck, and drew my face down to his. His words hurt me dreadfully.

“‘The Lord Himself will have to take hold to change him,’ I said.

“‘Yes, of course, mother; and you’ll help him.’

“He didn’t say any more; and in awhile he fell asleep, and neither of us stirred till I heard his father’s step on the floor. I did not stir then, though it had been our way all those years to keep out of his sight any special sign of affection between us.

“He came in and stood a spell looking at us, I suppose; and then he went out, knowing for certain the thing which in his heart he had been dreading all along, for he must have seen the signs of death on his boy’s face that day.

“Jim lived full three weeks after that, and he was a very happy boy. His fear of his father had all gone. Jim showed how glad he was every time he came into the room; and he would smile, and hold his hand, and speak softly to him, words which the rest of us could not hear, till he could stand it no longer. Then Ezra would rise and go out alone. He never came to me for comfort, and, if he had, I had none to give.

“Just once I heard Jim say, ‘You will, won’t you, father? God will help you, and—mother.’

“His father groaned, and with good reason, for God seemed far away from him, and he could not count much on help from me.

“Well, Jim died in his sleep, and we buried him near the other two; and it was very quiet in the house for a spell, and then everything fell into place again, and all went on as before, as far as those looking on could see.”

Chapter Nine.

Mrs Stone.

“That was the poorest summer I ever had as to health. Jim’s sickness had run me down, and then I missed him dreadfully, but what really ailed me was a heavy heart. I had lost my hope. I had been a Christian for a good many years, or thought I had. I had joined the Church when I was young, and had tried to live up to my profession, as far as I knew how. I had enjoyed religion in a way, and got real help in trouble from my Saviour. But that seemed all gone. I didn’t enjoy it that summer, and hadn’t for a great while.

“I had thought all along that I was doing the best I could, and that I did well to be angry with my husband’s ways and to hate them. But Jim had left it to me to help his father; and how was I to help him, when I hated not only his ways but himself, as I began to fear? I hated his greed, and his love of money, and his hardness, which had killed his boys; and I couldn’t separate the man from his sins, and yet I knew I ought. I was all wrong for awhile, and I knew it, but I didn’t know how to put myself right.

“Time went on, and a little help came to me after awhile in a way I never would have thought of. It was one Sunday. They had all gone to meeting, and I was alone in the house; and I got my courage up to look over Jim’s box and the few things that were his very own. Among them I found a little book, such as you’ve seen, that has a Bible verse for every day of the year, and after each verse a few words to explain it, or to send it home to the heart, and maybe a verse of a hymn after that. I knew it the minute I saw it. It was one Myra had had when she was a girl. It lay on her bureau always, and she read in it every night.

“She had given it to Jim. Their two names stood together on the first page, and Jim had kept it safe all this time, as I believe, for my help. For when I turned over the leaves, after awhile I found the text for that day, and it was this: ‘Fear not, daughter of Zion. Behold, thy King cometh unto thee! He is just, and having salvation.’ And then, among the words that came after to enforce the Scripture were these: ‘However strong thine inward enemies, thy corruptions, fear not and be not discouraged. Thy King is bound by His office, by His love, and by His promises, to help thee with strength to overcome.’

“They do not sound much as I say them to you, do they?—but to me they seemed to come like a voice from heaven. I had nothing to say for myself. I had been all wrong for a great while. And I knew I could do nothing now to put myself right. But, according to this, the King Himself was ‘bound to help me with strength to overcome.’ So I said—‘I’ll just let go, and see what He’ll do about it. He may guide me where He will.’ For I had lost my way; and if ever a poor soul knew herself to be ‘helpless, and blind, and naked,’ I did that day.

“I had a long spell of sickness after that I was run down, and needed rest rather than medicine, the doctor said, and I was left pretty much to myself; and, as we had good help at that time, my sickness didn’t make much difference in the house. Mind and body were better for the rest, and I rose in a month or two a happier, and, I hope, a better woman than I was when I lay down. I could not speak about myself or my feelings easily to anybody, and I couldn’t say a word to Ezra. But I think he saw the difference. There never was a day after that, that I did not try to say something pleasant to him; and he got none of the sharp answers of which he used to be afraid.

“Things went on pretty much in the old way for a year or two, but better in some respects. We had a new house built, and everything more comfortable about us. A good many people had come to the neighbourhood—well-to-do people; and Ezra had pride enough to wish to ‘keep up with the times,’ as he said. We had a school too within a reasonable distance, and meetings almost every Sunday; and there was some talk of having a meeting-house built: and, to my surprise, Ezra was the one to offer a lot of land to build it on.

“There was talk of a railroad coming our way, which would bring markets nearer, and increase the value of property; and all this did not make him less eager about making money, but more so. I *did* try to get on better terms with him these days, and I could see that anything I said had more influence with him, though he would not own it in words. My pride was broken as far as he was concerned; the hard feeling against him had gone out of my heart. I could pray for him, and hope for him, and I had peace in my own soul, which made all the difference. The boys were good boys too, and had an easier time than their brothers had had, and were growing up like other folks’ children—manly little fellows, afraid of nothing—and I did not fret about them as I had done about the others. We might have gone on like this for years if something had not happened.”

Mrs Stone paused, and leaned back against the rock with her face turned away for a little while. Then she said—

“It did seem even to me, for a while, that the Lord was dealing hardly by Ezra, and that his heart was hardening rather than softening under the hand that was laid upon him. The harvest time had come again, and there had been more than the usual trouble about getting men to help with it. The boys had been kept steadily at work, but made no complaint; and their father, as the hired men declared, had done the work of two. He was the first up in the morning and the last to go to rest at night, and sometimes even had his food carried to the field to him, rather than lose the time coming to the house. So one morning it gave me quite a start to see him coming toward the house about ten o’clock, and I laid down my work and waited till he came in; and, whatever I forget before I die, I shall never forget the look on his face as he came near. I saw that he staggered as he walked, and that his right arm hung helpless by his side.

“‘What is it?’ I cried out, running toward him, He put out his left hand as if to keep me off, and I saw that he moved his lips as though he were speaking, but he uttered no sound.

“‘You are hurt!’ I said; and I took his arm, and he stumbled into the house, and fell across the bed in a dead faint. We did what we could for him—Prissy and I—and in the midst of our trouble I heard steps and voices coming towards the house; and, for the first time, the thought that something worse might have happened came to me. I turned round and saw the two hired men bringing something in on a board. My Davie! I had no power to cry out when I saw him—bruised, broken, and bleeding to death! I had just sense enough left to make them carry him into another room, so that the eyes of his father might not fall on him when they opened; and so they laid him down.

“‘It’ll only hurt him to try to do anything for him, Mrs Stone,’ said one of the men, with a break in his voice. ‘Speak to him. He has got something he wants to tell you. All he has said since it happened is—“I must tell mother.”’

“So I knelt down beside him, and put a little water on his face, and rubbed his hands, and whispered—‘Davie dear, tell mother.’

“And then he opened his eyes and said faintly,—‘It doesn’t hurt much; and, mother dear, father wasn’t to blame.’

“‘And you’re not afraid, my Davie?’ I asked; and he said—

“‘No, I needn’t be, need I, mother? Jim’s gone there, and baby—and Jesus died. Pray, mother!’

“And so I did, a few broken words; and then he died with a smile on his face, which hadn’t left it when we covered it for the last time.”

The pause was longer this time. Fidelia rose and moved away, and stood looking over to the hills on the other side of the valley for a little while, and when she came back Mrs Stone’s face was quite calm, though there were traces of tears upon it.

“It wasn’t till after some time that I heard just how it happened. The boy whose business it was to drive the team of the reaping machine hadn’t come, and Davie was only too proud and happy to be just in his place. His father had been loth to let him try at first, but he consented, and all went well for a while. But the horses were young, and took fright—at what no one knew—and they ran away, with my Davie sitting where he never ought to have been. His father met them at a corner of the fence which they had tried to get over, and by sheer strength held them there till the man came to take the child from the wreck. Ezra never knew that he was hurt till he tried to lift his boy. He knew Davie was in a bad case, even before the men got him out from the ruins of the machine. But he did not think he was going to die till they laid him down on an armful of the fallen wheat; and then he came home, and the men followed with the poor little boy.

“Well, we had a sad time after that. The harvest was long over before my husband was able to go to the fields again. Besides his broken arm he was hurt inwardly, and his nerves gave way. It was weeks before he could look out on the sunshiny fields without a shudder. But he gradually got better after awhile. The harvest didn’t suffer. The men worked well, and the neighbours helped, and it was all saved and well sold, and a great deal of money—or what seemed a great deal to me—came in for it, and passed through my hands. It was the first time I had ever had a chance to know anything about Ezra’s money matters; but he was glad of my help now, and didn’t resent my having to do with it, as I was afraid he might. But he saw that the money didn’t mean all to me that it meant to him: it wasn’t much to me just then, for my boy’s death had been a hard blow to me. I was worn out with Ezra too. A man just well enough to be able to be about, and too sick to do as he has been used to, is a dead weight on a woman’s hands, I can tell you.

“I did the best I could for him, and was not so impatient with his fancies, or with the fretfulness and fault-finding that filled the days for a while; for by this time I had come to see some things differently. I had come over some rough places, but the Lord had been leading me, and I didn’t rebel under Davie’s loss as I had when we lost the others. I didn’t make much headway with my husband. It was only once in a great while that I could say or do anything to please him, but I laid it to his state of mind and body; and I took some comfort, in knowing that he was a little less miserable when I was by than when I was away.

“Dan wasn’t just like the other boys. He wasn’t so bright, for one thing. He was the least like his mother of any of them. He was shy, and hadn’t as much to say for himself as Jim had had; but he helped his father a good deal at this time. He took notice of all that was done or that needed to be done on the place, and coaxed his father out to see to things which he couldn’t do himself. And this took the poor man’s thoughts off from himself, and did him good in other ways.

“He had been much hurt, and he knew that he would never be the same man again; and for a while—and that was the worst time of all—he couldn’t but feel that he might be going to die, and he knew he wasn’t ready. I knew what his thoughts were, only by words muttered when he thought I was asleep, or out of the way. I read to him, and I prayed for him every hour of the day; but I hadn’t the faculty of speech on the subject nearest my heart. When I did say a word he never answered me, and there was no one else to say much to him.

“Early in the fall he had a letter from John Martin, who had been a neighbour when he lived at the old place. He wanted Ezra to come home and visit him. He had heard of his troubles and his poor health, and he said how good it would be for him to come home, and see his old friends and relations again. Of course I was included in the invitation, and Dan; and, after a little, Ezra said, if I wanted to go he would go too. But I did not think that would be the best thing to do. We had pretty good help as long as there was any one to do the planning; and I made Ezra see that, though he might be spared for a while, it would be better for me to stay at home while he was away; and he made up his mind to take Dan and go, for a month or two at least.

“As for me, I felt as if the rest and quiet I should have at home all alone would do me more good than anything else. But afterwards I was sorry enough that I had not gone with them, though it might not have made any difference in the end.

“Well, they went, and had a good time, and started for home—and you know the rest. They got safely enough to within fifty miles of home, and then an accident happened to the cars. Many were hurt, and among them was Dan; and I only just got where he was in time to see him alive; and we brought him home in his coffin, and laid him down with the rest. And again did it seem even to me as if the Lord was hard on Ezra, taking his last child in that terrible way.

“Well, I never could tell you just how we got through the next year. Angry and rebellious! That tells all that could be told of Ezra Stone for that year. He stuck closer than ever, if that could be, to his farm work; and, though he could not do so much with his own hands, his eye was never off the work that was going on, and the crops were as good as ever. He boasted a little about his crops, and the prices he got; but he did not take the comfort of his success as he had done in former years. He did not say it to me, but I am sure he said to himself many a time—‘What does it all amount to?’ It did not seem to make much difference—the adding of a thousand, or maybe two, to the dollars he had already, since there were none to come after him.

“Well, his health failed again that winter, and he was in the house a good deal of his time. I made it my whole business to see to him, and to make the time pass as easily as might be. I read the papers to him—he had always liked that—and after a while I read other things; and once a day, and sometimes twice, I read the Bible to him. I had promised Jim I would do that whenever I could, and I guess he had promised Jim to let me; and sometimes he took pleasure in it; and I have thought since, if I had been different—if I could have showed him the longing I had to do him good, if I could have spoken to him oftener of the Saviour and His love, that which I had longed for and prayed for all these years since Jim died might have come sooner. It came at last.

“‘Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven!’ The Lord Himself said that. And it was just that which happened to my husband. The man who for so many years had seemed to me to have the hardest heart and the narrowest mind that mortal could have, was just made over anew. He became a little child. There is no other way of putting it. He was gentle and teachable—yes, and lovable; and that last year with him seemed to more than make up to us both for all the suffering of our married life. Yes, I did come to love my husband; and, what seemed stranger to me, he came to love me those last years, and if I had been different he might have loved me from the first. My mistake was—but there, I do not need to tell you that, seeing I have told you so much—more than I have ever told even Eunice, I declare. And you needn’t be too sorry for me.”

There had been tears in Fidelia’s eyes many times while the story went on, and there were tears still as she stooped to kiss her.

“I am more glad for you than sorry. It all ended well, Aunt Ruby.”

“Yes; as well as well could be for them, and well for me too. I don’t feel as if I ever could be faithless or afraid again—but there’s no telling. And now, dear, had you not better sing something again? It seems as though they must have missed us before now; and some of them will likely be looking for us.”

So Fidelia kissed her old friend again; and, going a short distance up the steep side of the mountain, she placed herself on a high rock near the ascending path, and sung with a voice both strong and clear:—

> “How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
> Is laid for your faith in His excellent word!”

till she came to the last line, which she repeated over and over:—

“I’ll never—no, never—no, never forsake!” Before she had ended a hand was laid on hers, and she turned to see the moved face of Dr Justin. “Faithful,” he said—“Faithful!” He was pale, and his lips trembled, and so did the hand that touched hers.

“Oh, I’m so glad!” said Fidelia; and then she drew back a little, startled by his pale face, and added—“Were you afraid

about us? Did you think we might be lost?”

“Not afraid—there was no danger of your being lost very long,” said Dr Justin, pulling himself together and trying to speak quietly. “You have not been afraid?”

“No; and I think I could have found my way to the Peak; but Mrs Stone would not let us separate, and she grew very tired. So we sat down and waited, and I have been singing every now and then, hoping that some one might hear. Mrs Stone is a few steps below us.”

He took her hand to help her down from the rock, and held it firmly till they came to the place where Mrs Stone was waiting. She greeted him joyfully.

“Well, there! I *am* glad to see you, Dr Justin. Who would have thought that we two were not able to take care of ourselves?”

“And I am afraid we have spoiled the pleasure of all the rest,” said Fidelia. “Are they all scattered over the mountain looking for us? I am ashamed of myself.”

“No; only Jabez and I were despatched in search of you. And you have not been missed long. In going up the mountain the company got separated into different parties, and you were not missed till all came together at the top. Then Jabez and I undertook to find you.”

“And have you been searching long?”

“No, not long—though it seemed long. Are you too tired to go up the Peak? Because if you are we can send Jabez up to say so.”

“Tired? No. But is there time? I should hate to have to go home and own that I had not been up the mountain after all,” said Mrs Stone. “I do hate to be beat when I set out for anything.”

“There is plenty of time, and they will all be disappointed if you do not go. I must signal to Jabez first, however. He must be somewhere within sight or hearing, I should think.”

So he was, and came rushing down through bushes and over rocks and stones, at a headlong pace.

“Well, I declare! I knew pretty likely somebody would get into a scrape in the course of the day. But I didn’t think of its being either of you.”

“You were to make us your special care, you remember, Jabez,” said Mrs Stone.

“Yes, you promised Eunice,” said Fidelia, laughing. “What became of you? Did you think about us at all?”

“Why, yes! I thought about you more than once. But there were other folks missing too, and I expected you’d all turn up together,” said Jabez, giving a glance toward Dr Justin.

“If we are going up the Peak, the sooner we start the better,” said Dr Justin.

“Well, yes; but Dr Everett told me that if I came across the strayed ones, I must give them this the first thing,” said Jabez, presenting a little basket to Mrs Stone. “He said you’d got to eat something before you start, and take plenty of time. It takes Dr Everett himself to think of everything.”

“Which cannot be said of all the doctors,” said Dr Justin, laughing. “So you must sit down and enjoy your lunch before you go farther;” and he unfolded a snowy napkin and presented a sandwich to each.

They were soon on their way, however. Jabez privately promised Fidelia that he would take her to the Peak by a short cut, which was also a little the steepest, he acknowledged. So they set off together, and Dr Justin, with Mrs Stone, followed a more circuitous path.

But the shortest way proved the longest this time also, for Mrs Stone had time to tell Dr Everett and the girls the history of the morning, and their wanderings here and there in search of the path, before Fidelia, panting and breathless after her scramble over rocks and through thickets of bramble and berry bushes of various sorts, made her appearance.

It was not so late as they supposed. The lunch was the first thing to be considered, and this was done thoroughly by all.

Then, when that was over, they had the measure of enjoyment which is usually to be had on such occasions. They went here and there separately or in groups, and examined, and wondered, and wished, and, above all, determined and declared that it would not be long before they came up there again. They stayed a little longer than was quite wise, perhaps, to watch the lengthening of the western shadows, and the bright reflections which a wonderful sunset sent over to the eastern hills. And then it was full time to go home.

Dr Everett undertook the marshalling of the company, and this time he arranged that they should divide into parties of three or four, each member of a party being responsible for the safe home-getting and general well-being of each in that party, and of no one else.

“And as Mrs Stone and Fidelia seem to be the difficult case this time, we must see to them especially. So, Dr Justin, you take charge of Mrs Stone and one of the little girls, with Susie to help you, and I will take the other little girl with

Fidelia, Nellie Austin being my helper. Yes, that is quite the best way to arrange," said he, nodding to his brother, who did not seem so sure of it.

They got safely to the foot of the mountain, and safely home—tired enough, but cheerful, already eagerly discussing what was to be done on the doctor's next day of leisure, which, however, was not likely to come very soon.

Chapter Ten.

A Bad Dream.

"Eunice," said Mrs Stone, "there is something I want to say to you, only I am afraid you won't like it."

"Even if I shouldn't like it, I don't know that that would be a good reason why you shouldn't say it," responded Eunice, with a smile.

They were sitting together in the front porch, into which the sun was shining brightly; and in September days, when the afternoons are shortening, the sunshine is welcome among these hills, for warmth as well as brightness. They had been sitting there for an hour or two, sometimes exchanging a word about their work, or their neighbours, or the passers-by, but on the whole inclined to silence. Eunice had a book on her lap, and her sewing also, but they had both been neglected for a while. Mrs Stone was knitting steadily on, as if there were nothing more interesting to her at the moment than her monotonous work.

Fidelia had gone with the Everett children and their mother, and several other young people, on the long-talked-of blackberrying expedition, which had been delayed so often for one reason and another that the chances were against success, as far as the fruit was concerned. There had been some discussion as to the wisdom of calling it a nutting expedition instead, though it was early yet to think of getting nuts. But it did not really matter about either the one or the other. The chances were they would find that which they were seeking, though they should get neither nuts nor berries.

The young people had gone in Deacon Ainsworth's hay-cart, seated on a pile of fragrant hay, and with Jabez in charge of the oxen. Mrs Stone had been invited to go with them, but she had declined.

"Mother is coming in the chaise, and Uncle Justin," said Susie Everett. "Mother was afraid of the hay-cart. If you can drive, you might go with mother, Mrs Stone. Uncle Justin wouldn't mind going in the cart, I am sure."

"No, I don't much believe he would, under the circumstances," Mrs Stone had answered; but she still declined. The invitation had been renewed when the chaise passed half-an-hour afterwards, but had been again declined.

"I should have liked to go, just to know how it would seem to be there again," said she. But she had a stronger reason for staying than for going. She had something to say to Eunice which it would be as well to say when Fidelia was not within call.

"Well?" said Eunice, after a pause.

"Well; it isn't so much that I am afraid you won't like it, as that I shall hurt you."

"But if it is to do me good, I shall not mind the hurt after a little."

"But then I should feel dreadfully if you were to turn round and tell me I'd better mind my own business."

"A good deal of my business is yours now, Ruby," said Eunice, smiling still, but with a slow rising of colour to her cheeks.

"Well, I don't know, certainly, that you will think this is; but I know that I mean you nothing but good, and her too."

"Fidelia! Say what you have to say, Ruby."

"Well, I will. Hasn't it ever come into your mind that Justin Everett was letting his thoughts turn towards Fidelia?"

"Justin Everett!—Fidelia!"

There was not another word spoken for a good many minutes. Eunice sat with her eyes cast down and with her colour coming and going; and Mrs Stone, seemingly intent on her knitting, noted every change on the beautiful face. But she waited for Eunice to speak first, and in a little she did so quietly enough.

"I cannot say that I have never thought such a thing possible; but I have never seen any reason to make me think that it had happened. Have you, Ruby?"

"Well, if anybody—say Mrs Holt or Mrs Ainsworth—were to come and tell me all that I could tell you, I expect as likely as not I should tell *them* that all that amounted to nothing. It does not seem anything to tell. Well, a glance maybe, or a long look at her when he never supposed there was any one to take notice! It does not seem much to tell it, but the thought has come into my mind."

"And Fidelia?"

"Oh, as to Fidelia—I guess she's all right! I can't tell you anything about Fidelia. She didn't like him at first—anybody could see that. They are friendly now. Oh, yes, quite friendly! but I guess, Eunice, it is as your friend that Fidelia

thinks of Justin Everett."

"He *is* my friend," said Eunice gravely. And after a little she added—"We will not speak any more about this just now, Ruby. By-and-by perhaps I may. No, you haven't hurt me. And I could bear to be hurt by you, Ruby, for my good or for Fidelia's."

And not another word was spoken on the subject for a long time after that.

The sun was set, but the moon was up before the young people came home. The chaise came first, and was stopped a minute at the gate. Eunice stayed in the porch, but Mrs Stone went down to speak to Mrs Everett at the gate.

"I have got Fidelia with me," said Mrs Everett. "I wanted Justin to stay to take care of the young people. I should have been troubled about them; they are so full of frolic that they forget to take care of themselves. And I knew I should feel safe with Fidelia driving."

"I am going to drive Mrs Everett all the way home, Eunice," said Fidelia.

"There is no need. I guess I can drive myself the rest of the way."

But, knowing the lady's timidity, Eunice told Fidelia she had better go on.

"And I will send Jotham back with her at once," said Mrs Everett.

And so she did; and the chaise had not gone again before the sound of voices singing told that the party in the hay-cart were drawing near. There was a general outcry when it was discovered that Fidelia had not remained at Dr Everett's, where the young people were to have tea, and spend the evening. She was intreated to return with them. Dr Justin had gone to the door to speak to Eunice, and Susie followed him, begging him to ask permission for Fidelia to go. But Eunice said, in her gentlest voice, that she would like Fidelia to stay at home; and Dr Justin said nothing.

"Would you like to have gone, Fidelia?" asked Eunice, as they went into the house.

"No; I didn't care about going. I have had enough of noise and nonsense for one day. Oh, yes, I enjoyed it! We didn't get many berries; and—there!—they have carried mine off with them. I am hungry. I will tell you all about it by-and-by."

But there was nothing of very much interest to tell. Dr Justin's name came in with the rest, rather more readily than had been the case when she first came home, and neither of her listeners lost word, or tone, or gesture. But Fidelia had nothing of special interest to tell, and certainly she had nothing to conceal.

"She does not care for him. She is not thinking about him," said Eunice to herself.

"She does not care for him, or she does not know it," thought Mrs Stone; and both women were glad in their hearts that Dr Justin's visit was drawing to a close.

And so were others among his friends. At that moment Dr Everett and his wife were saying a few words to one another on the same subject.

"I am afraid he is thinking about her—that he does care for her," said the gentle little lady, who, much against her will, had been induced to go with the young people in the afternoon, because her husband had said it was the right thing to do. "No; I am quite sure he has not spoken, and I don't think Fidelia has the least thought of such a thing."

"And he mustn't speak. I would not have Miss Eunice troubled now for more than I can say. No he must not speak; and yet I don't see how I can tell him so, unless he first speaks to me."

"But, husband, do you think it would trouble her? I think Eunice Marsh is far beyond all such trouble now. And if—"

"We will not speak about it. Eunice is very near heaven, as I believe; but she can never be beyond caring for what must affect her sister's happiness. Justin must not speak. It would be the same sad story over again. Fidelia would never leave her sister if she knew her state. And she would have to know it. I do not think Justin will speak—now—unless he should be betrayed into it. But one can never tell. I am thankful he has but another day."

"But another day!" Dr Justin had said those words a good many times to himself during the afternoon, but he had not said them, as his brother did, with thankfulness. He did not mean to speak to Fidelia. He told himself that he must not speak; that speaking to her now could do no good—only evil. He wished the day well over, and for the moment he did not care to look beyond it.

They all said—"Only another day!" But much, either for good or ill, may happen in one day—even in one moment. And the next day it happened to Fidelia that the knowledge came to her, not of Justin Everett's secret, but of her own. It was nobody's fault, but it was a great misfortune; and it happened in this way.

In the afternoon, while the sisters and Mrs Stone were sitting in the porch in the sunshine, Jabez Ainsworth passed in the doctor's chaise, and he stopped to tell them that he was going down to the depôt to see about Dr Justin's filly.

"Dr Justin will be along in a few minutes riding her. She must be aboard the cars to-night, they say, and I am to stay with her to see that she doesn't get scared or anything. Dr Justin will drive home in the chaise." And Jabez went on.

Before a word was spoken Dr Justin came in sight.

"Eunice," said Fidelia eagerly, "come down to the gate and see Dolly. She is the most beautiful creature, and gentle

as a lamb. She minds Dr Justin's least word."

They went down to the gate, and Mrs Stone followed, much interested for various reasons. A beautiful brown creature was Dolly, gentle and full of spirit, with shy, bright eyes, and a mouth which answered to the slightest touch. She was duly praised and petted, and all expressed the hope that she might reach her new home in safety, and be happy there.

"You are not in danger of being too late, are you?" asked Mrs Stone, in a tone which might imply that she thought the danger certain.

"We don't go to-night—I mean Dolly does not go to-night. Miss Eunice, you promised to give me the address of your friend," said Dr Justin, taking his note-book and pencil from his pocket. He was riding his beautiful mare as he used to ride the horses in the pasture when he was a boy—with a bridle, but with no saddle, and he dropped the rein on the creature's neck as he prepared to write.

"There come the cars!" said Mrs Stone in a whisper, and the shriek of the engine rose and echoed and re-echoed among the hills. Neither of the women for months heard the sound without a thrill of pain. For it startled the pretty, gentle creature into terror which the loose rein gave Dr Justin no power for the moment to soothe or to control, and she sprang forward with a bound which, happily, failed to unseat her rider, and was out of sight round the corner of the road in a moment.

"Come, Aunt Ruby! No—stay with Eunice!" cried Fidelia; and she flew rather than ran up the hill, and out of sight. To see—what? Dr Justin standing with his arm thrown over the neck of his favourite, while, with hand and voice, he soothed her into quiet again.

The sudden relief moved Fidelia as the sight of no catastrophe could have moved her. With a cry she sprang forward, clasping with both hers the hand he held out to her; and, in the single instant of meeting, his eyes read in hers the secret which she herself had not known.

"My Faithful!" he breathed. She cared for him. He had but to speak the word, and she would be his for ever.

But he did not speak it. Something—was it a sense of honour, or an old memory, or was it the sudden change in the beautiful moved face that kept him silent?

"Eunice!—I must go and tell Eunice! We were all so frightened," she said hurriedly.

"I was in no danger. I hope your sister has not been startled. I will go back with you."

"No, no! There is no need;" and she waited to hear no more. She was out of sight in a moment. She met Mrs Stone toiling slowly up the hill.

"It is all right," said Fidelia. "He is walking and leading Dolly up the hill. We got our fright for nothing."

"And a good thing, thank God!" said Mrs Stone. "Now, Eunice, hadn't you better go and lie down? You have had enough excitement for one night," she added, as they entered the gate.

Eunice was pale, but quite calm. She was thinking, not of herself, but of her sister.

"You ran too fast, Fidelia."

"A great deal too fast. And up the hill too. And then to see him standing there—all right—with his arm over Dolly's neck, as cool as a cucumber! It was an anti-climax, Aunt Ruby, if you know what that is."

"Well, you didn't stay long to sympathise with him, did you?" said Mrs Stone.

"He didn't need it; and it was Eunice I was thinking of;" and Fidelia, who did not yet understand what had happened to her, looked at her sister with wondering eyes. "Were you frightened, Eunice? Is your heart beating in that uncomfortable way again? Come in and lie down, as Aunt Ruby says."

They went in, but Eunice did not lie down. They had tea as usual, and then Fidelia moved about, a little restless for a time; and then she sat down quietly with her work, and a book on the table beside her. It was Mrs Stone who went to the door when Jabez stopped to ask for Miss Eunice, and to explain that it had been thought best to give the mare a quiet night after her fright before beginning her journey, and that she was to leave at four the next day, and that Dr Justin was to travel a certain distance in the slow train with her, till he saw how it was to be.

"To-morrow afternoon they go. Were you scared Mrs Stone? And how is Miss Eunice?"

"Miss Eunice is all right, and so is Fidelia. Yes, I was scared a little, but not enough to hurt me; and I hope this is the last of Dr Justin for to-night anyway."

But it was not. Fidelia heard his voice at the door after she had gone to her room for the night. She did not hear what he said, but she heard Mrs Stone's answer.

"Yes, you did give us a scare. But there is no harm done. At least I hope not. They've both gone to bed anyhow. You can't very well see either of them to-night."

"I will call to-morrow, if possible. But if I should not see them again to-morrow—"

That was all Fidelia heard.

“Not see him to-morrow! No, nor the next day, nor the next—nor ever again, I hope and pray,” said Fidelia, hiding her face in her hands. For she was beginning to understand what had come upon her. And had she been a traitor to herself as well as to Eunice? Had she read aright the triumph in his eyes? And was he a traitor too?

“And, oh, Eunice—Eunice—Eunice!”

That was the burden of her thoughts, through many weary hours. She slept towards morning, and woke with a burden of shame and anger, and sorrow and dread, which made all trouble which she had passed through; or which she dreaded, seem as nothing to her.

But one night of sleepless misery does not pale the face, or dim the eye, or quell the courage of a healthy girl of eighteen; and she rose early and did all that she usually did in the morning, and, for all that Mrs Stone’s watchful eyes could see, enjoyed her breakfast as usual.

The morning passed as other mornings had, except that, perhaps, the time given upstairs to her books was a little longer than she gave on most days. But she came down in the middle of her work to read a bit to Eunice, as she sometimes did, either that she might claim admiration for something which she herself admired, or to ask an explanation of something which she did not quite understand. After dinner, she declared herself inclined to go and see old Mrs Belknap, which, she owned, she ought to have done long ago.

“Will you go with me, Mrs Stone?”

Mrs Stone hesitated.

“Well, no; I guess I’ll stay with Eunice. Oh, yes, she’s well enough!—but I guess I’ll stay. If you’ll wait till to-morrow I’ll try to go.”

“But I am going somewhere else to-morrow. I guess I’ll go.”

“You’ll miss seeing the last of Dr Justin if you go. He goes at five.”

“Oh, I can be back long before five! I don’t mean to stay to tea, even if she should ask me, which is not likely. I wonder if there is anything I could carry to the poor old lady.”

“I thought of sending her the stockings I finished last. And you might take her a bottle of pickles. I’ll put them in the basket if you are bound to go.”

“Why, Fidelia, you’ll miss saying good-bye to Dr Justin,” said Eunice also, when Fidelia went into her room before starting.

“I can be back before five. Three hours—nearly four. Oh, yes, I can be back! If I don’t go to see the old lady to-day I can’t this week, and perhaps not at all. I think I had better go, Eunice. I’ll take the near way through the woods.”

She went slowly up the hill, pausing a moment before passing the big rock, then hurried on till she came to the place where she entered the woods. She lingered there, making believe that she was enjoying the sunshine and the pleasant air, and singing as she crossed the level to the grey solitary house standing where two roads met.

Her visit was as successful as visits to Mrs Belknap usually were, but she did not linger over it. She should have taken sweetmeats instead of pickles to the old lady, she told Mrs Stone afterwards, for she was sharp and sour enough by nature. But she told her a good many things about the seminary, and about her visit at Dr Austin’s, and about getting lost on the mountain with Mrs Stone. She answered many questions also, some of which were not very easy to answer, and on the whole mollified the old lady before she went away.

“And how is Eunice these days? Yes, I know she looks pretty well. I worried considerable about her when I heard that Justin Everett was coming home. But I always thought she showed her sense by letting him go away, and staying herself. I guess she’ll let him go again. What do you think of him? Has he changed any? He hasn’t as much as looked at my place since he came.”

“That is strange!” said Fidelia. “I don’t remember him before he went away. Yes, he is going away pretty soon. Mrs Belknap, when are you coming over to see Eunice and Mrs Stone?”

“Ruby Peck that was? She was a pretty smart girl when I used to know her, and I expect she did a pretty smart thing when she married Ezra Stone. Folks say she’s got enough to keep her all her life, which is more than can be said of me; and Ezra Stone could not hold a candle to the kind of man *my* husband was!” and so on.

Fidelia heard it all, and remembered it, and made Eunice and Mrs Stone smile by repeating some of the old lady’s words, but all the time she was saying to herself—

“Shall I hurry home—or shall I stay till it is too late? Oh, I must go! No, I must not go.”

She went at last hurrying over the meadow and through the wood, till she came breathless to the gap in the fence by the road, and then she sat down to rest. And then slowly up the hill came the doctor’s old Grey, as usual, choosing his own pace. She did not see him, but she knew it was old Grey, and then she heard a voice say—“Let him breathe a minute;” and the old horse stood still.

Fidelia held her breath lest she should be discovered, then watched them as they went on, till the old chaise passed out of sight. Then she turned homewards, pausing at the spot near the big rock where last night she had seen Justin

Everett soothing his frightened mare with hand and voice.

“Only last night!” she repeated. “It was a dream—only a dream; and everything shall be as before—yes, everything! Only I wish Eunice would tell me—”

To outward seeming, all was as before. And, though every thought of Dr Justin hurt her, it was chiefly because of her own treachery to Eunice, as she angrily called it. And so a few days passed, and she grew afraid of the dull, persistent pain at last, and said—“I will speak to Eunice.”

Chapter Eleven.

A Sad Reality.

So one afternoon, when Eunice had gone to her room to rest, Fidelia followed her softly. As she paused a moment at the door, wondering if she were asleep, Eunice said—

“I see you, Fidelia; come in.” So Fidelia went in, and, as she stood over her sister, her trouble showed in her face. “What is it, dear? Are you not well?”

“Yes, I am well. But I am naughty, Eunice, and discontented, as I used sometimes to be when I was a little girl, and you used to send me away for a change.”

“Well, I am going to send you away again—too soon for my own pleasure; but, since it will be for your good, my darling, I must let you go.”

“I hope it may be for my good, Eunice. I am not good, but I will try to be good.”

“Fidelia, what is it? Something troubles you. Why, you are trembling! Are you cold? Sit down here beside me, and tell me what is the matter.”

“Well, we must speak softly, or we shall have Mrs Stone in upon us. Yes, I want to speak to you, and I have been trying to ‘dodge’ her all day. I hardly ever get you to myself now—not at the right time, when I have something to say.”

Fidelia spoke rapidly, as though she hardly considered what she was saying.

“Is that the trouble, dear? I am sorry,” said Eunice, gravely.

“You needn’t be sorry. Aunt Ruby is not the trouble. I am glad she is here.”

“Well, dear, tell me. You are making me anxious.”

“Something is the matter, Eunice. I do feel troubled. I feel as if there were something—something that I ought to be told. If you say there is nothing, Eunice, that will be enough.”

Eunice sat for a long time without a word, and Fidelia was saying to herself—

“When she has told me, I shall be able to forget these last few miserable days, and be as I was before. It is a bad dream, that is all, and I must forget it.”

“Yes, I will tell you. I have always wished to tell you. It is best, I am sure; and, though I may give you pain, you will be glad afterwards.”

“Yes,” said Fidelia faintly—“glad afterwards.”

“Fidelia, I may tell you now how unhappy I was for a time last year. Not unhappy exactly, but anxious and afraid—”

“And you sent me away?”

“Yes, dear, as was best. And when you came home, the worst was nearly over. Dr Everett came next day and gave me hope, and then Dr Justin came, and I was not afraid any more. He seemed to know—to understand better even than Dr Everett. Oh, Fidelia, I never can tell you the thankfulness of my heart! I wonder I didn’t sing it out to you a hundred times. But they seemed to think it was best not to say anything to you, as I had not spoken before. But I am glad to speak now, though I am afraid you will be startled.”

Fidelia rose and placed herself with her face turned from the light.

“Well?”

“Fidelia, you remember grandmother—how very patiently she suffered, and how long? Oh, no one but Dr Everett and myself knows what she suffered! It was a long and terrible time. Every night we used to pray together—she and I—that she might be patient to the end, and that, if it were God’s will, the end might be hastened. And so, when I thought—when the awful fear first came to me that I had all that to go through—well, for a while my faith failed me. I did not tell any one, not even Dr Everett. That was last year. Then you went away, and the winter was long and lonesome; but I was helped, and strengthened, and comforted, even at the worst time.

“It was not all fancy, dear. I had some cause for fear, but the danger for me is not that. I shall have no long time of

suffering, they say; and, though I can never hope to be very strong again, I may live and have such health as I have now for years. And, Fidelia, you must not say that I should have told you, and that I should not have let you go away. I could not have you suffer in seeing my suffering as long as I could keep it from you; and you see it was better so. You must have known after a time, if my fears had been realised, but not too soon."

Fidelia had listened like one in a dream. Her fears had touched nothing like this. All the time she had been thinking of quite other things. She sank down on her knees, and laid her face on her sister's lap with a cry.

"Oh, my Eunice—my Eunice!" Eunice laid her hand on her bowed head, but she did not speak for a while. By-and-by she said, gently—

"Fidelia, listen to me. There is nothing to grieve for. Think how different it might have been, and what a happy summer I have had! Neither pain, nor fear of pain—only a quiet mind, and rest, and peace. Tell me, dear, have you not sometimes been afraid of me, that I might have long suffering before me? And are you not glad and thankful with me? There is nothing to grieve for—nothing. Fidelia, have you never been afraid?" Fidelia raised her head.

"Yes, I have been afraid that perhaps, when you came to be an old woman like grandmother, you might have to suffer; but—"

"Well, you need not be afraid any more," said Eunice, leaning back as though there was nothing more to be said.

"And are you well, Eunice? And have you nothing else to tell me?"

"I am well—for me. You must see that yourself, dear. I don't expect ever to be very strong. I don't think I was ever one of the strong women; and the strain of nursing and anxiety told more on me than it would on some women. But if I take care of myself now, I shall have strength to do a great deal; and now that Mrs Stone is here, to take the housekeeping when you are away, I shall have leisure for reading and other pleasant things. And I have my Sunday-school class, and I can visit my friends, and, though I can never do much at nursing again, I can go to see sick and sorrowful people, and help and comfort them a little perhaps. And I can always speak a word for my Lord and Master. My darling, I can see such a happy, restful life before me!"

"Oh, my Eunice—my Eunice!" Fidelia's face was hidden again. "A happy life before her!" repeated she; and the thought of her own impatience and discontent, her envyings and her small ambitions, made her ashamed. "Oh, I am not a good girl! I am all wrong, all wrong!"

All thoughts of her "bad dream" had passed out of her mind till Eunice spoke again.

"Have I nothing else to tell? Nothing, I think, which you have not guessed already. And it may not come so soon as they think. But I think it need not trouble you. The thought of it does not trouble me any more except for your sake. And even to you the sorrow will only be for a little while, and the gladness will come after."

Fidelia raised her head, and looked with beseeching eyes into the face of her sister.

"Eunice, tell me!"

Eunice stooped and kissed her with a smile on her lips, though they trembled a little.

"Dear, do you remember our father, and how he died? Well, it may be that the end will come to me as it came to him. That is what Dr Everett thinks, and Dr Justin. They cannot tell me when. I may live for years—but, there, I may not. Is it cruel to tell you? But afterwards you would grieve not to have known. And you are a woman now, my darling, and you know that our life is not given just to take our pleasure in, but that the world is meant to be a place of discipline and of work for our fellow-creatures and for the Lord."

Eunice paused a moment.

"I hoped to work too, and at first I murmured, but I am quite content now, as you will be by-and-by. And you will never forget me, in the happy life which I hope—which I believe lies before you."

Fidelia put up her hands with a cry. "Hush!" she cried. "I cannot bear it; I cannot believe it. Oh, Eunice, how can you say it, smiling like that, when you know that I have no one in the world but you?"

"Does it seem so to you, dear? You have no other sister; but so many love you—and—you have our Lord and Saviour, whom you love, and whom you seek to serve; and you will not forget me. I shall be something in your life always, and to your children; and, dear, we will not speak any more—I am very tired."

Fidelia rose without a word. She made her sister lie down, and brought her water to drink, and bathed her face; and then Mrs Stone's step was heard on the stairs, and Eunice said—

"Go away for a little while. Go out for a walk through the woods, and think it all over, and ask our Father to give you a little glimpse of all the blessing He intends to give you through your sorrow. My darling, I have gone through the suffering. Yes, I know that parting is not so hard for the one who goes. But it is all as good and right as God can make it for His children, and you will see it so in a little while."

"Oh, Eunice, I am not good! You do not know—"

"But He knows, dear. Tell it all to Him, who loves you even better than I love you."

There was no time for more, and Fidelia went out at one door as Mrs Stone came in at the other. She was bewildered

and helpless for the moment. Her first impulse was to throw herself on the bed in an utter abandonment of sorrow, and, alas! of rebellion, under the hand that touched her. But Eunice had said—“Go out into the woods,” and she must go. So she rose and bathed her face, and, wrapping herself in her shawl, went out through the garden to the fields, and then to the woods, walking rapidly.

It was not grief alone which worried her. She was amazed and rebellious, and sought to see nothing beyond the desolation of being left without her sister. She was very selfish in the first shock of surprise and pain, and it was an hour of bitterness that she passed beneath the cedars by the brook; and, alas for her! she took both pain and bitterness home with her again.

Remembering her own time of trouble, Eunice had patience with her, knowing that light and help would come. She waited long, but she waited patiently, and help came at last.

“Fidelia,” said Mrs Stone, one night soon after this, “are you thinking of going to conference meeting to-night?”

“No; I can’t say I am. Mr Runkin is not at home.”

“Unless he came this morning, which is not likely. But there’ll be somebody there to lead the meeting, I expect.”

“Deacon Ainsworth, I guess,” said Fidelia, with a shrug. “I don’t feel as if it would pay to go to hear him.”

“No, I don’t suppose it would pay to go to hear him, if that were all you went for, or to hear anybody else. But don’t you know that to ‘two or three gathered together’ in His name the promise is given?”

“There will be two or three and more there, without me; and I shouldn’t help much, Aunt Ruby.”

“But you might be helped if the Lord Himself were there. I’d guess you’d better go. If you go, you’d better take down this book to the doctor. He left it here by mistake, I expect, since it is in a strange tongue. I presume he thinks he lost it out of his chaise, and he’ll be glad to get it again. If you do go, Jabez’ll be along at the right time to come home with you.” All this Mrs Stone said, seeing, but not seeming to sea, the cloud that lay darkly on Fidelia’s face.

One thought which had a little hope in it had come to Fidelia that day under the cedars—“Dr Everett will know. I will ask Dr Everett.” But she had never done so; and Mrs Stone’s insistence about the meeting and the doctor’s book gave the needed impulse; and she said she would go.

She was a little late; but so were Dr Everett and his daughters, who were just coming out of their own gate when she came in sight.

“It won’t be the deacon, at any rate,” thought Fidelia.

They waited for her, and she gave the book. It was as Mrs Stone had said—the doctor had thought the book lost, and was glad to see it again.

“Thank you, Miss Faithful. You generally do bring pleasant things and thoughts when you come. And how is Miss Eunice?” But, seeing her face, he did not wait for the answer. “Of course she is well, or you would not be here;” and they moved down the street together.

Afterwards, when Mrs Stone asked Fidelia if they had a good meeting, she said—“Oh, yes, I guess so! Dr Everett took the lead.” But that was all she could tell. She did not even remember the hymns that were sung, because she did not sing them. When she left the schoolroom her heart was beating so heavily, that she had to wait till they reached the house before she found voice to say—

“Are you busy, Dr Everett? I should like to speak to you before I go home.”

Dr Everett opened the door of his office, and she went in there. He lighted a lamp, and sat down opposite to her.

“Well, dear, what have you to say to me?”

“You know—Eunice—”

There is no need to go over it all again. What could the doctor say that Eunice had not said before? That they should be glad and thankful that no time of terrible suffering lay before her—that years of happy life might remain to her, though she could never be strong. That was his brother’s opinion, decidedly. And then he added a few words of sympathy and encouragement.

"YOU ARE NO LONGER A CHILD, FIDELIA; AND DOING GOD'S WILL IS BEST, WHETHER WE SEE IT NOW OR NOT." *Page 215.*

"Eunice was right to tell you. You are no longer a child, Fidelia; and doing God's will is best, whether we see it now or not;" and much more he said.

Fidelia sat silent and tearless through all, and when he ceased she said—

"You have told me your brother's opinion, now tell me yours."

"It is the same as his, only I know better than he could know how great was the strain of the watching, and the anxiety, and the sight of terrible suffering which she bore for years; and I believe that the end may be nearer than he thinks."

"Yes, Eunice says so. That is what I wished to know," said Fidelia, rising. "Now I must go."

"You need not hurry; Jabez has not come."

Fidelia sat down without a word. All this was not like her. The doctor would have liked to see her tears; but perhaps they might as well wait till she was at home. He had a word to say as to what was best for Eunice.

"Mrs Stone is a good nurse, and she loves your sister, and when you are away—"

"I am not going away," said she.

"To the seminary? Does Eunice know?"

"I have not told her, but I think she must know that it is impossible."

"She has greatly desired for you the privileges of the place. She will be disappointed."

"I cannot go."

"I think, if I were you, I would leave it to your sister to say. And, remember, she must not be excited or troubled."

"I know."

"And you must know that Mrs Stone is not just a nurse, but a friend whom your sister loves and trusts, and you must trust her too."

"I know," repeated Fidelia.

"If you were to ask my advice, I should say—Let there be no change in your plans; go as you intended to go, and—"

"But I am not going to ask your advice, nor the advice of any one. You must think me a poor creature, Dr Everett, if you can believe that I could leave my sister, now that I know!"

"My dear, you know better than that."

“Eunice did not go away when—Oh, Dr Everett, I am so miserable! She is all I have—all I have!”

The tears came now in a flood.

“That is better,” said the doctor to himself. To Fidelia he said nothing for awhile, but let her tears have way. There was no time for more words, for Jabez had come.

Strange to say, there was not a word spoken between Fidelia and the lad till they reached home. Jabez had “thought over” a good many things he meant to ask about, as to his recent reading, but he had caught a glimpse of her face by the light of the doctor’s lamp, and the questions were kept for another time.

“Miss Eunice is not worse, is she, Fidelia?” said he as they entered the gate.

“No, Jabez; but—good-night.”

One word of Dr Everett’s stayed with Fidelia. Eunice must not be excited or troubled. Still many days must not pass before her decision to stay at home was made known to her. Would it grieve and trouble her very much?

In her perplexity Fidelia spoke first to Mrs Stone, who listened in silence to all she had to say.

“Is it that which has been troubling you all these days?” said she, with the air of one relieved. “Let’s talk it over and find out what is best, before we say a word to Eunice about it. Is it of her you are thinking, or yourself? Before we go further you must settle that.”

“It isn’t that I think Eunice needs me at home, if that is what you mean.”

“Yes; you know I will take good care of her. I love her, and I have nursed sick folks before. She’ll miss you? Yes; but then she has set her heart on your getting the good of another year at the seminary, and she may feel worse about your having to lose that than about her having to lose your company. And she begins this winter with better health and better courage than she did last winter.”

“And do you think I would have gone away last winter if I had known? I know she has you now. Yes, Aunt Ruby, it is of myself I am thinking. She is all I’ve got, and I must stay with her while she is here. Months or years—what is the difference?”

“I understand your feeling.” There was a long silence, and then Mrs Stone added—“I don’t know that I am capable of realising all the good a year at the seminary would do you. I think you couldn’t fail to get much good for this world, and for the next as well, from the company of your sister. But if she has set her heart on your going away, I don’t see but you must go, dear.”

“I cannot, Aunt Ruby.”

“I know that’s your feeling. But you mustn’t be wilful about it, Fidelia.”

“I cannot go.”

“Have you spoken to Dr Everett?”

“Yes, but he didn’t help me any.”

“Well, I don’t see but you’ll have to talk to Eunice about it. Only you must make up your mind to do just as she says. And you must lay it all before the Lord. It is His will you must seek to know.”

“You will have to do that for me, Aunt Ruby. I don’t seem to have any right to do that.”

“Because you can’t submit. But, child, you may set your heart on getting your own will, and you may get it; and, if you do, it will be bitterness to you. Give up your will to be guided by the Lord, and then you will know what it is to be content.”

“How can it be His will that I should leave her who has been more than a mother to me all my life, now that she is so near—Oh, Aunt Ruby, I cannot go!”

To say that Fidelia was heart-sick these days, is not saying too much. She grieved over Eunice; and all her sorrow and her love were embittered by the memory of the “bad dream” which would return; and she hated it and herself, traitor as she called herself. She did not sleep at night, and she was restless and listless by day; her face grew pale, and her eyes grew large and full of anxious pain; and her sister, who had watched her through it all, could keep silence no longer, and so she spoke.

Fidelia had come down as usual with her book in her hand, but, seated at the window, with her eyes on the fading vine-leaves that fluttered about it, she seemed to have forgotten her book and the reading which Eunice had prepared herself to hear.

“Are you ready, dear?” said Eunice.

“Ready?” repeated Fidelia. “I don’t know. I don’t seem to care much about it to-day, or about anything else.”

“Fidelia, come and sit here by me. Never mind the book, dear. What is it that troubles you? Is it the thought of going away?”

“I don’t think I can go, Eunice. I don’t think I had better go.”

“Will you tell me all about it, dear?” said Eunice, speaking very gently. “Come and sit by me.”

Fidelia rose and went slowly to her sister’s side.

“For one thing, I don’t feel as if I could leave you,” said she, putting great restraint upon herself, that she might speak quietly.

“Well, and what else?”

“I should have to work even harder that I did last year in order to graduate. It is quite doubtful whether I could if I should do my best; and I don’t seem to care about it enough to try.”

“You might feel differently when you were there among the rest of the pupils.”

Fidelia shook her head.

“I think perhaps I should study at home, and perhaps teach awhile, as we first intended; and I might go next year. I don’t seem to have the ambition I used to have about it. Going to the seminary isn’t everything. I guess you had better let me stay at home.”

“I will think about it, dear. I am sorry you feel so,” said Eunice gravely.

Of course Fidelia had her own way. After much consideration of the matter by Eunice and her two counsellors, Mrs Stone and the doctor, it was thought best that it should be so. She was too unhappy and indifferent to appreciate or to profit by the advantages to be enjoyed at the seminary, and for the present she would be better at home. She could still go there later, if the way should open; and so it was left.

Jabez’s plans were not settled for the next summer yet; but, whether he was to rent Miss Eunice’s garden or not, it must be planted and sowed by some one; and the more there was done in the fall the less there would be to do in the spring.

“And I consider that it was in the contract that I should leave it all straight,” said Jabez; and so he worked faithfully, and Fidelia worked with him; and the sharp autumn winds brought a tinge of colour to her pale face, and now and then the sound of her laugh brought a thrill of pleasure to the hearts of the two women sitting within.

She was very gentle and loving with Eunice all this time, watching over her, and anticipating her wishes in many sweet and unexpected ways. She was helpful to Mrs Stone also—indeed, showing a little wilfulness in the constant taking of the least pleasant part of the household work into her own hands. She was trying to be good, but she was not happy. She might have known—she did know, that without submission to the will of God no one could be either truly happy or good; and she was not submissive. Things had gone sadly wrong with their happy life, and for her she saw no chance happiness again.

Poor foolish child!—that she could not see, because she shut her eyes to the light.

Chapter Twelve.

The Winter School.

Fidelia had too much real strength of character long to yield willingly to sorrow or to the pain of rebellion. She had the sense to see that her sadness depressed her sister, and did her harm.

She could not “make believe” to be happy and light-hearted as of old, but after a time she did try to accept the circumstances of her life as it seemed to lie before her, and to determine to make the best of it; and Eunice was content to wait patiently till a better peace on a surer foundation should be hers. And help came to Fidelia, after a time, in a way not foreseen.

They were all expected to spend Thanksgiving Day at Dr Everett’s. That is, they were to go to church in the morning, and return to dine early with the Everetts, intending to be home before dark. There was a little change in the plan, however. At the church they met Mrs Pease, the sister of Ezra Stone, who invited Mrs Stone to go home with her and keep Thanksgiving with “her own folks at the old place;” and Mrs Stone accepted the invitation, though it seemed rather like leaving “her own folks” to do so.

Mrs Pease had not been any too friendly hitherto and her sister-in-law was too glad to meet her halfway. So she gave up the pleasure she had been promising herself at Dr Everett’s, and went with her. Her kind heart had been touched by the sight of the boys growing up there “on father’s old place,” as she always called it to herself, and she longed for a chance to do them good, for the sake of the boys she had lost, and who were lying beside their father and their little sister far away in the West. So she gladly went.

All Thanksgiving Days and dinners are alike in most respects in homes were nothing very sorrowful has happened since the last one. It was in all respects a delightful day at Dr Everett’s. It was very mild for the season, and the young people went out and in, and amused themselves in various ways, and, without making any definite plan to that end, had a good time.

“Fidelia seems to be growing more cheerful again,” said the doctor, as the sound of gay voices came to them where

they were sitting in the house.

“Yes; I hope it will be well with her after awhile. I am not afraid for her,” said Eunice. But though she smiled she sighed also; and then she added—“I would have liked to live a little longer for her sake.”

“You may live many years yet, as Justin says. With a quiet life, such as you live, you may be well, though not strong, for years to come. You may see your sister’s children yet before you die.”

Eunice shook her head.

“No; I do not look for that. And I don’t think Justin quite knows.”

“You are not feeling worse, Eunice?”

“No—oh, no! I am better in many ways. I do not trouble myself about my health any more. I hope I am willing either to stay or to go. As for my Fidelia—why, she will be as safe, and by-and-by she will be as happy without me as with me, thank God!”

There was a pause of several minutes, and then Dr Everett said—

“I had a letter from Justin the other day. Yes—I know Mary showed it to you. There was a private note in it that Mary did not see. Eunice, Justin wrote to me about Fidelia.”

He had moved away a little, and was watching Miss Eunice’s face with some anxiety. She was silent a moment, and she said gravely—“I am not sure that it was wise in him to do so.”

“You are not surprised?”

“I am surprised that he should have written to you. I am not surprised at what he had to say—if it is as I think. He spoke to me before he went away.”

“He spoke to you?” said the doctor in astonishment, coming forward and sitting down again. “And Fidelia?”

“No,” answered Eunice gravely; “she is too young. I would not let him speak; and indeed he had not the chance. I would not have her disturbed by any such thoughts.”

“You are right. Justin was a bold man to venture to speak to you—about your sister. She is worth waiting for, if he have the courage to wait this time. Forgive me, Eunice—but I am angry with him.”

“You must not be angry with Justin for my sake. That is all past, Dr Everett—quite past. I did not quite know it myself until I saw him. Yes, I own I was a little afraid at the thought of his coming. But he was quite changed—another man. A better man perhaps than the Justin I loved when I was young, but different. Oh, yes, I love him still, in another way! You must see how differently, since I can say this to you.”

Dr Everett rose and walked several times up and down the room. Then Eunice spoke again.

“There is something which I ought to have told you long ago, for I have seen that you have been feeling hard toward your brother because of me. I had written to set him free from his promise to me, long before I heard that he was going to be married. I could not leave them, you know, and could not bear that he should feel himself bound to me and regret it. I do not deny that I felt his marriage as a blow. But all that has been long past. I never grudged him any happiness he may have had, nor any happiness that may come to him. But I will not have my Fidelia disturbed by thoughts of him, for years to come. Why did he write to you?”

“He gave me no particular reason. I think it was partly because he was not happy in keeping a secret from me. Foolish fellow! I knew how it was with him before he knew it himself. I was anxious only to get him away before he should betray himself to her.”

“He did not speak to her.”

“No. I think, too, he wished to bespeak for her a brother’s care, now and always. That was foolish too. I do not think I love my own daughters better than I love Fidelia.”

“I know it. I am sure of it; and I shall feel thankful that when I leave her she will be in your care.”

There was silence between them for awhile. Then Eunice said—

“Dr Everett, had you any special reason for telling me this?”

“For a time I hesitated, lest I might hurt you. But I felt that it would be wrong to conceal from you anything that might affect your sister’s future.”

“It is all in God’s hands. I leave it there. But I will not have Fidelia disturbed now, nor for years to come,” repeated Eunice.

“But not for *many* years, Eunice? Still, you are wise. If he were to speak now, or soon, it would end all for him. Fidelia would be shocked and offended for your sake. And indeed it would be wrong for other reasons.”

“We will leave it all, Dr Everett. We will not speak of this again. Say to Justin,—if you say anything,—that he must wait.”

“Eunice, will you let me say one thing more? I confess that I was hard on Justin long ago. I did not know that you had set him free from his promise, and I wrote to him, telling him that it would not be wise for himself or pleasant for me that he should bring his wife to visit us at that time, as he spoke of doing. I was hard on him. He did not write for a long time, but he forgave me and wrote first. I thought then he was not happy in his marriage. He told me something about it when he came home last. His wife was the adopted daughter of our uncle—a spoiled child, I fear. She loved him, and, I suppose, let him see it. His uncle wished for the marriage, and ‘it did not seem to matter much,’ he said, which was wrong. And so it came to pass. He tried to make her happy while she lived, he said. You are right, Eunice. Justin is a better and a stronger man than his youth promised. Yes, it is right that he should wait, though, waiting, he may lose the prize he covets. Other eyes are on the child; but to speak now would be to lose her.”

“We will not say anything more,” said Eunice.

Indeed there was no chance to say anything more at that time. A pleasant clamour had arisen in the front yard, where the young people had been moving about quietly enough until Jabez came. Jabez had been eating his Thanksgiving dinner at his grandfather’s, with uncles aunts, and cousins, as was the thing to do, and had enjoyed it all, it is to be supposed. But that something was the matter Fidelia saw the moment he came near.

“I have been to the office, and I have got the letters—one for Miss Eunice, and one for you. I got one for myself too, and I wish I hadn’t, though that would not have helped me any.”

“Who is the letter from?”

“And what is the trouble?”

“If it isn’t a secret?” said several voices in chorus.

“It isn’t a secret. My letter is from Mr Fuller. And the trouble is, that he is not coming to Halsey this winter. Oh, yes, he’s all right! His uncle has died and left him some money, and he doesn’t need to teach this winter. But his uncle has put a spoke in *my* wheel. I have a good mind to go to Scranton on my own hook, and take my chance.”

“But there may be as good a teacher as Mr Fuller here. You had better wait and see.”

“Not a chance of it. Unless you’ll take the school Fidelia?”

Then came the merry uproar which had interrupted the conversation within; and the laughter and chatter and noise increased till they were called into the house by the mother. The “What is the trouble?” of Dr Everett was answered by half a dozen voices at once. But it was Jabez who made the matter clear to their elders.

“Mr Fuller isn’t coming back this winter, and we all agree that Miss Fidelia ought to teach our school. Know enough? I guess so! And as for government—I should just like to see the first one try to make her trouble in school. There wouldn’t be any second time, I don’t believe.”

Jabez turned, quite fierce in looks, to the Everett boys, who, to tell the truth, were neither the most studious nor the most submissive to school discipline. Ned took refuge behind his father, and made believe to be very much afraid. Dr Everett had his own thoughts about the matter, but he did not commit himself that night. When he said it would be worth while for the school committee to take the matter into consideration, they all thought he was “only joking,” as Ned said.

However, it came to pass that the school was offered to Fidelia. Jabez had moved the doctor, and the doctor had moved the school committee. A woman had never taught the winter school in Halsey before, but there was no reason why a woman should not teach it this winter. Fidelia Marsh had been the best scholar in the school when she attended it. She had studied since at home, and she had been a year in Holyoke seminary. If anything had been needed to turn the scale of opinion in her favour, it was the suggestion made by Deacon Ainsworth, that being a woman they could get her to teach five months for as little, may be for less, than Mr Fuller or any other young man would expect for four months. It was the deacon who was appointed to see Miss Fidelia; and Dr Everett went with him “to help talk the matter over.”

Miss Eunice and Dr Everett had not waited for the assistance of Deacon Ainsworth before they talked the matter over, however; and after a good deal of anxious consideration they agreed to leave the decision to Fidelia herself, as to whether she would teach the school or not. To her it did not seem so very grave a matter.

“I might try it,” said she; “only, if I fail, I will never be able to hold up my head in Halsey again.”

But she had no thought of failing. After the weary time of depression through which she had been passing, it was real pleasure to throw herself into the work she had undertaken. The fact that she knew every boy and girl in the place, and that some of the elder ones among her pupils had been her schoolmates only a few years ago, made the teaching and even the government of the school easier in some respects than they would have been to a stranger. For she knew all their weak points both in scholarship and in temper—“their easily besetting sins,” as the deacon called them—and she could guide and restrain them accordingly, better than a stranger might have done, and she did succeed well with them all.

But she might have had some trouble in governing the bright, eager little men and women committed to her care, many of whom were in the habit of assuming a share of family government at home, if she had not been “well backed,” as Jabez called it. Of this backing Jabez did his share, both by precept and example. The respectful deference of his behaviour to the teacher, and the strict obedience he rendered, both in spirit and in letter, to the school rules, some of which were meant chiefly for the guidance of small boys who needed “line upon line,” helped her greatly, though, in observing him, Fidelia had sometimes much difficulty in preserving her gravity before the rest

of her pupils.

He helped her in other ways too. When Master Vanburen Swift, the son of one of the few rich men in Halsey, had been more than usually troublesome in school, and had answered Jabez's mild expostulation by demanding to be told "who Fidelia Marsh was, anyway?" his sled was forthwith taken possession of and impounded for the space of twenty-four hours. As it was after the first heavy fall of snow, and the long hill "just splendid" for coasting, it was a severe punishment, and all the more so that it was gravely suggested to his companions that loyalty to their teacher forbade the loan of any one's sled to the bad boy who would not do his duty. Of course the boy complained to his father, and his father complained to various people—to the school committee and the teacher—to Deacon Ainsworth, and to Jabez himself. Jabez acknowledged his part in the transaction, and promised not to repeat it—till the next time. But the next time never came. Young Van, as the boys called him, had had his lesson.

Other people helped also. School committees, from time immemorial, have acknowledged it to be their duty to visit the schools under their care, in order to encourage both teacher and pupils; but the duty had been rather neglected in Halsey. They did visit the school this winter, however. So did the minister, so did Dr Everett; and altogether it was agreed that, as a teacher, Fidelia Marsh might be considered a success. Work went on wonderfully well day by day, and there were now and then evening spelling schools, conducted in the usual energetic manner, and there were "speaking pieces," and "they did considerable more singing, first and last, than was generally done in schools," Deacon Ainsworth remarked in the course of a little speech he made one day when he came with the rest. He left his hearers in doubt of his entire approval of so much singing; but he declared himself "satisfied on the whole," which was encouraging.

Everything went smoothly. The scholars learned their lessons well, and they learned also some things not in the text-books. For Fidelia threw herself into her work with an earnestness and skill which could not but win from the bright scholars and the well-disposed among her pupils a cheerful response; but she did none of them more good than she received herself.

Not only was she able to throw off the sadness and depression which had fallen upon her when she had been told of the state of her sister's health, but she advanced a good many steps towards real womanhood. Before the winter was over, the neighbours "expected that there was considerable more in Fidelia Marsh than folks had generally thought," and gave themselves leave to hope that the softness of Miss Eunice in bringing her up had not altogether spoiled her. She was going to do some good work in the world, it was owned, if the work she was doing in Halsey was a fair sample.

And Fidelia herself began to think this possible.

"I like it, Eunice. I feel that I can teach those things that I know well. And, when I have learned more, I hope I shall be successful in higher teaching."

"If there is any teaching higher, in the best sense, than the teaching of the little children," replied her sister. "Remember, it is easier to bend the twig than the tall sapling; and what you teach them out of their school-books makes but a small part of what they must learn from you."

"Yes, if I were good—like you," said Fidelia gravely.

But she did try to be faithful in all her teaching. To do their work well and honestly, to hate a lie, to live by the "golden rule," and to remember everywhere and always, "Thou God seest me!" was the sum of her moral teaching as given to the school. Now and then a word was spoken quietly to one and another who seemed to need it, which went deeper than that, though Fidelia was not sure that she had a right to urge on others the duty and privilege of living up to the teaching and spirit of the Gospel, when she was not sure that she was so living herself.

But she came to surer and happier knowledge as the months went on. In her troubled moments, before she came home, she had said to herself that she needed Eunice, and she was right. And now she had Eunice, and her sweet words, dropped only now and then, did her good, and her beautiful life day by day did more. Her full content in that which God's will had assigned to her, though it had brought loss and pain in the past, and involved now a daily expectation of death, wrought, with higher teaching still, to bring Fidelia to clearer light and stronger faith than she had ever yet enjoyed. And with these came first submission, and then joy in God's will, for them both. But this came later, when her school-keeping days were over; and to the end, so greatly to be desired, Jabez helped a little, as well as Eunice.

For three whole months school life had gone on "without a hitch," as Jabez said triumphantly, and the pupils and teacher together were beginning to discuss the propriety of giving a little time to special preparation for the closing examination, when something happened. A thaw came—a sudden fall of warm rain, which lasted a day and a night, and covered the ice on the mill-pond with water, and the neighbouring meadows as well. And then the frost came again strong and sharp, making mill-pond and meadows sheets of shining silver; and for once everything happened just right, for it was full moon, with clear skies—the brightest of moonlight.

Of course every scholar in the school was bound to be on the ice, and a great many besides; and Jabez and a few others voted themselves into the office of a safety committee to see to the rest, to keep the naughty ones out of mischief and the heedless ones out of danger. There were not skates enough in the town of Halsey for half who were there, but there were a good many pairs, and there were sleds, and those who had neither skates nor sleds could slide on their own feet; and all expected a good time, and most of them had it.

Fidelia was not there the first night, but, yielding to entreaty, she came the second night, and enjoyed it as well as any of them all. But she was not there on the third night, when something happened. No one else ought to have been there, for the frost had gone, and there was water over the ice on some parts of the pond. The meadow ice was safe enough, but on the pond, where the water was not, the ice was like glass, and thinner than they knew.

Especially was this the case where the weir brook fell into the pond, a little below the bridge, at the place where the boys had taken their sleds to “coast” down the hill and over the sloping bank with an impetus which sent them flying over to the other side of the pond. Young Van, preferring to-night his sled to his skates, was there with the rest, and either through bravado or want of skill, steered, or let his sled take its own way, to the open water where the brook came in. A cry from his companions came too late to warn him, but it warned the others at a distance that some one was in danger; and several were on the spot in a minute or two, and among the rest Jabez.

“Who is it? Young Van? Yes, he is just the fellow for such a job,” said he, taking off his skates and plunging into the water where the boy’s sled was floating, the ice cracking and crumbling beneath his feet as he ran. The water was not very deep, and young Van, gasping and shivering with terror and cold, was passed over to the hands waiting for him.

“And I say, you boys, keep back. The ice at the edge is none too strong to bear the half of you. Be off home, or your mothers will be here before you know it. I mean to go the other way, if I can, and save a journey.”

All this time Jabez was struggling, and always into deeper water, with the ice that would not bear his weight when he let himself rest upon it. He could land easily on the other side, he knew, but then he must go home by the bridge, a good half-mile and more, which he did not care to do. He struggled awhile, cheered by the voices of his companions; but he had to give it up at last, as he owned afterwards he should have done at first; and he was chilled to the bone before he reached home.

The next day young Van was at school—“as smart as ever,” the boys declared—and so was Jabez, but Jabez was not as smart as ever. He shivered and burned alternately till noon, and then he went home; and that was the last that was seen of Jabez in the school that winter.

Chapter Thirteen.

Good Seed and Good Fruit.

There was a hard time before Jabez. Rheumatic fever was among the least of the troubles suggested as possible in his case by his grandfather, when he came shivering home from the mill-pond that night. But that was happily averted by the prompt and skilful treatment of Dr Everett, after just enough of suffering to make Jabez ever for the future rather more sympathetic with the aches and pains of his grandfather.

Jabez, however, was not to escape his share of discipline; and his trouble came, as most people’s troubles seem to come, in the way which is hardest to bear. He did not have “the long spell of rheumatism” which his grandfather had predicted, but he had what was worse. Inflammation settled in the lad’s eyes, and for a time he suffered great pain. He could have borne the pain patiently, even cheerfully. That which tried his courage and brought him low was the darkness—the darkness and the horrible doubt whether he was ever to see the light again.

He need not have suffered from this fear. Dr Everett never really feared blindness for him, and always spoke cheerfully to him about soon being well again.

“But that is the way the doctors have of letting a fellow down easy,” thought Jabez, taking less comfort than he might have done from the doctor’s words.

No visitors were admitted except those whom the doctor allowed to come, and every day seemed like a week to Jabez, and the nights were longer still. In the daytime he could hear his grandmother moving about the rooms, and the voices of chance comers and goers to the house. At night there was no sound but the rush of the wind, or the barking of his dog Buff outside; and within the ceaseless tick-tack of the tall clock in the corner, which said to him all manner of solemn things which he could not forget.

His grandmother made him nice things to eat, and his grandfather sat beside him a little while many times a day, and both were as good to him as good could be. His grandfather was faithful as well as kind, and reminded him of past misdeeds—the sins of his youth, he called them—and warned him of worse things that were in store for him unless he turned from his evil ways. It was “hitting a fellow when he was down,” Jabez thought, but he listened in silence to all he had to say. Indeed, through all these dark days he lay without a word, fighting his battle with his fears and his rebellious murmurs alone, asking help from no one.

Fidelia came in to see him for a minute or two every night on her way home from school, and gave him a summary of school work and school events generally, and enlarged more than would have been wise at another time on the amusing incidents of the day, for the sake of bringing a smile to his sober face. But even Fidelia got few words from him, and it was a good while before she came to see how miserable the poor fellow was in his solitude; and even when she saw it she did not know how to help him.

“What are you thinking about, Jabez?” said she one night, when she had scarcely got from him even the usual response. Seeing the look on his face, she did not wait for an answer. “To-morrow is Saturday. I shall bring down the books and have school here, if doctor will let me. Or shall I bring Eunice? Yes, if it is a fine day I will bring Eunice. She has wanted to come for ever so long, but she has waited till she should be able to have a good long visit with you. If any one can do you good, Eunice can,” added Fidelia, laughing, though, seeing Jabez’s sober face, she did not feel much like it.

“I shall be glad to have Miss Eunice come and see me,” said Jabez gravely.

A good while after that, Jabez told Fidelia what he had been thinking about that afternoon, and indeed what he had

been thinking about most of the time during these sorrowful nights and days.

“The ‘blackness of darkness for ever.’ Yes, I did feel hard. I thought I was going to be blind; and I would a great deal rather have died, only I was afraid.”

Eunice came to see him, but even Eunice did not seem to help him much on her first visit. Before her second visit, something had happened. Mr Swift had paid Dr Everett a visit, and they had had a little talk together.

The doctor owned that he was anxious about Jabez. No, he was not afraid he was going to die. It was his eyes he was in doubt about.

“Blind?” said Mr Swift. “He’d better die.”

“Only one can’t die till his time comes. Blind? No, I am not afraid of utter blindness. But I almost think it would be easier for Jabez to find himself blind than with just sight enough to potter about and do a little. He is a bright boy, Jabez, and ambitious.”

“Dr Everett, do you suppose you know all that is to be known about the eye and its diseases? Hadn’t you better have help?”

“I’d be glad to have help. No; I don’t know about the eye, as one who has made it the study of his life must know it. If Jabez could only pick up a little strength I would take him to Boston, and hear what Dr Blake would have to say about him. It would be too great a risk just now.”

“Send for Dr Blake—why can’t you?” said Mr Swift.

Dr Everett shook his head.

“I should like to. But it would cost a good deal; and Deacon Ainsworth is not a rich man.”

“Send for him. I’ll stand the fee.”

“It may be a big one.”

“It won’t cost more than my boy’s funeral would have done,” said Mr Swift huskily. “Jabez saved me that, they say.”

It was a queer way to put it, Dr Everett thought. Mr Swift went on—

“I’ll go on to Boston and fetch him straight on here. Days are precious when a man’s eyesight is to be considered.”

And he was as good as his word. Dr Everett saw him in a little while driving his sleigh at a great pace, over half-bare roads, in order to catch the afternoon train.

“He is something more than just a rich man,” said he to himself, “though I never thought it before.”

The next day Dr Blake came. He was an old man to look at, but he spoke like a young man, and had the quick, cheerful ways of youth; and he had wonderful bright eyes of his own. He saw a good deal more in Deacon Ainsworth’s house than the eyes of Jabez, which he had come to see, and his prescription went beyond them. He spoke encouragingly of the eyes, and gave a word of advice about other matters.

Jabez was to do his best to get strong and well, and he must be cheerful and hopeful. Nothing was so bad for a fellow as letting himself be downhearted. His eyesight was safe, as the doctor believed, but it would depend on the state of the patient’s general health as to how soon and how rapid the change for the better in the eyes would be—and so on. To Dr Everett he said—

“A solemn sort of place, Deacon Ainsworth’s house, isn’t it? The lad ought to get a change. Is there nowhere you could send him after a little while?”

He said this at Dr Everett’s tea-table, where on that occasion Fidelia was seated with the rest.

“Let Eunice have him for a little while,” said she to Dr Everett.

“All right,” said he, and explained the situation to Dr Blake.

“I have no doubt such a change will do all that can be wished, if Miss Eunice is at all like her sister,” said he politely.

So to Eunice Jabez came after awhile; and doubtless Eunice felt it to be her duty to improve the occasion also. But her way was not quite the deacon’s way. It went farther, and circumstances gave it a better chance. For Jabez had got a glimpse of daylight by this time, and the change was wonderfully pleasant to him. His heart was tender too, and the good seed of the Word which Miss Eunice let fall now and then, fell into ground prepared for it, and in course of time it took root there and sprang up, and, though Eunice did not live to see it, bore fruit a hundred-fold. Through the ministry of pain and a terrible dread, the Lord Himself had dealt with him, and a great light had begun to shine through the darkness, even before he knew that that which he feared was not to come upon him.

It was a good while before he told this to any one but Miss Eunice. It was years before he put into words, for other men to hear, the vow which he uttered to the Lord on the very first day when, standing by the fence in Miss Eunice’s garden, he could look over the field and the river to the hills beyond—the vow to be His servant for ever.

In the meantime the winter school, in which Fidelia had won golden opinions, came to an end; and the leisure which

this brought to her was as good for her as the constant occupation of teaching had been when the winter school began. She hardly knew what to do with her new liberty at first. She made plans for the wise disposal of her time, but these were for the future. For the present time she was content to go out and in, to read or work, to visit or receive visitors with a free mind; and her chief work which was also her chief pleasure, was taking care of Eunice.

Not that Eunice was supposed to need especial care just then. She was not strong, but her strength was not tried. Household matters were altogether in the hands of Mrs Stone, and in better hands they could not have been. Eunice was quite content that it should be so—a sign, if Fidelia had considered it, that she was no longer able for the lightest of her household work, which she had made her pleasure during all the years which they had been alone together. But Fidelia, at this time, had no thought of fear. It seemed to her almost as if the old happy days, when she, at least, had no dread of coming sorrow, had come again, with only the comfortable difference which the presence of Mrs Stone made in the house; and she saw no reason why this quiet happy life might not continue for years.

Jabez came often up the hill, after his return home, as soon as he had strength to do so—a little too often, his grandfather was afraid.

“Don’t you wear your welcome out up there,” said he. “Why don’t you go—” here or there, or to the other place which the deacon named.

Jabez troubled no one by his frequent comings and goings, for which his studies, to which he had returned with quiet determination, made reason sufficient. He had had a talk with his grandfather about this in the beginning of the winter. He was going to college—that was certain. No, he did not quite know what was to come after. He “was going to be President of the United States maybe,” he said gravely; and at any rate he was going to make himself fit for it.

His grandfather was by no means convinced of the wisdom of the boy’s resolution—indeed, he “worried about it considerable,” as Mrs Ainsworth had occasion to know. He could not refuse to let him attend the winter school, though he had told him it would pay him better to be splitting reeds in Weir’s swamp than in going to a woman’s school—and “only a girl at that,” said the deacon, with good-humoured contempt.

Since his illness Jabez had been allowed to do as he pleased, but his grandfather worried about him still. Few boys had a better chance than Jabez had. There was the farm—not a large one, but as good land as any in Halsey—which might be his as soon as ever the old folks were gone. It might be his now as far as management and profits were concerned. All the old folks would want was a home there while they lived. Jabez did not know his privileges—and so on.

“‘YOU GO AND TALK WITH THE DOCTOR ABOUT IT,’ SAID DEACON AINSWORTH’S WIFE.”
Page 253.

“You go and talk with the doctor about it, and with Miss Eunice,” said his wife, a little weary of the constant theme. So the deacon “freed his mind” to Miss Eunice, making a grievance of his idea that she and Fidelia encouraged Jabez in his determination to turn his back on the old place.

“Not directly, may be,” said he, qualifying his words after a glance at Fidelia’s face. “But you set so much by books, and a chance of getting an education, and all that—nothing else seems to count, and Jabez has always thought so much of you both. Well, I am not blaming you. But when a boy like Jabez begins to talk of going to college and being President of the United States, there does not seem to be much hope of him.”

“Why not?” said Fidelia, throwing down the gauntlet, or, rather taking it up. “All the Presidents of the United States were boys once, and a good many of them were just such boys as Jabez—farmers’ boys or poor men’s sons who had to push their own way.”

“But that is just what Jabez needn’t do. I am not rich, but neither am I so poor that there need be any hardship in getting along right here in Halsey. The fact is, he is a sight too ambitious. He thinks all he’s got to do is to go to college and come out again, and things will fix themselves to suit him. But he’ll fail as like as not; and then where will he be?”

“He can come home then to the farm,” said Fidelia, laughing. “But he is not going to fail.”

“Deacon Ainsworth,” said Miss Eunice gently, “I am sorry you feel so about Jabez. I know it will be a trouble to you if he should go.”

“Oh, well, as to that, I have other grandsons!”

“Yes, and I am glad for your sake it is so. Jabez, is not going to be President. But if you think of it, almost all the men of mark in our country that you or I know much about have begun by being just such boys as Jabez.”

“Yes, indeed!” said Fidelia; and she went over the names of half a dozen who were prominent men in the State, and in other States.

“Yes, and even better men and greater men, in your opinion and in mine, than some of these,” said Miss Eunice gently; and in her turn she gave the names of a good many distinguished ministers who had begun life as farmers’ boys, and the names of missionaries in whom they took interest for their work’s sake, as well.

Deacon Ainsworth did not get much help from Miss Eunice, nor from Dr Everett either.

“Whether Jabez is fit to make a scholar remains to be seen,” said the doctor. “But he has the fever on him, and he is bound to try.”

“I know he is a smart boy,” said the deacon dolefully.

“He isn’t a boy any longer. And I think he sees his way clear before him. You can’t keep him at home on the farm, deacon, and you may as well let him go, and help him along all you can.”

All this had been at the beginning of the winter. Jabez had gone to school, and in the spring the deacon saw that he must let him go his own way. As to helping him along—that had to be considered. But in the meantime, till he should get strong again, Jabez was permitted to do as he liked. He had changed very much since the beginning of the winter, especially since his illness. He looked less like an overgrown boy, and more like a lank and loose-jointed young man, who did not know quite what to do with his hands or feet in certain circumstances, and who was in danger of slouching somewhat, and of getting a stoop in his shoulders, unless some one took him in hand. Mrs Stone did him this kindness, and to good purpose.

He changed in other ways. He talked less, and it is to be supposed, thought more. But, though he was rather silent than otherwise, he was as cheerful as ever, and more gentle and considerate at home. His grandfather could see the difference, and acknowledged a hope that with his help the boy might come out right at last. His help at this time was given in a way that Jabez could appreciate.

It was the grandfather this time who proposed to Miss Eunice that she should let Jabez have her garden again. He was afraid of the mischief found for idle hands, and he could not be satisfied that in his books Jabez might find enough work to keep him out of any temptation to idleness. So the proposal about the garden was made by him.

Jabez had no objection. The garden had paid well last year, and would do better this year, he thought; and he knew that as much as he ought to do with his eyes, in the way of study, would not be hindered by the work of the garden. So he sat and listened while his grandfather set the matter in all lights, and assented quietly to all arrangements made. Fidelia was listening also, and watching Jabez. His silent and smiling assent to all that was agreed on,—so different from the boyish self-assertion which had amused them last year,—made her wonder. His manner to his grandfather also was very different.

“Yes,” said Eunice, when Fidelia spoke of this to her, “Jabez is changed. His sickness has been blessed to him.”

“His sickness, or something else, is making a man of him,” said Mrs Stone. “The world will hear of Jabez before he dies.”

“He is going to be President,” said Fidelia laughing. “One thing is sure. He is getting beyond *my* teaching. I shall have to look out, or I shall be left behind.”

There was more truth in Fidelia’s admission than she knew. Jabez had indeed “taken a new departure.” He had a new motive for work, and he worked better. He had no troubled thoughts as to what he was to do, or as to how he was to do it. He knew all would go well with him, because his life’s work, and his life itself, belonged to Him who had all things at His disposal, and Whose promise was sure that “all things shall work together for good” to His children.

He could speak to Miss Eunice about these things when she encouraged him to do so; he could not so easily speak to Fidelia. It was about their reading, as it had always been, and about the garden, that he had much to say to her for a time, and there was enough to say about both.

Gardening was pleasant enough work as they did it. They did not make hard work of it. Jabez sowed and planted;

and, when the time came for the disposal of the products of the garden, he was as pleased with the results as he had been last year, though he did not show his pleasure quite in the same way. His success meant even more to him than it had done the last year, for he saw more clearly the way before him, and the end of the way.

And, after all, the real work of the summer was not done in the garden. A good deal of it was done in his grandfather's old buggy, which carried here and there the garden products for the benefit of the summer visitors, who were this year more numerous than ever. One book, and sometimes more than one, in covers of thick brown paper, found a place beneath the cushion; and the deacon's trustworthy old horse was allowed to take his own way, and to choose his own pace along the hilly road between Halsey Centre and Halsey Corners, while Jabez read or pondered the wise words which they contained.

And more was done in the back porch when the time came for a pause in the work of the garden. There on fine mornings Miss Eunice sat with her needlework, and Fidelia with her books; and it was her part usually to read for the benefit of the three. In this way were gone through a good many books, and, among the rest, Fidelia's text-book on "The Evidences," which she acknowledged had been gone over rather hurriedly; and Butler's "Analogy," which was one of the studies of the last year in the seminary, to which she was beginning to think she might possibly go again. Neither of these would help Jabez in the preliminary examinations to which he looked forward. They might come in afterwards; and he took part in the reading, and in the talk which grew out of it, with an eagerness and a just appreciation which astonished the sisters. All enjoyed these mornings. Even Mrs Stone brought sometimes her peas to shell, or her beans to pick over, so that she might share the pleasure and the profit of the reading with the rest.

Chapter Fourteen.

"So He Giveth His Beloved Sleep."

And so the spring days passed, and the summer days shone over a happy homestead. Many a time Fidelia said to herself that she desired no other work and no other pleasure than just to live as they were living now. And it did seem as though God was going to permit it for a time. Her "bad dream" had vanished; if the thought of it came back now and then, the sharpness had gone out of the pain which still touched her a little. She had not forgotten altogether. Dr Justin had not allowed her to forget.

He had written frequently—not to her, but to her sister—kind, pleasant letters; the excuse for the first being to send her tidings of the friend whose address had been asked and given on that last day, and whom he had visited at her request.

He had found her a cripple and nearly helpless, but striving to do her part still in the great educational institution to which her health and strength had been given in her youth. Then he added a few good and true words about the hope and the help which had sustained this friend amid all her labours and suffering—"as they are doubtless sustaining you, dear Eunice, in the quiet of your favoured home."

Then he sent his respects to Mrs Stone, and added—"I was not surprised to hear that Miss Faithful had chosen to remain at home with you; and may the comfort and joy which her presence must give you be given to her by the best Comforter when her day of trial shall come!" In a little while he wrote again, sending also a book which he was sure Eunice would like; and after that he wrote with no excuse at all.

He told them about his new work in the college to which he had been appointed professor, and about his friends, and his pleasant social relations, and his outside work. Eunice did not answer all his letters, but she took pleasure in receiving them. Kind brotherly letters they were, which Fidelia read, and which they discussed a little, as they might have discussed the letters of Dr Everett himself, if he had been away from and had written, to them.

So the spring passed, and the summer wore on, till August came with burning days and sultry nights, which told on the strength of Eunice, already failing, so slowly that the eyes that watched her so lovingly did not see it for a time. Even Dr Everett saw no cause for alarm, nor Mrs Stone, who watched her more closely than he did.

But Eunice knew that the end was drawing near. Afterwards they all wondered that they had not seen more clearly, remembering looks and words which they might have taken for a sign that the joy of heaven was not far away. But so quietly passed the days, with so little to disturb or tire her, that she herself did not know how rapidly her strength was passing from her.

The close days of early August oppressed her, and made the change for the worse suddenly visible to them all. The end did not come without a warning, as Dr Everett had thought it might come. There were days and nights of waiting before her still, when even Fidelia saw the tokens of the last change. There was no great suffering, only weariness and exhaustion, borne sweetly and patiently, and a joyful waiting for "the rest which remains."

There was a word spoken now and then to console or to encourage her sister, who waited quietly beside her.

"You know all I wish for you, dear; I am not afraid for you. You are in a Father's loving hand, and by-and-by, when your work is done, you will come to me there," she said to her, murmuring the sentences at intervals, as she had the strength to speak; and Fidelia could answer firmly and smile brightly. For so deep was the peace and so sure the trust of the dying, and so near the glory awaiting her, that no thought of herself or her loss, or the lonely days that were before her, could move her from the calm which had fallen upon her. All was peace with her also.

Once, at the beginning of these last days, a word was spoken by Mrs Stone.

"About Fidelia, Eunice? The time may come when she will long to know what your wish would have been—have you

ever said a word to her about—Justin Everett?”

“No; I think there is nothing to be said. Yes, I know—afterwards she would give heed to any word of mine. But it might not be the right word. No; I can leave this, with all else that concerns her, in the hands of a loving Father. He will guide her in this as in all things.”

And so no care nor shadow of care came to darken these last days. Truly her eyes said to them, when her lips could not utter the words: “I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.” And, waiting and watching beside her, Fidelia was for the time lifted above all fear or care or sorrow for herself, and rejoiced in her sister’s joy.

Thus quietly one summer morning she passed away. So quietly, they—

> “Thought her dying when she slept,
> And sleeping when she died.”

They buried her beside her kinsfolk in the little graveyard of Halsey; and her memory still lives in the hearts of her friends and neighbours who knew and loved her so well.

Then, for a time, life and all its interests seemed to stand still for Fidelia. She was weary and spent, and they left her alone to rest and grow strong again. By-and-by, with no word of appeal or entreaty from any one, she came back to her old ways, and tried to take up her work again. It was not easy for her to do this, but it was easier than it would have been had her loss come a year sooner.

“It is God’s will that I should go first; and, dear, though you cannot see it now, God’s will in this, as in all things, is best,” Eunice had said to her many times; and she knew in her heart that it was true.

“And, oh, how much the best for my Eunice!” she said with many tears, yet with submission also.

But her occupation was gone; and, though friends and neighbours did what kind friends and neighbours may do at such a time, to cheer her, the days passed slowly and heavily, till one night Jabez came up “to have a little talk” with her. She had not seen much of him since her sister’s death. He had kept away, he told her, “because it hurt him dreadfully to see her in trouble that he could not help.” It cannot be said that she had missed him much, but she was glad to see him when he came.

Jabez’s “little talk” was about himself, and nothing could have been farther from his thoughts than a desire to give a lesson to his teacher. But she got her lesson all the same. They sat for awhile in the front porch, which was bright with the glory of the sunset. Mrs Stone was there as well as Fidelia, and they spoke about various matters at first; and a few words were said about Eunice. When Mrs Stone rose to go about some household duty, the others rose also, and went through the house into the garden, and down the walk between the tall hollyhocks, to the fence, where there was an opening between the apple-trees—a spot where Fidelia always stood a minute or two whenever she came there. They lingered for awhile in silence, looking down over the river flowing softly between wide irregular meadows, and over to the broken hill country beyond, beautiful now in the glow that fell on it from the west.

Something—perhaps it was the familiar voice of White Star coming suddenly to her ear—brought back to Fidelia the remembrance of the time when she stood there petting the pretty creature, the day after her first return from the seminary—the day when Jabez came up to speak about the garden. It came back so vividly that when Jabez began to speak his first words were lost in the surprise which seized her when she turned towards him.

What had happened to the lad since then? He was a boy no longer, for one thing. As he stood there regarding her with grave eyes, speaking quietly and earnestly, he was very different from the lad who had come whistling up the field, with his hoe over his shoulder, to greet her that day. A man? Well, hardly that yet; but with the promise of manhood on his good and pleasant face, to which, though she was tall herself, she had to look up now! A shadow passed over his face, and he ceased speaking and looked away, as a smile, of which she was quite unconscious, parted Fidelia’s lips.

“I thought maybe you would like to hear about it,” said he in a little, without turning round.

“Of course I shall like to hear about it. Excuse me; I was thinking about something else. You must begin again. Do you know, Jabez, that you are changed lately. You are not a boy any longer; you are a man, and I have only just found it out.”

“A man! No, not quite; but I mean to be a man one of these days,” said Jabez gravely. “And I think now I can see my way.”

“Well! Tell me all about it.”

There was not much to tell, but it took some time to tell it. A letter had come from an uncle of Jabez—his mother’s only brother—written in answer to one sent to him by Deacon Ainsworth, asking advice about the future career of his grandson. The uncle was a minister, living in the far West. He could do nothing for Jabez as to money, for he was a poor man, but he believed that he could better help the lad to help himself, in the part of the country where his home was, than could be done for him in New England. His own son, he said, with but little help from any one, had paid his way through college; and he did not doubt that Jabez, if he were the bright boy his grandfather described him to be, could do the same.

“And so,” said he, “you had better send him on. This is a good country for head-work and for handwork too—whichever he may prove himself best fitted for—and we shall all be glad to see him when he comes.”

“And,” said Jabez gravely, “I think I’ll go and have a try at it.”

“But surely your grandfather might help you a little? And Amhurst or Harvard is the right place for you, Jabez. Why do you wish to go so far away?”

“About grandfather’s help—no. If I go I suppose Cousin Calvin will come and take my place, and have the farm by-and-by, which is all right. And grandfather will pay my way out there, he says. And, as I expect my life’s work will be done out West, the preparation for it may as well be done there too. There is a good chance out there, uncle says.”

“Why should your life’s work be done in the West? And what is it to be?”

Jabez answered the last question first.

“Maybe you will think it presumptuous in me to talk of going in for the highest work of all. But I talked with Miss Eunice about it, and she said she was glad. If it hadn’t been for Miss Eunice I shouldn’t have thought of it. ‘Entire consecration to the highest work of all.’ That was her idea, and it is mine.”

There were tears in Fidelia’s eyes, but there were smiles on her face as well. She did not speak, however, and Jabez went on.

“I don’t just know what I’m fit for yet, but I do know that I don’t feel like holding back; and the Master will see about the rest. He has all kinds of work to be done in His world, and I will find something to do.”

“Yes; and He has work to be done here in New England. Why are you so glad to go away?”

“Oh, I am not glad to go away! But I am glad that I see my way to make a beginning; and I mean to do my best. It may not be a great deal that I can ever do, but the Lord will accept the best I have to give.”

“Yes; I am not afraid for you.”

“And about going West. A great country is being opened up there, and it is being filled with all sorts of people in a wonderful way. New towns, and even cities, are springing up everywhere; and my uncle says that what this wide land needs for true greatness is that the light of the glorious Gospel of the blessed God should shine through every corner of it. I shall like uncle, I am sure,” said Jabez.

“And you want to have a share in making the country great?”

“I want to do my part for my country and the world. It is God’s work, and there doesn’t seem to be anything else worth doing in comparison with this ‘holding forth the Word of Life,’ as uncle calls it, does there?”

Jabez spoke with eager voice and shining eyes, and Fidelia listened amazed. And then she asked herself: “Why should she be amazed?”

It was true. Jabez was right and wise in his choice. What else was there worth doing in comparison with the honour and blessedness of having a part in this work?

“*And so far*,” she said to herself, “I have neither part nor lot in the matter.” Her face grew grave as she stood looking away to the darkening hills. Hitherto she had lived for herself and for Eunice. Now Eunice was gone, what was she going to do with her life? What would Eunice have liked her to do?

“Miss Fidelia,” said Jabez in a little, “you’ll be going back to the seminary this fall, I suppose. It is a good place to go to, I guess. And it would be lonesome here now.”

“Yes, it would be lonesome here. Yes, I think I may go back again. There seems to be nothing better to do than to go there. Eunice always wished me to go.”

But she spoke sadly, and evidently without much interest.

“You will like it when you are fairly there, and have begun at your books again,” said Jabez.

“Yes, I suppose so. It is best to go any way. Eunice wished it.”

“I am glad of one thing—I shall be gone first,” said Jabez.

“Shall you? When do you go?”

“Next week, if grandma can get my things ready. Time is precious.”

“She must let us help her,” said Fidelia; and then there was silence between them. Fidelia was thinking of a letter which she had received a day or two since, which must be answered soon. Miss Kent had written to her, inviting her to visit her in Boston for as long a time as she could stay. It was such a letter as it is good to write and to receive. There were a few words of sympathy in her sorrow for her sister’s loss, and a few more as to the pleasant things to be done and seen and enjoyed during the visit; but the best of it was the evident kindness and sincerity of the writer in all she said.

Fidelia’s desire to accept the invitation had been growing since the day it came. She longed for a change of some sort, and she needed it. The thought of the seminary and her books gave her very little pleasure.

“It is because you are tired,” said Mrs Stone; but she did not, as it was her first impulse to do, remind her that it had been her sister’s wish that the next year should be passed at the seminary. “She will think of it herself by-and-by.”

Fidelia thought of it now. “Time is precious,” Jabez had said. Surely time ought to be precious to her as well! She ought to go to the seminary this year, if ever she meant to go; and, if so, there was no time to lose.

And, besides, she knew on which side temptation lay for her. An easy, pleasant life among people who knew no other kind of existence; a chance to see and hear and enjoy the beautiful and wonderful things of which she knew little, except from books, would be delightful; but would it be good for her? Would it be a preparation for the work of which she and Eunice used to talk and plan?—“the highest of all work,” as Jabez had called it, and “entire consecration to God’s service.”

“I must be a poor creature to have any other desire,” she told herself.

In a little Jabez said—

“Miss Eunice said something to me once. She said it made her glad to think that I might be permitted to do some of the work for the Lord which she would have been so glad to do. Does it seem presumptuous in me to say it, Fidelia? I would not say it to any one but you,” said Jabez humbly; “and I owe everything to Miss Eunice.”

“And what do I not owe to my Eunice?” said Fidelia to herself. To Jabez she said—“Yes, I know it made her last days happy to feel that perhaps she had helped you a little. And we must both honour her memory by trying to do in the world what she would have loved to do. I only wish—”

Fidelia did not put her wish into words for Jabez’s hearing. It was growing dark, and Mrs Stone’s white cap at the porch door had been more than once visible as a reminder that the dew was beginning to fall; and they knew it was time to go into the house.

But Jabez had one thing more to say, over which he hesitated a moment.

“Fidelia, I want to say one thing more, if I may. It was Miss Eunice that made me think more about it, so I hope you won’t be vexed. You haven’t any brother, and I haven’t any sister. Suppose we—adopt one another,” said Jabez, with a laugh which had the sound of a sob in it. “Miss Eunice told me more than once, that if ever the time came when I saw you in trouble I must help you, if I had a chance, for her sake.”

“Oh, my Eunice!” cried Fidelia; and she held out her hand to the lad. And then, to her amazement, he stooped and touched it with his lips before he took it in his own.

There were not many words spoken after that. This was their real parting. They met several times before Jabez went away; but it was this half-hour under the apple-trees that Fidelia always remembered, when the thought of Jabez came back to her, with all the other memories of these last days at home. For these were “last days.”

Fidelia came back again when her year at the seminary was ended. Mrs Stone was still in the old brown house, which in most respects looked just as it had looked when she came home the first time, to find Eunice waiting for her. It was good to see her old friend standing to welcome her at the gate, but her old friend was not Eunice. And, though she wondered that it should be so, and grieved over it, the house in which the greater part of her life had been passed never seemed quite like home again.

Chapter Fifteen.

Fidelia’s Perplexity.

This year in the seminary was far more profitable to Fidelia than the former year had been. The work which she had done so faithfully at home told now. She was not pressed or hurried by overwork in preparing for her classes, and had time to take the good of other things besides study.

Under the Christian influence lovingly and judiciously exercised over them, not even the careless or unimpressionable among the pupils could remain altogether untouched by some sense of their responsibility to the Lord Jesus, or to the claims which He had on them to be workers together with Him in the world which He came to save. Fidelia, with softened heart and awakened conscience, was now open to that influence, and yielded to it as she had not done before. There was no neglect or misappropriation of the “quiet half-hour” morning and evening now, nor of any other of the many means of grace provided for the benefit of all.

The scope and sense of all the teaching, as to duty, of the noble woman through whose labours and self-denials the seminary was founded had been—“Ye are not your own: ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

“No man liveth to himself.” One of her last utterances to the pupils whom she loved and for whom she laboured was this: “There is nothing in the universe that I fear, but that I shall not know all my duty, or shall fail to do it.” She was dead, but her works and words still lived and spoke through those who had come after her, and through them there came richly to Fidelia the blessing which above all other blessings she desired for herself—the wish and the power to consecrate her life to the work which is the highest of all. So she came back to her home in a different state of heart and mind this time—she herself did not know how different till she was among old familiar friends and circumstances again, looking over the past and on to the future with other hopes and aspirations than those which had made her discontented about the time of her last coming home.

It did not seem quite like home to her in Halsey any more. But she told herself she would wait patiently and do faithfully the work which came to her hand, till some opening should come to her of higher work in a larger field as a teacher, and then she would strive to be such a teacher as Eunice might have been in her youth, had not other work

fallen to her hand.

By-and-by something happened. A letter came to her from Dr Justin Everett which surprised her. It was not the first time that he had written to her. After the death of her sister he had written a letter of sympathy which she had answered briefly. She had not answered other letters which had followed, but this one must be answered. It was a long letter, telling her something of his youth and of his engagement to her sister, and of the disappointment and pain which their necessary separation had caused to them both.

He said he had returned to Halsey two years ago, hoping to carry Eunice back with him as his wife; but in her state of health they had both seen this to be impossible. Then he went on to say how unconsciously at first his heart had turned to the sister of the woman he had loved so dearly in his youth, and how Eunice had not refused to sanction his love, though she had utterly forbidden him to speak then or for some time to come. “Has the time come now when I may speak? And will you not listen to me?” That was the sum of what followed, though many words were used in saying it; and it must be owned that Fidelia was moved by them—for a time. If he had come himself it would have been a much more troublesome matter. But her dream had passed, and so had the pain it had caused her, though it took a little time to make her sure that it was so. After reading her letter over again, she wrapped a shawl about her, and went up the hill till she came to the turn of the road where she had seen Dr Justin standing soothing his startled mare. She could think of it all quietly enough now, and her calmness might have helped her to the knowledge of what her answer ought to be. But she allowed herself to ponder over it. It was a pleasant life that was set before her. She might have a charming home, intellectual society, a chance to improve herself, a chance also to do good to others. There would be the happy mean—neither poverty nor riches, and a home of her own; and for a time she was not aware how the possibility of taking all this into consideration, and of weighing it all quietly, proved that she did not care for Justin Everett as she ought to do before she answered him, “Yes.” There was the further question, though she scarcely dared to pursue it. Was the man who could thus transfer his affections really worthy of her trust? She shrank back when she thought of the past, as if she were wronging her sister’s memory.

“You are not worrying about anything, are you, Fidelia?” said Mrs Stone at last.

“Worrying? No; I hope not. I don’t think so. Why do you ask?”

“Was the big letter that Calvin brought you the other day from Dr Justin Everett?”

“Yes, it was,” answered Fidelia, with a touch of vexation in her voice.

“I wouldn’t have asked only—”

“Oh, there is no harm done!” said Fidelia, laughing. “I hope not,” said Mrs Stone gravely. “I have been expecting it ever since you came here. You mustn’t think I want to meddle, dear. I want just to tell you something that Eunice said to me. Oh, yes! She knew it might come some time. But she would not say a word about it. She said that the Lord would guide you right in this and in all other things. And so He will, if you ask Him.”

Mrs Stone gathered up her work, and rose to leave the room.

“Tell me about it, Aunt Ruby,” said Fidelia gently.

There was not much to tell. For herself, Mrs Stone had not a word to say. Even when Fidelia asked her advice, she replied quietly—

“It seems to me you ought to have known what answer to send to that letter as soon as ever you read it.” And then she went away, leaving Fidelia to ponder her words. She came back to add another word, however.

“Let your answer, whether it be Yes or No, be final. Don’t let there be any half-and-half doings—any waiting to find out what your real feelings are. You ought to know this minute all you need to know. Say it once for all.”

That very day another letter came, not so long as the other, but it brought help to Fidelia, in a way unexpected. This letter was from “Ella Wainright.” Fidelia knew that Miss Kent had married; but she did not know that she had married a widower with children. The letter told her this, and it told her also that the two little girls who had fallen into her hands more than filled them. They had been spoiled all their lives by two loving grandmothers and several aunts, all of whom had the best intentions with regard to the motherless children.

“As for me,” wrote Mrs Wainright, “I am to them the cruel or indifferent stepmother of the story-books, and I should not have a chance with them, even if I had any faculty with children, which I have not. They are bright girls of nine and twelve. I might leave them in school while I go to Europe with my husband, but that would not be good for them nor right for me, and it would only be postponing, perhaps increasing, the trouble. I know you mean to teach, and I have heard from your friend Nelly Austin that you covet hard work; and here it is, ready to your hand. You may name your salary. You will earn it, whatever it is. We shall be in Europe two years at least, perhaps longer. You will have a chance to see much that every one wishes to see, and you can improve yourself in your music, and learn a language or two; and you can help me to do the same. Do not decide against me till you come over to Eastwood to see me.” And so on.

Fidelia came into the room where Mrs Stone was sitting with her letter in her hand.

“Aunt Ruby, listen, and tell me what I had better do.” Then she read the letter.

Mrs Stone listened, but she did not need to advise. She saw that, though she was not aware of it herself, Fidelia had almost made up her mind to go.

“I think I would go over to Eastwood and see Mrs Wainright, and talk it over with her.” And she would have liked to

add—“You may as well write your letter to Dr Justin before you go,” but she did not. “It is all right, I guess; and I, for one, am glad of it.”

Fidelia went to Eastwood. If she had been inclined to hesitate over her decision, she could hardly have done so. Mrs Wainright took possession of her at once.

“If it is a chance to do good that you desire, it is the very place for you, for the children need you sorely.” And Miss Abby Chase, who had seen the children, said the same. Mrs Austin wished her to go because of Mrs Wainright, who was not strong, and who did not seem to have a chance with the children; and Nellie enlarged upon the delights of travel, and the opportunities for self-improvement which she would enjoy. There was, besides, little time for hesitation. Within ten days they were to sail. So Fidelia went home and wrote her letter to Dr Justin, and set her house in order, and was ready to depart.

“Halsey will always be your home while you own this place, and so you must keep it,” said Mrs Stone. “I don’t know a more forlorn feeling than for such a home-bird as you have always been than to find herself without a nest. We talked it all over, Eunice and I. I’d as lief live in your house as in my own, and I will pay you rent. It’s paid already in a way. Eunice had a little change of investment to make, under Dr Everett’s advice, about the time I came here, and I put something with what she had in your name—just about enough to make the interest pay rent for your house and land. I’ll keep up the place as well as I know how; the rent may be put with the rest while you don’t want, and it will be handy when you do. I thought it would be better to fix it so than to put you in my will, because of Ezra’s folks. No; there is nothing to be said. Eunice knew all about it; and you can just think of me as keeping house for you till you come home.”

Fidelia did not say much, but she said just the right thing in the right way when the time came. It was the night before she left.

“Aunt Ruby, let us go down to the graveyard now. We can go by the old road, where we shall not likely to meet any one, and come home by moonlight.”

“SHE KISSED THE DEAR NAME CARVED ON THE STONE.” *Page 286.*

So together they stood beside the grave of Eunice, and spoke lovingly and thankfully of her, and prayed in silence for each other. And there was no bitterness in Fidelia’s tears, though they came in a flood as she turned away. For it was well with Eunice, and she knew they would meet again. She turned back when she had gone a little way toward the gate, and, kneeling once more, kissed the dear name carved on the stone, and prayed with all her heart that by God’s grace she might be kept unspotted from the world, till the time came when she should meet her sister again.

And so Fidelia left her home—sad, but hopeful.

One untoward event happened before she set sail. She had to meet Dr Justin face-to-face, and give him his answer. She was not many minutes in his company, but they were full of pain to her.

Strangely enough, she caught her first glimpse of him from a window, as she had done that day in Eastwood from Miss Abby’s room; and, more strangely still, he was walking as he had been walking that day, by Miss Avery’s side, looking down upon her, while she, with smiles and pretty eager gestures, looked up at him. For a minute Fidelia was not sure of the nature of the feelings which the sight awoke within her; but she was quite sure of one thing—she did not intend to break her engagement to go with her friend and schoolmate, Mary Holbrook, to Cambridge, to see at least the outside of the poet’s house before she went away. She listened till she heard them enter the house; and,

when she knew them to be safe in the parlour, she went softly downstairs and out into the street; and, though she felt a little ashamed of herself for running away, she laughed heartily as she hastened on. She enjoyed every minute of the day, she told Mrs Wainright when—rather late in the evening—she came home. She had seen, not only the outside of the poet's house, but also, through the kindness of a friend of Miss Holbrook, the inside of it, and Mr Longfellow himself as well; and the day was a day to be remembered for many reasons.

She saw Dr Justin in the morning, however, though she hoped she need not. There was not time for many words between them; but Fidelia's words were spoken with sufficient decision. Dr Justin had not received her letter. He had heard from his niece Susie that her friend was going away, and he hastened to see her before her departure. He asked for nothing that would make it necessary for her to break her engagement with Mrs Wainright. He only asked her promise to return at the end of the year, and give him her answer then. But she refused to make the promise, or even to correspond with him while she was away.

"I have spoken too soon; I will wait and come again," said he.

"You will not be wise to wait or to come again," said Fidelia gravely.

He came to the steamer with other friends of the Wainrights to see the last of them. Miss Avery was there among the rest; and, as Fidelia watched them moving away together, she said to herself, that the chances were few that Dr Justin would either wait or return to her again.

And so it proved. Before the first year of her absence was quite over there came to Mrs Wainright a letter from her cousin, telling her of her engagement to Dr Justin Everett, and trusting that they might meet them in Europe before many months.

"And so *that* is well over," said Fidelia.

Fidelia's desire for real work by which she might do some good in the world was granted during the next three years, and besides her work she had both pleasure and profit; and little more than this can be told of the time she spent away from her home, on the other side of the sea. Her pupils respected her always, and by-and-by they loved her dearly; and her influence over them was altogether good and happy to body, mind, and spirit. And as much as that can be said as regarded her influence over their mother also. During a long and tedious illness, which came upon Mrs Wainright in Switzerland, Fidelia nursed and comforted her as she could not have done had there not been mutual respect as well as love between them; and to both mother and daughters her influence and example was a source of blessing which did not cease when the time came that they were called to separate.

This time came when they returned to America, for on going home to Halsey Fidelia found Mrs Stone—not ill, but ailing; and she made up her mind that it was her duty to remain with her old friend during the winter. Her pupils were to be sent to school, and needed her no longer. Their mother needed her very much, or she thought she did, and entreated her to return. But, even if Fidelia had not thought it her duty to remain with Mrs Stone, she would have hesitated about returning, for she had not been long in Halsey before she made a discovery which surprised her, and which made her ashamed.

After the first joy of welcome from old friends, and the first glad renewal of old associations well over, she could not but own to herself that she did not find life in Halsey altogether to her mind. This was not her discovery. She had hardly expected to find it so. She had had some such thought before she left it. Her surprise was, to find that she missed—even greatly missed—the pleasant things which she had become accustomed to during the last three years—the new books, the music, the sight and touch of rare and beautiful things; all the luxuries and the ease-giving which wealth dispensed judiciously, sometimes lavishly, had secured to her friend's household, and to her with the rest. She missed the movement and the change made by the coming and going of the many friends of the household—not merely the ordinary friends and neighbours, but people of whom the world had heard—men and women whom it was good to see and know.

The life had suited her. It was not surprising that she should regret many things which she had enjoyed while with the Wainrights. Was it wrong to regret them? She might enjoy them all again in somewhat different circumstances. Would it be right and wise for her to return at the entreaty of her friend?

"I must settle the question once for all," she said to herself. And she did settle it; and with it she settled another question which went farther and deeper. "Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." Would a chance to lead an easy, pleasant, even useful life in the house of her friend cover for her all the ground which this command covered? She did not need a long time to consider the answer. The past she did not regret. It was well that she had gone with Mrs Wainright. She knew that she had helped the mother and the children to a better knowledge of each other, and she trusted also that she had done something towards encouraging in them a desire for a higher knowledge—the knowledge which God alone can give. She was glad in looking back; but could she look forward and see that she had any special work for these young people which their mother might not do better than she did? And might she not be taking out of the mother's hands work the doing of which would be for her good as well as for theirs?

And then as to herself. Was "an easy time," with only light duties—which could hardly be called work in any right sense, amid the luxury which she had learned to like so well that now she missed it—was this what she ought to accept for herself as the best and highest? Did she owe no more than this to Him Who had bought her with a price? She was, in a sense, quite alone, and at her own disposal, free from all ties of relationship or friendship, such as might interfere with any work to which she gave herself. She could teach. That had been her plan always, and her sister's plan for her, because teaching undertaken and pursued in a right spirit might be made a part of the highest work of all. This Eunice had coveted for her; she had coveted it for herself.

Yes; the faithful doing of such work might be made work for the Master. Had she lost her desire to have a part in this

work? she asked herself. Had her easy life among the pleasant things of the last few years done her this evil? She had many thoughts about it, and, after a time, she had some talk with Mrs Stone about it also.

“No; I don’t think you are spoiled. Your life could not have been a very easy one. Anyway, it hasn’t spoiled you. You had good work to do over there and you did it pretty well, I expect, or they wouldn’t want you back again. In one way it has helped you. Yes, I think you could now do good work in a better way for the advantages you have had, and you are bound to do it. If you don’t, your privileges may become a snare to you, and you may get to be satisfied with a kind of work lower than the highest you are capable of. ‘No man liveth to himself,’ you must remember.”

“And the highest work I seem to be capable of, is to teach.”

“There is no higher work, if it is done in the right spirit. And it is the work you have prepared yourself for. If you are better fitted for other work, you’ll have a chance to try it. It seems to be your work in the meantime. You may marry.”

Fidelia shook her head.

“I am not sure about other work. I know I can teach.”

And so for the next few years she did teach. In one of those large seminaries which the Christian beneficence of many wise men of moderate means, with the help of a few rich men, has established for the higher education of the young women of the country, Fidelia found her work. She was one of many who there worked willingly and well, in a field where good and willing work rarely fails to give a full return.

It would take a long chapter to give even a glimpse of her experiences during those years. She was not without her troubles and anxieties, but on the whole they were happy years. For to be successful in good work which one loves, and which one can do well, comes as near to true happiness as most people ever come in this world. Day by day, as time went on, she was permitted to see the springing up of some “plant of grace” from the seed which she had sown; and she had good cause to hope that there were more to follow, for such plants do not die out, but increase, and bear fruit abundantly as the years go by. Once in a while, but not often, she paused amid her work, to ask herself whether she would be quite content in it all her life long. It was a question which did not need an answer, as she was quite satisfied with the present; and the future, she believed, would be guided and guarded by the Hand of love which had led her during the past.

Chapter Sixteen.

Thanksgiving.

Fidelia had not lost sight of her friends during these years in the seminary. A few weeks of every summer were given to Mrs Stone and her Halsey friends, and as many to Mrs Wainright and her daughters, either in their own home, or at the seaside, or among the mountains, wherever they chanced to be passing the summer. The change and the happy renewal of old associations did her good, and kept her interested in other matters than those which concerned her daily life and duties. Her friends did not allow her to forget them. Even Mrs Stone wrote frequently to her, though the writing of a letter cost her more labour than a day’s housework did. One or other of Dr Everett’s family wrote now and then, and so did the Austins. With Mrs Wainright the correspondence was constant.

“Come home to Thanksgiving,” wrote that lady soon after the work of Fidelia’s fourth year in the seminary had commenced. She had written the same thing every year, but Fidelia had never been able to accept the invitation. This year she had a great desire to accept it, for various reasons; so, though the journey was long, and the time she could give for the visit was short, she found herself in her friend’s house on the eve of Thanksgiving Day; and among the many thousands who, throughout the land, had that day turned their faces homeward, few could have been welcomed more kindly than she.

Thanksgiving Day was kept in the town of C— much as it is kept everywhere throughout the country, in which there is so much over which a thankful people may rejoice. Everybody, except the anxious housekeepers who had dinner on their minds, was expected to go to church in the early part of the day, and join in thanksgiving with their neighbours. The Wainrights all went, and so did Fidelia. There were many people present. The service was simple and devout; the sermon was appropriate; and all things went as usual till it came to the singing of the thanksgiving anthem, and that went better than usual, because Fidelia joined in it, and put all her glad and thankful heart into her wonderful voice as she sang.

She even sang the “solo” which Mrs Wainright was expected to sing. But a whispered entreaty from her friend, which there was time neither to answer nor to refuse, gave the honour to Fidelia. Clear and full and sweet rose her voice, and filled the house, thrilling and satisfying all the listening hearts and ears with the melody, till the saintly old souls among them asked themselves whether even the heavenly music could be sweeter.

Some one sitting near the door rose when the other voices came in again, and walked up the aisle till he came to a point where, looking up, the choir in the gallery could be seen. There he stood till the anthem was ended, and then moved quietly away. He was a stranger, and no one took much notice of him at the moment, though some among them remembered him afterwards. Lucy Wainright noticed him, and spoke of it when she came home.

“It must have been some stranger. No one of our people would have done such a thing,” said she.

“It must have been that he wanted to see where the voice came from,” said her sister.

“I do not wonder,” said their father. “Miss Marsh, how came you to take the place of honour to-day?”

“I don’t know,” said Fidelia.

Mrs Wainright laughed.

“I don’t know either. I did not think of it a second before I spoke. It was a risk, I acknowledge—or it would have been with any one but Fidelia.”

“A risk! It might have caused a breakdown. She might have refused.”

“No; I was sure of Fidelia!”

And while they went on talking the door-bell rang, and the maid brought in a card and gave it to Mrs Wainright.

“A stranger? Did he ask for me? I do not know the name. Jabez Ainsworth!”

Fidelia uttered an exclamation, holding out her hand for the card.

“I know him well. He is one of my oldest friends, though I have not seen him for years. Shall I go and see him?”

“Do go,” said Mr Wainright; “and, if he is a friend of yours, ask him to stay to eat his Thanksgiving dinner with us. He will have something to be thankful for when he sees you, I should say.”

“Of course—ask him to stay. And don’t be long about it, for dinner is ready.”

So Fidelia went in quickly, with both hands stretched out in eager welcome to the friend whom she had not seen for so many years.

“Can it be Jabez?” she said softly, pausing before she came near.

“I need not ask if it can be Fidelia. You haven’t changed, except to grow a little like your sister.”

“Ah, my Eunice!”

Was it the dear name that brought the tears to Fidelia’s eyes, and the memory of so many sad and happy days? She could not hide them except by turning her face away, for Jabez held her hands firmly in his, and her smiles came quickly as she looked up at him.

“You are a happy woman, Fidelia. Your face tells me that before a word is spoken.”

“Happy! Yes; and so glad to see you. How can it have happened that we have never met all these long years—never once since you left Halsey?”

“I have only been once in Halsey since I left it, and then you were on the other side of the sea, where I have been since.”

They ought to have had much to say to each other after so long a time, but there was not much said for awhile. Fidelia looked on the face and listened to the voice at once so strange and so familiar, saying to herself how changed he was—and yet he seemed the same. He was a large man now, dark and strong, not at all in these respects like the slender sallow boy who had loitered about the garden in Halsey. But it was Jabez all the same. He was very grave and silent for a time, and walked up and down the room once or twice, pausing at the window which looked out upon the street, as though he had something to consider or to conquer before he could either listen or speak. After a little he came and sat down beside her.

“Well, Fidelia, you are a happy woman. You have lived through your troubles, and have come safely to the other side, thank God!”

“But, Jabez, it does not seem like trouble to look back upon it now. Only think of my Eunice safe and blessed all these years. Why, I have not shed a tear for a long time—in sorrow!”

She might well add the word, for there were tears in her eyes and on her cheeks while she spoke; but there were smiles on her face as well, which made Jabez say—

“I thank God that you are happy now.”

There was no time for more. The door opened and Mrs Wainright entered, followed by her husband. She did not need an introduction.

“I am glad to see you, Mr Ainsworth, and sorry to interrupt you so soon, but dinner is ready, and there will be time to visit afterwards.”

Then she introduced her husband, whose welcome, though quiet, was sufficiently cordial. Then he said:

“I hope you have no other Thanksgiving dinner in view, for I think ours is to be a good one; and we are very happy to see you.”

“I supposed that I was to spend Thanksgiving in Halsey, but a mistake as to connection, and then a breakdown on the road, left me here for the day. I shall be glad to give thanks with you, and with—Fidelia.”

“I am sorry for your grandmother,” said Fidelia.

“You need not be sorry. My visit was to be a surprise to them. It must wait till next summer now. I am going West again.”

“Well, we will go to dinner now,” said Mr Wainright, offering his arm to his wife. “Miss Marsh, you must show Mr Ainsworth the way.”

“Miss Marsh?” said Jabez, turning astonished eyes upon her, as the others passed out at the door.

“Why, who did you suppose me to be?” said Fidelia, laughing.

“I—I don’t know. I asked the door-keeper at the church who was the singer to-day, and he said it was Mrs Wainright. But I am very glad he was mistaken.”

“I sang to-day—”

“You cannot imagine how strange it was—how wonderful. I had been thinking about you all the morning—never supposing that you were within hundreds of miles of me—and I heard your voice, Fidelia,” he added, taking both her hands in his. “It is Thanksgiving Day indeed with me to-day.”

“And with me too,” it was on Fidelia’s lips to say, but she only said it in her heart. The joy that shone in her friend’s eyes kept her silent, though why it should do so she could hardly have told.

They went very soberly into the dining-room, where a few friends besides the family were assembled. Fidelia sat between the two girls as usual, and Lucy whispered that her friend was the stranger who walked up the aisle, and that it must have been to to see where the voice came from, as Lena had said.

And Lena said: “How tall he is, and how strong! He is not the least like the lanky boy about whom you used to tell us funny stories.”

Fidelia laughed and said softly, “Yes, he has changed—almost as much as the little girls to whom the stories were told. It is a long time ago, you must remember.”

Mr Wainright was not mistaken. The dinner was a very good one, and passed off, as all Mrs Wainright’s dinners did, quite successfully. So did the evening with music and pleasant talk, and all else that was required for success. But it is not to be supposed that all this was quite satisfactory to Fidelia and her friend.

“There were so many things I wanted to hear about,” said Mr Ainsworth.

“And I too,” said Fidelia.

“I shall see you in the morning before I leave, if possible,” said he.

He came in the morning, and he stayed all day.

He could, by travelling all night, get to M— in time to meet an engagement on Monday. He should have had to do so if he had gone to Halsey.

He had something to tell and much to hear. He had, he thought, a right to say that he had been fairly successful as a student. He had had to help himself, and had done so in various ways, but not more than was right, or than had been good for him. His last two years had been spent in Germany. He had gone there in charge of two lads, sons of a German merchant in the West. Of course he had availed himself of the opportunity to go on with his own studies at the university, and now he was going West to find his work.

It was a very poor sort of work in the opinion of Mr Wainright, who, coming in at the moment, heard him say that the next few months were to be spent in travelling through some of the newer states in the service of one of the great missionary societies, with a view to the encouragement and aid of weak Churches, and the establishment of new ones, in the small settlements springing up everywhere.

“It will be hard work,” said Mrs Wainright. “And do you really suppose it will pay? Don’t you think that all that sort of thing might be safely left to the people themselves?”

“It seems to be the work laid out for me just now,” said Jabez, not caring to get into any discussion of the question.

“You might do far better work in an older community. It is the majority of the dwellers in our great cities which need most the civilising—or, if you like it better, the Christianising—influence which strong and good men can exercise in a community. It is from our great cities that power for good or for evil is sent out over all the land, in ways of which I need not tell you. If you have the will and the power to work for your fellow-men, it is not to these remote and sparsely-settled parts of the country that you should go. You are needed more where crowds would gather to hear you.”

But Mr Ainsworth shook his head.

“I have the will to work, and I trust, by God’s grace, to have also the power. But I think I am best fitted for such work as is needed out in our newer settlements. It will be hard work, perhaps, but it will be work, direct and simple, for the good of men and the glory of God. I don’t think I am so made and fashioned as to be likely to be very useful among such men as fill our great cities.”

“There are all sorts of men in our great cities; and you can hardly tell what sort of work you are good for yet, till you

try."

"And as to the importance of my work out there—it would be a good work, wouldn't it, to help to educate and influence some of the boys who come from country places to make the business men and the professional men of the great cities? Yes, and our senators and the governors of our states. You must know several country boys who have come to that."

"I know several certainly; and you may be right. We have a great country out there, which is getting filled up in a wonderful way with all sorts of people. God knows, some strong influence for good is needed among them."

"Yes, that is our hope—God knows," said Mr Ainsworth gravely.

This was the beginning of a long conversation, during which each man surprised the other, and each learned something from the other which bore fruit in the life of both in after years.

East and West, North and South, the past, the present, and the future of all sections of the country—all "the burning questions" of the day were discussed. Fidelia listened with shining eyes and changing colour, and dropped a strong word in now and then; and all the time she was saying to herself—

"To think that Jabez should have grown to be just the best sort of man! And what a life lies before him! I wonder if my Eunice knows?"

And Jabez, seeing her softened glance, knew as well as if she had spoken her name that it was of her sister that she thought.

It rained all the morning, so that there was nothing said about showing the town and the surrounding country to the visitor; and there was all the more time for the talk which seemed to interest them all. The rain ceased, and the sky cleared a little in the afternoon, and a walk was proposed. Mr Ainsworth rose at once and looked at Miss Marsh.

"I shall be glad to take a walk," said she. "I have heard so much talk to-day that I need to rest my mind by tiring my body. Come, Lucy and Lena, get your wrappers and let us go. Will you come with us, Mrs Wainright?"

"No, I think not; and I am not sure about its being best for the girls to go. Had they better, Fidelia?"

"Because of the dampness? It will do Lucy no harm. Lena, perhaps, had better not go."

"Oh, if one goes, they may both go! I guess the damp won't hurt them," said Mrs Wainright. And to her husband she said—"And if he has anything to say to her, I guess he'll find a chance to say it."

Apparently Mr Ainsworth had nothing particular to say—at least nothing which Lucy and Lena might not hear, for they all walked on together till they came to the church. It was a new and fine church, and visitors in C— were often taken to see and to admire it; so when Mr Ainsworth proposed that they should go into it, the girls at once set off to get the keys. They returned almost immediately, and with them came a gentleman who told Mr Ainsworth, after he had been introduced, that he knew more about the church than any one in C—, and could give them the history of every nail and stone, window and door. He did not quite do that, but he gave them many interesting particulars as to construction and cost, and the special advantages of the building generally over all the other churches in the town, or, in fact, any other town. Mr Ainsworth listened and kept silence in a way which won the respect of the pleased narrator, who probably was not always so fortunate in his listeners. He got through at last, or had another engagement and went away; and then Jabez said softly—

"Miss Fidelia, do you know why I wanted to come in here? I want to hear you sing again, 'For His merciful kindness is great toward us, and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever.'"

"Of course I will sing it. But I might have done that at home, and saved you the deacon's lecture on architecture. Oh, I must go up into the gallery, must I?"

"Yes; and I will stand here, where I first caught sight of your face."

So Fidelia went up and sang with a glad heart, not the solo only, but the whole Thanksgiving anthem, the two girls doing their best to help. They did not linger long after that; and when they had left the church, and the girls had gone to carry back the key, Jabez said gravely—

"I shall have that always to think about, till I see you again."

"And I hope that will not be so very long this time," said Fidelia.

It was not very long. They met the next summer in Halsey. There he found her one summer morning standing in the garden, at the opening under the apple-trees, looking down on the river and the meadows and the hills beyond, thinking of many things. There he found courage to say to her all that was in his heart.

Not at that first meeting, however; though even then it would not have surprised her or found her unready with her answer. For they had written to one another constantly since their first meeting at that glad Thanksgiving time; and Fidelia knew all that letters frequent and long could tell her about the work which he had found ready for hand, head, and heart in the far West. Now he had more to tell her. He had been called by the Church in M—, in the state of W—, to be their pastor, and he had accepted the call.

There were just fifteen members in the Church, but they were all New England men and women, of the right sort. M— was only a small place as yet, but the prospects were fair that it would be a city within twenty years. It would one day

be a great commercial centre for a grand stretch of country; and the faithful fifteen who had made their home there meant that, in so far as it should be in their power to make it so, it should be a centre of influence for good in the state, and in the whole great country; and their pastor elect meant no less than that also. And when he had got thus far, he said gravely—

“Fidelia, will you come with me, and help in this great work?”

And Fidelia put her hand in his and said quietly—“Jabez, I shall be glad to go.” And let the wise men of this world, and the rich men and the mighty, say what they will, there is no greater or grander work to be done under the sun than the work which these two, standing under the apple-trees, agreed to help one another to do. There is no work whose success can avail so much for the happiness of the individual soul, for the household, or for the community, and there is none whose success can bring such wealth and honour and stability to the nation, as that through which the hearts of men are taught to believe and know, and the eyes of men are enlightened to see, that it is “righteousness which exalteth a nation,” and that “sin is a reproach to any people.”

“Fidelia,” said Jabez in a little, “do you suppose that Eunice knows?”

And Fidelia answered softly,—“If she knows, I am pure she is glad.” Before the summer was quite over these two happy people went West to begin their work together. A good many years have passed since then. The place in which “the faithful fifteen” set up the standard is a great city now. They, and those who have joined themselves to them since then, have kept the promise made in these early days to their Lord and to each other. And He who said, “Them that honour Me I will honour,” has kept His promise to them.

| Chapter 1 | | Chapter 2 | | Chapter 3 | | Chapter 4 | | Chapter 5 | | Chapter 6 | | Chapter 7 | | Chapter 8 | | Chapter 9 | | Chapter 10 | | Chapter 11 | | Chapter 12 | | Chapter 13 | | Chapter 14 | | Chapter 15 | | Chapter 16 |

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