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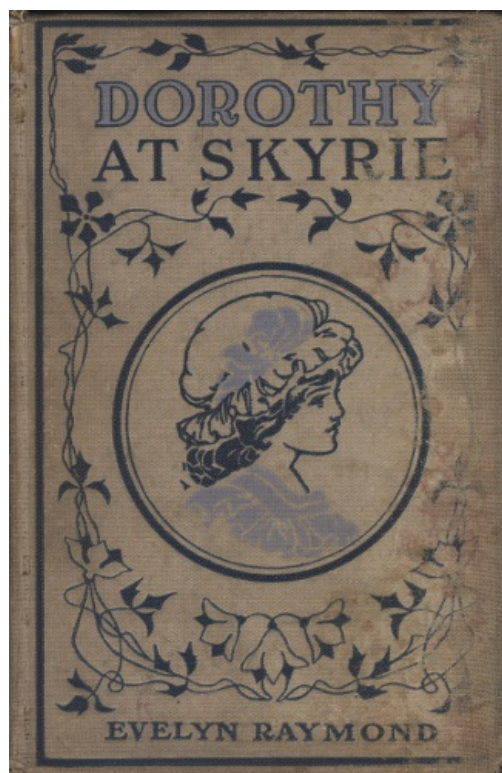
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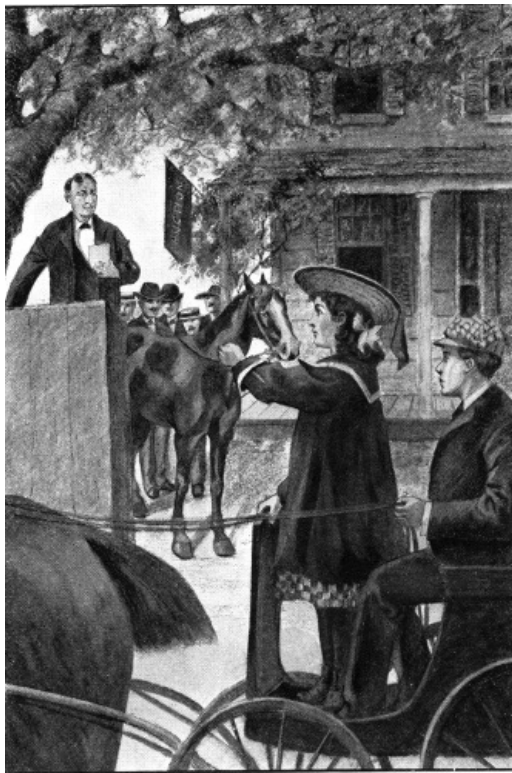
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**DOROTHY
AT SKYRIE**
BY EVELYN RAYMOND
ILLUSTRATED

New York
THE PLATT & PECK CO.



"HOW MUCH AM I BID FOR THE BEAUTIFUL CALICO PONY?"

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DOROTHY AT SKYRIE

CHAPTER I

EARLY VISITORS

"Hello! How-de-do?"

This salutation was so sudden and unexpected that Dorothy Chester jumped, and rising from the grass, where she had been searching for wild strawberries, beheld a row of pink sunbonnets behind the great stone wall.

Within the sunbonnets were three equally rosy faces, of varying sizes, each smiling broadly and each full of a friendly curiosity. It was from the biggest face that the voice had come, and Dorothy responded with a courteous "Good-morning!" then waited for further advances. These came promptly.

"I'm Alfaretta Babcock; this one's Baretta Babcock; and this other one, she's Claretta Babcock. The baby that's to home and can't walk yet—only just creep—she's Diaretta Babcock."

Dorothy laughed. The alphabetical names attached to these several "Babcocks" sounded very funny and she couldn't help her amusement, even if it were rude. However, no rudeness was suspected, and Alfaretta laughed in return, then walked a few steps to the bar-way, with her sisters following. These she hoisted upon the rails, and putting her hands upon the topmost one vaulted over it with an ease that astonished the city-bred Dorothy.

"Why! how well you did that! Like a regular gymnast!" she exclaimed, admiringly, and observing that this was a girl of about her own age though much larger and stronger in build, as the broad back now turned toward her showed.

Alfaretta did not reply, except to bid the children on the other side of the bars to "hop over," and when they were too timid to "hop" without aid she seized their hands and pulled them across, letting them drop on the long grass in a haphazard way that made Dorothy gasp and exclaim:

"Oh! you'll hurt them!"

Alfaretta faced about and keenly scrutinized Dorothy's face, demanding:

"You makin' fun, or not?"

"Fun? I don't see anything funny in such tumbles as those, and I surely wasn't making fun of the way you sprang over that fence. I wish I was as nimble."

"Pooh! That's nothing. I'm the best climber anywheres on the mounting. I can beat any boy 'round, even if I do wear petticoats. I'll learn you if you want me to," offered the visitor, generously.

"Thank you," said Dorothy, rather doubtfully. She did not yet know how necessary climbing might be, in her new country life, but her aspirations did not tend that way. Then thinking that this trio of Babcocks might have come upon an errand to Mrs. Chester, she inquired: "Did you want to see my mother?"

Alfaretta sat down on a convenient boulder and her sisters did the same, while she remarked:

"You may as well set, yourself, for we come to see you more'n anybody else. Besides, you haven't got any mother. I know all about you."

"Indeed! How can that be, since I came to Skyrie only last night? And I came out to find some wild strawberries for my father's breakfast—we haven't had it yet."

If this was intended for a polite hint that it was too early in the day for visiting it fell pointless, for Alfaretta answered, without the slightest hesitation:

"We haven't, neither. We've come to spend the day. Ma she said she thought you might be lonesome and 'twasn't no more'n neighborly to start in to once. More'n that, she's glad to get us out the way, 'cause she's going down mounting to the 'other village' to 'Liza Jane's store—Claretta, stop suckin' your thumb! Dorothy Chester don't do that, and ma said she'd put some more that picra on it if you don't quit—to buy us some gingham for dresses. She heard 'Liza Jane had got in a lot real cheap and she's going to get a web 'fore it's all picked over."

Tired of standing, Dorothy had also dropped down upon the boulder and now was regarding her uninvited guests with much of the same curiosity they were bestowing upon her, and Alfaretta obligingly shoved her smallest sister off the rock to make more room for their hostess.

"Don't do that! What makes you so rough with them? Besides, I must go. Mother will need me and I don't see any berries," said Dorothy, springing up. "Excuse me, please."

As she stooped to pick up the tin pail she had left on the grass, Alfaretta snatched it from her grasp and was off down the slope, calling back:

"Come on, then! I know where they're thicker 'n molasses in the winter time!"

With their unvarying imitation of their elder sister the two little girls likewise scampered away, and fearing she would lose mother Martha's new "bucket" Dorothy followed also. Across a little hollow in the field and up another rise Alfaretta led the way and there fulfilled her promise, for the northern hillside was red with the fruit. With little outcries of delight all of them went down upon their knees and began to gather it; the younger ones greedily stuffing their mouths till their faces were as red as the berries, but Alfaretta scrupulously dropping all but a few extra-sized ones into the rapidly filling pail. But she kept close to Dorothy and laughingly forced these finer ones between her protesting lips, demanding once:

"Ever go berryin' before, Dorothy C.?"

"Not—this kind of 'berrying,'" answered the other, with a keen recollection of the "berrying" she had done for the truck-farmer, Miranda Stott. "But how happened you to call me that 'Dorothy C.' as only my own people do? Who told you about me?"

"Why—everybody, I guess. Anyhow, I know all about you. See if I don't. You was a 'foundling' on the Chesterses' doorstep and they brought you up. You was kidnapped, and that there Barlow boy that Mis' Calvert's brought to Deerhurst helped you to get away. Mis' Calvert, she saw you in a lane, or somethin', and fetched you back to that Baltimore city where the both of you lived. Then she brought you here, too, 'cause Mr. Chester he's got something the matter with his legs and has had to come to the mounting and live on Skyrie farm. If he makes a livin' off it it'll be more'n anybody else ever done, ma says. The old man that owned it 'fore he gave it to Mis' Chester, he was crazy as a loon. Believed there was a gold mine, or somethin' like that, under the south medder—'D you ever hear such a thing! Ma says all the gold'll ever be dug out o' Skyrie is them rocks he put into his stone walls. The whole farm was just clear rocks, ma says, and that's why the walls are four five feet thick, some of 'em more. There wasn't no other place to put 'em and besides he wanted it that way. The whole of Skyrie farm is bounded—Ever study jogaphy? Know how to bound the states? Course. I s'pose you've been to school more'n I have: but I can bound Skyrie for you all right. On the north by a stone wall, 'joining Judge Satterlee's place: on the south by a stone wall right against Cat Hollow—that's where I live, other side the mounting but real nigh, cut 'cross lots. On the east—I guess that's Mis' Calvert's woods; an' west—Oh! fiddlesticks—I don't know whose land that is, but it's kept off by more stone wall an' the thickest of the lot. Where the stone wall had to be left open for bar-ways, to drive through, he went to work and nailed up the bars. That's why I had to hop over, 'stead of letting 'em down. Say, our pail is filling real fast. Pity you hadn't a bigger one. After we've et breakfast we can come and get a lot for Mis' Chester to preserve. Ma she's done hers a'ready. Let's rest a minute."

Dorothy agreed. She was finding this new acquaintance most attractive, despite the forwardness of her manner, for there was the jolliest of smiles constantly breaking out on the round, freckled face, and the blue eyes expressed a deal of admiration for this city girl, so unlike herself in manner and appearance. Her tongue had proved fully as nimble as her fingers, and now while she rested she began afresh:

"Ma says I could talk the legs off an iron pot, if I tried, and I guess you're thinkin' so too. Never mind. Can't help it. Ain't it queer to be adopted? There was a power of money, real, good money, offered for you, wasn't there! My heart! Think of one girl bein' worth so much to anybody! It was all in the papers, but ma says likely we never would have noticed it, only Mis' Satterlee she showed it to ma, account of Mis' Chester moving up here an' going nigh crazy over losin' you. Ma she washes for the Satterlees, and they give us their old papers. Pa he loves to read. Ma says he'd rather set an' read all day than do a stroke to earn an honest livin'. Pa says if your folks had so many children as he has and some of 'em got away he wouldn't offer no reward for 'em, he wouldn't. But ma said: 'Now, pa, you hush! You'd cry your eyes out if Diaretta fell into the rain-barrel, or anything!' We ain't all ma's children. Four of 'em's named Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They're hired out to work, 'cause they're older 'n what I am, and three is dead. Say, that's awful fine stuff your dress is made of. Do you wear that kind all the time? and shoes, too?"

"Yes, this is an everyday frock that dear Mrs. Calvert had made for me and gave me. She is my father's friend and is sorry for him, and does things for me, I reckon, just to help him. Of course, I wear shoes—when I have them!" laughed Dorothy, carefully refraining from looking at Alfaretta's own bare feet.

"What you laughing at?" demanded that observant young person, already joining in the mirth without knowing its cause.

"I was thinking how I was once allowed to buy a pair of shoes for myself and picked them out so small they nearly crippled me. And I have been barefooted, too, sometimes, when I was trying to escape from the truck-farm;" and once started upon the subject, Dorothy did not hesitate to complete the narrative of her adventures and, indeed, of all her short, simple life, as already related by me in another book called, "Dorothy Chester."—how she had been picked up on the doorstep by Mrs. Chester and brought up as that lady's own child—how she had been kidnapped and taken to the truck farm—how honest Jim Barlow had proved her best friend—and how at last the rich Mrs. Calvert had restored her to her foster parents at this picturesque if rather dilapidated home in the Highlands of the Hudson.

Alfaretta was likewise confidential, and with each passing moment and each fresh remembrance the liking between the two little maids strengthened. Finally, with a trifle of gloom, the country girl disclosed the fact:

"Pa he's the scolder to our house, but ma she's the licker. She says she ain't going to spoil her children by sparing rods when our 'upper lot' is full of 'em. The rods, I mean. She doesn't, neither. That's true as preachin'."

"Why, Alfaretta! Are you ever whipped? A big girl like you?"

"Huh! I may be bigger 'n you but I ain't much older. When's your birthday?"

"The second of April."

"My heart! If that don't beat the Dutch! Mine's the first. So we must be next door to twins. But lickin's! You just come to Cat Hollow any Saturday night, 'bout sundown, and you'll be in the nick of time to get a whack yourself. Ma says she's real impartial, 'cause she takes us in turn. One week she begins with me and the next time with Claretta. Diaretta ain't old enough yet to fall into line, and the boys were let off soon as they went to work and fetched in money. Ma says all of us need a lickin' once a week, anyhow, and she don't have time to bother with it only Saturday nights, after we all get washed. When do you get licked, yourself, Dorothy C.?"

"When? Never! Never in my whole life has anybody struck me. I—I wouldn't bear it—I couldn't!" cried Dorothy, indignantly. "But I mustn't stop here any longer. We've more than enough berries for breakfast and I'm so hungry. Besides, we're out of sight of the house and my father John will worry. He said last night, when he had me in his arms again after so long and so much happening, that he meant to keep me right beside him for the rest of his life. Of course, he didn't mean that exactly, and he was asleep when I came out. I waked up so early, with all the birds singing round, and oh! I think this wonderful old mountain is almost too beautiful to be true! Seems as if I'd come to fairyland, sure enough! I'm going now."

Dorothy said this with a faint hope that her visitors might depart without taxing Mrs. Chester to provide them a meal. She knew that no food was ever wasted in mother Martha's frugal household and but sufficient for three ever prepared, unless there was due warning of more to partake. Twice three would halve the rations and—at that moment, with appetite sharpened by early rising and the cool mountain air—the young hostess felt as if she could not endure the halving process.

However, her hope proved useless, for with a shout and bound, Baretta started for the cottage and Claretta kept her a close second, both crying loudly:

"I'm hungry, too! I'm hungry, too!"

Alfaretta was off with a rush, carrying the pail of berries and bursting in upon the astonished Mrs. Chester, with the announcement:

"We've come to spend the day! We're Mis' Babcock's children. See all the berries I've picked you? Is breakfast ready? 'Cause we are if it ain't!"

"Where—is—Dorothy C.?" questioned the housemistress, recognizing the extended pail as her own, wondering how it had come into this girl's hands, and failing to see any sign of her daughter, no matter how closely she peered outward.

"Why, sakes alive! Where is she?" echoed Alfaretta, with great surprise, also searching the landscape. "A minute ago she was tagging me, close, and now she isn't! My heart! What if she's gone and got herself kidnapped again!"

CHAPTER II

AN UNFORTUNATE AFFAIR

But nothing so dire had happened. Crossing the grassy stretch before the cottage Dorothy had caught sight of Jim Barlow's familiar figure, coming along the tree-bordered lane which led to Deerhurst, and had hurried to meet him. The shrubbery hid her from view of Mrs. Chester and the Babcock girls, and for a moment mother Martha's heart sank with the same dread she had known while her beloved child had been absent from her. "Kidnapped!" If Alfaretta had tried she couldn't have hit upon a more terrifying word to her hearer.

"O Jim! Did ever anybody see such a beautiful, beau-ti-ful spot as this? Let me hold Peter's chain—the darling dog! No, he won't get away from me! I shan't let him. You can lead Ponce—but why did you bring them? Did Mrs. Calvert know? How do you like Deerhurst? Are you going to be happy there? Shall you have a chance to study some? Must you work in the garden all the time? Oh! I want to know everything all at once and you are so slow to talk! But, Jim dear, just stop a minute and look—look! Isn't our new home lots prettier than the little brick house where we used to live—77 Brown Street, Baltimore! Do stop and look—please do!"

Obedient Jim did pause, for this small maid could always compel him to her will, though he felt he was half-disobedient to his real mistress, Mrs. Cecil, in doing so. She had sent him with a basket of fruit from her own fine garden for the family at Skyrie and had bidden him take the Great Danes along to give them their morning exercise. They were wild with delight over the outing, and their vigorous gambols not only threatened to upset the basket hung on his arm but made him caution:

"Look out, Dorothy Chester! That there dog'll get away, an' then what'll happen?"

"Why—he'll get away, silly! You just said so yourself! But I won't let him—Quiet, Peter, bad dog! Down, sir, down! No, I'm not one bit afraid of you now, even if once you did nearly kill me and scared me out of my senses! O Jim! I'm so happy—so happy! Almost too happy to live. If my precious father were only well! That's the one thing isn't just perfect."

In her joy Dorothy gave her tall friend a rapturous pat on the shoulder, and though a swift flush rose to his sunburned cheek he shook off her caress as he would the touch of a troublesome insect. In his eyes this little maid whom he had rescued from her imprisonment on Mrs. Stott's truck-farm was the most wonderful of human beings, with her dainty, graceful ways and her lovely, mobile face. All the same—she was a girl, and for girls, as such, James Barlow had a boyish contempt.

But she did not resent his action, indeed scarcely noticed it as, whirling about to suit her movements to those of Peter, she still pointed to her new home:

"They say the man who built that house was queer, but seems to me he was very wise. All of stone, so, it looks almost like a big rock and part of the mountain itself. Such cute little, tiny-paned windows! Such a funny stairway going up to the second floor on the outside! There's a little one inside—so narrow and twisted, Jim, that even I can hardly walk straight up it but have to go sidewise. Then the back of the house is even with the ground. I mean that the biggest, best room of all, which is father John's, opens right on the garden. Two stories and a cellar in front, only a wee low story behind! Like a piece of the hillside it's on. Then the vines! Did you ever see such beauties? Oh! I love it, I love it, already, and I've only been here one night. What will it be when I've lived a long time there!"

"Huh! You'll get sick enough of it—fore long too. S'pose you hain't heard it's *haunted*—but I have, an' 'tis!"

"Jim Barlow! How ridiculous and—how delightful! What sort of a 'haunt' is it? Masculine, feminine, or neuter?" demanded Dorothy C., clapping her hands.

"Look out! Don't you let go that dog! You hold him tight, I tell you!" returned the lad, as her sudden action loosened the chain attached to Peter's collar. But she caught it again, deftly, and faced her friend, vexed that she saw in his face no answering enthusiasm to her own over the "loveliness" of Skyrie cottage.

"I haven't let go—yet, Master 'Fraid-cat! And you *shall* say my home is pretty!" she protested, imperatively. "Say it quick, too, 'cause I haven't had my breakfast and I have company waiting to eat it with me. Say it, Jim, say it!"

The boy laughed. He was very happy himself, that sunshiny morning, and felt more at ease than he had done for many days, because, at last, he was once more clad in blouse and overalls and knew that he had a busy day of congenial work before him. True, these working garments were new and of the best quality, provided by his new employer, but like in cut and comfort to those he had always worn. His feet alone bothered him, for a barefooted person could not be permitted about Deerhurst and his shoes were stiff and troublesome. Now there's nothing more trying to one's temper than feet which "hurt," and it was physical discomfort mostly that made the lad's tongue sharp and his mood unsympathetic; and thus goaded to an enthusiasm he did not feel he retorted:

"Well, it's purty enough, then, but that ruff must leak like a sieve."

"It's all mossy green on one side——"

"Where the shingles is rotten."

"And the dear little window-panes are like an old-fashioned picture!"

"A right smart of 'em is cracked or burst entirely."

"O Jim! How very unromantic you are! But you cannot say but that the vines are beautiful!"

"I've heard they're fust-class for givin' folks the rheumatiz."

Dorothy's enthusiasm ebbed. Rheumatism was the one malady that sometimes affected mother Martha's health. But she was not to be dashed by forebodings, and pointing to the garden declared:

"You cannot say a thing against our garden, anyway. Think of all that room for roses and posies and everything nice!"

"Garden? I call it a reg'lar weed-patch."

Dorothy heaved a sigh which seemed to come from her very shoes.

"You're—you're perfectly horrid, Jim Barlow. But I heard you say, once, while we were working on that truck-farm, that the thing you most longed for—after your education—was to own land. Look yonder, all that ground, inside those big stone walls, is ours, *ours*! Mr. Barlow. Behold and envy! Even on that untilled land flowers grow. See them?"

"Pshaw! Them's mullein. Ain't no surer sign o' poor soil than a passel o' mullein stalks. Stuns and mullein—Your pa's got a job ahead of him! Now I'm goin' on. I was told to give this basket to Mis' Chester and this note I've got in my jumper pocket to Mr. I'd ruther you'd take 'em, only I was *told*; and we've stood here foolin' so long, I've got to hurry like lightnin'. Take care that dog!"

With that Jim set his aching feet once more in the path of duty and Dorothy C. marched along beside him, her head held high in disdain but with a twinkle in her eye and mischief in her heart.

Jim didn't like girls! Well, there was Alfaretta Babcock waiting for him, and he should be made to go through a formal introduction in punishment for his want of sympathy! She managed that he should precede her through the narrow doorway, into the very presence of the unknown, and chuckled in delight over his sudden, awkward pause, his flustered manner, and his attempt to back out of the little kitchen.

Mrs. Chester had gone up the stairs, to help her husband around the corner of the house and down the slope to the kitchen where breakfast was waiting and the three Misses Babcock with it. They sat in a row on the old lounge, their pink sunbonnets folded upon their blue-print laps, alert with the novelty of their situation and for "what next."

"Miss Alfaretta Babcock—Mr. James Barlow, of Baltimore. The Misses Baretta and Claretta Babcock—Mr. Barlow," announced Dorothy with perfect gravity, yet anticipating a funny, awkward scene. But she was unprepared for what really did happen, as Alfaretta promptly left the lounge, swept a most remarkable courtesy before the bashful lad, and seizing both his hands—dog-chain and all—in her own plump ones, exclaimed:

"Oh! Ain't I glad I come! You're the 'hero' that Mis' Judge Satterlee calls you! I meant to get to know you, soon's ever I could, but this beats the Dutch! I saw you in Mis' Calvert's carriage, last night all dressed up, and I was scared of you, but I ain't now. You might be just Matthew, or Mark, or Luke, though you're too tall for John. He's my littlest brother. Pshaw! To think any plain kind of a boy, same's them, could be a 'hero.' Ain't that queer? Did you come to breakfast, too? You fetched yours in a basket, didn't you? I would, too, but ma she hadn't nothing nice cooked up, and she was sort of scared offerin' city folks country victuals. My! Here comes Mis' Chester and her man. Won't they be tickled to see you!"

For a moment, after Alfaretta seized him, Jim looked full as flustered as Dorothy had desired: then all his awkwardness vanished before the hearty good will of the girl and he found himself shaking her hands with a warmth of cordiality equaling her own. She was as honest and simple-natured as himself, and instead of being amused by their meeting Dorothy soon felt something much nearer envy of Alfaretta's power to win liking and confidence.

Then she saw through the window father John limping down the path on his crutches, and hurried out to meet him; also to ask of the housemistress:

"Isn't there something I can do to help? How can we feed so many people? for, mother dear, Jim's come, too!"

"Oh! that's all right, deary. I cooked a lot of stuff, yesterday; made a feast for your homecoming. We'll have to use for breakfast what was meant for dinner. I was dismayed by those children coming, but I'm more than glad to have that boy here. We all owe him much, Dolly darling;" and mother Martha caught her restored child in a grateful embrace.

Poor Jim was far more ill at ease in the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Chester than he had been with Alfaretta: fidgeting under their thanks and praises, which they had vainly tried to express during their brief interview of the night before, and honestly astonished that anybody should make such ado over so trifling a matter.

"'Twan't nothin'. Not a mite. Anybody'd ha' felt sorry for a girl was coaxed away from her folks, that-a-way. Pshaw! Don't! No. I've had my breakfast a'ready. I couldn't. Mis' Calvert, the old lady, she sent me to fetch this basket o' garden sass to Mis' Chester: an' this letter was for you, sir. I was to give it to you an' nobody elst. I'm obleeged to ye, ma'am, but I couldn't. I couldn't, nohow. I'm—I'm chock-full!"

With this rather inelegant refusal, Jim turned his back on the neatly-spread table and fled through the doorway, dragging Ponce with him, overturning the too curious Claretta upon the floor, and making a vain effort to loosen Peter's chain from the arm of the chair where Dorothy had hastily fastened it.

The result was disaster. Both dogs jerked themselves free and gayly dashed forward toward the road leading down the mountain to the villages at its foot, instead of that leafy lane which would have brought them home to their own kennel. Their long chains dangled behind them, or whirled from side to side, catching in wayside obstructions, but in no wise hindering their mad rush.

Scarcely less mad was poor Jim's speed following in pursuit, and the day that had begun so joyously for him was destined to end in gloom. Only the week previous there had been an alarm of "mad dog" in the twin villages, "Upper" and "Lower" Riverside, and local authority was keen to corral any unmuzzled canines; and when these formidable Great Danes of Mrs. Calvert tore wildly through the street, people hastily retreated indoors, while the two constables with pistols, joined by a few brave citizens, gave Peter and Ponce a race for their lives.

To them it was all fun. Never, in their city restricted career, had they dreamed of such wide stretches over which to exercise their mighty limbs; and, heretofore, during their summer stays at Deerhurst they had been closely kept within bounds. They were so big that many people were frightened by that mere fact of size and it had been useless for their doting mistress to assure her neighbors that:

"They are as gentle as kittens unless they are interfered with. They always recognize the difference between honest persons and tramps."

The argument was not convincing. Even a "tramp" might be honest and, in any case, would certainly object to being bitten; therefore the beautiful creatures had lived their days out at the end of a chain and now, for the first, tasted the sweets of liberty.

The affair ended by the dogs escaping and finally making their way home almost unobserved, very weary, and reposing with an air of great innocence before their kennel door, where Ephraim the colored coachman discovered them and ejaculated in great surprise:

"Fo' de lan' o' love! How come dese yeah dogs done gone got dey chains broke? 'Peahs lak somebody gwine a spite my Miss Betty fo' keepin' 'em, anyhow. Mebbe"—here Ephraim's black face turned a shade paler—"mebbe—somepin's gwine to happen! Dere sholy is! Mebbe—mebbe some dem burgaleers I'se heerd of gwine—gwine——"

Visions of disasters too dire to be put into words cut short the old man's speech, and hastily fetching pieces of rope he proceeded to refasten the dogs to the kennel staples, and was much surprised that they submitted so quietly. Then, being as wise as he was faithful, he resolved to say nothing, at present, to the lady of Deerhurst about this incident, reflecting that:

"My Miss Betty she ain' sca'ed o' nobody, burgaleers er nothin'. Ef ol' Eph done tol' her erbout dis yeah succumstance she's boun' to set up de whole endurin' night a-lookin' out fo' trouble, wid dat dere pistol-volver in her han's, all ready fo' to shoot de fust creachah puts foot on groun'. Lak's not shoot de wrong one too. She's done got a pow'ful quick tempah, my Miss Betty has, same's all my Somerset family had, bein' fust quality folks lak dey was. No, suh! Dere's times fo' to talk an' dere's times fo' to keep yo' mouf shut. Dis yeah's one dem times, shuah ernuf."

So, fully satisfied which of these "times" the present chanced to be, the old coachman departed stableward to attend upon his beloved bays and to make ready for his mistress's morning drive.

Meanwhile, on the street of Lower Riverside, Jim Barlow had come to fresh grief. In his frantic chase of the runaway dogs he had almost caught up with Ponce, who suddenly darted into an open doorway of the post-office just as a gentleman emerged from it, carrying a pile of letters and papers just arrived in the early mail. A collision of the three was inevitable, and Ponce was the only one who came out from it intact.

With outstretched arms, believing that he had already captured one of the Great Danes, poor Jim threw himself headlong upon the gentleman, who staggered under the unexpected blow and fell backward upon the floor, with the lad atop. In the ensuing struggle to rise they forgot the dog, the animal rushing out of doors again as swiftly as he had rushed within.

Instantly there was great commotion. The postmaster hurried to the rescue, as did the crowd of other persons awaiting the distribution of the mail; but the assaulted gentleman proved as agile as he was furious and, as he gained his own feet, Jim found himself being shaken till he lost his balance again and went down at the stranger's side.

"You unmannerly lubber! How dare you? I say, how dare you knock me down like that? Set your dog on me, would you? Do you know who I am?"

The lad was slow to anger, but once roused could be as furious as the other. His natural impulse was greater than his knowledge of the world, and his answer was to send a telling blow into the gentleman's face. This was "assault" in truth, and oddly enough seemed to restore the victim to perfect coolness. With a bow he accepted the return of the eyeglasses which had been knocked from his nose during the mêlée and turned to the perturbed postmaster, saying:

"Mr. Spence, where is the nearest justice of the peace?"

"Why—why, Mr. Montaigne, sir, I think he——"

"Simmons is out of town. He and Squire Randall have both gone to Newburgh on that big case, you know," interposed a bystander.

"Sure enough. Well then, Mr. Montaigne, the nearest justice available this morning is Seth Winters, the blacksmith, up-mountain. Right near your own place, sir, you know."

"Thanks. Do you know this boy?"

"Never saw him before," answered Mr. Spence. Then, as Jim started to make his way outward through the crowd, he laid a firmly detaining hand upon his shoulder and forced him to remain or again resort to violence. "But I'll find out, sir, if you wish."

"Do so, please. Or I presume a constable can do that for me. As for you, young ruffian—we shall meet again."

With that the gentleman flicked off some of the dust which had lodged upon his fine clothing, again carefully readjusted his glasses, and stepped out to the smart little trap awaiting his convenience. Everything about the equipage and his own appearance betokened wealth, as well as did the almost servile attentions of his fellow townsmen; though one old man to whom he was a stranger inquired:

"That the fellow who's built that fine house on the Heights, beyond Deerhurst?"

Mr. Spence wheeled about and demanded in surprise:

"What? *you* here, Winters? And don't you know your own mountain neighbors? Did you see the whole affair?"

"I do not know that gentleman, though, of course, I do know his employees, who have brought his horses to me to be shod. Nor do I call anybody a 'neighbor' till I've found him such. The accident of living side by side can't make neighbors. My paper, please? We're going to have a glorious day."

It was noticeable that while the roughly clad old man was speaking, the excited voices of the others in the office had quieted entirely, and that as he received his weekly paper—his "one extravagance"—they also remembered and attended to the business which had brought them there.

As Mr. Winters left the place he laid his hand upon Jim's shoulder and said:

"Come with me, my lad. Our roads lie together."

The boy glanced into the rugged yet benignant face turned toward him and saw something in it which calmed his own anger; and without a word he turned and followed.

"Goodness! If the young simpleton hasn't gone off with the Squire of his own accord!" remarked one they had left behind.

But untutored Jim Barlow knew nothing of law or "justices." All he knew was that he had looked into the eyes of a friend and trusted him.

CHAPTER III

ON THE ROAD TO SOUTH MEADOW

For a moment the group in the kitchen at Skyrie were dismayed by Jim Barlow's sudden departure and the escape of the dogs. Then Dorothy, who knew him best, declared:

"He'll catch them. Course. Jim always can do what he wants to do; and—shall we never, never, have our breakfast? Why, Alfaretta, you thoughtful girl! Why didn't I know enough to do that myself? Not leave it to you, the 'company'!"

Mrs. Chester turned back from the doorway, where she had been trying to follow the dogs' movements, and saw that their guest had quietly possessed herself of a colander from the closet and had hulled the berries into it; and that she was now holding it over the little sink and gently rinsing the fruit with cold water.

The housemistress smiled her prompt approval, though she somewhat marveled at this stranger's assured manner, which made her as much at home in another's house as in her own.

"Why, Alfaretta, how kind! Thank you very much. How fragrant those wild berries are! You must have a good mother to have been taught such helpful ways."

"Yes, ma'am. She's smarter'n lightnin', ma is. She's a terrible worker, too, and pa he says she tires him out she's so driv' all the time. Do you sugar your strawberries in the dish? or let folks do it theirselves, like Mis' Judge Satterlee does? She's one the 'ristocratics lives up-mounting here and a real nice woman, even if she is rich. Pa he says no rich folks can be nice. He says everybody'd ought to have just the same lot of money and no difference. But ma says 't if pa had all the money there was he'd get rid of it quicker'n you could say Jack Robinson. She says if 'twas all divided just the same 'twouldn't be no time at all 'fore it would all get round again to the same hands had it first. She says the smart ones 'd get it and the lazy ones 'd lose it—Claretta Babcock! Wipe your nose. Ma put a nice clean rag in your pocket, and come to breakfast. It's ready, ain't it, Mis' Chester?"

The greatly amused Mr. Chester had taken a chair by the window and drawn Dorothy to his side; whence, without offering her own services, she had watched the proceedings of mother Martha and Alfaretta. The one had carefully unpacked the basket which Jim had brought, and found it contained not only some fine fruit but a jar of honey, a pan of "hot bread"—without which no southern breakfast is considered complete—and half a boiled ham. For a moment, as the mistress of Skyrie surveyed these more substantial offerings she was inclined to resent them. A bit of fruit—that was one thing; but, poor though she might be, she had not yet arrived at the point of being grateful for "cold victuals"!

Yet she was almost as promptly ashamed of the feeling and remembered a saying of her wiser husband's: "It takes more grace to accept a favor than to bestow one." Besides, with these three hungry visiting children, the addition to her pantry stores would be very timely.

"Such a breakfast as this is! I never laughed so much at any meal in my life!" cried Dorothy, at last finding a chance to edge in a word of her own between Alfaretta's incessant chatterings. "But, Alfaretta, do they always call you by your whole, full name?"

"No, they don't. Most the time I'm just Alf, or Sis. Baretta she's mostly just Retty; and Clary's

Clary. Saves time, that way; though ma says no use having high-soundin' names without using 'em, so she never clips us herself. Pa he does. He says life's too short and he ain't got time to roll his tongue 'round so much. But ma she tells him 't a man 't never does anything else might as well talk big words as little ones. Pa he's a Nanarchist. Ever see one? They're awful queer-lookin'; least pa is, an' I s'pose the rest is just like him. His hair's real red and he never combs it. He'd disdain to! And he's got the longest, thickest whiskers of anybody in Riverside, Upper or Lower, or Newburgh either. He's terrible proud of his whiskers, but ma don't like 'em. She says they catch dirt and take away all his ambition. She says if he'd cut 'em off and look more like other men she'd be real proud of him, he's such a good talker. Ma says I'm just like him, that way," naïvely concluded this entertaining young person, who saw no reason why her own family affairs should not become public property. Then without waiting for her hostess to set her the example she coolly pushed back from the table, announcing with satisfaction: "I'm done: and I've et real hearty too. Where's your dishpan at, Mis' Chester? I'll wash up for you, then we can all go outdoors and look 'round. I s'pose you've been down to the gold mine, ain't you?"

"Gold mine? Is there one on these premises? Why, that's the very thing we need!" laughed father John, working his chair backward from leg to leg and taking the crutches Dorothy brought him. Even yet she could not keep the look of pity from her brown eyes whenever she saw the once active postman depend upon these awkward, "wooden feet," as he jestingly called them.

But he had become quite familiar with them now, and managed to get about the old farm with real alacrity, and had already laid many ingenious plans for working it. He had a hopeful, sunny nature, and never looked upon the dark side of things if he could help it. As he often told his wife, she "could do enough of that for both of them:" and though he had now fallen upon dark days he looked for every ray of sunshine that might brighten them.

Not the least of these was the safe return of his adopted daughter, and with her at hand he felt that even his lameness was a mere trifle and not at all a bar to his success. Succeed he would—he must! There was no other thing left possible. What if his feet had failed him? Was he not still a man, with a clear head and infinite patience? Besides, as he quoted to Martha: "God never shuts one door but He opens another."

Now as he rose to go outdoors with Dorothy he remembered the letter Jim Barlow had brought him. Letter? It appeared rather like some legal document, with its big envelope and the direction written upon it: "*Important*. Not to be opened until after my death, unless I personally direct otherwise. (Signed), Elisabeth Cecil Somerset-Calvert." The envelope was addressed to himself, by his own full name, and "in case of his death," to his wife, also by her full title. The date of a few days previous had been placed in an upper corner, and the whole matter was, evidently, one of deliberate consideration.

Calling Mrs. Chester aside he showed it to her and they both realized that they had received some sort of trust, to be sacredly guarded: but why should such have been intrusted to them—mere humble acquaintances of the great lady who had bestowed it? and where could it be most safely kept?

After a moment's pondering mother Martha's face lost its perplexity and, taking the paper from her husband's hand, she whispered:

"I know! I've just thought of a place nobody would ever suspect. I'll hide it and tell you—show and when——"

Then all at once they perceived the too bright eyes of Alfaretta Babcock fixed upon them with a curiosity that nothing escaped. In their interest concerning the letter they had forgotten her, busy at her task in the rear of the room, and the others had already gone out of doors; yet even in the one brief glimpse she caught of that long, yellow envelope, she knew its every detail. Of course, she was too far away to distinguish the words written upon it, but she could have described to a nicety where each line was placed and its length. Nor did she hesitate to disclose her knowledge, as she exclaimed:

"My! That was a big letter that 'hero' boy brought, wasn't it? Have you read it yet? Ain't you going to? Pshaw! I'd like to know what it's all about. I would so, real well. Ma she likes to hear letters read, too, and once we got one from my aunt who lives out west. My aunt is my pa's sister, an' she wanted him to move out there an' make a man of himself; but ma she said he couldn't do that no matter what part of the country he lived in, so he might's well stay where he was, where she was raised and folks 'round knew *she* was the right sort if *he* wasn't. So we stayed: but ma she carried that letter round a-showin' it to folks till it got all wore to rags, and Diary got it in her mouth an' nigh choked to death, tryin' to swaller it. So that was the end o' that!" concluded Miss Babcock, giving her dishcloth a wring and an airy flirt, which would have annoyed the careful housemistress had she been there to see.

However, at the very beginning of Alfaretta's present harangue, she had perceived that it would be a lengthy one and had slipped away without explaining to her husband where she would put the letter. Mr. Chester also drew himself up on his crutches and swung across the floor and out of doors. Alfaretta's gossip, which had at first amused him, now bored him, and he was ashamed for her that she had so little respect for her parents as to relate their differences to strangers. Unconsciously, he put into his usual friendly manner a new sternness: but this had no further effect upon the talkative girl than to make her probe her memory for something more interesting. Following him through the doorway she laid her hand on his shoulder and begged:

"Say, Mr. Chester, let me fetch that big wheel-chair o' yours an' let me roll you down through the south medder to the mine. To where it's covered, I mean. I can do it first-rate. I'm as strong as strong! See my arms? That comes from helpin' ma with the wash. Once I done it all alone and Mis' Judge Satterlee she said 'twas 'most as good as ma 'd have done. Do let me, Mr. Chester! I'd admire to!"

The ex-postman looked around and whistled. There was no use in trying to oppose or frown upon this amazing little maid, whose round face was the embodiment of good-nature, and whose desire to help anybody and everybody was so sincere. Besides, there was in her expression an absence of that "pity" which hurt his pride, even when seen upon his darling Dorothy's own face. She seemed to accept his crutches and rolling chair as quite in the natural order of things, like her own sturdy bare feet and her big red arms.

"Well, my lass, certainly you are kindness itself. I thought I had hobbled over nearly the whole of this little farm, but I chanced upon no 'mine' of any sort, though if there's one existing I'd mightily like to find it. But I don't think you could roll me very far on this rough ground. Wheel-chairs are better fitted to smooth floors and pavements than rocky fields."

Alfaretta paid no attention to his objection, except to spin the chair out from its corner of the kitchen, or living-room, and to place it ready for his use. She was as full of delight and curiosity concerning this helpful article as over every other new thing she saw, and promptly expressed herself thus:

"I'm as proud as Punch to be let handle such an elegant chair. My heart! Ain't them leather cushions soft as chicken feathers! And the wheels go round easy as fallin' off a log. I'd admire to be lame myself if I could be rid around in such a sort o' carriage as this. Must have cost a pile of money. How much was it, Mr. Chester?"

"I don't know. It was a gift from my old comrades at the post-office: but don't, child, don't 'admire' to possess anything so terrible as this helplessness of mine! With your young healthful body you are rich beyond measure."

For the first time she saw an expression of gloom and almost despair cloud the cheerful face of her new acquaintance, and though she thought him very silly to consider health as good as wealth she did not say so; but with real gentleness helped him to swing his crippled body into the chair and set off at a swift pace across the field.

All the others had preceded them; even Mrs. Chester having joined the group, determined not to lose sight of her Dorothy again, even for a few moments: and also resolved that, for once, she would forego her usual industry and make a happy holiday.

For a time all went well. The ground near the house was not so very rough and the slope southward was a gentle one. The chair rolled easily enough and, for a wonder, Alfaretta's tongue was still. Not since he had arrived at Skyrie had father John had so comfortable a chance to look over the land; and whatever gloom he had for a moment shown soon gave way before the beauty of the day and the delight of feasting his eyes upon Dorothy's trim little figure, skipping along before him.

Presently she came running back to join him and with her own hand beside Alf's, on the handle of his chair, to start that talkative body on a fresh topic.

"Tell us about the ghost Jim Barlow said 'haunts' dear Skyrie, Alf, please. You've heard of it, too, course."

"Heard? I should say I had! Why, everybody knows *that*, an' I can't scarce believe you don't yourself. Pshaw! Then maybe you wouldn't have moved up-mounting if you had ha' known. When she heard you was comin' ma she said how 't you must be real brave folks. She wouldn't live here if you'd give her the hull farm. *I—I seen—it once—myself!*" concluded Alfaretta, dropping her voice to an awestruck whisper and thrusting her head forward to peer into father John's face and see if he believed her.

He laughed and Dorothy clapped her hands, demanding:

"What was he like? Was it a 'he' or a lady 'haunt'? How perfectly romantic and delightful! Tell, tell, quick!"

Alfaretta's face assumed a look of great solemnity and a shiver of real fear ran over her. These new people might laugh at the Skyrie ghost, but to her it was no laughing matter. Indeed, she had such a dread of the subject that it had been the one her loquacious tongue had abjured, leaving it to the newcomer, Jim Barlow, to introduce it. But now—Well! If they wanted to hear about the dreadful thing it might be wise to gratify them.

"He's a—'he.' Everybody says that who's seen 'him,'" began the narrator, still in an unnaturally subdued tone.

"Good enough!" ejaculated Mr. Chester, gayly, entering into the spirit of fun he saw shining on Dorothy's face, and glad indeed that his impressionable child did not take this statement seriously. "Good enough! He'll be company for me, for I greatly miss men companions."

"I guess you won't like *him* for no companion, Mr. Chester. Why, the very place he stays the most is in—*that very—room you—come out of to your breakfast—*where you stay, too!" cried Alfaretta,

impressively. "But other times he lives in the gold mine."

Father John looked back at Dorothy and merrily quoted a verse—slightly altered to fit the occasion:

"I never saw a Skyrrie Ghost,
I never hope to see one;
But I can tell you, anyhow
I'd rather see than be one."

Dorothy as merrily and promptly joined in this remodeled ditty of the "Purple Cow," but they were destined never to complete it; because, absorbed in her own relation and astonished at their light treatment of it, Alfaretta ceased to observe the smoothness or roughness of their path and inadvertently propelled the wheel-chair into a wide, open ditch, whose edge was veiled by a luxurious growth of weeds.

An instant later the wheels were uppermost, the two girls had been projected upon them, and poor father John buried beneath the whole.

CHAPTER IV

THE LEARNED BLACKSMITH

As the old man called Winters left the post-office he struck out for the mountain road, a smooth macadamized thoroughfare kept in perfect order for the benefit of the wealthy summer residents of the Heights, whither it led: but he soon left it for a leafy ravine that ran alongside and was rich with the sights and sounds of June.

Whether he did this from habit, being an ardent lover of nature, or because he knew that all anger must be soothed by the songs of birds and the perfume of flowers, can only be guessed. Certain it is that if he sought to obtain the latter result for his disturbed companion, who had as silently followed him into the shady by-way as he had from the crowded office, he fully succeeded.

The ravine, like the road, climbed steadily upward, and the noisy little stream that tumbled through it made a soothing accompaniment to the bird songs: and in his own delight of listening the old man almost forgot his fellow traveler. Almost, but not quite; for just at a point where the gully branched eastward and he paused to admire, a sigh fell on Seth Winters's ear, and set him face backward, smiling cheerily and remarking:

"This is one of my resting-spots. Let's stop a minute. The moss—or lichen—on this boulder must be an inch thick. Dry as a feather cushion, too, because the sun strikes this particular place as soon as it rises above old Beacon, across the river. Sit, please."

He seated himself as he spoke, and Jim dropped down beside him.

"Beautiful, isn't it, lad? And made for just us two to appreciate, it may be: for I doubt if any others ever visit this hidden nook. Think of the immeasurable wealth of a Providence who could create such a wonder for just two insignificant human beings. Ah! but it takes my breath away!" and as if in the presence of Deity itself, the blacksmith reverently bared his head.

Unconsciously, Jim doffed his own new straw hat; though his companion smiled, realizing that the action was due to example merely, or even to a heated forehead. But he commended, saying:

"That's right. A man can think better with his head uncovered. If it wouldn't rouse too much idle talk I'd never wear a hat, the year round."

To this the troubled lad made no reply. Indeed, he scarcely noticed what was said, he was so anxious over the affair of the morning; and, with another prodigious sigh, he suddenly burst forth;

"What in the world 'll I do!"

"Do right, of course. That's easy."

"Huh! But when a feller don't know which is right—Pshaw!"

"You might as well tell me the whole story. I'm bound to hear it in the end, you know, because I'm the justice of the peace whom that angry gentleman was in pursuit of. If his common sense doesn't get the better of his anger, you'll likely be served a summons to appear before me and answer for your 'assault.' But—he hasn't applied to me yet; and until he does I've a right to hear all you have to say. Better begin at the beginning of things."

Jim looked up perplexed. He had only very vague ideas of justice as administered by law and, at present, he cared little about that. If he could make this fine old fellow see right into his heart, for a minute, he was sure he would be given good advice. He even opened his lips to speak, but closed them again with a sense of the uselessness of the attempt. So that it was with the surprise

of one who first listens to a "mind reader" that he heard Seth Winters say:

"I know all about you. If you can't talk for yourself, my lad, I'll talk for you. You are an orphan. As far as you know there isn't a human being living who has any claim to your services by reason of blood relationship. You worked like a bond slave for an exacting old woman truck-farmer until pity got the better of your abnormal sense of 'duty,' when you ran away and helped a kidnapped girl to reach her friends. In recognition of your brave action my neighbor, Mrs. Betty Calvert, has taken you in hand to give you a chance to make a man of yourself. She is going to test your character further and, if you prove worthy, will give you the education you covet more than anything else in life. She brought you here last night and this morning trusted you with two important matters: the delivery to a certain gentleman, whom as yet I do not know, of a confidential letter: and the care of her Great Danes, creatures which she looks upon as almost wiser than human beings and considers her staunchest friends. The latter safely reached Mr. Chester's hands; but—the Danes? What shall we do about the Danes, Jim Barlow?"

"Thun—der—a—tion! You must be one them air wizards I heerd Mis' Stott tell about, 't used to be in that Germany country where she was raised. Why—pshaw! I feel as if you'd turned me clean inside out! How—how come it?"

"In the most natural way. The men who print newspapers search closely for a bit of 'news,' and so your simple story got into the columns of my weekly. Besides, Mrs. Betty Calvert and I are lifelong friends. Our fathers' estates in old Maryland lay side by side. She's a gossip, Betty is, and who so delightful to gossip with as an old man who's known your whole life from A to izzard? So when she can't seat herself in my little smithy and hinder my work by chattering there, she must needs put all her thoughts and actions on a bit of writing paper and send it through the post. Now, my lad, I've talked to you more than common. Do you know why?"

"No, I don't, and it sounds like some them yarns Dorothy C. used to make up whilst we was pickin' berries in the sun, just to make it come easier like. She can tell more stories, right out her plain head 'n a feller 'd believe! She's awful clever, Dorothy is—and spell! My sakes! If I could spell like her I'd be sot up. But I don't see how just bein' befriended by Mis' Calvert made you talk to me so much."

The blacksmith laughed, and answered:

"Indeed, lad, it wasn't that. That big-hearted woman has so many protégés that one more or less scarcely interests me. Only for something in themselves. Well, it was something in yourself. Down there in the office, while I stood behind a partition and nobody saw me—I would hide anywhere to keep out of a quarrel!—I saw you, the very instant after Mr. Montaigne had shaken you and you'd struck back, lift your foot and step aside because a poor little caterpillar was crawling across the floor and you were in danger of crushing it. It was a very little thing in itself, but a big thing to have been done by a boy in the terrific passion you were. It was one of God's creatures, and you spared it. I believe you're worth knowing. But I'd like to have that belief confirmed by hearing what you are going to do next. Let us go on."

They both rose and each carrying his hat in his hand, the better to facilitate "thinking," went silently onward again. It was a long climb, something more than two miles, but the ravine ended at length in a meadow on the sloping hillside, which Seth Winters crossed by a tiny footpath. Then they were upon the smooth white road again. Before them rose the fine mansions of those residents designated by Alfaretta as the "aristocratics," and scattered here and there among these larger estates were the humbler homes of the farmer folk who had dwelt "up-mounting" long before it had become the fashionable "Heights."

Not far ahead lay Deerhurst, the very first of the expensive dwellings to be erected amid such a wilderness of rocks and trees: its massive stone walls half-hidden by the ivy clambering over them, its judiciously trimmed "vistas" through which one might look northward to the Catskills and downward to the valley bordering the great Hudson.

Just within the clematis-draped entrance-pillars stood the picturesque lodge where the childless couple lived who had charge of the estate and with whom Jim was to stay. He had been assigned a pleasant upper chamber, comfortably fitted up with what seemed to its humble occupant almost palatial splendor. Best of all, there hung upon the wall of this chamber a little book-rack filled with well-selected literature. And, though the boy did not know this, the books had been chosen to meet just his especial case by Seth Winters himself, at the behest of his old friend, Mrs. Calvert, immediately upon her decision to bring Jim to Deerhurst.

Even now, one volume lay on the window ledge, where the happy lad had risen to study it as soon as daylight came. He fancied that he could see it, even at this distance, and another of his prodigious sighs issued from his lips.

"Well, lad. We have come to the parting of the ways, at least for the present. My smithy lies yonder, beyond that turn of the road and behind the biggest oak tree in the country. Behind the shop is another mighty fellow, known all over this countryside as the 'Great Balm of Gilead.' It's as old, maybe, as 'the everlasting hills,' and seems to hold the strength of one. I've built an iron fence around it, to protect its bark from the knives of silly people who would carve their names upon it, and—it's well worth seeing. Good-by."

"Hold on! Say. You seem so friendly like, mebbe—mebbe you could give me a job."

"No, I couldn't," came the answer with unexpected sharpness, yet a tinge of regret.

"Why not? I'm strong—strong as blazes, for all I'm kind of lean 'count of growin' so fast. And I'm steady. If you could see Mirandy Stott, she'd have to 'low that, no matter how mad she was about my leavin'. Give me a job, won't ye?"

"No. I thought you were going to do right. Good-morning;" and, as if he wholly gave up his apparent interest in the lad, Seth Winters, known widely and well as the "Learned Blacksmith," strode rapidly homeward to his daily toil, feeling that he had indeed wasted his morning; and he was a man to whom every hour was precious.

Jim's perplexity was such that he would far rather run away and turn his back on all these new helpful friends than return to Deerhurst and confess his unfaithfulness to his duty. He fancied he could hear Mrs. Cecil saying:

"Well, I tried you and found you wanting. I shall never trust you again. You can go where you please, for you've had your chance and wasted it."

Of course, even in fancy, he couldn't frame sentences just like these, but the spirit of them was plain enough to his mind. The dogs—One thought of these, at that moment, altered everything. It had been commented upon by all the retainers of the house of Calvert that such discriminating animals had made instant friends with the uncouth farm boy. This had flattered his pride and his fondness for all dumb creatures had made them dear to him beyond his own belief. Poor Ponce! Poor Peter! If they suffered because of his negligence—Well, he must make what atonement he could!

His doubts sank to rest though his reluctance to follow the dictates of his conscience did not; and it was by actual force he dragged his unwilling feet through the great stone gateway and along the driveway to that shady veranda where he saw the mistress of Deerhurst sitting, ready waiting for her morning drive and the arrival of Ephraim. As Jim approached she looked at him curiously. Why should he come by that road when he was due from another? and why was he not long ago transplanting those celery seedlings which she had directed him should be his first day's labor?

As he reached the wide steps he snatched off his hat again; not, as she fancied, from an instinctive respect to her but to cool his hot face, and without prelude jerked out the whole of his story:

"Mis' Calvert, ma'am, I've lost your dogs. I've been in a fight. I'm going to be arrested an' took afore a judge-blacksmith. Likely I'll be jailed. 'Tain't no sort o' use sayin' I'm sorry—that don't even touch to what I feel inside me. You give me a chance an'—an'—I wasn't worth it. I'll go, now, and—and soon's I can get a job an' earn somethin' I'll send you back your clothes. Good-by."

"Stop! Wait! *You lost my dogs!*" cried Mrs. Cecil, springing up and in a tone which brooked no disobedience: a tone such as a high-born dame might sometimes use to an inferior but was rarely heard from this real gentlewoman; a tone that, despite the humility and self-contempt he felt at that moment, stung the unhappy youth like a whip-lash. "Explain. At once. If they're lost they must be found. That you've been foolish enough to fight and get arrested—that's your own affair—nothing to me; but my dogs, my priceless, splendid, irreplaceable Great Danes! Boy, you might as well have struck me on my very heart. Where? When? Oh! if I had never, never seen you!"

Poor Jim said nothing. He stood waiting with bowed head while she lavished her indignation upon him, and realizing, for the first, how great a part of a lonely old life even dumb animals may become. When, for want of breath, or further power to contemn, she sank back in her stoop chair, he turned to go, a dejected, disappointed creature that would have moved Mrs. Cecil's heart to pity, had she opened her eyes to look. But she had closed them in a sort of hopeless despair, and he had already retraced his footsteps some distance toward the outer road when there sounded upon the air that which sent her to her feet again—this time in wild delight—and arrested him where he stood.

At once, following those joyful barks, that both hearers would have recognized anywhere, came the leaping, springing dogs; dangling their broken chains and the freshly gnawed and broken ropes—with which old Ephraim had unwisely reckoned to restrain them from the sweets of a once tasted liberty.

But even amid her sudden rejoicing where had been profound sorrow, the doting mistress of the troublesome Great Danes felt a sharp tinge of jealousy.

"They're safe, the precious creatures! But—they went to that farm boy first!"

CHAPTER V

AN ACCIDENT AND AN APPARITION

The screams of Dorothy and Alfaretta brought Mrs. Chester hurrying back to them and as she saw what had happened her alarm increased, for it seemed impossible that a helpless person, like her husband, should go through such an accident and come out safe.

For a moment her strength left her and she turned giddy with fear, believing that she had brought her invalid here only to be killed. The next instant she was helping the girls to free themselves from the tangle of wheels, briars, and limbs; and then all three took hold of the heavy chair to lift it from the prostrate man.

"John! John! Are you alive? Speak—do speak if you love me!" cried poor mother Martha, frantic with anxiety.

But for a time, even after they had lifted him to the bank above, Mr. Chester lay still with closed eyes and no sign of life about him. There was a bruise upon his forehead where he had struck against a rock in falling; and, seeing him so motionless, poor Dorothy buried her face in her hands and sobbed aloud:

"Oh! I've killed him! I've killed my precious father!"

"There is a bridge across the ditch just yonder!—Why didn't you see it! How could you—" began Mrs. Chester; yet got no further in her up-braidings, for father John opened his eyes and looked confusedly about him.

Either the sound of voices or the liberal dash of cold water, which thoughtful Alfaretta had rushed away to bring and throw upon him, had restored him to consciousness, and his beclouded senses rapidly became normal. It had been a great shock but, more fortunately than his frightened wife at first dared to believe, there were no broken bones, and it was with intense thankfulness that she now picked up his crutches and handed them to him at his demand.

"Well, I reckon wooden feet are safest, after all! I've never—I'll never go without them. Good thing I brought them—No, thank you! Walking's good!" he cried, with all his usual spirit though in a weak voice.

They had managed to get the chair into position and found it as uninjured as its owner. A few scratches here and there marred the polish of the frame and one cushion had sustained an ugly rent. It had been a very expensive purchase for the donors and an ill-advised one. A lighter, cheaper chair would have been far more serviceable; and, as father John tried to steady himself upon his crutches, he regarded it with his familiar, whimsical smile that comforted them all more readily than words:

"The boys might as well have given me an automobile! Wouldn't have been much more clumsy—nor dangerous!" he declared, trying to swing himself forward from the spot where he stood, striving to steady himself upon his safer "wooden feet."

"O John! how can you joke? You might be—be dead!" wailed mother Martha, weeping and unnerved for the first time, now that all danger was past.

"And that's the best 'joke' of all. I might be but I'm not. So let's all heave—heave away! for that pleasant shore of a wide lounge and a—towel! With the best intentions—I've been ducked pretty wet!"

"That was my fault! I'm awful sorry but—but—that time John Babcock he fell off the barn roof ma she flung a whole pail of water right out the rain-barrel onto him and that brung him to quicker'n scat. So I remembered and I'm real sorry now," explained Alfaretta, more abashed than ordinarily: and in her own heart feeling that the guilt of carelessness which caused the accident had been more hers than Dorothy's. "And nobody needn't scold Dolly C. 'Cause she didn't know about the bridge over an' I did, and—"

"No, no! My fault, my very own!" interposed Dorothy hastily.

"Let nobody blame nobody! All's well that ends well! Alfaretta mustn't regret her serviceable memory nor my drenching, for she's a wise little maid and I owe my 'coming to,' to her 'remembering.' As for you, Dolly darling, let me see another tear in your eye and I will 'scold' in earnest. Now, Martha, wife, I'll give it up. I'm rather shaky on my pins yet and the chair it must be, if I'm to put myself in connection with that lounge. I shan't need the towel after all. I've just let myself 'dreen,' as my girl used to do with the dishes, sometimes!"

He talked so cheerily and so naturally that he almost deceived them into believing that he was not a whit the worse for his tumble, and as they helped him to be seated and began to push him up the slope toward the cottage, he whistled as merrily as he had used to do upon his postal route.

"And you ain't goin' to the gold mine after all?" asked Alf, much disappointed. It was a spot she had hitherto shunned on account of its ghostly reputation, but was eager to visit now in company with these owners of it, who scoffed at the "haunt." She wanted to show them she was right and see what they would say then.

"Gold mine? Trash! If there had been such a thing on this farm, a man as clever as my uncle Simon Waterman would have used some of the 'gold' to keep things in better shape. I don't want to hear any more of that nonsense, nor to have you, Dorothy, go searching for the place. Our first trip to hunt for gold has been a lesson to us all," said mother Martha, with such sharpness that Alfaretta stared and the others, who knew her better, realized that this was a time to keep silence.

More than once that day was the good housewife tempted to send the three visiting Babcocks

home, but was too courteous to do so. She longed to have her daughter to herself, and to discuss with her not only the happenings of the past but plans for the future. Besides this desire, she also saw, at last, how badly shaken by his fall her husband was and that he needed perfect quiet—a thing impossible to procure with Alfaretta Babcock in the cottage.

However, the day wore away at length. The girl showed herself as useful in the dinner-getting and clearing away as she had done at breakfast time; also, she and her sisters brought to it as keen an appetite, so that, after all, the clearing away was not so great a matter as might be.

Dorothy kept the smaller girls out of doors, helping them to make a playhouse with bits of stones, to stock it with broken crockery and holly-hock dolls, and to entrance them with her store of fairy tales to such a degree that Baretta decided:

"I'm comin' again, Dorothy Chester. I'm comin' ever' single day they is."

"Oh, no! You mustn't do that!" gasped the surprised young hostess. "I will have to work a great deal to help my mother and I shan't have time for visiting."

"Me come, too, Do'thy Chetter," lisped Claretta. "Me like playhouth futh-rate. Me come to-morrow day, maybe."

Dorothy said no more, but found a way to end their plans by getting a book for herself, and becoming so absorbed in it that they ceased to find her interesting and wandered off by themselves to rummage in the old barn; and, finally, to grow so tired of the whole place that they began to howl with homesickness.

Dorothy let them howl. She had recently been promoted to the reading of Dickens, and enthralled by the adventures of Barnaby Rudge she had wandered far in spirit from that mountain farm and the disgruntled Babcocks. Curled up on the grass beneath a low-branched tree she forgot everything, and for a long time knew nothing of what went on about her.

Meantime, to keep Alfaretta's tongue beyond reach of her husband's ears, Mrs. Chester had gone down into the cellar of the cottage which, her visitor informed her, had once been the "dairy." Until now, since her coming to Skyrrie, the housemistress had occupied herself only in getting the upper rooms cleaned and furnished with such of her belongings as she had brought with her, and in attendance upon father John. She had not attempted any real farm work, though she had listened to his plans with patient unbelief in his power to accomplish any of them.

"If Dorothy should be found," had been his own conclusion of all his schemes, during the time of their uncertainty concerning her; and afterward, when news of her safety and early coming had reached them, he merely changed this form to: "Now that Dorothy is found."

Everything had its beginning and end in "Dorothy." For her the garden was to be made, especially the flower beds in it; the farm rescued from its neglected condition and made a well-paying one, that Dorothy might be educated; and because of Dorothy's love of nature the whole property must be rendered delightfully picturesque.

Now Dorothy had really come; and, unfortunately, as Mrs. Chester expressed it:

"I can see to the bottom of our pocket-book, John dear, and it's not very deep down. Plans and talk are nice but it takes money to carry them out. As for your doing any real work yourself, you can't till you get well. 'Twould only hinder your doing so if you tried. We'll have to hire a man to work the ground for us and clear it of weeds. If we can get him to do it 'on shares,' so much the better; if he won't do that—Oh! hum! To think of folks having more dollars than they can spend and we just enough to starve on!"

This talk had been on that very day before, while they sat impatiently awaiting her arrival, and it had made John Chester wince. While his life had been in danger, even during all their time of doubt concerning their adopted child, Martha had been gentleness and hopefulness indeed. She had seemed to assume his nature and he hers: but now that their more serious fears were removed, each had returned to his own again; she become once more a fretter over trifles and he a jester at them.

"Don't say that, dear wife. I don't believe we will starve; or that we'll have to beg the superfluous dollars of other people," he had answered, hiding his regret for his own lost health and comfortable salary.

But the much-trying lady was on the highroad toward trouble-borrowing and bound to reach her end.

"I might as well say it as think it, John. I never was one to keep things to myself that concern us both, as you did all that time you knew you was going lame and never told me. Besides the man, we must have a horse, or two of them. Maybe mules would come cheaper, if they have 'em around here. We'll have to get a cow, of course. Milk and butter save a lot of butcher stuff. Then we must get a pig. The pig will eat up the sour milk left after the butter's made——"

"My dear, don't let him eat up the buttermilk, too! Save that for Dorothy and me, please. Remember how the little darling used to coax for a nickel to run to the 'corner' and buy a quart of it, when we'd been digging extra hard in our pretty yard. And don't forget, in your financial reckonings, to leave us a few cents to buy roses with. I've been thinking how well some climbing 'Clothilde Souperets' would look, trained against that barn wall, with, maybe, a row of crimson

'Jacks,' or 'Rohans' in front. Dorothy would like that, I guess. I must send for a new lot of florists' catalogues, since you didn't bring my old ones."

"I hadn't room; and I hope you won't. We've not one cent to waste on plants, let alone dollars. Besides, once you and Dorothy get your heads together over one those books you want all that's in it, from cover to cover. There's things I want, too, but I put temptation behind me. The whole farm's run to weeds and posies, anyhow. No need to buy more."

Father John had thought it wise to change the subject. Martha was the best of wives, but there were some things in which she failed to sympathize. He therefore remarked, what he honestly believed:

"I think it's wonderful, little woman, how you can remember so much about farming, when you haven't lived on one since you were a child."

"Children remember better than grown folks. I don't forget how I used to have to churn in a dash-churn, till my arms ached fit to drop off. And I learned to milk till I could finish one cow in a few minutes; but it nearly broke my fingers in two, at first. I wonder if I can milk now! I'll have to try, anyway, soon as we get the cow. I guess you'd better write an advertisement for the *Local News*, and I'll go to Mrs. Calvert's place and ask her coachman to post it when he goes down the mountains to meet the folks. Just to think we shall have our blessed child this very night before we sleep!" ended the housemistress, with a return of her good spirits.

Father John laughed with almost boyish gayety. Dorothy was coming! Everything would be right. So he hobbled across to his own old desk which Martha had placed in the cheeriest corner of the room assigned to him, looking back over his shoulder to inquire:

"Shall it be for a cow, a horse, or that milk-saving pig? Or all three at one fell swoop? Must I say second-hand or first-class? I never lived on a farm, you know, and enjoyed your advantages of knowledge: and, by the way, what will we do with the creatures when we get them? I haven't been into that barn yet, but it looks shaky."

"John Chester! Folks don't keep pigs in their barns! They keep them in pens. Even an ex-postman ought to know enough for that. And make the thing short. The printers charge so much a word, remember."

"All right. 'Brevity is the soul of wit.' I'll condense."

Whistling over his task, Mr. Chester soon evolved the following "Want Ad.":

"Immediate. Pig. Cow. Horse. Skyrrie."

This effusion, over which he chuckled considerably, he neatly folded and addressed to the publisher of the local newspaper and left on his desk for his wife to read, then hobbled back to his bed to sleep away the time till Dorothy came, if he could thus calm his happy excitement. But it never entered his mind that his careful wife would not read and reconstruct the advertisement before she dispatched it to its destination.

However, this she did not do. She simply sealed and delivered it to old Ephraim, just as he was on the point of starting for his mistress at the Landing: and the result of its prompt appearance in the weekly sheet, issued the next morning, was not just what either of the Chesters would have desired.

After all, Alfaretta was good company down in that old cellar-dairy, poking into things, explaining the probable usage of much that Martha did not understand. For instance:

"That there great big wooden thing in the corner's a dog-churn. Ma says 'twas one more o' old Si Waterman's crazy kinks. He had the biggest kind of a dog an' used to make him do his churnin'. Used to try, anyhow. See? This great barrel-like thing is the churn. That's the treadmill 'Hendrick Hudson'—that was the dog's name—had to walk on. Step, step, step! an' never get through! Ma says 'twas no wonder the creatur' 'd run away an' hide in the woods soon's churnin' days come round. He knew when Tuesday an' Friday was just as well as folks. Then old Si he'd spend the whole mornin' chasing 'Hudson'—he was named after the river or something—from Pontius to Pilate; an' when he'd catch him, Si'd be a good deal more tuckered out an' if he'd done his churnin' himself."

Martha laughed, and rolling the big, barrel-churn upon its side was more than delighted to see it fall apart, useless.

"How could he ever get cream enough to fill such a thing? Or enough water to keep it clean? And look, Alf! what a perfect rat-hole of dirt and rubbish is under it. That old dog-churn must come down first thing. I've a notion to take that rusty ax yonder and knock it to pieces myself," she remarked and turned her back for a moment, to examine the other portions of her future dairy.

Now good-natured Alfaretta was nothing if not helpful, and quite human enough to enjoy smashing something. Before Mrs. Chester could turn around, the girl had caught up the ax and with one vigorous blow from her strong arm sent the dog-churn, already tumbling to pieces with age, with a deafening rattle down upon the stone floor.

The sound startled John Chester from his restful nap, silenced the outcries of the little Babcocks, and sent Dorothy to her feet, in frightened bewilderment. For there before her, in the flesh, stood

the hero of the very book she dropped as she sprang up—Barnaby Rudge himself!

CHAPTER VI

MORE PECULIAR VISITORS

"Barnaby Rudge! Fiddlesticks! That ain't his name nor nothing like it. He's Peter Piper. He's out the poorhouse or something. He ain't like other folks. He's crazy, or silly-witted, or somethin'. How-de-do, Peter?" said Alfaretta, as Dorothy, closely followed by the little Babcocks and the "apparition" himself, dashed down into the dust-clouded dairy where Mrs. Chester stood still, gazing in bewilderment at the demolished dog-churn.

Anybody might have easily been startled by the appearance of the unfortunate creature who had, also, come into the cellar; especially a girl whose head was already filled with the image of another storied "natural," as Dorothy's was. He was tall and gaunt, with an unnaturally white face and a mass of hair almost as white in color, though not from age. His narrow, receding forehead was topped by a hat bestowed upon him by some parading political band of the autumn previous, and was gay with red cock feathers and a glittering buckle polished to the last degree. His clothing was also, in part, that of a parader: a brilliant-hued coat worn over his ordinary faded suit of denim. In one hand he carried the same burnt-out torch bestowed upon him with his hat, and by the other he led a cow that might once have been a calf. He did not speak, though he evidently heard and understood Alfaretta's greeting, for he turned his protruding eyes from Dorothy to her and answered by a foolish smile.

"Why, Peter Piper, what you bringin' old Brindle up here for? Who told you to?"

Again Peter grinned and answered nothing, but he turned his gaze from Alfaretta to Mr. Chester, who had come to the window above, and stared until the gentleman fidgeted and broke the spell by saying:

"Good-afternoon, lad. 'Peter Piper,' are you? Well, I'm glad to see you;" then added in a voice only Dorothy, who had run in to stand beside him, could overhear. "Wonder if he's any relation to the man who pricked his fingers picking pickled peppers!"

"Looks as if he might be, doesn't he? Only, Dad, I feel so sorry for him."

"Oh! I'm sorry for him, too. I am sincerely. But—I'm a trifle sorry for myself, as well. I wonder—is this the beginning of things! What a power the press certainly is, if one little advertisement—Why, Martha, Martha! Come up here, please! Come right away."

Mrs. Chester promptly obeyed, surprised by the mingled mirth and vexation expressed by her husband's face. And came not only Martha but the trio of Babcocks, behind her. At which father John frowned and observed:

"I was speaking to Mrs. Chester."

"Yes, I heard you," answered Alfaretta, coolly: at which all the Chesters laughed, and she joined heartily in, not dreaming that what her host afterwards called her "perfect ease of manner" was the cause of the fun.

"Well, John, what is it? You seemed to want me."

"My dear, I always do. Never more than now when I wish you to tell me—Did you rewrite that advertisement sent to the local newspaper yesterday?"

"Rewrite it? No, indeed. Why should I? You understand such things better than I. So I just sealed it, with money inside to pay—By the way, there should be considerable change due us. I don't believe one advertisement in a country paper would cost a whole dollar: do you?"

Mr. Chester laughed now in earnest.

"No, I do not. Not that I sent, anyway. Martha, why didn't you look? Why didn't you? My dear, you wanted it brief and I made it so. But if such brevity brings such an answer, so soon, why—it will fairly rain cows before we're many hours older. Cows! *And* horses! *And* pigs! But worst of all, I've made the new Skyrie folks ridiculous in the eyes of their future townsmen."

"Tell it, John. Tell it exactly as you wrote it."

So he did; and though the lady was dismayed she couldn't help smiling under her frown, and it was a momentary relief to hear Alfaretta calmly explaining:

"That there cow don't belong to nobody. All her folks are dead. I mean all the folks she belonged to. She's a regular pest, ma says, an' 'twould be a real kindness to kill her. But nobody won't. She's too old for beef, or the butcher would; and she makes out to get her livin' without botherin' nobody *much*. She goes onto folkses' lawns an' nibbles till she's driv' off—summer times an' in winter, why 'most anybody 't has a barnyard and fodder give her a little. Pa he says she's a relict of a glorious past and is due her keep from a—a kermune—ity she's kep' in hot water as many years as she has. Ma she says she can recollect that old Brindle ever since she was a little girl,

an' that cow has got more folks into lawsuits than any other creatur', beast or human, in Riverside villages—Upper or Lower.

"Last one took her in an' done for her was Seth Winters, that lives up-mounting here, an' goes by the name o' 'Learned Blacksmith.' He's another crank; but ma she says he's a practical Nanarchist, 'cause he lives up to his idees. He's rich, or he was; but he's give his money away an' just lives in his old shop an' the woods, same as poor folks. He treats Peter Piper same as he does old Brindle. Keeps 'em both to his place, if they want to stay; an' don't hinder 'em none when they clear out. Pa an' him both say how 'freedom' is the 'herintage' of every livin' thing, an' they both take it. Ma she says there's consid'able difference in their ways, though; 'cause Seth he works, constant, an' pa he never does a stroke. Say, Peter, did Seth Winters send you an' Brindle up here?"

Peter did not answer. As if the question had roused some unsettled matter in his clouded mind, he frowned, studied the earth at his feet, and slowly walked away. A pitiable object in the sunset of that fair summer day, with his bedruggled scarlet feathers, and his scarlet leather uniform that must have been uncomfortably burdensome in the heat.

But Brindle tarried behind and foraged for her supper by nibbling the grass from the overgrown dooryard.

Suddenly, remembered Alfaretta:

"Ma she said I was to come home in time to get the cows in from pasture and milk 'em. She 'lowed she wouldn't get back up-mounting till real dark: 'cause she was goin' to stop all along the road, and get all the news she could an' tell what she knows, back. Ma she's a powerful hand to know what's doin', 'round. So, Baretta Babcock! Claretta Babcock! Put your toes together; even now, an' make your manners pretty, like I showed you teacher learned *me*, and say good-by."

With that the amusing girl drew herself up to her tallest, squared her own bare feet upon a seam of the carpet, and bent her body forward with the stiffest of bows. Then she took a hand of each little sister, and said—with more courtesy than some better trained children might have shown:

"I've had a real nice visit, Mis' Chester, an' I enjoyed my victuals. I'll come again an' you must let Dorothy C. come to my house. I'm sorry I tipped Mr. Chester into the ditch an' that I couldn't done more toward cleanin' up that cellar that I did. Good-night. I hope you'll all have nice dreams. Too bad Peter Piper went off mad, but he'll get over it. Good-night. Come, children, come."

So the three Babcocks departed, and the silence which succeeded her deluge of words was soothing to her hosts beyond expression. They sat long on the west veranda of the little cottage, resting and delighting in the beauty of nature and in the presence of each other. Then Dorothy slipped away and after a little absence returned with a tray of bread and butter, a big pitcher of milk, and the jar of honey Mrs. Calvert had sent.

"Bread and honey! Fare fit for a prince!" cried father John, as the food appeared. "And princes, indeed, we are to be able to sit and feast upon it with all this glorious prospect spread out before us."

He seemed to have entirely recovered from the shock of his fall and on his fine face was a look of deep content. He had suffered much and he must still so suffer—both pain of body and of mind. Poverty was his, and worse—it was the lot of his dear ones, also. To live at all, he must run in debt; and to his uprightness debt seemed little less than a crime.

However, the present was theirs. They had no immediate needs; there was food for the morrow, and more; and leaning back in the old rocker Martha brought for him, he let his fancy picture what Skyrrie should be—"Some time, 'when my ship comes in!' Meanwhile—Sing to us, Dolly darling! I hear a whip-poor-will away off somewhere in the distance, and it's too mournful a sound for my mood. Sing the gayest, merriest songs you know; and, Martha dear, please do let Dorothy bring another rocker for yourself. Don't sit on that hard bench, but just indulge yourself in comfort for once."

When they were quite settled again Dorothy sang; and in listening to her clear young voice both her parents felt their spirits soothed till they almost forgot all care. Indeed, it seemed a scene upon which nothing sordid nor evil would dare enter; yet, just as the singer uttered the last note of her father's beloved "Annie Laurie," there sounded upon the stone pathway below a heavy footstep and, immediately thereafter, an impatient pounding upon the kitchen door.

Since their arrival at Skyrrie none of their few visitors had called so late in the day as this, and it was with a real foreboding that Mrs. Chester rose and went to answer the summons. At a nod from her father, Dorothy followed the housemistress and saw, standing on the threshold, a rather rough-looking man, whose impatience suddenly gave place to hesitation at sight of the pair before him.

"Good-evening," said Martha, politely, though still surprised. Then, as he did not at once reply and she remembered the absurd advertisement in the *Local*, she asked: "Did you come to see about work, or selling us a horse, or anything?"

"H'm'm. A—Ahem. No, ma'am. 'Twasn't no horse errand brought me, this time, though I might admit I *be* ruther in the horse-trade myself, being's I keep livery in Lower village. 'Twas a dog—a

couple of dogs—sent me away up-mounting, this time o' day, a-foot, too, 'cause all my critters have been out so long they wasn't fit to ride nor drive, neither. Been two summer-boarder picnics, to-day, an' that took 'em. 'Shoemakers go barefoot,' is the old sayin', and might as well be 't liverymen use shanks-mares. I——"

By this time the housemistress had perceived that though the man was rough in appearance he was not unkindly in manner and that he was reluctant to disclose his errand. Also, if he had walked up the mountain he must be tired, indeed; so she fetched a chair and offered it, but only to have the courtesy declined:

"Thank ye, ma'am, but I—I guess you won't care to have me sit when I've told my job. 'Tain't to say a pleasant one but—Well, I'm the constable of Lower Riverside, and I've come to serve this summonses on that there little girl o' yourn. You must see to it that she's on hand at Seth Winterses' blacksmith shop an' justice's office, to-morrow morning at ten o'clock sharp. Here, ma'am, is the writ of subpœny 't calls for her to be a witness in a case of assault an' battery. Leastwise, to bein' known to the critters what assaulted and battered."

Before Mrs. Chester could really comprehend what he was saying or doing, the man had thrust a paper into her hand, and had vanished. He had never performed an official act of which he was more ashamed; nor can words properly express her amazement.

CHAPTER VII

AT THE OFFICE OF A JUSTICE

Fortunately the distance to the blacksmith's was not great, for Mr. Chester could not be dissuaded from accompanying his wife and daughter thither, in answer to that astounding "summons." That the document was legal and not to be ignored, he knew well enough, though mother Martha protested vigorously against paying any attention to it.

"It's some absurd mistake, John. How in the world could our Dolly be a witness in any such affair? No, indeed. Not a step will any of us take toward that shop-office! A pretty justice of the peace a blacksmith must be, anyway! I never was so insulted in my life. Instead of going there, I'm going down cellar to clean it up and made ready for our butter-making."

"First—catch your cow, wife dear! A better one than that old Brindle who has deserted us already. And as for your going, why, of course, *you* needn't. Dorothy C. is the important person in this case, and I'm as much her guardian as you."

"John, you mustn't! You couldn't walk so far on your crutches——"

"Oh! I must learn to walk long distances, and 'up-mounting' must be comparatively near. I remember that Alfaretta said it was 'next door to Cat Hollow,' and Cat Hollow's just beyond Skyrie. Dorothy'd better run over to Mrs. Smith's, where you get your milk, and ask directions. No use to waste any strength hobbling over the wrong route——"

"Maybe the grocer's wagon will be up before ten o'clock and he might carry you," suggested Mrs. Chester.

"He ought not to go out of his way, that clerk; besides, it would be as difficult for me to climb into his high cart as to trot along on my own wooden feet. Shall Dolly inquire?"

So Dorothy was dispatched upon the errand, duly warned not to inform the Smith household of its cause, though there was small danger of that. The girl had never been so angry in her life. "Arrested," was the way she put the matter to herself, yet why—why! She had never done anything wicked in her life! and this man, "Archibald Montaigne," what did she know about such a person or any dogs which might have run into him? Nor was she prepared for the evident curiosity with which Mrs. Smith regarded her; a curiosity greater than that her kidnapping adventures had provoked, and which angered her still more.

"The way to Seth's shop? Sure. I know it well's I know the road to my own barnyard. You go out your gate and turn toward the river and walk till you come to the corner of two roads. Take the upper road, right into the woods, and there you'll be. Don't you be afraid, Sis. Nobody can do anything to just a witness, so. The boy'll be the one'll catch it, and heavy. That Mr. Montaigne looks like a regular pepper-pod, and is, too. Why, he sent his man down here, t'other day, to warn me to keep my hens shut up and off his property. *My hens!* That was never shut up in their lives, nor found fault with before. But——"

"Good-morning. Thank you," interrupted Dorothy, rather rudely, but too impatient to be back at home to think about that. Arrived there she found that, like a good many other people, once given her own way mother Martha did not care to take it. Instead of ignoring the summons to court, she arrayed herself in her best street costume and duly appeared at Seth Winters's home with her crippled husband and indignant child.

There is no need to describe the "trial" which followed. It was almost farcical in its needlessness, and poor Dorothy's part in it of the slightest import. She had to tell that she did know the dogs,

Peter and Ponce, and that once she had been run against and knocked down by one of them. Also, that on the morning of the "assault" these dogs had called at Skyrie and that she had lost hold of one of them, and that they had run away with one James Barlow in pursuit. Then she was dismissed; but at a nod from Mrs. Calvert, crossed the room to where that lady sat and nestled down beside her, surprised to find her in such a place and, apparently, so much amused by the scene.

The outcome of the affair was simple. Mr. Montaigne's anger had had time to cool and he was a snob. It was one thing to prosecute a helpless lad but quite another to find that the "ferocious" dogs belonged to his aristocratic neighbor, whose acquaintance he had not heretofore been permitted to make, although he had endeavored so to do. Mrs. Cecil was, practically, the very center and queen of that exclusive circle which had "discovered" the "Heights" and was the most bitterly opposed to "outsiders" possessing property thereon.

"This man Montaigne, Cousin Seth, may have much more money than brains, but we don't want him up here on our hill," she had once said to her old friend, and giving him that title of "Cousin" from real affection rather than because he had any right to it.

He had laughed at her in his genial, hearty way, which could give no offence, and had returned:

"My good Betty, you need humanizing. We can't all be old Maryland Calverts, and I like new people. Don't fancy that a man who has made millions—*made it*, understand—is brainless, and not well worth knowing. You know I can *spend* money—"

"None better, man!"

"But the gift of *making* it was denied me. I intend that you and I shall know this Mr. Montaigne and—like him. I shall make it my business to accomplish that fact even though, at present, he thinks a country blacksmith beneath his notice. That time will come. I have infinite patience, I can wait, but I shall hugely enjoy the event when it arrives."

This conversation had taken place the summer before, when the newcomer had begun the building of his really palatial residence, and Seth Winters had waited a whole year, little dreaming that the acquaintance he had determined upon should begin in his own office, with him as arbiter in a case between a rich man and a penniless boy.

"The complaint is withdrawn," declared the complainant, as soon as he had discovered the real state of affairs, and that now was his chance to become acquainted with Mrs. Cecil. "I—I was offended at the time, but—it's too trivial to notice. I beg to apologize, Madam Calvert, for the annoyance I've given you. Of course, the lad—"

"Don't mention it; an amusement rather than an annoyance," replied the lady, graciously. "So little of moment happens up here on our mountain that an episode of this kind is quite—quite refreshing. My Great Danes will not trouble you again. My 'Cousin' Winters, here—allow me to make you acquainted in a social as well as business way—my 'Cousin' Winters is almost as much attached to the beautiful animals as I am, and he has this very morning presented me with a pair of wonderful chains, warranted not to break. Fortunately, he had them already waiting my arrival, as a gift, and never gift more opportune."

"My 'Cousin' Winters!"

Archibald Montaigne felt as if the boards beneath his feet were giving way. That this old gentlewoman whose blood was of the bluest—and he adored "blue blood"—should claim relationship with an obscure farrier was a most amazing thing. Well, then, the next best step for himself to take in this affair was to foster the acquaintance with the smith; and thereby, it might be, gain entrance for his family and himself into "Society."

For his family first. That credit was due him. Personally, he loved better a quiet corner in his own great mansion, where he might study the fluctuations of the "market" and scheme to increase the wealth he had already compassed. And with the shrewdness which had enabled him to take advantage of mere money-making "chances," he now seized upon the social one presented.

"My dear Madam Calvert, my wife and daughter are without in my carriage. They have been a little—little lonely up here, for it's quiet, as you say. Do allow me to present them, call them in, or—if you will be so kind, so very kind, our precious Helena is an invalid, you know, you might step out to them with me. If I might appeal to your kindness for my daughter, who's heard so much about you and will be so delighted."

What could Mrs. Cecil do? Nobody had ever appealed to her "kindness" without receiving it, and though she positively hated to know these "new, upstart people," she was too well bred to show it. But as Mr. Montaigne bowed the way outward she flashed a look toward the smiling smith, which said as plainly as words:

"You've caught me in this trap! The consequences are yours!"

The glance he telegraphed back meant, as well:

"Good enough! I'm always glad to see a prejudice get its downfall. The time I waited for came, you see."

Almost unconsciously, Mrs. Cecil still retained in her own soft hand the clinging one of Dorothy

C., which she had taken when she called the girl to her side; so that she now led her out of the office to the carriage before its door and to what Dorothy thought was the loveliest person she had ever seen.

This was Helena Montaigne, a blonde of the purest type, whose great blue eyes were full of a fine intelligence, but whose perfect features were marred by an expression of habitual discontent. This little lady made Dorothy think of the heads of angels painted upon Christmas cards and, also, for an instant made her stare rather rudely. The next she had recovered herself and acknowledged Mr. Montaigne's introduction with a natural grace and ease which delighted Mrs. Cecil beyond words. She was always gratified when "Johnnie's" adopted daughter proved herself worthy of the interest she had taken in her; and she now mentally compared the beauty of the two girls, with no disparagement to Dorothy C.

Indeed, the dark eyes, the tumbled curly head,—where the brown hair was just recovering from the rough shearing Miranda Stott had given it, while her young prisoner was ill with the measles,—and the trim, erect little figure, had already become in the eyes of this childless old lady a very dear and charming picture.

Helena's manner was that of a grown young lady, which, indeed, she quite fancied herself to be. Was she not fourteen and, on state occasions, promoted to the dignity of having her abundant hair "done up" by her mother's own hairdresser? And as for skirts, they had been lengthened to the tops of her boots: and by another year she would have her dinner frocks made *en train*. Her own manner was rather disdainful, as if the people she met were not her equals; yet this contempt was for their "general stupidity." She had not her father's love of money nor her mother's timidity concerning her own behavior; for the fear that she should not conduct herself according to the "best usages of polite society" was the bane of gentle Mrs. Montaigne's existence. By nature extremely simple and sweet, she tormented herself by her efforts to be haughty and "aristocratic"—not quite understanding the true meaning of the latter term.

Money had come to her too late in life for her to become accustomed to the use of, and indifferent to, it; and, though she revered her husband on account of his ability to make it, their wealth was a burden for her, at times almost too heavy to bear.

On the other hand, Helena and Herbert, her brother, two years older, could not remember when they had not more money at their command than they knew how to use. The boy was not as clever as his sister, but he was more generally liked, though his insolence, sometimes, was most offensive. He rode up, at this moment, upon a spirited black horse, and called out, noisily:

"Well, dad! How'd the trial go? Hope you walloped that lumpkin good; and the old woman owns the dogs—"

"Herbert! *Herbert!*" warned Mr. Montaigne, in distress. Whereupon his son came round from the corner of the shop, which had hidden him from sight of all the party save his father, and found himself in the presence of the very "old woman" herself. He had none of his parents' ambition to know her or any other of the "exclusives" of the Heights, being quite sufficient unto himself; but he had been trained in the best schools and knew how to conduct himself properly. Besides, he was more frank by nature than the others of his family and, having found himself "in a box," escaped from it by the shortest way possible.

"Hello! I've done it now, haven't I? I beg your pardon, Mrs. Calvert, and dad's and everybody's;" saying which, the lad pulled his hat from his head, and checked his horse to a standstill beside the carriage where his mother and sister sat.

He was a handsome boy, of the same fair type as Helena, but much more rugged in strength; and his blue eyes danced with merriment instead of frowning with the disdain of hers. He adored her yet quarreled with her continually, because she had so little interest in "sensible, outdoor things"; and his gaze now turned upon Dorothy with instant perception that here was a girl worth knowing and no nonsense about her.

His gay debonair manner and his ready apology for his own blunder pleased Mrs. Calvert. She liked honesty and did not mind, in the least, having been termed an "old woman." This boy was worth all the rest of the Montaignes put together, she decided, and thereupon showed her good will by admiring his thoroughbred mount.

"That's a fine beast you have there, lad. Needs a little exercise to get him into shape, but I reckon a few trips up and down this mountain will fetch him right."

She had herself walked to her old friend's shop and now stepped forward to examine at closer range the good points of the horse, stroking his velvet nostrils with an affectionate touch, and patting his shoulder approvingly.

Herbert stared and exclaimed:

"Why, that's strange! Cephy hates women. Won't let mother nor sister come near him, or wouldn't if they tried—which only Helena has done—once! You must like horses, ma'am, and understand 'em a lot."

"I ought to. I was brought up with them. They've been my best company many and many a time. I was put into a saddle when I was but a year and a half old. Held there, of course; but took to the business so well that by the time I was five I could take a fence with my father, any time he

wanted to ride over the plantation. I'm glad to see you like them, too. But I must be going. I'm sorry, Mr. Chester, that I didn't drive over; then I could have taken you home, but. I didn't expect to have the pleasure of meeting you here. I——"

As she paused this straightforward old lady looked at Mrs. Montaigne with a questioning glance; but receiving no comprehending glance in return addressed herself to her late opponent in law.

"Won't you let Mr. Chester take your place in your carriage, Mr. Montaigne, and you walk alongside me? It's such a low, easy vehicle and it's a good bit of a way back to Skyrie. I'm going there myself, and there couldn't be a better time than this for all of us to call upon our new neighbors. I'm sure we're all delighted to have them among us."

There was nothing for it but compliance. Though his face reddened and he would far rather have walked, or hobbled, twice the distance than become an enforced recipient of the Montaigne courtesy, John Chester felt that this old gentlewoman had been and was too true a friend for him to offend by not falling in with her proposal.

On his own part, Archibald Montaigne winced at the picture of this crippled ex-postman riding in state beside his wife and daughter, yet dared not refuse, lest by so doing he would close the door to that future intimacy which he coveted. He felt that this intimacy with Mrs. Cecil, personally, might be anything but agreeable; yet in her old white hands lay the key to the social situation which was his latest ambition.

There ensued but the briefest hesitation, during which there issued from Seth Winters's lips an amused, reproachful exclamation:

"O Betty, Betty! Never too old for mischief!"

But none heard the words save "Betty," who smiled as she did so. The others were helping Mr. Chester into the carriage and settling him comfortably there, with an ostentatious kindness on the part of Mr. Montaigne which the ex-postman inwardly resented. Then the coachman started his team forward, and the justice returned to his smithy, cheerily calling out:

"Well, lad, we've come out of that business with flying colors! It was the presence of Mrs. Calvert which did the most for us, though the man has more sense than appeared, yesterday, else he wouldn't—Why, Jim? James? Jimmy?"

There was no response. None but the office cat answered this summons. The defendant in this remarkable suit had vanished.

CHAPTER VIII

A WALK AND ITS ENDING

It was with great surprise that the dwellers in the houses along the way saw the contestants in a case of law returning from the trial in the most harmonious manner.

First came the Montaigne equipage, with Mrs. Montaigne and Helena upon the back seat, the latter sitting stiffly erect and haughty, the former chatting most pleasantly with the cripple facing her. Behind the carriage walked Mrs. Calvert and Mrs. Chester, both in the gayest of spirits and talking volubly of household matters; as mother Martha afterward described it:

"Might have been plain Mrs. Bruce, or Jane Jones herself, Mrs. Cecil might, she was that simple and plain spoke. She's going to have her currant jell' made right away, even whilst the currants are half green. Says she's read it was better so, and though she's afraid her old cook'll 'act up' about it she's bound to try. She said that when a body gets too old to learn—even about cookin'—it's time to give up living. Land! She's not one that will give it up till she has to! I never saw anybody as full of plans as that old lady is. You'd think she was just starting out in life instead of being so nigh the end of it, and I guess she thought I was s'prised to hear her tell. Because she caught me looking at her once, right sharp, and she laughed and said: 'I'm one of the people who can't settle down, I'm so many years young!' Why, she might have been Dolly, even, she was so full of fun over the way that lawsuit ended. I know 'twas that that pleased her so, though she never mentioned it from the time we left the shop till we got back to Skyrie. Well, green currants *may* make the jell' solider, but I shall wait till just before the Fourth, as I always have, to make mine: and I'm thankful for the few old currant bushes that still grow along that east wall. Almost any other kind of shrub'd have died long ago, neglected as things have been, but you can't kill a currant bush. More'n that, when I get my jell' done I'm going to send Mrs. Calvert a tumbler and compare notes. I reckon mine'll come out head, for I never was one to take up with everything one reads in the papers, nor cook books, either."

Which shows that, despite her previous objections to it, that morning's excursion to the haunts of justice proved a very enjoyable one to the rather lonely little woman from the city, who found the enforced quiet of the country one of her greatest privations.

Following their elders came also Dorothy C. and Herbert, who had slipped from his saddle to walk beside his new acquaintance, and she was already chatting with him as if they had always

known each other. To both the world of "outdoors" meant everything. To him because of the gunning, fishing, riding, and rowing; to her because of its never-ending marvels, of scenery, of growing things, and of the songs of birds.

"I tell you what—Steady, Bucephalus!" cried Herbert to the restless animal he led and whose prancing made Dorothy jump aside, now and then, lest she should be trampled upon. "I tell you what! The very next time I go out fishing in the *Merry Chanter*, my catboat, I'll coax sister to go, too, and you must come with us. If she will! But Helena's such a 'fraid-cat and Miss Milliken—she's my sister's governess—is about as bad. There's some excuse for Helena because she is real delicate. Nerves or chest or something, I don't know just what nor does anybody else, I fancy. But the Milliken! Wait till you see her, then talk about nerves. Say, Miss Dorothy——"

"I'm just plain Dorothy, yet."

"Good enough. I like that. I knew you were the right stuff the minute I looked at you. I—you're not a goody-good girl nor a 'fraid-cat, now are you?" demanded Herbert, anxiously.

"No, indeed! I'm not a bit good. I wish I were! And I'm not often afraid of—*things*. But I am of folks—some folks," she answered with a little shudder.

"Yes, I know about that. Just like a story out of a book, your being stolen was. But never mind. That's gone by. Do you like to fish?"

"I never fished," said Dorothy, with some decision.

"You'll learn. The old Hudson's the jolliest going for all sorts of fish. There's an old fellow at the Landing generally goes out with me and the rest the boys. He's a champion oarsman, old as he is, and as for—Say! Ever taste a planked shad?"

"No, never."

"You shall! Old Joe Wampers shall fix us one the first time we go out on the river. He can cook as well as he can fish, and some of us fellows had a camp set up on the old Point, last year. I haven't been over there yet, this summer, but it's all mine anyhow. When it came fall and the others had to go back to school they—well, they were short on cash and long on camp, so I bought them out. You like flowers? Ever gather any water lilies?"

"Like them? I just love them, *love them!* Of course, I never gathered water lilies, for I've always lived in the city. But I've often—I mean, sometimes—bought them out of pails, down by Lexington Market. Five or ten cents a bunch, according to the size. I always tried to save up and get a big bunch for mother Martha on her birthday. I used to envy the boys that had them for sale and wish I could go and pick them for myself. But—but I've seen pictures of them as they really grow," concluded Dorothy C., anxious that Herbert should not consider her too ignorant.

However, it was not the fact that she had never gathered lilies which had caught his attention; it was that one little sentence: "to save up." He really could scarcely imagine a state of things in which anybody would have to "save" the insignificant amount of five or ten cents, in order to buy a parent a bunch of flowers. Instantly, he was filled with keen compassion for this down-trodden little maid who was denied the use of abundant pocket money, and with as great an indignation against the parents who would so mistreat a child—such a pretty child as Dorothy C. Of course, it was because the niggardly creatures were only parents by adoption; and—at that moment there entered the brain of this young gentleman a scheme by which many matters should be righted. The suddenness and beauty of the idea almost took his breath away, but he kept his thought to himself and returned to the practical suggestion of planked shad.

"Well, sir,—I mean, Dorothy,—a planked shad is about the most delicious morsel a fellow ever put in his mouth. First, catch your shad. Old Joe does that in a twinkling. Then while it's still flopping, he scales and cleans it, splits it open, nails it on a board, seasons it well with salt and pepper, and stands it up before a rousing fire we've built on the ground. U'm'm—Yum! In about half or three-quarters of an hour it's done. Then with the potatoes we've roasted in the ashes and plenty of bread and butter and a pot of coffee—Well, words fail. You'll have to taste that feast to know what it means. All the better, too, if you've been rowing for practice all morning. Old Joe Wampers coaches college crews even yet, and once he went over with Columbia to Henley. That's the time he tells about whenever he gets a chance. 'The time of his life' he calls it, and that's not slang, either. Say. What's to hinder our doing it right now? This very afternoon—morning, for that matter, though it's getting rather late to go before lunch, I suppose. I'll tell you! Just you mention to your folks that you're going on the river, this afternoon, and I'll coax mother to make Helena and the Milliken go, too. Then I'll ride right away down to the Landing and get old Joe warmed up to the subject. He's getting a little stiff in the joints of his good nature, but a good dose of flattery'll limber him up considerable. Besides, when he hears it's for that real heroine of a kidnapping story everybody was talking about, he'll be willing enough. I'll tell him you never tasted planked shad nor saw one cooked, and he'll just spread himself. 'Poor as a June shad,' he said yesterday, when I begged for one, though that's all nonsense. They're good yet. Will you?"

He paused for breath, his words having fairly tumbled over each other in their rapidity, and was utterly amazed to hear Dorothy reply:

"No, thank you, I will not. Nothing would tempt me."

"Why, Dorothy Chester! What do you mean?" he asked, incredulous that anybody, least of all an

inexperienced girl, should resist the tempting prospect that he had spread before her.

"I wouldn't *touch* to taste one of those horrible 'flopping' fish! I couldn't. I wouldn't—not for anything. I should feel like a murderer. So there!"

"Whew! George and the cherry tree! You wouldn't? 'Not for anything?' Not even for a chance to sail along over a lovely piece of water, dabbling your hand in it, and pulling out great, sweet-smelling flowers? 'Course, *you* needn't see the shad 'flop.' I only said that to show how fresh we get them. Why, I coaxed even dad over to camp once and I've always wanted Helena to go. Pshaw! I *am* disappointed."

"I don't see why nor how you can be much. You didn't know me till an hour ago—or less, even. And I'm disappointed too. You didn't look like a boy who would"—Dorothy paused and gave her new acquaintance a critical glance—"who would *kill* things!"

"Nor you like a silly, sentimental girl. 'Kill things!' Don't you ever eat fish? Or beef? or dear little gentle chickens?" demanded this teasing lad, as he quieted his horse and prepared to mount, though at the same time managing to keep that animal so directly in Dorothy's path that she had to stand still for a moment till he should move aside.

She frowned, then laughed, acknowledging:

"Of course I do. I mean I have; but—seems to me now as if I never would again."

"Well, I'm sorry; and—Good-morning, Miss Chester!"

Away he went, lifting his hat in the direction of the people ahead, looking an extremely handsome young fellow in his riding clothes, and sitting the fiery Bucephalus with such ease that lad and steed seemed but part and parcel of each other. Yet his whole manner was now one of disapproval, and the acquaintance which had begun so pleasantly seemed destined to prove quite the contrary.

"He's a horrid, cruel boy! Kills birds and things just for fun! He isn't half as nice as Jim Barlow, for all he's so much better looking and richer. Poor Jim! He felt so ashamed to have made everybody so much trouble. I wish—I wish he'd come with us instead of that Herbert:" thought the little maid so unceremoniously deserted by her new friend.

"She's just a plain, silly, 'fraid-cat of a girl, after all!" were the reflections of the young horseman, as he galloped away, and with these he dismissed her from his mind.

Now it happened that Mrs. Calvert liked young folks much better than she did old ones, and the conversation which she had rendered so delightful to Mrs. Chester, during that homeward walk, was far less interesting to herself than the fragments of talk which reached her from the girl and boy behind her. So when the hoofs of Bucephalus clattered away in an opposite direction, she turned to Dorothy and mischievously inquired:

"What's the matter, little girl? Isn't he the sort of boy you like? You don't look pleased."

Dorothy's frown vanished as she ran forward to take the hand held toward her and she answered readily enough, as she put herself "in step" with her elders:

"I would like him—lots, if he didn't—if he wasn't such a *killer*. I like his knowing so much about birds and animals—he says he can whistle a squirrel out of a tree, any time, and that's more than even Jim can do. At least I never heard him say he could. And Jim Barlow will not kill anything. He simply will not. Even old Mrs. Stott had to kill her own poultry for the market though she'd strap him well for refusing. All the reason he'd tell her was that he could not make anything live, so he didn't think he'd any right to make it die. Mrs. Calvert, have—have you forgiven poor Jim for letting the dogs get away? and me too? Because I know he feels terrible. I do, and it makes me sort of ashamed to have you so kind to me when it was part my carelessness—"

"There, there, child! Have done with that affair. It was more amusing than annoying, for a time, and after I found my Danes were safe; but I hate old stories repeated, and that story is finished—for the present. There'll be more to come, naturally. One can't make a single new acquaintance without many unexpected things following. For instance: John Chester riding so familiarly in Archibald Montaigne's carriage and talking—Well, talking almost as his little daughter has been doing with her new friend. I overheard Mrs. Montaigne mention something about having once been a patient at a hospital in our city and that was the 'open sesame' to 'Johnnie's' confidence. Oh! it's a dear old world, isn't it? Where enemies can change into friends, all in one morning; and where people whom we didn't know at breakfast time have become our intimates by the dinner hour. This is a glorious day! See. We are almost at the turn of the road that leads to Skyrrie. Slowly as we have come it hasn't taken us long. I'm glad I walked. It has done me good and—given my neighbors yonder a chance to know one another."

"I'm glad, too. I haven't enjoyed myself so much since we moved here, only, of course, when Dolly got home," responded Mrs. Chester. "Yet what an angry, disgusted woman I was when I went over this road before, lawsuit-wards, so to speak."

They were almost at the corner when Dorothy cast a last glance backward and exclaimed:

"I don't see Jim anywhere. Why do you suppose he didn't come? Where do you suppose he is?"

"Well, little girl, my supposing is that he felt himself not one with any of our party. 'Neither hay

nor grass' he would likely express it. That's for his not coming. As for where he is now I suppose, to a degree that is certainty, that he is—doing his duty! From my brief acquaintance with the lad I judge that to be his principal idea. His duty, this morning, would have been the transplanting of the celery seedlings, which yesterday's events delayed. If we could look through the trees between us and my vegetable garden I believe we should see him bending over the rows of little green plants, oblivious to all that's going on around him, so intent is he on making up for lost time and not cheating his employer by wasting it. Jim Barlow is all right. I was angry enough with him yesterday, for a while, but I can do him justice, to-day."

Her guess at his whereabouts was correct. The lad had hurried away from Seth Winters's office and was already well along with his work while they were thus discussing him. But both his new mistress and Dorothy promptly forgot him when they came to that turn of the road they had been approaching and the view beyond lay open to them.

For an instant everybody stopped, even the coachman checked his horses in amazement, though he as swiftly resumed his ordinary impassive expression and drove forward again at the risk of disaster.

"What in the world! It looks like a—a funeral! Or the county fair! Whatever does that mean?" cried Mrs. Cecil, who was the first to voice her astonishment. Yet she wondered if she heard aright when, clasping her hands in dismay, Mrs. Chester almost shouted to her husband in front—riding backwards and thus unable to see at what they all so earnestly gazed:

"John, John! That dreadful advertisement!"

CHAPTER IX

A LIVE STOCK SALE

John Chester had prophesied that, in answer to his ill-advised jest of an advertisement, it would "rain horses."

Apparently, it had. Not only horses but cows; and, trampled upon by the first, hooked by the latter, an assorted lot of pigs mingled with the other quadrupeds, squealing, twisting, doubling-and-turning upon their leading ropes with the perversity native to swine.

These unlovely creatures frightened the high-bred team drawing the carriage, setting them to rearing and plunging till an accident was imminent. Their driver had made to pass directly through the assembly before Skyrie gate, leaving it for meaner turnouts to make way for him: with the result that the unmanageable pigs had set other horses into a tumult.

Fortunately, the coachman was both cool and skillful, and with a dexterity that seemed wonderful he brought the Montaigne equipage around and began a retreat, over the way he had just come. This saved the situation, so far as an upset was concerned, and he did not again draw rein till well away from the scene. Then, all danger being past, Helena promptly fainted, and saved her equally frightened mother from doing so by rousing her maternal anxiety.

John Chester never knew just how he managed to get out of that carriage. Certainly, with far less difficulty than he had found in entering it, for he was suddenly upon the ground, his crutches under his arms, and himself hobbling forward with tremendous swings into the very midst of things.

"Come here, come here!" commanded Mrs. Calvert to Dorothy, withdrawing to the high bank bordering the road and that was topped by one of those great stone walls which Simon Waterman had built. Amusement, surprise, and anxiety chased one another across her mobile old features, and with a sudden movement she turned upon Mrs. Chester, crying excitedly: "Well, my friend, you can't deny that plenty of things happen in the country, as well as in the city you bewail. Match me this in Baltimore, if you please! And explain it—if you can!"

For it was mother Martha and not her daughter who had obeyed Mrs. Cecil's imperative: "Come here!" and who could only gasp, through her astonishment: "It's that advertisement. A 'joke' of John's that he didn't mean to pass beyond our own doors. We need a horse, a cow, and pig to——"

"Add hens! to scratch up your neighbors' flower beds and give completeness to your lives!" laughed Mrs. Betty, who felt and declared that: "I haven't had so much fun in a single morning since—I can't tell when. I wouldn't have missed this!"

"Seems as if everybody in the whole town must have read and answered that foolish thing. I—*what shall we do?* How possibly get rid of all these people!" cried the mistress of Skyrie in real distress.

As yet neither she nor Mrs. Cecil had observed Helena's faintness, for the back of the carriage was toward them now and some distance down the road. But they had observed Mr. Chester's swift departure homeward, and had seen Dorothy leap like a flash over the intervening wall, toward the kitchen door and the well which was near it.

"Makes me think of the 'Light Brigade,' with horses for 'cannon.' That's shameful for me! though, there *are* cows to the right of them, pigs underneath them, and horses—did anybody ever see such a collection?" asked Mrs. Calvert, clutching Mrs. Chester's arm to keep herself from slipping downward from the bank into the briars below. Then suddenly again exclaiming: "Look at that child! She's carrying water in a pitcher. She's making her way through those men out into the road again. Something has happened. Somebody is in trouble. Oh! it must be that frail-looking daughter of the Montaignes! See. Dorothy is running now straight toward the carriage."

This was sufficient to banish all amusement from Mrs. Cecil's manner and she was instantly upon Dorothy's trail, moving with an ease and swiftness that amazed Mrs. Chester, active though she herself was. Indeed, the girl had to slacken her speed in order not to spill all the water from the pitcher, and so the pair reached the side of the carriage together; the old gentlewoman nodding approval for the presence of mind which Dorothy had shown.

However, Helena was rapidly recovering from her brief swoon, and her mother looked askance at the cracked pitcher in which the water had been brought and the rusty tin cup in which it was offered; Dorothy having seized the utensils always left lying beside the well, for the convenience of passers-by, without waiting to secure more presentable articles.

Still, it was Mrs. Calvert whose hand proffered the refreshing draught, and it was Mrs. Calvert's voice which was saying, in its most aristocratic yet kindest accents:

"I did not at once see that your daughter was ill. Your husband left us at the very first crossroad toward your place and I was absorbed with my new-old neighbors' affairs. Deerhurst is nearer than the Towers. Why not drive there first and let Miss Helena rest awhile before going further?"

Now the invitation was given in all sincerity, though the mistress of Deerhurst was inwardly smiling at the pictured face of Seth Winters, had he been there to hear her thus cordially soliciting for guests the people she had once declared she would never willingly know. Only the slightest reluctance accompanied her words. She had intended calling upon the Chesters in their home and upon having a plain business talk with "Johnnie." However, from all appearances at the cottage beyond, this was not an opportune time for such an interview and one that could easily be postponed. At present, the Skyrrie family had their hands sufficiently full of more pressing affairs.

Helena Montaigne shared her father's social ambition, so it was with a wan, sweet smile that she accepted from the mistress of Deerhurst the battered tin cup that she would have rejected had Dorothy held it upwards. Also, after graciously sipping a few drops of the refreshing water, she accepted for herself and mother—it was always Helena who settled such matters—that most gratifying invitation to the mansion. More than that she rose from her place on the wide back seat of the carriage and offered it to Mrs. Cecil, rather than that lady should be forced to ride backwards. But this sacrifice was declined:

"No, indeed, thank you. I will finish my trip as I begin it, by walking. It will take you as long to drive around by the entrance as for me to go across lots, through the woods. I will meet you at the door. Good-by, Dorothy. I trust you'll all come well out of your present predicament and I shall be anxious to hear results."

Mrs. Cecil was not prone to outward expressions of affection and the little girl was surprised to receive a kiss, as the pitcher was handed back to her, and this surprise was fully shared by the occupants of the carriage. But, having bestowed this light caress, the nimble old lady gathered up her skirts and struck into a footpath running beneath the trees, where every woodland creature was gay with the gladness of June. Yet as she passed among them, none seemed more glad than she; nor, maybe, in the sight of the Creator of them all was she alien to them.

Let alone, Dorothy sped backward to her home, and to the side of her parents, who stood together before the kitchen door, vainly endeavoring to hear what a half-dozen different men were saying at once. Her keen eyes scanned the odd collection of beasts with an ever increasing amusement, though she lifted her feet with a little shriek of fear as a mighty hog, which had long outgrown its "pig" days, broke from its owner's grasp and waddled up the path.

"I saw it in the *Local*, and if a man's goin' to start in farmin'——" began one.

"Pooh; neighbor! this feller's hoss ain't no kind o' use to a lame man like you! That hoss? Why, that hoss has run away and smashed things more times 'an it's years old—and that's sayin' consid'able!" interrupted a second trader, as the first one edged into the dooryard leading a gaunt black steed, himself dragging through the gateway a sorrel mare which had also reached the years of discretion.

At which number one retorted with fine scorn:

"Why, if that ain't Bill Barry! Huh! Lemme tell you, neighbor, a man that trades hosses, or buys one outright, off *Bill* gets left every time. That there sorrel? Why, she's twenty-odd if she's a day!"

Amid the laugh that followed this sally a third man called over the wall from the road beyond:

"Hello, mister? Advertised for a cow, didn't you? Well, just step a-here and take a peek at this fine Alderney o' mine. New milker with a calf still beside her—purty as a picture, the pair of 'em, and dirt cheap. Reason I sell, I've got more stawk 'an my land 'll keep. Come this way, won't you, Mr.—Mr.—'Skyrie,' is it?"

Poor father John scratched his perplexed head, shifted his weight upon his crutches, and would fain have answered each and all at once as each demanded; but the affair was too much for him, who was always so ready to see the funny side of things. He cast one bewildered glance into Dorothy's laughing, sympathetic face and, also, began to laugh aloud.

The trader nearest, he of the gaunt black steed, caught the infection of merriment and augmented it by a hoarse guffaw. Already, while waiting for the prospective purchasers, the many who had come to sell had seen the absurdity of the situation, and each new arrival of pig, cow, or horse, had caused an outburst of momentary mirth. Yet, hitherto, under this passing amusement, had lain a half-angry resentment. Each had climbed the mountain, or traveled across it, for the sole purpose of "making a good trade," and none was pleased to find his chances forestalled.

Now, however, personal feelings gave way before this good-natured acceptance of an annoying state of things; and, before another moment passed, the laughter which the master of Skyrie had started was echoed from man to man till Dorothy clapped her hands to her ears and mother Martha ran into the house, to escape the uproar.

The fun conquered, for a time at least, all ill feeling, but it had not settled more important matters. The buying and selling had yet to come, and John Chester fairly groaned as he whispered to Dorothy:

"What shall I do with them! However get out of this mess! I know no more about the good points of a horse or a cow than a babe unborn, and your mother who does—or should, for she's a farmer's daughter—has ignominiously fled!"

Seeing the pair in apparent consultation, the visiting owners of the various animals held their momentary peace, till Dorothy answered quite seriously:

"Well, whether you do or do not know which is good and which is bad, you did advertise for them, you know, and you ought to take one of each kind, I s'pose. That is—have you got the money ready, to pay right now?"

"Oh, yes! The money's all right. Martha has that in her cupboard."

"Well, then, let's try it this way. Ask her to come out again; then let's begin with the pigs. They act the meanest of all the creatures and I hate them! *Must* we have a pig, father John?"

"So your mother says. To eat up the milk!"

"Then I do think she ought to select it. I'll go and ask her, myself. Let everybody bring up his pig, one after another, like standing in line at the post-office, you know; and let mother look them all over and choose the one she wants. When we get through the pigs the rest of the pig-men will go away, and the cow-men show us their cows. Oh! it would be just jolly to do it that way! Mother buy the pig, you the horse, and I the cow! I'll go and see if she will."

Either Dorothy's arguments were convincing or Mrs. Chester had repented her retreat, thus leaving her more inexperienced husband to the mercy of possibly unscrupulous traders, for she promptly reappeared in the dooryard and announced:

"We will buy just what we advertised for: one cow, one horse, one pig. We will examine the pigs first, and in order, with lowest price stated at once. We will not dicker at all, but will buy as cheaply as we can. Now, begin."

The little woman had placed herself upon the doorstep, with an air of practical business which caused her husband to silently clap his hands and as silently applaud; nodding his head and saying, by his expression:

"Good enough, madam! Couldn't have done better if you'd been in continual practice!"

The only difficulty of the proceeding was that each "pig-man" had grown weary of waiting and now crowded to the fore, intent upon selling *his* pig before another had a chance. Result: seven specimens of swine, in varying degrees of fatness, were forced into the inclosure; where each immediately proceeded to entangle himself with his neighbor and to run in a direction diametrically opposed to his owner's will.

"Oh! how glad I am our flower beds haven't been made yet!" cried Dorothy, flying up the outside stairs of the cottage, where she felt quite safe, although one inquisitive porker did plant its fore-legs on the lower step, intent to follow. Thence it was jerked back by its owner, with the remark:

"Drat a hog, anyhow! They're plaguyest critters to drive of any that lives. Next time I have a pig to sell I'll do it on my own premises—or not at all!"

In mercy to the animals and to their owners Mrs. Chester made a quick selection and one that others, wiser than herself, knew to be a fortunate one. Her choice fell upon a half-grown creature, whose body had received a good scrubbing before being taken to Skyrie, and whose skin looked pink and clean beneath its white bristles. She was asked a larger price than was quite just, as all the other dealers knew, but as all likewise considered "city folks" legitimate prey nobody enlightened her, and she handed out the money at once; merely requesting its late owner to take the animal to the corner of the old barn and securely fasten it there.

Then there followed what father John remarked was "quite a lull in the hog market," and Dorothy

begged:

"Let's buy the cow next! There's a lovely one yonder! A soft, fat, écru-colored one, with the cutest little calf tied to it! Oh! do let's have the calf any way even if we don't the cow. It's a perfectly adorable little thing! see how it cocks its head and kicks up its heels—the sweet!"

The swine and their owners having departed the dooryard was comparatively clear; and it was noticeable that nobody crowded forward when, at a nod from Mr. Chester, the proprietor of the "écru-colored" cow and "adorable calf" led them up for closer inspection.

They certainly were attractive specimens of their race, and the Quaker miller who offered them had a most benignant countenance. He seemed to possess the respect and confidence of his neighbors and his words had the ring of truthfulness as he stated:

"Thee will go much further and fare much worse before thee has a cow like Hannah offered thee, friend Martha. She is of good pedigree, as I can show thee if thee will step over to my mill and look at my ledger. Her yield is ten quarts at a milking, twice a day, and her price is fifty dollars."

Martha Chester caught her breath. She had not anticipated paying more than half that sum for "just a cow"; even the price of the pig had startled her, remembering the small amount of cash she had in her purse. But alas! The demon of possession had seized her! The fact that the porcine "beauty" already tied to her barn was her own roused all her old farm-born instinct for "stock," and though she hesitated she did not say "No." Besides, her own half-forgotten grandsire had been a Friend and this man's speech carried her back to childhood's days and a roomy farmhouse, with its rich abundance of good things. Was ever a Quaker really poor?

Now nobody, in his senses, could have compared honest Oliver Sands to a tempter; yet his very next words proved temptation to John and Martha Chester, whose Christian names he had somehow acquired and now used so naturally.

"If thee buys Hannah thee will not regret it. Moreover, because I have heard the surprising tale of the little maid yonder, I will bind the bargain by giving her the calf, free of charge. I do not like to separate mother and child, even among brute creatures, unless from necessity; and, Dorothy Chester, thee may have my calf."

Of the astonishment of her parents and Dorothy's wild, almost incredulous delight, there is no need to tell. It can be easily surmised. Sufficient to state that very shortly afterward the broad-brimmed hat of Oliver Sands was disappearing down the road, while Hannah and her offspring had joined the squealing pig beside the barn.

CHAPTER X

AT MILKING-TIME

As if by mutual consent the owners of the rejected cattle slowly departed. They had awaited the outcome of the Sands-Chester transaction rather from curiosity than any doubt as to the result.

Oliver Sands was an upright Friend. He was, also, locally known as a "slick trader." What he set out to do he generally did. Moreover, though he dwelt in a plainly furnished farmhouse, his farm comprised the richest acres of the table-land crowning the mountain, and his flocks and herds were the largest in the county. His flour mill did a thriving business. Some said that its thrift was due, in part, to the amount of toll extracted from his neighbors' grists; but this, of course, was a heresy unproved. Nor did many of even these disgruntled folk grumble openly. They dared not. Oliver "held them in his hand," as the saying went, having mortgages upon almost all the smaller farms adjacent to his own—intent upon sometime adding them to his, at that dreaded day when he should see fit to "foreclose."

With the miller's departure from the scene the horse-owners had their chance, and took it promptly; but the prices asked for the several steeds which were now "put through their paces" were far and away beyond the balance left in the Chesters' power to pay. Therefore, short work was made of this part of the memorable sale and the grounds were rapidly deserted of nearly all.

Bill Barry lingered to the last, and finding himself still unsuccessful, relieved his disappointment by a parting fling:

"Well, neighbor, after all I dunno as you will *need* a hoss—ary kind of one, seein's you've got Hannah! That creatur's a repytation for speed 'at puts my sorrel here out of the runnin'. Lively, Hannah is, an' no mistake. Old Olly's head's leveler than this mountain-side, even if his mouth is mealier 'n his own flour bags. Well, good-day. If you shouldn't get suited, lemme know. I'll drive right up."

The silence that fell upon Skyrie then seemed intense, but most delightful; and for a few moments all its household felt the need of rest. They sat without speaking, for a time, till a low from the barnyard reminded them that their "family" had increased and might need attention. Who was to give it?

With a smile, half of vexation, mother Martha suddenly exclaimed:

"We've begun at the wrong end of things! 'Put the cart before the horse.' We needed a pig, a cow, a horse, and a man. Well, the man should have been our first to secure. Then he could have looked after the other things. Oh! hum! What a day this has been!"

"Yes. Country life *does* seem to be rather exciting," agreed Mr. Chester, idly poking the end of his crutch among the weeds along the wide stone where his chair had been placed. "A lawsuit, a stock-sale, and an introduction to 'Society'—all in one morning."

"But we didn't get the horse!" said Dorothy C., who liked matters to be completely finished, once they had been undertaken; and whose fancy had been unduly stirred by the sight of Bucephalus. She had then and there decided that she, too, would become a finished equestrian as soon as possible; though she had seen none among the horses just exhibited that compared with Herbert's mount.

"The horse can wait," returned Mrs. Chester, in a tone of relief. "Yet, for your sake, John, it should have been our first purchase."

"After that necessary 'man,' my dear!"

But Mrs. Chester was in no mood for joking. The reaction from excitement had set in, and she let her husband's jest fall to the ground where it belonged. If only that unfortunate advertisement had done the same! They would not then have been so annoyed by an overflow of traders nor been rendered the laughing-stock of the community. Besides it was now past noon and dinner must be prepared; so she rose to go indoors, suggesting to Dorothy:

"It might be well to see if Hannah and the calf need water. You can take that old pail I use to scrub from and carry them a drink. Take but a half-pailful at a time. You're too young to lift heavy things, yet."

"All right: but, mother, that generous old man didn't say what the calf's name was. And isn't Hannah the oddest for—a cow? Real Quakerish it sounds to me. What shall you name your dear little pig? May I call my darling calf Jewel? Just to think! I never, never dreamed I should have a real live little calf for my very, very own!"

"May your Jewel prove a diamond of the first water!" cried father John, always sympathetic.

But mother Martha was carefully counting the contents of her depleted pocket-book and her tone was rather sharp as she answered:

"It's a poor pig that can't live without a name: and—I'm afraid that old Quaker gentleman was not—was not quite so generous as he seemed. A calf requires milk. A calf that 'runs with its mother' generally gets it; and——" She paused so long that her husband added:

"What becomes of the family that owns the calf? Is that what you were thinking, my dear? No matter! So long as that lowing mother and child were not cruelly 'separated' everything is right. May I come and peel the potatoes for you?"

For helpless to do great things for his household the crippled man had insisted upon his right to do small ones; but it always hurt his wife's pride to see her once stalwart husband doing "woman's work," so he never attempted it without permission.

This time she nodded consent, and promptly brought him a basin of them, while she sat down to shell a measure of pease procured that morning from a passing huckster. She felt that they could talk as they worked, and indeed there was much to discuss. Until her return everything had been absorbed by Dorothy's fortunes; and even still it was thought of Dorothy which lay closest to both their hearts.

"But Dolly brought down to a real bread-and-butter basis! We are compelled to make our living and hers out of this run-down farm. Now, how to begin? Shall I sit by the roadside and ask every man who passes by if he wants to hire himself out 'on shares'? Or will you risk another advertisement, compounded by yourself?" inquired Mr. Chester. "Help we must have."

"Yes, we must. If I could only get hold of some of the strong, idle, colored men loafing the streets of Baltimore! They, or he, would be just what we need."

"Maybe not, my dear. In any case we haven't one, nor time to import one. Probably he would be discontented if we got one. We'll have to depend on 'local talent' and—hear that cow 'Moo!' Sounds as if she were homesick."

"Poor thing! probably she is. I am—a little, myself," returned mother Martha, rising to put her vegetables on to boil. "Also, I consider that we have accomplished sufficient for one morning. Let's rest on it and wait what may turn up; fortunately Hannah can live upon grass—the whole farm is grass, or weeds——"

"And the calf can live upon Hannah! My dear, country life is making you a philosopher: and here comes our girl as ready for her dinner as I am. I'll take a bit of a nap while she sets the table, and the sooner I'm called to it the better. No trouble with our appetites since we came to Skyrrie," rejoined the ex-postman, crossing to the lounge and settling himself, not for the "nap" he had mentioned but to best consider that farming question, almost a hopeless one to him.

The afternoon passed quietly, varied by frequent visits on the part of mother Martha and Dorothy to their respective possessions of live stock, tethered by the barn. All seemed going well. Hannah had ceased to low and lay upon the grass contentedly chewing her cud, while her festive offspring gambled around as far as its rope-length would permit.

As for the unnamed pig, it had rooted for itself a soft muddy bed, and from having been well fed, earlier in the day, was contented to lie and slumber in the sunshine.

Contemplation of the creatures gave Martha great pleasure, till Dorothy suddenly propounded the question:

"Who's going to milk Hannah? That nice Quaker man said 'twice a day,' and 'ten quarts at a time.'"

For a moment Mrs. Chester did not answer; then she looked up and, as if in reply to her own perplexity, beheld Jim Barlow.

"O my lad! Never anybody more welcome. You can milk, of course?"

"Yes, ma'am, I should say so. Mis' Calvert she sent me over to see if you needed anything. She said as how none your folks was used to farmin' and she's got a right smart o' curiosity over how you came out with your advertisement. More'n that, here's a letter she had Ephraim fetch up-mounting, when he druv down for her mail. She said I was to tell you 't all your letters could be put with her'n if you wanted; so's to save you or Dorothy walking way to the office."

"All our letters won't be many and she is very kind. Please thank her for us and tell her that—that—Jim, would you like to change 'bosses' and come to work for us at Skyrie?" asked Mrs. Chester with sudden inspiration.

"No, ma'am, I wouldn't," answered the lad, with unflattering promptness. "I mean—you know ___"

"Oh! don't try to smooth that over, pray. It was a mere thought of mine, knowing how fond you were, or seemed to be, of our girl. But, of course, you wouldn't. The comforts and conveniences of our little home can't compare with Deerhurst. Only——" said the lady, somewhat sarcastically, and on the point of adding: "It's better than Miranda Stott's." But she left her sentence unfinished and it was kinder so.

Poor Jim saw that he had offended. Even Dorothy's brown eyes had flashed, perceiving her mother's discomfiture, but though his face flushed to find himself thus misunderstood he did not alter, nor soften, his decision. He merely stated the case as he regarded it:

"If I could make two of myself I'd be glad to. I'd just admire to take hold this job an' clear the weeds an' rubbidge offen Skyrie. Not 't I think it'll ever be wuth shucks—for farmin': the land's all run to mullein an' stun. But I could make it a sight better 'n it is an' it might grow plenty of them posies Dorothy's so tickled with. If it could be stocked now—Mis' Stott used to say that keepin' lots o' cattle was to be looked at both ways; what they leave on the land in manure fetches it up, an' what they eat offen it fetches it down. She kep' more calves an' yearlin's than 'peared like she'd ought to, but she raised a power of stuff for market, 'count of 'em. If I was you folks I'd put my money into yearlin's fust thing," said this young farmer, rendered talkative by his novel position as adviser.

Dorothy was disgusted. This didn't seem like the old, subservient Jim she was familiar with and she disliked his plainness of speech. She improved the occasion by calling his attention to Jewel:

"See my calf? That's my very own! She was a present to me this very day, Jim Barlow, and I've named her Jewel. Maybe, though, I'll change that to 'Daisy.' I've read stories where cows were called 'Daisies,' and she'll be a cow sometime, and I shall sell her milk to get money."

"Pshaw! Looks like good stock, that calf does; 's if 't might make a nice steer, but 'twon't never be a *cow* to give milk. 'Tain't that kind of a calf; and after all, raisin' young cattle is a power of work. They run over fences an' fall into hollers, an' Mis' Stott she used to say, sometimes, she didn't know but they did eat their own heads off; meanin' their keep cost more than they was wuth—time they was ready for killin'. If I was you, Dorothy, I'd fat that calf up, quick's I could, then sell him to the butcher for veal," further advised this practical youth.

"O you horrid boy! You—you—I never saw anybody who could dash cold water on people's happiness as you can! You—you're as hateful as you can be!" cried Dorothy, venting all her disappointment in anger against him.

Now it happened that that same morning, at Seth Winters's office, the untutored farm boy had seen and envied the ease of manner with which handsome Herbert Montaigne had won his way into the favor of Mrs. Calvert and had instantly made friends with Dorothy. Then and there, something sharp and bitter had stolen into Jim's big heart and had sent him speeding out of sight—eager to hide himself and his uncouthness from these more fortunate folk, whose contrast to himself was so painful. Dorothy—why, even Dorothy—had, apparently, been captivated by the dashing Herbert to the utter neglect of her former friend; and, maybe, that was what had hurt the most. Incipient jealousy had stung Jim's nobler nature and now made him say with unconscious wistfulness:

"I'm sorry, girlie. You—you didn't think so—always."

The girl had turned her back upon him, in her indignation, but at the altered tone she faced about, while a swift recollection of all that she owed to him sent the tears to her eyes and her to clasp her arms about his neck and kiss him soundly, begging:

"O Jim! forgive me! I didn't mean—I forgot. *You* never can be horrid to me. I don't like to have my things made fun of—I never was given a calf before—I—Kiss me, Jim Barlow, and say you do!"

To the bashful lad this outburst was more painful than jealousy. His face grew intensely red and he did not return the kiss. On the contrary he very promptly removed her clinging arms, with his protesting:

"Pshaw! What ails you, Dorothy?"

Then he forced himself to look towards Mrs. Chester and to return to the real business of the moment. Fortunately, that lady was not even smiling. She was too accustomed to her child's impulsiveness to heed it, and she had resolved to act upon the principle that "half a loaf is better than no bread." In other words, she would improve this chance of getting some fit quarters for the pig, which had roused and begun to make its presence evident. She scarcely even heard Jim's attempted explanation:

"You see, Mis' Chester, 'twas Mis' Calvert that took me up an' set out to make a man of me. I disappointed her fust time she trusted me, and I've got to stay long enough to show I ain't so wuthless as I seemed. *I've got to*. More'n that, the gardener she's had so long is so old an' sot in his ways he don't get more'n half out the soil 't he'd ought to. I'm goin' to show him what Maryland folks can do! That truck o' his'n? Why, bless your heart, he couldn't sell it to Lexington Market, try his darnedest: nor Hollins', nor Richmond, nor even Ma'sh Market—where poor folks buy. Huh! No, I can't leave. But I'll come work for you-all every minute I can get, without neglectin' Mis' Calvert."

"O Jim! That's lovely of you, but you mustn't do that. It would be too great a sacrifice. You planned to study every minute you were not working or sleeping, and you must. It's your chance. You must, Jim dear. You know you're to be President—or something big—and you're to make me very, very proud of you. Some way, somebody will be found,—to farm poor Skyrie!" returned Dorothy, eagerly, yet unable to resist the last reproach.

"Now, Mis' Chester, I can, an' ought, to get that pig into a pen 'fore dark. Is there any old lumber 'round, 't you can spare?" asked the lad, rolling up his blouse sleeves, preparatory to labor.

"There's an old dog-churn in the cellar, that Alfaretta Babcock knocked to pieces the time——"

"Speaking of Babcock, ma'am, that is my name: and I've come to hire out," said a queer unknown voice, so near and so suddenly that mother Martha screamed; then having whirled about to see whence the voice came, screamed again.

CHAPTER XI

HELPERS

The man who had come so noiselessly over the grass, from Cat Hollow, might well have been the "Nanarchist" his daughter had termed him, were one to judge from tradition and appearance; and it is small wonder that Mrs. Chester had cried out so unexpectedly, beholding this specimen of the "Red Brotherhood."

Tall beyond the average, "Pa Babcock"—he was rarely spoken of otherwise—had a great head covered by a shock of fiery hair which proved Alfaretta truthful in her statement that "he'd disdain to comb it." The hair was stiff and bristly, and stood out in every direction, while the beard matched it in growth and quantity. He wore a faded red flannel shirt, and denim overalls that had once been red, while his great hairy feet were bare and not too clean. He wore no hat and scarcely needed one, and while his physique was that of a mighty man his face was foolishly weak and vain. His voice perfectly suited the face: and, altogether, he was a most unprepossessing candidate for the position of "hired man" at Skyrie.

"You wish to hire out?" asked the mistress of the farm, repeating incredulously his statement. "But I thought—Alfaretta said——"

"I do not doubt it. The reputation I have won at the hands of my own household is part of the general injustice of society—as it exists. Nothing can convince my labor-loving spouse that I am preparing for her and her children a future of—Stay, lad: are you, also, a member of this establishment?"

"I'm goin' down suller after lumber. Come along an' help. If we hustle right smart we can get a pen done 'fore dark, let alone gettin' them cattle into a shed. Strange critters need shuttin' up, a spell, else they'll make tracks for home—wherever 'tis," answered Jim, leading the way toward the house and the door he judged must lead to the cellar. His own voice sounded very strong and masterful by contrast with the high, thin falsetto of the "Nanarchist," and Mrs. Chester smiled, while Dorothy cried out:

"Alfy's father may be a *giant*, but my Jim is a *man*!"

They were no longer afraid of "Pa Babcock." His outward appearance wholly belied his nature, and they instinctively recognized that here was an easy-going, lazy fellow, who might impress his own household with a sense of his importance but could not overawe outsiders. They sat down on the barn doorsill to wait and watch events, and presently there returned Pa Babcock carrying an enormous quantity of the heavy, cobwebby planking that had formed the framework of the old churn. Behind him was Jim, rolling the treadmill part of the affair and as profoundly engrossed by the task in hand as by all he undertook. He had evidently assumed the direction of matters and his big assistant was amusingly obedient.

Mr. Chester, also, came out to the spot and was made comfortable with an old horse-blanket for cushion of a low chopping-block near. Dorothy found the blanket in the barn and also triumphantly asserted that there was a lot of "real nice hay" in one part of it. But Jim scoffed at this statement, declaring that hay kept as long as Skyrie had been closed wouldn't be "wuth shucks."

"James, James! Don't become a pessimist!" warned father John, yet smiling, too.

"Say it again, please, sir, an' I'll look it out in that little dictionary Mis' Calvert she's put in my room. Hurry up, man! Wish to goodness I had some decent tools! Nothin' but a rusty ax to work with—an' look yonder at that sky!"

All looked and mother Martha grew frightened. She was timid during any thunder shower and this was worse than a shower which threatened—a tornado seemed imminent. To retreat indoors and help John to get there was her first impulse, but Pa Babcock held up a protesting hand and she hesitated, curiously observing his movements. Moistening his fingers he let the rising wind blow over them, then calmly resumed his task of nailing a board to a post in the cattle-shed still left standing beside the barn.

"It will not come on to rain till midnight. Then look out for a deluge. You are perfectly and entirely safe here, ma'am, until our undertaking is accomplished and it is always well to have the eye of the master—I would say, mistress—upon——"

"Hand over that scantlin', old step-an'-fetch-it!" ordered Jim, with scant reverence and—the scantling was handed. Furthermore, Pa was set to searching the barn for a possible crowbar, pick-ax, or, "Any plaguy thing a feller can bore a post-hole with."

Thus rudely interrupted, the "Nanarchist" calmly surveyed his companion in labor, then squeaked out:

"There is no occasion for such remarkable activity, young man, but——"

"Hurry up! 'Twon't be no midnight 'fore that 'gust' strikes us!" ordered Jim Barlow.

Anger is a wonderful incentive to action—sometimes. At last Pa Babcock was angry—as much so as it was in his nature ever to be. The result was that he fell to work with a vigor and skill that almost distanced Jim's own; to the great advantage of the Chesters and their live stock.

By the time darkness had come a pig-pen had been constructed in one end of the cattle-shed; a milking-stool had been nailed into shape and Hannah milked—with a remarkable shrinkage in the amount Oliver Sands had accredited to her: she and "Daisy-Jewel" put under cover for the night: and the rickety barn-doors nailed here and there as a precaution against the coming "gust."

This seemed long delayed; yet Jim was wise enough to button his blouse tightly across his heated chest and to take his prompt departure the moment his self-imposed tasks were finished; Mrs. Chester calling after him:

"Don't forget to thank Mrs. Calvert for her kindness about the mail and tell her, please, that this letter held the change due us after the printing of that advertisement And thank *you*, James Barlow, for all your helpfulness in everything."

The lad went onward, with a comfortable sense of having been extremely useful and with all his slight jealousy allayed; reflecting, also:

"There ain't one that lot got any more sense about farmin' than a spring chicken! Not so much, either; 'cause a chicken *will* stir round an' scratch a livin' out the ground, sooner 'n starve. Dorothy, she—Well, she's got some ideas, kind of dull ones, but might answer once she gets 'em sharpened by tryin' an' failin'; but—Pshaw! I wish to goodness she was a boy an' not a girl! Then there'd be some show. As 'tis—shucks!"

The day may come, Master James, when you'll be very glad that your wish could not be gratified! Meanwhile, as you plod along beneath the trees, sighing and moaning overhead—in seeming terror of the coming storm—the family at Skyrie have re-entered the cottage: and with the ease of one who belongs, Pa Babcock has entered with them.

"Will you stay for supper, Mr. Babcock, or shall we take some other time for talking about business?" asked Mr. Chester, as their new acquaintance coolly settled himself in the invalid's own rocker by the window and began to sway lazily to and fro, while the host himself took a straight chair near by.

"O father John! Don't sit there. I'm sure Mr. Babcock will——" began Dorothy, indignant at the

stranger's selfishness.

But her father stopped her by a shake of his head and a smile of amusement which neither she nor Martha shared: though the latter did say, politely enough:

"I never knew anybody to come at a time they were more needed, for without your help Jim could never have fixed things so nicely. We owe you many thanks and some money. How much you will have to say, for we know little about wages here in the North."

Pa waited for her to finish, then ejaculated:

"I should say I did help! Done it all, if you'll recall the circumstances again. Furnished all the brain power anyway, and skilled labor outranks muscle at any time. He means well, that boy: but—I wonder if he realizes his own position in society! A poor, down-trodden member of the lower class. I must see him again. I must uplift him! Ennoble him! Rouse his slumbering ambition—Make a man of him! I——"

"You couldn't! I don't mean to be rude, but you mustn't talk about my Jim that way. He *isn't* down-trodden. He *is* uplifted. He's going to make a man of himself, for himself, by himself—without you or even dear Mrs. Cecil interfering. She'll help, of course, for she's rich and has the chance, but a boy like Jim Barlow—Huh!" cried Dorothy in valiant defense of her faithful friend, and with a contemptuous glance at this great man whom she had disliked on the instant.

"Dorothy! Dorothy C.!" reproved Mrs. Chester in her sternest accents, yet not far behind her daughter in the matter of dislike. The man seemed such a sham, but—"Praise the bridge that carries you safe over!" He was willing to be hired and they needed him.

Pa Babcock paid no more attention to the girl's outbreak than he did to the fly perambulating his frowsy forehead and which he was too indolent to brush aside; and indignant at this, also, Dorothy went about bringing food from the pantry and depositing dishes upon the table with most unnecessary decision. She hoped, oh! how she hoped that her parents would refuse to employ this "Anarchist"; or, if they did so, that they would prohibit his coming to the family table.

However, here he was and supper was ready, and he was invited to draw near; yet to the surprise of all, with the provision stipulated for by the host:

"To-night, Mr. Babcock, we consider you our guest: but should you engage to work for us I would like to arrange that you should board yourself. Mrs. Chester has no servant."

"Sir, I admire her for it! Let every member of society serve himself and the reign of equality begins. My wife is a fine cook and there will be no difficulty in our arrangements. Oliver Sands is my good friend, and it is by his suggestion that I am here. He is a man as is a man! There is no giving of titles by him. A plain man, Oliver, though not—not quite as fully imbued with the doctrines of universal equality and brotherhood as I should desire. Sir, are you a—Socialist?"

Certainly this strange man was what his daughter had described him, "a good talker," judging from the ready flow of language, and of better quality than is commonly found in men of his class. Though this may be accounted for by the fact that he was a greedy reader—of any and every thing which came his way. But to this suddenly propounded inquiry Mr. Chester answered, with his own merry smile:

"No, indeed! Nothing half so 'uplifted' or ambitious. Just a poor, afflicted fellow out of work and anxious to make a living for his family. Let us get through our meal and come to business."

Fortunately, while Pa Babcock was eating he could not well talk, and he was one, as Alfaretta had said, "could always relish his victuals." He now relished so many of prudent mother Martha's that her heart sank, knowing that food costs money and money was unpleasantly scarce in that cottage; but, at last, he seemed satisfied and pushed back from the table, saying:

"Now, let's settle things. I was sent here, first off, by my friend Oliver Sands, to negotiate a loan for him—for your benefit. He's a forehanded fellow, Oliver is, and always ready to help those along who are in trouble or—He's wanted to put a mortgage on my place in Cat Hollow, so's to give me time and opportunity—meaning cash—to promulgate the principles of——"

"Yes," said John impatiently.

"Of course, you understand. All sensible persons do and I shall eventually convert you to my ideas ——"

"Possibly, possibly! But return to your errand from the miller, please. It's growing late and we've had a fatiguing day."

"I was just coming to it. He was so pleased by you and your family, so delighted to find your wife, here, such a woman of business, that he wished me to say that in case you were in need of funds, a little ready money, you know, he would feel perfectly safe in advancing it: securing it, of course, by the necessary documents."

Mr. and Mrs. Chester exchanged glances, which Dorothy did not see. She had escaped the obnoxious presence of this man by simply going to bed, meaning to get up again, as soon as he should depart, and bid her parents good-night. Then said the ex-postman, after this brief telegraphing of opinions:

"Mr. Sands has guessed correctly. We are in need of ready money—to get things into running order; but the property is my wife's and, like your friend, I have the fullest confidence in her business ability. She will do as she thinks best."

Now what a cruel thing is jealousy! It had embittered the honest heart of Jim Barlow, earlier in the day, and now attacked the tender one of Martha Chester. It was quite true—they did need money. True, also, that they had expected to raise it by a mortgage on Skyrie, at present free and clear. They knew that this money would be forthcoming from the mistress of Deerhurst, simply upon application, and upon the most favorable terms. She had already delicately hinted at the matter, and had her visit to the cottage been made that morning, as she intended, it would doubtless have been settled.

But Martha Chester disliked to be beholden to the old gentlewoman who "made so much of Dorothy" and who, the mother fancied, was superseding herself in the child's heart. It had become a habit of Dorothy's to quote Mrs. Cecil as a paragon of all the virtues, and the child's ambition was to form her own manners and opinions upon her "fairy godmother's."

Now offered a chance for independence which Mrs. Chester eagerly seized, without protest from her husband, though inwardly he disapproved putting themselves in the power of a stranger when there stood ready to take his place a tried, true friend.

"Shall you see Mr. Sands again, to-night?" she asked.

"No, ma'am. I'm due to deliver an oration in the 'Sons of Freedom' Hall, Upper Village, eight o'clock sharp, tickets twenty-five cents. Oliver directed me to say that if you would send your little daughter to Heartsease, his place, to-morrow morning he would make it his pleasure to call and arrange everything. He's a sort of lawyer, himself. And, oh yes! If you should need anything in the way of feed or fodder he is always ready to supply his customers, at the ruling prices and with dispatch.

"Which brings me, ma'am and sir, to the subject of wages between ourselves; and if it's handy, to the payment for my services in erecting a pig-pen and repairing a cow-manger. Let me see. Two hours, at a dollar an hour—Two dollars, I make it. Do you find me right?"

Well! Pa Babcock might look like a simpleton, but he could use his queer voice to his own advantage!

John Chester shrugged his shoulders and Martha replied with considerable crispness:

"A dollar an hour! I never heard of such a thing. In Baltimore——"

"We are not in Baltimore, much as I should admire to visit that city. Skilled labor, you know——"

"But the *skill* was poor Jim Barlow's, and the lumber *mine*. At such a rate your farm services would be worth a fortune, and far more than I could pay. I hoped to get somebody to work 'on shares'; or at least, very cheaply."

"For the present, ma'am, there wouldn't be any 'shares.' The ground is absolutely profitless. But I am not exorbitant, nor would I grind the face of the poor. I am a poor man myself. I glory in it. I think that two dollars and a half a day would be fair to both sides."

With this the high, thin voice subsided and John Chester took up the theme, like his wife quoting their old city as a unit of measurement:

"In Baltimore, or its suburbs, a day or farm laborer would not earn more than a dollar and a half, or even so low as a dollar and a quarter."

"Per day, working on every consecutive day?" asked this would-be employee, leaning back in the rocker and folding his arms. It seemed he never could form a sentence without putting into it the largest words at his command, and listening to him, Martha almost hoped that their present discussion would prove fruitless. However could they endure his wordiness!

"Yes. Of course it would be every day," she answered.

But his next remark came with an originality worthy none other than himself:

"Very well. I have my price and my opinion—you have yours. Let us meet one another halfway. I will work only every other day—I can do as much as two ordinary men, anyway—and thus you will be called upon for no more than you would have had to pay some assistant from privileged Baltimore."

"But we could not board you!" protested John Chester. "I cannot have extra labor imposed upon my wife."

Pa Babcock rose, stretching all his mighty limbs as if he would convince these strangers that he could, indeed, accomplish the work of two ordinary men per day; then, waving the trivial matter of board aside with an airy lightness which his recent exhibition of appetite scarcely warranted, announced:

"We will consider the affair closed. I will work every other day, Sundays excluded, at two dollars and a half per day and find myself. I will enter upon my duties to-morrow morning, and I now wish you good-night. I go to establish the rule of equality in this unenlightened neighborhood."

So saying he slipped out of the house, a fearsome-looking but wholly harmless "crank," who seemed rather to have left his shadow behind him than to have taken it with him. As he departed the roar of thunder, the brilliant flash of lightning, filled the room; and, forestalling a remonstrance she feared might be forthcoming, mother Martha exclaimed:

"The storm is coming at last. I must go see to all the windows."

"I'll limp around and help you; and, wife dear, I can't help feeling we should think twice before we take up with that miller's offer. He's too sweet to be wholesome and I know that Mrs. Calvert ___"

"The matter is settled, John. You reminded me that Skyrie was my property. I claim the right to use my own judgment in the case. I will send Dorothy to see that kind old Quaker early tomorrow."

She did. But as her husband went about with her that evening, making all secure against the tempest, the shadow that Pa Babcock had left behind him—the shadow of almost their first disagreement—followed her light footsteps and the tap-tap of his crutches from room to room.

Till at last they came to the little upper chamber which they had both vied in making attractive for Dorothy's homecoming and saw her sleeping there; her lovely innocent face flushed in slumber and dearer to them both than anything else in life.

"It was for her, else I'd have let John have his way and ask Mrs. Cecil. But I cannot have her drawn away from me—and she's being drawn, she's being drawn," thought mother Martha, stopping to straighten a moist curl and kiss the pretty cheek.

"Oh! if only for that darling's sake we had trusted Mrs. Cecil. She has trusted us: but Martha—Well, women are kittle cattle. I don't understand them, but somehow I'm sorry," was his reflection.

So they went down again, he limping, she skipping almost like a girl, but with a division of thought which saddened both.

CHAPTER XII

SETH WINTERS AND HIS FRIENDS

Seth Winters was known as the best blacksmith in the country. The horses he shod never went lame, the tires of the wheels he repaired rarely loosened: consequently his patronage was extensive and of the best. Better than that, his patrons liked the man as well as his work and they were more than willing to grant him a favor—almost the first he had ever asked of them.

First, he visited Mrs. Cecil and counseled with her concerning the scheme he had formed: and she having most heartily approved it, he lost no time in mentioning it to each and all who came to his shop. The result was that on a sunny morning, not long after Dorothy's homecoming, there gathered before the little smithy an assemblage of all sorts and conditions of men and vehicles, which filled the road for a long distance either way, and even strayed into the surrounding woods for a more comfortable waiting-place.

In the wagons were also many women, farm-wives mostly, all gay with the delight of an unexpected outing and the chance to bestow a kindness.

"Amazing! How it warms the cockles of one's heart to be good to somebody!" cried Seth, his benign face aglow with the zest of the thing, as one after another team drew near and its occupants bade him a smiling "Good-morning!" "The very busiest time of all the year for farmer folk—hayng, crop-raising, gardening—yet not a soul I asked has failed to respond, in some shape or other."

"Of course not! It's as good as a county fair or a Sunday-school picnic, Cousin Seth! I wouldn't have missed it for anything!" cried a merry old voice behind him, and he turned to see Mrs. Calvert nodding her handsome head in this direction and that, with that friendly simplicity of manner which had made her so generally liked. For, though she could be most austere and haughty with what she called "common and presumptuous people," she had an honest liking for all her fellow-creatures who were honest and simple themselves.

"Now, Betty! But I might have known you would come—you're always on hand for any 'doin's.' Though don't you dare to give your own generosity free rein. This is strictly a case 'of the people, by the people, for the people.' Blue-blooded aristocracy and full purses aren't 'in it,'" warned the smith, in an alarm that was more real than feigned, knowing that his impulsive old friend could spoil the pleasure of many by exceeding them in giving.

"Oh! I shall take care. I've only sent one team, a couple of men—one the gardener, the other a carpenter who was working on the place, and—Do you know, Seth Winters, you barrier-destroying old 'Socialist!'—that the man positively refused to take pay for his day's labor, even though he can ill afford to lose his time? 'No, ma'am,' said this aristocrat of the saw and plane, 'I

claim the right to do a decent turn to a neighbor, same as another.' Rich or poor it doesn't appear to make a bit of difference—give them a chance at this sort of thing and they all lose their heads."

Seth laughed. Such "Socialistic" principles as these were the ones he advocated, not only by word but by his whole noble life. For him wealth had but one purpose—the bettering of these other folk to whom wealth had not been given. Then he asked:

"What of Jim Barlow? Is he one of the 'men' you furnished for the day?"

"Will you believe me—he is not? When that young Herbert Montaigne rode around this morning, before breakfast, to say that his father was sending two men with a mowing machine and that he, Herbert, was going to ride on the horse-rake himself, Jim was talking to me. He was full of enthusiasm and earnest to explain that nothing in our own home garden should suffer because of his taking this day off. He would work overtime to make up—as if I would let him! But as soon as Herbert came, just as enthusiastic himself, down goes my James's countenance to the very bottom of despair. What I love about that boy is his naturalness!" exclaimed this lively old lady, irrelevantly.

"Keep to the subject in hand, please, Cousin Betty. The reason of Jim's gloom perplexes me. I should have thought he would have been——"

"Oh! he was; he did; he must have been, he should have been, he would have been—all the tenses in the grammar you choose. If it hadn't been for my precious little Dorothy. That small maid——"

She paused so long and seemed so amused that again he spoke:

"For her sake alone I should think he would be pleased to find others ready to befriend her."

"In a way, of course, he is, though man-like, or boy-like, he'd very much rather *do* the befriending than have such a handsome young fellow as Herbert take it out of hand. That lad was just fetching! He'd dressed the part to perfection. Had on a loose white flannel blouse knotted with a blue tie—his color: his denim knickers might have been the finest riding trousers; and his long boots—I fancy there was more money went to the cost of them than you'd spend on yourself in a year. And all to make himself fair in the eyes of a little maid like Dorothy. But blood will tell. My Dolly——"

"Remember, she *isn't* your Dolly, Elizabeth Somerset Cecil Calvert, however you may now love and covet her. She's a charming small woman, as many another lad than poor Jim or gay Herbert will find some day. But I didn't dream that jealousy began so early in life, or that such a matter-of-fact person as young James Barlow could be jealous."

"He is. He is intensely so, though probably he doesn't know it himself. I fancy it is about the first time he has been brought into contact with other lads of his own age, and he is keen enough to see his own disadvantage. Herbert's nod to Jim was wholly friendly, I thought, but Jim resented it as patronizing. Silly fellow! And so he promptly changed his mind about affairs and decided that not for any consideration could he leave his garden and his 'duty' till the day's work was done. Then, if he had any time, my lord of the potato-crop may condescend to appear at Skyrrie. Also by that time, he doubtless thinks, a white-handed aristocrat like Herbert will have tired of the affair and betaken himself back to the Towers where he belongs. Oh! I do love young folks! They are so transparent and honest in showing their feelings that they're wonderfully interesting. As for my Dolly C.—Seth Winters, I believe that I will really have to ask those Chesters to let me have her for 'keeps,' as the children say."

"No, no, dear friend. Don't. You must not. It were most unwise. Leave the girl to grow up in the station to which God has assigned her, no matter by whose human hands the deed was done. At present she is fair, affectionate, simple, and womanly. To be suddenly transplanted into a wealthy home would spoil her. For once, put your generous impulses aside and leave Dorothy Chester alone, to be a comfort to those who have devoted their lives to her. And now, that sermon's ended! Also, I believe that all have come who promised, which is a remarkable thing in itself. You're walking, I suppose? So am I; and we'll start on together, while I signal the rest to follow."

So they set forth, a worthy pair of white-haired "children," who could not grow old because they lived so very near that Heaven whence they had come to earth: and behind them fell into line all the motley assortment of carts and wagons, with the clattering mowing machine from the Towers bringing up the rear.

Mother Martha was in what purported to be a garden, trying to persuade Pa Babcock to plant things that would yet have time to mature that season, and was at her wits' end to find arguments to stem his eloquent reasons why he should do otherwise. Quoth he:

"Now, of all the satisfactory vegetables grown, asparagus, or sparrowgrass, as the unenlightened around here call it—asparagus contains more nourishment and the properties——"

"But, Mr. Babcock, please don't dig any longer in that trench. It will have to be four or five feet deep and so much labor. My husband was reading all about it in one of his catalogues that he's just sent for, and it would take at least three years for asparagus to grow strong enough to begin cutting. Besides the roots are too expensive. And that terrible trench, so big, filled with stones——"

"Excuse me, ma'am, there's plenty of stone at Skyrrie to fill the asparagus beds of the nation: or if

not quite that——"

"But I must insist, since you've refused to listen to John about it, that you stop fooling with this trench and plant some late potatoes. We bought some seed ones from Mrs. Smith and my little girl is cutting them into pieces already. We were shown that by leaving one or two 'eyes' the pieces would grow just as well as whole tubers. Everybody needs potatoes and they can do without asparagus!" and too exasperated for further speech poor mother Martha folded her arms and brought her sternest glances to bear upon her hired man.

He had kept his word and appeared upon the morning following his engagement, and for a time he had been left to his own devices: his inexperienced employers judging that any man who had been brought up in the country must be wiser in farming matters than they. Besides, the storm that had threatened on the night of his first visit had proved a most disastrous one. The roof had "leaked like a sieve," as pessimistic Jim Barlow had declared it would, "give it storm enough to try it": rusty-hinged shutters had broken loose, stopped-up drains had overflowed, the cellar had become a pool of water, and the cherished furniture brought from the little home in Baltimore had, in several rooms, been ruined by the moisture. Moreover, father John had taken a severe cold and been kept in bed in his own more sheltered apartment; where he consoled himself with the gardening catalogues he had written for and whence he endeavored to direct their hired man.

"Did Pa Babcock bring his dinner, Martha?" he had asked on that first morning, when she was running distractedly about, trying to dry the damaged furniture and undo the storm's havoc.

"No, dear. He said—just this once it didn't happen to be convenient. His wife hadn't any cold meat on hand."

"Neither have you, I believe! Well, I will not board him. I will not! The farm may go to rack and ruin first!" cried Mr. Chester, indignantly. "The idea! Here are Dorothy and I trying to put our appetites into our pockets, just to save you labor, and this great, squeaking lout of a man——"

"John, John! Why, John, I never knew you to be so unjust! If I, with my quick temper, can have patience, you certainly should."

"But, mother, he's just been doing nothing at all, all this morning!" cried Dorothy, seconding her beloved father's opinion. "Just 'sort of nudgin' 'round,' Jim used to call it when I worked that way to the truck-farm, and I only a little girl. Why, I know I could have pulled more weeds myself in this time if I hadn't had to help you indoors, even if I did take that long walk to Heartsease farm. The ground is soaking wet, weeds would pull just beautifully, I know, 'cause we used to love to work after a rain, in our little garden at home! Oh! dear! this is very pretty, but—I wish we hadn't come!"

Alas! This regret was in all their hearts, in that early time at Skyrie. Views were beautiful but they didn't support life, and though they had secured a modest sum of ready money to tide them over these beginnings it had been at the cost of "debt," a burden which the Chesters hated to bear. But, fortunately, they had scant time for repining, and there is nothing like active occupation to banish useless brooding.

Hannah herself could well keep one person busy and, of course, her youth and fleetness ordained that this person should be Dorothy. Bill Barry's statement that the *écru*-colored bovine was "lively" and could outrun his sorrel mare was, at least founded upon fact. Among cattlemen she was what is known as a "jumper"; and though her behavior upon her first day of residence at Skyrie was most exemplary her sedateness forsook her on the next and forever after.

With the best intentions, after having tried her own hand at milking and succeeding better than she had expected, Mrs. Cheater kindly turned Hannah "out to grass"—with most unlooked-for results.

"All cattle graze, you know, John; and she really nibbled that bit of ground clean where she was tied yesterday. Dorothy and I—we won't hinder our 'man' for a trifle like that—Dolly and I will prop up that sagging gate, so Hannah won't be tempted to stray away, and give her the run of this first lot. She might almost mow it for us in time."

"Thus cutting short her winter supply of fodder. Let her have one day at the 'mowing,' if you choose, then she'd better be put into that old pasture and left there. I know a good farmer wouldn't let even a well-trained Quaker cow into his best meadow; even *I* know that! As for the pig, since we can't possibly drink all that milk and, as yet, have no pans in which to store it, he may as well consume it sweet as wait for it to sour. That will keep him quiet, anyway, and a squealing pig—I shouldn't like one."

Martha was delighted to find even thus much farm knowledge on her husband's part, and exclaimed:

"However you guessed that much about things, that meadows are meant for hay and pigs are raised on sour milk, I don't see! Only, of course, it's as you often say to Dolly: 'Anybody can use his head for anything he chooses.' I suppose you've chosen to study farming and so I know we shall succeed. By the way, Mrs. Smith has sent word over by her little boy that she is going up to Newburgh this afternoon to do what she calls 'trading.' She sells poultry, and eggs, and butter, and such things, that she raises on her farm, and takes in exchange all sorts of staple goods. She said she'd be pleased to have me go along and learn how to 'trade,' 'cause if I was going to be a farmer I'd have to know. I shall have to take some of that money, too, and buy a churn, some milk

pans, and—Well, so many things it doesn't seem as if we really had a single necessary article to start with! But it's all the same, of course, in the end. When we get the loan from Friend Oliver Sands it will be all right. You and Dorothy will be comfortable while I'm gone, I think, for our man is right on hand in the garden to——"

"Then, if you love me, keep him there!" pleaded father John, in his whimsical way. "If he forsakes the garden for the house—Well, *I* shall be asleep! As for poor Dolly, if he catches her and tries to convert her to his ideas, the child has nimble feet and can run. I shall advise her so to do. But I'm glad you're to have that nice long ride, though I can't imagine you as ever becoming a good 'trader.'"

It was during this brief absence that the écru-colored Hannah first returned to her natural ways, and that Dorothy had to prove herself "nimble," indeed. Despite the fact that she stood in the midst of the most luxurious vegetation the dissatisfied cow knew that there was better in the field beyond. Regardless of the appealing cries of Daisy-Jewel, this careless mother gave one airy flick to her heels and leaped the intervening wall; and though her child essayed to follow it could not, but set up such a bawling that Mr. Chester hobbled out to see what was amiss.

"Remarkable!" cried Pa Babcock, improving this opportunity to rest from his not too arduous weeding. "Remarkable how the qualities of a race horse will sometimes inhabit the bosom of a creature——"

"Dorothy! Dorothy! I guess you'll have to put Dickens down and go get Hannah back out of that lot. She's made a—a little mistake! Your mother wants her to graze on the home-piece and mother's our farmer, you know. Do run drive her back, but look out for her hoofs. She'd take a hurdle better than any horse I ever saw," called Mr. Chester, laughing; yet regretting to disturb Dorothy, who had worked industriously beside her mother to get things into good condition after the drenching of the rain. She had taken tacks from carpets, carried wet cushions and blankets out into the sunshine to dry and carried them back again when fit, and she wanted to rest and read.

"Oh, dear! I don't see anything to laugh at in this! Why couldn't Hannah stay where she belonged! And just hear that poor little calf! I—I wish it hadn't been given to me!" fretted the tired girl, yet obediently set off in pursuit.

Now the former master of Skyrrie had divided it into many fields. He had called these "building lots," and had confidently expected to sell them at high prices to the rich people who had begun to settle on the mountain. These dividing walls were stone, like all the others, but sufficiently narrow to admit of Hannah's leaping them easily. She did leap them, running from one to another in a manner confusing to herself and doubly so to Dorothy, pursuing. Fortunately, the wide walls bordering the square outline of the farm were impassable even to her: and gradually, pursued and pursuer made their way back to that home-field whence the race had started.

After all it was the voice of nature conquered, not Dorothy's fleetness. Daisy-Jewel's bleating and bawling accomplished the return of the runaway; though not till that too active creature had blundered into the wrong fields so many times that Dorothy was in despair.

Thereafter, Hannah was always most securely tethered or kept shut up in her stall within the barn; her mistress finding it easier to cut the grass and feed her there than to allow her to do it for herself. But these performances did not endear the creature to anybody: nor was it comforting to have Pa Babcock—who took no part in any of these "chasings"—inform them that:

"Of course, that was the reason my friend Oliver sold her to you so cheap. At ordinary rating that fine blooded cow would have brought at least a hundred dollars. Of course, too, there had to be some consideration to offset the price;" and again when, on the morning of that gathering at Seth Winters's smithy, Hannah had gnawed her fastening rope in two and started on a tour of the farm, he began to explain: "There is a way to prevent such——" But had paused abruptly, his attention attracted to the road below, and finished his possible advice by the pointing of his grimy finger and the exclamation: "Tiberius Cæsar! Look a-there!"

Mrs. Chester did look and instinctively sought the society of John and Dorothy, as a protection against the invasion that threatened them.

"Oh! what can it mean? They are all looking this way as if they were bound for Skyrrie! Wagons, people, such a crowd—tell me, John Chester, *have you advertised again?* Is it another 'sale'?"

But he shook his head, as much surprised and alarmed as she: till Seth Winters, the foremost of this invading army, came up to them, and courteously doffing his hat, explained, with a gay:

"Good-morning, neighbors! Don't be frightened! We are nothing but a well-meaning *bee!*"

CHAPTER XIII

A BENEFICENT BEE

If to be busy is a synonym for "bee" this one was well named. As the blacksmith further

explained, while Dorothy hastened to fetch a chair for Mrs. Calvert, who stood beside him, merrily smiling:

"It's a way country folks have of giving a neighbor a lift. We get up 'bees' to raise a barn, help in somebody's belated haying or harvesting, and we've arranged one now to get Skyrie into a little better shape. Too much of a job for one man to undertake alone, and with your permission, we'll begin. Each man knows his part and your near neighbor, John Smith, is boss of the whole. His farm is next to this, he knows most about Skyrie. 'One year's seeding makes seven years' weeding,' you know, and poor Skyrie has been running to weed-seeds far too long. *May* we begin?"

Mother Martha could not speak, and Dorothy seemed all eyes and mouth, so widely they stared and gaped in her surprise; but father John found voice to falter:

"We are almost overcome. I shall never be able to return this kindness, and I don't, I can't quite understand——"

"No need you should, and as for returning kindnesses, all can find some way to do that if they watch out. I take it you are willing we should go ahead. Therefore, John Smith! do your duty! and let every man hustle as he never did before. By sunset and milking-time Skyrie must be the best-ordered farm on the mountain! Hip, hip, hooray!"

What a cheer went up! With what honest pride did John Smith, the best farmer of them all, step to the fore and assign to each man his place! and with what scant loss of time did the fun begin!

Fun they made of it, in truth, though long untilled fields were stubborn in their yielding to plow or harrow, and unmown meadows were such a tangle as tried the mettle of mowing machine and scythe.

Into the garden rushed a half-dozen workers, with plow, spade, rake, and seed bags, coolly forcing the staring Pa Babcock aside, at the risk of being trampled in his own asparagus ditch. Also he, with equal coolness, resigned himself to having his task taken out of hand and repaired to the side of his employers to rest. Was he not, also, one of the family?

Such a "bee" as that was had never before buzzed on that mountain, even though this was by no means the first one known there. It was of greater proportions and more full of energy than could possibly have been brought to the mere raising of a barn or the gathering of a single crop. Dorothy's romantic history, added to the ex-postman's own pitiful story, would have been sufficient to win those warm-hearted country folk to the rescue, even without the example of Seth Winters to rouse them everywhere.

"My Cousin Seth calls himself a blacksmith, but he seems to be a carpenter as well. See? He is actually climbing the roof, to make sure every old, worn-out shingle is replaced by a new one. Trust me, if Seth undertakes anything it will be well done. Your roof will never leak again, as Dorothy said it did that stormy night," said Mrs. Cecil to Martha, while that astonished matron sat now beside her guest, watching and wondering, unable to talk; till at last a sudden fear arose in her housewifely breast, and she answered by asking:

"What shall I do with them? How feed them all? I can just remember such a time when my grandfather had a lot of people come to help, and all the women in the house had to cook for days beforehand, it seems to me, for the one dinner."

"O mother! We can't! Why, there aren't potatoes enough in the pantry for our own dinner, let alone so many people!" cried Dorothy, regretfully regarding her small fingers, roughened now by that cutting of "seed." "Even if we'd saved all you got of Mrs. Smith they wouldn't have begun to go around. I might—do you suppose I could make biscuit enough, like you taught me for father's supper—if there was flour—and maybe butter, and there was time!"

Mrs. Cecil laughed and drew the girl close to her for a moment; then, rising, said:

"Don't worry, Mrs. Chester, nor Dolly dear. These folks haven't come to make trouble but to save it. I see that the women are gathering in that far field that has already been mowed and raked. Herbert Montaigne is there, with his horse-rake, and I'm curious to see if he can manage something useful as easily as he does his own fast horse. Besides, country women are a bit shy, sometimes, and I want you to go among them with me and get acquainted. Get your—Mrs. Chester a hat, my darling, and your own if you need it, Dorothy."

She spoke with a tone of authority, habitual enough, but she had hesitated for an instant over the word "mother," and Martha's tender, jealous heart was quick to notice it and to assure herself that "she has taken a notion to my girl and wants to adopt her from me. I know it. I'm as sure as if she'd said so outright. But she shan't. She shall not. Dorothy is not the kind of child to be handed from pillar to post, that fashion. She's mine. She was sent to me and I shall keep her, even if John did once say that a richer woman could do more for her than we can. I—I begin almost to—to hate Mrs. Cecil! And I'm glad I didn't borrow money of her instead of that nice old Friend."

By which reflections it seemed that poor, jealous mother Martha likened herself to a "pillar" and the mistress of Deerpark to a "post." It was in that mood she followed the old lady down to that far field in which the group of women, aided by a few lads, seemed so strangely busy.

Busy, indeed! In a community accustomed to "picnics" conveniences for such were a matter of

course; so in some of the wagons had been brought wooden tressels, and the long boards that were laid upon these made the necessary tables for the great feast to come.

In one corner of this field, fragrant now with the freshly cut grass which Herbert had raked into windrows, was a cluster of trees, giving a comfortable shade; and beneath these the helpful lads detailed for the task set up the tressels and placed the boards in readiness; then brought from the wagons in the road outside such big baskets and so many, all so heavily laden with the best their owners could provide, that Dorothy could only clasp her hands and cry out in amazement:

"Why, this is far and away beyond anything we ever had at home! Even the Sunday-school excursions down the Bay didn't have so many baskets! I wish—how I wish that father was here!"

"Here he shall be!" cried Herbert, jumping from his seat upon the rake and hurrying toward her. "I've gathered up all that's in this lot and I'll go fetch him. Goodness! If there isn't the little mother herself! Come to see if her precious son has overheated himself by doing something useful! Wait, Dorothy! Here's a lark! My mother wouldn't mix with 'common folks'—I mean she wouldn't be let by Helena—but now she shall. She has let her curiosity and her anxiety over her son and heir"—here the lad swept Dolly a profound bow which she as merrily returned by as profound a courtesy, each laughing as if no disagreement had marked their last interview—"she has come to the 'Bee' and she shall taste of its honey!"

Away he sped, scattering jests and laughter as he went, the farm-wives whom his friendliness had already propitiated looking after him with ready approval, while more than one remarked on the absence of that "insolence" which had been attributed to him.

"The father and daughter may be terrible top-lofty, but there ain't no nonsense in the boy, and the mother looks as if she'd like to be neighborly, if she dared to," said Mrs. Smith, advancing to meet Mrs. Calvert and Martha. "How-do, Mis' Cecil? It's the crownin' top-notch of the whole business, havin' you come, too. But I knowed you would. I said to John, says I, 'Mis' Calvert's sure to be on hand if she can shake a leg, she ain't one to miss no doin's, she ain't,' I says, and I'm tickled to death to see you can, ma'am."

With this conclusion Mrs. Smith turned a triumphant eye upon her neighbors as if to show them how exceedingly familiar and intimate she was with the greatest lady "up-mounting." Besides, as wife of the commander of this expedition, she realized her own important position: and set to work at once to introduce everybody to Mrs. Chester, for Mrs. Calvert was already known to most and waited no introduction to those she did not know.

"Now, boys, get them benches sot up right to once! wouldn't keep visitin' ladies standing, would you?" ordered this mistress of ceremonies, herself setting the example by placing a bench under the very shadiest tree and beside the head table. "Now, Mis' Calvert, Mis' Chester, Dolly, and you, old Mis' Turnbull, step right up and se' down. Comfortable, be ye? All right, then, we'll have dinner ready in the jerk of a lamb's tail! Mis' Spencer, you set that cherry pie o' yourn on this particular spot an' figure of this table-cloth! I want Mis' Calvert to taste it, an' when she does she'll say she never knew before what cherry pie could be! Fact. Oh! you needn't wriggle an' try to make believe you don't know it yourself, Sarah Spencer, so bein's you've took first prize for pies at the county fair, three-four years hand-runnin'. Fit to set off this very best table-cloth in the bunch—My! but it's fine! yet the lucky woman 'at owns it didn't think the best none too good for this here joyful occasion. I tell you, isn't it a good thing the Lord sent us such a splendid day? Hot? Well, maybe, but need hot weather to make the corn grow an' hay cure right. Now, if that don't beat the Dutch! here comes the boss himself! Bore right along like a king on his throne! Hurray!"

By the "boss," of course, it was Mr. Chester she meant: smiling as even that sunny-tempered gentleman had rarely smiled, and carried in a stout chair upon the shoulders of two strong men, while waving them to the tune of his merry whistle, followed Herbert with the crutches.

"Coffee? Smell it! Fried chicken? Well, that's a smart trick. Wait till I copy that over at the camp!" cried the lad, always a hungry chap but never quite so hungry as now; and watching with admiration how deftly two women were deep-frying in a kettle, suspended by three crotched sticks above a fire on the ground, the already prepared fowls which had once been the choicest of their flocks.

Plenty of other things there were, roasts and broils and brews, but Mrs. Smith's mandate had long before gone forth that: "Our men must have something hot with their dinner, and not all 'cold victuals.' John he can get more work out of a hired man 'an anybody else I ever saw, an' he does it by feedin' 'em. He says, says he, in hayin' time when he wants folks to swing their scythes lively: 'Buttermilk an' whey, Draggin' all the day; Ham an' eggs—Look out for your legs!' So I'm bound to have that tried to Mr. Chester's 'Bee.'"

So not only figuratively but practically it was a case of "ham and eggs," and brimful of his enjoyment, master Herbert now deposited the crutches within easy reach of their owner and hurried to the road, where his mother and sister sat amusedly watching in their phaeton. He made one attempt to vault over the intervening wall, but it was so wide he failed and struck the top in an ignominious heap, which set all the other lads in the field into uproarious laughter—himself joining in it with perfect good humor. Even his mother, whose idol he was, looked at him in surprise, anticipating scowls instead of smiles; but the love and sympathy which had emanated from Seth Winters's big heart had touched, that day, the more selfish heart of many another—even the "spoiled" lad, Herbert's. Ah! the bliss of bestowing kindness! how it returns in an

overflow of happiness!

"O son! Are you hurt?" cried Mrs. Montaigne, in alarm. How could anybody fall upon stones in that way and not be injured? But "son" had rebounded from the impact like a rubber ball, or the best trained gymnast of his school, as he was.

Another leap brought him to the side of the carriage and to insisting that his women should return with him to what he called "the festal board," adding "it's literally such, though don't they look dainty? those rough planks covered with white linen? Oh! but they've got the 'fixings' to make your mouth water. Please get out, mother, Helena, and come. I'll help you over the wall. It's easy. Come!"

But Helena drew up with haughtiness, demanding:

"What can you be thinking of, Herbert Montaigne? The idea of mother or I mixing in such a crowd. If it suits you to play the fool——"

"No foolishness about what I did, I tell you! Why, child alive, I raked the hay together on three whole six-acre fields! I! your good-for-something brother! Think of that, then put it in your pipe and smoke it!"

With that he began strutting up and down beside the phaeton with such a comical resemblance to a pouter pigeon that coachman James had to turn his face aside, lest he should disgrace himself by a smile, while Mrs. Montaigne laughed aloud.

"Herbert, you dreadful boy! You use more shocking language every day. There's no need for you to suffer any further contamination by mingling with such persons as are yonder. Don't go back. Ride home with us, and let's go into Newburgh and pay visits upon somebody worth while," coaxed Helena, whose mission in life seemed to be the reconstruction of all with whom she came in contact.

"Not much I go! I hate visits, and if you think you're going to drag me away from Skyrie just the minute the real fun begins, you're mistaken, that's all. Besides, what would my friend Mrs. Calvert think if I deserted her in this base fashion? Why, we've settled it that I'm to be her attendant at this famous dinner—I tell you it's going to make history, this busy bumble 'Bee'! It will be told of and held up as an example of what can be done and should be done, sometimes. No, indeed, I shan't miss it, and you won't unless you're a bigger—I mean more unwise than I think you. Mother's coming anyway, to sit next to Mrs. Calvert and that pretty Dorothy. Huh! Talk about girls! She's a daisy, she is! Good deal more of one than that little-boy-calf of hers she's so fond of. That's right, mother! Have a will of your own or a will of mine, once in a lifetime!" commended this persuasive son.

Mrs. Montaigne loved both her children, said that she did so equally, and they both ruled her; Helena by fear, Herbert by love. Under all his rollicking nonsense the deepest feeling of the lad's heart was love for the timid little woman who was so ready to sacrifice herself to them all, and who he believed was also the superior of all. Once in a long while she acted with decision. She did so now. Whether the name of Calvert had been one to conjure with, or because she was really anxious to see what sort of people these were who had so evidently "bewitched" her son, she descended from the phaeton, laughingly demanding if Herbert thought she "possibly could get over that dreadful wall, or should they go further and through the gate?"

"Over it? Easy as breathing!"

She was a tiny woman and he a very strong lad: and before she knew what he was about he had caught her over his back, sack-fashion, and leaped to the top of the wide wall. A couple of steps, and he had swung her down upon the grass within the field, where she stood too amazed to speak: though Mrs. Smith, observant from a distance, dramatically exclaimed:

"My soul and body! You could knock me down with a feather!"

CHAPTER XIV

AN ASTONISHING QUESTION

"Everybody's here, with all his first wife and children!" cried somebody, facetiously, as the tin horn was blown to summon the men from their labors in the field to their dinner.

"So they be! So they be! yonder comes Mis' Babcock with all her flock, root and branch. Reckoned she'd strike Skyrie about feedin' time; but there's plenty, plenty for everyone; and she's a nice woman, a hard worker an' kind neighbor. Sho! Look at Seth Winters! If that man ain't a kind of a mesmeriser, or somethin' like it! for he's actually coaxed that proud Miss Montaigne to join the merry throng! Fact. I just seen him escortin' her through the gate, an', Dorothy! mind you put on your best manners an' treat her real polite, like city folks is supposed to know how. Since she's put her pride in her pocket an' come, I'd like to have her see she ain't the only young lady up-mounting. 'Cause you belong now, you know; you're one of *us*. Go meet her, whilst I fix another chair right alongside her ma and Mis' Calvert!" directed Mrs. Smith, handing the girl a

plate of rusk, with the added injunction: "Take special care o' them biscuit, too, child. I made them myself, I did, an' I want the 'ristocratics to have first chance at 'em. If some them men folks tackle them on the road to table, there won't be nothin' left of them but the plate. Take care! I—Why, I don't believe she heard a word I said!"

Dorothy had heard in part. She obediently carried the plate to the table, though not to that part of it which its owner had designated, and she had answered: "Yes, Mrs. Smith, I will try." But she had suddenly perceived a forlorn figure, leaning against the stone wall that separated the field from the road, and her interest centered on that.

Poor Peter Piper was peering wistfully into that busy, happy, laughing assemblage of people, as if he longed to be among them yet felt himself shut out. He had not heard about the "Bee," and even if he had might not have comprehended what it meant. Had he been at the blacksmith's home once after the scheme was started, Seth would assuredly have given the half-wit as courteous a chance to share in the fun and labor of that day as he had given all his other neighbors. But Peter had not been seen by anybody who knew him since that visit of his to Skyrie, in company with old Brindle. He had departed then, frowning and greatly troubled. Why, his clouded mind could not understand; but something had gone wrong. The once deserted farm had become the home of strangers and he could visit it no more. Thus much he felt and knew; and that night he disappeared.

However, the poor fellow's absences were so frequent that nobody missed him from the neighborhood and Dorothy had utterly forgotten him. Now, as she saw him, her heart throbbed with pity.

"He looks as if this picnic were Paradise, and he shut out! I'm going to ask him here!"

With a swoop upon it Mrs. Smith rescued her fine rusk from the plebeian appetites which would have consumed it and carried it triumphantly to the "aristocratic" end of the head table, then stood arms akimbo, staring after Dorothy and ejaculating:

"If that don't beat all my first wife's relations! That chit of a child set down the biscuit, but she snatched up a big cake worth twice as much. She's going to coax that simpleton with it, just as a body has to coax a wild critter to come an' be caught. And I plain told her that Helena Montaigne was here, and 'twas her chanst to make friends with *her*. Pshaw! I don't believe that Dorothy Chester cares a pin whether she gets in with rich folks or not! 'Tain't five minutes ago 't I heard her sassin' Herbert same as she might one my own boys. Don't stand in awe of nobody, Dorothy don't, an' yet nobody gets mad at her. 'Course, I don't begrudge Peter Piper a mouthful o' victuals. None of us would, but what's *left over* after the rest is done would be plenty good enough for him. Huh! All that splendid chocolate cake—five-layer-thick!"

As Dorothy approached the wall Peter dodged behind it and, for a moment, she thought he had run away. If he had she meant to follow; and with the ease that her long practice in chasing Hannah had given her she vaulted over the wall to pursue. But he had not run, and she landed on the further side plump beside him where he sat huddled against the stones.

"Well! It was lucky for you I didn't jump on you instead of by you!" cried the girl, as she, also, sat down on the bank.

Peter shrank aside, as one who wards off a blow, and mumbled something which she made out to mean:

"I didn't do any harm. I didn't!"

His speech was thick and he lisped like a baby learning to talk, but his face brightened when she answered quickly:

"Of course you didn't. But why aren't you in there with all the others? You must come, in a minute, back with me. First, see here?"

With the friendliest of smiles she held aloft the monster cake she had judged would be the waif's proper share of the feast, choosing for him, as she would for herself, to have the dessert come before the bread and butter.

Peter's protruding eyes fastened upon the dainty and his mouth opened widely, and for a time, at least, he knew nothing beyond that cake. Breaking it into bits, Dorothy fed him. He did not offer to take the food in his own hands, he simply opened that cavernous mouth and received with a snap of his jaws the portions she dropped therein. The operation became fascinating to the girl and she marveled to see no movement of swallowing; only that automatic opening and closing, and the subsequent absorption of the cake.

She had not supposed he would consume the whole loaf at one meal. He did. The last morsel followed the first and still there was no sign of surfeit, and the girl sprang up, saying:

"Now I must go back to help those ladies wait on the table. Will you come?"

With some hesitation Peter Piper got to his feet, and now his gaze was riveted upon her face as closely as it had been upon the chocolate cake and almost as greedily. As if within her bonny smile and unshrinking friendliness he beheld something new and wonderfully beautiful. It was just as they stood up that somebody behind the wall called out:

"Well, Peter Piper! Good enough! So you've come to the 'Bee,' too, have you? If you'd let me know where you were you'd have had your invitation long ago. Time enough, though, time enough. Always is to do a good deed, and there's a deal of work yet to be finished before nightfall. Let me tell you, Miss Dorothy Chester, there isn't a better gardener anywhere around than our friend Peter! If he'd only stick to it—if the lad would only stick to it!"

It was Seth Winters, of course, who had seen Dorothy's crossing of the field to that same spot where he, also, had discovered the feathered cap of the poor imbecile. He was honestly glad of the lad's return, being always somewhat anxious over his long absences. Much experience of life had shown him that the world is not very kind to such as Peter, and he tried by fatherly interest and goodness to make up to the boy somewhat for the harshness of others. Dorothy's action had delighted him: and with an approving smile he held his hands toward her, across the wall, and bade:

"Give me your hands, lassie! I'll help you back over; and, Peter, come."

Dorothy sprang lightly to the top of the wall and he swung her as lightly down; the half-wit following with a nimbleness one would not have expected and, like a child, catching hold of the girl's skirt and thus firmly attaching himself to her.

"Why, Peter! Don't do that! Young ladies don't like to drag big fellows like you around by main force!" remonstrated the smith, smiling and shaking his head at the youth, who merely smiled in return and clutched the tighter, even though the girl once or twice tried to loosen his grasp, attempting this so gently that it produced no effect; and thus escorted she came back to the stables beneath the trees and to the presence of Helena, toward whom officious Mrs. Smith immediately forced her.

Oddly enough, since they were so unlike, there was instant liking between the two girls; and with a smile Helena made room for Dorothy on the bench beside her. But there was no room for Peter, nor would he have claimed it now had there been plenty. With intense and haughty surprise Helena had stared at the unfortunate for a moment, till an amused contempt curved her lips in a disdainful smile.

In general, people did not credit the poor creature with sensitiveness; none save Seth Winters believing that he keenly felt the scoffs and gibes so often put upon him; but he now proved the truth of the blacksmith's opinion. Helena's scornful look did what Dorothy's efforts had failed to do—it loosened Peter's fingers from her skirt and sent him, cowering and abashed, to the furthest limit of the group. Fortunately, for him, straight also to a spot where Herbert Montaigne was merrily helping—or hindering—the women busy cooking over the fires upon the ground. Herbert had seen Dorothy's exit from the field with the great cake in hand and had, for an instant, intended pursuit that should end in a lark; then he had seen the red feathers of Peter's cap and reflected:

"That girl's got some fellow over there she's going to feed on the sly. They've both dropped down out of sight now—I reckon I won't spoil sport—shouldn't like it myself. It's none of my business anyhow, though I wouldn't mind being the fellow in the case—this time."

Also he made it sufficiently his business to watch for the reappearance of Dolly, minus the cake and attended by Seth and the too appreciative Peter. Then the whole significance of the incident flashed upon him, and to his boyish fancy for the little maid was instantly added a deep respect.

"Bless my eyes! I called her a 'daisy,' but she's more than that. There isn't a girl in a thousand who'd have done that decent thing without being bidden; but—Hello! seems as if she'd got what Mrs. Smith calls her 'come uppance'! The simpleton has glued himself to her petticoats and she can't shake him free!" Then a moment more of watching showed him the result of his sister's haughtiness and made him exclaim aloud: "Good enough for Helena! The first time I ever knew her confounded pride to be of any use. But here comes the victim of her scorn, and it's up to me to finish the job Dorothy C. has so well begun!"

In all his life poor Peter Piper had never been so happy as that day made him. Instead of the indifference or aversion commonly shown him, he was met with an outstretched hand and the genial greeting of another lad not much younger than himself; and if, for the sake of impressing others into the same friendliness, the greeting was rather overdone, the fault was on the right side and Peter was too simple to suspect it.

With a confused expression and an unaccountable warmth in his lonely heart, the "touched of God" accepted the extended hand and cast a grateful glance into Herbert's face. A look that, for an instant, suffused that youngster's own because he felt his present kindness to be "second hand." Then Peter turned about and pointed to where Dorothy now sat laughing and feasting, and volubly explaining to Mrs. Smith, between mouthfuls:

"I really couldn't help taking the nicest cake in sight, dear Mrs. Smith! I knew it was yours and belonged now to the public; and I will make you another to take its place. I—I hope it wasn't 'stealing——'" she finished, with a momentary gravity.

"Bless all my first wife's relations! Don't let such a horrid word as that come to this merry 'Bee!' It was yours, your very own, leastwise your ma's and pa's, to eat or give away just as you'd ruther. I do still think that broken pieces, after the rest has finished, would have answered the purpose full as well, but——"

"Broken pieces, Mrs. Smith! On a day like this?" cried Mrs. Calvert, reprovngly. "You do yourself an injustice. If I'm not mistaken you've put aside some mighty tender pieces of chicken and part of your own biscuits for this same poor estray."

The mistress of ceremonies blushed and bridled her head. In truth she had, indeed, "put aside" the dainties mentioned, but alas! they had been intended for the delectation of her own and her cronies' palates. With instant change of mind, however, she caught up the basket hidden beneath the table and marched valiantly forward to the spot where Herbert was supplying Peter with the best of everything he could lay his hands on. Admirably frank—when found out—good Mrs. Smith now added her store to Herbert's, and the half-wit's eyes grew more protruding than ever. Also, to the disgust of both watchful lad and woman, Peter caught the food from the basket and thrust it within his oilcloth jacket. He knew, if those watching him did not, the terrible pangs of starvation and here was provision for many a day. Besides, the whole of a rich chocolate cake does have a diminishing effect upon even such appetites as Peter's.

Bounteous as the feast was, but a brief half-hour was permitted for its consumption; then the master of the day announced:

"Our job's well begun and so half-done. Now for a fine finish and—home!"

All who were standing hurried to their tasks at this word of command, and all who were sitting as promptly rose. Among them Mrs. Cecil, with a sudden realization of her eighty years of cushioned ease and her one hour of sitting on a board. Also, her zest of the occasion had as suddenly passed. She had taken a moment's chance to speak to "Johnnie" of money matters; how it would "really be an accommodation for him to take and use some of her own superfluous ready cash, till such time as Skyrie began to yield a comfortable income"; and to her delicately worded offer "Johnnie" had returned a most awkward refusal. He had tried to soften his reply, but not being politic or tactful had succeeded only in expressing himself more brusquely. When pressed to tell if any other person had superseded her, he had to acknowledge that Friend Oliver Sands had done so, but that the affair belonged to his wife, etc.

That was the climax. Between the mistress of Deerhurst and the miller there was a grudge of long standing. Though liberal in her business dealings the old gentlewoman hated to be cheated, and she had openly declared to all who chose to listen that Oliver had cheated her. She stopped buying her feed of him and went to the extra trouble of sending all the way to Newburgh for everything in his line that was required at Deerhurst.

Few like to have their kindnesses returned upon themselves, unappreciated: Betty Calvert less than most: so with a feeling of affront, which she was too outspoken wholly to corer by politeness, she said:

"Mr. Smith, I must go home. May Dorothy Chester take your horse and wagon and drive me there?"

"Of course, and proud to have you use it. But can that little girl drive?" he asked, glancing at the child with a funny smile. Well he knew the retort he might expect—and presently received, amid a burst of kindly laughter from others around—from the lady:

"My good Mr. Smith, *I* sold you that nag. He's twenty years old if a day. A babe in arms could drive him! and I'll send a capable horseman back with him—and her. Good-day, all; and God speed the finish!"

She said it quite devoutly, thankful for the present help given the crippled, would-be farmer, and knowing that with even the best of help his future would be difficult.

A few moments later, for the first time in her life, Dorothy held a pair of reins in her hands, clutching them tightly as if all her strength were required to restrain the speed of the venerable animal hitched before the open "democrat" in which she sat, and that nothing could induce to anything swifter than a walk. Once she opened her lips and asked, nervously:

"Are you—much afraid, Mrs. Calvert?"

"Not—much!" quavered that lady, in mimicry, and with the most admiring contemplation of the earnest young face beside her. From the flapping ears of their steed Dorothy's own eyes never wavered. It was a wonderful experience. To pull on either rein and guide so big a creature to the right or left—Why, she had seen others drive but she had never before realized the great intelligence of a horse! Oh! how delightful it would be to own one for one's self! All the inborn love of horseflesh that, till that moment, she had not realized woke up in her small breast, and finally found voice in the exclamation:

"Oh! If Daisy-Jewel had only been a colt instead of a calf!"

"A perfectly simple matter to change him into one," quietly returned Mrs. Cecil; and hearing her, Dorothy wondered if this old gentlewoman were in truth the "fairy godmother" to whom she had sometimes likened her.

The girl did not answer. They had arrived at the gates of Deerhurst and this young "coachman" was gravely considering how to drive through them without hitting either ivy-covered pillar. So earnest was she now that Mrs. Calvert had twice to repeat a question she had long been pondering; but which fell upon Dorothy Chester's ears, at last, with the sound of an exploding

bomb.

"My little Dorothy, will you come to live with me, and become *my* adopted daughter?"

CHAPTER XV

CONCERNING SEVERAL MATTERS

"O Jim! I feel so—so guilty! Just as if I had done something dreadfully wrong!" cried troubled Dorothy C. to her faithful if jealous friend, as they were driving homeward again. The reins were in his hands this time and he held them with an ease which left everything to the old horse itself, and which would have surprised the girl had room been left in her mind for any smaller surprises after that great one of Mrs. Cecil's question.

"Don't see why," returned practical Jim. His own satisfaction was great, just then, for he had seen Herbert Montaigne driving homeward on his brand-new horse-rake, brilliant in red paint and purchased by that extravagant youth expressly for the Skyrrie "Bee." Herbert had forsaken that laborious festivity, soon after the departure of Mrs. Calvert and Dorothy; but not till after he had also finished all the raking there had been for him to do. Much of the ground was so overrun with bushes and brambles that only hand-rakes were available, and to the more difficult task of these the lad did not aspire.

Now, at ease with his own conscience and at peace with all the world, he drove by the gates of Deerhurst whistling his merriest, and bent upon ending his rarely useful day by a row upon the river. He even caught a glimpse of Dorothy sitting in the farm wagon waiting for Jim to "make himself tidy after his gardening," as his mistress had directed; and had called out some bit of nonsense to her which she was too absorbed in thought to notice.

"That's all right. Needn't answer if she doesn't wish! I'll see her to-morrow and get her to go on that picnic at the camp. One picnic paves the way to another—that's easy! I don't feel now any great longing even for planked shad—such a dinner I ate! But that's one good thing about a dinner, little Kit! Take a few hours off and you'll be ready for the next one! Good thing my top-lofty sister 'took a notion' to sweet Dolly! That's going to make things lots easier for my scheme, 'but I'll 'bide a wee' before I spring it on the Pater. Eh, little Kit? Aren't you a beauty? and—good luck! You're just the thing to take her, to-morrow. She told me, to-day, they hadn't a single cat. '*Not a single cat!*' In a tone of regular heartbreak, she said it, Kit! That's why I heard you squalling by the roadside and picked you up. Somebody dropped you, didn't he? Somebody a deal richer in cats than Dorothy C. Why, little Kit, I heard a workman telling the other day how he found a bag of kittens, a whole bag of them, 'lost' by somebody as heartless as your own late owner, probably, but far less wise. For the bag was a potato sack and it had the owner's name stamped in full on it. Must have lost it out the back of a wagon, the workman thought. Anyway, next day he gathered up all the stray cats and kittens he could find and in the dead of night—the dead of night, little Kit! when all dire deeds are done!—he carried the replenished sack back and left it on the 'loser's' doorstep. Good for that workman! but, query. What became of the cats? Never mind, Kitty, I know what will become of you, and your fate will be the happiest possible. Get up there, Slowpoke!" finished the lad, thrusting the tiny kitten he had found astray on the road into his blouse, and urging the work horse forward. In any case it is probable he would have picked up the lost kitten and given it a home in his father's barn, but it suited well with Dorothy's pathetic regret that he should have found it.

"You 'don't see why,' Jim Barlow, I feel so worried over what Mrs. Calvert asked? Then you're stupider than I thought. She is so kind, she found and saved me—after you, of course—and she is so old and lonely. I'd love to live with her if—if there were two of me. Already she looks to me to do little things for her that nobody else seems to think she wants, and to do them without her asking. I love her. Seems if she was sort of my folks—*my own folks* that I must have had sometime. We like the same things. She adores Dickens, so do I. She loves outdoors, so do I. She—But there, it's no use! I can't go to live with her and leave father John and mother Martha. It would break their hearts and mine, too! Oh! dear! I wish she hadn't asked me; then I wouldn't have had to say 'No,' and see her beautiful old face lose all its lovely brightness. When I think how old she is, how it's but a little while she'll need me—Why, then my heart breaks in two the other way! O Jim! Isn't life a terrible, terrible perplexity?" demanded this small maid to whom "life" was, indeed, just showing its realities.

Jim listened silently, but it wouldn't have flattered her to know that it was her ready flow of language and the rather long words she used which mainly impressed him. To his practical mind it was simply impossible for any right-minded girl to forsake those who had cared for her all her life, in order to gratify the whim of an old lady whom she had known but a short time. Nor did it enter the thoughts of either of these young folks that the material advantages offered to Dorothy would be very great. It was only a question of happiness; the happiness of the Chesters or that of Mrs. Cecil.

As they left Deerhurst behind them and still Jim had answered nothing except that provoking "Don't see why," Dorothy lost her patience.

"Jim Barlow, have you lost your tongue? I think—I think you're horribly unsympathetic!" she cried, flashing a glance upon him that was meant for anger, yet ended in surprise at his actually smiling countenance. "I don't see anything funny in this business, if you do! What are you laughing at?"

Now he looked at her, his face radiant with the fun of his own thoughts, and replied:

"Lots o' things. Fust off, Dorothy, will you correct me every time I use bad language?"

"Bad—language! Swearing, you mean? Why, Jim, I never heard you, not once. Huh! If I did I reckon I *would* correct you, so quick 'twould make you dizzy!"

"Pshaw! I don't mean that, silly thing! I mean—Dorothy, I want to talk like other folks: like Mis' Calvert——"

"Then begin to call her 'Mrs.'"

"Mrs. Calvert," answered Jim, obediently. "To you and her and Mr. Chester, talkin'——"

"Talking, Jim. Don't clip the g's off your words!"

He half-frowned, then laughed. She was almost too ready with her corrections. But he went on:

"I'm studyin'—studying—every night, as long as I dast——"

"Dare, you mean."

Poor Jim gasped and retorted:

"Well, dare, then, if you say so. D-a-r-e! and be done with it! Mis', I mean Mrs., Calvert has give orders——"

"Given orders, boy."

"Shut up! I mean she's told the old man and woman that keeps——"

"Who keep!"

"That keeps the gate and lives in the lodge an' I live with 'em, if you want to know the hull kit an' boodle of the story, she's give 'em orders I can't have no light lit after half-past ten o'clock, 'cause I'll spile my eyes an' break down my strength—Pshaw! as if a feller could, just a-studyin', when he's so powerful bent on't as I be! But, you know I know I don't talk quite the same as them 'at knows better an' has had more book l'arnin'," explained the young student, hopelessly relapsing into the truck-farm vernacular.

"Yes, Jim, I do know that you know, as you so tellingly put it. I've seen you flush more than once when you've noticed the difference in speech, and I'll help you all I can. I don't know much myself. I'm only a girl, not far along in her own education, but I'll do what I can; only, Jim Barlow, don't you go and get offended when I set you right. If you do you shall go on 'wallowing in your ignorance,' as I've read somewhere. Now, that's enough 'correction' for once. Tell me the other 'lots of things' you were laughing at."

"Sure! The first one, how we're goin' to get ahead of that old Quaker miller. Mis'—Mrs.—Calvert's planned the hull—whole—business. She don't like him none. She stopped me an' told me things, a few. She 'lows he's got some scheme or other, 'at ain't no good to your folks, a-lettin' good money on a wore-out farm like Skyrrie. There's more in his doin's than has come to light yet. That's what she says. Even his sellin' your ma that jumpin' cow was a low-down, ornery trick. An' that bull calf—no more use to such as you-all 'an a white elephant, she says. Less; 'cause I s'pose a body'd *could* sell a elephant, if they was put to it. Say, Dorothy. They's a-goin' to be a circus come to Newburgh bime-by. The pictures of it is all along the fences an' walls; an', say—I'm earnin' wages now, real good ones. I told Mis', Mrs., Calvert 't I didn't think I ought to take any money off her, 'cause she's give—given—me all these new clothes an' treats me so like a prince; but she laughed an' said how 'twas in the Bible that 'a laborer is worthy of his hire' and she'd be a poor sort of Christian that didn't at least try to live up to her Bible. Say, Dorothy, she's even give me one for myself! Fact. She give it an' says she, she says: 'James, if you make that the rule of your heart and life, you can't help being a gentleman, 'at you aspire to be, as well as a good man.' Then she fetched out another book, big—Why, Dorothy! So big it's real heavy to lift! An' she called that one a 'Shakespeare.' The name was printed on it plain; an' she said the man what wrote it more years ago 'an I can half-tell, had 'done the thinkin' for half—the world, or more,' she said. And how 'if I'd use them two books constant an' apply 'em to my own life I'd never need be ashamed an' I could hold up my head in even the wisest company.' Say, Dorothy! Mis' Calvert knows a powerful lot, seems if!"

"Well, she ought. She's lived a powerful long time."

"An' I've been thinkin' things over. I don't believe I *will* try to be President, like we planned. Lookin' into that Shakespeare feller's book I 'low I'd ruther write one like it, instead."

"O Jim! That's too delightful! I must tell father that. I must! *You*, a new *Shakespeare*! Why, boy, he's the wisest writer ever lived. I'm only just being allowed to read a little bit of him, old as I am. My father picks out the best parts of the best dramas and we often read them together, evenings. But—What are the other things you thought about, and made you laugh? That circus, too; shall

you go to it, Jim? Did you ever go to one?"

"Never. *Never*. But I'm just sufferin' to go. Say, Dorothy? If I can get all my work done, an' Mrs. Calvert she don't think it's sinful waste o' good money, an' your folks'll let you, an' it don't come on to rain but turns out a real nice day, an' I can get the loan of Mrs. Calvert's oldest horse an' rig—'cause I wouldn't dast—dare—to ask for a young one—an' I felt as if I could take care of you in such a terrible crowd as Ephraim says they always is to circuses, would you, will you, go with me?"

In spite of herself Dorothy could not help laughing. Yet there was something almost pathetic in the face of this poor youth, possessing a small sum of money for the first time, beset by the caution which had hedged his humble, dependent life, yet daring—actually daring, of his own volition—to be generous! Generous of that which Miranda Stott had taught him was the very best thing in the world—money! Of himself, his strength, his unselfishness and devotion,—all so much higher than that "money,"—he had always been most lavish; and remembering this, with a sympathy wise beyond her years, Dorothy speedily hushed her laughter and answered eagerly:

"Indeed, I will, you dear, care-taking, cautious boy, and thank you heartily. I love a circus. Father John used to take mother Martha and me to one once every summer. Why, what a perfectly wild and giddy creature I shall be! To a circus with you, a camp-picnic with Herbert and Helena, and this splendid farmers' 'Bee'—Hurray!"

Jim's countenance fell. "I didn't know 'bout that other picnic," said he. "When's it comin' off? And what is a picnic, anyway?"

"You'll see when we get home to Skyrie. A picnic is the jolliest thing there is—except a circus. *Except a circus*. When it's to come off I don't know, but when it does I mean you shall be in it, too, Jim Barlow. Yet you haven't finished about poor, dear Mr. Oliver Sands. You have wandered all over the face of the earth, as my teacher used to complain I did in writing my compositions. I didn't stick to my subject. You haven't stuck to yours, the Quaker man. Finish him up, for we're almost at Skyrie now."

Comforted by her ranking of a circus as something infinitely more delightful than even a rich boy's picnic, and because the fields of Skyrie were, indeed, now in view, Jim resumed concerning the gentleman in question:

"Dorothy, that calf o' yours won't never be no good. The man give him to you, all right, an' 'peared amazin' generous. But—he cal'lated on gettin' back more'n his money's worth. He'd tried to sell old Hannah time an' again, so Mrs. Calvert was told, an' couldn't, 'count of her being so hard to keep track of. He didn't dast to sell without the calf alongside, for if he did the critter's so tearin' lively she'd 'a' got back home to his farm 'fore he did, drive as fast as he might. But what he planned was: your ma take the calf for a gift an' she'd have to send to his mill to get feed an' stuff for to raise it on. To keep both cow an' calf would cost—I don't know how much, but enough to suit him all right. 'Tother side the matter, his side, you did get Hannah cheap. She's good breed, her milk'll make nice butter—"

"It does! Splendid, perfectly splendid! Mrs. Smith showed mother how to manage and it all came back to her, for she had only, as father says, 'mis-laid her knowledge' and she makes all the butter we need. Not all we want—We could eat pounds and pounds! But it takes a good many quarts of milk to make a pound of butter, I've learned; and an awful lot of what father calls 'circular exercise' to make the 'butter come.' Mother bought one of those churns that you turn around and around, I mean a dasher around and around inside the churn—I get my talk mixed up, sometimes—and it takes an hour, maybe, to turn and turn. Worse than freezing ice cream in a 'ten-minute' freezer, like we had in Baltimore, yet had to work all morning to get it frozen ready for Sunday dinner. Mother thinks a dash-churn, stand and flap the dasher straight up and down till your arms and legs give out, is the best kind. But the around-and-around is the modern sort; so, of course, she got that. If Daisy-Jewel and Piggy-Wig didn't need so much milk themselves there'd be more for us. And somehow, you don't make me feel very nice toward Mr. Oliver Sands."

"Say, Dorothy. Mis' Calvert's notion is for you to sell Daisy an' buy a horse. Will you, if you get a chance?"

"Simple Simon! A horse is worth lots and lots more than a calf! was that what she meant when she said a calf might turn into a colt? A colt is a horse, after all. A little horse. Well, maybe she was right. I might sell a little calf and get a little colt. But who in the world would buy? Besides, despite all the trouble she makes, mother wouldn't part with that pretty, écru-colored cow, and Hannah will not be separated from Daisy-Jewel. I mean Daisy-Jewel will not be separated from Hannah. Even a man, Mr. Oliver Sands, said that would be 'cruel.' You don't want to have me cruel, do you, Jim Barlow?"

"Shucks! Hannah won't mourn for no calf, longer 'n a couple of hours, 'less she's different from any cow I ever see, light-complected or otherwise. As for that jumpin' notion o' hern; I'll fix her! I've been layin' out to do it, ever since I heard she done it, but somehow I didn't get the chance."

"You didn't get the chance because you never take it. I don't think it's right, Jim Barlow, for you to work every minute of daylight, fearing you won't do all your horrid 'duty' to your employer, then study all night to make yourself 'fit for your friends,' as you told me. Maybe, some of your friends might like to see you, now and then, before you *are* 'fit,'" returned Dorothy, and with that they came to the gate of Skyrie and drove over the path to the barn, the path, or driveway, which

that very morning had been overgrown and hidden with grass and weeds, but now lay hard and clean as if just newly made.

"Pshaw! Somebody's been busy, I declare!" cried Jim, admiringly, and leaped out to tie Mr. Smith's "nag" in a comfortable shady place. He did not offer to help Dorothy alight, nor did she either wait for or expect this courtesy; but seeing mother Martha in the kitchen, ran to her with an account of her brief outing.

The housemistress had slipped away from the few women guests left remaining in the field where dinner had been served. Most of them had already left for home, their part in the day's proceedings having been well finished, and each a busy farmwife who had snatched a half-day from her own crowding tasks to help the "Bee" along.

She had made many acquaintances, she was glad to know them. She "liked folks better than scenery," as she had once complained to her husband, during a fit of homesickness for "dear old Baltimore"; but she was very tired. The excitement of this unexpected visitation, and the varying emotions of the day had strangely wearied her. Besides, deep down in her heart—as in father John's—lay a feeling of wounded pride. She had been very happy, for a time, she had found herself the center of much kindly attention: and yet—she wished that the need for such attention had not existed. So she was glad now of the privacy of her kitchen whither none would intrude; and into which Dorothy ran, full of talk and eager above all things to tell of that astonishing offer of Mrs. Calvert's to re-adopt her.

But something stopped the words on her lips. She could not herself have explained why she refrained from speaking, unless it were that weary, fretful expression of Mrs. Chester's face. So, instead of bestowing confidences, she merely said:

"Mother dear, do come upstairs to your own pretty room and lie down. It's grown terribly warm this afternoon and you look so tired. I'll shut the blinds and make it all dark and cool; then I'll find father John and see if he needs me too. Come, mother, come."

With a sudden burst of affection, such as rarely came from Mrs. Chester, that lady caught the girl in her arms and kissed her fondly, saying:

"You are my good angel, Dolly darling! You are the brightness of my life. Don't ever let anybody else steal you away from me, will you? I couldn't live without you, now—and here."

Dorothy's breath came quick and sharp. How odd this was, to have her mother touch upon that very subject lying uppermost in her own heart! Could she and Mrs. Calvert have been discussing her in this way? Well, at least, she now knew that she had been wholly right. The reluctant "No" she had given Mrs. Betty was the only word to say.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FATE OF DAISY-JEWEL

The "Bee" was a thing of the past. Everybody had gone, leaving a vastly different Skyrie from that which greeted the rising sun of that memorable day. Weed-grown, bramble-infested fields lay cleared of débris, that had been gathered into heaps and burned. The garden plot was now a stretch of well-made beds wherein had been sown or set such things as would develop to ripeness that season, although it was long past orthodox time for garden-making. To the delight of his obstinate soul, even Pa Babcock's asparagus trench had been duly prepared and a sufficient number of the roots set out. But the work of the trench, or bed, had not been accomplished by himself. He had explained the pressing need of such a thing to Mrs. Calvert, who, to rid herself and others of his "talk," had promptly furnished the necessary funds to pay for the plants and had dispatched him to a distant market gardener's to procure them. He had returned sooner than was expected or desired, but could he relegate his own intelligent task to anybody else? So, for once, he really did work faithfully, spreading out each tiny rootlet with a care that insured a prompt growth, and deluging them with water which it took many trips to the spring to bring.

The old well-curb had been repaired, the well emptied of water, and cleaned. The barn had been put in order, so far as might be with the time and material at command. The roof would not leak again nor the blinds fall because of rusted hinges. Even the cellar had been swept, and garnished with double coatings of sweet-smelling whitewash; and, indeed, all that these willing helpers could think of and accomplish had been done to make the Skyrie household "start farming fair and square."

The last event of the "Bee" had been an auction.

Mrs. Calvert had sent a brief note of instructions to Seth Winters and he had promptly acted upon them. With such an assembly at hand the time was ripe for selling Daisy-Jewel to the highest bidder. So the blacksmith held a short parley with Bill Barry, the village auctioneer, and afterward started the sale by a fair price named for such a blooded quadruped.

"Seven dollars! Seven dollars! Did I hear somebody bid seven dollars? only seven for such a beautiful Jewel and Daisy combined?"

"Seven fifty!" called Jim Barlow, also acting upon instructions.

"Seven fifty—somebody higher? *And* eight dollars? Eight, eight, eight, somebody raise me eight-eight-eight—*And* fifty! Eight dollars and fifty cents! Why, you folks, you make me blush to be an auctioneer, standing here on a horse-block and selling away from a little girl the only piece of stawk she owns for just eight dollars and fifty cents. That I should live to—Nine, nine, nine, nine! Somebody raise me nine dollars for a full-bred Jersey bull calf! nine, nine, nine—"

"Ten!" shouted Mr. Smith, who knew he could reimburse himself in some way for this recklessly extravagant purchase.

But the chance was not for him. "Ten fifty!" shouted somebody at the rear of the crowd, and:

"Ten and fifty! Fifty, fifty, fifty—Hard word that to rattle off—Make it 'leven; and ease my poor tongue! 'Leven, 'leven, 'leven, eleven dollars and fifty cents. That's that blamed old fifty cropping up again. Go it by even dollars, friends and feller citizens, Eleven and—twelve, twelve, twelve—Almost as bad to say! Hump her up. Thirteen do I hear? Thirteen? Don't let her stick at that! who'll pay just thirteen unlucky dollars when they can buy a full-blooded bull calf for—Fourteen, do I hear? Fourteen, fourteen, four—four—four—Fifteen good American dollars for a poor little girl's pet calf! Neighbors, I am ashamed of you, I certainly am. Why, I'll bid sixteen myself, ruther 'an have such a blot as that printed on this town's archives! I will, I say, though I haven't any more use for a poor little girl's one pet calf than I have for two wives! Sixteen I bid, seventeen somebody lifts me. Eighteen? Nineteen? Twenty? Now you begin to talk! But let me warn you fellers, that this here sale is cash or its equivalent. So anyone who's just biddin' to hear himself talk—take care! Twenty-one, one, one, one, one, one, one—"

The sale went on for a long time, and the bidding grew more spirited continually. Bill Barry's taunt about cash payment touched the pride of some, but the outcome of the matter was predestined from the beginning. Seth Winters had had his instructions and now acted upon them. When nobody would "raise" him any higher, the calf was knocked down to him at thirty-five dollars and was promptly dispatched to a new home in charge of the Smith boys, who had come to see the finish of the "Bee."

Bill Barry refused to take any payment for his services in the matter, so the blacksmith hurried to find Dorothy and to place the money in her hands. To his surprise, he found her weeping bitterly, with her head against old Hannah's hairy side, as if mingling her tears with that bereaved mother's.

"Why, Dorothy dear! I understood you were tired of Daisy-Jewel and more than willing to exchange him for a colt. See here—thirty-five dollars, all in crisp banknotes, and your very own!"

But Dorothy would not be comforted, nor even lift her curly head to look upon what she now sadly considered as the price of blood, while Hannah continued to moo distractingly, yet, at the same time managed to chew her cud—the sign of a well-contented bovine mind.

Jim also drew near, a wide, short board in hand and, wholly disgusted with Dorothy's inconsistency, exclaimed:

"Pshaw! If girls don't beat all creation for changin' their minds! Here was you wantin' to be rid of that calf, now cryin' like—most like one yourself. Shucks! Dorothy Chester, where's your good sense at? An' you stand aside, will you? I want to fix Hannah so you won't have to chase her no more."

Now the truth is that Dorothy had listened to the auction with keen interest and no thought of grief till she heard Mr. Barry allude to herself as a "poor little girl with only one calf." Then the springs of self-pity were touched and she would have stopped the sale had she dared or known quite how. That her father approved of it he had told her at its beginning, and so did Jim. These two were the most sensibly practical persons she knew, even more than mother Martha,—where the question of live stock was concerned,—and she ought to be guided by their judgment. Daisy-Jewel had been a trial and expense from the day of his arrival at Skyrie, but—he was *her* Daisy-Jewel, and she had sold him into bondage—probably, into worse: the hands of a butcher! Thirty-five dollars! It seemed incredible: but thirty-five dollars as the price of a life. How dreadful!

"Stand still, you old misery! Now, then, my Hannah, how do you find yourself?" cried Jim, coolly pushing Dorothy aside and stepping back himself to avoid the twisting and jerking of the cow's horns. "There you be! Plenty of chance to look down on the pasture but none to go skippin' over stun walls!"

Dorothy wiped her eyes, indignant with Jim for his callous want of sympathy in her own grief, and curious about Hannah; who had ceased both mooing and chewing, confused and distracted by the thing which had befallen her.

Jim had simply hung the board he had brought upon Hannah's horns and securely fastened it there, letting it fall forward over her face at an angle which permitted her to see the ground but, as he had declared, would not encourage her search for stone walls to leap. "Easy as fallin' off a log, ain't it?" he demanded of Mr. Winters, who had watched the operation with some amusement and some compassion. "Some folks think it's mean to put boards on 'em, but Mis' Stott she said 'twas better to be mean to critters than to have critters mean to folks. Why, here has Dorothy been runnin' half over the hull farm, catchin' Hannah, when all that time she might have been studyin' her books!"

"Thanks, noble youth! I'm not 'sufferin' to study in the summer and vacation time," answered Dorothy, who had begun to recover her cheerfulness and now asked the blacksmith, as he extended the money toward her: "What will become of Daisy now?"

"Mrs. Calvert has bought him. He will be kept on the Deerhurst farm, the other side of the mountain, and will grow up, I trust, quite worthy of his pedigree. She owns a fine herd of animals and her stock-farm is one of her chief interests here."

"Than he won't be—be murdered?"

"No, indeed. Here is your money. I must be going. Good-night."

"I'll go along with you. Good-night, Dorothy. Don't forget to ask your folks 'bout that circus!" called Jim, casting a self-important glance into Seth Winters's face as he followed him down the path.

With her money in hand Dorothy joined her parents and was well commended that she had consented to the sale of Daisy-Jewel; and for a little while, until milking-time required Martha's presence in the barnyard, the trio discussed its vast amount and the best sort of horse to be selected. Neither Mr. Chester nor his wife dashed the girl's enthusiasm or so much as hinted that the sum in hand would scarcely pay for a good horse. To her it seemed all-sufficient, not only for a horse, but for a wagon and harness as well. And—But let us not anticipate!

The circus whose coming attractions now filled Jim Barlow's mind more than even his beloved "study" had sent out its posters long ahead; so that the country folk might accustom themselves to the ideas of its tempting sights and to grow anxious to behold them. To the lad it seemed as if the days would never pass. The only relief to his eagerness was that Herbert's projected camp-picnic had been postponed on account of Helena's sudden illness. One of her bronchial attacks had kept her a prisoner within the Towers and she had become so interested in the idea of the affair that her brother waited for her to recover.

He contented himself the better by frequent visits to Skyrie, and by his gift to Dorothy of the stray kitten. The rather disreputable-looking little animal he had coaxed Miss Milliken to cleanse and adorn with a blue ribbon before its advent at Skyrie, where it now resided, petted and pampered till its thin outlines became plump ones and it almost filled that place in Dorothy's heart left vacant by Daisy-Jewel.

Also, Dolly herself had twice been sent for to visit Helena in her confinement of the sick-room, and had won the liking of everybody who saw her there. She was so simple and natural, so free from the imitating manner of some of Helena's friends who envied and toadied to the rich man's daughter, that the heiress found her society novel and refreshing. It was something quite new for Helena to be told, one day when she was "fussing" over the dainty meal sent up to her room, that:

"Why, Helena Montaigne! You perfectly wicked girl! My mother and Mrs. Calvert too both say that it's as sinful as it's ill-bred to quarrel with your food. 'Not fit to eat' isn't true. Maybe you aren't 'fit' to eat it yourself, poor dear, because you're ill. But I never saw such a dainty lunch as that, even at Deerhurst itself. Eat it, do, and get strong and make your mother happy. She's taken a lot of trouble for you. I know she went into the kitchen and fixed those things herself, because she thought your cook wasn't careful enough. Now, do behave! And I'll sing to you while you eat. I've heard my father say that at the big hotels at Atlantic City and other places they have a band play while the people dine. Well, then, I'll be your band and sing. So begin! You must! I shall make you!"

Laughing, yet wholly in earnest, Dorothy had picked a morsel of food on a fork and held it so close to Helena's lips that she had to take it, whether or not. A second morsel followed the first, and the performance was enlivened by a recital of Peter Piper's consumption of the chocolate cake.

Before she knew it Helena was laughing, and likewise before she quite realized it—so swiftly had Dorothy fed and talked—she had made a better meal than at any time since her illness. The food strengthened, for the illness was really past, and seeing her darling recover made Mrs. Montaigne very grateful to the girl whose influence had helped that recovery. Also, this general liking for his own especial friend, as Herbert considered her, fully confirmed the lad in the scheme he had formed, but had not yet broached to his family. Thought he:

"I'll wait a little longer yet, till even the Pater has seen how sweet and unselfish she is, then I'll spring it on the family. If I carry it through—Hurray!"

But though Jim knew of these visits he had not resented them. It was perfectly natural, he supposed, that girls should like other girls; and that puling, sickly-looking, stuck-up daughter of those rich folks—Well, he was glad that Dorothy could show them that a little maid who had once worked alongside himself on a Maryland truck-farm could "hold a candle" with the best of them! Herbert, himself, had not crossed Jim's way. He had gone into camp with some other lads of the Heights and had himself almost forgotten his home in the fun of that outing.

But weeks do pass, no matter how they sometimes seem to drag; and the day came when Jim and Dorothy were seated in Mrs. Calvert's runabout, a gentle horse in the shafts, and themselves *en route* for that long-dreamed-of circus.

Dorothy carried her money with her. As yet the sum received for Daisy-Jewel remained unbroken.

Neither parent would use any of it, each insisting that it was Dorothy's own and that she should expend it as she saw fit: though that this would be for the horse or colt into which the calf had been thus changed was a foregone conclusion.

It had become a standard jest with the ex-postman that she should never go anywhere away from Skyrrie without her pocket-book. "In case you might meet the horse of your heart, somewhere along the road. It's the unexpected that happens. You're certain to find Daisy's successor when you're unaware that he, she, or it is near." And to-day he had added:

"A circus is the very place to look for a horse! When you get there stir around and—pick up a bargain, if you can! By all means, take your pocket-book to-day!"

She had kissed his merry lips to stop their teasing but—she had carried the purse! Something unexpected was, in reality, to happen: Despite their long anticipation, this happy pair of youngsters were to fall short of their ambition—they were not to visit the circus.

CHAPTER XVII

ON THE ROAD TO THE CIRCUS

"Ain't this grand, Dorothy? I never did see anybody so good as Mrs. Calvert! She wouldn't hear tell o' my working half the day, though I could well's not, 'cause the circus don't take in till two o'clock. No, sir! She up an' give me the whole day an' said my pay was to go on just the same as if I was hoein' them inguns 'at need it."

"Onions, Jim; not 'inguns,'" corrected Dorothy with a smile. "You are improving fast. I haven't heard you call anybody 'Mis',' for Mrs., in ever so long, and most of the time you keep tight hold of your g's. Yes, she is dear! but you deserve her kindness. Nobody else ever served her so faithfully, she says; not even those old colored servants who love her and—impose on her, too! You look fine, to-day. Those 'store clothes' are mightily becoming and I'm proud of you. But whatever shall we do with a whole day?"

"Mrs. Calvert, she said we was to drive into the town, Newburgh, you know, where the circus is to be at and to a livery stable that knows her. Or the man who keeps it does. We was to put the horse up there an' leave it till time to go home again. Then we was to walk around the city an' see the sights. 'Bout noon she reckoned 'twould be a good plan to go to what they call the 'Headquarters,' where General George Washington lived at, when he fit into the Revolution. I've been readin' about that in the History she give me and I'd admire to stand on the spot he stood on once. There's a big yard around the house and benches for folks to sit on, and a well o' water for 'em to drink; and nobody has to pay for settin' nor drinkin', nary one. All the folks want you to do, and you don't have to do it, you ain't really obleeged, is to go inside a room an' write your name and where you come from in a 'Visitors' Book.' I've been practicing right smart, ever since she told me that, an' I can write my name real plain. What bothers me is to tell where I come from. I don't much like to say the poorhouse, where I was took after my folks died, and I hate to say Mrs. Stott's truck-farm. I haven't got no right to say Riverside nor Deerhurst, 'cause I've only lately come *to* them places, I've never come *from* 'em. I—"

"O Jim! Stop 'splitting hairs'!"

Thus arrested in his flow of language, the youth carefully inspected his clothing and failed to perceive the "hairs" in question. Whereupon Dorothy laughed and assured him that she had merely used a figure of speech, and meant: "Don't fuss! Just write 'Baltimore,' as I shall, and have done with it. Funny, Jim, but I just this minute thought that I'm the one who doesn't know where I came from! Well, I'm *here* now, and what's behind me is none of my business. But, boy, you mustn't put that 'at' after places. It sounds queer, and I hate queer people. Ah! me!"

Jim drove carefully along the fine road with a full appreciation of the beautiful scenery through which it ran, yet in no wise moved to express his admiration of it. He was too happy for words and his soaring thoughts would have amazed even Dorothy, familiar though she had become with his ambitions; and after driving onward for some time in this contented silence he became suddenly aware that his companion was not as happy as he. Her eyes were fixed upon the road and her face had a troubled, preoccupied expression.

"Dolly Chester, what you thinkin' of? Don't you like it? Ain't you glad you come?"

"Why—Jim! How you startled me! Of course I'm glad I come. The whole trip is the most delightful thing; but—what I was thinking of, I'm afraid would make you sneer if I told."

"Tell an' see if it will. I ain't no great hand to make fun of folks—I don't like to be made fun of myself. What was it?"

"The *Ghost* that haunts Skyrrie. *Jim—I've seen it!* I myself with my own eyes."

He checked his horse in his amazement, and incredulously ejaculated:

"You—don't!"

"Yes, I do. I did. This very last night that ever was; and talk about liking this ride? Huh! I'm more glad than I can say to get away from home just this little while, even. Yet mother and father are left there, and if IT should come and frighten them while I'm not there—O Jim! It scared me almost into a fit. Scared me so stiff and still I could neither move nor speak. Now I'm rather glad I didn't. It may not come again, though It has two or three times."

They were nearly at the top of a long hill and, partly to rest the perfectly untired horse, partly to hear in silence this remarkable story, Jim drew aside into the shade of a wayside tree and commanded:

"Silly Dolly! There ain't no such things; but—out with the hull business, body an' bones!"

"I'm glad to 'out' with it. It's seemed as if I should burst, keeping it all to myself, and the worst is I feel that father wouldn't believe me. There's something else, too. Jim, do you believe that Peter Piper is really harmless? He follows me everywhere I go. He doesn't come near the house because mother doesn't like him and shows that plain enough even for him to understand. She never did like beggars down home in Baltimore, and she's taken a fearful dislike to Peter."

"Stick to what you started to tell; not get a body's ideas all on edge, then switch off onto Peter Piper. As for that poor feller, he won't hurt nobody what don't hurt him. But *he* ain't a ghost. Tell what you saw."

"Will you promise not to laugh nor—nor disbelieve?"

"I won't laugh an' I will believe—if I can."

"You dear good Jim! I can always rely upon you to help me in my troubles!" cried Dorothy, gratefully.

With comfortable complacency Jim replied: "That's so."

"You know Pa Babcock doesn't work for us any more. He left the next day after the 'Bee.' Sent Alfaretta around to tell us that 'he'd overdone hisself and was obliged to take a vacation.' Why, Jim Barlow, he was engaged to work three days out of each week and he never got in more than one. He was to 'find himself,' which father says means to furnish his own food, and he never brought a single meal. Mother Martha had to cook extra for him every time. We weren't real sorry to have him leave, for we thought it would be easy to get another man, now that Skyrie had been put in such good order. But it wasn't; besides, any that offered asked from two to three dollars a day. Think of that! Why, of course mother couldn't pay that, even if it was haying time and men scarce, as they all told her. She said we must let all the farm alone except just the garden patch and that field of corn which is to feed our stock next winter. Jim, life in the country 'isn't all catnip!' I never, never dreamed that I could work so hard or do so much. Look at my hands, will you?"

She thrust out her little hands, now scarred and blistered by the use of heavy, unfamiliar tools, compared with which her old home "garden set" were mere toys.

For sympathy she received the assurance:

"Won't blister nigh so much, after a spell, and the skin gets tough. Go on with the ghost, will you?"

"I am going on. It's all mixed up with Pa Babcock. If he hadn't left I wouldn't have had to work in the garden nor mother in the cornfield. That tires her awfully, and makes her fearfully cross; so that father and I keep all little worries to ourselves that we can. He even tries to help her hoe those terrible rows of corn that has come up so beautifully and is growing so well. If only the weeds wouldn't grow just as fast! But to see my mother handling a hoe and my father trying to do so too, resting on his crutches and tottering along the row as he works—Jim, it makes me wild! So of course I try to take all care of the garden patch and—of course, I failed. Partly I was afraid to stay out there alone, sometimes, for I might happen any time to look up and there would be Peter Piper staring over the wall at me, or even inside it. Then I have to run in and stop working for awhile. Mother would be angry if she knew and drive him off with harsh words, and though I am afraid of him, too, I can't bear to hurt his feelings. I am really so sorry for him that often I carry my dinner out of doors with me and give it to him, though mother Martha thinks I've taken it because I do so love to eat out under the trees. I can't help feeling that he's hungrier than I am; and I don't think it's wrong because I've never been forbidden nor asked about it. Do you think it is, Jim dear?"

"I ain't judgin' for other folks and I 'low your victuals is your own," answered he.

"That's a horrid word, 'victuals!' It makes me think of 'cold' ones and beggars at the back gate."

"All right. I won't say it again. Get back to that ghost."

"I'm getting. Why hurry so? We have the whole day before us."

"But, Dorothy Chester, *that circus takes in at two o'clock!*" warned the careful lad.

"And it can't be later than ten now. Jim Barlow—I've been to bed some night, leaving those hateful garden beds all weedy and neglected: and I've got up in the morning and—*found—them—in—perfect—order!* What do you think of that?"

"Think? Why, 't likely your pa or ma done 'em for you after you was abed."

"No, sir. I might have thought so, too, only they both denied it; nor can I make them believe I didn't do the work myself. So, after I had explained once or twice how it was and they only laughed, I gave up and held my tongue. Mother Martha says that weeds can't pull themselves nor 'cultivators'—even little ones like mine—run over the beds as something certainly did. However, if they won't listen they needn't. I know it's true, though I dare not tell them I've seen the Ghost; because they are both so discouraged and anxious over this farming business that if they found the place was really haunted they'd leave it. Yet, Jim, we can't leave. We mustn't, no matter what. Father came here to get well—his only chance. We haven't enough money to move back to Baltimore nor to live there afterward. We must stay and live with the Ghost. It is the only way. But—O Jim! I've not only seen what It has done in the garden, I've seen It at work there. Seen It with my own two eyes! Now, do you believe?"

"Shucks! Pshaw! You don't!"

Alas! Honest Jim did not believe but he was profoundly sorry for Dorothy, who he felt sure had suffered from too great and unaccustomed labor: and he could only answer according to his own convictions; as he did with added gentleness:

"I think that that there Babcock girl had ought to had her neck wrung 'fore she stuffed any such nonsense into your head, Dolly girl, an' I wish to goodness, just as you did once, 't I 'could make two of myself.' Then I'd make short work of that mite of gardening what seems such a job to you. I—I don't know but I'd ought to quit Deerhurst an' hire myself out to your folks."

"No, no! Oh! no, indeed! You're in the right place now, just the best place to get on as you couldn't do with us."

This opinion was comforting. Jim was so happy in his new home that he had no real desire to exchange it for Skyrie: where he felt his conscience and "duty" would compel him to work so early and late that there would be no time left for his "study." He changed the subject and inquired:

"If you seen It, what did it look like?"

"It was tall, like a man. It was all in some light-colored clothes and it worked as steadily as if It were a machine. But it made very little noise. It didn't want to be heard, I thought. When It had finished It sort of vanished behind the lilac bushes and I thought I saw It crossing a field toward the south meadow. That's where the old 'gold mine' is, that Alfaretta told of, and where she said It lives part of the time. It used to come into the house itself, into the very room father sleeps in now. So *she* said."

"Huh! She's the foolishest girl I ever heard of. Dorothy, don't you go to takin' up with such a silly thing as her. Huh!"

"Oh! I'm not taking up with her, she's taking up with me! The 'shoe is on the other foot.' But she's real kind and good. She never comes to Skyrie without trying to help in whatever we are doing. Mother thinks she's a splendid girl, even if she is a little forward in her manners. But I haven't told her about the ghost being true. I've told nobody but you, Jim."

Such exclusive confidence was flattering, but the boy was still unconvinced. After a moment of pondering he asked:

"Why didn't your folks see It if you did?"

"Because it was only an accident that I did, either. I had to go down into the kitchen for a drink of water and so saw it through those windows. We all sleep on the other side of the house, away from the garden. That's why."

"All right. Giddap!" commented Jim, driving back into the road and chirruping to the horse, while, having relieved herself of her secret, Dorothy gave herself up entirely to the pleasure of the moment, and soon was eagerly discussing the chances of their finding a suitable animal for their purchase at the circus, as father John had suggested was possible.

A turn of the road soon brought them to a small house standing within a rude inclosure, and at present surrounded by such a concourse of people that both Jim and Dorothy immediately conjectured:

"Another auction! Let's stop and listen."

It was that same Bill Barry who had officiated at Skyrie who now stood on the box here; and, as Jim drove up toward the gate, he immediately recognized the two young people and called out to them:

"Hello, there! How-de-do? Lookin' for somethin' to put your money on? Well, sorry, but all the household stuff's bid off. Jest a-comin' to the prettiest little piece o' horseflesh 't ever you laid your eyes on." Then with a general sweep of his eye over the assemblage, he added for the benefit of all: "This here vandoo just sends the tears to my eyes, hardened old sinner though I am. Auctioning off a poor widow woman's goods ain't no joke, let me tell you. See this pretty little piebald mare? Household pet, she is. Gentle as a kitten, broke to saddle or harness, either one, used to children, got to be sold no matter how the kids' hearts ache, nor the widow's either! Start

her up, somebody! How much am I bid for the beautiful calico pony, beloved of a widow and orphans? How—much?"

"Ten dollars!" cried somebody in the crowd and the auctioneer retorted that the bidder must be joking.

Dorothy, listening, flashed one indignant glance over the crowd and stood up in the runabout, resisting Jim's abashed attempts to pull her down upon the seat. She clutched her pocket-book with all her strength, as if he might try to take it from her, and called out in her clear treble:

"Thirty-five dollars!"

A silence that might be felt over that assembly, and no other bid followed Dorothy's. Once, twice, thrice, Mr. Barry solicited a "raise" but none was forthcoming. To nobody else in that company was the pretty, piebald pony worth even half so much money. The creature had been born on the western plains, and while it had a reputation for speed was not strong enough for hard work, such as these other possible bidders required.

"Going, going, *gone*! Sold to Miss Dorothy Chester for thirty-five dollars, cash down! Now for the cart and harness. How much?"

While waiting offers for these articles the clerk of the auction obligingly led the pony through the gate and fastened its halter to the back of the runabout; whereupon Dorothy's consuming eagerness could hardly wait to count out the seven crisp banknotes which made her the happy possessor of that wonderful pony.

Another moment found her on the ground beside it, patting its neck, smoothing its velvety nostrils, and longing to kiss it with that sudden affection born in her. So absorbed was she in the creature that she noticed nothing further going on about her till somebody politely asked her to "step aside and let us hitch up."

Then she saw that Jim had left the runabout himself and was now between the shafts of a small low wagon, drawing it into the road. Five minutes later he announced:

"We're ready to go now, Dorothy."

"Shall we take the pony with us to the circus? Why are you turning the runabout around to go back the way we came? Newburgh's not in that direction."

"I—I guess we won't finish our trip to Newburgh, to-day, Dolly," he answered with a laugh.

"Why not?"

"Because—'cause you spent all *your* money for the horse an' I spent all *mine*, all 't I've earned yet, for the rig. Which critter'll you drive home, Dorothy? Home it is where we'll eat that nice lunch o' Mrs. Calvert's, 'cause I haven't got a cent left to buy them circus tickets. Which one did you say?"

"My own!" cried the girl, exultantly, as she sprang into the rickety little phaeton and took up the pony's reins.

CHAPTER XVIII

THAT SOUTH MEADOW

When even before mid-day the two vehicles returned to Skyrie both Mr. and Mrs. Chester were too astonished to do more than open their eyes and mouths and wait explanations.

These came with a volubility that was less wonderful in Dorothy than in Jim, but each of the pair seemed to trip the other up with a flood of words, till finally the listeners made out to sift the facts for themselves. Then, while they were wholly delighted by the possession of the pony, mother Martha's prudence was disturbed by the thought of debt, and she promptly demanded to know what Jim had paid for the phaeton and harness.

For a time he stubbornly declined to tell, and it was not till Mrs. Chester brought out her own purse and insisted upon repaying him that he acknowledged:

"Well, if you must know, 'twasn't but fifteen dollars, all told. *True*. Like Dorothy here I took every cent I had with me an' now I'm powerful glad I did. As for takin' your money, same's sellin' it to you, I shan't. I'm makin' it a present to Dolly an' all of you. If it hadn't been for her I never'd have known Mrs. Calvert nor had the chance of my life. 'Tain't but little, seems if, to return for all you've brought to me. If you don't want to hurt my feelin's and make me stay clean away from Skyrie, you won't say another word on that subject. And I don't want to stay away. I can't, not till some—some things gets straightened out. So, I reckon I'd best go see if there's a good stall in that old barn to put—Say, Dorothy? What you goin' to name the critter, anyway?"

"James Barlow, she is not a 'critter.' She is a perfectly beautiful piebald pony and her name is—Portia!" After which alliterative statement Dorothy rushed toward the lad, intent upon hugging

him in gratitude for the gift from which none of them could dissuade him.

But he had had experiences in that line and ungallantly backed away, blushing furiously that these elder people should witness his embarrassment, and covering his confusion by remarking:

"I'm going to the barn now, and you can come with me if you want to. If you do we can eat our dinner outside the door under that shady tree; then, as I've got the hull day give to me, I'd like to go see that mine in the south medder I've heard tell of."

"All right," cheerfully answered the girl, not at all offended by his rebuff of her attentions. "We'll find a place for my Portia and your phaeton, and I think it's perfectly lovely for us to have them, half-and-half, that way, Jim, just think! How little we dreamed of such splendid times together when we were at Miranda Stott's!"

Old "Si Waterman's Folly," as the rumored "mine" was called, seemed to be coming into sudden prominence. For years it had lain unnoticed, but some recent excavations on the other side of the mountain had recalled to the public this long abandoned one at Skyrie. The very first time that Dorothy had the delight of driving her father out in the phaeton, which was so low and comfortable for him to use, they met Friend Oliver Sands upon the road, and he brought up the subject by a roundabout manner all his own.

He had not been present at the "Bee." He had even expressed his disapproval of such an affair, affirming that "nobody should undertake to run a farm unless he knew he could do it." Which might be good sense but influenced few. Indeed, when hearing afterward of the sale whereby Daisy-Jewel was metamorphosed, so to speak, into a pony, he had been angry—as angry as such a benign old gentleman could be.

He had made an unnecessary gift to an unappreciative girl and *she* had made money out of it; whereas, if things had gone as he expected, it would have been himself who should make it. Hannah had been transformed into a model cow by the simplest of methods, one that he should have been wise enough to try for himself only—he hadn't thought of it. Of course, it was a good thing for him who had advanced money upon the land that Skyrie should be put into good condition, even though it were as temporary as but one day's labor would make it. But he had heard things. Rumors were afloat. He hoped these rumors had not yet reached the ears of Skyrie's owners; but if they had he had still time to forestall them and reap his own advantage. Altogether, a thrifty soul was Oliver, the good; though his tones were sweetly sympathetic as he now brought his own smart team to a standstill in the very path of Portia and the phaeton.

"Don't stop, Dolly, if you can help it, but drive straight past the miller who's coming. Exchange bows, of course, if a Quaker will bow; but I'm too happy to-day to be disturbed by talk with him. Ever since he loaned us that money, 'payable on demand,' I've felt uncomfortable. It's wretched enough to owe money to anybody, but I'd have felt safer if we'd borrowed from Mrs. Calvert or even from a bank. Oh, dear! He's going to stop and we will have to!" had been Mr. Chester's hurried comments, so soon as from a little distance they saw Mr. Sands approaching.

It was a rare bit of confidence and Dorothy looked at him in some surprise. She did not share in her father's prejudice against the kind gentleman who had given her the pretty calf, and indeed was doubly grateful to him now that she had exchanged his gift for Portia. So it was in all sincerity that she returned his pleasant:

"I am glad to see thee again, little Dorothy. Thee has a bonny face that should win thee many friends."

"And I am glad to see you, Mr. Sands. I wish I understood the 'plain language,' too, then I could answer 'thee' after thy own fashion. Do you—does thee see my pretty pony? Her name is Portia. I bought her with the money paid for the calf you gave me. The pony is more useful to us, 'cause my father's lame, and so I am twice pleased. This is the first time he has ridden out with me, but I can drive real well already."

"For a beginner thee does very well, and the plain speech is the sweetest in the world—heard on the lips of pretty girls. By the way, John, I was on my way to see thee about a little matter of business. Thee may have heard that I like to acquire and hold land?"

The statement was in the form of a question, to which the ex-postman rather coldly replied: "Yes, so I have heard." He resented the familiar "John" on this "plain" speaker's lips, though he had never felt otherwise than complimented by Mrs. Cecil's even more familiar "Johnnie." It was a case of like and dislike, and as inconsistent as most such cases are.

"Can you speak freely before the little maid, John Chester?"

"With perfect freedom. There are no secrets in our household——" At which remark Dorothy slightly winced, remembering that dreadful "secret" of the "ghost," which she had hidden from her parents. "We are a united family in all respects and Dorothy fully understands our circumstances."

"Very well. That is a good thing. It speaks well for thy household. Regarding that little loan of mine, 'payable on demand,' I have considered the matter well. Thee needs money, I want land. If thee will sell me a portion of Skyrie farm that transaction should offset the other. That south meadow, for instance, known by the name of 'Si Waterman's Folly,' is worth, at ruling prices for waste mountain land, about two hundred dollars. I loaned thee three hundred; but on account of

thy affliction I would pay thee more than I would another man. What does thee say?"

"I say that the property is my wife's; just as I told you before. My affliction does not enter into the case, but I shall certainly advise her against such an unfair transaction as that. There are ten acres in that south meadow, and I have learned that mountain land is not so cheap as you would have me think."

"Thee may have been misinformed. Ground suitable for fancy building lots may command a slight advance upon the ruling price, but not an overgrown piece, half-woods, half-rocks, like that misnamed 'south meadow.' Meadow stands for rich and profitable land; not such as the 'Folly.' Why, friend John, it would take all of that three hundred dollars I offer thee to fill up that hole which required several years of Simon Waterman's life to dig. The 'love of money is the root of evil,' the Good Book tells us, and it was an undue love of money which sent friend Simon to that hopeless task. A dream misled him—Thee has heard the story, John?"

"No, nor care to. We are going for a drive—my first, as Dolly explained—and a storm threatens. I will add my thanks to hers, and do appreciate the fact that but for your gift of the calf we should not now own this pretty pony."

"I trust thee may long enjoy the luxury. 'Calico' ponies are as pretty as uncommon, and there is a superstition in the neighborhood that they bring 'good luck.' Some even fancy that to 'wish upon one' has the same result. I will not detain thee from thy recreation, but will pass on to Skyrrie and talk matters over with Martha herself."

With a click of his unctuous lips the miller started his team into swift motion and vanished from sight: but he left discomfort behind him and had effectually spoiled that ride for father John. Also the few clouds which had been gathering grew heavier with each passing moment and, as the invalid was careful never to expose himself to a drenching, Dorothy soon turned Portia's head homeward and arrived there just in time to escape the slight summer shower.

Martha met them with a brighter countenance than she had shown for many days, and the exclamation:

"Good news, dear ones! That splendid old Quaker gentleman has just left here, and has made me such a generous offer. He says, since we so dislike debt, that he will take that worthless south meadow off our hands and call it an equivalent for the money he advanced. Farming is hard enough, but farming free from debt would be lessened of half its worries."

"Martha, I hope you didn't tell him you would sell!" protested Mr. Chester, alarmed.

Her brightness faded into that unhappy sharpness which was becoming habitual and she returned, sarcastically:

"Of course, I didn't promise. A good wife never does dare promise anything without consulting her husband, even about her own property. I'll come with you, Dorothy, and help put up the pony."

"O mother! Now you've hurt father's feelings and it isn't like you to do that! I—I begin to understand why he dislikes that miller and his money business, for he makes you disagree so. That's something never used to be at dear old 77 Brown Street!"

"Dorothy Chester! How dare you speak to me like that?" demanded the overtired housemistress, with an asperity rarely shown to her beloved child.

"Beg pardon, mother. It was wrong. I only felt—I wish father liked Mr. Sands as well as you and I do, but don't let's talk of him any more. No, thank you, I don't need you to help with Portia. I'm proud to know how to harness and unharness all by myself. It was good of Jim and old Ephraim to teach me, and Mrs. Calvert says she is going to give me a little side-saddle to fit the pony. She has ordered it made in Newburgh from measures Ephraim took one day. Isn't she the dearest? Please, sit down and rest, mother dear. I'll do whatever's needed as soon as I've put Portia under cover."

There were both balm and bane in Dorothy's words. Martha was soothed by the child's sweet affection and jealous that that other richer woman had the power to bestow gifts such as she could not. She had now learned of the offer of Mrs. Cecil to adopt Dorothy and this had not diminished her jealousy; but, at the same time, the longer and better she knew the lady of Deerhurst the more she was forced to admire and respect her.

As soon as Dorothy had driven toward the barn and Mr. Chester had entered the kitchen his wife returned to the subject of that south meadow.

"That field is the laughing-stock of the whole town, John, and I can't see why you should object to my selling it. To keep it would, it seems to me, make it 'Chester's Folly,' as well as 'Waterman's.'"

He answered rather sadly:

"I have no right to object, Martha, and I will not if your heart is set upon the deed. Yet I should not be loyal to your interests, if I did not caution prudence. Wait a bit. Take advice upon the matter. Of that wise Seth Winters, or Mr. Smith, or even of the best lawyer in Newburgh. There ___"

"Lawyers! We've no money to waste upon lawyers, John."

"I know. Still, there is such a thing as being 'penny wise and pound foolish.' Oliver Sands is a long-headed, shrewd old chap. He sees money, more of it than he suggested, in that south meadow, else he would never try to buy it. As for that extra hundred dollars he proposes to give—Pooh! He plans to more than reimburse himself. As Mrs. Calvert saw he did in that smaller affair of the calf. That he was outwitted then was due to Mrs. Cecil's knowledge of his character."

"You've just had a ride behind a horse we shouldn't have owned except for him," she reminded.

"I know, and I give him all credit due. Only I do not want you to agree to anything unfair to yourself. Why, Martha, we do not even know what that 'mine' is like. We have seen that the top of the 'hole' is covered, in part, by a sort of trap door, more than half-hidden by vines and bushes, and almost half decayed away. I peered down under what was left of the trap, that time I went there with Dorothy: but I was far too tired with my crutch-walk to do more than that, even if I had not feared some unseen danger. She was eager to slip under the trap and find out for both of us, but, of course, that was out of the question. Probably, it *is* just a piece of 'Folly'; yet in other things Simon Waterman had the reputation of being a sane, sensible man. He proved himself such by willing so much of his property to you, my dear."

"Humph! I don't see just now that it's so valuable. I feel as if Skyrie farm was a burden that would crush the life out of me yet," she returned, in that discouraged tone it was so painful to hear, and which always stirred his deep regret for that affliction which had thrust upon a woman's shoulders that weight of care which only the man's should have borne. "He said that he wanted that meadow merely because it would 'square' out his own property. He holds a mortgage on land lying between his Heartsease and Skyrie, of which our south meadow is the limit. He's to foreclose that mortgage and longs to own that one field of ours just to complete the shape of his farm. That's natural, isn't it?"

"Wholly and entirely natural to him, from what I've heard the neighbors say. But let him go. All I ask is that you should wait a little, until you can make inquiries of persons wiser than we are in land-lore, before you take a step you cannot retrace. Now, kiss me, my wife, and don't let's allow the portly shadow of Oliver Sands to fall across our peace again."

She did kiss him, and she did feel so impressed by his wisdom that she promised to follow his advice and "wait" before deciding the question of the south meadow: which strangely enough seemed so much more important to him than to her.

So, coming in from the barn and Portia, "running between drops" as she expressed it, Dorothy found happiness restored and hastened to unfold a plan which Helena and she had thought out and to which her parents gave a ready assent.

"You see, mother, the summer is going very, very fast, and before we know it, almost, Deerhurst and the Towers and all the big houses will be closed and the families gone away for the *long* winter. We haven't yet had even that camp-picnic Herbert planned. First he was away, or Helena sick, or something or other all the time kept happening. Now she wants to give a picnic herself and ask all the young folks 'up-mounting' to it. We made out a list the last time I went to see her, and first she had written only the names of the rich young folks on the Heights. Then I coaxed her and told her how much more it would mean to the poor ones, like myself, than it possibly could to those others. Then she was as nice as nice! and wrote down every name I said. Mrs. Smith's boys, and every Babcock except Claretta and Diaretta. Jim, too, of course, if he'll go. Helena is to provide the eating part of the picnic and I am to provide the place, if you'll let me. That's the south meadow that so many people are talking about, Herbert says, just now. Oh! I do hope you won't sell it to Mr. Sands before we have the party!"

"Not likely, unless you put it off too long," answered Mrs. Chester, quietly. "Do you mean that Miss Montaigne is willing, can afford, to provide food for a large company like that? Because, though I might——"

"O mother! Don't you worry about that. Of course she can 'afford'—why, anything in the world she wants, I reckon. The people at the Towers seem to think as lightly about spending money as we would about using the water from our well. I'm to take Portia to the Towers in the phaeton and bring back Helena and the baskets. Funny! How that girl who has so many faster horses of her own likes to ride behind my darling pet! But Portia *can* travel, too, if she takes a notion. Why, the other morning when you sent me to Eliza Jane's store of an errand and an automobile was going down the mountain behind us, she just picked up her little heels and raced that auto—My! how she did run! But—the auto beat. Wasn't it too bad? Portia was so disgusted. It must be awfully trying to waste all one's breath racing an automobile and then get beaten."

"It must, indeed; but I hope that's the last time you'll ever let her enter such a race as that. Child, you might be killed! An accident to either pony or machine—Dolly, never do it again!" cried father John, alarmed by the danger already safely passed.

"When do you want this picnic?" asked Mrs. Chester, with interest, and feeling somewhat flattered that the chosen ground for it should be on her own premises.

"Why, Saturday, if it's fine. If not, then the next Monday. We want to go early, in the morning sometime, and stay the whole day. We mean to explore that mine they call the 'Folly,' and who knows? I may bring home a nugget of pure gold! Wouldn't that be fine? I'm so glad you are willing. I think I'll harness Portia again and ride to tell Helena, after dinner; and I'll get that now. I can do it all alone if you'll only trust me. You rest, mother dear, and read your Baltimore weekly.

It came last night and yet you haven't even taken the wrapper off."

The dinner was to be a simple one and well-trained Dorothy was capable of preparing it; so Mrs. Chester did take the proffered rest and was deep in the home news which interested her so greatly when a shadow fell upon the threshold and she glanced up to see two men who appeared to be surveyors, for they carried the instruments of such over their shoulders; and the announcement made by the elder of the two fairly took her breath away:

"We are sent by Oliver Sands to survey that south meadow you've sold him. Will you direct us to it?"

CHAPTER XIX

DOROTHY HAS ANOTHER SECRET

The inquirer went away with "a bee in his bonnet," as the saying goes; and he promptly reported to Oliver Sands that he had been dismissed from Skyrrie as one who had gone there on a fool's errand.

"Say they haven't sold me that south meadow, do they, friend? Well, they are mistaken. Report to me again in one week from this day and I will give thee further directions. I am a just man. I will pay thee and thy assistant for the time thee has wasted, but the surveying will yet be done," returned the miller, quietly.

He even smiled, sitting comfortably in his great rocker upon his shaded veranda; and he opened and closed his fat hands with a suggestive gesture, as of one squeezing something soft and yielding. It was a gesture habitual to him while transacting certain kinds of business, as foreclosing a mortgage against some helpless person; and to keen observers—Seth Winters, for one—seemed most significant. Friend Oliver was in no wise disturbed by the indignant statement of the Chesters to the surveyor. He was perfectly contented to bide his time, remembering that adage: "All things come to him who waits."

But valiant as their denial, the Chesters watched the surveyors depart with sore misgivings. The bold falsity of the matter roused, at length, even Martha's suspicions that Friend Oliver Sands was not as benign as he appeared; and for the rest of that week she went about so silent and sad that neither father John nor Dorothy dared intrude upon her reserve.

Yet to the latter came a new trouble of her own: and knowing that she must confide in somebody old and wise enough to counsel her, she went to Seth Winters. She could not have done better. With almost the opening sentence of her story about the surveyors' visit he seemed to understand the whole matter, "body and bones" as Jim would say.

"I am thankful you came to me, little Dorothy. We'll outwit that man by meeting him on his own terms. I'm going to give you something to take care of till the time comes for you to use it. We'll have what Herbert calls a regular lark; and may I be there to see! Three hundred dollars, 'payable on demand, with interest from date.' Do you remember that date? No? Never mind. I'll put the time sufficiently far back to make everything secure, and I misjudge our floury Friend if he will object to a little more than his due. Watch, scholar, and see if I figure right."

Fetching pen and paper, the blacksmith made a rapid computation of what would be due Oliver at any time within the next month. Then he went to a cupboard in his room above the "office" and took from a small safe there the amount of cash which should satisfy even the "just" holder of the Chesters' "note." He gave the money into Dorothy's hands with a smile, saying:

"This is yours, your very own. It is no gift nor loan of mine. It was intrusted to me by a law firm in Baltimore, the business managers of Mrs. Calvert's property. Kidder & Kidder are the gentlemen. Well, what?"

"I've heard, I know about them. Why, Mr. Winters, I've *seen* that old Mr. Kidder!" cried Dorothy, eagerly.

"I'm glad of it. Well, I cannot explain much to you; only I can and do say that somebody related to you by blood, somebody of your own family that you never knew, left this money and a little more with these gentlemen; to be used by, or for, you whenever a case of real necessity occurred. They are my own lawyers, too, as well as Mrs. Cecil's; so after you moved to Skyrrie, knowing I was such a near neighbor, they wrote and asked me to take care of the small fund for you. I wasn't to mention it until that case of need I spoke of, and that has now surely arrived. Hurray! Three cheers for the climax! I can picture your face—all your faces—when 'payment on demand' *is* demanded, and you so calmly—it must be very calmly, Dolly dear!—come forward with that 'payment' in hand. One word of advice to you, more. Try to persuade your parents to hold on to south meadow. Things are stirring nowadays, and that very 'Folly' may yet show old Simon's wisdom, by proving the most valuable spot on Skyrrie farm or any other land 'up-mounting.' Keep the fact of your having the money a secret till the right time comes. Then, hurray!"

For a few moments the astonished girl could do no more than turn over and over the fat wallet which Seth had thrust into her hands; and she was so enraptured by the thought that it was she,

she herself, who should come to her parents' relief that she could only smile and smile. She could not even join in this boyish old fellow's hurrying; yet looking on her happy face, he was quite satisfied.

However, amid all her joy one dark word had fastened on her consciousness: "Secret." She had come in part to confide her own dread secret of the Ghost to this kind man, who would, she was sure, neither deride her fear nor fail to help her. Seth Winters helped everybody worthy of his help. All the mountain folk said so and trusted him.

"Mr. Winters, that story about there being a ghost at Skyrrie is—*is true*. I suppose you've heard it, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes! I've heard."

There was no scorn in his expression. The same gentle gravity rested upon his features that had inspired the confidences of so many troubled souls and now won hers. All the boyish hilarity he had manifested over the outwitting of Oliver Sands had vanished, and with a fatherly tenderness he drew Dorothy to him and listened intently as she said:

"Yes, Mr. Winters, it—is—true. I didn't believe Alfaretta when she told about it. I thought there were no such things. But there *is* a ghost haunts Skyrrie and—*I—have—seen—it*. I have to believe my own eyes, haven't I?"

"Most assuredly, my dear. And I, too, know it is true. I, too, have seen it."

"*You—have?*"

"Often and often. A most beneficent and harmless ghost. One to be cherished and not feared. One that has suffered much evil and done much good. A ghost I pity and almost love."

"Why, Mr. Winters! You make me feel as if—as if I could hardly breathe. Could any ghost be *good*? Any ghost be *harmless*?"

"This one is good, I told you. As for harm—has he harmed your garden by his presence? Have the weeds grown faster or the vegetables less, because of his nightly visitations to it? 'By their fruits ye shall know them.' Eh? What?"

"Why, you amaze me more and more. How did you know that about the garden and the night-time? I hadn't told you yet, though I was going to, in a minute."

"Well, easily. I've seen the garden and I know that all ghosts prefer the night. Not this one because his deeds are evil but because they are good. A person may learn a lot of things, little maid, by merely keeping his eyes open and putting two-and-two together."

"Oh! of course; but do you really think I shouldn't fear this one at all? I've been too afraid almost to live, and I've not dared to tell my father or mother, because she's so nervous she wouldn't stay at Skyrrie even to get my father cured, and he must be. *He must be*—no matter what happens. It must not be that a man so good, so kind, so altogether faithful to us all should be an invalid forever. O Mr. Winters! You don't at all know how brave he is! How he makes fun for mother and me when his own heart aches. It seems to me as if he took hold of everything, every little thing that happens, and turns it over and over, till he finds out some humor in it. Then he points out to us that humor which we'd never have discovered for ourselves. Why, I fancy he'd think there was something funny even about that dreadful ghost!"

"A brave and beautiful nature is poor John Chester's, little Dolly. I am proud to know him, to have him call me friend. Nor should I have called him 'poor' but rich. I would rather have his present poverty and his wholesome, sweet outlook upon life than all the money owned by the master of the Towers. By the way, he's not such a bad sort, either! come to know him well enough to see beneath that crust of greed and arrogance that he wears as if it were a coat. As for that fairy-faced daughter of his, I'm wholly in love with her, since you've put your own hand to the task of remodeling her into the simple, kindly creature God meant her to be when He fashioned her. Pity! when that other good gift of too much money buries beneath it the better side of the person to whom it is given!"

"Oh! Helena is sweet, Mr. Winters. It's not true at all that she is haughty and 'stuck-up,' as folks say. She's just been petted at home, and praised and sheltered so much, that she didn't have a chance to show what she really was. Even to know it herself. But I love her. I love her dearly. She's the nicest girl friend I ever had."

"That's good! That's excellent! For if a certain scheme of our friend Herbert's materializes it would be most important that there should be love between you and Helena. By the way, neither of you young ladies have invited me to your picnic!"

Dorothy opened her eyes in surprise. "Why, Mr. Winters! How did you know we were going to have one? I hadn't told that yet, either, and I do believe you must be a witch—a gentleman witch—to guess at things the way you do!"

"I hope I'm a 'gentleman' witch if I'm any sort. I shouldn't like to be a 'lady,' one that's always pictured as bestriding a broomstick. That would be most uncomfortable. I prefer a horse. Well, am I to come to your picnic, or am I not, Miss Dorothy Chester?"

"O Mr. Winters! Will you? If you will, your coming will make us both so happy. I'd rather have you

than anybody I know, even young folks——"

"As if I were not that! Thank you for your cordial 'bid.' I will be most happy to accept the invitation I've had fairly to worm out of you. What am I expected to provide as my share of the entertainment?"

"Oh! you love to tease me, don't you? Nothing. Of course, you are to provide nothing. Only come, and don't disappoint us."

"I will surely come. But I hope to do my share, as I said; and if I succeed in obtaining what I hope for, it will be a novelty in picnics!"

"Now you've made me curious! I love novelties! What will yours be?" asked Dorothy, eagerly, and rising to leave, since some men had arrived with horses to be shod and her host must attend to business.

"Take care of that parcel, child. Tell nobody of it, not even the father and mother, till the right moment comes. You'll recognize it when it does, and what shall I bring? Let me see—I think I will bring a GHOST!"

It was a very happy girl who returned to Skyrie, carrying safely hid in her pocket that which should "at the right time" release her beloved parents from the power of debt, held over them by even so "generous" a man as Miller Sands. It was almost impossible for her to keep this new and splendid "secret" from their knowledge. At times she felt she must, she certainly must, break her promise to Seth Winters and disclose it; but she had never knowingly broken her word and she would not let herself begin to do so now. Besides, if she had been able to keep that other, dreadful "secret" about the "ghost" she surely could keep this happy one of the money. She had made it her business to bestow this in a place of safety, although her frequent visits to the spot would have betrayed her interest in it had the elder Chesters been at all suspicious.

The days sped by till the end of the week and that beautiful summer Saturday appointed for Helena's picnic. They had been busy and peaceful days at Skyrie. No further demands had been made upon the elder Chesters by Mr. Oliver Sands. That most industrious of "ghosts" had not reappeared nor nervous mother Martha so much as suspected his existence; though rumors concerning him were rife in all Riverside. These rumors had been freshly set afloat by the Babcocks. Dorothy had admitted to Alfaretta that there "*might* be some truth" in the story of a spooky visitant, and Alfie had promptly stated that there *was*. Pa Babcock affirmed the tale and declared that this was why he had left off working on the haunted farm. "It had got upon my nerves to the extent of interfering with my orations," he had explained, to whoever would listen. Until then, nobody had credited Pa with possessing "nerves" of any sort; but even such an absurd statement found credence with some.

More than with the "spook," however, was the public mind agitated by other rumors which touched upon "south meadow." The "Folly" was a word often on men's lips, yet, as often happens, the persons most nearly concerned in the subject were the last to hear of it.

The promised saddle for Portia had been sent home and found to be a delightful change from the bareback riding which ambitious Dorothy had been practicing. So delightful, indeed, was it and so eager was she to have all her own friends enjoy it with her that she decided:

"I'm going to put the saddle in the phaeton along with the baskets when we drive to the 'meadow.' The 'Bee' people fixed the bars to it so nicely, we can drive along the road till we come to the field and then through the bar-way into it. I'll take Portia out of the shafts and saddle her, or the boys will do it for me. Then all the girls that wish can take a ride, turn and turn about. It will add ever so much to our fun—everybody I know simply loves and envies me my darling 'calico' pony! I'll come back for you first, though, mother and father, for you must be there. A picnic, or anything nice, wouldn't seem perfect without you two. Dear Mr. Winters is sure to come. He said so and he's going to bring—My! I almost let the cat out of the bag!"

Dorothy's sudden pause and startled expression provoked no comment from her parents other than mother Martha's protesting:

"Cat! I wouldn't take Lady Rosalind, if I were you, Dolly dear. It would only be a worry to you. Those little Babcocks are sure to come, invited or not, and as surely would plague the life out of her. Why, Rosalind runs under the lounge the very minute any Babcock, big or small, sets foot inside the door. Don't take the cat."

"It wasn't—it wasn't—that kind of a cat! and I haven't let it out—yet!" laughed the girl, with a gayety that seemed exaggerated for so humdrum a remark.

"You're a queer child, Dorothy C. But—but I hope you'll have a happy day," answered her mother, slipping an arm about the girl's shoulders and lightly caressing the flushed young cheek; while Dolly answered, trustfully:

"I'm certain to! Mrs. Calvert is coming and says she *cannot* unless Jim Barlow brings her and waits upon her! That settles Jim and his refusals! She's made it a point of 'duty' and that boy was never yet known to turn his back on his duty—even when it led him into having a good time himself at a picnic! Good-by, now. I'm off!"

It did prove the happiest sort of a gathering. Everybody came who was invited and some

appeared who were not. But there were food and room and fun enough for all. Portia did ample service in the cause; trotting patiently around and around the smoother portions of the meadow, carrying various small maidens on her back but, at length, being given a chance to nibble her own dinner from that plentiful pasture. She was still saddled and bridled, the smallest Babcock having testified by screaming that she was still unsatisfied with her share of the exercise, and being promised "one more ride after dinner."

Never a Babcock screamed more wisely. But for that scream Portia would have been unsaddled and but for Portia—a life might have been lost.

CHAPTER XX

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

The chief event of the day was to be the exploration of "Si Waterman's Folly." This occurred immediately after dinner.

Jim and Herbert, aided by Mr. Winters's strong arms, found small difficulty in removing the decayed plank covering which the old miner had placed above his narrow-mouthed shaft. This had once rolled easily enough upon deftly applied rollers and had been arranged to protect Mr. Waterman from detection when excavating, in search of that gold which he believed lay buried in south meadow. He was a secretive man who shared no secrets with his neighbors if he could help it, yet whose very idiosyncrasies betrayed them.

"Well, that's a good job done!" cried Seth, as the cover was pushed aside. "See there?"

He placed his heel upon the boards, which at once broke into fragments beneath his weight.

"Why, anybody might have stepped upon it and fallen through!" cried Dorothy, astonished.

"Yes. A good job to have prevented such an accident. But the hole, or shaft is—Hello, friend GHOST! Come out of that, if you please; all your neighbors have come to visit you and expect you to show the honors of your retreat!"

Many heads were now crowded together, peering into the dimness of the shaft. It sloped inward and downward into a wider opening that was almost like a small chamber in its dimensions. Another entrance led to this chamber, a passage of a few feet in length, burrowed beneath the ground and opening upon the hillside beyond. Through this little tunnel came fresh air and light; and within the chamber had been collected the odds and ends of things which had caught the half-wit's fancy. A bundle of straw and a worn-out horse-blanket which somebody had discarded formed his bed. Some bits of broken crockery furnished his table, a board wedged against the rock. A spring of water gushed from one wall of the chamber and trickled into the depths below, and a curious odor escaped from the spring.

The leather jacket, the glazed hat with its bedraggled scarlet feathers, lay carefully folded upon the straw pallet, and its owner sat beside the jacket shamefaced and terrified by this intrusion upon his retreat. But it was something else that caught Dorothy's attention—a simple suit of denim that had once been blue but was now faded by sun and water to a ghostly white. Peter wore these now and—she recognized them.

"Peter! Peter! So *you* are the good 'Ghost' that came in the night and tilled my garden for me! Come out, come out and let me thank you!"

Though he had obstinately refused to answer the call of Seth Winters, the voice of the girl he had so secretly served, because she had been kind to him, was instantly obeyed. He climbed out of the shaft and, taking hold of her skirt as he had done once before, stood foolishly smiling while his good friend, the blacksmith, gayly announced:

"Behold the 'Haunt' of Skyrrie! The honestest, most innocent, most grateful of Ghosts! During the years it was vacant he made Skyrrie his home, sleeping of winters in its hillside room, and in summer seeking this cool retreat where we have just unearthed him. He must, he will, *haunt* no more; for if I judge aright the new master of old Skyrrie will at once engage him to take the place of Pa Babcock, resigned. A better gardener there isn't 'up-mounting.' A more devoted servitor no man can find, once his affection is won as our little Dorothy has won it. What say, neighbors Chester? Will you secure your greatly needed 'hired man' and forever 'lay the ghost' of Skyrrie at one 'fell swoop'?"

"Aye, aye! Hear!" cried father John, entering fully into the blacksmith's spirit, even while he did not fully understand, till Dorothy explained all the mysterious, yet beneficent, happenings of the past few weeks; and then not only he but mother Martha bade the poor waif welcome to their home, while all the others standing by applauded vigorously.

"But this isn't all we came to see. The gold mine, the gold mine! Peter may be human gold, but the rich yellow metal is what we want!" cried Herbert, when the cheers had died away.

"Who'll go first?" asked somebody.

"Why, I, of course!" returned young Montaigne, springing recklessly into that rough shaft which veered from the wide safety of the upper chamber.

Whereat a strange thing happened. Peter dropped the fold of his new mistress's skirt and stepped hastily forward, warning by gestures and his uncertain mumbling that Herbert should not go. Alas! the warning was useless. The spirit of adventure was on the whole party, an eager desire to be the first who should unearth a "nugget," and even cautious Jim Barlow caught the infection, while Dorothy ran forward as lightly as if she were to cross only the smooth meadow.

As the heads disappeared below the surface of the ground, and the shouts of those who scrambled downward over the rude rocky shaft grew fainter, Peter was seized with a terrible trembling and stood as if rooted to the ground in fear. A minute more and a girl's scream aroused him. Dorothy's! She was falling—falling—into an unknown depth! One mis-step, the slimy stones, the unforeseen peril! Both Jim and Herbert were already far below, following with extreme care, if still with all the speed possible, the tortuous excavation, in search of that deluding metal which has lured so many to their ruin. Only Peter Piper, the simple, to hear and comprehend.

As if by magic his trembling ceased and with a cat-like leap, so swift and soft it was, he had also disappeared beneath the ground. Then something whispered to the Chesters of their darling's danger. They pressed forward to the edge of the pit, and almost equally pale with fear, Mrs. Cecil joined them; clinging to Martha with a sympathy of distress which broke down in a moment the younger woman's dislike of the elder.

None of the trio were prepared for that which followed. Dorothy's slight figure came hurtling out of the pit's mouth, tossed to their very feet by the long arms of Peter Piper. A moment later he stood beside them, exhausted, silent; while the girl explained, as her own breath returned and terror subsided:

"Oh! he saved my life! He saved my life! I was falling—I knew—it was death—those awful stones—so dark. He caught me, he knew. He isn't 'simple' but wise; wise and oh! so good! Peter, you blessed Ghost! I owe you my life!"

But this excitement ebbed only to give way to another. When Dorothy had recovered her composure and sat quietly beside her elders, Peter beside her, with no desire left on her part for either explorations or the biggest of "nuggets," a fresh cry of alarm sounded from the mine. The cry preluded the frenzied rush out of the chasm of those who could escape it first; but it was upon Herbert and Jim that all were intent—upon poor Jim more than the other.

As they came up Peter Piper cast one glance upon them, then hid his face and shuddered.

"A horse! A doctor! Quick, quick! For the love of God, a horse!" gasped Herbert, and in a few broken words explained:

"We got into a nest—a nest of serpents. One had raised its head—I didn't see it—to strike my hand! Jim—Jim caught it, it swung around—bit him—O God! Don't let him die! He offered his life for mine whom he didn't like! He saved me! Can nobody—nobody save him?"

With his arm around his rescuer the frantic Herbert searched the blanched faces for some sign of help; and out of the startled silence which greeted his appeal came Seth Winters's calm voice:

"To my shop. I've medicines there. I'll take one side, you the other, Herbert. If need be, we can make a 'chair' and carry him between us. You can walk, for a while anyway, Jim. You are not going to die. Steady now, on your own feet, steady—as when you so nobly threw away your life to save the boy you 'didn't like'!"

The shop was, indeed, the nearest place where help could be obtained, and they started, all following; a sad and terrified party that but an hour before had been so gay and happy. And presently Jim's nerve returned to him, for it had been worsted for the moment by the cries and assertions of the others that he was doomed to death.

But where was Dorothy—who should have been foremost with sympathy and cheer? Halfway down the mountain before the company had all left that unlucky south meadow. Fully down by the time the smithy was reached. Race, Portia, race. A life hangs on your fleetness! Jim's life, Jim's! Who has proved that "greater love hath no man but that he lay down his life for his friend." And this was more than "friend"—it was the boy "he didn't like"—yet by the strange rule of nature, was forever after to be the Damon to his Pythias. Experience has long proved that the surest way to overcome an aversion to a person is to do that person a kindness.

Where, too, was Peter, the simple? Not far behind his faithful friend, the smith, having lingered only long enough to dart into the woods and fill his hands with a certain herb he knew; then to follow and reach the smithy just in time to hear its owner say:

"Faint, Jim? Drink this. Herbert, bare his arm. It will be heroic treatment, my lad, but, *my hero*—bear it! and live to teach the world a lesson."

Some turned their eyes aside as the smith drew from the glowing forge a white-hot iron and held it to the wound upon Jim's sunburned flesh. Not Jim! this wise old man toward whom his young soul had yearned from the beginning had called him "hero": and within himself he knew that he was far more such now than when he had rescued Dorothy from bondage, though they had termed him "hero" even then.

The wound cauterized, came Peter Piper with his healing leaves, bringing infinite relief; and soon as might be came also Dorothy upon her piebald mare, and the doctor close beside her on his own fleet steed; approving all that had been done, assuring everybody that no fatal results could follow such prompt treatment; and especially commending Peter Piper for his knowledge of those simples which mother Nature grows so luxuriantly for the use of all her children.

Thus ended the picnic and the search for hidden gold. But so soon as most of the company had departed from the over-crowded shop, Jim was made to ride upon Portia home to Skyrie, though he was now able to smile and declare that his legs were so long they would drag upon the ground.

However, he managed to hold them sufficiently high and to adapt himself to the despised saddle of a girl. With him went the few who knew him best; Seth Winters and Herbert, Mrs. Cecil and Martha, Helena herself—not to be outdone in gratitude for her brother's life; and John Chester with his "little maid" beside him. They had all anticipated finding a restful quiet at Skyrie; but they failed. The moving events of that memorable day were not all accomplished yet.

On the little upper porch sat Mr. and Mrs. Montaigne, waiting the return of Skyrie's owners to lay before them the scheme first evolved by their son and heir, and now indorsed with all heartiness by themselves. Chatting familiarly alongside, was Friend Oliver Sands; never more benignant nor complacent than now, and never more persistently engaged in "squeezing his hands" than at that hour.

Below, on the stone doorsteps, sat the two surveyors who had once before visited the cottage; and at sight of these the hearts of the elder Chester's sank, while Seth merrily whispered to Dorothy:

"Behold the hour is ripe and I *am* here to see!"

One other group there was, strolling idly about the garden, toying with Lady Rosalind, and contentedly amusing themselves until such time as they could make their errand to Skyrie known. Nobody seemed to know them; even Seth Winters failed to recognize the strangers and, for a moment, feared what they might have come to say. The next instant his brow cleared and his laughter was merrier than before.

Mr. Montaigne was the first to state his business, when once all were ready to listen. It was extremely simple and concerned Dorothy most of all. Said he:

"My dear young lady, we have come to invite you to accompany us to Europe. We shall leave New York in a few weeks and remain abroad for one, possibly two, years. We are going to give our children the benefit of foreign education, which we want you to share with them and along whatever lines you, or your parents, select. Of course, there will be no expense to you, who will be to us exactly as our own daughter, and whom we have learned to love almost as such. Will you go?"

For a moment nobody spoke. Then said Dorothy very quietly, and scarcely daring to look at Helena or Herbert in their so evident disappointment:

"I thank you, Mr. and Mrs. Montaigne, for your great kindness. It is very wonderful that you should have shown it to me whom you have known such a little while. But I cannot go. My father and mother need me and—I need them. A foreign education would not help me to earn my living as I must do some day, and—I thank you again, but I cannot go."

To Helena's and Herbert's pleadings, which so strenuously followed, she could give no other answer. The invitation had been most tempting to her who so dearly loved to see new places and new people, but—her answer still was: "No."

Then the family from the Towers departed and Friend Oliver began:

"Thee is a good daughter, Dorothy Chester, and thee has well said that as a poor girl thee will need only the plainest education."

"Beg pardon, sir, but I did not say that! I shall get just as good an education as I can, but I won't turn my back on those I love and who love me for the sake of getting it. That's already planned for. Dear Mr. Winters is going to open a school in the old smithy and all of us are to attend it. We've talked it over many a day, knowing how soon our summer friends would be away and our own real time for study and work would come. Jim and I, all the Babcocks, and——"

But the miller had scant interest in these plans. He interrupted her by turning to Martha Chester and saying:

"I suppose, Martha, that thee has reconsidered thy objection to selling south meadow, or are ready to pay me my money loaned thee 'on demand.' Is thee ready?"

"Oh! sir!" began the troubled housemistress, and was amazed that a child should interfere by saying:

"Wait a moment, mother dear. How much do my parents owe you 'on demand'?"

At a nod from Mr. Winters she had slipped away and as swiftly returned and now stood before the astonished company, holding a fat purse in her hands and calmly awaiting the miller's reply.

For an instant he could not make it. His amazement was too deep. The next with a sort of chuckle, as if sure that so large an amount could not be held in so small a compass, he announced the sum with interest in full.

"Very well. Here, father, is the money. More I think than you will need. It is mine. My very own to give to you and mother, as I do give it now. Mr. Winters knows. He will explain. Pay the man, do please, and let him go."

John Chester glanced at Seth Winters and received that gentleman's confirmatory nod; then he promptly opened the pocket-book and counted out the crisp banknotes which freed him and his home from the society of the miller and his men.

Oliver departed. If he were crestfallen he did not show it, and in that respect the worthy smith and Mrs. Cecil both were disappointed. He even ventured to congratulate the Chesters upon the possession of "such a forehanded" daughter and to wish them every prosperity. With that and summoning his surveyors, he took his benign presence out of the way.

Strangely enough, the surveyors did not at once follow, even to secure their wage which so just a man would surely pay. They even made light of such wages. During the time of waiting they had made other possible arrangements with the gentlemen in the garden, and they waited still further, with admirable patience, to see if these arrangements were correct.

It was time for the strangers in the garden to have their own little interview, and, seeing them approach, poor mother Martha passed her hand across her tired brow, confused by all that had happened and dreading what might come. Too tired, as yet, to fully realize herself that her dreadful "debt" no longer rested on her shoulders.

But she need not have feared. These strangers were plain business men, with no sentiment about them. Said the foremost:

"Madam, we represent a syndicate prepared to buy, or operate in common with you, an iron mine that has been discovered on your land. In connection with this mine there is also a mineral spring from which a rich revenue may be obtained if properly managed. I have the honor to lay before you the two propositions of our company and to close with you as soon as the legal forms can be completed. It is royalty or open sale—if you will consider either."

Oh, but it was well that two such wise and faithful counselors as Seth Winters and Mrs. Calvert were present then to advise these inexperienced Chesters for their own best advantage. Be assured they did so, and subsequently that "deal" was accomplished on the wise "royalty" basis, which proved, in one sense, indeed a "gold mine"; although the "gold" was but pure iron and a most unsavory water—that local physicians had always maintained would cure many diseases, and which soon received widespread attention elsewhere.

Such a day and such an ending! What time more fitting to take a temporary leave of our dear Dorothy? Whose life moves forward in blessing, as all lives should move, and whom we must come back to at some happy, future day.

All partings hold a touch of sadness—so must ours. But there is brightness in the sunset which floods the fields of Skyrrie, a promise of greater brightness on the morrow. Before the night falls, while the sunshine still lasts, let us bid our heroine a real, old-fashioned farewell:

"Well, Dorothy, good-by!"

THE END

THE DOROTHY BOOKS

By EVELYN RAYMOND

These stories of an American girl by an American author have made "Dorothy" a household synonym for all that is fascinating. Truth and realism are stamped on every page. The interest never flags, and is oftentimes intense. No more happy choice can be made for gift books, so sure are they to win approval and please not only the young in years, but also "grown-ups" who are young in heart and spirit.

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Dorothy at Skyrrie
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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DOROTHY AT SKYRIE ***

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